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SOCIAL AND DEVELOPMENTAL EFFECTS OF ESPORTS AND THE GAMING INDUSTRY

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Abstract: Esports and the gaming industry have become significant social phenomena that increasingly influence young people, education, and the broader processes of digital transformation. The subject of this paper is the analysis of the social and developmental effects of esports and gaming, with particular emphasis on their impact on youth. The aim of the study is to examine, based on relevant scientific literature, both the positive aspects of developing digital competencies, cognitive abilities, socialization, and social capital, as well as the risks associated with problematic gaming, health-related challenges, and toxic communication in digital environments. The findings indicate that esports can contribute to the development of skills that are essential for the digital society, while simultaneously generating certain psychosocial, educational, and ethical risks. It is concluded that maximizing the positive effects and minimizing the negative consequences requires cooperation among families, educational institutions, governmental bodies, and the gaming industry. Future research should focus on the empirical examination of the long-term social consequences of esports and its role in shaping the digital generation.

Keywords: esports, gaming industry, youth, digital competencies, social capital.

Introduction

One of the most dynamic things in today's digital society is the gaming business and esports. What was formerly primarily thought of as a kind of personal amusement has developed into a sophisticated social, cultural, educational, and economic field. Esports is the term for organized competitive video gaming, which is usually played in virtual settings and is backed by spectators, teams, advertisers, streaming services, professional players, and larger online communities. According to Hamari and Sjöblom (2017), esports is a type of sport in which human-computer interfaces facilitate player and team relationships while electronic systems mediate the essential elements of competitive activity. This definition is important because it positions esports not

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merely as gaming but as a broader media, technological, and social phenomenon.

In recent years, esports and the gaming industry have become important subjects of research across multiple scientific disciplines, including sociology, media studies, psychology, education, economics, sport sciences, and youth studies. Reitman, Anderson-Coto, Wu, Lee, and Steinkuehler (2020) demonstrate that esports research has developed into a highly interdisciplinary field that integrates issues of technology, culture, sport, education, identity, and social interaction. This interdisciplinarity makes esports particularly relevant for sociological analysis, as it can be examined not only as a market-driven industry or entertainment format but also as a space in which young people construct identities, develop digital competencies, shape social relationships, and participate in new forms of cultural production (Dasic, 2018; Dašić, 2025).

One of the most important problems from a sociological standpoint is how gaming and esports affect young people as a social group. In digital gaming contexts, youth are the most significant users, audiences, and content producers. In addition to gaming, their involvement in esports activities includes peer communication, teamwork, watching streams, studying methods, participating in online communities, honing digital skills, and establishing connections with more diverse cultures. In a thorough assessment of the research, Zhong, Guo, Su, and Chu (2022) discovered that playing esports may help people develop 21st-century abilities like social responsibility, problem-solving, communication, teamwork, and digital literacy. These findings suggest that esports possess significant educational and developmental potential, particularly when incorporated into organized, pedagogically structured, and institutionally supported activities.

Without taking into account the wider psychological implications of digital play, it is impossible to completely comprehend the positive features of video games and gaming culture. According to Granic, Lobel, and Engels (2014), playing video games can improve attention, perseverance, emotional control, cooperation, and prosocial conduct, among other cognitive, motivational, emotional, and social benefits. Even while these impacts vary depending on the kind of game, amount of time spent playing, player motivation, and social environment, current research is moving away from oversimplified interpretations that depict video games as either totally beneficial or totally negative. Rather, the prevailing perspective sees gaming and esports as conflicting phenomena that can be sources of risk as well as opportunities for growth.

A particularly important area of research concerns social capital and the social relationships developed within online gaming communities. Kim, Jeong, Lee, and Yoo (2022) demonstrated in a longitudinal study that social capital plays a significant role in shaping the relationship between gaming time and

psychosocial outcomes among adolescents. Young people with stronger social capital may experience higher self-esteem and greater life satisfaction through gaming, whereas those with lower levels of social capital may be more vulnerable to negative psychosocial outcomes. This finding is sociologically significant because it indicates that the effects of gaming are not universal but are influenced by broader social contexts, including family support, peer relationships, educational environments, and the quality of online communities.

Simultaneously, scientific literature draws attention to possible hazards linked to intense engagement in online gaming and esports. In their systematic review of esports psychology, Bündai, Griffiths, Kirė, and Demetrovics (2019) stress the significance of looking at player motivation, the professionalization of esports activities, potential psychological risks, and the difference between problematic gaming behavior and healthy engagement. Intense participation in esports and online gaming may also be linked to lifestyle choices, levels of physical activity, mental health issues, and general social functioning, according to Chan et al. (2022). Simplistic conclusions should therefore be avoided. The social impact of esports depends on the extent of engagement, contextual factors, motivational structures, institutional support, family supervision, educational policies, and the manner in which society and public institutions recognize and regulate this phenomenon.

Based on these considerations, the subject of this paper is the analysis of the social and developmental effects of esports and the gaming industry on youth and society as a whole. The study seeks to demonstrate that esports are not merely a marginal form of digital entertainment but rather a complex social field in which education, technology, culture, economics, peer communication, social capital, and emerging digital-age risks intersect. Particular attention is devoted to examining how esports and the gaming industry can contribute to digital inclusion, the development of youth competencies, and the creation of new professional opportunities, while also identifying the psychosocial, health-related, ethical, and educational risks associated with uncontrolled or excessive participation in digital gaming environments.

The main objective of this paper is to critically analyze, based on relevant scientific literature, the role of esports and the gaming industry in contemporary society, with particular emphasis on youth as both the most active and the most vulnerable social group within this domain. The specific goals are to: (1) explain esports as a new kind of digital culture and social interaction; (2) investigate its potential to help young people develop digital, cognitive, communicative, and social skills; (3) emphasize the importance of online communities and social capital in shaping young gamers' experiences; (4) identify the main risks associated with excessive gaming, psychosocial pressures, sedentary lifestyles, and digital addiction; and (5) suggest a balanced societal approach that neither demonizes or idealizes gaming.

Esports and gaming need to be seen from a variety of angles, as prior study has shown. One of the most often used definitions of esports was given by Hamari and Sjöblom (2017), who also listed the main reasons people watch esports. Reitman et al. (2020) emphasized the interdisciplinary nature of esports research and systematized its progress. Zhong et al. (2022) made a substantial contribution to our understanding of esports as a setting for the development of juvenile skills. Granic et al. (2014) broadened the conversation about video games' beneficial social, emotional, and cognitive effects. The significance of social capital in comprehending the connection between gaming and psychosocial outcomes was highlighted by Kim et al. (2022). Bányai et al. (2019), together with Chan et al. (2022), advanced the critical understanding of the psychological, health-related, and lifestyle risks associated with intensive gaming and esports participation.

The synthesis of these findings demonstrates that esports and the gaming industry are multidimensional phenomena. They can simultaneously function as spaces for learning, socialization, creativity, digital inclusion, and youth development, while also serving as environments characterized by risk, inequality, pressure, commercialization, and potential psychosocial problems (Dašić et al., 2023; Dašić et al., 2024; Ilievska Kostadinović et al., 2025). For this reason, a sociological approach is required—one that examines esports in relation to institutions, families, schools, peer groups, labor markets, the digital economy, and public policy. Such an approach enables esports and the gaming industry to be understood not as isolated youth activities but as integral components of the broader transformation of contemporary society.

Esports and the Gaming Industry as Factors in the Social and Educational Development of Young People

Esports and the gaming industry are becoming more and more vital for young people to develop a variety of skills in today's digital culture, going beyond the realm of entertainment. Despite the fact that video games are frequently linked to risks in public discourse, research indicates that their effects are more nuanced and vary depending on the kind of game, how it is played, the social setting, player motivation, and the educational setting in which it is played. Digital competences, creativity, problem-solving, critical thinking, strategic decision-making, information processing speed, and young people's interest in STEM disciplines hold a special place in current study.

Digital competencies no longer refer only to the technical ability to use digital devices; they also include understanding digital systems, communicating in online environments, evaluating information, solving problems, and acting creatively in digital spaces. In this sense, esports and video games can be viewed as environments in which young people develop functional digital literacy through practice. Connolly, Boyle, MacArthur, Hainey, and Boyle (2012), in a systematic review of empirical research, show that computer games

and serious games may be associated with learning, skill development, motivation, and engagement. This finding is important because it indicates that gaming should not be analyzed solely through screen time, but also through the type of activity, cognitive demands, and educational outcomes that may result from such activity.

A particularly significant aspect concerns the development of twenty-first-century skills. Qian and Clark (2016), in their review of research on game-based learning, emphasize that games can foster critical thinking, problem-solving, collaboration, communication, and creativity. These findings are highly relevant for the sociological understanding of youth, as they show that digital games can function as an informal learning space in which competencies required for contemporary education, work, and social participation are developed. In the context of esports, these competencies are especially evident through team coordination, role distribution, opponent analysis, strategic planning, and decision-making under time pressure.

Problem-solving is one of the most frequently emphasized cognitive benefits of strategic video games. Adachi and Willoughby (2013), in a longitudinal study, showed that playing strategic video games may be associated with the development of self-reported problem-solving skills among adolescents, as well as with indirect positive effects on academic achievement. The importance of this finding lies in the fact that certain types of games, particularly those requiring planning, resource assessment, strategic thinking, and adaptation to changing conditions, may have developmental potential for young people. Esports, as an organized form of competitive gaming, further strengthens these processes because it involves situational analysis, rapid decision-making, coordination with teammates, and constant strategic adjustment.

The cognitive effects of video games have been particularly examined in the areas of attention, visual perception, and speed of information processing. One of the most influential studies in this field showed that action video games can affect visual selective attention and the ability to process multiple pieces of information in a complex visual environment (Green & Bavelier, 2003). A later meta-analysis by Bediou et al. (2018) confirmed that the effects of action video games are most pronounced in the domains of perception, attention, and spatial cognition. However, these results do not mean that every video game has the same effect. On the contrary, scientific literature emphasizes that cognitive outcomes must be analyzed in relation to game genre, intensity of play, player age, duration of exposure, and the broader life context.

Creativity within gaming culture develops through several mechanisms. Games often require players to experiment, combine different approaches, design new strategies, and solve problems that do not have a single predetermined solution. In such an environment, young people can develop flexibility of thought, improvisational ability, and creative use of digital resources. Open-world

games, simulations, strategy games, and team-based games are particularly important because they enable players to develop various forms of creative thinking through interaction, planning, and experimentation. Barr (2017), in a randomized study, showed that playing commercial video games can contribute to the development of skills such as communication, adaptability, and resourcefulness, which is particularly important for understanding gaming as a space for developing transversal competencies.

From an educational perspective, it is important to emphasize that the potential of video games is not automatic but depends on how they are used. Wouters, van Nimwegen, van Oostendorp, and van der Spek (2013), in a meta-analysis of the cognitive and motivational effects of serious games, show that such games can be more effective than conventional methods in terms of learning and knowledge retention, but that their effect is stronger when they are connected with a clear pedagogical structure, feedback, and instructional support. This is especially important for analyzing esports and gaming within a national context, because developmental benefits do not depend only on the games themselves, but also on educational policies, institutional support, digital infrastructure, and the capacity of schools to recognize the educational potential of digital media.

Esports can also be significant for developing interest in STEM fields. Although esports is not the same as formal STEM education, it introduces young people to digital ecosystems that involve understanding technology, data, algorithms, system performance, platform economy, graphics, design, streaming, and game analytics. Young people who actively participate in gaming communities often encounter issues of technical optimization, data analysis, digital content production, programming, video editing, and online channel management. In this way, gaming can serve as an entry point into broader digital learning, especially when supported by families, schools, and local communities.

Nevertheless, scientific caution is necessary. The development of digital competencies, creativity, and cognitive abilities does not result from every form of gaming, nor can it be observed in isolation from social conditions. Excessive, uncontrolled, or one-dimensional gaming may have consequences entirely different from those of organized, moderate, and educationally oriented gaming experiences. Therefore, it is important to distinguish between spontaneous gaming, pedagogically designed game-based learning, professional esports, and recreational participation in gaming communities.

Viewed synthetically, the available scientific literature shows that esports and the gaming industry may have significant developmental potential for youth. They can foster digital literacy, strategic thinking, problem-solving, cognitive flexibility, team communication, creativity, and interest in technological fields. However, this potential should not be regarded as self-evident, but rather as a possibility that is realized only when appropriate educational, family, institutional, and social conditions exist. For this reason, the analysis of esports

in the context of a particular country should include not only individual effects on young people, but also the broader social framework within which digital competencies are developed, valued, and transformed into educational, cultural, and economic resources.

One of the most significant sociological dimensions of esports and the gaming industry concerns their influence on the socialization of young people and the formation of new forms of social relations in the digital environment. Unlike earlier generations of video games, which mainly involved individual gaming experiences, contemporary esports and online gaming are based on interaction, cooperation, communication, and participation in virtual communities. In such an environment, players do not function merely as users of digital content, but also as members of complex social networks in which identities are shaped, friendships are established, behavioral norms are developed, and new forms of social capital are created.

Socialization in the digital environment is a process through which individuals adopt values, rules, behavioral patterns, and communication practices characteristic of a particular online community. Contemporary multiplayer games and esports platforms enable young people to interact with many peers from different social, cultural, and national backgrounds. Kowert, Domahidi, and Quandt (2014) show that online games represent an important space for developing and maintaining friendships, and that players often establish meaningful social relationships that do not end in the virtual environment but extend into everyday life. This finding is particularly important for understanding esports as a space in which new forms of social connectedness among young people are developed.

One of the key elements of contemporary esports is teamwork. Most popular esports disciplines, such as League of Legends, Counter-Strike, Valorant, or Dota 2, are based on the coordination of several players who must communicate, make joint decisions, and harmonize their roles within the team. Jenny, Manning, Keiper, and Olrich (2017) emphasize that esports represents an environment in which players develop communication skills, leadership abilities, cooperation, and the capacity to function within complex team structures. For this reason, esports increasingly attracts the attention of researchers who view it as a potential environment for the development of social competencies and collective action.

The concept of social capital occupies a particularly important place in the analysis of esports. According to contemporary sociological approaches, social capital refers to resources arising from social networks, mutual trust, cooperation, and belonging to a community. In the context of digital games, social capital can be formed through interaction with other players, participation in teams, knowledge exchange, and involvement in various forms of online communities. Trepte, Reinecke, and Juechems (2012) showed that online

gaming may be associated with the development of social capital, particularly through the strengthening of social ties and the sense of belonging to a group. These findings indicate that digital games are not necessarily spaces of isolation, as is often assumed in public discourse, but may represent an important mechanism of social connection.

The development of online communities represents one of the most visible forms of social transformation brought about by the gaming industry. Contemporary players are not limited to the act of playing itself; they actively participate in forums, Discord servers, Twitch channels, Reddit communities, and other platforms that enable continuous communication. Hamilton, Garretson, and Kerne (2014) point out that streaming platforms such as Twitch represent new forms of social spaces in which communities are created based on shared interests, interaction, and the exchange of experiences. In such communities, players do not merely consume content but actively participate in its creation, interpretation, and dissemination.

Another important aspect concerns the formation of digital identity. In online environments, young people have the opportunity to shape and present different aspects of their identity through avatars, usernames, communication styles, and membership in various groups. Gee (2005) emphasizes that video games enable the development of multiple identities through identification with roles, communities, and activities within virtual environments. Such a process may contribute to the development of self-confidence, the exploration of personal interests, and the formation of a sense of belonging, particularly among young people who have limited opportunities for social affirmation in traditional environments.

In addition to individual identity, collective identity also plays a significant role within esports teams and gaming communities. Seo (2016) emphasizes that esports represents a specific cultural space in which players develop a sense of community and belonging, often independently of geographical, ethnic, or social boundaries. This characteristic makes esports one of the most globalized forms of contemporary youth culture.

However, socialization in the digital environment is not without challenges. Online communities can simultaneously be spaces of support and cooperation, but also spaces of conflict, toxic communication, discrimination, and cyberbullying. Therefore, it is necessary to analyze not only the positive but also the negative aspects of digital social interactions. Nevertheless, most contemporary research indicates that the quality of social outcomes depends primarily on the manner of participation in the community, the social norms that dominate within it, and the broader institutional and family context.

In general, the gaming business and esports constitute a significant area for modern adolescent socializing. Young people build many types of social capital through collaboration, communication, involvement in online groups, and the

creation of digital identities. These developments may have a big impact on their personal, academic, and professional growth. Because of this, esports need to be considered a significant social phenomena that actively contributes to the development of new social interaction patterns in the digital era.

Challenges and Risks of Esports and the Gaming Industry in Contemporary Society

Alongside the development of esports and the expansion of the gaming industry, scientific literature has increasingly focused on the potential risks associated with intensive and uncontrolled video game use. Although numerous studies point to the positive educational, cognitive, and social effects of gaming, contemporary approaches emphasize the need for a balanced understanding of this phenomenon. Particular attention in academic debates is devoted to problematic gaming, video game addiction, young people's mental health, physical inactivity, sleep disorders, and broader psychosocial consequences that may arise from excessive use of digital games.

One of the most significant steps in the institutional recognition of this problem was the inclusion of Gaming Disorder in the International Classification of Diseases (ICD-11) by the World Health Organization. Pontes et al. (2021) emphasize that this represented a turning point in the scientific and clinical understanding of problematic gaming, as it enabled clearer definition of criteria, diagnostic procedures, and research frameworks. However, the authors stress that it is necessary to distinguish between a high level of engagement in gaming and an actual gaming disorder, since intensive participation in esports or gaming does not automatically imply addiction.

Problematic gaming is most often defined as a behavioral pattern characterized by loss of control over time spent gaming, prioritizing gaming over other life activities, and continuing to play despite negative consequences. Kuss and Griffiths (2012) point out that individuals with more pronounced forms of problematic gaming often experience difficulties in education, family relationships, professional functioning, and social life. These findings are particularly important for the analysis of youth, since adolescents and young adults represent the group most intensely involved in digital gaming culture.

In addition to problems related to behavioral control, a significant body of research examines the relationship between video gaming and mental health. Mihara and Higuchi (2017), in a systematic review of the literature, indicate that problematic gaming may be associated with symptoms of depression, anxiety, stress, loneliness, and lower levels of psychological well-being. At the same time, the authors emphasize that causal relationships are not always straightforward. In some cases, psychological difficulties may be a cause of excessive gaming, while in others, excessive gaming may contribute to the worsening of existing psychological problems. For this reason, contemporary

research increasingly seeks to understand the complex interaction between individual characteristics, social environment, and digital behavior.

Particular attention is also paid to health aspects related to prolonged sitting and lack of physical activity. Esports, as a professional or semi-professional activity, involves long periods of sitting, intense concentration, and frequent exposure to screens. DiFrancisco-Donoghue, Balentine, Schmidt, and Zwibel (2019) point out that esports players often do not meet recommended levels of physical activity and that some players may experience problems related to a sedentary lifestyle, including an increased risk of metabolic disorders, postural problems, and musculoskeletal complaints. These findings do not mean that esports is harmful in itself, but rather indicate the need to integrate physical activity and health education into esports programs.

One of the most frequently studied problems concerns sleep disturbances. Intensive gaming during evening and night hours, exposure to blue light from screens, and high psychophysiological activation may negatively affect sleep quality and duration. King, Gradisar, Drummond, Lovato, and colleagues (2013) showed that excessive video gaming may be associated with delayed bedtime, shorter sleep duration, and increased daytime fatigue. Among young people, who are already in a sensitive phase of biological and psychosocial development, such disturbances may affect concentration, academic achievement, emotional stability, and general health.

Psychosocial risks are not limited solely to the individual level. Contemporary research indicates that excessive gaming may also affect the quality of family relationships, educational achievement, and the social integration of young people. Paulus, Ohmann, von Gontard, and Popow (2018) emphasize that problematic gaming is often associated with family conflicts, weaker academic motivation, and reduced participation in offline social activities. However, the authors also point out that risk is not the same for all players, but depends on gaming intensity, family environment, social support, and individual psychological characteristics.

At the same time, it is important to emphasize that contemporary scientific literature increasingly rejects simplified and moralistic interpretations of video games. The problem does not lie in the existence of esports or gaming itself, but in the way they are used. Stevens, Dorstyn, Delfabbro, and King (2021) indicate that most young people who play video games never develop symptoms of addiction, and that it is necessary to avoid generalizations that portray the entire gaming population as a risk group. Scientific consensus is increasingly moving toward understanding problematic gaming as a specific behavioral pattern that emerges from the interaction of individual, social, and technological factors.

Available research suggests that esports and the gaming industry may be associated with various psychosocial and health risks, particularly in cases of excessive and uncontrolled gaming. The most commonly identified problems

include video game addiction, psychological difficulties, physical inactivity, and sleep disorders. However, scientific findings also show that these risks are neither universal nor inevitable. Their intensity depends on the individual characteristics of players, their family and social environment, and the way gaming activities are integrated into young people's everyday lives. For this reason, esports and the gaming industry should be viewed as complex social phenomena that require a balanced approach based on scientific evidence rather than stereotypes or moral panic.

The development of esports and the gaming industry has opened numerous opportunities for education, communication, socialization, and the professional development of young people. However, alongside these positive processes, complex ethical, educational, and social challenges have also emerged, increasingly attracting the attention of both scholars and practitioners. The contemporary digital generation is growing up in an environment in which the boundaries between education, entertainment, communication, and commercial content are becoming increasingly blurred. For this reason, questions concerning the balance between gaming and education, toxic communication, cyberbullying, the commercialization of young people, and the role of family, schools, and the state have become central themes in the study of the social impact of esports and the gaming industry.

One of the most significant challenges concerns establishing a balance between participation in gaming activities and educational obligations. Contemporary video games and esports platforms are designed to retain users' attention through reward systems, continuous progression, and social interaction. Although such mechanisms can contribute to motivation and engagement, they may also lead to conflict between time devoted to gaming and time intended for learning. Gentile, Lynch, Linder, and Walsh (2004) indicate that excessive gaming may be associated with reduced academic achievement and lower involvement in school activities. Although later research shows that this relationship is not simple and depends on numerous mediating factors, time management remains one of the most important challenges for the digital generation.

Another important problem concerns toxic communication in online environments. Many esports and gaming platforms enable interaction among players from different social and cultural backgrounds. Although such diversity can contribute to intercultural understanding and the expansion of social networks, it can also become a space for aggressive communication, hate speech, discrimination, and harassment. Blackburn and Kwak (2014) showed that toxic behavior is one of the most serious problems in online gaming communities and can negatively affect user experience, psychological well-being, and the sense of belonging to a community. Young players are particularly vulnerable because they are still in the process of forming their personal and social identities.

Closely related to toxic communication is the phenomenon of cyberbullying. Unlike traditional forms of peer violence, cyberbullying takes place in digital environments and is often accompanied by anonymity, a wide audience, and the possibility of continuous exposure of the victim. Kowalski, Giumetti, Schroeder, and Lattanner (2014), in a meta-analysis, indicate that cyberbullying can have significant consequences for young people's mental health, including increased anxiety, depression, social isolation, and reduced self-esteem. In the context of esports and online games, this problem becomes even more serious because communication often occurs in real time and involves a large number of participants.

In addition to communication-related risks, increasing attention is being paid to the commercialization of young people in digital environments. The gaming industry is now one of the most profitable sectors of the digital economy. Contemporary games often include microtransactions, virtual goods, paid upgrades, and various forms of digital consumption. King and Delfabbro (2018) emphasize that monetization mechanisms in many games are designed to encourage continuous user spending and engagement, which may particularly affect young people who are still developing the ability to critically assess commercial messages. This aspect of gaming raises important questions concerning consumer protection, media literacy, and the ethical responsibility of the industry.

The role of the family occupies a particularly important place in the analysis of these challenges. Research shows that parental supervision, communication, and involvement in children's digital activities can significantly influence outcomes related to video game use. Nikken and Jansz (2014) indicate that different forms of parental mediation, including discussion about digital content, shared media use, and rule-setting, can contribute to the development of healthier patterns of digital behavior. The family thus becomes an important factor in shaping young people's relationship with gaming, esports, and the broader digital environment.

In addition to the family, educational institutions also play a significant role. Contemporary schools are increasingly faced with the need to develop students' digital and media literacy and to prepare them for a critical understanding of digital platforms and online communities. Jones and Mitchell (2016) emphasize that digital citizenship programs can contribute to reducing risky forms of online behavior and developing responsible communication in digital spaces. In this sense, schools should not view gaming exclusively as a problem, but also as an opportunity for developing new educational approaches and competencies.

Lastly, by establishing an institutional and regulatory framework, the state also plays a significant role. Data protection, online safety, addiction prevention, commercial practice regulation, and digital literacy development are some of the current policies targeted at safeguarding youth in digital environments. According to Livingstone, Stoilova, and Kelly (2021), families, educational

institutions, business, and state authorities must work together to implement successful policies in this area because none of these entities can handle the intricate problems of the digital age on their own.

Esports and the gaming industry simultaneously represent a space of great opportunities and significant challenges for contemporary youth. Balancing gaming and education, preventing toxic communication and cyberbullying, protecting young people from excessive commercialization, and developing responsible digital behavior have become key issues of contemporary society. For this reason, an integrated approach is necessary—one that brings together family, school, the state, and the digital industry in an effort to maximize the positive and minimize the negative effects of esports and gaming on younger generations.

Conclusion

Esports and the gaming industry represent one of the most significant phenomena of contemporary digital society, with an influence that extends far beyond the realms of entertainment and leisure. The analysis of relevant scientific literature indicates that esports can contribute to the development of digital competencies, cognitive abilities, creativity, communication skills, and social capital among young people, while simultaneously creating new forms of social interaction and digital communities.

On the other hand, research also points to the existence of certain risks reflected in problematic gaming behavior, potential negative consequences for mental and physical health, exposure to toxic communication, cyberbullying, and the increasing commercialization of digital environments. Therefore, the impact of esports and gaming cannot be viewed from a one-dimensional perspective but rather as a complex social process whose outcomes depend on patterns of use, levels of digital literacy, family support, educational environments, and institutional frameworks.

It can be concluded that esports and the gaming industry simultaneously represent both a developmental opportunity and a social challenge for contemporary youth. Maximizing their positive effects while minimizing potential risks requires coordinated efforts by families, educational institutions, public authorities, and the gaming industry itself. Only such an integrated approach can enable esports and gaming to become valuable resources for the development of digital society and human capital in the twenty-first century.

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