



Identifying Strategies for Developing Electronic Sports in Iran

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Abstract

The global popularity and rapid development of electronic sports (e-sports) have made their strategic growth a significant concern for many nations. While e-sports development necessitates a structured national platform, Iran currently lacks a specific, comprehensive framework to guide this growth. Identifying and formulating development strategies for e-sports in Iran is crucial for advancing the field. Therefore, this study aimed to identify and categorize the strategies essential for developing Iranian e-sports. Using a qualitative and exploratory methodology, the research is classified as applied research in terms of purpose. Participants, selected via purposive expert sampling, included e-sports professionals, players, club managers, and coaches. Data were collected through in-depth, semi-structured interviews, with theoretical saturation achieved after 17 interviews. Thematic analysis was employed to systematically analyze the data. The results establish that e-sports development strategies in Iran comprise six main categories: Professional Club Structure, Economic Facilitation, Strategic Management and Governance, Championship Sports System, Education and Information Dissemination, and E-sports Promotion. The findings underscore the immediate need to implement these strategies to create a suitable and sustainable platform for e-sports development in the country.

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Extended Abstract

Introduction

The demand for and following of e-sports are increasing daily, driven by factors such as industrial lifestyles, a shift toward individualism, and a growing interest in digital environments (Hinrich, 2020). E-sports is now positioned as a major global phenomenon, with its potential inclusion in the Olympic Games being actively discussed (Heidi and Collison, 2020). Consequently, e-sports is no longer merely a widespread interest but a new and essential industry whose systematic development is vital for most countries. Nations that proactively plan and implement effective development solutions will secure a strong position in the future national and international e-sports landscape. To ensure optimal growth, e-sports club managers and related organizations require specific strategies to navigate various challenges. Based on existing literature, a significant research gap exists regarding specific development solutions tailored to the Iranian context. This study, therefore, sought to answer the main research question: What are the strategies for developing e-sports in Iran?

Methods and Material

This study adopted a qualitative research strategy and is an analytical and exploratory investigation. In terms of objective, it is classified as applied research. We used thematic analysis to analyze the data. The study population consisted of experts and experienced individuals in the e-sports sector, including e-sports players, club managers, and coaches. The research employed purposive sampling, selecting participants based on their specialized knowledge. A total of 17 in-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted until theoretical saturation was confirmed. For data analysis, we utilized an inductive approach to thematic analysis, following the six-phase model by Braun and Clarke (2006). The six phases applied were: (1) Familiarization with the raw data; (2) Generating initial codes; (3) Searching for themes; (4) Reviewing themes; (5) Defining and naming themes; and (6) Producing the final report and analysis. Following the interviews, the data were subjected to open coding to identify, categorize, and structure the main and subcategories of e-sports development strategies in Iran.

Results and Discussion

Descriptive statistics revealed that the majority of participants were male (76%). The most represented age group was 31 to 40 years old (47%), and most participants held a Bachelor's degree (53%). E-sports coaches and club managers represented the largest professional group (29%). Following the 17 expert interviews, the transcribed data were coded and categorized. Through a process of summarizing, consolidating, and merging conceptually similar codes, a total of 85 open codes representing development strategies were identified. These codes were organized into 15 subcategories which, in turn, formed six core main categories (as detailed in a supplementary table that would typically follow this paragraph in the full paper). The six main strategic

categories identified are: Professional Club Structure, Economic Facilitation, Strategic Management and Governance, Championship Sports System, Education and Information Dissemination, and E-sports Promotion.

Conclusion

As a rapidly expanding segment of the global sports industry, e-sports has recently secured a unique position, capturing a substantial share of the entertainment, education, and employment markets. Iran possesses strong foundational assets for e-sports growth, notably a young demographic, high internet penetration, and strong public interest in digital gaming. The sustainable development of e-sports in Iran demands a comprehensive and synergistic strategy that must include: establishing standard technical infrastructure, enacting supportive laws and regulations, stimulating private and public sector investment, expanding specialized education, and fostering a positive social culture. Implementing the identified strategies is crucial to transform Iran not just into a consumer market, but into a regional hub for e-sports production, competition, and innovation.

Keywords: e-sports education, e-sports clubs, e-sports industry, e-sports management