

DIGITIZED FIELDS EXAMPLE OF E-SPORTS

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Abstract. As a result of rapid technological transformations, many activities that once took place solely in everyday physical life have now begun to occur in virtual environments as well. Advancements in technology have enabled concepts and meanings that exist in the social world to manifest within digital spaces, leading to shifts in various social concepts and practices. With the emergence of digital culture, Pierre Bourdieu's concept of habitus has increasingly been used in the form of digital habitus to describe the tendencies and practices produced by everyday online interactions. This study examines whether e-sports generate a digital habitus and correspondingly digital forms of capital (social, cultural, economic). A comprehensive literature review was conducted on the topic, and relevant conceptual analyses were performed. E-sports can be regarded as a product of today's network societies. Consequently, it can be argued that a digital version of Bourdieu's habitus has emerged. The study concludes that e-sports do indeed create a digital habitus and provide participants with digital social capital and a distinct digital culture. These findings are further analyzed through examples specific to the e-sports context.

Keywords: E-sports, Habitus, Bourdieu, Digital Habitus, Digital Culture

Introduction

Technological advancements are transforming numerous elements within the socio-cultural and economic spheres. Rapidly developing technologies have begun to generate new social domains and new conceptual frameworks. E-sports is one such concept that has gained substantial presence in the literature in recent years. Growing at an extraordinary pace worldwide and reaching enormous budgets and follower numbers, e-sports can be defined as a sport in which technology is used within competitive computer games, where individuals or teams compete at amateur or professional levels within leagues and events, where game-specific rules exist, and where stakeholders such as game developers, players, teams, organizers, sponsors, and spectators interact.

The concept of e-sports not only provides research areas directly related to computer gaming but also opens new fields of inquiry across other disciplines. As communication technologies evolve through the expansion of the internet, new domains emerge in which Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and capital can be discussed. The notion of field, which encompasses the competition between different forms of capital, also becomes significant in digital contexts; possessing capital determines who holds influence within a field [1].

With technological developments, digital spaces have increasingly become arenas where social capital competes and circulates. In this study, the digital culture and digital habitus formed by e-sports will be examined through Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, field, and capital. One of the key contributions of this research is its potential to enrich the limited body of literature on e-sports within our national context.

Habitus, field, and capital in Pierre Bourdieu's sociology

Bourdieu emphasizes economic relations and the significance of capital within these relations, yet he also draws attention to the multidimensional nature of capital. Accordingly, he identifies four forms of capital: economic capital, cultural capital, social capital, and symbolic capital. In this sense, it can be argued that Bourdieu was influenced by Marx's theoretical framework.

According to Bourdieu, economic capital is the form of capital based on property ownership. An actor attempts to elevate their position within a field by combining or converting economic capital into other forms. Economic capital, in one way or another, is embedded within all other forms of capital [2].

The form of capital most closely associated with Bourdieu is cultural capital. First used in 1966, the concept was developed by Bourdieu during his research in the 1960s on the relationship between

education, cultural reproduction, and social reproduction. Bourdieu is regarded as one of the theorists who has most profoundly influenced cultural studies. Cultural capital identifies the education system as the primary source of its acquisition. According to Bourdieu, the education system legitimizes social order by concealing class differences and transforming these differences into academic sanctions.

Unlike cultural and economic capital, social capital does not have a clear and fixed definition in Bourdieu's framework. It consists of durable social networks formed through reciprocal relationships. Social capital is used to describe an actor's group relations, their social position within a group, and the advantages they obtain from these relationships.

Although symbolic capital appears to be a distinct category of capital, Bourdieu argues that it represents the form assumed by other types of capital once they are misrecognized as legitimate. Symbolic capital frequently appears within other forms of capital and represents the sum of symbolic values. Through these four types of capital, Bourdieu moves the concept of capital beyond the strictly economic realm and demonstrates how capital-driven power dynamics operate across non-economic domains of social life [3].

Bourdieu maintains that in order to fully grasp the concepts of habitus and capital, one must first understand the concept of field. The field is as significant as habitus in Bourdieu's sociology because it constitutes the environment in which habitus is formed. Therefore, before habitus can be analyzed, the field must be examined and internalized.

The concept of field refers to arenas in which knowledge, services, and statuses produced by actors already exist. Bourdieu conceptualizes the field at the level of relational interactions, defining it as a structure in which actors maintain relationships both with each other and with social institutions. The field expresses the ontological meaning of society. According to Bourdieu, relational thinking constitutes the foundation and infrastructure of all sciences, as scientific inquiry requires a relational approach. The boundaries of a field are determined by the relations among the actors operating within it; these relations may expand or restrict the field.

Bourdieu explains the concept of field through the metaphor of a game. Each field is a game, and actors participate only if they have an interest in doing so. Here, interest is capital itself. For instance, if an actor seeks to enter the economic field, they must possess the appropriate economic capital. This necessity gives rise to competition within the field. Actors strive to improve their position using their accumulated capital. Those with less capital attempt to alter the rules of the field through various strategies (e.g., cooperation), whereas those with more capital attempt to preserve the existing rules. As a result, a continuous struggle emerges within the field. For Bourdieu, social life itself is a struggle; actors constantly compete to preserve or enhance their capital [4].

There is a reciprocal relationship between field and capital. A field becomes meaningful only when conceptualized in relation to capital. The nature of a field is determined by the forms of capital it values, and conversely, the meaning of capital is shaped by the relationships among the actors within that field.

In *Reproduction*, Bourdieu discusses his research on education and schooling. He argues that economic capital—similar to Marx's observation—creates inequality within schools. However, this inequality is not exclusively economic. Children attending school also encounter educational disadvantages due to disparities in cultural capital. Bourdieu contends that schools are far from being neutral institutions devoted to transmitting universal culture; rather, they are categorized institutions that impose an arbitrary cultural dominance defined by the ruling class. Cultural capital is unevenly distributed among social classes, granting upper classes more cultural capital than lower classes. Consequently, cultural capital functions as a mediating factor in the reproduction of class structure. Bourdieu and Passeron argue that cultural capital is intrinsically linked to social class. Education, through culture, becomes a mechanism of domination, enabling ruling classes to maintain their power while preserving preexisting social inequalities.

At this point, the concept of habitus becomes essential. Habitus refers to the fundamental mental schemas formed through an actor's life within specific cultural contexts. Habitus consists of the dispositions internalized through the socialization processes shaped by various forms of capital. It manifests in aspects such as speech, taste in films, behavior, manners, and even preferences in food—essentially defining social and personal characteristics. Through the notion of habitus, Bourdieu offers a

practical concept of class; individuals classify themselves and others through their tastes and preferences. Dominant habitus becomes a form of cultural capital taken for granted by schools and functions as an effective filtering mechanism in reproducing hierarchical order. Those who possess the appropriate cultural capital are rewarded with "success." By naturalizing the dominant culture, habitus renders children outside the privileged groups disadvantaged or unsuccessful [5].

Considering these explanations, one conclusion can be drawn: the acquisition and transmission of cultural capital is one of the most important factors in shaping habitus. According to Bourdieu, habitus is internalized throughout family education. During this process, not only cultural and intellectual dispositions but also class-specific tendencies are learned. Consequently, actors possess varying levels of cultural capital before entering formal education. For example, children from families with books, art interests, and home libraries enter the education system with experiences and language skills that working-class children generally lack. This early-acquired cultural capital becomes part of the habitus, shaping educational success and broader life trajectories. In short, individuals from "cultured" families are more likely to acquire the "appropriate" cultural capital.

A general overview of the concept of e-sports

When examining the definition of e-sports, the Korea e-Sports Association describes it as "a leisure-time activity in cyberspace in which participants match their electronic gaming skills against one another to win or lose." Similarly, the Asian Electronic Sports Federation (AESF) defines e-sports as "the combination of electronics and sports, referring to the use of electronic devices as a platform for competitive activities."

In academic terms, sport is typically defined as an activity that involves a competition or match, includes winners and losers, requires physical ability, and is performed among specific individuals within a certain period of time. Nevertheless, many sources primarily characterize sport as "a physical activity." The term "e-sports" was first used in 1999 by the Online Gamers Association. Expressions such as electronic sports, cyber sports, and virtual sports are commonly regarded as synonymous with the concept of e-sports [6].

The origins of e-sports can be traced back to the arcade halls that were popular in the 1970s and 1980s. With the spread and decreasing cost of technology, games once played in arcades were brought into homes through gaming consoles. This transition enabled a shift from static, individually played arcade machine games to competitive national and international gaming environments. As home-use consoles such as Atari and Super Nintendo became widespread, the first real international video game tournaments began to emerge.

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, the rapid expansion of the internet allowed players to find opponents from different countries. As a result, e-sports quickly spread within the social world and became an increasingly accepted activity among young people.

The growing popularity of e-sports can be examined sociologically through its connections with internet culture, competitive culture, gender, and identity formation. This phenomenon contributes to the formation of social relationships, provides economic opportunities, and plays a significant role in the construction of identity.

Digitizing cultures

The rapid development of digital technologies has significantly increased the importance of digital culture. Digital culture refers to the collection of cultural products and practices produced and shared through the internet and other digital technologies. These cultural products include websites, blogs, social media platforms, digital games, virtual reality applications, and various other digital formats. The rise of digital culture has led to substantial transformations in the cultural practices of individuals and societies [7].

As technology continues to evolve and advance, it increasingly becomes embedded in many aspects of daily life. Today, a large portion of the global population has access to digital technologies. As a result, digitalization has become influential across wide segments of everyday activities. Consequently, a new cultural form-distinct from oral and written traditions-has emerged: digital culture.

According to Castells, network societies constitute the fundamental structure of contemporary society and substantially reshape culture. As technology advanced, communication processes became electronic; societies transformed into network societies; and the informational processes of these new network societies digitalized, leading to the formation of digital culture.

In the literature, various scholars conceptualize digital culture through different perspectives. Generally, digital culture is defined as a form of culture arising from the use of digital technologies. Its defining characteristics include:

Digitalization:

Digital culture is characterized by the widespread use of digital technologies. The internet, social media, smartphones, and other digital tools form its foundational elements [8].

Content Production: In digital culture, users become active producers of content. Blogs, podcasts, videos, and other digital formats contribute to the shaping of digital cultural practices.

Sharing: Content sharing plays a central role in digital culture. Social media platforms enable users to share their own content and engage with the content of others.

Multimodality: Digital culture is defined by the use of multiple media forms. In addition to traditional media such as text and images, digital culture involves animations, games, interactive content, and numerous other multimodal formats.

Digital technologies transform symbolic values through new communication tools and create new cultural spaces shaped by both users and producers. This dynamic interaction also influences cultural processes. Therefore, it is reasonable to assert that contemporary social actors function within a digital cultural environment.

Digital culture is considered a self-renewing phenomenon that emerged in the mid-20th century as a response to the needs generated by modern capitalist life and subsequently expanded across various domains. Furthermore, digital culture is defined as a participatory culture in which users not only consume information but also actively contribute to it in various ways. The emergence of digital communication technologies-particularly online communication-has brought about comprehensive cultural transformations [9].

The digital configuration of cultural elements, online content production, and users' engagement with digital platforms constitute the core components of digital culture. As new technologies emerge within societies, new forms of perception evolve alongside them. Social actors create new images, symbols, expressions, and linguistic forms that align with these new perceptions. Consequently, a cultural structure emerges that resembles traditional culture yet exists within virtual environments-giving rise to a distinctly digital culture.

Conclusion

Social media, digital games, and activities that take place in virtual environments-as well as their spheres of influence-provide new spaces for the production and transformation of individuals' social identities. These social spaces simultaneously offer opportunities for individuals to generate social capital. It can be stated that this emerging social capital and the virtual environments in which it is formed also give rise to a new habitus, one that shapes and is shaped by various practices determining online behaviors.

In conclusion, e-sports-despite being different from traditional sports-has become increasingly widespread in Türkiye and continues to exist today as a recognized sport within the rapidly developing digital culture. Without question, e-sports can be viewed as a product of digital network societies. This emerging form of digital reality may be regarded as a contemporary version of Bourdieu's habitus. Moreover, it is evident that e-sports, as a form of digital habitus, not only provides its participants with digital social capital but also influences the existing digital culture and cultural capital.

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