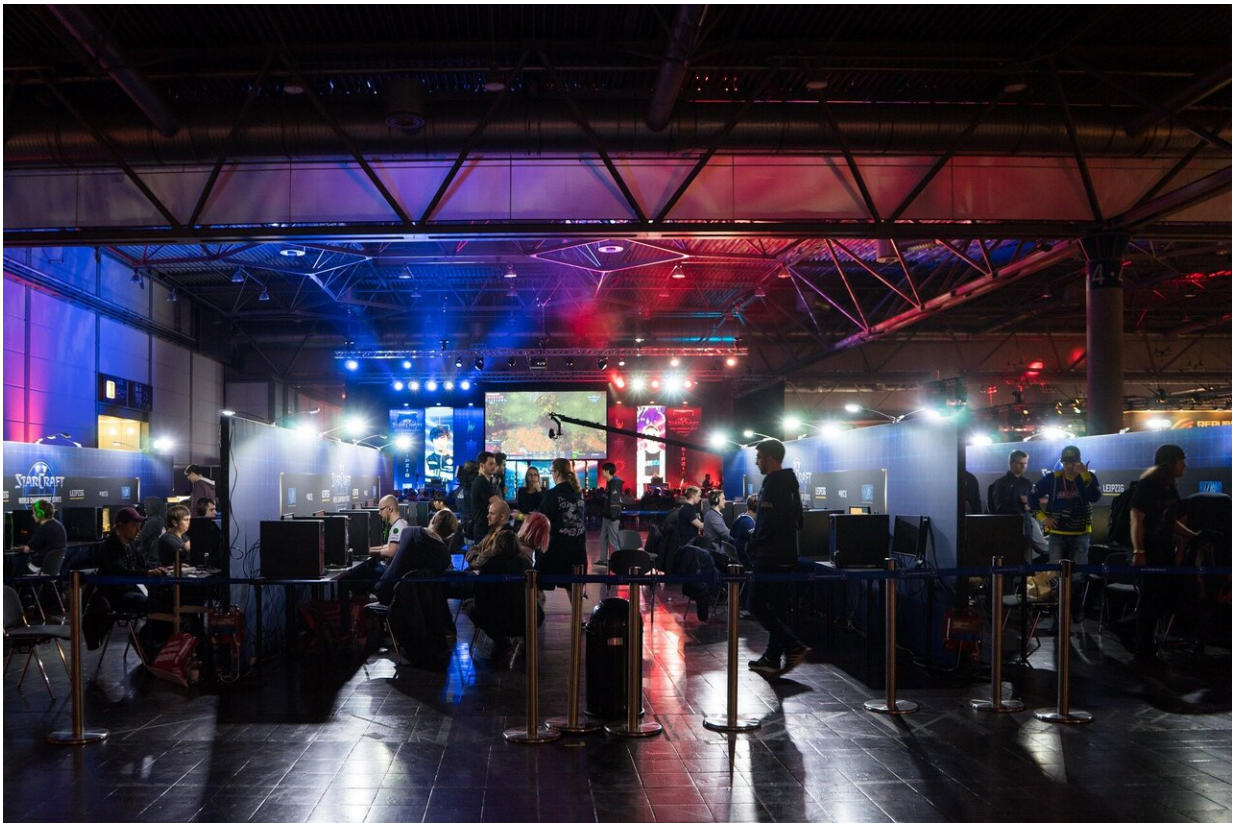# Why we should take competitive video games more seriously

January 8 2024, by Thomas Burelli, Haoran Liu and Marie Dykukha

Credit: CC0 Public Domain

Is playing competitive video games a serious business?

There's no question about it for the thousands of [League of Legends](#) fans

who flocked to South Korea last October to attend the [Worlds 2023](#) championships of this ultra-popular [game](#). The grand prize? [US$2,225,000](#).

The Worlds 2023 event, which is still largely unknown to the [general public](#), provides an opportunity for video game law specialists such as ourselves to explain just why competitive video games should be taken more seriously.

Esports: A global social, cultural and economic phenomenon

While North American sports leagues such as the NHL and NFL are well known—as are major traditional sporting competitions such as the Football World Cup or the Olympic Games—the same cannot be said for video game competitions. And yet, there is a whole world of professional competitions in the video game universe. Like [traditional sports](#), the competitive video games world has its own leagues, well-established international competitions, its share of famous athletes and [hordes of fans](#). These are known as esports.

Esports can be described simply as video games played in a competitive environment.

Although esports do not always enjoy the same level of recognition as traditional sports, they represent a sector that has grown significantly [over the last 10 years](#) and regularly attracts [millions of simultaneous viewers](#).

A huge variety of esports games are now played competitively. In games such as [League of Legends](#) or [Dota](#), two teams of players compete in multiplayer online battle arenas (MOBAs). These action-strategy games

are something like supercharged chess games in which the aim is to destroy the opposing base.

There are also a number of very popular first-person shooting games such as [Valorant](), [CSGO](), [Overwatch]() and [Fortnite]().

In short, when it comes to esports, there's something for everyone, including those who prefer to (virtually!) play [traditional sports]().

A booming sector

In terms of viewership and popularity, the esports industry has [started to overtake traditional sports]() in the past 10 years. The COVID-19 pandemic has contributed to this phenomenon.

Esports has also seen the emergence of internationally renowned superstars such as [Faker](), an athlete often considered the [greatest League of Legends player of all time]() thanks to his huge victories and consistent success over the past decade.

Today, the esports industry is worth [several billion dollars globally.]()

So it's worth asking if esports will come to be recognized alongside traditional sports, or even have organized events as part of the Olympic Games?

It's certainly possible. Esports are becoming more popular and have recently been added to the programs of major regional and international competitions. Several esports games have been included as demonstration events at the [Asian Games since 2018]() and were on the official program of the [2023 Asian Games held in Hangzhou, China](). [South Korea won the gold medal]() in the League of Legends competition at these games, which led to Faker getting a [rare exemption from South]()

[Korea's compulsory military service](link). This exemption demonstrates how much recognition esports athletes are getting today in certain countries.

Regarding the inclusion of esports in the Olympics, video games were included as part of the [Olympic Esports Series](link) in 2023. The event is organized by the International Olympic Committee (IOC).

This committee, which explores ways to rejuvenate the image of the Olympic Games and attract new audiences, has also initiated discussions about the [creation of an esports Olympic Games](link).

Career opportunities, but little support infrastructure

Much like traditional sports, the opportunity to get involved in esports isn't reserved exclusively for professional gamers who compete in official events.

As with any competitive event, professional management and support teams are essential for achieving a high performance level.

That means the development of electronic sports has opened up a [vast field of career possibilities](link) for game enthusiasts: as event organizers and managers, specialized journalists, nutritionists, [consultants in mental preparation](link), physiotherapists and even lawyers to organize the relationships between all these actors.

However, despite the popularity and immense potential of electronic sports, Canada lacks infrastructure and programs. This is especially obvious within [educational institutions](link), places which nevertheless have many young fans of this booming industry.

Ideally, infrastructure suitable for esports should include high-performance computers, a dedicated esports room, a support team,

intercollegiate competitions and, above all, an atmosphere that promotes the inclusion and participation of all in esports.

Some post-secondary institutions have created spaces on their campuses dedicated to esports. These spaces contribute to student recruitment. This is the case, for example, of [St. Clair College in Ontario](#) which in 2022 created a brand new space at the cutting edge of technology—with a $23 million budget.

Meanwhile, the University of British Columbia (UBC) invested $100,000 in equipment to create a [lounge dedicated to electronic sports](#).

Other organizations, such as the [Ontario School Esports Associations (OSEA)](#), are actively promoting the integration of an esports program into the school curriculum.

In the near future, if these efforts expand, we can imagine young esports fans will have the chance to turn their passion for video games into a professional career—whether they would compete at high-level competitions or whether they would pursue another career in the video game field.

Players' health

Even with the growth and dazzling popularity the sector has gained in recent years, the picture of esports today is not entirely rosy.

The daily life of professional esports athletes is not easy. Their [schedules](#) are particularly busy and they spend a large part of their day [training](#) or [producing online content](#).

The competitive seasons are particularly demanding and, with some exceptions, most players' careers are very short. In recent years, more

and more players have opened up about their [mental health struggles](link). Others have simply [disappeared from the radar](link) after having made a thunderous breakthrough on the professional scene.

Research and support related to athletes' working conditions will be necessary to ensure that they [do not endanger their health](link) and that they are not exploited by professional teams and leagues.

Prevention and treatment of addiction phenomena

The practice of esports can also have harmful effects on professional players, aspiring athletes or the general public due to excessive play time and/or expenses.

These phenomena are encouraged and exacerbated by the presence of mechanisms or strategies called ["Dark Patterns,"](link) widely used in [certain video games](link).

Dark Patterns can be temporal, encouraging players to invest an extended period of time in playing the game. For example, rewards for progressing in the game can be offered to players who play regularly every day.

Dark Patterns can also be monetary, by maximizing how much players will spend on a game. These expenses include mechanisms allowing players to pay to unlock aesthetic content or additional parts of a game.

Because of these mechanisms, it is essential to monitor and regulate the practices of the video game companies that use them.

Esports are growing

Electronic sports is a relatively recent practice that has grown incredibly over the last 10 years. However, this development has gone largely unnoticed by a large part of the general public.

Esports is nevertheless in a position to offer major events which can easily rival the biggest traditional sporting events in popularity. It would be a mistake to underestimate esports, as it attracts both large crowds and talent.

On the contrary, it is important to support those who aspire to work in this field.

And above all, it is important to take a serious interest in the challenges and problems that esports face today, both in its professional and amateur practice.

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