

The esports experience economy: a multiple case study of esports events, peripherals and fashion

Abstract

Purpose – To examine the cultural and economic circumstances that shape esports consumer agency through case studies of ‘experiential consumption’ (Miles, 2021).

Design/methodology/approach – A multiple case study approach (Stake, 2006) is deployed alongside participant observation and document analysis to identify three cases of experiential consumption in esports – an esports tournament, a large online community for gaming peripherals and accessories, and an esportswear fashion brand.

Findings – The research identifies three aspects of experiential consumption relevant to esports. First, tournaments are sensory and emotional ‘spectacles’, immersing consumers in memorable experiences. Second, online gaming communities enable consumers to express themselves through ‘self-work’. Third, esportswear companies engage consumers with exclusive, authentic fashion experiences via ‘lifestyle branding’.

Research limitations/implications – The case studies highlight the need for future cross-cultural research on esports experiences, particularly how regional differences shape consumer behaviour. The impact of emerging technologies like VR, AR, blockchain and AI on personalising experiences, enhancing interactivity, and related ethical considerations should be further explored.

Practical implications – Esports stakeholders can enhance esports events with real-time data analytics, VR and AR to create immersive experiences. They can also diversify income streams via personalised and exclusive apparel lines that reflect consumer identity, collaborating with mainstream fashion or entertainment brands. Compelling, emotionally resonant storytelling can deepen fan engagement and help build brand loyalty.

Originality/value – This article presents a new theoretical understanding of esports consumption through multiple case studies of experiential consumption, revealing the central role that ‘experience’ plays in shaping the design and choice of esports products and services.

Keywords Esports, Experience, Identity, Video Games, Consumer Behaviour

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

Esports, or electronic sports, has witnessed tremendous growth in recent years as a swiftly evolving form of digital entertainment (Lehnert *et al.*, 2022). As the prominence of esports surges, the volume of scholarly research into esports consumers has also quickly expanded (Cranmer *et al.*, 2021; McCauley *et al.*, 2024; also see Brock, 2023). In particular, psychologists have begun to identify a variety of motivational processes that influence esports consumption, including escapism, drama, vicarious achievement and the acquisition of knowledge that accompanies esports spectatorship (Hamari and Sjöblom, 2017; Pizzo *et al.*, 2018). This research has resulted in the construction of various typologies of esports consumers, often based on their level of participation and the gratification that comes from spectating competitive video gameplay or purchasing esports-related goods (Anderson *et al.*, 2021; Macey *et al.*, 2022). Importantly, these typologies emerge from sports consumer research, which has examined the motivations of sports fans and their preferences for specific sporting events (Lee and Schoenstedt, 2011). While these approaches reveal the psychological processes behind esports consumer behaviour, less has been said about the influence of economic and cultural structures. Indeed, there is a long-standing practice in sociology of treating consumption *critically*, which means examining the cultural and

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3 economic circumstances that shape consumer agency (Miles, 1998, 2021). This has been
4 largely absent from research into esports consumption.

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6 This article intends to address this gap by answering the following research question:
7 'How do economic and cultural structures shape the practices and identities of esports
8 consumers?' To explore this, the concept of 'experiential consumption' (Miles, 2021) is
9 applied to esports consumer practices, examining how consumers engage with esports goods
10 and services as commodities and meaningful experiences. In recent years, research has
11 identified a cultural shift in consumer behaviour wherein traditional goods and services
12 become increasingly secondary to the experiences they produce (Pine and Gilmore, 1999).
13 This shift towards experiential consumption can be seen in several industries, including retail,
14 tourism, wellness and immersive entertainment (Banco and Kobakova, 2018; Shin, 2018,
15 2022). Rather than solely selling physical products or services, these industries tie consumers
16 into meaningful and memorable experiences by creating new social connections and forms of
17 belonging (Illouz, 2018). Notably, consumer research has started to raise critical questions
18 about this shift, suggesting that economic and cultural tensions lay behind the act of 'buying
19 experiences' (Rose and Wood, 2005). Indeed, research points to the potentially paradoxical
20 ways consumers shop for pre-packaged experiences to construct the self (Rose and Wood,
21 2005). This critical approach has been extended to video games, a key driver of experiential
22 consumption (Muriel and Crawford, 2018).

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24 This article breaks new ground in its focus on esports' economic and cultural context,
25 particularly its argument that as a provider of experiential consumption, it shapes the
26 practices and identities of esports players and their audiences. A multiple case study (Stake,
27 2006) of esports events, products, and fashion shows how esports goods and services afford
28 consumers endless forms of 'experience'. More specifically, it identifies the different
29 characteristics of experiential consumption within each case – an esports tournament, an
30 online community for mouse peripherals and accessories, and an esports fashion and
31 sportswear ('esportswear') brand. This analysis reveals the sociological role of experience in
32 shaping consumer agency and practices within esports, particularly in terms of how
33 consumers construct their identities by engaging with esports goods and services. This article
34 also identifies potential tensions around the 'authenticity' of esports consumer behaviour
35 through a cross-case comparison, revealing that consumers seek symbolic experiences
36 outside of competitive gameplay and spectatorship.

40 41 2. Literature review

42 2.1 Esports consumption

43 As competitive video gaming has evolved from a niche hobby into a global phenomenon
44 (Zhouxiang, 2022), understanding the nature of esports consumption has become a central
45 concern for consumer researchers. Indeed, understanding why people watch and engage with
46 esports is crucial for game developers, marketers, teams and other stakeholders in the
47 industry (Hamari and Sjöblom, 2017). As a result, a significant proportion of research into
48 esports consumption has been devoted to the psychology of consumer motivations.

49 Psychologists have argued that a variety of micro-level motivational factors influence esports
50 consumption, including cognitive engagement (Lee and Schoenstedt, 2011; Pizzo *et al.*,
51 2018; Jang *et al.*, 2021a), aesthetic appreciation (Sjöblom *et al.*, 2019; Pu *et al.*, 2021, 2022;
52 Jang *et al.*, 2020b), identity and community (Lee and Schoenstedt, 2011; Jang *et al.*, 2020a,
53 2021b; Tang *et al.*, 2022), observational learning and vicarious achievement (Macey *et al.*,
54 2022; Santos *et al.*, 2021), escapism (Macey *et al.*, 2022), nostalgia (Hua *et al.*, 2023) and
55 gambling (Abarbanel *et al.*, 2020; Macey and Hamari, 2018; Macey and Hamari, 2019;
56 Macey *et al.*, 2021). Importantly, this interest in esports consumer motivations draws heavily
57 from psychological research into sports consumers, which has deployed quantitative
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3 measurement instruments to develop consumer behaviour typologies. For example, Jang *et al.*
4 (2021a) and Ma *et al.* (2021) have identified types of esports consumers based on their levels
5 of motivation and consumption of esports hardware, software or media content online.

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7 There are, of course, limitations to classifying and explaining esports consumer
8 behaviour in this way. As Pham's (2013) critique of consumer psychology testified,
9 psychological research into consumption can operate with a 'narrow' theoretical lens that
10 fails to appreciate the macro-structural contexts influencing consumers' consumption. In
11 Pham's (2013) view, consumer psychology has suffered from various 'sins', the most
12 significant being its tendency towards researching individual motivational processes, but
13 often at the expense of understanding the cultural and socio-relational contexts that shape
14 consumer decision-making. The result, Pham (2013) argued, is research that views the
15 consumer 'mechanistically' through reference to 'triggers' and 'outcomes'. The same is true
16 of esports consumer research, within which there has been a tendency to reduce complex
17 human behaviours and attitudes to quantifiable variables such as 'time spent playing' (Lee
18 and Schoenstedt, 2011; Macey and Hamari, 2019) or 'total monthly views', 'hours viewed',
19 and 'average length of views' (Tang *et al.*, 2022). Such variables have stood in for
20 explanations about esports consumer types and the effectiveness of marketing techniques
21 (Jang *et al.*, 2020a, 2021a) or the design of games and platforms to draw consumer attention
22 (Tang *et al.*, 2022). Pham (2013) has contended that this approach has very little to say about
23 the 'genuine experience' that sits at the heart of consumption, which needs to be understood
24 as embedded within complex cultural norms and political-economic systems.
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29 2.2 A sociological approach to 'experience' in consumer research

30 Against this backdrop, we propose a sociological appraisal of 'experience' in esports
31 consumption, mainly through Miles's (2021) concept of 'experiential consumption'.
32 Suggesting that we live in an 'experience society', Miles (2021) has argued that the very idea
33 of consumption has changed as a result of broader macro-economic, social and cultural
34 processes.
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36 First, since the mid-20th century, the markets and economies of Western nations have
37 shifted away from acquiring tangible goods and services to focusing on buying experiences
38 (see Pine and Gilmore, 1999). Where historically, the accumulation of physical products was
39 a key indicator of wealth and status, contemporary consumers value the emotional and social
40 benefits that 'experiences' offer, such as personal growth, memorable moments and new
41 social connections (Bronner and de Hoog, 2018; Yeoman and McMahon-Beattie, 2019). As a
42 result, businesses adapt by creating products that are not just 'consumed' but are 'lived and
43 felt', thereby aligning the economy with contemporary consumers' emotional needs and
44 social values (Illouz, 2018). Sociological analyses of esports have examined this relationship.
45 For example, Borowy and Jin (2013) argued that esports tournaments are 'experiential
46 commodities', where consumers derive value from watching skilled players compete in
47 multisensory, interactive and communal environments. Similarly, Seo (2013) has discussed
48 how esports marketing strategies leverage cultural experiences to engage audiences, turning
49 consumer engagement into economic profit. Additionally, Seo (2016) explored how the
50 identities of esports players and fans have evolved to align with the economic dynamics of
51 the industry, becoming more commercialised as esports play is professionalised. This
52 analysis aligns with Jin (2010) and Taylor (2012), who have shown that the cultural
53 acceptance of esports has propelled a new market of experiential goods and services,
54 including sports merchandise and sponsorships. According to Brock (2021), these
55 experiential goods extend beyond physical products to digital services within the esports
56 ecosystem, such as online coaching and boosting services.
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Second, experiential consumption is connected with a change in social values and identity. Sociologists like Bauman (2007) have argued that late-20th century societies have become increasingly focused on individualism, self-identity and self-improvement. As traditional social structures like religion or class have weakened, people shape their identities through consumer choice, not just of goods, but of experiences that allow them to express their individuality. Video gaming is seen as an effective medium for delivering these experiences. Molesworth and Denegri-Knott (2007) have argued that video game consumers use virtual collectable items to control, order and make sense of the ‘liminality’ of their daily lives. Video games are said to be a resource for the scheduling of ‘life scripts’, which provide players with new ways to construct fantasies, daydreams and escapes from daily life (Molesworth, 2009). Similarly, Molesworth and Watkins (2016) have suggested video gaming symbolises technological and personal progress for individuals as they acquire new consoles or accumulate in-game resources and achievements. From this perspective, research has reflected on the ‘craft-like experiences’ accompanying esports play as an example of how consumers actualise expressions of autonomy and expertise (Brock and Johnson, 2021).

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Third, there has been a cultural shift in the role of leisure in society. Miles (1998) has argued that, by the late-20th century, leisure was no longer primarily concerned with rest and relaxation. Rather, leisure became an act of ‘conspicuous consumption’ (Bellezza *et al.*, 2017) – a means of social distinction – through the acquisition of goods and services to display one’s material wealth, social status or cultural tastes. Consumers would engage in carefully curated and publicly shared activities allowing them to use their leisure time to construct and perform their desired identities. As such, leisure quickly became an extension of work with consumers using their ‘down time’ to continue their personal and professional development (Dimanche and Samdahl, 1994). What resulted was a culture of perpetual busyness, where the idea of leisure became synonymous with the need for discernible, productive outcomes (Bellezza *et al.*, 2017). Others have demonstrated this culture in the context of esports, which are often marketed, purchased and consumed by young people in the belief that they provide benefits to social status (Wearing *et al.*, 2021). Indeed, esports live streaming platforms, like Twitch.tv, encourage young people to use their leisure time to develop practices around self-presentation, self-promotion and entrepreneurial enterprise (Brock, 2019). Esports play has also been connected to broader neoliberal values regarding productivity and self-development (Brock, 2021).

From these broader societal changes, Miles (2021) identifies three meso-level aspects of experiential consumption that are useful in consumer research:

1. ‘The spectacle’: social interactions are increasingly mediated through images and appearances (Debord, 1967). People now relate to one another through commodities and their representations, publicly displaying their identities. This stage is characterised by individuals showcasing their emotional and memorable experiences as part of their leisure pursuits. This performativity enriches an individual’s social capital whilst reproducing producer and consumer relations within a capitalist economy (Illouz, 2018).
2. ‘Self-work’: individuals’ intentional efforts to craft their identities through consumption practices. In particular, buying decisions reflect broader goals of personal and professional self-improvement (Rose and Wood, 2005). Through self-work, consumers are not just buying an experience but investing in their identity, expecting these experiences to transform them meaningfully.
3. ‘Lifestyle branding’: consumers are not just passive recipients of marketed experiences but active participants in shaping their lifestyles through the branded experiences they consume (see Shields, 2003). Lifestyle branding can be seen in

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3 tourism, where consumers select destinations and activities that resonate with their
4 values, aspirations, and self-image, often seeking out less commercialised experiences
5 to find a sense of discovery and authenticity (Miles, 2021, p.48). Lifestyle brands
6 reflect a broader cultural shift towards understanding the role of experiences in
7 shaping individual identity.
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10 As Figure 1 shows, ‘experiential consumption’ underscores the significant role that macro-
11 structural factors play in shaping esports consumer behaviour at an intermediate and
12 individual level. This framework enables researchers to analyse consumer practices by
13 considering how economic, social and cultural contexts shape consumer agency, often
14 beyond the control of the individual consumer. It connects psychological aspects of consumer
15 behaviour with broader sociological contexts, like historical shifts in production and
16 consumption. As such, concepts like the spectacle, self-work and lifestyle branding serve as
17 valuable meso-level tools for examining consumer agency within these broader contexts.
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20 3. Method

21 3.1 Research design

22 This study deployed a multiple case study approach, which involves the detailed examination
23 of multiple cases (more than one) within a study. According to Stake (2006), this approach is
24 particularly effective for research investigating phenomena across different settings or
25 situations. As Figure 2 shows, these cases are understood as ‘parts’ of a broader ‘whole’,
26 where each case is studied in terms of its boundaries and *across* them to help identify deeper
27 patterns or contexts. As such, Stake (2006, p.8) **has contended** that the multiple case study
28 approach effectively examines complex phenomena in natural settings, yielding
29 comprehensive, contextual understandings of the real-life application of theoretical concepts.
30 Researchers should be careful not to overgeneralise from the particular to the general,
31 especially as cases might represent unique or context-specific conditions. The synthesis and
32 comparison of cases can highlight occurrences useful for theory-building and confirming
33 (Stake, 2006, p.11-12). More specifically, there is a benefit to thinking of case-based analyses
34 as a form of retrodution: using empirical data to explain and verify the existence of (causal)
35 mechanisms theorised to have generated the phenomena under study (Wynn and Williams,
36 2012). As such, cases can effectively create knowledge about *what* connects ‘parts’ to the
37 ‘whole’, albeit in non-linear, complex, and falsifiable ways (Byrne, 2009).
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40 Given that a multiple case study aims to examine how a particular concept
41 (‘experiential consumption’) binds cases together, **Stake (2006, p.23) argued** that researchers
42 should select cases that examine how the concept performs in different environments. Indeed,
43 in contrast to a statistical or science-based approach to cases, **Stake (2006, p.24) argued** that
44 ‘the binding concept, the phenomenon of interest...needs to be prominent’. This approach is
45 consistent with other case studies published in this journal (**Marx et al., 2023**). It involves
46 establishing each case's conceptual boundaries (or ‘boundedness’), ensuring that each case is
47 clearly defined and contextualised within its specific setting. It draws on a purposive sample
48 tailored to provide insights about the complexity of a particular idea or concept. For Stake
49 (2006, p.26-27), choosing cases based on their relevance and variety can support researchers
50 to connect their data to their theoretical framework. As such, the conceptual boundaries
51 around ‘experiential consumption’ were used to justify the selection of each case.
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54 Case study one (4.1 *The ALGS*) focused on the nature of esports tournaments –
55 competitive gaming events and high-energy entertainment experiences. Esports tournaments
56 merge digital and physical elements to create immersive environments that engage live
57 audiences and online viewers. This case study sought to explore how the production
58 elements, crowd dynamics and the overall atmosphere contributed to the consumer’s
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3 experience of tournaments, drawing parallels with traditional sporting events whilst
4 emphasising their digital nature. Case study two (4.2 *r/MouseReview*) centred on gaming
5 mice, which was selected as a representative product to more broadly investigate the role of
6 customisation in gaming peripherals. Gaming mice are highly customisable and
7 technologically advanced, offering users not just tools for gameplay but as instruments of
8 self-expression. This study investigated how these features influence consumer experiences
9 and interaction. Case study three (4.3 *100 Thieves*) concentrated on esportswear, which
10 refers to apparel and accessories designed and marketed to the gaming community. Like
11 traditional sports, wearing team-branded wear is a popular method for fans to show team
12 allegiance, thereby connecting personal identity with community support. This case aimed to
13 uncover how such apparel affects esports consumers' social and personal identities within the
14 esports ecosystem.
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18 3.2 Data collection and analysis

19 According to Stake (2006, p.29), researchers in the field can seek out the 'ordinary'
20 happenings for each case through standard qualitative methods that help establish 'the details
21 of life' which may otherwise be hidden from them. The data collected for this study was
22 structured around two primary qualitative methods that Stake (2006, p.29) has mentioned:
23 observations and document analysis. These are well-established qualitative research methods
24 (Denzin and Lincoln, 2018), regularly used to examine how observable behaviours or
25 contextual documents shape consumer decision-making (Belk, 2006). As such, they are
26 relevant to identifying practices of experiential consumption within the esports ecosystem.
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30 3.2.1 Observational data

31 Trained qualitative researchers developed a structured approach to collecting observational
32 data for the esports tournament case study. This structure was designed to support a rigorous
33 and comprehensive understanding of experiential consumption within an esports tournament,
34 in keeping with accounts of participant observation (Boellstorff *et al.*, 2012, p.124). The
35 researchers were briefed about the required observational details and developed observation
36 guides to ensure consistency and comprehensiveness in data capture. For the esports
37 tournament, the guide included a checklist of specific elements to observe (e.g., staging and
38 audiovisual displays, crowd dynamics, brand visibility), questions to prompt attention ('what
39 factors engage consumers in the event experience?'), and a standard form for recording
40 observations. Observations were scheduled to cover the entire *Apex Legends Global Series*
41 (ALGS) esports tournament in Birmingham, UK, 6-10 September 2023. A total of 40 hours
42 across four days were spent observing, taking field notes, and debriefing about activities. The
43 researchers carefully focused on areas that provided a natural context to observe consumer
44 practices. For example, at the ALGS, observers were positioned strategically around the
45 venue to capture audience reactions in the stands and backstage activities to view the
46 production in creating entertainment experiences.
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49 The data analysis followed an approach from 'systematising' to 'thematizing' the data
50 collected (Boellstorff *et al.*, 2012, p.164-168). Researchers reviewed all the observational
51 notes and entered them into NVivo (release 1.7.2). The initial coding involved a form of
52 'tagging' (Boellstorff *et al.*, 2012, p.165) based on the predefined focus areas in the
53 observation guides (e.g., staging, displays, audience engagement, etc.). This was followed by
54 inductive coding to identify emerging themes that had not been initially anticipated. The
55 themes emerging from this case were later compared across the other two studies to identify
56 common patterns and distinctive features of each case to provide a broader view of
57 experiential consumption.
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3.2.2 Document analysis

Document analysis is often used with other qualitative methods as a means of ‘triangulation’, where researchers draw upon multiple sources of evidence to seek corroboration (Bowen, 2009). Similar to document analyses in other areas of games research (Gee, 2014), this project took a structured approach to extracting, reviewing and synthesising information across various types of documents related to experiential consumption in esports. This approach involved examining esports promotional materials, product specifications, online consumer reviews, and social media coverage among social video game enthusiasts. The document analysis complemented the observational data by examining how the community receives and presents products and events, generating further insight into the relevant cultural and social discourses. According to Bowen (2009), inclusion and sampling criteria are key issues to consider when selecting and analysing these documents. Documents were selected based on their relevance to the case studies, publication date (further ensuring relevance), and the source’s credibility. Following Bowen (2009, p. 33), priority was given to documents produced by credible sources such as brand companies and event organisers, respected media outlets in the gaming industry, and platforms commonly recognised to host active gaming communities. Similarly, the researchers prioritised diversity in their document collection to ensure a broad range of sources, perspectives and content to avoid an over-reliance on one text, such as a single discussion thread on a forum (Bowen, 2009, p.29). A total of 108 documents were collected between September and November 2023. Purposive sampling was used to select documents most likely to provide insight into esports experiential consumption. For example, tournament social media channels and related forum content were selected as representative of audience engagement and feedback; product descriptions and reviews were selected as representative of the consumer experience and customisability of gaming mice; marketing materials and social media feedback were selected as representative of how consumers understood gaming apparel in terms of design and brand loyalty.

The documents were analysed using discourse analysis familiar to games sociological research (Gee, 2014). The primary goal of this analysis was to decode the narratives constructed by brands and consumers. This involved coding themes emphasised in online discussions and promotional content. As Gee (2014) suggests, analysing texts in this way can help to reveal the narratives hidden within documents and their capacity to promote particular social identities or how they align with broader cultural contexts. As with the observational data, the themes emerging from the document analysis were compared across the case studies to identify patterns in experiential consumption.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 The ALGS

The ALGS is the leading competitive esports league for the first-person shooter (FPS) ‘Apex Legends’, developed by Respawn Entertainment and published by Electronic Arts. Since its inception, the ALGS has played a crucial role in shaping the high-tier competitive landscape of the game, attracting established esports players, teams and audiences from around the world. The ALGS is supported by substantial investments from game developers, sponsors, and advertisers, which helps to elevate its tournaments into a significant ‘spectacle’ in the esports calendar. Indeed, the ALGS Championship, held in Birmingham in 2023, was such a landmark event, with a peak viewership of over 590,000. Three aspects of experiential consumption emerged from the data collection.

The first was *sensory and emotional engagement*. Whilst existing psychological research **has discussed** the sensory richness and emotional intensity derived from live esports attendance (Sjöblom *et al.*, 2019), the ALGS also served to maximise public displays of experience and fandom. This was particularly evident during ‘clutch moments’ – high-stake

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3 game scenarios that determine a match's outcome. At the ALGS, these intense and
4 emotionally charged moments were not only an opportunity to engage audiences through
5 advanced audiovisual technologies (Jang *et al.*, 2020b) but also heightened the consumer
6 experience through the use of social media. As Miles (2021, p.92) has argued, the power of
7 social media is that it can turn a private act into a collective social experience, thereby
8 amplifying their sense of presence and belonging. As Figure 3 shows, ALGS attendees
9 regularly took photos and videos of the elaborate laser shows, LED displays and soundscapes
10 accompanying the competitive action. Posts of these sensory-rich moments were quickly
11 shared online through Instagram and Twitter or live-streamed via Twitch.tv. For example,
12 attendees photographed the roaring crowds alongside personal captions like 'Absolute
13 amazing gameplay!'. They also shared footage of the strobing lights synchronised with the
14 Apex Legends 'champion' theme music playing in the background, commenting
15 'Birmingham, are you not entertained?!' These posts exemplify the 'experiential flow'
16 (Miles, 2021, p.92) that comes from turning private play into public entertainment. Social
17 media offers consumers the experience of signalling their identities to the broader
18 community. This was particularly evident on Twitch.tv, where social media influencers
19 would interview renowned competitive Apex players like ImperialHal and ZachMazer or
20 other popular celebrities like Acie to create a symbolic 'buzz' around themselves and the
21 event. As such, consumer engagement extended beyond immediate gratification (Sjöblom *et*
22 *al.*, 2019) to the experience of being seen online (Johnson *et al.*, 2019).

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24 The second was *memorable storytelling*. Clutch moments were not just an opportunity
25 for impressive visual and audio displays; they were also selected to enmesh the audience in
26 particular narratives. As Miles (2021, p.154) contends, stories are an effective way for brands
27 to add 'experiential value' to their products by drawing consumers into their situational or
28 subjective nature. It was interesting to observe how, at the ALGS, particular camera angles,
29 player perspectives and in-game statistics were mobilised to convey this value. For example,
30 camera angles were selected to emphasise moments of triumph or demonstrate intense player
31 focus and close-ups of team huddles and player and audience reactions were used to
32 communicate stories about team spirit and skill. Sports companies are adept at
33 choreographing these moments, notes Miles (2021, p.130), drawing consumers further into
34 the emotional journeys of players and teams by inviting them to invest in their personal and
35 collective success. Indeed, extensive fan discussions, highlight reels, and positive
36 commentary from social media (e.g., r/CompetitiveApex and YouTube) reaffirm stories
37 about the resilience of particular teams and their well-earned ascent into high-tier competitive
38 play.

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40 A critical aspect of memorable storytelling was the role of the 'Master of Ceremonies'
41 (MC) at the ALGS. The MC acted as a significant narrative agent at the event, engaging the
42 audience through controlled, charismatic presentations that embellished the 'spectacle' of
43 proceedings. They did this by crafting a narrative that emphasised key aspects of the
44 competition, such as long-standing rivalries between teams that set the stage for current
45 matchups. The MC further added 'experiential value' (Miles 2021, p.154) by building action
46 and suspense, transforming otherwise mundane plays into meaningful experiences. Indeed,
47 the MC would incorporate players' backgrounds, share anecdotes or tell jokes to transform a
48 simple map rotation into an interesting fact or more communal experience. In this respect, the
49 MC shares similarities with other sports commentators who generate intense experiences and
50 emotions by painting tense pictures verbally (Mumford, 2013). At the ALGS, this approach
51 would be accompanied by asking the audience to share their favourite team moments,
52 imbuing some social frisson into the live experience through crowd rivalry and jeering. The
53 MC purposely constructs what Miles (2021, p.130) has called a 'sporting carnival':
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3 filtering gameplay through personal stories and collective rivalries to create memorable
4 moments of festivity.

5 The third was *agency*. Integrating real-time analytics and statistics within the ALGS
6 Championship arena transforms the spectator experience by **shifting the consumers' role** from
7 passive viewer to active participant. This technological enhancement alters the traditional
8 view of watching competitive play by enabling fans to adopt a 'god-like' perspective of the
9 action. At the ALGS, spectators can see and hear players' actions and begin to anticipate how
10 scenarios unfold through access to advanced analytics, real-time statistics, and strategic
11 overlays. These features empower spectators by giving them a sense of control over the
12 viewing experience, allowing them to assess what rotations and encounters might come next.
13 **As Brock (2021) argued**, gameplay metrics afford consumers a sense of agency to make
14 informed decisions. This sense of agency is not limited to in-person attendance. Indeed,
15 documents reveal how esports events agencies are turning towards gamification as a way to
16 empower **live streaming** audiences, using features like live polling, social media integration,
17 and gambling-like chat features to earn points, redeem prizes and receive access to exclusive
18 in-game content and future events (Ars Futura, 2023). These immersive design practices
19 specifically reward consumers for the time they spend consuming esports content, further
20 deepening their involvement and sense of control over the viewing experience.

21 This case study shows how an esports tournament was designed as an experience that
22 maximised visual, auditory, and social experiences to immerse consumers in an intense and
23 memorable spectacle. This spectacle was interactive and performative, with consumers
24 constructing shared and celebrated moments online, amplified by carefully crafted stories and
25 vibrant visual and auditory technologies. In this sense, the ALGS was an experience
26 consumers bought *into*, characterised by sensory and emotional engagement, memorable
27 storytelling and consumer agency.

32 33 4.2 r/MouseReview

34 The subreddit r/MouseReview is a vibrant online community that discusses all aspects of
35 computer and gaming mice, including reviews, modifications and general advice. Members
36 of the subreddit share their experiences and knowledge about various mice, often within the
37 context of playing PC-based games or work. The community is recognised for its detailed
38 discussions about mice and acting as a resource for those looking to find one that meets their
39 needs. Significantly, a dedicated Discord server is associated with r/MouseReview, popular
40 among esports enthusiasts, offering technical advice to those interested in understanding the
41 advantages and disadvantages of mouse technologies in particular games. 'Self-work' **sat** at
42 the heart of these discussions in two ways.

43 The first was *identity expression*. Consumers **selected gaming** mice that **aligned** with
44 their desired gaming identity, choosing brands and designs that resonated with their self-
45 perceptions as professional, causal or specific-genre game players. **Some consumers chose**
46 **mice based on cost and available play time; others requested recommendations based on**
47 **whether they played FPS or real-time strategy (RTS) games; others reflected on their**
48 **experiences with particular brands and the customer support they had received.** The level of
49 depth that these consumers **went** into when deciding which mouse **was** right for them **was**
50 insightful. For example, consumers choose mice from brands that already have a strong
51 existing presence within the community, such as those that sponsor successful esports teams.
52 One example was the Fnatic Bolt Wireless mouse, popular amongst esports enthusiasts due to
53 Fnatic's competitive tournament success. Fnatic marketed the Bolt on MouseReview as an
54 esports product developed 'with feedback from current and former esports pros... Our goal
55 was simple: create a lightweight, top-tier WIRELESS gaming mouse that would boost your
56 performance in any game' (Escaldi, 2021). As such, consumers within the MouseReview

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3 community often endorsed the mouse as one to ‘trust’ for competitive players, with general
4 comments like ‘this is dope AF, best wireless mouse contender’ or more technical
5 observations like ‘Big props for using an alps encoder...Tons of other mice companies
6 promise high end specs but skimp on the scroll encoders...Really amazing value’ (Escaldi,
7 2021).
8

9 The extent to which consumers could customise the aesthetics of their gaming mice,
10 such as through RGB lighting, also played an important role in identity expression. In one
11 example, consumers discussed Razer Chroma – a key platform that facilitates this
12 customisation in Razer branded gaming mice. The Razer Chroma **enabled** consumers to
13 adjust their mouse’s lighting and sync it with specific in-game activities and sounds, such as
14 firing a gun or winning a match. This feature was a popular topic amongst users, who shared
15 advice on personalising their gaming setups by designing different Razer Chroma profiles.
16 Consumers discussed the creativity associated with this customisation and the personal
17 ‘statements’ it made, such as showcasing their favourite colours or reflecting their current
18 mood. This interest in customisation also extended to ergonomics, as consumers discussed
19 mice that offered adjustable wrist support, grip style and comfort in terms of multiple
20 accessible buttons and preferred handedness (left or right). One recurring topic of
21 conversation here was the shortage of left-handed gaming mice used for competitive gaming.
22 Consumers queried the ‘disappearance’ of both left-handed and ambidextrous mice within
23 major brand product ranges, suggesting that **the ergonomic** needs of left-handed players had
24 been excluded from the market.
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26

27 These aesthetic tastes and preferences sat alongside financial considerations. One
28 consumer suggested that they bought a high-end gaming mouse as an ‘investment in
29 themselves’. They justified the expense (regarding their financial commitment) based on their
30 dedication to competitive gaming. Other consumers valued budget-friendly devices that
31 allowed them to balance their gaming as a hobby alongside other financial responsibilities,
32 such as work and childcare. These consumers discussed the value of resourcefulness,
33 identifying affordable, quality gaming mice with good functionality.
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36 Each reflection reveals the self-work consumers put into choosing a gaming mouse.
37 As Miles (2021, p.47) **has suggested**, consumption is an embodied performance – a way of
38 doing identity. Purchasing a mouse is not merely about obtaining a functional tool but also
39 about how these consumers express their identity within gaming contexts, whether by
40 aligning their aspirations with high-performance teams or by expressing their creativity,
41 mood and personal values. As a result, the gaming mouse **was** an exciting medium for the
42 performance of consumer identity, as consumers **made** conscious choices in line with their
43 self-expression.
44

45 **The second was that** consumers bought professional-grade gaming mice because of an
46 interest in *self-improvement*, viewing them as tools to enhance their gaming skills. Forum
47 discussions focused on the performance and specifications of gaming mice, from DPI (dots-
48 per-inch) settings to sensor precision and the availability of customisable buttons (remapped
49 for particular in-game activities or using macros). Consumers referenced the specifications
50 listed in the marketing material, as shown in Figure 4, using this information to rationalise the
51 effectiveness of a particular gaming mouse in maximising their chances of success in a
52 particular game. For example, one consumer rationalised their choice to buy a Logitech G Pro
53 X Superlight because they felt its HERO sensor helped them maintain better accuracy in FPS
54 titles, helping them to secure a positive kill-death ratio. Another consumer justified their
55 purchase of a Razer Naga because of their experience playing massively multiplayer games at
56 a competitive level. This consumer suggested that the Naga gave them the ‘competitive edge’
57 due to being able to bind in-game actions to the device’s multiple buttons, allowing them to
58 act more efficiently. A third consumer discussed their selection of a Corsair Dark Core RGB
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3 Pro because of its wireless functionality and ergonomic design. They explained that the
4 advantages of using a wireless mouse came from eliminating the ‘drag’ of a cable, allowing
5 them to freely move their mouse across a large area without resistance or snagging. In each
6 example, ‘the products aren’t simply products, but ... constitute a means to an experiential
7 end’ (Miles 2021, p.47): an accumulation of reflexive experiences about the performance of
8 gaming mice and the symbolic reality that they can enhance gaming skill and enjoyment.
9

10 The r/MouseReview case study shows how gaming mice serve as a medium for a key
11 aspect of experiential consumption: self-work. Consumers do self-work by performing their
12 identities and values by making (and sharing) purchasing choices about gaming mice.
13 Identity expression is a common practice among members of the r/MouseReview community,
14 where they **showcased** their preferences for specific brands, **customised** their device(s) to
15 reflect personal aesthetics, and **selected** features that **aligned** with their financial situation or
16 ergonomic needs. This active engagement in the selection process is part of their consumer
17 experience, reinforcing their identity around competitive play. Indeed, in some cases, these
18 discussions also focused on self-improvement and the need to identify and purchase a mouse
19 that directly enhanced their gaming performance. In this case, the subreddit **became** a space
20 for skill development as consumers **debated** technical specifications alongside gaming
21 expertise.
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25 4.3 100 Thieves

26 **100 Thieves** is a popular esports organisation founded by former professional *Call of Duty*
27 player Matthew ‘Nadeshot’ Haag. Initially known for its competitive success across games
28 like *League of Legends*, *Valorant* and *Apex Legends*, **100 Thieves** has evolved into a versatile
29 ‘lifestyle brand’ that merges gaming with fashion, entertainment and content creation. A key
30 element of **100 Thieves**’ brand evolution has been its move into esportswear, blending
31 gaming culture with fashion to produce recognisable team jerseys, casual wear and luxury
32 items. As Figure 5 shows, the organisation has launched various iconic apparel lines through
33 its online shop based on exclusive fashion partnerships and collaborations. The marketing
34 and discussion of these esportswear lines reveal two important aspects of lifestyle branding
35 and experiential consumption.
36
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38 The first was *exclusivity*. Drawing inspiration from brands like Supreme, Drake’s
39 OVO clothing range and Michael Jordan’s partnership with Nike, **100 Thieves** employs
40 scarcity to elevate the desirability of their esportswear range. They use ‘limited drops’ –
41 limited production runs that only produce a small quantity of each item – to ensure that not
42 every consumer can buy their merchandise. Consumers on the r/100Thieves subreddit
43 **discussed** the sense of urgency that this marketing strategy creates, with many expressing
44 excitement and anticipation about the launch of upcoming collections. In one example – an
45 exclusive collaboration between **100 Thieves** x Dragon Ball Z (DBZ) – consumers **discussed**
46 how eager they are to secure these unique, stylish items before they quickly sell out. They
47 reflect on the personal significance and emotional connection that the apparel has for them –
48 identifying their favourite characters from the DBZ universe (e.g., Shenron) and the positive
49 memories they evoke. **As Miles (2021, p.35) argued**, the value of fashion lies in its
50 symbolism: in what it tells others about group membership. In this case, it is a connection to
51 their favourite characters and the nostalgia it communicates that **underscored** their
52 appreciation. Consumers expressed their ‘love’ for the collaboration, not just as a piece of
53 merchandise but as a symbol of their belonging, the exclusivity of which becomes part of
54 *their* consumer experience.
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57 **100 Thieves integrated** luxury elements into their apparel to further the exclusivity of
58 their brand. Through collaborations with high-end brands like Gucci and Lexus and the use of
59 premium materials, including heavyweight cotton and custom embroidery, **100 Thieves**
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3 **infused** their designs with cultural status, elevating their apparel from a consumer
4 perspective. The **100 Thieves** x Gucci collaboration saw a limited run of 200 ‘Off-the-grid’
5 backpacks priced at around USD 2500. These backpacks, featuring Gucci’s signature
6 craftsmanship combined with **100 Thieves’** gaming aesthetic, were not only seen as
7 functional items but were marketed as symbols of prestige. Gaming websites and social
8 media influencers ran promotional campaigns about Gucci bringing a ‘touch of class’ to the
9 world of esports. Consumers on r/100Thieves also discussed the exclusivity of the item,
10 recognising that whilst its price was out of reach for many, this luxury item helped connect
11 fashion enthusiasts with a gaming aesthetic. Indeed, Gucci themselves marketed the bag as an
12 example of the values shared across luxury fashion and esports, speaking of ‘freedom and
13 self-expression’ as a converging interest. As Miles (2021, p.51, 137) **noted**, brands
14 increasingly use the theme of self-expression as a means to ‘play’ with the traditional
15 distinction between author and consumer. The **100 Thieves** x Gucci apparel reflects this as
16 notions of craftsmanship sit alongside themes of uniqueness, individuality and creativity.

17
18 **The second was that** the *authenticity* of **100 Thieves’** collaborations were a crucial
19 part of their ‘lifestyle branding’. The organisation uses famous gaming celebrities and social
20 media influencers to advertise and launch its esportswear. These influencers are not randomly
21 selected but are recognised members of the **100 Thieves** community and regular esports and
22 gaming presenters. One example is Rachell ‘Valkyrae’ Hofstetter, known for streaming
23 *Fortnite* to over 13.5 million followers on social media. Valkyrae, a co-owner of **100**
24 **Thieves**, regularly **showcased** the launch of new collections to her followers through social
25 media content and live streams. In anticipation of the launch of the **100 Thieves** x Attack on
26 Titan collection, for example, **Valkyrae discussed** the **Japanese manga** with her social media
27 followers, tapping into her genuine passion and interest in the series. Valkyrae also released
28 content featuring sneak peeks of the collection, including personal commentary on the design
29 and quality of the products. As Miles (2021, p.31) contends, authenticity is established
30 through performance and Valkyrae’s endorsement is integral to how **100 Thieves** creates an
31 authentic connection with their consumers.

32
33 This performance is carried over into product launches, which are significant
34 community events. The organisation uses the r/100Thieves subreddit to engage consumers in
35 discussions about launching products, initiating posts and threads where fans can share their
36 excitement, ask questions, and offer feedback on initial designs and concepts. **The**
37 **esportswear enthusiast was a kind of contemporary pilgrim** (Miles 2021, p.45), always
38 **seeking the next product launch, creating demand where it had not existed whilst showcasing**
39 **brand loyalty.** Consumers voice their need to experience more distinct pleasures, providing
40 suggestions about potential future collaborations and generating example artwork and ‘mock-
41 ups’ of apparel design (e.g., **100 Thieves** x Family Guy). This dialogue produces a particular
42 kind of ‘authentic value’ for the consumer, where their sense of self and how they choose to
43 define their interactions offers endless forms of novelty albeit within a familiar environment
44 (Miles 2021, p.46).

45
46 This case study reveals how **100 Thieves** has positioned itself as a lifestyle brand by
47 integrating exclusive luxury collaborations and community engagement into the design and
48 marketing of their esportswear. It shows how esports consumers are not just passive
49 recipients of marketed experiences but seek to create emotional connections that link their
50 identities and choices to the brands they consume. By collaborating with iconic media and
51 significant influencers, **100 Thieves** taps into this desire for individuality by creating products
52 that blend gaming and high fashion. As a result, they use exclusive drops and community
53 engagement to foster a sense of urgency and prestige around their esportswear – the appeal of
54 which resides in seeking ever newer products.

4.4 Cross-Case Comparison

A vital element of any multiple case study is the comparison of cases to discuss their similarities and differences with the phenomena under investigation (Stake, 2006, p.82). As Table 1 shows, this study compared the three cases discussed above – ALGS, r/MouseReview and 100 Thieves – alongside aspects of experiential consumption drawn from the literature: *spectacle, self-work and lifestyle branding*. This comparative approach revealed how parts of the esports economy foster engagement, cultivate consumer identity and build brand loyalty in distinct ways. For example, Table 1 shows how each case study engaged consumers differently, whether through the use of audiovisual technologies (ALGS), discussion of product features such as ergonomics (r/MouseReview) or the leveraging of aesthetics and visual appeal (100 Thieves). Table 1 also shows how consumers interacted with products and services differently across the esports economy, with tournaments promoting interaction through live audience participation, whilst online communities and businesses communicate through peer-to-peer support or the use of gaming celebrities and influencers to endorse particular products. Interestingly, Table 1 also shows how parts of the esports economy cultivated consumer identity differently, as tournaments created a sense of belonging through team and player identification and the collective excitement of spectatorship. Online communities and businesses focus on customisation and personalisation, allowing consumers to express their unique preferences and tailor their experiences to reflect personal tastes. The same is true of branding: the ALGS built a collective identity through fan loyalty, whilst r/MouseReview emphasised personal utility. 100 Thieves built brand loyalty through exclusivity, using limited product releases and luxury brand partnerships to emphasise scarcity and status.

Following Miles (2021), this cross-case comparison also identified *market-driven authenticity* as a shared characteristic of experiential consumption. Market-driven authenticity refers to the manufacture of engaging, relatable experiences that, whilst resonating deeply with consumers, nevertheless remain mass-produced (Miles, 2021, pp.159-164). This critical issue raises a question about the authenticity of consumer experiences as choices are co-opted and standardised by market forces (Miles, 1998). This tension was expressed across the case studies in three main ways.

First, consumers were concerned with the presence of *formulaic designs and the declining quality of esportswear*. Consumers on the r/100Thieves subreddit raised concerns about the shifting quality and experience of 100 Thieves esportswear. As Dittmar (2010) argued, there is an economic and cultural tension between the uniqueness of mass-marketed products. Whilst the company's earliest designs were considered fashionable and creatively distinct from other esports apparel, consumers questioned the release of more recent designs as 'simple' and 'repetitive'. Consumers felt the formulaic use of 'box logos' and graphics was becoming a common theme across esportswear. Indeed, other esportswear outlets, such as Navi, Fnatic, Astralis, etc., have products that feature this minimalistic design. Consumers also questioned the uniqueness of 100 Thieves' products when other esports organisations, like Team Liquid and TSM, released apparel in collaboration with popular cultural franchises like Star Wars and My Hero Academy. As a result, there were critical comments regarding the exclusiveness and quality of 100 Thieves' more recent apparel. Some consumers criticised the company's high price points as 'lazy' and mass-market designs. Others specifically critiqued a change in the quality of materials, noting a shift from heavy to lightweight fabrics and cheaply made zippers. In each case, there was speculation that consumers were 'enabling' this shift by continuing to purchase poor quality apparel.

Discussions within r/MouseReview revealed the extent to which consumers were prepared to buy their way to success, raising questions about *consuming-to-win* and the authenticity of competitive performance. Indeed, esports consumers exist within an

ecosystem of products and services marketed to help them improve their gameplay. These products are not limited to controller inputs but range from computer components to gaming chairs and desks to paid-for services that use big data and artificial intelligence to help players improve (Brock, 2021). One of the most interesting ways r/MouseReview consumers connected to this ecosystem was through the various health and wellness tools now available in esports. Discussions about the ‘best’ or most competitive gaming setup would take place alongside photos or mentions of nutritional supplements like GFUEL – so-called ‘cognitive enhancers’ or ‘nootropics’ meant to support competitive performance by addressing deficiencies in diet or mood. Some consumers would list their ‘top 5’ gaming supplements, ranking them according to ingredients and taste. Others discussed their use alongside other medications, like Adderall – a medication used to treat attention deficit hyperactivity disorder by increasing users’ ability to pay attention and stay focused. Several problematised the use of nootropics as an example of ‘overhyped’ marketing, making cross-references to subreddits that scrutinised their chemical and biological impact. As Brock (2021) has argued, it is a paradox that performance enhancement is both a site of freedom and disempowerment, simultaneously offering consumers a sense of control whilst its authenticity is contested.

Finally, a common theme across all three case studies was that the experience of spectating or playing esports was *secondary to other consumer experiences*. As Miles (2021, p.121) discussed in the context of sport, the symbolic value offered by new markets eclipses traditional notions of fandom as consumers shift from watching (and belonging) together towards finding new experiences. The ALGS was not solely driven by an intrinsic interest in sharing the experience of competitive play but by the spectacle of clutch moments and its gamified elements. Indeed, through dramatic highlights, interactive features, and storytelling, competitive gameplay was transformed into a new immersive entertainment experience (Miah, 2017). Similarly, competitive play appeared secondary to the experience of debating and evaluating optimal input devices and associated techniques and technologies of performance enhancement. Consumers discussed mice as a tool to enhance their gameplay experience through access to improved accuracy, faster response times, or near-endless customisation options. Following Miles (2021), what is interesting here is the process by which consumer culture enabled ‘big business’ to play a primary role in the understanding of sport. Companies like Razer or SteelSeries, through community discussions about the quality and effectiveness of their products, have come to represent the reality of competitive gameplay. Esports and gaming hardware are amalgamated in such a way that experience of competitive gameplay (and what it *should* be) is tempered through the latest products on the market. Esportswear also speaks to this trend. The experience of buying esportswear rarely resides around competitive play. On the contrary, esportswear has allowed consumers to express themselves in new and exciting ways. Consumers sought authentic esports experiences not through *their* team but through the symbolism that a company’s fashion products represented – exclusivity, prestige or nostalgia. As such, gaming celebrities helped mediate the creation of the esports spectacle. They personalised the experience and constructed an image through which fans could find gratification in fashion products effectively designed for their consumption.

5. Conclusion

5.1 Summary

This article has shown that esports products and services are increasingly designed to meet the needs of an ‘experience economy’ (Pine and Gilmore, 1999), within which esports consumers express themselves through acts of ‘experiential consumption’ (Miles, 2021). Through a multiple case study approach of esports events, products and fashion, it evidences characteristics of experiential consumption in esports: spectacle, self-work and lifestyle

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3 branding. These characteristics further reveal the different ways that consumers experience
4 esports within the boundedness of each case. They confirm the design of esports tournaments
5 as immersive spectacles, the importance of product customisation and optimisation in online
6 communities, and the exclusive and authentic lifestyle experiences that brands create through
7 fashion collaborations and community engagement. Comparing these cases reveals a tension
8 between market-driven forms of authenticity and genuine consumer experiences. The
9 commodification of esports consumption through formulaic designs, performance-enhancing
10 products, or lifestyle branding raises questions about the authenticity of esports experiences.
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13 *5.2 Theoretical contributions*

14 This article contributes to existing knowledge in three ways. First, it addresses a gap in
15 knowledge regarding the macro-level (structural) processes that shape esports consumption
16 beyond initial micro-level (individual) factors. Theoretically, it introduces the concept of
17 'experiential consumption' as a meso-level (intermediate) concept that helps bridge the
18 psychological, economic and cultural dimensions of esports consumption. As a result, it
19 shows that consumer behaviour is shaped by factors that esports consumers themselves may
20 not be aware of. Second, this article offers specific case studies of how esports consumers
21 engage with products and experiences not just for functional or entertainment purposes but as
22 a means of identity expression and social differentiation. Third, the article reveals various
23 tensions that characterise the esports consumer experience, particularly between authentic
24 personal engagement and market-driven commodification. Whilst consumers seek unique and
25 meaningful connections with esportswear or tournament participation, these experiences are
26 influenced by formulaic designs and marketing strategies that frustrate perceived authenticity.
27 As such, this article highlights the delicate balance between consumer desires for
28 individuality and the broader commercial objectives that shape esports experiences.
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33 *5.3 Practical contributions*

34 This article also offers practical implications for esports stakeholders in three ways. First,
35 esports event organisers can leverage **audiovisual** technologies, charismatic hosts, and real-
36 time analytics to create immersive and sensory experiences that enhance the spectacle of their
37 tournaments. By crafting compelling narratives around matches and empowering spectators
38 through access to data and alternative viewing perspectives, esports event organisers will
39 create memorable and emotionally resonant experiences. Second, esports organisations
40 seeking to diversify their income portfolio should look to apparel offerings that enable
41 consumers to express their identities through personalisation. Lifestyle branding strategies,
42 including limited edition esportswear and collaborations with popular culture icons, can
43 create deep consumer connections through exclusivity and nostalgia. Similarly, esports
44 organisations can foster brand loyalty by engaging in community feedback through social
45 media platforms, which encourages consumer participation and results in the creation of
46 meaningful apparel lines. Third, marketing agencies can benefit from understanding how
47 esports companies tailor products and experiences that align to evolving consumer
48 expectations. Marketing agencies should develop campaigns that focus on emotional
49 storytelling and community-building rather than on product design features solely. By
50 working with influential figures or communities in esports, who reflect a genuine passion and
51 involvement in esports culture, marketing agencies can enhance the authenticity of game-
52 related products and services.
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57 **5.4** *Limitations and future research*

58 Whilst the case studies were chosen to illustrate the concept of experiential consumption and
59 provide insight into the esports consumer experience, other important areas including mobile
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gaming, virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) games were not addressed and could provide different insights. Relatedly, the findings from these case studies cannot be easily generalised across the esports industry, which is global with variations across regions, games, and consumer demographics. The selected cases are predominately Western-centric (in keeping with the existing theoretical research cited), limiting the applicability of the conclusions to other cultural contexts. The cross-case comparison reveals that consumers desire more unique, personalised esports experiences. As such, future research could investigate the impact of emerging technologies, such as VR, AR and blockchain, which have the potential to further personalise the consumer experience (as is the case in digital fashion already). Future research could also consider the ethical and social implications of the trends identified, such as the potential for consumer manipulation through sophisticated marketing techniques and the manufacturing of ever-more engaging experiences.

Figures

Figure 1. Conceptual framework for researching esports consumer experiences

Source(s): Author's own creation

Figure 2. Mapping of the case study boundaries using the conceptual framework

Source(s): Author's own creation

Figure 3. Attendees at the Apex Legends Global Series Championship in Birmingham, United Kingdom 6-10 September 2023

Source(s): Author's own creation

Figure 4. Marketing materials for the Logitech G Pro Superlight

Source(s): Logitech Website, <https://www.logitechg.com/en-gb/products/gaming-mice/pro-x-superlight-wireless-mouse.910-005943.html> (accessed 17 October 2023)

Figure 5. Marketing materials from the 100 Thieves online store

Source(s): Reproduced with permission from 100 Thieves

Table 1. Case study matrix of experiential consumption in esports

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Figure 1. Conceptual framework for researching esports consumer experiences

Source(s): Author's own creation

386x386mm (150 x 150 DPI)

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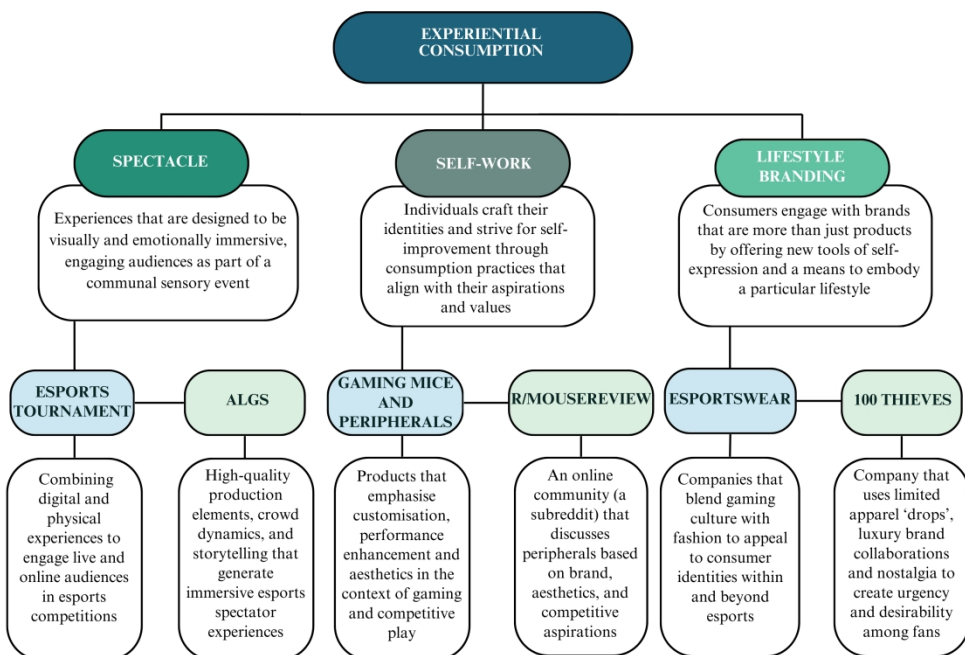


Figure 2. Mapping of the case study boundaries using the conceptual framework

Source(s): Author's own creation

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Figure 3. Attendees at the Apex Legends Global Series Championship in Birmingham, United Kingdom 6-10 September 2023 Source(s): Author's own creation

1422x1066mm (72 x 72 DPI)

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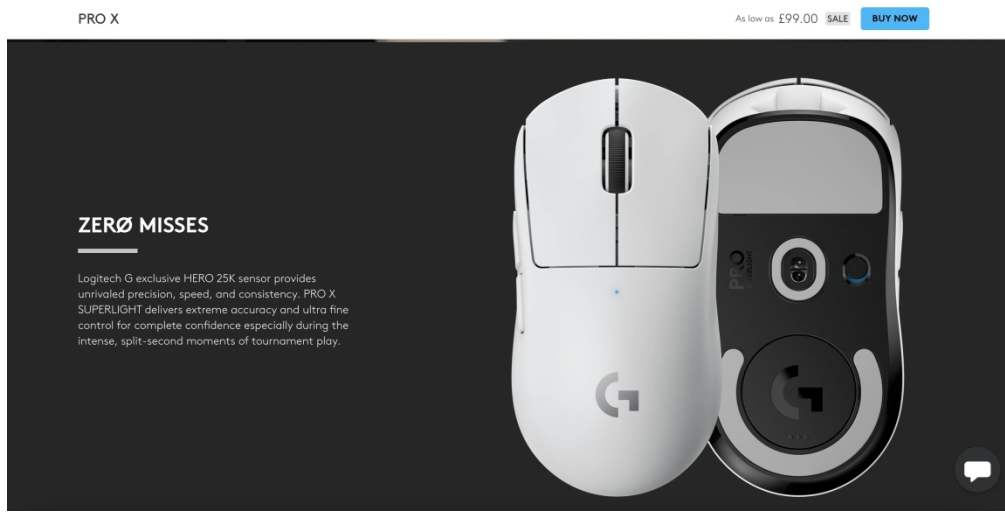


Figure 4. Marketing materials for the Logitech G Pro Superlight Source(s): Logitech Website

994x505mm (72 x 72 DPI)

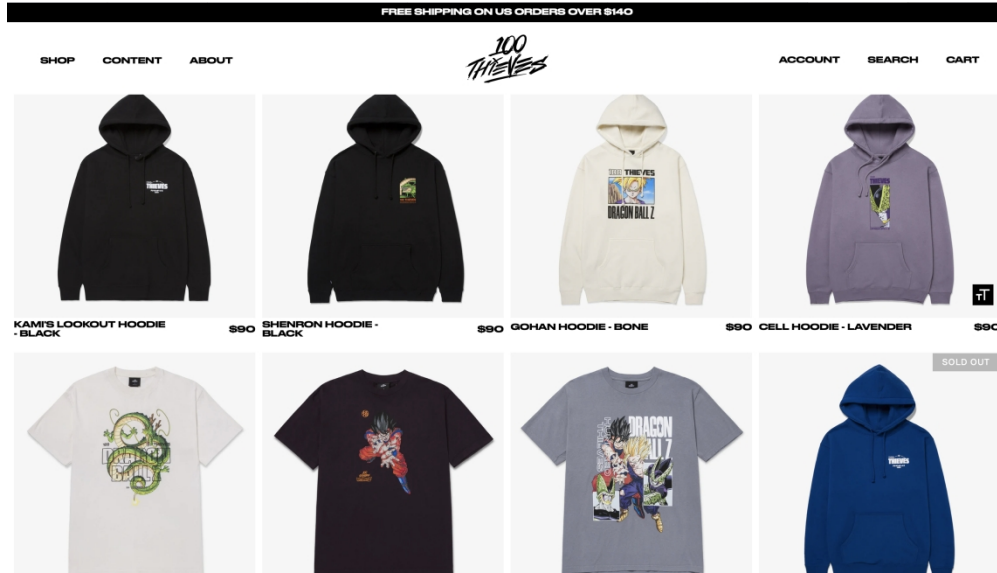


Figure 5. Marketing materials from the 100 Thieves online store Source(s): Reproduced with permission from 100 Thieves

507x289mm (144 x 144 DPI)

Aspects of Experiential Consumption	ALGS	r/MouseReview	100 Thieves
Spectacle	The ALGS creates an intense spectacle through advanced audiovisual technologies, amplifying clutch moments, dramatic highlights, and storytelling. Community engagement is enhanced by live audience participation and social media features, generating emotional connections during competitive wins and losses. However, the commercialisation of the spectacle, through corporate sponsorship and overly staged dramas, raises questions about the authenticity of the experience.	Focuses on detailed, peer-to-peer product reviews with no emphasis on audiovisual spectacle. Instead, users share insights and preferences, treating each product as a focal point for functional discussion. Occasional live streams add a live event element to the community.	Coordinates product drops with influencers and aesthetics akin to luxury fashion events, creating an exclusive social spectacle. Social media plays a significant role, with influencers heightening the sense of community and desirability for each product release. Spectacle focuses on the aesthetics of fashion and culture over gameplay.
Self-Work	Consumers express empowerment through the presentation of real-time stats and analytics, which help to immerse them as ‘active participants’ rather than passive spectators. Strategic overlays enhance consumers’ sense of agency by allowing them to anticipate gameplay moves and providing achievement experiences vicariously.	Self-work is focused on optimising performance and expressing gaming identity through customisation and technical mastery. Authenticity comes into question as users critique the commercial ecosystems around gaming hardware, such as how performance is tied to purchasing high-end products (e.g., ‘pay-to-win’).	By investing in branded apparel, consumers adopt status symbols within the gaming community by aligning with cultural icons. Consumers focus on external identity signalling through fashion rather than internal skill development or analytics apparent in r/MouseReview.
Lifestyle Branding	The ALGS cultivates collective identity through fan loyalty to teams and players, enhanced by live tournaments and online communities. The shared experience of high-energy events, alongside the sale of merchandise and esports team apparel, supports a communal feeling of belonging.	Personal device choices reflect accessibility, aesthetic tastes, and financial considerations. Not scarcity-driven and consumers value utility over luxury.	Cultivates brand loyalty through limited product launches, collaborations and partnerships with luxury brands. Places emphasis on exclusivity and scarcity and the status symbolism attached.