THESIS

On

ETHICAL ASPECT OF ESPORTS

SUBMITTED FOR THE AWARD OF THE DEGREE OF BACHELOR OF ARTS IN JOURNALISM

By

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DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

I, Mister Shikhar Srivastava, hereby declare that my research paper on the topic **"ETHICAL ASPECT OF ESPORTS"** is an original work done by the researcher. I further reaffirm that the paper has not been published yet.

Approval for research

Recommended that the research report titled “Ethical Aspect of Esport” prepared by Shikhar Srivastava under the supervision and guidance is accepted for the subject. There is no content that can cause harm on any basis.

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Signature:

Acknowledgement

First and foremost, I bow my head in gratitude to the almighty, whose divine grace has granted me the strength, wisdom and perseverance to undertake and complete this research.

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the thesis titled, 'Ethical Aspect of Esport' submitted to Dr. Nidhi Singhal faculty, Department of Journalism, Delhi College of Arts and Commerce, University of Delhi, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the reward of the Bachelors of Arts Journalism, is an original work carried out by Mr Shikhar Srivastava.

This research was undertaken under my supervision and guidance, and to the best of my knowledge, the thesis has not been submitted for the reward of any degree or diploma, associateship, fellowship, or any other similar title at any other university or Institution in India or abroad.

Dr. Nidhi Singhal

Superviser

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Abstract

The rise of eSports as a global phenomenon has led to intense public interest that has further resulted into noticeable economic growth and cultural influence. And as every other industry has its own pros and cons, esports' aspects remain underexplored in academic research.This study investigates the ethical concerns present in the eSports ecosystem and their potential impact on players' mental well-being and real-life responsibilities. This research aims to assess how the three core issues namely 'toxic behavior and harassment','excessive time investment' and 'gambling-related mechanisms' influence the psychological and social health of individuals engaged in competitive gaming.

This study has adopted a quantitative approach through a structured survey distributed among a general public sample, including gamers and non-gamers. The questionnaire consists of close-ended questions, frequency scales, and one open-ended item to allow for qualitative input. This data explores the relation between ethical issues in eSports and how it affects mental health strain, addictive behavior, and daily-life responsibilities.

Eer, what the study actually found was an nuanced ethical quagmire dwelling in esports and gaming. Overall, 73% of gamers had seen toxic behavior in the game and there was a positive relationship between the amount of time someone spent exposed to in-game toxicity and post gaming frustration. Loot boxes are worrying over half the participants and some of them when they bought in-game charms. We found gender based disparities in which females were more likely to report harassment or discomfort in gaming environments. Although the gamers conceded the advantages of play, including relaxation and skills, a great portion indicated that over gaming interfered with their sleep, studies, or duties. However, non-gamers (n=27) had a risk perspective on gaming with strong emphasis on addiction, aggression and regulation failure. Nevertheless, both groups agreed upon the requirement of ethical reform, including financial exploitation, lack of moderation, and insufficient mental health protection. These findings converge to call for systemic changes in digital policy and community management in general, and game design in particular.

Keywords: eSports, ethics, mental health, toxic behavior, gambling, gaming addiction, cyberbullying

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Over the past two decades, due to the increasing rate of internet penetration, eSports has evolved from a timepass enjoyment to a formidable global phenomenon. What began as informal matches in internet cafés and college dormitories has burgeoned into an industry generating over USD 2.5 billion in 2024 revenue and attracting more than 600 million active viewers worldwide (Newzoo, 2024). Major tournaments now fill large capacity arenas, for example Riot Games' League of Legends World Championship drew 70000 spectators in person and Peaked at over 5 million concurrent online viewers in 2023 alone. This cultural boom experienced by the industry was actually fueled by technological advances, social media application and recognition from the mainstream stakeholders (Scholz & Nothelfer, 2022).Now as eSports continues to permeate and even dominate the popular culture, it exerts profound influence on youth identity formation, community building, and also in digital literacy (Jenny et al., 2017).

Now the problem with this rise is that it has outpaced the development of ethical guidelines, regulatory frameworks, and mental health support structures that are required in every form of Sports. The industry of eSports is so new that unlike the traditional sports with well established leagues and athlete unions and Organisations, eSports remain largely decentralised. Governance is fragmented among game publishers, tournament organizers, streaming platforms, and ad-hoc community groups, resulting in uneven enforcement of codes of conduct and player protections (Nyström et al., 2022). The Demographic of gamers is dominated by youth- adolescents and young adults account for more than 70% of population which raises concerns about the vulnerability to exploitation, harassment, and risky monetization practices because after all minors are more susceptible to it (Kegelaers et al., 2024). The culture overlap between leisure gaming and professional competitive gaming blurs boundaries and has exposed casual players to high-stakes environments that puts more psychological stress on them. Given the extensive psychological, social, and economic implications, investigating eSports ethics is both timely and crucial.

This investigation is especially significant in light of the global push toward digital wellness and responsible tech engagement. With mental health becoming a worldwide concern, especially among younger generations increasingly immersed in screen-centric activities, eSports cannot be excluded from critical discourse. Government, educators, and mental health professionals are beginning to recognise that digital spaces can have serious, real consequences.The eSports environment populated by competitive stress and a culture of relentless performance that gets awarded asks for scholarly attention to develop a healthy framework for its stakeholders.

eSports—or electronic sports—denotes organized, competitive video gaming in which individuals or teams compete under standardized rules, often accompanied by live or

streamed audience engagement. It's important to note that Role-Playing Games (RPGs) are not usually included in eSports but can have similar effects. eSports genres exhibit considerable diversity: first-person shooters (FPS) like Counter-Strike: Global Offensive, multiplayer online battle arenas (MOBA) such as League of Legends and Dota 2, real-time strategy (RTS) exemplified by StarCraft II, battle royales including Fortnite and PUBG, and sports simulations like FIFA and NBA 2K. These titles differ from casual gaming in their emphasis on structured competition, high skill expression, and iterative strategic depth (Seo & Jung, 2016).

An eSports event typically features franchised teams, player contracts, sponsorship deals, and media rights agreements akin to traditional sports leagues. Prize pools that often reach multimillion-dollar totals, incentivises regular training programmes, coaching staffs and performance analytics (Scholz, 2019). Players often begin as amateurs before reaching the minor leagues or professional status. As fast as the digital medium enables immediate Global participation and recognition, it also brings unique ethical complications with it. Online anonymity fosters toxic behaviour and the absence of physical separation between player and spectator has kind of motivated personal, psychological harassment through perpetual digital connectivity (He & Yue, 2021).

eSports has become a good source of income and the innovation of in-game purchases for various purposes has blurred the line between in-game value and real-world currency. In-game purchases include items, premium passes, skins and many other digital collectibles that are not only bought from the game platform, but also sold and traded across global markets among the players. This economic integration brings about challenges related to fairness, access, manipulation, and regulatory oversight, requiring constant ethical scrutiny.

Despite the burgeoning interest, research studies and regulations in eSports remain nascent and distributed in fragments. Most of the studies isolate specific phenomena such as player burnout, cyberbullying, gambling-like mechanisms, etc., and also don't correlate them with the psychological effects. This review synthesizes existing research across three interrelated dimensions: toxic behavior and harassment, excessive time investment, and gambling-like monetization mechanisms. eSports ethics are complex, and looking at where different viewpoints meet helps us understand this better.

1. Toxic Behavior and Harassment

Verbal abuse, hate speech, griefing, and targeted cyberbullying are all manifested forms of toxicity in online gaming communities. A survey of 145 competitive gamers revealed that 96 percent experienced cyberbullying within the prior year, with 49 percent attributing abuse to fellow players and the remainder to the public at large (Trudgett-Klose & McLinton, 2024). Gender minorities and LGBTQ+ participants face disproportionate harassment—cisgender and transgender women report higher incidence of sexual harassment, ranging from unsolicited explicit messages to derogatory insults in live streams (University of South Australia, 2024). The psychological toll of this includes elevated anxiety, depressive symptoms, social withdrawal, and reduced self-esteem (DiFrancisco-Donoghue et al., 2019).

Philosophical analysis tells us that toxic behavior undermines the virtues of moderation and justice (Aristotelian ethics) and erodes communal bonds essential for eSports' social capital (He & Yue, 2021). The community's fragmented governance- where rules differ across publishers, leagues, and streaming services- makes it difficult to have fair and reliable enforcement (Nyström et al., 2022). Community-driven moderation on community platforms like Twitch and discord only partially mitigates abuse, often relying on bots that can be outsmarted. Also we're short on the work that has studied long term effects of toxicity on players furthers the urgency for ethical reforms.

2. Excessive Time Investment

To compete at elite levels, professional and semi-pro eSports players dedicate 30-50 hours per week (i.e. 6 to 10 hours a day) to practice and analysis that is if not more than then equal to a full-time employment (Nyström et al., 2022). While structured training can enhance cognitive abilities, team cohesion, and strategic acumen (He & Yue, 2021), unregulated play leads to physical injuries (e.g., mouse/keyboard-related strain, myopia) and mental health issues such as gaming disorder (WHO, 2018). In a survey of Portuguese eFootball players, 37 percent reported having symptoms of depression and anxiety, and 45 percent experienced sleep disturbances that were linked to intensive training schedules (Monteiro Pereira et al., 2021).

Excessive gaming disrupts daily responsibilities—academic performance suffers, familial relationships strain, and employment stability wavers (Smith et al., 2022). Parallel to traditional sports, disinhibition of time management was also found among the eSports players that points towards athlete overtraining syndrome, which correlates with burnout and psychological distress (Gouttebarge et al., 2019). Despite all these studies, the lack of awareness among the youth continues to romanticise "the grind", normalising over commitment at the cost of mental well-being and real life responsibilites. It would be a lot better if structured rest intervals, coaching oversight, and mental resilience programs were available more easily.

3. Gambling-Related Mechanisms

Modern eSports monetization strategies are increasingly including gambling-like features disguised as loot boxes, skin betting, and real-money wagering. Loot boxes utilize variable-ratio reinforcement schedules that mirror slot machines, with evidence linking frequent purchases to problem gambling in youth (Zendle & Cairns, 2018; King & Delfabbro, 2019). Skin betting is when in-game cosmetic items are wagered on match outcomes or third-party games which happens in a legal grey zone and facilitates real-world cashouts, often easily attracting underage gamblers (Greer et al., 2021). Licensed sportsbooks now offer direct eSports betting markets, normalizing wagering behaviors among younger demographics (Mangat et al., 2023).

These mechanisms are made in a way to exploit psychological vulnerabilities like impulsivity, reward sensitivity, and social comparison. Regulatory responses vary: some

jurisdictions classify loot boxes as gambling, whereas others maintain ambiguous stances, complicating enforcement (Delfabbro & King, 2020). Critics argue that there's a lack of transparency, informed consent, and financial safeguards for younger players. Some scholars as a solution suggested that there should be age-gated content, mandatory disclosures of win probabilities, and stricter age verification systems. Since these rules or suggestions are not strict and there is no governing body, commercial interests often surpass ethical concerns.

Research gap

Although each dimension—toxicity, excessive play, gambling-like features—has been studied individually, few investigations integrate these ethical challenges to assess their impact on player well-being and life responsibilities. Also an important part is that existing research focuses on professional athletes or high risk youth samples and overlooks the community of semi-professional and casual competitive gamers. Moreover, cross-sectional methodologies limit causal inference and mask longitudinal trajectories of harm (Poulos et al., 2023; Kegelaers et al., 2024). This study fills this critical gap by a cross-sectional survey of the general gaming public, capturing the co-occurrence of ethical issues and their association with mental health outcomes and daily life disruptions.

Aim of the Study This research aims to evaluate how three primary ethical issues in eSports—

1. Toxic behavior and harassment,
2. Excessive time investment, and
3. Gambling-related mechanisms—

collectively influence participants' mental health and their capacity to manage real-life responsibilities.

(Summary of Results)

Organization of the Paper

Section 1 gives an introduction to this paper, subject, and the reason for this research. Section 2 provides a bit expanded literature review and theoretical framework. Section 3 details the methodology, including the survey instrument development, sampling procedures, and analytical strategies. Section 4 has the data analysis and results. Section 5 holds the interpreted data with ethical and psychological contexts. The last part (Section 6) talks about what this means for the people involved and what to study next.

CHAPTER 2

LiTERATURE REVIEW

Esports gained prominence as both a cultural phenomenon and economic field so scholars from media studies along with psychology and law and digital ethics established studies about it. Despite growing institutional development eSports continues to stand out through its digital foundations and worldwide participation and broad audience demographics. The three ethically problematic domains within eSports environments include toxic behavior alongside harassment policies and excessive time commitment, disruption of everyday life alongside the facilitating environment for gambling elements, and monetary transactions within the system. This section incorporates fifteen essential studies consisting of peer-reviewed journal articles, case studies and meta-analyses to fully analyze existing academic research about the identified issues alongside remaining knowledge gaps and this paper's strategic response.

1. *Toxic Behavior and Harassment in eSports*

The ethical issue of toxic behavior remains the most dominant ethical challenge within eSports competition. Motivational disorders among eSports participants include multiple forms of antisocial conduct such as verbal attacks and distressing behavior along with hateful slurs and both targeted bullying and attack targets. The anonymity of online platforms together with their instant nature facilitates toxic behaviors that easily find no effective accountability.

Research by the University of South Australia (2024) shows that harassment in eSports occurs widely and it attacks women along with LGBTQ+ participants more frequently. Sheep Nẵng University conducted research which established that among matches in games such as Valorant and Overwatch sexual harassment became a reality in 14% of cases additionally 80% of players faced common verbal abuse. He and Yue's (2021) research on toxic behavior in eSports received verification from the current findings which demonstrated the absence of moral standards in Esports competition. Both experts utilize Aristotelian ethics to show that game competition systems support aggressive actions and dominance instead of rewarding behaviors that promote fairness along with humility and empathy.

Morrier et al. (2025) performed an instrumental variable analysis on Call of Duty: Warzone chat logs to determine that toxic behavior in the game increases the probability teammates will act with equal hostility. The research indicates toxic behavior spreads between players while shaping their collective standards and behavioral tendencies since the beginning. Researchers confirmed the established theory of "moral disengagement" which shows people embrace challenging situations by accepting unacceptable actions.

Nyström et al. (2022) continue the research by evaluating institutional accountability because eSports contains no centralized frameworks like traditional sports leagues. The three sectors comprising game publishers and tournament organizers along with platform providers maintain multiple and frequently mismatched codes of conduct. The numerous unclear and

nonuniform governance systems combined with minimal implementation lead victims of harassment to lack sufficient means of seeking compensation. The Ethic Code in eSports (2020) supports a universal code that upholds inclusion while respecting participant rights alongside transparent procedures but the loophole is that it does not outline how to enforce these standards.

2. *Excessive Time Investment and Real-Life Disruption*

The large commitment of game time by players creates ethical concerns because it harms their physical health as well as their social bonds and both educational and professional objectives and harms their emotional state. Professional and semi-professional gaming enthusiasts sacrifice more than 40 hours each week to training alongside gameplay (Nyström et al., 2022). Casual gamers along with those who wish to join eSports gangs commonly adopt these gaming patterns because of eSports cultural influences.

According to Monteiro Pereira et al. (2021) Portuguese eFootball players demonstrated sleep disruption in 45% of surveyed cases while depression and anxiety symptoms affected 37% of the competition-driven sample group. Satapathy et al. (2025) analyzed 84 studies involving more than 641,000 participants to establish a global prevalence rate of 8.6% for gaming disorders particularly high in China at 11.7%. The massive analysis using this data confirms the findings that smaller localized studies have already identified gaming disorder being a genuine issue with increasing prevalence.

The World Health Organization (2018) identified Gaming Disorder as an official clinical diagnosis which manifests through excessive game control problems combined with priority selection of gaming activities and persistent engagement although it causes harm. Academic research and clinical case studies have been initiated by the inclusion of gaming disorder as documented in the American Psychological Association (2024) which presented the therapy program that helped Dan overcome his 12-hour daily gaming addiction. In a single instance the researchers illustrate the controversial challenge of defining gaming addiction because it often creates uncertain boundaries between addictive and non-addictive behavior.

The amount of time dedicated to gaming activity directly impacts the breakdown of major aspects within a person's lifestyle. Smith et al. (2022) established that students who spent too much time gaming faced academic slides and lost both movement capabilities and social connections The research team suggested inadequate time management training inside gaming platforms and recommended official institutions to introduce coaching sessions along with parent programs with built-in rest periods as two methods to stop burnout and restore equilibrium.

3. *Gambling and Monetization Mechanisms*

The rise in economic value within the eSports sector and gaming industry developed wagering systems that belonged to activities intended for skill demonstration and entertainment use. Virtual item containers known as loot boxes and skin betting serve as the

main gaming problems because they distribute randomized gaming prizes while allowing players to exchange cosmetic objects. The video games CS:GO and Fortnite and FIFA represent a few titles in which loot boxes regularly appear.

According to González-Cabrera et al. (2024) the relationship between online gambling disorders and gaming disorders can be fully explained by the difficulty experiences gamers encounter with loot boxes. Research shows that loot boxes fuel gaming addiction since they might accelerate the formation of issues related to video game gambling. The research findings indicate that loot boxes promote gambling symptoms through a structural equation model that addresses other risk elements.

Research by Greer et al. (2021) showed that the problem gambling diagnosis rates were significantly higher among eSports bettors (64.8%) compared to traditional sports bettors (17.3%). The research indicates that eSports can become home to substance-abusing gamblers who are more prone to developing problems with gambling. Oksanen et al. (2024) maintained this hypothesis through research spanning four periods in Finland which demonstrated that both online casino exposure and microtransactions predicted enduring gambling-related problems.

The joining of video games with gambling produces confusing sections of existing legal frameworks. The legal status of loot boxes remains uncertain since they qualify as gambling in certain territories but nations other than those treat them like regular gaming content. The lack of consistent regulation about these features and gambling interfering with video games creates barriers to user protection specifically regarding children and youth. The literature criticizes game companies because they fail to disclose item odds as well as that they do not have spending restrictions or parental control features (King & Delfabbro, 2019).

4. Ethical Frameworks and Governance Gaps

A larger issue involving the ethical framework of the eSports environment encapsulates these three critical problem areas. According to He and Yue (2021) video game environments require virtue ethics implementation as stakeholders should work on developing temperance alongside respect and community spirit. The authors believe contemporary games prefer winners to social development through failing to teach empathy or civil-minded behavior.

The authors of Nyström et al. (2022) demand multiple systemic changes by urging better player safeguards together with standard mental health services and unified governing systems. Through collaborative research they establish that sustainability includes ethical concerns in addition to economic and environmental considerations since eSports durability depends on participant well-being and empowerment.

The Ethic Code in eSports (2020) attempts to convert these principles into practical guidelines that address both fair play and inclusiveness and accountability. However, the lack of enforcement mechanisms and the voluntary nature of adherence limit its impact.

Trudgett-Klose & McLinton (2024) maintain that ethics codes need regional gaming norm-based adaptations when trying to be effective.

Conclusion

Research articles provide a detailed and coherent description of eSports which presents itself both as a promising field and an intricate ethical dilemma. The challenges exist in great numbers and run deeply throughout the realm of video gaming. The individual research reports highlight various specific issues but they lack the ability to connect those issues across multiple domains. An investigation alerts us to how harassment along with excessive time commitment and gameplay mechanics influence mental health and life duties of players through their mutual interplay. An analysis of these relationships through empirical methods follows the description of methodology within the next section.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The study examines ethical aspects within the eSports world using these key research objectives. Current research literature has guided the creation of these objectives which address direct deficiencies found in previous research studies:

1. To assess the impact of toxic behavior, harassment, and cyberbullying in eSports environments.

2. To examine how time spent on eSports affects players' mental health and real-life responsibilities**.**

3. To evaluate ethical concerns surrounding gambling mechanisms such as loot boxes and skin betting in eSports.

CHAPTER 4

HYPOTHESES

To operationalize these objectives, the study formulates the following research hypotheses. These hypotheses will structure the statistical testing and theoretical interpretation of the survey data:

H_1 (Alternative Hypothesis):

Ethical issues in eSports significantly affect players' mental health or their ability to manage real-life responsibilities.

H_2 (Opposite Hypothesis):

Ethical issues in eSports do not significantly affect players' mental health or their ability to manage real-life responsibilities.

H_0 (Null Hypothesis):

There is no statistically significant relationship between ethical issues in eSports and players' mental health or real-life responsibilities.

CHAPTER 5

METHODOLOGY

1. Research Design

Using a quantitative approach as well as descriptive and cross-sectional format the study investigates ethical concerns within eSports ecosystems. The main research goal focuses on quantitatively measuring players' direct experiences as well as their behavioral reactions and perspective about toxic behavior, time dedication, mental well-being effects alongside loot box and gambling practices. The survey approach stood as the best selection since it effectively collected extensive data efficiently and shielded participants from identification thus ensuring protection against sensitive ethical subjects.

A cross-sectional design obtains a wide range of participant feedback at the same moment for a snapshot of current viewpoints and actions. The research design detects correlations between factors and descriptive patterns through non-altering approaches which make it well-suited to analyze actual real-world scenarios and their contexts. The quantitative research methodology enables statistical analysis of data which increases the objectivity through generalized findings across comparable groups.

2. Population and sampling

This study targeted individuals who are 13 years and old and above as the population of interest, since they come with disparate levels of exposure to eSports. The audience includes professional and amateur gamers, spectators and members of the general public. It is necessary to have such a wide inclusion criterion, as the study is to investigate how perception of participants in the eSports ecosystem belies itself from those with little or no involvement in the ecosystem and even those with limited involvement.

Non probability convenience sampling was used as the sampling technique and snowball sampling was used to fill the gap of convenience sampling. Using social media platforms like WhatsApp, Instagram, Telegram and Discord, it allowed people to read the survey and take the survey online and also allowed for wide and rapid dissemination among tech savvy people. With snowball sampling, early respondents were allowed to send the survey to their own networks without your help, creating organic growth. The dual approach turned out to be rather successful for collecting a large number of valid responses (more than 100 responses in total) in a short period of time (approximately 2 weeks).

There were no restrictions on participants' geographic location, but the survey was administered in English. Although the researcher was associated with Delhi University, the majority of respondents were from India, due to the use of the primary distribution channels.

To lessen the probability of ethical breach, participants were advised about the study's academic purpose, their rights as respondents, which included that participation is purely voluntary and they had the right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

3. *Research Instrument*

Data collection tool was a structured online questionnaire which was designed and administered via Google Forms. The questionnaire was in several thematic sections related to the respective research objectives. The problems consisted of yes/no, yes/no with Likert scales, multiple choice, and open ended text boxes. Together, breadth and depth were supplied through this combination: quantitative analysis could be provided, while rich qualitative details were captured.

In contrast, the design of the conditional logic of the instrument was a unique feature of the instrument. Earlier one question was, “How often do you play games?” Based on the reply to this form, it was customized.

Participants who clicked “Never” were forwarded to questions related to awareness and opinions of the ethical issues in eSports (such as gambling, toxicity in the eSports, and diversity).

For those who replied either “Rarely” or “Sometimes” to the first question, more detailed questions about their own experiences in this environment were presented.

This is because this branching logic produced questions that were pertinent to only the level of involvement that participants lent. Additionally, it would correct data as non gamers would not be responding to questions informally.

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Participants who clicked “Never” were forwarded to questions related to awareness and opinions of the ethical issues in eSports (such as gambling, toxicity in the eSports, and diversity).

There were more in-depth questions about their personal experiences in eSports environments presented to those who “Rarely,” “Sometimes,” “Often” or “Everyday” answered “Rarely.”

This is because this branching logic produced questions that were pertinent to only the level of involvement that participants lent. Additionally, it would correct data as non gamers would not be responding to questions informally.

4. *Data Collection Procedure*

This was conducted in data collection in April, 2025. The survey was sent on WhatsApp, on Instagram stories, on personal networks, on Discord communities and Delhi University student groups. With snowball sampling, the early respondents were asked to forward the link to their peers to increase reach.

Approximately 92 out of 100+ respondents were active or casual gamers while 26 were non gamers or spectators. The form was made to prevent multiple returns from the same device and was available via desktop and mobile devices.

Moreover, the general form consisted of the introductory section including a consent statement, which clearly announced the academic purpose of research, guaranteed anonymity allowed only participation, and participation was voluntary. The only ones who could move forward were only participants clicking “I agree”.

Participation in the questionnaire took about 6–8 minutes on average per respondent. An automatically recorded spreadsheet linked to a researched Google account was able to record responses. There was no collecting of identifying information like a name, phone number, email or IP address.

5. *Ethical Considerations*

Given the sensitive nature of topics explored in this study—such as mental health, toxic behavior, and gambling-related mechanisms—ethical research practices were prioritized at every stage. All participants were provided with clear information about the purpose of the research and were required to give informed consent before beginning the questionnaire. While all questions were mandatory to ensure complete datasets, care was taken to phrase sensitive items neutrally and without judgment. For any question involving personal experience, participants were given the option to select “Prefer not to say” or “Not sure,” providing them with a respectful degree of control over their responses.

No personally identifiable information was collected, ensuring full anonymity. Data were stored securely in password-protected files accessible only to the primary researcher. These protocols were designed to protect participants’ privacy, promote honest participation, and uphold the ethical integrity of the study.

No incentive was given, to ensure no coercion or bias was present when responding to the question.Ethical standards as laid down by Delhi University were followed by the study and it also reflected the best practices of responsible social research.

6. *Data Analysis Plan*

Once the survey closed, all answers were downloaded into Microsoft Excel and loaded into IBM SPSS Statistics with the aim of conducting more advanced analysis. Descriptive and inferential statistical methods as well as descriptive qualitative analysis on open ended responses were included in the plan.

Descriptive Statistics: For any multiple choice item, there was calculation of frequencies and percentages. Likert scale responses were computed by mean scores and standard deviations.

Demographic variables were cross tabulated with responses to explore relationships. To get an example, reports of toxic behavior were cross tabulated with age and gaming frequency.

Association by Variable: Pearson's correlation coefficients were used to analyze the correlations between variables like time spent gaming, time spent exercising, daily expenditure on entertainment and the level of stress, or how much one spends and perceived amount of gambling risk.

Excel was used to create visualizations, that is, pie charts, bar graphs, and stacked column charts to illustrate the frequency distributions and the major trends. The Results chapter contained these visual tools.

Inconsistencies and outliers, the data was screened. Although inferential analysis was restricted to blank or contradictory entries, they were retained for descriptive reporting if appropriate.

7. *Limitations of Methodology*

Despite the fact that the methodology was designed and executed with care, some limitations have to be noted.

The sampling bias: Since the survey was disseminated online, through convenience and snowball sampling, the findings will not necessarily reflect on the under connected population or people that do not belong to academical or gaming circles.

Accessibility and Language: The survey was offered in English only, and this may have deprived non English speakers from sitting for the survey.

Self reporting bias: Participants may have under reported the behavior of harassment or overspending as a result of social desirability.

It is a Cross Sectional Design: the data collected is one point in time and with no shift, it cannot draw causality between the variables.

Response Platform Restriction: Responses were therefore not possible for people who do not have access to the internet or a basic level of digital literacy.

Nevertheless, the methodology is still worthwhile for exploratory research, and is able to yield practically meaningful insights into the ethics of eSports as confessed by the gamers and spectators from across the spectrum.

Given this detailed methodological framework for its analysis, the collected data is examined. The next part is to give the survey findings and analysis of the findings in comparison to the research objectives and hypotheses discussed in the introductory chapters.

CHAPTER 6

DATA ANALYSIS

1. Overview of Collected Data

This section presents a full description of the dataset acquired for the study on the ethics of eSports and gaming. An online questionnaire was designed to collect data about gaming behaviors, potential exposure to toxic or harsh environments within gaming and how gamers currently perceive the ethics of modern gaming and eSports. Both gamers and non gamers are included in the responses giving a wider picture of how gaming is viewed and perceived across various indigenous.

1.1 Total Number of Responses

A total of 102 responses were collected for this research. The survey was designed with conditional logic, allowing certain questions to be shown only to individuals based on their responses to earlier items (e.g., only those who identified as gamers were asked specific questions about gameplay habits). This approach helped ensure the relevance and quality of responses for each section of the questionnaire, thereby improving the overall integrity of the data.

1.2 Gamer Classification

In order to analyze trends and perspectives better, respondents were split into two first level groups that are referred to as Gamers and Non-Gamers. This was classified by their response to the question of how often they play video games or watch video games. ‘Gamers‘ were those who, who ever took part in video games or eSports content, or at least occasionally. In contrast, we defined “Non Gamers” as the participants who responded “never” to playing or watching games.

Of the 102 participants, 75 (approximately 73.5%) were classified as Gamers and 27 (26.5%) as Non Gamers. In particular, this distribution indicates a high level of engagement with gaming amongst the respondents, indicating that the topic is relevant to a majority of the surveyed people. In addition, it mirrors the rising adoption of gaming culture by society’s various components since there is a great number of participants who are actively enlisted in the gaming ecosystem by being either a player or spectator.

1.3 Age Distribution

In order to capture age related data that shows generational differences in attitudes and experiences associated with gaming, the survey was administered. The ages were under 18, 18–24, 25–34, 35–44 and 45 and above.

A majority of respondents (n=53, 52%), formed the respondents in the 18–24 age group, indicating a strong presence of young adults that are typically the most active demographic of gamers and eSports.There were 18 respondents (7.6%) in the 18 category, which is the same as the Under 18 category and provided the opportunity to learn from minors on how they interact and perceive gaming culture. Of the 15 respondents (14.7%) who were in the 25–34 age bracket, the 35–44 age group individualized 11 respondents (10.8%).

The last group consisted of 5 individuals (4.9 %) representing the 45+ age group which showcased a relatively smaller but notable participation of older adults.

This distribution is such that it is skewed towards younger people with late adolescents and early adults more inclined to game and digital entertainment as well as the rest of the world is witnessing a trend of a younger group engaged with gaming and digital entertainment.

1.4 Gender Distribution

The gender breakdown of respondents is also significant in understanding the social dimensions of gaming culture. Among the 102 participants:

- 61 respondents (59.8%) identified as Male
- 41 respondents (40.2%) identified as Female

The male majority aligns with historical trends in gaming demographics; however, the substantial female representation reflects the growing diversity in the gaming community. The almost 60:40 male-to-female ratio provides a balanced sample that supports gender-based comparisons throughout the rest of the study, especially in areas related to toxicity, harassment, and mental health impacts within the gaming environment.

1.5 Data Cleaning and Processing

Before conducting the analysis, the dataset underwent cleaning and preprocessing. Redundant whitespace was removed from column headers and categorical entries to standardize responses and ensure consistency during analysis. In cases where respondents skipped non-mandatory questions, those entries were marked as missing (NaN) and treated accordingly in the statistical summaries. No data imputation was performed to preserve the authenticity of self-reported experiences. Where appropriate, categorical responses were grouped into broader categories to simplify interpretation (e.g., converting diverse time-based gameplay frequency responses into "Gamer" or "Non-Gamer" classifications).

This foundational overview establishes the context and composition of the dataset used in this research. The diversity of the sample—in terms of age, gender, and gaming engagement—enables a meaningful exploration of ethical concerns and experiential realities within eSports and gaming communities. In the following sections, a more detailed analysis

will unpack the statistical trends, correlations, and patterns that emerge from the quantitative data.

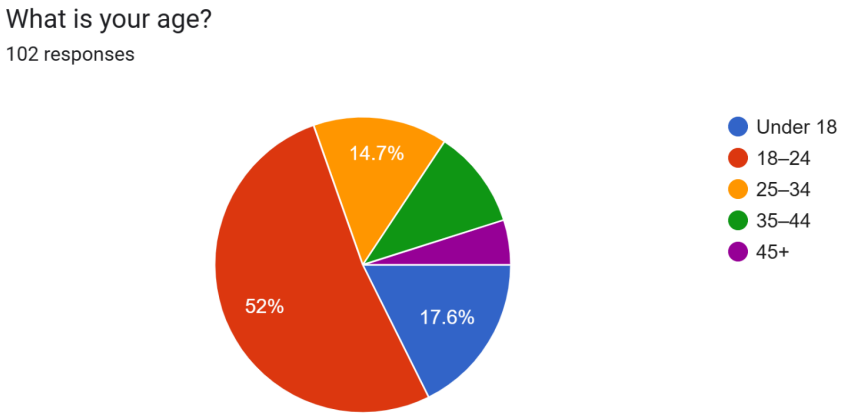

Figure 1.

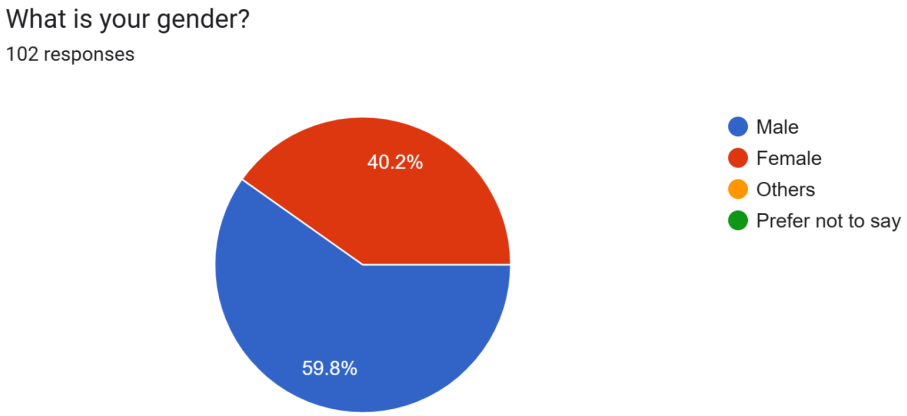

Figure 2.

2. Descriptive Statistics

This section outlines the major statistical trends from the survey responses, focusing on behaviors, perceptions, and experiences related to eSports and gaming ethics. Data is presented in two parts: (1) responses from the 75 participants who identified as gamers and completed the full gaming section, and (2) responses from all 102 participants (including 27 non-gamers) who answered the final six general ethical perception questions. The intention is

to ground the study in clear, representative findings that will guide further relational analysis and interpretation.

2.1 Gaming Engagement and Frequency (n = 75)

Among the 75 gamer respondents, engagement levels varied significantly:

- "Regularly" (plays or watches almost every day): 15 respondents (20%)
- "Often" (several times a week): 17 (22.7%)
- "Sometimes" (once a week or so): 24 (32%)
- "Rarely" (less than once a week): 19 (25.3%)

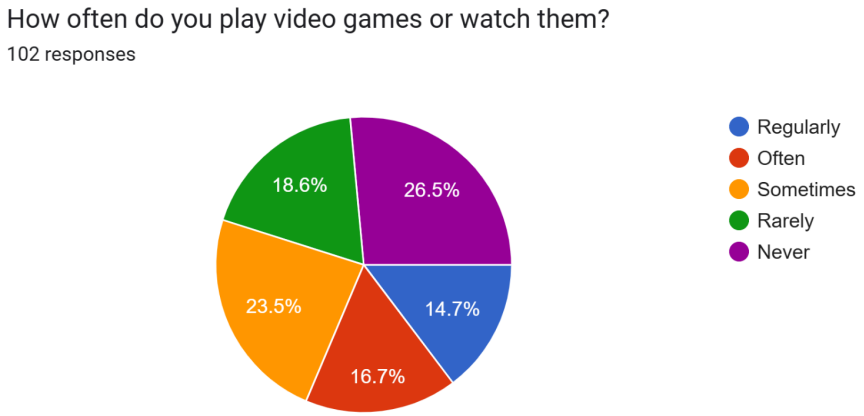

Figure 3.

This indicates a fairly balanced sample, with a large portion participating actively in gaming, but also a significant group engaging more sporadically.

2.2 Role in eSports Ecosystem (n = 75)

Participants were asked how they typically interact with eSports:

- "Player" (actively plays competitive or casual games): 34 respondents (45.3%)

- "Spectator" (watches tournaments/streams but does not actively play): 18 (24%)
- "Both player and spectator": 21 (28%)
- "Organizer or professional role": 2 (2.7%)

This breakdown suggests that nearly 3 out of 4 participants are directly involved in gaming, whether competitively or casually, while the remaining portion engages primarily as observers or in organizing roles.

2.3 Exposure to Toxic Behavior (n = 75)

A significant majority of participants reported encountering toxic behavior in gaming or eSports contexts:

- "Yes": 55 respondents (73.3%)
- "No": 15 (20%)
- "Maybe/Not Sure": 5 (6.7%)

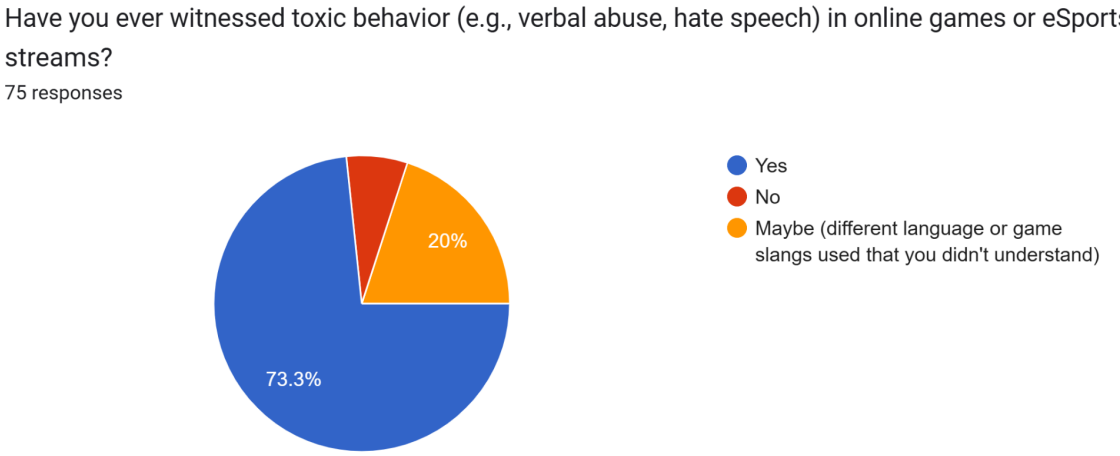

Figure 4.

Toxicity appears to be an embedded feature of the online gaming environment, with nearly three-quarters of participants having witnessed verbal abuse, hate speech, or other hostile interactions.

2.4 Harassment Experience (n = 75)

When asked about personal experiences of harassment while playing or watching eSports:

- "Yes": 37 respondents (49.3%)
- "No": 24 (32%)
- "Maybe/Unclear": 14 (18.7%)

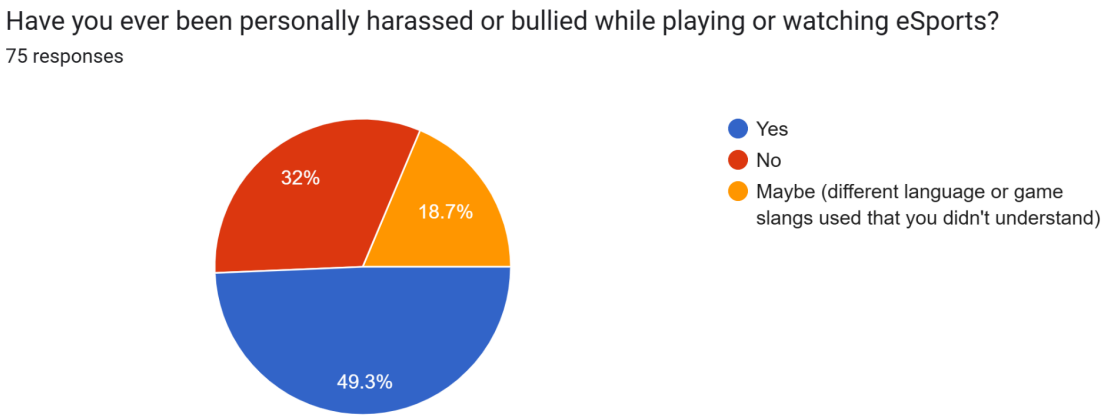

Figure 5.

This finding—almost half of gamers reporting direct harassment—highlights the personal impact of toxicity and discrimination in digital environments.

2.5 Emotional State After Gaming (n = 75)

Respondents were asked how they generally feel after a gaming session, on a Likert-style scale:

- "Refreshed/Positive" (score 4–5): 38 participants (50.7%)
- "Neutral" (score 3): 20 (26.7%)
- "Frustrated/Negative" (score 1–2): 17 (22.7%)

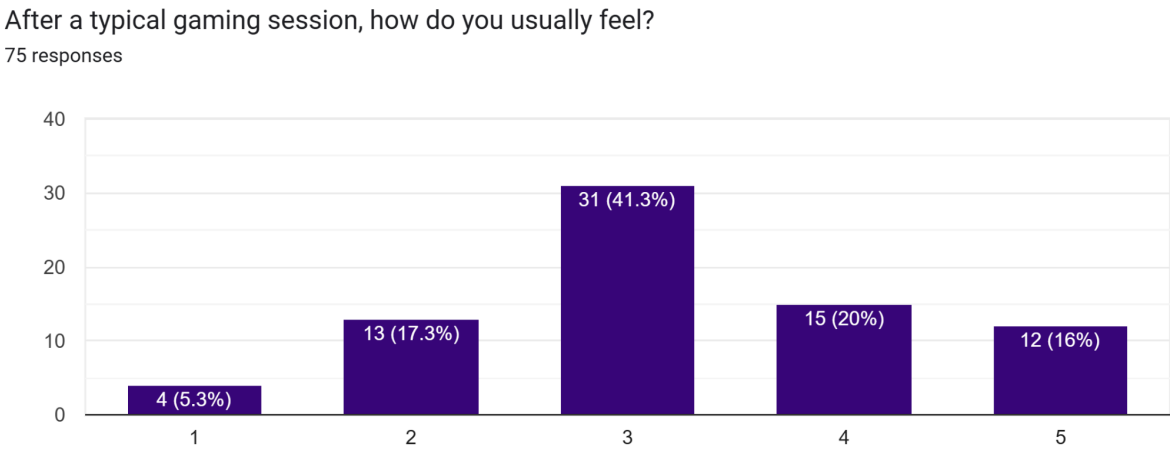

Figure 6.

While most participants reported feeling neutral or positive after gaming, more than one in five described feeling emotionally drained or frustrated, indicating that for some, gaming is not always a restorative or uplifting experience. 5 represents Happy and Refreshed while 1 represents Frustrated and Mentally Drained.

2.6 Sacrifice of Sleep or Responsibilities (n = 75)

When asked if they had ever missed sleep, meals, or important tasks due to gaming:

- "Yes": 30 respondents (40%)
- "No": 25 (33.3%)
- "Maybe": 20 (26.7%)

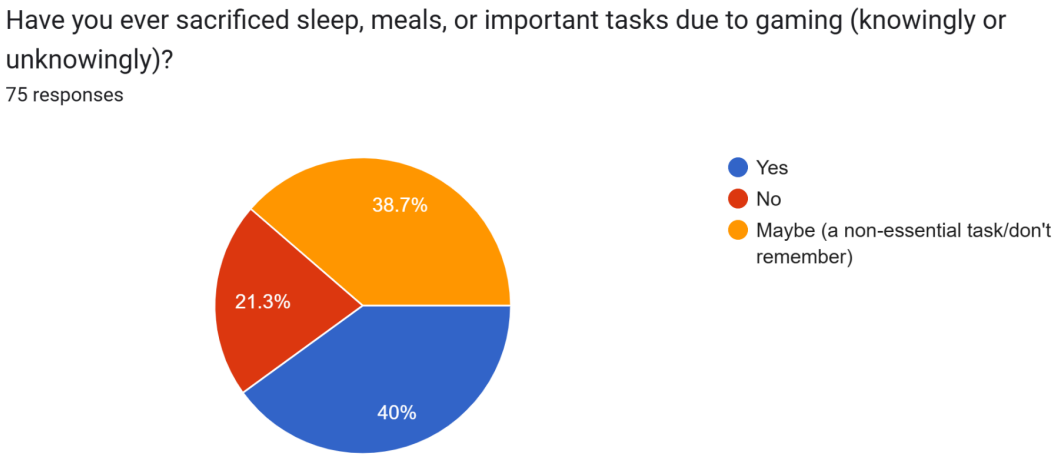

Figure 7.

This finding suggests that nearly half of gamers experience some form of lifestyle disruption as a result of their gaming habits, raising questions about the ethical implications of time management and addictive design.

2.7 In-Game Spending Behavior (n = 102)

All respondents—gamers and non-gamers alike—were asked about financial participation in gaming:

- "Yes, I have spent real money": 29 respondents (28.4%)
- "No": 73 (71.6%)

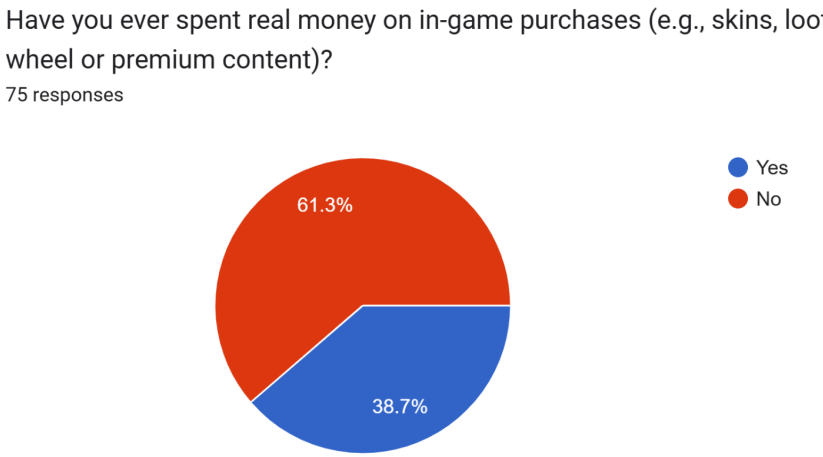

Figure 8.

This shows that while a majority of participants avoid in-game purchases, over a quarter actively engage in microtransactions—a key topic in ethical debates around loot boxes and spending incentives.

2.8 Perception of Loot Boxes as Gambling (n = 102)

Participants were asked whether they view loot boxes or lucky wheel mechanisms as a form of gambling:

- "Yes": 53 respondents (52%)
- "No": 49 (48%)

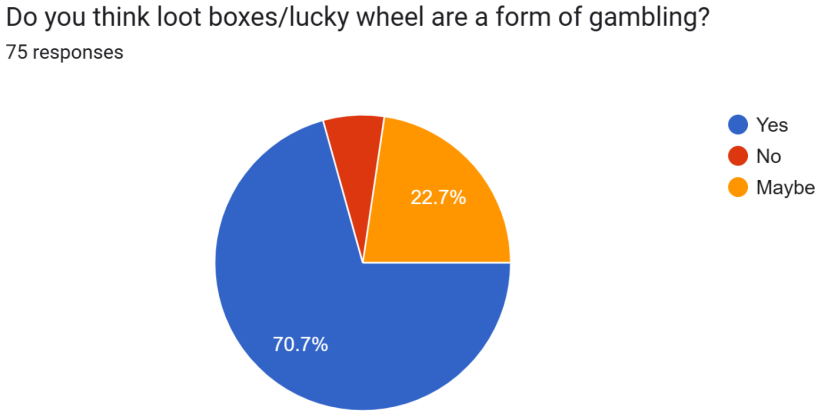

Figure 9.

This even divide underscores the controversy surrounding loot box mechanics. Public opinion is clearly split, reflecting ongoing global debate over regulation and psychological impact.

2.9 Perceived Real-Life Impact of Gaming (n = 102)

In a broader societal question, respondents shared their beliefs about how gaming affects real life:

- "Both positive and negative": 35 respondents (46.7%)
- "Depends on type of game": 22 (29.3%)
- "Mostly negative": 9 (12%)

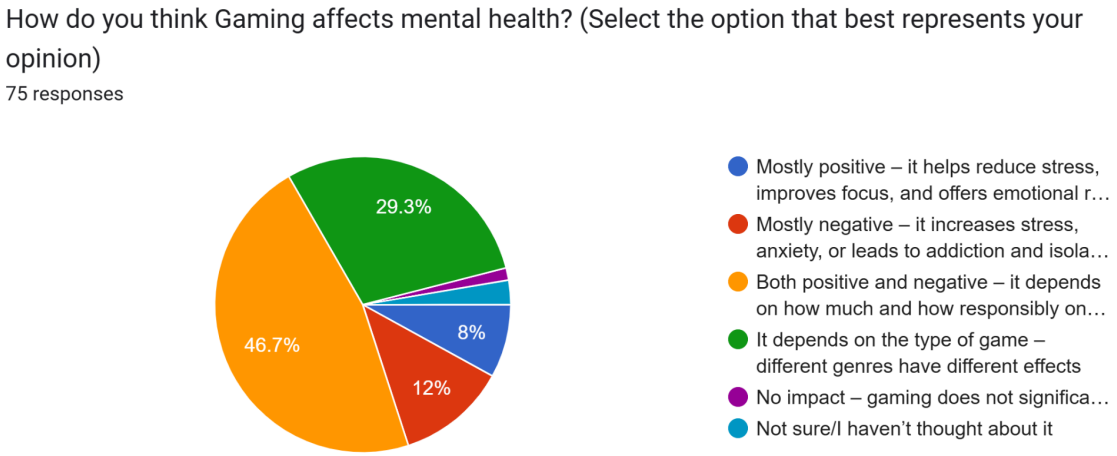

Figure 10.

This suggests that more than one-third believe gaming directly influences daily functioning, while the majority recognize context-dependent effects. Only a small minority view gaming as harmless in all cases.

2.10 Summary of Key Trends

In summary:

- A majority of gamers report witnessing or experiencing toxic behavior.
- A significant number feel frustrated post-gaming, and many acknowledge sacrificing responsibilities.

- Roughly one-third of all participants engage financially with games.

- Public opinion is sharply divided on whether loot boxes constitute gambling.

These findings paint a multifaceted picture of ethical concerns in gaming, ranging from emotional well-being and personal conduct to corporate monetization and societal consequences. The next section will explore how these variables interact to reveal deeper ethical tensions in the world of eSports.

3. Inferential and Relational Patterns

Beyond descriptive statistics, exploring the interrelationships between key variables allows for a deeper understanding of the ethical dimensions within eSports. This section focuses on how exposure, behavior, identity, and perception intersect in the lived experiences of respondents. Unless otherwise indicated, findings in this section are based on the 75 participants who identified as gamers and completed the gaming-specific portion of the survey. The final six questions, however, were answered by all 102 respondents, offering a broader lens for certain insights.

3.1 Exposure to Toxicity and Emotional Well-being

Exposure to toxicity and emotional well-being reveals a significant ethical concern in online gaming spaces. Among the 75 gamers surveyed, a notable 73.3% indicated that they had witnessed toxic behavior, such as hate speech, excessive flaming, or targeted harassment, during gameplay or while watching competitive streams. Within this group, nearly a quarter (23.6%) also reported feeling frustrated or emotionally drained after typical gaming sessions. Although the majority of exposed participants did not describe negative emotional outcomes, the contrast becomes clearer when examining the group that had not witnessed toxicity: only four of these individuals reported frustration. This pattern suggests that while not all exposure to toxicity results in negative affect, there is a perceptible association between hostile environments and diminished post-game emotional states. The implication is not simply about individual resilience, but also about the normalization of toxicity within gaming cultures and how this can desensitize players or erode emotional health over time.

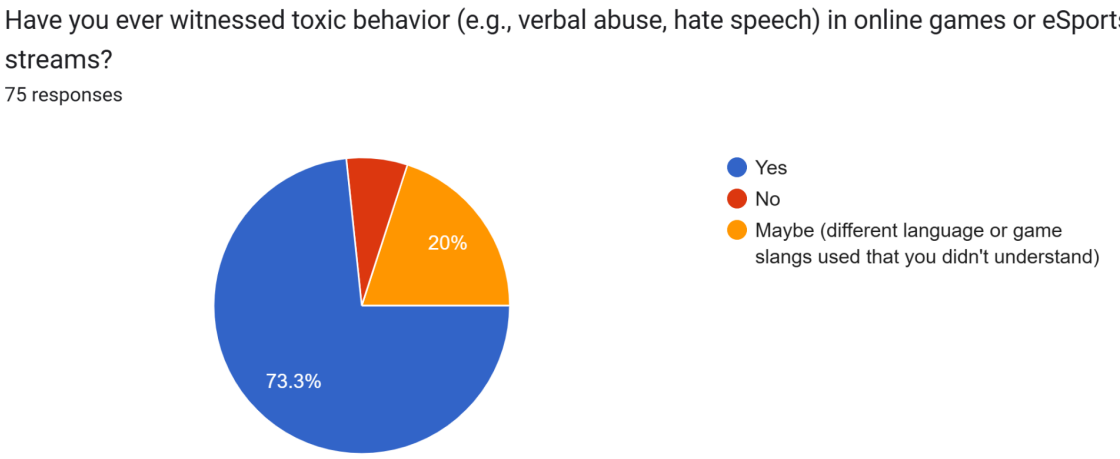

Figure 11.

3.2 In-Game Spending and Perceptions of Gambling

In-game spending and perceptions of gambling also emerged as a revealing intersection of behavior and ethical reflection. Across all 102 respondents—regardless of gaming frequency or experience—29 individuals acknowledged having spent real money on in-game purchases, such as cosmetics or loot boxes. Of these spenders, a significant 82.8% believed that loot box mechanics constitute a form of gambling. This perception was also shared by a considerable number of non-spenders: 39.7% of those who had never engaged in monetary transactions within games still equated loot boxes with gambling practices. These findings suggest a strong correlation between direct financial involvement and heightened awareness of the risks and manipulative design behind randomized reward systems. However, the fact that nearly 40% of non-spenders share these views points to a growing societal recognition of how such systems function—particularly in light of public discourse around addiction, regulation, and underage spending. The ethical implications here extend beyond personal choice, raising questions about game design, informed consent, and the role of oversight in digital economies.

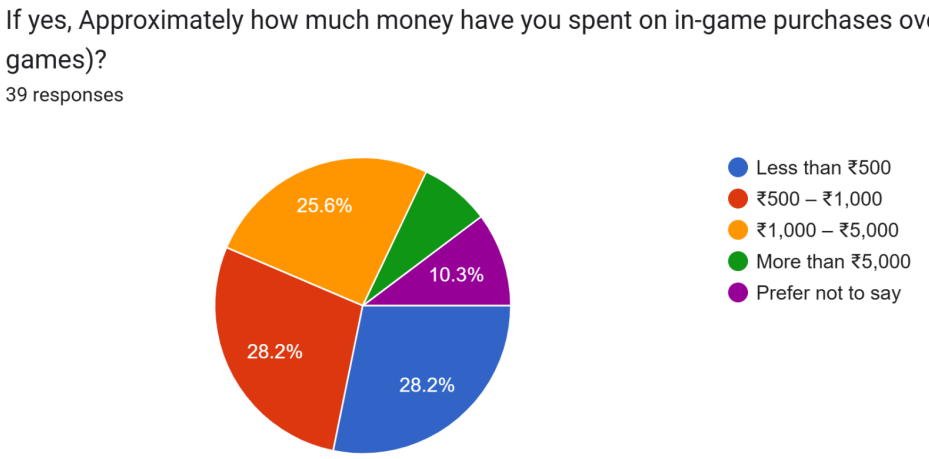

Figure 12.

3.3 Gaming Frequency and Lifestyle Sacrifice

Gaming frequency and its impact on daily responsibilities illustrates another dimension of ethical concern, particularly in the context of time management and balance. When asked whether they had ever sacrificed essential activities—such as sleep, meals, or academic and professional responsibilities—40% of the 75 gamers answered affirmatively. This behavior varied across levels of gaming frequency. More than half of those who played regularly reported lifestyle compromises, while a similar pattern was visible among those who played often or occasionally. Even those who reported rare engagement were not immune to such consequences. The data suggests that regardless of intensity, gaming has the potential to disrupt personal routines and well-being. While the issue may seem behavioral rather than ethical at first glance, it implicates questions around game design that incentivizes prolonged engagement, the lack of embedded time-limiting features, and the broader societal challenge of digital overconsumption.

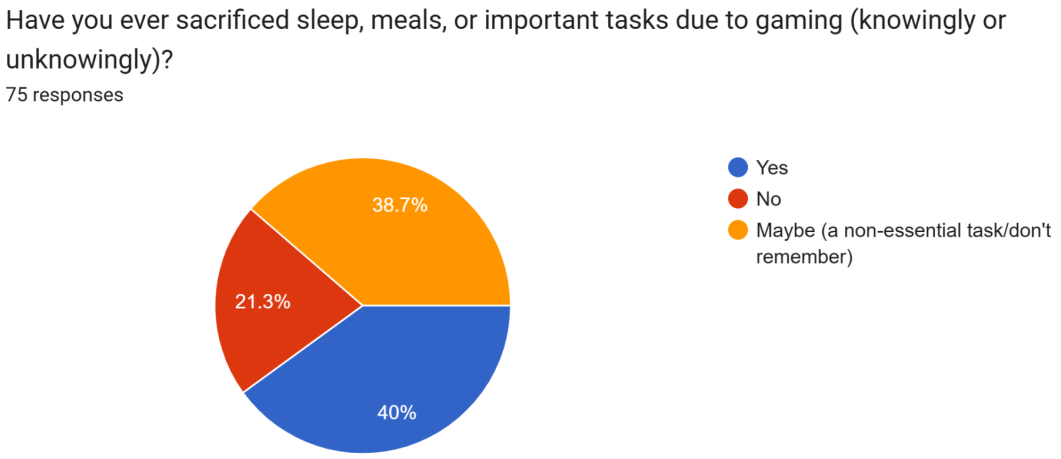

Figure 13.

3.4 Gender and Harassment Exposure

The issue of gender and harassment exposure adds further complexity to the ethical landscape. Of the 75 gamers, nearly half (49.3%) reported having experienced harassment while gaming or watching competitive events. When analyzed by gender, male respondents accounted for the majority of these reports, although this reflects their higher numerical presence in the sample. Notably, over one-third of female gamers reported being harassed, with additional participants indicating uncertainty—often citing factors such as unclear language, coded slurs, or regional differences in expression. These numbers reflect broader concerns within the gaming community and academic literature regarding the gendered nature of harassment. The findings underscore how toxic environments can disproportionately affect marginalized players, potentially limiting participation, silencing voices, and reinforcing exclusionary norms. While male gamers may face harassment as well, the context and content of such interactions often differ significantly in tone and impact, revealing deeply rooted power imbalances and cultural biases within the digital gaming sphere.

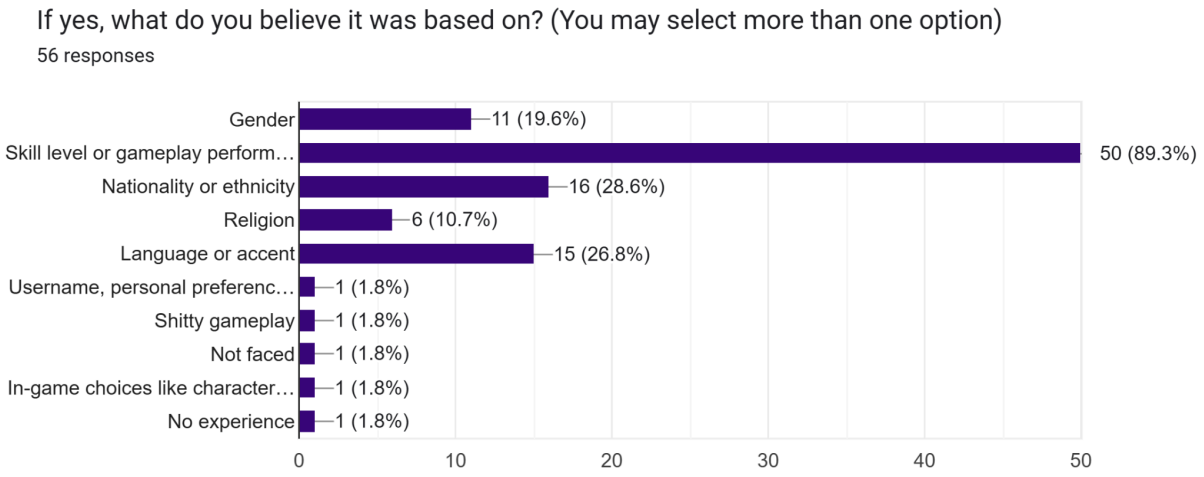

Figure 14.

3.5 Summary of Key Relational Patterns

In summary, this section reveals several relational patterns that deepen our understanding of the ethical challenges in gaming. There is evidence that toxic behavior correlates with emotional strain, that financial engagement increases awareness of exploitative mechanics, and that gaming often competes with daily responsibilities in ways that are ethically questionable. Furthermore, harassment remains a deeply gendered issue, affirming the need for inclusive and respectful gaming environments. These findings not only highlight problematic trends but also suggest focal points for future intervention, policy, and education.

4. Gamers vs. Non-Gamers – Response Differences

While the majority of this research focused on individuals who participate directly in gaming activities, the inclusion of non-gamers allowed for a comparative perspective on ethical awareness and perception in the broader public. The last section of the survey, comprising six general questions, was answered by all 102 participants and provided valuable insights into how ethical concerns in eSports and gaming are understood differently by those inside and outside the gaming culture.

4.1 Awareness of In-Game Spending and Financial Ethics

One of the starkest contrasts between gamers and non-gamers appeared in their financial interaction with games. Among the 75 gamers, approximately 34.7% reported spending real money on in-game purchases. In contrast, only 14.8% of non-gamers indicated the same. While this might initially suggest a lack of exposure among non-gamers, it also points to the

extent to which real-money transactions are normalized within gaming environments. Gamers were significantly more familiar with the mechanics and justifications behind such expenditures, often referencing aesthetics, progression advantages, or social signaling within games. Non-gamers, on the other hand, largely interpreted these practices through a more skeptical lens, often questioning their necessity and fairness, especially when real-money advantages could lead to imbalances or perceived exploitation.

4.2 Perception of Loot Boxes as Gambling

Differences were also evident in the perceived ethical equivalence between loot boxes and gambling. A slight majority of gamers (approximately 50.6%) agreed that loot boxes resemble gambling, whereas among non-gamers, this view was held by 59.3%. This divergence is noteworthy, as it suggests that gamers, despite being more exposed to such systems, are less inclined to equate them outright with gambling. This may be due to normalization, desensitization, or greater familiarity with the nuances of game mechanics. Non-gamers, viewing these mechanisms from a more detached standpoint, appear more likely to recognize the similarities to traditional gambling practices—such as randomized outcomes, psychological reinforcement, and potential for compulsive behavior.

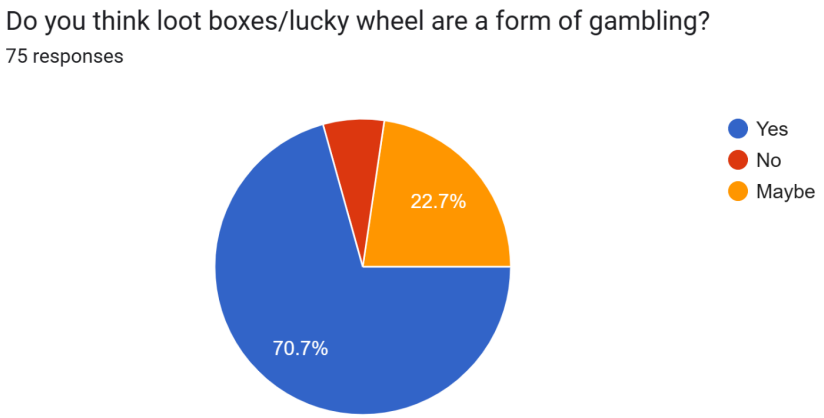

Figure 15.

4.3 Gaming's Impact on Real Life

Another point of divergence centered on the perceived impact of gaming on real life. Among gamers, 41.3% stated that gaming had a noticeable effect on their daily routines or responsibilities, while only 18.5% of non-gamers felt the same—though notably, most non-gamers responded from a general observational stance rather than personal experience. Nearly half of all respondents in both groups answered "maybe," suggesting a recognition that gaming's influence may vary depending on individual context, level of engagement, and personal discipline. Still, the data indicates that gamers are more likely to acknowledge

tangible lifestyle disruptions, whereas non-gamers often reserve judgment, perhaps due to a lack of direct experience.

4.4 Ethical Perception Through Distance and Participation

These differences in response suggest that proximity to gaming as a cultural and participatory activity significantly shapes one's ethical perception of it. Gamers, immersed in the systems and social norms of digital play, often display a more nuanced or defensive stance toward practices that outsiders may critique more readily. For example, gamers who recognize spending habits or loot boxes as ethical concerns are often those with direct experience navigating these systems and their effects. Meanwhile, non-gamers, though fewer in number, sometimes apply a broader moral framework based on societal values, consumer rights, or youth protection—areas not always foregrounded within gaming culture itself.

4.5 Non-Gamers as Ethical Observers

Non-gamers' responses may also serve a critical role in highlighting ethical blind spots within the community. With no personal investment in game mechanics or peer dynamics, their assessments often carry an outsider clarity that identifies issues long normalized by habitual players. For instance, while gamers may weigh the strategic or entertainment value of spending mechanisms, non-gamers are more likely to see exploitative potential, especially among younger or more vulnerable users. Similarly, where gamers might justify certain degrees of emotional fallout as "part of the competitive experience," non-gamers may identify these patterns as troubling signs of over-engagement or unhealthy digital environments.

4.6 Summary of Gamer vs. Non-Gamer Perspectives

The contrast between gamers and non-gamers highlights a tension between lived experience and external observation. Gamers tend to bring a more complex, sometimes conflicted, perspective shaped by participation, while non-gamers often evaluate the industry through normative ethical standards from outside. This duality enriches the study by showing how the legitimacy of ethical concerns can shift depending on the standpoint from which gaming is approached. It also underscores the importance of incorporating both insider and outsider voices when shaping policies, educational initiatives, and ethical guidelines for the gaming ecosystem.

CHAPTER 7

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

This chapter presents the core results and emergent findings of the research, drawn from a mixed-methods analysis of responses collected through a structured online survey. With a sample of 102 participants—75 gamers and 27 non-gamers—the study sought to explore ethical concerns, behavioral patterns, and perceptional divides within the domain of eSports and digital gaming. This section synthesizes quantitative results from closed-ended questions with qualitative insights obtained from open-ended prompts, allowing for a robust interpretation of how ethical themes are situated in both practice and perception.

1. Demographics and Respondent Overview

The sample consisted of 102 individuals who completed the survey, with 75 (73.5%) self-identifying as gamers and 27 (26.5%) identifying as non-gamers. Gamers proceeded to answer the full set of domain-specific questions, while non-gamers responded only to a general ethics section designed to assess outsider perspectives. Age distribution skewed toward younger cohorts, with the majority (41%) falling within the 18–24 age group. The gender breakdown indicated a male majority (65.3%), followed by female respondents (31.3%) and a small proportion identifying as non-binary or preferring not to disclose (3.4%). Participants hailed from a variety of urban and semi-urban regions, contributing to the geographic diversity of the dataset.

This demographic spread, while not wholly representative of the broader population, closely aligns with known patterns in gaming demographics, particularly in competitive or semi-competitive eSports environments. It also provided the foundational context for segmenting behavioral data and mapping relational trends across identity variables.

2. Gaming Behavior and eSports Participation

Among the 75 gamers, engagement levels varied significantly. A substantial portion (37.3%) reported playing games daily, while another 32% played a few times per week. Casual or occasional play was less common but still present, with only 13.3% identifying as infrequent players. This range of involvement suggests that gaming occupies different roles in the lives of participants—from a form of leisure to a more embedded aspect of daily routine.

In terms of roles within the eSports ecosystem, the majority of gamer respondents identified as players (58.7%), followed by spectators (22.7%) and a smaller percentage who participated in organizational or content creation roles. This multi-faceted engagement allowed the study to capture ethical concerns from various vantage points within the community.

The data revealed significant levels of exposure to negative behavioral dynamics. Approximately 73.3% of gamers reported having witnessed toxicity in gaming environments—ranging from verbal abuse to discriminatory commentary. Furthermore, 49.3% of respondents had experienced some form of direct harassment. These findings affirm the notion that online gaming spaces, particularly those linked to competitive eSports, often tolerate or inadequately moderate harmful interactions.

3. Emotional and Lifestyle Effects of Gaming

A recurring concern in eSports ethics relates to the emotional and psychological impacts of prolonged or intense gaming. Participants were asked to reflect on their typical post-gaming emotional state, and the results revealed a nuanced picture: 53.3% reported feeling neutral or refreshed, whereas 23.6% acknowledged experiencing frustration. The correlation between negative emotional states and toxicity exposure was noteworthy, suggesting that toxic environments not only impair social cohesion but may also influence individual mental health.

Additionally, 40% of gamers reported that they had, at some point, sacrificed essential daily activities such as sleep, meals, or academic/professional responsibilities due to gaming. This behavioral pattern, when cross-referenced with frequency of play, indicated that daily or near-daily players were more likely to report such sacrifices. This points to a tension between digital immersion and personal well-being—a central theme in broader ethical debates surrounding gaming culture.

4. In-Game Spending and Perceptions of Gambling

The financial dimension of eSports engagement emerged as another significant axis of ethical inquiry. Approximately 34.7% of gamers reported spending real money in games, with common purchases including cosmetic items, character upgrades, and randomized loot boxes. Among those who spent money, 82.8% agreed that loot boxes could be equated to gambling. This perspective was not limited to spenders alone; 39.7% of non-spenders also perceived loot boxes as a form of gambling.

Across all 102 respondents, roughly half of the gamers (50.6%) and a slightly higher proportion of non-gamers (59.3%) endorsed the view that loot boxes resemble gambling practices. The fact that non-gamers—despite their distance from gaming culture—were even more likely to categorize loot boxes in this way suggests that outsider perspectives often carry a critical lens that is perhaps dulled among regular players due to normalization or desensitization.

5. Gendered Experiences and Harassment

An analysis of harassment experiences by gender revealed that male respondents reported the majority of incidents, primarily due to their higher representation in the sample. However, the experiences reported by female and non-binary gamers were more contextually intense. Many

of these respondents not only confirmed being harassed but also reported being targeted with gender-specific insults or unwelcome attention. These experiences were frequently framed as a deterrent to continued participation, especially in competitive or public gaming environments.

This aligns with broader literature on gender in gaming, which has consistently found that underrepresented groups face disproportionate levels of hostility and marginalization. It also adds a vital intersectional dimension to the ethical concerns identified, reinforcing the call for more inclusive and well-moderated platforms.

6. Comparative Analysis: Gamers vs. Non-Gamers

The inclusion of non-gamers in the final section of the survey provided a valuable opportunity to compare ethical perspectives across engagement boundaries. One notable area of divergence was the perceived impact of gaming on real life. While 41.3% of gamers agreed that gaming had disrupted their routine at some point, only 18.5% of non-gamers endorsed this view—often based on observation of others rather than personal experience. This gap underscores a tendency among gamers to normalize or rationalize their engagement, while non-gamers often view the same behavior through a more critical or detached ethical lens.

Non-gamers also appeared more likely to call for stricter regulation of in-game monetization, parental oversight, and age-appropriate content gating. Their responses often framed gaming as an environment that lacked sufficient adult supervision and ethical transparency, particularly in regard to young users' access to spending mechanics.

7. Thematic Insights from Open-Ended Responses

In addition to structured responses, the open-ended questions invited participants to articulate their personal views on ethical concerns in eSports. Thematic analysis revealed several recurring motifs that both expanded and contextualized the quantitative data.

Foremost among these was the theme of *addiction and lifestyle imbalance*, where many gamers voiced concerns over how competitive structures and performance incentives foster compulsive play. Another dominant theme was *toxicity and poor moderation*, which participants described as a deeply entrenched cultural norm that is inadequately addressed by game developers or tournament organizers.

Gambling and exploitative monetization emerged as a third critical concern, with both gamers and non-gamers condemning loot box mechanics as financially manipulative and psychologically predatory. Additionally, participants reflected on *mental health pressures* and the difficulty of sustaining a healthy identity in environments where skill, visibility, and social performance are constantly judged.

A subtler theme, mostly raised by non-gamers, involved the *responsibility of parents and educators* in mitigating harm among younger players. These respondents emphasized the importance of digital literacy and ethical parenting in combating overexposure, toxic socialization, and unsupervised spending.

8. Finding

This study yielded results that add support to the acceptance of the alternative hypothesis (H1) that ethical issues in eSports, such as toxicity, harassment and exploitative game mechanics have a huge impact on the psychological well being of players and their capability for managing their real life responsibilities. Participants reported emotionally exhausting, frustrating and day to day function compromised especially on academic, time and sleep. The results were seen consistently in descriptive data and participant narratives. On the other hand, the findings overall do not support the null hypothesis (H_0), the contrary hypothesis (H_2), i.e. that there is or cannot be a significant or observable effect on ethical issues. It was tested if exposure to toxic behavior was associated with perceptions of interference with personal responsibilities, using a Chi-Square Test. The p value of 0.856 was not significant statistically for the relationship between the two, or rather, what is interesting is the thematic evidence present in the dataset. Instead, it points out the restricted power which categorical testing suggests; that of describing only the simplicity of emotional and ethical impact in digital environments. The descriptive results, relational trends, and qualitative insights, when combined, verify H_1 as the most acceptable interpretation of the data collected.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

It examines ethical dimensions of the eSports and digital gaming domain, revealing a domain to be a complex and multi-layered ecology with competing interests and unresolved mortal tensions. It ends this chapter drawing us together so that we can critically consider what these data taken together imply. We also make specific policy and design recommendations for video game developers, policy makers, educators and video game players that will support ethically responsible video gaming. Ultimately, this study proves there is an urgent need to continuously be involved in dialogue, design exclusivity and interventionatics based on evidence to the emergence of the growing eSports landscape.

1. Conclusion

1.1 Reframing Gaming: From Entertainment to Ethical Terrain

Gaming is no longer merely a pastime. With the rise of competitive structures, global viewership, monetary incentives, and digital communities, eSports has solidified its status as a serious cultural and economic force. However, this growth has been accompanied by a range of ethical issues—from exploitative monetization to exclusionary practices and digital harassment. The current study set out to explore how these issues manifest across different stakeholder groups, particularly gamers and non-gamers, and how individuals interpret and navigate the moral terrain of gaming environments.

The findings reflect an ecosystem in flux—one that is both vibrant and vulnerable. Most participants recognized the positive dimensions of gaming, including social interaction, skill development, and relaxation. At the same time, there was broad consensus that toxicity, addiction, financial exploitation, and insufficient oversight remain persistent challenges. The data underscore the duality of gaming as a source of empowerment and risk, community and conflict.

1.2 The Normalization of Ethical Violations

One of the most striking revelations of this study was the degree to which certain unethical practices have become normalized within gaming spaces. The prevalence of toxicity and harassment, for instance, was acknowledged by nearly three-quarters of gamers, with many suggesting that such behaviors were simply “part of the experience.” Similarly, monetization mechanics like loot boxes—described by a majority of respondents as akin to gambling—have become accepted features of many popular games, despite mounting legal and psychological concerns.

This normalization is not the result of ignorance but of prolonged exposure and lack of structural intervention. It suggests a cultural milieu where unethical behaviors are seen as inevitable rather than addressable. Such an attitude can foster resignation and inaction,

especially among players who may feel powerless against the policies of large corporations or the entrenched norms of peer networks.

1.3 Divergence in Perspective: Gamers vs. Non-Gamers

A key strength of this study was its inclusion of both gamers and non-gamers. The contrast between these groups yielded valuable insights into how proximity to the gaming world influences ethical awareness. Gamers, while more familiar with the nuances of gameplay and community dynamics, often downplayed the severity of ethical issues—perhaps as a coping mechanism or due to desensitization. Non-gamers, on the other hand, approached the topic with greater moral rigidity, often invoking concerns about addiction, supervision, and social development.

This divergence points to the need for more nuanced ethical education that neither demonizes gaming nor trivializes its risks. Both insider and outsider perspectives must be considered when crafting interventions, as each offers distinct and complementary insights into the moral implications of digital play.

1.4 Toward an Ethical Gaming Ecosystem

The study also highlighted a recurring desire among participants for reform. Across open-ended responses and structured questions, there was repeated emphasis on the need for better moderation, fairer monetization, more inclusive communities, and greater transparency. This shows that while ethical issues persist, the will to address them exists within the player base. What is lacking are clear pathways, empowered voices, and systemic support.

Creating an ethical gaming ecosystem will require sustained effort from all involved parties. It is not enough to impose regulations or ban problematic content; the entire culture surrounding gaming must evolve to value empathy, fairness, and digital well-being. This transformation will necessitate both top-down and bottom-up approaches, including policy innovation, platform accountability, player advocacy, and interdisciplinary research.

2. Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study and supported by existing literature, the following recommendations are proposed across six key domains: platform governance, monetization ethics, digital education, community management, regulatory policy, and future research.

2.1 Game Developers and Platform Holders

Game developers are in a unique position to shape user experience and behavior through design choices and policy enforcement. Ethical engagement must be embedded into the development lifecycle, rather than retrofitted as an afterthought.

- Improve moderation systems: Use AI-assisted and human moderation tools to detect, flag, and act on toxic behavior more effectively. Real-time interventions, reputation

scores, and tiered penalties can create safer environments.

- Redesign reward systems: Move away from loot boxes and randomized rewards toward transparent, skill-based progression models. Players should know what they are paying for and how it affects gameplay.

- Encourage prosocial behavior: Implement incentive structures that reward cooperation, supportiveness, and fair play. This can help reshape community norms over time.

- Accessibility and inclusivity: Games should be designed with diverse players in mind, including gender, ability, and cultural context. Feedback mechanisms should be open and accessible to underrepresented groups.

2.2 Regulatory Bodies and Policymakers

While self-regulation in the gaming industry is important, external oversight remains crucial to enforce baseline ethical standards and protect vulnerable populations.

- Classify loot boxes as gambling: Based on the majority perception and psychological parallels, regulatory bodies should treat loot boxes as a form of gambling, particularly when they involve real money or target minors.

- Establish age-appropriate content labels: Existing rating systems must be expanded to include warnings for manipulative monetization practices, toxic chat environments, and predatory design.

- Support mental health resources: Develop public campaigns and digital tools that raise awareness about gaming addiction, sleep hygiene, and emotional regulation in the context of play.

2.3 Educators and Parents

Parents and educators must be empowered with the tools and knowledge to engage meaningfully with young gamers. Digital literacy is now a foundational skill, as vital as reading or mathematics.

- Incorporate ethics into digital curricula: Schools should teach students about the social and psychological impacts of online interactions, including gaming. These discussions must address peer pressure, spending, and screen time.

- Parental controls and communication: Rather than blanket bans or passive oversight, parents should be encouraged to participate in games with their children, understand

the content, and co-create rules that reflect shared values.

2.4 eSports Organizations and Tournament Hosts

The professional tier of gaming, including streamers, influencers, and tournament organizers, plays a major role in shaping cultural norms and public expectations.

- Enforce codes of conduct: All competitive events should have clear, enforceable ethical standards related to harassment, doping, and fairness. These codes must apply equally to players, audiences, and staff.

- Provide player support services: Given the pressure and visibility of high-level play, eSports professionals should have access to psychological counseling, career coaching, and conflict resolution resources.

- Promote ethical role models: Platforms should uplift content creators and athletes who exemplify ethical play and community responsibility, rather than rewarding controversy or aggression.

2.5 Players and Communities

Gamers themselves must be seen not only as consumers but as co-creators of the digital spaces they inhabit. Empowering player agency is essential for cultural change.

- Practice and promote ethical behavior: Players can report misconduct, support newcomers, and set positive examples within their circles. Peer-driven initiatives often prove more effective than top-down rules.

- Join advocacy efforts: Communities can organize around ethical causes in gaming, from anti-bullying movements to fair monetization campaigns. These grassroots efforts give legitimacy to player concerns.

- Engage in critical self-reflection: Awareness of one's own behavior—how we speak, what we normalize, whom we exclude—is a powerful tool in challenging unethical norms.

2.6 Future Research Directions

This study has laid foundational groundwork, but many questions remain unanswered. Future research should expand the demographic scope and methodological depth of such investigations.

- Longitudinal studies: Track players over time to assess how prolonged exposure to toxicity or monetization practices influences their behavior and beliefs.

- Cross-cultural comparisons: Ethical norms vary significantly across regions. Comparative studies can illuminate universal trends and culturally specific dynamics.

- Experimental designs: Simulate in-game scenarios to test interventions, such as nudges against toxic speech or visual cues to curb impulsive spending.

- Underrepresented voices: More research is needed on marginalized groups within gaming—women, LGBTQ+ players, neurodivergent individuals—to better understand their unique ethical challenges and resilience strategies.

3. Final Reflections

The ethical future of eSports and gaming is not predetermined; it will be shaped by the choices we make today. This study has shown that while the digital arena offers extraordinary opportunities for play, connection, and achievement, it is also fraught with moral complexity. Toxicity, exploitation, and exclusion are not inevitable by-products of online competition—they are the result of design choices, cultural inertia, and social neglect.

But the data also carries a more hopeful message: gamers and non-gamers alike are increasingly aware, increasingly vocal, and increasingly unwilling to accept the status quo. If industry leaders, educators, researchers, and players can collaborate with humility and urgency, a more ethical, inclusive, and joyful gaming culture is within reach.

CHAPTER 9

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APPENDIX

GAMING SPECIFIC QUESTIONS

1. What is your age?
   a. Under 18
   b. 18–24
   c. 25–34
   d. 35–44
   e. 45+

2. What is your gender?
   a. Male
   b. Female
   c. Non-binary
   d. Prefer not to say

3. How often do you play video games or watch them?
   a. Regularly
   b. Often
   c. Sometimes
   d. Rarely
   e. Never
4. On average, how much time do you spend gaming each day?

   a. Less than 1 hour

   b. 1–2 hours

   c. 2–4 hours

   d. 4–6 hours

   e. More than 6 hours

   f. More on weekends than weekdays

   g. Prefer not to say

5. Have you ever witnessed toxic behavior (e.g., verbal abuse, hate speech) in online games or eSports streams?

   a. Yes

   b. No

   c. Maybe (different language or game slangs used that I didn't understand)

6. Have you ever been personally harassed or bullied while playing or watching eSports?

   a. Yes

   b. No

   c. Maybe (different language or game slangs used that I didn't understand)

7. If yes, what do you believe it was based on? (You may select more than one option)

a. Gender
b. Skill level or gameplay performance
c. Nationality or ethnicity
d. Religion
e. Language or accent
f. Other:

8. Have you ever displayed toxic behavior toward teammates or opponents during gameplay (e.g., insults, blaming, or aggressive language), even if it happened in the heat of the moment?

   a. Yes

   b. No

   c. Maybe (not significant/don't remember)

9. Have you ever sacrificed sleep, meals, or important tasks due to gaming (knowingly or unknowingly)? *

a. Yes
b. No
c. Maybe (a non-essential task/don't remember)

10. Do you think healthy time management is possible for competitive gamers? *

a. Yes
b. No
c. Not sure

11. Have you ever spent real money on in-game purchases (e.g., skins, loot boxes, upgrades, lucky wheel or premium content)?*

a. Yes
b. No

12. If yes, Approximately how much money have you spent on in-game purchases over time (across all games)?

a. Less than ₹500
b. ₹500 – ₹1,000
c. ₹1,000 – ₹5,000
d. More than ₹5,000
e. Prefer not to say

13. Do you think loot boxes/lucky wheels are a form of gambling? *

a. Yes
b. No
c. Maybe

14. Do you believe gambling elements in games can cause addiction or financial problems? *

a. Yes
b. No
c. Maybe

15. Do you think eSports companies should be more transparent about monetization practices? *

a. Yes
b. No
c. Maybe

16. How do you think Gaming affects mental health? (Select the option that best represents your opinion)*

a. Mostly positive – it helps reduce stress, improves focus, and offers emotional relief
b. Mostly negative – it increases stress, anxiety, or leads to addiction and isolation
c. Both positive and negative – it depends on how much and how responsibly one plays
d. It depends on the type of game – different genres have different effects
e. No impact – gaming does not significantly affect mental health if you are emotionally mature
f. Not sure/I haven't thought about it

17. After a typical gaming session, how do you usually feel?*

Frustrated and mentally drained

1

2

3

4

5

Refreshed and happy

GENERAL QUESTIONS

18. Do you believe toxic behavior in eSports affects players' mental health? *

a. Yes
b. No
c. Maybe

19. Do you think excessive time spent on gaming can lead to poor academic or work performance? *

a. Yes
b. No
c. Maybe

20. Do you believe gaming can interfere with personal responsibilities (e.g., chores, studies, family time)? *

a. Yes
b. No
c. Maybe

21. Have you heard of loot boxes, skin betting, lucky wheels, gambling, etc. in games? *

a. Yes
b. No
c. Maybe

22. Should games with gambling-like features be restricted for minors? *

a. Yes
b. No
c. Maybe

23. Is there anything you would like to share about your personal experiences or opinions related to eSports, gaming, or its impact on mental health and daily life?