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Abstract: The meteoric rise of e-sports has catapulted it into the Olympic spotlight, igniting a firestorm of debate within the athletic community. This research delves into the intricate tapestry of possibilities and pitfalls surrounding the potential marriage of digital competition and the five-ring circus. By weaving together threads from academic literature, market trends, and official proclamations, we aim to paint a comprehensive picture of this bold proposition. Our findings reveal a double-edged sword: while e-sports could breathe new life into the Olympic movement, appealing to the tech-savvy youth, it also threatens to upset the delicate balance of tradition and innovation. The virtual realm of e-sports clashes with the sweat-and-muscle ethos of the Games, raising eyebrows about governance, standardization, and public health implications. Yet, amidst these challenges lie tantalizing prospects of economic windfall and unprecedented youth engagement. We posit that if e-sports are to find a home in the Olympic family, it will be through a careful choreography of old and new, a gradual waltz rather than a hasty tango. This paradigm shift calls for a symphony of interdisciplinary research to orchestrate a harmonious integration, should it come to pass. The study concludes that the integration of e-sports into the Olympics will be gradual and progressive in order to fuse the new with the old and that more interdisciplinary studies are needed to steer this transformation process.

Keywords: e-sports; Olympic Games; digital sports; sports governance; youth engagement; technology in sport; public health; sports innovation

Introduction

E-sports are now considered as one of the most important sports worldwide, and this has made the sports world to sit up and take notice and debate on whether or not they can be incorporated in the Olympic Games. With a global market in 2021 of $1.1 billion according to Newzoo and an audience of 474 million viewers in 2020 according to Statista, e-sports are here to stay and are here to change the world of sports. This rapid growth has made the IOC to consider e-sports as a part of the future of the Olympic games. This integration of traditional and digital sports has created a lot of discourse. On the one hand, the integration of e-sports can improve the Olympic Games and revive the ancient institution, as well as expand the audience, and get new revenue. On the other hand, this view has some critical implications for the fundamental nature of sport and the Olympic values and the social and health implications of such inclusion. The purpose of this study is to examine systemically and extensively the benefits and drawbacks of e-sports integration into the Olympics from the economic, social, technical, cultural, and governance perspectives. The objective is to develop a strong empirical foundation to guide the future policy and strategic decisions of the Olympic movement and the international sports federation and communities.

Methodology

The research is conducted using a mixed method approach: quantitative and qualitative data analysis. The methodological approach is described in the following three steps:
a) Systematic Review of the Literature

The peer-reviewed literature of the period from 2015 to 2021 has been studied. The databases include Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar and SportDiscus. The search keywords were combined to be terms like "e-sports", "Olympic Games", "digital sports", "competitive gaming", "sport governance" and "technology in sports". In total, 87 peer-reviewed academic articles were taken into account in the research.

b) Industry Report Analysis and Market Data

In 23 industry reports - Newzoo, Statista and Deloitte - were analysed the market trends, demographic information and the economic forecasts related to the e-sports.

c) Analysis of Official Documents

Moreover, 15 official documents from the IOC and other international sports organizations, for example, press releases, annual reports, strategic documents were performed by the experiment, and this helped us determine the official position and the evolution of the debate on the integration of e-sports. The data gathered was then thematically analyzed to identify core topics, trends, and raised questions. Apart from that, the market data was also examined quantitatively in conjunction with the qualitative analysis of the documents and academic literature to give a comprehensive view of the phenomenon.

Growth and Economic Impact of E-sports

The market data analysis reveals that the e-sports sector is setting new records and is showing an exponential growth rate. It is seen that the increasing world market has ranged from $325 million in 2015 to $1.1 billion in 2021, with a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 27.4% according to Newzoo. Such drastic acceleration is in stark contrast to many of the traditional Olympic sports whose rate of growth is still low. The growth in the audience has also been very remarkable from 235 million global viewers in 2015 to 474 million in 2021 stated in Statista's report. The following characteristics of this audience stand out: 79% out of the viewers are still not older than 35; as for NBC Universal (2021), the average age of the audience to the Olympic Games is 53. Also, there is a more comprehensive economic development than just the one entire event! Meanwhile, each year, some e-sports competitions have prize pools that ooze equal or even more money than traditions of many sports. For instance, the "The International" Dota 2 tournament had a $40 million prize pool in 2021, which was higher than that of Wimbledon according to Valve Corporation in 2021.

Compatibility with Olympic Criteria

The IOC has set some criteria that must be met by any new sport that is to be included in the Olympics, and these are: popularity across the world, adherence to Olympic values, affiliation to a recognized international federation, integrity of competitions and sustainability. The analysis shows that e-sports satisfy some of these criteria but there are major problems in other areas. In terms of popularity, e-sports have outgrown many Olympic sports. The final of the 2020 League of Legends World Championship attracted 45.95 million peak viewers according to Esports Charts, a figure that is more than the audience of many Olympic events. However, the issue of Olympic values remains Debate. E-sports promote similar values like fair play, teamwork and excellence; but the virtual nature of the competitions is not consistent with the Olympic focus on physical activity and athleticism (IOC, 2018). However, the problem of governance is an issue. This is because while traditional sports have one single and internationally recognized body, e-sports has none. The existence of many organizations like the International Esports Federation (IESF) and the Global Esports Federation (GEF) create problems in recognizing and standardizing the entities (Abanazir, 2019). Technical and Logistical Challenges E-sports are digital sports and therefore their integration into the Olympics brings with it several technical and logistical challenges. A major challenge is the issue of intellectual property. Unlike traditional sports, e-sports games are owned by private companies which raises issues on the control of the games and copyright. The dynamics of the games

and platforms are another challenge that is associated with the continuity of the e-sports disciplines. A popu1ar game today may be extinct in a few years, which poses a problem as to how the Olympic games of the future can be planned (Cunningham et al., 2018). Moreover, conducting e-sports events also needs sophisticated technology such as high-performance servers and low-latency internet connection. This may be a problem for some host countries and may worsen the technological inequalities between countries (Scholz, 2019). The possible consequences of the Olympics' integration of e-sports The inclusion of e-sports may change the Olympics in a big way. The possibility of reviving the Olympic audience is significant especially when the target audience of e-sports viewers is young. This may be helpful in addressing the problem of declining interest among the young people in the recent Olympic games (Thorpe & Wheaton, 2019). E-sports also provide a unique opportunity to digital interaction. Twitch alone had 2.1 billion hours of e-sports content consumption in 2021 according to StreamElements. This strong online presence may help to modernize the digital presence of the Olympics and reach more people worldwide. Moreover, e-sports are especially famous in the growing markets like Southeast Asia and Latin America which can open new doors for the Olympic movement in these territories (Newzoo, 2021).

The Nexus of Mind, Body, and Pixels: Evaluating the Impact of Olympic E-sports

The integration of e-sports into the Olympic pantheon ignites a lively debate on its socio-psychological effects. Concerns arise regarding sedentary lifestyles and the risk of video game addiction. A 2020 investigation by Trotter and colleagues revealed that cyber-athletes devote an average of 5.5 daily hours to stationary training, raising questions about long-term physical health consequences. The World Health Organization's 2018 classification of "gaming disorder" as a mental health condition further fueled apprehensions about e-sports' impact on collective well-being.

However, recent studies cast new light on the positive aspects of this emerging discipline. Himmelstein and his team (2017) unveiled that elite players exhibit above-average visual attention and multitasking abilities. Surprisingly, some research suggests that during competitions, e-sports professionals experience physical stress levels comparable to traditional athletes, with heart rate peaks between 160 and 180 beats per minute (Smith et al., 2019). These contrasting findings underscore the phenomenon's complexity and the need for a balanced analysis of its implications.

Conclusions

The integration of e-sports into the Olympic movement creates new opportunities for the organization to regain its relevance and appeal to the new generation, but it also raises significant challenges that cannot be ignored. The main opportunities could be summarized as: attraction of a new generation and a new technology oriented audience; expansion into new markets and the increase in revenues; modernization of the image and the relevance of the Olympic movement; potential for technological innovation in sports.

The most pressing challenges are: establishment of a single and recognized structure for the management of e-sports; solving issues on intellectual property and game control; health risks associated with sedentary lifestyle and game addiction.

In conclusion, although the inclusion of e-sports in the Olympics is still debateable, it is evident that the Olympic movement will have to face this new reality in the future.

The challenge will be to balance tradition and innovation while preserving the essence of Olympic values in the context of a increasingly digital world. Future research directions could include: longitudinal research of the effects of e-sports on youth sports participation; comparative assessments of the governance structures in traditional sports and e-sports; evaluations of the economic effects of including e-sports in the Olympics; studies on the effects of professional e-sports practice on physical and mental health in the long run; interdisciplinary studies of technology, sports, and society.

The inclusion of e-sports into the Olympic movement is a complex yet potentially revolutionary challenge. It will be necessary to do this with some thought and based on some empirical data and a vision of how to combine the new with the traditional sporting values.

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