



Towards a responsible gaming ecosystem: A call to action

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3 **Towards a responsible gaming ecosystem: A call to action**
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Towards a responsible gaming ecosystem: A call to action

Abstract

Purpose – Drawing from transformative service research (TSR) and service ecosystem perspectives, I seek to provide multi-level insights into gaming service systems and call to action how this knowledge can contribute to cultivating socially responsible gaming by addressing the following research questions: What insights from service ecosystem and TSR literature can help optimise value co-creation and cultivate socially responsible practices in digital gaming services? What future research directions could advance our understanding of digital gaming services and their potential to develop a responsible gaming ecosystem that balances social well-being with commercial success?

Design/methodology/approach – Adopting a conceptual approach of theory synthesis and adaptation, I discuss four overarching themes alongside key research gaps and directions crucial for understanding the dynamics of gaming ecosystem.

Findings – The central themes – ‘*Exploring individuals as game service consumers,*’ ‘*Gaming service exchange dynamics among meso-level stakeholders,*’ ‘*A macro lens to gaming service ecosystem,*’ and ‘*The complexities of multi-actor dynamics and interdependencies*’ – shed light on how responsible services can be fostered.

Originality – Through this research, I advance our understanding of gaming as a service by illuminating value co-creation and co-destruction within an interconnected gaming service ecosystem through the lens of TSR. Such understanding empowers businesses to prioritise consumer welfare in their decision-making and practices.

Research implications – Given the absence of a well-defined scope for understanding responsible gaming, future research should develop a typology to capture its multifaceted aspects. Expanding beyond micro-level analysis, conducting consultation interviews with industry practitioners and policymakers can contribute insights into promoting responsible gaming services.

Social implications – I offer insights for the game players, designers and developers, service providers and policymakers to promote a healthy gaming culture.

Keywords: Digital game, responsible service, service ecosystem, transformative service research, conceptual, value co-creation, ethical design, social well-being, consumer vulnerability, consumer welfare

Introduction

Digital games consumption has rapidly become a significant global phenomenon, establishing itself as an integral part of consumer culture (Wang and Hang, 2021). As game mechanics evolve, digital games can generate massive revenues through in-game items sales and virtual currency (Teng *et al.*, 2022). However, growing concerns regarding their addictive nature and consequences, including depression, social isolation, poor school or work performance (McLean *et al.*, 2022), have prompted intense debates on the need for policy interventions (Leahy, 2022). Media reports highlight lawsuits over the toxic effects of digital games, with headlines such as “*How a Star Wars video game faced charges that it was promoting gambling*” (Park, 2017) and “*Epic games to pay \$520 million over children’s privacy and trickery charges*” (Singer, 2022). These public concerns and media attention can harm the game industry by prompting stricter regulations, deterring investment, eroding consumer confidence, and damaging brand image (McCaffrey, 2019). While effective policies are needed to protect consumers, gaming companies must prioritise ethical standards to ensure sustainable growth. This approach aligns with transformative service research (TSR) principles, bridging the gap between revenue focus and consumer well-being by adopting responsible practices that stimulate value co-creation (Buhalis *et al.*, 2020). To cultivate responsible service provision of gaming, it is vital to gain multi-level insights into gaming service systems and identify promising research opportunities. This is my call to action in this conceptual research aiming to advance knowledge on this pressing concern.

Digital gaming is a service-based industry operating within the broader service ecosystem (Hussain *et al.*, 2023). Anchoring gaming research through the service ecosystem lens allows us to comprehend the complexities of gaming service system (Huotari and Hamari, 2017) and the tensions between the business interests and social goals. Such knowledge could lead to win-win outcomes for players, service providers, advocacy groups, policymakers and

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3 society (Guo *et al.*, 2019). However, research has largely been developed in isolation, missing
4
5 opportunities for developing a comprehensive understanding of digital gaming services.
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7 Guided by the TSR goals, I leverage insights from service ecosystem literature to develop a
8
9 multi-level understanding of gaming service systems by addressing the following questions: 1)
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11 *What insights from service ecosystem and TSR literature can help optimise value co-creation*
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13 *and cultivate socially responsible practices in digital gaming services?* and 2) *What future*
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15 *research directions could advance our understanding of digital gaming services and their*
16
17 *potential to develop a responsible gaming ecosystem that balances social well-being with*
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19 *commercial success?* By uncovering the dynamics involved in digital gaming services drawing
20
21 on four themes – ‘Exploring individuals as game service consumers,’ ‘Gaming service
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23 exchange dynamics among meso-level stakeholders,’ ‘A macro lens to gaming service
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25 ecosystem,’ and ‘The complexities of multi-actor dynamics and interdependencies’ – I hope to
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27 stimulate scholarly dialogue and introduce new research that promotes socially responsible
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29 gaming, where businesses create and promote ethical games and consumers engage mindfully
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31 to cultivate a healthy gaming culture.
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38 My work enriches existing gaming research in the following ways. First, I take a service
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40 research perspective on digital gaming, an area that has thus far received limited attention.
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42 Through a synthesis of rapidly growing yet fragmented literature and the integration of
43
44 previously unrelated research streams, my research advances our thinking of digital gaming as
45
46 a service (i.e., *theory synthesis* approach for conceptual studies). Theory synthesis refers to
47
48 conceptual integration across diverse theoretical perspectives or literature streams (Jaakkola,
49
50 2020), which allows us to interpret past findings through a higher-order perspective that
51
52 connects previously distinct phenomena (MacInnis, 2011). The aforementioned four themes
53
54 that underpin different levels of the gaming ecosystem are distilled. Within each theme,
55
56 conceptual arenas requiring academic attention are identified, followed by outlining a
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3 comprehensive research agenda. In doing so, I answer the call for heightened conceptual
4 exploration made by influential marketing scholar MacInnis (2011), acknowledging the
5 substantial impact of conceptual research on the vitality of marketing discipline. While I do not
6 intend to provide an exhaustive review akin to a systematic literature review, I focus on themes
7 that are essential for understanding gaming as a service. This approach is similar to those used
8 in past studies (e.g., Brodie *et al.*, 2019; Yap *et al.*, 2021).
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17 Second, I respond to Gilson and Goldberg's (2015, p. 128) call for conceptual papers that
18 "bridge existing theories in interesting ways, link work across disciplines, provide multi-level
19 insights, and broaden the scope of our thinking" by adopting the theory adaptation approach
20 for conceptual studies. Theory adaptation, as described by Jaakkola (2020), involves modifying
21 the perspective or scope of an existing theory or knowledge by integrating insights from other
22 theories or lenses. Gaming scholars have primarily focused on motivations and the impact of
23 games on individual behaviours, emphasising micro-level analysis (Yam *et al.*, 2017). To
24 address this gap, I introduce the service ecosystem perspective to provide multi-level insights
25 into fostering responsible services within the gaming service ecosystem, an area largely
26 neglected in gaming research. This aligns with what MacInnis (2016) has identified as a core
27 contribution of conceptual studies. By considering the role of various stakeholders in
28 perpetuating the gaming ecosystem, this perspective offers a lens for understanding the
29 intricacies of the gaming service system. With this perspective, I extend existing thinking
30 around the conceptual scope of gaming research beyond micro-level analysis and dyadic
31 interactions to understanding the connectivity with all relevant stakeholders. Taken together,
32 the integrated approach of theory synthesis and adaptation I adopted to develop this conceptual
33 piece, which Hulland (2020) refers to as a 'process,' makes a theoretical contribution by
34 reshaping existing ways of understanding digital gaming through the service ecosystem lens.
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3 Lastly, I bring together two traditionally incompatible domains – TSR and the digital
4 games industry – and explore how value can be co-created by various actors within the gaming
5 ecosystem to foster responsible gaming. TSR emphasises well-being and positive change
6 across individuals, communities, and societies, whereas the gaming industry often prioritises
7 revenue generation, sometimes at the expense of consumer welfare. By merging these
8 perspectives, I provide insights that can inspire healthier gaming behaviours and offer gaming
9 firms and developers a deeper understanding of the diverse actors and practices within the
10 ecosystem. This understanding, aligned with the transformative service paradigm (Russell-
11 Bennett *et al.*, 2019), empowers businesses to make socially responsible decisions and balance
12 social well-being with commercial success.
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27 **Integrating transformative service and gaming**

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29 Service literature is increasingly recognising the transformative power of services to bring
30 about improvements in individuals, organisations, and society (Kemppainen and Paananen,
31 2024). The TSR paradigm shifts the focus from conventional metrics like profits, market share,
32 and consumer satisfaction to well-being outcomes such as health, equity, inclusivity, and
33 happiness (Blocker *et al.*, 2022). Hence, TSR offers a comprehensive perspective of how
34 service exchanges can create more impactful experiences, which benefit service users and other
35 stakeholders alike (Anderson and Ostrom, 2015). Given TSR's emphasis on positive societal
36 impact, it aligns well with the central premise of this conceptual investigation into socially
37 responsible gaming ecosystem.
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50 To set the scene, I provide an overview of research in this area to establish the rationale
51 for this study¹. My aim is not to offer an exhaustive review akin to a systematic literature review
52 but to focus on key past studies that adopt the TSR and service ecosystem perspectives. Using
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60 ¹ I would like to thank an anonymous reviewer for this suggestion.

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3 keywords like 'transformative service' AND 'ecosystem,' I identified 20 relevant articles.
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5 Table 1 summarises the key insights, with most articles published in service journals and two
6
7 in hospitality and tourism.
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10 [Insert Table 1 here]
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12 The analysis of these publications reveals key insights into designing and implementing
13 services that promote well-being across various contexts, with a major theme of value co-
14 creation. Interactions among actors within service ecosystems, such as patients sharing
15 experiences in healthcare (Akareem *et al.*, 2022), transformative service mediators overcoming
16 inequalities for Indigenous students (Davey *et al.*, 2023), and vulnerable elderly individuals
17 acquiring new skills (Bianchi, 2021), illustrate how service interactions fulfill social, utilitarian,
18 and hedonic needs. These examples show that value co-creation involves transformative
19 interactions that enhance individual and collective well-being. Furthermore, spatial and
20 systemic mechanisms are crucial for the effectiveness of service ecosystems, as studies show
21 that physical spaces, like retail or healthcare settings, shape service experiences (Anzivino *et*
22 *al.*, 2024), while systemic tensions between stakeholders (O'Connor and Cook, 2020) or
23 between sustainability goals and operational constraints (Dodds *et al.*, 2022; Galeone and
24 Sebastiani, 2021) serve as both enablers and barriers to successful implementation. Lastly,
25 delivering effective services in complex, resource-constrained environments presents
26 challenges, such as mismatches between client needs and service provider capabilities (Hepi *et*
27 *al.*, 2017) and limited (Kabadayi, 2019). Jefferies *et al.* (2019) highlight how patients co-create
28 value in telehealth by addressing internal conflicts within the service ecosystem, emphasising
29 the need to understand the lived context of service users and tailor services to meet their unique
30 needs.
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55 Two key observations arise from this review. First, while TSR studies typically focus
56 on transformative services like healthcare and social services, digital services receive less
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3 attention (Kemppainen and Paananen, 2024). Apart from two studies on patient experiences in
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5 online healthcare communities (Akareem *et al.*, 2022) and the impact of internet services on
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7 elderly well-being (Bianchi, 2021), none of the reviewed articles integrates TSR and service
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9 ecosystems within digital gaming. While there are emerging TSR studies on gamification (i.e.,
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11 Hammedi *et al.*, 2017; Tanouri *et al.*, 2023), they do not link to service ecosystems. Second,
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13 there is a notable gap in designing service ecosystems to promote socially responsible practices.
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15 Existing TSR research has not thoroughly explored how multi-level stakeholders in the digital
16
17 gaming ecosystem can co-create to balance commercial objectives with the prioritisation of
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19 consumer welfare. Integrating TSR principles allows reimagining the digital gaming industry
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21 by fostering value co-creation among key stakeholders, thereby ensuring healthy gaming for
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23 all. This approach addresses Rosenbaum and Russell-Bennett's (2021) call for studies on
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25 balancing humanity and service technologies to enhance well-being. Nevertheless, TSR
26
27 integration may lead to unintended negative consequences (Blocker *et al.*, 2022), such as
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29 technology-based services inadvertently harming the vulnerable (Varman *et al.*, 2012) or
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31 culture-based brand appeals intensifying consumer vulnerabilities (Kipnis *et al.*, 2013). To
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33 mitigate these risks, a holistic approach grounded in systems thinking is essential to consider
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35 the roles of all actors and the broader environment within the service ecosystem (Buhalis *et al.*,
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37 2020). This perspective will guide the next section on viewing digital gaming through the
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39 service ecosystem lens.
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48 **Digital gaming: A service ecosystem perspective**

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50 Service delivery today increasingly involves multiple actors, transcending the boundaries of
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52 traditional dyadic service encounters (Chen *et al.*, 2023; Russell-Bennett *et al.*, 2019). Service
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54 is now viewed as “something that is part of a system, of a network ... in an ecosystem” (Van
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56 Riel, 2015, p. 199). This perspective aligns with service-dominant logic (S-D logic) that
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58 emphasises a dynamic and holistic perspective of service exchange and value co-creation,
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3 leading to the adoption of a service ecosystem lens to capture this systemic view (Simmonds
4 *et al.*, 2021). While the service ecosystem perspective has been applied in healthcare (Akareem
5 *et al.*, 2022), social service (Ho and Shirahada, 2021), tourism (Buhalis *et al.*, 2020; Xie *et al.*,
6 2020) and retail (Dodds *et al.*, 2022), its application to digital gaming has been limited. At its
7 core, digital gaming operates within an ecosystem encompasses various actors, each playing a
8 unique role in the creation, distribution, consumption of games. Value is created through
9 complex networks (Tsiotsou, 2021) involving game organisations (e.g., developers, platform
10 holders, publishers), players, gaming communities, and other stakeholders like policymakers,
11 advocacy groups, and media. To illustrate, the successful launch of games like Pokémon GO,
12 a location-based augmented reality (AR) game for mobile devices (Harborth and Pape, 2020),
13 depends not only on the developer's innovation and player engagement but also on gaming
14 communities that amplify excitement. Additionally, stakeholders such as policymakers,
15 advocacy groups, and media can influence public sentiments and the regulatory environment.

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17 Vargo and Lusch (2016) define service ecosystems as “relatively self-contained, self-
18 adjusting systems of resource-integrating actors connected by shared institutional
19 arrangements and mutual value creation through service exchange” (pp. 10-11). Building on
20 this perspective, I incorporate Vink *et al.*'s (2021) view on service ecosystem design which
21 highlights how these ecosystems can be intentionally shaped by actor collectives using
22 reflexivity and adaptation to facilitate desired forms of value cocreation. Following this
23 definition, three elements are crucial. First, adopting a service ecosystem perspective enables
24 the reconfiguration of institutional arrangements that prioritises shared rules, practices, norms
25 and ideologies guiding value co-creation, which help define human systems and social
26 behaviours that contribute to building a sustainable ecosystem (Vink *et al.*, 2021). Second, it
27 facilitates an understanding of the gaming ecosystem across multiple levels, emphasising the
28 interconnectedness within and between these levels (Tsiotsou, 2021) in achieving positive
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3 outcomes. Third, the reflexivity of actors and their shared intentionality can collectively shape
4 service ecosystems and contribute to improved social outcomes (Fehrer *et al.*, 2024). These
5 elements align with the central theme of this conceptual piece, emphasising collective efforts
6 for value co-creation and advocating a gaming ecosystem that prioritises societal well-being
7 and sustainable outcomes for all stakeholders.
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15 The game industry faces widespread criticisms over unfair or exploitative game systems,
16 which poses significant psychological, social, and financial risks for consumers (Brock and
17 Johnson, 2021), thereby impacting financial performance of gaming businesses. At the heart
18 of this problem is that the traditional tendency of gaming organisations to operate in isolation,
19 overlooking the interdependencies and interactions among key actors within the gaming
20 environment (Tang *et al.*, 2023), thus undermining the potential for achieving mutually
21 beneficial outcomes. As “services fundamentally affect our lives and well-being” (Anderson
22 and Ostrom, 2015, p. 243), it is important that gaming organisations go beyond delivering
23 company value and financial gains but seek a holistic perspective to delivering value to
24 individuals, communities and society (Sönnichsen *et al.*, 2024). The key challenge is how to
25 orchestrate value co-creation for the whole ecosystem of actors. Nevertheless, value outcomes
26 can range from co-creation to co-destruction (Monferrer Tirado *et al.*, 2024), indicating that
27 interactions among actors have the capacity to diminish or even destroy value of the network
28 (Viglia *et al.*, 2023). For instance, developers and publishers may implement monetisation
29 strategies (e.g., loot boxes), which can inadvertently incentivise addictive behaviours among
30 players. Similarly, co-destruction can arise from instances of cheating or unfair gameplay,
31 fostering a negative atmosphere within gaming communities, ultimately eroding trust and
32 damaging the overall service experience for all players.
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56 To consider the complex network of actors involved in digital gaming, I adopt a service
57 ecosystem lens (Vink *et al.*, 2021) and weave theoretical framework from S-D logic and digital
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gaming literature to develop an understanding of value creation and destruction within an interconnected, multi-actor, and multi-level gaming service ecosystem. This entails examining individual player activities at the micro-level, recognising their interdependence with and influence from activities at the meso and macro levels (Trischler *et al.*, 2020). Specifically, the micro-level provides insights into individual actor's motivations, experiences and activities. Building upon this foundation, I will then zoom out to consider higher-level influences. This involves meso-level examination of service exchange dynamics among various organisations (e.g., developers, platform holders, publishers) and communities (e.g., clubs, esports teams/fans, social media groups) levels of interactions (Simmonds *et al.*, 2021). At the macro-level, I consider institutionalised norms, values and stakeholders such as regulators, policymakers, rating agencies, advocacy groups, and media (Boenigk *et al.*, 2021).

Paving the way for tomorrow: Research gaps & directions

This section introduces four overarching themes integral to understanding gaming ecosystem and its associated research gaps. I selected these themes based on their relevance to a multi-level analysis of the service ecosystem. When developing conceptual ideas, I integrate the principles of TSR into the discussion, focusing on the cultivation of socially responsible gaming from both service provision and consumption perspectives. The first three themes focus respectively on the micro, meso, and macro levels, while the final theme adopts a holistic approach to explore the complexities of multi-actor dynamics and interdependencies to provide an integrated view of how these levels interact and influence each other. This selection ensures a comprehensive approach to understanding the gaming service ecosystem while aligning with TSR goals. Next, I will present each theme by first identifying research gaps related to unexplored issues or opportunities that could lead to new insights and advancements. Based on these gaps, I propose future research questions, outlined in Tables 1, 2, 3, and 4.

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3 *Theme 1: Exploring individuals as game service consumers*
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5 The first theme concerns micro-level analysis where I explore the behaviours and consumption
6 experiences of digital game users. This is important because understanding individual user
7 interactions and their motivations can reveal key insights into potential areas for improving
8 user engagement and promoting responsible gaming consumption, ultimately enhancing
9 consumer welfare.
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17 Research Gap
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19 Advancements in virtual reality (VR) and AR technologies have pushed gaming experiences
20 to new heights of immersion. Excessive immersion in gaming may lead to increased escapism,
21 a detachment from reality often associated with negative consequences (Orazi *et al.*, 2023).
22 Severe social withdrawal, known as hikikomori, where young people isolate themselves within
23 their homes for extended periods has become a societal concern (Park and Yap, 2024a; Teo *et*
24 *al.*, 2020). This withdrawal behaviour is often linked to problematic gaming, where individuals
25 escape from real-world pressures by immersing in digital gaming, exacerbating hikikomori
26 tendencies as they become increasingly disconnected from social realities and obligations
27 (Giardina *et al.*, 2024). Furthermore, the prevalence of monetised services through features like
28 loot boxes and skin betting raises concerns about their potential to stimulate addictive
29 behaviours, especially among vulnerable populations (Brock and Johnson, 2021). Existing
30 literature defines vulnerability as a state of powerlessness stemming from a lack of control and
31 agency in consumption settings (Stewart and Yap, 2020). This implies a deficit approach to
32 vulnerability; however, Raciti *et al.* (2022) advocate for a strengths-based approach, which
33 proves more effective in mitigating social problems by framing consumers as possessing
34 agency and capable of problem-solving. There is a need to explore the adoption of a strengths-
35 based approach in addressing vulnerability within the digital gaming ecosystem.
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Past research has provided valuable insights into addictive gaming, yet it often overlooks the complexities of gaming consumption. Notably, Glasser (1977) introduces the concept of positive addiction, suggesting that “unlike negative addiction which produces a good feeling but no strength, positive addiction produces both the feeling and the strength” (p. 175). While extensive research addresses negative manifestations of gaming engagement, the questions arise: why do gaming activities lead to issues for certain individuals while others remain unaffected? Is it time for scholars to rethink addiction as a negative phenomenon? Some scholars contend that participation in ‘happiness-relevant activities’ can contribute to psychological well-being (Vallerand, 2012). For instance, responsible and enthusiastic engagement in music consumption can enrich one’s life (Cockrill *et al.*, 2011). The concept of passion, rooted in psychology, defined as a deep engagement in an activity considered important, involving a substantial investment of time, energy and financial resources (Vallerand *et al.*, 2003), may explain this observation.

Introduced by Vallerand *et al.* (2003), the dualistic model of passion delineates two types of passion – harmonious and obsessive – which characterise the internalisation of an activity into one’s identity. Harmonious passion involves freely chosen activities that align with other life aspects and are under the person’s control, whereas obsessive passion entails compulsive engagement, often conflicting with other life domains, and where the activity exerts control over the person (Zsila *et al.*, 2023). While harmonious passion promotes psychological well-being and positive emotions, obsessive passion undermines it and triggers negative emotional states (Okazaki *et al.*, 2021). Scholars have predominantly assumed gaming engagement to be static, missing the opportunity to identify problematic behaviours without pathologising healthy gaming engagement (Park and Yap, 2024b). This presents an opportunity for research to move beyond a static approach and the simplistic categorisation of gaming as either purely

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3 positive or negative, instead exploring the complex and dynamic nature of gaming engagement
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5 and its varied impacts on individuals and society.
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8 Contemporary research on digital gaming tends to adopt either a utopian view,
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10 emphasising its potential benefits, or a dystopian perspective, focusing on its negative impacts.
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12 Nevertheless, this dichotomous and deterministic approach overlooks the nuanced and socially
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14 constructed nature of human-technology relationships (Zolfagharian and Yazdanparast, 2019).
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16 Individuals navigating game consumption encounter various contradictory elements, such as
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18 the tensions between pleasure and pain, winning and losing, and immersion and distraction.
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20 How they manage these tensions can significantly influence their well-being. One promising
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22 approach to navigate these contradictions is through a 'paradox mindset,' which identifies,
23
24 understands, and embraces the conflicting impacts and opportunities of digital gaming (Rotimi
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26 *et al.*, 2024; Yap and Lim, 2024). Originating from the field of organisational behaviour and
27
28 management, paradox theory offers a useful lens for exploring how contradictory elements can
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30 coexist to optimise users' well-being (Smith and Lewis, 2011), which can be applied to the
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32 study of gaming and the development of strategies that promote consumer welfare and
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34 responsible gaming practices.
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42 Future Direction

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44 Future research opportunities lie in exploring how strengths-based approaches can mitigate the
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46 negative consequences of excessive immersion in VR and AR gaming, such as problematic
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48 gaming and social withdrawal, by empowering individuals with agency and problem-solving
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50 capabilities. For instance, scholars could employ co-design methods involving various
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52 stakeholders, such as researchers, firms, and governments, following Russell-Bennett *et al.*'s
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54 (2023) guidelines to implement a strengths-based approach when addressing consumer
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56 vulnerability. This line of research provides insights into consumers' perceptions and
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3 experiences of vulnerability related to monetised gaming services and develops strategies to
4 promote responsible consumption within the gaming ecosystem. Another avenue is to explore
5 the ethical implications of monetised services (Karlsen, 2022). and exploitative game
6 mechanics on consumer welfare.
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12 I encourage future research to explore the dynamics between harmonious and obsessive
13 passion and the mechanisms facilitating transitions between these states (Park and Yap, 2024b).
14 For instance, future investigation could leverage affordance theory, which emphasises the
15 interplay between user intentions and technological capabilities in enabling various actions (De
16 Luca *et al.*, 2021), to examine the processes through which individuals transition from
17 obsessive to harmonious engagement. Furthermore, while the significance of passion is
18 acknowledged, its nature and fundamental components remain unclear (McFarlane *et al.*,
19 2022). Empirical research to unravel the essence of passion, its defining elements, and the
20 conceptual differences between passion and desire (Kozinets *et al.*, 2017) can offer novel
21 insights into this emerging paradigm within gaming ecosystem. Future research could also
22 theorise how the paradox concept can extend, modify, or develop new understandings to
23 advance our knowledge of responsible gaming ecosystem (Rotimi *et al.*, 2024).
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40 In summary, it is important to encourage individuals to take personal responsibility for
41 their gaming behaviour. Future research could investigate how consumer responsabilisation,
42 defined as the shift of primary responsibility from the public sector and service providers to
43 individual consumers (Tikkanen, 2020), manifests within the digital gaming ecosystem. This
44 exploration could assess whether responsabilisation fosters responsible consumption and yields
45 positive social outcomes. However, it's insufficient to focus solely on the micro-level;
46 understanding responsabilisation should also extend to meso-level stakeholders, which will
47 follow in the subsequent theme. Table 2 summarises the key ideas for future research related
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[Insert Table 2 here]

Theme 2: Gaming service exchange dynamics among meso-level stakeholders

The second theme focuses on the meso level, where I analyse the interactions and exchanges among various stakeholders, such as developers, publishers, and platform holders, within the gaming community. This focus is crucial because it helps uncover the meso-level dynamics that drive service provision and consumption, highlighting how these stakeholders influence each other and contribute to the overall gaming experience. Understanding these interactions can help me identify research implications for promoting socially responsible practices that benefit both the industry and its consumers.

Research Gap

Gaming companies are increasingly incorporating psychologists into their game design teams to enhance the gaming experience. While designing games to achieve flow—a state of immersive focus—is not inherently unethical, concerns arise when companies exploit psychological techniques, such as cognitive biases and mental heuristics, to encourage excessive spending and time consumption, as seen in the pervasive use of loot boxes (Leahy, 2022) and monetised "free-to-play" models (Marder *et al.*, 2019). These practices prompt ethical questions that gaming service providers must address as part of their corporate social responsibility initiatives. This growing intersection of psychology and game design presents a research opportunity to ensure that psychological techniques are used responsibly, promoting consumer welfare and preventing exploitative practices.

The gaming industry has shown limited acknowledgement of service providers' responsibilities regarding potential harms linked to gaming products (King *et al.*, 2019). It is unclear whose responsibility it is to ensure healthy gaming, as the term 'responsible gaming' largely places the main responsibility on individual gamers. While responsabilisation policies are often intended to promote consumer accountability and self-regulation, they risk

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3 overlooking potential negative consequences (Anderson *et al.*, 2016). Promoting equity and
4 responsible gaming is a collective responsibility, with service providers playing a crucial role
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6 in influencing gamer behaviour and encouraging ethical practices among game developers to
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8 ensure long-term business sustainability. This highlights a research opportunity to explore how
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10 service providers can better balance individual accountability with collective measures to
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12 promote responsible gaming service provision.
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17 In gaming, 'distribution' involves making a game available to players, from content
18 creation to reaching end-users (Marchand and Hennig-Thurau, 2013), a process involving
19 multiple stakeholders including game developers, designers, publishers, distributors, platform
20 holders, and retailers. Tensions often arise from differing priorities and expectations among
21 stakeholders; developers and designers typically seek creative freedom whereas publishers and
22 distributors focus on profitability and market share (Tschang, 2007). Maintaining quality
23 versus meeting commercial demands, particularly when developers face pressure to meet
24 release deadlines imposed by publishers, also creates tension. Understanding the impact of
25 tensions across different service encounters is crucial.
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38 In addition to traditional stakeholders, gaming enthusiast networks (e.g., influencers,
39 online communities, and fan clubs) can shape gaming culture and identity. Partnership with
40 these enthusiast groups holds the potential to promote responsible gaming practices.
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42 Nevertheless, existing service research often neglect the social context that could facilitate
43 value co-creation (Ciuchita *et al.*, 2023). Investigating the power of social contagion in
44 spreading ideas and behaviours (Park *et al.*, 2018) offers insights into reinforcing responsible
45 gaming practices within gaming communities. It is crucial to reinforce and spread responsible
46 gaming practices, especially given the pervasive nature of social media platforms.
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58 Future Direction

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3 While conventional thinking often views the use of psychological principles in game design
4 negatively, future research should instead focus on developing a framework for leveraging
5 these principles to foster responsible gaming design. A future research direction could explore
6 the ethical dilemmas in game mechanics design and identify the challenges and opportunities
7 of integrating ethical principles into game development. Another potential avenue is to
8 investigate how meso-level stakeholders, such as game developers, publishers, designers, and
9 platform holders, can co-create value to ensure a positive gaming experience for all.
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19 Services are crucial in facilitating societal shifts towards responsabilisation (Tikkanen,
20 2020). However, what knowledge can service research offer to enhance our understanding of
21 responsabilisation policies and initiatives? One crucial research agenda involves assessing
22 responsabilisation policies and their impacts on gamer behaviours and broader social dynamics.
23 Developing a service blueprint can unravel complexities of accountability, power dynamics,
24 and agency within the gaming ecosystem, which promote collective responsibility to mitigate
25 gaming-related harm.
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35 Future research should uncover how tensions affect various distribution and marketing
36 processes and explore how actors manage these tensions over time. While 'tension' often
37 conveys negative connotations arising from conflicting goals among actors, it also holds
38 positive potential (Tura *et al.*, 2019), serving as a catalyst for innovation within gaming
39 industry. Future research should investigate service exchanges among meso-level actors and
40 explore how tensions are managed and leveraged in collaborative settings to foster a
41 responsible gaming ecosystem could be a promising avenue for future research.
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51 To offer a more critical perspective, future research should examine how social contagion
52 can spread destructive behaviours or sentiments, addressing the need to mitigate potential value
53 destruction within gaming enthusiast networks. Lastly, adopting an anthropological lens can
54 uncover cultural norms, social dynamics, and community practices within the gaming
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ecosystem to cultivate a healthier gaming environment. Table 3 presents possible research questions pertaining to Theme 2.

[Insert Table 3 here]

Theme 3: A macro lens to gaming service ecosystem

The third theme adopts a macro perspective, where I situate the analysis within the broader gaming ecosystem and consider relevant environmental influences such as cultural, technological, and legal frameworks. This is important because it provides insight into how large-scale factors shape and impact the gaming industry. By examining these external influences, I can identify systemic issues and opportunities for aligning industry practices with evolving societal and regulatory expectations, ultimately promoting a responsible gaming ecosystem.

Research Gap

Zooming out to a macro lens, this conceptual paper considers macro-level as the external environment similar to Brodie *et al.*'s (2021) approach. Digital gaming addiction, often stimulated by intentional actions of the tech industry, creates a paradox wherein tech firms themselves become reliant on harvesting human attention for their business models (Berthon *et al.*, 2019). Thus, mitigating digital gaming addiction requires regulatory and policy intervention beyond market-level solutions. Despite overseeing various aspects like content ratings and consumer protection, regulatory frameworks face challenges such as ambiguous legal status of in-game purchases (King *et al.*, 2019), difficulties in addressing psychological exploitation in games and flaws in rating systems like Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB) and Pan European Game Information (PEGI) (Felini, 2015). Furthermore, the effectiveness of policy interventions for consumer protection remains unclear (Jo *et al.*, 2020) and designing legislation to cover every aspect for ensuring socially responsible and ethically

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3 designed games is complex (Xiao and Henderson, 2021). This situation reinforces the need for
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5 research into regulatory and policy aspects.
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8 Macro forces like societal sentiments and global culture can shape the digital gaming
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10 ecosystem. Growing awareness around issues like diversity, inclusion, and mental health
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12 pressures the gaming industry to address these concerns (Naidoo *et al.*, 2020). As these
13
14 concerns gain prominence, the role of consumer activism becomes increasingly significant.
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16 Consumer activism is a powerful force in shaping the gaming industry (Humphery *et al.*, 2023).
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18 Activist movements demand transparency and accountability from developers and publishers,
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20 advocating for clear communication on game content and monetisation models and promoting
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22 campaigns supporting marginalised communities. These efforts empower consumers to make
23
24 informed choices and hold gaming companies accountable for responsible service provision.
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26 Besides, news media platforms play a crucial role in advocacy and activism within the gaming
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28 community, thereby shaping consumer perceptions and market trends. They function as
29
30 watchdogs and hold developers and publishers accountable for their actions and decisions.
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32 Media also acts as cultural intermediaries, bridging cultural meanings with consumption
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34 (McCracken, 1990). These socio-cultural influences warrant research attention.
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40 Another critical macro-level factor is technological advancement. In today's increasingly
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42 disruptive world, immersive technologies like VR, AR, and augmented virtuality (AV) are
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44 transforming consumer experiences across several industries (Flavián *et al.*, 2019). These
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46 technologies enable developers to create interactive virtual worlds, as seen in platforms like
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48 Second Life and Fortnite. However, the sophisticated sensory experiences they offer raise
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50 concerns regarding the proliferation of unwanted and privacy-invasive content (Cowan *et al.*,
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52 2021). Despite these concerns, emerging technologies offer avenues for immersive gaming
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54 experiences that prioritise socially responsible behaviours such as energy-efficient
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56 consumption (Yam *et al.*, 2017), which bring beneficial outcomes for multiple actors. Thus,
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3 dualities can arise which requires firms to reconcile when co-creating experiences (Bolton *et*
4 *al.*, 2018; Groven *et al.*, 2021). The concept of duality is defined as “the simultaneous presence
5 of competing and ostensibly contradictory” elements (Graetz and Smith, 2008, p. 270). It is
6 therefore crucial for future research to critically examine both the positive and negative aspects
7 of emerging technologies to fully understand their impact and develop balanced, socially
8 responsible approaches.
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18 Future Direction

20 Instead of solely focusing on micro-level consumer protection through law, policy
21 interventions could aim to reconcile the competing interests among stakeholders, which often
22 hinder responsible business practices (Ozanne *et al.*, 2021). Future research could investigate
23 the efficacy of current regulatory frameworks and explore alternative policy interventions using
24 incentivised approaches like discretionary funding, tax relief, and other incentives. For
25 instance, future research could explore how regulatory policies shape service exchanges among
26 meso-level stakeholders and the impact of regulatory changes on value co-creation among
27 them. It is also crucial to explore how regulatory frameworks can be customised to better
28 safeguard consumer welfare.
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41 For socio-cultural influences, future research could examine how societal sentiments
42 towards these social values influence responsible production and consumption of game services
43 (Harrer, 2021). In addition, future research could adopt social movement theory (Buechler,
44 1995) to explore how consumer activism influences consumption patterns and industry
45 initiatives. Another research avenue is to study the role of media in cultivating gaming culture
46 that prioritises social responsibility, diversity, and ethical production practices.
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55 In terms of technological forces, future research should acknowledge the unintended and
56 unforeseen consequences that come with immersive technologies that may adversely impact
57 individuals, organisations and communities (Rosenbaum *et al.*, 2022). For example, AR games
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3 that collect detailed user data can have significant privacy implications (Sandovar *et al.*, 2016),
4 which are worth academic and empirical attention. However, there is another side to the coin
5 regarding the use of technology. Considering the potential ambidextrous nature of these
6
7 immersive technologies, future research could explore the intricacies of these dualities (Diao
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12 *et al.*, 2024) and the necessary balancing act to foster a more balanced gaming ecosystem. In
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14 addition, future research should address challenges in developing socially responsible
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16 immersive experiences (Hoyer *et al.*, 2020) and ethical considerations in immersive technology
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18 use in game design. Table 4 presents the future research agenda concerning Theme 3.
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21 [Insert Table 4 here]
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25 *Theme 4: The complexities of multi-actor dynamics and interdependencies*

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27 Finally, the last theme offers a holistic view of how various stakeholders from different levels
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29 interact, influence each other, and are interdependent. This analysis is essential as it provides a
30
31 comprehensive understanding of the complex web of relationships within the gaming
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33 ecosystem. This integrated perspective is crucial for identifying research opportunities that
34
35 enhance collaboration among stakeholders to promote a responsible gaming ecosystem and
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37 ultimately achieve the goals of TSR.
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40 Research Gap

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42 While the first three themes discuss micro, meso and macro levels separately, this last theme
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44 offers a holistic view on the gaming ecosystem. Existing digital gaming studies often focus on
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46 either individual consumption or dyadic interactions between service recipients and providers.
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48 However, cultivating a responsible gaming ecosystem requires understanding of the actions of
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50 multiple interconnected actors within a complex system (Simmonds *et al.*, 2021). Nevertheless,
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52 there has been a lack of academic attention on these interdependencies and the dynamic nature
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54 of the ecosystem (Cornwell *et al.*, 2024). Exploring concepts of value co-creation and
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3 constructions within this framework can provide valuable insights into how different actors
4 collaborate and contribute to a more responsible gaming ecosystem.
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8 One foundational element of service ecosystems is institutional arrangements, which
9 encompass enduring rules, meanings, standards, practices, and symbols linking actors and
10 facilitating value co-creation (Baron *et al.*, 2018). These institutional arrangements are critical
11 for promoting responsible business practices, as they help define appropriate behaviour and
12 can influence actors by facilitating or constraining their actions (Vink *et al.*, 2021). However,
13 in reality, the challenge lies in the potential for actors within the gaming ecosystem to hold
14 divergent interpretations of institutional arrangements (Mustak and Plé, 2020). Thus, the
15 effectiveness of these institutional arrangements can be compromised, becoming a barrier to
16 achieving a responsible gaming ecosystem.
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28 The reconfiguration of institutional arrangements requires continuous learning,
29 adaptation, and transformation by actors across micro, meso and macro levels (Parkinson *et*
30 *al.*, 2017). Nevertheless, this process underscores the importance of fostering collaboration
31 among actors within an ecosystem. However, fostering collaboration among actors within an
32 ecosystem is not without its challenges. Gaming service ecosystem is shaped by the collective
33 actions of multiple actors, with some actors holding greater influence than others (Fehrer *et al.*,
34 2024), thus resulting in a power imbalance within the network (Hogg, 2023). Past research has
35 often overlooked challenges like power asymmetries (Mustak and Plé, 2020), which can lead
36 to tension as actors pursue competing interests and seek to maximise their own benefits
37 (Monferrer Tirado *et al.*, 2024). This is a crucial topic for achieving the goal of TSR in building
38 a responsible gaming ecosystem.
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56 Future Direction

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3 Given the significance of the concept of value co-creation, future research should explore
4 exchanges among multiple actors in co-creating value and their role in shaping the gaming
5 system to foster responsible service provision (Labrosse *et al.*, 2024). Equally important is
6 understanding the potential occurrence of value co-destruction (Chen *et al.*, 2023) within a
7 multi-level gaming system. By investigating both the positive and negative outcomes of value
8 co-creation, future research can offer insights into how various actors influence one another
9 and leverage their collaborative power to achieve a responsible gaming ecosystem.

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Given the susceptibility of service ecosystems to disruptive forces that may introduce
instability (Thompson-Whiteside *et al.*, 2023), future research should explore factors driving
instability within gaming ecosystem and theorise how actors (re)negotiate and reconfigure
established institutional arrangements. For example, investigating how social embeddedness
(Ben Letaifa and Reynoso, 2015), a concept highlighting the interconnections among
individuals, organisations, and phenomena within social structures and networks, shapes actors'
behaviours and decisions enables the identification of opportunities for fostering socially
responsible practices. Additionally, future research could investigate the underlying factors
contributing to these differing interpretations and their implications for collaborative efforts
and strategic decision-making within the gaming industry. Addressing these areas will help
improve our understanding of managing instability and fostering socially responsible practices
within the gaming ecosystem.

Lastly, future research is needed to explore potential collaborations among actors and the
integration of resources aimed at fostering mutual value creation in the development of
responsible gaming services. For instance, future research could investigate how crowdfunding
platform (Nucciarelli *et al.*, 2017) could facilitate cooperation between game developers and
other actors in the value chain to build and sustain socially responsible gaming ecosystem.
Recognising the challenges of power asymmetries, future research could investigate how it

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3 manifests within gaming ecosystems and the mechanisms behind how these dynamics evolve
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5 to shape institutional arrangements over time. Another avenue for exploration is to examine
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7 the key tensions and trade-offs experienced by actors, and to determine how best to balance the
8
9 demands of various levels and actors within a systemic world (Karlsen, 2022). These future
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11 research directions on power dynamics and balancing tensions have the potential to advance
12
13 the TSR goal of developing a socially responsible gaming ecosystem. Table 5 summarises the
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15 future research agenda for Theme 5.
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23 **Conclusion and future research**

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25 Through this conceptual research, I advance the gaming literature by theorising digital gaming
26
27 from a service ecosystem perspective through the TSR lens. I offer a theoretical framework for
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29 developing responsible gaming services that extend beyond individual consumption or dyadic
30
31 interactions. By weaving insights from S-D logic and digital gaming literature, I shed light on
32
33 value co-creation and co-destruction within the gaming service ecosystem. My theoretical
34
35 analyses at the micro, meso and macro levels diverge from a silo approach (Trischler *et al.*,
36
37 2020) often observed in existing digital gaming research. Through this multi-level conceptual
38
39 investigation, I identify four overarching themes crucial to understanding the gaming
40
41 ecosystem and highlight key research gaps. I then proposed a set of research questions intended
42
43 to stimulate further thinking among both research and practice communities, ultimately
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45 contributing to promoting a responsible gaming ecosystem (see Figure 1 for a visual
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47 representation of the future research agenda).
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53 [Insert Figure 1 here]
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55 While this conceptual work presents promising research directions, it is essential to
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57 acknowledge and address certain challenges. One challenge is the absence of a well-defined
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59 scope for defining socially responsible gaming. Questions arise regarding what exactly
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3 constitutes socially responsible gaming and how it is defined across micro, meso, and macro
4 levels. Should it primarily cover ethical game design and regulatory compliance, or should its
5 scope extend to broader issues such as consumer protection and environmental sustainability
6 (e.g., electronic waste)? To move forward, I urge future research to develop a typology of
7 socially responsible gaming. Typologies provide a deeper understanding of a phenomenon or
8 concept, allowing identification of “key dimensions that distinguish the variants” (Jaakkola,
9 2020). By developing a robust typology, researchers can lay the groundwork for future
10 investigations to capture the multifaceted aspects of responsible gaming. This approach will
11 facilitate consideration of different types, contexts, and conditions that contribute to the
12 development of responsible gaming business models.
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26 Methodological considerations deserve careful attention. Scholars can employ a variety
27 of psychophysiological methods and sentiment analytics techniques to conduct micro-level
28 digital gaming research. Psychophysiological methods, such as eye tracking systems, facial
29 electromyography analysis, and skin conductance measurements, offer insights into the
30 cognitive and emotional responses of players during gaming experiences. Sentiment analytics,
31 which involve the application of machine learning algorithms to extract sentiment and emotion
32 from massive textual data, can help researchers analyse player feedback, reviews, and social
33 media interactions related to gaming experiences. To examine the psychological mechanisms
34 underlying player behaviour, preferences, and interactions with digital gaming, future research
35 should explore the application of reality-enhancing technologies with immersive and
36 multisensory features, recognising that individuals process information differently within
37 immersive environments compared to online or physical settings (Hilken *et al.*, 2022). Besides,
38 scholars are encouraged to employ participatory action research, a qualitative research
39 methodology where researchers and participants collaborate to understand social problems and
40 instigate actions for social change (Baum *et al.*, 2006). For example, consulting with industry
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3 practitioners such as designers, developers, game critics, content creators, and gaming
4 influencers offers insights into industry trends, technological advancements, and emergent
5 gaming phenomena. Consultative interviews with policymakers provide researchers with a
6 comprehensive understanding of the regulatory framework, societal impacts of gaming, and
7 the complexities of the gaming ecosystem, enabling advocacy for evidence-based policies.
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12 This conceptual paper highlights the involvement of multiple actors in co-creating a
13 responsible gaming ecosystem across micro, meso and macro levels, with potential applications
14 beyond gaming for practitioners. Industries such as entertainment streaming services,
15 telecommunication, social media and e-commerce platforms face similar challenges in
16 managing relationships with various stakeholders and ensure socially responsible practices.
17 Each of these industries operates within complex networks of actors, regulatory considerations,
18 technological advancements, and market dynamics, mirroring the multifaceted nature of the
19 digital gaming ecosystem. Thus, this research not only sheds light on gaming but also
20 stimulates reflection on the broader connections between the gaming industry and other service
21 sectors, offering valuable insights for academia and industry practitioners alike.
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38 In closing, the pursuit of a research agenda on digital gaming is crucial, particularly with
39 the transformative impact of immersive technologies and gaming businesses are here to stay.
40 This conceptual work lays a foundation for continued research and stimulates new thinking,
41 advocating for a more holistic approach to gaming service provision. Building and sustaining
42 a responsible gaming ecosystem presents significant challenges, thus prompting the call for
43 future scholarship to adopt robust methodological designs in this pursuit. Current gaming
44 research tends to exist within disciplinary silo. Moving forward, it is imperative for future
45 research to progress with an interdisciplinary approach, which involves synergistic
46 collaboration and better integrations among various disciplines such as computer science and
47 software engineering, psychology, sociology, media studies, law and policy, and cultural
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3 studies. I lay the groundwork for this interdisciplinary endeavour with the theoretical
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5 framework, providing a platform for continued exploration into the transformative potential of
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7 responsible gaming service provision.
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Table 1: A chronological overview of past research on TSR and service ecosystem

Reference	Context	Focus	Methods	Purpose	Key Findings
Anzivino et al. (2024).	Social service	Sustainability	Longitudinal, in-depth case study	Examine the spatial aspects of sustainable ecosystem design (SED).	Identified five spatial mechanisms crucial to how SED unfolds in relation to spaces and places, and three tensions that both enable and constrain sustainable implementation.
Davey et al. (2023)	Educational service	University completion	Interviews Focus groups	Explore how Indigenous Australian students leverage their strengths and service providers' efforts to enhance university completion.	Transformative Service Mediators – recognising communities, understanding lived contexts, ensuring continuity, and implementing practical solutions – help overcome barriers to inequalities faced by students and enable value co-creation.
Barrios et al. (2023)	Social service	Service innovations	Case study	Explore how service innovations cocreate transformative value for individuals & communities.	Value co-creation emerged from integrating an innovative service system with individual actions, enhancing both well-being and the service ecosystem.
Dodds et al. (2022)	Retail	Sustainable retail fashion	In-depth case study	Examine how sustainable fashion impacts well-being within a retail service ecosystem.	Three key themes critical to transforming sustainable retail service ecosystems: (1) core purpose or ethos, (2) relevance of fit, (3) message scope.
Akareem et al. (2022)	Healthcare	Patients' sharing experience	Large-scale survey	The use of online communities as transformative service mediators by base-of-the-pyramid patients.	Vulnerable patients sharing experiences create transformative value by fulfilling social, utilitarian & hedonic needs, enhancing well-being & benefiting the healthcare ecosystem.
Upadhyaya et al. (2021).	Social service	Intergenerational effects of poverty	Focus group interview	Investigate polarities at the intersection of family, poverty, and social services to advance value co-creation & well-being aiming to reduce poverty.	Intergenerational poverty can be mitigated by using a two-generation service model that fosters open communication, co-creates value through online platforms, tracks progress, and facilitates multi-actor interactions across generations.
Bianchi (2021)	Social service	Internet services & inclusion	In-depth interview	Explore how internet services enhance the well-being of elderly consumers through value co-creation.	Vulnerable elderly co-create value by learning, following guidance, and receiving support, enhancing their well-being in enjoyment, growth, mastery, autonomy, social connectedness.
Ho & Shirahada (2021)	Social service	Support services for vulnerable consumers	Ethnographic In-depth interview	Develop a process model for the role transformation of vulnerable consumers through support services.	Developed a consumer transformation model showing how vulnerable consumers evolve from recipients to quasi-actors, and eventually to generic actors.
Galeone & Sebastiani (2021)	Hospitality & Tourism	Sustainable tourism	Netnography Case study	Explore how sustainable hospitality firms improve individual and collective well-being from a TSR perspective.	5 transformative themes – sustainability concerns, reciprocal exchange, mutual network, cultural view, and authentic experience – influence individual & collective well-being.
Gardiazabal & Bianchi (2021)	Retail	Retail ecosystem & societal well-being	In-depth interview	Analyse the well-being impact of value co-creation focusing on micro & meso levels of the ecosystem.	Actors who spend more time or have limited options in the retail ecosystem experience significant impacts on their well-being.
Tuzovic et al. (2021)	Hospitality & Tourism	COVID-19 & well-being	In-depth interview	Explore the well-being perceptions of restaurant diners during COVID-19.	Well-being in hospitality is a collective concept spanning the macro, meso, and micro levels of a service system.
Buhalis et al. (2020)	Hospitality & Tourism	Sharing economy (Airbnb)	Netnography Case study	Explore the processes of value co-creation & co-destruction of well-being within the sharing economy ecosystem.	To optimize value co-creation and enhance well-being, a balance of planning, regulation, enforcement, and partnerships is essential.

Xie et al. (2020)	Hospitality & Tourism	Customer participation & well-being	Survey	Examine how customer participation in the service process affects their experience and eudaimonic well-being.	Customer participation positively impacted well-being through service experience. This effect was moderated by customer empowerment and social support.
Dean & Indrianti (2020)	Social service	Well-being outcomes (BoP)	Case study	Explore how value creation & TSR are interconnected at the base of the pyramid	Identified three critical change periods in consumers, showing that improving well-being requires recognising value outcomes, realising agency, and envisioning a new future.
O'Connor & Cook (2020)	Health service	Patient referral leakage	Quantitative multi-source data	Examine how PCPs connectivity with other specialists affects future patient referrals.	The likelihood of future referrals increases when primary care physicians' (PCPs) relate to many specialists but decreases if they are linked to too many.
Kabadayi (2019)	Social service	Global refugee crisis	Netnography	Service employees' motivations to engage in sabotage when they interact with refugees in service settings.	Employees use resource scarcity, fairness, identity mismatch, government role, and other nations' roles as motivations for their sabotage behaviour toward refugees.
Guyader et al. (2019)	Green service	Sustainability	Multiple case study	Understand how homopathic & heteropathic resource integration processes affect the natural ecosystem.	Homopathic (reducing, recirculating, recycling, redistributing) impact environmental consumption, while heteropathic (reframing, renewing) enhance the natural ecosystem.
Jefferies et al. (2019)	Healthcare	Service interactions (Telehealth)	Observations; interviews	Explore how patients co-create value while negotiating conflicting institutional arrangements.	Patients engage in functional, relational, and translational adaptation processes to co-create value by addressing internal conflicts and tensions within the service ecosystem.
Baron et al. (2018)	Social service	Innovative food waste reduction	Interviews Observations Documentary evidence	Explore how redistributing surplus food can mitigate food poverty within the waste service ecosystem.	Service innovation in the food waste ecosystem can mitigate food poverty by altering institutional boundaries, including norms, rules, practices, meaning, and symbols.
Hepi et al. (2017).	Social service	Engagement (Indigenous context)	Case study	How to improve marginalised client's engagement and well-being through transformative value co-creation	Client resource limitations and mismatches with social workers are primary barriers, while other actors and cultural practices are enablers of well-being improvement.

Note: Articles were published in the following journals: Journal of Service Research (3), Journal of Service Marketing (8), Journal of Service Management (1), Journal of Theory and Practice (3), Journal of Business Research (2), Psychology & Marketing (1), Tourism Management (1), and International Journal of Hospitality Management (1).

Table 2: Future directions for exploring individuals as game service consumers

Research Gaps	Proposed Research Questions
<p>Raising concerns about the prevalence of monetised service and exploitative mechanics and their impact on consumer welfare (Brock & Johnson, 2021).</p> <p>Beyond a conventional deficit approach to understanding consumer vulnerability within digital gaming ecosystem (Raciti <i>et al.</i>, 2022; Stewart & Yap, 2020)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What role do individual differences in cognitive abilities play in moderating the impact of game mechanics on gaming behaviours? • How do psychological characteristics (e.g., values, beliefs, needs, perceptions, and emotions) influence consumers' susceptibility to exploitative game mechanics and their decision-making abilities within the gaming environment? • What game mechanics have a detrimental effect on players' gaming experience, and what mechanisms underlie this impact? • How do consumers perceive and experience vulnerability in relation to monetised gaming services? What are the ethical implications of the prevalence of monetised services and exploitative game mechanics on consumer welfare? • How do the effectiveness and long-term outcomes of a strengths-based approach in addressing vulnerability compared to traditional deficit-based strategies? • What strategies can be implemented to mitigate consumer vulnerability and promote responsible consumption practices in the gaming ecosystem?
<p>Positive addiction: rethinking addiction as a negative concept (Glasser, 1977).</p> <p>A narrow focus on the negative aspects of gaming engagement, assuming its static nature, misses opportunities to empower users for responsible gaming (Park & Yap, 2024b).</p> <p>Exploring the conceptualisation of passion within digital gaming context (Vallerand <i>et al.</i>, 2003).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the defining characteristics of positive addiction and how does this conceptualisation challenge existing frameworks of addiction within digital gaming context? • How does positive addiction manifest in digital gaming, and what are the psychological, social and behavioural implications of embracing positive addiction as a viable concept in gaming? • How can positive addiction be harnessed as a therapeutic tool to promote responsible gaming? What are the potential risks associated with this shift from the conventional perspectives that typically regard addiction as inherently negative? • What are the psychological processes through which digital game players transition from obsessive to harmonious engagement and vice versa? What mechanisms underlie this transition? • How do different game design elements (e.g., reward systems and immersion) influence the transition between harmonious and obsessive passion (Park & Yap, 2024b), and how can game developers utilise these elements to promote mindful gaming behaviours? • What are the essential components that define passion in gaming, and how do these components work to foster responsible gaming engagement? • What conceptual distinctions exist between passion and desire in gaming context, and how do they influence gamers' behaviour and experiences?
<p>Problematising the dichotomous approach of either utopian or dystopian view of digital gaming consumption (Zolfagharian & Yazdanparast, 2019).</p> <p>The potential of paradox lens for exploring how conflicting elements in gaming can coexist to enhance users' well-being (Yap & Lim, 2024).</p> <p>Promote individual accountability for gaming behaviour.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In what ways do the utopian and dystopian views of digital gaming consumption intersect or overlap, and how does this impact perceptions of gaming culture? • What paradoxical tensions do consumers encounter in their digital gaming consumption? How do users navigate these conflicting elements to maintain or enhance their well-being while gaming? • How can a paradox mindset help unravel the conflicting elements of digital gaming engagement? • What strategies can facilitate a balanced approach that acknowledges both the positive and negative aspects of gaming to empower users for responsible gaming? • What interventions can be developed based on a paradoxical understanding of gaming to promote users' well-being? • How does the process of responsabilisation unfold as game users are encouraged to adopt responsible gaming practices? • To what extent does consumer responsabilisation contribute to fostering positive social outcomes within the digital gaming ecosystem?

Table 3: Future directions for understanding gaming service exchange dynamics among meso-level stakeholders

Research Gaps	Proposed Research Questions
<p>Questionable practices involving the exploitative use of psychological principles for maximising revenue (Leahy, 2022).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the ethical dilemmas faced by meso-level actors like gaming developers and designers in the design of game mechanics? • How can service marketers leverage the psychology of game mechanics to promote responsible gaming ecosystem? • What are the challenges and opportunities faced by service marketers in integrating ethical principles into game development? • How can meso-level stakeholders (e.g., game developers, publishers, designers, and platform holders) co-create value that ensure a positive gaming experience for all? • What strategies can be employed to address ethical concerns surrounding the use of psychological principles in game design?
<p>Problematising consumer responsabilisation policies & initiatives (Anderson <i>et al.</i>, 2016).</p> <p>The role of services in developing a nuanced understanding of consumer responsabilisation (Tikkanen, 2020).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the potential negative consequences overlooked by responsabilisation policies and initiatives, and how do they impact gaming communities, businesses and broader societal dynamics? • How can collective responsibility be fostered among meso-level stakeholders to promote socially responsible gaming ecosystem? • Do consumer responsabilisation policies contribute to issues of inequality, stigmatisation, and the erosion of collective responsibility, and if so, how? • How can service research contribute to developing a service blueprint to enhance our understanding of accountability, power dynamics, and agency within the gaming ecosystem, and how can this blueprint foster collective responsibility to mitigate gaming-related harm?
<p>Identifying potential tensions that hinder the development and maintenance of a responsible gaming ecosystem (Tschang, 2007).</p> <p>Recognising opportunity to leverage the positive aspects of these tensions (Yap & Lim, 2024).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What tensions arise when various meso-level actors interact and exchange services within the gaming industry, and what opportunities can be identified to promote responsible gaming? • How do tensions inherent within service exchanges influence relationships among meso-level actors, and thereby affect the development of a responsible gaming ecosystem? How can these tensions be managed? • What are the ripple effects of tensions from one service encounter to another within the gaming industry? • What drives meso-level actors to strike a balance between maintaining creative control and achieving commercial success? • How can a typology of synergies be developed to resolve tensions in the gaming industry? How can this typology support opportunities for co-creating responsible gaming goals? What role do services play in enabling this process?
<p>Leveraging gaming enthusiast networks to cultivate responsible gaming culture (Ciuchita <i>et al.</i>, 2023).</p> <p>Exploring the dual nature of social contagion (Park <i>et al.</i>, 2018).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What role do gaming influencers play in shaping social norms and responsible behaviour, and how can service marketers collaborate with influencers to enhance transformative service impact? • What are the most influential factors or sources of social influence within gaming enthusiast networks, and how can service marketers leverage these factors to promote responsible gaming practices? • What are the long-term effects of pro-social gaming initiatives on community dynamics, player engagement, and overall gaming experience, and how can service marketers measure these effects? • How can the key principles of social contagion theory be applied to understand the intricacies inherent within gaming enthusiast networks? How can this understanding contribute to co-creation efforts that foster a responsible gaming ecosystem? • Can social contagion contribute to value destructive within gaming enthusiast networks? If so, what factors exacerbate this phenomenon? What interventions can effectively mitigate instances of value destruction caused by social contagion? How can these findings inform the development of responsible gaming practices?

Table 4: Future directions using a macro lens on the gaming ecosystem

Research Gaps	Proposed Research Questions
<p>Building a healthy digital gaming ecosystem requires regulatory and policy measures beyond market-level solutions (King <i>et al.</i>, 2019).</p> <p>Policy interventions should focus on reconciling the competing interests of gaming stakeholders (Ozanne <i>et al.</i>, 2021).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do regulatory frameworks influence consumer vulnerability to unethical game mechanics? • How effective are current policy interventions in mitigating negative repercussions of digital gaming? What policy changes or reforms might contribute to mitigating the problem? • How do regulatory policies shape service exchanges among developers, publishers, and platform holders? • How do regulatory changes impact the value co-creation within the gaming ecosystem, and what kind of service infrastructure is essential to cultivate and sustain a socially responsible ecosystem? • How can regulatory frameworks be customised to safeguard consumer welfare, and what role does service research play in informing these regulations? • How effective are alternative policy interventions utilising incentivisation approaches, such as discretionary funding and tax relief, in achieving a responsible gaming ecosystem?
<p>Challenges and opportunity regarding societal sentiments on diversity, inclusion, and mental health (Naidoo <i>et al.</i>, 2020).</p> <p>Consumer activism as a powerful force in shaping the digital gaming ecosystem (Humphery <i>et al.</i>, 2023).</p> <p>The dual impact of media – serving as platforms for advocacy, cultural intermediaries and acts as a watchdog (McCracken, 1990).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do societal sentiments towards diversity and inclusion evolve over time, and how does this impact the responsible production and consumption of game services? What are the mechanisms through which these sentiments influence such cultivation? • How does globalisation impact gaming service exchanges, particularly regarding localisation versus cultural adaptation of gaming content and the permeation of global culture? • What role does consumer activism play in shaping regulatory frameworks and industry initiatives, and how can this influence the development of responsible gaming business models? • How does consumer activism within the gaming community influence transparency and accountability practices among developers and publishers? What are the boundary conditions? • How do advocacy efforts influence game perceptions and behaviours, particularly in relation to marginalised communities? • How does the media act as cultural intermediaries within the gaming community, and what impact does this role have on shaping gaming culture that prioritises social responsibility, diversity, and ethical production practices? • What service elements facilitate value co-creation in media, and how can system actors leverage these elements to foster responsible business model?
<p>Research opportunities for understanding how immersive technologies influence gaming experiences and consumer welfare (Flavián <i>et al.</i>, 2019).</p> <p>Reconciling the dualities of immersive technologies in co-creating gaming experiences (Bolton <i>et al.</i>, 2018; Groven <i>et al.</i>, 2021).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do immersive technologies shape gaming engagement and thus influence consumer well-being, and what factors mediate or moderate these effects? • What are the psychological and emotional impacts of prolonged exposure to immersive gaming experiences? • What are the risks associated with unwanted and privacy-invasive content in immersive gaming, particularly for vulnerable individuals? • What new opportunities do emerging immersive technologies offer for creating inclusive and harmonious gaming experiences? • What are the dualities inherent in immersive technologies, and how can they be navigated to promote responsible design and implementation of immersive gaming experiences? • How can actors effectively reconcile competing interests and contradictory elements when co-creating immersive experiences to ensure they align with responsible practices? • What are the implications of immersive technologies for privacy, data security, and digital rights management? • What are the ethical considerations associated with the use of immersive technologies in game design, and how can they be addressed? • How can policymakers ensure that immersive technologies are deployed responsibly and ethically within gaming ecosystem?

Table 5: Future directions addressing multi-actor dynamics and interdependencies in gaming

Research Gaps	Proposed Research Questions
<p>Lacking exploration of interdependencies between actors (Cornwell <i>et al.</i>, 2024).</p> <p>Dynamic of service exchanges among actors in value-cocreation and their impact on socially responsible gaming goals.</p> <p>Potential for value co-destruction hampering the advancement responsible gaming ecosystem (Chen <i>et al.</i>, 2023).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do actors across micro, meso and macro levels engage with and interact within the social world of gaming ecosystems? • What are the interdependencies between actors within the gaming ecosystem, and how do these interdependencies evolve over time in response to changing dynamics and external pressures? • How can we theorise the co-creation process from a multi-actor perspective with the aim of fostering a socially responsible ecosystem? What are the key factors that influence this process? • How can service exchanges among actors be effectively managed to facilitate mutual value co-creation, and what are the implications of this process for responsible gaming goal attainment? • What are the potential risks of value co-destruction within a gaming system, and how can these risks be mitigated to cultivate responsible gaming practices?
<p>Understanding the processes involved in the reconfiguration of institutional arrangements during disruption (Baron <i>et al.</i>, 2018; Vink <i>et al.</i>, 2021).</p> <p>Addressing challenges related to divergent interpretations of institutional arrangements (Mustak & Plé, 2020).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the key elements of institutional arrangements within gaming ecosystems, and how do they influence actors' behaviours and decisions, particularly in promoting responsible service provision? • What are the disruptive forces that introduce instability within gaming ecosystems, and how do they impact the overall dynamics of the ecosystem? • How do actors within gaming ecosystems negotiate and reconfigure established institutional arrangements in response to disruptive forces? • What role does social embeddedness play in shaping actors' behaviours and decisions within gaming ecosystems, and how does it influence the reconfiguration of institutional arrangements? • How do divergent interpretations of institutional arrangements among actors affect collaborative efforts and decision-making? What strategies can be employed to reconcile these divergent interpretations of institutional arrangements? • What factors contribute to differences in how actors interpret institutional arrangements within gaming ecosystems? How can this understanding help in identifying opportunities to promote responsible gaming services?
<p>Facilitating collaborations among actors for mutual value creation.</p> <p>Addressing challenges related to power asymmetries (Mustak and Plé, 2020).</p> <p>Recognising tensions and trade-offs within gaming ecosystems and strategies for balancing competing interests (Monferrer Tirado <i>et al.</i>, 2024).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How can collaborations with actors across multiple levels be fostered to support responsible gaming services? What internal and external factors shape this collaborative process? • How do power dynamics manifest within gaming service ecosystems, and what mechanisms drive the evolution of these dynamics to shape institutional arrangements over time? What strategies can marketers deploy to leverage power imbalances among actors to promote socially responsible services? • What are the behavioural responses of actors within gaming ecosystems to power strategies employed by other actors, and how do these responses influence the overall dynamics of the ecosystem? • What are the key tensions and trade-offs experienced by actors within digital gaming ecosystems, and how do these impact their interactions and activities? How can these tensions be effectively managed to balance the demands of various actors within the gaming industry? • What factors influence the relative influence of focal actors in resolving tensions within digital gaming ecosystems, and what implications does this have for promoting responsible service exchanges?

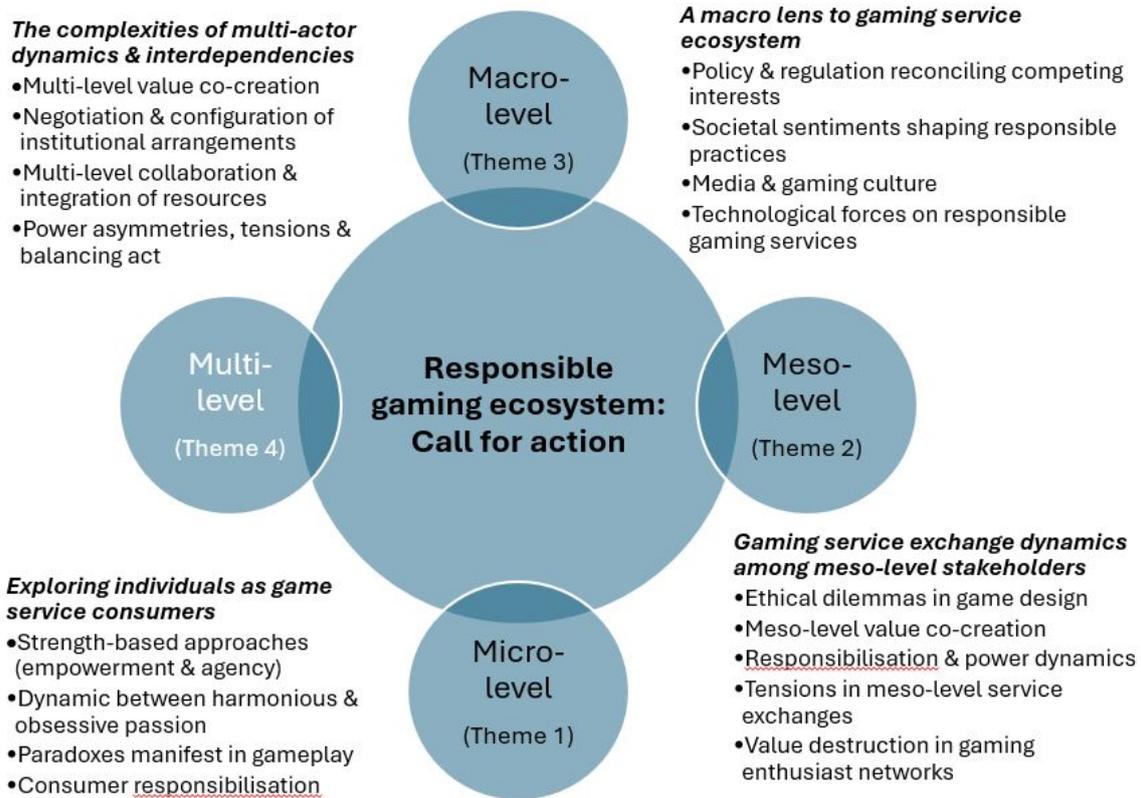


Figure 1: A visual representation of themes and future research agenda

Source: Developed by the author based on the discussion