



Gaming: A Catalyst for Transformation in the MENA Region

The MENA region is rapidly emerging as a global gaming powerhouse, with the industry poised to revolutionize the region's economy, culture, and technological landscape. As we look towards the future, it's clear that gaming is not just a form of entertainment but a driving force for positive change across the MENA region. This blog post explores the multifaceted impact of gaming on the region and how it's shaping a brighter future for its people.

The gaming industry in the MENA region is experiencing unprecedented growth. According to recent projections, spending in the gaming sector across MENA is expected to reach USD 2.87 billion by 2028, highlighting not only the financial opportunities available but also the evolving entertainment culture in these nations. The MENA gaming market was valued at approximately USD 4.0 billion in 2023, with mobile gaming accounting for about 80% of this market. This surge is driven by a young and tech-savvy population, increasing smartphone penetration, and supportive government initiatives to diversify regional economies. and long-term implications for the region.

The MENA region's gaming market is expanding faster than many other regions globally, driven by several key factors. The region has a young population, with more than 60% of residents below the age of 30 who are naturally inclined towards digital entertainment. Mobile gaming is another significant driver, with smartphone penetration rates in countries like Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Egypt allowing gaming to become accessible to a broader audience. According to a report by Newzoo,



mobile gaming accounts for approximately 58% of the total gaming market in MENA.

Government support is also playing a pivotal role. Countries in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), particularly Saudi Arabia and the UAE, invest heavily in gaming and esports sectors to diversify their economies beyond oil. Saudi Arabia's "Vision 2030" economic diversification agenda, for example, focuses on bolstering the entertainment sector, with initiatives like the Saudi Arabian Public Investment Fund (PIF) investing in international gaming companies to establish the country as a leader in gaming.



Image Source: Getty Images



The gaming market is also experiencing growth due to cultural acceptance and localization. The introduction of Arabic-language games, culturally relevant content, and the availability of high-speed internet infrastructure have helped gaming become a mainstream cultural phenomenon. Saudi Arabia is currently the largest gaming market in MENA, with a thriving community and high spending power. The UAE is a regional hub for gaming events, while Egypt's rapidly expanding market is largely focused on mobile gaming.

The rise of esports in MENA is also noteworthy. Major tournaments attract large audiences, both online and in person, creating new social spaces and opportunities for cultural exchange. Statista's market forecast indicates that revenue in the MENA games market is expected to reach USD 15.25 billion in 2024, with an annual growth rate leading to USD 22.28 billion by 2029. These projections underscore the rapid expansion and potential of the gaming sector in the MENA region.

Gaming is becoming an important medium for cultural expression and preservation in the MENA region. Local developers are creating games that reflect the region's rich cultural heritage, helping to share MENA stories and perspectives with a global audience. Games like "Unearthed: Trail of Ibn Battuta" showcase the region's history and culture, promoting cultural understanding and pride. The global nature of gaming is helping to bridge cultural gaps between the MENA region and the rest of the world. Online multiplayer games and international esports tournaments are creating spaces for cross-cultural interaction and understanding.

The growth of the gaming industry is driving demand for localized content and Arabic-language games. This trend is not only making gaming more accessible to local audiences but also creating opportunities for Arabic content creators and translators. The emphasis on localization is helping to preserve and promote the Arabic language in the digital realm.



Gaming is playing a crucial role in developing STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) skills among young people in the MENA region. Through game development and modding, young enthusiasts are gaining hands-on experience in coding, 3D modeling, and problem-solving. These skills are highly valuable in the modern job market and are helping to prepare the region's workforce for the digital economy.

The principles of game design are being applied to education through gamification. This approach is making learning more engaging and interactive, particularly in subjects like mathematics and science. Educational games developed in the region are helping to improve learning outcomes and make education more accessible and enjoyable. Multiplayer games and esports are fostering important soft skills such as teamwork, communication, and strategic thinking. These skills are crucial in the modern workplace and are helping to produce well-rounded professionals capable of thriving in diverse work environments.

The rise of esports in the MENA region is fostering a sense of community and healthy competition. Major tournaments are attracting large audiences, both online and in person, creating new social spaces and opportunities for cultural exchange. Esports teams and fan communities are providing a sense of belonging and shared purpose for many young people in the region. Games are increasingly being used as tools for social impact in the MENA region. Serious games addressing issues like

conservation, mental health awareness, and social inclusion are gaining popularity. These games are not only entertaining but also educating players on important social issues and inspiring positive action.

The gaming industry is promoting inclusivity and diversity in the MENA region. Female gamers and developers are gaining recognition and opportunities in the



industry, challenging traditional gender roles. Games are also being developed to be more inclusive of people with disabilities, ensuring that everyone can enjoy and benefit from gaming experiences.

As the gaming industry grows, there is a need for a robust regulatory framework that encourages innovation while addressing concerns about content, addiction, and online safety. Governments in the region are working on developing policies that strike a balance between promoting industry growth and protecting consumers. While significant progress has been made, continued investment in digital infrastructure is crucial for the gaming industry to reach its full potential in the MENA region. This includes improving internet connectivity, especially in rural areas, and ensuring the availability of affordable high-speed internet. To sustain the growth of the gaming industry, there is a need for continued focus on talent development. This includes integrating game development and related skills into educational curricula and providing more opportunities for aspiring developers to gain practical experience.

As the MENA region continues to invest in and develop its gaming industry, the potential for positive transformation is immense. From driving economic growth and technological innovation to preserving cultural heritage and developing crucial skills, gaming is proving to be a powerful force for change in the region. The gaming industry is not just about entertainment; it's about building a more diverse, innovative, and connected society. It's creating new opportunities for economic growth, fostering technological advancement, and providing a platform for cultural expression and exchange. As we look to the future, it's clear that the MENA region's bet on gaming is a strategic move towards a more prosperous, skilled, and globally connected region.

The journey has just begun, and the coming years promise even more exciting developments in the MENA gaming landscape. As the industry continues to evolve



and mature, it will undoubtedly play a pivotal role in shaping the future of the region, transforming challenges into opportunities, and paving the way for a brighter, more interactive, and more inclusive MENA region.

The article draws on original research by Dr. Yossi Mann, Arnon Bersson, a member of MENA2050's Regional Vision Team, and Dr. Gedaliah Afterman, a member of MENA2050.