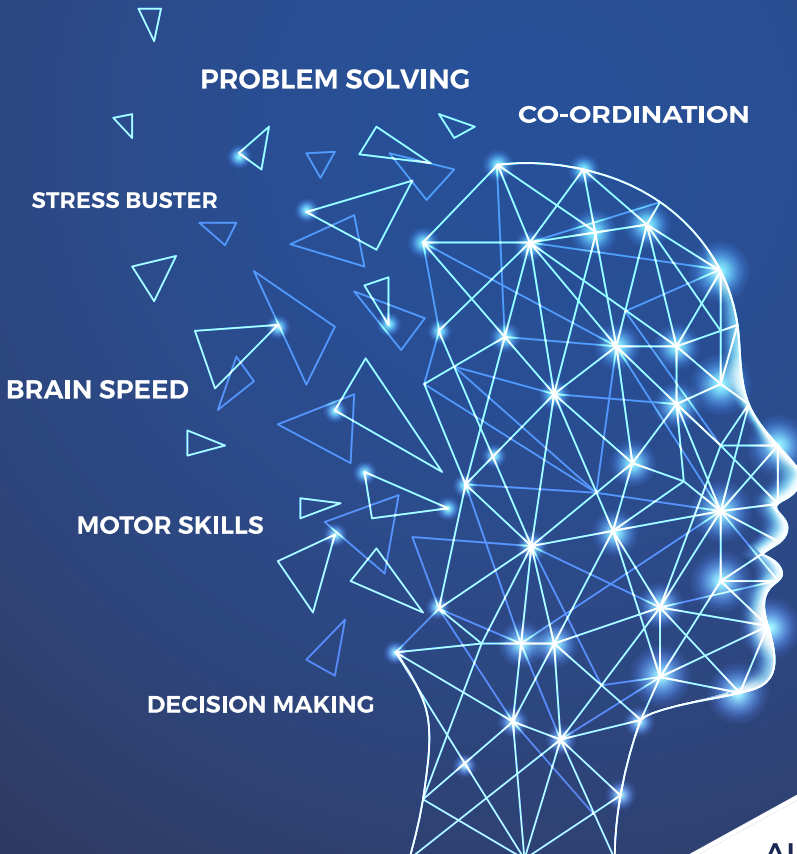


ONLINE GAMES:

A tool for learning & development



AUGUST 2019

INDEX

01

OVERVIEW

02

ONLINE SKILL
GAMES

06

LEARNING &
DEVELOPMENT
BENEFITS OF
ONLINE GAMES

10

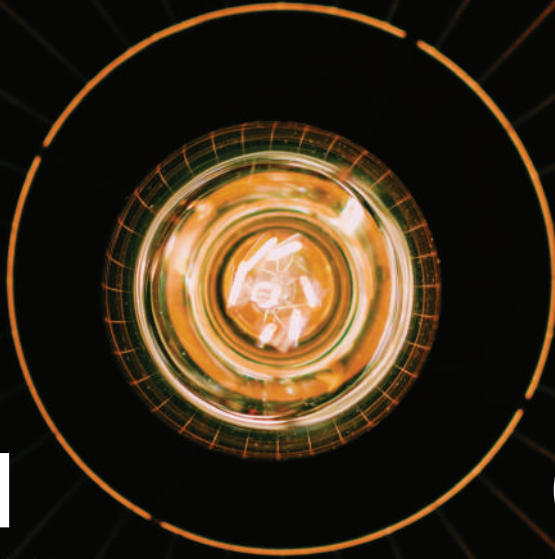
TESTIMONIALS

21

CONCLUSION

25

ABOUT AIGF





01 OVERVIEW

In a dynamic global society, where technology is playing a major part in transforming lives, sport too is seeing its influence. The aim of this report developed by AIGF, is based on expert opinions from the field of education, learning & development, gaming industry & the gamers themselves which will help you make an informed opinion on digital sports gaming* & its role in present day society.

Ever since the first association of digital sports gaming that came into existence in the early 2000s, the sector today sees revenues clocked at US \$906 million, with most global players clocking a healthy double digit growth. A rapidly urbanised Indian society, that sees internet & mobile penetration second to none, sees a robust digital sports gaming community, where organizations in the space have grown 10 times to 250 in a short span of 8 years.

To quantify its emergence as a major sporting discipline, the digital sports gaming market in terms of value will be almost similar to the global media rights of cricket at around US \$2 billion.

India, today sees a social stigma attached to online games. It is far from being the norm. There are three main preconceptions to it; it is unsocial, it is unhealthy, and it is addictive.

Over the course of this report, we will try and address each of the above. As you further dwell deeper into this comprehensive report, you will appreciate that the new-age smart products introduced by the digital sports gaming companies help our young minds build on skills like mind & body coordination, cognitive and social skill development which are relevant and of paramount importance in the new age digital world.

REVENUE



10X GROWTH



VALUE



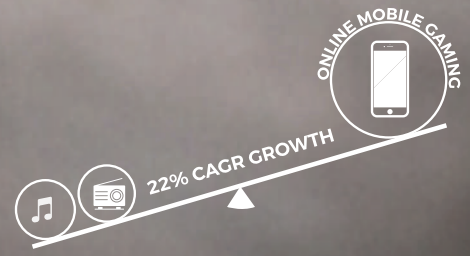
*Digital sports gaming is also referred to as competitive eSports



02

ONLINE SKILL GAMES

According to the report, 'The evolving landscape of sports gaming in India', published by KPMG in 2019, online gaming through mobile devices will become larger than radio and music industries combined in the next few years, growing at a **CAGR of 22%***.



*As per the 'The evolving landscape of sports gaming in India' report, published by KPMG in 2019

Online skill games are not designed to replace physical sports. Nor it disturbs the existing model of the social-cultural norm of outdoor sports.

The millennials breathe in a competitive eSports universe in which digital sports games are far advanced than the old Pong and Pacman.

The new age games are top-notch, sophisticated & demand innate skills to play. The sheer drama & excitement that is seen in any multiplayer battle arena can only be experienced and not described.

The individuals or teams that win consistently have the same set of qualities that are essential to excel in other physical sports.

Qualities like handwork, concentration, teamwork, and communication.

A recent research shows that one fourth of the total internet browser loves to play online games and there are more than 250 million online game players worldwide.

(TechPreyue 2018)



League of the Legends, the world's most popular online game is a global phenomenon. The 2013 finals had attracted more than 32 million eyeballs. That is more the NBA finals and the MLB World series.

TBS, one of the leading broadcasters in the world have decided to air the world tournament of competitive eSports for a game called 'Counter-Strike' on Fridays at 9 pm. Furthermore, NASA did a study around a competitive eSports group to study technology, teamwork, and human performance.



Be it the Madison Square Garden in New York, Staples Center in Los Angeles and the Bird's Nest in Beijing, they all are jam-packed with supporters rooting for their favorite teams.

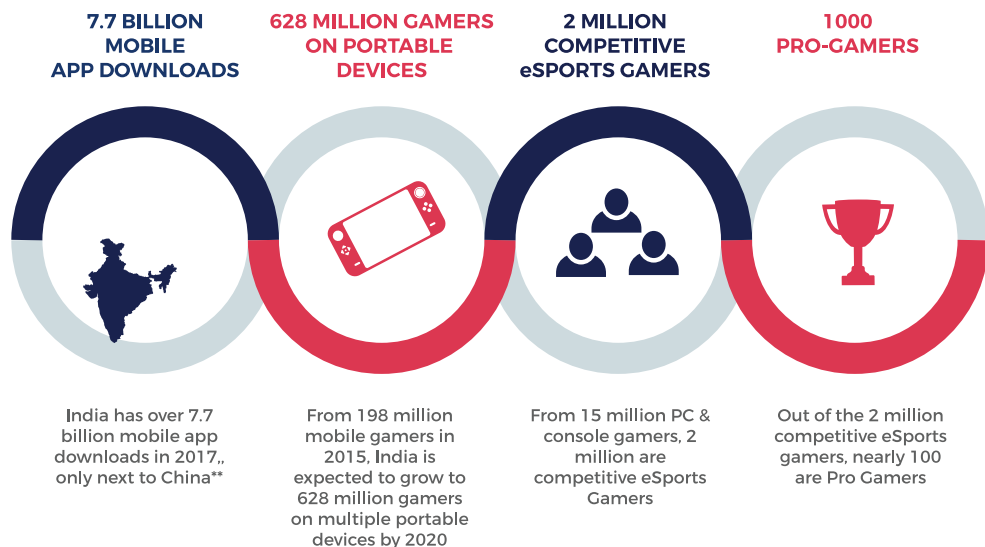
INDIA'S eSPORTS REVENUE TO RISE AT A CAGR OF 56.6%* FOR 2017-2022

According to a report, 'India's Trillion Dollar Digital Opportunity' by McKinsey and Co., in 2017, India has over 7.7 billion app downloads, next only to China. India had 198 million mobile gamers in 2015, and this number is expected to grow to 628 million gamers on multiple portable devices by 2020. Out of those, close to 15 million PC and console gamers in the Country, two million are eSports gamers and nearly 1000 are pro-gamers in India—making PC and console gaming the next step in the evolution of a gamer's life-cycle.

The rapid rise of eSports is being fueled by recurring consumer interest and the increasing attention paid by advertisers and sponsors.

At present, favourable demographics - millions of young consumers with increasing levels of disposable income - are making consumer contribution the largest revenue stream.

Excellent advancements in the field of Artificial Intelligence has allowed the users to have Gainful Entertainment wherein online gaming is now one of the alternative options in their free time and a massive source of entertainment. Online games are now designed with an eye for social connectivity. Integration of chatbots and social messaging in these platforms have allowed people to make new friends and socialize.



*As per 'Global Entertainment & Media Outlook 2018-2022' report by PWC India

**As per 'India's Trillion Dollar Digital Opportunity' by McKinsey and Co., in 2017.

MPL - THE GAME CHANGER

While the online gaming scene in India is booming, Mobile Premier League (MPL) an online multi-gaming portal has been a revolution in the industry since its launch in 2018. With over 39 games on the portal and 25 million registered users, MPL aims to be the marketplace of digital sports gaming in India. Their latest game, MPL Chess Mahayudh which was flagged off by Grandmaster Viswanathan Anand was a mega event with over 300,000 registrations, over 90,000 live players who participated & a total of 1.2 million chess games played over a 12 hour period.



VS RATHANVEL

FIDE Master



Rathanvel, an 18-year-old prodigy from Coimbatore won 253 matches out of 265 to win the tournament as well as the prize money of US \$14,350. The scale of the competition and the massive prize money is a significant step in creating a career in RMGs.



TIRTH MEHTA

India's first ever competitive eSports bronze medallist at Asian Games 2018

India's 23-year-old Tirth Mehta who won the country's first-ever competitive eSports medal; a bronze in the collectible card-based video game tournament at Hearthstone in the 2018 Asian Games is a story of great pride. The inclusion of competitive eSports at the Asian Games is a giant step towards building a healthy digital sports gaming culture in India.

After having become a prominent name in the Indian digital sports gaming market, MPL is now looking to go global. In May, it was announced that MPL is looking to make a foray into the South East Asian market.

“ We are looking to become available in multiple Countries around the world. Like we did this chess tournament in India, we would love to host a global tournament for the sport. ”

Sai Srinivas Kiran G

CEO & co-founder of MPL

(while speaking to Zeebiz.com)

Apart from MPL, there are several other gaming platforms who are on the rise in India. WinZo is a vernacular competitive eSports gaming platform which announced US \$1.5 million funds to support and groom Indian game developers. Paytm First Games and Funlearn are the other major players working in the digital sports gaming space in India.



03

LEARNING & DEVELOPMENT BENEFITS OF ONLINE GAMES

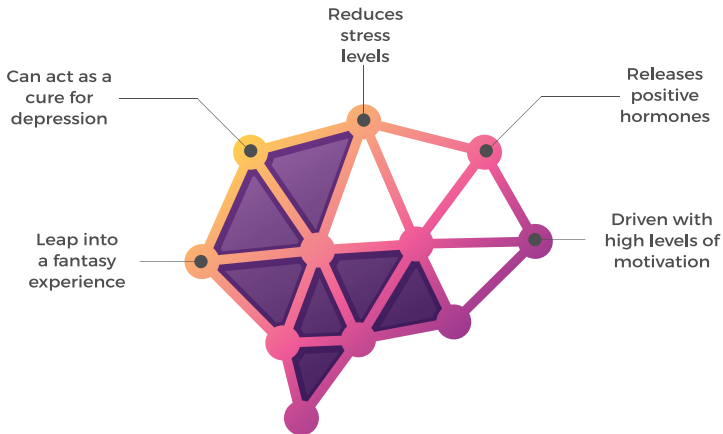
Online gaming is proven to make people sharper and mentally more active. These games have various levels or missions to be completed in limited time which helps the gamers in learning about time management.

One of the primary benefits includes the co-ordination of body and mind. While playing online games, the user learns to co-ordinate their minds with their movements. Thus, while executing these actions, they also develop mental strength.

LEARNING & DEVELOPMENT BENEFITS OF ONLINE GAMES

The study of Syrian refugee children, presented by researchers in 2017 at BAU International University in Washington, DC, suggested that digital games can be a cost-efficient and scalable approach to meeting the educational and psychological needs of refugee children. The researchers concluded that digital games can effectively teach children much-needed skills like learning a new language, cognitive skills, and coding. It also improved their mental health

In the report 'Game-Based Digital Interventions for Depression Therapy: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis', published in 2018, the researchers echoed the idea that online games have the potential of reducing depression and are useful while treating mental disorders. Positive game-playing experiences trigger the release of hormones such as endorphins and striatal dopamine that are responsible for feelings of pleasure and well-being which acts as a cure against depression.



Research suggests that regular players of online games show lower stress levels, with cortisol – one of the primary stress-related hormones – being 17% less in online gamers.

In March 2019, JMIR Mental Health revealed the results of a study that concluded that digital games, like those on smartphones, help in relieving stress after a day's work, more effectively than a fidget-spinner toy.

Economist Edward Castronova believes more and more people are investing in the virtual world because it involves a leap into a fantasy existence, something that humans have apparently been trying to do since the dawn of civilization. He calls it 'a mass exodus to a virtual world and online game environment'.

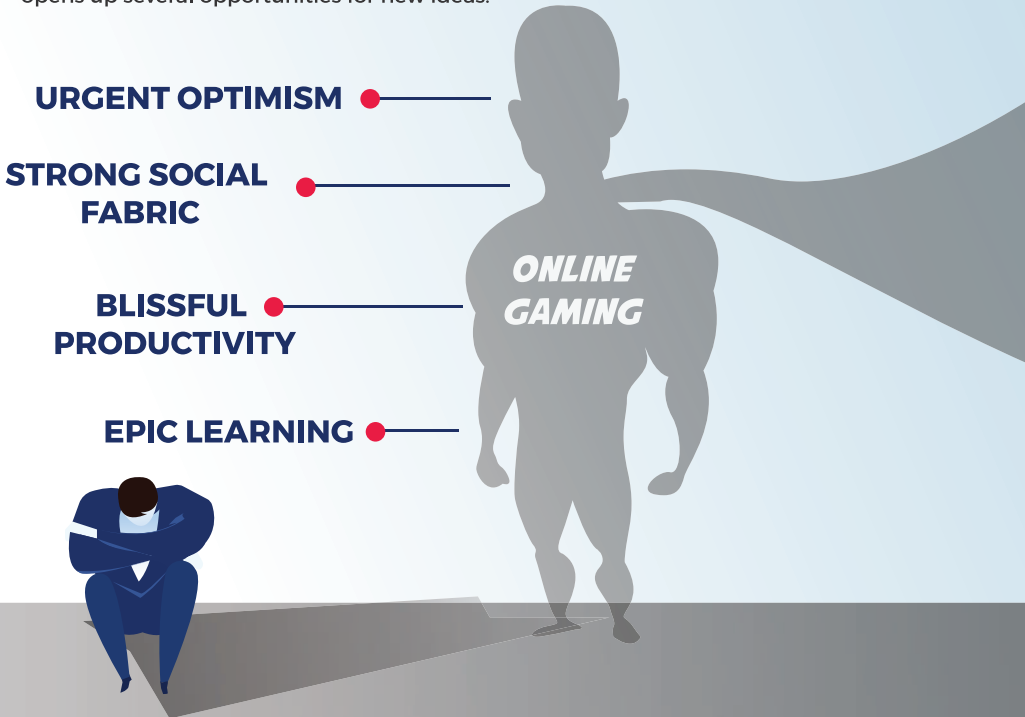
Online gamers are supreme, empowered, powerful and hopeful individuals who are driven with the motivation that they can achieve much more in the virtual world.

4 QUALITIES OF AN ‘ONLINE GAMER’

Jane McGonigal, who is an American game designer and author advocates the use of mobile and digital technology to channel positive attitudes and collaboration in a real-world context. She points out the four qualities that online gamers develop over a period of time that makes them special.

The first one is **Urgent Optimism** which is extreme self-motivation and a desire to act immediately to overcome an obstacle. This optimism comes from within themselves. Which is exactly why gamers don't sit around thinking about a failed attempt. They keep trying. Secondly, gamers have a **strong social fabric**. It is evident that we tend to develop a liking for someone once we have played a game with them. This is because the activity involves trust. The trust of them spending time with you, playing by the set rules, valuing similar goals and staying with you till the game ends. Gamers develop a great sense of bond, trust, cooperation, and relationship.

The third quality is what Jane calls, **'Blissful Productivity'**. Gamers are happier while they are working hard. They are happier trying to solve an impossible puzzle than they are relaxing or just hanging out. The fourth one is termed as **'Epic Learning'**. She explains this quality by citing that the world's second largest Wiki is the Wiki of War of Warcraft which has more than 80,000 articles accessed by more than 5 million people every week. This proves that the gaming community collaborates in learning and that opens up several opportunities for new ideas.



DIGITAL SPORTS GAMING (DSG)

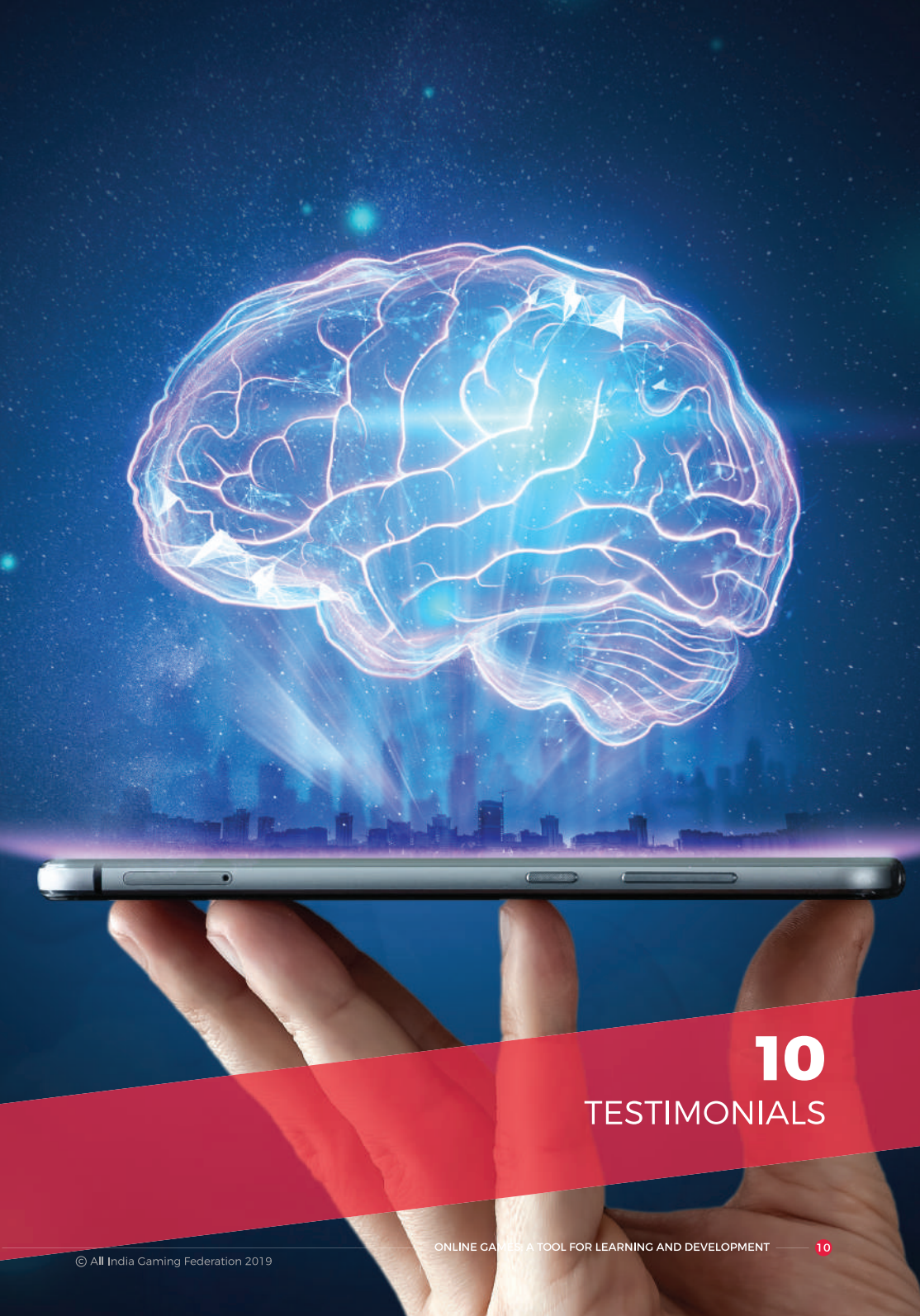
Digital sports gaming doesn't only make better minds and bodies but also have provided a significant number of breakthroughs in tackling learning & development issues. The World Health Organization (WHO) accounts the number of people suffering from depression amounts to a monumental 300 million. India Today reported that a study carried out by WHO, conducted for the NCMH (National Care Of Medical Health) in 2018, states that at least 6.5 percent of the Indian population suffers from some form of a serious mental disorder.

And time and again research has pointed out how gaming helps individuals resolve their learning & development issues. DSGs are designed on two core principles; that you challenge the player and then you reward the player for completing the challenge. The user takes the help of his or her skills to solve the puzzle and after completing it, feels smart, dynamic and feels good about being in control of the environment. This little piece of satisfaction is very rare in somebody suffering from a severe mental condition.

Game developers around the world are designing games around co-operation, communication, and collaboration. This has led to numerous and distinctive gaming communities which not only celebrates the game but also gets people to share their own experiences with other like-minded individuals. These gaming communities are a way of reaching out to others which is exactly the kind of support system someone needs while fighting a learning & development disorder.

To put this into perspective we are lucky that we can use these flourishing and incredibly smart gaming communities to start talking about learning & development and the first step in doing so is acknowledging the many health benefits of online games.





10 TESTIMONIALS

TESTIMONIALS



“

Online games demand a level of innovation that you can only understand if you've excelled at it.

”

ANKUR DIWAKAR

Pro-Gamer & current South Asian Competitive eSports Champion

An auditorium full of people are glued to a giant screen. It is the 2017 National Championships of Pro Evolution Soccer (PES) in Delhi. 93rd minute of a humdinger contest is tied with two apiece. After being two-nil down, Jaunty Tank, and his Real Madrid have scored twice in the last twenty minutes to stay alive in the game. His opposition is the new kid on the block who just defeated the defending champions by three goals heading into this final.

Ankur Diwakar fondly known as Jaunty Tank is a giant in the Country's gaming scene - the 'scene' that he has seen & helped develop. Well-built, cheerful and fiercely competitive, Diwakar specializes in FIFA, a game that he credits to be his calling & purpose.

Diwakar notices Cristiano Ronaldo lurking and pushing the defense line. He makes Gareth Bale cross having visualized what Ronaldo would normally do. Ronaldo barges in to be at the right place at the right time and steers the ball in with a nonchalant header. Goal! "I will never forget that goal. It was not a moment of luck but the knowledge that I have acquired over a career of 15 years. My approach of treating the virtual & real games on par has helped me tremendously"

Professional gaming requires a sense of commitment. It needs preparation, practice and most importantly passion. But this 'Messi from Mira Road' has all these qualities in abundance. 'I started playing, back in 2007. It was just a mere hobby. I used to see my classmates being very good at outdoor sports and thus they hogged the limelight.



I was the shy kind. But gaming allowed me to express myself.” Diwakar pushed his limits when he broke into the college volleyball team & earned his side several accolades and thus began the extraordinary journey of Jaunty Tank. “When I started, the scene was pretty underground & people used to link this to gambling. I am the only one from still around from my generation. Everyone else has quit because there was no recognition, no reward.” He has survived because he seems to have invented his own brand of gaming. If the man has won three national level tournaments in 3 different online games, then he must have cracked the code.

“Online games demand a level of innovation that you can only understand if you’ve excelled at it. Every year, game developers take the bar higher. These games are coded and designed based on real-life actions and events. Which means that the strategies need to be real too. Your emotions, your thought processes and confidence must be real.” This understanding puts him in a league of his own & perhaps the only gamer who drives with a little notebook on his dashboard, a black pen handy to note down a fresh approach.

“I think what changed my life is the confidence gaming gave me. Recognition became my remuneration which is why I could survive the tough years. Post 2011, everything went quiet for a while. I had to get a desk job & abandon gaming. However, shortly thereafter I jumped back in the gaming arena ring because that is where I belonged.”

Diwakar who has been a guest lecturer at several Indian universities has been educating the next crop about shaping a career in gaming. He talks to them about courage and commitment. Two things, he believes are the cornerstone of the business. “I tell them to play to win rather than playing it for the love of the game. And winning involves planning, training, and physical fitness. Serious gamers need to follow a strict regime. Over the years, we have been closing the gap between ourselves the other Asian Countries.

I sincerely believe that the next generation of gamers will be in safe hands if they are made aware of the future opportunities.”

When Diwakar represented India in the 2018 Asian Games, he not only reached a significant milestone but also became a household name. “Competitive eSports being a feature in Asian Games has done wonders for its growth. Like every sport, if online gaming gets its due recognition then the entire demographics will change. India is a thriving market and competitive eSports is an exciting product. Our role is to preserve it, expand its reach to newer audiences & build a socially acceptable gaming culture. When we get there, I can bet you India will be a force to reckon with.”

From an under-confident kid to the undisputed gaming champion, Jaunty Tank’s journey teaches us a little lesson that of sheer hard work and passion. Competitive eSports has helped him carve a niche for himself, and he has done it with a certain amount of panache. “My story is good, but it won’t be great if I don’t continue the good work. I keep a close watch on my diet. My mom is an International Yoga instructor. So, she ensures I stay in good space both mentally and physically.

Also, I have realized that competitive eSports has presented me with an opportunity to showcase my talent, so I never take anything for granted.” As Diwakar prepares for yet another action-packed season he hasn’t forgotten where it all started. “My life changed because of digital sports gaming and I don’t picture myself doing anything else. This my game. This is who I am.”

TESTIMONIALS



“ Globally, competitive eSports has enabled children to connect from different parts of the world and is considered a valuable tool for cognitive development as well ”

FATIMA AGARKAR

Leading Educationist & Founder of KA Education

India's leading educationist, Fatima Agarkar was adjudged Education World's top 50 educators in 2014. She is a recipient of the Giants Group awards for outstanding contribution to education.

She advocates the use of competitive eSports to enhance cognitive skills in children. "Early theorists like Piaget have focused on stages of mental development and the importance of different stage-wise enablement against milestones. This was different from the earlier view that children were 'mini' adults. The strong takeaway was that children think and react differently, and future generations will be using technology a lot more meaningfully. Globally, competitive eSports has enabled children to connect from different parts of the world and is considered a valuable tool for cognitive development as well."

Fatima says that from an educator's point of view, it is important to recognize that children in a class have varied learning abilities & different perspectives. Some children who have gained confidence with their online abilities have translated that into the classroom as well. They are recognized for their innate ability, and not simply because they cannot articulate as efficiently in a group discussion as some of their peers.

Using competitive eSports as a tool to enhance academics is a growing trend in the United States. The National Association of Collegiate Esports (NACE) which started as a non-profit organization of seven colleges just two years ago, has more than 100 member colleges. NACE schools have awarded more than US \$9 million in scholarships and aid for students interested in enrolling in competitive eSports programs in more than 30 colleges and universities in America.



Schools and universities are also investing in competitive eSports arenas fitted with high-end gaming technology to host league tournaments. The University of Akron is opening three dedicated gaming facilities to accommodate its esports programs with more than 90 state-of-the-art gaming PCs and 30 consoles is an example of how focused educational institutes are in incorporating competitive eSports in the education structure.

In the learning process, Fatima points out that problem-solving can be vastly improved by playing competitive eSports. “Given the time-bound nature of these games, decision-making has to be efficient and have to be made on the basis of the challenges faced with algorithms and constant upgrades. The speed of these challenges is also something that will lead children to work out a problem and solve it. Once again, this is brought into a classroom as well when faced with a Math or Scientific question – the ability to work out the problem and solve it with confidence and taking risks”.

Similarly, memory enhancement is another aspect that cannot be ignored. “The rules in competitive eSports are constantly upgraded and therefore it is important to remain alert, but the audio-visual impact of gaming works on their interests and keeps them 'glued' in and this leads to better concentration eventually and keeps them attentive. Additionally, it has been noticed that those children who struggle to 'recall' seem to 'remember' everything when it is presented in the form of a game!

Attention to detail is key to learning behaviour. “Games work on multiple skills and hand-eye co-ordination, and there are several variables to be factored in – especially navigating the site to the next screens, and also use of the keypad. Children have to remain alert to these variations. Multi-tasking becomes imperative as you work as a team and use the audio and visual aspects in the e-version.”

Fatima feels that a lot of these children who do not have well-developed gross motor skills are often not shortlisted in the main team.

In an e format, it is an open field and children often take to these games with confidence and using the comfort of their private space. Thus, they are able to game with others without being singled out. “You gain experience in handling situations and learn from mistakes. Speed enables you to make quick decisions because the objective is to learn and win the game.”

Competitive eSports also helped educators bridge the STEM skills gap by luring in young students with the appeal of cutting-edge technology. So, schools are using it starting from computational thinking routines to science projects, and math games, etc. The best part about this is the technology that enables captured data to be used effectively as it provides great intelligence about the way a child approaches the game, and what can be done to improve it. It is Fatima's belief that competitive eSports enables multi-skill development by connecting children through games.

“Gaming is the fastest growing industry with programmers earning perhaps more than your average MBA. Given its specialization and being lucrative could lead to career progression expansion from creativity, marketing, and product trials. Given the fast-paced nature of gaming, often children have to encounter failures on account of their fellow teammates not being in sync with them as it is controlled online and this enables them also to understand valuable lessons of teamwork, planning strategies that work with each one's strengths, and also thinking through their defeats to emerge as a stronger team.”

TESTIMONIALS



“
A competitive eSports player is a professional gamer who plays for competition rather than for fun or relaxation

”

DR. SANJU GEORGE

Mental Health Expert

Dr. Sanju George is regarded as India's finest psychiatrist. He spent 15 years of his in doing prolific work in the U.K and has now returned home. Regarded as an International expert in gambling addiction, Dr. George's approach to the subject is crystal-clear from his opening comment. "There is very little robust research in this field and findings are inconclusive but throughout this report, the difference between video games and competitive eSports has to be borne in mind – what is being talked about here is competitive eSports, that is, those who 'play' these games for a career."

The major difference he points out between recreational gaming and professional gaming is the phenomenon of 'occupation' attached to competitive eSports that is missing in the former. "A competitive eSports player is a professional gamer who plays for competition, rather than for fun or relaxation."

He further elaborates why competitive eSports must be treated as a real sport. "Electronic sports can be classed as a sport because it includes voluntary, intrinsically motivated activities and the events are organized and governed by rules. It includes competition with the outcome of a winner and a loser and comprises skill. Similar to other traditional sports, the rules of competitive eSport tournaments, judging, and broadcasting can be similar to traditional sports, and professional gamers can be compared to athletes of professional sports (i.e., training, practice, physical and mental state of athletes).



Dr. George feels that playing digital sports games have a positive impact on our cognitive processes. “Gamers appear to have better conscious control of their attention and better processing speed. They exhibit superior cognitive flexibility through improved results on the switching tasks. Also, they show better multisensory temporal processing, that is, the ability to differentiate simultaneous stimuli from consecutive ones, and the ability to decide which stimulus came first when stimuli were presented consecutively.”

After having closely monitored the finding in this field, he states this with certainty that although studies generally showed improved cognitive processes among video game players, due to the quasi-experimental design used, no causal link can be confirmed. “Research has also demonstrated measurable differences between novice and expert game players, the latter group often demonstrating enhanced short-term memory, executive control / self-monitoring, pattern recognition, visual-spatial abilities (e.g., object rotation), and task-switching efficiency, along with more efficient problem-solving skills.”

Dr. George lists out the following benefits of digital sports gaming:

- Many frequent gamers say it has a social angle - games help them connect with their friends.
- Games may have the potential to optimise cognitive performance.
- Competitive eSports can help promote teamwork.
- Players tend to be competitive, focused and goal oriented.
- Games may help players' anxiety levels and can be a source of relaxation.

He also mentions that the impact of digital sports games is not just positive and highlights the other side of the coin. “When it comes to competitive gaming, many players will play excessively and spend many hours every single day either practicing or competing. For many competitive gamers, their whole life is dominated by the activity and may impact on their relationships and family life. This does not necessarily mean they are addicted to playing the games because the excessive game playing is clearly a by-product of the activity being their job. However, it could perhaps be argued that they are addicted to their work.” Talking about the negatives he believes are secondary to a sedentary lifestyle.

Those who engage in competitive eSports need to know that only a tiny percentage of them will be able to become professionals and only very few will be able to make a financially viable career out of it (like of the millions who play cricket, only few will be able to play for India).

“It is crucial to look at the profile of a digital sports gamer, his motivations and the overall cost-benefit ratio. It goes without saying that further research is warranted to shed light on many aspects of digital sports games, particularly in India. It is also important that the benefits and potential effects of competitive eSports should be presented to the players in a balanced and dispassionate way so the players are fully aware.”

TESTIMONIALS



“

Hand-eye coordination, reaction time, decision making skill and our ability to handle pressure are very closely related to online gaming.

”

DR. DIVYA JAIN

Mental Health & Behavioural Science Expert

Dr. Divya Jain is the Head of Psychological Services for the Department of Mental Health and Behavioural Sciences, Fortis National Mental Health Program.

She believes that competitive eSports is largely a game that is played in the mind. Hand-eye co-ordination, reaction time, decision making skill and our ability to handle pressure are very closely related to online gaming.

Dr. Jain understands that different people have different skills sets so it is wonderful that people who have tremendous speed, accuracy and reaction time have a new avenue opened for themselves where they can make the best use of their skills by playing competitive online games.

She explains that gamers need to balance their lives by making sure that other aspects of their lifestyle are looked after. Having a healthy routine of physical activities, a disciplined sleep-cycle and nutritious food should be taken care of.

In terms of skills, she states that the repetitive actions involved in gaming such as concentration, focus, ideation and strategy making are honed while playing. Similarly, there will be an improvement in the reaction time as well.



Dr. Jain who holds a master's degree in Clinical Psychology from the University of Delhi and is a Board-Certified Sport Psychologist from the American Board of Sport Psychology lists out confidence being a factor in the kids who indulge themselves in gaming. "A sense of mastery that we can achieve something in any field helps us build confidence. So for kids who at an early age were maybe not great at other physical sports, online games helped them build that self-confidence. But for that to translate into other social skills, their approach needs to be monitored."

She also advocates the use of online games as a learning tool because the students get an opportunity to interact and engage with the study material. When it comes to learning we must explore all possible options and online games are an interesting option in teaching concentration, focus and the ability to manipulate concepts.

The volume of work that has been put in sports psychology of online gamers has helped us understand a lot about what goes inside the mind of a pro-gamer. Dr. Jain, who specializes in psychological skills training for performance enhancement and mentoring for elite and young sportspersons elaborates the need for sports psychology for online gamers.

"Reading into their autonomic arousals of online gamers and understanding their control of heart rate will give us an insight into their gaming and thus they can overcome issues like performance anxieties."

An Instructor with the American Board of Sport Psychology, Dr. Jain feels that online gaming only becomes an addiction when it starts hampering other aspects of life. "This is someone who's sleep-cycle is getting affected, who is restless and agitated during the hours he or she is unable to play, only then it is a serious issue and needs to be dealt with. Hence it is essential to strike a balance and ensure that online gaming doesn't become an addiction."

TESTIMONIALS



“

Competitive eSports helps improve special cognitive benefits, strategic problem solving, hand-eye coordination and enhances short-term memory.

”

DR. ISHITA PATERIA

Counselling Psychologist & Founder State of Mind -
The Emotional Wellness Centre

Dr Ishita Pateria, a member of the British Psychological Society, Bombay Psychological Association and Counsellors Association of India believes that competitive eSports reduces stress and anxiety and can be used as a medium of relaxation when using it to escape everyday problems. It falls under the umbrella coping mechanism or a mechanism for entertainment. However, she also advises that it can also be a cause for stress and anxiety and therefore has to be played with caution.

“I feel competitive eSports definitely helps people escape or cope. Escapism is significant as it allows the player to reduce stress by distracting him/herself from their stressor in their own comfortable environment. Still, it is important to remember that this escapism is temporary and other coping mechanisms need to be explored to handle the stress better.”

Dr Pateria explains that stress management include skills that an individual uses to alleviate themselves from the stress and tension in their lives. She suggests that one prime way of stress management that can be sharpened during competitive eSports is relaxation. “By using competitive eSports as a distraction, you can let go of regular tensions. It further reduces the unhealthy pattern of overthinking about the problems and decreases the pre-occupation from one’s negative automatic thoughts.”



With more than a decade of clinical experience in the field of mental health including depression, anxiety, phobia and stress management, Dr Ishita further elaborates that interoceptive awareness is the awareness of inner body sensations so that they become available to the conscious awareness. Interoceptive awareness helps maintain emotional balance and increases the capacity of emotional regulation. One way of doing so is through mindfulness-based approaches.

“On one hand higher levels of immersion in games can help the player escape or cope with their own problems, however it can have an adverse effect on the player. It can cause obsessive thoughts, addiction, burnout, anxiety, panic and depression. It can also alienate a person from their social surroundings causing social anxiety.”

“Competitive eSports helps improve special cognitive benefits, strategic problem solving, hand-eye co-ordination and enhances short-term memory. There are negative effects on mental health too and therefore one has to take active measures to keep their mental health in check,” rationalizes Dr Pateria.

Professional competitive eSports teams like Team SoloMid, Fnatic and SK had the service of psychologists and their figure is growing within the field. Dr Ishita describes three core areas where psychologists help the online gaming units to perform better:

Team Building

Sports psychologists try to psycho-educate players and team players on leadership, ways to motivate, and relationship with each other. They must direct teamwork towards common goals. They also assess the team dynamics and see points regarding support, healthy competition and overall aim to keep a healthy environment.

Cognitive Behavioural Training

Through cognitive behavioural training psychologists can target anxiety, depression, preoccupation of the game, obsession, addiction and burnout amongst others. It also targets anger management, confidence and self-esteem to ensure the individual's or teams well-being.

Counselling

One on one counselling is extremely helpful when an individual is unable to play in moderation within limitations. It is also extremely helpful when competitive eSports becomes the only way of coping, escaping and entertainment. The counsellor helps them understand what the role of competitive eSports in their life is and how best to go about it.

Dr Pateria clarifies that the threat of addiction is quite high as one is able to play for unlimited number of hours from the comforts of their own home. “The player soon has to play longer hours to win games or receive the desired results. It is therefore important that the player or the gaming websites keep limitations on how many hours they play, their reasons to play, what other resources they have for entertainment and as coping mechanisms.”



06

CONCLUSION

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We need to appreciate the changes and evolution of society in today's digital world and the emergence of competitive eSports as a formidable coexistent to traditional outdoor sports in the sporting sector of the world. With external factors like a booming Smartphone market, cheap data, better internet connectivity, it is realistic to embrace competitive eSports as a mainstream sport and not influence our judgement by pre-existing false notions.

What is important though is to balance digital sports gaming with other aspects of life. This is where the industry and AIGF have been on top of the issue, that sees some of our leading players like Mobile Premier League (MPL) take a leading role in self-regulation and following the industry best practices.

All India Gaming Federation ("AIGF") with the purpose of self-regulating all games of skill played online in pay-to-play formats ("Online Games of Skill"), follows a charter that lists out the regulatory pointers encompassing all the different aspect of online gaming in India.

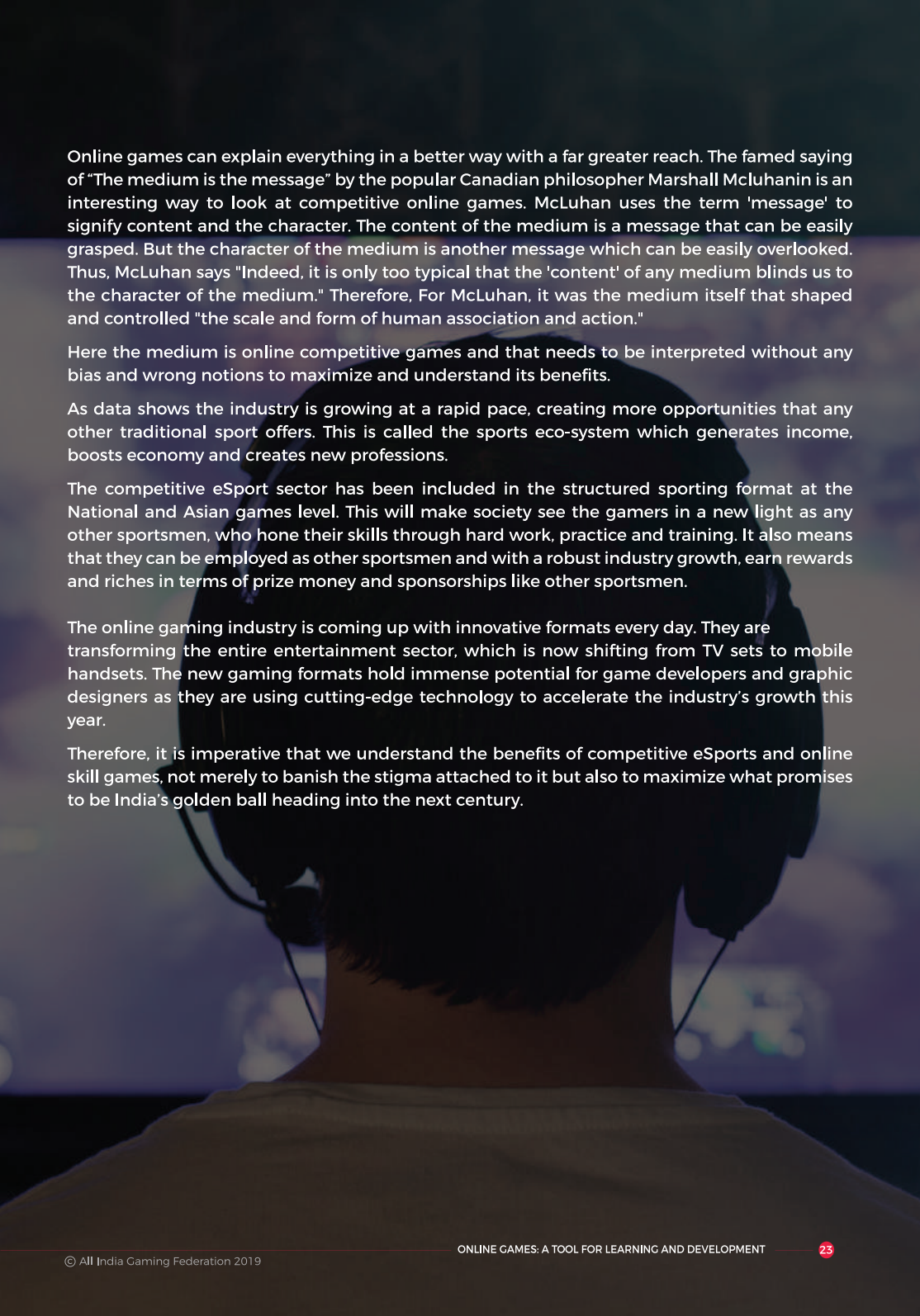
The 16-page document that runs along defining, informing, explaining the various elements and intricacies of digital sports gaming in India is considered to be the cornerstone of the country's online gaming universe.

Along with caution one heartening fact that emerged while developing and researching for this document is the benefits that esports plays towards skill development, mental health, stress reduction and development of relevant social and competitive skills. We are constantly being aided by research that proves the distinct benefits of online gaming in dealing with learning and development issues.

Gaming therapy has been found helpful in treating youth, who are used to interacting with technology almost constantly throughout their day. Introducing games in a counselling or therapy setting involve simply allowing a child to play a game for a short time to relieve stress. Or a mental health professional can ask their patient to play a cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT)-based game, which is designed to challenge users to progress past milestones and collect rewards. CBT games continue to evolve along with gaming technology. (Headstuff 2019)

Researchers and developers have already designed so many games that help to overcome many chronic illnesses and other health issues. They are also instrumental in improving mental health and overcome depression state. These way online games are helping millions of families worldwide who were once clueless about the issue.

As per a report, 'Health Benefits of playing online games' published by Tech Preyue in 2018, a student registered a 12 percent improvement in his memory recall after he had played online games. The report also confirmed that playing games that require problem-solving and which consist of spatially complex tasks can help improve the brain by training the hippocampus. They can help you remember new names or where you last kept your house keys.



Online games can explain everything in a better way with a far greater reach. The famed saying of "The medium is the message" by the popular Canadian philosopher Marshall McLuhan is an interesting way to look at competitive online games. McLuhan uses the term 'message' to signify content and the character. The content of the medium is a message that can be easily grasped. But the character of the medium is another message which can be easily overlooked. Thus, McLuhan says "Indeed, it is only too typical that the 'content' of any medium blinds us to the character of the medium." Therefore, For McLuhan, it was the medium itself that shaped and controlled "the scale and form of human association and action."

Here the medium is online competitive games and that needs to be interpreted without any bias and wrong notions to maximize and understand its benefits.

As data shows the industry is growing at a rapid pace, creating more opportunities than any other traditional sport offers. This is called the sports eco-system which generates income, boosts economy and creates new professions.

The competitive eSport sector has been included in the structured sporting format at the National and Asian games level. This will make society see the gamers in a new light as any other sportsmen, who hone their skills through hard work, practice and training. It also means that they can be employed as other sportsmen and with a robust industry growth, earn rewards and riches in terms of prize money and sponsorships like other sportsmen.

The online gaming industry is coming up with innovative formats every day. They are transforming the entire entertainment sector, which is now shifting from TV sets to mobile handsets. The new gaming formats hold immense potential for game developers and graphic designers as they are using cutting-edge technology to accelerate the industry's growth this year.

Therefore, it is imperative that we understand the benefits of competitive eSports and online skill games, not merely to banish the stigma attached to it but also to maximize what promises to be India's golden ball heading into the next century.

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ABOUT AIGF

The All India Gaming Federation (AIGF) is a not-for-profit organisation, the apex body that focuses on policy advocacy, research and forum for discussion among various stake holders associated with the Online Real Money Skill Gaming industry.

The AIGF is committed to dealing with issues pertaining to the Gaming industry and its stakeholders, through knowledge papers, conferences, events, discussions, press briefings etc. Since its inception in 2016, AIGF has been at the forefront, working with relevant policy makers to demonstrate the benefits of having a regulated gaming market place in India.

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