

OCTOBER 22

NEW SURVEY SHOWS PASSION FOR ESPORTS IN SAUDI ARABIA DRIVING DEMAND FOR PURPOSE-BUILT VENUES

New survey data from YouGov and Populous shows majority of Saudi gamers now prefer attending esports events in person to streaming them online

A survey conducted by YouGov has revealed that gamers in Saudi Arabia are increasingly interested in attending live esports events and want more opportunities to do so.

The survey was commissioned by Populous, the global architectural design firm, and pioneer in the design of esports arenas and training facilities. It found that 53% of gamers who had participated in a live esports event preferred the experience to tuning in from home, with just 5% saying they did not like the experience of going out of their house to attend live events.

Populous partnered with YouGov, the leading international research, data and analytics group, to survey more than 1,000 male and female residents of Saudi Arabia, aged 18+, who spend at least seven hours a week gaming. The analysis was further enriched by leveraging syndicated data tools YouGov Profiles and Global Fan Profiles to provide insights on key points of difference between gaming and esports fans in Saudi Arabia and other major international markets (the US, UK, Germany and Japan).

The resulting data has provided an up-to-date insight into the rapid growth and increasing popularity of gaming and esports in Saudi Arabia, as well as the role event experiences might play in the continued growth and development of dedicated gaming and esports venues.

The research findings have also demonstrated the massive crossover appeal between gaming and esports taking place in Saudi Arabia, with more than three quarters of gamers (78%) saying they were interested in esports, with 39% “very interested”.

Although a third said they had participated in an esports event as a spectator, a significant portion of esports’ fans remain unengaged or untapped as possible live event attendees. For 25%, this was simply because they don’t live close to an esports arena, but 35% of respondents just didn’t know when or where esports events happen. This indicates a clear need for increased marketing to raise awareness of events, particularly given that 81% of those surveyed felt esports events should happen in Saudi Arabia more often than they currently do.

In light of Populous’ involvement in the design of a number of next generation esports projects that form a part of high-profile mega-projects shaping the future of the Middle East region, the survey also sought to understand what matters most to those gamers who have participated in a live event and what facilities they would like to see at esports arenas.

No less than 86% of people surveyed, who have participated in an esports event, said the venue itself had a direct impact on how they experienced that event. The design elements identified as most important in an esports arena were a proper layout for gamers to play and for fans to watch, and providing gaming meet-up spaces where fans can game against one another.

Subsidiary events such as cosplay and conventions happening alongside the main competition play were also cited as desirable, along with high-quality hospitality and retail spaces for fans.

Significantly, the research found that more than a third (37%) of people surveyed had attended or participated in an esports event held in a venue that was not specifically designed to host such

POPULOUS®

events, suggesting there is considerable room for the growth of bespoke esports venues in Saudi Arabia.

The survey's findings come on the back of Gamers8, an eight-week gaming and esports festival held in Riyadh, the capital city of Saudi Arabia, which closed with The Next World Forum, which saw Saudi and international gamers taking part in the biggest event of its kind globally.

It also follows the unveiling of the National Gaming and Esports Strategy on 15 September 2022, which aims to make the country 'the global hub' for both sectors by 2030.

Commenting on the results of the survey, Rhys Courtney, Senior Principal and EMEA Esports Lead at Populous, said:

"The findings underline the huge interest in esports in Saudi Arabia and why many experts in the sector are predicting the Kingdom will become not just a regional but a global hub for the gaming industry.

"Whether new build, retrofit or mixed-use, esports venues and destinations will be central to the successful delivery of the National Gaming and Esports Strategy and the significant number of associated job opportunities.

"As a designer of this new breed of venues, this research will help Populous to continue to raise the bar for live esports experiences, creating venues that bring people together, placing them at the heart of the action and providing an unforgettable shared experience."

- ENDS -

For more information, please contact:

Sean Julliard, +44 208 874 7666 or sean.julliard@populous.com

Robert Pine, +44 7894 462 342 or robert.pine@ing-media.com

About Populous

Populous is a global architecture and design practice that has led the design and delivery of some of the most iconic sports and entertainment projects across Europe and around the globe, including Tottenham Hotspur Stadium, the O2 Arena, Lyon's Groupama Stadium, and the newly opened Climate Pledge Arena in Seattle, US.

Twitter: [@Populous](https://twitter.com/Populous) Website: www.populous.com