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Review article

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THE E-SPORTS INDUSTRY AT A GLANCE: DEVELOPMENT, COMMUNICATION AND FINANCIAL ASPECTS

Abstract

The electronic sports (e-Sports) industry is a professional sector of video gaming in which players, teams, and organizations compete according to defined rules, prize pools, and a commercial infrastructure analogous to traditional sports. Its significance derives from multiple interrelated factors influencing society, the economy, and technology, including the rapid expansion of the digital entertainment industry, its substantial economic, cultural, and social impact, technological innovations, professionalization

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of competitive gaming, and the global accessibility and democratization of sports.

This paper examines the development, communication strategies, business models, and core financial mechanisms of the e-Sports industry, aiming to provide a comprehensive understanding of its distinctive characteristics. Over the past few decades, e-Sports has evolved from amateur arcade tournaments into a global industry that attracts millions of spectators, professional players, and investors worldwide. This growth has been driven by technological innovations, the expansion of the digital economy, the proliferation of the Internet, the emergence of streaming platforms, as well as the professionalization of teams and leagues.

Public relations (PR) in e-Sports are defined by unique characteristics stemming from its digital nature, the rapid flow of information, a young and digitally literate audience, and an interactive environment in which authenticity and immediate responsiveness are paramount. Concurrently, e-Sports business models rely on a combination of digital revenues, sponsorships, and various commercial activities, forming a sustainable financial ecosystem. Major revenue streams include sponsorships, media rights sales, and online content creation, while additional income from tournaments, merchandise, ticket sales, and fan engagement further strengthens the industry's financial stability. Collectively, these factors make e-Sports one of the most dynamic and fastest-growing sectors in the global digital economy.

Key words: *e-Sports, video-game publishers, digital economy, public relations (PR), sponsorships, publisher-led model, franchise system.*

JEL classification: L83, M30, Z20, Z23

Introduction

Electronic sports (e-Sports) can be defined as the organized competitive play of video games at a professional level. Over recent years, e-Sport has evolved from a popular hobby into a globally recognized industry, attracting millions of followers and spectators, while relying on substantial prize pools and professional league structures. Although debates persist regarding its classification as a “real” sport – particularly due to its limited physical component – e-Sports has established itself as a competitive phenomenon with

formalized rules, structured tournaments, and growing institutional recognition, including endorsement by certain national sports federations. E-Sports represents one of the fastest-growing sectors within the global entertainment and sports industry, generating significant economic impact and drawing a worldwide audience. Like traditional sports, professional e-Sports players often belong to organized teams supported by coaches, analysts, and other specialized staff. Its increasing legitimacy is further demonstrated by the emergence of e-Sports as an official discipline in some universities, where student-athletes receive scholarships and participate in competitive leagues with substantial prize funds.

In recent years, e-Sports has emerged as one of the fastest-growing forms of new media, driven by the increasing popularity of video games and advancements in online broadcasting technologies. It is estimated that approximately 532 million viewers watched e-Sports globally in 2022, with projections for 2025 reaching up to 640 million [15]. The rise of e-Sports has prompted modern sports to increasingly rely on information technologies and digital media, creating new opportunities for the application of contemporary information and communication technologies (ICTs). Through internet streaming and the integration of ICTs, e-Sports has become an important domain for academic monitoring and research [5, pp. 211–212]. Moreover, digital technologies – including artificial intelligence (AI) – are extensively applied in various areas of sports management, such as strategic management, organizational culture, sports marketing, finance and economics, human resource management and leadership, sports law and policy, ethics and integrity, event and facility management, technological innovation, and sports analytics [14].

Today, the e-Sports industry is achieving unprecedented levels of growth. By the end of 2022, it generated revenues of USD 1.38 billion, with China accounting for nearly one-third of global e-Sports revenues. Within this sector, digital content and online streaming represent the two fastest-growing segments, with a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 27.2% and 24.8%, respectively, in the period between 2020 and 2025. At the same time, the increasing popularity

of e-Sports, coupled with fans' growing awareness of the value of digital assets, is expected to drive higher investments and broader interest in various forms of intellectual property within this industry [15].

E-sports today attracts a large and rapidly growing audience, with hundreds of millions of people worldwide following these competitions, while making it a significant commercial and media phenomenon. A substantial portion of this audience originates from the Asia-Pacific region, which has, over time, positioned e-Sports as an attractive marketing arena, supported by brands, sponsors, and prominent event organizers demonstrating increasing potential.

The aim of this article is to explore the multiple dimensions of e-Sports and to present them to a broader academic and professional readership, particularly given that e-Sport is a relatively new sports discipline that is still establishing its place within contemporary society, public discourse, and scholarly debate. This study employs a scientific and theoretical analysis, by surveying the relevant available literature sources – including published books, scientific monographs, peer-reviewed articles, and industry reports – in order to provide valid, well-supported research findings.

1. History of the Development of E-Sports

Although e-Sports today is associated with highly popular competitions and professional players, its origins date back to the early development of video games. The history of e-Sports can be traced to the 1970s and 1980s, when the first video games and organized competitions emerged. In 1972, Stanford University hosted the inaugural *Spacewar* video game competition, known as the *Intergalactic Spacewar Olympics*, with the prize consisting of an annual subscription to *Rolling Stone* magazine. This event is widely regarded as the first officially organized e-Sports competition [12]. The 1980s witnessed the rise of arcade culture, with iconic games such as *Pac-Man*, *Donkey Kong*, and *Space Invaders* contributing to the emergence of high-score competitive gaming as a mass cultural phenomenon [10].

The 1990s are notable for the advent of the Internet era and the rise of PC and console-based competitive gaming. By the end of the 20th century, the first LAN (Local Area Network) tournaments emerged, enabling players to connect and compete in real time. The development of LAN technology facilitated the creation of landmark games such as *Doom* (1993), *Quake* (1996), *Warcraft II* (1995), and *StarCraft* (1998). The Red Annihilation tournament in 1997 is often cited as the first major modern e-Sports event. However, 1998 marked a pivotal year with the establishment of the professional *StarCraft scene* in South Korea, widely regarded as the “cradle” of professional e-Sports. This development was driven by the mass availability of the Internet, the proliferation of Internet cafés, and substantial state support for electronic sports [4].

The period from 2000 to 2010 was characterized by the early professionalization of electronic sports and the emergence of the first organized global leagues. During this time, several major e-Sports organizations were established, including ESL (Electronic Sports League, 2000), WCG (World Cyber Games, 2000), MLG (Major League Gaming, 2002), and IEM (Intel Extreme Masters, 2006). These professional organizations gradually developed structured teams, qualification systems, tournament broadcasts, as well as sponsorship and commercialization frameworks for competitive gaming. This era is also notable for the dominance of titles such as *Counter-Strike 1.6*, *StarCraft: Brood War*, *Warcraft III*, and, later, *Dota* (a mod of *Warcraft III*), as well as for the transition from primarily LAN-based events to broader Internet-based competitions [20].

E-Sports experienced its most significant growth with the emergence and widespread adoption of live streaming platforms. Between 2010 and 2015, *Twitch* (launched in 2011) emerged as a platform enabling mass, free access to tournament broadcasts, facilitating the rise of professional players into celebrity status, and promoting the professionalization of commentators, known as casters. During this period, video games increasingly transformed into a global industry, characterized by a worldwide audience of

millions, modern leagues, professional franchises, and record-breaking prize pools [5, pp. 211–212].

From 2015 to the present days, e-Sports has evolved into a global industry, with major professional tournaments held worldwide and prize pools exceeding US\$ 40 million. Some franchise leagues have adopted a structure similar to that of traditional professional sports, such as the NBA and NFL. Prominent examples of these leagues include the Overwatch League, the League of Legends Championship Series (LCS, LEC, etc.), and the Call of Duty League. Today, e-Sports is widely supported and recognized by many universities and national institutions, with professional teams being acquired for tens of millions of US dollars. Several countries have begun to treat e-Sports as an official sports discipline, and its potential inclusion in the Olympic Games is increasingly being considered. These developments highlight the opportunities for enhanced management of e-Sports content, as well as the adoption and integration of technological innovations within this sector [8]. Although, compared to traditional sports, the content and visibility of e-Sports remain a topic of academic debate, its impact on contemporary digital culture and global sports dynamics is now indisputable [11, p. 12].

2. E-Sports as a New Field of Public Relations in Sports

E-Sports has emerged as a global phenomenon in recent years. Although competitive video gaming has existed for decades, modern e-Sports has evolved into a multi-billion-dollar industry with significant implications for media, marketing, and public relations (PR) [3, pp. 329–339]. This rapid development has created unique communication challenges and opportunities, necessitating the adaptation of traditional PR strategies to effectively convey messages and engage with the target audience. A key characteristic of e-Sports is its audience, which is highly dynamic, technologically literate, and predominantly composed of younger generations, such as Millennials and Generation Z. Effective communication with this audience requires an in-depth understanding of their digital habits, preferred

platforms, and the specific cultural and linguistic norms that define the e-Sports community.

Most e-Sports enthusiasts use platforms like *Twitch*, *YouTube*, *Discord* and *Reddit* to follow matches, discuss and connect with the community. For PR professionals, this means that traditional media coverage via television and print is less effective, while digital strategies and presence on these platforms are crucial. Transparency, authenticity and quick response to feedback information are the basic elements of successful communication with this audience. In addition, it is important to understand the geographical specificities of the e-Sports audience. While e-Sports is a global phenomenon, local communities have their own specific interests, languages and cultures. For example, the popularity of certain games such as *League of Legends*, *Counter-Strike: Global Offensive* or *Dota 2* varies from region to region. *MOBA games*[§] are extremely popular in Asia, while the *FPS genre*^{**} is strongly present in Europe and North America. PR strategies must take these regional differences into account in order to be successful.

In e-Sports, the community plays a central role in shaping the dynamics of the industry. Fans are highly active, vocal, and passionate, and they are quick to detect any attempts of manipulation or inauthentic representation. Consequently, public relations (PR) in e-Sports must prioritize the development of genuine, trust-based relationships with the audience. Brands, organizations, and professional players need to demonstrate an understanding of the community and its values. Sponsorships, for example, should not be perceived merely as marketing strategies, but rather as authentic support for e-Sports culture. Notable examples include *Red Bull* and

§ MOBA (Multiplayer Online Battle Arena) games are team-based strategy video games in which two teams of players try to destroy the opposing base while controlling heroes with different abilities. Maps are divided into lanes, and games combine elements of action, tactics and teamwork.

** FPS (First-Person Shooter) games are action video games from a first-person perspective, where the player sees the world through the eyes of the character they control. The focus is on quick aiming, shooting and movement, and the goal is to eliminate opponents or complete missions.

Logitech, which have established themselves as credible partners of the e-Sports community through sustained support of tournaments, professional teams, and individual players. Furthermore, authenticity extends to digital engagement, particularly on social media platforms. Brands that actively respond to comments, participate in discussions, and acknowledge fan opinions are more likely to cultivate trust and long-term loyalty within the e-Sports audience.

The e-Sports industry is characterized by rapid developments and a highly dynamic environment. Tournaments occur on a daily basis, scores change continuously, and trends emerge and disappear at remarkable speed. Consequently, public relations (PR) strategies in this context must be highly flexible and capable of rapid response. This includes real-time communication via social media, swift crisis management, and continuous engagement with the community. Timely reactions are particularly critical in situations involving controversies or operational issues, as the e-Sports audience typically responds quickly and emotionally. Delays in communication can result in significant reputational damage for brands or organizations. Effective PR in e-Sports requires constant monitoring of the situation, active listening to audience feedback, and readiness for immediate intervention. For instance, technical difficulties during a tournament broadcast often elicit immediate reactions from fans on social media. Prompt explanations and apologies from event organizers are essential to mitigate potential negative impacts and maintain trust within the community.

In the e-Sports industry, professional gamers occupy a status comparable to that of traditional sports stars and social media influencers. Their significant popularity and influence within the community render them highly effective as brand ambassadors. Public relations strategies that involve players in promotional activities can achieve substantial impact; however, they require careful planning and execution. Authenticity is crucial, as endorsements that appear overly commercialized or insincere are often met with scepticism by the community. When players genuinely endorse a product or service, the audience is more likely to respond positively and engage with the message. Furthermore, PR

professionals must recognize that players possess individual attitudes and interests that may not always align with the brand's objectives. Therefore, it is essential to develop adaptable strategies that respect the individuality of each ambassador while maximizing promotional effectiveness.

Unlike traditional sports, e-Sport possesses a distinct media ecosystem, supported by specialized journalists and online platforms that closely follow the industry. Portals such as *HLTV.org*, *Dot Esports*, *The Esports Observer*, and other dedicated sites serve as primary sources of information for the e-Sports community. For public relations professionals seeking effective engagement with these media outlets, a deep understanding of the specific needs of the industry is essential, including familiarity with game genres, tournament formats, and the specialized terminology used within the community. Superficial or inaccurate reporting can rapidly undermine credibility among the audience. Consequently, it is imperative for organizations to employ capable PR professionals who are well-versed in e-Sports culture and possess experience in interacting with its distinct community.

3. Contemporary Business Models in E-Sports Industry

In the pursuit of global sustainable development, a pathway is opened for the synergistic interaction between sports and economics, which is characterized by innovation, dynamism, and significant societal influence. Sports, as a unique force capable of uniting diverse populations, act as a powerful driver of social change, while fostering inclusiveness, gender equality, and community development [23, p. 127]. Conversely, economics supports the sustainable development of sports by providing an appropriate financial framework, aimed at promoting environmental protection, social equity, community engagement, and long-term economic sustainability. The economic dimension of this synergy also enables investments in green infrastructure, job creation, and income generation, facilitated through various financing models, including sponsorships, licensing, franchising, and the sale of broadcasting

rights, all of which contribute to the funding of sustainable social initiatives.

By integrating economic strategies with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), sports can serve as a powerful catalyst for positive social change, contributing to broader global development objectives such as Poverty reduction (SDG 1), Improved health and well-being (SDG 3), Quality education (SDG 4), Gender equality (SDG 5), Economic growth and decent work (SDG 8), Reduced inequalities (SDG 10), and Sustainable urban and community development (SDG 11) [21]. Although digital and highly specialized, e-Sports similarly exerts a wide-ranging social, economic, and educational impact, contributing to quality education, gender equality, economic growth and decent work, reduced inequalities, sustainable urban and community development, and climate action. These outcomes would not be possible without socially responsible entrepreneurship and leadership, which play a key and complementary role in achieving the SDGs in sports by enabling the sector to transition from a traditional model to a driver of comprehensive economic, social, and environmental progress [22].

The e-Sports industry today constitutes a multi-billion-dollar ecosystem, generating revenue from multiple sources, some of which overlap with traditional sports, while others are unique to digital industries. E-Sports business models typically combine sponsorships, content creation, and the sale of broadcast rights, supported by an engaged online audience. A distinctive feature of this industry is the dominant role of game publishers, who control entire competitive environments. The e-Sports audience is predominantly young and generally less receptive to traditional advertising campaigns, which necessitates innovative marketing and revenue-generation strategies. Despite its novelty, the e-Sports industry exhibits mature financing models characterized by diversified revenue streams. Its rapid development has been fuelled not only by technological innovation and globalization but also by policy support and investment incentives, attracting a broad range of viewers and investors [19, pp. 16–22]. Consequently, the largest sources of income in the e-Sports

industry are derived primarily from **sponsorships**, which typically include:

- Promotion of sports brands – which pays players, teams and organizers of leagues and events for their recognition and visibility.
- Making contracts – with players, teams, tournaments or entire leagues.
- Marketing campaigns – which include logos, presence on jerseys, sponsored content and live stream integration.

As the e-Sports industry has matured, video game publishers have introduced innovative business models, including revenue-sharing schemes, franchise systems, and strategic partnerships with media outlets and sponsors, in order to enhance the financial sustainability of this rapidly growing sector. Today, the global e-Sports market continues to experience its strong growth, with estimates suggesting that it could reach a value of as much as US\$ 9.29 billion by 2032. Table 1 presents the revenue structure of the e-Sports industry for the year 2022.

Table 1. Revenue structure in global e-Sports industry in 2022

Type of revenue	Value (in US\$ millions)	Percentage share in revenue (in %)
Sponsorships	8,737.3	94.11
Sale of media rights	207.8	2.24
Fees to video game publishers	130.7	1.41
Sale of sport goods and tickets	107.9	1.16
Digital infrastructure	53.9	0.58
Live streaming	46.3	0.50

Source: [9, p. 4]

The sustainable growth of e-Sports reflects increasing investments in the sector, a rapidly expanding audience, and the development of a comprehensive ecosystem of digital sports events and strategic partnerships. These factors simultaneously enhance the

commercial appeal of this emerging sports discipline worldwide. Consequently, the primary drivers of e-Sports today include [9, p. 5]:

- Cultivating talents and communities – digital platforms connect players and allow them to share their unique experiences. From organizing tournaments and e-Sports leagues, all the way to supporting creators of content and live streamers, video game publishers actively engage their communities in order to foster their sense of belonging and loyalty, and
- Introducing innovative monetization strategies – along with the evolution of e-Sports, publishers have been finding new monetization strategies with the goal of generating their business growth. From in-game purchases and the sale of tickets and passes, all the way to sponsorships and the sale of media rights, publishers balance between financial motivation and player satisfaction in order not to alienate their main audience in their quest for profits.

E-Sport relies fundamentally on video game publishers, whose role is unique compared to traditional sports. In **the publisher-led model**, game owners exert control over all aspects of the competitive environment, including competition rules, league and tournament funding, revenue from micro transactions, branding, commercial rights, battle passes, game sales, and the sale of exclusive tournament organization rights. Consequently, publishers retain central legal and economic authority, shaping the structure of the e-Sports ecosystem and distinguishing it from conventional sports. Unlike traditional sports organizations, publishers operate as profit-oriented entities that develop and market their games as proprietary commercial products, thereby acquiring exclusive intellectual property rights and full control over virtual gameplay and competition rules. While e-Sports associations attempt to adapt traditional sports structures to the digital domain, they are heavily engaged in lobbying and creating support networks to enhance both industry development and its social acceptance [6]. In contemporary e-Sports, publishers act as de facto league operators, with micro transactions serving as a primary

revenue source, solidifying the publisher-led model as the dominant global standard.

In addition to revenue from media and streaming rights, modern e-Sports business models also rely heavily on **the franchise system** for the operational management of professional teams. Certain leagues, such as the League of Legends Championship Series (LCS) and the Overwatch League (OWL), implement a franchise structure in which teams pay substantial entry fees in exchange for permanent league positions (slots), a share of jointly generated revenues, and access to league-provided marketing, legal, and sports infrastructure. Within this system, teams pay a significant buy-in fee but gain a stable position in the league, participating in every season without the risk of relegation. These slots are typically permanent, providing franchise owners with long-term business security and financial predictability. Accordingly, the key characteristics of the franchise model in e-Sports include the following:

- Permanent positions of teams in the league (slots).
- Revenue sharing (from media rights, sponsorships, merchandises, tickets, etc. between publishers and teams).
- Standardization of game rules and conditions.
- High entry costs to obtain slots.
- Ownership of the league by the publisher/organizer.

Although the franchise model in e-Sports provides numerous advantages, including stable and secure conditions for teams, diversified revenue streams, improved infrastructure, professionalization of the industry, and long-term sustainability, it also carries some inherent risks and limitations. The main disadvantages of the franchise model in e-Sports can be summarized as follows [16]:

- High buy-in fees – teams usually have to pay huge amounts of money to buy their place in the franchise, which can exclude smaller organizations and start-ups from the *game*. This "locked-in" model limits diversity, while its barriers are high for undercapitalized organizations.

- Lack of promotion (entry) and relegation (exit) of teams from leagues – all of which creates a passive and less competitive e-Sports *scene*. Without the risk of relegation, even bad teams stay in the league, which can reduce competitive pressure and *drama*.
- Fewer opportunities for smaller and amateur teams to enter – the franchise system in e-Sports can limit the entry of new organizations and talented players because the number of slots remains fixed, while the entry threshold is very high.
- Publishers control over surroundings conditions – video game publishers often have a lot of control over their franchise leagues, which can lead to conflicts of interest, as well as to decision-making driven by high profits rather than a competition. All of this can further limit the autonomy of teams and reduce the variety of strategic choices (e.g. marketing directions, community development, etc.).
- Deterioration of the competitive balance – since stronger teams will further consolidate their position on the *scene*.
- The risk of volatility of games – investments in franchises in e-Sports are usually riskier than in traditional sports, since the "lifetime" of the game titular can be short and unpredictable.
- Market saturation and "franchise fatigue" syndrome – along with the dispersion of franchise models, there is also the risk of the market oversaturation since too many leagues or teams can reduce the value of franchises and the number of league visitors.
- Locking of teams in the league (the "lock-in" syndrome) – teams become "locked" in the league over time and cannot easily leave the franchise, which reduces their flexibility and increases the risk if the leagues fails to achieve their goals.

Unlike traditional sports, which are often influenced by cartels – direct collusive agreements between rival teams aiming to maximize profits and protect shared interests [13] – there is no evidence of widespread cartelization in e-Sports that would systematically

control the entire industry. Nevertheless, certain forms of illicit associations, corruption, and collusion do occur in the e-Sports sector, sometimes described as “cartel-like behaviour.” Among these, **match-fixing** represents the most prevalent and serious form of criminal influence within this sports branch [1].

Furthermore, certain indications of “**cartel-like behaviour**” can be observed among some e-Sports organizations. In particular, large teams or tournament organizers sometimes engage in mutual arrangements aimed at limiting competition, such as the exclusion of smaller teams from the ecosystem, signing exclusive contracts that restrict competitive opportunities, and the implementation of closed tournament formats. While these practices do not constitute “crimes” in the classical legal sense, they can nevertheless produce monopolistic or oligopolistic effects, threatening the participation and growth of smaller actors within the e-Sports industry. In practice, cases of opaque financial agreements and unfulfilled contractual obligations have been documented, which, at least superficially, resemble cartel structures in terms of control and power distribution among e-Sports organizations.

Additionally, in certain regions, particularly in Asia and the countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), practices such as non-transparent player transfers, establishment of “ownership” over players by managers, and payment of illegal commissions have been reported. These practices create an environment resembling “**mini-cartels**”, where players and teams are effectively controlled by narrow interest groups, rendering the market largely unregulated and vulnerable to various forms of abuse. Moreover, there have been documented instances of violations of contractual obligations related to transfers of players, including missed payment deadlines for both players and the teams managing them [2].

Finally, in contemporary e-Sports practice, instances of exploitative player contracts, colloquially referred to as “**contract hells**”, are not uncommon. In such cases, teams compel players to accept unfavourable contractual terms, which may include taking large percentages of sponsorship earnings, limited player protections,

unilateral control over sponsorship agreements, one-sided contract terminations, imposition of excessive fines, reduced wages, and the elimination of previously agreed-upon benefits. These practices highlight significant power imbalances between players and organizations and underscore the need for regulatory oversight and standardized contractual protections within the e-Sports industry.

Conclusion

The aim of this paper was to examine the multifaceted dimensions of e-Sports and to make them accessible to a broader academic and professional audience, particularly given that it is an emerging sports discipline gaining prominence in contemporary society, public discourse, and scholarly research. Over the past few decades, electronic sports have evolved from amateur arcade competitions into a global industry attracting millions of spectators and professional players worldwide. This growth is closely linked to technological innovations, the expansion of the Internet, the emergence of streaming platforms, and the professionalization of teams and leagues. Today, e-Sports represents not only a form of entertainment but also a significant economic and cultural phenomenon, shaping new models of competition, marketing, financing, and digital community engagement. Although the industry continues to face challenges – such as regulatory frameworks, career sustainability for players, and the legitimacy of its sporting status – it is evident that e-Sports' influence within the global media and sports landscape will continue to expand. Moreover, the e-Sports sector has become an integral part of the global digital economy, demonstrating strong market potential and offering opportunities for reaching sustainable development.

Modern e-Sports represent a distinctive intersection of digital culture, global communication, and a rapidly evolving market, while generating novel challenges and opportunities for public relations. The e-Sports audience – technologically savvy, digitally literate, highly critical, and actively engaged – demands communication that is faster, more authentic, and more deeply embedded within the community's culture than in traditional sports or media contexts.

Consequently, effective public relations in e-Sports extend beyond the mere dissemination of information. This PR requires a nuanced understanding of the audience's linguistic, cultural, and technological specificities, alongside a sustained effort with the aim to build long-term trust and credibility.

In an industry where trends evolve almost in real time, flexibility, transparency, and responsiveness are fundamental prerequisites for maintaining the reputation of teams, organizations, and brands. Equally critical is the role of the e-Sports community, which not only shapes communication flows but also establishes the standards of authenticity to which brands must adhere. Within this ecosystem, professional players as influencers, specialized media outlets, and digital platforms emerge as key actors in message dissemination and in the construction of the industry's identity.

Taken together, these factors clearly demonstrate that e-Sports requires communication strategies that are carefully redefined and deeply adapted to the specific culture, needs, and expectations of its audience. It exemplifies the transformation of modern public relations, where success is no longer determined solely by one-way marketing but by continuous dialogue, authenticity, and genuine partnership with the community. Consequently, e-Sports is not only a global digital phenomenon but also a space in which new standards of communication and reputation management are being established, exerting a significant influence on the future of PR and media practices.

The e-Sports ecosystem represents a distinctive intersection of the digital economy, commercial power, and specialized organizational structures, with video game publishers occupying a central role as both creators of game rules and regulatory authorities. The publisher-led model grants these entities comprehensive control over competition regulations, legal frameworks, and the monetization of business outcomes, which fundamentally differentiates e-Sports from traditional sports and positions publishers as the dominant actors in the industry. Meanwhile, franchise systems provide stability and long-term security for professional teams, yet they also impose high barriers to entry and

may constrain competition, particularly for smaller or emerging organizations.

However, current manifestations of "cartel behaviour," non-transparent player transfers, and exploitative contractual practices underscore the pressing need for regulatory oversight and further professionalization of the e-Sports market. These challenges reveal that, despite its global growth and profitability, the e-Sports industry remains susceptible to power concentration, uneven revenue distribution, and inadequate protection for players.

Overall, the sustainable development of e-Sports hinges on establishing a balanced economic and legal framework that promotes innovation and growth while safeguarding the interests of players, teams, and the broader community. In the absence of robust oversight and transparent, fair practices, the industry risks fostering monopolistic or oligopolistic structures that could compromise competitiveness and undermine the long-term sustainability of e-Sports as a global phenomenon.

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INDUSTRIJA E-SPORTA NA DLANU: RAZVOJNI, KOMUNIKACIONI I FINANSIJSKI ASPEKTI

Apstrakt

Industrija elektronskog sporta (e-sport) je profesionalni sektor video-igara u kojem se igrači, timovi i organizacije takmiče u igrama pred publikom – uživo ili online – uz definisana pravila, nagradne fondove i komercijalnu infrastrukturu sličnu tradicionalnom sportu. Značaj industrije e-sporta proizilazi iz više međusobno povezanih faktora koji utiču na društvo, ekonomiju i tehnologiju, uključujući i ogroman rast industrije digitalne zabave, njen zavidan ekonomski, kulturni i društveni uticaj, razvoj tehnoloških inovacija, profesionalizaciju sporta, kao i globalnu dostupnost i demokratizaciju sporta.

Ovaj rad se bavi izučavanjem razvojnih, komunikacionih, finansijskih i poslovnih aspekata e-sporta u svojoj nameri da približi njegove specifičnosti široj čitalačkoj publici. Ova grana sporta je u poslednjih nekoliko decenija prešla put od amaterskih arkadnih turnira do globalne industrije koja privlači na milione gledalaca, profesionalnih igrača i investitora širom sveta, oslanjajući se na razvoj tehnoloških inovacija i digitalne ekonomije, rapidan rast interneta, pojavu platformi za strimovanje i profesionalizaciju timova i liga.

Odnosi sa javnošću (PR) u elektronskom sportu odlikuju se svojim specifičnostima koje proizilaze iz njegove digitalne zavisnosti, ekstremne brzine informacija, mlade zahtevne i digitalno pismene publike i interaktivnog okruženja u kojem publika očekuje autentičnost i trenutnu reakciju. Sa druge strane, poslovni modeli u elektronskom sportu zasnivaju se na kombinaciji digitalnih prihoda, sponzorstava i komercijalnih aktivnosti koje zajedno čine održiv sistem njegovog finansiranja. Najveći deo diversifikovanih prihoda potiče iz sponzorstava, prodaje medijskih prava i kreiranja online sadržaja, dok deljenje prihoda od turnira, prodaje promotivnih proizvoda, ulaznica i zajednica fanova dodatno jačaju njegovu finansijsku stabilnost, čineći ga jednom od najdinamičnijih i najbrže rastućih industrija globalne digitalne ekonomije.

Ključne reči: *e-sport, izdavači video-igara, digitalna ekonomija, odnosi sa javnošću (PR), sponzorstva, model kojim upravlja izdavač, franšizni sistem.*

JEL klasifikacija: L83, M30, Z20, Z23