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**THE
STORY
MOB**

About

THE STORY MOB

The Story Mob is the world's first communications consultancy focused solely on esports. We came together to form The Story Mob because **we believe that esports fans are the most valuable fans in the world**, and there is only one way to reach them: through authentic, transparent, and timely communication. We also saw a genuine gap in the market for brands, teams, and companies who wanted to effectively reach esports fans, but couldn't quite speak their language. We believe that our esports ecosystem has a long way to go when

it comes to effective communications. Unlike baseball or basketball, we haven't had over a hundred years to refine our practices and get this right. On the flip side, we have the ability to reinvent how we employ communications, what channels we use, and how best we speak to this new audience. *The Story Mob* wants to be at the forefront of that journey and to help esports gain its own voice - **a more connected and authentic voice than any other sport in history.**



COMMANDMENTS OF ESPORTS COMMUNICATIONS

This whitepaper is designed to give a fan-focused view of communications - applicable for teams and brands alike. We're not here to point fingers or to call out examples of terrible communication in our industry.

Well, maybe a few.

**But, we're all in it together.
And, we all have a lot to learn.**

Esports is a young industry, and young industries take time to build up effective communications. And, while we can learn from industries all around us - sports, entertainment, gaming -

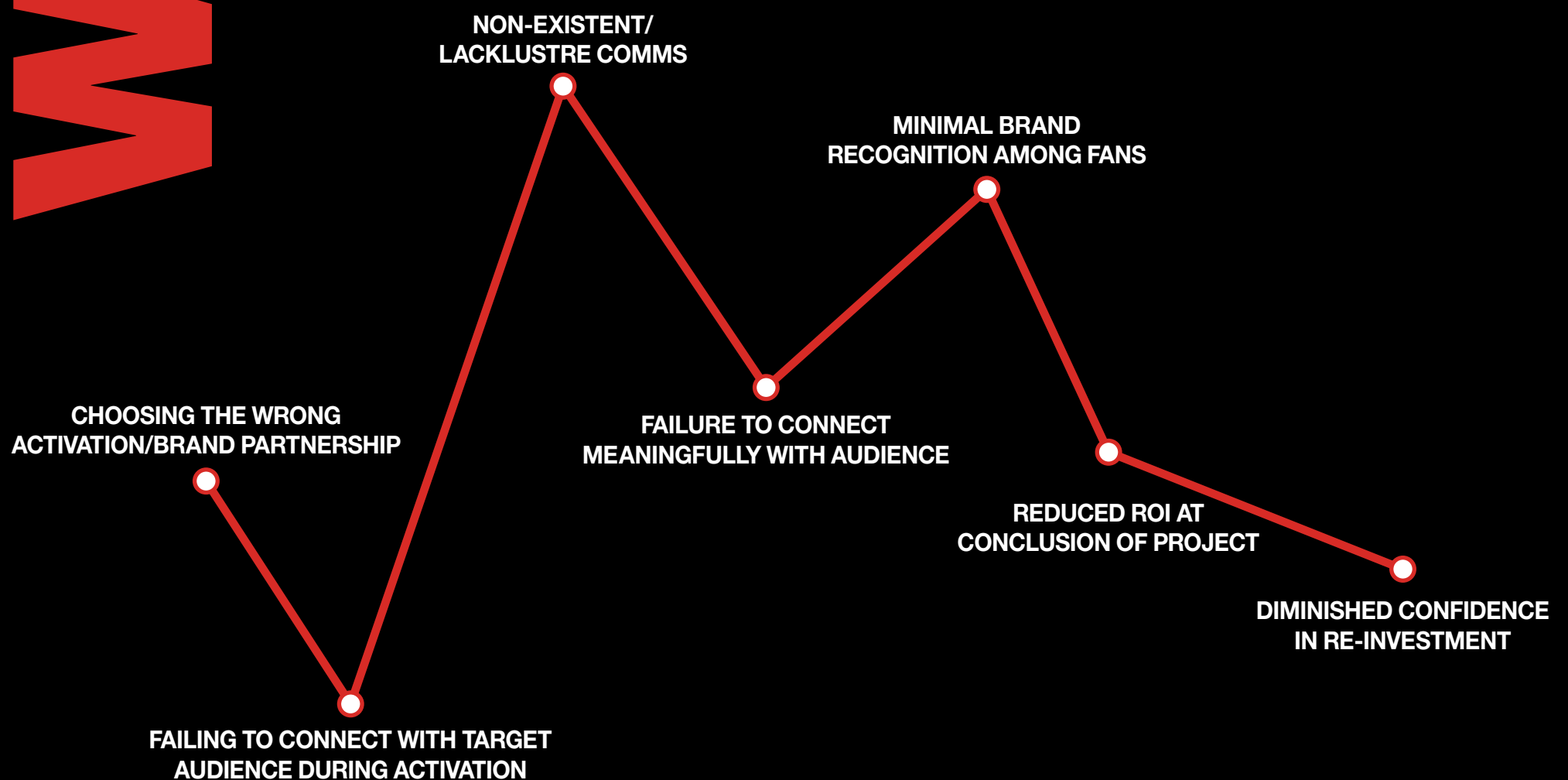
we must adapt our best practices to fit an audience that's more connected, more demanding, and more intolerant of bullshit than any that's come before it.

As with any dense and rich community, points of entry can be difficult to find. Whether it's a brand looking to dip a toe with a first sponsorship, or an investor wondering where best to make their bets, esports doesn't make it easy. In this whitepaper, we're taking a look through the communications lens and adding some practical advice for those either looking to take their first step, or to increase an existing footprint.

WRONG

What can go wrong when brands enter the esports space?

After any failed or lacklustre campaign, brands need to look at what part communication played in its downfall. Too often, we see that the lack of any clear strategy meant that the campaign may have been doomed from the beginning - and frankly, you'd have been better off keeping hold of your money.



GOOD NEWS

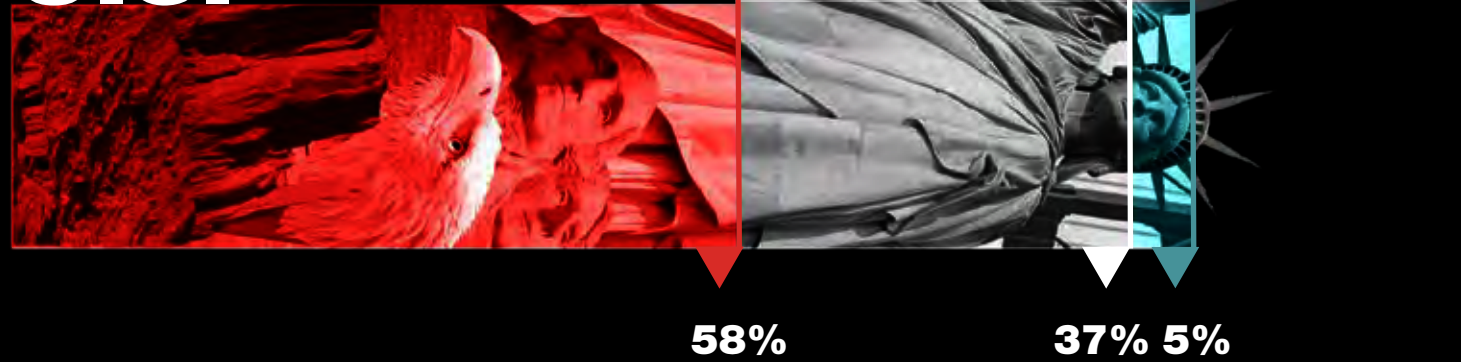
ATTITUDES TOWARDS BRAND INVOLVEMENT IN ESPORTS

POSITIVE

NEUTRAL

NEGATIVE

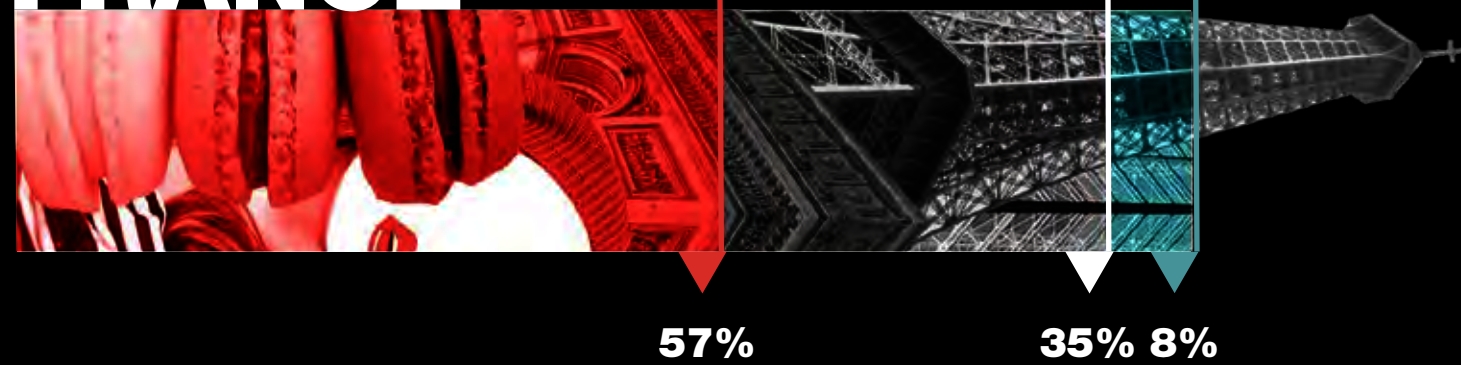
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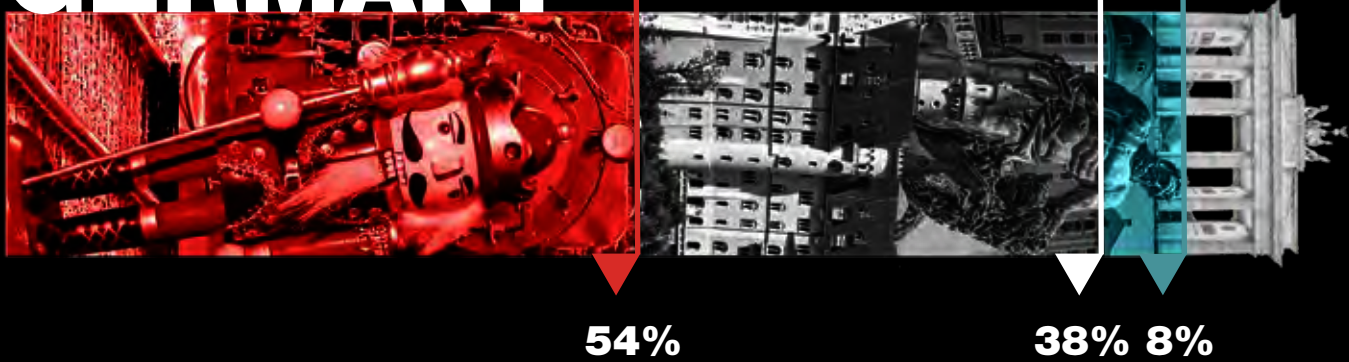
UK



FRANCE



GERMANY



Nielsen Esports Playbook, 2017

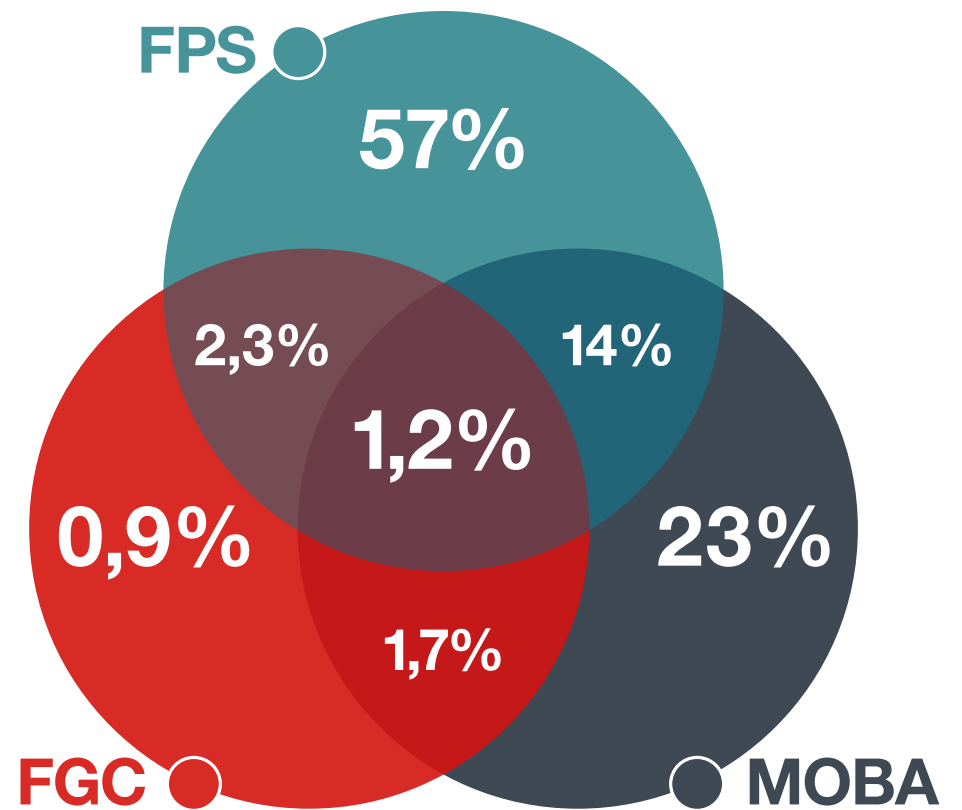
Esports is not one size fits all.

Esports is an umbrella term for: **a)** competitive gaming at a professional level, **b)** in an organized format (a tournament or league), **c)** with a specific goal (i.e., winning a champion title or prize money), and **d)** a clear distinction between players and teams that are competing against each other.

There are several Tier One esports games, including MOBAs like League of Legends or Dota 2, FPS games like Counter-Strike: Global Offensive or Overwatch, and Battle Royale titles like Fortnite or PlayerUnknown's Battlegrounds. These audiences are unique, often do not overlap, and need to be communicated to in very different ways.

Data recently published in July by FanAI, an audience monetization platform, suggests that 81% of esports fans follow only one genre. If your brand is active across more than one type of game, you will do yourself a favor by paying close attention to how you talk to fans of each.

Brands should talk to CS:GO fans in a different way than League fans, and if that isn't understood from the beginning, brands are likely to see failed campaigns.



81%

of esports fans only follow their preferred genre on Twitter

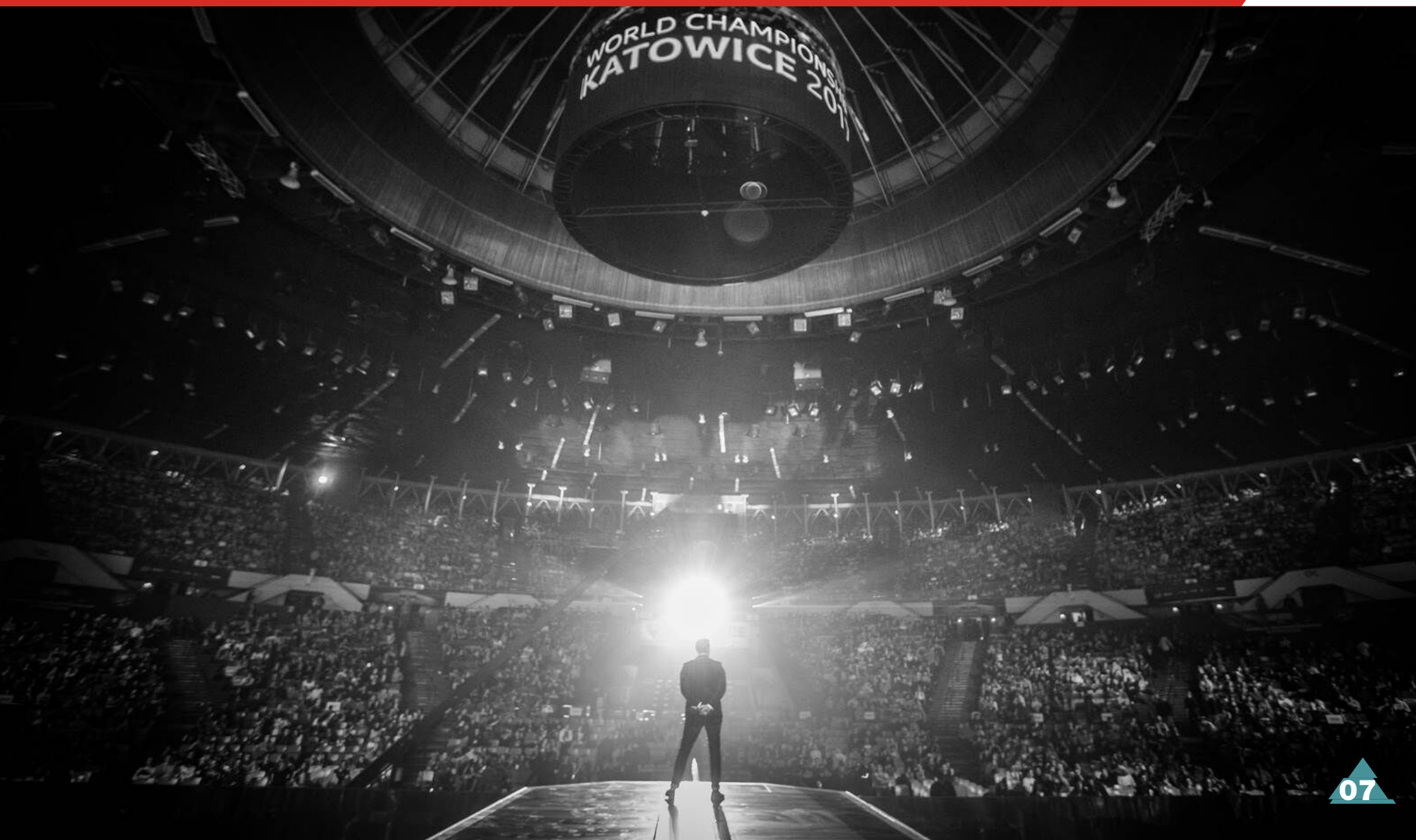
26,704,816

Total Deduplicated Twitter Handles Analyzed

As with all new industries, communications tend to take a back seat, resulting in non-existent, lackluster campaigns. This is a mistake. It doesn't matter how amazing your product or partnership is if you don't have a clear strategy of how to get it in front of your fans.

What's even worse than not understanding the esports audience is thinking you do – and failing miserably.

All these errors result in minimal brand recognition among the target audience, decreased - if any at all - ROI, and ultimately the decision to no reinvest in esports. We believe that if fan communication is at the core of an esports campaign, chances of success skyrocket.





PRECARIOUS EARLY GROUND

BRANDS AND ESPORTS: THE GOOD NEWS

Here's the good news for brands out there - **esports fans actively want your support.** They are aware that their sport and their community is still on precarious early ground and they know that commercial help is the best way to strengthen it and shore up a longer-term future. According to a Nielsen study, the vast majority of esports fans are positive or neutral when it comes to brands entering the space.

Esports is a young industry fueled by a passionate and highly vocal fan audience. To target them successfully, here are a few simple commandments to keep in mind, which are based on years of esports communications experience on the front lines.



Commandment One:

CREATE VALUE

Is this the most demanding sports audience in history?

It could be. After all, this is the first sport that's been designed by the fans themselves.

Since the earliest days of esports, esports fans have enjoyed a system that their fandom created and nurtured - zero paywalls, limited commercial interruption, and tournaments brought to them by pros, teams, and organizers, often investing their own money to make them happen.

In return for this bounty, esports fans had to defend how they spent their time to a mainstream world that not only didn't understand competitive gaming, but considered it a waste of time.

As the esports ecosystem has grown, mainstream acceptance has grown along with commercial investment — and fans have reaped the benefits of more money and

resources flooding into their sport — but the power balance is still weighted in their favor. This remains an industry focused on its audience - and still pursuing the dream of a sport that lasts for generations.

It's critical, therefore, that any brand within the space, whether it be team, sponsor, or pro, creates the value for this demanding audience. **It's not enough to just show up and play.** The most successful teams create extensive content, giving insight



into their teams and players. Check out *Team Liquid's Squad* or *TSM: Legends* for examples of two series that have been extremely successful in building brand loyalty.

Likewise, it's not enough for a sponsor to slap their name on a broadcast to get the ROI they're seeking. **To create true value, brands need to initiate a change in the esports world that doesn't already exist and offer something**

to fans they didn't previously have. Intel created value and entertainment for the esports fan through the Intel Extreme Masters series, while Red Bull serves the fighting game community through the Red Bull Kumite events. Elsewhere, brands have created original content or forged unique partnerships to enable more effective entertainment.



**YOU NEED TO BE ALL
IN TO GET ANYTHING BACK.**

Commandment Two:

BE AUTHENTIC

As we said earlier, esports fans are notorious for sniffing out bullshit.

That's why your voice in esports has to be authentic. It can't be faked.

Don't hire people to be the voice of your company who don't understand esports (tip: if you're spelling it eSports, you're doing it wrong). If you're new to esports, be humble and learn from those around you. Admit when you're learning — and take feedback from the community. Show that you understand that there are no shortcuts when it comes to a sport with a proud, tribal history.

When it comes to authentic communications, non-endemic brands have several great endemic examples to look up to. Some of the world's largest traditional sports groups have successfully entered the space and allowed their endemic counterparts to lead the way while they

provide additional resources and support.

Take The Madison Square Garden Company, for instance, who acquired the controlling stake in the leading North American esports organization, CLG. The new ownership recruited and maintained a team that had proven long-term expertise in esports for day-to-day operations, continuing to successfully facilitate the team's growth and lead them to competitive success.

Equally, global brands like Vodafone have taken smart and informed first steps. By partnering with ESL on global events, the telecoms giant has been able to learn about the audience firsthand and design campaigns around the community. This is why we see Vodafone bracelets pulsing in time with the bomb countdown at a CS:GO event **instead of just seeing a logo slapped on a few banners.**

Commandment Three:

BE TIMELY

SOMETHING STRANGE HAS HAPPENED IN OUR POST-INTERNET WORLD.

When working our first PR jobs straight out of college, we used to hit a physical stopwatch when we got news of a crisis. Usually, you had a few hours' grace to get your shit together, get a statement out, and battle through media requests for more information, all the while keeping your client calm and the team focused on putting out the fire.

As you'll see from any terrifying stroll through Reddit during an ongoing crisis, esports fans have a stopwatch too, and they're not shy about letting you know when it's running out.

It's no secret that esports has a healthy and thriving crisis communications need. Between us, it's one of the reasons why firms like The Story Mob exist. As the young industry, we are constantly redefining rulesets and moving goalposts because we are still

growing and learning as we go along.

**THIS MEANS YOU CAN
COUNT ON CRISES
HAPPENING - AND YOU
CAN COUNT ON
ESPORTS FANS CALLING
YOU OUT THE MOMENT
THEY DO.**



A GLOBAL AUDIENCE FORGED IN THE FIRES OF THE INTERNET NEVER FORGETS.

Whether it's a player forgetting his media training and having an internet meltdown, or a tournament coming to a halt because of technical difficulties, shit will hit the fan. (Side note: if you're a team that doesn't already have regular media training for your players, or a spokesperson at a tournament organizer who hasn't gone through at least one of those, it's time to rethink your practices). What's important, is that you care enough to respond quickly.

TO KEEP FIRES UNDER CONTROL, HERE'S A QUICK WALKTHROUGH OF SOME OF THE KEY PRINCIPLES TO KEEP IN MIND WHEN ENTERING THE CRISIS ZONE:

REACT QUICKLY

For most esports fans, trust is based on acknowledgement. Recognize that you're being asked a question, even if you don't have an answer, and let fans know you'll get back to them.

COMMIT TO SOMETHING

What makes promises empty, is the lack of follow-up. In every ongoing crisis statement, you must commit to something – even if it's just a timeline on when you'll provide another update – and you must make good on that commitment.

SHOW YOUR FACE

As humans, we base trust on multiple things, but one of the most important is being able to visualize the face of the people we're speaking to. In communications terms, this means that expressing difficult messages, that may even include regret, can fall pretty flat unless they're attributable to a person.

FOLLOW UP

Once the immediate crisis has died down, it's tempting to try to forget all about it and sweep it under the rug. Not helpful. To gain esports fans' trust after a rocky period, you need to show them that you haven't forgotten – that you've learned from your mistakes and are ready to put those learnings into action.

Commandment Four:

BE MEDIA SAVVY

Traditional sports understand the power that media can hold because they've had years to work with them. **Esports doesn't have the same kind of symbiotic relationship with media, and it's something we need to improve as an industry.** Here are the top four ways you can use media to your advantage.

BUILD PLAYER/FAN RELATIONSHIPS

Independent media is one of the best possible sources to build and strengthen genuine relationships between players and their fans. It's an unbiased (ideally) and unvarnished look at their lives and an opportunity to get more stories that draw back the curtain for fans. Remember when ESPN Magazine called Faker the Unkillable Demon King? That profile afforded him the same privilege as any other athlete - an unguarded look at his origins, his drive, and how much self-doubt he has to overcome.

DRIVE THE NARRATIVE

Traditional investment and business opportunities are still very much driven by brand equity - to keep it simple, your reputation matters. Recognition in the wider business community can help teams and others in the esports world position themselves for success, but arguably not many know how to use it well. Figure out which parts of the global conversation you want to participate in, and find ways to lead that conversation with hard data, thought leadership, and smart community communication and fan engagement.

DRIVE THE MAINSTREAM CONVERSATION

Mainstream media is still a hit or miss ally for esports. We've come a long way from the blanket snide 'nerds in basements' tone that seemed to introduce every mainstream piece of coverage on esports prior to 2014 - but, as with any niche sport, we're still misrepresented by those that don't take their time to get to know our unique culture.

CUT THE BULLSHIT

We've talked a little about crises, but few in the esports world are using media to their advantage when it comes to setting the record straight - or getting their point of view across. An independent voice can go a long way when it comes to regaining trust - so fold media into your crises plans, even if they've covered the crisis with more relish than you would like.

Commandment Five:

BE TRANSPARENT

We've talked about what happens when the shit hits the fan - but even before that, there's an opportunity to use communications to forge a closer and more honest relationship with the esports community.

As we know by now, this is a demanding audience that **requires transparency and timeliness from their sports figures on a level not yet seen in traditional sports.**

Transparency can be hard. It's time consuming and costly to explain decisions and to train

spokespeople to be able to speak to them. It's difficult and humbling to admit mistakes that can mean a knock to your brand image, and it's tough to know where to draw the line with sensitive information. Ultimately, no business (arguably) has been successful at complete transparency - putting all their financials, emails, and unsigned deals all on the table publicly - so the challenge is to find the level of transparency that works for you. Any successful company in esports, however, will need to stretch in this area to inspire true fan loyalty.





This is an example from Team Liquid, who put large sections of their successful NA LCS franchise application online. This is not only great marketing, but also a good example of a brand holding them-selves accountable and letting their fans see what they're promising behind closed doors.

Transparency doesn't just mean owning up when you're wrong. **It means pulling back the curtain to give a glimpse at projects in the works, even if you're not sure they'll work out.** It means being open to feedback - and to being clear about how you plan to implement it. It also means giving the real reasons you decided to fire a player, instead of a PR statement. It means trusting your audience and treating them like adults.

ESPORTS FANS ARE LOYAL TO BRANDS AND TO TEAMS WHO TREAT THEM WITH RESPECT. SPEAK TO THEM LIKE ADULTS, AND YOU'LL BE A LOT MORE SUCCESSFUL IN GETTING THEIR ATTENTION.

Commandment Six:

BE TRUTHFUL ABOUT WHO YOU ARE

BEING TRUTHFUL
IN YOUR
ESPORTS COMMUNICATIONS
MEANS DEFINING
YOUR VALUES
- AND STICKING
TO THEM.

IF YOU claim to be the most player-friendly team

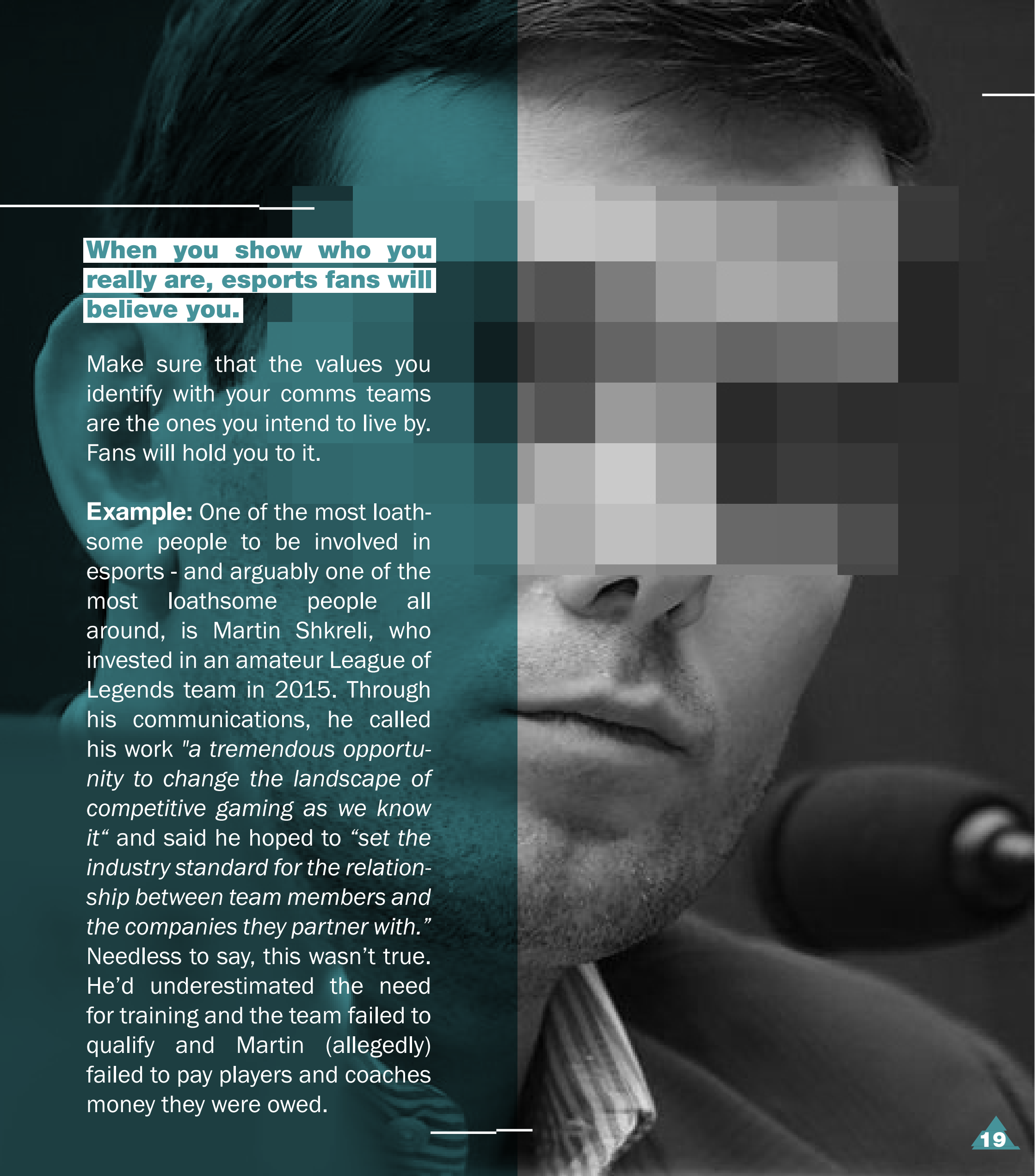
DON'T get caught trying to shortchange a pro on their wages.

IF YOU'RE a brand entering esports for the first time and claim to be taking the first step on a long journey

DON'T be surprised if fans make fun of you when you pull out after 3 months.

IF YOU'RE a tournament organizer who claims to put on the very best events

DON'T be shocked when your fans take to Reddit to voice their disappointment when a tournament is cancelled, delayed for hours or has shitty equipment for the pros competing.



When you show who you really are, esports fans will believe you.

Make sure that the values you identify with your comms teams are the ones you intend to live by. Fans will hold you to it.

Example: One of the most loathsome people to be involved in esports - and arguably one of the most loathsome people all around, is Martin Shkreli, who invested in an amateur League of Legends team in 2015. Through his communications, he called his work *"a tremendous opportunity to change the landscape of competitive gaming as we know it"* and said he hoped to *"set the industry standard for the relationship between team members and the companies they partner with."* Needless to say, this wasn't true. He'd underestimated the need for training and the team failed to qualify and Martin (allegedly) failed to pay players and coaches money they were owed.

Commandment Seven:

BE BOLD

Esports, for most of us, offers an incredible and unique opportunity to reinvent the usual way of doing things - and this applies to communications too. It's a great place to take a risk.

Leaders of esports are more visible - and more vulnerable than ever before. Some of the most memorable moments come from unfiltered and unedited moments when they're sharing their thoughts with the community. **This is the time to be bold and to put a stake in the ground.**

Want to know how esports fans feel about your CEO? Give them a weekly AMA stream, and you'll soon find out. Alternatively, jump into a game with your fans and answer questions from an honest and unfiltered perspective.

” It's a great place to take a risk.

From Marc Merrill of Riot Games playing ARAMs with fans, to Gabe Newell letting loose on tournament talent who disappoint the audience, the best moments don't have a PR buffer.



THE STORY MOB

FOUNDERS

Founded by the industry's most experienced communications professionals, **The Story Mob** is the world's first international communications consultancy focused on esports. Throughout our years in the industry, we've worked within some of the biggest esports communities in the world and learned the ways in which brands and investors - existing and new, endemic and non-endemic - can add value to the world's fastest growing sport.



Anna **ROZWANDOWICZ**

Before co-founding the world's first esports communications consultancy, **The Story Mob**, Anna was the **VP of Communications at ESL**. Leading a worldwide team at the world's largest esports company, Anna has overseen global corporate communications, public relations, crisis management, and internal communications on behalf of ESL. Her team developed and deployed communication strategies for all of ESL's major tournaments across the world's top titles: ESL One, Pro League and Intel Extreme Masters, in League of Legends, CS:GO, StarCraft II and Dota 2. She's also led the setup of the industry's first integrity initiative (ESIC), is **an adviser for the Cybersmile Foundation**, and a **mentor at leAD Sports Accelerator**.



Nicola **PIGGOTT**

After a 10-year career in brand communications, Nicola spent over five years at Riot Games, where she was **leading global communication for Riot's esports team** and the most successful esports title in history. Nicola has given counsel and training to esports teams' organizations worldwide. **Named one of PR Week's Top Women in PR in 2015**, she has managed communications around global events like the League of Legends World Championships, which in 2017 was the most watched esports event to date with over 80 million unique viewers.



Kalie **MOORE**

Before co-founding **The Story Mob**, Kalie was **Head of Communications for BITKRAFT Esports Ventures**, the first investment fund entirely dedicated to esports. Through her work with BITKRAFT's portfolio companies, Kalie has overseen the communications strategy, crisis communications, and media relations for esports technology startups seeking coverage in mainstream business, financial and tech news. Previously, Kalie **drove growth, led marketing, and garnered media attention** for startups and corporate clients across Europe and the US.



We embrace the joy in competitive play by working with stakeholders who are seeking ways to build and bolster the scene for fans and for pros.

Our vision is a future in which pro teams, players, brands, and investors we work with are able to harness the potential and reach of esports fans through meaningful communication strategy and engagement. We want to help them identify core messages and share authentic, inspiring stories of heroes through earned and owned channels. By providing strategic communication support, we promise measurable brand recognition and engagement, boosting fan loyalty and attracting external investment.

Based on years of experience working with the world's largest competitive gaming communities, we help you cut the fluff and create impactful, authentic outreach to esports fans. Whether you're a legacy brand or new to the esports space, as your strategic communication partners we can help refine your message. We'll engage your target audience, plan effective communications campaigns, manage media relations, help weather the storms, and develop and deploy your own, unique esports voice.



**IF YOU HAVE A STORY,
WE HAVE THE MEGAPHONE.**

SAY HELLO

THE
STORY
MOB

The Story Mob is proud to represent some of the top names in the industry: from endemic and non-endemic brands in the space, to esports organizations competing in top tier tournaments and most popular on-air talent.


Wanna hear about that time we turned a PR disaster into an industry-changing initiative, successfully helped a male grooming brand sponsor a top tier tournament or announced a \$\$\$ million VC fund for esports?

WE'D LOVE
TO TELL YOU.

WWW.THESTORYMOB.COM

OR REACH OUT TO

CONTACT@THESTORYMOB.COM

There's more where that came from! If you'd like to stay up to date on all things esports comms, drop us a line **here** and we will make sure to keep you in the loop. 

PHOTOGRAPHY - COURTESY OF HELENA KRISTIANSSON/ESL