

Professional Esports Players Motivation

Subjects: Psychology

Contributor: Daniel Duclos-Bastías

Esports refers to competitive video games in which teams or individuals compete against each other. It is considered a sporting activity in which players can develop and train their mental skills and hand-eye coordination while playing. The professionalisation of esports has increased in recent years, generating the need for further study. Its evolution and continuous development have led the consideration of esports as a profession, increasing the number of players, practice modalities, and hours of play dedicated to this field.

Keywords: esports ; physical activity ; videogame ; motivation

1. Introduction

Electronic sports (esports) began to gain popularity in the gaming community in the early 2000s ^[1], reaching an estimated mass of 395 million people around the world in 2018 ^[2]. The exponential growth of esports in the world ^[3] has led to this recreational activity being recognised as a sport ^[4], generating a source of employment for players who master and demonstrate skills related to the game, becoming professional players sponsored by recognised companies and with the possibility of winning large cash prizes. Progress in this area has resulted in 201.2 million consumers of esports ^[5], i.e., actively participating in or consuming esports events, while 1757.5 million people have heard of esports without participating in or watching it ^[5].

Esports refers to competitive video games in which teams or individuals compete against each other. It is considered a sporting activity in which players can develop and train their mental skills and hand-eye coordination while playing ^{[6][7][8]} ^[9]. In recent years, esports revenues (e.g., merchandising, tournament tickets, commercial contracts with brands, media rights and sponsorships) also grew notably, reaching in total revenues in 2019 an increase of 26.7% from 2018, which is equivalent to USD 1.096 million ^[5].

Competitive video games comprise esports tournaments organised with rules, systems, gameplay, evaluation, and broadcasting similar to more traditional sporting events. In addition, professional esports players face similar training requirements to other sports athletes ^[10], so their form of organisation is similar to traditional sports, as it identifies the presence of rules, competitions, and training, among other aspects; even authors such as ^[11] consider esports as a new sport although participants have reduced physical activity involvement.

Moreover, it is worth noting that, in recent years, interest in esports has increased not only for gamers but also because of the enthusiasm it generates among spectators and investors ^[12]. Although research on video games has predominantly focused on problematic use or addiction ^{[13][14][15]}, it has become a recreational activity for most people. This has led different scientific fields (e.g., marketing, law, exercise, and health) to start studying esports in more depth, making esports a fruitful topic for scientific research.

2. Physical Activity and Esports

Esports comprise a group of different classifications of video games (e.g., multiplayer arena, first-person shooter, collectible card, real-time strategy, last survivor, fighting, sports simulators, and driving games) that are played in a specific environment (i.e., online), becoming internationally and globally executed ^{[16][17][18][19]}. Esports can be run under organised, rule-governed competitions that require skill and have a wide following; however, esports currently lack regulation and institutionalisation ^[20].

On the other hand, and in relation to their professionalisation, only a few esports players can reach the professional level ^[21]. The development of this type of sport contributes to athletes reaching a high level of performance, so it is important to delve into how screen time, physical inactivity, and sedentary behaviour in these athletes could affect their health and sporting performance.

Several studies point out that physical inactivity and sedentary lifestyles are a global public health problem and have been associated with short- and long-term health risks, such as cardiovascular disease, psychological problems, and cancer [22][23]. Conversely, high levels of physical activity have been associated with reduced mortality and major comorbidities [24][25][26][27].

Some studies suggest that esports players engage in sedentary behaviours for 4.2 h per day while training [28]. The amount of time esports players spend sitting has potential negative consequences, including increased risk of injury and chronic diseases, such as upper limb dysfunction, metabolic dysregulation, circadian rhythm problems, and neck and back problems [29]. To date, there is no empirical evidence on whether professional esports players are more or less physically active than the general population and whether this relationship is associated with other negative health behaviours and obesity levels. However, on the contrary, there are studies that have reported that, as part of their training regimen, elite gamers spend 1.08 h per day exercising [28]. Other studies also claim that esports players include physical training as a strategy to improve gameplay and manage stress; however, only 6–9% of esports players report exercising for perceived performance benefits, while 32–47% engage in physical activity primarily for general health benefits [19][28]. Although both individual and team esports players report that physical activity is a component of their overall training, there is currently no evidence to indicate the effect of physical activity on players' overall performance or general health. However, recent studies on the physical activity levels of sports simulator esports players reported regular and vigorous physical activity [19] even above international recommendations [28], which could be a driving force for improving physical activity for both esports players and spectators who follow esports [19][30]. In fact, esports players at elite levels of different videogame genres have been reported to have a BMI status of normweight, which goes against the empirical notion that esports players are obese because they are physically inactive [28][31][32]. In addition, exercise and physical activity may be important to improve esports performance [30][33].

3. Motivation

Motivation can be initially defined as the tendency of people to do something for some purpose. It corresponds to a state of energization and activation of the organism in a social context [34]. One of the psychological theories that has had an important development in the field of motivation is the Self-Determination Theory (SDT) [35]. This theory is based on the assumption that human beings tend toward self-regulation, competence, and integrated action. Motivation is seen as a multidimensional construct, which can vary not only in intensity but also in the type of motive. SDT considers that human beings are not merely conditioned by external reasons but are assumed to have volition, freedom, and autonomy [36].

Intrinsic motivation (IM) is defined as the practice of the activity in the absence of external contingencies [37]. It has been postulated that intrinsic motivation is a global construct composed of sub-types of regulation [35].

Extrinsic motivation is related to a variety of behaviours that do not have a purpose in themselves. The sport action is, in this case, a means to other ends. The reasons for behaviour in EM move on four levels, ranging from more to less self-determination. These adjacent levels of a continuum correspond to various classes of regulation: (a) Integrated regulation (INTEG) represents the most self-determined form of the internalization process and occurs when the motivational rationale is consistent and harmonious with the individual's self-concept, other schemas, and values [38]. (b) Identified regulation (IDR) occurs when people judge the reason for a behaviour as important, and although the activity is still performed for extrinsic reasons (e.g., the achievement of personal goals), the behaviour is internally regulated [38]. (c) the Introjected regulation (INTY) corresponds to internal representations of external contingencies. (d) Finally, external regulation (EXT) corresponds to those behaviours that are controlled by external sources, such as material reinforcement or obligations imposed by others.

Amotivation (AMOT): In AMOT, feelings of self-determination are absent, and there are no extrinsic or intrinsic reasons that support its relationship with behaviour. Amotivation is similar to what is understood as hopelessness [39]. This regulation is associated with feelings of incompetence and lack of control. Non-participation or abandonment is possible [35].

4. Motivation in Esports

There are several studies that analyse the motivations for playing sports [40][41][42][43][44][45]; however, there are still few studies that analyse the motivations that lead players to play esports competitively. In this way, Seo [3] and Kim and Thomas [46] highlighted that intrinsic motivations and the acquisition of an esports player's identity can be decisive in becoming a professional. In relation to acquiring an identity as an esports player, Seo [3] found in field observation sessions and interviews with 10 professional esports players that players, when they were from an amateur category,

observe playing video games as a casual leisure activity (i.e., playing for fun) and gain interpersonal relationships within the esports community, and as they improve their skills and knowledge, esports gradually become an important aspect of their lives and identity. Furthermore, it was concluded that the main characteristics of esports players who choose competitive gaming as a career path were mastering skills; the pursuit of self-improvement; the importance of fairness, equality, and respect in the community; and experiencing high self-esteem, achievement, and recognition [3].

Kim and Thomas [46] examined how the motivations (intrinsic and extrinsic), goals, and learning style of professional esports players change during the process of becoming a professional. Following their interviews with professional esports players, their team coaches, team manager, and psychological counsellor, five different stages in the process of becoming a professional esports player were identified. The motivation pattern of the players changed during each stage. For a beginner in the esports scene, the gaming activity itself is motivating enough. By gaining more experience and struggling to win and lose, meeting more experienced opponents, and competing in video games, the games lose their fun factor. However, by developing greater competition, the enjoyment of gaming intrinsically motivates experienced esports players. Despite this, Kim and Thomas [46] drew attention to the need to distinguish casual esports players based on the change in their motivational patterns. More specifically, competing at higher levels should be considered a job and is generally driven by extrinsic motivation (e.g., tournament prizes, rewards, and fame) rather than intrinsic motivation.

On the other hand, other works have investigated different aspects of gaming motivations by comparing esports players with casual gamers. Martončík [47] highlighted that professional gamers compete in video games to satisfy their life goals (i.e., intimacy, affiliation, altruism, power, achievement, and fun). Affiliation (i.e., the need to help others, active interaction, and relating to others) differentiated professional esports players from casual players, probably because professionals tend to develop meaningful relationships with team members and other members of the esports scene. In addition, distraction motivation (i.e., the need for excitement, tension, and new experiences) also drives professional players more than casual players to compete in video games. Moreover, those professionals who were leaders of esports teams also satisfied their need for power by occupying the leadership position [47]. In a more recent study, Bányai et al. [1] concluded that professional esports players played more (more game time on weekdays and weekends) and scored higher on social motives (developing and maintaining relationships with other players), competition, and skill development than casual players. These results are consistent with research among athletes in conventional sports that has shown similar results. More specifically, the motivational pattern of sports has both intrinsic and extrinsic aspects. Traditional athletes enjoy the competition itself, internalise the identity of the professional athlete, and constantly strive for self-improvement, but they may also be motivated by extrinsic motivations, such as stimuli, rewards, or fame [40][41][42][43][44][45].

References

1. Bányai, F.; Griffiths, M.D.; Demetrovics, Z.; Király, O. The Mediating Effect of Motivations between Psychiatric Distress and Gaming Disorder among Esport Gamers and Recreational Gamers. *Compr. Psychiatry* 2019, 94, 152117.
2. Nagorsky, E.; Wiemeyer, J. The Structure of Performance and Training in Esports. *PLoS ONE* 2020, 15, e0237584.
3. Seo, Y. Electronic Sports: A New Marketing Landscape of the Experience Economy. *J. Mark. Manag.* 2013, 29, 1542–1560.
4. Tassi, P. The U.S. Now Recognizes ESports Players as Professional Athletes. Available online: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/insertcoin/2013/07/14/the-u-s-now-recognizes-esports-players-as-professional-athletes/> (accessed on 6 January 2022).
5. Newzoo Global Esports Market Report 2019 Light Version. Available online: <https://newzoo.com/insights/trend-reports/newzoo-global-esports-market-report-2019-light-version/> (accessed on 1 December 2021).
6. Hemphill, D. Cybersport. *J. Philos. Sport* 2005, 32, 195–207.
7. Wagner, M. On the Scientific Relevance of Esports; CSREA: Providence, RI, USA, 2006; ISBN 1-60132-005-1.
8. Jonasson, K.; Thiborg, J. Electronic Sport and Its Impact on Future Sport. *Sport Soc.* 2010, 13, 287–299.
9. Adamus, T. Playing Computer Games as Electronic Sport: In Search of a Theoretical Framework for a New Research Field. In *Computer Games and New Media Cultures*; Springer: Dordrecht, Switzerland, 2012; ISBN 978-94-007-2777-9.
10. Taylor, T.L. *Raising the Stakes: E-Sports and the Professionalization of Computer Gaming*; MIT Press: Cambridge, MA, USA, 2012; ISBN 978-0-262-01737-4.
11. Chae, H.-S.; Kang, S.-K. An Exploratory Research on Categorizing e-Sports as One of the Sports. *J. Korea Game Soc.* 2011, 11, 85–95.

12. Cunningham, G.B.; Fairley, S.; Ferkins, L.; Kerwin, S.; Lock, D.; Shaw, S.; Wicker, P. ESport: Construct Specifications and Implications for Sport Management. *Sport Manag. Rev.* 2018, 21, 1–6.
13. Király, O.; Griffiths, M.D.; King, D.L.; Lee, H.-K.; Lee, S.-Y.; Bányai, F.; Zsila, Á.; Takacs, Z.K.; Demetrovics, Z. Policy Responses to Problematic Video Game Use: A Systematic Review of Current Measures and Future Possibilities. *J. Behav. Addict.* 2018, 7, 503–517.
14. Rumpf, H.-J.; Achab, S.; Billieux, J.; Bowden-Jones, H.; Carragher, N.; Demetrovics, Z.; Higuchi, S.; King, D.L.; Mann, K.; Potenza, M.; et al. Including Gaming Disorder in the ICD-11: The Need to Do so from a Clinical and Public Health Perspective: Commentary on: A Weak Scientific Basis for Gaming Disorder: Let Us Err on the Side of Caution (van Rooij et al., 2018). *J. Behav. Addict.* 2018, 7, 556–561.
15. Müller, K.W.; Beutel, M.E.; Dreier, M.; Wölfling, K. A Clinical Evaluation of the DSM-5 Criteria for Internet Gaming Disorder and a Pilot Study on Their Applicability to Further Internet-Related Disorders. *J. Behav. Addict.* 2019, 8, 16–24.
16. Karhulahti, V.-M. Reconsidering Esport: Economics and Executive Ownership. *Phys. Cult. Sport. Stud. Res.* 2017, 74, 43–53.
17. Hallmann, K.; Giel, T. Esports—Competitive Sports or Recreational Activity? *Sport Manag. Rev.* 2018, 21, 14–20.
18. Geoghegan, L.; Wormald, J.C.R. Sport-Related Hand Injury: A New Perspective of e-Sports. *J. Hand Surg. Eur. Vol.* 2019, 44, 219–220.
19. Pereira, L.G.; Fernández, E.B.; Cruz, M.G.; Santiesteban, J.R.G. Programa de actividad física y su incidencia en la depresión y bienestar subjetivo de adultos mayores. *Retos Nuevas Tend. Educ. Física Deporte Recreación* 2018, 33, 14–19.
20. Jenny, S.E.; Manning, R.D.; Keiper, M.C.; Olrich, T.W. Virtual(Ly) Athletes: Where ESports Fit within the Definition of “Sport”. *Quest* 2017, 69, 1–18.
21. Nielsen, R.K.L.; Karhulahti, V.-M. The Problematic Coexistence of “Internet Gaming Disorder” and Esports. In *Proceedings of the 12th International Conference on the Foundations of Digital Games*, New York, NY, USA, 14 August 2017; Association for Computing Machinery: New York, NY, USA, 2017; pp. 1–4.
22. Guthold, R.; Ono, T.; Strong, K.L.; Chatterji, S.; Morabia, A. Worldwide Variability in Physical Inactivity a 51-Country Survey. *Am. J. Prev. Med.* 2008, 34, 486–494.
23. Hallal, P.C.; Andersen, L.B.; Bull, F.C.; Guthold, R.; Haskell, W.; Ekelund, U. Lancet Physical Activity Series Working Group Global Physical Activity Levels: Surveillance Progress, Pitfalls, and Prospects. *Lancet* 2012, 380, 247–257.
24. Melzer, K.; Kayser, B.; Pichard, C. Physical Activity: The Health Benefits Outweigh the Risks. *Curr. Opin. Clin. Nutr. Metab. Care* 2004, 7, 641–647.
25. Lear, S.A.; Hu, W.; Rangarajan, S.; Gasevic, D.; Leong, D.; Iqbal, R.; Casanova, A.; Swaminathan, S.; Anjana, R.M.; Kumar, R.; et al. The Effect of Physical Activity on Mortality and Cardiovascular Disease in 130 000 People from 17 High-Income, Middle-Income, and Low-Income Countries: The PURE Study. *Lancet* 2017, 390, 2643–2654.
26. Piercy, K.L.; Troiano, R.P.; Ballard, R.M.; Carlson, S.A.; Fulton, J.E.; Galuska, D.A.; George, S.M.; Olson, R.D. The Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans. *JAMA* 2018, 320, 2020–2028.
27. World Health Organization Physical Activity. Available online: <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/physical-activity> (accessed on 6 January 2022).
28. Kari, T.; Karhulahti, V.-M. Do E-Athletes Move? A Study on Training and Physical Exercise in Elite E-Sports. *IJGCMS* 2016, 8, 53–66.
29. Zwibel, H.; DiFrancisco-Donoghue, J.; DeFeo, A.; Yao, S. An Osteopathic Physician’s Approach to the Esports Athlete. *J. Osteopath. Med.* 2019, 119, 756–762.
30. De Las Heras, B.; Li, O.; Rodrigues, L.; Nepveu, J.-F.; Roig, M. Exercise Improves Video Game Performance: A Win-Win Situation. *Med. Sci. Sports Exerc.* 2020, 52, 1595–1602.
31. Giakoni-Ramírez, F.; Duclos-Bastías, D.; Yáñez-Spúlveda, R. Professional Esports Players Are Not Obese: Analysis of Body Composition Based on Years of Experience. *Int. J. Morphol.* 2021, 39, 1081–1087.
32. Trotter, M.G.; Coulter, T.J.; Davis, P.A.; Poulus, D.R.; Polman, R. The Association between Esports Participation, Health and Physical Activity Behaviour. *Int. J. Environ. Res. Public Health* 2020, 17, 7329.
33. Toth, A.J.; Ramsbottom, N.; Kowal, M.; Campbell, M.J. Converging Evidence Supporting the Cognitive Link between Exercise and Esport Performance: A Dual Systematic Review. *Brain Sci.* 2020, 10, 859.
34. Ryan, R.M.; Deci, E.L. Self-Determination Theory and the Facilitation of Intrinsic Motivation, Social Development, and Well-Being. *Am. Psychol.* 2000, 55, 68–78.

35. Deci, E.; Ryan, R.M. *Intrinsic Motivation and Self-Determination in Human Behavior*; Springer: Berlin/Heidelberg, Germany, 1985; ISBN 978-1-4899-2273-1.
36. Ryan, R.M.; Deci, E.L. Self-Regulation and the Problem of Human Autonomy: Does Psychology Need Choice, Self-Determination, and Will? *J. Pers.* 2006, 74, 1557–1586.
37. Brière, N.M.; Vallerand, R.J.; Blais, M.R.; Pelletier, L.G. Développement et Validation d'une Mesure de Motivation Intrinsèque, Extrinsèque et d'Amotivation En Contexte Sportif: L'Échelle de Motivation Dans Les Sports (ÉMS). *Int. J. Sport Psychol.* 1995, 26, 465–489.
38. Vallerand, R.J.; Blissonnette, R. Intrinsic, Extrinsic, and Amotivational Styles as Predictors of Behavior: A Prospective Study. *J. Pers.* 1992, 60, 599–620.
39. Pelletier, L.G.; Fortier, M.S.; Vallerand, R.J.; Tuson, K.M.; Brière, N.M.; Blais, M.R. Toward a New Measure of Intrinsic Motivation, Extrinsic Motivation, and Amotivation in Sports: The Sport Motivation Scale (SMS). *J. Sport Exerc. Psychol.* 1995, 17, 35–53.
40. Baker, J.; Horton, S.; Weir, P. *The Masters Athlete: Understanding the Role of Sport and Exercise in Optimizing Aging*; Routledge: London, UK, 2009; ISBN 978-0-415-47657-7.
41. van de Pol, P.K.C.; Kavussanu, M. Achievement Motivation across Training and Competition in Individual and Team Sports. *Sport Exerc. Perform. Psychol.* 2012, 1, 91–105.
42. Pelletier, L.G.; Rocchi, M.A.; Vallerand, R.J.; Deci, E.L.; Ryan, R.M. Validation of the Revised Sport Motivation Scale (SMS-II). *Psychol. Sport Exerc.* 2013, 14, 329–341.
43. Rottensteiner, C.; Tolvanen, A.; Laakso, L.; Konttinen, N. Youth Athletes' Motivation, Perceived Competence, and Persistence in Organized Team Sports. *J. Sport Behav.* 2015, 38, 432–449.
44. Clancy, R.B.; Herring, M.P.; MacIntyre, T.E.; Campbell, M.J. A Review of Competitive Sport Motivation Research. *Psychol. Sport Exerc.* 2016, 27, 232–242.
45. Lochbaum, M.; Kazak Çetinkalp, Z.; Graham, K.-A.; Wright, T.; Zazo, R. Task and Ego Goal Orientations in Competitive Sport: A Quantitative Review of the Literature from 1989 to 2016. *Kinesiology* 2016, 48, 3–29.
46. Kim, S.; Thomas, M. A Stage Theory Model of Professional Video Game Players in South Korea: The Socio-Cultural Dimensions of the Development of Expertise. *Asian J. Inf. Technol.* 2015, 14, 176–186.
47. Martončík, M. E-Sports: Playing Just for Fun or Playing to Satisfy Life Goals? *Comput. Hum. Behav.* 2015, 48, 208–211.