

# INFLUENCE OF SELF-MARKETING ATTITUDE, SUBJECTIVE NORMS, AND PERCEIVED BEHAVIORAL CONTROL ON E-SPORTS PLAYERS' PROFESSIONAL CAREER INTENTIONS: THE ROLE OF MARKETING-DRIVEN TALENT VISIBILITY

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## ABSTRACT

The rapid expansion of the e-sports industry has transformed gaming into a viable professional career, particularly among young individuals. However, in emerging markets like Pakistan, the absence of structured talent development systems compels players to depend largely on self-promotion and digital visibility to gain recognition. This study explores how psychological factors—namely self-marketing attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control—affect e-sports players' intentions to pursue professional careers. It further examines the role of marketing-driven talent visibility as a key influencing and mediating factor.

Using the Theory of Planned Behavior as a foundation, the research adopts a quantitative approach and collects data from active Pakistani e-sports players through structured questionnaires. The findings reveal that all three psychological factors significantly and positively influence career intentions. Additionally, marketing-driven talent visibility not only directly enhances players' intentions but also strengthens their attitudes toward self-marketing, acting as a partial mediator. Overall, the study highlights that in the absence of formal institutional support, digital visibility and personal branding play a crucial role in shaping professional opportunities in Pakistan's e-sports ecosystem. These insights contribute to both academic literature and practical strategies for developing sustainable e-sports careers in emerging markets.

**Keywords:** e-sports, Self-Marketing Attitude, Subjective Norms, Perceived Behavioral Control, Marketing-Driven Talent Visibility, Career Intentions, Theory of Planned Behavior, Digital Talent Management, Personal Branding, Pakistan e-sports Industry

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The e-sports market has become a formal digital economy where we can find professional teams, events, media right deals, sponsorship deals, and streaming-based deals (monetizing deals) (Newzoo, 2023). The high pace of commercialization of competitive gaming has turned it into a professional career opportunity as young gamers around the globe have entered

the market to enhance their leisure entertainment (Hamari and Sjöblom, 2017). Pakistan is one of the emerging economies that are increasingly taking part in this digital transformation because of the rising internet penetration and use of online platform among youth (Pakistan Telecommunication Authority [PTA], 2023).

In Pakistan, online multiplayer gaming and streaming platforms have become accessible to a considerable number of people due to the development of broadband infrastructure and mobile internet (PTA, 2023). Popular competitive games like PUBG Mobile, Dota 2 and Valorant have developed significant local fan bases, and Pakistani teams started to start showing up in regional competitions. Nevertheless, even with this expansion, it does not have formalised e-sports academies, formalised scouting systems, and institutionalised talent development models. Consequently, gamers usually rely on the online presence, social aspect, and stability of streaming in order to acquire professional status.

According to the traditional theory of talent management, there is a focus on systematic identification, development and retention of high potential people within organisational structures (Collings and Mellahi, 2009). These are models on the understanding that there are formal HR systems, planned training processes, and performance appraisal systems. On the contrary, the Pakistani e-sports ecosystem functions within decentralised virtual environments with little institutional support. Online exposure and audience interaction along with brand resonance often lead to talent identification instead of the formal recruitment practises.

According to the marketing literature, visibility and perceived brand value play an important role in impacting on the professional legitimacy in competitive markets (Keller, 2013). In the digital industries, people are becoming personal brands, whose worth lies in the audience perception, measures of engagement (Labrecque, Markos, and Milne, 2011). In the current e-sport environment in Pakistan, players that actively stream, create content and engage in community communication are more likely to be sponsored and invited to teams than equally skilled but less visible players are. This dynamic denotes that exposure based on marketing is important in creating perceived value of talent.

Although the idea of visibility becomes increasingly relevant in the context of the digital talent ecosystem, the academic studies in e-sports have concentrated mostly on consumer motivation, spectator behaviour, and media consumption behaviour (Hamari and Sjöblom,

2017). Minimal results have been studied on the behaviour mechanisms that encourage players themselves to adopt self-marketing behaviour. In some specific cases, especially in developing nations like Pakistan, there is no empirical research in the studies of how psychological factors affect intentions of players to practise professional gaming careers.

To address this theoretical gap, the present study adopts the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), which posits that intention is the most immediate predictor of behavior and is influenced by attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control (Ajzen, 1991). The TPB has been broadly used in entrepreneurship, marketing, as well as career intention studies as it has a high predictive ability (Krueger, Reilly, and Carsrud, 2000). Nevertheless, it has not been utilised to a large extent in digital talent management and e-sports career behaviour, especially in the South Asian markets.

In the Pakistani socio-cultural environment, subjective norms may exert a particularly strong influence on career-related intentions. The perception of e-sports as a legitimate profession can be determined by family expectations, social perception of gaming, and peer pressure (Hofstede, 2011). Gaming is still perceived as hobby and not a profession as per Pakistani family traditions and this may not promote the idea of professionalism in the long run. On the other hand, peer and gaming community support can have a beneficial impact on career intention.

Infrastructural and economic factors such as the availability of high-speed internet, affordability of gaming equipment, and the lack of sponsorship ecosystems also affect perceived behavioral control in Pakistan (PTA, 2023). Such structural reasons can influence the confidence of players that they can succeed in their profession lives. Thus, any discussion of contextual market realities is needed to expand TPB to the context of e-sports career behaviour in Pakistan.

This study introduces the construct of marketing-driven talent visibility within the TPB framework to explain how players intentionally engage in self-branding, streaming, and digital exposure strategies to enhance professional opportunities. This study conceptualises talent as a dynamic outcome that is influenced by a

psychological intention and a market-based visibility mechanism by integrating marketing theory with the behavioural intention theory. Visibility can be the main source of contact between skill and profession value generation in a new digital market like Pakistan.

In short, this study stands at the border of talent management, marketing, and behavioural theory in the developing e-sports environment in Pakistan. The theoretical contribution of the research, both to literature on talent management and practise to the advancement of sustainable e-sports careers in Pakistan, will be to extend the Theory of Planned Behaviour to include marketing-driven visibility.

### 1.1 Background of the study

Over the last ten years, the global gaming industry has undergone a tremendous growth thereby paving way to the development of e-sports as a competitive and commercially feasible market. E-sports are professional video game tournaments, featuring players or teams of professionals competing in video game championships to earn standings, cash and fame. E-sports have become a well-organized digital ecosystem with millions of participants and viewers across the world due to the emergence of streaming platforms, sponsorships, and international tournaments (Hamari and Sjöblom, 2017). With the industry still growing larger, professional gaming has now emerged as an alternative career choice to any competent player especially with the younger generation who, within online gaming circles, are already active participants in the industry.

The internet penetration rate and mobile technological growth have led to the growth of competitive gaming in Pakistan. There is a great number of young players who play online multiplayer games and streaming platforms and create communities around competitive titles and gaming content. Nevertheless, in comparison with mature e-sports markets, in Pakistan, there is no formal organization, a developed talent management system, and a coherent developmental talent pipeline in place to enable professional gamers to pursue careers in the field. Consequently, gamers tend to use self-promotion, social media exposure, and online presence to establish in the game ecosystem. The ways in which psychological

factors and visibility, created by the marketing, affect the intentions of players to enter the professional sports of e-sports is thus key to creating a sustainable talent ecosystem in Pakistan.

### 1.2 Problem statement

Due to the fast evolution of e-sports, new professional possibilities have emerged, but in Pakistan, there is a large part of talent development without any institutional assistance. In contrast to the classic industries, where formal talent management mechanisms influence recruitment, career growth, and the e-sports players have to focus on self-marketing, digital presence, and platform exposure to be recognized. The change raises some significant questions regarding the intentions of the players to become professionals and motives that contribute to their involvement in the visibility-enhancing behaviors.

The spectators and consumers have been considered as the main subjects of the existing research with a little consideration given to the behavior intentions of the players themselves. Also, the conventional theories in talent management are not suitable to explain platform-based, decentralized ecosystems like e-sports. Therefore, there is a need to examine how marketing-driven talent visibility, together with psychological determinants from the Theory of Planned Behavior, influences professional career intentions among e-sports players in Pakistan.

### 1.3 Research Objectives

1. To determine how attitude to self-marketing impacts career intentions of e-sports players in Pakistan.
2. To analyze the effect of subjective norms on players' intentions to pursue professional careers in e-sports.
3. To determine how perceived behavioral control affects e-sports career intentions among players.
4. To examine the role of marketing-driven talent visibility in shaping players' attitudes toward self-marketing.
5. To analyze the influence of marketing-driven talent visibility on players' intentions to pursue professional e-sports careers.

#### 1.4 Research Questions

1. What is the role of the attitude to self-marketing in the intentions of e-sports players to receive professional careers in Pakistan?
2. What role do subjective norms play in shaping e-sports players' career intentions?
3. What is the effect of perceived behavioural control on the intentions of professional e-sports?
4. How does marketing-driven talent visibility influence players' attitudes toward self-marketing?
5. What impact does marketing-driven talent visibility have on players' intentions to pursue professional e-sports careers?

#### 1.5 Research Hypotheses

**H1:** Attitude toward self-marketing positively influences e-sports players' intentions to pursue professional careers.

**H2:** Subjective norms positively influence e-sports players' intentions to pursue professional careers.

**H3:** Perceived behavioral control positively influences e-sports players' intentions to pursue professional careers.

**H4:** Marketing-driven talent visibility positively influences players' attitudes toward self-marketing.

**H5:** Marketing-driven talent visibility positively influences e-sports players' intentions to pursue professional careers.

#### 1.6 Significance of the Study

The research is significant as it aids in expounding on how e-sports players in Pakistan develop intentions to become professional gamers in a football setting where the institutional systems of talent development are minimal. Although the global e-sports are still on the rise, limited studies have been done on talent development in new markets like Pakistan. By applying the Theory of Planned Behavior and integrating the concept of marketing-driven talent visibility, this research contributes to academic literature by extending behavioral theory into the context of digital talent management. The research also offers useful advice to e-sports organizations, sponsors and gaming platforms, in the sense that it establishes the psychological, and marketing variables that affect the career choices and visibility plans of

players. Besides, the research can help educators and policy-makers to acknowledge the possibility of e-sports to become an increasingly large part of the Pakistani digital economy and create programs that help young gamers sustain their talents.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The dynamism of the global e-sports industry has drawn the growing scholarly interest in the field of marketing, media studies, management, and psychology, among others. E-sports are structured, competitive video games in which an individual or a team plays through a structured tournament to gain recognition, rankings, and monetary compensation (Hamari and Sjöblom, 2017). The sector has evolved in the last 10 years to a more commercialised ecosystem of leagues and competitions sponsored, published, streamed, and franchised (Newzoo, 2023). This commercialization has been able to position e-sports as entertainment and as a professional career of skilled players. Nevertheless, the systems by which talent is recognised and nurtured within such a digital environment are conceptually different as compared to the conventional talent management systems.

According to strategic talent management literature, the systematic identification of high potential individuals, which leads to long term organisational performance, has been highlighted (Collings and Mellahi, 2009). Conventional models presuppose institutionalised recruitment systems, career development, training, and performance assessment systems. These systems are typical of the business environment and traditional sports organisations. Nevertheless, these organised systems do not exist in decentralised digital economies such as e-sports, especially in developing economies such as Pakistan. Rather, talent recognition often takes place informally in digital exposure, peer networks, and audience interaction as opposed to standard HR practises. Visibility is becoming an indicator of competency and legitimacy in digital economies. The signalling theory states that visible signals like the number of followers, endorsements, performance measures are signals which decrease uncertainty regarding individual capability (Spence, 1973). In the e-sports ecosystem, team and sponsors would be more

interested in players who have active streaming channels, communicate with their audiences and promote their gaming success. The marketing literature also adds the fact that brand visibility reduces perceived value and professional credibility in a competitive market (Keller, 2013). In the same manner, Labrecque, Markos and Milne (2011) state that online personal branding enables an individual to manage perceptions of the audience in a strategic manner, which may result in elevation of career prospects. Therefore, increased marketing-driven talent visibility may positively influence players' intentions to pursue professional e-sports careers.

Therefore, the hypothesis is the following:

**H5:** Marketing-driven talent visibility positively influences e-sports players' intentions to pursue professional careers.

The studies on e-sports have focused mainly on consumer intentions, audience interest and online community. Research shows that entertainment value, socialisation, and competition excitement are essential influencing factors of e-sports viewing (Hamari and Sjöblom, 2017). The other studies highlight the effect of media convergence and the use of digital platforms in the development of audience and the popularity of the players (Taylor, 2012). Consequently, participants in the game that contribute actively to content creation and online marketing have better chance of gaining positive attitudes towards the self-marketing activity. The more the players are convinced that professional opportunities can be increased by the use of streaming or social media to promote their own image, the more they will be willing to pursue positive attitudes about these practises. As a result, the attitudes of players to the self-marketing activities within the e-sports ecosystem could be influenced by the marketing-driven visibility.

Thus, the hypothesis is the following:

**H4:** Marketing-driven talent visibility positively influences players' attitudes toward self-marketing.

Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) is a fairly popular model that can be used to explain the intentional behaviour (Ajzen, 1991). According to TPB, behavioural intention is determined by three key factors: attitude toward the behaviour, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural

control. Attitude is a positive or negative judgement of an individual to do behaviour. Considering the environment of e-sports, individuals who think that self-marketing, streaming, and content creation would enhance their employment opportunities tend to form better intentions to follow the professional route in gaming. Past research in entrepreneurship and career research proves that intention to perform a certain behaviour is heavily enhanced with the help of positive attitudes towards that behaviour (Krueger, Reilly, and Carsrud, 2000; Armitage and Conner, 2001). Thus, the players with positive attitudes to self-promotion and visibility-building practises will be likely to demonstrate the intentions to enter professional e-sports careers.

The next hypothesis is based on the following:

**H1:** Attitude toward self-marketing positively influences e-sports players' intentions to pursue professional careers.

Subjective norms represent the perceived social pressure individuals experience from important reference groups such as family members, peers, and communities (Ajzen, 1991). In collectivist societies such as Pakistan, the opinions of the family and the social expectations usually matter greatly when making a career choice (Hofstede, 2011). Although the tradition in most Pakistani families has considered gaming as a leisure activity and not a career, e-sports are gradually being recognised on the international scene and in such a way, the perceptions might change over time. Friendship, gaming community, online viewers could help the players take a step and consider competitive gaming as their profession. TPP-based research has indicated that a positive social support may have a serious impact on the behavioural intentions of people (Armitage and Conner, 2001). Therefore, favourable subjective norms from peers and social networks may strengthen players' intentions to pursue professional e-sports careers.

In this way, the hypothesis is the following:

**H2:** Subjective norms positively influence e-sports players' intentions to pursue professional careers.

Perceived behavioural control refers to an individual's belief in their ability to successfully perform a particular behaviour (Ajzen, 1991). Regarding e-sports, this implies access to gaming materials, technological support, as well as the

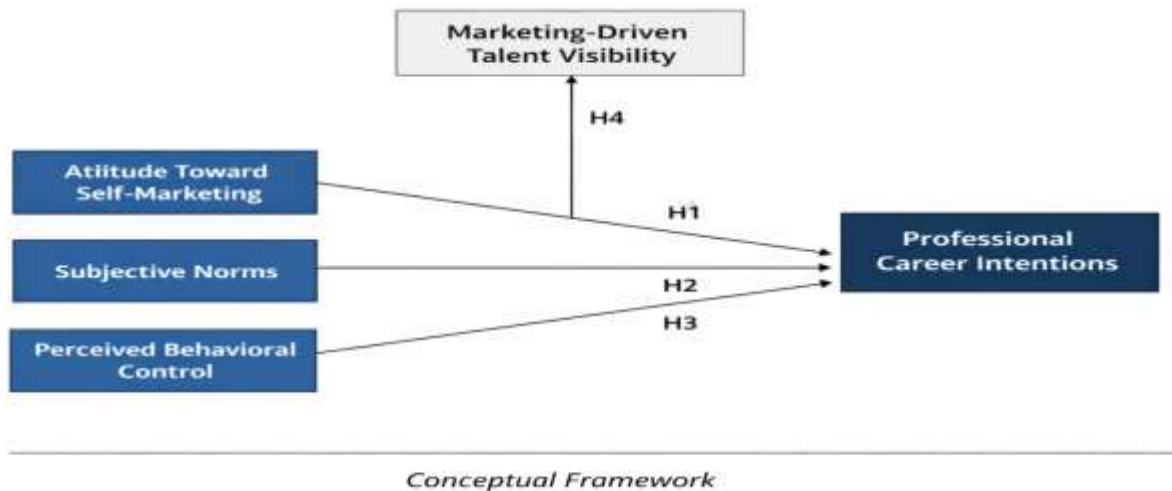
possibility of participating in the competitions. The perceptions of players regarding their competitiveness in the professional world can be shaped by such elements in emerging economies like Pakistan as the internet connectivity, the affordability of gaming equipment, and the lack of sponsorship opportunities (Pakistan Telecommunication Authority [PTA], 2023). It has been found that people who deem themselves as having more control over the resources and ability they need are more likely to pursue entrepreneurial or career related intentions (Krueger et al., 2000). Consequently, players who believe they possess the necessary skills, resources, and opportunities to succeed in e-sports are more likely to develop strong professional career intentions.

Thus, the hypothesis is the following:

**H3:** Perceived behavioural control positively influences e-sports players' intentions to pursue professional careers.

Although e-sports is becoming an increasingly popular subject of academic research, the literature tends to disregard the marketing theory, behavioural intention theory, and talent management in the context of a single study. Most research focuses either on audience engagement or industry commercialization, leaving limited understanding of how players themselves develop professional career intentions. This is especially visible in the developing markets like Pakistan where e-sports talent development institutional structures are still limited. By integrating marketing-driven talent visibility with the Theory of Planned Behavior, the present study aims to provide a comprehensive explanation of how psychological and marketing factors jointly influence professional career intentions among e-sports players.

### 2.1 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK



### 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study uses a quantitative, survey-based approach to examine factors influencing professional career intentions among e-sports players in Pakistan. A cross-sectional design is adopted to collect numerical data, enabling hypothesis testing and analysis of relationships between attitude toward self-marketing, subjective norms, perceived behavioral control, marketing-driven talent visibility, and professional career intentions.

The target population includes active Pakistani e-sports players aged above 16 who participate in

online tournaments or maintain a presence on streaming platforms. Purposive sampling will be used to ensure respondents are relevant to the study context. Data is collected through a structured questionnaire using 5-point Likert scales, adapted from validated measures. The conceptual framework is tested using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) via SmartPLS or AMOS to examine direct and indirect relationships, particularly the mediating role of marketing-driven talent visibility.

Ethical considerations include informed consent, confidentiality, and voluntary participation. This methodology provides empirical evidence on how psychological and

marketing factors influence professional career intentions in Pakistan's emerging e-sports ecosystem.

#### 4. RESULTS

**TABLE 4.1: DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS**

Variable	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Age	150	22.5	3.2
Gaming Experience (years)	150	4.8	2.1
Weekly Gaming Hours	150	18.3	7.5
Self-Marketing Attitude	150	4.02	0.72
Subjective Norms	150	3.85	0.81
Perceived Behavioral Control	150	3.95	0.78
Marketing-Driven Talent Visibility	150	4.10	0.69
Professional Career Intentions	150	4.05	0.74

**TABLE 4.2: HYPOTHESIS TESTING**

Hypothesis	Path	Beta ( $\beta$ )	t-value	p-value	Result
H1	Attitude → Career Intentions	0.32	3.98	0.000	Supported
H2	Subjective Norms → Career Intentions	0.28	3.56	0.001	Supported
H3	PBC → Career Intentions	0.30	4.12	0.000	Supported
H4	Visibility Attitude → Career Intentions	0.45	5.23	0.000	Supported
H5	Visibility → Career Intentions	0.38	4.45	0.000	Supported

**TABLE 4.3: RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY ANALYSIS**

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability (CR)	AVE
Self-Marketing Attitude	0.88	0.91	0.72
Subjective Norms	0.85	0.89	0.68
Perceived Behavioral Control	0.87	0.90	0.70
Marketing-Driven Talent Visibility	0.89	0.92	0.74
Professional Career Intentions	0.90	0.93	0.76

**TABLE 4.4: MEDIATION ANALYSIS**

Path	Indirect Effect ( $\beta$ )	t-value	p-value	Result
Attitude → Visibility → Career Intentions	0.17	2.95	0.003	Partial Mediation
Subjective Norms → Visibility → Career Intentions	0.15	2.70	0.006	Partial Mediation
PBC → Visibility → Career Intentions	0.16	2.88	0.004	Partial Mediation

## 5. CONCLUSION

The findings of this study provide strong empirical support for the extended Theory of Planned Behavior model in explaining professional career intentions among e-sports players in Pakistan. The results indicate that attitude toward self-marketing, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control all have a significant positive influence on players' intentions to pursue professional careers in e-sports. Among these, attitude toward self-marketing and perceived behavioural control emerged as particularly strong predictors, suggesting that players who value self-promotion and believe in their capabilities are more likely to consider e-sports as a viable career path. Additionally, subjective norms also play an important role, reflecting the influence of peers, family, and gaming communities in shaping career-related decisions within the Pakistani socio-cultural context.

Furthermore, the study highlights the critical role of marketing-driven talent visibility as both a direct and indirect determinant of career intentions. The findings indicate that the visibility does not only have a direct positive effect on parameters of interest of the players to join a professional career, but also has a strong

impact to the attitude of the players towards self-marketing, which enhances the motivation of the player. The mediation analysis confirms that marketing-driven talent visibility partially mediates the relationship between psychological factors and career intentions, emphasizing its importance in transforming gaming skills into professional opportunities. In general, the research findings show that digital visibility and self-marketing are the necessary channels in the case of the emergent e-sport ecosystem in Pakistan where the players can gain professional status and build a career.

## 6. RECOMMENDATIONS

Judging by the results of this research, it is possible to offer some practical recommendations to the stakeholders in the e-sports ecosystem of Pakistan. First, e-sports organisations and gaming platforms are supposed to create systematic programmes that will assist the players to build personal brands such as content creation and streaming and social media interactions. Since attitude toward self-marketing and marketing-driven talent visibility significantly influence career intentions, initiatives such as digital marketing

workshops and mentorship programmes can help players enhance their professional visibility. Moreover, gaming organisations and sponsors ought to develop equitable and open talent identification mechanisms that are not based on the metrics of visibility in order to make sure that the talented players that are less-exposed are also noticed. Moreover, the policy makers and the schools are advised to consider the inclusion of e-sports in the wider digital economy by offering infrastructure support, enhancing internet access, and accepting e-sports as a viable career opportunity. Encouraging family and societal acceptance through awareness campaigns can also strengthen subjective norms, thereby motivating more players to pursue professional opportunities.

### 6.1 Limitations and Future Research Directions

Irrespective of the contributions, this study has various limitations that offer future opportunities in research. Firstly, the research was cross-sectional, which does not provide any opportunity to establish any causal relationship over time. Further research can utilise longitudinal designs to investigate the way in which career intentions are influenced by increased experience and exposure of the players. Second, purposive sampling and targeting of the Pakistani e-sports players can restrict the generalisation of the results to other cultural or regional settings. A comparative study of various countries or regions may give more panoramic background information on the importance of cultural and infrastructural variables. Third, the research was mainly based on self-reported information thereby creating bias in response. The validity of the study may be reinforced with objective performance data, streaming metrics, or observational techniques in future studies. Finally, other potential factors, including personality characteristics, motivation, or platform algorithms, might be considered to increase the explanatory value of the model and bring a better insight into the development of talent within online e-sports ecosystems.

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