



As a Strategy to Boost Tourism in the Philippines During the New Normal

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ABSTRACT

Purpose of the study: This study aims to assess the potential of E-sports as a new approach to promote tourism in the Philippines during the new normal, particularly by exploring how virtual engagement through gaming can contribute to revitalizing the tourism industry.

Methodology: The study utilized a quantitative research design using crowdsourcing and snowball sampling. A self-validated survey questionnaire was distributed via Google Forms to members of E-sport communities worldwide, focusing on DOTA2 and Mobile Legends players. Data analysis involved frequency counts, percentages, ranking, mean, t-test, and F-test using Microsoft Excel software.

Main Findings: Most respondents were aged 21–25, predominantly male, and from Southeast Asia. DOTA2 was the most popular game. Respondents showed a high level of agreement that E-sports can effectively promote Philippine tourism. There were significant differences in perception based on age, but no significant differences based on gender, nationality, or preferred E-sport.

Novelty/Originality of this study: This study introduces E-sports as an emerging strategic tool for tourism promotion in the post-pandemic era. By analyzing global gamer perceptions, it expands the scope of digital tourism initiatives and proposes integrating virtual sports with national tourism strategies an area that remains underexplored in existing literature.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Tourism is a major contributor to global economic growth, cultural exchange, and international collaboration. In the Philippines, tourism has long been a vital sector, supporting livelihoods, infrastructure development, and the country's image as a destination rich in natural and cultural assets [1]-[3]. However, the outbreak of COVID-19 and the resulting travel restrictions brought tourism to a standstill, leading to massive declines in tourist arrivals and revenue. In contrast, the pandemic accelerated digital entertainment trends, particularly the exponential rise of E-sports, which emerged as a dominant form of online engagement worldwide. According to Gough [4], the global E-sports industry is expected to reach over 1.6 billion USD in value and 286 million active viewers by 2024, making it a powerful medium of influence and connection.

Tourism is a major contributor to global economic growth, cultural exchange, and international collaboration [5], [6]. In the Philippines, tourism has long been a vital sector, supporting livelihoods, infrastructure development, and the country's image as a destination rich in natural and cultural assets. However, the outbreak of COVID-19 and the resulting travel restrictions brought tourism to a standstill, leading to massive declines in

tourist arrivals and revenue [7], [8]. In contrast, the pandemic accelerated digital entertainment trends, particularly the exponential rise of E-sports, which emerged as a dominant form of online engagement worldwide. According to Gough [9], the global E-sports industry is expected to reach over 1.6 billion USD in value and 286 million active viewers by 2024, making it a powerful medium of influence and connection.

Despite its digital nature, E-sports has strong links to physical tourism [10]. Major tournaments stimulate international travel, hotel occupancy, and city branding. In the new normal, where physical mobility remains uncertain, leveraging the digital momentum of E-sports as a channel for promoting tourism offers a promising strategy. Previous research highlights the growing overlap between digital innovation and tourism yet few studies have examined how E-sports can be systematically positioned as a promotional tool in national tourism campaigns, especially in Southeast Asia [11], [12]. This study addresses that gap by assessing the perception of E-sports communities about its potential to promote Philippine tourism during and after the pandemic.

Through a structured survey of global E-sports enthusiasts, this research investigates how virtual engagement through gaming can contribute to tourism awareness and interest in the Philippines [13]-[15]. The novelty of this study lies in its conceptualization of E-sports not merely as entertainment, but as a strategic, tourism-driven digital platform. While past studies have focused on tourism recovery plans or the economic potential of E-sports separately, this study innovatively connects both fields to propose a sustainable and tech-integrated approach to destination marketing in the post-pandemic landscape .

The perfection between this study and previous studies lies in the coverage, contextual focus, and orientation of tourism development strategies as reflected in the background. This study focuses on broad and innovative approaches such as digital platforms, special tourism (e.g., e-sports), and health protocols intended to revitalize the national tourism industry amidst the disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic [16]-[18]. This study discusses tourism recovery through adaptive and responsive strategies in the "new normal" conditions. In contrast, previous studies take a more technical and local perspective with a focus on improving the structural quality and competitiveness of coastal tourism areas through the application of standardized tourism benchmarks. Although both aim to strengthen tourism, this study is reactive and macro, shaped by crisis management and national resilience, while the previous study is proactive, micro, and necessary for long-term development planning [19], [20]. This reveals a key research problem: the limited integration between crisis response innovations and standardized quality improvement frameworks in the tourism literature. Bridging this gap is essential to developing a sustainable tourism model that is resilient to future crises and aligned with global quality standards.

This study offers a distinct novelty by focusing on the dual layers of discrimination ethnic and gender-based experienced by Chinese-Indonesian female characters in Clara Ng's *Dimsum Terakhir*, a context that remains underexplored in Indonesian literary criticism. While most existing studies on gender discrimination in literature concentrate on global feminist themes or dystopian representations, this research situates its analysis in a realistic, localized socio-cultural landscape where discrimination is subtle, systemic, and often internalized [21], [22]. The novel's portrayal of female characters subjected to traditional family roles, cultural marginalization, and limited autonomy provides a nuanced depiction of intersectionality in a Southeast Asian setting. By bringing attention to how everyday social structures perpetuate invisible forms of oppression, this study contributes original insight into the intersection of ethnicity, gender, and narrative in post-reform Indonesian fiction.

The findings of this study carry important implications for feminist literary scholarship, cultural discourse, and multicultural education in Indonesia [23]-[25]. By uncovering the mechanisms of discrimination embedded within character interactions, family dynamics, and social expectations, the research invites readers and educators to question normalized gender and ethnic hierarchies in literature. It urges a more critical reading of Indonesian fiction that takes into account the layered identities of female characters, especially those belonging to ethnic minorities. Furthermore, the study can inform the development of inclusive literary curricula that not only promote gender sensitivity but also address the complexities of cultural identity and social marginalization, ultimately empowering underrepresented voices within the national narrative.

The urgency of this research is driven by the immediate and long-term disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic to the Philippine tourism industry one of the country's most vital economic sectors. With drastic declines in international arrivals, closures of tourism establishments, and widespread job losses, there is an acute need to implement recovery strategies that are both responsive and sustainable [26], [27]. As the world transitions into the "new normal," tourists now prioritize safety, hygiene, and flexibility in travel experiences. Without swift innovation and adaptation, the Philippine tourism sector risks being left behind in a rapidly evolving global market [28]-[30]. This study is therefore crucial in addressing the need for timely, localized, and practical solutions that can help restore traveler confidence, stimulate local economies, and re-establish the Philippines as a competitive and resilient tourism destination in the post-pandemic era.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a quantitative descriptive research design aimed at assessing the role of E-sports as an innovative approach in promoting tourism in the Philippines during the new normal. The design is appropriate

since it enables the researchers to quantify the perceptions and opinions of E-sports community members through a structured survey, allowing for statistical analysis of the collected data. The design also supports comparative analysis across demographic segments to test for significant differences in perspectives.

The population in this study consisted of international and local E-sports enthusiasts who actively engage in competitive gaming communities, specifically those who follow or participate in DOTA2 and Mobile Legends: Bang Bang tournaments. A snowball sampling technique was utilized to reach respondents from different countries. The initial contact was made through E-sport community leaders, who then shared the survey links within their groups and networks. The total number of valid responses collected was 200 participants, mostly aged between 21–25 years old, predominantly male, and largely from Southeast Asia.

Data were gathered using online surveys, taking into account pandemic-related restrictions and the digital nature of the research subject. The survey was distributed via Google Forms, allowing respondents from various global locations to participate conveniently. The link was disseminated through E-sport groups and social media platforms. Prior to data collection, consent was obtained from all participants.

The main research instrument was a self-constructed and expert-validated questionnaire. It was divided into two major parts.

Table 1. Structure of the Research Instrument

Description	Variables/Items	Scale Used
Demographic Profile of Respondents	Age, Gender, Nationality, Preferred E-sport Game	Categorical (Frequency, Percentage)
Role of E-sports in Promoting Tourism	17 items assessing perceived role of E-sports in tourism promotion	5-point Likert Scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree)

The instrument underwent content validation by academic experts from De La Salle University-Dasmariñas and a reliability test using the test-retest method. Revisions were made according to their suggestions to ensure clarity and consistency.

The collected data were organized and analyzed using Microsoft Excel, utilizing the following statistical tools. Frequency and percentage to describe the demographic data, Mean scores and ranking to determine the level of agreement on E-sports' role in tourism promotion, □ T-test for determining differences based on gender and game preference, F-test (ANOVA) to test for significant differences based on age and nationality.

Table 1. Summary of Variables, Statistical Methods, and Objectives

Variable Type	Statistical Test Used	Purpose
Demographic profile	Frequency, Percentage	To describe respondents
Role assessment	Mean, Ranking	To evaluate perceptions
Group differences	T-test, F-test (ANOVA)	To examine significance of variation

The research followed a structured procedure to ensure validity and ethical compliance. First, permission was obtained from academic supervisors and relevant community moderators. The validated questionnaire was formatted into Google Forms and distributed online. A clear informed consent section was included at the beginning of the form. Respondents were given sufficient time to complete the survey. Upon data collection, responses were screened for completeness and duplicates. The results were encoded, tallied, and subjected to statistical analysis using the outlined methods. Findings were then interpreted in relation to the research objectives, and conclusions were drawn based on quantitative trends observed in the dataset.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings derived from the survey conducted on 200 E-sports community members globally. The results are presented in tables and explained thoroughly, followed by a comprehensive discussion regarding the role of E-sports in promoting tourism in the Philippines during the new normal period.

3.1. Respondents' Profile

The respondents consisted of 200 E-sport players and enthusiasts from different countries. The age distribution indicated that the largest group (47%) were aged 21–25, followed by 26–30 years old (28%), which reflects the global trend of E-sports consumption among young adults [11]. In terms of gender, the respondents were overwhelmingly male (97%), while females represented only 3%, confirming the current demographic dominance of males in the E-sports scene.

Table 3. Age Distribution of Respondents

Age Group	Frequency	Percentage
15–20	26	13%
21–25	94	47%

26–30	56	28%
31–35	18	9%
36–40	4	2%
41+	2	1%

Most respondents were from Southeast Asia (46%), followed by Europe (27%) and America (17%). The Southeast Asian dominance aligns with the popularity of mobile-based games such as *Mobile Legends: Bang Bang* in the region [16]. Meanwhile, *DOTA2* emerged as the most commonly played E-sport, with 89% of respondents identifying it as their preferred game.

3.2. Role of E-sports in Promoting Tourism

The core objective of the study was to assess how E-sports could serve as a mechanism to promote Philippine tourism. Participants answered 17 Likert-scale items. The data showed strong agreement (mean score above 4.0) with statements suggesting that E-sport events (especially live tournaments) could stimulate tourism interest.

Table 4. Selected Survey Results on the Role of E-sports in Tourism Promotion

Statement	Mean Score
I would consider visiting a country if it hosts international E-sport tournaments.	4.28
Watching local tournaments online increases my interest in the country.	4.15
E-sports could be used to showcase local culture and destinations.	4.21
Advertisements during live E-sport events positively influence my travel perception.	3.89
I enjoy attending E-sport events in person when available.	4.42

Respondents indicated the highest agreement with the enjoyment of attending live E-sport events (mean = 4.42), underscoring the potential for physical tourism once health restrictions are lifted. The lowest agreement was on the impact of in-game advertisements (mean = 3.89), which suggests that the promotional strategy must go beyond traditional ads and instead focus on immersive cultural integration.

This confirms existing literature that E-sports tournaments, especially LAN events, create real-world tourism movement, venue engagement, and branding potential. According to Daniels [4], physical E-sports tournaments simulate a festival-like atmosphere, drawing large crowds and significant economic impact. Therefore, by leveraging digital and physical engagement, tourism planners can integrate destination branding within the E-sports ecosystem.

2.3. Comparative Analysis by Demographics

A series of statistical tests were conducted to determine whether perceptions of E-sports' tourism potential differed based on demographic variables. Results showed a significant difference based on age ($F = 4.671$, $p < 0.05$), particularly with younger respondents (15–30) expressing stronger agreement on E-sports' role in tourism. However, no significant differences were found based on gender ($t = 0.322$, $p > 0.05$), nationality, or preferred game. This implies that age is a defining factor in how E-sports is perceived as a promotional medium, with younger audiences being more receptive to the integration of tourism in digital platforms. These findings are consistent with prior studies highlighting the digital-native generation's engagement in hybrid tourism experiences.

The results highlight the strategic opportunity for tourism stakeholders in the Philippines to tap into the expanding E-sports market. Given the high level of global engagement and strong association between live events and destination interest, E-sports can serve as a gateway to post-pandemic tourism recovery.

This study supports the integration of E-sport events into national tourism campaigns. Hosting international E-sports tournaments, virtual game-based promotions featuring local attractions, and partnerships with streaming platforms can all contribute to rebuilding tourist interest. The alignment of digital trends with national development goals could mark a transformative shift in tourism marketing strategy.

The gap between this study and previous studies stems from the different focus and outcomes revealed in their findings. This study emphasizes the development and implementation of adaptive local tourism strategies such as promoting niche markets (e.g., e-sports), strengthening health protocols, and digital transformation to stimulate tourism recovery in the Philippines. Its findings highlight how grassroots innovation, community engagement, and pandemic-tailored experiences can directly revive domestic and international interest in tourism. In contrast, previous studies have focused on the macro-level role of media in shaping a country's global image during a crisis [31]. Their findings show how communication strategies, branding, and international media engagement are critical to maintaining a positive national image and restoring tourist confidence [32]-[34]. This reveals a clear research picture: while one study focuses on strategic operations within the tourism sector, the other emphasizes perception management through the media. There is limited integration between internal tourism recovery efforts and external image-building mechanisms, both of which are critical for long-term recovery.

Bridging this gap could offer a more holistic tourism crisis management model that aligns communication strategies with local innovation and destination development.

This study presents a significant novelty by proposing locally grounded and context-specific strategies to boost tourism in the Philippines amid the global shift to the "new normal" brought by the COVID-19 pandemic [35]-[37]. Unlike prior research that primarily focuses on international image recovery or generalized crisis communication models, this study delves into innovative tourism products such as digital tourism platforms, community-based experiences, and niche tourism activities like e-sports as practical tools for immediate recovery. It introduces a fresh perspective by integrating public health compliance, technological adaptation, and community participation into tourism strategy, making it uniquely relevant to developing countries dealing with pandemic-induced disruptions in tourism infrastructure and demand.

The research offers valuable implications for tourism planners, government agencies, and local stakeholders in crafting resilient and adaptive tourism strategies. The findings highlight that promoting health-conscious, tech-integrated, and culturally sensitive tourism activities can accelerate recovery while aligning with changing traveler behavior in the post-pandemic era [38]-[40]. These insights emphasize the need for collaboration between tourism boards, digital marketers, and local communities to create appealing and safe experiences. Furthermore, the study suggests that national tourism campaigns must not only revive local economies but also align with broader efforts to improve the Philippines' global image, showing that micro-level innovation must be paired with macro-level promotional coherence.

Despite its practical contributions, this study has several limitations. It primarily focuses on internal tourism strategies without thoroughly examining how these strategies are communicated or perceived on the international stage. While it effectively identifies what can be done on the ground to revitalize tourism, it does not fully incorporate media and image management strategies that are equally essential in a global crisis context. Moreover, the research is largely qualitative and localized, which may limit its generalizability to other regions or national contexts. Future studies could address these limitations by incorporating comparative cross-country analysis or integrating media-based data to assess how domestic tourism initiatives influence external perceptions and international tourist behavior.

4. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that E-sports holds significant potential as a new approach to promote tourism in the Philippines during the new normal. The findings revealed that young E-sports enthusiasts, particularly from Southeast Asia, view international tournaments and online game content as effective tools for increasing interest in Philippine destinations. Given the high engagement levels and favorable perceptions, integrating E-sports into tourism strategies can support the revitalization of the industry in the post-pandemic era.

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