

Podcasts and Play: Examining the formats of gaming podcasts

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ABSTRACT

Gaming podcasts are one of the most prominent forms of podcast in the leisure category of Apple Podcasts, with roughly 24,000 podcasts being tagged in this category (Misener 2021). Despite this, there has been no examination of this widespread form of gaming content creation. This presentation will begin the work of examining these podcasts by presenting a typology of gaming podcasts. This typology will divide these podcasts in two ways: first by the style or genre of the podcasts, and then by the background of the creators involved. In doing so, the hope is that this will help shed light on who is creating these podcasts, as well as what they are focused on discussing. This will lay the foundation for future study of gaming podcasts.

Keywords

Gaming content creation, podcasts, typology, audio, games podcasts

INTRODUCTION

One exciting area of gaming content creation yet to be explored is the field of games podcasts. This is surprising considering the depth of the field – “Video Games” and “Games” are the two largest tagged categories in the Leisure section of the Apple Podcasts platform, with a combined total of roughly 24,000 shows on the one platform alone (Misener 2021). This presentation will focus on providing a working example of a first typology of games podcasts, drawing on the work previously done in the fields of podcast studies and gaming content creation studies to highlight the diversity of content and creators present in the industry. This typology will serve as the first step into the previously unexplored area of games podcasts. While some analysis has been directed at podcasts which fall under the category of “Actual Play” (White 2019), there has been no analysis of the broader “games” category of podcasts. Games podcasts hence represent a unique case study of the habits and labour practices of content creators in a variety of disciplines, due to their cross-disciplinary nature.

Game podcasts do not exist in isolation, but in the intersection between two growing industries. Analysis of these podcasts and the practices behind them can help shed light on the ways these industries have developed – and will continue to develop. Of particular interest here is the ways in which the capitalist framework governing the platforms (Srnicek & De Sutter 2017) which the majority of this content is developed for has influenced creators – both in big ways and ways small. Research has highlighted the ways that content creators on platforms like Twitch and YouTube are forced to navigate the asymmetrical power dynamics present when they attempt to monetize their labour (Johnson & Woodcock 2019, Kopf 2020, Partin 2020, Tomesena 2019) – something which has also been seen in the ways podcasters do the same.

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This typology will break down the podcasts in two ways. Firstly, by their format. This will predominantly draw on the existing literature that has worked to create typologies of podcast styles and genres (Rowles & Rogers 2019, pp. 26-31), as many of the podcasts that exist here fit into these typologies. Many games podcasts, for example, are defined by podcast typologies as fitting in what is colloquially known as the “chumcast” format, where casual discussion around a specific topic is lightly edited in create a conversational listening experience –often centred on discussing news relevant to the broader game culture or topics targeted at a specific niche community. The format aspect of the typology will draw on the work done categorizing and defining the different types of gaming content creation styles and genres. Authors like T.L Taylor (2019) have noted a variety of different styles present on platforms like Twitch. Considering the background and experience some podcast creators have with these platforms, it is important to consider the ways style or format may be shaped by the categories they present.

This also highlights another aspect which will form the basis of the second part of the typology: who the creators are. Games podcasts are a large medium, with creators from a vast variety of backgrounds all competing in the field. Most obviously, there are the different professional backgrounds which creators may have. While some may be podcast or radio natives, others may have more experience in the gaming content creation fields, be they as entertainers, or as journalists. Furthermore, some may be complete amateurs, with little to no experience in the field; podcasting, like the field of gaming content creation, is often viewed as being an equal playing field where any amateur can potentially become successful (Johnson & Woodcock 2019, pp. 344, 345; Sullivan 2018). And while the meritocratic illusion presented here rarely pans out, it highlights the important role that the amateur podcasters play in the field. As a result, there is a large spectrum of professional skill levels creating games podcasts – something which this typology will codify and examine.

Understanding the *who* behind these podcasts is hence a key factor in determining the *what* or *why* behind them –something which I hope to engage with in further study. This presentation aims to lay the foundation for future study of games podcasts and will, by defining a typology, propose a variety of possible angles or areas ripe for future study.

BIO

Ryan Stanton is a PhD candidate at the University of Sydney. His thesis aims to provide the first academic analysis of the gaming podcast industry, and in doing so broaden the fields of gaming content creation studies, podcast studies, and platform studies. Before his PhD he completed an honours thesis examining the rise of the new media trend known as Actual Play and the ways fans interact with Actual Play shows, using popular podcast *The Adventure Zone* as a case study.

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