

A Study of Strategies for Building a Sustainable esports Tourism Ecosystem in Korea

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[Abstract]

This study analyzes the relationships among infrastructure, content and experience, technological innovation, community and policy factors, customer satisfaction, and revisit intention to propose strategies for building a sustainable esports tourism ecosystem. A mixed-methods approach was employed, combining literature review, international case studies, and an empirical survey of 194 participants. Five hypotheses were tested using structural equation modeling(SEM). The findings indicate that all factors exerted significant positive effects on customer satisfaction and revisit intention, with infrastructure and content/experience demonstrating the strongest influence. Moreover, technological innovations such as the metaverse, VR, and AI, together with community and policy engagement, enhanced immersive experiences and loyalty. As a result, the hypotheses proposed in this study were supported, showing that these factors positively affect customer satisfaction and revisit intention.

▶ **Key words:** esports, Contents, Digital transformation, Regional revitalization, Customer satisfaction, Revisit-intention

[요 약]

본 연구는 인프라, 콘텐츠·체험, 기술 혁신, 지역사회·정책 요인, 고객 만족도, 재방문 의도 간의 관계를 분석하여 지속가능한 e스포츠 관광 생태계 구축 전략을 제시한다. 문헌연구, 국제 사례, 194명 대상 실증조사를 결합한 혼합 방법을 적용하고 구조방정식 모형(SEM)으로 5개 가설을 검증하였다. 모든 요인이 고객 만족도와 재방문 의도에 유의한 긍정적 영향을 미쳤으며, 특히 인프라와 콘텐츠·체험 요인이 가장 큰 영향을 보였다. 메타버스·VR·AI 등 기술 혁신과 지역사회·정책 참여는 몰입 경험과 충성도를 강화하였다. 그 결과 본 연구에서 제시한 가설들이 고객만족과 재방문에 긍정적인 영향을 준다는 결과를 도출 하였다.

▶ **주제어:** e스포츠, 콘텐츠, 디지털 전환, 지역 활성화, 고객만족, 재방문 의도

I. Introduction

According to the Korea Tourism Organization(2023)[1], esports has established itself as a central pillar of the global cultural content industry, demonstrating tangible possibilities for integration with the tourism sector. In particular, following the COVID-19 pandemic, the demand for non-face-to-face content has increased, and online-based esports has not only served as a substitute for offline events but also driven the expansion of fan-participatory tourism content[2].

In this context, Kim & Lee(2021)[3] point out that the esports tourism industry goes beyond merely hosting events, generating diverse ripple effects such as community engagement, job creation for the youth, and strengthening of local identity. For example, esports arenas not only offer game viewing but also create economic benefits through linkages with various industries such as local food, accommodation, and transportation, while enhancing the brand value of specific cities[4].

From this perspective, the esports tourism industry should be approached not only from an “industrial” viewpoint but also from the perspectives of regional development strategies and sustainability. Furthermore, esports venues can serve as urban regeneration hubs, contributing to local economic and social development[5].

Furthermore, advancements in digital technology are transforming the way tourists experience destinations. esports experiential content utilizing technologies such as the metaverse, virtual reality(VR), and augmented reality(AR) can offer highly immersive experiences, providing a differentiated competitive edge compared to traditional tourist attractions.

The application of immersive technologies significantly impacts tourist engagement in esports tourism[6]. With the emergence of Generation Z and Generation Alpha, the demand for content-oriented tourism is on the rise, making the development of esports-based tourism content

targeting these groups an urgent task.

Policy changes in the broader environment also warrant attention[7]. In Korea, the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, along with local governments, jointly supports the construction of esports arenas and the development of tourism content.

According to the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism(2023)[8], there is also an increasing number of cases overseas in which esports are included in national tourism attraction strategies. This demonstrates that esports is being utilized as a means to secure national tourism competitiveness[9].

Therefore, it is important to develop the esports tourism industry not merely as a short-term, high-profile event, but as a strategic industry that builds regionally based industrial ecosystems, establishes sustainable tourism infrastructure, and responds to global tourism demand[10]. Developing sustainable strategies for esports tourism events is crucial for long-term growth[11].

The purposes of this study are as follows: First, to analyze the concept and characteristics of the esports tourism industry; second, to assess the current status through domestic and international case studies; third, to identify key factors for building a sustainable ecosystem; and fourth, to propose policy and industrial implications.

This study combines literature review and case analysis, advancing the discussion from a convergent perspective between the cultural content industry and the tourism industry. esports has emerged as a central axis of the global cultural content industry, clearly showing the potential for convergence with the tourism sector. Particularly after the COVID-19 pandemic, the demand for non-face-to-face content has risen, and online-based esports has driven expansion into fan-participatory tourism content[12].

As a result, esports is gaining more attention as it aligns with new tourism trends such as “participatory tourism,” “experiential tourism,” and “digital-based tourism.” In this flow, the esports

tourism industry not only involves hosting events but also generates a variety of ripple effects, including community engagement, job creation for young people, and strengthening of local identity. For example, esports arenas contribute economically through linkages with various sectors such as local food, accommodation, and transportation, and they help enhance the brand value of particular cities. Thus, the esports tourism industry should be approached from a perspective of regional development strategy and sustainability, not merely as an “industry.” Moreover, advancements in digital technology are changing how tourists experience destinations[4]. esports experiential content utilizing the metaverse, VR, and AR provides highly immersive experiences, offering a distinct competitive advantage compared to traditional tourist sites[2]. With the rise of Generation Z and Generation Alpha, content-driven tourism demand is increasing, making the development of esports-based tourism content for these demographics urgent[13].

Additionally, policy shifts are noteworthy. In Korea, the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism and local governments are jointly supporting the construction of esports arenas and the creation of tourism content, while internationally, there is a growing number of cases where esports are included in national tourism attraction strategies.

This shows that esports is being used as a tool to secure tourism competitiveness between countries. Therefore, it is crucial to view the esports tourism industry not as a short-term spectacle but as a strategic industry aimed at establishing regionally rooted industrial ecosystems, creating sustainable tourism infrastructure, and addressing global tourism demand[7].

Accordingly, the purpose of this study is to analyze the concept and characteristics of the esports tourism industry, identify key factors for building a sustainable ecosystem, and empirically examine how the esports tourism industry contributes to local communities.

II. Theoretical Background

Today, the esports industry has expanded into a complex industrial sector through the convergence of cultural content, digital technology, and global networks[12]. In particular, its potential to generate new added value through integration with the tourism industry has attracted attention from various academic fields and policy arenas[15][14][3].

Based on this trend, this section examines the definition and characteristics of the esports industry, explores its potential for convergence with the tourism industry, and reviews the theoretical foundations of sustainable tourism. First, esports has evolved from a simple leisure activity into cultural content equipped with professional competition and entertainment elements. While the traditional gaming industry was consumer-centered, esports has transformed into a community-centered industry based on fandom.

This transformation increases its potential for integration with tourism and suggests that it can have a tangible impact on attracting tourists and revitalizing local economies[16].

Recently, there have been cases where esports arenas serve as central hubs of tourism, sometimes utilized as part of urban marketing strategies [17][14]. From a tourism perspective, esports can be regarded as a new form of stay-type tourism content[18]. Whereas traditional tourism resources have focused on tangible assets such as natural environments, cultural heritage, and cuisine, modern tourism has shifted toward experience-based, digital-centered, and immersive content.

esports aligns with this shift, offering not only game viewing but also activities such as fan meetings, merchandise purchases, and participation in interactive gaming experiences[2]. These activities can effectively extend tourists' length of stay and stimulate local consumption.

Advancements in digital technology are also accelerating the growth of esports tourism[19]. The popularization of streaming platforms allows fans

worldwide to watch matches simultaneously, fostering the formation of global fan communities[20].

Furthermore, immersive content using AR and VR technologies provides tourists with a sense of presence and expands their experiences beyond physical limitations. These technologies ultimately contribute to positioning esports as a core component of digital-based tourism[21]. From a sustainability perspective, esports tourism has the advantage of being a relatively low-environmental-impact, content-centered industry.

Tourism resources can be developed through digital infrastructure and creative planning without requiring large-scale facility construction, and events can be operated with a focus on co-prosperity with local communities. For example, esports commentary academies for local youth and events in collaboration with small local businesses can have positive effects in terms of generating social value in tourism. Such cases can fulfill the three elements of sustainable tourism—economic, environmental, and socio-cultural sustainability [18][19].

In conclusion, the esports industry offers new strategic intersections in the era of digital transformation and content centrality in tourism. With Generation Z and Generation Alpha emerging as major consumer groups, their digital-friendly consumption patterns and high affinity for esports represent one of the most important trends for the tourism industry moving forward.

Therefore, esports should not be viewed merely as an industrial sector, but rather as a complex ecosystem in which culture, technology, local economies, and tourism converge, requiring a sustainable approach. esports is a form of sport conducted electronically, primarily through computer or console games, in which competition takes place. It shares similar rules and viewing formats with traditional sports, emphasizing performance, teamwork, and strategy. Additionally, advancements in the internet and streaming technologies have enabled real-time communication with fans and significantly increased its global scalability. These characteristics demonstrate the

potential for esports to merge with the tourism industry[19].

Traditionally, the tourism industry has been based on tangible resources such as natural assets, cultural heritage, and local festivals. However, in recent years, its scope has expanded to include intangible, content-driven resources. Representative examples include Hallyu which are K-pop, dramas, and films, and esports is increasingly recognized as a tourism resource within this trend. esports-related events can attract fan visits and have positive impacts on local economies. Thus, the convergence of the tourism and content industries is evaluated as an important strategy for creating new added value.

Sustainable tourism aims to meet present tourism demand while preserving tourism resources for future generations[12]. The key lies in balancing the three elements of environmental, socio-cultural, and economic sustainability. The esports tourism industry should pursue long-term growth by considering these elements, encompassing not only short-term profit generation but also values such as co-prosperity with local communities, environmental protection, and respect for cultural diversity.

Based on this, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1: Infrastructure factors have a positive effect on customer satisfaction.

H2: Content and experiential factors have a positive effect on customer satisfaction.

H3: Technological innovation factors have a positive effect on customer satisfaction.

H4: Community and policy factors have a positive effect on tourist satisfaction.

H5: Customer satisfaction has a positive effect on revisit intention.

III. Research Method

1. Measurements

This study aims to assess the growth potential of the esports tourism industry and propose strategies

for building a sustainable ecosystem. To this end, it examines the infrastructure factors, which include the physical and technological facilities and accessibility elements that enable esports tourism; the content and experiential factors, which involve the quality and diversity of programs, events, and storytelling experiences available to tourists through esports; the technological innovation factors, which encompass advanced digital technologies used to differentiate and enhance the esports tourism experience; and the community and policy factors, which address community participation, policy support from local and central governments, and the institutional environment.

Furthermore, the study explores the customer satisfaction factor, referring to tourists' overall satisfaction with their esports tourism experience, and the revisit intention factor, which reflects tourists' willingness to return to the same destination or program or to recommend it to others. Using these factors, this research conducts an empirical analysis to investigate the positive relationships among them. Factors Items References Infrastructure 1-5 Getz(2008)[16]; Chalip (2006)[17] Content-Experience 6-10 Hallmann & Giel (2018)[20]; Seo & Jung(2016)[9] Technological Innovation 11-15 Gretzel et al.(2015)[21]; Shin & Kang (2024)[19]; Kusumah et al.(2022)[20] Community-Policy 16-20 Porter & Kramer (2011)[21]; Hugaerts et al. (2023)[22] Satisfaction 21-25 Shonk & Chelladurai (2008)[10]; Hsu & Lin (2008)[18] Revisit Intention 26-30 Kim et al. (2020)[4]; Lam & Wong (2024)[24].

Table 1. The results of Exploratory Factor Analysis

Factors	Items	References
Infrastructure	1-5	Getz(2008); Chalip(2006)
Content/ Experience	6-10	Hallmann and Giel(2018)[15]; Seo and Jung(2016)
Technological Innovation	11-15	Gretzel et al.(2015); Shin and Kang(2024); Kusumah et al.(2022)
Community/ Policy	16-20	Porter and Kramer(2011); Hugaerts et al.(2023)
Satisfaction	21-25	Shonk and Chelladurai(2008); Hsu and Lin(2008)
Revisit Intention	26-30	Kim et al.(2020); Lam and Wong(2024)

2. Collecting data

This study conducted both online surveys via Google Forms and offline surveys over a period of approximately two months, from December 26, 2024, to February 26, 2025. Out of a total of 220 collected responses, 26 inappropriate responses were excluded, leaving 194 valid responses for analysis. The demographic profile of the respondents shows that 120(61.9%) were male and 74(38.1%) were female. By age group, 70 respondents(36.1%) were in their 20s, 80(41.2%) in their 30s, 40(20.6%) in their 40s, and 4(2.1%) were aged 50 or older[19].

Table 2. Sample Results

	Category	Freq	%
Gender	male	120	61.9%
	female	74	38.1%
Age	20s	70	36.1%
	30s	80	41.2%
	40s	40	20.6%
	over50s	4	2.1%

IV. Research Methods

1. Result of Exploratory Factor Analysis

Before evaluating the research model, an exploratory factor analysis(EFA) and reliability analysis were conducted to examine how accurately the measured variables reflect their respective constructs and to assess the internal consistency of the items comprising each factor. In this study, the principal component extraction method was employed, and the varimax orthogonal rotation method was applied. Items with a factor loading of 0.40 or higher were considered significant and retained, while those with cross-loadings or factor loading below 0.50 were removed. The criterion for factor extraction was based on factors with eigenvalues greater than or equal to 1, and Cronbach's α values were calculated to assess internal consistency.

Table 3. The results of Exploratory Factor Analysis

Items	Factors						Cronbach's α
	1	2	3	4	5	6	
1	.865						0.881
3	.851						
2	.795						
15	.734						
5		.665					0.643
7		.775					
10		.604					
11		.721					
13			.722				0.592
14			.667				
19			.668				
22			.602				
24				.611			0.602
9				.701			
25				.744			
21				.622			
15					.585		0.575
16					.566		
17					.631		
18					.603		
25						.552	0.559
26						.501	
27						.612	
30						.668	

= 121.262, GFI = 0.882, AGFI = 0.898, NFI = 0.902, CFI = 0.875, and RMR = 0.041. Furthermore, all of the proposed hypotheses were supported.

Table 4. Results of Structural model

H	Path	FL	P-values	Supported
H1	0.295	3.641	0.009	**
H2	0.106	1.299	0.015	*
H3	0.167	2.557	0.026	*
H4	0.197	2.870	0.021	*
H5	0.232	1.686	0.014	*

*: P<0.05, **: P<0.01, ns: not significant

VI. Conclusion

1. Discussion

This study empirically examined the relationships among infrastructure factors, content and experiential factors, technological innovation factors, community and policy factors, customer satisfaction, and revisit intention for the sustainable development of the esports tourism industry. The analysis revealed that all factors had a positive impact on customer satisfaction and revisit intention to a certain extent, with infrastructure and content-experiential factors showing relatively stronger effects. This suggests that stable, accessible venues and advanced broadcasting/network environments, along with differentiated experiential content, are key drivers of tourist satisfaction.

Moreover, the significant effects of technological innovation and community/policy factors indicate that immersive experiences incorporating new technologies such as the metaverse, VR, and AI-combined with active policy support from local governments and community participation-contribute to enhancing tourist satisfaction and loyalty. These findings imply that, for the esports tourism industry to evolve beyond short-term event-centered activities into a long-term, sustainable tourism ecosystem, it is essential to integrate digital technologies with local resources and establish cooperative systems among stakeholders.

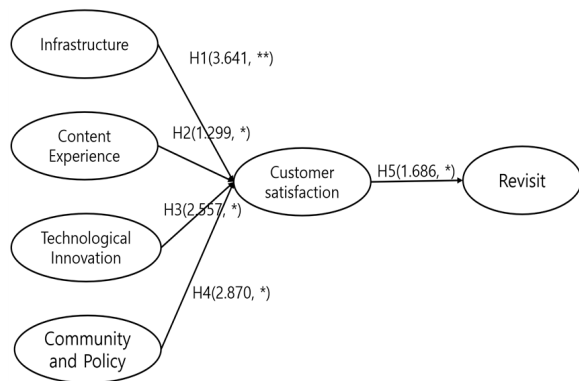


Fig. 2. Results of hypotheses

V. Results

Subsequently, a structural equation modeling (SEM) analysis was conducted. Causal analysis is commonly used to identify the interrelationships between causes and effects. In this study, a covariance structure model was applied to examine the relationships among factors based on the five proposed hypotheses. The results showed that all model fit indices were within acceptable ranges: χ^2

require developing domestic infrastructure and content to meet international standards, while simultaneously implementing strategies to attract foreign tourists. Therefore, the results of this study provide policy and industry directions for leveraging esports tourism as a catalyst for local economic revitalization, youth employment creation, and the dissemination of cultural content, offering meaningful implications for both practice and academia.

2. Limitations

First, this study relied on self-reported survey data, with the sample restricted to a specific region and age group, thereby limiting the generalizability of the findings.

Second, although the analytical model examined the relationships among variables, it did not account for temporal dynamics or long-term effects. Future research should therefore adopt longitudinal designs to more clearly establish causal relationships between variables.

Third, the study lacked a quantitative assessment of environmental sustainability and socio-cultural impacts. Future research should incorporate multidimensional evaluations that include environmental and social indicators such as greenhouse gas emissions and community acceptance, as highlighted by recent studies on mega-event sustainability[22].

Fourth, the comparison with international cases was limited, which constrained the ability to capture cross-national differences in policies and cultural contexts. Future studies should conduct international comparative analyses, as suggested by [24], to provide deeper insights into the global expansion strategies of esports tourism.

Finally, the effects of technological innovation factors were addressed only qualitatively. Further studies are needed to quantitatively examine how the actual application of emerging technologies—such as the metaverse, XR, and AI—affects tourist experiences and revisit intentions[19].

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