

Exploring Career Opportunities in the Gaming Industry: A Research Perspective

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Peer Review Information	Abstract
Type: Article Received: 20 March 2026 Revised: 03 April 2026 Accepted: 21 May 2026 Published: 03 June 2026	The global gaming industry has transitioned from a peripheral entertainment niche to a cornerstone of the 21st-century digital economy, with India emerging as a critical nexus for talent, innovation, and consumption. This Systematic Literature Review (SLR) investigates the shifting career landscapes within the gaming sector from 2018 to 2026, a period defined by extreme volatility, regulatory restructuring, and the disruptive integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI). Analyzing datasets from the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce & Industry (FICCI-EY), the Game Developers Conference (GDC), and the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (MIB), this research identifies a structural pivot in the Indian market from "money-gaming" formats to intellectual property (IP)-driven video game development following the 2025 Promotion and Regulation of Online Gaming Act. The findings reveal a "Skills Paradox" wherein a 20% overcapacity in legacy roles coexists with a profound shortage of AI-augmented specialists. Central to the Indian narrative is the National AVGC-XR Policy, which aims to cultivate 20 Lakh skilled professionals by 2030, leveraging the "Create in India" initiative to transform the nation from a service-oriented "back office" to a sovereign architect of global digital products. The research concludes that the necessity of AI-augmentation for Indian developers is not merely a productivity preference but an existential requirement for global competitiveness in an era of Agentic AI. Keywords: AVGC-XR Policy; Agentic Artificial Intelligence; Gaming Industry; Skills Paradox; Intellectual Property Development; Online Gaming Act 2025.

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Introduction

The evolution of the gaming industry between 2018 and 2026 reflects a broader macroeconomic reorientation of the digital landscape. At the inception of this period, the industry was largely characterized by the dominance of Western and East Asian console and PC markets. However, the proliferation of high-speed mobile internet—exemplified by the "Jio effect" in India—democratized access to interactive media, turning mobile devices into the primary gaming platform for a global audience. By 2025, India's gamer base had surpassed 52 Crore individuals, positioning the country as one of the world's largest gaming markets by user volume.¹ This massive engagement has translated into a structured market growth where the interactive media segment is projected to expand from ₹20,000 Crore (US 2.4 billion) FY25 to over 65,000Crore(US 7.8 billion) by FY30.²

The year 2025 served as a definitive "inflection point" for the Indian gaming ecosystem. Prior to this, a significant portion of the domestic industry's revenue was derived from online money gaming (OMG). However, the enactment of the Promotion and Regulation of Online Gaming Act in August 2025 fundamentally altered the sector's trajectory by prohibiting formats involving monetary entry fees and cash-out rewards.¹ While this caused a temporary contraction of 17% in the broader gaming segment, it catalyzed a massive shift toward pure-play video games, esports, and in-app purchase (IAP) models, which grew by 15% during the same period.⁴ This regulatory clarity has encouraged Indian studios to move beyond "renting out hard work" as service providers and instead focus on original IP creation and global co-development.⁶

Simultaneously, the global industry has faced a period of "fortune and heartbreak." While engagement levels remained high, the "post-pandemic reset" led to over 45,000 layoffs worldwide between 2024 and 2026.¹ In this volatile climate, India has emerged as a resilient hub for technical and creative talent. The government's focus on the "Orange Economy"—industries where value is generated from creativity, culture, and intellectual property—has led to the formulation of the National AVGC-XR Policy.⁸ This policy framework, combined with state-level initiatives like the Maharashtra AVGC-XR Policy 2025, seeks to bridge the gap between educational output and industry requirements.⁹

Furthermore, the rise of Generative AI and "Agentic AI" has fundamentally reshaped the nature of game development careers. By early 2026, AI-native game production—where AI supports everything from ideation and asset creation to live-ops and personalization—has become the default model for successful studios.¹⁰ This technological shift has created a unique set of opportunities and challenges for the Indian workforce, necessitating a rapid upskilling of the nation's 4.16 Lakh AI-adjacent professionals to meet an industry demand that is expected to reach 10 Lakh by 2026.¹¹ This report provides an exhaustive analysis of these dynamics, offering a research-based perspective on the career opportunities and structural shifts defining the gaming industry's future.

Methodology

This Systematic Literature Review (SLR) adheres to a rigorous framework designed to synthesize diverse data points into a cohesive narrative of the gaming industry's career landscape between 2018 and 2026. The research primary objective is to evaluate the evolution of job roles, market size, and technological adoption, with a specific focus on the Indian context within the global market.

The methodology involved a multi-stage process:

1. **Source Identification:** Primary data was harvested from high-authority industry reports, including the FICCI-EY Media and Entertainment reports (2024–2026), the Unity Game Development Reports (2024–2026), and the GDC State of the Game Industry reports (2025–2026). Official government documentation from the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (MIB), the Press Information Bureau (PIB), and state-level AVGC policies (Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh) provided the legislative and policy context.²
2. **Data Normalization:** Financial figures and workforce statistics were converted into the Indian numbering system (Lakhs and Crores) to maintain consistency with the research requirements. For instance, a market size of US\$32 billion was represented as ₹2.78 Lakh Crore.⁴
3. **Thematic Categorization:** The collected literature was analyzed through three lenses: the Regulatory Lens (impact of the 2025 Act), the Technological Lens (AI-augmentation and Agentic AI), and the Labor Lens (the Skills Paradox and global layoffs).
4. **Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria:** Sources were prioritized based on their relevance to the 2018–2026 timeline. Research snippets focusing on the 2025 regulatory shifts and the 2026 AI breakthroughs were given the highest weightage to reflect the current state of the industry.³

This SLR does not merely restate data but generates second and third-order insights by analyzing the causal relationships between regulatory interventions and talent migration, and between AI adoption and the widening digital divide. The synthesis of these elements provides a comprehensive map of the strategic transition India is making from a service-exporting node to a sovereign digital powerhouse.⁶

Findings & Thematic Analysis

Market Trajectory and the 2025 Regulatory Reset

The Indian Media and Entertainment (M&E) sector has exhibited a robust growth trajectory, reaching a total valuation of ₹2.78 Lakh Crore (US\$32 billion) in 2025.⁴ Within this broader sector, the gaming and interactive media segments have emerged as the fastest-growing engines, expanding at 1.5 times the rate of the overall market.² This growth is anchored by a young, mobile-first user base of 83.5 Crore internet users who exhibit some of the highest daily smartphone engagement rates globally.²

However, the industry underwent a significant "structural reset" in August 2025 with the passage of the Promotion and Regulation of Online Gaming Act. This legislation distinguished "online social games" and "e-sports" from "online money games," with the latter being comprehensively prohibited.³

Table 1. Indian Media, Entertainment, and Gaming Market Growth Projections

Market Segment	2024-2025 Valuation	2028-2030 Projection	Key Drivers
Overall Indian M&E	₹2.78 Lakh Crore	₹3.3 Lakh Crore (by 2028)	Digital advertising, live events, IAP
Online Gaming (Total)	₹23,200 Crore	₹35,000 Crore+	Shift to IAP and Esports
Video Game (IAP-led)	₹6,300 Crore	₹9,200 Crore (by 2028)	Mid-core and Battle Royale titles
Interactive Media	₹3,650 Crore	₹26,500 Crore (by 2030)	Astro-tech, micro-dramas, social connect
Animation & VFX	₹10,300 Crore	₹20,000 Crore+	Global outsourcing and original IP

The immediate impact of the 2025 Act was a 17% decline in the broader gaming segment as money-gaming revenues dropped by 26%.⁴ Conversely, pure-play video games benefited from this shift, recording 14% to 15% growth as users concentrated their spending on battle passes, character skins, and progression boosters in titles like BGMI and FAU-G.¹ This realignment is driving a 13% CAGR in the video game segment through 2028, signaling a permanent shift toward content-driven ecosystems.¹

The Evolution of Job Roles and the "Skills Paradox"

The employment landscape within the gaming industry has been redefined by a phenomenon termed the "Skills Paradox." As of 2025, while the overall unemployment rate in tech-heavy economies remains stable, there is a profound structural divergence.¹⁸ Approximately 94% of organizational leaders cite a 20% overcapacity in "legacy roles"—such as junior data analysts and generalist developers—while simultaneously struggling with a acute shortage of AI-critical skill sets.¹⁸

In India, the technical workforce in gaming companies saw a 30-fold increase between 2018 and 2023, reaching a base of over 1 Lakh individuals.¹⁹ However, the current demand is outpacing the supply of "high-end" talent.

Table 2. Skill Demand, Salary Premium, and Future Outlook in the Gaming Industry

Category	Demand vs. Supply Gap	Salary/Wage Premium	Future Outlook (2030)
AI/ML Specialists	50–55% Shortage	56% Wage Premium	Critical for Agentic AI roles
Data Engineering	30–40% Shortage	High	Essential for LiveOps
Legacy Developers	20% Overcapacity	Stagnant/Declining	High risk of AI displacement
Narrative/Creative Professionals	17% Growth in Roles	Variable	High demand for “Human Touch”

This paradox is further complicated by "talent migration." While India produces world-class STEM talent, particularly from the IITs, a significant portion of top-tier AI researchers migrates to the US or Europe for graduate studies and subsequent employment.²⁰ To counter this, the government's AVGC-XR policies emphasize "Create in India," aiming to build a domestic ecosystem that can retain high-potential talent.¹⁷

AI-Augmentation and the Production Revolution

By 2026, the adoption of Artificial Intelligence has moved beyond experimental curiosity into the foundational layer of game production. Approximately 50% of studios globally now actively deploy AI in their pipelines, and 97% of developers utilize AI-assisted tools for tasks ranging from asset creation to automated testing.¹⁶

India is uniquely positioned in this "AI race." The relative penetration of AI skills in the Indian workforce is 2.5 times greater than the global average.²¹ Indian studios are leveraging AI to compress development timelines and reduce costs, allowing leaner teams to compete with international AAA studios.¹⁰

- **Asset Creation:** AI tools are used for hyper-realistic facial animation, texturing, and 3D modeling, which were previously labour-intensive processes.²²
- **Procedural Generation:** AI crafts complex, dynamic environments and NPCs with genuine "memory," making game worlds feel alive and personalized.¹⁶
- **LiveOps and Analytics:** AI-driven systems manage in-game economies, resource pricing, and predictive player analytics to maintain long-term engagement.¹⁰

However, the rapid mainstreaming of AI has met with developer caution. GDC 2026 data indicates that over half (52%) of game professionals believe AI is having a negative impact on the industry, up from 18% in 2024.²⁴ Concerns center on the "gameslop" effect—an oversupply of low-quality, AI-generated content—and the displacement of entry-level workers.¹⁶

Workforce Demographics and Global Volatility

The gaming workforce is becoming increasingly diverse, even as it faces economic pressure. Women and non-binary developers now make up 32% of the global community, a significant increase from 24% in 2022.⁷ LGBTQ+ representation has also reached a record high of 25% of the total developer pool.⁷

Despite these social gains, the 2025-2026 period has been marked by "layoff fatigue." Over one in four (28%) developers were laid off in the past two years, with AAA studios being the most affected.²⁴ This global volatility has led many professionals to embrace "solo development," with 21% of developers now working alone, an increase from 18% in 2024.⁷ For the Indian market, this global stress presents an opportunity to attract international projects and "offshore delivery" as developed markets seek fiscal discipline and high-end talent.¹

Discussion

The "Product Nation" Aspiration and Sovereign Digital Infrastructure

India's transition from an IT service hub to a "Product Nation" is perhaps the most significant theme in the 2025–2026 gaming landscape. The historical model of "renting out hard work" is being replaced by the "Promotion of Intellectual Property".⁶ This shift is supported by what researchers call "Sovereign Digital Sovereignty"—the state's right to control its data and digital borders while integrating with the global economy.⁶

The gaming sector is the vanguard of this aspiration. The "Create in India" initiative, launched under the World Audio Visual & Entertainment Summit (WAVES), has provided a platform for domestic startups to engage with global investors.¹³ The WaveX Startup Accelerator has mentored a cohort of media-tech startups, focusing on IP generation and protection.¹³ This institutional support is crucial because, as the NASSCOM 2025 report notes, the transition from "Seed" to "Pre-Series A" remains the most fragile stage for Indian startups, where many lose momentum due to structural gaps in commercialization.²⁷

Analyzing the Skills Paradox: The Demise of the Generalist?

The data suggests that the "Skills Paradox" is not merely a shortage of labor but a mismatch of "depth." India possesses a large pool of STEM talent, but employers frequently report a lack of "job readiness" among engineering graduates.²⁰ In the era of AI, a generalist developer who can only perform basic coding is increasingly obsolete.

1. **High-End Talent Concentration:** AI expertise is currently concentrated in hubs like Bengaluru, Hyderabad, and Delhi-NCR.¹¹ This geographic concentration has created a "skills gap" for Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities, where 65% of the population resides.¹¹
2. **The Rise of Agentic AI:** As AI moves from generating content (Generative AI) to performing autonomous tasks (Agentic AI), the demand shifts toward professionals who can manage "AI workflows" rather than those who perform the tasks manually.¹⁸
3. **VET and Skill India:** To address this, the government is integrating AVGC-XR courses into mainstream vocational training (VET) and higher education, supported by a "National Talent Registry".¹⁷

The implications are clear: the future of gaming careers in India belongs to the "Technical Artist" and the "AI Workflow Architect"—roles

that blend creative intuition with the ability to orchestrate complex machine-learning models.

The Impact of the 2025 Act on Career Pathways

The prohibition of online money games (OMG) in August 2025 was a "creative destruction" event. While it displaced thousands of workers in the real-money gaming (RMG) sub-sector, it cleared the path for a more sustainable "play-led" industry.

- Esports as a Career: The Act explicitly recognizes and promotes e-sports, leading to the establishment of the Online Gaming Authority of India.³ This has legitimized professional gaming, coaching, and tournament management as viable career paths.
- Genre Diversification: Studios that previously focused on narrow OMG formats are now diversifying into simulation, arcade, and puzzle games.¹ This has increased the demand for designers who understand "engagement-led monetization" rather than just "monetary mechanics".¹
- Handheld and Cloud Gaming: The launch of handheld consoles (like the ROG Ally) and the rollout of Xbox Cloud Gaming in India in 2025 have opened new avenues for developers to optimize games for portable PC and cloud-native environments.¹

Global Trends: The Unity and GDC Perspective

The international landscape provides a cautionary tale for India. The 2026 Unity Report highlights that developers are managing risk by "doing more with less"—keeping teams lean and investing in "LiveOps" to squeeze more value out of existing games.²⁹ About 62% of developers now prioritize "maximizing existing games" over developing new IPs in different genres.²⁹

For Indian professionals, this means that roles in LiveOps management and community engagement are becoming as critical as initial game design. Furthermore, as "games get bigger" with expansive open worlds and non-stop updates, the ability to use "efficiency tools" (which 45% of developers cite as their main risk-mitigation strategy) becomes a mandatory skill.²⁹

Opportunities for India

The Indian gaming landscape is currently undergoing a "Resilient Recalibration," driven by the vacuum left by the 2025 prohibition of online money gaming. This regulatory shift has fundamentally redirected the nation's massive user base—which surpassed 52 Crore individuals by 2025—toward pure-play video games and original IP development. India's competitive edge in this new era lies in its technical depth; with an AI skill penetration 2.5 times the global average, the workforce is uniquely positioned to adopt "Agentic AI" workflows that compress development timelines and enable leaner teams to produce AAA-quality content. Furthermore, the institutional backing of the National AVGC-XR Policy, which aims to cultivate 20 Lakh skilled professionals by 2030 through initiatives like the 15,000 Content Creator Labs, ensures that the "Skills Paradox" is addressed at the foundational level. By blending this government-led infrastructure with a pivot toward engagement-led monetization and esports, India is transitioning from a service-oriented "back office" into a sovereign, value-driven powerhouse in the global digital economy.

Conclusion

The Systematic Literature Review of the gaming industry from 2018 to 2026 identifies a sector that has successfully navigated a period of intense regulatory and technological upheaval. For the Indian market, the trajectory is one of "Resilient Recalibration."

Summarizing the 'Skills Paradox'

The "Skills Paradox" stands as the defining labor challenge of 2026. The industry is currently witnessing a 20% overcapacity in legacy developer roles while facing a 50% shortage in high-end AI and data engineering talent.¹¹ The paradox is not just a numerical gap but a "quality and depth" gap. Junior developers who rely on traditional coding are finding their roles increasingly automated by AI, while those who can master "Agentic AI" workflows are commanding a 56% wage premium.¹⁸ This suggests that the talent pipeline must pivot from "generalist coding" to "specialized AI-augmentation" to remain relevant in a market that is increasingly focused on technical depth and creative sovereignty.⁶

The Impact of the AVGC-XR Policy in India

The National AVGC-XR Policy, supported by state-level frameworks in Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh, has transformed from a vision document into an operational engine for job creation. By establishing 15,000 Content Creator Labs in schools and colleges, the government is addressing the "job readiness" problem at its source.¹³ The projected requirement for 20 Lakh skilled professionals by 2030 is no longer a speculative figure but a target backed by ₹250 Crore in initial budget allocations and the creation of National Centres of Excellence like the IICT in Mumbai.¹³ This policy has successfully positioned the "Orange Economy" as a legitimate and pandemic-proof pillar of India's GDP, shifting the narrative from consumption to "Create in India, Create for the World".¹³

The Necessity of AI-Augmentation for Indian Developers

Finally, the research underscores that AI-augmentation is no longer a luxury but a fundamental necessity for Indian developers. As global studios downsize and focus on efficiency, Indian talent must leverage its "2.5x global average" AI skill penetration to offer high-end co-development and original IP creation.²¹ The 2025 regulatory reset has created a "safe space" for video game innovation, but competing on the global stage requires the use of procedural generation, AI-driven LiveOps, and automated asset pipelines to manage the rising scale of modern games.¹ For the Indian gaming professional, the pathway to success lies in the synthesis of human creativity and AI-augmented productivity—ensuring that India remains not just a "scale-driven ecosystem" but a "value-driven powerhouse" in the global digital economy.

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