

# Playing with Diplomatic Culture: A Comparative Study of Esports Policies in South Korea and Brazil

Ian Bacellar  
Universidade Federal da Paraíba, Brasil  
ian.ham.bacellar@gmail.com  
0009-0000-0033-4623

Tarcízio Macedo  
Universidade Federal Fluminense  
Fundação Oswaldo Cruz, Brasil  
tarciziomacedo@gmail.com  
0000-0003-3600-1497

**Received:** February 17, 2025

**Accepted:** June 11, 2025

## Abstract

This article proposes an analysis of public policies aimed at electronic sports (esports) as a tool for cultural diplomacy in South Korea and Brazil. Its objective is to determine whether esports are used by these states as a foreign policy resource to achieve absolute gains in the international sphere, based on a qualitative analysis of data obtained from South Korean and Brazilian legislation on the subject. The corpus consists of 50 documents addressing this theme, retrieved from the official websites of the South Korean and Brazilian governments. Among the main findings, the South Korean government's consolidated approach to esports stands out. In contrast, Brazil lacks a public policy consensus regarding the subject. However, some international public prestige gains are achieved, even though the state's foundations regarding esports remain incipient. This study presents originality by exploring potential connections between the field of International Relations and the universe of electronic sports, a growing expression of contemporary youth culture.

**Keywords** *Esports, Foreign policy, Cultural diplomacy, Brazil, South Korea*

## 1. Introduction

As a consequence of the recurring crises of capitalism, the COVID-19 pandemic intensified market concentration processes and the commercialization of gaming. Although impacted, the gaming industry took advantage of the global crisis as an opportunity to reinvent itself, gain social legitimacy, and demonstrate its resilience in a pandemic scenario marked by uncertainty. Major companies in the video game and esports industries thrived during this period. In particular, esports experienced a moment of prominence and a unique opportunity for social self-affirmation.

Several authors discuss concepts to define the phenomenon of esports. Wagner (2006) states that they are a field of sports activities in which people develop and train physical or mental skills using Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs). Macedo (2023a), on the other hand, contributes to the construction of the concept by highlighting the importance of understanding esports more broadly than is commonly discussed in the academic mainstream. He argues that not only the professionalized practice of digital games should be considered esports, but other forms should also be included, such as amateur, recreational (casual), community, and university competitions.

The fact is that esports are now a global phenomenon with varied repercussions and appropriations across different parts of the world (Jin, 2021), depending on socioeconomic contexts,

geopolitical projects, and the interests of game developers, countries, and controlling groups. Within this context, the central question guiding this study is: are esports used as a tool of foreign policy? Our intention is to verify the existence of a strategy based on international gains<sup>ii</sup> through esports in two countries with very different realities in this practice: South Korea and Brazil.

A key motivation for this research emerged from the perception that sports practices, undeniably recognized within the cultural spectrum of states, serve as vehicles for executing foreign policy. The Qatar FIFA World Cup 2022, for example, represents the culmination of a long-term process in which Gulf nations have invested in sporting events and mega-events, sponsored franchises, companies, and various sports clubs, and purchased major football clubs as part of sophisticated geopolitical strategies (Koch, 2018).

Against this backdrop, this study is justified by the growing relevance of the digital gaming industry and, especially, the rise of esports as a form of sociocultural expression for a wide range of actors. This is further reinforced by the fact that, at the intersection of Communication and International Relations studies on culture and foreign policy constitute a growing field, yet there is a scarcity of works that specifically analyze esports, particularly as a potential tool of state foreign policy.

The central objective of this research, therefore, is to assess whether South Korea and Brazil adopt international success in esports as part of their cultural diplomacy strategy. To this end, the specific objectives include: (1) contextualizing cultural diplomacy as a tool of foreign policy; (2) analyzing Brazilian and South Korean legislation regarding esports practices; and (3) identifying the absolute international gains these countries have achieved through esports. Using a comparative case study method, we aim to examine the public policies of Brazil and South Korea related to esports and their consequences on the international stage. The collected data were classified into five categories (alliances and partnerships; global development; economic integration; innovation and technology; public prestige) to determine whether they are in any way related to foreign policy gains.

The study is structured into six sections. Initially, we provide a contextualization of esports, followed by a theoretical framework that seeks to structure the study's argument. The fourth section discusses the methodology used in this research, while the following section presents the results of each case analysis and a synthesis of the findings. Finally, the last section presents the concluding remarks.

## **2. Brief context of esports**

Esports have a long history worldwide. Some of the earliest video game competitions were documented in Asia, North America, and Latin America, in countries such as Japan, the United States, and Brazil. Since then, the development of arcades and the first home consoles during the 1980s has increasingly fueled the popularity of video game competitions. Taylor (2012) points to a pivotal shift in the competitive aspect of gaming experiences with the implementation of a user score ranking system.

Since then, arcade and console competitions have expanded into Local Arena Network (LAN) groups, incorporating new styles based on fighting and shooting games into the competitive scene.

To understand the popularization of these practices, it is essential to consider the emergence of cultural manifestations stemming from a new social structure, driven by the development of information technology, particularly the internet. This accelerated globalization enabled individuals from all regions of the world to interact through digital screens. Castells (2000), for example, referred to this new organizing structure as the "network society," while more recently, authors like Van Dijck, Poell, and De Waal (2018) have identified a new transformation called the "platform society."

Furthermore, the growth of the gaming industry is directly linked to the increasing access of new devices for consuming gaming experiences, driven by the widespread use of smartphones, computers, streaming platforms, and consoles. This dynamic has significantly expanded the number of potential digital game consumers. Looking at the financial figures of the gaming industry and ecosystem also helps illustrate the scale this market has reached in the global economy. It is now a well-established fact that this sector has become the largest entertainment industry, surpassing revenue from television, film, and music.

Within digital games, however, esports still represent a relatively small portion of total revenue, surpassing the US\$1 billion mark only in 2020 – small when compared to the +US\$100 billion of the digital games sector in its entirety (Newzoo, 2020). Despite this, esports have gained immense popularity in many regions, including Brazil. Historic sports entities such as Clube de Regatas do Flamengo, Sport Club Corinthians Paulista, and renowned Brazilian football athletes have already participated in the esports ecosystem by sponsoring professional teams (Newzoo & Esports Bar, 2018). Gradually, esports are securing a prominent place within the gaming industry, becoming relevant elements in contemporary entertainment, leisure, the market, culture, and politics.

Beyond fans, esports events involve several other key players. Among them are major technology corporations that act as sponsors for both competitions and professional teams, which are composed of professional players, known as pro-players, who compete in tournaments. Additionally, there are presenters, commentators, tournament organizers, and coaching staff who contribute to the structure of the competitive scene.

### **3. Foreign Policy and National Interests**

Foreign policy or a state's external policy, according to Figueira (2017), is a set of actions undertaken by a state in the international arena. It not only reflects the country's intended interests or its global conduct but should also encompass strategies for the state's engagement in various spheres of international life. To achieve foreign policy objectives, states seek to obtain gains and define their interests in terms of individual benefits (Grieco, 1988). Cai (2011) establishes that the pursuit of absolute gains is one of the key focuses of contemporary neoliberal's foreign policy and

defines it as the assessment of the benefits of an international action, measuring its overall effect, considering dimensions such as power, security, economy, and culture.

According to Pinto (2011), following contemporary theoretical approaches in International Relations, five areas can be identified where a state may direct its foreign policy to achieve absolute gains: (i) the institutional field of alliances and partnerships; (ii) governance capacity for global development; (iii) economic integration; (iv) innovation and technology; and (v) public prestige. Table 1 provides a more detailed overview of the activities related to each of these fields.

**Table 1: Spheres of Absolute Gains in Foreign Policy**

<b>Spheres of Absolute Gains in Foreign Policy</b>	<b>Description</b>
Alliances and partnerships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintenance of the State's commitment to international institutions;</li> <li>• Renewal of alliances with traditionally partner States.</li> </ul>
Global development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provision of support for the socioeconomic development of poorer countries.</li> </ul>
Economic Integration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Meet the State's commercial needs;</li> <li>• Reduce barriers and facilitate cooperation with other States in Strategic sectors.</li> </ul>
Innovation and technology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure access to contemporary and sustainable technology</li> </ul>
Public prestige	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Influencing international Perception of the State through unofficial diplomatic actions.</li> </ul>

One constant goal of a country is the formulation of a foreign policy that relies on the attainment of power. Although it is a highly contested concept, for Joseph Nye (2011) power can be broadly understood as the ability to influence others to achieve desired outcomes. It is important to add, as well, that no one is able to possess it because power is constantly contested and is an intrinsic component of social relations, which can be circumscribed in the form of cultural or political hegemony (Digeser, 1992).

There is one particular form of power, coined as soft power by Nye (2004), that is based not on coercion – like classic forms of power, materialized by expansionist empires through coercion, for example –, but on a seductive articulation of institutions, standards of living, customs, cultures, or ideologies that seeks to co-opt people or entities into wanting to be like them rather than forcing them to do so (Martinelli, 2016; Nye, 2004).

Despite appearing to be abstract, soft power allows a state to achieve its external objectives from the moment other countries desire to follow it, admiring its values, copying its example, and aspiring to the same level of its prosperity, openness, and freedom (Nye, 2014). A clear example of the effectiveness of this strategy can be seen in patterns exported by the United States, such as the famous American Way of Life – disseminated during the post-World War II period in the 20th century. In addition to generating a positive image for the country on the international stage, the model results in billions of dollars annually spent on consumer goods by those who are inspired by this standard of living (Martinelli, 2016).

To mention not only a Western case, other good example can be observed in the case of China and its Confucius Institute. While the country faces a position of distrust among the public opinion of many people in the Western world – largely due to historical and political legacies from the Cold War period and the current disputes against the US – the presence of the Confucius Institute in 146 countries (Confucius Institute, 2025), including Western powers such as Brazil, the United States, and Switzerland, represents a measure of Chinese soft power. This is because, through these institutions, people who once knew nothing about China – or worse, held a negatively stereotyped view of the country – now have the opportunity to learn its language and cultural customs, often in a way that is financially and logistically accessible.

#### **4. Cultural Diplomacy Strategies: Sports as a Foreign Policy Tool**

One way to build a foreign policy that aims to earn soft power among the international sphere is with cultural diplomacy strategies, which constitute the exchange of cultural aspects between nations and their people to ensure mutual understanding. We understand, as Macedo & Falcão (2019), that esports constitute a mixed phenomenon spanning the fields of entertainment, communication, and sports, establishing themselves as an element of contemporary digital culture. With this in mind, esports become a fruitful practice to the development of cultural diplomacy.

According to Mark (2009), cultural exchange, including the interchange of individuals between distinct countries, helps open effective communication channels between two or more nations. Goff (2013) argues that properly applied cultural diplomacy can tell a different story about a country<sup>iii</sup>, explain aspects of a culture that would otherwise be incomprehensible to the outside world, and establish agreements that traditional diplomacy would not achieve. Among the objectives of cultural diplomacy, highlighted by Fan (2010), are the redefinition of national identity, the integration of political, cultural, economic, and sports activities into the image of the State, the promotion of national interests on the international stage, and, ultimately, the strengthening of a positive national image abroad.

Within the cultural sphere, sports are considered an effective means of interaction between countries, as many of their disciplines transcend borders and are practiced, watched, and valued by a plurality of individuals. The universal nature of sports introduces them as an effective tool for cultural diplomacy (Dubinsky, 2019).

However, the public prestige sought through the sports sector may be limited due to multiple factors. As argued by Haut et al. (2017), success in a particular sport is only valued in countries where that practice is common or appreciated. Conversely, it may be considered irrelevant in nations where the sport is neither traditionally practiced nor valued. Furthermore, aspects such as respect for rules, the promotion of fair play, and sports events marked by memorable stories can significantly impact a country's international image, either positively or negatively.

Although the discussion regarding the classification of esports within the realm of sports practices remains contested (Macedo, 2023a; Taylor, 2012), the phenomenon shares a certain universality, as

mentioned aboveiv. This is evident, as video gaming has become one of the most significant cultural industries in the world in recent years (Jin, 2010; Taylor, 2012), even featuring international competitions between different nations.

For example, in 2012 and 2013, the Chinese government demonstrated its intention to compete with South Korea in the esports sector by hosting the World Cyber Games (WCG), which at the time was one of the largest esports competitions in the world. Beneath the surface of this initiative, China displayed the power of its audience to the world and diverted public attention from recent scandals involving China's role in the global technology industry. These widely publicized cases included allegations of labor exploitation and precarious working conditions in factories (Szablewicz, 2016).

From this perspective and within this context, taking the Chinese case as an example, this study seeks to examine the Brazilian and South Korean contexts regarding the use of esports — by public authorities — as a strategic tool to achieve desired political, economic and cultural interests. To this end, we employ absolute gains theory in foreign policy as an analytical framework, along with the concept of cultural diplomacy, to classify and analyze the results obtained by both countries in their esports initiatives.

## 5. Methodological Procedures

The overall process applied in this study was, firstly, through a bibliographical research to understand the local context of Brazil and South Korea in the development of their esports scenario. In parallel, we also observed how the governments approached its sports (and esports) scenario in their foreign policy strategies, finding the concept of cultural diplomacy. After that, we conducted a documental research in the laws and regulations of Brazil and South Korea regarding esports, as detailed in this section. Lastly, we compared results achieved by both countries in the most important international competitions of the most watched esports games until 2023.

The strategy used to operationalize the research was the comparative case study (or multiple case study), an approach that involves observing a pattern of occurrences between two or more cases, aiming to compare different realities under the same conditions and theoretical frameworks in order to understand the context of each case (Yin, 2001). The subjects of this study, therefore, are the Brazilian and South Korean foreign policies and their relationship with esports.

The choice of these particular two countries is justified by the following facts: i) South Korea is widely known by its success in many esports titles, gathering some of the best players in the world, and seems to have a well structured environment to sustain local championships and form new successful players; ii) Brazil, on the other hand, appears to have international success in some titles, but not as hegemonic as South Korea, while its internal esports ecosystem appears to be more fragile in terms of infrastructure; iii) both countries have very different settings – geographical dimension, cultural aspects about gaming and population scale, for example. We think that by analyzing how the official government institutions approach the phenomenon can give us a hint about their international

performance and the absolute gains earned through their cultural diplomatic strategies (if they exist in this field).

The data collected were interpreted based on their classification into one of the following variables: 1) institutionalization – which institutions are responsible for the governance of esports in the country; 2) regulation – the set of national or regional policies surrounding the topic of esports; 3) economic integration – signs of economic cooperation between different institutions, groups and individual actors that permeate the esports scenario in each country; 4) international advertising strategies – official initiatives from the government that aim to advertise the local esports ecosystem to the world abroad; and 5) public prestige – unofficial actions that in any way gather prestige for the country through esports competitions. The choice of these five categories was based on the interpretation of the arguments in defense of absolute gains by Pinto (2011), as well as Cai (2011), addressed in the previous section and adapted to the context of esports and the concept of cultural diplomacy.

In addition, the analysis technique applied is of a documentary nature. To access official documents related to the legislative issues analyzed in the research, institutional websites of both countries were consulted: for Brazilian laws, the websites of the Federal Senate, the National Congress, and the Chamber of Deputies; for South Korean laws, the official website of the Ministry of Government Legislation and the Korean Legislation Research Institute. This stage was conducted between March 2 and 9, 2023. The survey used the keyword "esporte eletrônico", (for the portuguese websites) and "esports" (for the Korean websites in English) in the advanced search system of each selected website, without time period restrictions, including all types of documents (articles, laws, propositions, bills, and other related documents) in progress or completed. A total of 31 cases were found in Brazil, of which 27 documents and articles relevant to the research were analyzed. In South Korea, 20 results were found, of which 8 were analyzed as they were related to the topic. All documents that only addressed conventional sports were excluded.

During the bibliographic research phase, we identified that the agencies involved with the topic were distinct in both countries. Therefore, we searched for the same term "esports" with its Portuguese, English, and Korean variations on the websites of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MRE) of Brazil and the Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism of South Korea in order to find diplomatic measures related to the topic. The search on the Brazilian website yielded 7 results, of which only 2 were relevant to the topic and were analyzed. The Korean website, on the other hand, provided 91 results, of which only 13 were relevant to the research and, therefore, were analyzed.

For obtaining information on state laws in Brazil, we searched for the keywords "esporte eletrônico," "e-sports," "esport," and "prática eletrônica esportiva" on the websites of the state assemblies and the "state laws" and "municipal laws" query repository, using the same filter specifications as for the search of national laws. Quotation marks were used to specify the terms searched in the search systems. As discussed in the results, the national government and the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism centralize the regulations about esports in South Korea, thus, the search for province laws was not applicable to their case.

## 6. Presentation and Analysis of Results

### 6.1. Institutionalization

South Korea was one of the first countries in the world to institutionalize the practice of esports (Taylor, 2012). In a survey conducted by Thiborg (2009), only a few European and Asian countries had actors dedicated to organizing digital sports, with the Korea eSports Association (KeSPA) being a pioneering case. Currently, the organization has been working behind the scenes of the main esports leagues in the Asian country for over 20 years, strengthening its foundation through government support from the Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism.

Beyond the ministry, South Korea's government view on digital games and the global role of the country in the sector is unified. In 2001, South Korean President Kim Dae-jung spoke at the opening of the WCG in Seoul, seizing the opportunity to express his expectations regarding how the event could support the global recognition of the country in the gaming and ICT industries, as well as "help passionate gamers around the world exchange information and build friendships" (Sung-Jin, 2001 in Taylor, 2012, p. 22).

Brazil, on the other hand, does not have the same level of unity among the agents that make up the national esports landscape. However, this has not prevented some attempts at institutionalization over the years. The "Confederação Brasileira do Desporto Eletrônico" v (CBDEL) and the "Confederação Brasileira de Games e Esports (CBGE)vi, for example, are some initiatives trying to establish themselves as official representatives and national entities administering esports, although their positions are widely contested by the country's main developers and teams (Falcão et al., 2023). Still, both organizations are private and nonprofit entities and display the national certification of the Ministry of Citizenship, represented by the Special Secretariat for Sports and the Secretariat of High Performance Sports, as the administrators of Brazilian sports.

However, the main esports teams and organizers in Brazil do not recognize the legitimacy or competence of CBDEL, CBGE, or any other national entity to regulate or oversee the practices of this modality in the country. By observing the response letter from the Brazilian Esports Ecosystem to Bill 383/2017 (Falcão et al., 2023), one of the first attempts at regulation by the State, as well as controversial cases involving disagreements between these actors and CBDEL, it is possible to observe the discrediting of these organizations by such agents.

In addition, the speech of Brazil's former Minister of Sports, Ana Moser, in an interview with the UOL news portal in January 2023, reveals a contradictory institutional view in the country regarding the legitimacy of digital games as a sports practice. At the time, she commented on the exclusion of esports from the definition of sports in the "Plano Nacional do Desporto (PND)vii". In her statements, the Minister said:

*"The text [of PND] is there protecting the true sport. In the definition of sport an opening had been given that could include electronic sports, and we closed this definition to not take that risk. [...] In my opinion, electronic sports is an Entertainment industry, it is not sport" (Moser in UOL Esporte, 2023, on-line, translated by the authors).viii*



Although the argument that esports are a form of entertainment is not entirely incorrect, the activity is not limited to this aspect. There is a consensus in game studies that understands esports as both sports products and entertainment media, resulting from a process of rulemaking and discipline within digital games (Jin, 2010, 2021; Macedo, 2023b; Taylor, 2018; Wohn & Freeman, 2020). The interpretation put forth by the former minister, therefore, restricts the understanding of esports as a holistic and multidimensional media ecosystem (Macedo, 2023a; Wohn & Freeman, 2020).

During that same occasion, the former minister generated discontent within the Brazilian gaming community by stating that she does not consider esports to be a sports modality, comparing the preparation of a video game athlete for a competition to that of an artist for a performance. By affirming that she did not intend to direct investments toward the sector, Ana Moser contributed to the perpetuation of an institutional perspective that increasingly distances Brazil from the debate on public policies and investments in esports.

## 6.2. Regulation

The years 2006 and 2012 marked significant advancements in legislation surrounding esports in South Korea. The Game Industry Promotion Act (2006) and, most notably, the Act on Promotion of E-Sports (2012) formalized various obligations of the South Korean government regarding the emerging industry. The latter consists of 18 articles covering topics ranging from the responsibilities of the federal and local governments in relation to esports and their promotion (Articles 4 and 5) to the conditions for funding and the professionalization of qualified personnel (Articles 8 and 10), making it a comprehensive legislative tool to prevent legal issues in the following years.

Furthermore, the Act on Promotion of E-Sports, as well as Article 10 of the Game Industry Promotion Act, establishes the South Korean government's interest in fostering and encouraging the competitiveness of South Korean esports on the international stage, as well as promoting exchanges with other countries, as stated in the following excerpt:

*“Article 14 (Assistance in International Exchange and Overseas Publicity) (1) In order to invigorate international exchanges of e-sports, the Government may provide necessary assistance to the following institutions: 1. The International e-Sports Federation; 2. An institution or organization, the capital of which is partially funded by the Government. [...]. (2) In order to enhance the competitiveness of domestic e-sports and invigorate the expansion of overseas markets, the Government may implement programs for overseas publicity.” (Act on Promotion of E-Sports, 2012).*

This article highlights the government's intention to use esports as an international publicity tool to secure benefits such as the expansion and strengthening of the sector in foreign markets, effectively constituting a South Korean foreign policy measure through esports.

In the Brazilian context, on the other hand, there have been some attempts by the state to regulate the practice. One notable example is Senate Bill (PL) No. 383/2017, introduced by Senator Roberto Rocha from the Partido Social Democrata Brasileiro<sup>x</sup> (PSDB / State of Maranhão), which aimed to regulate esports activities in Brazil. The proposal, led by CBDEL in an attempt to take over the administration of esports in the country, was inspired by the General Sports Law (Law No. 9,615/98), popularly known as the "Pelé Law"<sup>x</sup>, and sought to grant professional esports players the same status

as athletes. Additionally, it recognized esports as a democratic and universal activity, serving as an initial step toward potential government support for players.

After strong opposition from various stakeholders in the Brazilian esports scene—including players, influencers, pro-players, and game developers (Falcão et al., 2023)—the legislative process of PL 383/2017 was ultimately shelved after six years, with only two public hearings held. Given the bill's failure, federal units decided to act independently. Between 2019 and 2022, eight states and one Brazilian capital enacted ordinary laws to regulate esports, including Alagoas (Law No. 8.219, 2019.), Amazonas (Law No. 5.321, 2020), Bahia (Law No. 14.116, 2019), Espírito Santo (Law No. 11.515, 2021), Goiás (Law No. 21.080, 2021), João Pessoa (Law No. 14.385, 2022), Mato Grosso (Law No. 11.830, 2022), Paraná (Law No. 20.281, 2020), and Santa Catarina (Law No. 18.396, 2022)<sup>xi</sup>. The content of these laws closely resembles PL 383/2017, equating pro-player status with that of athletes and paving the way for public administration support. However, some federal units went further, such as Mato Grosso, which assigned the state the responsibility of organizing competitions and granting credits and benefits to players (Law No. 11.830, 2022).

Moreover, another bill (PL 70/2022) revives the text of PL 383/2017, reintroducing a legislative proposal very similar to its predecessor. Currently, this bill has been under review in the Brazilian Chamber of Deputies for over two years. Due to uncertainties and the lack of regulatory unification from the Brazilian government on the matter, potential investments and the organization of a domestic professional esports ecosystem remain hindered. Despite state and municipal laws, the industry is still largely led by game developers and private corporations, which manage the country's largest and most significant esports competitions and regulate relationships among the various stakeholders across different disciplines.

### **6.3. Economic Integration**

One of the key characteristics observed in the global esports sector is the continuous rise in the number of multinational and transnational organizations investing in the market. In South Korea, domestic companies frequently invest billions of won<sup>xii</sup> in team development and infrastructure to compete in the country's largest tournaments. Some of the major companies involved include Nongshim Co Ltd, SK Telecom Co Ltd, Hyundai Motor Co, Kia Corp, Hanwha Life Insurance, and KT Corp. Despite the relatively low volume of formal government subsidies for the gaming and esports industry — accounting for only 0.11% of the country's annual budget in 2021 (Roh, 2021) — capital from multinational corporations and game developers serves as the primary financial driver of South Korea's esports scene.

Similarly, in 2015, KeSPA announced a partnership agreement with L.ACE to regulate and facilitate the transfer of esports pro-players between South Korea and China (Vanese, 2015). Since both nations are strong competitors in the industry, many top-tier professionals are exported to other regions of the world to compete on international teams, including in Brazil (Oliveira, 2023). As a result, this unprecedented cooperation agreement opens new opportunities for the relationship between the two countries in this market.

In South Korea, certain esports titles with high popularity, such as League of Legends (LoL), serve as ideal environments for developing athletes who later compete internationally. At least one South Korean professional can be found participating in official LoL tournaments on every continent. For example, in 2023, Brazil had 13 South Korean professionals working in the scene, either as players or as coaches (Oliveira, 2023). This phenomenon is not observed to the same extent with Brazilian athletes in mainstream esports titles.

The Brazilian market has also seen multimillion-dollar investments from corporate conglomerates, often involving both national and international companies. One notable example is the creation of the Spacecaps group, formed by LOUD, one of Brazil's largest esports organizations, alongside six other companies—five of which are based in North America. Despite the lack of formal government investments in Brazilian esports, the industry's development by private entities has successfully attracted significant foreign investments. In 2018, Team Liquid — the world's third-largest esports organization — and in 2021, Team SoloMid (TSM) — the largest esports organization in the world — funded Brazilian teams in emerging esports titles, including Rainbow Six Siege, Free Fire, Wild Rift, and female Valorant.

#### **6.4. International Advertising Strategies**

Digital games are dispersed in everyday life, not only in an explicit manner but also subtly through streaming services or the growing dependence on games as part of transmedia storytelling. As a byproduct of the digital gaming industry, esports often take on an ambiguous role in terms of its classification as an industry. In the local context, the "Korean Wave" was driven by the national government, with elements of popular culture becoming a crucial resource for South Korea's diplomacy. The state then moved forward with the articulation of public policies aimed at cultural diplomacy as an essential component of its foreign policy (Nye & Kim, 2019). As a result, the digital gaming industry, and specifically esports, became part of the South Korean government's portfolio for developing public policies to promote its gaming culture abroad. This is highlighted by the acts already presented in the Regulation section.

Additionally, it is a worthy mention the fact that many giant private corporations in South Korea are using famous national esports players as brand ambassadors. Technology brands like Razer, for example, are associating their products with athletes like Faker, the most famous League of Legends player worldwide. Even though this is not a South Korean foreign policy strategy, it still advertise South Korean esports actors as synonyms of quality and good performance.

In the Brazilian diplomatic scene, on the other hand, digital games are a recent topic within the Ministério das Relações Exteriores (MRE)<sup>xiii</sup>. In December 2022, MRE published the "Panorama Internacional de Mercados de Jogos Eletrônicos" (International Overview of Electronic Games Markets). In the document, the institution highlights the potential of the gaming market both in Brazil and abroad, but with an emphasis on game developers (Ministério das Relações Exteriores, 2022). Therefore, esports have not yet been included in Brazil's cultural diplomacy efforts, but the creation of the report suggests a possible future engagement with the topic.

## 6.5. Public Prestige

The international success of a player or national team, as well as the successful hosting of a mega sports event, provides arenas for a country to gain international leverage (Haut et al., 2017). Roche (2003) presents the concept of mega-sporting events as temporary cultural actions that have long-lasting pre- and post-event social dimensions. The public perceives these events as extraordinary occurrences due to their large scale, the time intervals between their editions, and the impacts they generate.

With this in mind, we conducted a survey of the largest international competitions of 10 out of the 14 most-watched games in 2022, according to the Esports Charts portal (2022)<sup>xiv</sup>. The goal was to assess how many times Brazilian and South Korean players or teams appeared on the podium of each game's largest international tournament, as well as how many times the countries hosted such high-profile events. The criteria for selecting the 10 games were: the number of viewers (audience size); presence of the game in Brazil and South Korea; the competitive nature of the game; and the clear nationality of the teams. The latter criterion, in particular, made Fortnite unsuitable for analysis, as its main world tournament (Fortnite Champion Series) is played only in duos, and its scoring and nationality dynamics are difficult to analyze. Moreover, no Brazilian or South Korean representatives were present in this competition. Thus, the following tournaments were selected, divided into three genres:

**Table 2: Tournaments selected to the analysis by game genre**

Game Genre	Analyzed Tournaments
Multiplayer Online Battle Arena (MOBA)	League of Legends World Championship (2011 – 2023), Mobile Legends: Bang Bang M World Championship (2019 – 2022), Dota 2 The International (2011 – 2022), Arena of Valor World Cup (2018 – 2021) and Brawl Stars World Finals (2019 – 2023).
First Person Shooter (FPS)	CS:GO Major Championships (2013 – 2023), Valorant Champions Tour (2021 – 2023) and Overwatch World Cup (2016 – 2019).
Battle Royale	PUBG Mobile Global Championship (2020 – 2023) and Apex Legends Global Series (2022).

The data about these competitions were gathered from Liquipedia, an esports wiki that stores real-time data on tournaments, players, teams, and matches from a myriad of competitions<sup>xv</sup>. The choice of Liquipedia is justified by the reliability that the portal has within many esports actors, as well as by its role as a tool that consolidates precise data on the history of the world's major esports competitions. Table 3 illustrates the survey results, emphasizing the number of appearances by each country per game genre and the number of events hosted by each nation within the analyzed competitions.

**Table 3: Frequency of Hosting and Podium Appearances by South Korea and Brazil in the Major International Esports Competitions by Genre until March 2023**

Genre/Place	1 <sup>st</sup> Place	2 <sup>nd</sup> Place	3 <sup>rd</sup> Place	Total	Hosted Events
MOBA – South Korea	8	6	7	21	2
MOBA – Brazil	0	1	1	2	0
FPS – South Korea	4	0	2	6	0
FPS – Brazil	3	3	5	11	2
Battle Royale – South Korea	0	0	0	0	0
Battle Royale – Brazil	0	1	1	2	0

It is observed that the total number of podium appearances by South Korea (27) in the analyzed events is 80% higher than Brazil's appearances (15). South Koreans show superior results only in the MOBA genre, with a highlight for the LoL (League of Legends) modality (20 appearances). On the other hand, Brazil has a greater presence on the podiums in the FPS and Battle Royale categories, with highlights in CS:GO (8 appearances) and Valorant (3 appearances). Regarding the hosted events, both Brazil and South Korea organized two events, but in game genres that represent their best international performance. This suggests that a country with greater prestige in a particular genre is also more likely to be selected as the host for mega esports events in that same genre, as indicated by research on the limitations of public prestige in sports by Haut et al. (2017). Our survey considered only teams formed by at least three players of Brazilian or South Korean nationality or teams operating under an organization founded in one of these two countries.

## 6.6. Summary of Results

**Table 4: Comparison of the Analyzed Variables between South Korea and Brazil.**

Analyzed Variables	South Korea	Brazil
Institutionalization	It has KeSPA, nationally recognized by the ecosystem's actors. With the support of the Ministry Of Culture, Sports and Tourism, it regulates esports.	It has CBDEL and CBGE, entities certified by the Ministry of Citizenship, but not recognized by game developers or the esports community as regulators of the practice
Regulation	It has, at the national level, the Act on Promotion of E-sports.	It does not have a nationally approved law that regulates esports.
Economic Integration	It has public-private cooperation and investment initiatives in the sector, with a focus on professional esports.	Private, community, and university initiatives predominate in the economic relations of Brazilian esports.
International Advertising Strategies	Esports are incorporated into the South Korean <i>Hallyu</i> as an area to be promoted by the country's cultural diplomacy, carried out by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism.	It does not have formal measures from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs regarding esports.
Public Prestige	It has International prominence in the MOBA game genre.	It has international prominence in the FPS and battle royale game genres.

The analysis of the development of public policies aimed at the international projection of Brazil and South Korea – through esports – requires a multifaceted approach. Part of this is due to the

complexity involved in shaping a state's foreign policy agenda. Additionally, the intersectionality in games, generally, and in esports, specifically, makes it difficult to analyze from a single perspective. Therefore, Table 4 briefly presents the responses obtained from each of the fields analyzed in this study, in order to make a direct comparison between the two investigated scenarios.

It is observed that South Korea has institutions, laws, and cultural diplomacy initiatives involving esports, being considered a pioneer in this type of policy (Jin, 2010). Therefore, absolute gains in foreign policy can be seen in the areas of alliances and partnerships, economic integration, and the country's public prestige in the international arena (Pinto, 2011). When observing these data, it is possible to reach the conclusion that South Korea has a more established approach – especially with its public institutions – regarding the field of esports. We believe in the possibility that, beyond the absolute gains earned by the country with its esports scenario (international prestige, economic integration, agreements and trade opportunities – to say the least), part of its strong esports culture<sup>xvi</sup> has its basis in these set of policies and strategies.

Brazil has a less established formalized scenario. The lack of a widely recognized regulatory institution among internal actors, as well as the absence of national-level regulation of the practice, hinders the establishment of economic integration initiatives and the inclusion of the topic in the cultural diplomacy portfolios of MRE. Nevertheless, the country has achieved remarkable results in certain genres, despite the absence of state action, which represents an international gain in public prestige within the esports community, particularly in the FPS and battle royale genres.

These achievements, however, are frequently the results of much effort from the players (Macedo, 2023b). As Brazil do not have a unified approach to internally support its esports scenario, and consequently has minor international gains with it, national players' journey towards professional success is much harder. It does not mean, notwithstanding, that some players achieve status of celebrities, like Gabriel 'Fallen' Toledo, or Felipe 'brTT' Gonçalves. But, even in their cases, remuneration is still far away from the South Korean pros<sup>xvii</sup>.

## 8. Final Considerations

In this paper, we present an exploratory comparative study of the existing public policies in Brazil and South Korea, aimed at both fostering and improving esports practices within their territories and obtaining international gains through success in these practices. By gathering information from institutional websites of both countries, a comparative case study was conducted to identify the existence and initial framework of public policies related to esports in both nations. During the data collection process, 50 results related to the topic were identified, with 29 referring to Brazil and 21 referring to South Korea, distributed among articles, laws, bills, and decrees. Bibliography on the subject was also consulted in order to understand local cultural aspects regarding the practice of esports, and concepts of cultural diplomacy applied to foreign policy, and its connection with sports. Through qualitative analysis of all the material, it was possible to understand the general treatment of the phenomenon within each country's political-administrative reality.

Among the main findings, the robust vision developed by the South Korean government regarding the phenomenon and its direction of esports as part of a sophisticated cultural diplomacy strategy stands out. In the Brazilian context, an uncertainty within the national government regarding esports was identified, which serves as an obstacle to the development of public policies to promote the practice and, consequently, the assignment of the topic within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' cultural diplomacy portfolio.

Research in International Relations analyzing esports as a tool of foreign policy is scarce, and the subject is still very recent in academia. However, the flow of information on the topic is constantly renewed, making it necessary to update research on the phenomenon. Therefore, we believe that developing new studies on esports policies is important for the maturation of the understanding regarding the connections between cultural diplomacy, soft power policies and different esports modalities, especially in the reality of other countries that excel in the field<sup>xviii</sup>.

This research also has limitations, primarily related to language barriers. Therefore, it is important for the reader to be aware of the scope of the repositories and languages examined, as well as the period of the materials consulted, as the research data were majorly collected up until March 2023. In addition, as other possible limitation of this study, we only used secondary data in our analysis. We strongly recommend future studies to explore primary sources, conducting interviews or other forms of direct contact with important actors such as pro-players, regulatory institutions' members, sponsors and policymakers.

The points presented here aim to highlight some exploratory reflections that may support a discussion between the fields of game studies, Communication, and International Relations. This, in turn, suggests future projects that may explore this argument in different game genres like MMOs or Card Games, for example. These questions, however, may contribute to the creation of an agenda of tension and debate that seeks to address the complex relationships between esports, foreign policy, and cultural diplomacy, as three key axes of articulation in interface with the universe of esports, Communication, and the field of International Relations.

## Acknowledgments

This work was carried out with the support of the *Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior* (CAPES – Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel) – Brazil – Funding Code 001, and the *Conselho Nacional de Desenvolvimento Científico e Tecnológico* (CNPQ – National Council for Scientific and Technological Development) – Brazil (152907/2024-6).

## References

- Act on Promotion of E-Sports (Electronic Sports), Pub. L. No. 11315/2012, Republic of Korea National Government (2012).  
[https://elaw.klri.re.kr/eng\\_mobile/viewer.do?hseq=43120&type=part&key=17](https://elaw.klri.re.kr/eng_mobile/viewer.do?hseq=43120&type=part&key=17). Accessed on Feb. 09, 2025.
- Cai, F. (2011, April 28). *Absolute and Relative Gains in the Real World*. <https://www.e-ir.info/2011/04/28/absolute-and-relative-gains-in-the-real-world/>. Accessed on Feb. 09, 2025.
- Castells, M. (2000). *A Sociedade em Rede* (8th ed.). Paz e Terra.

- Confucius Institute (2025). *Sobre*. <https://www.institutoconfucio.com.br/sobre/>. Accessed on Feb. 09, 2025.
- Dubinsky, Y. (2019). From soft power to sports diplomacy: a theoretical and conceptual discussion. *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy*, 15(3), 156–164. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41254-019-00116-8>
- Esports Earnings (2025a). <https://www.esportsearnings.com/players/2455-fallen-gabriel-toledo>. Accessed on Feb. 09, 2025.
- Esports Earnings (2025b). <https://www.esportsearnings.com/players/3832-faker-lee-sang-hyeok>. Accessed on Feb. 09, 2025.
- Esports Earnings (2025c). <https://www.esportsearnings.com/players/5595-brtt-felipe-goncalves>. Accessed on Feb. 09, 2025.
- Falcão, T., Marques, D., Mussa, I., & Macedo, T. (2023). No limite da utopia: Cultura gamer, neoliberalismo e regulação dos esports no Brasil. *Revista FAMECOS*, 30(1), e43088-e43088.
- Fan, Y. (2010). Branding The Nation: Towards a Better Understanding. *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy*, 6, 97–103. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1057/pb.2010.16>
- Figueira, A. (2017). *Introdução à análise de Política Externa* (F. A. Bravin, Ed.). Saraiva.
- Game Industry Promotion Act, Pub. L. No. 7941/2006, Republic of Korea National Government (2006). [https://elaw.klri.re.kr/eng\\_mobile/viewer.do?hseq=46844&type=part&key=17](https://elaw.klri.re.kr/eng_mobile/viewer.do?hseq=46844&type=part&key=17). Accessed on Feb. 09, 2025.
- Goff, P. M. (2013). Cultural Diplomacy. In A. Cooper, H. Heine, & R. Thakur (Eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Modern Diplomacy* (pp. 419–435). Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199588862.013.0024>
- Grieco, J. M. (1988). Anarchy and the Limits of Cooperation: a Realist Critique of the Newest Liberal Institutionalism. *International Organization*, 42(3), 485–507. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2706787>
- Haut, J., Grix, J., Brannagan, P. M., & Hilvoorde, I. van. (2017). International prestige through ‘sporting success’: an evaluation of the evidence. *European Journal for Sport and Society*, 14(4), 311–326. <https://doi.org/10.1080/16138171.2017.1421502>
- Jin, D. Y. (2010). *Korea’s Online Gaming Empire*. The MIT Press.
- Jin, D. Y. (2021). *Global Esports: Transformation of Cultural Perceptions of Competitive Gaming*. Bloomsbury Academic.
- Jonasson, K., & Thiborg, J. (2010). Electronic sport and its impact on future sport. *Sport in society*, 13(2), 287–299.
- Koch, N. (2018). The geopolitics of sport beyond soft power: event ethnography and the 2016 cycling world championships in Qatar. *Sport in Society*, 21(12), 2010–2031. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17430437.2018.1487403>
- Lei N° 5.321, de 23 de Novembro de 2020. Dispõe Sobre a Regulamentação Da Prática Esportiva Eletrônica, Pub. L. No. 5231/2020, Assembleia Legislativa do estado do Amazonas (2020). <https://sapl.al.am.leg.br/media/sapl/public/normajuridica/2020/11101/5321.pdf>. Accessed on Feb. 09, 2025.
- Lei N° 8.219, de 19 de Dezembro de 2019. Dispõe Sobre a Regulamentação Da Prática Esportiva Eletrônica No Âmbito Do Estado de Alagoas, e Dá Outras Providências, Pub. L. No. 8219/2019, Governo do estado de Alagoas (2019).



- [https://sapl.al.al.leg.br/media/sapl/public/normajuridica/2019/1764/lei\\_no\\_8.219\\_de\\_19\\_de\\_dezembro\\_de\\_2019\\_\\_1.pdf](https://sapl.al.al.leg.br/media/sapl/public/normajuridica/2019/1764/lei_no_8.219_de_19_de_dezembro_de_2019__1.pdf). Accessed on Feb. 09, 2025.
- Lei N° 11.515, de 27 de Dezembro de 2021. Reconhece e Regulamenta a Prática Esportiva Eletrônica No Âmbito Do Estado Do Espírito Santo, e Dá Outras Providências, Pub. L. No. 11515/2021, Governo do estado do Espírito Santo (2021). <https://www3.al.es.gov.br/Arquivo/Documents/legislacao/html/LEI115152021.html>. Accessed on Feb. 09, 2025.
- Lei N° 11.830, de 18 de Julho de 2022. Institui a Política Estadual de Incentivo à Prática Profissional de Esportes Eletrônicos, Pub. L. No. 11830/2022, Assembleia Legislativa do estado de Mato Grosso (2022). <https://leisestaduais.com.br/mt/lei-ordinaria-n-11830-2022-mato-grosso-institui-a-politica-estadual-de-incentivo-a-pratica-profissional-de-esportes-eletronicos?r=p>. Accessed on Feb. 09, 2025.
- Lei N° 14.116, de 02 de Setembro de 2019. Dispõe Sobre a Regulamentação Da Prática Esportiva Eletrônica, Pub. L. No. 14116/2019, Assembleia Legislativa do estado da Bahia (2019). <https://leisestaduais.com.br/ba/lei-ordinaria-n-14116-2019-bahia-dispoe-sobre-a-regulamentacao-da-pratica-esportiva-eletronica>. Accessed on Feb. 09, 2025.
- Lei N° 14.385, de 7 de Janeiro de 2022. Reconhece a Prática Esportiva Eletrônica, Denominada “Esports” Ou “Esports” Como Modalidade Esportiva No Âmbito Do Município de João Pessoa, Pub. L. No. 14385/2022, Prefeitura do município de João Pessoa (2022). [https://sapl.joaopessoa.pb.leg.br/media/sapl/public/normajuridica/2022/18846/lei\\_no\\_14385-2022.pdf](https://sapl.joaopessoa.pb.leg.br/media/sapl/public/normajuridica/2022/18846/lei_no_14385-2022.pdf). Accessed on Feb. 09, 2025.
- Lei N° 18.396, de 13 de Junho de 2022. Dispõe Sobre a Regulamentação Da Prática Esportiva Eletrônica No Âmbito Do Estado de Santa Catarina e Adota Outras Providências, Pub. L. No. 18396/2022, Assembleia Legislativa do estado de Santa Catarina (2022). <https://leisestaduais.com.br/sc/lei-ordinaria-n-18396-2022-santa-catarina-dispoe-sobre-a-regulamentacao-da-pratica-esportiva-eletronica-no-ambito-do-estado-de-santa-catarina-e-adota-outras-providencias?q=LEI>. Accessed on Feb. 09, 2025.
- Lei N° 20.281, de 5 de Agosto de 2020. Dispõe Sobre o Exercício Da Atividade Esportiva Eletrônica No Estado Do Paraná, Pub. L. No. 20281/2020, Palácio do Governo do estado do Paraná (2020). <https://leisestaduais.com.br/pr/lei-ordinaria-n-20281-2020-parana-dispoe-sobre-o-exercicio-da-atividade-esportiva-eletronica-no-estado-do-parana>. Accessed on Feb. 09, 2025.
- Lei N° 21.080, de 09 de Setembro de 2021. Regulamenta Os Denominados e-Sports, Pub. L. No. 21080/2021, Assembleia Legislativa do Estado de Goiás (2021). <https://legisla.casacivil.go.gov.br/api/v2/pesquisa/legislacoes/104291/pdf#:~:text=Ficam%20reconhecidas%20como%20instrumento%20fomentador,na%20data%20de%20sua%20publica%C3%A7%C3%A3o>. Accessed on Feb. 09, 2025.
- Macedo, T. (2023a). Querelas esquecidas dos game studies: monopólio e diversidade configuracional nos esports. *Galáxia (São Paulo)*, 48, e58769.
- Macedo, T. (2023b). *Quem não sonhou em ser jogador de videogame? Free Fire, movimento e as mediações do esport no Brasil* (Publication no. 001198584) [Doctoral dissertation, Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul]. Lume Repositório Digital <https://lume.ufrgs.br/handle/10183/273736>
- Macedo, T., & Falcão, T. (2019). E-Sports, herdeiros de uma tradição. *Intexto*, 246-267.
- Mark, S. (2009). *A Greater Role for Cultural Diplomacy*. Netherlands Institute of International Relations ‘Clingendael.’ <http://researchspace.auckland.ac.nz/handle/2292/2943>. Accessed on Feb. 09, 2025.

- Martinelli, C. (2016). O jogo tridimensional: o hard power, o soft power e a interdependência complexa, segundo Joseph Nye. *Conjuntura Global*, 5(1), 65-80.
- Ministério das Relações Exteriores. (2022). *Panorama Internacional de Mercados de Jogos Eletrônicos*. [https://www.gov.br/mre/pt-br/assuntos/ciencia-tecnologia-e-inovacao/copy\\_of\\_PanoramaInternacionaldeMercadosdeJogosEletronicos.pdf/view](https://www.gov.br/mre/pt-br/assuntos/ciencia-tecnologia-e-inovacao/copy_of_PanoramaInternacionaldeMercadosdeJogosEletronicos.pdf/view). Accessed on Feb. 09, 2025.
- Newzoo. (2020). *Global Esports Market Report*. <https://newzoo.com/resources/trend-reports/newzoo-global-games-market-report-2020-light-version>. Accessed on Nov. 10, 2024
- Newzoo, & Esports Bar. (2018). *Esports in Brazil: Key Facts, Figures, and Faces*. <https://newzoo.com/resources/trend-reports/global-esports-market-report-2018-light>. Accessed on Nov. 10, 2024
- Nye, J., & Kim, Y. (2019). Soft power and the Korean Wave. In Y. Kim (Ed.), *South Korea Popular Culture and North Korea* (pp. 41–53). Routledge.
- Nye, J. (2014). *The information revolution and soft power*. Current History.
- Nye, J. (2011). Power and foreign policy. *Journal of political power*, 4(1), 9-24.
- Nye, J. (2004). *Soft power: The means to success in world politics*. Public Affairs.
- Oliveira, G. (2023, January 23). CBLOL 2023: “Coreano, quando vem, não é tudo aquilo”, diz vice da Keyd. *GE*. <https://ge.globo.com/esports/lol/noticia/2023/01/23/cblol-2023-coreano-quando-vem-nao-e-tudo-aquilo-diz-vice-da-keyd.ghtml>. Accessed on Feb. 09, 2025.
- Pinto, D. J. A. (2011). Smart Power: os pilares deste poder na política externa brasileira. 3° *Encontro Nacional Da ABRI*. [https://www.abri.org.br/anais/3\\_Encontro\\_Nacional\\_ABRI/Politica\\_Externa/PE%2017\\_Danielle%20Jacon%20Ayres%20Pinto%20Smart%20Power%20os%20pilares%20deste%20poder%20na%20pol+%a1tica%20externa%20brasileir.pdf](https://www.abri.org.br/anais/3_Encontro_Nacional_ABRI/Politica_Externa/PE%2017_Danielle%20Jacon%20Ayres%20Pinto%20Smart%20Power%20os%20pilares%20deste%20poder%20na%20pol+%a1tica%20externa%20brasileir.pdf). Accessed on Feb. 09, 2025.
- PL 70/2022. Regulamenta o Exercício da Atividade Esportiva Eletrônica no Brasil, Pub. L. No. 70/2022, Câmara dos Deputados (2022). <https://www.camara.leg.br/proposicoesWeb/fichadetramitacao?idProposicao=2313858&fichaAmigavel=nao>. Accessed on Feb. 09, 2025.
- Roche, M. (2003). Mega-events, Time and Modernity. *Time & Society*, 12(1), 99–126. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0961463X03012001370>
- Roh, J. (2021, October 28). Esports talent in S.Korea gets boost from big business, easing of gaming ban. *Reuters*. <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/esports-talent-skorea-gets-boost-big-business-easing-gaming-ban-2021-10-28/>. Accessed on Feb. 09, 2025.
- Szablewicz, M. (2016). A Realm of Mere Representation? “Live” E-Sports Spectacles and the Crafting of China’s Digital Gaming Image. *Games and Culture*, 11(3), 256–274. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1555412015595298>
- Taylor, T. L. (2012). *Raising the Stakes*. The MIT Press.
- Taylor, T. L. (2018). *Watch me Play: Twitch and the Rise of Game Live Streaming*. Princeton University Press.
- Thiborg, J. (2009, June 16). eSport and Governing Bodies: An outline for a research project and preliminary results. *Conference Kultur-Natur*. <https://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:1408608/FULLTEXT01.pdf>. Accessed on Feb. 09, 2025.
- UOL Esporte. (2023, January 10). *Ana Moser e eSports: “Não pretendo investir nisso, é entretenimento”, diz ministra do Esporte* [Broadcast]. UOL Esporte.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F5NuA4zHYSM&ab\\_channel=UOLEsporte](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F5NuA4zHYSM&ab_channel=UOLEsporte). Accessed on Feb. 09, 2025.

Van Dijck, J., Poell, T., & De Waal, M. (2018). *The Platform Society*. Oxford University Press.

Vanese, B. (2015, April 30). Un accord entre la KeSPA et L.ACE. *Against All Authority*. Un accord entre la KeSPA et L.ACE. [https://www.team-aaa.com/fr/breve/un-accord-entre-la-kespa-et-l-ace\\_96134](https://www.team-aaa.com/fr/breve/un-accord-entre-la-kespa-et-l-ace_96134). Accessed on Feb. 09, 2025.

Wagner, M. G. (2006). On the Scientific Relevance of eSports. *International Conference on Internet Computing & Conference on Computer Games Development*, 26–29.

Wohn, D. Y., & Freeman, G. (2020). Live Streaming, Playing, and Money Spending Behaviors in eSports. *Games and Culture*, 15(1), 73–88. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1555412019859184>

Yin, R. K. (2001). *Estudo de caso - Planejamento e Métodos* (2nd ed.). Bookman.

---

<sup>i</sup> Foreign Policy here refers to the strategies adopted by a country to pursue their interests outside its borders. Discussion regarding this concept is in “Foreign Policy and National Interests section (p. 3).

<sup>ii</sup> Discussion regarding this concept is also in “Foreign Policy and National Interests section (p. 3).

<sup>iii</sup> A good example of this can be observed in international programs such as “Experience Africa”. Created by the Institute for Cultural Diplomacy, the initiative brings together students and young professionals from across the African continent, and the wider international community, to learn more about political, economic and cultural issues of the African continent. During the reunion, participants have the opportunity to expand their vision about the continent and change the stereotyped vision of poverty that is commonly associated with Africa.

<sup>iv</sup> Our goal in this article is not to dwell on the sociological definition of esports and its relation with traditional sports. Not because this is trivial – which is not –, but because it would render a large discussion that was already competently conducted by sports sociologists (Jonasson; Thiborg, 2010), and adapted to the context of the Global South (Macedo, 2023b).

<sup>v</sup> Brazilian Confederation of Electronic Sports (free translation)

<sup>vi</sup> Brazilian Confederation of Games and Esports (free translation)

<sup>vii</sup> National Sports Plan (free translation)

<sup>viii</sup> Original (portuguese): “O texto [do PND] está lá protegendo o esporte raiz. Na definição de esporte tinha sido dado uma abertura que poderia incluir esporte eletrônico, e a gente fechou essa definição para não correr esse risco. [...] A meu ver, o esporte eletrônico é uma indústria de entretenimento, não é esporte”.

<sup>ix</sup> Brazilian Social Democracy Party (free translation)

<sup>x</sup> It is the legislation that establishes the general rules for sports in Brazil, regulating areas such as athlete contracts, club management, and transfers.

<sup>xi</sup> In addition to these, the states of Ceará and São Paulo also introduced similar legislative proposals. However, their progress was halted due to different controversies. In Ceará, a conflict of interest among legislators led to the bill's shelving. In São Paulo, the state government declared the proposal unconstitutional, arguing that it was impossible to regulate an entity protected by intellectual property rights. It is worth noting that São Paulo, the state capital, hosts the majority of esports organizations' offices in Brazil, including the headquarters of the country's main teams and national competitions.

<sup>xii</sup> The national currency of South Korea. On March 9, 2023, **R\$1.00** was equivalent to **256.70 won**.

<sup>xiii</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs (free translation)

<sup>xiv</sup> The choice of this specific portal was because it organizes the most-watched games of 2022 by peak viewership (the number of people watching simultaneously). In practice, the highest viewership peaks for competitive games occur during the finals of international megaevents. Thus, it is possible to extract which games had the most viewership precisely during these events. Available at: <https://escharts.com/top-games?order=peak&year=2022>. Accessed on Feb. 09, 2025.

---

<sup>xv</sup> An online encyclopedia where users themselves contribute by adding or correcting data. Available at: <https://liquipedia.net>. Accessed on Feb. 09, 2025.

<sup>xvi</sup> Although not properly discussed in this work, South Korea was the first country to have a TV channel dedicated to the streaming of esports content – OnGameNet (OGN), already in 1999. Many of their esports pro-players are treated as big celebrities, receiving a lot of gifts and donations by fans and moving a crowd of people where they are (Jin, 2010).

<sup>xvii</sup> According to the portal Esports Earnings (2025a, 2025b, 2025c), just with tournament prizes, brTT and Fallen received a little more than 1.3 million US dollars in 228 tournaments, while Lee “Faker” Sang Hyeok gathered more than 1.8 million US dollars just with 72 tournaments. This value is not considering other sources of income, such as livestreaming, donations and sponsorships. It illustrates the huge difference in the financial prize of national tournaments (the majority in both their lists), considerably higher in South Korea.

<sup>xviii</sup> We refer to countries like the United States, China, Japan, France, Germany, Italy, Vietnam, Russia, and many others where esports is a successful practice.