Esport co-streaming and spectator motivations

Michael Williamson
Griffith University
Gold Coast, 4215, QLD, Australia
michael.williamson@griffithuni.edu.au

Keywords

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Esport broadcasts on live streaming platforms such as Twitch.tv and YouTube have enabled game publishers to reach millions of fans (Newzoo 2021). In 2016, the League of Legends world championship final drew 43 million online spectators, 12 million more than the NBA final of the same year (Clavio 2017). It is expected that the esports audience will grow to 474 million spectators in 2021 (Newzoo 2021). These viewership metrics provide sponsors with the justification to continue their investment in esport. As sponsors are the major source of revenue in esports, game publishers have sought to increase the reach of their broadcasts (Fitch 2021; Newzoo 2021). Recently, these same game publishers have allowed a small number of live streamers to rebroadcast esport matches alongside the main broadcast (Fitch 2021). These live streamers add their own commentary and insights to live matches and broadcast to their audience on their chosen streaming platform. Game publishers use co-streaming to introduce a larger audience to esport allowing for both the co-streamer and the organisation to benefit. Game publishers (e.g., Riot Games) and live streamers are thought to benefit from the increased viewership through expanded monetisation opportunities (Masters 2021). However, unlike research in traditional sport, research regarding the motives of esport spectators is still ongoing. This is especially the case in the context of co-streaming. To explore the audience of co-streamed esports, this research employs the uses and gratification (U&G) theory to investigate motivation.

The U&G theory is widely used for understanding the needs, and as a result, motivations of consumer choice and use of media (Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch 1973; Neus 2020). A central aspect of U&G theory is the emphasis on the audience as active (Ruggiero 2000). Ruggiero (2000) also argues that U&G theory is applicable in new media domains and specifically media on the internet. U&G theory has been used previously within traditional sport contexts (Hayes et al. 2019) and later extended into esports (Neus 2020). In the context of the current research U&G theory is used to identify motivations related to the choice to watch esport co-streams instead of the official broadcast. To investigate the choice to watch co-streamed esports the following research question is proposed: Why do people choose the method of co-streams to spectate esports?

From the sport management domain, the Motivation Scale of Sport Consumers (MSSC) is a widely used tool to investigate the motives of sport consumers (Trail and James 2001). Trail and James (2001) validated nine motives, vicarious achievement, acquisition of knowledge, aesthetics, drama, escape, family, physical attractiveness, physical skill, and social interaction. As such, the use of the MSSC across the sport

domain has resulted in comprehensive assessments of sport consumers motivations (Chan-Olmsted and Xiao 2019; Hamari and Sjöblom 2017; Pizzo et al. 2018). Yet, the MSSC remains unexplored in the context of co-streaming esport consumers. Thus, the following research question is proposed: What motivates fans to watch esport co-streams?

The motivations of esport spectators have been investigated with respect to whether the spectator views online or in person and how these two forms of spectating change motivations (Neus 2020). Literature also highlights the differences among spectator motivations in different genres of esports and compared to traditional sport (Anderson et al. 2021; Pizzo et al. 2018). From the current literature motives found to be statistically significant include, acquisition of knowledge, player skill, escape, and vicarious achievement (Hamari and Sjöblom 2017; Neus 2020; Pizzo et al. 2018). However, the literature currently focusses on spectators who watch the official esports broadcast, but the rise of co-streaming provides the opportunity to advance knowledge about consumer spectator practices and motivations.

Qian (2021) investigated co-streaming Thursday Night Football (TNF) and factors which influenced intentions to continue watching (Qian 2021). The results demonstrate that virtual interactions between the viewers in chat and the streamer, and the fit of the co-streamer to the content they are co-streaming positively influence the intention to continue watching (Qian 2021). Although this research investigated co-streaming in a different context (TNF) it provides background for esports co-streaming. As the method for co-streaming TNF and esport is essentially the same both co-streamer fit, and social interactions are expected to impact the spectator's motivations to watch a co-stream.

To answer the research questions, a mixed methods approach was employed. Following a pragmatic methodology and parallel research design this research both investigates the motives of esport spectators who choose to watch a co-stream and provides deeper insight into the motives from the perspective of these spectators in the context of co-streaming on twitch.tv. Expected results of this research will further the literature regarding esport spectator motivations to include those who choose to watch co-streams. Expected results also provide practical insights for game publishers and co-streamers as spectator motivations can be used to ensure co-streams are customised to the audience.

BIO
Michael Williamson is a PhD candidate at Griffith University in the Department of Tourism, Sport, and Hotel Management. He is supervised by Associate Professor Kevin Filo, Dr. Brooke Harris-Reeves and Dr. Jason Doyle. His research interests focus on consumer motivation, sport development, athlete wellbeing, and branding. His thesis centers on Australia's esport landscape investigating the interplay of branding and consumer motivations.

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