Investigating the Potential of E-sports Tourism in New Egyptian Tourism Cities

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Abstract

The rapid evolution of e-sports has made it an interesting phenomenon for many tourism cities in terms of tourism growth and new cities awareness. Similar to traditional sports, e-sports have significant economic impacts and the potential to be a tourism motivator and a new market for tourism destinations, that could be used for attracting tourists, increasing tourist expenditure, and developing city branding. However, there is a lack of research concerning e-sports events as a sports events tourism and how they could be a great motivator for thousands of tourists. Accordingly, this paper aims to investigate the potential for e-sports tourism in the Egyptian destination, especially the new cities, such as Alamein city and the New Administrative Capital which have numerous resources that may provide great opportunities for hosting e-sports events. The study uses qualitative research with a phenomenological approach to investigate Egypt as an e-sports tourism destination and describe the state of e-sports events in Egypt. The findings of the study demonstrate that e-sports tourism is growing rapidly and has a positive influence on tourism destinations' branding and economic development. Therefore, the study recommends expanding the e-sports events in Egypt and considering e-sports tourism as a vital resource for sustainable tourism in the future.

Keywords: E-sports events, E-sports Tourism, Venue requirements, Sports events tourism.

1. Introduction

Technological advancements have immensely impacted all fields of life, including sports. Thus, a new sports type has emerged and become a global trend called e-sports or electronic sports (Frans et al., 2022; Wettergren, 2020).

Despite the massive advancement of e-sports over recent years, the rise of competitive gaming was first introduced with the advent of computers invention (Scholz, 2019; Li, 2017). The first gaming competition was the 'Spacewar' in 1972 at Stanford University (Hedlund et al., 2021; Kim et al., 2020). Then, e-sports kept immensely growing since 2015 in terms of audience size and revenues (Exley and

Bertram, 2021). In April 2022, the e-sports audience size reached 532 million and is expected to reach 640 million by 2025 worldwide. Meanwhile, its revenues reached 1.38 billion U.S. dollars in April 2022 with a prediction to reach 1.87 billion U.S. dollars by 2025 (Gough, 2022).

Meanwhile, e-sports events, have the potential to be interesting for tourists and thus become a type of sports events tourism (Nikas and Poulaki, 2021). However, there is a lack of research that tackles e-sports in relation to the tourism industry (de Freitas, 2021; Gawrysiak et al., 2020).

Thus, this paper aims to explore the potential of e-sports events for the Egyptian tourism destination, especially the new cities, such as New El-Alamein City and the New Administrative Capital, that would acquire the proper infrastructure and requirements of e-sports events venue.

2. Review
2.1. E-sports

The accelerated evolution of the e-sports phenomenon in relation to the audience size and revenues allows it to be considered a 'modern economy' (Çavuş, 2020). Jia (2019: 16) defines e-sports as "a form of sports where the primary aspects of the sport are facilitated by electronic systems; the input of players and teams as well as output of the e-sports system are mediated by human computer interfaces".

E-sports refer to professional video game competitions (Jia, 2019; Kaukiainen, 2018). It also describes places where players train mentally and physically through sports activities that integrate information and communication technologies (Pedraza-Ramirez et al., 2020; McCutcheon et al., 2018). They are also known as cybersport, virtual sport, professional gaming, or competitive gaming (Exley and Bertram, 2021; Jenny et al., 2017). Some of the popular e-sport competitions are League of Legends, FIFA 17, Street Fighter IV, and StarCraft I (Hayday et al., 2022; Noriya et al., 2021; Gawrysiak et al., 2020).

E-sports tend to have lower costs than classic sports when it comes to spectator facilities and investment in players as well. Besides, professional wise, players are able to take part in numerous competitions and games. However, players' training schools are not available yet due to the novelty of e-sports (Nikas and Poulaki, 2021).

E-sports events and competitions are held either online or offline in arenas and stadiums (Exley and Bertram, 2021; Nikas and Poulaki, 2021). Some places are popular for holding e-sports tournaments including the USA, Asia, and Europe (Zhao et al., 2022; Jenny et al., 2018).

2.2. E-sports Venue Requirements

E-sports events have been hosted in traditional sports venues. However, e-sports are becoming increasingly popular, thus establishing venues that suit e-sports requirements has become essential, where tournaments could be held and players could train as well (Gawrysiak et al., 2020; Jenny et al., 2018).

E-sports have specific venue requirements and standards (Kim et al., 2020). The venue for instance has to have a large space that would be adequate for the number of spectators. It also has to have a suitable network connection to prevent delay and lag time. Besides, it has to be sufficiently prepared and equipped with gaming consoles, chairs, computers, and headsets for gaming as well as large screens for the spectators (Saldana, 2021; Jenny et al., 2018). Moreover, the venue has to be conveniently accessible via various means of transportation and surrounded by various amenities (Social Tables, 2022).

An example of successful e-sports venues is the e-sports stadium in Arlington, Texas, which is the largest in North America. It was inaugurated in November 2018 as a pioneer huge esports events venue. The arena was set up on 100.000 square feet and holds a capacity for 2500 spectators. Besides, it is equipped with 90-foot Light Emitting Diode (LED) screens, Red, Grean and Blue (RGB) stage, lighting and audio with melodramatic quality, technology systems with high-security measures, and a high-speed internet connection. Additionally, there are 8 rooms for teams' private training, shopping retails, and socializing areas. Furthermore, the venue is conveniently accessible and surrounded by various amenities such as luxury hotels, shopping malls, restaurents, and nightlife spots (Arlington Convention and Visitor Bureau, 2022; E-sports Venues LLC, 2021).

2.3. E-sports Tourism

Sports tourism has been progressively growing recently. It includes traveling for sports playing or watching as well as visiting sport-related attractions. Sports tourism encompasses four forms (Stainton, 2022; UNWTO, 2022; Dilek, 2019):

a. Active sports tourism that includes traveling to participate in sports such as soccer, tennis, golf, or yoga.
b. Passive sports tourism that includes spectators and fans who travel to watch played sports, or to support a friend or a relative who plays a sport.
c. Sports events tourism that includes traveling for sports events such as the Olympics, the Rugby Championship, and the Football World cup.
d. Nostalgia sports tourism that includes visiting sport-related attractions such as Barcelona Olympic Park and Maracana football stadium.

Meanwhile, the massive advancemrnt in e-sports has been influencing consumers' behavior and preferences related to tourism (Çavuş, 2020). This has led to the emergence of e-sports tourism which is categorized as sports events tourism (Vegara-Ferri et al., 2020).

2.4. The Potential for E-sports Tourism

E-sports were approved in more than 60 countries by the International e-Sports Federation and were accepted as a medal game in 2022. Besides, its players have been considered professional players. Additionally, e-sports have lower costs when compared to traditional sports, while its revenues have witnessed a 14% annual increase, and players' number has also increased by 8.8% in Africa and the Middle

East, which create business opportunity for the host cities (Chiu et al., 2021; Nikas and Poulaki, 2021).

Meanwhile, E-sports events create a vacation opportunity when held near tourist attractions and amenities (Social Tables, 2022; Ismangil and Fung, 2021), especially since a huge number of people are interested in e-sports events to the extent that they would travel to attend them (Becka et al., 2021), most of which are below thirty years old and high-income earners (Abreu Freitas et al., 2020; TSE Consulting Ltd., 2017). Moreover, hosting e-sports events have the potential to increase tourists' expenditure levels. Further, it contributes to developing the city branding and increasing the awareness of new cities (Çavuş, 2020; TSE Consulting Ltd., 2017).

All these factors combined undoubtedly allow e-sports events to be an interesting phenonmenon for the tourism industry and make e-sports tourism a promising market for the e-sports events host cities (Thompson et al., 2022; Masłowski and Karasiewicz, 2021; Lokhman et al., 2018).

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Material and Methods

Tenny et al. (2022) and McCombes (2019) explained that qualitative research includes collecting and analyzing non-numerical data to recognize concepts and experiences. It is an appropriate choice when not much is known yet about the topic or problem. There are many approaches to qualitative research, such as a phenomenological approach, which investigates a phenomenon or event by describing and interpreting participants' lived experiences. Each research approach is using one or more data collection methods, for example, observations, focus groups, and secondary research (Bhandari, 2020).

Due to the lack of research about e-sports tourism in Egypt, this study uses qualitative research with a phenomenological approach to describe the state of e-sports events in Egypt, and explore the potential for e-sports tourism that could be a tool for branding and increasing awareness of the new Egyptian cities.

The first step was the selection of the cases of the e-sports events held in Egypt such as the E-sports Summit, The Insomnia Egypt Gaming Festival, and Free Fire: The Battle of Egypt. Then, the New Administrative Capital as an example of an urban new city, and New El-Alamein City as a coastal city were selected as new cities that would possess the proper infrastructure and requirements when it comes to hosting e-sports events tourism. The New Administrative Capital was selected for being the biggest innovative new city, while the New El-Alamein City was selected for its similarity to the New Administrative Capital in terms of the significance of the projects to be built on it as a tourist city (SIS, 2022).

The cases data were collected using secondary research such as organizations linked to e-sports, and based on the data gathered, the analysis was done to explore

the potential for e-sports events tourism in both cities, in addition to the implications of this.

3.2. E-sports Events in the Egyptian Context

The number of e-sports viewers has been constantly growing in the last few years. Despite the challenges that face e-sports events including the internet connection speed, and the high cost of the required equipment, Egyptians have an increasing interest in the e-sports trend due to its popularity on different social media platforms (Egyptian Streets Website, 2020). Moreover, the report by Nico (2022) demonstrates that Egypt is the fastest-growing gaming market in Africa and MENA region with above 40 million gamers. Following are three cases of e-sports events held in Egypt:

3.2.1. E-sports Summit
E-sports Summit started in 2018, with the target of designing an annual festival that attracts all types of gamers and allows them to join in real tournaments, and also to enhance that type of events in Egypt and the Middle East to be able to compete globally (E-sports Summit, 2022). In its first edition in 2018, the event was held in the Greek campus in Cairo with more than 5000 participants, competing in over 20 games on PC, PlayStation, and Mobile (E-sports Summit, 2018). In its second edition, it became the largest Local Area Network (LAN) event in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. It was held in The Field, in Maadi district, Cairo, with a number of participants exceeding 8000 during three days (E-sports Summit, 2019).

Despite the global pandemic (Corona virus), the third and fourth editions were held online. In 2021, 37 various tournaments in many competitive games were organized over one month with 10500 participants from all over the MENA region (E-sports Summit, 2021; Cairo360 Website, 2020).

3.2.2. The Insomnia Egypt Gaming Festival
UK's largest festival for gamers was first held in Egypt in 2018, allowing gamers to enjoy and compete in e-sports tournaments. After achieving remarkable success in its first and second editions in 2018 and 2019, it was suspended due to the pandemic for two years until it was held in February 2022, at the International Exhibition Center in Cairo. The event was attended by more than 21.000 gamers across three days, 95% of which expressed their satisfaction with the event and their intent to participate in the following edition. the event witnessed not only government support through the sponsorship of the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology, but also the support of many big-name sponsors including gaming industry pioneers and popular hardware manufacturers. Moreover, huge media coverage was organized with a marketing campaign that combined various traditional and online tools. It should be noted that social media coverage achieved more than 60 million impressions (Insomnia Egypt, 2022; Nico, 2022).

3.2.3. Free Fire: The Battle of Egypt

Under the supervision of the Ministry of Youth and Sports as well as the Egyptian Federation of Electronic Sports, the "Free Fire: The Battle of Egypt" tournament was held in Egypt in 2022, as an initiative to support Egypt's vision 2030 of digital transformation. The number of players reached 16.700 from all over the world with more than 70.000 spectators on YouTube live, and the final competition was held at Hassan Mostafa Sports Complex in the 6th of October City, Egypt (A.Moneim, 2022; Egypt Independent Website, 2022).

3.3. New Egyptian Cities' Venues

Egypt has recently witnessed a massive development as a part of the Egyptian strategic urban development plan 2052. The plan addresses the problems of overpopulation and density in existing cities through the construction of new cities outside the crowded areas all over the country, to ultimately reduce the congestion and improve citizens' life quality. All new cities are distinguished by using the latest technologies to provide the most advanced amenities and facilities in terms of transportation, greenery, smart homes, education, and investments across all fields (Property Finder Website, 2022; Fazza, 2021).

3.3.1. New Administrative Capital

The New Administrative Capital is situated between Cairo/Suez and Cairo/Al Ain Sokhna roads near Badr city, Future city and Madinaty city. It is the biggest new city that introduces a modern and smart concept of residence. The main objectives of its construction are to keep up with the population growth, to provide a better quality of life, and to achieve sustainable development (Property Finder Website, 2022; El Sakty, 2021).

El Sakty (2021) stated that the new capital includes all services that integrate smart technologies and provide all possible ways of comfort including:

a. All governmental and residential Institutions
b. An integrated transportation network with a smart traffic system.
c. A unified digital infrastructure and smart network facilities.
d. Technology and innovation park, Disney land, Floating forest with an artificial river and artificial lakes.
e. Sports city, Medical city, Expo city, Culture and Arts city, and digital conference halls.
f. Essential facilities such as an international airport, hospitals, health clubs, social clubs, worship houses, hotels, and banks.

3.3.2. New El-Alamein City

The New El-Alamein City is a smart innovative city, located on Alexandria Matrouh International Road. It is easily accessible via private cars, rental cars, buses, trains, or planes. Therefore, it attracts lots of investors and buyers, in addition to domestic and inbound tourism (Abdel-Ghani, 2021).

In the sports events context, New Alamein City hosted its first sports event in 2020. It was organized by the Ministry of Youth and Sports and included several competitions: cycling race, beach volleyball, beach five-a-side football, speedball, and street workout. Such events aim to emphasize the importance of practicing sports for its vital role in keeping people fit, in addition to its benefits to attract tourists and as a marketing tool for new cities such as El-Alamein new city as stated by the Egyptian Prime Minister (SIS, 2022).

Furthermore, in accordance with its strategy to promote tourism, the city hosted various sports events such as Egypt's International Car Racing Championship, Arab and African rowing, canoe, and kayak championships in the artificial lakes area. The lakes' pattern was altered to suit the international standards that enable the city to host international races and attract European teams to train there when their own lakes freeze during the winter (Atef, 2022; Abdel-Ghani, 2021).

According to Aqarmap Website (2022) and Abdel-Ghani (2021), the New El-Alamein City is similar to the New Administrative Capital in that they both integrate advanced technologies in all services and projects to suit all visitors. These services and facilities include the following:

  a. Recreational services: that include beachside entertainment areas, international restaurants, cafes, all-inclusive international shopping centers, a gym, spa, beauty centers, sports clubs, a theme park, artificial lakes for swimming, yacht rides, and a tourist walkway about the length of the Alexandria Corniche.
  b. Cultural services: that include arts and culture city, a luxurious library equivalent to the Library of Alexandria, a conference hall, a cultural center, and Al-Alamein Narrator Museum of the city's history.
  c. Health and educational services: that include international schools and universities, hospitals and clinics, pharmacies, as well as a medical center for physiotherapy.
  d. Residential services: that include serviced apartments, luxury hotels, unique housing projects, and beach towers.
  e. Public utility: that includes a drinking water production plant, sewage station, high-speed train, and reliable high-speed telecommunication and Internet networks.

4. Discussion and Results

Based on the mentioned e-sports events in Egypt and the previous literature review, the findings can be discussed and concluded as follows:

  4.1. E-sports is a global phenomenon, and the MENA region's gaming community continues to grow, especially with the establishing of specialized organizations and holding tournaments in several countries.
  4.2. The Insomnia Gaming Festival return undoubtedly shows that e-sports continue to grow in Egypt and gain more popularity.

4.3. E-sports tournaments are held both online and offline. Online streams can reach over 100 million viewers while offline tournaments may fill the stadiums.

4.4. The government officially supports e-sports as a national sport.

4.5. The e-sports types are numerous, but the most popular are team-based multi-player games like multiplayer online battle arenas (PUBE, Call of Duty, etc.)

4.6. In Egypt, the e-sports community is expanding rapidly as gamers use online platforms to meet together, rather than game separately. Therefore, e-sports events in Egypt are a vital opportunity for marketers, depending on their product, service, or brand. Meanwhile, gamers seek more support from brands and tech companies to support their increasing passion.

4.7. The number of participants in the mentioned tournament demonstrates that e-sports events can be a great motivator for attracting thousands of spectators and participants to travel, which makes them a potential market for e-sports events tourism. Thus, more investments and job opportunities would be generated in the host destinations, especially the new cities. That would also increase awareness of the new cities, improve city branding, open new tourism markets, and eventually promote economic development

4.8. The characteristics of traditional sports events are similar to e-sports events. However, the e-sports are unique due to their venues' facilities, technological access, as well as live interactions and reactions among the e-sports fans and players.

4.9. Egypt's new cities are destinations with numerous advantages to hosting e-sports events in terms of IT infrastructure, venues, top services, and smart facilities and amenities. Thus, they have the potential to be destinations for e-sports events tourism.

4.10. Egypt's new cities provide different areas that already have hosted sports events and consequently can be used as e-sports venues, especially with having the proper e-sports venue requirements.

4.11. The New Administrative Capital and New El-Alamein City possess proper e-sports venue requirements including suitable arenas for all e-sport events size, convention centers, stadiums, high-speed internet connection, and sports events experience. Additionally, they have easy accessibility, unique attractions and amenities that create vacation opportunities for e-sports events participants and spectators.

5. Conclusion

As evidenced throughout this study, e-sports events have a high potential to be a new attractive tourism type for many reasons; the e-sports community and businesses are growing increasingly through hosting e-sports events, which generate massive revenues. Besides, selling licenses for e-sports events can be a source of income and a promoting opportunity not only for the host cities or organizers, but for the games' publishers as well. Moreover, from the perspective of e-sports players and spectators, traveling to attend or participate in e-sports events allows them to meet together and share their experiences and passion. Furthermore, e-sports events tourism can be a recovery type of tourism during

crises. Meanwhile, the New Administrative Capital and New El-Alamein City have the potential to be pioneer destinations for e-sports tourism.

6. Recommendations

The study recommends that the Ministries of Youth and Sports, Tourism and Antiquities, Communications and Information Technology, as well as the Ministry of Industry, in coordination also with the Egyptian Federation of Electronic Games, have to cooperate to do the following:

6.1. Expanding e-sports events tourism in Egypt through planning to host more e-sports events as sports events tourism and attract more sponsors and subscribers

6.2. Setting up e-sports venues equipped to host huge e-sports events in the new Egyptian cities including the New Administrative Capital and New El-Alamein City.

6.3. Organizing huge media coverage and marketing campaigns when hosting e-sports events in the new Egyptian cities to use them as a branding tool and increase tourist awareness of the new cities.

6.4. Providing large-scale screens and digital leaderboards for e-sports competitions, also a planning to avoid poor internet and electricity problems in e-sports venues.

6.5. Preparing a detailed budget that includes media production, tournament costs, marketing and advertising, venue and staff costs, prizes, as well as events management software when seeking funds and event sponsorship.

6.6. Considering various aspects before hosting e-sports events including setting events' goals and objectives like brand building and revenue increasing, choosing popular games and sports that would draw a large audience, choosing the suitable venue according to the event's budget, size, and the targeted tourists as well.

6.7. Contacting e-games creators and publishers to have the appropriate license and permission to play the games.

6.8. Using event planning software to coordinate the e-sports events layout, implement, follow and evaluate all event steps.

6.9. Integrating technical solutions into the e-sport events, especially the energy consumption incurred during the events, for a sustainable approach.

6.10. Maximizing the involvement of e-sports events as a tourist product in the Egyptian tourism sector.

Additionally, more future researches have to tackle the main challenges and how to set effective strategies for e-sports events management.

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دراسة إمكانيات سياحة الرياضات الإلكترونية في المدن السياحية المصرية الجديدة

التطور السريع للرياضات الإلكترونية جعلها ظاهرة مثيرة للاهتمام للعديد من المدن السياحية من حيث نمو السياحة والوعي بالمدن الجديدة. على غرار الرياضات التقليدية، للرياضات الإلكترونية تأثيرات اقتصادية كبيرة وإمكانية أن تكون حافزًا للسياحة وسوقًا جديدًا للوجهات السياحية، والتي يمكن استخدامها لجذب السياح، زيادة الإنفاق السياحي وتطوير العلامة التجارية للمدينة. ومع ذلك، هناك نقص في الأبحاث المتعلقة بأحداث الرياضات الإلكترونية كسياحة أحداث رياضية وكيف يمكن أن تكون حافزًا كبيرًا لآلاف السياح. وبناءً على ذلك، تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى استكشاف إمكانات سياحة الرياضات الإلكترونية في الوجهة المصرية، وخاصة المدن الجديدة، مثل مدينة العلمين الجديدة والعاصمة الإدارية الجديدة، والتي لديها العديد من الموارد التي قد توفر فرصًا كبيرة لاستضافة أحداث الرياضات الإلكترونية.

تستخدم الدراسة البحث النوعي لدراسة مصر كوجهة سياحية للرياضات الإلكترونية ووصف حالة الأحداث الرياضية الإلكترونية في مصر. تظهر نتائج الدراسة أن سياحة الرياضات الإلكترونية تنمو بسرعة ولها تأثير إيجابي على العلامات التجارية للوجهات السياحية والتنمية الاقتصادية. لذلك، توصي الدراسة بتعاون وزارات السياحة والآثار، الشباب والرياضة، والاتصالات وتكنولوجيا المعلومات مع الاتحاد المصري للألعاب الإلكترونية لتوسيع فعاليات الرياضات الإلكترونية في مصر واعتبار سياحة الرياضات الإلكترونية موردًا حيويًا للسياحة المستدامة في المستقبل.

الكلمات المفتاحية: أحداث الرياضات الإلكترونية، سياحة الرياضات الإلكترونية، متطلبات المكان، سياحة الأحداث الرياضية.