Proceedings of ICFTBA 2026 Symposium: Driving Organizational Strategic Change for Financial Gains
DOI: 10.54254/2754-1169/2026.BH38723

Marketing Strategies and User Experience Analysis of Offline E-Sports Events

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Abstract. With the rapid development of the e-sports industry, online e-sports events can no longer meet the demands of most audiences. Offline e-sports tournaments have become mainstream, attracting and retaining fans while generating economic profits. Beyond the broad reach of online streaming, offline events serve multiple functions, including emotional consumption, social engagement, and brand marketing, offering a unique social atmosphere and user experience. Taking popular domestic offline tournaments (such as KPL and IVL) as examples, this paper employs case analysis to examine four key dimensions of user experience—sensory, emotional, social, and service—to analyze the marketing strategies of offline esports events (both traditional and experiential marketing), dissect the various factors influencing audience attendance, evaluate the value operations of major IPs and players, and propose optimized marketing strategies for offline e-sports. The study finds that commercial monetization in offline e-sports relies more heavily on experiential marketing; however, an imbalance often exists between marketing activities and user experience—ticket scalping, forced advertising, and inadequate service remain significant barriers to event growth. Only through mutual alignment between commercial marketing and user experience can both revenue generation and fan retention be achieved. This paper aims to provide practical insights for offline e-sports event operations, helping tournaments better serve their fan base.

Keywords: E-sports industry, fan economy, experiential marketing, user experience, marketing strategy

1. Introduction

As a new form of industry emerging at the intersection of youth sports and the digital economy, e-sports has completed its transformation from online network competitions to offline physical events. Offline e-sports events are no longer confined to in-stadium gaming; they have gradually evolved into multifaceted consumption venues integrating live viewing, fan check-ins, player support, fan community interaction, and merchandise sales. This transformation would not have been possible without capital-driven marketing and commercial branding of e-sports athletes [1].

However, as the offline e-sports economy rapidly expands, the industry has also exposed numerous real-world issues regarding user experience: some events rely too heavily on player popularity for commercial marketing while neglecting fan engagement; merchandise and ticket

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supply are imbalanced, with scalpers dominating the market and driving up fans' costs, leading to widespread dissatisfaction; and fans' emotional needs at live events go unmet, significantly diminishing their interactive experience [2]. How to balance commercial marketing goals with the offline fan experience has thus become a key research topic for event organizers.

This paper primarily addresses the following research questions: RQ1: What marketing strategies are predominantly used in domestic offline e-sports events? RQ2: What key factors influence the user experience of offline esports events? RQ3: How can event marketing and user experience be synergistically optimized? The study mainly employs a case analysis approach, using popular domestic tournaments such as KPL and IVL as specific examples.

Theoretically, this paper applies traditional e-sports event marketing and service experience theories to offline events, aiming to enrich research on marketing and in-person experiences for domestic offline e-sports events. Practically, by analyzing real-world case studies, it identifies key marketing challenges and user experience shortcomings, offering valuable insights for event organizers and brands. It helps maximize traffic and revenue for offline events, meet fan demands, enhance player visibility and retention, and build unique, distinctive IPs.

2. Overview of related concepts

2.1. Offline e-sports tournaments

Offline e-sports events are held primarily in physical venues, featuring professional players competing live while offering on-site audiences opportunities to watch, interact, and enjoy entertainment. Compared to purely online tournaments, offline e-sports provide a stronger sense of presence and social engagement while also leveraging online streaming to expand their reach. Taking the popular domestic event KPL as an example, offline esports encompass not only competitive matches but also activities such as esports carnivals and Wonderful Day events.

2.2. Marketing strategies for offline esports tournaments

Offline e-sports events adopt an integrated marketing strategy combining online and offline elements, including social media pre-promotion, sponsorship and advertising, fan engagement, derivative IP products, and collaboration with urban cultural tourism to enhance the richness of live viewing experiences and strengthen fan loyalty. At the event venues, behind-the-scenes footage of players is shown, and interactive zones for audience engagement and brand activation are set up, transforming advertisements into immersive experiences. By integrating multiple marketing approaches, these efforts achieve traffic exposure, user retention, and commercial monetization.

2.3. User experience of offline e-sports events

Offline user experience consists of four dimensions: sensory experience, social experience, emotional experience, and service experience. This experience spans multiple stages, including ticketing, entry, in-stadium viewing, interactive participation, and departure. Throughout these stages, on-site guidance and service from event staff play an essential role. A positive user experience significantly influences word-of-mouth promotion and fans' willingness to spend.

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3. Current status of domestic offline tournaments

In recent years, leading domestic e-sports events such as the KPL (King Pro League) for Honor of Kings and the VCT (Valorant Champions Tour) have steadily advanced toward offline operations and home-and-away formats. Fixed competition venues have been established in cities including Shanghai, Chengdu, and Chongqing, while tournaments have also adopted a multi-city touring model. According to a report by Game Industry Network, China's e-sports industry generated 12.761 billion yuan in revenue during the first half of 2025, representing a year-on-year increase of 6.10% [3]. Live streaming accounts for the largest share of e-sports revenue, followed by event operations and club-related income [4]. Offline tournament commercial revenue primarily consists of ticket sales, merchandise sales from derivative IPs, brand sponsorships, and licensing fees.

From the user perspective, offline e-sports audiences are primarily young people aged 16 to 30, with women accounting for a striking 71.8%. Fans not only watch matches and care about outcomes but also seek offline social experiences, engaging in close interaction with players to create an immersive live viewing atmosphere. Today, "e-sports + cultural tourism" has become a new trend. Beyond official competitions, leagues such as KPL and IVL host esports carnivals, Wonder Days, and other events in various locations, boosting local tourism and stimulating consumption in accommodation, dining, and related sectors, thus further integrating e-sports traffic with the real economy. These cross-sector collaborations not only broaden the reach of e-sports events but also enrich viewers' offline experiences in consumption, socializing, and emotional engagement.

However, domestic offline e-sports events have only recently emerged, and the accumulated marketing experience remains limited. The industry still faces significant shortcomings: high venue rental costs that small and medium-sized tournaments cannot afford; fans' demand for limited, high-priced tickets and player interactions has led to rampant ticket scalping and a poor user experience [5].

4. Analysis of mainstream offline esports marketing strategies

4.1. Brand scenario-based sponsorship marketing

Compared to traditional voice-over ads and logo placements, offline esports events are gradually shifting sponsorship marketing toward deeper, scenario-based integration. Event venues typically feature dedicated brand experience zones, interactive photo spots, and product consumption areas, while leveraging player endorsements to seamlessly incorporate sponsored products throughout the entire viewing experience. For example, at IVL's offline tournaments, Duoduo Lemon Tea is integrated into pre-match announcements and commentary booths, with a dedicated beverage bar set up for fans. IQOO, as the official device of KPL matches, has its own product experience booth at KPL offline events, providing ample space for partner brands to showcase their offerings.

4.2. IP product marketing and fan economy

As e-sports events and players gain increasing popularity, offline venues have established official stores to sell merchandise featuring event IPs or player-related items such as towels, banners, large fans, keychains, and team-collaborated plush toys. Meanwhile, various activities like e-sports carnivals and "Wonderful Days" are organized to provide fans with diverse offline consumption and interactive experiences. The KPL's Dream Team series of merchandise has launched pop-up stores in cities including Hangzhou, Guangzhou, and Shanghai, where character-based products such as the

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MENGJI plush toy quickly sold out, while other limited-edition items were also hotly bought. This demonstrates that IP-driven marketing can rapidly stimulate fan economic growth, highlighting the significant potential of the fan economy. However, while pursuing IP marketing, organizers should also respect the culture within fan communities, manage supply-demand imbalances for limited products, and avoid excessive scarcity tactics that could overconsume fan enthusiasm [6].

4.3. Cultural tourism integration marketing tied to the city

Today, professional esports clubs participate in city naming rights by paying to acquire the naming privileges of urban landmarks. Several clubs have already established a presence in cities such as Shanghai, Chengdu, and Chongqing, promoting local cultural and tourism development through the construction of offline venues. Event organizers also collaborate with local governments and cultural tourism districts to host e-sports-related activities in designated locations. For example, the KPL Wonderland Day held from May 22 to 24, 2026, in Puyuan Fashion Ancient Town, Tongxiang, Jiaxing, Zhejiang, brought together 24 KPL teams for offline events, including local competitions and boat tours. Fans had the opportunity to interact closely with players and engage in various activities. This high-profile event significantly boosted the local cultural tourism industry, setting a new benchmark for e-sports-driven urban tourism development. On one hand, this model increases the visibility of tournaments; on the other, it reduces venue rental costs—creating a win-win situation for tournaments, fans, and host cities.

5. Experiential marketing and user experience analysis in offline e-sports events

Unlike traditional marketing, offline e-sports employs experiential marketing to engage fans emotionally and create a sense of connection, thereby earning consumer recognition. Experiential marketing consists of five core dimensions; integrating these principles, we categorize the offline user experience into four main aspects: Sensory Experience—referring to the human senses (hearing, smell, sight, touch, and taste). The stage design, lighting effects, and large-screen audiovisual presentations in an offline e-sports venue deliver sensory experiences far superior to those online. However, if the venue is too small, crowded, or stuffy, or if the screen quality is poor, it can significantly diminish the viewing experience. Emotional Experience—watching live allows fans to immerse themselves closely in the match atmosphere, including player entrances, collective cheering, and championship ceremonies—experiences that are hard to replicate online. Fans celebrating together, shouting support for their favorite players, generate strong emotional resonance and foster a unique sense of community among like-minded individuals. Witnessing a favorite player's highlight moments in person also brings deep emotional satisfaction. Service Experience:

Offline event services cover a wide range, including dedicated staff for entry guidance, food and beverage stations outside the venue, ticketing systems, security screening, and clear directional signage. These fundamental services not only meet users' basic needs but also ensure their safety, delivering a high-quality experience. Social Experience: At offline events, fans can interact closely with players, take photos together with fellow supporters, and actively participate in cheering activities, fostering a strong sense of community among many fans. For numerous attendees, the core purpose of attending in person is to integrate into the fan community and engage in meaningful exchanges with like-minded individuals. To enhance social interaction and boost user satisfaction, many venues set up designated fan photo spots and team-specific support zones around the stadium.

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6. Offline marketing strategies and user experience face challenges, along with pathways for collaborative optimization

Offline events are an emerging industry, and there remain many issues in marketing and user experience that need adjustment. Although these two aspects are independent, only through coordinated development and optimization can both users and event organizers benefit.

6.1. Marketing strategy optimization

Brand marketing transforms simple advertising into deep, co-created experiences, minimizing forced placements by integrating more closely with fan-driven economies and embedding campaigns within offline events. Brand selection can also become more diverse, extending beyond just mobile phone or beverage brands.

Leverage platform marketing to create a closed loop between online and offline traffic. Produce short videos featuring highlight moments from the competition and individual player performances, then distribute them across platforms to boost traffic and achieve marketing goals.

By integrating cultural tourism with e-sports in a differentiated manner, collaborative events with local cities can more effectively leverage regional culture to create activities that retain the authentic essence of E-sports while incorporating distinctive local characteristics. This not only enhances fan engagement and novelty but also leverages cultural promotion for marketing and exposure [7].

6.2. User experience level

Optimize the ticketing mechanism to prevent scalping, avoiding situations where fans have to purchase interactive tickets at inflated prices. Additionally, improve the entire offline service process, including emergency support services for hot weather or rain.

Enrich offline activities during non-viewing hours, such as fan check-in spots, drawing areas, and contestant interactions, to prevent boredom from queuing and ensure a more engaging viewing experience.

Establish user feedback channels, such as reviews or questionnaires.

7. Conclusion

This paper takes leading domestic e-sports events such as KPL and IVL as case studies to clarify key concepts related to e-sports competitions and analyze the current development of offline e-sports events in China. It summarizes mainstream marketing strategies, including scene-based sponsorship, IP-derivative product marketing, and the integration of e-sports with cultural tourism. The study also examines offline event user experience from four dimensions—sensory, emotional, service, and social—and identifies existing industry challenges while proposing collaborative optimization pathways. Research shows that offline e-sports events primarily rely on experiential marketing to generate fan-driven economic value and achieve commercial monetization. However, common industry issues include scalping, inadequate supporting services, and homogenized cultural tourism activities. User experience and marketing profitability are not mutually exclusive; only through coordinated development, respecting both fans and players, can offline esports events ensure long-term and sustainable growth.

However, this study still has limitations: the research cases are primarily focused on top-tier, well-established domestic events, with insufficient investigation into smaller-scale offline

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competitions (such as Peace Elite and QQ Speed). The study mainly employs a case study approach but lacks audience-oriented questionnaire surveys, resulting in limited case diversity. Consequently, the data and marketing strategies proposed may have limitations and might not be applicable to the development of specialized events. Future research could broaden its scope by including mid-to-small-scale events, incorporating empirical methods such as questionnaires and interviews to collect primary user data, thereby ensuring greater accuracy and generalizability.

Looking ahead, offline e-sports events, as an emerging industry and a significant form of digital sports, hold substantial commercial value. Future research could further focus on areas such as the integration of e-sports with cultural tourism and fan consumption behavior. The development of offline e-sports should pursue both commercial profitability and user experience in tandem. As e-sports become more mainstream, event brands should concentrate on their core audience, continuously pay attention to the physical and mental well-being of youth, and achieve mutual enhancement in brand promotion and fan engagement, thereby promoting the healthy growth of domestic e-sports events.

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