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Spectator Experience in Online Esports Events: Investigating Satisfaction and Consumption Intentions via the Experience Economy Model

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Abstract

Although esports have rapidly evolved into a major global entertainment industry in recent years, research on the behavioral consequences of spectators' event experiences remains limited. In particular, there is a lack of empirical studies examining how the perceived experience of online esports spectators influences their post-event behaviors, such as satisfaction and future viewing intentions. This study, therefore, explores the influence of perceived event experience on satisfaction and consumption intention among online esports spectators through the lens of the Experience Economy Model. The research employed structural equation modeling to test the hypothesized relationships using data from 270 participants who watched online esports events, limited to live-streamed tournaments. Findings indicate that perceived event experience positively affects satisfaction, and satisfaction significantly predicts consumption intention. However, no direct relationship was found between experience and consumption intention. Mediation analysis further revealed that satisfaction is a key mediating variable between event experience and consumption intention. These findings underscore the critical role of satisfaction in transforming experiential elements into behavioral outcomes. The study offers theoretical contributions to esports and experience economy literature and practical implications for stakeholders seeking to enhance viewer engagement and retention in digital esports environments.

Keywords: *Consumption Intention, Esports, Event Satisfaction, Experience Economy Model, Online Esports Events*

INTRODUCTION

Esports, defined as a professional form of video gaming (Bányai et al., 2019), is now recognized as a globally popular entertainment genre (Hamari & Sjöblom, 2017). In 2024, more than 1,900 officially recognized global esports tournaments were held, with 700 in Asia, 450 in Europe, 400

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in North America, 230 in South America, and 120 in other regions (Fragster Team, 2025). Millions of people watch these events online (Gough, 2021), and tens of thousands watch them in arenas (De la Navarre, 2020). This expanding spectator base has also resulted in economic value (Zhu et al., 2021). For example, the Statista platform projects that global esports revenues will increase from $5.1 billion in 2026 to $6.2 billion by 2030 (Statista, 2026a), while the global online esports audience is expected to grow from approximately 500 million in 2022 to over 640 million by 2026 (Statista, 2026b). However, this expansion also fragments spectators across more events and channels, making it harder for stakeholders to retain attention. Therefore, competition for spectators' attention intensifies, making it crucial to understand how the spectator experience translates into satisfaction and consumption intentions. Since the core issue is how spectators experience and appraise esports events, the Experience Economy Model offers a suitable lens for understanding this issue (Pine & Gilmore, 1998; 1999). Therefore, it is first necessary to define the esports ecosystem and identify its key stakeholders.

Esports industry is described as an ecosystem consisting of primary stakeholders such as game developers, players, teams, event organizers, and spectators, and secondary stakeholders including media, suppliers, investors, shareholders, sponsors, and national and international esports federations (Peng et al., 2020; Scholz, 2020). Within this structure, the esports industry revolves around primary stakeholders, and their actions directly influence the sustainability of secondary stakeholders (Scholz, 2020). From the Experience Economy perspective, spectators are central among these stakeholders because value is ultimately realized in their lived and evaluated event experience.

Spectators, among the primary stakeholders, are considered as one of the main players in the esports industry (Scholz, 2020). This group is divided into those who watch esports events live at the venue and those who watch them online. Online spectators experience esports events by watching them on live streaming platforms (Keiper et al., 2017). Economically, compared to the audience watching the event live, the online audience forms a larger market (Qian, 2020a). For example, while the League of Legends World Championship was watched live by 47,268 spectators in the arena in 2016 (Lineups.com, 2025), in 2018, the same championship was followed online by 100 million viewers (Kim & Kim, 2020). This situation supports the view that the online spectator group constitutes a more valuable market for the industry (Qian et al., 2020a; Qian et al., 2020b).

Given the scale and economic value of the online spectator market, esports' shift toward a spectator-based format (Qian et al., 2020c) has become increasingly attractive to global brands (Hitmarker, 2021). The main motivation for global brands for sponsorship is that esports events are one of the top ways to reach a broad range of esports enthusiasts. Additionally, thanks to esports events, companies producing services and products for the esports industry can capture the loyalty of spectators and develop long-term relationships with them. Therefore, considering that the experiential value of an event plays a critical role in enhancing the success of online events (Song et al., 2019), examining the relationship between event experience and post-consumption outcomes (i.e., satisfaction and consumption intention) is of considerable importance.

However, prior literature on the subject has examined attractive and deterrent factors for live esports broadcasts (Qian et al., 2020c), the motivations of online esports spectators (Qian et al., 2020b), the service quality of esports events (Zhu et al., 2021), the impact of watching esports on game consumption (Macey et al., 2020), the effect of prior gaming experience on the relationship between playing esports and watching esports broadcasts (Jang et al., 2021), and the factors associated with behavioral intention to watch esports (Xiao, 2020). Although these studies have made significant contributions to the literature, they have overlooked the effect of the experiential value of events on spectators' post-consumption behaviors. The current study addresses this gap by adopting the experience economy model and conceptualizing online esports spectating as a multidimensional experiential process. This approach provides a comprehensive and in-depth perspective on how the event experience influences post-consumption outcomes. Accordingly, the findings not only fill an important gap in the literature but also offer valuable insights that event managers can apply in practice.

Theoretical Framework

Experience Economy Model

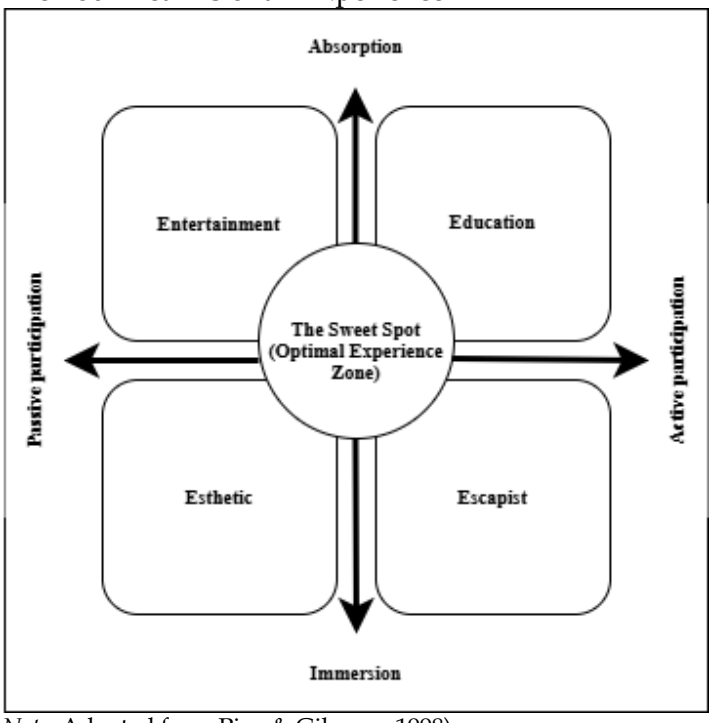
This study uses the "Experience Economy Model" developed by Pine and Gilmore (1998) to strengthen the performance of organizations operating in different industries as the theoretical lens. Pine and Gilmore pointed out that in contemporary economies, people not only focus on consuming products or services but also seek experiences that are meaningful, memorable, and emotionally satisfying for them from the beginning to the end of the consumption process. Pine and Gilmore emphasized that organizations that provide consumers with unique experiences will

gain an economic advantage. After Pine & Gilmore (1998) emphasized the economic aspect of customer experience, organizations seeking to gain a market advantage and researchers seeking to develop an in-depth understanding of the subject (Keiningham et al., 2019; Pine & Gilmore, 1998) began to focus on customer experience. Studies in different fields, such as tourism (Yfantidou et al., 2024), parks (Lee et al., 2020), recreation (Yazıcı et al., 2018), sports (Duan et al., 2023), and sports tourism (Yang et al., 2020), now accept experiences as an economic value and emphasize that they play an important role in providing organizations with a competitive advantage.

The experience economy model describes consumers' experiences as a result of their involvement during consumption and their interaction with their environment (Pine & Gilmore, 1999; Lee et al., 2020). Based on this perspective, the model points out that there are four areas of experience - education, entertainment, aesthetics, and escape - as a result of consumers' role in participation and interactions with the environment, as shown in Figure 1 (Pine & Gilmore, 1998; 1999). These four themes are positioned along two horizontal and vertical axes. The consumer actively or passively participates in the experience creation process on the horizontal axis. In contrast, on the vertical axis, which intersects the horizontal axis, the consumer assimilates the experience goal or immerses in the experience (Pine & Gilmore, 1998; 1999). The sweet spot where the experience areas intersect represents the optimum experience effects. In other words, when experiences are adapted and integrated into the consumption process, they can create economic value for organizations (Pine & Gilmore, 1999).

The educational dimension of the model focuses on processes where the consumer actively seeks to acquire knowledge. In contrast, the entertainment dimension focuses on experiences in which the consumer passively enjoys and consumes content. The aesthetic dimension is associated with experiences in which the visual elements and design associated with the environment in which consumption takes place stimulate the senses. The escapist dimension refers to experiences in which the individual is fully involved in the consumption process, distanced from the world in which he or she is immersed, and in which the perception of time and space temporarily disappears (Pine & Gilmore, 1998; 1999).

Figure 1
The Four Realms of an Experience



Note. Adapted from Pine & Gilmore, 1998).

The experience economy model provides a strong theoretical basis for examining audience experiences during online esports events organized by digital platforms (such as Twitch, YouTube, TikTok Live, and kick.com). Because during the events, viewers are exposed to visual and auditory stimuli (Çevik et al., 2025), they observe the strategies of the players they watch and learn something (Hamari & Sjöblom, 2017; Ma et al., 2021; Qian et al., 2020b), and provide personalized participation in the events. From this point of view, online esports events can impact audience satisfaction and future consumption intention by combining the four dimensions offered by the experience economy model.

Literature Review

Online Esports Events

Esports events are typically grouped into two categories: live esports events (Pizzo et al., 2018) and online esports events (Sjöblom & Hamari, 2017). Live esports events are attended in person by spectators at esports venues, similar to traditional sports (Keiper et al., 2017; Çevik et al., 2025). Online esports events, referring to live-streamed tournaments, are watched by esports enthusiasts via live-streaming platforms (e.g., Twitch, YouTube, Kick, SOOP Korea; Qian et al., 2020b). Since

spectators' demand to watch online events exceeds their demand to attend live esports events (Jang et al., 2021; Takahashi, 2017), live-streamed tournaments have become increasingly popular in recent years, and viewership has continued to grow. For example, the 2022 League of Legends World Championship final attracted 5.1 million online viewers (Esports Charts, 2026a), rising to 6.4 million in 2023 (Esports Charts, 2026b). In 2024 and 2025, online viewership reached nearly 7 million for each final (Esports Charts, 2026c; Esports Charts, 2026d).

One reason for the demand for online esports events is that participation requires lower costs and effort (Qian et al., 2020a). In addition, online events offer spectators a broad range of experiential benefits. Compared with live events, esports spectators report experiencing more intense emotional responses in online settings, including drama (excitement/uncertainty), information acquisition, appreciation of player skill, novelty, aesthetics, and enjoyment derived from aggression (Sjöblom et al., 2020). Moreover, viewing events from multiple camera angles, replaying key moments, and using enhanced visual elements not only provide richer visual presentation but also enable spectators to develop their game-related knowledge (Sjöblom et al., 2020). During events, spectators' ability to observe all map movements and strategies, elements not visible to players, allows them to anticipate game progression and assume a more active role as viewers (Brock & Crawford, 2025). The instant messaging feature further reduces boundaries by facilitating social interaction and enabling spectators to become more deeply involved in the event experience (Seo, 2013). In sum, spectators' experiences during online esports events intersect with the entertainment, education, aesthetic, and escapist dimensions of Pine and Gilmore's (1999) experience economy model. Accordingly, this study examines the online esports event experience through the lens of the experience economy framework.

Satisfaction

Customer satisfaction is generally defined as a pleasing inner satisfaction (fulfillment) for the product, service, benefit, and reward (Oliver, 1980). In the service industry, it emerges from the customer's prior perceptions of the service or product and the evaluation of actual service performance (Wang, 2009). In the spectator sports industry, which is a service industry, satisfaction is defined as the audience's enjoyment and inner fulfillment in response to the competition in the sports match, as well as the ancillary services offered during the game (Yoshida & James, 2010).

The mechanism underlying customer satisfaction is explained based on the expectation-disconfirmation theory. Accordingly, if the customer's perception of the product or service is equal to or above the performance expectation, positive disconfirmation, and as a result, satisfaction occurs (Oliver, 1980; Santos & Boote, 2003). Disconfirmation is the difference between a customer's expectations before consuming the product and the product's actual performance (Premkumar & Bhattacherjee, 2004). If the product or service performance falls below customer expectations, then negative disconfirmation occurs, and customer dissatisfaction occurs (Oliver, 1980; Santos & Boote, 2003).

Satisfying customers is one of the primary goals of most organizations (Oliver, 2010). Especially for businesses that provide sports services with intangible and heterogeneous features, customer satisfaction is even more important because it is difficult to maintain consistent service performance. However, satisfaction provides organizations with important feedback on service performance, enabling them to evaluate their services. In addition, satisfaction is a structure that reinforces customers' desired post-consumption loyalty and repeat-purchase behavior (Yoshida & James, 2010). Because of these features, customer satisfaction is a consideration for organizations in the spectator services industry.

Consumption Intention

Having a strong intention to perform the behavior strengthens the likelihood of the behavior occurring (Park et al, 2019). Therefore, researchers use behavioral intention as the most reliable predictor of actual behavior, as it measures the willingness to perform certain behaviors (Ajzen, 1991). Behavioral intention is defined as an individual's behavioral tendency based on feelings, cognition, or evaluation of experiences (Spears & Singh, 2004). In the context of esports spectators, behavioral intention is defined as the tendency of esports viewers to participate in their favorite esports event in the future (Jang et al., 2020).

According to Zeithaml et al (1996), there are five behavioral intentions: loyalty to the company, positive word of mouth, propensity to switch, negative word of mouth, and complaining. Various researchers arrange these factors into between 2 and 5 dimensions. According to Fishbein (1996), behavioral intention has three dimensions: repurchase tendency, word of mouth, and premium purchase. Zeithaml et al (1996) divide behavioral intention dimensions into two: positive and negative. While repeat purchases and recommending to others are positive aspects, the propensity

to switch, negative word of mouth, and complaining are negative aspects. Researchers focus on different aspects of behavioral intention, depending on the context of their study. For example, researchers measuring behavioral intentions of spectators in traditional sports focused on repurchase/revisit and recommendation aspects (Çevik & Şimşek, 2020; Yoshida & James, 2010; Zhang et al., 2021). However, consumption in esports occurs through digital platforms, and there are distinctive dynamics different from traditional sports that shape spectators' behavioral intentions (Jang et al., 2020; Qian et al., 2020b). Chat rooms, streamer characteristics, and virtual rewards (Rodrigues et al., 2021; Yadav et al., 2022), spectators' opportunities to improve their own gaming skills (Qian et al., 2020b), and opportunities for socialization through virtual communities are some of these dynamics (Sjöblom et al., 2020). In addition, rather than physical attributes, players' skill level, hand–eye coordination, strategic intelligence, and game mechanics are factors that influence spectators' participation in events (Qian et al., 2020b; Sjöblom et al., 2020). Taking these characteristics into account, as in prior studies on esports spectatorship (Jang et al., 2021; Xiao, 2019), this study focused on the loyalty and revisit components used to measure behavioral intention.

Hypothesis Development

Experience is defined as the internal and subjective response that arises from the direct and indirect interaction of the consumer with the organization (Meyer & Schwagger, 2007). It consists of three stages: pre-purchase, onsite experience, and post-purchase (Lemon & Verhorf, 2016). In the on-site experience stage of these phases, the consumer interacts directly with the product or service itself. Since the consumer directly consumes the product and benefits from it at this stage, marketing activities focus on it (Meyer & Schwagger, 2007). Additionally, by manipulating the interaction between experience providers and consumers, subjective outcomes can be produced for the consumer (Duerden et al., 2015).

In the esports context, event organizers can enable spectators to have subjective experiences through the event content they provide. In their study, Yin et al. (2023) classified the esports event characteristics that influence subjective experience into four categories: entertainment, credibility, variety, and usefulness. Entertainment is the element of an event that gives spectators pleasure and stimulates their emotions. Credibility relates to the reliability and persuasiveness of the information presented by broadcasters. Variety refers to offering spectators a range of characters,

settings, themes, animations, and audiovisual features. Usefulness, on the other hand, means that spectators acquire new esports-related information through the event and that the event contributes to the development of their skills.

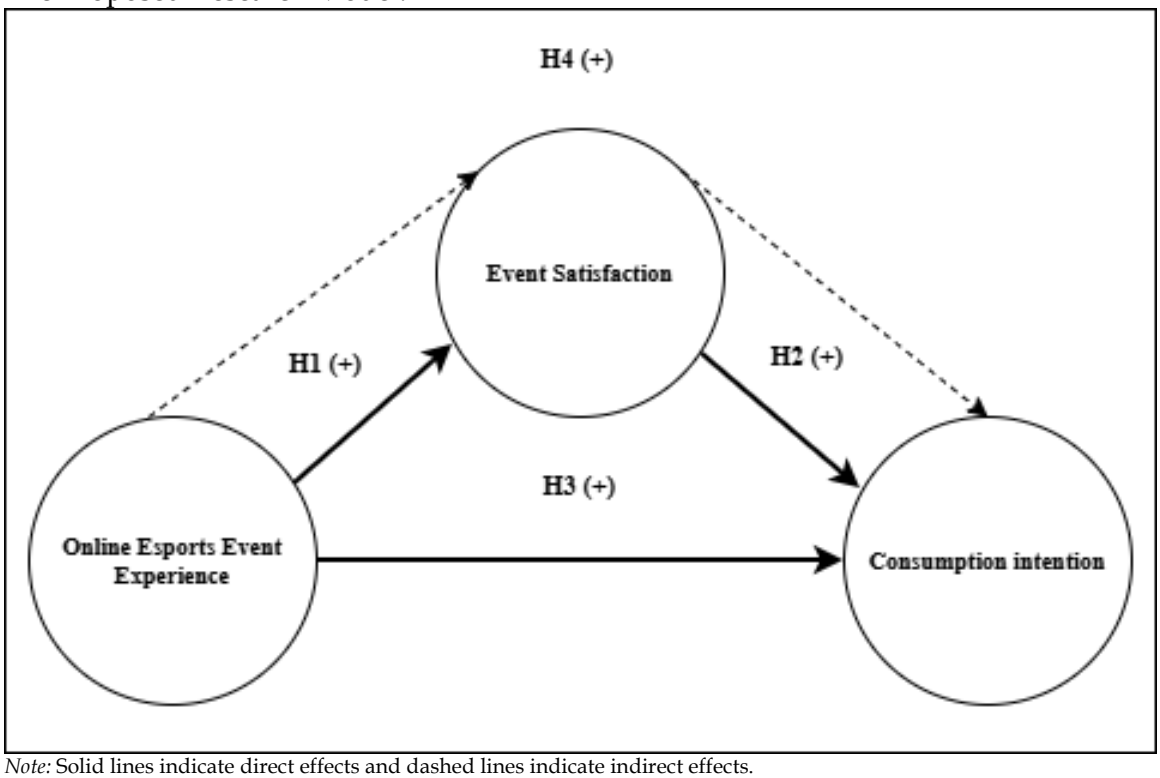
In esports events, the spectator experience can be manipulated based on the event's content characteristics, as defined by Yin et al. (2023). In this way, spectator satisfaction can be increased, and the intention to participate in the event again can be strengthened. Prior studies on traditional sports spectators support this argument by demonstrating that experience has positive effects on satisfaction (Çevik & Şimşek, 2020; Oklevik et al., 2021; Sorrentino et al., 2020) and on intention (Kharouf et al., 2020; Sorrentino et al., 2020). However, the limited number of studies on esports spectators suggests somewhat different findings. For example, Çevik et al. (2025) found that, among live esports event spectators, experience has a direct effect on both satisfaction and intention; whereas Navarro-Lucena et al. (2024) concluded that, among online viewers, experience has an indirect effect on intention. Jung et al. (2024) argue that, in live events, spectators take part in and share within a "fantasy" world together with other spectators; that the immersive experience and social-learning experience dimensions are dominant; and that spectators are actively involved in the event. In this context, the direct effect of the live event experience on intention may stem from the diversity of environmental and emotional stimuli present in live events. In other words, the content characteristics of live events may be strong enough to directly reinforce spectators' intention. Overall, the existing literature generally reflects the view that event experience is a strong antecedent of satisfaction and intention. Accordingly, assuming that a similar relationship may also hold in the context of online esports events, the following hypotheses are proposed:

- *H1: There is a positive relationship between online esports event experience and event satisfaction.*
- *H2: There is a positive relationship between event satisfaction and consumption intention.*

Empirically, a wide range of literature has documented a positive relationship between customer satisfaction and consumption intention both in traditional (Brown et al., 2017; Shonk & Chelladurai, 2008) and esports spectators (Zhu et al., 2025). However, the relationship between the two constructs in the context of esports audiences is not always significant. For example, Çevik et al. (2025) examined the effect of esports venue attributes on customer experience, satisfaction, and re-attendance intention in the context of live esports spectators. They found that the

relationship between satisfaction and re-attendance intention was insignificant. On the other hand, satisfaction is generally considered an antecedent of behavioral intention in spectator sports (Biscaia et al., 2016; Duan et al., 2020; Yim & Byon, 2018). Therefore, it is thought that there may be a significant and positive relationship between satisfaction and consumption intention in online esports viewers. Based on this, the following hypothesis is proposed; *H3: There is a positive relationship between online esports event experience and consumption intention*.

Figure 2
The Proposed Research Model.



Note: Solid lines indicate direct effects and dashed lines indicate indirect effects.

According to the literature, satisfaction is not only an antecedent of intention (Çevik & Şimşek, 2020; Kharouf et al., 2020) but also serves as a mediating variable between experience and intention (Ali et al., 2016; Brown et al., 2017; Fernando et al., 2023; Rasoolimanesh et al., 2022). In the context of traditional sports spectators, previous studies have examined this mediating role of satisfaction and have reported significant findings (Çevik & Şimşek, 2020; Brown et al., 2017). However, this role has yet to be explored in the context of online esports spectators. The mediating role of satisfaction provides a valuable mechanism for understanding consumer behavior in digital environments, such as esports (Fayyaz et al., 2025). Therefore, investigating this mediating role is essential to comprehend better how online esports viewers engage with event

consumption. Based on this rationale, the following hypothesis is proposed; *H4: In the relationship between event experience and consumption intention, satisfaction has a mediating effect.*

Based on the theoretical relationships and hypotheses discussed above, the proposed research model is presented in Figure 2.

METHODS

Participants and Data Collection Procedures

The target population of the research was online esports event spectators who watch online esports events from platforms such as Twitch, YouTube, and Facebook, aged 18 years old and older. To reach online esports event viewers, two researchers attended the Valorant Champions Tour, held at Volkswagen Arena in Istanbul from September 16 to 18, 2022, and the Valorant Challengers TR: Birlik League Grand Final event, held at ESA Esports Arena on March 12, 2023. During events and between matches, the researchers included 293 participants, selected via convenience sampling from among esports enthusiasts in the concourses of the arenas. To confirm participants' eligibility, they were asked whether they had watched at least one of the specified esports events online before completing the survey. Those who had watched the specified event and agreed to participate voluntarily were included in the study. Thus, it was ensured that the selected sample consisted of genuine online esports viewers. After data collection, 23 surveys deemed inappropriate were excluded from the analysis. 270 responses were used for data analysis. Using Bentler and Chou's (1987) rule of thumbs of ten (data point) to one (variable), the product of 22 and 10 was calculated, estimating a minimum sample of 220 was necessary to test the model. A guideline of at least a 10:1 ratio of participants to the number of parameters. Thus, 270 responses were deemed sufficient based on this rule.

Before data collection, ethics committee approval was obtained from Eskişehir Technical University (08.09.2022, No: 14/2). Then, we initiated the data collection process. The process of gathering data was voluntary. The participants gave their consent after being briefed on the study's objectives. Before data collection, participants were told that their answers would always remain personal and anonymous.

Table 1
Frequency Distributions for Sociodemographic Variables (N = 282)

Variables	Category	Frequency (%)* (N=270)	Cumulative %
Gender	Female	76 (28.1)	28.1
	Male	194 71.9)	100.0
Age	17-22	167 (61.9)	61.9
	23-29	85 (31.5)	93.3
	30-34	17 (6.3)	99.6
	35 and more	1 (0.4)	100.0
Education	Secondary school	6 (2.2)	2.2
	High school	155 (57.4)	59.6
	Associate/bachelor's degree	90 (33.3)	93.0
	Advanced Degree	19 (7.0)	100.0
Profession	Student	195 (72.2)	72.2
	Worker	24 (8.9)	81.1
	Self-employment	11 (4.1)	85.2
	Other	40 (14.8)	100.0
Income	Below 14000 TL	129 (47.8)	47.8
	14000-20000 TL	67 (24.8)	72.6
	20001 TL or above	74 (27.4)	100.0
Game Genre	FPS	141 (52.2)	52.2
	RTS	45 (16.7)	68.9
	MMORPG	25 (9.3)	78.1
	MOBA	32 (11.9)	90.0
	Battle Royale	25 (9.3)	99.3
	Other	2 (0.7)	100.0
Weekly watching hour	1-3	112 (41.5)	41.5
	4-5	75 (27.8	69.3
	6-7	39 (14.4)	83.7
	8 hours or more	44 (16.3)	100.0
Most-Watched Platforms for Online Esports Events	Twitch	162 (60.0)	60.0
	Youtube	105 (38.9)	98.9
	Other	3 (1.1)	100.0

Note. *: Percentage indicates valid percent.

Of the 270 survey participants, 71.9% were male, while 28.1% were female. Just under 61.9% were between 17 and 22, 31.5% between 23 and 29, 6.3% between 30 and 34, and 0.4% 35 or older. Slightly more than 57% of respondents indicated that they had a high school degree. 72.2% of respondents were students. Most participants (47.8%) had a monthly income below 14000 TL. The most played game genre (52.2%) was FPS. 41.5% of the respondents indicated they watched esports streaming 1-3 hours weekly. According to the respondents, Twitch was the most-watched platform for online esports events (60.0%). A list of frequency distributions for all sociodemographic variables is provided in Table 1.

Data Collection Tools

In order to examine the structures included in the model within the scope of the project, validated measurement tools from previous research were used. For event experience, a measurement tool adapted by Hallmann et al. (2021) to assess spectator experience domains in sports events was included (e.g., "The esports event stimulates my curiosity to learn new things"). The measurement tool consists of four dimensions: education, escape, entertainment, and aesthetics, with a total of 16 items, with four statements in each dimension. Consumer satisfaction was measured with three statements used by Oklevik et al. (2021) to evaluate event satisfaction (Example: The esports event has lived up to my expectations.). For measuring consumption intention, three statements adapted from Venkatesh et al. (2012) study by Jang and Byon (2020) in the "Esports Consumption Model," to examine media consumption intention for esports events were used (I plan to continue watching esports events through media). The statements used a 7-point Likert scale ranging from "1 strongly disagree" to "7 strongly agree".

The items in the measurement tools were translated from English into Turkish using the back-translation technique. In this stage, two translators initially translated the original items into Turkish. Then, two different translators performed back-translation from Turkish into English. Afterward, the items were compared with their originals by a group consisting of researchers and translators, and the final version of the items was determined (Banville et al., 2000).

After the original items were translated into Turkish, an item–total correlation analysis was conducted to determine whether the items were understandable to the participants, and Cronbach's alpha (α) coefficient was calculated to test internal consistency. At this stage, 50 participants who watched online esports events were included in the study. The analysis showed that the item–total correlation values ranged from 0.464 to 0.794. The literature states that item–total correlation values should be above 0.30 (Cristobal et al., 2007). Accordingly, it can be said that all items exceeded the threshold value. In addition, the internal consistency coefficient of the scale was calculated as 0.934. This result indicated that the items exhibited similar characteristics with one another and with the overall scale, and that they were sufficiently correlated.

Data Analysis

Testing the proposed model within the scope of the research followed a two-step approach. In the first stage, Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was conducted to test the measurement model,

and in the second stage, Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was performed to examine the theoretical relationships among variables. Fit indices, convergent and discriminant validity analyses were utilized for construct validity. Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha (α) coefficient. Factor loadings, Average Variance Extracted (AVE), and Composite Reliability (CR) values were calculated for convergent validity, while inter-construct correlations were examined for discriminant validity (Hair, Black & Babin, 2013). In the analysis of the structural model, fit indices were examined, the statistical significance of paths was checked to determine the relationships between constructs, and regression coefficients were examined. IBM SPSS Statistics 22 and IBM SPSS Amos 22 programs were used for data analysis.

Common Method Bias Analysis

Since the data for this study were collected via a self-report survey, common method bias was assessed prior to the primary analysis. We conducted a principal component analysis on each item to execute Harman's single-factor test. According to the findings, the first factor explained 48.94% of the variation, less than the 50% threshold (Podsakoff et al., 2003). These findings imply that common technique bias was not a significant issue for this investigation.

RESULTS

Measurement Model

Before conducting the confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) for the measurement model, the normality of the data distribution was evaluated through skewness and kurtosis. The decision on whether the data set showed a normal distribution was made based on whether the skewness values were within the range of +2/-2 and the kurtosis values were within the range of -7/+7 (Hair et al., 2013; Byrne, 2010). According to the analysis results, the skewness value was between -1.725/-0.340, and the kurtosis value was between 3.244/-0.683. The results showed no violation of normality in the data set (Hair et al., 2013; Byrne, 2010). Then, we conducted CFA to test the measurement model. The results indicate that the fit indices are within the acceptable range, as reported in the literature. The obtained fit indices are as follows: $x2 = 408.317$, $df = 194$ ($p < 0.001$), $x2/df = 2.105$, RMSEA = 0.064, SRMR = 0.057, CFI = 0.947, TLI = 0.937. These results indicate a satisfactory fit between the model and the data (Table 2).

Table 2
Factor Loadings, CR, AVE, and α Values

Factors and Items	Factor Loadings	CR	AVE	α
Education				
I learn a lot during the esports event.	.867			
The esports event experience makes me more knowledgeable.	.908	0.903	0.705	0.899
The esports event is a real learning experience.	.842			
The esports event stimulates my curiosity to learn new things	.721			
Escapism				
I play a different character at the esports event.	.707			
The esports event experience lets me imagine being some one else	.796	0.787	0.479	0.784
I completely escape from my daily routine at the esports event.	.553			
I feel like I am in a different time or place at the esports event.	.705			
Entertainment				
The activities in the esports events are amusing.	.875			
The entertainment in the esports event is captivating	.808	0.915	0.733	0.914
The activities in the esports event are entertaining.	.843			
The activities in the esports events are fun.	.890			
Esthetic				
The setting of the competition/race in the esports event is attractive.	.779			
The setting of the competition/race in the esports event pays close attention to details	.706	0.835	0.555	0.831
It is just pleasent being at the esports event.	.761			
There is a real sense of harmony during the esports event.	.743			
Satisfaction				
Overall, I am satisfied with the esports event.	.774	0.851	0.661	0.848
Being a participant at the esports event was a good choice for me	.858			
The esports event has lived up to my expectations.	.795			
Consumption intention				
I plan to continue watching esports events.	.865	0.860	0.668	0.859
I intend to watch esports events soon.	.770			
I expect to continue watching my favorite esports events in the near future.	.823			

Note. CR = Construct reliability; AVE = Average Variance Extracted; α: Cronbach's alpha.

After evaluating the fit indices, the factor loadings of the items in the measurement model were examined. All items in the measurement model are statistically significant, and the factor loadings are above the threshold of 0.50 (Hair et al., 2013). The AVE value of the escape factor (0.479) is close to 0.50, while the AVE values of the other factors are above 0.50 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981), and the CR values are above 0.70 (Hair et al., 2013). Fornell and Larcker (1981) state that when the CR value is above 0.60, AVE values below 0.50 can be considered acceptable. Similarly, according to Hatcher (1994), when CR is at an acceptable level, a low AVE value is deemed acceptable. Based on this, and considering the theoretical framework of the experience economy model, it was decided not to remove the escape factor and to retain it as a separate construct rather than combining it with other factors. Based on these findings, it can be stated that the measurement

model provides convergent validity.

Inter-factor correlation values were calculated to assess discriminant validity, and the square root of each factor's AVE value was compared with its correlation coefficient. According to the results, there is a positive relationship among the factors ($p < 0.05$), and the correlation coefficient does not exceed 0.85 (Kline, 2011). Additionally, it was observed that the correlation coefficients are smaller than the square root of the AVE value for each factor (see Table 3). In this context, the measurement model satisfies the criteria for discriminant validity. The Cronbach's alpha values for all factors are above 0.70 (see Table 2). This result indicates that there is no problem regarding internal consistency in the measurement model.

Table 3
Discriminant Validity of Constructs

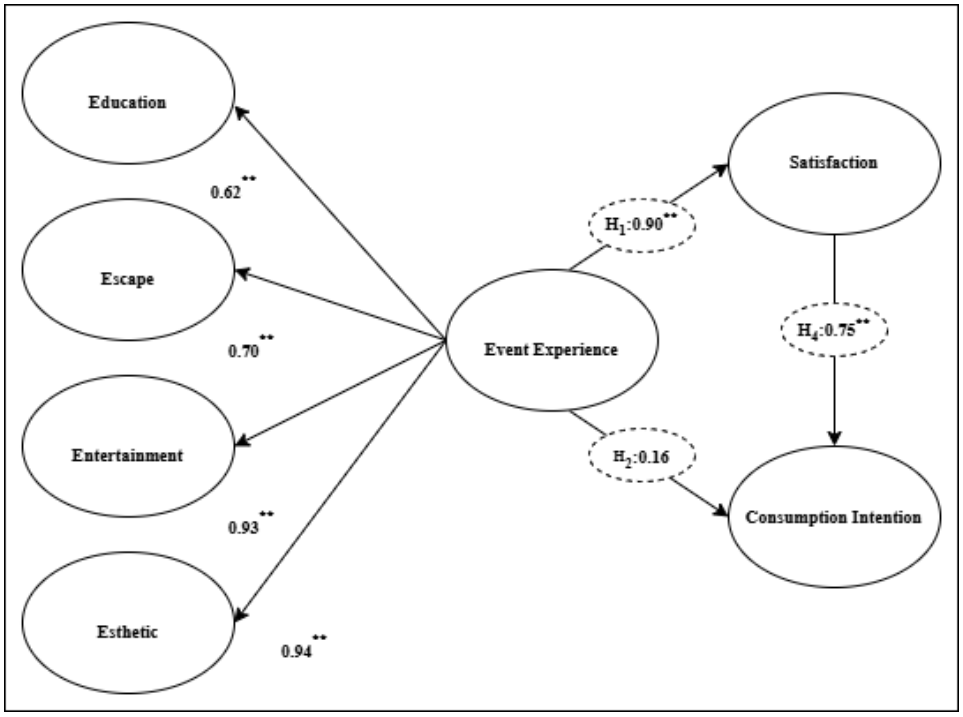
Variables	Education	Escapism	Entertainment	Esthetic	Satisfaction	Consump. intention
Education	(0.837)					
Escapism	.469**	(0.695)				
Entertainment	.563**	.575**	(0.854)			
Esthetic	.511**	.486**	.758**	(0.747)		
Satisfaction	.496**	.503**	.725**	.747**	(0.809)	
Consumption intention	.484**	.469**	.696**	.672**	.755*	(0.820)

Note. **p<0.01; () = The square root of the AVE value.

Structural Model

After conducting the structural model analysis, the results are as follows: x2 = 425,069, df = 202, x2/df = 2.104, RMSEA = 0.064, SRMR = 0.0616, CFI = 0.945, TLI = 0.937. According to the results, it was found that esports event experience has a positive effect on event satisfaction ($\beta = 0.903$, $p < 0.01$), while its effect on consumption intention was not significant ($\beta = 0.161$, $p < 0.302$). Therefore, H1 is supported, while H2 is not accepted. The high standardized regression coefficient ($\beta = 0.903$) between esports event experience and event satisfaction suggests that multicollinearity between variables may exist (Midi et al., 2010). Variance inflation factor (VIF) values were calculated to assess multicollinearity among the variables (Field, 2013). According to the analysis results, the VIF values for event satisfaction and online esports event experience were both 2.318 (tolerance = 0.431). Since this value is below the recommended threshold of 0.30, there is no multicollinearity between the variables (Zuur et al., 2010). Additionally, the results indicate that the effect of event satisfaction on consumption intention is significant ($\beta = 0.754$, $p < 0.01$). Thus, H3 is accepted (see Figure 3). The results of direct path analysis are presented in Table 4.

Figure 3
Research Model



Note. *p < 0.05; **p < 0.01.

Moreover, a mediation analysis using a bootstrapping technique with 5,000 samples revealed that EE indirectly influenced CI through SAT (β = 0. 681, 95% CI [0.383, 1.242], p = 0.001), supporting Hypothesis 4. This finding underscored the mediating role of SAT in the relationship between EE and CI. Overall, the SEM analysis provided strong empirical support for most of the hypothesized relationships. The results of indirect path analysis are presented in Table 5.

Table 4
SEM Direct Effects Path Coefficients

	Relationship	*β*	S.E.	C.R.	p	
H1	EE → SAT	.903	.119	8.82	.001**	Supported
H2	EE → CI	.161	.239	1.03	.303	Rejected
H3	SAT → CI	.754	.216	4.60	.001**	Supported

Note. ** = p<0.001; EE = Event Experience; SAT = Satisfaction; CI = Consumption Intention; β = Standardized estimate; S.E.= Standart Error; CR = Critical ratio.

Table 5
SEM Indirect Effects Path Coefficients

	Path	Bootstrap Percentile (95% CI)				
		Standardized estimate (*β*)	*Lower*	*Upper*	*p*-value	Result
H4	EE → SAT→ CI	0.681	0.383	1.242	0.001**	Supported

Note. Event experience (EE); satisfaction (SAT); consumption intention (CI); **p <.001.

The explanatory power of the hypothesized model for variation in CI was assessed using the R^2 value. The model accounted for 81% of the variance in CI, indicating that EE and SAT collectively explained a substantial portion of the variance.

DISCUSSION

This study examines the effect of event experience on satisfaction and consumption intention in online esports events. According to results, the esports spectators' perceived event experience has a positive and significant effect on event satisfaction, while it does not have a significant impact on consumption intention. Additionally, the results showed that event satisfaction had a direct significant effect on consumption intention. Notably, event satisfaction mediated the relationship between event experience and consumption intention. These findings suggest that while satisfaction serves as a critical mediating factor, underscoring its importance in shaping the consumption behaviors of online esports spectators.

One of the most important results of the study is that the event experience has a positive and significant effect on satisfaction. This result is similar to the results of Aşan et al. (2020), Lee et al. (2019), and Yazıcı et al. (2017), who found that experience areas (education, aesthetics, escape, and entertainment) have an impact on satisfaction. In addition, the result of the current study is consistent with the results of previous studies that support the idea that spectator experience impacts satisfaction in traditional sports (Slavich et al., 2018). To interpret the strength of this relationship, it is essential to clarify the two constructs conceptually. Event experience reflects the stimuli and experiential states such as entertainment, education, aesthetics, and escape encountered by online viewers during the event, whereas satisfaction represents an overall post-consumption evaluation of whether viewers' expectations were met. Accordingly, the literature emphasizes that event satisfaction is not a component of the experience but a result of it, and that there is a strong relationship between the two (Lee, 2020; Oklevik et al., 2022; Yazıcı et al., 2017). Based on this, the results of our study contribute to the literature by revealing that the experience perceived by online esports event viewers affects event satisfaction as a dependent variable.

Another noteworthy finding is that perceived experience did not have a significant positive effect on consumption intention. While this result is similar to the study results of Sinha and Singh (2023), which was conducted in the service industry and examined the relationship between the two constructs, it is different from the study results of Yazıcı et al. (2017), who examined the effect

of experience areas on consumption intention in the context of traditional sports. This result can be interpreted in light of the context-specific characteristics of the online esports viewing experience. Unlike in-venue esports spectatorship, the experience of watching esports matches online may manifest as loyalty to streaming platforms (e.g., Twitch, YouTube). Viewers may demonstrate such loyalty by following or subscribing to these platforms, enabling notifications, or making donations. Therefore, this indicator of loyalty is not solely related to the event's experiential value. Accordingly, platform-specific features (such as interface design, recommendation systems, and reward mechanisms) may also play a role in shaping online viewers' consumption intentions. In addition, another characteristic of online esports viewing behavior is that it occurs simultaneously with digital media interactions (e.g., Discord streams, online communities). This situation occurs independently of the perceived experience, which derives solely from the intrinsic characteristics of the event. Thus, the experience also encompasses viewers' evaluations of their experiences within these communities. This framework suggests that experience may influence consumption intention not directly, but indirectly through platform-specific behaviors and evaluations of virtual communities. Consequently, given that the online esports viewing experience has a multi-layered structure extending across platform and virtual community interactions, it can be logically inferred that this experience does not directly affect consumption intention without the formation of satisfaction.

According to the research results, satisfaction positively affects the intention to consume among online esports viewers. The positive and significant effect of satisfaction on consumption intention is supported by the consumer behavior literature and by previous research on sports audiences (Brown et al., 2017). The results of this study contribute to the literature by revealing that satisfaction significantly affects consumer behavior and consumption intention in esports spectators, as in traditional sports spectators.

Although the direct effect of event satisfaction on consumption intention reflects only part of the relationship among the structures addressed in this study, the mediation analysis revealed a different pathway. The analysis demonstrated that the effect of event experience on consumption intention occurs indirectly through satisfaction. This finding suggests that satisfaction is a key psychological mechanism in online esports events, transforming experiential elements into consumption intentions. The relationship between event experience and consumption intention has yielded inconsistent results in the existing literature. While some studies empirically

demonstrate the direct impact of satisfaction on the relationship between experiential elements and consumption intention (Çevik & Şimşek, 2020; Çevik et al., 2025; Kharouf et al., 2020), others have found no significant association (Navarro-Lucena et al., 2024). These mixed results imply that the transformation of experiential stimuli into behavioral outcomes does not always occur directly and that, in some instances, cognitive-affective evaluation-based variables may serve as bridges in this relationship. Indeed, in the consumer behavior literature, satisfaction is widely accepted to play a critical role in shaping behavioral intention. This study provides valuable insights into the literature by specifically investigating the mediating role of satisfaction in the relationship between online esports event experience and consumption intention. The findings offer empirical support for the mediating role of satisfaction and help explain the inconsistencies in prior research. Moreover, the results contribute to a more comprehensive and in-depth understanding of the conceptual structure of the Experience Economy Model in the context of consumer behavior within esports.

Managerial Implications

This study examines the effect of online esports viewers' event experience on event satisfaction and consumption intention. The findings indicate that the event experience does not directly influence consumption intention. Accordingly, the event experience enhances consumption intention only through satisfaction. Therefore, it is critically important for event managers, when designing the event experience, to thoroughly understand consumer expectations and to design experiential features that respond to them. In this regard, expectation-identification methods should be employed prior to the event, and after the event, the extent to which these expectations have been met, namely, whether satisfaction has translated into viewing intention, should be monitored on a regular basis. Therefore, the results obtained have important implications for stakeholders in the esports ecosystem (game producers, event organizers, broadcasters, investors, sponsors, etc.). First, live esports event viewers are among the important stakeholders for the esports industry. The increasing number of viewers and the demand for online events make the esports industry attractive for investors and sponsors (Schonauer, 2024). As a result of this interest, the revenues of the esports industry are increasing. In order to maintain and increase the revenue stream, we can state that satisfaction based on research results is an important strategy. Practitioners and event organizers can create content that can provide live esports viewers an escape, i.e., to immerse them in the event entirely. However, they can also create content where

viewers can improve or learn new things. It is also suggested that engaging content be designed to entertain the audience during the online activity and to elicit their aesthetic senses. In this way, audience satisfaction can be achieved, and consumption tendencies for future events can be positively affected.

The empirical and original theoretical contributions of this research provide important insights that stakeholders within the esports ecosystem (game producers, event organizers, broadcasters, investors, sponsors, etc.) can utilize to build a sustainable viewer base. First, the research model explains 81% of the variance in consumption intention. This indicates that meaningful practical implications can be obtained by correctly interpreting the research results.

In the context of the study's original findings, it is recommended that organizers integrate the four dimensions (entertainment, education, aesthetics, escapism) of Pine and Gilmore's Experience Economy Model into online esports events. According to the findings, entertainment was found to be the strongest dimension of the event experience. Based on this result, it is suggested that event organizers design entertainment-oriented experiences in collaboration with broadcasters. Instead of a monotonous match flow, a commentary style that includes humor and storytelling can enhance the perceived entertainment. In addition, creating surprise quizzes and reward-based prediction surveys that involve viewers in the game can be used as strategies to help them enjoy their time during the event. This may also support the education dimension, which is considered one of the important factors of online esports event experience. Also, dividing some content of the event into segments such as "beginners" and "advance," and developing educational modules suitable for each segment, would be beneficial. It is important to ensure high-quality visuals and audio for perceived aesthetic experience. However, these may not be sufficient on their own. Using of appropriate color schemes, minimal screen clutter, and readable fonts can be beneficial for a high level of perceived aesthetic experiences. Moreover, using animations in line with the general expectations of viewers and integrating these animations into sponsorship strategies may be effective in meeting the expectations of both sponsors and spectators. In terms of the escapism dimension, it is thought that strategic practices should be developed to make the viewer feel as if they are "in a different character" and "detached from daily routine." In this regard, broadcasters can offer viewers the opportunity to embody in-game characters through decision points by asking questions such as "what would you do now if you were in this role?" This application can be enhanced by integrating VR-based technologies, allowing users to adopt roles and emotionally

engage with the event.

The direct and mediating effects of satisfaction on event consumption intention in this study indicate that viewers' satisfaction plays a critical role in event organization. Within the context of the research results, the fact that the direct effect of experience on consumption intention is not significant and that this effect occurs indirectly through satisfaction can be interpreted as a sign that managers should adopt a satisfaction-oriented strategy. Accordingly, it is suggested that investments aimed at improving the experience should be designed to systematically increase consumer satisfaction. In this context, using multidimensional metrics to measure consumer satisfaction and identifying and improving factors that cause dissatisfaction will be highly beneficial.

Limitations and Future Research

Although this research makes original contributions to the literature on esports events, like all studies, it has some contextual limitations. Firstly, this research is a cross-sectional study in which the data were collected at one point in time. This means the research findings reflect a specific time frame. Therefore, new research using longitudinal data can capture changes in viewers' intentions to consume events over time. The sampling method and sample size of the study are relatively small, limiting the generalizability of the findings to a large population such as esports viewers. In this context, more generalizable results can be obtained from future studies that use a larger sample group or a probabilistic sampling method. The study concluded that the direct effect of experience on consumption intention was not significant. Future studies may test whether this effect differs depending on various samples, experience contexts, or types of consumption. This research was designed with a survey-based quantitative research method. In future studies, the antecedents of online esports experience and event consumption intention can be specifically identified through qualitative methods. This would provide a much deeper insight into the real-life relevance of the research findings. Finally, findings from similar studies involving cultural comparisons will allow us to determine whether there are differences in the relationship between viewer experience and consumption intention across audiences in developing and developed esports industries.

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Authors' Contribution

First author was responsible for data collection and interpretation of the findings, as well as contributing to the writing and critical revision of the manuscript. The second author contributed to the conceptualization and design of the study, coordinated the research process, and led the manuscript drafting. Third author participated in the data collection process, prepared the visualizations and tables, and contributed to the literature review and discussion sections. Fourth author contributed to developing the research methodology, assisted in data analysis, and edited and finalized the manuscript. All authors reviewed and approved the final version of the manuscript and agree to be accountable for all aspects of the work.

Declaration of Conflict Interest

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest regarding the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Ethics Statement

Ethical approval for this study was obtained from the Eskişehir Technical University Social and Human Sciences Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Committee (08.09.2022, No: 14/2).

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