How to bring traditional sports marketing into esports

ENCE esports

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Kirjoittaja	Aleksi Sipilä	**Vuosi** 2020
Aihe	Kuinka tuoda perinteisen urheilun markkinointi e-urheiluun	
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Tiivistelmä

Tämä tutkielma keskittyy siihen, kuinka perinteisen urheilun markkinointi voidaan tuoda e-urheiluun ja kuinka perinteinen urheilu on adaptoitunut digitaalisen markkinoinnin aikaan ja mitä e-urheilu voi oppia perinteisen urheilun markkinoinnin kulttuurista, sponsoreista ja urheilun katsomisesta. Ja miten urheilumarkkinointi tulee kehittymään seuraavien vuosien aikana, kun kiinnostus virtuaaliseen todellisuuteen ja lisätty todellisuuteen tulevat kasvamaan.

Sisällön tärkeys, mikä houkuttelee kuluttajia tulemaan mukaan mainostamaan lempi tiimejänsä sosiaalisessa mediassa ja suusta-suuhun markkinoinnissa samanlaisten kuluttajien kanssa.

Tämä tutkielma on tehty ENCE esportsille, mikä on Suomalainen e-urheilu organisaatio joka alun perin laukaistiin 2013, jossa pelataan pelejä kuten Counter-Strike: Global Offensive, Starcraft 2, Playerunkown's Battlegrounds ja League of Legends. ENCE pyysi tutkielman kirjoittajaa etenemään tällä aiheella, kuinka tuoda tavallisen urheilun markkinointi e-urheiluun, sillä se oli aihe, jota ENCE entuudestaan oli tahtonut tutkia.

Avainsanat	eSports, urheilu, markkinointi, digitaalinen aika
Sivut	30

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ABSTRACT

This research focuses on how traditional sports marketing can be brought into eSports and how traditional sports has adapted into the digital era of marketing and what eSports can learn from the culture of sports marketing, sponsorships and watching sports. And how sports marketing will evolve within the next years due to increasing interest in virtual reality and augmented reality.

The importance of creating content that is engaging and interesting for consumers, so that it makes them want to promote the organization through social media and word of mouth advertising to like-minded individuals.

This research was done for ENCE esports, which is Finnish esports organization that originally launched in 2013, playing games such as Counter-Strike: Global Offensive, Starcraft 2, Playerunknown's Battlegrounds and League of Legends. ENCE wished for the author to proceed with the topic, how to bring traditional sports marketing into esports as it is a topic they have wanted to study prior to this research.

Keywords   eSports, sports, marketing, digital age

Pages   30

CONTENTS

1 INTRODUCTION

In the first chapter, the author goes through briefly: What is esports and introduces the case company.

During the next chapter, the author will go through what type of literature they used during this research, what methodology was used and what is the context of this research.

From there, the author will go into the results and findings chapter where they will go through all the research they gathered for the report. During this chapter, the author gives context to where they base the ideas for how to bring traditional sports marketing into eSports.

1.1 Case company, ENCE esports

ENCE is a Finnish esports organization that originally launched in 2013, playing games such as Counter-Strike: Global Offensive, Starcraft 2, Playerunknown's Battlegrounds and League of Legends. ENCE thrives to create success stories and build a winning culture in the Finnish esports scene. They have created multiple success stories, such as Joona ''Serral'' Sotala as he became the world champion in Starcraft 2 by winning the WSG Global Finals in Los Angeles, California. Their CS:GO team has had multiple successful tournaments, such as the IEM Katowice 2019 tournament, while PUBG team won the first ever European League in 2019. (Kuusisto, 2020)

Beyond competitive success, ENCE is also one of the founding teams of ESL Pro Tour together with 12 others highly merited CSGO teams, as well as a founding team of the upcoming Northern League of Legends Championship operating in Nordics, UK and Ireland. (Kuusisto, 2020)

ENCE is credited to be the pioneer of international esports success in Finland. Their local followership is supported with a global fan base adding total number of followers to 850'000 fans in May 2020. On social media, such as Twitter and Instagram, ENCE is most followed sports organisation in Finland since summer 2019. (Kuusisto, 2020)

1.2   What is esports

Esports (electronic sports) is organized and competitive gaming. Players compete against one another in competitive gaming scenarios in different types of video games. The most popular esports video games are, Counter strike: Global offensive (CS:GO), League of legends (LoL) and Player Unknown's Battlegrounds (Pubg) to name a few. These games have a viewer base of millions across the world on online services and tv, or people who attend these events live. The most popular streaming service to view these events and the players playing the games outside of these events, is Twitch.tv. Players can stream themselves playing these games and gather audience to watch them play. (Willingham, 2018)

1.3   Monetization in esports

Esports have been growing in the last decade tremendously and the prize money for the tournaments can be in the seven figures. The prize money is split among the playing teams who make a higher placement in the tournament, the winners of course makes the most.

The money for the tournaments comes from sponsorships, ticket sales, endorsements, advertising and media rights. (Willingham, 2018)

1.4   Differences of eSports and traditional sports

The obvious differences, such as one is electronic while the other is not put aside, there are more interesting topics to be discussed about the differences of eSports and traditional sports. As discussed in the interview with Malph Minns of Strive Sponsorship, Minns discusses the differences of eSports and traditional sports sponsorships.

The influence of game developers and publishers plays a large part in eSports. No one owns football, but Riot Games owns League of Legends. The influence of growing publishers has an impact on everything in eSports.
(Minns, 2020)

1.5   Research question

This thesis will provide insights to the question:

How to bring traditional sports marketing into esports?

The author discussed the topic with the case company, ENCE esports and they wanted the author to go more in-depth with the process and bring new ideas to marketing the Finnish esports scene. Esports is a growing market and Finland has one of the best esports teams in the world, but the viewer base for esports has a great potential for growth in the future. For decades, traditional sports have been largely marketed in Finland and there is a tremendous number of viewers for it. There is a market for esports, but the author thinks it is currently not as accessible for consumers as traditional sports.

In the Analysis and Discussion chapter, the author gives insights, thoughts and ideas on how to bring traditional sports marketing into eSports. The author researched several different sources for this analysis, including interviews with professionals of the sports and marketing business and insights on different literature the author researched for this report.

2 CONTEXT

The case company, ENCE, wished for the author to proceed with the topic as it benefits their business and is research, they have wanted to conduct prior to this thesis.

Studying sports marketing to further understand the subject in order to go further with the research, the author discusses different areas of sports marketing in the 21st century and how has it evolved within the years. Studies such as sports marketing in social media to how virtual reality and augmented reality can be used in sports marketing and how can they be adapted into eSports.

The author interviewed three professionals of sports marketing to get an in-depth view of the thought process of these organizations on how sports marketing could be adapted into eSports.

3 LITERATURE REVIEW

The author bases this study on several sports marketing related articles and books to get an understanding on how sports marketing works and based on the knowledge from these articles and books, the author gives their own thoughts and research founding's.

The author wished to understand sports marketing from all different perspectives, to fully comprehend how it works and how has it evolved in the past years. Reading articles and books from various years brought interesting insights for the author to analyse for the thesis.

The most relevant and important aspects of this research are the growth of social media in sports marketing and how has globalization affected sports marketing.

The author thinks there is not enough existing research on the difference of eSports and sports marketing. They are very much alike in many ways, but there are subjects both sides can learn from each other's. There are studies comparing eSports growth to sports in digital media, such as the article by (Jones, 2019), but the subject of one learning from another has not been studied excessively and the author thinks it is a subject open for discussion for the next years to come as eSports continues to grow rapidly.

3.1   Sports marketing, advertisement, and sponsorship

To learn how to adapt the marketing from traditional sports into eSports, the author went in-depth with learning as much as possible about sports marketing in the 21st century. It comes as no surprise that the biggest part of sports marketing now days revolves around social media and the internet. The author studied different articles and books that focused on the social media and globalization of sports marketing. In an article by (Lynn R. Kahle, 2004) the author explains objectives of sports marketing and how it functions in social media.

Social media is a large part of sports marketing and in the book by (Guillermo Armelini, 2014) they explain how social media has changed traditional sports marketing and how word of mouth advertising has been growing since social media became the new standard of advertising and marketing.

The growing of social media shows the decline of traditional marketing through newspapers and television. The overwhelming amount of content you can find online can sometimes be bad for advertising. Back in the 90's a company could reach 80 percent of their targeted consumers with just one well-placed television advertisement according to (Fortunato, 2013) this has since evolved to the point where a company has to make smart advertisements that differentiate them from the competition on social media.

Massive sport events, such as the super bowl, has always been a major attraction for both consumers and organizations looking to advertise their products. In the research by (Steven J. Jackson, 2004) they discuss the evolving culture of sports.

4 METHODOLOGY

The author used different sports management and marketing materials, such as articles and books to further understand the field in order to bring some of those ideas to esports. The author used qualitative data mostly but for some chapters, quantitative data was required. For example, secondary data of viewers of large sports events.

The author believes interviews are a big part of the research and they gave valuable information and further understanding of sports marketing and how it can be adapted into esports.

The author collected data and researched information of different aspects of sports marketing in the 21st century, to further increase the knowledge of sports marketing before they gave ideas on how to bring traditional sports marketing into eSports. Data has been collected from various articles and books by different authors from different eras of sports marketing, to research how sports marketing has adapted into the digital era of marketing and how they are utilizing the growth of social media.

The author spent the summer of 2020 researching the topic.

5 RESULTS AND FINDINGS

In this chapter, the author analyses different articles and books to learn more on the subject. They also conducted interviews with a variety of professionals of the subject.

When you think about sports marketing from a perspective where you have no in-depth knowledge of the subject, the first things that come to your mind are sponsors and arena advertisements. Both of which are important parts of sports marketing, of course. But the author wished to understand different types of sports advertising opportunities and marketing strategies.

The author explains how sports marketing has evolved throughout the years and how it continues to thrive and grow as social media keeps growing.

5.1 Sports marketing

Traditional sports marketing uses any type of sports and sport events to help them sell their goods and or services consumers and businesses. Sports marketing does not only use large events and major league players, it can include any small sport team to help them with their marketing, while sponsoring the chosen team or player. (marketing-school.org, 2012)

Sport marketing can be seen in various forms in the 21st century. Sport teams can sell advertising space in their stadiums to marketers who want their advertisements on billboards and other printed advertisements. TV networks sell airtime for sports events and famous athletes can sign contracts to endorse and lend their images to marketers. (marketing-school.org, 2012)

Sports marketing advantages on the fact that the fans of the teams the marketers advertise through are usually extremely devoted to the sport and the team. If a team advertises a product or a service, the fans are more likely to trust that brand. (marketing-school.org, 2012)

There are disadvantages to sports marketing as well. A small advertisement can get lost in the several advertisements that are shown during the sport event. When the people who watch the match can see dozens of different advertisements during the match, the advertisement might be left unnoticed.
(marketing-school.org, 2012)

Sports marketing involves three different type of marketing objectives which are: Marketing involved in promoting a team or an athlete to viewers, the second objective is to promote participating in sports clubs and teams and thirdly, to promote non-sport related products or services to viewers. (Lynn R. Kahle, 2004)

5.2 Sport advertising

Traditional sport events attract millions of viewers globally, making it an excellent choice for a company to purchase advertising space. For example, Budweiser has spent almost 240 Million dollars on Superbowl advertisements over the last 10 years. (Steven J. Jackson, 2004)

The promotional value of sport events is tremendous, for example:
- US television network NBC paid US$4 Billion for the broadcast rights to the Olympics from 1996 to 2008
- The current National Football League television contract is worth more than $2 billion per year

(Steven J. Jackson, 2004)
(marketing-school.org, 2012)

Studies has shown, that when advertisements are shown to viewers who are actively engaged by what they are watching, the advertised products sales are increased by 2.4 times. Creating engaging content for viewers who are actively watching the sport of their choosing, is the most efficient way of advertising the product or service. It might not always be the best option to take the advertisement spot on the match that is shown on peak hours, when people who watch the match at whatever time it is shown are more engaged and actively watching the match – Leading to higher advertisement engagement and sales. (Weaver, 2019)

In 1995, efficiently placed television commercial could reach up to 80 percent of the target audience for the advertisement and by the year 2003 the same advertisement would have to be shown 97 times to reach the same number of targeted consumers. The rising numbers of platforms and channels you can market your products, services or teams at makes it harder for organizations to market their product. Consumers can now choose what do they want to see and where to see them and they can contribute their thoughts, comments and opinions online. (Fortunato, 2013)

5.3   **Sport culture**

Sport culture is something that has evolved throughout the years. It is not just the typical, sitting in a pub while watching a game with your friends. Just like almost everything in the world, sports can be seen all over the internet. Social media influencers can be seen promoting their favourite sport teams, advertising their merchandise and sharing them with their followers. Sport is evolving, the players can show their support through social media with their following they have gathered from playing the sport they play. (Steven J. Jackson, 2004)

Large sport events such as the super bowl, Hockey world championship and World cup soccer has become events which fans mark to their calendars. These events bring all the fans together to root for their favourite teams and bet money on the games. (Steven J. Jackson, 2004) (Medium, 2018)

5.3.1   Sports viewing culture

In the past ten years, sports have been affected by drastic transformation of media. Sports can be viewed from anywhere with basically anything. The enormous amount of different sports you can choose from and a shocking number of hours of sports viewed in a year. In 2015, there was around 127,000 hours of sports programs available for broadcasting and cable tv and over 31+ Billion hours spent watching sports. (Stephen Master, 2015)

While there are numerous options of watching sports, live viewing is still the standard for sports. 95% of sports programs viewed happened live. (Stephen Master, 2015)

''Sport is now the only potential discipline where you can engage very high numbers of people. It still provides one of the few moments that is broadcast live where having a replay does not make sense. When it comes to sport, Netflix has zero value.'' (Diernaz)

Sport is one of the only things people still prefer to watch broadcasted live. When we live in a society where everything is accessible 24/7 around the year, sport is one of the only exceptions to this. While large sport events gather millions of viewers to traditional tv broadcasts, sports marketers need to adapt their marketing strategies significantly. Especially with younger audience, the traditional ''gathering around tv to watch sports'' is dying. They prefer to stream the matches live on their mobile devices and computers. The rise of live broadcasting on social medias such as Twitter and Facebook have been growing in the past decade as the younger generation tune in to watch their favourite sports through them.

Broadcasters look into modernizing their content, to appeal to their target audiences. (Bashford, 2017)

The next step for social broadcasts has been predicted to be micropayments to buy tickets. Along with social broadcasting, it is likely that sports create their own platform for broadcasting the matches, similar to Twitch and Youtube. (Bashford, 2017)

5.3.2 Virtual Reality and Augmented Reality as platforms

Professionals believe that Virtual reality (VR) and Augmented reality (AR) are the next big step in sports marketing. Viewers can get a 360-degree experience. While VR and AR are still climbing their way to be more accessible for the standard customer, it is the future of watching sports. Engaging and watching a match through VR opens possibilities for sports marketing. Some professionals believe VR and AR has issues as well, as they believe they are a ''Solo adventure''. They believe live sport content will not be broadcasted widely through it, compared to actually being in a live venue. (Bashford, 2017)

Different sports are already using virtual reality to enhance the experience, such as soccer, American Football, Nascar, Basketball and Poker. Watching Nascar through VR is a whole different experience than watching it through a live stream or TV. Imagine watching Nascar through the eyes of the drivers. . (Viar360, 2020)

Soccer and American Football uses VR to allow people to watch the matches from a perspective and angle they never were able to before. Poker can now easily be played through VR on online casinos, even professional poker games have been played through VR already. . (Viar360, 2020)

VR is becoming a profitable and a game-changing experience in various fields of sports. Few years from now, it would not be a surprise if VR becomes part of every consumers day-to-day actions. (Viar360, 2020)

5.4 Sport sponsorship and endorsement culture

Today's time, it is rare to see a sport event without sponsors. Companies want to represent themselves through the popular sport teams and athletes. The bigger the team, the more it costs to get your companies name represented by them. Companies pay large amount of money to get represented, in an attempt to get viewership and sales for the product they are advertising via the sponsor (Sara Keshkar, 2019)

Sponsorships in sports has always been a large part of the sports marketing culture. Companies of every size can be seen sponsoring their favourite sports teams or athletes. For example, at 2016 Rio Olympics large companies like Samsung, Nissan, Coca-Cola, Visa and Toyota sponsored or partnered with the event. Olympic sponsorship deals are one of the most expensive sports sponsorships, some companies pay up to $200 Million for a 4-year sponsorship. Players benefit from these sponsorships by receiving monetary compensation while companies receive publicity and advertisement space on the players attires, vehicles and or arenas.
(Sara Keshkar, 2019)

According to Poole (2005) 88% of consumers recommend products to their friends and family. Endorsing a celebrity who your target audience admires is therefore a crucial part of sports advertisement and marketing in the 21st century. (Brenda G. Pitts, 2007, p. 314)

Sponsoring the right athlete or player can boost any sports viewing up by a large marginal. For example, sports like climbing and paintball have seen double-digit increases in participation due to endorsements.
 (Brenda G. Pitts, 2007, p. 314)

5.4.1 Sponsorship culture

Advertisement effects can be influenced by class and social context. So, if other countries see a sport as a different class of sport, it affects the sponsorships value

Sponsorships differentiate by culture, if sports like tennis, golf and swimming can be considered to be high-class sports in some countries, they may not be in different cultures. (Sara Keshkar, 2019)

Sport sponsorship culture varies from culture and country and sponsors should take this into consideration when they are looking to sponsor a team or an athlete. For example, in Iran, golf, horse riding, paraglider and tennis are considered as a high-class sport, but swimming and other gym sports are categorized as low to middle class sports.
(Sara Keshkar, 2019)

Sponsorships used to be just displaying advertisements on shirts and signs, but it has evolved with the rise of social media and the internet. A sponsorship in the 21st century, is more of a partnership with the two parties. A key to a successful sponsorship / partnership is shared values and interests in marketing. (Sara Keshkar, 2019)

5.4.2 Product placement

Product placement has been a big part of sponsorship culture always. The problem with product placement can be, that if the content is too engaging and interesting, the product that is placed for advertisement, might be lost in the content. There is a bigger chance of getting your advertised product shown if it is shown for a marginally longer time during the program. (Fortunato, 2013)

In digital media, product placement can be noticed more easily. If an athlete or a team shows a product during interviews or on their social media pages, it is more possible for the product to be noticed by consumers. A well thought product placement, with verbal element can boost the effectiveness of the advertisement. (Fortunato, 2013)

5.5 Globalization in sports

Globalization has affected sports as it has almost everything in the world. Different type of sports is now accessible through-out the world, making it easier for consumers to find the sport they wish to consume through internet or television broadcasts. For an example in small towns in Finland, there are three sports you could choose from: Hockey, Football and Basketball. No one told the kids growing up in these towns about the thousands of options there was available. Kids these days have the option to easily research different sports from the internet and television and they have a wide variety of options to choose from.

While this gives more variety of sports to consume, it takes away from the local teams that are broadcasted or viewed in person near the consumer. Globalization has also brought sports that used to be more uncommon in Finland to here, for example American Football. (Steven J. Jackson, 2004)

Globalization allows sport teams to expand their market in selling their merchandize and gear. (Meltzer, 2016)

5.6 Sports marketing in social media

Importance of organizations competing in highly saturated online environment, it is important to stand out from the crowd. Do something that no one else does and do something that people look up to and can remember you doing. If an organization does the same thing as everyone else, how can they gather new customers? It might be pure luck to struck out in the 21st century if you are not doing anything different from the other competitors. Small things that differentiate the organization from the competition can bring a huge online following.
(Trevor Cook, 2008)

Engaging with your audience in social media is something you can always improve as there is no such thing as a maxed out social media engagement. Sports teams and athletes should always aim for a higher engagement to interact with their audience. Social media engagement is a broad subject, as it can mean a lot of things. Answering to your messages, reacting to mentions, likes and posts is important. (Chen, 2020)

The organization should follow their social media engagement metrics and analytics to see what type of posts engage their audience. Is it videos, images or text-based posts? Giveaways can boost an organizations viewership in social media as people love free stuff! Sharing your posts about the giveaway can bring a large amount of new engaging customers and promote it to their friends. Giveaways promote word of mouth advertising, which is important for organizations. (Chen, 2020)

Twitter has grown exponentially during its lifespan. From February 2008 through February 2009 it grew its userbase from 475,000 to over seven million. By 2010, Twitter had grown by over 100 Million users and more recent data has shown that it has since grown to over 200 Million users. This shows how important social media is for sports marketing in the 21st century. (Chad Witkemper, 2012)

Now that social media has become the largest advertisement method, sport teams and athletes must have a social media presence and following. When a consumer first hears about an athlete they are interested in, they will most likely check out their social media pages and if they do not have one, it would appear weird to the consumer. Social media has become such a large part of every marketing strategy and it keeps on growing. There are multiple different platforms you must take into consideration, such as: Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, Youtube, LinkedIn. It is simply not enough for an athlete or sport team to have a presence in one of these, they must be active on each of them separately as consumers search the social media of their preference to find the person or team they are looking for. (Guillermo Armelini, 2014)

Social media marketing is making traditional marketing obsolete. In today's world, you simply do not check the paper or the news to see who won a match you missed as it is a lot easier and convenient to browse the social media of your choosing. Social media creates a large amount of word to mouth marketing, which for the teams and athletes is basically free advertisement. A simple tweet from a sports organization can reach millions of people while traditional word to mouth advertising is limited by nature. Word to mouth advertising is always more credible than even the best advertisement, people trust word to mouth advertisement as it comes from someone's own experience and knowledge. (Guillermo Armelini, 2014)

Even though it is easier to get people talking about your team or athlete, you cannot control what they say. Social media can also make it easier for bad reputation to grow for a mistake you have done. Word to mouth works both ways, people will believe someone who slanders a team or athlete. (Guillermo Armelini, 2014)

People do not get irritated by e-WOM (Electronic Word of mouth) as much as the traditional marketing, at least not yet. There was a time when emails were not considered annoying, but then emails were over saturated with spam advertisements. Over saturation can ruin e-WOM in the upcoming years as it keeps on growing and becoming more and more of a standard for people. (Guillermo Armelini, 2014)

5.7   Consumer behaviour in sports

If a consumer is interested in sports, what thrives them to choose the team they wish to support? Choosing the local team is the typical choice due to peer pressure. If your classmates for example cheer for one team, it is likely that you adapt to that and cheer for them as well. Sports is usually highly competitive and so is the fanbase of it. Sports can encourage consumers to a lifestyle of fandom you could say. The most loyal fans of a sports team will stick through thick and thin with their team, it does not matter if they win or lose. (Guillermo Armelini, 2014)

5.7.1   The psychological continuum Model (PCM)

The psychological continuum model (Referred to as PCM further on) was developed by Daniel Funk and Jeff James in 2001. It is one of the most efficient ways of explaining sport and event consumer behaviour. It shows how engaging in continuous sport consumption, such as playing or watching sports, progress through four general stages: Awareness, Attraction, Attachment and Allegiance. Sport marketers' job is to move consumers up the PCM, aiming to reach the Attachment stage. The PCM is a concept of involvement, which represent a consumer's level of interest, motivation and engagement in a sport related activity. (Ivanov, 2016)

5.7.2   Awareness

When you consider awareness in sports, marketers must consider the various social interactions which through a consumer may introduce themselves to your marketed team: Peers, media, family, friends and so on. (Ivanov, 2016)

Social media is extremely important for awareness in marketing, especially if you are targeting younger generations. The role of social media is getting more prominent when you consider the interplay between sport subcultures and online communities. Viral marketing is a recommended strategy for communication with consumers through social media due to minimal effort and simplicity. (Ivanov, 2016)

5.7.3 Attraction

The difference between Awareness and Attraction is the willingness of consuming the marketed sport. While awareness aims to bring in new consumers, attraction aims to keep them attracted to your sport team. During the attraction phase, the interaction of the consumer is still relatively low, but they have interest and motivation for the sport they are following. (Ivanov, 2016)

The aim for marketers to move consumers from awareness to attraction is to create emotional responses and increase the pleasure of engaging in sports. Creativity and targeted consumer marketing are the key to get people attracted to the sport you are marketing. (Ivanov, 2016)

5.7.4 Attachment

Attachment is the functional, symbolic meaning and emotional attraction a consumer has for sport object that is enough to motivate behaviour. Sport marketing during attachment phase of PCM focuses on personalization. The majority of people working in sports marketing work on bringing consumers from the attraction stage into the attachment stage. Attachment stage aims to make consumers so attracted and attached to the sport that they post about it to social media and follow the teams intensively. (Ivanov, 2016)

5.7.5 Allegiance

Sports marketers job from moving a consumer from attachment to allegiance is designed to focus on increasing their loyalty and devotion to a sports team or object. The difference between the allegiance and attachment stages in PCM is the attitudinal strength. It strengthens the functional and emotional attachment to the sports team. (Ivanov, 2016)

High consumer loyalty is typical sports consumer behaviour. Sports viewers pledge their allegiance to their favourite teams, and they thrive to cheer their favourite teams over the others. It bases on shared passion for activities revolving around the sport. (Ivanov, 2016)

The most important part of the allegiance stage for sports marketers is to serve as a platform for co-creation. Engaging the consumers and make them talk about your team together. (Ivanov, 2016)

5.8   **Costs, sales, and brand in social media marketing**

Traditional word of mouth marketing may be the cheapest way of advertising and marketing your team or athlete, but the same cannot be said for e-WOM. If a company wishes to use a famous athlete to market their product through social media, it will cost them quit a bit of money, depending on the popularity of the athlete. (Guillermo Armelini, 2014)

Marketing in the digital age is growing and it is not going anywhere. Traditional media advertisements are being used less-and-less by everyone in today's time. It is vital for organizations to be present in social media and they have to put time and money into creating that presence.
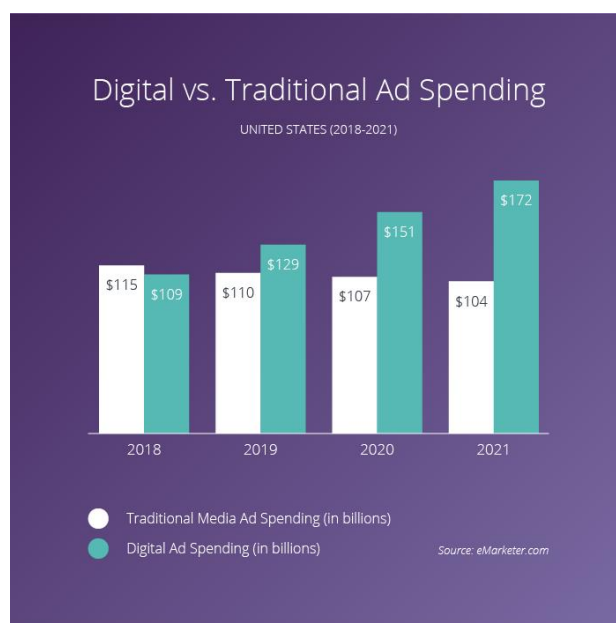
Digital advertisement spending has already been overthrowing traditional marketing spending over the last few years as can be seen from the graph provided by eMarketer.com

Creating content where customers can interact with their favourite brands has been trending over the years. (Tina Eaton, 2019)

6   INTERVIEWS

The author conducted interviews with different professionals of sports marketing from different perspectives. In the appendix you can see the full transcript for the interview questions.

- Aki Holma, Director of sales and marketing – Tappara (Holma, 2020)
- Niklas Segercrantz, Commercial Manager esports – Telia (Segercrantz, 2020)
- Joona Leppänen, Marketing Director – ENCE (Leppänen, 2020)

The questions which the author asked in the interviews were:
- What does sports marketing mean to (the company)?
- In what ways does (the company) fulfil marketing?
- What goals does (the company) have for marketing?
- How could (the company) bring sports marketing into eSports?

6.1   About the companies

6.1.1   Tappara

Tappara is a Finnish hockey team situated in Tampere, Finland and they have been playing since 1955. They have won the Finnish ice hockey cup 17 times since then. (tappara.fi)

6.1.2   Telia

Telia Finland oy, previously Sonera Oyj is now days a Swedish owned company when Sonera merged with Telia. Telia Finland is one of the biggest operators of Finland, providing internet connections and mobile subscriptions. (Telia)

6.1.3   ENCE

ENCE is a Finnish esports organization that originally launched in 2013, playing games such as Counter-Strike: Global Offensive, Starcraft 2, Playerunknown's Battlegrounds and League of Legends. (Kuusisto, 2020)

6.2 Outcome of the interviews

The questions in the interviews were all the same for the three organizations due to consistency in the research. The questions were all thought out so, that they answer what the author has already researched prior to the interviews. The author wished to see three different perspectives to the questions in order to see if different companies and organizations see sports marketing in a different way and how do they collide with each other's.

One thing that was clear from all the interviews is, that sports marketing has digitalized and none of the organizations think otherwise, which does not come as a surprise. Both Telia and ENCE believe that creating content that speaks to the audience makes them market the company themselves in their social media posts, so word of mouth advertising in social media is prioritized in marketing the teams and organizations.

Goals for marketing was similar for all the organizations; to create content that speaks to the target audience and makes them want to come back for more.

All the companies had different type of answers for ''how could the company bring sports marketing into eSports''. It was perhaps the most important question in the interview, due to it basically being the research question. The author got three very different answers to it, but on the bottom-line, they were all going for the same thing. Both eSports and sports can benefit each other's and can learn from another. Telia is doing a phenomenal job of already doing so as they market both sides, and they wish to create a larger audience for eSports in the Nordics.

6.3 What does sports marketing mean to the company

Exposure and being apparent in the scene, being an example for others and bring sports marketing to a next level. The companies believe that sports marketing is more than just the typical ice hockey rink advertisements. Being relevant and present on the sports scene is crucial for all the organizations.

Tappara's whole operation is based on economic well-being, so marketing is the cornerstone of that success. Both ENCE and Telia believe that exposure and creating emotions for the viewers is a crucial part of their marketing strategy and is the most important part of sports marketing for them.

Creating content that creates feelings and emotions for their viewers. The target audience of sports and eSports marketing is very critical about content and advertisement, so creating witty content that speaks to the audience is important.

Athletes and players are not that different from any influencer. Players and athletes have a large following, so whatever individual player or athlete does affect the thought process of viewers.

6.4 In what ways does the companies fulfil marketing

All three companies fulfil marketing in very similar ways. They all believe in digitalization of sports marketing and how word-of-mouth advertising is a crucial part of their marketing strategies.

Data-driven and multi-channel marketing is an important part of the 21st century sports marketing and creating experiences for customers. A strong appearance in social media and the organizations own channels is crucial to a successful marketing plan. Creating content that speaks to the target audience and makes them want to follow for more interactive and interesting content.

Creating focus group marketing for both traditional sports and eSports, overlapping them if possible, to bring a broader view of both sides of the sports and eSports marketing plans.

While ENCE focuses on creating content in video format and their aim is for their viewers to create the content for them, Tappara and Telia focuses on creating marketing through their own channels or through digital partners.

6.5   What goals does the company have for marketing

Being the forerunners of sports marketing and commercial success. Commercial and brand identity is important to all the organizations and measuring marketing's success and efficiency on both longer and shorter terms.

Making content that makes the viewers want to share it with their friends, so the content is making itself. Inspiring and creating moods and strengthening the brand image.

6.6   How could the company bring eSports marketing into traditional sports?

ENCE works with Finnish sports teams and athletes to combine eSports and sports content to appeal for a broader audience. All the companies believe sports marketing is not that different from eSports marketing and they can be easily adapted to one-another. Social media skills and marketing of ticket sales is something that Tappara believes is what eSports can benefit from traditional sports marketing.

Telia is working on creating a larger market for eSports in Finland and the Nordics. They wish to push eSports to another level, creating easily accessible eSports content for everyone. They wish to make Nordics the pioneers of eSports. The Spanish are known for football, they aim to make the Nordics known for eSports. The aim is to offer so great connections and possibilities that every player wants to live in the Nordics!

7   ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

During this chapter, the author will go through his thoughts and ideas on how to bring traditional sports marketing into eSports and thoughts on how traditional sports culture, marketing and advertising can be adapted into eSports.

7.1   Social media

Traditional sports marketing compared to eSports is not that different. Both industries can learn from each other and adapt their marketing and sales strategies for themselves. Where traditional sports can use their own stadiums to sell advertisement space, eSports lack their own stadium at least for now. But the future of sports marketing is not in the traditional stadium advertisement slots which you can sell to companies.

The future of traditional sports marketing is where everything is now days,- the internet. Everything revolves around social media and the internet in the 21st century, sports marketing is not an exception. eSports is something that has grew up and has always been part of the internet, so their marketing has always been online unlike traditional sports marketing. But there is no need to look behind and try to adapt the 20th century marketing tactics for eSports from traditional sports. Traditional sports can and has learned a lot from eSports about online marketing and online presence. But what can eSports learn and adapt from traditional sports?

From the interview with Aki Holma of Tappara, the author learned about how a sports team utilizes social media for their marketing and how they execute their marketing.

7.2 Word of mouth advertisement

Much like in traditional sports, WOM (word of mouth) is something that eSports thrives on. Social media posts about the viewers favourite athlete or player in this case, is a great way to gain new viewership and encourage the current fans to feel like their part of the team when they are cheering for their favourite teams online or face-to-face.

The author first heard about ENCE from a friend through WOM as they were hyping about ENCE's latest conquest. Word of mouth advertising is a lot easier now that social media is so easily accessible, anyone who owns a mobile device can check on their friends and family to see what they are talking about. So, to get people motivated to talk about your team, athletes or players is something both eSports and traditional sports should focus their marketing strategy to. During the interview with Joona Leppänen of ENCE, the author learned how ENCE already utilizes this in their marketing as they aim to create content that speaks to their audience and how they aim to make content that makes the viewers want to discuss about it with their friends and share the stories online to each-others.

7.3 Globalization and localization

Since globalization has made it easier for consumers to consume the type of content they wish to consume, it is crucial for eSports to make sure they inspire the youth to be interested in eSports from a young age.

The author grew up in a small town and nobody told them about all the possibilities of sports they could do. It was just all about Hockey and Floorball. Globalization helps this cause, making it easier for all the small-town kids to learn about whatever they could be interested in. The author thinks it would be important to promote eSports to schools and smaller towns as well and not only focus the marketing online, even though online marketing is the most important part. Small inspirations for the youth can bring new viewers and new players for eSports.

7.4 Watching eSports

Watching eSports is easy and accessible for those who know where to view it. The author thinks there is currently the issue of people not knowing where to watch it. In the interview with Niklas Segercrantz of Telia, the author discussed how Telia is trying to bring eSports to a larger audience. They are doing a phenomenal job of doing so, as you can see eSports being marketed a lot more today than you could a few years back.

But why is it so, that eSports is not that know? Of course, the fact that it is a newer scene in Finland and the Nordics overall compared to traditional sports, but the author thinks there is a large market for eSports in Finland.

There are so many sports bars in Tampere alone, but why are there only a handful of bars dedicated to the gaming industry? The gaming bars in Tampere offers beverages, snacks and computers to play on. The atmosphere in the bar is astonishing; people playing and enjoying drinks together. The author thinks there is a large market for eSports to promote these places and the culture of watching sports in bars could easily be adapted into eSports and these gaming cafes/bars.

The author thinks that once eSports gains a larger audience, it becomes the standard of watching the big matches together with your friends, much like sports. It does not have to be in a bar, as sports is watched from your own home as well most of the time. When large companies like Telia start to promote eSports and it becomes more accessible, eSports becomes an event you share with your friends and like-minded viewers.

Much like in sports, eSports should emphasise events they are attending. For example, the Assembly which is hosted twice a year. Assembly for Finnish gaming enthusiasts is very much like the ''Super bowl of gaming''. Every year, gamers wait for these events to see their favourite content creators and eSports players playing in tournaments. This is a culture which is just growing, and it keeps on growing. Assembly sold 4000 computer slots in the year 2019, according to Ilta-sanomat (Hartikainen, 2019). This number keeps growing every year and events like Assembly should be hosted all over the Nordics.

7.4.1 Virtual Reality and Augmented Reality

As sports are adapting to the new rising trends of VR and AR, eSports should follow along. Creating experiences for consumers to watch and interact through VR and AR can be a game changer for the future of consuming sports and eSports. It would not come as a surprise for the author if VR and AR would be the new standard of watching sports and eSports in the next ten years.

7.5 Adapting sports culture into eSports

As the author discussed in the previous section, watching eSports is becoming more-and-more like watching sports with your friends. The culture around eSports is growing and evolving as eSports becomes more known around the world. Sports culture is something everyone comes across during their everyday lives. Everyone knows someone who loves a certain sports team or a sport itself.

As gaming becomes more relevant year-by-year, eSports will grow along with it. When the author was young, it was considered weird if you played video games excessively, when in-fact, the people who played games were just ahead of their time. In 2020 it would be considered to be weirder if you did not play any games at all during your childhood and this brings us to adapting the culture of sports into eSports.

The meaning of ''Watching a match with friends'' used to mean watching a game of football or any other sport with your friends. If someone would say that now, it could mean anything. If the authors friends said to the author, they would automatically connect the sentence to watching eSports rather than sports. Creating this culture that supports gaming and makes young people more aware of eSports and competitive gaming in general is amazing.

7.5.1 The psychological continuum model (PCM) in eSports

The psychological continuum model (PCM) that sports marketers use for sports works for eSports as well. Adapting the same strategies from PCM to eSports in a longer run, will create fans that are devoted to their favourite esports teams.
- Awareness
- Attraction
- Attachment
- Allegiance

The four stages of PCM as explained in the results and findings chapter of this report, works exactly the same for eSports. eSports organizations should consider using the same methodology for their marketing strategies to create those consumers who are attached to the sport and the teams.

7.6   **Sponsorship and product placement**

Sponsorships are a huge part of sports and eSports marketing and funding. Sports sponsorships have changed and adapted with the growing of social media and the internet. During their studies, the author studied traditional sports marketing in-depth and learned a lot about how sports marketing has adapted to the online marketing scene and how sport teams and athletes use different type of sponsor deals in today's time.

Sponsors used to be just about selling space on the athletes or teams clothing and cars, but since social media has grown, so has sponsor deals and the possibilities around them as well.

The picture on the left is a great example of sport sponsorship in the 21st century. An American football player made a deal with Wilson Football and Adidas to stream a giveaway of these signed shoes on Twitch. It is a great example of something that eSports should adapt into their marketing.

An online presence is crucial to an athlete, player and the team nowadays. The bigger, the better. Creating an online following for each of the individual players and engaging with the viewers on a more personal level is something that brings the viewers back for the next match.

7.6.1 Product placement

Product placement, much like in traditional sports, can be utilized in eSports. People who watch the matches, may spend hours a day watching the tournaments of eSports or sports. A well-placed product, verbal or visible, is a great spot for companies to sponsor. Organization that is interested in the customer base of eSports should invest in product placements during tournaments. From the authors perspective, seeing a team drinking energy drinks or using a mouse or a keyboard from a specific company, brings forth interest in the product. ''It must be good if they are using it'' is a mind-set viewer have for both sports and eSports. eSports of course already uses product placement from their sponsors during tournaments, but the author thinks it could be utilized more. Getting a company to sponsor a team's social media posts could bring new viewers to the tournaments and raise awareness of the team.

7.6.2 Sponsorship culture

Much like in sports, eSports should take into consideration how different cultures see gaming and eSports in general and what brands are seen as high-value when choosing their sponsorships.

Sponsorships are more like a partnership in both sports and eSports nowadays, which can already be seen from different eSports organizations marketing and tournaments. Sponsorship culture keeps growing along with eSports and it adapts to the consumer culture of eSports.

8 CONCLUSION

During this conclusion, the author will go through what they discussed in the previous chapters about how to bring traditional sports marketing into eSports.

The author learnt a lot about sports marketing while researching for this thesis. How sports have adapted to the digital era of marketing and how they keep growing their following online and how important word of mouth advertising is for both traditional sports and eSports.

While sports and eSports marketing are very similar when it comes to the online presence, the author thinks eSports can learn a lot about what has been discussed during this research. Creating a culture of watching eSports on the same level as watching sports has created it in the past decades is something that eSports should aim their goals towards. Focusing on word-of-mouth marketing and creating content that is engageable by the community, so that they want to talk about it to their friends is what thrives digital marketing.

Creating sponsorships that are fit to the culture of eSports and promoting them in a fun and engaging way during their tournaments and social media marketing is what sports has done for a while now and eSports has adapted into the same culture and creating partnerships with the same values and goals.

9   RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research on the subject should be considered to be done in reverse: What could traditional sports learn from eSports. There is a great amount of knowledge eSports has and traditional sport organizations could and should adapt to the digital marketing era, where eSports thrives!

As virtual reality and augmented reality continues to grow, it is a subject that should be researched in-depth for both sports and eSports marketing. It was interesting how Nascar for example has created Virtual Reality experiences, so you can watch the race from the driver's perspective. That is definitely something that should be researched further.

Going more in-depth with word-of-mouth advertising would be an interesting topic as all the companies in the interviews and most of the research was based on how traditional sports has adapted into the digitalization of sports marketing and how word-of-mouth advertising is a crucial part of the 21st century sports marketing.

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11 APPENDIX

11.1 Aki Holma, Director of sales and marketing - Tappara

The first interview the author conducted was for Aki Holma, Director of sales and marketing of Tappara. Tappara is a Finnish hockey team and their hometown is Tampere.

Q. What does sports marketing mean to Tappara?

- Our whole operation is based on economic well-being, so marketing is the cornerstone of that success.

Q. In what ways does Tappara fulfil marketing?

- We have a forum with our internal team, marketing office and digital partners through which we implement our marketing.

Q. What goals does Tappara have for marketing?

- Being Tappara's communities, the leagues and the sports vanguard of commercial success.

Q. How could Tappara bring sports marketing into eSports?

- The same elements of sports marketing could be adapted into eSports. Social media skills and marketing of ticket sales.
(Holma, 2020)

11.2 Niklas Segercrantz, Commercial Manager esports – Telia

Q. What does sports marketing mean to Telia?

- For us, that is exposure and that we are apparent in the scene. We want to be a role model for others and to enable sports to go to the next level. We have installed optical fibre to all the stadiums in Finland and we want to be the liable operator in our society.

For us, sports marketing is more than the typical ice hockey rink advertisement. We want to be relevant and present in the sports scene. May it be eSports or traditional sports.

Q. In what ways does Telia fulfil marketing?

- We do data-driven, multi-channel marketing. We invest in costumer experience. Strong appearance in media and our own channels are a strong marketing tool. We create focus group marketing for both traditional sports and eSports, of course they overlap for some. Some of our customers who watch sports on our pay-per-view, are customers who are also interested in eSports.

Q. What goals does Telia have for marketing?

- Commercial and brand identity. We measure our marketing's success and efficiency on both longer and shorter terms.

Q. How could Telia bring sports marketing into eSports?

- In a way, we already have. We work with the Finnish sports and eSports leagues. We bought the Assembly (The largest eSports driven event in Finland) and we have brought our own leagues to Finland and the Nordics. We have created possibilities for other companies to enter the eSports

scene as well. We see ourselves as a larger company which can help the society to understand what eSports is about and raise awareness of eSports in the Nordics. Our vision is that we will bring Finland and the Nordics to the biggest eSports scene there is. The Spanish are known for their football, we want the Nordics to be known for eSports.

Our mission is to offer so great connections, possibilities and content that every player wants to live in Finland and the Nordics! (Segercrantz, 2020)

11.3 Joona Leppänen, Marketing Director – ENCE

Q. What does sports marketing mean to ENCE?

- It is a lot about content creation, in this sort of organization it is about creating feelings and emotions for viewers. Our target audience is very critical about content and advertisement, so we aim to create witty content that has commercialised content within it.

Athletes and players are not that different from any influencer. Players and athletes have a large following, so whatever the individual player or athlete does affect the thought process of the viewers. Playing video games have become more of a life-style for a lot people now days.

Q. In what ways does ENCE fulfil marketing?

- It is very media centred and we do a lot of content in video format. It depends a lot about what or who we are marketing. For example, one of our partners, Wolt, has a specific type of marketing we fulfil while our other partner, Telia, has bunch of different branches within it so marketing is not that straight forward. Our primary objective is similar goals with our partners.

Q. What goals does ENCE have for marketing?

- Our principal is from viewers to viewers, so the content in a way creates itself. We aim to inspire our viewers to talk about us to each other's. Creating various moods and strengthening brands.

The context may not be only about gaming. It can be about the clothing and the brand; we focus on that more and more. We want to make emotional bonds with our viewers.

Q. How could ENCE bring eSports marketing into traditional sports?

- We have worked with Pelicans (Finnish Hockey team) and different athletes and teams. For example, race car drivers have worked with our

players to create content, uniting sports and eSports players. (Leppänen, 2020)