A Profile of Spectators during the 2025 Call of Duty League Championship

A Summary of Results from

The 2025 Call of Duty League Championship Spectator Survey

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Introduction

The 2025 Call of Duty (CoD) League Championship was held at The AUD in Kitchener from June 26 to 29, 2025. Our research team, led by Dr. Luke Potwarka and Dr. Kai Jiang at the University of Waterloo's Interdisciplinary Network for Esports (UWIN-Esports), designed a survey to understand spectator experiences and evaluate the spectator experience in the Waterloo Region as an esports hosting destination during this event. The team developed the survey using the University of Waterloo's Qualtrics platform. We distributed it on-site at the AUD, utilizing nine iPads on two data collection dates: June 28 and 29, 2025. The iPads were pre-loaded with the survey website and/or QR code. The team approached the survey participants on-site, introduced the study based on the information letter, and obtained their consent using a consent form approved by the University of Waterloo Research Ethics Board (UW REB). Survey participants were provided with iPads to complete the survey; in some cases, participants chose to scan the QR codes on their phones to complete the survey.

An information letter was distributed at the beginning of the survey, and the first question sought consent. Following the consent question are the main survey questions. This study has two main research objectives. Firstly, it aims to understand the spectator experiences during the 2025 CoD League Championship held at The AUD in Kitchener from June 26 to 29, 2025. Secondly, this survey aims to investigate the destination image of the Waterloo Region as an esports event hosting destination, the psychological pull factors that influence tourists' and visitors' satisfaction with the event, and behavioral intention throughout their travel/visiting experience (e.g., overall attitude toward the destination and event, intention to revisit).
At no time was identifying information requested from participants; therefore, the survey is anonymous. Furthermore, participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Participants were welcome to opt to participate in the survey or refuse. They can also end their participation in the study at any time by informing the researchers of their decision.

During those two data collection days, Qualtrics saved the survey data electronically. After data collection, the data were downloaded from Qualtrics and password-protected. The researcher cleaned and analyzed the data using SPSS. The data will be securely stored on the principal investigator, Dr. Luke Potwarka's secured computer for at least seven years.

Among 430 people that we approached on-site, 367 (85.3%) agreed to participate in the study and responded. Of the 367 questionnaires that were submitted, only two were deemed unusable. Therefore, the total number of usable questionnaires was 365, representing a response rate of 84.9%. The survey closed on June 30, 2025.

This report presents both quantitative, statistical, and qualitative thematic analysis results. It starts with detailed, descriptive statistics on quantitative measures, such as satisfaction with the event and the event hosting destination. Later in the report, we present the results of the thematic analysis of answers to two key open-ended questions. We conducted a thorough, focused grouping of the codes and themes into higher-order categories (axial coding), which consolidates similar concepts. Taken together, the results presented here provide a snapshot of the overall opinions from spectators during the 2025 CoD League Championship and offer a clearer strategic picture for planning and decision-making.

Statistical Abbreviations and Terms

n	Number of respondents
Pct.	Percentage of respondents
Mean	Arithmetic average
Std. Dev.	Standard deviation (average amount the scores deviate from the mean)
Min.	Minimum score reported
Max.	Maximum score reported

Demographic Profile

Understanding the demographic composition of survey participants is essential for interpreting the findings within the appropriate context. This section provides an overview of key demographic variables, including age, gender, marital status, and other relevant characteristics of spectators. Examining these attributes helps to assess the diversity of the sample and ensure that the insights drawn from the data accurately reflect the perspectives of the surveyed population.

In this section, a demographic profile of the survey respondents is presented first, and results of measures on destination awareness, satisfaction with the event, destination image, and destination loyalty, etc, are provided next.

Table 1

Profile of Respondents to the 2025 CoD League Championship Spectator Survey:
Gender (n=365)

Gender	n	Pct.
Boy/Man	310	84.9
Girl/Woman	45	12.3
Non-binary person	5	1.4
Two-Spirit	3	0.8
I describe my gender differently	2	0.5

Table 2

Profile of Respondents to the 2025 CoD League Championship Spectator Survey:
Age[a] (n=335)

Age	n	Pct.
26-35	158	42.7
18-25	156	42.2
36-45	14	3.8
46-55	6	1.6
56 and above	1	0.3

[a] Respondents had to be at least 18 years of age to participate in the survey. The average age of the respondents was 27.6 years (*SD* = 11.5). Age was asked as an open-ended question and was recoded into the above groups.

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Table 3

Profile of Respondents to the 2025 CoD League Championship Spectator Survey:
Marital status (n=360)

Marital status	n	Pct.
Single, never married	212	58.9
Married or domestic partnership	121	33.6
I prefer not to say	16	4.4
Divorced or separated	9	2.5
Widowed	2	0.6

Table 4

Profile of Respondents to the 2025 CoD League Championship Spectator Survey:
Highest level of education attained (n=365)

Highest level of education	n	Pct.
College Diploma	122	33.4
High School	97	26.6
Undergraduate	91	24.9
Postgraduate	39	10.7
I prefer not to say	12	3.3
Elementary or less	4	1.1

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Table 5

Profile of Respondents to the 2025 CoD League Championship Spectator Survey:
Personal annual income (n=364)

Personal annual income	n	Pct.
$40,001-$60,000	74	20.3
$60,001-$80,000	61	16.8
$80,001-$100,000	49	13.5
Less than $20,000	48	13.2
over $100,000	43	11.8
$20,001-$40,000	39	10.7
I prefer not to say	50	13.7

Table 6

Profile of Respondents to the 2025 CoD League Championship Spectator Survey:
Ethnicity and racial background (multiple-choice) (n=388)[a]

Ethnicity and racial background	n	Pct.
White	227	58.5
Latin American	33	8.5
South Asian	24	6.2
East Asian	17	4.4
Middle Eastern	17	4.4
Black	16	4.1
Southeast Asian	14	3.6
Indigenous (First Nations (status and non-status), Métis, or Inuk/Inuit)	12	3.1
Another category	8	2.1
I prefer not to say	20	5.2

[a] *Some respondents chose more than one category; therefore, the total sample size of this question is 388 and is bigger than 365, the survey sample size.*

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Table 7

Profile of Respondents to the 2025 CoD League Championship Spectator Survey:
First time spectating an esports event in the Waterloo region or not (n=365)

First-time spectating an esports event in the Waterloo Region or not	n	Pct.
Yes	330	90.4
No	29	7.9
I prefer not to say	6	1.6

Table 8

Profile of Respondents to the 2025 CoD League Championship Spectator Survey:
First time spectating the CoD Championship in person or not (n=362)

First-time spectating the CoD Championship in person or not	n	Pct.
Yes	271	74.9
No	84	23.2
I prefer not to say	7	1.9

Table 9

Profile of Respondents to the 2025 CoD League Championship Spectator Survey:
Have you played the CoD game in the last 30 days? (n=363)

Played CoD in the last 30 days or not	n	Pct.
Yes	289	79.6
No	67	18.5
I prefer not to say	7	1.9

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Table 10

Profile of Respondents to the 2025 CoD League Championship Spectator Survey:
Self-rated overall ability to play the CoD game (n=364)

Self-rated ability to play the CoD game	n	Pct.
Beginner	39	10.7
I prefer not to say	10	2.7
Intermediate	134	36.8
Expert	181	49.7

Table 11

Profile of Respondents to the 2025 CoD League Championship Spectator Survey:
How much money will you spend in the Waterloo region because of this event (overall spending, including all sources)

	n	Min.	Max.	Mean	Std. Dev.
Spending in the Waterloo Region	342	18	2000	601.2	578.2

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Results of Main Questions

To better understand the overall patterns in survey responses, frequency distributions were calculated for the main questions in the survey. These distributions provide a clear view of how often particular responses occurred, highlighting dominant trends. In addition, measures of central tendency—specifically the mean, median, min, and max—were computed where appropriate to summarize the typical or most representative responses. Together, these metrics offer a concise yet comprehensive overview of the data, forming the basis for deeper interpretation in subsequent sections.

Table 12

Brand Awareness:
To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? [a]
(1=Strongly disagree; 3= Neither disagree nor agree; 5= Strongly agree)

Awareness	n	Mean	Min.	Max.	Std. Dev.
I am familiar with Call of Duty	360	4.61	1	5	0.98
People at this esports event are friendly	363	4.37	1	5	0.89
People in the Waterloo Region are friendly	363	3.99	1	5	0.97
I am familiar with the AUD as an event hosting venue	365	3.13	1	5	1.46
I am familiar with the Waterloo Region as a tourism/event destination	365	2.99	1	5	1.38
I am familiar with special events/festivals in the Waterloo Region	364	2.96	1	5	1.4

[a] *Means are arranged in descending order.*

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Table 13

Destination image:
To what extent do you agree with the following statements about the Waterloo Region? [a]
(1=Strongly disagree; 3= Neither disagree nor agree; 5= Strongly agree)

Destination image	n	Mean	Min.	Max.	Std. Dev.
The Waterloo Region is safe	365	3.92	1	5	0.88
The Waterloo Region has quality restaurants	365	3.78	1	5	0.91
The Waterloo Region has a variety of cuisines	363	3.75	1	5	0.94
The Waterloo Region has a variety of cultural offerings	364	3.72	1	5	0.95
The Waterloo Region has a variety of special events/festivals	363	3.64	1	5	0.94
The Waterloo Region has good quality local lodging facilities	362	3.62	1	5	0.91
The Waterloo Region has good shopping places	363	3.54	1	5	0.98

[a] *The Waterloo region contains the cities of Cambridge, Kitchener and Waterloo, and the townships of North Dumfries, Wellesley, Wilmot and Woolwich. Means are arranged in descending order.*

Table 14

General satisfaction with the destination:
How would you describe the Waterloo Region as a destination for hosting esports events and gaming? (n=365)

General satisfaction with the destination	n	Pct.
Excellent	105	28.8
Very Good	72	19.7
Good	96	26.3
Fair	62	17.0
Poor	29	7.9
I prefer not to say	1	0.3

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Table 15

Destination image:
To what extent do you agree with the following statements about the Waterloo Region as an esports event destination? [a]
(1=Strongly disagree; 3= Neither disagree nor agree; 5= Strongly agree)

Satisfaction with different aspects of the destination	n	Mean	Min.	Max.	Std. Dev.
The Waterloo Region has provided me with good experiences	362	3.86	1	5	0.94
I enjoy staying in the Waterloo Region	361	3.74	1	5	0.99
The Waterloo Region is pleasant for spending my leisure time	360	3.65	1	5	1.02
The price for activities and events in the Waterloo Region is reasonable	362	3.64	1	5	1.00
I am satisfied with the Waterloo Region as a destination	362	3.58	1	5	1.07
The local transportation is convenient	364	3.46	1	5	1.07

[a]*The Waterloo region contains the cities of Cambridge, Kitchener and Waterloo, and the townships of North Dumfries, Wellesley, Wilmot and Woolwich. Means are arranged in descending order.*

Table 16

General satisfaction with the event (single choice):
How would you describe the 2025 CoD Championship as an esports event? (n=362)

General satisfaction with the event	n	Pct.
Excellent	150	41.4
Very Good	88	24.3
Good	80	22.1
Fair	28	7.7
Poor	15	4.1
I prefer not to say	1	0.3

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Table 17

Inspiration/Demonstration effects:
While watching the CoD Championship, I…
(1=Strongly disagree; 3= Neither disagree nor agree; 5= Strongly agree)

Inspiration/demonstration effects items	n	Mean	Min.	Max.	Std. Dev.
paid attention to the performance of the CoD athletes	362	4.35	1	5	0.86
felt inspired to play CoD	364	4.28	1	5	0.96
felt proud of the CoD athletes	360	4.21	1	5	0.95
Something I saw or experienced inspired me	357	4.05	1	5	0.93
got so into the action that I lost touch with what was happening around me	364	3.86	1	5	1.10
imagined that I am one of the athletes	361	3.49	1	5	1.27

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Table 18

Spectator evaluations of the CoD Championship:
To what extent do you agree with the following statements about the CoD Championship?
(1=Strongly disagree; 3= Neither disagree nor agree; 5= Strongly agree)

Evaluations of the CoD Championship	n	Mean	Min.	Max.	Std. Dev.
Watching this event is entertaining	361	4.42	1	5	0.73
Watching this event is exciting	358	4.38	1	5	0.76
I've had fun watching this event	360	4.37	1	5	0.80
The event is engaging	358	4.29	1	5	0.79
The game quality is high	360	4.29	1	5	0.88
My overall feelings towards this event are positive	362	4.29	1	5	0.85
I am satisfied with this event	360	4.24	1	5	0.83
The venue has sound audio-visual systems (e.g., large-scale video screens)	356	4.16	1	5	0.99
The venue has good gaming hardware	361	4.14	1	5	0.90
The venue layout and physical environment at this event are good	360	4.01	1	5	1.00
The admission ticket price is reasonable	361	3.81	1	5	1.02
The venue has high-speed Internet	359	3.81	1	5	1.12

Table 19

Intention to spectate the CoD Championship again:
To what extent do you agree with the following statements about your intention to spectate the
CoD Championship again?
(1=Strongly disagree; 3= Neither disagree nor agree; 5= Strongly agree)

Intention to spectate the CoD Championship again	n	Mean	Min.	Max.	Std. Dev.
I want to spectate other Call of Duty championships in the future	356	4.40	1	5	0.79
If my team is competing, I would come back to support it again	355	4.32	1	5	0.86
I want to spectate or participate in this event again	365	4.29	1	5	0.86
I will recommend this event to my friends and families	359	4.21	1	5	0.88
I will say positive things about this event to other people	360	4.21	1	5	0.90

Table 20

Place of origin:
Where are you from? (single choice)
(n=363)

Place of origin	n	Pct.
The Greater Toronto area	109	30.03
Elsewhere in Ontario, Canada (please specify)	87	23.97
The Waterloo Region	78	21.49
United States of America	53	14.60
Other provinces in Canada	29	7.99
Other countries	6	1.65
I prefer not to say	1	0.28

[a] *Respondents who indicated coming from elsewhere in Ontario, Canada are from cities/areas such as Barrie, Collingwood, Guelph, Huntsville, Lambton Kent, London, Niagara, North Bay, Ottawa, Peterborough, Sarnia, and Windsor.*

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Table 21

Tourist/visitor revisit intention:
If you are a tourist/visitor here, to what extent do you agree with the following statements about your intention to revisit the Waterloo Region? [a]
(1=Strongly disagree; 3= Neither disagree nor agree; 5= Strongly agree)

Intention to revisit the Waterloo Region	n	Mean	Min.	Max.	Std. Dev.
I will say positive things about the Waterloo Region to other people	281	3.82	1	5	0.94
I want to revisit the Waterloo Region in the future	283	3.57	1	5	1.08
I will recommend the Waterloo Region as a destination to my friends and families	284	3.55	1	5	1.05

[a] Only respondents who indicated not coming from the Waterloo Region in the previous question answered this question, since this is a question only for tourists/visitors.

Table 22

No. of times visiting:
How many times have you visited the Waterloo Region for leisure/fun?[a]
(n=285)

No. of times visiting the Waterloo Region	n	Pct.
1 time	139	48.8
5 times or more	49	17.2
2 times	39	13.7
3 times	34	11.9
4 times	14	4.9
I prefer not to say	10	3.5

[a] Only respondents who indicated not coming from the Waterloo Region in the previous question answered this question, since this is a question only for tourists/visitors.

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Table 23

When to revisit:
When do you plan to return to the Waterloo Region to revisit?[a]
(n=286)

When to revisit the Waterloo Region	n	Pct.
Within the next 6 months	63	22.0
Within the next year	58	20.3
Within the next 2 years	35	12.2
Within the next 2-5 years	29	10.1
5 years later	10	3.5
Never	46	16.1
I prefer not to say	45	15.7

[a] *Only respondents who indicated not coming from the Waterloo Region in the previous question answered this question, since this is a question only for tourists/visitors.*

Table 24

Overall attitude towards the Waterloo Region:
The Waterloo Region is...[a]
(n=364)

Overall attitude towards the Waterloo Region	n	Pct.
Exciting	118	32.4
Very exciting	80	22.0
Boring	25	6.9
very boring	8	2.2
neither exciting nor boring	133	36.5

[a] *The Waterloo region contains the cities of Cambridge, Kitchener and Waterloo, and the townships of North Dumfries, Wellesley, Wilmot and Woolwich.*

Table 25

Teams to support:
Are you spectating the CoD Championship to support any of the following teams?[a] (Mark all that apply) (*n=648*)

Teams to support	n	Pct.
OpTic Texas	204	31.5
Toronto Ultra	190	29.3
Los Angeles Thieves	95	14.7
Atlanta FaZe	50	7.7
Vancouver Surge	49	7.6
Miami Heretics	37	5.7
Boston Breach	15	2.3
Carolina Royal Ravens	8	1.2

[a] *Some respondents chose more than one category; therefore, the total sample size of this question is 388 and is bigger than 365, the survey sample size.*

Thematic Analysis Results

In this step, we conducted qualitative thematic coding of all the answers to the two main open-ended questions in the survey to identify patterns and themes. The purpose is to understand spectators' opinions on what the Waterloo Region can improve to become a better esports event hosting destination and what aspects of hosting the CoD Championship can be improved upon for the future. Firstly, we reviewed all the valid answers/comments and coded them into detailed, descriptive codes. All texts were reviewed and coded to ensure that no critical feedback was missed. The report provides a comprehensive list of codes that we created, and under each code, it displays a corresponding segment of text (e.g., a sentence or part of a sentence) to which this code was applied. Secondly, we further conducted a more focused grouping of the previous codes/themes into higher-order categories (axial coding), which consolidates similar concepts to provide a clearer strategic picture for planning and decision-making. Below, please see the specific results.

What can the Waterloo Region improve to become a better esports event hosting destination?

Here is the list of **qualitative codes** developed from the 220 responses, along with the specific responsess each code applies to:

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1. Build or Upgrade Event Venues
Segments include:
- "The Waterloo region can add gaming cafes in Cambridge or Kitchener."
- "More esports focused venues."
- "Need more dedicated esports spaces like arenas."
- "Have dedicated esports venues with large screens and seating."
- "Make gaming centers or halls available for rent."
- "Provide more event spaces equipped for esports."
- "Have professional esports venues."
- "Host tournaments in large, accommodating facilities."
- "Create a local esports arena."
- "Offer a space for large-scale competitions."
- "Build esports-friendly venues."
- "Retrofit community centers for gaming events."
- "Create local esports-specific infrastructure."
- "Provide access to VR and gaming setups."
- "Setup LAN centres."
- "Gaming lounges and PC cafés."
- "Event space for 200+ people."
- "High-quality streaming and tech support at venue."
- "Have flexible esports halls."
- "Build a multi-purpose gaming arena."
- "Have venue-specific partnerships with game companies."

- "Improve audio/visual equipment in spaces."
- "Offer stages, lights, streaming booths."

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2. Expand Nightlife and Entertainment Options
Segments include:
- "Really just more of a night life."
- "Activities that keep people in town."
- "Create fun events outside of tournaments."
- "Include music, shows and fun venues."
- "Kitchener lacks entertainment appeal."
- "More nightlife activities for all ages."
- "Keep people in the city after events."
- "Have bars and late-night activities."
- "Create a fun culture beyond gaming."
- "Events like afterparties or social mixers."
- "Entertainment that matches gamer culture."
- "Host cosplay nights, themed parties."
- "Comedy clubs, arcades, and bars."
- "Host gaming nights at local pubs."
- "Live music and food trucks."
- "Include cultural events with gaming."
- "Nightlife in the region is dead."

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3. Improve Transportation and Accessibility
Segments include:
- "Easier transport to major cities and from Cambridge."
- "Better transportation, organized structure."
- "Public transit is not convenient."
- "More frequent LRT or buses to venues."
- "Accessible from Toronto."
- "Buses that run later at night."
- "More parking at events."
- "Make Cambridge and Waterloo more connected."
- "Need shuttle services."
- "Include train or bus travel packages."
- "Transportation between hotels and event spaces."
- "Improve access from universities to events."
- "Shuttle from GO Train to venue."
- "Better local transit infrastructure."
- "Safer walking paths to venue."
- "Late night options for travel."

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4. Increase Marketing and Promotion
Segments include:
- "More promotions."
- "Advertise better."
- "Need more marketing around events."
- "Reach out to broader gaming audience."
- "Better social media promotion."

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- "Promote events at schools."
- "Include influencers and streamers."
- "Get on TikTok, Instagram."
- "Run ads in gaming communities."
- "Engage with Reddit and Discord."
- "Have countdowns or hype builds."
- "Advertise in Toronto and beyond."
- "Make esports events known to locals."
- "Work with online gaming groups."
- "Create consistent branding."
- "Make Waterloo a recognizable name."
- "Get featured on esports blogs."

5. Improve Hospitality and Amenities
Segments include:
- "More hotels nearby."
- "Better food options at venue."
- "Affordable accommodations."
- "Partner with restaurants."
- "Have gamer-friendly cafés."
- "Food trucks and lounges near venue."
- "Include food courts or snack bars."

6. Enhance Tourism Promotion
Segments include:
- "More tourism."
- "Promote local sights along with events."
- "Combine esports with tourism packages."
- "Highlight attractions in Waterloo."
- "Create destination events."
- "Bundle esports tickets with tourist passes."

7. Foster Local Esports Community Engagement
Segments include:
- "Esports clubs at schools."
- "Create grassroots events."
- "Support local gamers."
- "Hold regular local tournaments."

8. Improve Event Organization and Structure
Segments include:
- "Better transportation, organized structure."
- "More organized planning and structure for events."

9. Support Diversity and Inclusion
Segment:
- "Make events inclusive for everyone – LGBTQ, women, and POC."

10. Address Safety and Crime Issues

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Segment:
- "Downtown Kitchener has a big drug problem."

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11. Leverage Tech and Startup Ecosystem
Segment:
- "Work with local tech companies for innovation."

In the next step, we performed a more focused grouping of the codes and themes into higher-order categories (axial coding), which consolidates similar concepts to provide a clearer strategic picture for planning and decision-making.

1. Infrastructure & Logistics
1.1 Venue & Event Space Development
- Focus: Creating and upgrading physical spaces for esports events.
- Responses:
    - "More esports focused venues."
    - "Build a multi-purpose gaming arena."
    - "High-quality streaming and tech support at venue."
    - "Create local esports-specific infrastructure."
    - "Offer stages, lights, streaming booths."

1.2 Transportation & Accessibility
- Focus: Ease of movement to, from, and within the region for attendees.
- Responses:
    - "Easier transport to major cities and from Cambridge."
    - "Late night options for travel."
    - "Need shuttle services."
    - "Transportation between hotels and event spaces."

1.3 Hospitality & Visitor Services
- Focus: Accommodations, food, and local services for visitors.
- Responses:
    - "Affordable accommodations."
    - "More hotels nearby."
    - "Better food options at venue."
    - "Bundle esports tickets with tourist passes."

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2. Spectator & Cultural Experience
2.1 Entertainment & Nightlife
- Focus: Activities that enrich the attendee experience beyond the event.
- Responses:
    - "Really just more of a night life."
    - "Host cosplay nights, themed parties."
    - "Comedy clubs, arcades, and bars."
    - "Create fun events outside of tournaments."

2.2 Tourism & Cultural Integration
- Focus: Positioning esports within a broader destination experience.
- Responses:

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- o "Create destination events."
- o "Highlight attractions in Waterloo."
- o "Promote local sights along with events."

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3. Engagement & Ecosystem Building
3.1 Marketing & Visibility
- Focus: Promotion, branding, and outreach.
- Responses:
  - o "Advertise in Toronto and beyond."
  - o "Include influencers and streamers."
  - o "Create consistent branding."
  - o "Run ads in gaming communities."

3.2 Community & Local Esports Development
- Focus: Fostering local involvement and growing grassroots support.
- Responses:
  - o "Esports clubs at schools."
  - o "Create grassroots events."
  - o "Hold regular local tournaments."
  - o "Support local gamers."

3.3 Innovation & Partnerships
- Focus: Leveraging the region's tech/startup ecosystem.
- Response:
  - o "Work with local tech companies for innovation."

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4. Inclusion, Safety & Governance
4.1 Diversity & Inclusion
- Focus: Ensuring representation and welcoming environments.
- Response:
  - o "Make events inclusive for everyone – LGBTQ, women, and POC."

4.2 Public Safety & Urban Perception
- Focus: Addressing safety concerns in public spaces.
- Response:
  - o "Downtown Kitchener has a big drug problem."

4.3 Event Planning & Organization
- Focus: Quality of event execution.
- Responses:
  - o "More organized planning and structure for events."
  - o "Better transportation, organized structure."

Below is a bar chart representing the focused coding themes based on the feedback for improving Call of Duty esports events in the Waterloo Region. The themes are ordered by total number of responses.

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Distribution of responses by category
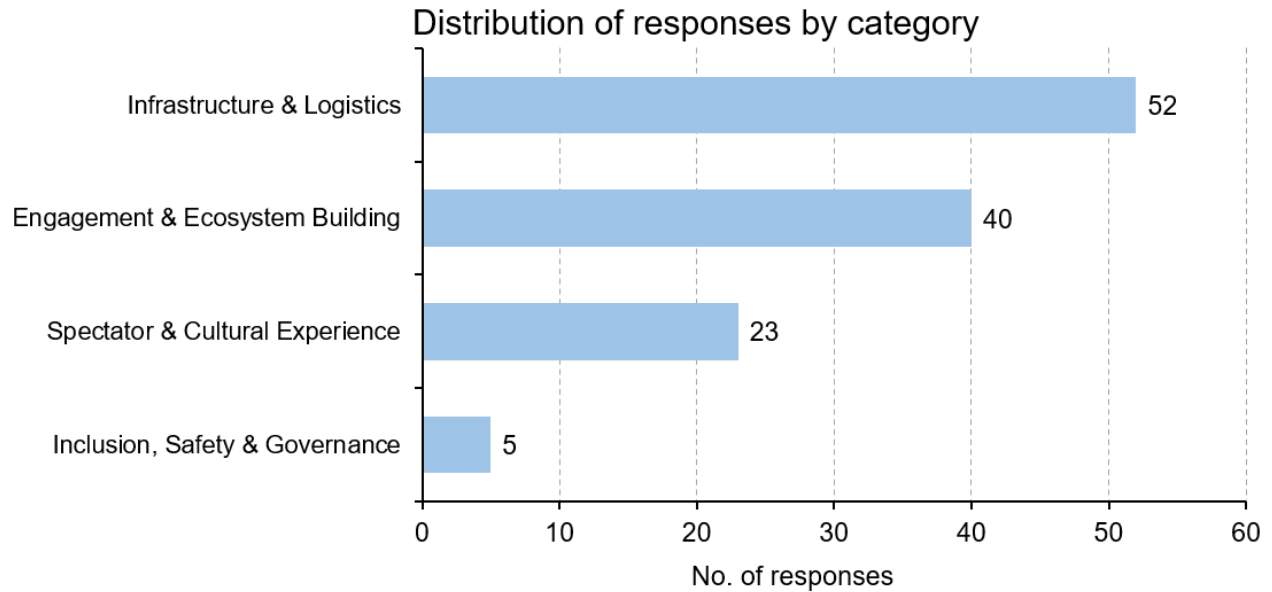
Note: Unclassified/ambiguous responses are not included.

What can be improved about hosting the CoD Championship in the future?

There are 215 valid responses regarding the improvement of hosting the Call of Duty Championship. Below is the complete list of descriptive qualitative codes developed from the 215 responses on improving the CoD Championship, along with the number of responses per code and full text segments:

1. Add Interactive Stations and Activities
- "More stations and activities"
- "Have more to do between matches"
- "Interactive booths and game demos"
- "Let fans try CoD on site"
- "More fun stuff to keep us busy"

2. Add More Vendors and Amenities
- "More vendors"
- "Better food options"

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- "Need more drink stations"
- "Include more merch stalls"
- "Lineups for food too long"
- "More places to get snacks"
- "More varied food options"
- "Sell limited edition merch"
- "Add gaming chairs or rest areas"
- "More washrooms near seating"
- "Make merch affordable"
- "More COD-themed products"
- "More booths selling cool stuff"
- "Add energy drink stands"
- "Improve the lounge areas"
- "Allow food delivery inside"
- "Merch ran out too fast"
- "Better vendor layout"
- "Have food options near every section"
- "Mobile food carts"
- "Dedicated merch pop-up"
- "Hydration stations needed"
- "Too few food options"
- "No souvenirs available"
- "Let local businesses participate"

3. Better Signage and Navigation
- "Hard to find restrooms"
- "Need better directions at venue"

4. Enhance Broadcast and Viewing Experience
- "Stream quality needs improvement"
- "Cameras miss key plays"

5. Fix Audio and Sound Quality
- "Audio is a little bad in bowl seating"
- "Sound was off during match intros"
- "Mic volumes were inconsistent"
- "Crowd couldn't hear commentary"
- "Too quiet in the upper seats"
- "Audio lag in replays"
- "Fix speaker setup"
- "Buzzing from speakers"
- "Sound quality not great"
- "Loud music drowned out casters"
- "Echo during announcements"
- "Muffled commentary"
- "More volume control"
- "Sound cuts during finals"
- "Sound wasn't synced"
- "Better audio output"

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- "Audio was distorted"
- "Improve in-game sound levels"
- "Sound balancing issue"
- "Mic feedback screeching"
- "Fix bowl section sound"

6. Host in Major Urban Centers
- "Bigger cities"
- "Doing it in Toronto"
- "More central city"
- "Closer to major airport"
- "Host in large metros"
- "Toronto or Montreal"
- "Larger population = more audience"
- "Easier access in GTA"
- "Bring it to Vancouver"
- "Host in a city with better transit"
- "Urban area with nightlife"
- "Better location for travel"
- "Do it downtown"
- "Host in bigger venues"
- "Closer to other esports hubs"
- "Use cities with good hotels"
- "Large urban spaces"
- "Better transportation access"
- "Have it in a main city"
- "Bigger crowd in bigger city"
- "Location is key"
- "Expand to urban centers"

7. Improve Casters and Commentary
- "The CODCasters can improve on transition timing"
- "Commentary was dull"

8. Improve Connectivity and Tech Support
- "WiFi didn't work"
- "No internet in upper seating"
- "Lag during live play"
- "More charging stations"
- "Tech support booths"
- "Network crashed"
- "Better on-site tech setup"

9. Improve Crowd Engagement and Energy
- "Crowd was quiet"
- "More hype!"
- "Need better crowd interaction"
- "Cheering felt forced"
- "Use hype team"

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- "Pump up fans more"
- "Make it more exciting for audience"

10. Improve Parking and Accessibility
- "Parking was hard to find"

11. Improve Seating and Venue Layout
- "Seating not ideal"
- "Better view from back rows"
- "Uncomfortable seats"
- "Stadium not designed for esports"
- "Need raised stages"
- "Seats were too far"
- "View obstructed by camera gear"
- "More comfortable chairs"
- "Better sight lines"
- "Seats too close"
- "Add screens for side seats"
- "Make layout more fan-friendly"
- "Need tiered seating"
- "Some seats blocked view"
- "Poor venue layout"
- "Rearrange stage orientation"

12. Make Pricing More Affordable
- "Tickets too expensive"
- "Lower prices for students"

13. No Improvement Needed
- "Nothing everything is perfect"
- "It's on point"
- "No suggestions, loved it"
- "Ran perfectly"
- "I think it was good"
- "Not much to improve"
- "It was great"
- "Perfect event"
- "Good job overall"
- "Happy with everything"
- "Nothing to change"

14. Smooth Event Flow and Transitions
- "Transition timing between matches"
- "Too long between games"
- "Improve pacing of event"

15. Support More Gaming Platforms and Devices
- "Bring Xbox controllers. It's only pc and play"

To create a clearer strategic picture from your detailed codes, the researcher grouped the above codes and responses into **higher-order categories (axial codes)** that consolidate similar ideas. Each axial code represents a broader area of focus for planning and decision-making. Here's the focused axial coding:

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1. Venue Infrastructure and Logistics
Focuses on the physical and operational setup of the venue.
Included Codes:
- Improve Seating and Venue Layout
- Better Signage and Navigation
- Improve Parking and Accessibility
- Smooth Event Flow and Transitions

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2. Spectator Amenities and Comfort
Deals with improving attendee comfort, sustenance, and engagement through services.
Included Codes:
- Add More Vendors and Amenities
- Add Interactive Stations and Activities
- Make Pricing More Affordable

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3. Event Production Quality
Related to the execution and presentation of the event for both in-person and streamed experiences.
Included Codes:
- Fix Audio and Sound Quality
- Enhance Broadcast and Viewing Experience
- Improve Connectivity and Tech Support

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4. Location and Accessibility
Refers to macro-level decisions about where events are hosted.
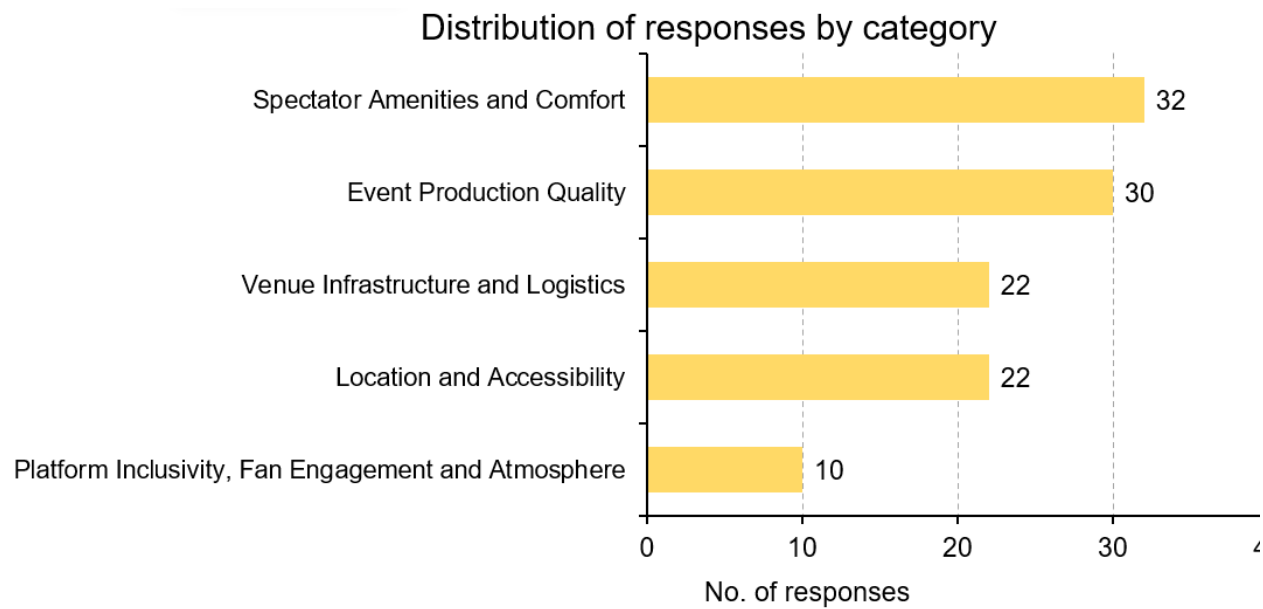**Included Code:**
- Host in Major Urban Centers

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5. Platform Inclusivity, Fan Engagement, Atmosphere,
Encompasses efforts to boost crowd energy and enhance the overall vibe. Reflects hardware and gamer diversity considerations.

Included Codes:
- Improve Crowd Engagement and Energy
- Improve Casters and Commentary
- Support More Gaming Platforms and Devices

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Figure 2: Axial cording themes for improving CoD championships in the future
(descending order)

Distribution of responses by category

Category	No. of responses
Spectator Amenities and Comfort	32
Event Production Quality	30
Venue Infrastructure and Logistics	22
Location and Accessibility	22
Platform Inclusivity, Fan Engagement and Atmosphere	10

No. of responses

Note: Unclassified/ambiguous responses are not included.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The 2025 CoD League Championship was successfully held at The AUD in Kitchener from June 26 to 29, 2025. It provided a valuable chance for understanding spectator experiences and the competitiveness of the Region of Waterloo in hosting esports competitive events. This study served as an initial endeavour to explore esports spectators' evaluations of local infrastructure, sociocultural economics, and marketing effectiveness in hosting esports events. It generated insightful strategies for planning and decision-making.

Demographically, the CoD Championship audience is overwhelmingly young (93.8% are between 18-35). Marketing, experiences, and communication strategies should focus on these cohorts. This age profile supports mobile-first communication, with heavy use of social media platforms like TikTok, X, and YouTube, as well as esports programming that reflects contemporary culture and trends. The CoD Championship audience is also overwhelmingly **male**, but the presence—albeit small—of gender-diverse individuals and women suggests a foundational interest that can be nurtured. Moving forward, prioritizing equity, inclusion, and representation could broaden the fan base and enrich the overall community. The spectator base is largely well-educated and comprises mainly young adults either pursuing or having completed postsecondary education. This demographic insight is beneficial for marketing strategies targeting career-minded, tech-savvy individuals. Another approach is to design content or partnerships that align with higher education institutions or brands that appeal to students and young professionals.

Geographically, the largest group (30%) of spectators comes from the GTA, indicating a strong regional draw from Ontario's largest metropolitan area. This suggests that proximity and population density in the GTA are significant contributors to event turnout. Over one-fifth (21.5%) of participants are local to the event region, which reflects strong community involvement or interest. A notable international presence is represented by the USA (14.6%), indicating that the event has cross-border appeal. Future promotions can be geo-targeted based on these segments. The GTA and Waterloo remain high-value markets, while the U.S. and other provinces in Canada, as well as other countries, present growth opportunities.

When asked about their evaluations of the CoD Championship, spectators rated the emotional and entertainment value of the event most highly; top 3 scores (Means of 4.42-4.37) are related to entertainment, excitement, and fun, indicating the core gameplay and spectator experience were outstanding. The event content (gameplay, excitement, engagement) is clearly resonating with attendees. Aspects related to technical infrastructure and venue setup (audio-visual, layout, internet, etc.) scored moderately lower. High-speed internet and admission ticket price were tied for the lowest rating (3.81), suggesting room for improvement in infrastructure, pricing, and perceived value.

On a scale from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree), spectators rated their level of agreement with various statements describing the Waterloo Region as a destination. Safety, food quality, and variety of cuisine were identified as Waterloo Region's strongest image assets. Shopping and accommodations are seen as adequate but less distinctive. Cultural and festival offerings are moderately well-regarded, pointing to potential for growth and marketing promotion. While spectators are very familiar with Call of Duty and generally find the people

(locals and event-goers) friendly, there is a relatively low brand awareness for Waterloo Region as an esports event destination. This highlights the need for more robust regional marketing and branding efforts to increase awareness of local venues, festivals, and tourism assets.

Overall, Waterloo Region is a competitive esports event hosting destination with high growth potential. About three-quarters (74.8%) of the respondents described the Waterloo Region as excellent, very good, or good for hosting esports events and gaming. More than half (54.4%) of the respondents perceived the Waterloo Region as very exciting or exciting. Over 40% (42.3%) of the respondents said they would revisit within a year or less. This shows high immediate interest and satisfaction with the Waterloo Region. Revisit interest tapers to 12.2% within 2 years, and only 10.1% within 2-5 years. This suggests the region may not yet have enough long-term tourism pull or loyalty unless experiences are refreshed regularly. Most visitors are willing to return soon (within 6–12 months), indicating a positive recent experience. However, long-term revisit intent is relatively weaker, and a notable minority (over 30%) show either disinterest or uncertainty. Therefore, there's an opportunity for the Waterloo Region to build repeat visitation strategies, especially for short-term loyalty. Feasible strategies include launching follow-up campaigns, events, or exclusive offers within 6-12 months and building loyalty programs that reward return visits within a year.

Spectators also expressed strong positive sentiment and intent to engage with the CoD Championship again. They are not only willing to continue supporting their teams but are also interested in attending other CoD championships, demonstrating brand loyalty beyond a single event. High return intent indicates the event experience was well received and likely met or exceeded expectations. Future CoD Championship organizers can leverage fan loyalty by 1) creating targeted campaigns or offering exclusive perks to returning spectators, particularly fans of specific teams, 2) capitalizing on the strong scores for promotion by incentivizing referrals, social shares, and testimonials, and 3) sustaining momentum by keeping attendees engaged year-round through newsletters, sneak peeks, or content related to the CoD esports scene.

When it comes to what can be improved about hosting the CoD Championship in the future, the concerns on venue infrastructure and logistics reflect room for improvement on fundamental structural and planning. Fans are asking for a more purpose-built esports environment—with clear navigation, smoother transitions, and seating designed for immersive viewing. Addressing these issues is essential for comfort and flow, especially in large or repurposed venues. Services and features that directly affect the comfort, convenience, and satisfaction of spectators can be further improved; key issues identified include insufficient food and beverage options, with long wait times; lack of interactivity between matches—attendees want booths, demos, and other ways to stay engaged; and high ticket and merchandise prices, which reduced perceived value for fans. The technical and sensory quality of the event for both live and remote audiences can also be enhanced. Fans view the host city as part of the experience. Accessible urban centers with convenient transit, hotels, and nightlife will be preferred. Smaller or remote venues are seen as barriers to attendance and buzz. Fans crave an electric atmosphere that mirrors the energy of other pro sports or top-tier esports. Better casters, platform diversity, and fan interaction tools could amplify emotional investment and make the event more memorable and inclusive.

The thematic analysis results also indicated that areas that the Waterloo Region can improve to be an even stronger esports event hosting destination include: 1) Infrastructure & logistics, e.g., creating a local esports-specific infrastructure with better food options and higher quality of

streaming and tech support at the venue, and providing shuttle services and transportation between hotels and event spaces; 2) audience & cultural experience, e.g., positioning esports within a broader destination experience and highlighting attractions in Waterloo; 3) Engagement and ecosystem building, e.g., leveraging the region's tech/startup ecosystem for innovation and promotion, branding, and outreach; 4) Inclusion, safety & governance, e.g., making the events inclusive for everyone and ensuring representation and welcoming environments.