

Scoping Review of South Korean Esports Research and Comparison to the Stakeholder Perception

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

In the last decade, 860 research outputs on esports have been published and registered more than 7000 citations on the Web of Science platform alone. The trend has been consistently increasing, with an average annual growth of 1.5-times and 1.9-times for publications and citations, respectively. Despite this rise in interest among academics, esports research is still in its ‘nascency’ and “there are still fundamental questions about how the field is unfolding (Reitman et al, 2019)”; the scene faces ‘unique challenges (Cranmer et al, 2021),’ as ‘many disciplines who never have conversations before (Reitman et al, 2019)’ rapidly join the discourse. However, only avenues of inquiry aligned with certain discipline interests are brought in, leaving many aspects of the complex ecosystem unexplored. This has led researchers to emphasize the need for a more interdisciplinary and holistic approach to realize the potential of esports (Boguslavskaya et al., 2020; Vera & Terrón, 2019; Wood et al., 2019). Furthermore, as esports is often characterized as ‘born digital’ (Scholz, 2019), thus transnational culture, there have been limitations in incorporating regional differences in its understanding. While both the industry and research grow globally, it is becoming clearer that in actual sociocultural context, ‘esports culture or the word itself represents different values; esports, as a phenomenon, is ever-emerging technic-human ensembles or assemblages from the relations with diverse sociocultural, technical, and historical contexts (Jin, 2022). In other words, tendencies in esports research could have also been materialized with socio-cultural contexts and biases, and research on certain esports-related topics might be over/underrepresented across cultures. But which topics are worth further exploration or have been inadequately accounted for? A comparison of stakeholders’ perceptions of what needs to be explored with the actual representation of these topics in the existing literature could point researcher teams toward more valuable directions.

This could be tackled by a meta-scientific approach. In the present (ongoing) study on South Korean esports research, we will simultaneously: (1) conduct a scoping

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(systematic) review of the scientific outputs by researchers based in South Korea and extract and categorize the topics of the outputs; (2) administer a survey in a sample of stakeholders (i.e., esports players, coaches, researchers, sponsors, audiences, fans, etc.) and categorize their preferences. Afterward, the outputs of the two processes will be compared (i.e., the discrepancy between what has been studied and stakeholders' interests will be examined) and potential pathways for future research will be suggested.

A search was conducted in Korean Citation Index (KCI) with keywords of 'esports' or 'e-sports' or '이스포츠' or 'e스포츠' or 'e-스포츠'. At the current stage, 86 articles (out of an initial result of 755 articles by March 2019) have been selected for analysis are being coded; the more recent articles published up until 2021 will be added to the corpus for further analysis. The systematic review will provide a general overview of the regional esports research and thus reveal the different tendencies compared to previous similar analyses on English language studies.

The present study focuses on the South Korean context since South Korea represents one of the regions that significantly influenced the development of the modern esports format from the late 90's and remains one of the leading players in the scene today. At the same time the region where the academic discourse has been kept mostly within the nations' boundaries and has not been shared sufficiently, owing to linguistic constraints. However, at the same time, the results and the methodology (which will be publicly available) could provide food for thought for researchers worldwide and inspire further (replication) studies on this topic. In the long run, such an initiative could help shape esports research, with a special focus on its interdisciplinarity and cross-cultural differences.

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