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Esports As A New Economic Frontier: A Bibliometric Exploration Of Global Trends And Research Hotspots

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Abstract

This study conducts a comprehensive bibliometric analysis of global research on esports and business, aiming to identify publication trends, influential authors, collaboration networks, and emerging thematic areas from the perspectives of technology management and technopreneurship. Data were retrieved from the Scopus database using a title based search strategy, covering the period 2007–2025, using the query terms “esport”, “competitive gaming”, “management”, “marketing”, “business model”, and “sponsorship”. A total of 111 documents were analyzed using VOSviewer and Publish or Perish to map co-authorship, co-citation, keyword co-occurrence, and citation metrics. Results indicate a significant increase in publication activity beginning in 2020, with notable growth during 2023–2025. The most productive countries were the United States, Brazil, and Spain, while leading institutions included Universidade da Madeira and Temple University. Prominent authors such as Contreras-Espinosa and Scholz contributed to defining the intellectual structure of the field. The dominant research themes revolve around marketing strategies, sponsorship models, consumer behavior, and the strategic management of esports organizations within digitally enable business ecosystem. The dataset accumulated 1,533 citations, yielding an h-index of 15 and a g-index of 38, indicating growing scholarly impact. Overall, the findings highlight esports as an emerging economic and cultural phenomenon that bridges digital innovation with global business practices. The study concludes by suggesting future research directions focusing on sustainability, governance, and entrepreneurial innovation within the esports ecosystem.

Keywords: Esports, Business; Bibliometric Analysis; Marketing; Sponsorship; Digital Economy; Global Trends

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1. Introduction

The rapid evolution of electronic sports (esports) has redefined the boundaries of modern sport, media, and entertainment. Emerging from grassroots gaming communities in the early 2000s, esports has evolved into a globalized and professionalized industry valued at billions of dollars, with established leagues, corporate sponsorships, and dedicated fan bases across continents (Scholz, 2020; Funk et al., 2018). Supported by advances in digital technologies, streaming platforms, and interactive media, esports has transformed into a hybrid cultural and economic ecosystem that integrates competition, technology, and consumer participation (Seo, 2013; Scholz & Brock, 2024).

As a digital sporting phenomenon, esports mirrors many characteristics of traditional sports including structured competition, coaching systems, fan loyalty, and event management while introducing distinctive features such as virtual environments, real-time interactivity, and data-driven performance analytics (Cunningham et al., 2018; Flegr & Schmidt, 2022). Its rapid growth has attracted multidisciplinary interest from scholars in sport management, marketing, psychology, media, and education, positioning esports as a contemporary field of academic and industrial importance (Gentile, 2024; McCauley & Baker, 2024).

From a management perspective, esports has shifted from informal player communities to institutionalized organizations characterized by strategic leadership, talent development, and cross-sector collaboration (Flegr & Schmidt, 2022). Professional teams and event organizers now operate within sophisticated business ecosystems, balancing commercial goals with stakeholder welfare and ethical governance. Studies show that strategic agility, innovation capability, and content-driven engagement are key factors that sustain competitive advantage, particularly in emerging markets such as Southeast Asia (Lefebvre & Thang, 2023). Likewise, Gentile (2024) and Karadakis et al. (2025) highlight the growing importance of esports education and leadership development, as universities incorporate esports into curricula to cultivate industry-ready skills in management, marketing, and digital communication.

At the commercial core of esports lies branding and sponsorship, which account for more than half of the industry's total revenue (Pizzo & Hedlund, 2024). Sponsorship effectiveness depends not only on visibility but also on perceived authenticity and brand–event fit (Ko et al., 2025). High congruence between sponsors and esports teams enhances positive brand transfer, while incongruent sponsorships can generate skepticism among fans who value cultural alignment and transparency (Huettermann et al., 2020). As Kordyaka et al. (2023) argue, the success of brand engagement in esports relies on value congruence, shared identity, and

community co-creation, which foster emotional bonds and long-term loyalty. In this sense, esports audiences differ from traditional sports spectators—they actively participate in brand storytelling through social media, streaming, and digital fan communities.

Digitalization has also redefined consumer engagement and audience behavior. Platforms such as Twitch, YouTube, and TikTok enable fans to interact directly with players and brands, blurring the line between production and consumption (Xu et al., 2021; Mao, 2022). Studies indicate that parasocial relationships with streamers and influencers significantly shape consumer trust and purchase intention (Xu et al., 2021). Moreover, real-time event streaming and personalized marketing campaigns enhance viewer loyalty and content retention, making engagement metrics central to sponsorship valuation and media strategy (Fernandes et al., 2025). As esports continues to evolve within the attention economy, success increasingly depends on continuous audience interaction and community participation rather than one-way promotional exposure.

Beyond marketing, esports research now encompasses organizational culture, human resources, and infrastructure development. Büsselker et al. (2024) emphasize the need for esports organizations to adopt innovative HRM frameworks that promote well-being, inclusion, and skill development among players and staff. Human resource policies emphasizing ethical governance and workplace diversity are essential to reducing burnout and turnover in high-pressure competitive environments. At the same time, the physical spaces that host esports arenas, training facilities, and gaming centers that have become important symbolic and social hubs that contribute to city branding and community engagement (Kauwela, 2024). These developments underscore esports expanding role as both a cultural and economic catalyst in local and global contexts.

However, the industry's rapid growth has also raised ethical and policy challenges, particularly in relation to sponsorship regulation, gambling exposure, and youth protection. Chambers (2020) and Freitas et al. (2019) caution that the prevalence of gambling and alcohol sponsorships risks normalizing potentially harmful behaviors, particularly among younger audiences. Such concerns call for stronger governance frameworks and industry standards to ensure responsible marketing and protect vulnerable consumers. This aligns with broader discussions on sustainability and social responsibility in esports, advocating a balance between commercial growth and ethical accountability (Flegr & Schmidt, 2022).

Recent literature also points to the educational and social potential of esports. Studies show that esports

participation enhances cognitive skills, teamwork, and social inclusion (Batalla et al., 2024; Wei & Du, 2025). Universities and educational institutions increasingly integrate esports into curricula not only as a professional pathway but also as a platform for experiential learning, leadership, and digital literacy (Karadakis et al., 2025). These findings challenge outdated stereotypes of gaming as isolating or unproductive, reframing esports as a legitimate avenue for personal development and career innovation.

Overall, the academic discourse portrays esports as a complex and rapidly institutionalizing industry shaped by digitalization, participatory culture, and global connectivity. Its evolution intertwines management strategy, branding, consumer psychology, and social responsibility, demanding interdisciplinary frameworks to understand its dynamics. As the field matures, researchers emphasize the importance of integrating technological innovation with ethical and educational priorities to ensure esports sustainable growth and legitimacy as a mainstream cultural and economic force.

2. Literature Review

Over the past decade, esports has evolved from a niche entertainment activity into a globalized, professionalized industry that integrates competition, technology, and commercial management. Scholars describe it as both a cultural and economic phenomenon, combining the structure of traditional sports with the interactivity of digital media (Seo, 2013; Scholz, 2020; Flegr & Schmidt, 2022). Recent studies emphasize that branding, sponsorship, authenticity, and fan engagement are central to sustaining organizational success (Ko et al., 2025; Kordyaka et al., 2023), while strategic human resource management and ethical governance underpin long-term sustainability (Büssecker et al., 2024; Gentile, 2024). Understanding the evolution and institutionalization of esports provides a foundation for exploring these themes, particularly as research increasingly focuses on how structure, legitimacy, and stakeholder collaboration shape global industry growth (Cunningham et al., 2018; Scholz, 2020).

2.1 The Evolution and Institutionalization of Esports

The literature consistently portrays esports as a structured and institutionalized industry that parallels traditional sport yet thrives within a digital context. Seo (2013) introduced the concept of esports as part of the “experience economy,” where value emerges through co-creation among players, audiences, and brands. His framework redefined esports as both a competition and a socially embedded cultural practice. Subsequent research reinforced this understanding, with Cunningham et al. (2018) and Scholz (2020) highlighting esports evolution into a “hybrid media sport” characterized by leagues, teams, and media rights that merge

competitive play with entertainment production.

Further analysis by Funk et al. (2018) and Flegor and Schmidt (2022) positioned esports within sport management discourse, underscoring its multidimensional nature and the need for governance, ethical standards, and financial transparency. Using a PESTLE framework, Flegor and Schmidt (2022) identified that while technological and socio-cultural dimensions dominate current studies, economic and legal structures remain underexplored. Complementing this, Lefebvre and Thang (2023) observed that team success in emerging markets depends on leadership, innovation, and strategic management—capabilities common in mature professional sports. Collectively, these studies affirm that esports has transitioned into a legitimate institutional system, though governance and workforce development remain key challenges for sustainable growth.

2.2 Branding, Sponsorship, and Marketing Effectiveness

Sponsorship and branding are widely recognized as the financial pillars of the esports ecosystem. Seo (2013) and Pizzo and Hedlund (2024) note that sponsorship accounts for over 60% of esports revenue, operating in an environment where audience participation directly influences brand visibility. Esports sponsorships differ from traditional models by emphasizing authentic engagement over passive exposure. Ko et al. (2025) demonstrated that a strong sponsor–event fit enhances brand image and purchase intention, whereas incongruence fosters skepticism. Similarly, Huettermann et al. (2020) found that non-endemic sponsors must demonstrate cultural understanding to earn credibility among esports fans.

Kordyaka et al. (2023) further examined the psychological drivers of esports brand loyalty, revealing that value congruence, generational identity, and social engagement underpin sustainable fan–brand relationships. Fernandes et al. (2025) and Mao (2022) extended this by showing that personalized campaigns and frequent online events on platforms such as Twitch and YouTube significantly increase brand retention. Unlike conventional media advertising, esports marketing thrives on interactive, co-created experiences, where fans actively shape brand narratives.

However, ethical issues remain a concern. Chambers (2020) and Freitas et al. (2019) criticized the prevalence of gambling and alcohol sponsorships, arguing that these can erode public trust and expose young audiences to risk. Thus, the literature converges on three key principles:

1. Authentic alignment between brand and community values;

2. Interactive engagement through digital platforms; and
3. Ethical, sustainable sponsorship practices that preserve industry integrity.

2.3 Consumer Behavior and Fan Engagement

Recent studies on esports consumers bridge psychology, marketing, and media research, emphasizing fan participation and emotional engagement. Wei and Du (2025) identified motivation, co-production, and community participation as the core factors shaping esports consumption. Unlike traditional sports fans, esports audiences are active co-creators of content and meaning. Xu et al. (2021) demonstrated that parasocial relationships which is related to the emotional bonds between fans and streamers enhance trust and influence purchasing decisions. This supports Seo's (2013) notion that social identity and affective connection form the basis of esports loyalty.

Yuliana et al. (2025) found that when advertising aligns with the gaming experience, it strengthens brand trust and loyalty, showing that in esports, marketing becomes part of the entertainment ecosystem rather than an external intrusion. Additionally, Batalla et al. (2024) revealed that gaming fosters teamwork, adaptability, and problem-solving, challenging earlier negative stereotypes. Collectively, these studies highlight a shift from transactional to relational consumer models, where engagement, identity, and emotional investment drive long-term loyalty.

2.4 Human Resource Management and Organizational Culture

While marketing dominates esports scholarship, organizational development and human capital are gaining prominence. Büsselcker et al. (2024) argue that effective esports management requires HRM systems that address burnout, diversity, and informal employment, emphasizing inclusion and mentorship. Similarly, Karadakis et al. (2025) show that experiential learning in esports education enhances managerial and creative competencies, preparing graduates for roles in this fast-evolving sector. Kauweloa (2024) adds that esports venues function as cultural infrastructures, reinforcing fan identity and social belonging. These studies collectively suggest that strategic HRM and supportive organizational cultures are vital for maintaining both performance and well-being, ensuring that esports organizations evolve as sustainable, learning-oriented entities.

2.5 Ethics, Governance, and Sustainability

Ethical and governance issues remain critical to the legitimacy of esports. Flegr and Schmidt (2022) emphasize the need for regulatory frameworks addressing player welfare, sponsorship ethics, and data management. Chambers (2020) calls for responsible marketing practices that protect youth audiences, while Freitas et al. (2019) advocate for corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives that promote diversity and digital literacy. Gentile (2024) highlights the role of education in instilling ethical awareness, arguing that academic programs can cultivate socially responsible esports leaders. Together, these studies point to sustainability as resting on three pillars: ethical governance, responsible sponsorship, and education-based leadership development.

2.6 Integrative Perspective

Across two decades, esports research has evolved from defining the phenomenon to understanding its management, marketing, and societal implications. Four converging themes emerge:

1. Institutionalization and strategy provide structural legitimacy (Flegr & Schmidt, 2022; Scholz, 2020).
2. Sponsorship authenticity and brand congruence drive financial sustainability (Ko et al., 2025; Kordyaka et al., 2023).
3. Fan co-creation and digital interactivity sustain community loyalty (Seo, 2013; Xu et al., 2021).
4. Ethical governance and education safeguard credibility and long-term viability (Chambers, 2020; Gentile, 2024).

Overall, esports literature presents a multidimensional ecosystem where economic innovation, cultural participation, and ethical responsibility intersect. The industry's continued growth depends on balancing commercial ambition with governance, education, and social accountability, ensuring esports develops as a sustainable global enterprise.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a bibliometric research design, guided by the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines, to systematically analyze of esports related business and management research. Bibliometric analysis was selected because it enables the quantitative assessment of publication patterns, research impact, and collaboration networks, offering robust evidence to inform policy and research agendas. The design aligns with previous studies that have successfully used bibliometric methods to examine emerging esports and business fields.

The Scopus database was chosen as the primary data source due to its comprehensive coverage of peer-reviewed scientific literature. A structured search query was developed to capture relevant documents related to esports and Business. The literature search was conducted on 20 October 2025 using the following exact Scopus search string applied to the article title field: TITLE ("esport" OR "electronic sport" OR "competitive gaming") AND TITLE ("management" OR "marketing" OR "business model" OR "sponsorship" OR "brand" OR "consumer behavior").**. The timespan was set from 2007 to 2025 to capture the evolution of the field. Publications were included if they explicitly addressed the use of analysis of esports related business and management research. This screening process ensured that the dataset reflected scholarly contributions directly relevant to analysis of esports-related business and management research.

The search was intentionally restricted to the TITLE field rather than TITLE-ABS-KEY to ensure high thematic relevance and conceptual precision. In multidisciplinary and emerging research areas such as esports, broader searches may retrieve a substantial number of peripheral studies in which esports is only marginally mentioned. Limiting the search to article titles therefore enhances the validity of the bibliometric dataset, although it may reduce coverage; future studies may expand the search to TITLE-ABS-KEY to capture a wider range of related literature.

The bibliographic data were exported in RIS and CSV formats for further processing. Variables extracted included year of publication, authorship, institutional affiliation, country of origin, source journals, citation counts, and keywords. Data cleaning was performed to standardize author names and affiliations, and duplicates were removed. No records were excluded during the screening or eligibility stages because all retrieved documents met the predefined inclusion criteria based on title relevance and scope alignment. Figure 1 depicts the PRISMA flow diagram which include the structure of database and registry searches.

Three complementary bibliometric software tools were employed. VOSviewer was used for visualization of co-authorship, co-citation, and keyword co-occurrence networks. Publish or Perish was applied to calculate citation metrics such as the h-index, g-index, and average citations per year.

This study utilized secondary bibliometric data extracted from Scopus, which are publicly available and do not involve human subjects. Therefore, no ethical approval was required. However, all analyses were conducted with transparency and reproducibility in mind, adhering to good research practices in bibliometrics.

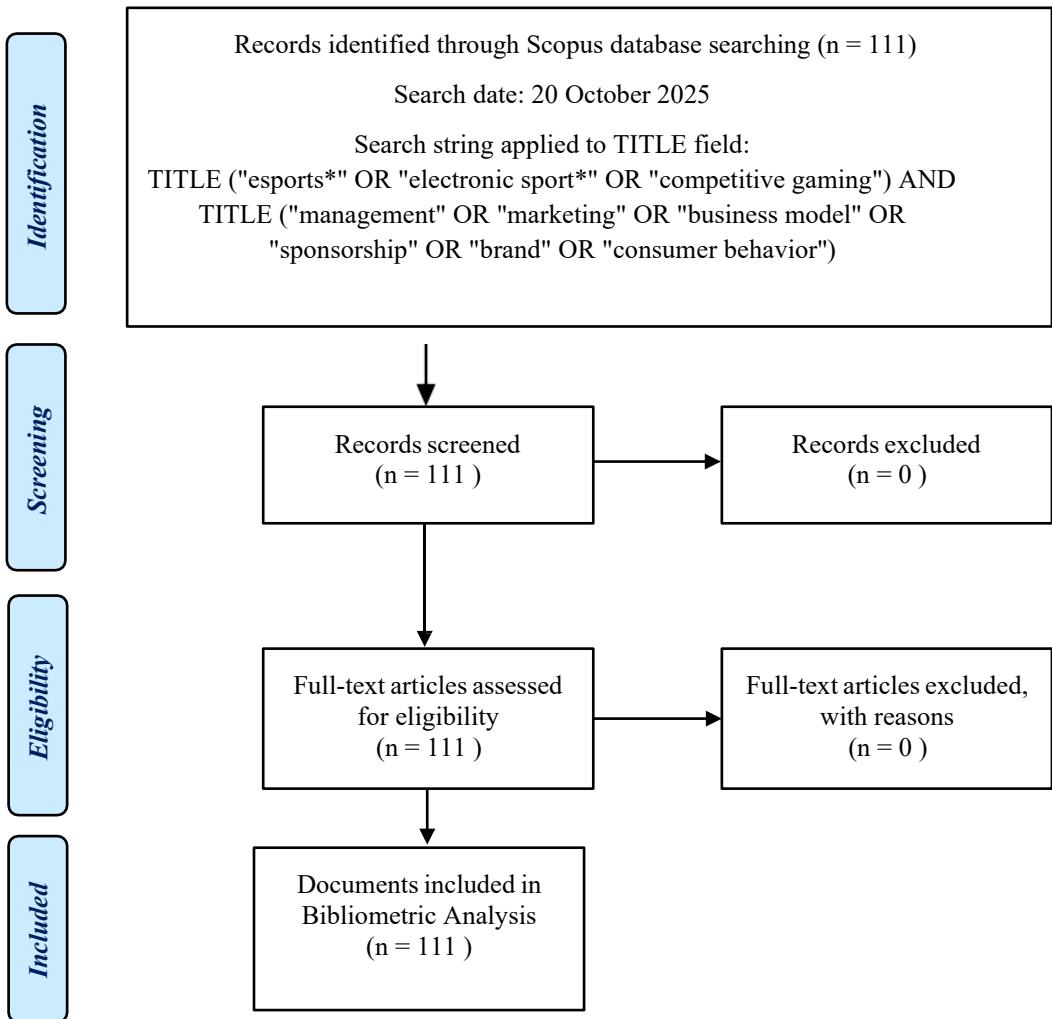


Figure 1. PRISMA Flow Diagram (Moher et al., 2009)

4. RESULTS

A total of 111 documents on esports and business were retrieved from Scopus covering the period from 2007 to 2025. Table 1 presents the distribution of document types. Articles accounted for the largest share (69.37%), followed by book chapter (14.41%) and conference papers (9.91%). and other forms such as reviews, and book. This distribution demonstrates that esports and business is a well-established academic field with a strong balance between empirical studies and conceptual work.

Table 1. Document Type

Document Type	TP	%
Article	77	69.37%
Book Chapter	16	14.41%
Conference Paper	11	9.91%
Review	6	5.41%
Book	1	0.90%

Source type analysis (Table 2) reveals that journals are the primary publication outlets (74.77%), followed by books (14.41%). This indicates that while journal articles dominate dissemination, conference proceedings remain an important avenue for presenting esports and business in this field.

Table 2. Source Type

Source Type	TP	%
Journal	83	74.77%
Book	16	14.41%
Book Series	6	5.41%
Conference Proceeding	6	5.41%

Regarding language (Table 3), the overwhelming majority of documents were published in English (81.08%), followed by Portuguese (18.92%) and Spanish (2.70%). Publications in other languages such as Arabic, German, Indonesian, Russian and Spanish were minimal, underscoring the dominance of English as the lingua franca of Management research.

Subject area classification (Table 4) highlights the interdisciplinary nature of the field. Business, Management and Accounting (46.85%) and Social Sciences (43.24%) accounted for the highest shares, followed by Computer Science, Economics, Econometrics and Finance, and Medicine (17.12%). These findings confirm that esports and business multiple domains, integrating business, technology, and social sciences.

The temporal distribution of publications is presented in Table 5 and Figure 2. Research activity was sporadic during the 2020s and early 2025s, with fewer than ten publications per year. A marked increase occurred from 2022 onwards, with the most productive years being 2024 (18.02%) and 2023 (16.22%). The citation trend mirrored publication growth, indicating a maturing field with increasing academic influence.

Table 3. Languages

Language	TP	%
English	90	81.08%
Portuguese	21	18.92%
Spanish	3	2.70%
Chinese	1	0.90%
French	1	0.90%
Catalan	1	0.90%

Table 4. Subject Area

Subject Area	TP	%
Business, Management and Accounting	52	46.85%
Social Sciences	48	43.24%
Computer Science	19	17.12%
Economics, Econometrics and Finance	19	17.12%
Medicine	19	17.12%
Health Professions	15	13.51%
Decision Sciences	10	9.01%
Arts and Humanities	8	7.21%
Psychology	6	5.41%
Engineering	5	4.50%
Environmental Science	4	3.60%
Mathematics	4	3.60%
Earth and Planetary Sciences	3	2.70%
Energy	3	2.70%
Multidisciplinary	2	1.80%
Agricultural and Biological Sciences	1	0.90%
Biochemistry, Genetics and Molecular Biology	1	0.90%
Chemical Engineering	1	0.90%
Neuroscience	1	0.90%
Pharmacology, Toxicology and Pharmaceutics	1	0.90%

Table 5. Year publications

Year	TP	%
2025	15	13.51%
2024	20	18.02%
2023	18	16.22%
2022	16	14.41%
2021	9	8.11%
2020	10	9.01%
2019	4	3.60%
2018	3	2.70%
2017	2	1.80%
2016	3	2.70%
2015	2	1.80%
2014	2	1.80%
2013	4	3.60%
2012	2	1.80%
2007	1	0.90%

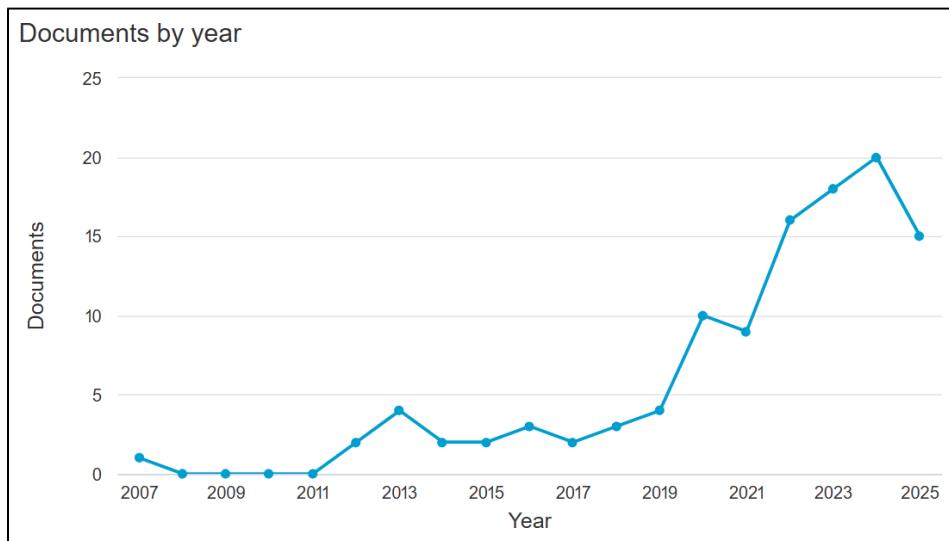


Figure 2. Research trends

Table 6 illustrate the global contributions to esports and business research. The United States ranked first with 21 publications (18.92%), followed by the Brazil (18.02%), Spain (14.41%). Document by affiliation (Figure 3) revealed that Universidade da Madeira (Spain), Temple University, and Universitat de Vic was the most productive with 4 publications. Table 7 summarizes the most productive authors. Contreras-Espinosa, R.S. and Scholz, T.M. lead with 4 publications (3.60%). These scholars represent leading voices in shaping the global discourse on esports and business.

Analysis of source titles revealed that Routledge Handbook of esports was the most active publication outlet with 6 documents (5.41%), underscoring its role as the leading specialist journal in the field (Table 8). Other prominent sources included the esports and business, which contributed 4 documents (3.60%), reflecting the strong involvement of marketing and sponsorship.

Table 6. Top 10 Countries contributed to the publications

Country	TP	%	Continent
United States	21	18.92%	North America
Brazil	20	18.02%	South America
Spain	16	14.41%	Europe
China	15	13.51%	Asia
Germany	10	9.01%	Europe
United Kingdom	10	9.01%	Europe
Portugal	6	5.41%	Europe
Australia	4	3.60%	Oceania
France	4	3.60%	Europe
Mexico	4	3.60%	North America

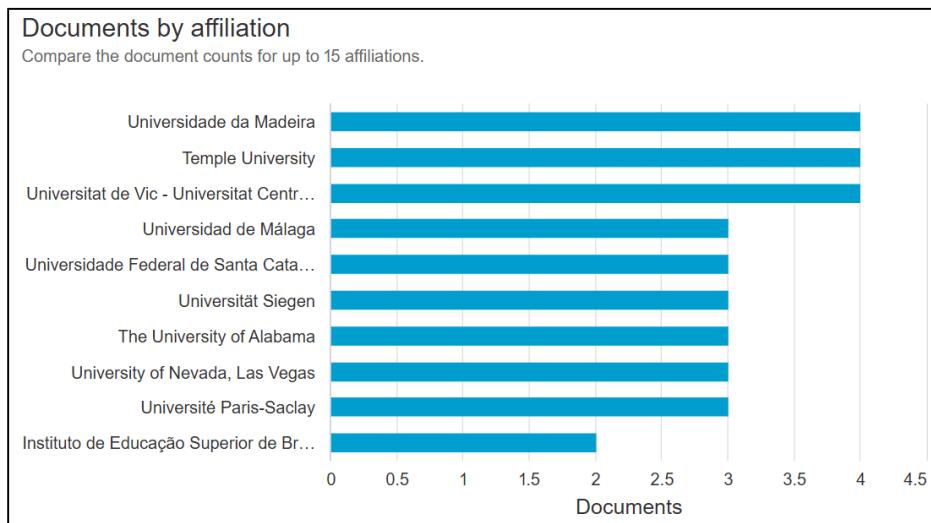


Figure 3. Document by affiliation

Table 7. Most Productive Authors

Author Name	TP	%
Contreras-Espinosa, R.S.	4	3.60%
Scholz, T.M.	4	3.60%
Baker, B.J.	3	2.70%
Cardoso, O.R.	3	2.70%
Correia, P.Á.P.	3	2.70%
Freitas, B.D.A.	3	2.70%
Pizzo, A.D.	3	2.70%
Alexandris, K.	2	1.80%
Anaya-Sánchez, R.	2	1.80%
<u>Bertschy, M.</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>1.80%</u>

Table 8. Most Active Source Title

Source Title	TP	%
Routledge Handbook of Esports	6	5.41%
International Journal of Sports Marketing and Sponsorship	4	3.60%
Movimento	4	3.60%
Retos	4	3.60%
Revista Brasileira De Medicina do Esporte	4	3.60%
Espacios	3	2.70%
Revista Brasileira De Marketing	3	2.70%
Sport Management Review	3	2.70%
Apunts Educacion Fisica Y Deportes	2	1.80%
Communications in Computer and Information Science	2	1.80%

The retrieved dataset of 111 papers accumulated a total of 1533 citations over a 18-year period (2007–2025), averaging 85,17 citations per year (Table 9). Each paper received an average of 13.81 citations, while the dataset achieved an h-index of 15 and a g-index of 38, indicating both breadth and depth of scholarly impact. Table 10 lists the ten most highly cited articles. The most cited work was by D.C. Funk, A.D. Pizzo, B.J. Baker (2018), esports management: Embracing esports education and research opportunities, with 255 citations and an average of 36,43 citations per year. This followed by J. DiFrancisco-Donoghue, J. Balentine, G. Schmidt, H. Zwibel (2019) on Managing the health of the esports athlete: An integrated health management model (185 citations) and Y. Seo (2011), Electronic sports: A new marketing landscape of the experience economy (179 citations). Collectively, these studies emphasize the esports and business in shaping the field.

Table 9. Citations Metrics

Metrics	Data
Publication years	2007-2025
Citation years	18 (2007-2025)
Papers	111
Citations	1533
Citations/year	85,17
Citations/paper	13,81
Citations/author	712,49
Papers/author	52,48
Authors/paper	2,78

h-index	15
g-index	38

The keyword frequency analysis (Table 11) indicates that esports is the dominant theme in the field, appearing in 31 records (27.93%). This confirms its position as the central organizing concept around which the literature has evolved.

The document-level citation network is presented in Figure 4. Each node represents a document, with node size indicating the number of citations and links reflecting the co-citation relationships between papers. The visualization reveals several clusters of highly influential works that have shaped the field of esports and business.

Table 10. Highly Cited Articles

Authors	Title	Year	Source	Cited	Cites Per Year	Cites Per Author
D.C. Funk, A.D. Pizzo, B.J. Baker	esport management: Embracing esport education and research opportunities	2018	Sport Management Review	255	36.43	85
J. DiFrancisco-Donoghue, J. Balentine, G. Schmidt, H. Zwibel	Managing the health of the esport athlete: An integrated health management model	2019	BMJ Open Sport and Exercise Medicine	185	30.83	46
Y. Seo	Electronic sports: A new marketing landscape of the experience economy	2013	Journal of Marketing Management	179	14.92	179
G.B. Cunningham, S. Fairley, L. Ferkins, S. Kerwin, D. Lock, S. Shaw, P. Wicker	esport: Construct specifications and implications for sport management	2018	Sport Management Review	146	20.86	21
T.M. Scholz	esports is business: Management in the world of competitive gaming	2019		133	22.17	133
X. Ke, C. Wagner	Global pandemic compels sport to move to esports: understanding from brand extension perspective	2020	Managing Sport and Leisure	61	12.2	31
M. Huettermann, G.T. Trail, A.D. Pizzo, V. Stallone	Esports Sponsorship: An Empirical Examination of esports Consumers' Perceptions of Non-Endemic	2023	Journal of Global Sport Management	51	25.5	13

Sponsors							
M. Bertschy, H. MÄhlbacher, M. Desbordes	Esports extension of a football brand: stakeholder co-creation in action?		2020	European Sport Management Quarterly	51	10.2	17
J. Gawrysiak, R. Burton, S. Jenny, D. Williams	Using Esports Efficiently to Enhance and Extend Brand Perceptions-A Literature Review		2020	Physical Culture and Sport, Studies and Research	43	8.6	11
P. Cuesta-ValiÃ±o, P. GutiÃ©rrez-RodrÃºguez, C. Loranca-Valle	Sponsorship image and value creation in esports		2022	Journal of Business Research	42	14	14

Table 11. Top Keywords

Keywords	TP	%
Esports	31	27.93%
Esports	13	11.71%
Sponsorship	13	11.71%
Sports	13	11.71%
Marketing	12	10.81%
Human	10	9.01%
Article	8	7.21%
Sport	7	6.31%
Management	6	5.41%
Commerce	5	4.50%

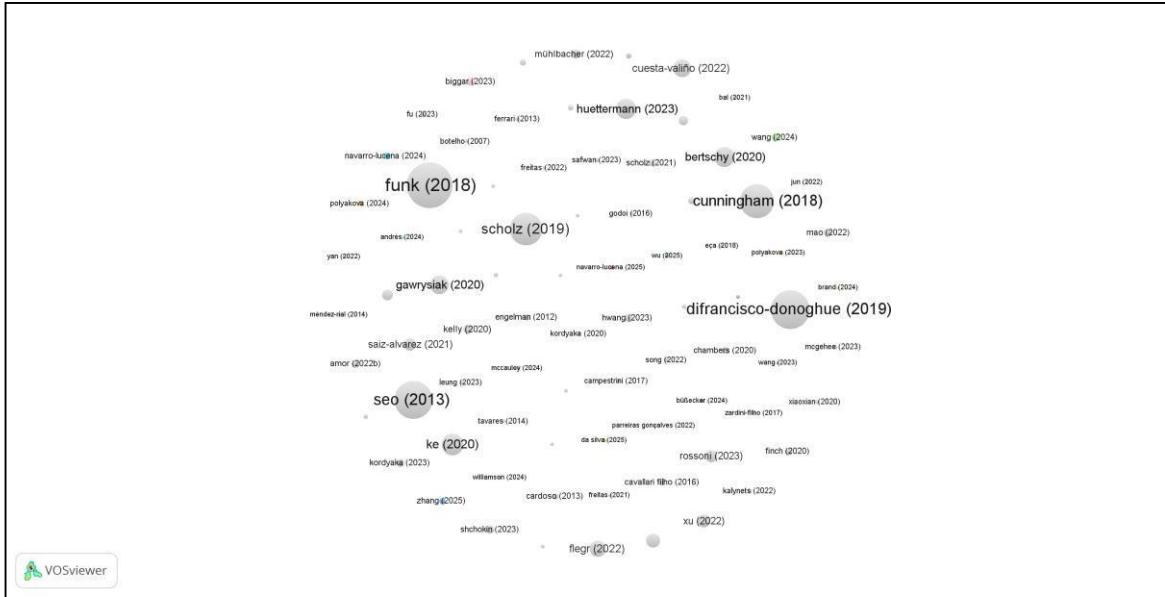


Figure 4. Network visualisation map of the citation by documents

Minimum number of citations of a document = 1

5. DISCUSSION

The findings of this bibliometric analysis demonstrate that the intersection of esports and business has emerged as a rapidly expanding research domain with growing scholarly attention since 2020. The temporal distribution indicates that this surge coincides with the global digitalization wave and the accelerated growth of the esports industry during the COVID-19 pandemic. The increasing number of publications and citations reflects a maturing research field that has successfully attracted both academic and industrial interest. Scholars have progressively recognized esports not merely as entertainment but as a dynamic economic sector influencing marketing strategies, sponsorship models, and consumer engagement.

From a geographical perspective, the dominance of contributions from the United States, Brazil, Spain, and China underscores a global diversification of research efforts. Brazil's high productivity can be attributed to the rapid growth of its esports market and government-supported digital initiatives, while Spain benefits from strong academic networks and European funding programs. North America and Europe continue to lead theoretical development and market analysis, while Asia, notably China, represents a rapidly expanding region in both research production and industry growth. This global spread reflects the democratization of esports research and its integration into diverse business ecosystems. The active involvement of multiple institutions such as Universidade da Madeira and Temple University indicates strong international collaborations and the emergence of specialized research hubs.

Author and source analyses further reveal a concentrated yet collaborative research landscape. Influential scholars such as Contreras-Espinosa, Scholz, and Baker have contributed seminal works that define the intellectual core of the field, particularly in sport management and marketing. The Routledge Handbook of esports and the International Journal of Sports Marketing and Sponsorship serve as central publication outlets, reinforcing the field's academic legitimacy. Keyword clustering confirms the multifaceted nature of the research, encompassing management, sponsorship, consumer behavior, and technological integration, which collectively portray esports as both a digital innovation and a business model.

Despite this progress, several gaps remain evident. Research is still fragmented across regions and lacks longitudinal studies exploring the sustainability and governance of the esports economy. Additionally, while marketing and sponsorship dominate, fewer studies address issues such as labor economics, ethical regulation, or financial valuation of Esports enterprises. Future research could benefit from integrating frameworks from digital economy, entrepreneurship, and behavioral economics to deepen understanding of how esports drives value creation and cultural transformation in the global business landscape.

6. CONCLUSION

This bibliometric study provides a comprehensive overview of the evolution, structure, and intellectual landscape of esports and business research from 2007 to 2025. The findings indicate steady growth in publications and citations, reflecting the maturation of the field and the emergence of a global, interdisciplinary research community. Esports has evolved from a niche entertainment activity into a significant economic and technological phenomenon, shaping both industry practices and academic inquiry. The dominance of research on marketing and sponsorship highlights the growing importance of digital brand engagement and technopreneurship, suggesting that future business models in esports will increasingly rely on innovative monetization strategies and technology-driven consumer interaction.

The study also underscores the critical role of technology management, as esports exemplifies the integration of digital platforms, analytics, and operational innovation to enhance organizational competitiveness. At the same time, the global spread of research, with significant contributions from regions such as North America, Europe, and Asia, points to the need for coherent governance and policy frameworks that ensure ethical practices, labor standards, and sustainable growth within the esports ecosystem. Finally, the results highlight the need for future longitudinal and comparative studies to explore the evolution of business models, value creation mechanisms, and cross-disciplinary innovation in esports, providing a foundation for both academic advancement and practical strategic decision-making.

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that esports represents a dynamic convergence of technology, business, and social sciences, and continued scholarly exploration will be essential to understand its long-term implications for entrepreneurship, technology management, and policy development in the digital economy.

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