

# Silver gaming in Poland. The margin or the future of the gaming industry?

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## INTRODUCTION

The gaming culture and communities are in constant change. One of the facets of that transition is visible in sociological and demographical indicators. The number of older (or silver) gamers has been steadily rising over the last decades (Dale, Shawn Green 2017). In 2019, the AARP organization explored the gaming habits and attitudes of Americans aged 50 plus. The conclusions suggest that the inclusion of older citizens into gaming culture will continue, changing the state of the gaming industry (Nelson-Kakulla 2019). And the process is not limited to North American society. In 2017 ISFE (The Interactive Software Federation of Europe) with Ipsos agency deduced similar findings from European markets, concluding that there “is evidence of a growing appetite for gaming across a whole range of age and gender groups” (ISFE 2017). Yet, there are still European countries with limited studies on silver gamers, including Poland. Therefore, in my research, I focused on Polish society.

I derived the idea of studying the silver gaming phenomenon in Poland from the simultaneous occurrence of two macrosocial processes: the process of population ageing (“demographic factor”) (United Nations 2020) and the process of ludification of culture (“cultural factor”) (Lammes 2015). Their mutual occurrence seemed to create prerequisites for video games' popularization among older citizens, including Polish citizens. Moreover, the limited quantitative data supported this theoretical assumption (ISFE 2012), though the lack of in-depth knowledge on this topic is conspicuous.

To fill this knowledge gap, I designed and conducted an exploratory qualitative study on gaming practices among Polish citizens aged 60 plus who played video games on any hardware platform at least once a week in the last six months. The study included personal, family, educational and institutional contexts to achieve a holistic approach typical of the sociological perspective. To gain in-depth insights and a better understanding of the gaming habits of Polish senior citizens, I performed ten open-ended and unstructured interviews. An equal number of open-ended and unstructured interviews were conducted among experts (mostly media education and NGO representatives with knowledge or experience in the use of games or digital media in training aimed at older people) to expand the perspective to educational and institutional contexts. The data was analysed in a mixed coding procedure, including concept-driven coding and data-driven coding (open coding), in MaxQDA 2020. As a result, the coding book consisted of more than 1200 transcript segments, allowing an in-depth understanding of the gathered data and the research problem. Both research

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groups were selected according to the principles of purposive sampling method. The sampling method, combined with the qualitative and exploratory nature of the study, does not allow the conclusions to be extrapolated to the general population of the country. At the same time, such a design of the study provided in-depth insights into the daily practices of Polish silver gamers. The interviews with silver gamers covered such topics as:

- 1) the evolution of media practices (the transition from the use of traditional media to digital media, including digital games);
- 2) ways of participation in the culture of digital games;
- 3) the role of peer groups, family and institutions in the development of the passion for digital games at later stages of life;
- 4) relationships maintained or established through gaming;
- 5) subjectively perceived benefits and risks of gaming.

Whereas the expert interviews sought information on, among other things:

- 1) experiences and plans for using digital games in the training of older citizens;
- 2) opinions on the use of digital games in institutions for seniors;
- 3) possible ways of popularising silver gaming among Polish population.

The main results provide a better understanding of silver gamers in Poland, who usually:

- 1) implement the restricted type of gaming pattern that is limited to the ludic aspects of video games, ignoring their educational or social potential;
- 2) suffer stagnation related to their gaming competencies and experiences, thus limiting the chance for development both as gamers (enrichment of gaming capital) and older citizens (social inclusion through digital technologies);
- 3) have limited interest in social features of games that are encouraging intergenerational and intrageneration gaming;
- 4) might be unconsciously exposed to the negative gaming scheme described as “gaming disorder” in WHO’s ICD-11 classification (WHO 2020);
- 5) suffer lack of proper support from families, institutions or state authorities.

Detailed explanations of the mentioned findings will be provided during the conference presentation. To conclude, in Poland the potential of silver gaming is still untapped, and numerous actions on several levels have to be done to release it. Above all, these actions should aim to disseminate a more holistic approach to games among older citizens and representatives of institutions, which takes into account the positive and negative potential of this medium for the health and social functioning of silver gamers.

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