How Society's Negative View of Videogames Can Discourage Brands from Sponsoring eSports

Bruno Duarte Abreu Freitas

Ruth Sofia Contreras-Espinosa

Pedro Álvaro Pereira Correia

Abstract

The purpose of this research was to identify the main motives that contribute to society's negative view of videogames and that present a risk to the eSports sponsors' image. To achieve this, an exploratory, qualitative, and integrative literature review was conducted. According to the theoretical data, there are four main reasons why society has a negative perception of videogames. It is commonly believed that: (1) gaming is an unproductive activity, (2) violent videogames incite aggressive behaviors, (3) videogames lead to gaming-addiction, and (4) eSports lead to eSports-related gambling addiction. However, while the literature presents convincing evidence that gaming can create addiction and that eSports can promote gambling addiction, there is no conclusive evidence to assume that violent videogames lead to aggressiveness and there is evidence showing that playing videogames can be a productive activity. Nevertheless, these four beliefs are a threat to the eSports sponsors' image and may lead them to cancel their existing sponsorships or lead other brands to not want to sponsor eSports to prevent being associated with these negative notions. This research will help expand the minor literature on eSports sponsorships and advance the knowledge of why some eSports sponsorships are terminated and why some brands may be reluctant to sponsor eSports.

Keywords

eSports Sponsorships Market analysis Marketing Branding

Download conference paper PDF

1 Introduction

Electronic sports, commonly referred to as *eSports*, can be described as organized videogame competitions [1] where professional gamers, usually referred to as *pro-gamers*, compete [2] for the chance to win prizes, money, and prestige [3]. There are various levels of professionalism, including amateur [4], high-level amateur, and professional [5]. Still, while amateur tournaments are mostly held through the internet, with gamers competing from their own homes [6], important and high-level competitions are held in large arenas full of enthusiastic fans and broadcasted over the internet [7]. It should be noted that eSports are a collective term just like water sports. That is, they are composed by a multitude of different videogames and genres [1].

In 2018, the eSports fan-base consisted of roughly 395 million people [8] and was experiencing an average annual growth of 13.5% [9]. This subsection of the videogame industry has evolved quite quickly and has now reached a worldwide scale [3], filling out entire football stadiums [10] and featuring its own developed ecosystem [11]. South Korea has even already established competitive gaming as an official sport and multiple western countries are also in the process of giving it the same type of recognition [12]. The reason why eSports have only now reached this level of popularity is due to the fact that the evolution of the information and communication technologies has only recently reached a state where the necessary

technological and sociological conditions have been met to live stream and proliferate these events over an online and worldwide audience [13].

The development and professionalization of eSports have made it similar to regular sports [14]. Its market is very complex, being composed of multiple elements and entities [2], including the tournaments and leagues, the fan-base, media channels [1], event producers, gaming genres, game developers and publishers, etc. [2]. But the most important element for the survival of eSports is the sponsors [1, 3, 10, 15, 16, 17]. While the past small scale eSports events could be funded just by the event organizers and fans, the current scale that eSports has reached means that it needs sponsors to be sustainable [10]. There are different figures, for example, Shabir [2] states that sponsors are responsible for 60% of eSports revenue, SuperData [18] estimates 70%, Lokhman et al. [15] mentions 74%, Ströh [1] affirms that it is approximately 75%, and ONTIER [19] indicates that it is a maximum of 80%. Although there is still no agreement on what the real percentage is, what is agreed upon is that, unlike regular sports, which can also earn significant revenues from player sales, TV rights, private investors, etc. [20], eSports, in their current scale, receive most of their revenue from sponsors. Hence, they cannot survive without them [1, 2, 3, 10, 11, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26].

However, despite eSports' worldwide popularity [1, 2, 10, 27], gaming is still negatively perceived by some [28, 29]. This negative public perception is so infamous that it has created a cultural barrier [28]. Unlike regular sports, people have not accepted videogames. They even consider it to be a negative activity. It is not unusual to see videogames being accused of inciting aggressive behaviors and of leading to addiction [30]. Furthermore, videogames and eSports are still seen as belonging to a nerd culture [20]. Gaming has such a negative connotation that some employers would favor someone who simply did voluntary work at a random sports club over someone who is a former administrator of a renowned eSports institution [31]. Unfortunately, it does not seem like this mentality will change anytime soon [32]. This negative stigma is a challenge for the eSports industry because the negative image that society and the media give to videogames may spread and, in turn, negatively affect, not only eSports' image, but also the image of eSports sponsors [1]. Due to how vital sponsors are for eSports and the danger of these negative views leading brands to cancel their eSports sponsorships, the following literature review will seek to identify what are the main motives that are creating these negative perceptions. The review will also include some data that challenges these negative views. In short, the objective is to identify what are the main reasons that create the gaming stigma so that future studies may try to find ways to shield eSports from this threat.

2 Methodology

This research was structured as a review article. An exploratory and qualitative methodology was employed to gather, analyze, and synthesize the most pertinent literature of the study topic. Since there are very few data on the novel topic of eSports sponsorships and on what aspects may discourage brands from sponsoring eSports (which greatly limited this review of the literature), an integrative literature review method was employed. As it is common in integrative literature reviews, the contemporary literature was scrutinized with the intent of generating new knowledge and frameworks on what are the main motives that lead society to negatively view videogames. The scant nature of eSports sponsorships-related research meant that a light filter had to be used when deciding which literature to include or exclude. Nonetheless, only academic works, published books, and relevant statics websites were used as sources for this review. The statistics websites included in this review were limited to those that have performed various eSports-related market analyses. Statistic websites that have only conducted a small number of eSports analyses were not included. Data from general gaming and eSports-related websites were not included in this review in order to keep the literature at an acceptable level of quality and reliability. The only exception was an article from PCMAG.com, by Jeffrey L. Wilson, who provided a very interesting and unique insight on the physical deterioration issues of pro-players. Since the eSports market is constantly changing and evolving, preference was given to the latest literature, especially data published not before

2015, as old data may present outdated or obsolete information. Hence, older literature was kept to a minimum, only being included if it contained either issues that were still prevalent nowadays or if it presented very convincing arguments or interesting data. In total, 62 literary references were used in this literature review, with 51 of them being published not before 2015 and only 11 being published between 2013 and 2006. The main keywords that were used to search for the relevant literature were: "eSports", "sponsorship", "videogame", "videogame industry", "negative effect", "problem", "danger", "disorder", and "marketing". In other words, literature related to the negative aspects that society associates videogames with and how eSports sponsors may be negatively affected by them were extensively searched. The major databases that were used to locate relevant literature were: Scopus, Emerald Insight, Google Scholar, Google Books, Web of Science, Science Direct, Taylor and Francis Online, and Sage Publishing. In these databases, it was possible to find pertinent data on multiple journal articles, conference proceedings, and books. Relevant data was also found on the following statistics websites: Newzoo, Statista, and SuperData.

3 Literature Review

Throughout the literature review, it was possible to identify several aspects that contribute to society's negative views over videogames. However, after scrutinizing and synthesizing these data, it became apparent that the vast majority of these elements fell into one of four main categories, which will now be covered in detail.

3.1 Unproductive Activity

Numerous individuals believe that the act of playing videogames is a waste of time [28, 30, 33] and energy [30]. In essence, according to them, videogames are damaging people's productivity, creativity, literacy [27], lowering school grades, and promoting obesity and sedentary behaviors [33]. Entering into further detail, critics believe that the act of playing a videogame does not require any sort of work or strategic planning. Everything that the players must do is simply kill everything they see and nothing is learned from it. It is also believed that videogames completely eliminate reading habits. For critics, while the act of reading a book promotes literacy and writing, the act of playing videogames does not promote any of that. However, this is an ignorant notion as there is a wide variety of videogames, like *Final Fantasy* and *The Legend of Zelda*, which include vast amounts of text in the form of narratives that gamers must read. People also argue that gaming damages creativity as it is believed that videogames do not provide the necessary tools to promote imagination. Hence, gaming is seen as a trivial activity where individuals do not gain any sort of abilities [27]. But this is another uninformed criticism as several videogames, including *Minecraft*, place a heavy emphasis and highly promote creativity [34]. Moreover, since gaming is accused of turning otherwise productive members of society into mindless sheep who look at screens for excessive periods of time, it is common to hear people saying that gamers are unproductive individuals who should be making better use of their time. However, several of these negative notions are either wrong or have little to no scientific evidence [27]. In fact, several books and articles about the benefits and importance of videogames have been published [35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41]. For instance, research has shown that videogames promote teamwork, teach people to adhere to rules, improve technological and motor skills [1], help in education [35, 36, 37, 39, 40], and enhance the ability to conduct multimodal operations. This last one refers to the skill of simultaneously and quickly interpreting haptic, auditory, and visual data and responding in a fast and effective manner [27]. Similarly, another study concluded that pro-players present above-average problem-solving skills, pattern recognition, short-term memory, and visual-spatial abilities [42].

Because people believe that a gamer's life is centered on his videogames instead of his job [31], there is also the stereotype that gamers are overweight nerds living in their parents' basements. It is believed that, since gaming is an activity where people's attention is detached from reality [28], it promotes antisocialism [27, 29] and social isolation [30]. However, this belief ignores the fact that a considerable number of videogames are not solo experiences [27]. Furthermore,

roughly 56% of gamers regularly play multiplayer videogames [43]. Still, there is also the notion that gamers would rather communicate only through the internet instead of in person [2]. But data also shows that gamers enjoy playing personally with their friends [43]. Hence, gaming also promotes social behaviors [42].

Although, at present, there is not as much incorrect gaming information being distributed, the social stigma that haunts the gaming industry is still very present [21]. Sadly, it will be very difficult to change society's notion of the solitary, geek, and obsessed gamer and turn it into an image of a technologically-skillful and healthy human [44]. This constant negative mental image that society has over gaming is a barrier that repels many potential eSports promoters [20].

3.2 Virtual Violence

Another very prevalent stereotype is that videogames promote violent behaviors [2, 27], drug use, and theft [2]. Since gamers are regularly perceived as antisocial individuals who prefer to play videogames than to be with others, there are some who believe that these are dangerous, unbalanced, and obsessive people. Thus, whenever an act of violence, like school shootings, are committed by someone from a young demographic, it is often believed that such acts were promoted by exposure to videogames [27]. In this sense, it is important to note that the media can greatly influence the acceptance of eSports. For instance, the topic of whether videogames promote violent behaviors began being spread by several media when school shootings started turning into a recurrent problem. Here, the media indicated that videogames, especially first-person shooters, were partially to blame. An example of this happened in 2002 when an article of a very popular German newspaper, called the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, stated that several games, including *Counter-Strike*, were training students to become school shooters. This led the German authorities to conduct some investigations, but the game was not banned. Nevertheless, there is always the risk that a popular eSports videogame may be banned due to its graphic violence, which may negatively affect the brands that were sponsoring it or were connected to that game [1].

The violent contents of various videogames have led several people to infer that they are a negative influence on the younger demographics. There are numerous eSports videogames, like *Counter-Strike*, *Halo*, and *Call of Duty*, which also present graphic and realistic depictions of violence and have the potential to create negative word of mouth about their contents [2]. The media has nicknamed these as *Killer Games* and some people believe that they lead to the loss of empathy or train gamers for the army [45]. For several times now, videogames have been blamed for real-world acts of violence and this trend will continue to persist, particularly now that a massive demographic of young people is starting to watch or participate in eSports [2].

Despite the belief that violent videogames lead to aggressive behaviors, there is, in fact, little to no evidence that supports these accusations [46]. Most studies have presented inconclusive data [47]. The unfortunate truth is that the majority of accusations over how videogames incite violent behaviors are partially based on ignorance. For instance, the *Huffington Post* once accused videogames of being more dangerous than guns. Nevertheless, all it takes is a quick online search about how gaming affects children to find a surprising number of effects like aggressiveness, insensitivity towards violence, etc. [32]. This problem has already started negatively affecting eSports. For instance, the violent content of several eSports videogames has decreased the International Olympic Committee's interest of including eSports in the 2024 Olympics. According to them, in order to be included as an Olympic sport, eSports must follow the Olympic values of non-violence and peace. But this will exclude some of the most popular eSports videogames (e.g. *Counter-Strike*, *Dota 2*, and *League of Legends*). This raised the concern of the eSports community as it would mean that the eSports' debut at the Olympics would not feature their favorite games and would have low viewership levels [2].

As can be seen, the media's negative portrayal of videogames can be a threat to the eSports market. This negative publicity means that eSports are always under the risk of losing

partnerships. All it may take is the media blaming videogames for another school shooting for brands to end their eSports sponsorships to prevent any kind of damages to their image. This has already happened once when a shooting in Munich took the lives of 10 individuals and led to a heavy discussion on the effects of violent videogames. This led the ProSiebenSat.1 Media SE to suddenly call off their eSports TV show. Hence, considering that the most popular videogames and genres contain violent content, it becomes immediately apparent that the negative media portrayals of violent videogames are a threat to competitive gaming. If the media generalizes this to the eSports industry it may affect the entire competitive gaming market [1].

3.3 Gaming Addiction

Several people state that videogames are addicting [2, 33] and the truth is that research has presented convincing evidence to conclude that too much exposure to gaming can lead to addiction [2]. However, if someone wishes to become a pro-player, they must play them for as long as possible in order to have a chance of entering the professional eSports tournaments. This can lead to a very exhausting lifestyle [48], with people playing videogames for roughly 10 [2, 49, 50] to 16 h per day [20]. There are even gaming houses that serve as training camps where pro-players continuously hone their gaming skills. There are not any kinds of parties in these houses. The pro-players are aware that they are making a living out of eSports and they know that their careers are at stake. So they must practice as much as possible. In essence, eSports are just like regular sports. People must heavily commit to training if they wish to have a chance of entering, and staying, on the professional scene [49].

However, this perseverance has led to some incidents. For instance, in 2014 a 22-year-old was sent to the hospital with a collapsed lung and, since he was a pro-player, he still kept practicing his gaming skills 5 h per day at the hospital [48]. But there have been more severe cases. For example, an 18-year-old regular gamer was once found unconscious at an internet café due to continuously playing a videogame for 40 h. Unfortunately, despite being transported to the hospital, he still passed away. This latter incident proves without a doubt that gaming addiction is indeed a real and dangerous issue [51].

Excessive gaming can negatively affect the human body in several ways, including the brain [2]. Evidence has shown that, when young people stare at screens or play videogames for long periods of time, their neurological brain system can be damaged in a similar fashion to what happens to those who consume too much cocaine. Furthermore, excessive gaming has been connected to disorders like depression, anxiety, and psychosis, also referred to as the *Tetris Effect* [52]. The Tetris Effect is caused by excessive exposition to pattern-based activities. The name Tetris is used due to its pattern-based gameplay and because it was one of the very first videogames to cause addiction. This condition does not occur solely to those who play *Tetris*; it can affect anyone who plays a videogame for excessive periods of time. In the case of someone who played too much *Tetris*, a moderate case of Tetris Effect would manifest as a desire to perfectly group together ordinary real-life objects that they found. More severe cases could include seeing the tetrominoes themselves falling when not staring at the screen. Some people have even had their brain's ability to process information being severely damaged [53] or have even lost their grip on reality [51].

Regarding the pro-players, most of them must end their eSports careers in their mid-twenties [48]. This is because of the physical deterioration that this sport causes [54], like wrist or hand injuries due to the long gaming sessions [48] and the necessity of constant and fast button presses. For instance, the pro-player Aziz "Hax" Al-Yami has had his hand and wrists analyzed by surgeons 12 times and has undergone two operations. Sadly, it is common for pro-players to suffer from these issues, with some having to quit their careers even earlier than expected. To help fight these physical problems, Dr. Levi Harrison has appeared at several eSports tournaments to instruct both pro-players and the community on how to keep gaming safe and healthy [55].

Although gaming addiction is a real thing [51], in the case of eSports, the general public must learn to distinguish between the people who play to make a living (i.e. pro-players) from the people who play because they are really addicted to videogames [56]. Both professional athletes and pro-players train for around 10 h per day [2]. Despite this, it must be recognized that gaming addiction is a real problem that should not be ignored [51]. The increasing success of eSports has led more people to become addicted to videogames. This has raised several concerns about the pro-players' health and social life. Hence, several countries like China, Japan, South Korean, and the USA are now acknowledging that gaming addiction is a real health problem. Because of this, the media and the general public have become very cautious about how the eSports market is evolving since its major demographic is quite young and vulnerable to addiction [57].

3.4 Gambling Addiction

Another type of addiction that eSports can create is gambling addiction. The ease of skin gambling (i.e. betting in-game items) has the potential to persuade several individuals to experiment with gambling and even lead to addiction [58]. Interestingly, research has shown that, although gaming addiction does not promote eSports-related gambling, the more someone watches eSports, the more likely they are of engaging in eSports-related gambling and of developing a gambling addiction. This means that, when someone develops an eSports-related gambling addiction, it is very likely that it was due to high eSports consumption [59].

A different study has also suggested that eSports do not create new gamblers; they simply attract existing ones. In a study, most eSports gamblers indicated that they had gambled in other areas before betting on eSports. Hence, most eSports-related gambling addicts may have been individuals who were already addicted to gambling in other areas and eSports were not responsible for creating the gambling addiction. This data is in line with another research which concluded that most people addicted to online gambling had already shown signs of gambling addiction before trying online gambling [60]. Furthermore, several authors have stated that more research on eSports gambling addiction is necessary [58] because at the moment there is no reliable data about this issue [10].

Evidence has also shown that eSports gamblers are more engaged than other bettors. For instance, an eSports gambler will bet on more different kinds of eSports-related bets than a regular sports bettor [60] and will also place more bets [60, 61]. It is common for regular gamblers to bet one time per week, but eSports bettors usually gamble every day [61]. eSports gamblers are more likely to become addicted because most of them belong to a young demographic. Moreover, eSports have a lot of offshore and illegal gambling websites, which facilitates the chances of becoming addicted [60, 61].

It is also important to note that, although the eSports gambling market was only officially established in 2010 [10], it has already become more valuable than the entire eSports industry itself [61]. Just in 2014, more than one million eSports bets were placed on the Pinnacle website [62]. According to this website's director, eSports gambling has overtaken both golf and rugby, and are now their seventh most popular gambling area. The director also affirmed that eSports wagering is growing so fast that it will not take long for it to surpass hockey and that, in the long run, it may even surpass football and tennis [10]. Estimates show that, in 2016, there were roughly 6.5 million people [61] betting roughly $8 billion on eSports [2] and it is expected that by 2020 there will be 19 million individuals [10] wagering approximately $23 billion [2, 10].

eSports betting has become so popular that various of the world's largest gambling companies are now allowing people to wager on eSports [2]. However, this popularity may end up damaging eSports itself as research has already proven that eSports promote gambling and can create betting addiction [59]. This issue becomes even more problematic when we bear in mind that most eSports fans belong to a young demographic and thus are even more susceptible to developing addiction problems [60].

Being the most vital revenue source of competitive gaming, it is vital to make sure that eSports provide sponsors with a welcoming environment. However, there are some aspects that might discourage or prevent brands from sponsoring this market and may even lead existing brands to end their sponsorships. One of these is the still present negative perception that society has over videogames and the eSports industry. Through this literature review it was possible to identify four main aspects that seem to be promoting these negative views: (1) the belief that gaming is an unproductive activity, (2) the belief that violent videogames lead to aggressive behaviors, (3) the belief that gaming leads to addiction, and (4) the belief that eSports lead to gambling addiction. While the literature does not present conclusive evidence that videogames are unproductive or lead to violent behaviors (in fact there is evidence against these assumptions), the literature does show convincing evidence that videogames can lead to gaming addiction and that eSports may lead to gambling addiction.

Some people believe that playing videogames is a waste of time. But that would also mean that anyone who plays chess, for example, is also wasting their time, which is not a present stereotype. None of these activities contribute to one's physical health and there are very low chances of being able to enter the professional scenes or of making a living out of them. Still, none of these activities seem to be a waste of time. Both chess and videogames are good at training one's strategic thinking abilities for example and the varied nature of videogames means that they can provide even more benefits than simply playing chess. Videogames promote creativity, literacy, technological and motor skills, teamwork, etc. This negative view of unproductivity could be easily minimized if the media placed a higher importance on showing the positive effects of videogames rather than solely focusing on the sensationalist attention-grabbing stories of unproven negative aspects of videogames. If the mass media called society's attention to how several studies have proven that gaming is a productive and positive activity, and listed several of its benefits, society would be much more inclined to understand that gaming is not unproductive. Unfortunately, dramatic stories are what catch the public's attention, so several media prefer to emphasize isolated issues related to how gaming has ruined someone's life. To make matters even worse, they tend to assume that those isolated issues are generalizable and fail to analyze the scientific studies which present a large spectrum of concrete evidence on how gaming is not an unproductive activity. The eSports sponsors themselves could also help here by showing the general public (e.g. through the mass media) how videogames are not unproductive since there are now several individuals making a living out of playing videogames in eSports or by being a gaming personality on appropriate social media like YouTube or Twitch.

Regarding the aspect of virtual violence, it is undeniable that several videogames contain explicit and very graphic content. However, this is not different from the movie industry. Just like with videogames, several films feature guns and people killing each other, and several of these movies are not rated for mature audiences only. Furthermore, just like with films, videogames indicate in their covers the recommended age for the consumption of each one. Hence, and again, just like with movies, parents must make sure that they do not buy their children videogames that are not appropriate for their age. The same applies to videogame stores which, just like with alcohol or cigarettes, should not sell videogames that are not appropriate to the buyer's age. Whenever a child has access to videogames that are not appropriate for their age, the individual that gave them access to that videogame should take responsibility instead of passing the blame to the mature content of the game. The media also can be of tremendous help here. If the mass media made the public comprehend that the virtual violence of videogames is not different from the violence that is present on TV or in cinemas, society would better understand that videogames do not incite violence more than any other form of basic entertainment like movies. Furthermore, while a child needs their parents' money to gain access to a violent videogame, they can easily turn on the TV and gain immediate access to a panoply of violent content. Likewise, and as stated by Hilvoorde [32], attention should be called to why a game with virtual guns is negatively viewed by society but the selling of toy guns (some of them very realistic) for children is not. Both cases will lead children to immerse themselves in an imaginary or virtual world where they are using guns to kill each other. If the media brought these aspects to the attention of the general public, then

there is a chance that the negative notions of virtual violence would be mitigated. Similarly, whenever school shootings occur, research should be conducted to analyze if the motive was centered on videogames or if it was related to any other issue (e.g. social or mental problems). Finally, eSports sponsors should call the general public's attention to how eSports are in fact less violent than several sports. Unlike boxing or football, eSports are not a contact sport. No pro-player walks out of a tournament covered in blood or with a broken arm. Likewise, unlike racing, the pro-player is never under the threat to risking his life by taking a sharp turn.

As recognized, the literature presents very compelling arguments and evidence that gaming addiction is a serious issue that must be dealt with. While pro-players have a reason to play videogames for long periods (i.e. that is what they do for a living), regular gamers do not and should not view gaming as a lifestyle. eSports sponsors and the media must educate the general public that, while pro-players have to spend up to 16 h per day playing videogames to improve their gaming skills, the general gamer should not play for so long. Pro-players are only allowed to engage in such long playing sessions because their careers and income are at stake. The general gamer should only threat gaming as the hobby it is. Just like with football, professionals spend the majority of their time training while the fans only treat it as a hobby. The demanding lifestyle of both football and eSports means that professionals must retire at a young age. This gruesome way of life is something that the general individual must avoid. Anyone who does nothing but play videogames for all day, every day, and cannot stop playing, has a high chance of being addicted and should seek medical help. In this sense, the appearance of medical professionals at eSports events, as indicated by Wilson [55], may prove to be a great way to help educate the general gamer on how to avoid gaming addiction and keep gaming as a healthy hobby. It should be in the best interests of eSports sponsors to implement these tactics as this will help shield their brands from negative views regarding gaming addiction.

Lastly, the literature also showed that eSports gambling addiction is a real problem and that appropriate measures must be implemented. Although most people addicted to gambling showed to already have gambling problems before starting to wager on eSports, the fact still remains that eSports are promoting gambling addiction. To mitigate this issue, both eSports sponsors and the media should educate parents to monitor their children's spending and make sure that they are not engaging in any form of eSports-related gambling (or gambling in general). As for adults, the media must educate people to be able to identify gambling problems in themselves and in others and to seek the appropriate medical help whenever these issues are detected. Furthermore, it would also be appropriate to sensitize eSports fans about the dangers of gambling through short presentations during the breaks between eSports matches (these same presentations could also be used to show the dangers, and how to avoid, gaming addiction).

Since the people who grew with videogames now comprise a very significant portion of the adult population, it is expected that these negative notions will diminish in the future. But the fact still remains that these are contemporary problems and present a risk both to the general gaming industry and to the eSports sponsors.

In short, even though there is evidence contradicting some of the negative beliefs about gaming, the truth is that all of these beliefs will not disappear in the short-term and that they have the potential to negatively affect the eSports sponsors' images. Thus, there is the ever-present risk of brands suddenly wanting to cancel their existing sponsorships or of brands that are not sponsoring wanting to avoid this market. Hence, the most important things to do would be to first mitigate the gaming problems that research has proven to exist (i.e. gaming addiction and eSports-related gambling addiction). Secondly, and as stated by Newman [27], although the logic that backs several of the accusations towards gaming is greatly flawed, this stigma is so voracious and persistent that corrective actions must be implemented to chance society's negative view. In this sense, it would be wise to follow the advice provided by AEVI [21] and try to alter the way the media views and approaches videogames so that a more realistic and positive image of gaming can be spread throughout society.

References

1. 1.

Ströh, J.H.A.: The eSports Market and eSports Sponsoring. Tectum Verlag, Marburg (2017)CrossRefGoogle Scholar

2. 2.

Shabir, N.: Esports: The Complete Guide 17/18: A Guide for Gamers, Teams, Organisations and Other Entities in, or Looking to Get Into the Space. Independently Published, Wroclaw (2017)Google Scholar

3. 3.

Mooney, C.: Inside the E-Sports Industry. Norwood House Press, North Mankato (2018)Google Scholar

4. 4.

Hamari, J., Sjöblom, M.: What is eSports and why do people watch it? Internet Res. **27**(2), 211–232 (2017). https://doi.org/10.1108/IntR-04-2016-0085CrossRefGoogle Scholar

5. 5.

SuperData. Esports Courtside: Playmakers of 2017, December 2017. http://strivesponsorship.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/SuperData-2017-Esports-Market-Brief.pdf. Accessed 6 Apr 2018

6. 6.

Stein, V., Scholz, T.M.: Sky is the limit – esports as entrepreneurial innovator for media management. In: Jesus, S.N.d., Pinto, P. (eds.) Proceedings of the International Congress on Interdisciplinarity in Social and Human Sciences, pp. 622–631. University of Algarve, Faro. CIEO – Research Centre for Spatial and Organizational Dynamics (2016). http://hdl.handle.net/10400.1/9888

7. 7.

Gifford, C.: Gaming Record Breakers. Carlton Books Limited, London (2017)Google Scholar

8. 8.

Statista. eSports audience size worldwide from 2012 to 2020, by type of viewers (in millions), February 2019. https://www.statista.com/statistics/490480/global-esports-audience-size-viewer-type/. Accessed 3 Mar 2019

9. 9.

Newzoo: Free 2018 Global Esports Market Report, 21 February 2018. http://resources.newzoo.com/2018-global-esports-market-report-light. Accessed 13 Apr 2018

10. 10.

Winnan, C.D.: An entrepreneur's guide to the exploding world of esports: understanding the commercial significance of counter-strike, league of legends and DotA 2. Kindle eBook: The Borderland PressGoogle Scholar

11. 11.

CGC Europe: Marketing Channel eSports – How to get the attention of young adults? (2015). http://docplayer.net/12867287-Marketing-channel-esports-how-to-get-the-attention-of-young-adults.html. Accessed 19 Jan 2018

12. 12.

Hiltscher, J., Scholz, T.M.: Preface. In: Hiltscher, J., Scholz, T.M. (eds.) eSports Yearbook 2015/16, pp. 7–8. Books on Demand GmbH, Norderstedt (2017). http://www.esportsyearbook.com/eyb201516.pdf

13. 13.

Carter, M., Gibbs, M.: eSports in EVE online: skullduggery, fair play and acceptability in an unbounded competition. In: Yannakakis, G.N., Aarseth, E., Jørgensen, K., Lester, J.C. (eds.) Proceedings of the 8th International Conference on the Foundations of Digital Games, pp. 47–54. Society for the Advancement of the Science of Digital Games, Chania (2013)Google Scholar

14. 14.

Lopez-Gonzalez, H., Griffiths, M.D.: Understanding the convergence of markets in online sports betting. Int. Rev. Sociol. Sport, 1–24 (2016). https://doi.org/10.1177/1012690216680602CrossRefGoogle Scholar

15. 15.

Lokhman, N., Karashchuk, O., Kornilova, O.: Analysis of eSports as a commercial activity. Probl. Perspect. Manag. **16**(1), 207–213 (2018). https://doi.org/10.21511/ppm.16(1).2018.20CrossRefGoogle Scholar

16. 16.

Callus, P., Potter, C.: Michezo video: Nairobi's gamers and the developers who are promoting local content. Crit. Afr. Stud. **9**(3), 302–326 (2017). https://doi.org/10.1080/21681392.2017.1371620CrossRefGoogle Scholar

17. 17.

Holden, J.T., Kaburakis, A., Rodenberg, R.: The future is now: Esports policy considerations and potential litigation. J. Leg. Aspects Sport **27**(1), 46–78 (2017). https://doi.org/10.1123/jlas.2016-0018CrossRefGoogle Scholar

18. 18.

SuperData: 2017 Year in Review: Digital Games and Interactive Media (2018). https://www.superdataresearch.com/market-data/market-brief-year-in-review/. Accessed 7 Apr 2018

19. 19.

ONTIER: Guía legal sobre e-Sports: Presente y futuro de la regulación de los esports en España (2018). https://es.ontier.net/ia/guialegalesports-2018web.pdf

20. 20.

Taylor, T.L.: Raising the Stakes: E-Sports and the Professionalization of Computer Gaming. The MIT Press, Cambridge (2012)CrossRefGoogle Scholar

21. 21.

AEVI. Libro blanco de los esports en España (2018). http://www.aevi.org.es/web/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/ES_libroblanco_online.pdf

22. 22.

Nichols, M.: Endemics vs Non-Endemics: eSports expanding its sponsorship horizons. European Sponsorship Association (2017). http://sponsorship.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Sportcals-Endemics-vs-Non-Endemics-eSports-expanding-its-sponsorship-horizons.pdf

23. 23.

Seo, Y.: Electronic sports: a new marketing landscape of the experience economy. J. Mark. Manag. **29**(13–14), 1542–1560 (2013). https://doi.org/10.1080/0267257X.2013.822906CrossRefGoogle Scholar

24. 24.

Simon, J.P.: User generated content – users, community of users and firms: toward new sources of co-innovation? info **18**(6), 4–25 (2016). https://doi.org/10.1108/info-04-2016-0015CrossRefGoogle Scholar

25. 25.

SuperData: eSports: The market brief 2015, May 2015. https://pt.scribd.com/document/269675603/ESports-Market-Brief-2015-SuperData-Research. Accessed 7 Apr 2018

26. 26.

SuperData: European eSports Conference Brief, February 2017. http://strivesponsorship.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/Superdata-2017-esports-market-brief.pdf. Accessed 6 Apr 2018

27. 27.

Newman, J.: Playing with Videogames. Routledge, Abingdon (2008)CrossRefGoogle Scholar

28. 28.

Li, R.: Good Luck Have Fun: The Rise of eSports. Skyhorse Publishing, New York (2016)Google Scholar

29. 29.

Brookey, R.A., Oates, T.P. (eds.): Playing to Win. Indiana University Press, Bloomington (2015)Google Scholar

30. 30.

Peša, A.R., Čičin-Šain, D., Blažević, T.: New business model in the growing e-sports industry. Poslovna izvrsnost: znanstveni časopis za promicanje kulture kvalitete i poslovne izvrsnosti **11**(2), 121–131 (2017). https://doi.org/10.22598/pi-be/2017.11.2.121CrossRefGoogle Scholar

31. 31.

Scholz, T.: eSports in the working world. In: Christophers, J., Scholz, T. (eds.) eSports Yearbook 2009, pp. 57–58. Books on Demand GmbH, Norderstedt (2010). http://esportsyearbook.com/eyb2009_ebook.pdf

32. 32.

van Hilvoorde, I.: Sport and play in a digital world. Sport Ethics Philos. **10**(1), 1–4 (2016). https://doi.org/10.1080/17511321.2016.1171252CrossRefGoogle Scholar

33. 33.

Tavinor, G.: The Art of Videogames. Wiley, Malden (2009)CrossRefGoogle Scholar

34. 34.

Hill, V.: Digital citizenship through game design in Minecraft. New Libr. World **116**(7/8), 369–382 (2015). https://doi.org/10.1108/NLW-09-2014-0112CrossRefGoogle Scholar

35. 35.

Beavis, C., Dezuanni, M., O'Mara, J. (eds.): Serious Play: Literacy, Learning and Digital Games. Routledge, New York (2017)Google Scholar

36. 36.

Becker, K.: Choosing and Using Digital Games in the Classroom: A Practical Guide. Springer, Heidelberg (2017). https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-12223-6CrossRefGoogle Scholar

37. 37.

Brown, H.J.: Videogames and Education. M.E. Sharpe, Armonk (2008)Google Scholar

38. 38.

Hergenrader, T.: The place of videogames in the digital humanities. Horizon **24**(1), 29–33 (2016). https://doi.org/10.1108/OTH-08-2015-0050CrossRefGoogle Scholar

39. 39.

Shaffer, D.W.: How Computer Games Help Children Learn. Palgrave Macmillan, New York (2006)CrossRefGoogle Scholar

40. 40.

Wankel, C., Blessinger, P. (eds.): Increasing Student Engagement and Retention Using Immersive Interfaces: Virtual Worlds, Gaming, and Simulation (Vol. 6C). Emerald Group Publishing Limited, Bingley (2012)Google Scholar

41. 41.

Scolari, C.A., Contreras-Espinosa, R.S.: How do teens learn to play video games? Informal learning strategies and video game literacy. J. Inf. Lit. **13**(1), 45–61 (2019). https://doi.org/10.11645/13.1.2358CrossRefGoogle Scholar

42. 42.

Griffiths, M.: The psychosocial impact of professional gambling, professional video gaming & eSports. Casino Gaming Int. **28**, 59–63 (2017). http://irep.ntu.ac.uk/id/eprint/30079

43. 43.

ESA. 2018 Essential Facts About the Computer and Video Game Industry (2018). http://www.theesa.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/EF2018_FINAL.pdf

44. 44.

Liboriussen, B., Martin, P.: Special issue: games and gaming in China. Games Cult. **11**(3), 227–232 (2016). https://doi.org/10.1177/1555412015615296CrossRefGoogle Scholar

45. 45.

Scholz, C.: Gamers as a safety hazard. In: Christophers, J., Scholz, T. (eds.) eSports Yearbook 2009, pp. 51–52. Books on Demand GmbH, Norderstedt (2010). http://esportsyearbook.com/eyb2009_ebook.pdf

46. 46.

Crawford, G., Gosling, V.K.: More than a game: sports-themed video games and player narratives. Sociol. Sport J. **26**(1), 50–66 (2009). https://doi.org/10.1123/ssj.26.1.50CrossRefGoogle Scholar

47. 47.

Franke, T.: The perception of eSports - mainstream culture, real sport and marketisation. In: Hiltscher, J., Scholz, T.M. (eds.) eSports Yearbook 2013/14, pp. 111–144. Books on Demand GmbH, Norderstedt (2015). http://esportsyearbook.com/eyb201314.pdf

48. 48.

Stivers, C.: The first competitive video gaming anti-doping policy and its deficiencies under European Union law. San Diego Int. Law J. **18**(2), 263–294 (2017). http://digital.sandiego.edu/ilj/vol18/iss2/4/

49. 49.

Parkin, S.: Death by Video Game: Tales of Obsession from the Virtual Frontline. Serpent's Tail, London (2015)Google Scholar

50. 50.

Szablewicz, M.: A realm of mere representation? "Live" e-sports spectacles and the crafting of china's digital gaming image. Games Cult. **11**(3), 256–274 (2016). https://doi.org/10.1177/1555412015595298CrossRefGoogle Scholar

51. 51.

Şentuna, B., Kanbur, D.: What kind of an activity is a virtual game? A postmodern approach in relation to concept of phantasm by Deleuze and the philosophy of Huizinga. Sport Ethics Philos. **10**(1), 42–50 (2016). https://doi.org/10.1080/17511321.2016.1177581CrossRefGoogle Scholar

52. 52.

Holden, J.T., Kaburakis, A., Rodenberg, R.M.: Esports: Children, stimulants and video-gaming-induced inactivity. J. Paediatr. Child Health (2018). https://doi.org/10.1111/jpc.13897CrossRefGoogle Scholar

53. 53.

Ackerman, D.: The Tetris effect: The Game that Hypnotized the World. PublicAffairs, New York (2016)Google Scholar

54. 54.

Zolides, A.: Lipstick bullets: labour and gender in professional gamer self-branding. Persona Stud. **1**(2), 42–53 (2015). https://doi.org/10.21153/ps2015vol1no2art467CrossRefGoogle Scholar

55. 55.

Wilson, J.L.: How I Learned to Stop Hating and Love Esports, 5 June 2017. https://www.pcmag.com/article/354028/how-i-learned-to-stop-hating-and-love-esports. Accessed 10 June 2018

56. 56.

Nielsen, R.K.L., Karhulahti, V.: The problematic coexistence of "internet gaming disorder" and esports. In: Deterding, S., Canossa, A., Harteveld, C., Zhu, J., Sicart, M., (eds.) Proceedings of the 12th International Conference on the Foundations of Digital Games, pp. 1–4. ACM, New York (2017). https://doi.org/10.1145/3102071.3106359, https://dl.acm.org/citation.cfm?id=3106359&dl=ACM&coll=DL

57. 57.

Lu, Z.: From E-Heroin to E-Sports: the development of competitive gaming in China. Int. J. Hist. Sport **33**(18), 2186–2206 (2017). https://doi.org/10.1080/09523367.2017.1358167CrossRefGoogle Scholar

58. 58.

Teichert, T., Gainsbury, S.M., Mühlbach, C.: Positioning of online gambling and gaming products from a consumer perspective: a blurring of perceived boundaries. Comput. Hum. Behav. **75**, 757–765 (2017). https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2017.06.025CrossRefGoogle Scholar

59. 59.

Macey, J., Hamari, J.: Investigating relationships between video gaming, spectating esports, and gambling. Comput. Hum. Behav. **80**, 344–353 (2018). https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2017.11.027CrossRefGoogle Scholar

60. 60.

Gainsbury, S.M., Abarbanel, B., Blaszczynski, A.: Intensity and gambling harms: exploring breadth of gambling involvement among esports bettors. Gaming Law Rev. **21**(8), 610–615 (2017). https://doi.org/10.1089/glr2.2017.21812CrossRefGoogle Scholar

61. 61.

Gainsbury, S.M., Abarbanel, B., Blaszczynski, A.: Game on: comparison of demographic profiles, consumption behaviors, and gambling site selection criteria of esports and sports bettors. Gaming Law Rev. **21**(8), 575–587 (2017). https://doi.org/10.1089/glr2.2017.21813CrossRefGoogle Scholar

62. 62.

Schneider, S.: eSport betting: the intersection of gaming and gambling. Gaming Law Rev. Econ. **19**(6), 419–420 (2015). https://doi.org/10.1089/glre.2015.1963CrossRefGoogle Scholar

About this paper
CrossMark

Cite this paper as: