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The Social Practice of E-Sports in the United Arab Emirates: An Empirical Field Study on a Sample of University Students

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A) conception and design of the study
B) acquisition of data
C) analysis and interpretation of data
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Yahia Benlarbi[1*A,C,D.E], Samia Hashim[2A,B,D.], Samira Belghitia[3A,C,D]

[1]*Liwa College, Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates*
[2]*American University in Emirates, United Arab Emirates*
[3]*Umm Al Quwain University, United Arab Emirates*

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***Correspondence:** Yahia Benlarbi, Liwa College, Abu Dhabi Campus. Al Danah, Zone 1-Abu Dhabi; Email**:** Yahia.benlarbi@lc.ac.ae

Abstract

This research examines United Arab Emirates (UAE) university students' electronic sports habits and motivations using the theory of uses and rewards and the motivation scale for sports consumption (MSSC). A deliberate sample of 172 participants was surveyed using an electronic questionnaire to give their perspectives on various electronic sports-related topics. Most respondents considered e-sports a serious sport and valued it as a social practice. They practiced e-sports for two to four hours daily, preferring multiplayer games, confirming the collective tendency. Live-streaming services have helped electronic sports to become mainstream. Considering the UAE's enthusiasm, most respondents played e-sports professionally. Finally, indirect realization, aesthetics, and escapism motivated e-sports players. These findings shed light on the perspectives and experiences of UAE residents who participate in electronic sports and may be used to guide efforts to legitimize and mainstream the activity.

Keywords: social practice, e-sports, motivations, UAE, electronic sports.

Introduction

The history of the emergence of electronic sports is linked to the video game industry that emerged at the end of the 60s, with the invention by Ralph H. Baer of the first video game console, "Brown Box," whose name refers to the color of the wooden box of the console, to develop the invention in the late 70s and early 80s to inaugurate the golden age of arcade games (coin-operated entertainment machines), which will establish what will later become sports electronics (Baer, 1977).

The 1990s gave e-sports a huge boost, as the development of personal computers (PCs) and the internet changed the initial paradigm of competition, moving from human versus machine to human against human. Thus, this decade laid the foundations for the explosive growth of e-sports, which in recent years has become one of the fastest-growing forms of new media, stimulated by the growing source of (online) games and online broadcasting technologies.

Today, South Korea is a reference for electronic sports. It was the first country to organize the World Cyber Games in 2000. Parallel to the Olympic Games, these games enjoy wide media coverage on giant screens and through its dedicated television channel.

Also, in 2014, Robert Morris University in Chicago was the first university in North America to recognize e-sports as a full-fledged academic sports discipline, and

the term e-sports became more common. Many universities now have official e-sports teams (more than fifty, whether in the USA, Canada, Europe, etc.). In these universities, the so-called e-athletes are often supported by the sports services, in the same way as other athletes, because they even benefit from scholarships in the field of sport and special supervision (nutritionist, psychologist, etc.).

Since its founding in 2003 in South Korea, the World Federation of Electronic Sports has contributed every year to the development of electronic sports and innovation by creating new forms of competition to achieve universality, sporting equality, and entertainment content. The last meeting at the end of 2021 revealed the 2022, 2023, and 2024 World Cup hosts: Turkey, Riyadh, and China. At the 2024 Olympic Games in Paris, the Olympic Committee recognized electronic sports as a new vocation. Electronic sports have become so popular that academic research in business administration, sports sciences, computer science, law, media, and sociology has increased rapidly since 2002 to study a new complex industry that combines culture, sport, business, and technology.

Modern digital technologies have enabled the worldwide distribution of virtual games and the transition to professional electronic sports in structure and competition in a new virtual entertainment media landscape that is constantly evolving in revenue, audience, and practice. Between 2016 and 2018, the number of viewers increased from 281 million to 380 million, and this number should reach 800 million (Jurre Pannekeet, 2019).

E-sports is growing, yet social contexts need theoretical knowledge. In this regard, Trail and James (2001) developed a consumption measure to study electronic sports motivation (Trail & James, 2001). Theatre, escapism, and social interaction motivate motivation scale for sports consumption (MSSC) athletes (Appelbaum et al., 2012; Trail & James, 2001), and empathy with players' achievements and social connection with other spectators are indicators of these factors. E-sports are becoming increasingly popular among young people, especially at universities, which are the cradle of their emergence in the US and South Korea, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) is moving towards becoming a leading regional center for games and e-sports, with its success in organizing the world championship of e-sports games in 2020 and will organize the World Cup in 2025. Thus, this research examines the nature of e-sports and the behaviors, trends, and motives of the UAE university students who play them.

Terminology and Procedural Concepts

Electronic Sports

E-sports, or electronic sports, are a kind of competitive video gaming in which individuals or teams compete in sanctioned events utilizing various electronic devices with human-machine interfaces, such as personal computers, game consoles, tablets, and smartphones (Wagner, 2006). E-sports are competitive video game competitions where players utilize digital media and networking tools to improve their cognitive or physical skills. E-sports revolve around competitive play, with multiplayer video games as the principal competition medium. Websites and groups focused on e-sports generally agree with this description (Krejcik, 2014).

Social Practice

Jouët (1993) argues that the application of modern technology and its social practice are separate. The former describes the practical use of technology, whereas the latter includes people's customary practices, beliefs, and idealizations about that same equipment (Jouët, 1993). The ritualization of social conduct is a cultural phenomenon (Layadi, 2020). For this research, "social practice" refers to the beliefs, actions, and representations of Emirati academics towards the widespread participation of university students in internet-based video game tournaments that are an integral part of their everyday lives.

Literature Review

Qianyin Sun's (2019) research aims to learn about Chinese e-sports fans, particularly Chinese League of Legends (LOL) players, and what drives them. The study's author noted a shift in Chinese society's view of e-sports from disdain to acclaim. The research surveyed 209 LOL players' satisfaction levels via an online questionnaire and found that the level of contentment was significantly affected by the players' sense of self-identification. E-sports professionals in China were encouraged to confirm and enhance e-sports traits and trends based on players' motives, as suggested by the research, which called for the localization of e-sports growth in China (Sun, 2019).

By analyzing sportsmen's training practices, physical preparation routines, and subjective accounts of the activity, Thierry Karsenti and Julien Bugmann (2018) sought to establish electronic sports as a legitimate category of athletic competition. The research employed semi-directed in-person interviews and online surveys with 522 college students who are "electronic athletes" in this field. According to the research, e-sports participants engage in sustained physical activity and prepare for competition like traditional athletes do. They train for an activity in a structured environment with coaches and management, emphasizing improving teamwork. Eighteen percent of those polled did not consider e-sports a "sport" in the traditional sense. The research also looked at how e-sports interact with the academic world (Karsenti & Bugmann, 2018).

Hamari and Sjöblom (2017) analyzed data from an online survey with a sample size of 888 persons who watched electronic sports in order to understand e-sports customers' motives better and investigate the conceptual diversity of e-sports. They determined that e-sports are a kind of competition in which electronic technologies assist the core elements of competition. The research found that the motivations for esports viewers' consumption were predictors of the athlete's aggression, skill, novelty, and ability to avoid detection. These factors were directly related to the length of time people spent watching (Hamari & Sjöblom, 2017).

Based on the theory of logical action, Min Xiao (2019) examined the psychological factors related to behavioral beliefs, normative beliefs, attitudes, subjective norms, and behavioral intention as they pertain to electronic sports viewers. The researchers surveyed 295 individuals throughout the USA using an online questionnaire. According to the findings, drama, escapism, and beauty all impact how people feel about e-sports. According to the data, there are also positive associations between normative beliefs and subjective norms, subjective norms and attitudes, and behavioral attitudes and intentions (Xiao, 2020).

These previous studies used questionnaires and interview tools to collect their information from intentional samples of e-sports practitioners. Our current research has benefited from them in identifying the different theoretical approaches that have framed the subject of e-sports in America, Europe, and Asia, and monitoring the habits, patterns, and motives of sports consumption. However, our research is distinguished in that it addresses the problem of the motives for practicing electronic sports by focusing on the gaming dimension of a sample of university students in an Arab country located in the Middle East.

Methodology

Given the nature of the study and its objectives – revealing the habits, modes of practice, and rewards obtained from electronic sports among young academics – the present study is a descriptive study. It is interested in explaining and clarifying the various events and situations that express an important group of phenomena and in analyzing the context in which these events are situated to analyze and explain the apparent causes of these events and reach useful logical conclusions that contribute to solving problems or removing obstacles and ambiguities in these phenomena in order to develop new ideas, information and models of behavior (Al-Ta'i, 2007).

This descriptive study seeks to achieve its objectives using the survey method, which is considered one of the basic methods of descriptive research (Benmorsli, 2012). Thouqan Obeidat defines it as: "The method that is based on the collection of information and data on the phenomenon studied, to identify its current situation and its strengths and weaknesses" (Benmorsli, 2012) where this method has been applied through the following two approaches:

A. The documentary approach: through which theoretical library data have been collected to form a scientific point of view on the subject of the study on the different sources and references related to it.
B. The applied approach: the data and information were collected from the research sample using the questionnaire as the main tool for collecting quantitative data.

Depending on the nature of the data to be collected in the study, the approach followed, the time allotted, and the material capabilities available, it was found that the most appropriate tool for collecting information from the specified sample was the questionnaire, which constitutes not only questions addressed to the respondents but rather verbal stimuli that can be carefully studied (Al-Anzi, 1999). As a result, a questionnaire was designed based on previous studies close to the subject, the theoretical aspect of the study, and consulting professors specialized in the fields of communication sciences, sociology, and sport.

The Validity of the Questionnaire Statements

The Integrity of the Referees:

The initial draft of the questionnaire was presented to a group of referees specialized in the field and who have sufficient knowledge of the subject of the study. Three professors assessed the validity of the questionnaire in terms of the accuracy and clarity of its language, its suitability, and its completeness for the study, removing inappropriate statements or suggesting new ones (Thorndike et al., 1991). Modifications were made to the statements in the questionnaire according to the observations and suggestions made by the referees so that the final questionnaire consisted of ten questions and 20 statements distributed over three axes:

The first axis: General data, includes questions 1–3.

The second axis: Habits and patterns of practice of electronic sports, includes questions 4–10.

The third axis: Motivations for practicing electronic sports, includes 20 statements.

Stability of the Questionnaire Scores: (Alpha-Cronbach Coefficient)

After Making Changes Suggested By the referees to ensure the stability of the study, it was distributed to a survey sample composed of 20 individuals, including students from the American University of Emirates. The

stability of the questionnaire scores was confirmed by calculating the alpha-Cronbach coefficient of the degrees of the sentences of each axis separately to ensure the stability of the sub-sentences and then by calculating their average to obtain the alpha-Cronbach coefficient of the second and third axes using the statistical packages for the SPSS program of the social sciences. The alpha-Cronbach coefficient for the questionnaire scores was high and positive at 0.839 towards the value "1". The test also allowed the research team to ensure the stability of the axes of the questionnaire and its expressions by calculating the alpha-Cronbach coefficients for the entire questionnaire in the case of omitting one of the degrees of the main sentences or the degree of the sub-sentences.

The Population Under Study and the Sample

From the perspective that watching e-sports and playing games are two distinct but closely related practices that work together to guide consumer behavior within the specific context of the contemporary environment, the research team defined their study population as individuals who practice e-sports in the UAE at a professional or informal level (amateur).

Considering our lack of data on the number of people who practice this sport, we resorted to the option of relying on a non-probability, purposive sample of university students, where the questionnaire was distributed to student groups on WhatsApp, Instagram and Facebook forums, and video games, where they were initially asked about if they play e-sports as professional or amateur players. We received 217 responses, 45 of which were removed from the data because they were only followers of e-sports. Accordingly, the research sample consisted of 172 suitable participants during the study period from 20-11-2022 to 01-25-2023.

Study Difficulties

The difficulties were evident in the lack of local references and studies that deal with the social practice of e-sports, as well as the difficulty of finding a theoretical approach to measure the motivations of e-sports players to practice it, considering the spread of standards specific to viewing only.

Previous Studies

The Theoretical Framework of the Research

For each academic study, there is literature that can serve as a theoretical framework. The approach of uses and rewards and the mathematical measurement of consumption represent the theoretical basis that was the starting point of our research. There are studies that have paved the way for these ideas, particularly the theory of uses and gratifications, which considers the recipient audience as an effective and positive element in the communication process. Since we have devoted the first axis of the questionnaire to checking the hypotheses of this theoretical approach we employed a specialized scale for measuring sports consumption used by Trail and James (2001) to understand the underlying motivations for the practice of electronic sports.

The Uses and Rewards Approach

The uses and rewards approach is one of the most widespread traditions of audience studies on a global scale because it stems from a fundamental question: what does the public do with the media? It examines the needs that the mass media satisfy for the public and is also interested in the study of mass communication in a functional and organized study. Within the framework of two visions, the first takes the concept of the constructive function, and the second takes the individual function (Deffler & Rokeach 1989).

The concept of constructive function focuses on mass communication functions as an integrated system. In contrast, the concept of individual function considers mass communication functions from the point of view of individuals, focusing on their motivations and need for exposure. Thus, the heading "jobs and gratifications" is related to the concept of individual function.

A-1- Hypotheses of the uses and rewards approach:

It is based on the following five basic assumptions:

1. The media public is an active participant in the communication process, and its use of the media aims to achieve specific objectives that meet its expectations (Makkawi, 1998). This theory considers that exposure to the media is nothing more than an expression of psychological motivations or the needs of the public.
2. The use of mass media reflects the public's needs; individual differences and social interaction factors interfere with this, and therefore, the needs differ from person to person.
3. Citizens choose the messages and content that meet their needs, as they use the media and not the other way around.
4. The public clearly defines its needs and motivations and thus chooses the appropriate means to satisfy them.
5. The cultural norms that prevail in a society can be deduced from the use of the media by the public and not only from the analysis of their contents.

In the context of recent trends in theory, Sjöblom and Hamari's study (2017) aimed to identify the reasons why people choose to watch live video game streaming services (watching other people's games); the study concluded that social integration is the most important motive for

people to watch live streaming services for video games, followed by emotional motives, stress relief motives, and finally cognitive motives and personal integration motives.

The Trail and James Mathematical Scale of Consumption

Schiffman and Kanuk (Schiffman, 2004) describe motivation as the feeling of desire or aversion in individuals that motivates them to adopt a particular behavior, and Sloan's (1989) manuscript is widely recognized as a reference text that examined the motivations that influence consumer behavior in a mathematical context (Cottingham et al., 2014). Then, the study of the behavior of sports consumers was developed by Wann (Wann, 1995) and (Trail & James, 2001), who developed a measurement of the motivations of sports spectators.

The MSSC sports consumption scale has undergone some revisions, increasing the number of dimensions or constructions from eight to ten, including indirect realization, the aesthetics of sports, the drama of sports, watching sports as an escape from everyday life, acquiring knowledge about sports, admiration for the athlete's skills, social interaction with other spectators, the physical attractiveness of athletes, the novelty of new players and teams, and the pleasure of aggressiveness and aggressive behaviors displayed by athletes.

Indirect Realization

Indirect realization refers to empathy and coexistence with people and characters in media content and in the context of sports. With the achievements of teams and players, as such, indirect realization has a strong social component, as it is closely linked to a sense of community and belonging to the players and teams to which the viewer supports.

In e-sports, professional players are more easily accessible than their real-life counterparts. Many professional players are also active broadcasters, allowing easy channels of communication between viewers and professional players (Trail & James, 2001).

Aesthetic

The aesthetics of sports refers to the elements of beauty and grace inherent in sports. We can separate aesthetic gratification in e-sports into the players and the game. The construction of physical attractiveness refers to an appreciation of the appearance of people and characters in the media and, in the sports context, to watching the players participate in the game and the extent to which the spectator finds the players attractive (Xiao, 2020).

The Acquisition of Knowledge

Knowledge-building acquisition refers to the extent to which media consumption allows knowledge acquisition. In traditional sports, two important cognitive engines for observation were the learning of players and teams and the collection of information to be shared in conversations about sports.

In electronic sports and video games, strategies and tactics are easily copied and reproduced since sports activities do not have as many required abilities as traditional sports.

James, Kolbe, and Trail (2002) surveyed 507 season-ticket holders for a new Major League Baseball series to examine what motivated this group of sports fans to watch baseball games. The results indicated that acquiring knowledge is an important driver for fans who have a strong psychological connection with the team and who buy season tickets (James et al., 2002).

Drama

The drama is about enjoying the suspense that happens in sports. Like traditional sports, many e-sports matches are only decided in the last seconds. Thus, the belief that watching electronic games will bring a thrill to a person not only motivates the individual to watch electronic sports but also positively influences the individual's attitude towards electronic sports (Trail & Kim, 2011).

Escape

The term "escape" refers to how the media allow you to escape from the daily routine and distract yourself from everyday activities. Escapism has been shown to have a significant impact on sports viewing. Unlike other forms of emotional motivation, escape motivation is less important (Fink et al., 2002).

Haugh and Watkins (2016) identified the factors that motivate people to follow sports on social media. According to their research, many Instagram and Snapchat users share photos and videos related to sports. However, social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter were linked to media-related reasons for watching sports (Haugh & Watkins, 2016).

Social Interaction

The desire of sports fans to connect with other followers while sharing a common interest motivates their sports viewing habits. Because they allow people to bond over a shared interest, sports are often considered a social activity. Supporters of various clubs and players may connect via online chat rooms to discuss game occurrences and show solidarity. Since e-sports consumption depends heavily on technology, it is important to remember that various social groups and people may live in the same environment without interfering with one another (Sjöblom & Hamari, 2017) (Table 1).

Table1: Sports consumption motivation scale chart

Structures	Code	Indicator	Concept
Indirect achievement	va	3	Empathy and coexistence with the achievements of teams and players to which the spectator is emotionally attached
Aesthetics	AES	3	Appreciation of the beauty and grace inherent in sports
Drama	DRA	4	Enjoyment of the drama, uncertainty, and dramatic turns of events in sports
Escape	ESC	3	The extent to which watching sports allows you to escape from the daily routine and distract yourself from everyday activities
Gaining knowledge	KNO	3	The degree to which watching sports makes it possible to acquire knowledge related to the game, its strategies, and other technical aspects
Skills of players/athletes	SKI	3	Enjoyment of watching the high skill shown by the players and good performance in sports
Social interaction	SOC	3	Pleasure related to interacting and socializing with others watching the game
Physical attractiveness	ATTR	3	The pleasure is associated with the degree to which the spectator finds the players physically attractive
Novelty and modernity	NOV	3	The Pleasure and excitement associated with seeing new players and teams in the sports scene
Enjoyment of aggression	AGGR	4	The pleasure derived from watching aggressive behavior, masculine attitudes, and hostility shown by the players

Source: (Trail, 2012)

Results

The First Axis: The General Data of the Respondents

The questionnaire data reveal that men constitute 98.8% of the 172 people participating in the survey, while women constitute less than 2%. The results also showed that 95.5% of the participants in e-sports were single, while married people constituted less than 5% of the respondents. In the sample, according to the questionnaire data, the percentage of part-time workers is 41.3%, which is more than double the percentage of non-workers (17.4%).

The Second Axis: Habits and Patterns of Practice

The answers of the respondents showed that 40.1% spend 2 to 3 hours a day practicing electronic sports. In comparison, the percentage of people who spend more than 4 hours a day playing e-sports is 39%. The percentage of those who practice e-sports for 1-2 hours is 15.1%. An hour or less 5.8% Among all e-sports, the percentage of playing FIFA was 25.6%, which means that association football is very popular among respondents. In comparison, respondents' practice habits and patterns were distributed among many games, such as "Counter Strike," and "Lee Off," with low percentages ranging between 9.9% and 4.7%.

When participants were asked to what extent they consider e-sports a real sport, 80.8% agreed, while 19.2 disagreed.

Survey data showed that 57% of participants regularly participate in multiplayer e-sports, indicating that gamers like to compete against each other. However, only 20% of participants primarily participate in multiplayer sports. 77% of participants regularly participate in multiplayer e-sports, while 12.2% do so sometimes. Less than 5% of participants never or rarely engage in multiplayer play.

According to usage priorities, the live e-sports broadcast service sites used by respondents are YouTube, with a rate of 37.2%, followed by the Twitch platform in second place, with a rate of 35.5%, while the Nobody platform came in third place with a rate of 35.5%. Other sites use rates range from less than 1% to 0%.

The responses regarding the professional practice of e-sports came first at 60.5%. In comparison, the percentage of e-sports practiced in an amateur manner was 39.5%.

The table shows that the sample studied experienced a wide range of motivations and rewards from participating in electronic sports, with high scores on "indirect success," "aesthetics," and "escape," and average scores on "knowledge acquisition," "drama," "social interaction," and "pleasure of aggression." The statements "I feel like I win when the team wins, I feel a sense of personal achievement when the team plays well, and I am proud when the team plays well" scored highest on the indirect success dimension, while the statements "I appreciate the inherent beauty of the game, there are natural beauties

Table 2. Third Axis

Statement	Arithmetic mean	Standard Deviation	Percentage %	Degree of approval
I feel like I win when the team wins	4.33	0.914	86.6	Elevated
I feel a personal sense of achievement when the team performs well	4.31	0.794	86.2	Elevated
I feel proud when the team plays well	4.25	0.826	85	Elevated
Indirect achievement	4.29	0.845	85.93	Elevated
I regularly check the statistics of certain players or teams	3.16	1.3	63.2	Medium
I usually know the history of team matches	2.18	1.209	43.6	Low
I read scores and team statistics regularly	3.16	1.3	63.2	Medium
Gaining knowledge	2.83	1.22	56.5	Medium
I appreciate the inherent beauty of the game	4.16	1.058	83.2	Elevated
There is some natural beauty to the game	4.01	1.076	80.2	Elevated
I enjoy the agility associated with the game	4.01	1.076	80.2	Elevated
Beauty	4.06	0.729	81.2	Elevated
I enjoy the drama of close-level sports	3.18	1.515	63.2	Medium
I prefer a „close level” sport instead of a one-sided game”	3.16	1.3	63.6	Medium
Sport is much more enjoyable for me when the result is not decided until the end	3.63	1.085	72.6	Medium
I enjoy the dramatic turn of events that it can take	3.42	1.447	72.4	Medium
Drama	3.34	1.215	67.85	Medium
E-sports provides me with an opportunity to escape from the reality of my everyday life for a while	3.74	1.138	74.8	Elevated
E-sports represents a big change in the pace of what I do regularly	3.87	0.965	74.4	Elevated
Practicing it enables me to get away from stress in my life	3.97	0.963	79.4	Elevated
Escape	3.86	1.027	76.2	Elevated
I like to watch e-sports with my friends	3.49	0.637	69.77	Medium
I like to watch games with others who are interested in e-sports	3.42	1.234	68.4	Medium
I love watching e-sports with my family	1.79	1.114	25.8	Low
Interacting with other fans is an important part of watching e-sports	2.18	1.209	43.6	Low
I like to talk to other people when watching matches	3.16	1.3	63.2	Medium
E-sports broadcasts are a great way to connect with others	4.25	0.829	85	Elevated
Social interaction	3.04	1.27	59.29	Medium
I enjoy fighting and rough play during the match	3.18	1.515	63.6	Medium
I enjoy the strong masculine atmosphere that exists in the game	3.16	1.3	63.2	Medium
I enjoy the aggressive behavior of the players	3.16	1.3	63.2	Medium
I enjoy the hostility and intimidation that are part of the game	3.18	1.515	63.6	Medium
Enjoyment of aggression	3.17	1.41	63.4	Medium

of the game that I appreciate with the agility associated with the game" scored highest on the aesthetics dimension. However, some parts of the learning and socializing components were rated lower.

Discussion

According to the questionnaire data, e-sports appeal to males more than females in the sample studied, a result that is like many previous studies (Karsenti & Bugmann, 2018; Hamari & Sjöblom, 2017; Xiao, 2020) and differs from Qianyin's study. Sun (2019) investigated the motivations of League of Legends players, finding that 53.6% were female and 46.4% were male, demonstrating that gender plays a role in the social practice of e-sports (Sun, 2019).

The high rate interest of unmarried respondents in playing electronic games, according to the questionnaire data, is explained by the difference in the size of family or familial connections, which makes marital status one of the factors influencing the choice of this type of sport, and this is consistent with one of the hypotheses of the uses and gratifications theory, which believes that exposure to the media is nothing but an expression of the psychological motivations or needs of the audience according to the rule of attention and selective attention, which is based on the fact that individuals care about and pay attention to specific media content and neglect other content under the influence of their cognitive structure, affiliations, interests, trends, and needs, and under the influence of other variables such as marital status, profession, and degree of education.

The number of hours of e-sports practice was inversely correlated with the duration of work. These results differ from the results of the study by Hamari and Sjöblom (2017), in which the order was different (full time 197 – part time 75 – without work 83), which was explained by financial resources and the ability to purchase the latest software and hardware for full-time workers.

This means that an individual's employment status is a factor in determining whether or not they participate in e-sports. An individual's cognitive structure, connections, interests, attitudes, and requirements influence how they prioritize and reject different media materials depending on their employment status.

The questionnaire data tells us that more than half of the sample practices e-sports for an average of 2–4 hours a day, or an average weekly exercise rate estimated at between 14 and 28 hours, which means that the sample members have a practice pattern specific to practicing electronic sports in their daily lives.

The current data are consistent with the results of the study by (Karsenti & Bugmann, 2018), which found that 83% of the sample members spend 2–30 hours per week in group training, which plays sports here specifically directed towards the group.

The questionnaire data revealed that more than half of the participants divided their interests between types of sports and did not focus on one specific electronic sport.

Regarding the problem of electronic sports assuming the status of real sports, 80% of the participants considered electronic sports to be a real sport that gives them the same satisfaction that real sports give them, in the sense of immersion in virtual reality as if it were a real reality, and also as a mental and physical activity. An opposing opinion may be that it causes addiction to electronic devices and harms physical health.

The interpreted opinions were as follows:

1. *Electronic games have recently been adopted as a mental sport, such as chess and others, due to their emphasis on planning and quick reaction.*
2. *It is a mental activity that requires concentration.*
3. *Like other real sports, it requires practice, perseverance, and effort to reach a good level of competition.*
4. *Of course, it is a sport because it is about training and competition.*
5. *Of course, it is a real sport that is developing and witnessing major progress in the field. It is an enjoyable sport with a special nature compared to other sports.*
6. *True sports are those that are practiced and work to increase the heart rate, pump blood into the body, and increase the secretion of sweat, which leads to a healthy and active body. As for electronic sports, it is just a waste of time, encourages addiction, and harms physical health.*

Many of the opinions of e-sports practitioners from the research sample agree with the results of research through which a group of researchers interested in the effects of competitive video games classified e-sports within the framework of real sports, as Jonasson and Tyborg (2010) integrated e-sports into Guttman's (2004) model of modern sports. It defines the following criteria for classifying e-sports as real sports: physical activity, entertainment, competition elements, organizational structure, and social acceptance of e-sports (Guttman, 2004; Reitman et al., 2020).

Regarding the difference between real sports and electronic sports, Hamari and Sjöblom (2017) believe that although real sports tend to use communication technologies to help improve the decisions taken regarding the results of sports activities and some controversial arbitration cases, most of the results of these activities occur. In the real world, the activities whose results are determined in electronic sports are programmed according to a dual system that includes game practitioners in the real world

and electronic systems that control and manage the rules of electronic sports. Accordingly, electronic sports can be considered a type of sport, and its results are determined through a practice that requires the integration of the real world (the existence of living organisms) with the virtual world (programs and electronic devices).

According to the questionnaire data, 77% of the respondents prefer the multi-player practice method, and they also differ in using websites for live broadcasting services for electronic sports, which indicates the activity of electronic sports practitioners and their selectivity in the method of practice and the media used. The results of the above questionnaire are consistent with the hypothesis of the uses and gratifications theory, which confirms that the active audience picks and chooses from among the messages of the means of communication until it ultimately satisfies its needs, and this depends on the element of benefit it derives from its use of the means of communication. Therefore, the audience chooses content that reflects their interests and preferences in a way that serves their motivations. The majority of responding university students tend to practice e-sports professionally in specialized clubs, considering the official interest of the UAE in establishing a federation for this purpose and its success in organizing the World Championship for Tolerance Electronic Games in 2020 and obtaining the honor of organizing the 2025 World Cup.

E-sports activity indirectly advanced the careers of respondents. When their favorite teams won championships, sports fans felt proud of themselves. Sports fans may feel connected through "BIRGing" or "joy in reflected glory." McDonald, Milne, and Hong (2002) found that sports fans' success is associated with their viewing time. Another study suggests that performance and attitude should be addressed independently since e-sports players seldom build emotional bonds with professional teams or athletes (Xiao, 2020). E-sports fans support a game rather than a team or person. This problem exists because professional e-sports teams and players are not as actively promoted as traditional sports.

The findings suggest that the presence of aesthetically pleasing visuals and special effects contributes significantly to the overall appeal of e-sports as a medium for entertainment consumption. The professional players' ability to direct the characters in the game to do beautiful animations was also a major factor in the games' visual attractiveness. This contradicts the results of previous research by Hamari and Sjöblom (2017), who found an inverse relationship between enjoying the visual components of e-sports and tuning in often. The study's authors attributed it to the fact that e-sports often include intricate computer games that require sustained mental effort. Therefore, appreciating the game's aesthetics while still keeping tabs on the finer points of the action may be difficult, and spectators who concentrate on the aesthetics may have a different viewing experience than those who focus on the technical and rule-based components of the sport.

Thus, the dynamics between aesthetic appreciation and consumption could be a fruitful area for future research, and other studies could compare electronic sports practiced in specific games for a semiotic analysis of preferences and their implications.

The results of this study corroborated those of prior studies that related the escape dimension to the captivating quality of video games. The mental and emotional strains of everyday life might be temporarily forgotten when playing video games or watching e-sports competitions. Participants in the survey said that participating in e-sports was a refreshing break from their usual routines and a welcome diversion from the stresses of daily life. Consistent with the finding reached by Hamari and Sjöblom (2017) about the impact of escapism on the e-sports audience, they found that participating in e-sports helped individuals alleviate stress in their daily lives. In addition, Min Xiao's research showed that people had a favorable outlook on e-sports viewing if they consider it a healthy kind of recreation (Xiao, 2020).

According to the results, the dramatic aspect of e-sports was the second most important factor in getting into the hobby. Many studies have classified the dramatic component as the primary motivational factor in conventional sports and e-sports, but our findings contradict that classification. According to research conducted by Min Xiao, viewers of e-sports events respect the tension and drama presented in competitive gaming (Xiao, 2020). However, the same research also indicated that the dramatic component did not correlate with how often people watched esports. This could be because comeback dramas are becoming less common. However, the research of Hamari and Sjöblom (2017) suggests that e-sports players, although appreciating the drama and perceiving it as a crucial driving component, are not always influenced by it.

The survey indicated that information acquisition ranked second among the sample's motivations for engaging in e-sports practice, with participants giving mixed approval ratings to knowing the team's match history and giving average ratings to regularly monitoring player/team statistics and reading scores. This shows that esports and video games rely mostly on mental skills, unlike conventional sports, which need a wide range of physical abilities. In contrast to these results, Hamari and Sjöblom (2017) showed that viewers' interest in e-sports increased as they learned more about the games, the players, and the teams. Therefore, viewers are more likely to participate in desirable viewing behaviors if they consider e-sports viewing to learn relevant information about the game, players, and play style.

The results of the current investigation showed a modest level of curiosity in engaging in social contact while participating in e-sports among the research population.

While they enjoyed practicing and watching e-sports with their friends and other interested parties, they did not like doing so with their families. They also did not think it was important for fans to talk to one another while watching e-sports. Despite features in electronic gaming services that promote social connection, the results of this research reveal that most of the sample views e-sports from a first-generation, human-machine relationship viewpoint. Previous research (Hamilton et al., 2014; Sjöblom & Hamari, 2017), however, has stressed the importance of social contact in the e-sports watching experience; therefore, this finding stands in contrast.

Empirical studies using MSSC indicate that sports fans are more likely to interact with other fans when they consume sports-related content or attend live events (Fink et al., 2002; Trail & Kim, 2011).

Brown et al. (2018) compare the motivations for e-sports consumption with those of traditional sports consumption. Their study reveals that social interaction is an important motivating factor for the consumption of e-sports and traditional sports, indicating that the consumption of e-sports and traditional sports are quite similar in the social motivation aspect. Therefore, a person who thinks that watching e-sports is a good social opportunity will see the behavior positively (Xiao, 2020).

However, a study (Weiss & Schiele, 2013) on the effect of social gratification on the practice of electronic sports found the opposite, since there was no significant effect to be found due to the possibilities of social interaction offered by the services through which the virtual practice takes place and does not provide the level of interaction necessary to obtain sufficient levels of satisfaction as in real-world sports (Weiss & Schiele, 2013).

The data of the present study indicate that the pleasure of aggressive behaviors manifested by the respondents is also moderately associated with their practice, which suggests that the study sample prefers less violent and aggressive electronic sports. The uses of the media by the public and not only the analysis of the contents they contain but a result also differ from the results of a study, which revealed that the enjoyment of aggression, at least in part, stems from the competitions that exist between sports teams (Sjöblom & Hamari, 2017). On the other hand, many electronic sports games are inherently violent in their images, such as Counterstrike: Global Offensive, where shooting at opponents must be part of the base game. It is the other type of aggressiveness that can be seen as a motivating factor for consumption, according to the results of this study.

Conclusion

This study examined the habits and motivations that could predict the frequency of university students practicing electronic sports. For practitioners, the questionnaire results provide information for the further development of services related to electronic games, such as broadcast content, electronic sports community tools, services related to the organization of competitions in electronic sports, etc. The results of the study highlight the satiety likely to increase consumption related to electronic games. They reveal different aspects of electronic sports that may be worth highlighting in the further development of services related to electronic games based on the results of this study, which can be summarized as follows:

- The social practice of electronic sports in the UAE attracts more men than women and the category of singles in particular.
- Groups that do not work or are active part-time are more likely to practice e-sports than those that work full-time.
- The practice of e-sports takes up a significant amount of time for the study sample, from two to four hours a day between training and competitions.
- Classify the study sample of e-sports as a real sport and its importance as a social practice.
- The preference of the study sample to practice multiplayer e-sports constantly confirms the trend of e-sports toward the collective.
- The role of live streaming platforms made available via the internet in developing the popularity of electronic sports.
- Most of the respondents practice e-sports professionally, taking into account the official interest of the UAE.
- The dimensions of indirect success, aesthetics, and escape are the main motivations for the practice of electronic sports by respondents in the UAE.
- The dimensions "acquisition of knowledge, theatre, social interaction and pleasure of aggression" are secondary motives for the practice of electronic sports by respondents in the UAE.
- Preference of the study sample to practice less violent and aggressive electronic sports.
- The study sample preferred to practice e-sports on a solitary basis rather than with the participation of family members and, to a moderate extent, to interact with friends or fans.
- Average interest in gaining new knowledge by playing e-sports related to team history, game analysis, player, and style of play.
- The decline in the role of the dramatic dimension as the main motive in the practice of electronic sports compared to the results of previous studies.
- The appreciation by the sample of the aesthetic dimension of choice to practice electronic sports in terms of beauty inherent in the game, natural beauty, or agility.

- The practice of electronic sports among respondents is mainly associated with achieving indirect achievements represented by obtaining victories or crowning titles for their teams or reincarnated personalities.

Future research on e-sports in the Arab world should investigate players' actions, thoughts, and interactions with others in competitive play. Collaboration with important players in the area is necessary to collect data on e-sports communities in each nation. Research based on direct observations or frequent contact with e-sports communities is recommended.

It is worth noting that e-sports may have different motivating factors than conventional sports in areas like learning, aesthetics, and even physical appeal. Therefore, it may not be the best idea to use metrics developed for conventional sports to examine interest in e-sports. To further investigate the connection between practice and motivation in e-sports and video games, future research should use more targeted measurements of motivation.

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Conflict of interest

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