

# Esport as a Sport-related Brand Extension: Consumer Perceived Typicality and Attitude



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## Abstract

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The esport industry has attracted professional sports organizations globally into the space with the intention of attracting new consumers, redefining brand meaning, and creating new revenue streams through the activation of esports. However, the growth in the type of esport products offered by professional sports organizations raises questions about the “fit” of this offering. The purpose of this study is to employ the theoretical ideas of categorization theory and brand extension to help sport marketers predict the effects of an esport brand extension, and to plan a more strategic esport brand extension strategy. To achieve this, sports consumers are surveyed and exposed to varying esport brand extensions. Using a MANCOVA, descriptive statistics and exploratory analysis of the results suggest consumers do not evaluate all esport extensions similarly. The MANCOVA indicated a significant main effect: Wilks’ Lambda = .899,  $F(4, 232) = 3.167$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $\eta^2 = .052$ , indicating a small effect with a large observed power of .82 (Cohen, 1988), meaning particular esport extensions providing a better sense of typicality and attitude. Implications from a scholarly and practitioner perspective are discussed.

**Keywords:** Esport; brand extension; typicality; attitude

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## 1. Introduction

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With audiences and revenue projected to surpass 495 million and \$1 billion respectively (New Zoo, 2020), current statistics validate that the esports industry, though emerging, is prosperous. This has attracted many professional sport organizations nationally and internationally into the space with the intention of attracting new consumers and creating new revenue streams through the activation of esports (Cunningham et al., 2018).

A look at sports leagues and teams across the globe further exemplifies this. Representing this case from a league perspective, the United States' National Basketball Association (i.e., NBA) has partnered to create the NBA 2K League, a competitive international basketball video game league, in which many of the NBA's own franchises have created a subsidiary esports team to compete with (NBA2k League, 2020). Other professional sports leagues such as England's Premier League have extended into the space of esports via the ePremier League Series. Narrowing in scope, individual franchises from Europe in the French Ligue One such as prominently known football club Paris St. Germain F.C. and AS Monaco now operate active esports teams under their brand for game titles such as *Brawl Stars*, *Defense of the Ancients 2* (i.e., *DOTA 2*), *FIFA*, *Fortnite*, *League of Legends*, *Rainbow Six*, *Rocket League*, and more (AS Monaco Esports, 2019; Paris Saint-Germain, n.d.).

As illustrated, industry has exemplified two avenues of esports brand extension by professional sports teams and leagues: 1.) solely creating an esports product that parallels the core product they offer- for example, sports organizations creating sport related esports teams (I.e., NBA and NBA 2k

League) or 2.) create a variety of esports teams in addition to sport-related esports teams that do not parallel the core product they offer- for example, sport organizations creating non-sport related esports teams (I.e., Paris St. Germain and their *League of Legends* team). For further illustration, consider the Golden State Warriors, a current NBA basketball organization, who have two affiliate esports teams: one for a sport-related genre (i.e., an *NBA 2K* team named the "Warriors Gaming Squad"), and one for a non-sport-related genre (i.e., a *MOBA League of Legends* team named the "Golden Guardians"). This begs the question of understanding which esports extensions are most viable for a sport organization.

With professional teams and leagues deciding to extend into the space of esports, a rich opportunity presents itself to study the question of whether esports are a suitable offering by sport organizations from a brand extension perspective. That said, the justification presented here for researching esports brand extensions in sport is twofold. First, from a brand management perspective, categorization theory would postulate that some esports brand extension offerings are a better fit than others- much of which the success of the extension will depend on (Aaker & Keller, 1990). It would first be meaningful to know how consumers evaluate various esports extensions offered by sport organizations to determine which extensions are viable versus being potentially costly with brand-damaging effects (Aaker, 1991). Second, to the researcher's knowledge, only one prior study has examined the offering of an esports product in a comparable manner. Bertschy et al. (2020) examined how the creation of an esports product would influ-

ence consumer perceptions of the offering brand. However, Bertschy et al. (2020) only examined one type of esport product extension offered by the professional sports team of focus, sport simulation games, neglecting other esport product extensions offered by professional sports organizations. There is a possibility that other types of esport products from varying genres offered by sport organizations provide more or less fit which deserve analysis, especially since sports teams are beginning to offer these kinds of esport product extensions. In doing so, this study can help in triangulating the results of Bertschy et al. (2020)'s work and more so add to the research concerned with esport as a brand extension offering.

## **2. Literature Review**

### *Brand Extension*

The term 'brand' refers to "a distinguishing name and/or symbol [such as a logo, trademark, or package design] intended to identify the goods or services of either one seller or a group of sellers, and to differentiate those goods or services from those of competitors. (Aaker, 1991, p. 21). Brand management research has been examined extensively given that the brand in and of itself has been deemed "one of a firm's most valuable assets" (Keller & Lehmann, 2009, p. 6). Keller and Lehmann (2009) discuss the brand and its role as a "growth engine" (p. 6), and further illustrate a conceptual model discussing what factors may influence the long-term value of a brand. Specifically analyzing the brand growth component of this model, Keller and Lehmann (2009) explain how one of the most important considerations, as it pertains to strategic growth and value of a brand, is

how extendable the brand is to other product categories- this is congruent with the ideas of Aaker (1991) and Aaker and Keller (1990) who emphasize the importance of a brand's ability to take advantage of their brand name to enter new markets. This phenomenon is otherwise known as brand extension, or a brand's act to enter a different product class (Aaker & Keller, 1990).

Marketing literature on the topic has shown that brand extensions are beneficial for an organization for many reasons. For example, Aaker (1991) suggests brand extensions can help enhance the core brand by increasing brand awareness amongst consumers, reinforcing associations, and/or creating name recognition and associations in new consumer segments. Similarly, Keller (1993) suggests extensions can serve as an organizational growth opportunity, improve favorability, strengthen the brand's associations amongst consumers (e.g., one of the main antecedents of brand equity), help clarify the brand's business definition and benefits, aid in viability, and support long term value. Further, Keller and Aaker (1992) found that successful brand extensions can even increase valuations of an average quality core brand (e.g., an average brand with a successful intervening brand extension can help form more favorable brand interpretations amongst consumers).

### *Positive Implications of Brand Extension*

Within the field of sport marketing and management literature, Apostolopoulou (2002) states "Brand extensions are increasingly implemented by sport organizations to create additional revenue streams and enhance brand strength." (p. 205). Precisely within the field of sport management,

Apostolopoulou (2002) conceptualized five categories of brand extension strategies employed by professional sports organizations (see table 1): Sport-related Extensions; Entertainment-related extensions; Media-related extensions; Information-related extensions; low perceived fit extensions. Brand extensions “allow teams to potentially have a positive impact on revenue outside of their traditional revenue sources and it provides another point of interaction between teams' brands and their consumers” (Walsh & Ross, 2010; as cited in Walsh & Lee 2012, p. 232), and thus are a

main driver behind the motivation for product extension (Apostolopoulou, 2002). Furthermore, Apostolopoulou, (2002) found that aside from financial benefits, extensions “were introduced as a means to establish a stronger presence in the market, to enhance its relationship with the fans, and to build fan loyalty” and to communicate/build a fan base during the off-season (p. 209). Further, consumption of the brand extension can help not only enhance the value of the brand, but also the value of the original brand’s core product (Chadwick & Clowes, 1998).

**Table 1** *Extension Strategies employed by U.S. Professional Sports Teams (Apostolopoulou, 2002)*

<b>Extension Type</b>	<b>Examples</b>
Sport-related extensions	Extension teams and leagues (e.g., NBA-WNBA)
	Sport camps and clinics
	Youth leagues Tournaments
	Street teams
	Merchandise stores
Entertainment-related extensions	Team mascots
	Cheerleaders
	Bands
Media-related extensions	TV and radio shows
	Broadcasting stations
	Pay-per-view programs
Information-related extensions	Team publications
	Web sites
Low perceived fit extensions (i.e., “stretch extensions”)	Art galleries
	Health and fitness clubs
	Credit cards and banking accounts
	Water and beverages
	Stores (not team merchandise)
	Software packages
Advertising services	

### *Negative Implications of Brand Extension*

Despite the positives brand extensions can provide, there are potential negative consequences of extending a brand into a new product class. Aaker (1991; 1996) argues that brand associations are often at the root of consumption decisions and typically represent the foundations of brand loyalty formation. However, extensions may have the ability to negatively impact brand associations, given consumers can form new associations from the product extension that may negatively impact associations of the parent brand (Aaker, 1990). For example, Walsh and Ross (2010), although minimal, found that brand extensions could dilute team brand associations. This is dangerous to an organization, as Walsh and Ross (2010) illustrate:

Any diminished brand equity will impact the team's ability to foster fan loyalty, generate media exposure, and solicit revenue in the form of merchandise sales, ticket sales, and sponsorship agreements (Ross, 2006). Given the consequences of damaged brand equity, it is vitally important for sport marketers to be cautious when introducing brand extensions and protect (p. 204).

### *Brand Extension Fit*

As mentioned prior, the success of a brand extension relies on the “fit”, or similarity between the core product and extended product, plays a role in consumer evaluations of an extended product (Aaker & Keller, 1990). What creates “fit” has been researched considerably. Aaker and Keller (1990) explain three dimensions of how an extended product can be perceived to “fit” between the two products: 1.) compliment- extent to which consumers view two product classes as comple-

ments and are consumed jointly to satisfy a particular need; 2.) substitute- the extent to which consumers view two product classes as substitutes through application and use context to satisfy the same need; 3.) transfer- the ability of an organization operating in the first product class to make a product in the second product class through the transfer of people, facilities, and skills. Likewise, Lee et al. (2015) measured five dimensions of fit derived from prior research: product class similarity (Monga & John, 2007), attribute transfer (Monga & John, 2007), complementarity (Bottomley & Holden, 2001), image consistency (Monga & John, 2004), and substitutability (Bottomley & Holden, 2001). Brand extension literature in the field of business, marketing, and sport management have consistently studied the “fit” or similarity between the core product and extended product, and the role it plays in consumer evaluations of an extended product (Aaker & Keller, 1990). In short, it is important to consider these measures of fit because 1.) the transfer of quality to the extended product is enhanced when the two products fit together and 2.) to avoid negative consequences (Aaker & Keller, 1990).

### *Esport as a Brand Extension*

#### *Esport Defined*

Esport can be defined as “Competitive gaming at a professional level and in an organized format (a tournament or league) with a specific goal (i.e., winning a champion title or prize money) and a clear distinction between players and teams that are competing against each other.” (NewZoo, 2020, p.18). It should be noted that not all esports are “sports” simulation- popular competitively played esport games commonly fall within five

categories of game genre (Sciberras, 2020): Real time Strategy (RTS; e.g., Star Craft II); First-Person Shooters (FPS; e.g., Call of Duty series); Battle Royale (e.g., Fortnite); Multiplayer Online Battle Arena (MOBAs; e.g., League of Legends); Fighting Games (e.g., Brawlhalla); and Racing and Sports Simulators (e.g., F1 series, Rocket League, FIFA series, Madden series, NBA 2kseries).

#### *Esport Brand Extension*

Today, sports organizations themselves are beginning to establish esport leagues and teams of their own (e.g., NBA 2K league, Warriors Gaming Squad). By doing so, this strategic imitation and development of an esport product illustrates the act and employment of a new sport-related brand extension strategy (Apostolopoulou, 2002a). Specifically, considering the nature of the esport product being produced by such sport organizations (i.e., competitive esport leagues and teams), it is argued here that these kinds of esport extensions classify within the extension strategy of ‘teams and leagues’ under ‘sport-related extensions’ as delineated by Apostolopoulou (2002a; see Table 1).

Literature has reasoned that esports teams who are associated with respected sport organizations may not only innovate but may also expand an organization’s brand (Bertschy et al., 2020; Lim, 2018). Specifically, Bertschy et al. (2020) recorded that fans felt that an esport product can strengthen international visibility and brand image. Moreover, Lim (2018) found a positive correlation between time playing an electronic football video game and attendance, TV viewership, and merchandise consumption at Korean K League and Korean National soccer events. Ke and Wagner (2022) suggest that offering “‘mixed’ compet-

itive entertainment attracts a high spectatorship and significant social media attention” (p. 152), and more so, suggest that extending into the esport space may influence consumer understanding of a brand by offering a potential strategy for sport brand innovation. For the reasons mentioned above, sport organizations have decided to extend their brand into the esport space and create their own esport product.

Despite the possible benefits an esport product extension may provide, there is a potential for negative effects too. For example, Bertschy et al. (2020) examined esport within the context of understanding how an esport brand extension influences the meaning of the parent brand. Results indicated a lack of fit with respect to associations between the brand and the esport brand extension product. Specifically, Bertschy et al. (2020) found that “fans ignore or do not consider the launch of sport simulation esports games worth discussing.” (p. 47) and that “Esports fans are not concerned with football.” (p. 47), suggesting a mutually exclusive development of two fan communities. As discussed above, a lack of fit between the core product and extension could lead to negative consequences. Moreover, while Ke and Wagner (2022) suggest that an esport brand extension may have been perceived more acceptable during a global pandemic, the researchers also posit that “sports fans may become less tolerating and feel their belief in original brand and culture is ‘contaminated’ if the sports organizations keep recommending this “mixed content” to them after the global pandemic” (p.155) due to inconsistent parallels between the two offerings, that could result in “a negative extension experience, which may



weaken the original power and image of the sports brand (i.e., brand dilution occurs)” (p. 155).

### *Theoretical Framework*

#### *Categorization Theory*

Derived from Mervis and Rosch (1981), categorization theory has been used in marketing literature to explain how consumers evaluate brand extensions based upon their representativeness of the extending brand’s current product category (i.e., variation of products; Boush & Loken, 1991). Boush and Loken (1991) claim there are varying degrees of typicality within a product category, meaning there is a “range in category representativeness from the most representative members of a category to the nonmembers that are least similar to the category” (p. 17). This is defined as “graded structure”. From a brand extension perspective, graded structure implies consumers perceive “some products [as] more representative of a brand category than are others” (Boush & Loken, 1991, p. 17). Perceptions of typical brand extensions include those that are most representative of a brand’s current product offerings, while atypical extensions are those that are least representative. Typicality and fit are used synonymously.

*Effect of Brand Breadth on Perceived Typicality.* Aside from graded structure, brand breadth is another influencer on brand extension evaluation (Boush & Loken, 1991). Brand breadth, either narrow or broad, is defined as the variability of product types in a brand category (Boush & Loken, 1991). Boush and Loken (1991) claim a narrow brand breadth is the result of consistently releasing new extensions that are remarkably similar (e.g., Nike selling only running shoes). Inversely, an overly broad brand would be considered the result

of consistently releasing new extensions that are dissimilar (e.g., Nike selling shoes, refrigerators, and gardening tools). Many brands fall within the two ends of the spectrum (I.e., Nike selling running shoes, athletic apparel, and other athletic goods). Boush and Loken (1991) claim the brand breadth (i.e., the variability of product types offered) of an organization can affect perceived brand extension typicality. That is, an increased (decreased) variability in product offerings, or an extremely broad (narrow) brand, will result in less (more) extreme perceptions of typicality.

*Effects of Brand Extension Typicality on Evaluation.* While the above is concerned with the consumer evaluation process of brand extensions, from a marketing perspective understanding how typicality of a brand extension affects attitude can be meaningful insight for anticipating the effects of a potential brand extension (Boush & Loken, 1991), and thus, it is also important to consider the outcome or effect of brand extension typicality on consumer attitude (Boush et al., 1987; Boush & Loken, 1991). According to the theoretical ideas of schematic fit (Fiske, 1982), schematic congruency decides affective response, meaning “the greater the similarity of the new product to the existing product, the greater the transfer of positive or negative affect to that new product.” (Boush et al., 1987, p. 234). In short “brand extensions are liked better if they are typical of the original family-brand category than if they are not.” (Boush & Loken, 1991, p.19).

Considering the effect of brand breadth on perceived typicality, and the extension typicality effects on extension evaluation, it is argued that esport brand extensions vary in typicality with the

offering brand's product category, and therefore, it is hypothesized that an esports brand extension that is more typical of the brand's product category will result in a more positive attitude in comparison to esports brand extensions that is atypical. This is further supported by brand extension research in the field, specifically, Apostolopoulou (2002a) found that brand extensions that are more related to the core offering (i.e., sport-related brand extensions) are perceived more positively of fit amongst consumers. Given that sport genre games share remarkably similar characteristics to the core product be offered by sports teams- with the licensing that many sport genre video games receive, it is almost identical to the core product regarding specific stadiums, players, jerseys, coaches, team style of play, etc.- the following hypotheses are formed:

H1: Typicality ratings for a sport genre esports extension will be higher than those of a non-sport genre esports extension.

H2: Attitude ratings for a sport genre esports extension will be higher than those of a non-sport genre esports extension.

### 3. Methodology

#### *Design*

The purpose of this study is to understand the difference in sport consumers' perceived fit and attitudes towards various esports extensions on behalf of a professional sports organization. To do so, the study employed a between-subjects design to test the proposed hypotheses. Via cluster random sampling, participants were randomly selected and exposed to one of three esports brand extensions and asked to record their perceptions of typicality and attitude. A MANCOVA was then conducted to

statically decide any differences between the groups.

#### *Independent Variables*

*Brand Breadth.* Brand breadth was constructed to stand for a sports organization's product category to supply a baseline and reference point for survey participants and to hold brand breadth constant. Specifically, the NBA was selected as the professional sport organization of choice.

*Brand Extension.* Esports brand extensions were manipulated as the between-subjects variable. Specifically, participants evaluated either an FPS esports extension (i.e., *Call of Duty*), MOBA esports extension (i.e., *League of Legends*), or sport-related esports extension that parallels the core offering (i.e., *NBA 2k*). However, it is important to note that because the esports industry is developing at a rapid pace, and with the release of entirely new game titles, this results in an ever-changing landscape influencing the popularity of titles being played and consumed at a single point in time.

#### *Dependent Variables*

*Typicality.* Lee et al. (2015) proposed five dimensions of fit derived from prior research: product class similarity, attribute transfer, complementarity, image consistency, and substitutability. Lee et al. (2015)'s measure of fit was selected specifically because it is one of the latest scales that focuses on measuring the fit of a sport product using a comprehensive, inclusive set of dimensions used in many contexts of brand extension literature. Thus, the overall perceived fit score of the esports product extension was measured amongst participants using method from Lee et al. (2015). This scale consists of five items using a seven-point Likert scale from "very strongly disagree" to "very



strongly agree.

*Attitude.* Consumer attitudes will be measured adopting Lee et al. (2015)'s instrument. This scale consists of three items using a seven-point Likert scale from "very strongly disagree" to "very strongly agree" to gauge general attitudes towards the product extension.

#### *Covariate*

*Fan Identification.* Brand extension research in the sport context has shown that consumers with greater loyalty towards a team are likely to have more favorable attitudes towards a sports team's brand extensions (Apostolopoulou, 2002b; Walsh & Ross, 2010). Further, it has been pointed out that some fans are "less likely to moderate their attitudes toward their favorite teams" (Funk & James, 2001; Mahony et al., 2000; as cited in Walsh & Ross, 2010, p.201). Therefore, because it is predicted that fan identification affects consumer decision-making (Walsh & Ross, 2010), all participants were measured on their identification towards the NBA using James and Ross (2002)'s team identification scale which consists of four items using a seven-point Likert scale ranging from "very strongly disagree" to "very strongly agree."

#### *Subjects*

The intended population of study is sport consumers. It has been established in previous sport brand extension research that undergraduate students are "significant consumers and users of sport" (Ross, 2006, p. 265), and thus, are considered proper for study as sport consumers. More so, because the sample is of the Generation Z demographic, which includes those who will continue to age into the market as sports consumers and those

who have grown up during the explosion of esport, valuable insight can be derived from their unique perspectives regarding esport and sport organizations. Therefore, a sample of undergraduate sport management students at a large, Mid-Western university in the United States was the defined target population (n = 122).

#### *Procedure*

Upon granting consent, subjects completed a survey which consisted of 15 total questions. Twelve questions were directed towards measuring the constructs of fan identification (i.e., four items), fit (i.e., five items), and consumer attitudes towards an esport product extension (i.e., three items) in addition to general demographic data (i.e., three items). Before beginning the survey, participants were provided with a definition of sport brand extension for contextualization and to clarify any technical language. Subjects were then introduced to a scenario in which one of the three esports brand extensions were being offered on behalf of the NBA and asked to evaluate their perceptions of fit and attitude accordingly.

#### *Preliminary Analysis and Model Verification*

Survey data was collected from Qualtrics and analyzed using IBM SPSS statistical software version 28. A total of 128 responses were collected from the 350 being recruited, resulting in a 36.6% response rate. The method for deciding and removing incomplete surveys and outliers beforehand was adopted by Tabachnick and Fidel (2013). Specifically, outliers were treated using the calculation of Mahalanobis distances which resulted in the removal of one survey. Five respondents' surveys were discarded due to survey incompleteness. Tabachnick and Fidel (2013) claim missing data

that is removed that is 5% or less of the total sample yields comparable results. In all, outliers (one survey or <1%) and incomplete surveys (six surveys or < 4%) were removed following the recommendations of Tabachnick and Fidel (2013) leaving a total of 122 surveys compatible for statistical analysis (n= 122).

A MANCOVA was chosen as the proper statistical analysis because of its ability to decide if consumer perceptions of fit and attitude (i.e., dependent variables) would be statistically significantly different based upon esports genres (i.e., independent variables), in addition to general descriptive data pertaining to their perceptions of fit and attitude, while simultaneously controlling for fan identification. For the MANCOVA, a sample size of 111 was needed based upon three independent groups, one covariate, a moderate effect size of .3, a power analysis of .80, and a confidence interval of 95% (Faul et al., 2009). Thus, the current sample obtained for study sufficed the power requirements according to (Faul et al., 2009). Finally, assumptions of a MANCOVA, including independence, homogeneity of variance, normality, linearity, and homogeneity of regression slopes were assessed and met according to Hahs-Vaughn and Lomax (2020).

Next, the reliability of all measures including attitude, fit, and fan identification were assessed. Cronbach's alpha was reported as .91, .85, and .93, respectively, satisfying the acceptable reliability threshold of .70 (Cortina, 1993; McCoach et al.,

2013). Exploratory factor analysis was conducted to ensure all items were loaded on one factor. Using the Scree plot method, the visual analysis indicated each measurement had a clearly defined elbow that illustrated one factor or construct being measured for each of the measures. Statistical data from the EFA also supported that one factor was measured for each of the measures in which the first factors of attitude, fit, and fan identification accounted for 85%, 63%, 87% of the variance for each construct, respectively. Further, the eigenvalues of the second factor in all EFAs were less than one, which provides further evidence that only one factor was measured by each of the instruments (McCoach et al., 2013).

#### 4. Data Analysis

Results of the MANCOVA suggested a small statistically significant effect of the covariate, identification, on the dependent variables attitude ( $F_{\text{identification}} = 22.79$ ;  $df = 1, 117$ ;  $p < .001$ ,  $n^2 = .16$ ) and fit ( $F_{\text{identification}} = 7.34$ ;  $df = 1, 117$ ;  $p = .008$ ,  $n^2 = .06$ ). The adjusted group fit, and attitude mean scores for the Sport genre were 4.78 (SD = .14) and 5.09 (SD = .12) respectively. The adjusted group fit, and attitude mean scores for the MOBA genre were 4.38 (SD = .14) and 5.03 (SD = .13) respectively. Finally, the adjusted group fit, and attitude mean scores for the FPS genre were 4.09 (SD = .14) and 4.80 (SD = .13) respectively (see Table 2).

**Table 2** Mean Scores of Dependent Variables based upon Genre

Dependent Variable	Group	Adjusted Mean	SD
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Attitude	Sports <sup>a</sup>	5.09	.12
	MOBA <sup>b</sup>	5.03	.13
	FPS <sup>c</sup>	4.8	.13
Overall Fit	Sports <sup>a</sup>	4.78	.14
	MOBA <sup>b</sup>	4.38	.14
	FPS <sup>c</sup>	4.09	.14

Note. N = 122

<sup>a</sup> Sports = Sport Genre

<sup>b</sup> MOBA = Multiplayer Online Battle Arena Genre

<sup>c</sup> FPS = First-Person Shooter Genre

Upon further analysis, the MANCOVA indicated a significant main effect: Wilks' Lambda = .899,  $F(4, 232) = 3.167, p < .05, \eta^2 = .052$ , indicating a small effect with a large observed power of .82 (Cohen, 1988; see Table 3). Follow-up tests were conducted to evaluate the pairwise differences among the adjusted means of fit and attitude based on genre. The post hoc procedure selected

(i.e., Tukey's with a Bonferroni adjustment) was applied to control for the risk of increased Type I error across all pairwise comparisons. Pairwise comparisons revealed that when considering fit, the sport genre had a statistically significant better perceived fit than the FPS genre ( $p < .01$ , positive mean difference of .69, see Table 4). No other significant results were reported.

**Table 3** *Multivariate Tests*

	Value	F	Hypothesis df	Error df	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared	Observed Power
Wilk's lambda	.899	3.167	4	232	.015	.052	.817

Note. Computed using alpha = .05

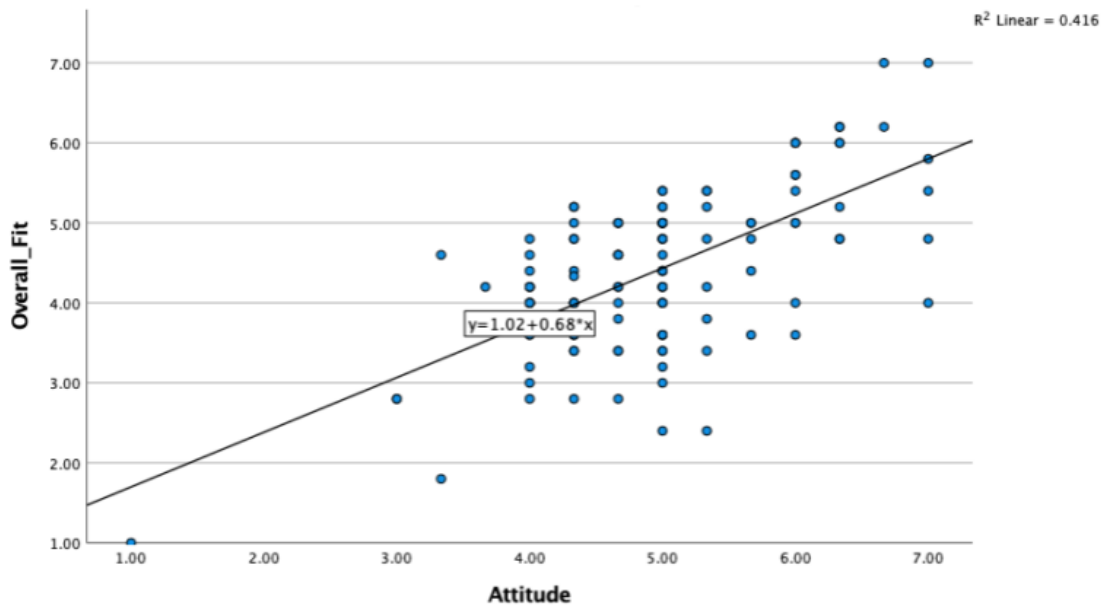
**Table 4** *Pairwise Comparisons based on Estimated Marginal Means*

Dependent Variable	(I) Group	(J) Group	Mean Difference (I-J)	Sig. <sup>b</sup>
Attitude	Sports <sup>c</sup>	MOBA	.067	1.000
		FPS	.292	.316
	MOBA <sup>d</sup>	Sports	-0.67	1.000
		FPS	.225	.650
	FPS <sup>e</sup>	Sports	-.292	.316
		MOBA	-.225	.650

Overall Fit	Sports <sup>c</sup>	MOBA	.401	.136
		FPS	.694*	.002*
	MOBA <sup>d</sup>	Sports	-.401	.136
		FPS	-.293	.449
	FPS <sup>e</sup>	Sports	-.694*	.002*
		MOBA	-.293	.449

- \*The mean difference is significant at the .05 level.
- <sup>b</sup> Adjustment for multiple comparisons: Bonferroni;  $p < .01$
- <sup>c</sup> Sports = Sport Genre
- <sup>d</sup> MOBA = Multiplayer Online Battle Arena Genre
- <sup>e</sup> FPS = First-Person Shooter Genre

**Figure 1** Scatter Plot of Overall Fit vs. Attitude



**Table 5** Pearson Correlation Table of Fit and Attitude

		Fit	Attitude
Fit	Pearson Correlation	1.00	.65
	Sig.		< .01
	<i>n</i>	122	122
Attitude	Pearson-Correlation	.65	1.00
	Sig.	< .01	
	<i>n</i>	122	122

## 5. Results

### *Esport Extension Typicality*

H1 predicted that a sport genre extension would result in higher typicality ratings than non-sport genre esport extensions considering the breadth and product category of a sports organization. Results indicate the sport genre was statically significant from FPS genre when examining consumer fit. There was not a statistically significant difference when comparing the sport genre in comparison to the MOBA genre, thus, H1 is partially supported. However, descriptive statistics indicate mean consumer perception of fit scores for Sport were higher than MOBA and FPS with fit scores recorded as 4.78, 4.38, and 4.09, respectively.

### *Esport Extension Attitudes*

H2 predicted that a sport genre extension would result in more positive attitude ratings than non-sport esport genre attitude ratings. However, there was no statistically significant difference between the independent variable of genre on the dependent variable of consumer perceived attitude. Thus, H2 is not supported.

## 6. Discussion

### *Key Findings*

Regarding the typicality of esport brand extensions, the graded structure of the type of esport offering supports categorization theory's claim that "some products are more representative of a brand category than are others" (Boush & Loken, 1991, p. 17). As postulated, given the similarities the sport esport genre has with the core product offering, this may be able to explain why the sport genre esport extension offered the best sense of fit, and more so, a significantly better fit than the FPS esport extension.

That said, it was unanticipated to find the esport genre extension not significantly perceived as a better fit than the MOBA genre. Though why this may be needs to be further explored, it is argued here that product category breadth of the NBA could have affected these perceptions of fit. To justify, NBA teams already have ownership ties to MOBA genre video game *League of Legends* including the Cleveland Cavaliers (I.e., 100 Thieves), Huston Rockets (I.e., Clutch Gaming), Milwaukee Bucks (I.e., Flyquest), and Golden State Warriors (I.e., Golden Guardians; Beck, 2017). Because of these current esport offerings, the typicality of this extension may seem more congruent than expected and thus resulting in a non-significant comparison between the sport genre. For further explanation, congruent values, which were not explicitly measured in this study, between the core product offering and the extension has been supported to increase the sense of fit (Chadwick & Clowes, 1998). One main value that consumers hold for both sport and a MOBA genre esport game is entertainment (Pizzo et al., 2018), thus providing another argument for a positive sense of fit.

Regarding consumer attitudes, mean scores for the genres of sport, MOBA, and FPS were 5.09, 5.02, and 4.8 respectively while controlling for fan identification, indicating consumers are positive on esport as a potential brand extension for all three genres-meaning they like, feel good about, and think esport is a good product extension. More specifically, sport genre video games had the highest positive perceived attitudes, followed by MOBA genre video games and FPS genre video games respectively according to mean scores.

However, when considering  $H_2$ , statistically speaking, results from the study indicate that no genre of video game, that is, sport, MOBA, or FPS, was statistically significantly different with respect to perceived attitudes.

Further, the study at hand proves a significantly, moderately strong positive correlation between fit and attitude when examining Pearson correlation tests ( $r = .65$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and a simple scatterplot of fit and attitude. That is, when sense of fit was greater for a respective esports extension, it also resulted in a greater sense of perceived attitude amongst consumers, supporting prior brand extension and categorization theories which claim that a greater sense of fit results in a greater perceived attitude towards the product (Aaker & Keller, 1990; Boush & Loken, 1991; Apostolopoulou, 2002a). That said, this analysis supports the theory that the typicality, or similarity between the core product and extended product, plays a key role in consumer evaluations of an extended product in terms of how they are positively or negatively perceived (Aaker & Keller, 1990). To illustrate this, the sport genre had the highest perception of fit and the highest perceived attitude; the MOBA genre had the second highest perception of fit and the second highest perceived attitude; and finally, FPS had the lowest perception of fit and the lowest perceived attitude.

### *Implications*

#### *Scholarly implications*

The results of this study are in line with findings said by scholars focusing on brand extension and sport brand extension research, that is, extensions that have a better fit (i.e., more typical) with the parent brand product category have a higher prob-

ability of consumer perceived acceptance (Aaker, 1990; Aaker & Keller, 1990; Apostolopoulou, 2002a; Boush & Loken, 1991). Moreover, not all esports extensions are evaluated similarly by sports consumers, upholding ideas of graded structure in categorization theory (Boush & Loken, 1991).

More so, to contextualize the findings of this study in more sport related brand management literature regarding professional sport teams' brand extensions, and to add to the theoretical ideas of brand extensions as prescribed by Apostolopoulou (2002a), interpretations of consumer perceived fit concerning the sport genre esports extension may help classify this product within the spectrum of brand extensions that are commonly offered by sport organizations. To explain, Apostolopoulou (2002a) conducted descriptive interviews with U.S. professional sports teams. Specifically, 12 marketing decision-makers from U.S. professional sports teams were interviewed to "explore the strategic considerations and tactics utilized by team marketing executives when introducing extension products." (Apostolopoulou, 2002a, p.208). Apostolopoulou (2002a) found that brand extensions can be categorized into "five main categories of extension products offered by professional teams: sport-related entertainment-related, media-related, information-related, and miscellaneous products with low perceived fit with the parent brand ('stretch extensions')" (p. 208-9; see Table 1). It is argued here that sport genre esports extensions that parallel the core product being offered (e.g., NBA offering NBA 2k esports teams and league) would be considered as a sport-related extensions.

As mentioned, the similarities the sport video game has in comparison to the core product are al-



most identical. On the other hand, esport product extensions that do not parallel the core product as much, or have a weaker sense of fit (i.e., MOBA and FPS genre games), may be considered as “stretch” extensions, as conceptualized by Apostolopoulou (2002a). Stretch extensions have a low sense of perceived fit amongst consumers, and while the results of this study indicate FPS and MOBA games were not on the negative side of the spectrum with respect to fit, they also were not heavily shown on the positive side either.

This research further supports and builds on the existing evidence of consumer perceptions towards esport extensions offered by professional sport organizations in prior literature. To explain, while Bertschy et al., (2020) did not directly examine consumer perceived fit and attitudes using the measurements of the same degree as in this study, indirectly however, results from the study stipulated that “fans ignore or do not consider the launch of sport simulation esports games worth discussing.” (p. 47) and that fans are “not interested or very peripherally touched only by [the sport organization’s] new esports activities” (p. 60). As suggested in this study, consumer attitudes toward esport extensions are neutral to slightly positive at best, suggesting that consumers do have little interest in esport extensions now as Bertschy et al., (2020) implies. In one sense, however, the results of this study add to Bertschy et al. (2020)’s study by providing empirical evidence regarding product fit *precisely* based on the product itself—using the dimensions of product class similarity, attribute transfer, complementarity, image consistency, and substitutability to calculate fit helps further explain why there may be a current small

or lacking interest amongst sport consumers towards a sport organization’s esport product extensions. Another significant contribution to the work by Bertschy et al. (2020) is the analysis of several types of esport products offered by professional sport organizations. Bertschy et al. (2020) only examined one genre of esport-sport simulation video games. However, this study examined multiple genres being offered in the form of an esport brand extension to assess consumer perceived fit and attitudes towards a more wide-ranging selection of esport products, and not just sport genre esport products, which are being offered by professional sports organizations in the form of a brand extension.

#### *Managerial Implications*

From a practitioner standpoint, this study suggests that sport fans are only neutral to slightly positive on esport as a brand extension as supported by the results of this study and Bertschy et al. (2019)’s suggestion. With esports not receiving an incredibly positive attitude, this type of investment may be a costly one with a higher associated risk. This implication is derived not only from the theoretical concepts of brand extension literature and categorization theory (Aaker, 1990; Boush & Loken, 1991), but can also be supported by the theoretical considerations of Ansoff (1965) too. To illustrate, Ansoff (1965) conceptualized a model for analyzing product and market growth strategies (Doyle, 2011). Based on Ansoff’s (1965) Growth Matrix, it is argued here that the esport product extension falls within product development and product diversification according to Ansoff’s (1957) Product/Market Growth Matrix. The reason is, esport is a new product being offered to current

sport consumers (e.g., NBA 2k to NBA fans) illustrating product development. However, it is also argued that an esports product extension can align itself on the Diversification strategy of Ansoff's (1965) Growth Matrix, given esports is a new product being implemented to attract new consumers/market as well (e.g., the gamer demographic, generation Z). With joint consideration of the empirical evidence of consumer perceived attitude and fit towards esports as illustrated in this study and in Bertschy et al. (2020)'s study, and the risks conceptualized by Ansoff (1965)'s growth matrix such as a great cost or investment (e.g., the expansion fee for a team to join the NBA 2k league is \$750,000 [Wolf, 2018], not including ancillary costs such as player, coach and staff salaries, facilities, equipment, and marketing/promotion costs) and inexperience with new markets and industries (i.e., gamer demographic, esports industry), such an investment, with only slight positive perceived attitudes and neutral fit as shown in this study, could be deemed as a high-risk low-reward opportunity for sport organizations despite the excitement surrounding the esports space. However, these consumer perceptions could change over time as the younger demographic heavily involved in video games ages into the market and as brand breadth increases into esports revising what sports consumers perceive as typical.

The final implication of this study, and most important, is that if an organization is going to delve into the esports space and offer an esports product, the esports product extension itself should mirror the core product given the study indicated the sport genre had the highest perceptions of fit and the highest perceived attitude accordingly. Though

sport genre esports are not the most popular in the esports space, they do seem to be the most fitting and well received amongst sport consumers as indicated by the results of this study. To further contextualize this into prior research regarding brand extension theory, prior literature has claimed that consumer perceptions of fit can be mediated by one's confidence in the supplying organization's ability to provide a brand extension (Smith & Andrews, 1995). Logically speaking, if one is to extend into the esports space, it makes sense to first start out with a sport genre that parallels the core product, given the organization's ability to manage and produce real-life sporting events has been established. Once accepted in the space of esports using a sport genre video game, consumers may shift to more confidence in one's ability to extend into other genres that have a smaller sense of fit such as MOBA esports games.

#### *Limitations/Future Research*

The study at hand does not come free of limitations. First off, this study used the NBA as a backdrop for the proposed esports extension that was exposed to participants. Other professional sport organizations with a different product category breadth may yield different results. For example, the NBA has several team related brand extensions (Apostolopoulou, 2002): The Women's National Basketball Association (i.e., WNBA), the National Basketball Association Development League (i.e., G League), and The Basketball African League (i.e., BAL). As these products develop, what is "typical" to the consumer is revised, and thus potentially resulting in an esports basketball league seeming more typical as the brand breadth in basketball products increases (Boush & Loken, 1991).

Examining other leagues active in esport with a smaller product category breadth, such as the MLS, may yield different findings.

Second, the results cannot confirm that one's interest in esport or competitive gaming did, or did not, serve as a confounding variable that could influence the results. It is hypothesized that if someone has a strong involvement in esport, or identifies strongly with esport as an activity, that these individuals would have more positive perceptions of fit and attitude toward esport brand extensions in comparison to those that have low involvement with esport or low identification on with esport overall. This may also be a reason as to why Bertschy et al. (2020) saw esport fans and sports fans develop mutually exclusively.

Third, the generalizability of the results is limited by the small sample size and sample characteristics. Having more individuals in the study would have increased the statistical power overall and allowed for greater support when generalizing based upon the results of this study. More so, the sample characteristics may not be the most representative of whom the results are trying to be generalized to—that is, sports consumers. Prior literature has reasoned that undergraduate students are significant consumers of sport (Ross, 2006; Walsh & Ross, 2010). However, not all sports consumers are of the college student demographic as in this study.

Furthermore, it was beyond the scope of this study to uncover a rich reason as to why sports consumers feel the way they do about esport as a product extension, with respect to fit and attitude. However, this opens the door for future qualitative research to be conducted on the matter to provide

detailed understandings on consumer thoughts towards esport as a product extension on behalf of professional sport organizations. In addition, future research should examine how these esport brand extensions are being marketed. To illustrate, the promotional support of a brand extension can also influence how these esport brand extensions are perceived (Apostolopoulou, 2002a). However, it was outside the scope of this study to examine marketing efforts of an organization's esports product extensions, and as a result, this study neglected any marketing efforts concerned with esport brand extensions. A comparative analysis of a sport organization who markets their esport product in comparison to a sport organization that does not may produce some interesting results with respect to how consumers perceive the esport product extension.

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