

## Article

# eSports Events Trend: A Promising Opportunity for Tourism Offerings

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**Abstract:** eSports events are a groundbreaking phenomenon worldwide. For this reason, this study aims to recognize the potential of eSports as an alternative for tourism events diversification in the city of Guayaquil, Ecuador. Within the methodological framework of an exploratory-descriptive scope, it was proposed to analyze the conditions of eSports events and the tourist perception of them in the selected city. A survey was applied to 384 participants of eSports events (potential tourists), using video game rooms and player community networks throughout Latin America. The instrument used to collect data was a questionnaire available online for six months for further analysis. The principal findings in terms of quality performance of the event, perception of the event, destination image, and satisfaction revealed four vital indicators associated. Event staff, event atmosphere, hospitality, and good feelings about live attendance must be taken into consideration while designing a satisfactory experience to integrate into eSports into the city's tourism offerings. Attendees also expressed their willingness to return to the city in the future. These results contribute to expanding the scientific literature on the evaluation and management of eSports events for other developing cities and countries.

**Keywords:** tourism offer; tourist perception; eSports



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## 1. Introduction

The resilient nature of the tourism industry is probably one of the reasons for its fundamental role in the global economy. Throughout the years, demographic, social, biological, cultural, and technological drivers have shaped tourist demand in the pursuit of new tourism experiences. As a result, a wide spectrum of alternative tourist activities have been offered to increase the diversity in tourism supply, focusing on special interests, such as adventure, events, sports, and culture, among others [1–3].

In recent years, digital youth culture interests have grown into internet-driven tourism centered around online gaming. Competitive computer gaming or eSports has evolved from a participant-oriented activity into a worldwide phenomenon, captivating enthusiastic players and massive spectators of professional tournaments around the globe [4–7]. By 2019, the Newzoo industry report revealed that the number of global audiences for eSports was 443 million, and the industry made USD 950 million [8]. Other reports have anticipated a USD 1.79 billion industry for 2022, with high expectations to be part of future Olympic games [9].

eSports, or electronic sports, can be introduced as a new form of sports, where digital games are played on any platform, online or offline, individually and/or as a team [10]. This professional gaming scenario provides many people a way of life, through prize pools

in tournaments or from corporate sponsorship [11]. In addition, eSports is also a multi-dimensional hallmark that comprises an ecosystem not exclusively located in simulated environments (computers or robotics) but also for live environments (geographical hubs that foster tourism in the host destination) [12–14].

The popularity of eSports has now consolidated as a truly new traveling motivation for modern entertainment [15]. Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic has generated a significant increase in the number of spectators and players, whose fandom boosts them into assiduous tourists [16]. These factors have triggered a tourism trend in eSports, where in-person events have become more frequent in recent years, due to the intrinsic potential in promoting tourism within destinations [17].

For this reason, several destinations have integrated eSports events into their tourism offers as a way to channel tourist traffic, especially during the off-season, while partakers compete, spectate, or simply attend organized competitions [18–20]. Although these events have proven to be profitable tourist attractions in North America, Europe, China, and South Korea, Latin America is rapidly growing into an emerging market with the arousal of awareness about the eSports industry and the improvement in the general tourist infrastructure [10,21].

The aim of the study was to evaluate eSports-related events from a potential tourist's approach. A survey was conducted to shed some light on their interests and insights towards live attendance events regarding indicators, such as quality performance, perception, destination image, and satisfaction. The study also meant to take into account key factors for the further development of eSports tourism, considering national and international attendees.

The rest of the article is structured as follows. Section 2 presents a background of eSports evolution, placing emphasis on event tourism based on sports tournaments and eSports events. In addition, tourist implications in hosting cities are reviewed, along with the destination's experiences in order to hold these events for incipient markets. Section 3 addresses the methodological framework, which denotes the elements involved in this study to achieve the proposed objectives. Section 4 presents the analysis and interpretation of the results obtained in this study. Section 5 provides a discussion regarding the impact of eSports events over tourism in destinations. Finally, Section 6 summarizes the principal findings and conclusions of the study.

## 2. Theoretical Background

Electronic sports (eSports), also known as cybersports or virtual sports, are considered an area of sports activities in which people develop and train mental or physical abilities in the use of information and communication technologies through video games [22]. However, not all eSports are the same; for that reason, they are organized into genres. Popular ones include multiplayer online battle arenas (MOBAs) (e.g., League of Legends or Dota 2), first-person shooters (FPS) (e.g., Counter-Strike or Call of Duty), battle royale games (BR) (e.g., Fortnite or PUBG), collectible card games (CCGs) (e.g., Hearthstone or MTG Arena), real-time strategy games (RTS) (e.g., Starcraft 2 or Age of Empires IV), fighting games (e.g., Guilty Gear Strive or Street Fighter V), sport-based video games (SBVGs) (e.g., FIFA 22 or NBA 2k22), and driving games (e.g., F1 2021 or iRacing) [23].

Today, video games can be played on a variety of platforms, e.g., smartphones, tablets, computers, and game consoles. These environments have quickly created the opportunity for competitions, which have become popular over time [15,24]. Possibly, due to technological advances in network capabilities, gaming has made its way into its transition to eSports. This began by connecting gaming consoles in local area networks (LAN) for weekend-long parties with friends; however, skilled players, after a certain level, felt the need to branch out to higher levels of competition within professional leagues in a remarkable and legitimized sport structure [19,24].

As in traditional sports, the eSports industry brings together a large number of people, team players, fans, sponsors, and representatives of gaming companies in tournaments [10].

Events in electronic sports (eSports) gather audiences every year only equal to those obtained by the largest sporting events in the world. Since 2013, the finals of the League of Legends (LoL) championships has surpassed in audience the finals of sports leagues as consolidated as the NBA or the MLB [25].

The history of eSports events dates back to 1980, the year in which the First National Space Invaders Competition was held in the United States, the first large-scale event focused on video games. It was organized by Atari, bringing together 10,000 people in the United States [26]. Throughout that decade, many arcade game tournaments were included as great achievements, mainly due to their annual public promotion, since these were televised in a program called *Starcade* (<https://www.starcade.tv/starcade/games/index.html> (accessed on 18 June 2022)) together with other tournaments and interviews related to video games [25,27].

It was not until 10 years later, in 1990, that the first competition that included a monetary prize of USD 10,000 was held in the context of the Nintendo World Championship. The next big step in eSports history came in the mid-2000s, including the creation of the first eSports communities known today. Another milestone in the evolution of eSports events was the launch of live streaming, which appeared in 2007 on a website now called *Twitch* (<https://www.twitch.tv/> (accessed on 18 June 2022)). This made it possible for professional players and tournaments to be broadcast online instead of on television [25]. Actually, the site is the leading platform in America, Europe, and Asia, where the professionalization of live streaming has also led to quickly growing career choices [28].

Since then, eSports events have continued to grow and gain space among massive events, for example, the finals of the League of Legends World Cup, which was held in 2018 in Incheon (South Korea) and achieved a peak audience of 205,348,063 viewers [29]. eSports have become a very fruitful field of study that ranges from the competitive scenes of video games to their professionalization as eSports [30]. eSports are now a multidimensional ecosystem, involving motivations that lead to competitiveness [31] and the development of complementary industries that nurture event tourism [32–34].

Event tourism mitigates the effects of tourism seasonality by scheduling many meetings, incentives, conferences, and exhibitions (MICE) in times of low tourist influx. Thus, events have the capacity to spread tourist demand geographically, allowing each region to develop its destination image. Leading countries in event tourism around the world are mostly European, with the exception of the United States; however, Europe has the highest number of events per region, followed by Asia and North America. In Latin America, an increase in the number of events between 2013 and 2019 is evident; among the leading countries in this region are Brazil, Argentina, Mexico, Colombia, and Chile [35–37].

It should be noted that one of the most memorable events attracting tourists are the World Cups and the Olympic Games, held every four years, where athletes and fans from almost all sports and from all over the world prepare during that time for the big event. Usually taking place in a single city, these mega-events have an impact on the economy, politics, society, culture, etc., of the host city and country, becoming a historical element. As a matter of fact, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) has created a department for virtual sports development, acknowledging eSports as providing multiple sources of opportunities for its consolidation in society [38,39].

Although eSports have their roots in digital consumption, their leap from virtual to physical space occurs more frequently through the hosting of increasingly massive competitive events with greater international impact. In addition, the association between the host city, the organizing company, and its sponsors transforms in-person events into tourist attractions not only for professional athletes and amateur fans but also for crucial members or stakeholders of the industry, such as coaches, activists, journalists, businessmen, and so forth [17,19].

With the rising interest that eSports events have generated, the next important issue to take care of is the role of eSports in the context of sustainable tourism [40]. Therefore, it is vital to explore vital perspectives in the sustainability model, including economic and social

approaches. Probably, the economic impact of eSports events has been mostly addressed in reports through a number of events and revenues, assuring not just the stability of the industry but business growth [41]. For instance, 5.432 eSports tournaments were held around the world in 2019, with the United States, China, and South Korea as the top three hosts. In addition, since 2018, the total income generated by this market rounds between USD 700 and USD 900 million [4,10,42,43].

Regarding social sustainability, eSports events satisfy several needs of individuals attending them [41]. Firstly, professional athletes receive awards, remuneration, and recognition for their sports performance. As for the fans, they intentionally devote their spare time and finances to closely experience the competitions, meet their favorite players, and share their passions with other enthusiastic fans of similar interests. In the words of eSports tourists, live event attendance is considered to be a unique and unforgettable experience, deriving pleasure from satisfying vanity and snobbism [17,44–46].

Therefore, hosting events for eSports tourists has a direct impact on the hospitality industry due to expenditures on transportation, accommodation, food, beverages, etc. Profits associated and local economy stimulation turn eSports events into promising opportunities for tourism destination competitiveness. Several studies consider tourist facilities and services offered as drivers in enhancing tourism destination image. A satisfactory experience towards conditions of existing facilities as well as good quality of service will definitely shape eSports tourists' perceptions about the visited destination and also their willingness to return for future visits [4,40,47].

In addition to tourist facilities and services, event facilities also need careful consideration. Hosting eSports events requires meeting the standards of infrastructure (e.g., stadium) and technology (e.g., computer, consoles, cables, large-scale monitors) considering public and private participation [24]. Whenever the event venue is equipped with quality standards, complementary elements will influence the responses of attendees [48]. In this sense, good service conditions, event amenities, entertainment, and activities are a must to achieve the best experience a destination can offer [40]. Recent findings also emphasize the importance of social and interactive experiences in generating friendships and a perceptual sense of belonging at events [49].

Despite the fact that eSports events are a new trend in the tourism industry, research findings and literature, including systematic evaluation of destinations, are still in their infancy [24]. Few studies have explored indicators or variables linked to successful event destinations. For instance, Iberian Cup 2019 participants in Barcelona evaluated the variable "personal of the event" as the most important, while exhibiting good satisfaction with the event and intention to return in the future. In Valencia, service performance variables and brand variables that had a significant influence on the loyalty of users attending eSports events were general quality, perceived value, and corporate image [23,50].

Although the market for eSports events is largest in North America, Europe, and Asia, Latin America is considered the third fastest-growing region. According to the Newszoo analysis, the use of smartphones to play various franchises helped Latin America and the Caribbean increase profits by 17%, approaching more powerful markets. The growth of this sector has been so great that even in Mexico, in 2020, an event center for eSports tournaments was inaugurated in its capital, the Mexico City eSports Arena [51]. Currently, the largest eSports event in Latin America is the Latin American League of Legends (LOL) event, the 2021 edition of which took place at the referred arena [52].

According to Pablo Monti, eSports Manager at Latam Media Group (LMG), Argentina, 2021, was the year in which Latin American eSports exploded. Brands were expected to fully enter the ecosystem of competitions, and teams were able to establish themselves as serious and well-organized companies. The COVID-19 pandemic has undoubtedly helped raise awareness of eSports, and there is much less evangelism to be performed [43].

In Ecuador, there are leagues and teams with a considerable history in eSports competition, but never as country representatives [53]. However, 2020 brought interesting shifts: finally, and Ecuadorian teams joined other participating countries of the Latin

American League, where Argentina, Colombia, Mexico, Peru, and Chile were already members. The professional league announced its arrival in Ecuador in February 2020, promoting the development of more eSports tournaments that stir passions from national and international participants [54].

In fact, in 2020, the Ecuadorian Association of Electronic Sports (AEDE by its acronym in Spanish) was created, with the purpose of professionalizing electronic sports in Ecuador. This organization is a member of PAMESCO (Pan American Electronic Sports Confederation) and WESCO (World Esports Consortium), the main objectives of which are the organization, regulation, administration, and promulgation of electronic sports at all levels seeking recognition by the international governing bodies of the sport [55].

Despite a few national eSports competitions organized in recent years, to date, there is a reduced offering of these events in Guayaquil city, mainly due to a lack of knowledge about the city's potential to create an image as an eSports events organizer. However, Guayaquil's infrastructure is suitable as a host destination: its convention centers are the largest and most complete in the country, tourist facilities and services are highly recognized internationally, and there are highly trained professionals in event design and production. In addition, in 2017, the Guayaquil Convention Bureau became a member of the International Congress and Convention Association, ICCA, an important global institution in the MICE market [56].

Notably, Guayaquil has evolved as a destination for events and congresses, adapting the tourist experience to consolidate itself as an optimal venue for national and international offers. In 2018, the city received the FIEXPO AWARD for being the destination for Congresses and Conventions that grew the most in 2018 in both Latin America and the world. Over the years, events that Guayaquil has hosted have ranged from beauty pageants, forums, fairs, and conventions to events more linked to pop culture such as ComicCon and Budokan (both related to the world of anime, manga, and comics), providing an opening for events related to video games and their competitive eSports scene [57,58]. In this sense, it is necessary to evaluate the potential tourists' perception of Guayaquil as an eSports hub in Ecuador and Latin America.

### 3. Methodological Framework

The present study contemplated field research evaluating eSports events as a new option that can potentiate tourism offerings for Guayaquil City, Ecuador. The principal objective was to examine two main variables related to eSports players' interests and insights towards in-person events, with the premise that players are likely to become potential tourists. The measurement of variables was conducted over a six-month period through a previously tested questionnaire by an analogous investigation carried out in Barcelona [50].

#### 3.1. Research Scope

Within the framework of this study, an exploratory-descriptive scope was used for analyzing how eSports events can potentiate an event tourism offering of the city of Guayaquil. A survey was proposed to address this phenomenon, considering conditions related to eSports events and tourists' perception of them in the selected city. Regarding both variables, a survey was conducted within a sample of people who have previously attended an eSports event. The applied questionnaire contained closed single-choice questions, including dichotomous, multiple choice, and Likert scales (1 to 5).

#### 3.2. Conceptualization and Operationalization of the Variables

The two main variables selected were analyzed as follows.

- **Conditions related to eSports events:**
  - Type: Independent;
  - Conceptualization: Set of general aspects on attendance at eSports events;
  - Dimensions:

- \* Relationship with eSports:
  - Indicators:
    1. Type of attended events (national and international);
    2. Main reason for travel;
    3. Average number of companions;
    4. Relationship with companions;
    5. Average stay length in destinations;
    6. Type of additional activities carried out.
- **Tourist perception towards eSports events**
  - Type: Dependent;
  - Conceptualization: Set of important considerations that are taken when participating in eSports events in Guayaquil;
  - Dimensions:
    - \* Quality Performance of the event:
      - Indicators:
        1. Event Staff;
        2. Event logistics;
        3. Information of the event;
        4. Activities and play areas;
        5. Ticket price;
        6. Overall organization.
    - \* Perception of the event:
      - Indicators:
        1. Event atmosphere;
        2. Emotion associated with the event;
        3. Opportunity to meet people with common interests;
        4. Social interaction with other event participants.
    - \* Destination Image:
      - Indicators:
        1. Solidarity and hospitality;
        2. Good leisure and entertainment opportunities;
        3. Interesting areas to visit;
        4. Quality versus Price offer.
    - \* Satisfaction:
      - Indicators:
        1. Good feeling about attending the event;
        2. Future recommendation of the destination to third parties;
        3. Repetition of the experience in another event;
        4. Social media sharing about event attendance;
        5. Future intention to return to the destination.

### 3.3. Population and Sample

The universe was considered as the population that has ever attended an eSports event, mainly amateur and professional players who practice electronic sports.

Since the number of people that made up the population was not known, for the selection of the sample size, the expression corresponding to infinite population was used as indicated in Equation (1):

$$n = \frac{Z_{\alpha}^2 * p * q}{d^2} \quad (1)$$

where  $n$  constitutes the sample size,  $Z_{\alpha}$  is the standard normal percentile corresponding to the confidence level,  $p$  represents the probability of success or occurrence of an event,  $q$  represents the probability of failure or non-occurrence of an event, and  $d$  is the maximum admissible error in terms of proportion.

Substituting the expression, the result presented in Equation (2) was obtained:

$$n = \frac{1.96^2 * 0.5 * 0.5}{0.05^2} \quad (2)$$

A value of  $Z_{0.05}$  of 1.96 corresponding to the 95th percentile of the standard normal distribution (95% of confidence) was expected, with  $p$  and  $q$  equal to ensure that the ratio of success or failure is the same, i.e., 0.5. Additionally, a 5% admissible error was considered. The sample size selected was 384 people.

The representative sample was obtained through virtual channels of League of Legends and Fortnite (lobby video game rooms and player community networks in Latin America), which are the most popular video games according to ICCA reports [37]. The employed sampling method was non-probabilistic for convenience. Data were collected from the questionnaire available online, and valid responses were processed with Microsoft Excel and SPSS statistical software for subsequent analysis and interpretation of results.

Frequencies and percentages analyses were calculated for the independent variable (conditions related to eSports events). The descriptive statistics and mean and standard deviation were calculated for the dependent variable (tourist perception towards eSports events) together with correlation analysis and  $t$ -test for independent groups (participants of national or international events).

#### 4. Analysis and Results

According to the conceptualization and operationalization of the variables indicated in the methodological framework of this study, the conditions related to eSports events and the tourist perception of these events were investigated, along with seven socioeconomic and demographic questions for mapping the sample profile.

##### 4.1. Sample Profile

According to the country of origin, 39% of the sample were Ecuadorians, 18% Mexicans, 12% Colombians, 11% Argentinians, 9% Peruvians, and 8% Chileans; with less representation, the remaining nationalities included Paraguayans, Hondurans, Nicaraguans, Bolivians, Venezuelans, and Panamanians. Regarding age, around 62% were between 21 and 30 years old, followed by the group of 18 to 20 years old, and, finally, 31 to 40 years old.

Regarding gender, three-quarters of the surveyed sample was male. Around 71% were single, followed by 25% married, and around 4% stated that they were in a de facto union. Regarding occupation, the two largest groups were employees (43.7%) and students (42.5%), with a higher level of education in 92% of cases, and the remaining 8% had an intermediate level of education. Finally, the predominant socioeconomic classes were middle (46.7%) and lower (42%) classes.

##### 4.2. Conditions Related to eSports Events

We found that 68% of the sample has mostly attended national eSports events, while the remaining 32% have attended international events, the main reason being for travel and attendance at eSports events (81%).

On average, most of the respondents indicated attending events accompanied by one (51.9%) or two (35.6%) people, these being friends (58.5%), relatives (28.4%), and partners (13.1%). Regarding the average stay length in destinations, they pointed out stays of 2 (54.8%) to 3 (27.7%) days.

In addition to attending eSports events, the respondents mentioned having engaged in entertainment (39%), leisure (29.1%), and cultural (23.5%) activities.

### 4.3. Tourist Perception towards eSports Events

The results evidenced in Table 1 show the quality performance of an eSport event perceived by the respondents. All the items scored high average values out of a total of 5 points, considering that the event staff was the item best evaluated by the attendees with an average of  $4.65 \pm 0.71$  points; however, the price of the ticket was the worst evaluated item and the only one that obtained an average value below 4 points ( $3.25 \pm 1.17$  points). The rest of the items associated with the event obtained scores between 4.40 and 4.48 points.

**Table 1.** Descriptive analysis of the dimension Quality Performance of the event.

Items	Mean	Std Dev
Event staff	4.65	0.71
Event logistics	4.41	0.70
Event information	4.48	0.79
Activities and play areas	4.40	0.74
Ticket price	3.25	1.17
Overall organization	4.46	0.74

Regarding the results summarized in Table 2, the correlation analyses between the descriptive statistics of the dimensions of perception of the event, destination image, and satisfaction were visualized. In the first instance, no strong correlation was observed between different variables. However, the variables *meeting new people–contact with other participants* ( $r = 0.727$ ), *hospitality–environment* ( $r = 0.730$ ), and *sharing information on social media–future intention* ( $r = 0.706$ ) showed a moderate correlation, while the variables *hospitality–contact with other participants* ( $r = 0.212$ ), *quality versus price–contact with other participants* ( $r = 0.214$ ), and *meet new people–repeat the experience* ( $r = 0.220$ ) obtained the weakest correlations.

**Table 2.** Correlation analysis between the dimensions Perception of the event, Destination image, and Satisfaction.

Items	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1 Environment	1												
2 Emotion	0.637 *	1											
3 Meet new people	0.349 *	0.368 *	1										
4 Contact with other participants	0.297 *	0.357 *	0.727 *	1									
5 Solidarity and hospitality	0.730 *	0.571 *	0.367 *	0.212 *	1								
6 Leisure and entertainment	0.560 *	0.615 *	0.425 *	0.479 *	0.642 *	1							
7 Areas to visit	0.614 *	0.420 *	0.271 *	0.252 *	0.639 *	0.628 *	1						
8 Quality vs. price offer	0.459 *	0.354 *	0.280 *	0.214 *	0.448 *	0.591 *	0.603 *	1					
9 Sense	0.666 *	0.494 *	0.285 *	0.253 *	0.617 *	0.590 *	0.612 *	0.581 *	1				
10 Recommendation	0.572 *	0.548 *	0.274 *	0.354 *	0.505 *	0.621 *	0.598 *	0.563 *	0.611 *	1			
11 Repeat the experience	0.565 *	0.551 *	0.220 *	0.389 *	0.458 *	0.510 *	0.530 *	0.406 *	0.542 *	0.598 *	1		
12 Share information on social media	0.512 *	0.448 *	0.291 *	0.310 *	0.391 *	0.452 *	0.477 *	0.465 *	0.441 *	0.623 *	0.600 *	1	
13 Future intention	0.514 *	0.445 *	0.309 *	0.342 *	0.416 *	0.458 *	0.476 *	0.483 *	0.470 *	0.591 *	0.677 *	0.706 *	1

\* The correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (bilateral).

The indicators evaluated in the dimensions of perception of the event, the image of the destination, and satisfaction for attendees at national and international events were recorded in Table 3. On the one hand, regarding the perception of the event, the item best valued by both groups was the atmosphere of the event, while for those attending national events, the worst valued item in the dimension and in the entire questionnaire was the opportunity to meet people with common interests (3.99 points). On the other hand, those attending international events indicated that the item with the lowest rating was social interaction with other participants, also coinciding with being the worst-rated of the entire questionnaire for this group (3.60 points).

Regarding the destination image, hospitality was the item best valued by both groups ( $4.58 \pm 0.78$  points and  $4.64 \pm 0.70$  points) while quality versus price in the offering was the indicator with the lowest scores for the dimension analyzed in both groups ( $4.32 \pm 0.82$  points and  $4.15 \pm 0.88$  points, respectively).



**Table 3.** Descriptive analysis of the dimensions Perception of the event, Destination image, and Satisfaction.

Dimension	Item	Participants of National Events		Participants of International Events		p-Value
		Mean	Std Dev	Mean	Std Dev	
Perception of the event	Event atmosphere	4.61	0.75	4.7	0.72	0.263
	Emotion associated with the event	4.34	0.7	4.32	0.7	0.761
	Opportunity to meet people with common interests	3.99	0.97	3.7	0.92	0.004 *
	Social interaction with other event participants	4	0.93	3.6	1.27	0.001 *
Destination image	Solidarity and hospitality	4.58	0.78	4.64	0.7	0.459
	Good leisure and entertainment opportunities	4.38	0.75	4.16	0.62	0.005 *
	Interesting areas to visit	4.42	0.78	4.45	0.8	0.76
Satisfaction	Quality vs. Price offer	4.32	0.82	4.15	0.88	0.062
	Good feeling about attending the event	4.68	0.71	4.64	0.7	0.617
	Future recommendation of the destination to third parties	4.48	0.75	4.21	0.68	0.001 *
	Repetition of the experience in the future in another event	4.49	0.73	4.4	0.72	0.269
	Social media sharing about event attendance	4.44	0.81	4.25	0.72	0.020 *
	Future intention to return to the destination	4.52	0.75	4.33	0.66	0.013 *

\*  $p \leq 0.05$ .

Regarding the satisfaction dimension, both groups evidenced the indicator of having a good feeling about attending the event as the item with the highest score; in the case of the group of attendees to national events, it was also the highest-valued item of the entire questionnaire (4.68 points). For the group of participants of national events, the worst-evaluated item was posting on social networks about attendance at the event (4.44 points), while for the group of international events, it was the future recommendation of the destination to third parties (4.21 points).

A comparison between the groups of participants of national and international events showed that the participants in the context of events within their own country gave a higher value to most of the indicators analyzed, finding significant differences in six of the items according to the *p*-value shown in Table 3.

## 5. Discussion

In this study, the eSports trend was analyzed as an alternative for event tourism in Guayaquil, Ecuador. Specifically, the tourist perceptions of participants and attendees of eSports events were evaluated considering Guayaquil as the venue for these events, taking into account four dimensions: quality performance of the event, perception of the event, destination image, and satisfaction, in addition to conditions related to said events and the profile of the sample.

Thus, consumer demand for eSports and the growth of its international competitions have generated attention from the sports, events, tourism, and entertainment industries [5]. Although electronic sports do not fall into the category of traditional sports, eSports tourism can be evaluated as a type of sports tourism since its events attract large audiences worldwide and are a tourist attraction in the context of its organization [15,59–61].

The eSports events are massive attractions, where, in addition to the central act that is the competition, there are rooms where you can try video games and play with friends, and lectures are given on some new eSports or video games, among other associated activities. In addition, eSports events offer experiences perceived by consumers in special interest tourism [4]

League of Legends and Fortnite are the most popular video games with the longest hours of live streaming, in addition to having the largest competitive scene today, having

multiple tournaments and leagues [8]. This popularity in the culture of eSports not only implies the enjoyment of electronic games as a form of sport but also the motivation to attend events where other attendees can be observed interacting in real life, particularly the most skilled players [62].

To carry out this study, a recent evaluation of tourist perception in Barcelona within the context of the Iberian Cup 2019 [50] was taken as a reference; however, this work is not focused on an evaluation of an event specifically, but on the evaluation of the importance of certain key characteristics on expectations for eSports events in Guayaquil, considering the previous experience of attendees at national or international events. The scope of this evaluation remained at the Latin American level to obtain a perspective of potential foreign tourists.

Regarding the profile of those attending eSports events, similarities were found with what was obtained in the study of the Iberian Cup 2019 demonstrating that this segment is dominated by the male gender, young people, and single people from the lower-middle social classes [50]. However, differences were found regarding the level of education, since, in the Iberian Cup 2019, the attendees had mostly intermediate level educations while the present study reported a higher level, the dominant age group being between 21 and 30 years. In addition, regarding occupation, the reference study showed mostly students. On the contrary, the results of this study reflected employees and students, for the most part. This may be due to differences between the groups studied, considering that Latinos, despite being young, wake up to the world of eSports at the university level, when they already work and can afford their equipment to play, while in Europe, young people from school face fewer barriers when accessing technology, particularly eSports, while also having the support of their parents [63].

In this study, correlation analysis indicated that all items were related, albeit at a moderate or low level. The strongest relationships were associated with the variables meeting new people, contact with other participants, hospitality, environment, sharing information on networks, and future intention, which have a great influence when evaluating the tourists' perceptions of the event. Meanwhile, in the Iberian Cup 2019, the variables with the strongest relationships were emotion, atmosphere, repeating the experience, recommendation of the event, contact with other participants, and meeting new people. The common thing is the social interaction during the event, and although Guayaquil has not hosted a massive eSports event, it has been experienced through the organization of other emblematic events the hosting preparation for potential visitors for an event, considering infrastructural needs and other services required [56].

Regarding the dimension of the quality performance of the event, both studies agree that the best-evaluated item was the quality of the event staff [50]. This factor is important in the evaluation of events since it has been one of the most analyzed in sports tourism literature [64,65]. In addition, the second most important factor reported by this study was the information about the event, directly associated with the quality of communication, which must be considered in any sporting event [66], given that these two factors are the ones that attract the most attention from tourists. In this sense, if you want to achieve quality service, these factors are essential for the perception of the attendees about the event [67].

Regarding the dimension of perception of the event, the studies agreed that the event environment item was the highest scoring [50]. In part, the success of eSports events consists of transferring to the physical context what characterizes this type of game, that is, a large number of players, sharing a permanent virtual world and communicating through interactive tools within the game itself (public and private chats, mail, bulletin boards, event calendars, etc.), in addition to the interaction between players in a conducive environment.

Regarding the destination image dimension, both studies reaffirmed that their best-evaluated item was the one that refers to feeling hospitality in the host city of the event [50]. For this study, all items associated with this dimension were above four on a five-point scale. This definitively reinforces that the knowledge and analysis of the image of the

destination are crucial to developing strategies that contribute to the execution, operation, and improvements in events [68–71]. In addition to this, the literature reports that the image of the destination affects the decisions of sports tourists, especially in their intention to return to the destination and be present in future editions [72].

Finally, regarding the satisfaction dimension, the study on the Iberian Cup 2019 in Barcelona reported that the items of this dimension scored close to six on a seven-point scale [50]. Similarly, the present study carried out for the Guayaquil context also reported items scoring four on a five-point scale of importance. This dimension in particular has been widely valued by the scientific community, where several investigations carried out within the framework of sporting events have found a relationship between satisfaction with the event and the intention to repeat the experience [59,72,73]. In addition, a recent study on the profile of those who visited Guayaquil showed that 98% of them would recommend this city as a tourist destination.

Additionally, the comparison made between the groups of participants of national and international events showed significant differences in six of the items (opportunity to meet people with common interests, social interaction with other event participants, good leisure and entertainment opportunities, a recommendation of the destination to third parties, posting on social networks about attendance at the event, and intent to return to the destination in the future). Although all the items were evaluated as important since they scored above 3.50, a more detailed study is required to explore the reason for these differences found.

## 6. Conclusions

According to the expectations generated around eSports events for Guayaquil in Ecuador, tourist perception was evaluated through four dimensions: quality performance of the event, perception of the event, destination image, and satisfaction. These perceptions were addressed through the application of a survey directed to participants and attendees of eSports events (potential tourists) using lobby video game rooms and player community networks throughout Latin America.

In terms of the preferred dimensions, four vital indicators were identified. Event staff, event atmosphere, hospitality, and good feelings about live attendance must be taken into consideration while designing a satisfactory experience to be integrated into the city's tourism offerings. Findings showed event facilities and quality services as key factors in order to attract more domestic and international tourists, increase the involvement in eSports events activities, and foster willingness for future visits. Thus, Guayaquil might be presented as a promising venue for eSports events, which will serve to potentiate special interests tourism in the destination and delineate future steps for other developing countries with similar infrastructure and technological characteristics in the region.

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