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Innovation in the esports servicescape: a media business research agenda

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ABSTRACT

Esports represent an increasingly influential and innovative component of the global media business landscape. The ever-evolving ecosystem of dynamic new media is driven by a heterogeneous array of stakeholders that co-create value in online and offline spaces, often described as servicescapes, where innovations are increasingly influential in diverse areas including entrepreneurial business models, media, sports, entertainment, culture, and consumer engagement. In this research, a semi-systematic literature review was undertaken focused on the intersection of the esports ecosystem, servicescapes and innovations. Four clear directions for future research, with questions specific to esports, servicescapes and media were identified. Scholars can utilise these findings to enhance understanding of innovation from the servicescape perspective, with relevance for scholars engaged in business, marketing, and media.

Introduction

Esports, a form of electronic sports where competitive video gaming is broadcast through various media channels (Hamari & Sjöblom, 2017), has received increased media and academic attention during the last decade (Pizzo, et al., 2022). Engagement with esports is similar to traditional sports, with professionals competing before audiences in large arenas (Scholz, 2020) and the viewing audience playing the various games themselves (in both online and offline spaces) (McCauley et al., 2020). Esports is a global industry of media businesses (Scholz, 2019) that potentially exceeds 25 billion US dollars in value (Ahn et al., 2020). Since 2014, it has experienced rapid expansion (Scholz, 2019), evidenced by an ever-increasing audience, sponsors and an increased value of the industry. Various factors have facilitated this growth including new gaming technology, improved connectivity and technological infrastructure developments and live streaming innovation (Ji & Hanna, 2020; Wulf et al., 2020). Collectively, these technology innovations have been leveraged to reflect a business orientation within the wider gaming industry and esports that has a disruptive impact on our understanding of media business

models (Scholz & Stein, 2017). With the rise of new technology such as the "metaverse" (Kim, 2021; Sax & Ausloos, 2021) and the relevance of understanding digital disruption (Maijanen et al., 2019), media management can leverage the insights gained from esports to develop sustainable media business models in the digitised society.

As a disruptive and innovative phenomenon rooted in the digital world (Kordyaka et al., 2020), esports as media and business has continued to expand to develop their own media landscape and ecosystems (Scholz, 2020). Esports has established itself as a disruptive force within the media industry with its influence predicted to grow in the coming years (Hammerschmidt et al., 2024).

Due to the nascent nature of esports research, a wealth of multidisciplinary opportunities remain for studying people and systems within this complex digital ecosystem, including business and media studies (Reitman et al., 2020). Esports also offers unique opportunities for cross-disciplinary studies (Brock, 2023), providing for media management what Oliver (2018) identifies as "an extraordinary opportunity to develop new intellectual insight by bridging previously discrete fields of knowledge" (p. 295). For media organisations, technology and digitisation have impacted the competitive environment and in so doing have blurred "the borders which have encircled media markets" (Kostovska et al., 2021, p. 6). As a result, the disruptive and innovative nature of the esports context is increasingly relevant within the context of media management (Roth et al., 2023).

Esports is a socio-cultural phenomenon that emerged in a digitised environment, blurring the barriers between areas such as sports, media, entertainment and culture (Scholz, 2020). It is both international and regional, consisting of numerous actors and stakeholders exchanging resources and co-creating value (McCauley et al., 2020). However, to more effectively understand esports, a broader theoretical perspective is required which examines how resources, such as knowledge, information and innovative technology are shared through various media and across a broad network of stakeholders and actors, including consumers (Marchand & Hennig-Thurau, 2013). With a better understanding, it becomes possible to view the vast esports network as a *business ecosystem* containing a multitude of interdependent actors (Nuseibah & Wolff, 2015) playing diverse roles in value co-creation (Carrillo Vera & Aguado Terrón, 2019), providing media services and products (Kostovska et al., 2021) that drive business model innovation and future profitability (Ji & Hanna, 2020). This relevance is accelerating due to the fact that esports acts as a key driver of modern media culture and engagement for younger generations of consumers (Kordyaka et al., 2023).

The interactions between actors and stakeholders in business ecosystems have been studied in a variety of contexts (Anggraeni et al., 2007; Hollebeek et al., 2022; Moore, 1993; Viglia et al., 2018), yet the space and place in which this interaction takes place to explain how and where value co-creation occurs have been less explored. One theoretical viewpoint to understand where these interactions occur is *servicescapes*. Servicescapes were originally theorised as the offline (physical) environment where services are delivered (Bitner, 1992) but have been expanded to include online services, where they offer "tangible and intangible resources for consumers to develop meaningful and memorable experiences" (Pizam & Tasci, 2019, p. 26). The esports servicescape is where esports services are presented (Seo, 2013) and includes both offline and online offerings, thus being viewed as a hybrid service experience. The offline offering includes examples such

as live stadium events (Jenny et al., 2018) and Local Area Network (LAN) parties (Taylor & Witkowski, 2010) while playing the game on the internet and actions such as live streaming comprise the online experience, thus being considered part of the modern servicescape (Chen et al., 2020).

Esports as a context is inherently disruptive (Scholz, 2019), driven by digitisation (Stein & Scholz, 2016), occurring offline and online simultaneously (McCauley et al., 2020), thus servicescapes can serve as a relevant perspective to use when studying the esports ecosystem. For this study, the esports servicescape is defined as the communication and distribution channels existing in both offline arenas and online platforms where multifaceted media engagement with the context occurs. Conceptualising and exploring innovation in an ecosystem, mainly through looking at how the servicescape functions as a medium for innovation, contributes theoretical as well as practical insights. Considering the existing ambiguity in the relationships between media, servicescapes, innovation and esports, the purpose of this research is to (1) examine and create a model of the esports ecosystem with a focus on the servicescape (paying particular attention to media-related issues); (2) through a literature review examine the types of innovation occurring in the esports servicescape to identify suggested areas for future esports research.

Background

The esports ecosystem

Ecosystems are comprised of interdependent actors having diverse roles (Adner & Kapoor, 2010), interacting in diverse ways (Nuseibah & Wolff, 2015), existing in diverse industries, and filling unique roles in the value-creation process. Understanding these aspects (actors, roles, activities and interactions) is the starting point for understanding any ecosystem (Nuseibah & Wolff, 2015). When viewed from a process perspective, there are numerous interrelated actors and affiliations within the esports ecosystem. In esports, traditional actors include game publishers, the players and the audience (Kostovska et al., 2021) with new actors such as the Olympic Movement increasingly becoming part of the ecosystem (Lefebvre et al., 2024). In the case of a sporting event occurring in a venue in front of fans, value is co-created through an interplay between the players and the audience (Hedlund, 2014). When the activities are streamed on the internet or televised live and recorded for future consumption, value is also co-created by the event, its actors and consuming fans both at the venue and online (Woratschek et al., 2014). As a result, the core of the esports ecosystem is the games played by the audience and competitions played in front of and/or broadcast to these consumers. Esports empowers consumers to innovate forms of value for themselves, gaming companies, and society at large (Seo et al., 2015) with firms focusing on value integration towards the audience (Scholz, 2019). Markets such as esports can be viewed as value-creating systems governed by various institutions and actively shaped by the actors (Vargo & Lusch, 2017). The audience co-creates value with the firms and with other audience members through a range of activities that range from playing and socialising (McCauley et al., 2020), to actively developing a competitive scene in the absence of publisher involvement (Koch et al., 2020). The audience co-creates value within games through the act of play (McCauley

et al., 2023) while also co-creating value within the communities that comprise the wider service ecosystems (Roth et al., 2023).

Esports do not always require a physical location for competition to occur and consequently, broadcasting, communication and interaction between stakeholders can occur within the digital component of the servicescape (Anggraeni et al., 2007; Kostovska et al., 2021; Nuseibah & Wolff, 2015). Players, teams and streamers generate revenue through sponsorship, advertising and prize money (Ahn et al., 2020) with platforms such as Twitch allowing innovative revenue strategies to be "easily tested by platform holders and streamers alike, making it a space for rapid experimentation and monetization enquiry" (Johnson & Woodcock, 2019a, p. 9). Esports and the rise of livestreaming on Twitch are inarguably linked and challenge existing assumptions about the business of media production (Sherrick et al., 2024). Further disruption to existing media practices can be seen through how games such as Fortnite deliver a free-to-play (freemium) model that seeks to maximise microtransactions from their player base while also acting as a content delivery platform for third parties to offer non-gaming services (Sax & Ausloos, 2021). For example, Fortnite acts as a gateway to the metaverse, a network of shared virtual environments and platforms providing a variety of content (Kim, 2021). The esports ecosystem represents a media space where a plethora of digital business models are constantly evolving to ensure sustainability (Nyström et al., 2022). To create a model of the esports ecosystem with servicescapes at the core, both the core and the nearest outer components are further examined.

The servicescape in the esports ecosystem

The core of the esports ecosystem is the servicescape or "the contextual landscape for service" (Ballantyne & Nilsson, 2017, p. 226) in this case, the communication and distribution channels where media engagement occurs in offline and online settings. Considering that ecosystems represent various linkages and relationships between different actors and stakeholders, their existence does not occur in a vacuum. These interactions must have a place or space where, for instance, media communication, co-creation, or activities materialise. While traditionally identified in physical settings, increased digitalisation of activities requires its expansion to include online settings (Helmefalk & Marcusson, 2020; Nilsson & Ballantyne, 2014). This is of particular importance to esports where the majority of gaming and competitive events occur online. Servicescapes are "consciously designed" to deliver commercial outcomes (Arnould et al., 1998, p. 90). Commercial outcomes can, for instance, range from tangible and intangible influences on consumers or employees in commercial contexts, such as time spent, money spent or other outcomes (Turley & Milliman, 2000). For video games and esports, content is provided on digital platforms (i.e. the servicescape) where the games are located and distributed. Games are likewise offered through physical distribution channels (e.g. video game consoles). The platforms and servicescape also facilitate communication between players, fans and the public (Marchand & Hennig-Thurau, 2013; Wulf et al., 2020). The ability to create relationships, value and promote communication between the firm (e.g. gaming companies or teams) and the consumer, or between consumers themselves, such as through a forum, voice chat or in-game messages requires a system that is engaging and facilitates interaction.

The esports servicescape represents a dynamic and ever-evolving context where both simple and radical *innovations* are driven by a multitude of stakeholders ranging from large media companies to consumers. Media and distribution channels as components of servicescapes can serve as a context for innovation activities (Aal et al., 2016). In esports, this innovation is reflected in business models, media strategies and customer engagement (Ji & Hanna, 2020) within an ecosystem that allows a plethora of opportunities for value co-creation (Roth et al., 2023). Esports can disrupt old media and distribution channels through innovation (Abrate & Menozzi, 2020) as the context is characterised as entrepreneurial innovation driven by change-oriented actors (Scholz, 2019). For instance, during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, the innovation inherent in the digital aspects of esports was demonstrated as the sports industry, in a direct alliance with esports (Ke & Wagner, 2020), developed media and marketing content strategies to provide sport consumption opportunities to fans quarantined at home (Goldman & Hedlund, 2020). Within 4 days of the lockdown, NASCAR adapted the existing esports format as the eNASCAR iRacing Pro Invitational Series featuring current professional NASCAR drivers alongside the existing esport drivers. Broadcast on both TV and streamed online, the total viewership of both linear and streaming audiences resulted in them being "six of the seven most-watched esports programmes ever on U.S. TV" (Stern, 2020). This represents an example of how digital technologies can disrupt and enhance media practices (Maijanen et al., 2019), reflecting innovation specifically within the esports servicescape influencing traditional media spheres.

Live streaming, the act of playing games while engaging with an audience online, represents a key aspect of esports that takes place on platforms such as Twitch and YouTube (Hilvert-Bruce et al., 2018; Wulf et al., 2020). Streaming platforms serve not only as a communication channel between stakeholders or between players but also as a marketing and distribution channel for games and game content (Marchand & Hennig-Thurau, 2013). Twitch and its associated streamers drive the "platformization" of cultural production through innovative engagement practices that seek to maximise revenue (Johnson & Woodcock, 2019a). In esports, the nexus of the interaction between the actors is found in and through servicescapes (Seo, 2013) with platforms such as Twitch or Fortnite forced to constantly adapt their practices to attract an audience that has an ever-increasing range of options within the esports servicescape.

The second level in the esports ecosystem

Scholz (2019) emphasises the importance of understanding the actors and the stakeholders within the ecosystem as the esports experience is consumed through two distinct though overlapping or hybrid formats, namely offline (e.g. face-to-face events) and online (e.g. online competitions, streamed events, social media). Stakeholders can thus co-create value in both online and offline settings, often simultaneously.

Stakeholders such as endemic stakeholders, professional esports creators, and non-endemic stakeholders together with the audience and customers are the key stakeholders that impact the core. The role of stakeholders in offline environments is key to value co-creation and market-shaping through communities that host local tournaments and develop institutions to support and develop the next generation of esports (Koch et al., 2020; McCauley et al., 2020). The actors and stakeholders identified here exist and are

embedded within the wider society and culture, interacting in multiple ways, characterised through embedded technology that is increasingly found in the tangible offline "real" world.

Through examining the literature, four common stakeholders within the esports business ecosystem were identified; the *audience, endemic stakeholders, non-endemic stakeholders and the professional esport creators* (see McCauley et al., 2020). Firstly, the *audience* justifies the existence of other stakeholders and as a result, usually occupies a central stakeholder role (Scholz, 2019; Seo, 2013). The audience is the most important active stakeholder within esports as they have been the primary driving force for its development over the years (Scholz, 2019; Taylor, 2012). Esports emerged through the disruptive actions of gaming enthusiasts who created the culture, practices and structures around competitive gaming through LAN parties in the pre-high-speed internet era (Taylor, 2012). Modern day grassroots actors continue to work towards legitimising the context within wider society and developing the institutions that ensure a sustainable future (Cestino et al., 2023). Recent examples include how the audience, acting as user entrepreneurs, developed the modern competitive scene for Nintendo's Smash Bros franchise in the absence of the publishers' involvement (Koch et al., 2020). The role of the audience as a driver of innovation is driven by accessibility, connectivity, and ease of use of modern gaming and content creation technologies, positioning them as important stakeholders as both consumers and producers of informal media content. The large volumes of data generated through these digital consumers, which evolve faster than other audiences, also have value for understanding innovations in media management, business models and strategic management (Ji & Hanna, 2020).

Secondly, *endemic stakeholders* in esports include actors such as game publishers, pro teams, players and tournament organisers (Scholz, 2019). The game publishers, as the most prominent endemic stakeholders, serve as gatekeepers within esports due to the intellectual property rights of these companies in the form of games (Scholz, 2019). Esports events and tournaments are inherently valuable to the publishers as they allow them to demonstrate their offerings and thereby increase revenues (Parshakov et al., 2020). Endemic sponsors such as those that produce the technology (headsets, PCs, gaming mice) of esports played an essential role in the development of the early scene (Taylor, 2012) that continues to this day.

Thirdly, *non-endemic* stakeholders such as sponsors and a variety of organisations from outside the esports ecosystem continue to engage with, and shape, the context (Scholz, 2020). Esports continues to be pervasive in the offline world with the examples of esports bars similar to traditional sports bars continuing to emerge. Esports creates numerous opportunities for non-endemic sponsors across a broad range of product categories including drinks, cars and fashion to create positive outcomes such as positive attitudes and purchase intentions (Hayward, 2019; Huettermann et al., 2020). One example of this is franchises such as "Meltdown" or "Kappa" Bar which are attracting audiences who engage with esports but also those who want alternatives to the traditional bar or sports bar formats (McCauley et al., 2020). Traditional media and sports organisations, in particular, have made a commitment to engaging with esports (Scholz, 2020) as illustrated by the integration of esports within the modern Olympics (Lefebvre et al., 2024) and the growing influence within modern professional football (Hammerschmidt et al., 2024).

Lastly, *professional esport creators* represent a range of actors engaging in different practices that produce the media that is central to engagement within the servicescape. Professional gamers and streamers produce game-based content that the audience engages with for a variety of reasons such as learning, connecting or simple enjoyment. Successful livestreamers create parasocial relationships to engage their audiences and maximise financial success (Sherrick et al., 2024). This represents the "formal media content" that traditional media markets were built around. Further actors such as game community managers build content and co-create value in both online and offline spaces for the audience to connect around. Increasingly niche yet linked segments such as cosplayers (those who create and wear fantastical game-based costumes) can be seen as creating content that is part of the ecosystem. Esports has its own unique culture built on language, practices, norms, rituals, symbolism and history (Seo, 2016) which creates unique professional opportunities. Esports provides opportunities for the audience to stream, view and spend money (Wohn & Freeman, 2020), and they are the target for professional content creators. The accessibility of esports through low barriers of entry (Scholz, 2019) provides opportunities for the audience to turn their passion for esports into a career, which Seo (2016) views as a form of professionalised consumption. These low barriers are themselves a form of "inclusive innovation" that creates employment opportunities that may otherwise not be feasible (Mortazavi et al., 2020). It may be that the audience is acting as prosumers (e.g. those who both produce and consume goods and services, often simultaneously) who become part of the formal media economy in a variety of roles based on their experiences. The ethos of esports is not solely about fun but also about performance and improvement which means esports participants often move beyond games as casual leisure (Seo, 2016). Those professionally engaged in esports that the content is created around are labelled as "professional esports creators", given it is their roles that generate the core content of the context that attracts stakeholders such as sponsors and brands. This could include visible actors such as streamers, shoutcastors (presenters) or players but also the tournament organisers, brand managers, technicians, or coaches.

In line with Scholz (2019), Seo (2013) and McCauley et al. (2020), this study proposes the esport ecosystem model that includes the stakeholders and actors; *audience, endemic stakeholders, non-endemic stakeholders and the professional esport creators*, with servicescapes at the heart of this ecosystem, highlighting the importance of media in the servicescape itself and its associated innovation activities (Marchand & Hennig-Thurau, 2013). Figure 1 represents a model of the esports ecosystem in terms of value creation where various actors and stakeholders co-create value in a complex array of interactions. It differs from the media ecosystem proposed by Kostovska et al. (2021) as it is driven by users in a bottom-up approach that characterises esports while also reflecting the unique nature of esports. Further in this case it is not a media ecosystem that co-evolves around one or several focal firms (Kostovska et al., 2021) but instead one where a diverse range of online and offline communication and distribution channels act as the servicescape allowing multifaceted media engagement to facilitate the co-creation practices between a diverse range of actors that drive innovations.
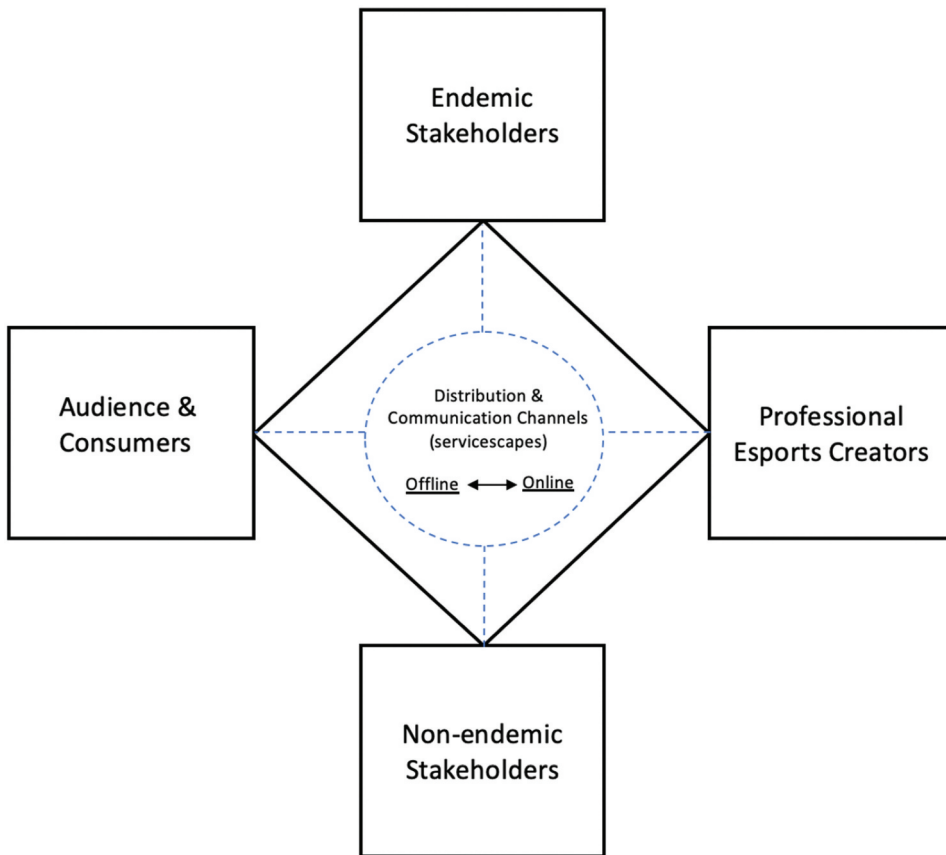
Figure 1. The esports ecosystem with the servicescape as central.
Source: adapted from Scholz (2019); Seo (2013); McCauley et al. (2020).

Looking for innovation in the esports servicescape

The esports industry is characterised by a high degree of innovation (Marchand & Hennig-Thurau, 2013), applying resources that come from a range of stakeholders in the ecosystem (Moore, 1993). The servicescape as central to our model represents the key element in showcasing and distributing the results of esports' *"entrepreneurial innovativeness"* (Scholz & Stein, 2017). In this increasingly interconnected ecosystem, for clarity of narrative, four stakeholders are focused on to showcase innovative aspects of the context from the servicescape perspective. With each element, this paper will showcase innovations that underline the value of understanding esports within media and management. The role of the games themselves within this model is pervasive, with the multiplicity of existing and emerging titles underpinning each subsequent discussion.

As the esports ecosystem comprises continuous innovation (both radical and simple) that occurs between the different stakeholders, it highlights the need for academics and practitioners to "recognize the disruptive role of esports" (Ke & Wagner, 2020, p. 2). Aspects of esports such as the extensions of sporting brands

(Bertschy et al., 2020), sponsorship (Huettermann et al., 2020), and customer engagement (Abbasi et al., 2016) warrant examination in the area of media business. To better understand these important questions, an examination of existing research is undertaken to illuminate and organise key themes for future research.

Method

One of the biggest challenges researchers and scholars face, especially in areas that are undergoing rapid change and innovation, is identifying, and keeping up with the current state of research.

To explore innovation occurring in the esports servicescape, a semi-systematic literature review was conducted (Snyder, 2019) utilising the key themes of esports ecosystems, servicescapes and innovation to provide a focused future research agenda. This semi-systematic literature review was undertaken using a thematic analysis, similar to McColl-Kennedy et al. (2017). A semi-systematic review differs from a systematic review in that it offers a meta-narrative in contrast to displaying effect sizes, but is also appropriate when reviewing different domains and traditions that may hinder a full systematic review process (Snyder, 2019). In line with the aim of this paper, the justification for using a semi-systematic review is that it provides researchers with "[...] the ability to map a field of research, synthesize the state of knowledge, and create an agenda for further research [...]" (Snyder, 2019, p. 335).

The key terms identified were ecosystem, innovation and servicescape (See Figure 2) were combined with several sub-areas and these were used to search for recent journal articles. To conceptually capture the nexus between the (1) esport ecosystem, (2) servicescapes and (3) innovation, several keywords and synonyms needed to be identified to ensure relevant articles were included review. For the (1) esport ecosystem Figure 1 was used as a starting point, using words such as professional esport actors, esport, video game developers, publisher, organisers, professional players, (non)endemic, audience, and consumers. For the (2) servicescape concepts, words, such as platform, online, offline, place, space, media and game, as well as the word servicescape were used. For the (3) innovation similar wordings, such as innovate* were utilised. Thus, the nexus was searched for by combining different keywords from 1, 2 and 3. To illustrate search
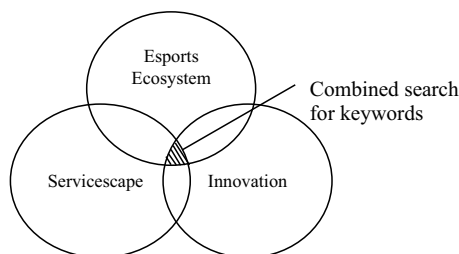
Figure 2. The intersection of concepts for the literature review.

queries encompassing all keywords; (esport organisers OR play* OR non-endemic OR publish* OR developers OR endemic OR non-endemic OR audience OR consumer*) AND (platform OR online OR offline OR place OR space OR media OR game* OR servicescape) AND (innovati*).

As esports can be viewed as disruptive and ever-changing, particularly during the last few years (Hayduk, 2021), the period was limited to articles published between 2018 and the time of writing to maximise the recency and relevance of the research agenda. This resulted in the identification of articles which were then categorised and evaluated based on the journal in which they were published. Thesis work and books were excluded from the results due to the possibility of a lack of peer review. Articles not in English were also excluded. Further, articles were evaluated based on the journal of publication which was required to appear in a leading index such as the Web of Science or ABS list. The document search identified 359 articles associated with each of these search terms and evaluation criteria.
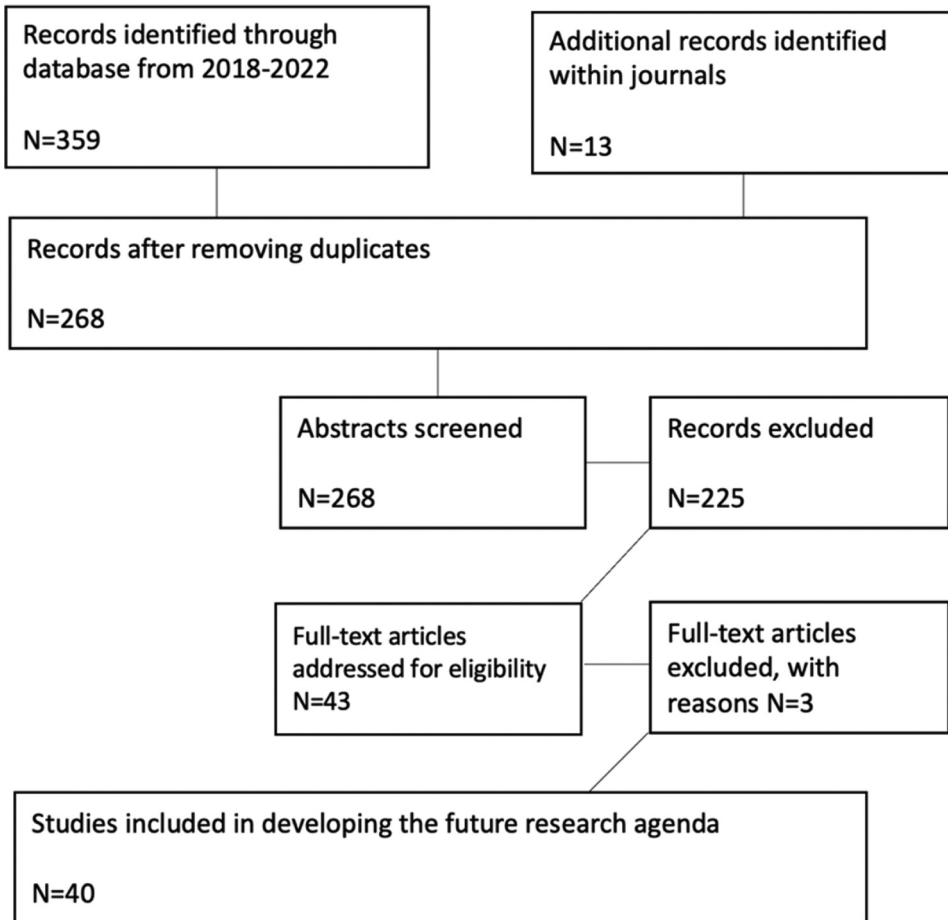
Figure 3. Process of identifying the number of articles.

The search and quality assessment followed Snyder's (2019) recommendations and was conducted by two of the researchers who verified the search terms as well as the result and the papers excluded. This process is illustrated in Figure 3.

In total, the search generated 40 articles that were common to the search terms i.e. at the nexus of these three areas (see Figure 2 and Appendix 1). Each of these articles was read and analysed considering the purpose of the study to propose new areas for future research. Following the identification of the articles, a thematic analysis was undertaken (Snyder, 2019). This analysis is commonly used as a method for analysing and identifying themes or patterns in texts or data (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The process of analysis followed and was inspired by the procedures and phases of Braun and Clarke (2006) is illustrated in Appendix 2. First, articles were read to familiarise the researchers with the content. Subsequently, various findings were systematically coded into words, concepts, or sentences. After summarising and coding the text, the codes and central meanings were reconfigured and (3–4) organised into aggregated (mapped) and latent codes, encapsulating the essence of the findings according to the previously mentioned theories of servicescapes, innovation and esports. (5) These aggregated codes and meanings were then clustered together to illuminate a designated theme. (6) Findings were then discussed according to the themes and potential future avenues they offer (in the next section). Although the content of the articles in Appendix 1, were overlapping to some extent, the themes then enabled the similar categorisation of the articles which reinforced their viability. From the discussion, a table (see Table 1) was generated summarising potential research avenues.

The findings are used to guide future research and from this analysis, the four main areas of future research were identified which are presented in the following section.

Findings, discussion and future research

Based on an examination of the articles, four clear directions for research for understanding innovation from the servicescape perspective, particularly in marketing and media, were found and are summarised in Table 1. Additionally, a series of focused research avenues with research questions specific to the esports context are presented with directions also related more generally to servicescapes and media business.

Firstly, the online digital characteristics of the esports context provide opportunities for research associated with *online servicescapes and live streaming*. Increasingly, streaming is a vital part for creators, not only for promoting new games, or streaming tournaments, but also acting as a natural platform for many actors and stakeholders in the service ecosystem (Johnson & Woodcock, 2019b). Extensive research has been conducted on Twitch as a platform (see Gasparetto & Safronov, 2023; Johnson & Woodcock, 2019b; Partin, 2020; Sjöblom et al., 2017, 2019; Wulf et al., 2020), highlighting its importance for a wide range of stakeholders. As gaming is built on the premise of competition and hence a social activity (Chen et al., 2020), limited previous research exists on this aspect, presenting additional research avenues specifically in terms of how live streaming permeates service ecosystems. Additional innovation opportunities and strategies among a diverse range of actors can serve as the focus of this research, such as watchers and players (Diwanji et al., 2020). The investigation of cultural perceptions and communities is indicated as this serves as a leading stimulant for innovation through interaction

Table 1. Summary of research avenues.

Research avenues	Specific questions	Servicescape- and media-related questions
Online servicescapes and live streaming		
The competitive and social nature of gaming.	In what ways do live streaming media permeate the service ecosystem in (e)sports? How do rivalry amongst games genres or professional teams (dis) engage consumers in esports?	How do online live servicescapes impact consumer engagement in the service ecosystem? What media facilitates and impacts player engagement? How can servicescapes facilitate rivalry- (dis)engagement?
The range of actors who stimulate interaction and co-mentorship.	How does innovation occur in competitive-oriented live streams between players and spectators? How and when do players implement innovative practices in live-streaming services?	What influence does cooperative and competitive servicescape have on innovation performance? How does instant (live) interaction in servicescapes influence innovation processes?
The investigation of cultural perceptions and communities that stimulate innovation through interaction and co-mentorship.	How do cultural perceptions stimulate innovation through interaction and co-mentorship in the various communities? How do communities (e.g. gaming communities) stimulate innovation through co-mentorship?	What cultural adaptations can be made to online servicescapes by communities? What adaptations do communities make to servicescapes to facilitate innovation?
New esports media such as Twitch can transform an industry that can be applied to traditional sports.	What factors are required for the success of using live-streaming services in non-computer game contexts? How can traditional sports employ live streaming similar to esports in their marketing strategies?	What elements of an online servicescape determine the success of innovation in different contexts? Which (dis)similar marketing strategies exist between esport- and traditional sports ecosystems?
Innovation by breaking rules in servicescapes		
The freedom to change rules (mapmaking, modding, other), within the service context.	How can rule-breaking improve the rate of innovation in sports services? To what extent can rule-breaking be beneficial for service engagement?	What type of rules can be identified within a co-innovation servicescape? What is the relationship between rule-breaking and servicescapes?
Upscaling innovation activities within servicescapes.	How can innovation within the sports service ecosystem be upscaled? How are grassroots and community activities upscaled within (e)sports?	How does innovating practices within grassroots movements occur within service ecosystems?
Examining the impact of platformization on engagement, innovation and cultural production.	How are various platforms restricting innovation and engagement activities in (e)sports? What restrictive criteria hinder innovation on physical and digital platforms?	How can servicescapes restrict outcomes of innovation in service ecosystems? What is the optimal level of restrictions within a service ecosystem to foster innovation?
Innovation and the endemic and non-endemic actors within esports		
The difference between endemic and non-endemic sponsors is unclear, requiring the definition and clarification of appropriate inclusive or exclusive criteria.	What would result in an endemic stakeholder (sponsor) being classified as such? What would result in a non-endemic stakeholder (sponsor) being classified as such?	What factors determine whether an actor/s or stakeholders would be described as endemic or non-endemic in a service ecosystem?
The congruence (i.e. fit) between events and sponsors.	How is the fit between the game (sport) genre and sponsor established?	What servicescape factors influence the fit between the brand and the game genres? What servicescape factors influence the fit between the brand and games?
Spillover effects exist between endemic and non-endemic actors and with game genres.	How are spillover effects of (un) successful congruence between actors seen in the (e)sport service	How does the servicescape moderate/ mediate the spillover effects of (non)endemic actors?

(*Continued*)

Table 1. (Continued).

Research avenues	Specific questions	Servicescape- and media-related questions
	ecosystem?	
Cross-cultural knowledge on technologically driven co-creation practices between digitally savvy audiences (Roy et al., 2019)	How does knowledge sharing occur in sports-oriented service ecosystems? How are digital and global services overcoming cultural obstacles for co-innovation amongst consumers?	How do cross-cultural audiences interact within the service ecosystem? Do these services provide culture-specific solutions to stimulate co-innovation in the servicescape?
The hybrid nature of esports and technology		
Understanding hybridity within esports and LANs.	What can offline sporting events learn from LANs? How does a LAN and its stakeholders in the service ecosystem contribute to innovation?	How can offline sports develop an appropriate servicescape? What servicescape innovations can be produced through the interaction between the stakeholders in hybrid contexts?
Incorporating value co-creation through participation, besides spectating and betting (e.g. arena games).	How is co-creation of value facilitated in hybrid competitive events?	What servicescape aspects facilitate co-creation in hybrid settings? What types of value can be co-created within the servicescape in hybrid settings?
Insights and innovation drive hybridity i.e. the move from an online medium to the real world.	How can hybrid services engage actors and stakeholders in (e) sports?	How can online servicescape aspects be transferred offline? To what extent do the differences in offline and online servicescapes impact innovation?

and co-mentorship. As suggested by Klaß (2020), the scope still exists to investigate open innovation within the media industry but in terms of marketing within sports management, streaming and the associated practices represent new ways to engage, track and monetise audiences. Questions connected to online audience engagement further demonstrate that alternate media can potentially develop innovations based on esports practices. Cranmer et al. (2021) emphasised that more research is needed to understand the motivations of audiences' engagement with these channels and the formation of e-sport communities. While Huang et al. (2024) have shown that informativeness and convenience when live streaming are important for viewer satisfaction and flow experience, Pu et al. (2022) examined instead physical settings and showed that knowledge acquisition, game drama and socialisation were important for attendance, and that event organisers need to be more innovative in physical settings. The innovativeness of the emergent new esports media such as Twitch represents an example of how innovations can transform an industry (Ward & Harmon, 2019) with implications for both scholars and practitioners engaged in the study of media business.

A second stream of research identified is an *innovation by breaking rules in servicescapes*. With the involvement of players in innovative co-creational activities in esports, future research on how this occurs in online servicescapes is necessary as many actors and stakeholders are already well-positioned (DiPietro et al., 2018). For example, the rules of a game are determined by the game developer publisher, tournament organisers or the platforms in general, and these boundaries are set for what is possible within the framework of the servicescape. Many major esport titles and genres (e.g. Counter-Strike) are the result of audience-developed changes that give power to players through changing

rules, and autonomy for players, thus providing the incentive to be more innovative and participatory. For instance, Abrate and Menozzi (2020) show that there can be a mutual benefit between the producer and user in services where modding is allowed and users can innovate through the freedom to change the rules (e.g. mapmaking, modding etc.), thereby facilitating a demand for the original product.

Further, in understanding how innovation occurs, it would be of interest to explore how innovation activities within servicescapes can be upscaled (DiPietro et al., 2018), especially in competitive events. The case of the Super Smash Brothers esports scene being developed by the audience represents the pinnacle of user entrepreneurship in innovating a globally shared experience (Koch et al., 2020). The reluctance of Nintendo to engage with the game as an esports title meant that it was built by the audience from the ground up. As Nintendo begins officially engaging with the existing scene it represents a unique case to reflect the call by DiPietro et al. (2018) to investigate scaling up innovative service ecosystems. Platformization (i.e. how technology can infiltrate and connect multiple areas of life via a single technology) of cultural production within services can be seen in how platforms limit the innovation of users and remain under-explored in research (Foxman, 2019). Given that everyday users can now be more participatory and creative in how they engage with technology (Freeman et al., 2020), scholars should examine if there is a platformization effect hindering engagement and explore how esports enables innovative freedom of cultural production. An interesting perspective that can provide further insight is the concept of sense-breaking (Pizzo, et al., 2022) in challenging existing associations in the industry. The example of how esports actors are innovative in shaping regional markets (McCauley et al., 2020) provides further evidence of the value of supporting alternate media audiences with opportunities to innovate outside of traditional boundaries.

The analysis thirdly identifies the need for further research into the broad area of *innovation related to endemic and non-endemic actors within esports*. Sponsorship has become a large revenue stream comprising both endemic and non-endemic sponsors (Cuesta-Valiño et al., 2022). While non-endemic sponsors may also gain positive benefits from sponsoring esports (Huettermann et al., 2020), the differences between these categories of sponsors are unclear. Research is required to define and clarify the ex- or inclusive criteria for contrasts between these two categories of sponsors. Further, the nature of branding suggests that congruence in the fit between events and sponsors is necessary, but clarity on the nature of congruence in this context is unclear, and as more games and genres develop, this is potentially more complex (Huettermann et al., 2020). Flegr and Schmidt (2022) identify similar future research avenues when it comes to esports and marketing, such as endorsement and game-sponsor congruence. Digital events may attract different sponsors from physical events as they have different target markets, with esports attracting younger consumers than traditional sports (Kordyaka et al., 2020; Lopez et al., 2021). The ever-increasing gambling sponsorships occurring in the industry poses risks to these consumers who are attracted to engage in gambling and experience harm (Biggar et al., 2023). To avoid alienating consumers, sponsors need to be strategically selected (Lopez et al., 2021) due to their signalling effect on the event such as creating positive brand and event associations (Chien et al., 2011). Interestingly, the introduction of an esports activity by a brand is neither reinforcing nor destabilising the identity, if the audience is not involved or interested in the sport (Mühlbacher et al., 2021).

In understanding endemic and non-endemic actors, the nature of spillover effects between various actors as well as game genres also requires examination, including how communication and innovation disperse among the different servicescapes. While knowledge sharing among actors has to influence innovation capabilities (Yue et al., 2022), the amount of generated data during these events may also provide new insights. Esports events provide data and an appropriate context to potentially examine the hard-to-measure effects of sponsorship (Parshakov et al., 2020). Further, the global and online characteristics of esports audiences could provide opportunities to extend research on cross-cultural knowledge on technologically driven co-creation practices between digitally savvy audiences (Roy et al., 2019). Esports consumers represent the prosuming early adopters of technology that will represent the future sports fan (Andrews & Ritzer, 2018) and media and sports management scholars should explore what aspects of this inherently innovative audience can be applied to traditional sports business realms and other media consumption experiences. However, while the use of existing knowledge and structures of sports management may be beneficial when expanding into the arena of esports, not all existing business and marketing practices may be directly transferred into this context (Pizzo, et al., 2022).

Finally, the *hybrid nature of esports and technology* presents additional research opportunities. The rapid development of new technologies (Jenny et al., 2018) provides new business opportunities that by themselves give rise to new business and monetisation models (e.g. Hayduk, 2021; Johnson & Woodcock, 2019a; Partin, 2020), smart consumers and smart servicescapes which can lead to new services (Roy et al., 2019). The hybridity of intertwining physical and digital (e)sporting activities can be perceived in different levels, for instance, at micro, meso and macro levels in service ecosystems (Kunz et al., 2021), or by types of sport-hybridity, such as digitally-supported, augmented, replicated and translated sports (Goebeler et al., 2021), all occurring in servicescapes. Future platforms will also present new opportunities, not only for sponsors but also for the professional (e)sports actors, such as teams, to monetise their streams and build their brands, for instance through crowdsourcing (Hayduk, 2021). In addition, there are opportunities for media companies to leverage innovative technology (e.g. media digitalisation) within the servicescape, while simultaneously identifying new revenue sources and enhancing profitability (Scholz, 2020). In addition, the rapid development of many platforms offers innovation among the actors to build or complement their careers, through these channels. Ji and Hanna (2020) emphasise, for instance, that in-game platforms may be viable to study to investigate the leverage as well as the extent to which esport partners are needed. Virtual reality as an innovative technology has been discussed for competitive gaming for esport (Turkay et al., 2021), but also as a way of socially including individuals with a disability to compete (Byers et al., 2021). LAN events, such as DreamHack offer a novel context for innovation in hybrid servicescapes. In contrast to other sporting events (arenas), LAN includes (online) participation in many services (Abdolmaleki et al., 2023). During these events, other competitive elements exist that can foster innovation and co-creation of value, such as 24-hour competition and developing small games or tournaments that consumers participate in. Ningning et al. (2023) show that willingness to physical activity may be evoked by esports, more research is recommended into how traditional sporting and non-sporting live events can incorporate co-creation of value through participation, besides

spectating (e.g. arena games). Thus, this study suggests more research similar to Ruiz and Gandia (2023) on esports events such as tournaments and LANs to understand the ecosystem, the hybridity of such servicescapes and their applicability and value to modern media management scholars. Esports represents one of the first examples of a phenomenon moving from an online medium to integrate with the analogue real world (McCauley et al., 2020). As such it provides a unique opportunity for researchers to disentangle the process and gain insights into how innovation drives hybridity.

Implications, limitations, and conclusions

By anchoring a relevant conceptual model, this study has discussed, contrasted, exemplified and proposed future research on innovation within servicescapes that could contribute to overcoming the nascency of esports research and media innovation research (Ratten, 2016; Reitman et al., 2020). The servicescape perspective provides direction for recent calls to investigate developing questions on the implications of esports for modern media businesses such as prosumers (Andrews & Ritzer, 2018), consumer journeys (Houston, 2020), user entrepreneurship (Koch et al., 2020) the metaverse (Kim, 2021) and the augmentation of the sports experience as driven by esports (Cranmer et al., 2021). Through shifting the focal point from the audience in ecosystems as identified in previous research to media acting as servicescapes of consumer engagement, additional insights have surfaced. The multiplicity of potential servicescapes identified here indicates a plethora of specific cases and contexts of value to interested researchers engaged in understanding the business of media.

Firstly, this paper has highlighted the importance of various actors and stakeholders and how they have adapted their servicescapes, marketing activities and services to adapt to concurrent shifts of digitalisation and demands of consumers as seen during the COVID-19 pandemic. Secondly, the availability of offline and only servicescapes offers broadens access to the audience through live streaming while simultaneously offering offline avenues for engagement (Wulf et al., 2020). Thirdly, innovation provides new monetisation techniques and solutions such as live streaming donations or free-to-play solutions which may broaden the potential user base and co-creation of value (Johnson & Woodcock, 2019a). Fourth, communities reflect the bottom-up resource allocation which can be fostered (Scholz & Stein, 2017), supported by the hybrid nature of esports and the development of many successful gaming titles. The research avenues identified through the review reflect the complex interplay of these factors to provide focused research directions for interested scholars.

Limitations of this paper include the perspective taken of servicescapes and its application to esports. While examples have been provided of innovations, and the authors have not commented on their success (or lack thereof). The conceptual model may be deliberately simplistic, yet its discussion illustrates the complexity and variety of actors and stakeholders sharing knowledge and resources, as well as determining whether they are endemic (or not). The scope and global nature of the context combined with the nascent stage of associated research mean it is not possible to encompass all aspects of the questions posed here in one study.

Esports has assumed a lot of the traditional formats of existing sports and digital media as it continually negotiates and develops structures and institutions around

rapid global growth. These events only add to the value inherent in media business examining the context of esports as these events moved up the timeline of the associated impact and innovations. What is presented here is limited by necessity as esports is truly interdisciplinary as a research topic (Brock, 2023) with almost unlimited potential to be examined within media and business. Innovative digital phenomena such as the metaverse increasingly require academic inquiry and conceptualisation in terms of how consumers engage (Kim, 2021) with the esports as servicescape perspective representing a valid lens. Characterised by a young digitally savvy audience that engage in both physical and digital spaces, esports represents a future laboratory for understanding the disruption of media business through digital innovations.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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Appendix 1

Author	1	2	3	4	5	Method	Aim/Purpose	Key findings
Abdolmaleki et al. (2023)	X				X	A two-phase, multimethod analysis	The purpose of the study is to identify business practices that are relevant to operations of LANs, in the context of Iran.	The findings show that relevant business factors are to offer variety of services, providing attractive facilities, monitoring competition, and developing multiple revenue streams.
Biggar et al. (2023)	X		X			Systematic review	The study documented the level of gambling sponsorship of the world's top esports teams.	The findings showed that half of the esports teams were sponsored by gambling companies in popular esport titles such as Dota 2 and CS:GO during the world championship events in 2021 and more.
Byers et al. (2021)			X		X	Conceptual	The purpose is to discuss how innovation creates a legacy in mega sports events, specifically relating to the Paris 2024 Olympic/Paralympic Games.	A conceptual model is developed and proposed. It highlights the importance of innovation by suggesting new applications for VR technology as it can contribute to the development of social inclusion.
Chen et al. (2020)	X	X			X	Quantitative/Scale development/ Testing	The purpose was to develop and test an online streaming perceived servicescape to help in the development of channel promotions.	A 35-item OLSPS scale with eight dimensions was developed and validated. OLSPS is shown to be positively correlated with the audiences' cognition, behavioural intentions and continued use. Para-social relationships with broadcasters rather than platforms were highlighted.
Cranmer et al. (2021)	X	X				Conceptual	The purpose of this conceptual paper is to redefine esports and propose a unified framework to not only capitalise on esports business potential but also to provide a future research agenda.	The findings present a proposed esports Matrix with four distinct realms contrasting the technological and physical nature of sports. This is used to present a research agenda that includes physical activity, the esports environment and the role of technology.
Cuesta-Valiño et al. (2022)	X	X	X			Quantitative – Survey	The study's purpose is to investigate how the sponsorship image and consumer involvement (in co-creation consumption activities) impact fans' responses to sponsorship in e-sports.	The findings show that sponsor antecedents are crucial factors for a sponsor changing their image and sponsorship response. It is also possible to use the participation to increase responses.
DiPietro et al. (2018)	X				X	Qualitative – case study focused on Eataly and KidZania	The purpose is to explore the key drivers of the scaling-up process associated with service innovations. They use 2 innovative ecosystems as illustrative cases.	Four drivers of scaling up are identified namely effectuation, sensing and adapting, reconfiguration and the alignment of resources and forms of collaboration between actors and the resonance with values.
Diwanji et al. (2020)	X				X	Mixed methods using chat logs and thematic analysis	The purpose is to theorise on information behaviour and copresence, specifically on Twitch.	Copresence is the sense of being and acting with others and the study includes information behaviour such as production, reception, reaction and reward behaviour which impact copresence.

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Author	1	2	3	4	5	Method	Aim/Purpose	Key findings
Faas, et al. (2018)	X				X	Qualitative – participant observer method	The purpose of the study was to study how streamers mentor and learn in live streaming contexts.	They found that live streams support learning-focused communities that mentor both the streams and each other during and after the streams, which implies that it provides a space for learning and motivation learners.
Flegr and Schmidt (2022)	X	X	X			Systematic review	The aim of the review is to synthesise and reflect on the literature from multiple academic fields to advance an understanding of strategic management in eSports.	They found that a large portion of research are interested in the socio-cultural aspects, more specifically the motives and preferences of consuming eSports. However more research is needed on the economic, political, legal, and environmental aspects of strategic management.
Foxman (2019)	X		X		X	Qualitative – interviews	The purpose is to investigate how Unity game engine sets (platforms) use emerging technology.	Platforms are understudied, yet they use existing tools when applying new technology to create content. These platforms disrupt cultural production and the economy.
Freeman et al. (2020)	X	X				Collected self-reports posted on a variety of forums followed by interviews among these indie game developers	The purpose is to expand the understanding of user-driven technological practices and how they impact the future design within collaborative systems, specifically indie games.	They highlight the importance of small teams and their democratic form of participation, the various socio-technological challenges and how game designers can address these challenges.
Gasparetto and Safronov (2023)	X					Quantitative – Multiple Linear Regressions	The study aims to analyse the streaming demand of the CS: GO.	The findings indicate that quality of tournament, match quality, and individual skill of the athletes when watching matches are valued by eSports enthusiasts. Moreover, high competitiveness and uncertainty of outcomes were also important.
Goebeler et al. (2021)	X	X			X	Conceptual (Inductive)	The purpose of this paper is to explore how sports activities are influenced by technology by focusing on sports that have both physical and online components.	The study finds four clusters of physical-digital hybrid sport configurations. The study identified the effect of technology on these configurations.
Hayduk (2021)	X	X				Secondary data, quantitative analysis.	The purpose of this article is to assess the market dynamics in the video game market and identify critical success factors.	The findings suggest that crowdfunding an esport project is more difficult than crowdfunding projects in other industries. A reason for this can be the founder-funder information asymmetries and the lost opportunity costs and the number of esports projects on these platforms.
Hilvert-Bruce et al. (2018)			X		X	Quantitative	This study explores the motivations of viewer engagement from a Uses and Gratification perspective.	Six motivations were identified in this context. Those engaging in live streaming have a stronger social and community basis, and smaller channels had more motivated viewers.

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Author	1	2	3	4	5	Method	Aim/Purpose	Key findings
Huang et al. (2024)	X				X	Quantitative – Latent moderated structural equations	The purpose of the study was to explore how livestreaming media attributes and viewer characteristics influence experience and media loyalty	The study shows that informativeness and convenience influence flow experience and viewer satisfaction, which subsequently influence media loyalty. Interactivity was also found to be a more important for viewer satisfaction and flow experience for viewers that very highly involved. Informativeness was important for viewers that are less involved.
Huettermann et al. (2020)		X	X			Quantitative – model testing	The purpose was to determine the perceptions of gamers to non-endemic game sponsors using a scale developed for sports marketing.	Non-endemic sponsors can benefit from sponsoring an esports team sponsorship through improving attitudes, perceived goodwill, and product purchase intentions among the audience. There is an effect on perceived goodwill and product purchase intentions, which makes this form of sponsorship attractive.
Jenny et al. (2018)	X		X			Review/Descriptive	The paper examines how facilities are adapted or created to attract esports events. These events need to generate revenue to survive, and this requires spectators.	Esports events need to be held in suitable facilities. Watching may even be more important than playing in the case of these events, making it important to develop suitable facilities. Organisers need to consider venue equipment and personnel, adapting existing venues and developing esport- specific venues.
Ji and Hanna (2020)	X	X			X	Survey	The purpose of this research is to understand the needs of consumers and their impact on esports innovation.	Esports consumers perceive value based on their levels of engagement i.e. low and heavy. More engaged gamers are more aware of the value of personal data, which can be a valuable resource for esports organisations. This could involve giving customers different incentives to obtain this data.
Johnson and Woodcock (2019a)	X		X		X	Qualitative – interview data	This paper examines monetisation that takes place in live streaming. Various monetisation strategies on the platform are examined.	Various monetisation strategies are identified, including subscribing, donating, advertising, sponsorships, competitions, unpredictable rewards and channel games. All seven strategies impact the cultural production on platforms.
Johnson and Woodcock (2019b)		X	X		X	Empirical – qualitative interviews with primary and secondary stakeholders.	The study investigates how streaming, specifically Twitch is changing the games industry, including when launching new games and how it is critical in the game ecosystem.	Findings show that live streaming is a major force in the games industry. It links a range of stakeholders including developers and influences. Streaming impacts expectations of gameplay and game design.

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Author	1	2	3	4	5	Method	Aim/Purpose	Key findings
Klaß (2020)	X	X				Review	This is a literature review of open innovation (54 articles) to suggest implications for media management.	Three processes and six key practices are identified and discussed in the literature. The motivation for open innovation is mainly motivated by market-related outcomes through a range of media-specific conditions. This is obtained through technology, the audience, or other media companies. Cultural uniqueness is the most relevant media-specific condition.
Kordyaka et al. (2020)		X	X			Quasi-experimental approach	The purpose of this research is to obtain a better understanding of diversification as a competitive advantage for organisations in eSports.	Franchises using a strategy of medium diversification seem to attain the most beneficial positions. Franchise identification can also potentially explain media engagement. Consumption and contribution aspects of media engagement positively affect franchise loyalty.
Kunz et al. (2022)		X	X			Qualitative case study	The paper aims to identify similarities and differences and to understand the different roles, relationships and multiple interactions of actors involved in value co-creation processes among selected cases of the eSports service ecosystems.	The study reveals how actors interact and co-create value during events. Interactions are illustrated where actors are connected within the ecosystems.
Lopez et al. (2021)		X	X			Network analysis	The purpose of this paper is to identify which corporate growth strategy is being used by the NBA within the 2K League by comparing their sponsorship portfolios.	The NBA is using an innovative hybrid corporate growth strategy by incorporating sponsors from the NBA and LCS. This means the league has sponsors from both traditional and esports. By using a range of sponsors, they can appeal to a younger audience, and convey the legitimacy of esports.
McCauley et al. (2020)		X	X			Qualitative	This paper investigates the cultural relevance of an esports event in a regional city to determine the benefits for a range of stakeholders.	The local esports scene is viewed as a market and identified four key actions of local actors that enable the development of esports, namely building culture and values, advocating and legitimising, institutional development and co-creation of value through socialising and practice.
Mühlbacher et al. (2022)		X	X	X		Netnographic study and Qualitative interviews	The study examines how the introduction of esports sport simulation games by a sport club influences the identity formation process among fans, and whether it reinforces or destabilises the club's brand identity.	The findings show that brand identity is neither reinforced nor destabilised by the introduction of a new offer, but only if the fans of the brand are not interested in the new sport nor feel disturbed by the new fans.
Ningning, et al. (2023)		X			X	Quantitative – Survey	The purpose is to provide guidance to young people staying away from negative, sedentary, addictive, and other behaviours, as well as to promote healthy behaviours	The study shows that e-gaming scenes, virtual sports experience, and social presence had a positive impact on young peoples' intention to participate in sports and fitness. Virtual sports experience was a mediator on the intention.

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Author	1	2	3	4	5	Method	Aim/Purpose	Key findings
Parshakov et al. (2020)	X	X				Quantitative – data from 20 years is analysed	The purpose is to determine whether there are spillover effects from promotion into sales. The video game industry and eSports tournaments as events for the period of 1997–2015 serve as the context for the study.	Marketing through events does give positive impacts with an optimal number of 80 esports tournaments being organised per year. Examples of positive spillover effects include cross-product, cross-region and cross-firm affect both game popularity and sales.
Partin (2020)			X	X	X	Critical review	The study focuses on donations in live stream, including its development and how platform capture is used as a strategy in Twitch e.g. Twitch Bits	It presents the development of platform capture – and how Twitch Bits have been able to challenge the dominance of other third-party tools. Platform owners, it is argued, do leverage power asymmetries to contribute to the technical development of their platforms.
Pizzo et al. (2022)	X		X			Qualitative – semi-structured interviews with the esport industry	The purpose of this research is to examine how mature organisations (specifically mature professional sports organisations) generate a competitive advantage when diversifying beyond their native industry i.e. affiliating with esports – organised video game competitions.	Prior resources can be used when diversifying into a new industry. Specifically, experience-based tacit knowledge within a firm (and its human capital) can generate a competitive advantage yet they need to be versatile if they are to be valuable. The versatility of resources and knowledge create a competitive advantage, making the identification of versatile resources and their combination with knowledge-based competencies important.
Pizzo et al. (2022)	X	X			X	Qualitative – Interviews – Case study methodology	The study examines the deliberate strategies of a professional sport franchise to integrate an esports team, specifically on how practitioners influence the integration of novel practices through micro strategies.	Sensemaking strategies was used to initially foster a progressive culture, create a shared understanding, and endorse operational synergies. Managerial and operational changes required addressing gender stigma and brand decoupling that limited the promotion between the franchise and the esports team.
Pu et al. (2022)		X			X	Mixed method research – Scale development	The purpose was threefold. First to identify motivational factors attending the event. Second, to develop and validate the esports events attendance motivation scale (EEAMS). Lastly, to assess motives between male and female participants.	By developing the scale, the study shows several different motivations on attendance. The study also showed the importance of context, such as that socialisation may bear different weight being online or offline for different people.
Roy et al. (2019)	X	X		X		Quantitative – develop and test a model	In this paper, smart servicescapes are studied, in addition to how customers co-create experiences, based on the SOR model.	The technological environmental cues influence the creation of the smart experience. In turn, they influence consumers' service brand equity and word-of-mouth intentions.

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Author	1	2	3	4	5	Method	Aim/Purpose	Key findings
Ruiz and Gandia (2023)						Case study – Secondary data and interviews	The study aimed to address the following research question: "How does an event combine business and community-based logics to manage an ecosystem?"	In summary the study that events provides space for combining business and community logics, that community logic allows the emergence of business logic, lastly, both the business and community logics are enabled by digital and spatial mechanisms
Sjöblom et al. (2019)	X	X				Qualitative- digital ethnography	The purpose is to investigate why and how streamers get involved in Twitch.tv and what tools they have to be successful. 100 streamers serve as the focus of the study.	Social affordance such as webcams and microphones create a two-way communication flow, creating social interaction. This in turn provides income and the ability to create a personal profile (brand) which also generates revenue.
Turkay et al. (2021)	X				X	Pre-post interview design	The purpose was to understand gamer attitudes towards VR esports and their experiences thereof, specifically Counter-Strike: Global Offensive.	The players had largely positive emotional experiences of the game. They also had positive attitudes and perceptions towards aspects of it yet barriers such as accessibility and a lack of knowledge were also identified.
Ward and Harmon (2019)	X	X				Quantitative – evaluating income levels – Secondary data	The paper examines the careers of esports professional players and their earnings.	Not all players earn enough to play professionally. Some are superstars, able to earn substantial amounts – a superstar effect. The age and experience affect the players' success, but this is also difficult to determine. There are also career exits of those playing no longer. Esports may develop the features of other superstar markets.
Yue et al. (2022)	X				X	Quantitative – Questionnaire	The study examines the ability of and relationship between members, knowledge alliances, and whether it affects the innovation performance through knowledge sharing.	Firstly, member ability, member relationships, and member knowledge sharing significantly impact the innovation performance. Moreover, knowledge sharing mediated the relationship between [member ability] + [membership relationship] and [innovation performance].

1. Serv+Inv+ProffEsport.
2. Serv+Inv+Consumer.
3. Serv+Inv+Endemic.
4. Serv+Inv+Non-endemic.
5. Serv+Inv.

Appendix 2

The process of analysis

Codes	Illustrations and examples from articles	Aggregated codes	Emerging Themes
• Advertising • Affordances • Broadcasting • Content • Copresence • Donations • (big)Demand • Interaction • Media engagement (Loyalty) • Online live streaming servicescape • Platforms • Power asymmetries • Prosumtion • Revenue models • Social commerce • Streaming • Subscription • Twitch	• Online live streaming (OLSTR), Important for promoting games. • Streaming tournaments • OLSTR as a major new force in the video game industry • Form of reviewing, entertaining and marketing • OLSTR offering new revenue (e.g. donations) and business models. • New type of content production and consumption • Imperative for broadcasting esports • Various mediators and moderators for the motivation to view OLSTR	• The impact of streaming on different parts of esports and servicescapes • New consumption patterns and user behaviours • New practices and expectations • Disrupting old channels • Streaming platforms as servicescapes	*Online service-scapes and live streaming*
• Bottom-up innovation • Co-creation • Creativity • Diffusion of innovation • Innovation (Individual) • Lock-in • Mods • Platform	• Established rules or practices are changed (in games or platforms • Limitation of innovation in platforms (e.g. lock-in by software) • Creativity is not hindered, but shaped by frameworks of the platform • Many indie game developers use participatory technologies that facilitate bottom-up innovation. • Diverging from existing norms may be beneficial.	• Innovation outside traditional boundaries • Innovation shaped (e.g. limited) by servicescapes • Scaling up bottom-up innovation in servicescapes • Co-creation of value in servicescapes • Breaking norms and associations as innovation	*Innovation by breaking rules in service-scapes*

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Codes	Illustrations and examples from articles	Aggregated codes	Emerging Themes
• Rule-bound set of tools • Sensebreaking • Brand (Image/Identity) • Co-creation • Digitalization • Diversification • Endemic • Gambling • Legitimization • Non-endemic • Portfolios • Spillover effects • Sponsorship • Strategic selection for collaboration	• Sponsorship is a large revenue stream in esports. • Non-endemic can also see benefits from sponsoring esports. • Spillover effects requires examination. • Esports being digitalised uses channels with plenty of data. • Digitalisation requires firms to collaborate more (hence questions of [non]endemic fit)	• Understanding the scale from endemic to non-endemic • The variety of channels and servicescapes offers variety of sponsors and new innovative ways of sponsorship. • Spillover effects are still unexplored in esports. • Data provides opportunity to innovate marketing	*Innovation and the endemic and non-endemic actors within esports*
• Augmented • Changing technology • Crowdsourcing • Community • Digital • Digital distruption • Hybridity • In game platforms • LANs • Micro/Meso/Macro • Online/Offline • Physical (activity) • Replicated • Supported • Virtual reality	• Virtual reality as a solution for inclusion in esports • New ways of monetising and conducting business are enabled. • Physical-Digital hybridity consists of several different configurations. • LANs offer a physical meeting place (community), as well as playing games digitally. • Physical settings offer innovation in digital spaces. • Competition against digital opponents remain interesting feature for physical contexts	• Esport, subjected to rapid technological change. • New monetisation and business models are enabled. • Esport is inherently hybrid, occurring offline and online. • Hybridity is complex and requires more inquiry. • LANs are central in esports and offer innovating hybrid contexts.	*The hybrid nature of esports and technology*