

Of Digital Games and Dignity: Rationalizing E-Sports Amidst Stereotypes Associated with Gamers

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Abstract : The community of gamers has been at the crux of stigmatization and marginalization by the larger society, resulting in dignity erosion. India presents a unique context where e-sports have recently seen large-scale investments, a massive userbase, and appreciable demand for gaming as a career option. Yet the apprehension towards gaming is salient among parents and non-gamers who engage in the de-dignification of gamers, by advocating the discourse of violence promotion via video games. Even the government is relentless in banning games due to data privacy issues. Thus, the current study explores the experiences of gamers and how they navigate these de-dignifying circumstances. The study follows an exploratory qualitative approach where in-depth interviews are used as data collection tools guided by a semi-structured questionnaire. A total of 25 individuals were interviewed comprising casual gamers, professional gamers, and individuals who are indirectly impacted by gaming including parents, relatives, and friends of gamers. Thematic analysis via three-level coding is used to arrive at broad themes (categories) and their sub-themes. The results indicate that the de-dignification of gamers results from attaching stereotypes of introversion, aggression, low intelligence, and low aspirations to them. It is interesting to note that the intensity of de-dignification varies and is more salient in violent shooting games which are perceived to require low cognitive resources to master. The moral disengagement of gamers while playing violent video games becomes the basis for de-dignification. Findings reveal that circumventing de-dignification required gamers to engage in several tactics that included playing behind closed doors, consciously hiding the gamer identity, rationalizing behavior by idolizing professionals, bragging about achievements within the game, and so on. Theoretically, it contributes to dignity and social identity literature by focusing on stereotyping and stigmatization. From a policy perspective, improving legitimacy toward gaming is expected to improve the social standing of gamers and professionals. For practitioners, it is important that proper channels of promotion and communication are used to educate the non-gamers so that the stereotypes blur away.

Keywords : dignity, social identity, stereotyping, video games

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