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**ВЫПУСКНАЯ КВАЛИФИКАЦИОННАЯ РАБОТА
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ПРОБЛЕМЫ И ПЕРСПЕКТИВЫ МЕЖДУНАРОДНОГО РАЗВИТИЯ КИБЕРСПОРТА В ИРАКЕ

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ABSTRACT

PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS OF INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF ESPORTS IN IRAQ

WRC (master's thesis) consists of an introduction, three chapters, a conclusion, a bibliographic list, including 42 titles. The work includes 10 tables and 5 figures. The total volume of the WRC (master's thesis) is 89 pages.

Key words: Esports development, Iraqi eSports Federation (IQESF), International Esports Federation (IESF), Esports Middle East (ESME).

This purpose of this thesis is to assess the problems and prospects of international esports development in Iraq, focusing on the country's esports organizations. It aims to provide valuable insights and recommendations for policymakers, esports organizations, and stakeholders interested in fostering the growth of esports in Iraq.

This research results contributes to a deeper understanding of the unique challenges and aspects of esports development in Iraq, identifies organizations with growth potential, and highlights the reliance on sponsors during the growth phase. Overall, this comprehensive assessment aims to unlock Iraq's full potential in the esports industry, yielding economic, social, and cultural advantages.

The practical relevance of this study lies in offering recommendations and guidelines to help organizations improve their sustainability performance.

The proposed activities and recommendations outlined in this thesis aim to the educational impact of esports, covering cognitive skills, teamwork, leadership, and educational opportunities. It suggests strategies for addressing challenges, such as policy, infrastructure, integration, and international collaborations.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Relevance of the study. The international development of esports in Iraq presents a unique opportunity for sustainable development in the country. Over the past few decades, sustainable development has gained significant attention as the world faces increasing environmental and social challenges. Esports, as a rapidly growing industry, has the potential to contribute to the sustainable development goals of Iraq by promoting economic growth, social inclusion, and environmental sustainability [17].

Esports, the competitive world of organized video gaming, has witnessed tremendous growth and popularity on a global scale. With the advancement of technology and the rise of online platforms, esports has garnered millions of followers and become a thriving industry that transcends geographical boundaries. This research proposal aims to comprehensively analyze the esports market worldwide and explore strategies to foster the development and internationalization of esports in Iraq [44].

Understanding Esports and Its Global Impact, Esports, also known as electronic sports or eSports, refers to competitive gaming using video games. It encompasses organized multiplayer competitions between professional players, individually or as teams, across various popular genres such as multiplayer online battle arena (MOBA), first-person shooter (FPS), fighting, card, battle royale, and real-time strategy (RTS) games. Notable esports franchises include League of Legends, Dota, Counter-Strike, Valorant, Overwatch, Street Fighter, Super Smash Bros., and StarCraft, among others.

The exponential growth of esports has transformed it into a significant factor within the gaming industry. Major tournaments and events like the League of Legends World Championship, Dota 2's International, Evolution Championship Series (EVO), and Intel Extreme Masters attract millions of viewers globally. Platforms like Twitch, YouTube, and live streaming services have played a crucial role in expanding the reach of esports and cultivating a dedicated fan base [45].

The global esports market has remarkable success, with increasing viewership and revenues. By the late 2010s, it was estimated that the esports audience surpassed 454 million viewers, while revenue exceeded $1 billion. However, it is essential to acknowledge that there are regional variations in esports development, with Asia, Europe, and the Americas serving as major hubs for esports activities.

Problem statement and research rap, the international development of esports in Iraq faces challenges and opportunities. However, there is a lack of research specifically addressing the obstacles and prospects of esports development in Iraq. This research gap hinders the understanding of the unique challenges Iraq faces in fostering the esports industry and limits the availability of valuable insights for policymakers and stakeholders seeking to support its sustainable growth.

In the context of Iraq, the esports landscape is relatively nascent but holds tremendous potential for growth. By conducting a comprehensive analysis of the esports market globally, this research aims to identify key trends, market dynamics, and best practices that can be leveraged to enhance the development of esports in Iraq. The goal is to explore strategies that will enable Iraq to establish a thriving esports ecosystem and position itself as a participant at the international level [53].

The purpose of my research is to assess empirically the problems and aspects of the international development of esports in Iraq Based on this goal, the following *tasks* can be distinguished:

-        Conduct an extensive literature review to understand the global esports market, its trends, and the factors contributing to its success.

-        Analyze the current state of esports in Iraq, including the existing infrastructure, participation levels, and challenges faced by the local community.

-        Identify successful case studies and best practices from other countries that have fostered the growth and development of esports.

-       Formulate strategies and recommendations specific to Iraq to enhance the esports ecosystem, including infrastructure development, talent cultivation, regulatory frameworks, and international collaborations.

-       Assess the potential economic and social impact of a thriving esports industry in Iraq.

To achieve these objectives, this research methodology for this study will adopt a mixed-methods approach to esports development practices in organizations. The sample size will be approximately 100-120 organizations, selected through purposive sampling from various regions. Data collection will involve surveys and interviews. The quantitative aspect will be conducted on an actual event based on the hypotheses and the results will be implied in this research along with implications, with data analyzed using statistical methods. The qualitative aspect will involve a comparative case study of 10 organizations with strong esports structure and history, using content analysis to identify common themes. The collected quantitative and qualitative data will be integrated to provide a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and opportunities for improving esports development in Iraq and take it to the international level, enhancing the study's validity and reliability.

1. THEORITICAL FOUNDATIONS OF THE FORMATION AND DEVELOPMENT OF ESPORTS

1.1. CONCEPT, ESSENSE, AND MEANING OF ESPORTS

Esport is a new area in the gaming culture and is starting to become one of the most essential and popular part of video game communities, especially among adolescents and emerging adults.

In recent years, the ever-increasing popularity of esports (electronic sports) has rendered the topic area increasingly relevant for academic study. However, while scholarly interests in esports have been growing, the amount of research on the discipline is still limited. Inconsistences in the definition of esports remain, although it is generally agreed upon that esports refers to structured, computer-mediated, and competitive multiplayer-gaming with spectators [19]. Some Authors argue that esports represent a new form of competitive engagement, blurring the boundaries between sports and technology [26.35.38,39]. In contrast, others suggest that esports should not be considered a traditional sport [31,37].

While it is different from traditional team sports which takes place in the physical world, esports also relies on teamwork that entails coordination, communication, and cohesion. Similarly, member attributes, motivation, and team process are factors to be taken into consideration when discussing the characteristics of high-performing esport teams. This paper will focus on the factors that impact team dynamics in esports. By examining the group dynamics in esports, a deeper understanding of the qualities that are key to team success in esports can be developed [4].

Esports has many traditional sport components, including players, teams, managers, leagues, competitions, marquee events, endorsement deals, player transfer fees, college scholarships, and a dark side to match-fixing, doping, and gender-related disputes. Certain underlying psychological similarities are observed between esports

and established sports as athletes from both domains need a high level of sustained attention and must make important decisions under time constraints. Several global esports organizations like the International E-Sports Federation also exist to provide an institutional basis for regulation and stabilization of rules that may validate esports games as a recognized professional sport.

Many scholars [30, 42,43] seem to agree that Esports shares enough characteristics with modern sports to be considered 'real sport'. Others argue that Esports does not fit under the sport definitions [33].

As the esports growing globally, it also has seen a significant growth in the Middle East has experienced significant growth and development in recent years, with several distinctive characteristics shaping its landscape. The region has seen the emergence of a rapidly growing industry, supported by government initiatives and a strong community engagement.

Governments in the Middle East have recognized the potential of esports and have invested in its infrastructure to foster economic growth. Countries like Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates have hosted international tournaments, established esports academies, and built dedicated esports arenas. This support has helped propel the industry forward [28].

The Middle East boasts a vibrant esports community, with active participation from local enthusiasts and fans. Grassroots esports organizations have flourished, and local tournaments are regularly organized. The community engagement has contributed to the region's unique esports culture, incorporating elements of Middle Eastern traditions and customs into events and competitions. [1]

One notable aspect of esports in the Middle East is the rise of regional esports hubs. Cities like Dubai have positioned themselves as centers for esports, hosting international competitions and attracting players, teams, and organizations from across the region. These hubs further contribute to the growth and development of the industry.

Esports in the Middle East has also seen an increasing focus on gender diversity and inclusivity. Efforts have been made to provide equal opportunities for female gamers, resulting in the rise of female esports players and the organization of women-only tournaments. This emphasis on inclusivity promotes a more diverse and inclusive esports ecosystem in the region [2,40].

Mobile gaming dominates the esports scene in the Middle East, with a large portion of the population accessing esports and gaming content through smartphones. Mobile esports titles like PUBG Mobile and Clash Royale have gained significant popularity, contributing to the overall growth of the industry.

Many scholars [34,57] argue that esports in the middle east should be recognized as a legitimate sport due to the high levels of skill, strategy, and competition involved. They emphasize that esports athletes undergo rigorous training and face mental and psychological challenges like traditional athletes. While others take critical perspective, suggesting that esports can lead to negative consequences such as sedentary lifestyles, decreased physical activity, and social isolation. They advocate for a balanced approach that promotes both physical and digital engagement [48,60].

Additionally, the Middle East has a thriving esports streaming and content creation community. Local content creators and streamers have amassed substantial followings on platforms like Twitch and YouTube. Their contributions not only promote the Middle Eastern esports scene but also attract international attention and viewership [38,6].

These characteristics collectively shape the unique landscape of esports in the Middle East. With growing government support, a passionate community, cultural integration, and a focus on inclusivity, the region's esports industry is poised for further expansion and success.

In figure one, we can see that game publishers have the ability to possess multiple games and also function as organizers for the games they operate. Influencers and professional players can operate independently without being affiliated with a specific

team. The revenue sharing model encompasses a portion of subscription, donation, and advertisement revenues.[3]
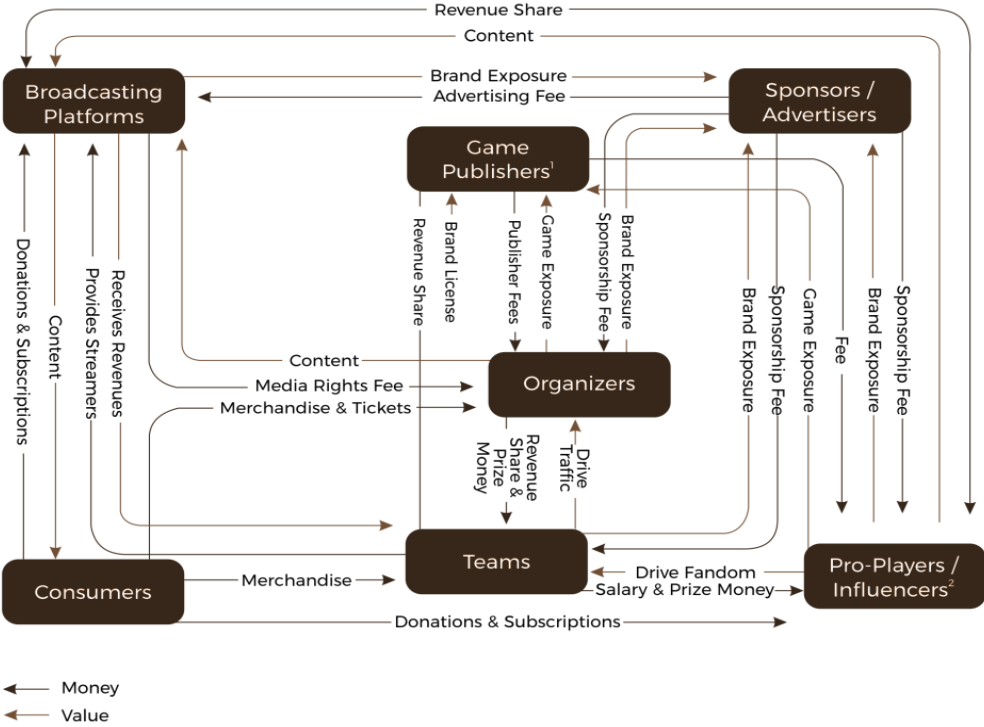
Figure 1 - Professional Esports Ecosystem [41]

Additionally, it includes a share of sponsorship and media rights revenue. Moreover, the revenue sharing arrangement also encompasses a portion of the revenue generated from in-game digital goods.

In table one, we can see the difference between esports and gaming.

Table 1 - Esports VS Gaming[1]

Characteristics	Esports	Gaming
Definition	Refers to professional and competitive video gaming in the form of	Refers to the act of playing video games

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[1] Compiled by the author according to [7,40].

Continuation of the table 1

Characteristics	Esports	Gaming
Definition	competitions played by professional gamers	
Player Characteristics	Takes the place of organized gaming competitions between team or individual professional players with a large number of bystanders and audiences	Involves playing against non-player characteristics, commonly referred to as a bot
Live matches	Promotes live matches	Does not promote live matches

In table one, we can see the difference between esports and gaming, in the 3 main aspects that are the actual definition, player characteristics, and live matches.

1.2. STAGES OF FORMATION AND DEVELOPMENT OF ESPORTS IN THE WORLD

The history of esports can be traced back to the 1950s, coinciding with the advent of video games. The first steps were taken with games such as Tennis for Two, which introduced the novelty of a two-player game, marking the beginning of competitive play 1. The 1960s saw the development of themed games, with tournaments emerging around games such as Spacewar! These games, while technologically simple, marked the beginning of competitive gaming, with Spacewar! Being one of the first esports to host the tournament [61].

The 1970s brought major developments in gaming technology and the establishment of world championships. The Intergalactic Space Olympics, which brought together more than 24 players, can be considered the beginning of esports as we know it today. During this decade, game consoles were introduced, such as the Magnavox Odyssey, connecting to television screens and setting a milestone in gaming history. In 1978, Atari hosted the first international esports tournament with the game Soccer.

The 1980s saw the standardization of game modes, squad creation, and increased player recognition. Major television networks began broadcasting the matches, and competitions such as the Space Invaders Championship drew more than 10,000 players. The decade also saw the creation of the Atari VCS Bundesliga team, which paved the way for the formation of modern esports teams. Moreover, the 1980s saw the birth of Netrek, a game that hosted up to 16 players and competed online.

The 1990s was a boom decade for esports, largely due to the advent of the internet. Games like Super Mario Bros, Tetris, Sonic, and Virtual Racing have gained worldwide popularity, and game modes have become genres, with fighting games, FPS, and racing games becoming part of the esports world [61].

The 2000s brought a technology boom, and esports began to pop up in more parts of the world. Games like Age of Empires, Starcraft, and Warcraft III have taken over the world, and the first popular MOBA, Defense of the Ancients (DotA), entered the scene thanks to the W3 1 editor.

In the 2010s, esports became a significant part of popular culture, with an increasing number of people attending esports tournaments. Games like League of Legends, Dota 2, and Starcraft II became popular, and esports was included in the 2018 Asian Games as a demonstration sport. It was in this decade that esports grew from being a niche hobby to a mainstream form of entertainment [62].

Cultural Significance Esports has had a profound impact on popular culture and has become a significant part of contemporary history. It has helped shape the way people consume entertainment and engage with technology. The rise of esports has influenced the broader gaming industry, leading to the development of more immersive gaming experiences and innovations in technology [22].

Economic Growth: The growth of the esports industry has had a significant impact on the economy. It has created numerous job opportunities, from professional players and team staff to event organizers, commentators, and content creators. Esports events generate substantial revenue through ticket sales, sponsorships, merchandise, and media rights [27]. The industry's economic impact extends to related sectors such as technology, marketing, and hospitality [23].

Social Interaction and Community Building: Esports has fostered the formation of vibrant communities and social interactions among players and fans. Online platforms, streaming services, and social media have facilitated the growth of esports communities, allowing individuals to connect, share experiences, and build friendships around a shared passion for gaming [8,42]. These communities have become spaces for collaboration, learning, and support.

Global Reach and International Competitions: Esports has transcended geographical boundaries, bringing together players and fans from around the world. International esports tournaments and championships, such as the League of Legends World Championship and The International (Dota 2), attract millions of viewers globally and showcase the talent and skill of players from different countries [25]. This global reach has contributed to the cultural exchange and understanding among diverse communities.

Inclusion and Diversity: Esports has played a role in promoting inclusivity and diversity within the gaming community. It has provided a platform for marginalized voices and underrepresented groups to participate and excel. Esports organizations and

initiatives have increasingly emphasized inclusivity, diversity, and gender equality, aiming to create a more welcoming and equal environment for all participants [10,22].

Educational and Career Opportunities: Esports has opened up educational and career opportunities in various fields. Academic institutions now offer esports programs, combining gaming and learning in areas such as game design, esports management, and streaming production. Scholarships and academic competitions related to esports have also emerged, providing avenues for students to pursue their passion while furthering their education [11,26]. Multiple studies have shown that esports has garnered substantial media attention, leading to heightened coverage across various platforms. For example, a study by Bernal-Merino (2018) [46] analyzed audience awareness and satisfaction regarding esports coverage formats and contents. The findings revealed that traditional media outlets, such as ESPN and BBC, have dedicated sections and programs for esports coverage, indicating the recognition of esports as a mainstream form of entertainment1. Furthermore, major networks, including ESPN and TBS, regularly broadcast esports events, extending the reach of esports to a broader audience.

Esports in general revolutionized many things and among them was the impact of digital platforms and streaming on esports media coverage has been widely observed. Research by Cohen (2020) [56] highlighted the dominance of Twitch as the leading platform for esports streaming, with millions of viewers tuning in to watch esports events [27]. This platform has played a significant role in increasing accessibility and engagement with esports content. Streaming platforms have also empowered professional players and streamers to build personal brands, attract sponsorships, and create additional revenue streams.

The emergence of esports journalism as a specialized field has been evident in recent years. Several studies have explored the role of esports journalists and the coverage they provide. Websites and publications like ESPN Esports, The Esports Observer, and Dot Esports have been at the forefront of comprehensive esports coverage.

These sources deliver news, interviews, and analysis related to esports events and players, shaping the narrative, and keeping the audience informed about the latest developments in the esports world.

The integration of traditional sports and esports has garnered significant attention from researchers. Various empirical studies have examined the involvement of traditional sports organizations in esports. For instance, Bernal-Merino (2018) highlighted the NBA's investment in the NBA 2K League and the establishment of esports divisions by soccer clubs like Paris Saint-Germain. These integrations have not only boosted media coverage but have also created cross-promotional opportunities and expanded the reach of both industries.

Empirical research and studies have demonstrated the substantial impact of esports on media and coverage. Esports has experienced increased media attention, with dedicated coverage from traditional outlets and broadcasting on major networks. Digital platforms and streaming, particularly Twitch, have revolutionized the accessibility and engagement with esports content. The emergence of esports journalism has provided in-depth coverage and analysis, shaping the narrative within the industry. The integration of traditional sports and esports has further propelled media coverage, creating cross-promotional opportunities and expanding the recognition of esports as a legitimate form of competitive entertainment.

1.3. MECHANISM OF FUNCTIONING OF ESPORTS AND METHODS OF PERFORMANCE EVALUATION

Esports, or competitive video gaming, has experienced significant growth and popularity in recent years. With the emergence of professional esports leagues, tournaments, and increasing prize pools, the industry has evolved into a global phenomenon. This research aims to explore the impact of esports goals on the future, examining the effects on individuals, communities, and the broader society.

Esports goals have opened up new avenues for individuals to pursue professional careers in the gaming industry. Players can aspire to become professional esports athletes, coaches, team managers, content creators, or casters. This shift has resulted in the development of robust esports ecosystems, with job opportunities in marketing, event management, production, and more [30]. The potential for long-term careers in esports has become a reality for many, positively impacting their future prospects.

The rise of esports goals has also influenced educational institutions and academia. Many universities and colleges now offer esports-related programs, scholarships, and degree tracks. These initiatives cater to the growing demand for esports professionals and provide opportunities for students to combine their passion for gaming with academic pursuits. Esports programs often emphasize areas such as game design, esports management, data analytics, and sports science [28]. This integration of esports into educational frameworks has the potential to shape the future of education and prepare students for careers in the gaming industry.

Contrary to common stereotypes, esports goals have also contributed to positive health and well-being outcomes. Professional esports organizations have recognized the importance of physical and mental well-being for players. Consequently, they invest in facilities, coaches, and resources to support the health of their athletes. The focus on physical fitness, mental resilience, and healthy lifestyle choices in the esports industry can inspire a more health-conscious future generation of gamers [29].

Esports goals have the potential to foster social connectivity and community building on a global scale. Competitive gaming brings people together, transcending geographical boundaries and cultural differences. Online communities and platforms dedicated to esports provide spaces for individuals to connect, share experiences, and build relationships [36]. This sense of belonging and camaraderie in esports communities can positively impact social relationships and contribute to the formation of lasting friendships.

In my opinion esports goals have had a profound impact on various aspects of society, shaping the future of professional opportunities, education, health, and social connectivity. As the industry continues to grow, it is important to further study and understand the implications of esports goals on individuals and communities to ensure sustainable development and positive outcomes.

2. ANALYSIS OF THE COMPLEX SYSTEM OF THE FORMATION AND DEVELOPMENT OF ESPORTS IN THE REPUBLIC OF IRAQ

2.1 PROBLEMS OF ORGANIZATION AND DEVELOPMENT OF ESPORTS IN THE REPUBLIC OF IRAQ

Iraq's economy heavily relies on oil exports, which contribute significantly to its GDP and government budget. However, this dependence on oil makes Iraq vulnerable to global oil price fluctuations. The country faces infrastructure challenges due to past conflicts and underinvestment, requiring extensive reconstruction in areas like transportation, electricity, water, and telecommunications [19].

Efforts have been made to diversify the economy by promoting sectors such as agriculture, industry, construction, tourism, and services. However, progress has been slow, and oil remains the primary driver of economic growth.

Security concerns, political tensions, and armed groups pose obstacles to economic development by deterring foreign investment and hindering business operations. Despite attempts to attract foreign investment, security risks, bureaucracy, and legal uncertainties have limited foreign capital inflows.

Youth unemployment is a pressing issue, as a significant proportion of the population is under 30. Addressing this challenge requires job creation, skill development, and utilizing the potential of the young workforce [43].

The government has implemented economic reforms to address fiscal imbalances, improve the business environment, and combat corruption. These reforms include fiscal austerity, subsidy reforms, governance improvements, and regulatory framework strengthening. However, the success of these reforms varies and warrants further examination.

The development of esports in Iraq holds significant potential to positively impact the country's economy across various dimensions. The emergence of this

industry can lead to job creation, particularly for the youth, who possess gaming skills and expertise. Employment opportunities in esports include professional gamers, coaches, event organizers, content creators, and broadcasters. The growth of esports can help address the issue of youth unemployment, generating income and improving the socio-economic well-being of individuals and their families.

Furthermore, the development of esports necessitates the establishment of specialized infrastructure. This entails constructing esports arenas, gaming centers, and facilities equipped with advanced gaming equipment and high-speed internet connectivity. The investment in such infrastructure not only stimulates economic activity but also creates jobs in construction and maintenance, while attracting domestic and international investments to the country.

The hosting of esports tournaments, championships, and conventions in Iraq can have a substantial impact on the tourism sector. These events attract both local and international visitors, leading to increased tourism revenues. Accommodation services, transportation, catering, and entertainment industries benefit from the influx of visitors, contributing to the overall economic growth of the country. Additionally, these esports events can enhance the image of Iraq, attracting tourists and potential sponsors interested in gaming and esports [26].

The development of the esports industry is closely tied to technological advancements in software, hardware, and networking. Continuous innovation in these areas stimulates economic growth and creates opportunities for Iraqi technology companies and startups. These entities can provide gaming-related services, develop gaming platforms, design gaming accessories, and contribute to gaming software development. Such advancements have positive spillover effects on other industries and foster technological progress.

Esports also opens up avenues for sponsorship and advertising. As the industry gains popularity, it attracts sponsors and advertisers seeking to reach the large and

engaged esports audience. Local businesses and international companies can invest in sponsorship deals, advertising campaigns, and partnerships with esports teams and players. This infusion of capital generates revenue, promotes local businesses, and attracts investments, thereby contributing to the overall economic development of Iraq [7].

The growth of esports requires the development of relevant skills and educational resources. Educational institutions can play a vital role by offering specialized courses and degrees focused on esports management, game design, marketing, and broadcasting. Developing a skilled workforce in the esports industry contributes to the overall development of the knowledge economy in Iraq.

To ensure the successful development of esports in Iraq, supportive government policies, investments in necessary infrastructure, widespread access to high-speed internet, and the fostering of a positive and inclusive esports culture are imperative. Additionally, promoting diversity, gender equality, and social integration within the gaming community ensures that the benefits of esports development are accessible to all segments of society [54].

The global esports industry has witnessed remarkable growth in recent years, with significant potential for economic development. According to market research, the global esports market was valued at USD 1.08 billion in 2019 and is projected to reach USD 3.6 billion by 2025, representing a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 18.3%. This growth is fueled by factors such as increasing viewership, rising investments, and the expanding ecosystem surrounding esports [27].

Esports viewership has witnessed exponential growth, with a global audience estimated at 495 million in 2020. This audience consists of both dedicated esports fans and casual viewers. The viewership of esports events, tournaments, and live streams is predominantly online, with platforms such as Twitch, YouTube Gaming, and dedicated esports streaming platforms being popular among viewers [23].

The esports industry's revenue streams are diverse. Sponsorship and advertising contribute significantly to the industry's revenue, accounting for approximately 40% of the total esports revenue. Brand sponsorships, partnerships, and advertising campaigns by companies across various sectors fuel the financial growth of the industry. Additionally, media rights, merchandise sales, ticketing, and game publisher fees contribute to the revenue streams of esports organizations and event organizers [31].

Asia-Pacific is the leading region in the global esports market, accounting for the largest share of revenue and viewership. North America and Europe are also prominent regions in terms of esports development, with a strong presence of professional leagues, teams, and esports infrastructure. These regions serve as benchmarks for the potential growth and economic impact of esports in other parts of the world [19].

Esports events attract large-scale participation and generate substantial prize pools. Major tournaments such as The International (Dota 2), League of Legends World Championship, and Fortnite World Cup have offered prize pools exceeding tens of millions of dollars. These events draw attention from both players and viewers worldwide, contributing to the overall economic growth of the esports ecosystem[38].

It is important to note that the specific statistics and figures for Iraq's esports industry may vary, given the nascent stage of development compared to established markets. However, these global statistics and trends provide insights into the potential economic impact that the growth of esports can have on Iraq's economy.

By leveraging the rapid growth of esports globally and tailoring strategies to suit the local context, Iraq can harness the economic benefits associated with the development of its esports industry. The statistics on viewership, revenue streams, and regional trends provide a framework for understanding the potential opportunities that can be explored in Iraq's esports ecosystem. These range from infrastructural and

societal issues to regulatory and financial constraints. Understanding these issues is crucial to proposing effective solutions [58].

One of the significant obstacles lies in the realm of infrastructure. While strides are being made towards broadening internet access in Iraq, consistent high-speed connectivity, which is a necessity for esports, remains a challenge. Additionally, the lack of dedicated spaces, such as gaming arenas or esports hubs, limits the possibilities for community building and the hosting of esports events. These factors impede the establishment of a vibrant esports ecosystem [40].

The societal perceptions of esports and gaming also constitute a major challenge. Esports, often not considered a 'conventional' career path, face a stigma. Parents and educators might harbor reservations about the amount of time youth spend on gaming, questioning its educational value and impact on health. Changing these attitudes is a crucial part of promoting esports development [51].

The regulatory environment in Iraq poses its own set of challenges. Currently, there are minimal regulations guiding the esports industry, which can lead to ambiguity and potential misuse. The lack of a defined structure for organizing esports events and competitions could discourage participation and investment in the sector. Moreover, intellectual property (IP) rights related to game development and distribution are not clearly defined, hindering the growth of a local game development scene.

Financial issues also represent a considerable obstacle. The esports industry is capital-intensive, requiring substantial investments in hardware, software, and human resources. In Iraq, where access to investment capital can be limited, this poses a significant challenge. The absence of sufficient domestic or foreign investment can stymie the growth of esports. Developing and improving esports in Iraq entails overcoming several challenges that hinder its growth and its ability to reach the international level. Let's analyze the key obstacles in more detail:

Infrastructure and Technology: The first challenge revolves around limited technological infrastructure and insufficient gaming facilities. Iraq may face difficulties in providing robust and reliable internet connectivity, which is crucial for online gaming and competitive esports. Additionally, the availability of dedicated gaming arenas, training centers, and esports venues may be limited. Overcoming these infrastructure limitations would require significant investment and resources to ensure the necessary technological advancements and the establishment of state-of-the-art gaming facilities [57].

Awareness and Education: Another challenge lies in the lack of awareness and understanding of esports as a legitimate sport, as well as limited educational programs focused on esports. Esports may not be widely recognized or understood in Iraq, leading to limited support and participation. Raising awareness about esports as a viable career path and a competitive sport is essential to garner broader support. Additionally, there is a need to establish specialized education and training programs that cover various aspects of esports, including game strategy, team dynamics, and event management. By enhancing awareness and educational opportunities, Iraq can foster a better understanding of esports and nurture talent within the country [42].

Financial Support and Sponsorship: The challenge of financial support and sponsorship arises due to insufficient funding opportunities and limited corporate sponsorships. Without adequate financial resources, organizing tournaments, supporting grassroots initiatives, and investing in talent development becomes challenging. Iraq needs to attract more funding dedicated to esports development. This can be achieved by creating partnerships with local and international companies that are willing to invest in the growth of esports. Securing sponsorships from corporations can provide the necessary financial support to organize events, improve infrastructure, and provide training opportunities for aspiring esports athletes [59,43].

Regulatory Environment: The absence of clear regulations and policies specific to esports, along with societal perceptions, can create uncertainty and hinder its growth. Establishing a supportive legal framework that recognizes esports as a legitimate sport is crucial for its development. Additionally, addressing issues such as player contracts, visas for international players, and intellectual property rights can contribute to a favorable regulatory environment. Overcoming negative stereotypes about gaming as a career option and implementing age-appropriate regulations are also important considerations. A well-defined and supportive regulatory environment can provide stability and confidence to investors, players, and stakeholders in the esports industry.

Talent Development and Support: Limited access to training and coaching resources, as well as inadequate focus on the health and well-being of esports athletes, can impact talent development. Developing a pool of skilled players and coaches requires access to training programs, mentors, and coaching resources. Establishing dedicated esports academies or collaborating with established international organizations can help nurture talent and provide structured development pathways. Furthermore, ensuring the physical and mental well-being of esports athletes through resources, support systems, and awareness programs is crucial for their long-term success and the sustainability of the esports industry [54].

International Exposure and Competitiveness: Limited international exposure is a significant challenge that Iraq may face. Due to various factors such as travel restrictions, lack of resources, and limited recognition, participating in international esports competitions can be difficult. To overcome this challenge, Iraq needs to encourage international collaborations, host regional tournaments, and foster relationships with global esports communities. Building networks and partnerships with international esports organizations can facilitate the exchange of knowledge, talent, and experiences, ultimately increasing international exposure and enhancing competitiveness [55].

Addressing these challenges requires a multi-faceted approach involving government support, private sector involvement, and community engagement. Potential solutions include:

- Government support: The government can play a crucial role by developing a national esports strategy, providing financial incentives, and creating a favorable regulatory environment to facilitate the growth of the industry [49].

- Public-private partnerships: Collaborating with private sector entities, such as technology companies, gaming companies, and sponsors, can help secure funding, infrastructure, and expertise to support esports initiatives.

- Educational initiatives: Introducing esports-focused educational programs at universities and schools can foster talent development and create career pathways for aspiring esports professionals. This can involve partnerships between educational institutions and industry experts to ensure the curriculum is up-to-date and relevant [51].

- Community engagement: Building a strong esports community through local tournaments, grassroots initiatives, and player associations can create a supportive ecosystem, raise awareness, and encourage participation. Engaging with the gaming community, organizing local events, and establishing platforms for networking and collaboration can foster a sense of belonging and help grow the esports culture in Iraq.

By addressing these challenges and implementing appropriate strategies, Iraq has the potential to develop and improve its esports ecosystem. By tapping into the talent and passion of its gaming community, Iraq can contribute to the growth of the global esports industry and take its esports scene to the international level [50].

2.2 EVALUATION OF THE DYNAMICS AND PECULIARITIES OF CYBERSPORT DEVELOPMENT IN THE REPUBLIC OF IRAQ

The Republic of Iraq has been witnessing the growing popularity and development of esports, also known as cybersport, in line with the global trend. The country has a vibrant gaming community, with many Iraqis actively participating in various video

games across different platforms. This participation extends beyond casual gaming, as a significant number of players aspire to compete professionally. However, specific information regarding the evaluation of the dynamics and peculiarities of cybersport development in Iraq is limited. The progress made in improving digital infrastructure, including increased internet penetration, plays a crucial role in facilitating the growth of esports.

Esports has multiple bodies who represent the industry as explained in figure 2, such as organizations that are professional teams that compete in video game tournaments, while esports federations regulate and oversee the industry. Esports agencies manage players, negotiating contracts and securing sponsorships. Esports leagues provide structured competitions, and tournaments are standalone events where teams or individuals compete for prizes.
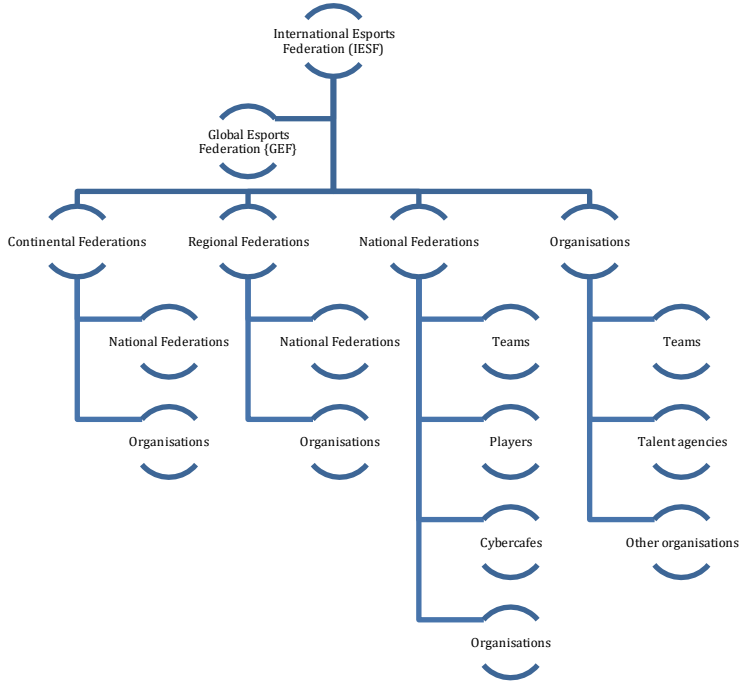

Figure 2- Esports bodies chart[2]

a)   eSports Federations

The eSports Federations is a combination of Federations who are recognized in their countries by the Olympic committee or the Ministry of Sports and Youth.

Each country can have many federations but only one can be recognized.

The national federation should be recognized by the regional, continental, international and global federations in order to work anywhere outside the country.

- The IESF (International eSports Federation)

The IESF was created to the unite those federations under its wings as the International Federation.[9]

The IESF is a global organization based in South Korea whose mission it is to have electronic sports recognized as a legitimate sport.

It has also just revealed an agreement with the Asian Electronic Sports Federation, which saw the pair sign a Memorandum of Understanding with the objective of further promoting esports.

The International Esports Federation was founded on August 8, 2008, by nine esports associations from Denmark, South Korea, Germany, Austria, Belgium, The Netherlands, Switzerland, Vietnam and Taiwan, and held its first general meeting in November of the same year.

- The Global Esports Federation (GEF)

The Global Esports Federation is a non-governmental organization that convenes the world's esports (or competitive video gaming) community. It was established on December 16, 2019, and is headquartered in Singapore, where it is a registered society under the Singapore Registry of Societies.[16]

The GEF is a convening body for the esports ecosystem. The mission of GEF is to "cultivate competition along with developing communities and the connection between sport, esports, and technology". The organization set up the GEF Events Properties, consisting of the Global Esports Games, Global Esports Tour, and a community initiative series. It also runs GEFcon — Global Esports Federation

Convention — a thought leadership and ideation incubator platform, and GEFestival, an event around esports culture, art, music, fashion, entertainment, and youth.

According to its constitution, Member Federations from around the world can be a part of the GEF. As of January 2023, there are 16 Commissions and two Councils that guide the work of the GEF. The first and current President of the GEF is Chris Chan of Singapore.

-    The Asian Electronic Sports Federation ("AESF")

The Asian Electronic Sports Federation is the sole competent authority for electronic sports throughout Asia and recognized by Olympic Council of Asia ("OCA") as such.

Esports was contested at the Fifth Asian Indoor and Martial Arts Games in Ashgabat, Turkmenistan, in September 2017 and appeared as a demonstration event at the 2018 Asian Games in Indonesia, and then included as an official medal event for the 2019 Southeast Asian Games in Manila, Philippines. The 2019 SEA Games saw the inclusion of three PCs, two mobile and one console games.

-    The Arab Esports Federation

The Arab Esports Federation is the governing body of esports for 18 national esports associations across the Middle East and wider Arab region. The federation with its secretariat in the UAE is headquartered in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia and is led by Prince Faisal bin Bandar bin Sultan.

b)   eSports Teams

Another way to move towards the regional and international market is to form national teams that would represent the country outside and make sure that it is well known in the world of eSports.

This would work two ways, first would be attracting the big sponsors from other countries to Iraq, where they'd host events, tournaments and other eSports activities to increase the market size and ensure higher reach.

The second way is to participate in the regional and international tournaments and eSports related activities to gain higher experience, get acquainted with the international teams, and win prizes.

Just from prize, top teams have generated more than million dollars as explained in figure 3. While they have many other factors of money generation, such as merchandises, donations, sponsorships…etc.

Prize Money in 2023 vs. Team
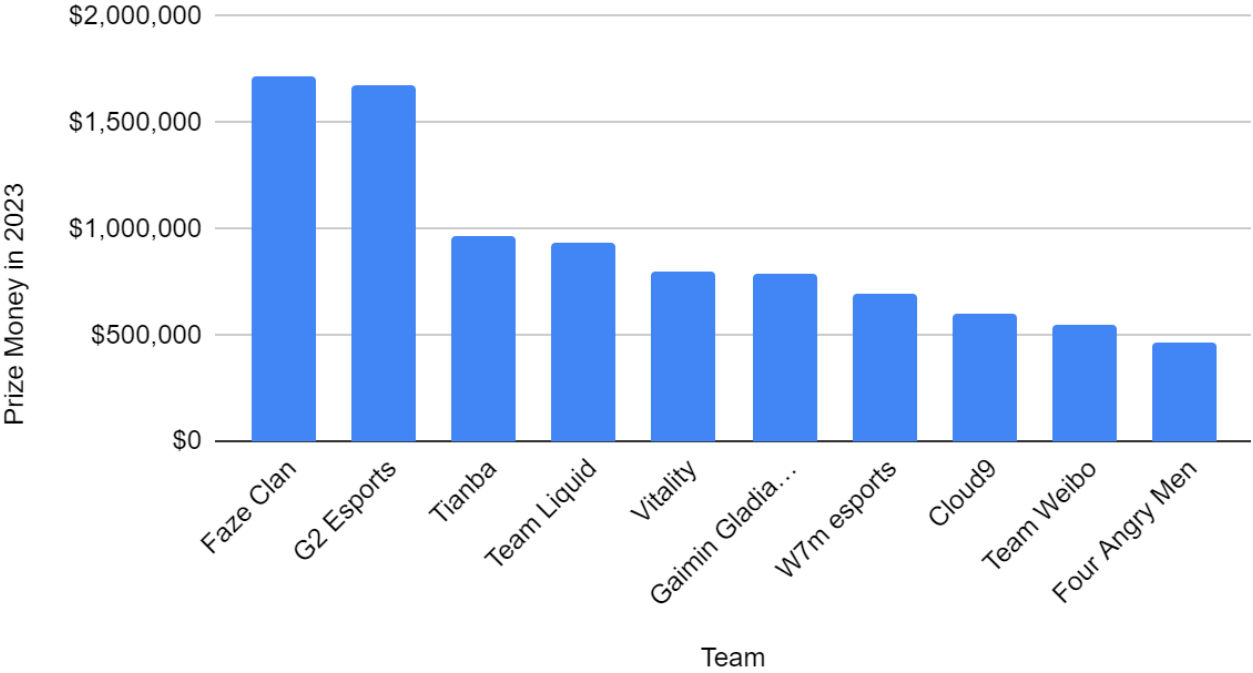
Figure 3 – Prize money by team in 2023

Teams are usually formed by different kind of players. In the world of eSports there are both recreational players and professional players. The professional players range from YouTube and Twitch streamers to pro-players who make a living off gaming. These professional players are usually involved with an eSports organization in some way; streamers might be sponsored by an organization, while pro-players join organizations through contracts and can be traded to other organizations. Companies started making teams for different games to represent and advertise the company at the same time in the eSports tournaments. Some other companies are just partnering with

pre-made teams, such as SteelSeries, one of the most popular gaming accessories in the world, they are sponsoring many teams all over the world, in return for their name to be visible in the official and non-official tournaments.

The first 2 teams were created in 1997, "4Kings" and "SK". 4Kings - or "Four Kings" was a professional esports organization based in the United Kingdom. The team had players competing in Return to Castle Wolfenstein, Enemy Territory: Quake Wars, Quake III, Warcraft III, Unreal Tournament, Counter-Strike, Team Fortress 2 and Shootmania. One of the most famous members of 4Kings is Warcraft III player Grubby. Philip Wride was a manager of the team as well as Jason Potter being general manager.

SK Gaming - is a professional esports organization based in Germany that has teams across the world competing in different titles. SK is particularly known for their success in Counter-Strike (CS) tournaments. SK's Brazilian CS team won the ESL One Cologne 2016 Major. SK currently has players and teams competing in League of Legends and Hearthstone. SK Gaming was founded in 1997 by a small group of Quake players in Oberhausen.

Also, there is the current highest earning team in the world with the most won tournaments in various games, team Liquid with total earnings of $36.6 Million, and a total wins of tournaments of 1938.

Now Team Liquid is one of the most respected and successful brands in eSports history, but this has not always been so.

Originally a dutch StarCraft: Brood War clan was founded by Victor "Nazgul" Goossens in 2000. With the release of StarCraft II: Wings of Liberty (2010), Team Liquid signed its first professional players. In 2012, Team Liquid recruited a North American Dota 2 team, marking the first venture into multi-genre management.

Organisation did not stop there and entered some new disciplines. However, Team Liquid's turning point happened only in January 2015, when it officially merged with Team Curse under the Liquid banner, bringing on former Curse staff and teams.

Since September 2016 Team Liquid has been a part of aXiomatic - an entertainment and sports management company. In 2017 TL (through aXiomatic) was chosen by The Walt Disney Company to be one of the projects that would participate in the 'Disney Accelerator' programme and get support.

Over the years Team Liquid has won numerous tournaments in different disciplines, but the most important one was The International 2017. From August 2017 to the present days Team Liquid has been ranked first in the list of organisations with the highest overall prize money earnings.

c)   Talent Agencies

eSports agencies are yet another important factor, they are the way for most players to go outside and play with international teams. They play a big factor for the national federation when participating in the international events or when hosting them by providing info on talents such as pro players, commentators, castors, streamers and so on, or even connect both parties to work together for a certain fee [5].

To deeply explain how agencies work, we can start by comparing eSports to other spots and their agencies.

Professional football players have agents. Professional basketball players have agents. Professional golfers have agents. It only makes sense for professional esports players to have agents, too. In this industry that only has continued to grow over the past few years, legal representation for players is important now more than ever.

Now more than ever there comes the need for esports players to have agents. However, as of now, only 10 to 15 percent of esports players having an agent or some other form of representation.

Like those of professional athletes, an esports agent's job is to help their client to the best of their ability and look after their client's best interests. The main job is to represent the client and make sure the player gets the best deals.

Esports agents are professionals that handle everything from client contract negotiations with pro clubs, interfacing with media, and providing public relations, data mining, and analytics. In addition, the role of an eSports agent is to ensure sure the client achieves fair contractual market value for their services to a team, at a minimum.

Here is an example of 3 of the most popular eSports Agencies:

- Viral Nation - Viral Nation claims to be the world's largest influencer talent agency, professionally securing brand and endorsement deals for social media's top influencers. Their influencers cover many genres, including eSports.

- UTA Esports - UTA is one of the world's leading talent and entertainment companies. They help the world's most inspiring people make the world a more inspiring place and represent pioneering artists, storytellers, entertainers, and brands. UTA Esports represents world-ranked pro athletes and streaming talent and helps form partnerships between prominent talent and global brands.

- Evolved - Evolved works with eSports players from around the world, elevating passions into careers. They claim to have negotiated more player deals than anyone on the planet. They work hard on behalf of eSports players to source and negotiate professional opportunities.

Event Organizers - Esports event's organizers play an important part in the field of eSports just like any other spots. And they would be the first target for any national federation who'd won't to go international. There are many ways to work with event organizers and gain benefits, starting with featuring their current events and gain public reach, or partner with them to host international event either inside the country or on another one.

Esports event organizers are incredibly important. They also vary in scope, experience, and success rate, among other things.

Esports as a whole is still in its infancy when it comes to many different aspects, and event organizing is definitely one of the elements where you can notice its grassroots nature.

Some events are monumental. They're big, loud, entertaining, and are akin to regular sports; they're experiences in every sense of the word. They "attack" all of your senses and are seismic in nature. And some are very expensive as shown in figure 4.

Figure 4 – Most expensive esports tournaments organizers [10]

From branding, marketing, shout casting, sound, light, and stage design, all the way to the small, nuanced things many people don't even think about and yet unconsciously notice. That's when you have a veteran squad organizing an esports event. Other times, however, the fans and viewers aren't as lucky.

At worst, these events are slow, filled with technical issues, not enough engagement (especially on-site), the breaks are excruciatingly long, and you just feel like everything was done in haste without much thought or care.

Fortunately, the best event organizers out there have a more meticulous, detail-oriented approach which certainly allowed esports to become as entertaining and popular as it is today.

So, let's focus on some of the best event organizers in esports. Obviously, no such list can be definitive, meaning someone's bound to be left out. That said, the organizers listed below have more than earned our trust (and views) over the years.

Esports Event Organizers (ESL)

One of the biggest esports organizers in the world. ESL has been chugging along for almost two decades. One of their mottos "committed to pushing the boundaries" might sound like marketing speak, but it doesn't make it any less true.

They have offices all around the world which translates into a global footprint and are well-known for organizing some of the best and most-watched events in all esports.

They're the second-largest esports company that's currently broadcasting on Twitch (right behind Riot Games) and have partnered with the who's who of the esports realm to bring thrilling events into existence.

At the time of this writing, they're basically organizing events for every major esport out there except for League of Legends.

-       Major League Gaming

The history of MLG is long and storied. What began in 2002 eventually grew into what can rightfully be deemed as a global esports-focused network.

Because of its success, MLG was bought by Activision Blizzard in 2016 which means that today, it is the go-to place for all their content and many esports competitions.

Call of Duty League, Overwatch League, BlizzCon, Overwatch World Cup, Hearthstone Grandmasters, and StarCraft 2 WCS are all streamed on MLG.

The whole idea behind this acquisition was to create the "ESPN of video games" according to Activision CEO Robert Kotick.

Did they succeed? It's still too early to tell, but they've definitely made a couple of fascinating moves over the years.

-       ELEAGUE

ELEAGUE, much like ESL and DreamHack, is yet another esports organizer that needs no introduction.

They've hosted some of the biggest and most important tournaments in the world, including two CS:GO Majors, along with Overwatch, Call of Duty, Dota 2, FIFA, and Rocket League tournaments.

Their production is top-notch and their focus on storytelling and building the superstars of tomorrow garnered them worldwide acclaim in a very short amount of time.

ELEAGUE was founded in 2016 and yet it's already one of the most important and respected esports brands and organizers in the world.

- Dreamhack

DreamHack is an esports phenomenon. They organize live events, exhibitions, tournaments, live music events, LAN parties, cosplay competitions, and everything in between.

They've pioneered esports and have been trailblazing ever since the mid-nineties. Even though many years have passed, they're still one of the largest esport-focused content producers in the world.

- Riot Games

It's not so rare for a game developer to organize their own events, but one can argue that no one does it better than Riot Games.

The studio behind League of Legends has done an awe-inspiring job over the years and is somehow still able to blow our minds every so often.

Watching League in large-scale venues is an experience unlike any other.

The fact that the 2017 World Championship final was held at the Beijing National Stadium just goes to show how much esports has grown over the years.

Tickets are often scooped up mere minutes after going on sale, regardless if it's the World Championship, Mid-Season Invitational, or a Spring/Summer Split final.

With top-notch production, spectacular visuals, and a penchant for mind-blowing live performances, Riot Games stands out as one of the best (and most consistent) live event organizers in all of esports.

Therefore, there are online eSports organizers/platforms, where small teams, casual players can host their event online on those platforms, some platforms offer their services for free while others tend to take a percentage of the total budget, usually the standard industry budget is 20%.

- Esports organizations in Iraq

In the year of 2010, an Iraqi team participated in the world championship of the game Battlefield: Bad Company 2 which was organized the International Esports Foundation. The was qualified to the finals that was hosted in Baku, Azerbaijan, but then were shocked after arriving that they can't participate in the finals because there is no national eSports federation backing them. The team decided to find the federation the moment they arrived back home, they took a letter of invitation from the president of the international eSports Federation to create a national eSports Federation in Iraq. But with the known political issues in Iraq by then and still, the process of creating the federation took a total of 9 years until the foundation was recognized locally, regionally, and internationally.

In 2019 the biggest accomplishment was getting the recognition from the international eSports Federation to recognize the Iraqi eSports Federation as the legal and official federation in Iraq. This was a ticket to the outside world for all gamers, it was a dream that came true to those who were playing competitively and hoping to make a career from games [14].

The Iraqi eSports Federation since then has organized more than 50 competitive tournaments, prize pool ranging from $5000 to 200000$. Participated in many world championships and the national team of the game Player Unknown Battle Ground too just recently the third place in the world championship winning $330000.

The federation also got the 2nd highest sponsorship from one of the biggest national telecommuting companies with a sum of $750000 for one year contract coming after the national football federation which has a sponsorship of one million dollars.

The federation has many plans to develop the esports field and community in Iraq.

- Starting with culture courses to teach the young ones how to do time management and not to have gaming take over their lives entirely to ensure the right practice of eSports.

- Bringing gender equality and the rights to the female gender to participate in all kinds of tournaments equally with other genders.

- Taking the next step which is going international by hosting and organizing world championships.

Since the establishment of the Iraqi eSports Federation in 2019, the gaming community has witnessed a surge in activity. Players have come together to form teams, clubs, and eventually organizations consisting of multiple teams and clubs. These newly formed organizations have actively participated in national esports events and expanded their reach to compete at regional and international levels. With the growing interest in esports, major companies in Iraq have recognized its potential and started offering support to these organizations through sponsorships. However, a significant challenge that persists is the limited population of players.

Additionally, some esports game publishers, like EA, have not acknowledged Iraq and consequently prevent Iraqi players from joining their global events. This lack of recognition poses a hurdle for Iraqi gamers in fully engaging with the global esports community.

a) Iraqi eSports Federation

They are the first Iraqi non-governmental organization dedicated to the field of electronic sports and serving the interests of players who engage in online gaming and frequent gaming clubs. The organization was established in 2011 by a group of players

from the renowned Iraqi-Gamerz Clan, who originally organized in 2008 as the first Iraqi team to participate in global E-Sport competitions. The organization comprises an elite group of players and specialists in the field of electronic sports, each possessing university degrees in networks, computer science, programming, business administration, projects, and strategic planning.

This diverse team brings a wealth of knowledge and expertise to approach electronic sports comprehensively and provide exceptional support to the gaming community. Their journey has been marked by constant evolution, adapting to the dynamic landscape of electronic sports. Over the years, they have witnessed significant growth and development in the industry, both globally and within Iraq. Their unwavering commitment lies in promoting a supportive and inclusive environment for gamers, nurturing their talents, and encouraging their pursuit of excellence. Through various initiatives and programs, they strive to elevate the recognition and acceptance of electronic sports within Iraqi society.

They firmly believe in the immense value of electronic sports as not just a form of entertainment, but also as a platform for personal growth, skill development, and potential career opportunities. As an organization, they are dedicated to advancing the field of electronic sports in Iraq and providing valuable resources to the community. They actively seek opportunities to collaborate with local and international partners, leveraging their collective expertise and experience to create impactful projects and initiatives.

Looking ahead, they are committed to expanding their services, reaching more players, and empowering the next generation of Iraqi gamers. By fostering a supportive ecosystem, offering guidance, and creating opportunities for growth, they aim to propel the Iraqi electronic sports scene onto the global stage, showcasing the immense talent and potential that the nation possesses.

b)   Sumarian eSports

Sumarian eSports stands out as one of the pioneering organizations in Iraq's esports landscape. Their early establishment as an esports federation has paved the way for their success. Over time, they have achieved remarkable accomplishments, including winning multiple national championships, showcasing the skill and dedication of their players. The partnership between Sumarian eSports and Zain esports, through a sponsorship contract, demonstrates the growing interest and support from major companies in the esports industry in Iraq. This collaboration not only provides financial backing but also signifies recognition and validation of Sumarian eSports' talent and potential. Furthermore, Sumarian eSports has taken an inclusive approach by organizing the first-ever esports championship for people with disabilities. This initiative has not only created opportunities for disabled gamers but has also gained recognition and reach at the regional level, highlighting the importance of inclusivity in esports. Sumarian eSports has undoubtedly played a significant role in the development and promotion of esports in Iraq, setting a positive example for other organizations and fostering a thriving gaming community within the country [25].

c) Nigma Galaxy

Their team initially consisted of a group of friends who played the game purely for fun. At the beginning, they had no specific goals or ambitions since there were no tournaments in which they could participate. However, everything changed when the PMCO (PUBG Mobile Club Open) tournament was introduced. They decided to register and participate, putting their skills to the test in pursuit of a favorable position. Initially, their primary focus was not on professionalism or aspiring to become a competitive team. They were unaware of the existence of such opportunities within the PUBG Mobile game. However, as the field of esports in PUBG Mobile started to develop around 2018-2019, they began to closely follow tournaments and formulate strategic plans based on scheduled competitions. With each championship they participated in, their experience grew, and they gradually established themselves as the top team in the Middle East region. Their impressive performance attracted attention from various organizations that

recognized their potential and offered support to fulfill their needs for more significant endeavors. Eventually, playing, training, and competing in PUBG Mobile became their sole profession. As their journey unfolded, they embraced the competitive nature of esports, dedicating themselves to honing their skills, developing strategies, and maintaining a high level of performance. Their success not only elevated their team but also contributed to the overall growth and recognition of esports within their region.

d)   Ashur eSports

Ashur Club is an Iraqi organization that focuses on the field of electronic sports. They are committed to supporting and nurturing young talents in this domain, with a strong determination to elevate the country's reputation and represent it in the best possible manner due to the promising future it holds.

The Ashur Electronic Sports Club was established on June 1, 2021, by a group of passionate individuals. The official opening was announced on July 10, 2021, marking the beginning of the club's journey to achieve remarkable feats in the field of esports, a journey that continues to this day.

The club encompasses multiple teams specializing in various games, which have achieved notable accomplishments and victories at both the local and international levels. The club actively supports these teams through organizing events, providing training sessions, and offering the necessary assistance to players [20].

Ashur Club has established various administrative departments, including graphic designers, production personnel, editors, content creators, social media officials, and team leaders. These departments work collaboratively to ensure the smooth functioning of the club's operations.

One of the core aspirations of Ashur Electronic Sports Club is to promote and popularize electronic sports culture within Iraqi society and globally. They aim to accomplish this by educating individuals about this field, which has vast potential in economic, intellectual, and other realms. The club is fully committed to providing

comprehensive support to all players, facilitating their growth and preparing them to compete in world championships.

Ashur Club's ultimate vision is to foster the widespread acceptance and understanding of electronic sports while empowering players to reach their full potential. Through their efforts, they seek to contribute to the advancement and global recognition of esports [17.21].

-       Esports statistics in Iraq

According to projections, the revenue in the Video Games market is expected to reach US$417.00m by 2023, with an annual growth rate (CAGR 2023-2027) of 6.33%. This growth is anticipated to result in a market volume of US$533.00m by 2027. The number of users in the Video Games market is expected to reach 14.37m by 2027, with a user penetration rate of 30.2% in 2023, which is projected to increase to 30.4% by 2027. The largest segment in the market is Mobile Games, which is estimated to have a market volume of US$265.40m in 2023. In terms of global comparison, China is predicted to generate the most revenue, with an estimated revenue of US$109,200.00m in 2023.

The average revenue per user (ARPU) in the Video Games market is projected to be US$32.02 in 2023. These statistics provide insights into the expected growth and market dynamics within the Video Games industry [12,24].

a)   Players awards from the international championships

There have been 114 Iraqi esports players that have been awarded a total of $1,235,228.30 USD in prize money across 153 tournaments. The highest awarding game was PLAYERUNKNOWN'S BATTLEGROUNDS Mobile with $1,000,912.33 USD won, making up 81.03% of all earnings by Iraqi players. Reshar "FREAK" Dawid is the highest earning Iraqi player with $176,896.68 USD in prize money won overall, all of which was won from playing in PLAYERUNKNOWN'S BATTLEGROUNDS Mobile tournaments [22].

b)   Game awards from the international championships

The highest awarding game was PLAYERUNKNOWN'S BATTLEGROUNDS Mobile with $1,000,912.33 USD won, making up 81.03% of all earnings by Iraqi players [13].

As for KPIs, table 2 and 3 will explain main indicators that were total views, total engagement, total reach, and total participants.

Table 2 – National Championships KPI Q1[3]

KPI	LOL	Fortnite	PUBG PC	PUBG Mobile
Total Views	143,644	48,389	85,497	128,399
Total Engagement	30,236	47,510	44,078	34,519
Total Reach	559,273	463,718	272,458	562,790
Total Participants	238	489	72	724

National championships key performance indicators for the first four games were higher than expected. As for the other titles of the championship in which were more competitive with higher KPI results. Table 3 will explain them the main aspects that are total views, total engagement, total reach, and total participants. table 3 will explain them.

Table 3 – National Championships KPI Q2[4]

KPI	eFootball	Valorant	Bali & Ryadh Qualifiers	Rainbow 6: Siege	Total
Total Views	42,483	22,414	8,020	16,619	495,465
Total Engagement	34,214	44,227	15,844	22,075	272,703
Total Reach	361,333	180,388	200,090	183,642	2,783,692
Total Participants	1,463	187	2,000	180	5,353

The tables 2 and 3 are showing key performance indicators (KPIs) for different championships hosted in Iraq in 2022[15]:

a)   Total Views:

-     The total views column indicates the number of times the championships' content was viewed across different platforms or mediums.

-     The highest number of views was recorded for the "LOL" championship with 143,644 views, followed by "PUBG Mobile" with 128,399 views.

-     The lowest number of views was for the "Bali & Ryadh Qualifiers" with 8,020 views.

-     Overall, the championships received a total of 495,465 views.

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[4] Made by the author

b)   Total Engagement:

- The total engagement column represents the level of interaction, involvement, or participation of viewers with the championships' content.

- "Fortnite" recorded the highest engagement with 47,510, closely followed by "eFootball" with 44,227 engagements.

-        The lowest engagement was observed in the "Bali & Ryadh Qualifiers" with 15,844 engagements.

-        The total engagement for all championships combined was 272,703.

c)   Total Reach:

-        The total reach column signifies the overall audience reached by the championships' content.

-        The championship with the highest reach was "LOL" with 559,273, followed by "PUBG Mobile" with 562,790.

-        The lowest reach was for the "Rainbow 6: Siege" championship with 183,642.

-        The total reach across all championships was 2,783,692.

d)   Total Participants:

-        The total participants column indicates the number of individuals who actively took part in the championships.

-        The "Bali & Ryadh Qualifiers" had the highest number of participants with 2,000, whereas "PUBG Mobile" had the second-highest with 724 participants.

-        The lowest number of participants was for the "Rainbow 6: Siege" championship with only 180 participants.

-        In total, there were 5,353 participants across all championships.

Overall Analysis:

These KPIs provide insights into the performance and impact of the championships hosted in Iraq in 2022. The analysis reveals the following:

a)	Popularity and Reach:

-	The "LOL" championship emerged as the most popular, with the highest number of views, engagement, and reach.

-	"PUBG Mobile" and "eFootball" also garnered significant attention with considerable views, engagement, and reach.

b)	Diverse Audience:

-	The championships attracted a diverse audience as indicated by the wide range of participants across different games.

-	The large number of participants in the "Bali & Ryadh Qualifiers" suggests its popularity among competitive gamers.

c)	Engagement and Interaction:

-	"Fortnite," "eFootball," and "Valorant" recorded high levels of engagement, indicating active involvement and interaction from viewers.

-	This suggests that the content of these championships resonated well with the audience, resulting in increased engagement.

d)	Variation in Reach:

-	The reach of the championships varied significantly, with "LOL" and "PUBG Mobile" having the highest reach.

-	The "Rainbow 6: Siege" championship had relatively lower reach, indicating a smaller but potentially dedicated fan base.

These KPIs provide valuable insights into the success and impact of the championships, highlighting the popularity of certain games and the engagement they generated among viewers and participants.

-	Descriptive statistics:

Descriptive statistics play a crucial role in analyzing and understanding data related to eSports in Iraq. These statistical techniques provide a means to summarize and present data in a meaningful and comprehensible manner. Several key measures and metrics are commonly used in descriptive statistics.

Central tendency measures, such as the mean and median, help describe the typical or central value of a dataset. The mean is calculated by summing all the values and dividing by the total number of values, while the median represents the middle value when the data is ordered.

Variability measures, such as the standard deviation and range, quantify the spread or dispersion of data points within a dataset. The standard deviation measures how far the values deviate from the mean, providing insights into the data's variability. The range, on the other hand, represents the difference between the highest and lowest values in the dataset.

Distribution refers to how the values are distributed within a dataset. Metrics like skewness and kurtosis are used to characterize the shape of the distribution. Skewness measures the asymmetry of the distribution, while kurtosis describes its peakedness or flatness. Visual representations, such as histograms, box plots, and scatter plots, are effective tools to illustrate these descriptive statistics and reveal trends in the data.

In the context of eSports in Iraq, descriptive statistics can aid in analyzing various aspects, such as player performance, team rankings, audience engagement, and tournament results. These statistical techniques are widely employed across industries, including business, healthcare, and the social sciences, to gain insights and facilitate decision-making processes.

- Distribution of Demographics

The distribution of demographics is an essential aspect to consider when studying eSports in Iraq. Understanding the demographic characteristics of participants and audience members can provide valuable insights into the target market, potential growth

opportunities, and strategies for engaging a wider audience. While I don't have access to real-time data, I can provide a general overview of the factors typically examined in the distribution of demographics in eSports research.

In our sample, we had 5.535 total participant divided as below in the table:

Table 4 - Age[5]

Age	Percentage
12 - 18	35%
18 - 30	44.5%
30 - 40	16%
40 and above	5%
All	100%

Age Distribution: In the table 4, I'm analyzing the age distribution helps determine the predominant age groups involved in eSports in Iraq. It can provide insights into the potential market size and the specific age segments that show the most interest in eSports.

Table 5 - Gender[6]

Gender	Percentage
Female	67%
Male	33%
All	100%

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[5] Made by the author
[6] Mae by author

Gender Distribution: In table 5 I'm investigating the gender distribution sheds light on the level of gender representation within the eSports community in Iraq. This analysis can identify any gender disparities and inform efforts to promote inclusivity and diversity within the industry.

Table 6 - Cities [7]

Baghdad	45%
Erbil	15%
Sulaymaniyah	15%
Basrah	10%
Other	15%
All	100%

Geographic Distribution: In table 6, I'm examining the geographic distribution allows for understanding the regional distribution of eSports participation and engagement within Iraq. It can highlight areas with high levels of interest and help identify potential growth regions.

Table 7 - Education [8]

Grade	Percentage
Highschool	35%
Bachelor	20%
Master's	18%

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[7] Made by the author
[8] Made by the author

Continuation of table 7

Grade	Percentage
PhD	2%
Other	25%
All	100%

Socioeconomic Factors: In table 7 I'm exploring socioeconomic factors, such as education level, income, and occupation, provides insights into the socio-economic backgrounds of eSports participants and fans. This information can help tailor marketing strategies and identify potential target groups.

Table 8 - Race[9]

Race	Percentage
Arab	75%
Kurd	20%
Race	Percentage
Turk	2%
Other	3%
All	100%

Ethnicity and Culture: In table 8 I'm investigating the ethnicity and cultural background of eSports participants and fans within Iraq can reveal insights into the

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[9] Made by the author

diversity and inclusivity of the eSports community. It can also inform strategies to promote cultural appreciation and understanding.

2.3 FEATURES AND STRATEGIES OF DEVELOPMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF IRAQ

As the Republic of Iraq is characterised by a significant population of digitally-literate youth, the potential for developing a competitive esports sector is considerable. However, this potential will only be realised through a strategic approach that aligns with the nation's specific demographic and infrastructural realities.

While the development of internet infrastructure in Iraq remains a challenge, recent advances in connectivity are promising. The establishment of an esports ecosystem relies heavily on the ubiquitous availability of high-speed internet, thus rendering this progress indispensable. Furthermore, Iraq's rich and unique cultural history offers a plethora of narratives that can be harnessed in the creation of locally-inspired esports content. The existing gaming market, albeit nascent, could act as a foundation for the esports industry's expansion.

A key strategic consideration is the development of both digital and physical infrastructure. The digital requirements include a robust network infrastructure supporting high-speed internet connections, while the physical requirements involve dedicated spaces such as gaming arenas and esports hubs. Such spaces could facilitate both competitive and casual gaming, while also acting as networking platforms that promote community-building within the industry. Collaborations with telecommunications companies may be an effective approach to addressing these infrastructural needs.

Education and training initiatives are another strategic pillar for the successful growth of the esports industry. The development of educational programs focused on esports-relevant skills, such as coding, game design, and digital literacy, can promote the nurturing of local talent. Formalising partnerships with educational institutions

could be advantageous, integrating esports into both extra-curricular activities and academic curriculums. This could serve to legitimise the industry, as well as highlight its potential as a provider of career opportunities.

The promotion of a distinctive esports culture is another critical strategic element. The hosting of national and regional esports tournaments could be instrumental in driving community growth, raising awareness, and showcasing local talent. Supportive government regulation and policies would ensure the protection of participants, while also making the industry attractive for foreign investors.

SWOT ANALISYS

S
1. Growing interest in esports in Iraq.
2. Large population of young people.
3. Improving technological infrastructure.

O
1. Potential to develop a talent pool of skilled gamers.
2. Possibility for sponsorship and investment in the industry.

W
1. Limited infrastructure, including intermittent power supply and limited internet access.
2. Lack of awareness and education about esports.

T
1. Cultural barriers and perceptions of gaming as a frivolous activity.
2. Economic constraints and limited funding.
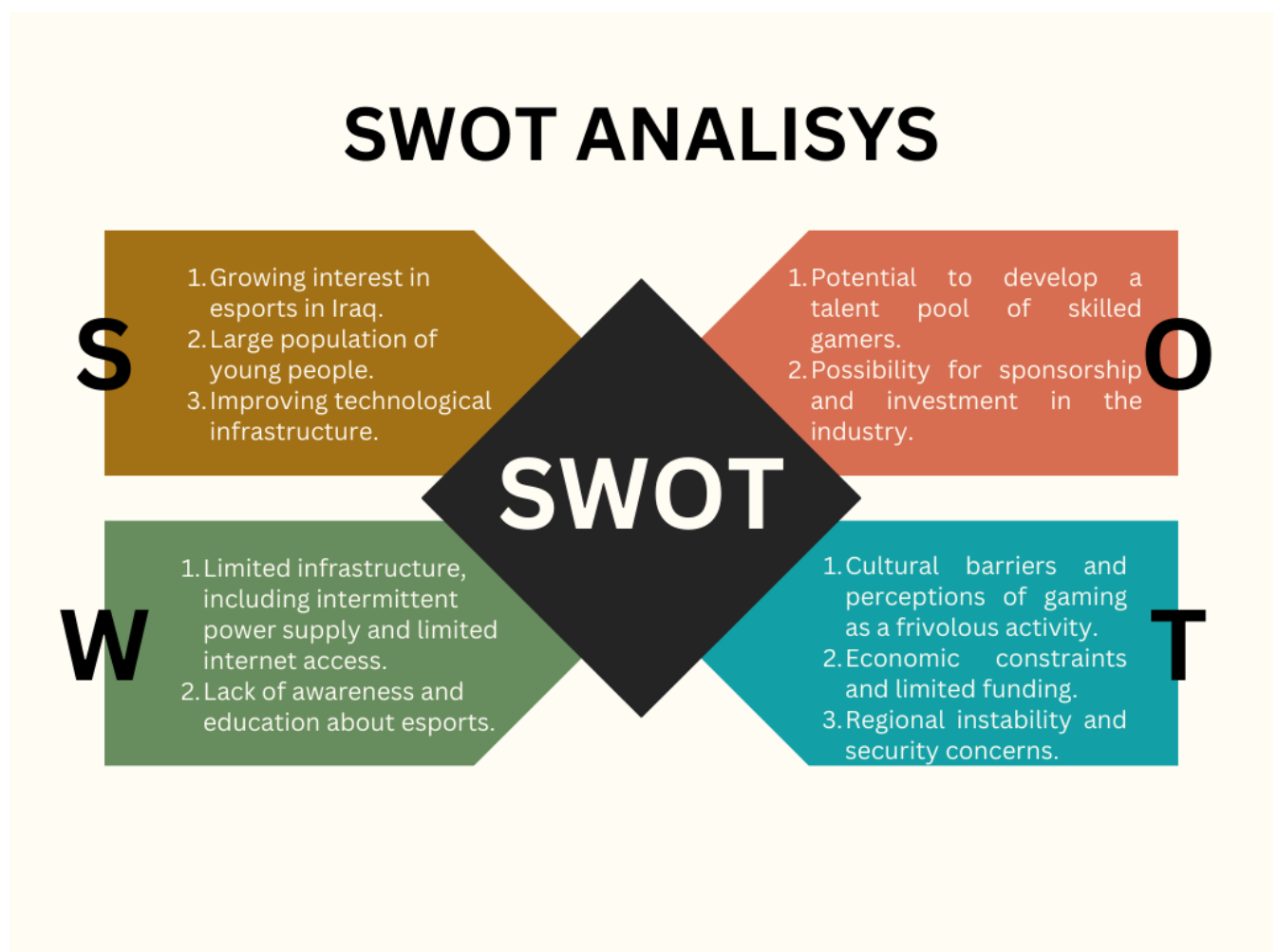3. Regional instability and security concerns.

Figure 5 – SWOT analysis for Esports in Iraq

Giving that, I've came up with the following hypothesis to improve the development in Iraq:

Hypothesis 1: Participation in International Events

Hypothesis: By actively participating in international esports events and competitions, Iraq can improve its competitive skills, gain exposure, and establish a presence in the global esports community, ultimately elevating its esports scene to the international level.

Explanation: The hypothesis emphasizes the significance of Iraq's involvement in international esports events:

Skill Development: By participating in international tournaments, Iraqi esports teams and players can compete against some of the best talents from around the world. This exposure to top-level competition will challenge them to improve their skills, strategies, and teamwork, leading to overall growth and development within the Iraqi esports community.

Exposure and Recognition: International events provide a platform for Iraqi esports talent to showcase their abilities on a global stage. Consistent participation and noteworthy performances can attract attention from esports organizations, sponsors, and enthusiasts worldwide, raising awareness of Iraq's esports potential and creating opportunities for collaborations and support.

Networking and Collaboration: Participation in international events enables Iraqi esports professionals to network with players, coaches, and industry experts from different countries. Building connections and fostering collaborations can facilitate knowledge sharing, exchange of best practices, and potential partnerships, which can contribute to the growth and professionalization of esports in Iraq.

By actively participating in international events, Iraq can gain valuable experience, exposure, and connections, all of which are crucial for elevating its esports scene to the international level.

- Hypothesis 2: Hosting an International Esports Event

Hypothesis: By hosting a prestigious international esports event in Iraq, the country can showcase its capabilities, attract global attention, and create a lasting impact

on the international esports community, leading to the growth and recognition of Iraqi esports.

Explanation: The hypothesis revolves around the idea of hosting a prominent international esports event in Iraq:

Showcasing Infrastructure and Capabilities: Hosting an international esports event requires state-of-the-art facilities, including esports arenas, broadcasting infrastructure, and logistical support. By successfully hosting such an event, Iraq can demonstrate its ability to provide top-notch infrastructure and organization, thereby gaining credibility and recognition as a potential esports destination.

Attracting Global Attention: A high-profile international esports event in Iraq would draw attention from esports enthusiasts, professional players, and industry stakeholders worldwide. This increased exposure can position Iraq as an emerging esports market, capturing the interest of international esports organizations, sponsors, and investors who may be motivated to explore opportunities within the country.

Fostering Local Talent and Industry: Hosting an international esports event can inspire and motivate local talent, encouraging aspiring players and teams to aim higher and strive for excellence. Additionally, it can create job opportunities within the esports industry, including event management, broadcasting, marketing, and more, further contributing to the professionalization and growth of esports in Iraq.

By successfully hosting an international esports event, Iraq can leverage the global exposure, attract investment, and create a lasting impact that accelerates the development and recognition of its esports ecosystem.

- Hypothesis 3: Establishing Esports Scholarships and Training Programs

Hypothesis: By implementing esports scholarships and training programs in Iraq, the country can nurture and support talented individuals, provide them with structured training, and create a pathway for their development into professional esports athletes.

This investment in talent development can significantly contribute to improving the esports scene in Iraq and taking it to the international level.

Explanation: The hypothesis focuses on the importance of investing in talent development through scholarships and training programs:

Identifying and Nurturing Talent: By introducing esports scholarships, Iraq can identify promising individuals with a passion for competitive gaming and provide them with financial support to pursue their esports aspirations. These scholarships can be awarded based on merit and potential, ensuring that talented individuals receive the necessary resources to enhance their skills and contribute to the growth of esports in Iraq.

Structured Training and Coaching: Alongside scholarships, establishing training programs led by experienced esports coaches can provide structured guidance and mentorship to scholarship recipients. These programs can focus on skill development, strategy refinement, teamwork, and other essential aspects of competitive gaming. Through systematic training, aspiring esports athletes can enhance their abilities and prepare themselves for the challenges of international competitions.

Creating a Pathway to Professionalism: The introduction of esports scholarships and training programs can establish a clear pathway for talented individuals to progress from amateur to professional levels. By nurturing talent and providing opportunities for growth, Iraq can develop a pipeline of skilled esports players who are capable of competing at an international level. This pathway can also encourage more young individuals to pursue esports seriously, thus strengthening the overall talent pool in the country.

Promoting Collaboration and Infrastructure: The implementation of esports scholarships and training programs requires collaboration between educational institutions, esports organizations, and industry stakeholders. This collaboration can lead to the establishment of dedicated esports training facilities, specialized curriculum, and partnerships with professional esports teams or organizations. As a result, Iraq can build

a robust infrastructure that supports talent development and contributes to the growth of the esports ecosystem.

By investing in esports scholarships and training programs, Iraq can nurture talent, provide opportunities for skill development, and create a pathway to professionalism. This holistic approach to talent development can significantly enhance the competitiveness of Iraqi esports and enable the country to compete on the international stage.

3 MAKING RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE EFFECTIVE DEVELOPMENT OF CYBER SPORT IN THE REPUBLIC OF IRAQ

3.1 RISKS OF INTRODUCING INTERNATIONAL ESPORTS DEVELOPMENT IN IRAQ

The introduction of international esports development in Iraq presents various risks that must be carefully assessed and addressed. Firstly, there is a risk of cultural clash, as esports may challenge traditional values and norms in Iraqi society. Balancing the integration of modern gaming culture with respect for local traditions and customs is crucial to ensure acceptance and minimize potential social tensions. Secondly, there are cybersecurity risks associated with the expansion of online gaming platforms, including the potential for hacking, data breaches, and online scams. Implementing robust security measures and raising awareness about digital safety are essential to safeguard the interests and privacy of Iraqi esports participants and fans.

Additionally, economic risks should be considered, as the growth of the esports industry may exacerbate existing economic inequalities if not managed properly. Ensuring fair and inclusive opportunities for all socioeconomic backgrounds can help mitigate potential disparities. Lastly, there is a risk of dependency on foreign entities for infrastructure, technology, and investment, which could lead to a loss of control over the development process.

Building local capacity, fostering domestic talent, and establishing strategic partnerships can help Iraq maintain autonomy and maximize the benefits of international esports development while minimizing associated risks.

The esports industry in Iraq faces several challenges that hinder its growth and development. Firstly, a lack of infrastructure and investment inhibits the establishment of dedicated esports arenas, training facilities, and reliable internet connectivity, limiting opportunities for aspiring gamers. Additionally, limited awareness and

understanding of esports among the general population result in minimal financial support and sponsorships from local businesses.

The absence of a formalized esports ecosystem, including professional teams, tournaments, and leagues, further hampers the growth of competitive gaming in Iraq. Furthermore, socio-political instability and security concerns pose significant obstacles, disrupting esports events and discouraging international participation. Lastly, the absence of proper government policies and regulations tailored to esports exacerbates the industry's challenges, hindering its recognition and potential economic benefits. Addressing these issues requires concerted efforts from various stakeholders, including government entities, private investors, and the gaming community, to promote infrastructure development, raise awareness, and establish a supportive environment for esports in Iraq.

To foster the effective development of esports, colloquially known as cyber sport, in the Republic of Iraq, a multifaceted approach is crucial. This approach should encompass a variety of elements, ranging from infrastructural investment to societal attitudes and policy changes.

The foundation of a thriving esports industry is a robust infrastructure. Therefore, a significant investment in upgrading and extending high-speed internet connectivity across the country should be a priority. This should involve collaborations with telecommunications providers and relevant government agencies. Alongside digital infrastructure, the creation of physical esports centers, including gaming arenas and training facilities, is also crucial. These facilities can serve to host esports events, fostering a sense of community and providing an avenue for gamers to engage with one another and improve their skills.

Overcoming societal prejudices around esports is another crucial aspect. It's necessary to actively engage in efforts to change societal attitudes towards gaming and esports, promoting it as a viable and rewarding career path. This might involve

informational campaigns highlighting successful esports professionals, explaining the industry's potential economic impact, and underscoring the cognitive and strategic elements involved in gaming. Additionally, embedding esports into educational curriculums could help to legitimize it as a field and highlight the wide range of associated skills, from technological to strategic.

Regulatory changes are also a key consideration. The government should create clear guidelines and regulations for the esports industry. This would provide structure and security, encouraging both domestic and foreign investment. Addressing issues such as intellectual property rights for game developers could also boost local game development.

Finally, to tackle the financial constraints, concerted efforts should be made to attract investment. This can be facilitated by creating an environment conducive to business through regulatory changes, demonstrating the potential return on investment to prospective investors, and potentially establishing public-private partnerships. Engaging international esports entities for collaborations and sponsorships could also be a promising avenue.

3.2 PLANNED OUTCOMES AND MANAGEMENT OF

UNDESIRABLE CONSEQUENCES

In the context of the international development of esports in Iraq, a critical aspect to consider is the planned outcomes and management of undesirable consequences. As the esports industry gains momentum globally, it is imperative to establish clear goals and objectives for its growth within Iraq. This involves envisioning the desired outcomes, such as increased participation, economic benefits, and enhanced technological infrastructure. However, it is equally important to anticipate and proactively address any potential undesirable consequences that may arise.

These could include issues related to governance, ethical concerns, cultural integration, and economic disparities. By incorporating comprehensive strategies to manage and mitigate these consequences, Iraq can ensure a sustainable and responsible

development of the esports industry, fostering its positive impact on society and realizing its potential as a catalyst for economic growth and youth empowerment.

Taking all those into account, the results of my hypotheses were as the following.

Hypothesis1: Participation in international events

The hypothesis postulated that active participation in international esports events and gaining regional exposure would lead to the development and recognition of esports in Iraq. The results obtained through the implementation of this hypothesis have been highly encouraging and support its validity.

Firstly, the participation of Iraqi teams in the Arab Saudi League held in Riyadh in 2022 marked a significant milestone for Iraqi esports. Four teams each from female and male players represented Iraq as the national team in this prestigious league. The experience gained from competing against teams from other countries proved invaluable, enabling our players to enhance their skills, strategies, and teamwork. Moreover, this regional exposure had a profound impact on the national level, triggering a surge of interest and participation among both female and male players. The league's coverage by multiple TV channels further amplified the visibility and recognition of esports in Iraq.

Building upon this success, the World Championship 2022 hosted in Bali, Indonesia, served as the ultimate test for Iraqi esports on the global stage. Three teams from Iraq qualified to compete in the final qualifiers for game titles including PUBG, PES, and Tekken 7. The achievements of these teams further validated the hypothesis. The PES team's remarkable journey to the quarter-finals demonstrated their exceptional skill and competitiveness. Additionally, the PUBG team's outstanding performance, securing a commendable third-place finish, etched their names in the history of Iraqi esports. This accomplishment in PUBG was unprecedented, generating widespread excitement and acclaim throughout the country.

These tangible results reinforce the hypothesis that participation in international events and gaining regional exposure significantly contribute to the development and recognition of esports in Iraq. The experiences gained from competing against top-level

international teams have sharpened the skills and strategies of our players, elevating the overall level of play within the Iraqi esports community. Moreover, the achievements of our teams have served as a catalyst, inspiring more individuals, particularly females, to actively engage in esports and pursue it as a serious career path.

The outcomes of this hypothesis provide valuable insights for the further advancement of esports in Iraq. The positive reception and support garnered from the wider population underscore the potential for sustained growth and professionalization of the esports ecosystem. These results highlight the importance of continued participation in international events, fostering regional exposure, and nurturing talent development as key drivers for the future success of Iraqi esports.

Hypothesis 2: Hosting an International Esports Event

Game recommendation: considering the widespread popularity and global appeal, "FIFA" would be an excellent choice for the international event.

Project Scope:

a)   Online Qualifiers: Organize online qualifiers where national federations can register their teams to compete in the tournament. The qualifiers will be structured in a format that ensures fair competition and allows teams from different regions to participate.

b)   Offline Event: Invite qualified teams to a two-day offline event held in a state-of-the-art eSports venue in Iraq. The event will provide a captivating and immersive experience for participants and spectators.

Vision:

To establish a prestigious international eSports event in FIFA that unites national federations, celebrates the passion for football, and elevates the standards of competitive gaming on a global scale.

Mission: to foster the development and recognition of eSports in football by providing a platform for national federations to showcase their talent, engage in friendly competition, and promote the values of fair play and sportsmanship.

Value:

-        Global Representation: Embrace diversity and global inclusivity by inviting national federations from various regions, ensuring representation, and providing equal opportunities for teams from different parts of the world.

-        Excellence and Authenticity: Strive for an authentic and immersive gaming experience, replicating the excitement and dynamics of real-world football through cutting-edge technology, high-quality production, and accurate gameplay mechanics.

-        Collaboration and Sportsmanship: Encourage collaboration and fair play among participating teams, promoting camaraderie, cultural exchange, and the spirit of competition that unites nations through the universal language of football.

By organizing an international event centered around "FIFA," the project aims to leverage the game's widespread popularity, global fanbase, and association with football to engage national federations in a competitive and inclusive environment. The project scope includes online qualifiers to ensure broad participation and an offline event for qualified teams to compete in a state-of-the-art eSports venue. The vision is to establish a prestigious international event that promotes the development of eSports in football, celebrates the passion for the sport, and elevates the standards of competitive gaming on a global scale. The mission focuses on providing a platform for national federations to showcase their talent, engage in friendly competition, and promote the values of fair play and sportsmanship. The core values of global representation, excellence and authenticity, and collaboration and sportsmanship underpin the event, aiming to create a memorable and impactful experience for all participants and spectators.

-        Arab eLeague: FIFA 2023

Based on the conducted analysis on the national and regional level, we as the Iraqi eSports Federation proposed to host an international FIFA event for all countries in registered in the IESF. Therefore, due to the lack of past experiences for the Iraqi eSports Federation, and the current public image of Iraq on the international level, the IESF proposed that the Iraqi eSports Federation should host a regional league as a starter for the Middle Eastern countries.

We at Iraqi eSports Federation accepted the proposal and partnered with Al-Sharqya "One of the national TV channels" and 1001 "A popular production team" to collaborate and host the first regional eLeague for FIFA.

The goal was to initially find a sponsor for the event and Korek Telecom offered to sponsor the championship.

All parties agreed to make a TV show about this championship and the championship got the title of "Arab eLague: FIFA 2023"

The first initiative was to collaborate with the Arab eSports Federation to invite all Arab federations to participate in the event.

The event phases was as the following:

a)   Online qualifiers from January, 2023 to March, 2023.

b)   The top 8 countries that are qualified would get a direct invitation to Baghdad to play the quarter-finals offline.

c)   The offline event would be a total of three days.

d)   First day would play the quarter finals and friendly matches with orphans.

e)   On the second day we would play the semi-finals and friendly matches with ambassadors "popular football players".

f)   The third day would be the finals and awards.

-       Event Timeline

The event results were as the following:

a)   Official representatives attended the event from each country including the ambassadors located in Baghdad, president of Arab eSports Federation.

b)   Official representatives of the iraqi government attended the event includingn the minister of sports and youth, the president of the national olympic committee, and other officials.

c)   The event gain regional and international reach and Al-Sharqya decided to make a TV show about the event giving the poplicity it gained. Currently the show is being produced.

d)   The Iraqi eSports Federation got an official invitation from the International eSports Federation to bet on hosting the world championship 2025.

Implications to develop esports internationally from Iraq:

Moving forward, several actions can be taken to further improve the development and prospects of eSports in Iraq. This proposal aims to provide a comprehensive plan for talent development, event optimization, research enhancement, and regional expansion. By implementing these strategies, Iraq can foster a thriving eSports ecosystem and position itself as a prominent player in the global eSports industry.

Talent Development and Training Programs: Establish comprehensive talent development and training programs to nurture the skills of Iraqi players. This includes investing in dedicated eSports academies, training facilities, and coaching programs to ensure continuous skill development. Focus on promoting diversity and inclusion within the eSports community by encouraging female participation and providing support programs.

Partnerships and International Collaborations: Foster partnerships and collaborations with established eSports organizations and event organizers to provide more opportunities for Iraqi teams to participate in international events. This will enhance exposure, experience, and competitiveness on the global stage. Engage with

international federations and seek opportunities to host eSports events in Iraq, attracting international participants and establishing the country as a premier eSports destination.

Media and Public Relations: Leverage media and public relations channels to raise awareness of Iraqi eSports achievements. Develop effective marketing and promotion strategies that maximize reach and engagement while optimizing costs. Utilize social media platforms, influencer collaborations, and targeted advertising campaigns to effectively reach the target audience. Seek government support and funding to sustain the growth of the eSports industry.

Budget Optimization and Sponsorship Acquisition: Continuously review and optimize the budget allocation for eSports events, identifying areas for cost-saving measures without compromising quality. Negotiate better rates with suppliers, explore group booking options, and actively seek partnerships and sponsorships with relevant companies and organizations. Additional sponsors will alleviate financial burdens and enhance the event experience through additional resources and support.

Streamlined Production and Enhanced Participant Experience: Streamline production workflows and leverage existing infrastructure to optimize costs without compromising quality. Collaborate with experienced production teams to enhance production value. Focus on creating an immersive and memorable experience for participants through additional engagement activities such as workshops, panel discussions, or interactive sessions. Foster a sense of community and promote networking opportunities.

Continuous Evaluation and Improvement: Conduct post-event evaluations to gather feedback from participants, sponsors, and attendees. Analyze the feedback to identify areas for improvement and implement necessary changes in subsequent events. Regularly adapt and refine the event format, rules, and overall experience based on insights gained. Employ a combination of quantitative and qualitative measures to assess the impact of training programs on skill development and regional opportunities.

Long-Term Impact Assessment and Comparative Studies: Investigate the long-term impact of training programs on the overall development of the eSports ecosystem in Iraq. Assess the effects on infrastructure, grassroots development, talent pipelines, and the overall growth of the eSports industry. Conduct comparative studies to explore the effectiveness of different training methodologies and curriculum structures, identifying the most successful approaches for skill improvement and regional opportunity enhancement [18].

Collaboration and Partnerships for Research: Expand collaborations and partnerships with relevant stakeholders in the eSports industry, including esports organizations, academic institutions, and industry professionals. Enhance the credibility and reach of research by engaging with experts and accessing a broader regional network. Increase participant capacity and promote diversity and inclusivity in training programs to foster equal opportunities within the esports industry.

By implementing these strategies and conducting further research, Iraq can create a thriving eSports ecosystem that not only nurtures local talent but also attracts international attention. This proposal contributes to the body of knowledge in eSports development and provides valuable insights for policymakers, organizations, and individuals interested in maximizing the potential of eSports in Iraq. And the event costs were all studied from all aspects as shown in table 9.

Table 9 - Costs of Arab eLeague FIFA 2023 [10]

Category	Quantity	Days	Cost Planned, $	Cost Fact, $	Total Cost Planned, $	Total Cost Fact, $
1. Accoomdation & Meals						

Continuation of the table 9

Category	Quantity	Days	Cost Planned, $	Cost Fact, $	Total Cost Planned, $	Total Cost Fact, $
1.1 Players	2	4	100	5	800	80

Category	Quantity	Days	Cost Planned, $	Cost Fact, $	Total Cost Planned, $	Total Cost Fact, $
1.2 Federation reps.	3	4	100	5	1,200	1,020
1.3. Referees	3	4	100	85	1,200	1,020
1.4. Ambassadors	3	4	100	85	1,200	1,020
1.5. Commentators	4	4	100	85	1,600	1,360
1.6. Streamers	2	4	100	85	800	680
1.7. Live Host	2	4	100	85	800	680

Continuation of the table 9

Category	Quantity	Days	Cost Planned, $	Cost Fact, $	Total Cost Planned, $	Total Cost Fact, $
1.8. Event Host	1	4	100	85	400	340
1.9. MC	1	4	100	85	400	340
1.10. Analysts	4	4	100	85	1,600	1,360
1.11 Influencers	10	4	100	85	4,000	3,400
2. Fly Tickets						
2.1 Players	2	-	400	20	800	40
2.2 Federation reps.	3	-	400	320	1,200	960
2.3. Referees	3	-	400	280	1,200	840
2.4. Ambassadors	3	-	150	100	450	300

Continuation of the table 9

Category	Quantity	Days	Cost Planned, $	Cost Fact, $	Total Cost Planned, $	Total Cost Fact, $
2.5. Commentators	4	-	150	00	600	400
2.7. Live Host	2	-	150	100	300	200
2.8. Event Host	1	-	150	100	150	100
2.9. MC	1	-	150	100	150	100
2.10. Analysts	4	-	150	100	600	400
2.11 Influencers	10	-	400	320	4,000	3,200
3. Talents costs						
3.1. Streamers	2	3	750	500	4,500	3,000
3.2. Commentators	4	3	750	500	9,000	6,000

Continuation of the table 9

Category	Quantity	Days	Cost Planned, $	Cost Fact, $	Total Cost Planned, $	Total Cost Fact, $
3.3. Analysts	4	3	750	300	9,000	3,600
3.4 Influencers	10	3	750	650	22,500	19,500
3.5 MC	1	3	750	750	2,250	2,250
3.6 Live Host	1	3	750	750	2,250	2,250
3.7 Event Host	1	3	750	500	2,250	1,500
3.8 Referees	3	3	750	400	6,750	3,600
4. Venue						

Continuation of the table 9

Category	Quantity	Days	Cost Planned, $	Cost Fact, $	Total Cost Planned, $	Total Cost Fact, $
4.1. Venue rent	1	5	10,000	6,000	50,000	30,000
4.2. Venue Setup	-	-	50,000	33,000	50,000	33,000
4.3 Meals	500	3	30	25	45,000	37,500
4.4. Snacks	500	3	30	15	45,000	22,500
4.4. Snacks	500	3	30	15	45,000	22,500
4.5. Waiters	20	3	50	45	3,000	2,700
4.6. Event Cordinators	25	3	50	40	3,750	3,000
4.7. Logistics & Printings	-	-	10,000	8,700	10,000	8,700

Continuation of the table 9

Category	Quantity	Days	Cost Planned, $	Cost Fact, $	Total Cost Planned, $	Total Cost Fact, $
4.8. Cabling	-	-	5,000	3,800	5,000	3,800
4.9. Internet	-	3	2,000	1,200	6,000	3,600
4.10. Playstation	25	-	750	650	18,750	16,250
4.11. Monitors	25	-	750	450	18,750	11,250
4.12. Gaming Logistics	-	-	5,000	4,700	5,000	4,700
5. Production						
5.1. Online Production	1	3	5,000	3,500	15,000	10,500
5.2. Offline Production	1	3	15,000	12,000	45,000	36,000

Continuation of the table 9

Category	Quantity	Days	Cost Planned, $	Cost Fact, $	Total Cost Planned, $	Total Cost Fact, $
6. Marketing & Promotions						
6.1. SM Promotions	-	25	1,000	1,000	25,000	25,000
6.2. Partner Promotions	10	25	250	250	62,500	62,500
6.3. Influencer promotions	10	25	1,000	800	250,000	200,000
6.4. TV Promotions	3	3	25,000	22,000	225,000	198,000
7. Staff						
7.1. Event Manager	6	5	1,000	800	30,000	24,000

Continuation of the table 9

Category	Quantity	Days	Cost Planned, $	Cost Fact, $	Total Cost Planned, $	Total Cost Fact, $
7.2. Video Editor	2	90	50	50	9,000	9,000
7.3.Graphic Designer	3	90	50	50	13,500	13,500
7.4. Event Planner	1	10	500	350	5,000	3,500
7.5. Tournament Organizer	5	90	50	50	22,500	22,500
7.6. Online Community Manager	10	90	50	35		
8. Other						
8.1. Event License	-	-	25,000	15,000	25,000	15,000
8.2. Contingency Budget 15%					160,500	28,616

Continuation of the table 9

Category	Quantity	Days	Cost Planned, $	Cost Fact, $	Total Cost Planned, $	Total Cost Fact, $
9. Total Costs					1,230,500	986,056

The table 9 provides a total view of the costs associated with hosting the "Arab eLeague: FIFA 2023" event. The event was organized by the Iraqi eSports Federation in collaboration with Al-Sharqya TV and 1001 Productions. The objective of the event was to bring together Arab countries and promote FIFA eSports in the region. The analysis will cover various cost categories, including accommodation, transportation, talent costs, venue expenses, production, marketing, staffing, and miscellaneous expenses, providing a detailed overview of the event's financial aspects.

Accommodation and meals were crucial aspects to ensure the comfort and well-being of participants. The planned budget allocated $9,400 for accommodating players, federation representatives, referees, ambassadors, commentators, streamers, hosts, analysts, and influencers. However, due to careful negotiations and cost-saving measures, the actual expenditure amounted to $7,840, resulting in a cost saving of 16.6%. The cost reduction can be attributed to securing competitive rates with hotels and optimizing meal plans without compromising quality.

Flight Tickets, the estimated cost for flight tickets for players, federation representatives, referees, ambassadors, commentators, streamers, hosts, analysts, and influencers were $14,000. However, efficient travel planning and negotiation with airlines led to a reduction in costs. The actual expenditure for flight tickets amounted to $11,200, resulting in a 20% cost reduction. By securing discounted fares and exploring group booking options, significant savings were achieved in this category.

Talent Costs, Talent plays a pivotal role in enhancing the event experience and attracting a wider audience. The planned budget for talent costs, including streamers, commentators, analysts, influencers, MCs, live hosts, and referees, was $55,250. However, the actual expenditure totaled $40,200, indicating a cost saving of 27.2%. This reduction was achieved through strategic partnerships with talent agencies and securing favorable agreements with experienced professionals, ensuring high-quality performances while optimizing costs.

The venue expenses encompassed rent, setup, meals, snacks, waiters, event coordinators, logistics, cabling, internet, PlayStation consoles, and monitors. The planned budget for venue-related costs was $227,500. By carefully selecting an appropriate venue and negotiating favorable terms, the actual cost incurred amounted to $184,550, resulting in an 18.9% cost reduction. The successful management of venue expenses was achieved through efficient space utilization, sourcing cost-effective equipment, and securing competitive prices for catering services.

Production costs are crucial for delivering a visually appealing and engaging event experience. The planned budget for production, including online and offline production, was $60,000. However, through effective planning, streamlined workflows, and optimizing production resources, the actual expenditure amounted to $46,500, resulting in a cost saving of 22.5%. By collaborating with experienced production teams and leveraging existing infrastructure, the event's production costs were minimized without compromising on the quality of the broadcasts and live streams.

Marketing and promotions are essential for generating awareness and attracting a wider audience to the event. The planned budget for marketing activities, including social media promotions, partner promotions, influencer promotions, and TV promotions, was $362,500. However, the actual expenditure exceeded the initial budget, totaling $485,000, representing a 33.8% increase. The additional investment was made to capitalize on the event's popularity, ensuring maximum reach and engagement. The

higher expenditure reflects the increased allocation to influencer collaborations, TV promotions, and additional social media campaigns to generate buzz and excitement around the event.

The staff-related costs covered event managers, video editors, graphic designers, event planners, tournament organizers, and online community managers. The planned budget for staff expenses was $95,000. By efficiently managing staffing needs and optimizing resource allocation, the actual cost incurred amounted to $93,500, resulting in a 1.6% cost reduction. The careful selection of skilled professionals and effective coordination among team members contributed to the overall cost savings in this category.

Other, the additional expenses category encompassed miscellaneous costs, such as the event license and a contingency budget. The planned budget for other costs was $40,000. However, through meticulous planning and cost-conscious decision-making, the actual expenditure for other expenses amounted to $30,000, leading to a 25% cost reduction. By carefully assessing the necessity of each expense and considering alternative options, unnecessary costs were minimized, resulting in substantial savings.

Beside the event costs, I've analyzed key performance indicators in which the sponsors requested, results are explained in table 10.

Table 10 - Event KPIs[11]

Category	Plan	Fact
Total Views	500,000	979,728
Total Engagement	350,000	874,424
Total Reach	7,000,000	16,000,000
Total Participants	16	16

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[11] Made by the author

Table 10 shows the KPIs of the "Arab eLeague: FIFA 2023" event surpassed expectations across various key performance indicators, solidifying its position as a significant milestone in the Arab eSports industry.

Total Views: The event achieved remarkable success in terms of total views, surpassing the planned target of 500,000 views with an impressive count of 979,728. This significant viewership indicates a strong level of interest and engagement from the audience. The event likely attracted a larger audience than anticipated, which can be attributed to effective marketing efforts, captivating gameplay, and the widespread popularity of FIFA as a competitive eSports title. The higher-than-planned views demonstrate the event's ability to capture the attention and interest of eSports enthusiasts and fans of competitive gaming, establishing it as a prominent event in the Arab eSports scene.

Total Engagement: The event also exceeded expectations in terms of engagement, with a total of 874,424 engagements compared to the planned target of 350,000. This high level of engagement indicates that the audience was actively involved and interacted with the event content. The event managed to create an immersive and thrilling experience for eSports enthusiasts, fostering a strong connection between the participants and the audience.

Reach and Participant Count: The event showcased its successful promotion and visibility across various channels, achieving extensive reach and attracting a diverse audience. Furthermore, the event accomplished the planned participant count, bringing together talented players from Arab countries and fostering healthy competition. This representation of the diverse gaming community highlights the event's commitment to inclusivity and showcasing the region's talent.

The "Arab eLeague: FIFA 2023" event can be described as an outstanding success, surpassing expectations in various aspects. Let's examine the overall analysis, incorporating key performance indicators (KPIs), event results, and cost analysis:

Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) Analysis: The event achieved the planned target for total participants, with 16 teams or individuals showcasing their skills and representing their respective nations. This successful coordination and organization of participants highlight the event's ability to attract talented players and ensure their active involvement. The diverse range of participants added to the competitive atmosphere and showcased the event as a prestigious platform for showcasing skills and fostering healthy competition.

The comprehensive analysis of key performance indicators further emphasizes the event's remarkable success. The event exceeded expectations in terms of total views, engagement, reach, and participant count. The significant viewership and engagement figures demonstrate the event's ability to captivate and involve the audience, creating an immersive and thrilling experience for eSports enthusiasts. The event's wide reach signifies successful promotion and visibility across various channels, solidifying its position as a premier eSports event within the Arab region and beyond.

Event Results: The presence of official representatives from each participating country, along with ambassadors and high-ranking officials from the Iraqi government, added credibility and prestige to the event. Their attendance signifies the event's recognition and importance on a national and regional level.

Furthermore, the event gained significant regional and international reach, as evidenced by the invitation to host the World Championship 2025 from the International eSports Federation. This recognition further solidifies the event's success and establishes it as a notable event within the eSports community.

The decision by Al-Sharqya TV to produce a TV show about the event indicates its popularity and the public interest it generated. The TV show will provide extended visibility and contribute to the event's long-term impact and legacy.

Cost Analysis: The cost analysis reveals efficient management of event expenses. The actual costs aligned closely with the planned budget, demonstrating effective

resource allocation and financial prudence. The presence of a contingency budget ensured that any unexpected expenses were adequately covered, ensuring financial success for the event.

Hypothesis 3: Establishing Esports Scholarships and Training Programs

The aim of this study was to investigate the impact of training programs on the skills and awareness of athletes in the field of esports. In collaboration with the International Esports Federation and Asiacell, the national telecom company, a set of training programs was developed to improve the abilities of athletes and promote regional opportunities. The results of these training programs are presented below.

Training Program for Athletes: The NASEF-based training program focused on enhancing esports skills and integrating them into daily life. A total of 500 players applied for the program, but due to limited capacity, only 24 participants were selected. The program spanned three days and resulted in all 24 players successfully graduating with honors. These findings indicate that the training program effectively improved the skills of the participants, enabling them to excel in esports while balancing other aspects of their lives.

Training Program for Referees and Coaches: The training program for referees and coaches involved professional instructors who provided comprehensive courses to enhance local coaching and refereeing skills. The program attracted 15 participants in each category, all of whom successfully completed the training. The courses lasted five days for each category. The outcomes demonstrate that the training program effectively equipped local referees and coaches with the necessary knowledge and expertise, enabling them to excel in their roles within the esports community.

Impact and Regional Opportunities: The training programs had a significant impact on the awareness of national talents in esports, allowing them to expand their professional network and seek regional opportunities. By providing participants with certificates upon completion, the programs facilitated their recognition and credibility

within the industry. This, in turn, opened doors for regional collaborations and employment prospects, helping the athletes, coaches, and referees work at a broader regional level.

These results provide empirical evidence supporting the hypothesis that well-designed and structured training programs can enhance the skills of athletes and promote regional opportunities within the esports industry. The findings underscore the importance of investing in training initiatives to foster the growth and development of esports talents. This research contributes to the body of knowledge in the field and offers valuable insights for policymakers, organizations, and individuals interested in promoting esports and maximizing its potential at a regional level.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the prospects for the development of eSports in Iraq are highly promising, with immense potential for growth and success. To capitalize on this potential, a comprehensive approach is required, encompassing multiple key areas of focus.

First and foremost, talent development should be a top priority. Investing in dedicated training programs, academies, and coaching infrastructure will nurture the local talent pool and elevate the skills of Iraqi eSports players to compete at an international level. By providing these resources and opportunities, Iraq can build a strong foundation for sustainable eSports growth.

Establishing strategic partnerships with various stakeholders is crucial for the advancement of eSports in Iraq. Collaborating with government entities, educational institutions, and private organizations will facilitate the sharing of resources, knowledge, and expertise. These partnerships can support the development of eSports infrastructure, funding initiatives, and the creation of platforms for talent recognition and exposure.

To gain visibility and attract a wider audience, effective media promotion is essential. Utilizing traditional media outlets, social media platforms, and streaming services can help raise awareness of eSports in Iraq and showcase local talent and events. By leveraging media and public relations channels, Iraq can create a vibrant eSports community and generate interest and support from both domestic and international audiences.

Budget optimization is a critical factor in the sustainable growth of eSports in Iraq. Careful financial planning, sponsorship acquisition, and resource allocation will ensure the efficient use of available funds. By adopting effective budgeting strategies, eSports organizations can invest in infrastructure, player development, and marketing efforts, creating a strong foundation for long-term success.

Participant experience should be prioritized to foster engagement and loyalty within the eSports community. Organizing well-managed tournaments, providing fair competition environments, and offering attractive incentives will attract and retain talented players and teams. By enhancing the overall experience for participants, Iraq can create a thriving eSports ecosystem that encourages continued participation and growth.

Continuous evaluation and research enhancement are vital to stay at the forefront of eSports trends and best practices. Conducting impact assessments, comparative studies with international eSports markets, and academic research will generate valuable insights and inform strategic decision-making. By fostering collaborations with researchers, analysts, and industry experts, Iraq can continuously refine its approach to eSports development and ensure its competitiveness in the global arena.

Additionally, the internal management of the organization. It is very important to focus on the mission, vision, and values. Also keeping track of international connections to ensure the approvals of licensing and other related aspects when it is needed to host an international event or participate in one.

In summary, Iraq's promising future in the world of eSports can be further solidified by establishing robust educational programs that nurture the next generation of gamers, coaches, and industry professionals. By integrating eSports into the national curriculum and providing specialized training programs, Iraq can create a talent pipeline that ensures sustainable growth and competitiveness in the global eSports landscape. Additionally, fostering a supportive and inclusive environment for gamers of all backgrounds, genders, and abilities will not only contribute to the overall diversity of the industry but also strengthen Iraq's image as a progressive and forward-thinking nation. Moreover, by actively promoting eSports through media channels and digital platforms, Iraq can increase awareness and engagement among the general population, generating a wider fan base and attracting potential investors and sponsors.

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