

Career, Hustle or Hobby? The Lives of Gaming Podcast Creators

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Keywords

Gaming podcasts, gaming content creation, podcasts, platform studies,

INTRODUCTION

Gaming podcasts are a growing medium, with over 24,000 different shows present in the Games or Video Games categories on Apple Podcasts (Misener, 2021) – this actually represents the largest subcategory in the platform’s leisure section. Despite this, they remain an unexplored area of gaming content creation. This paper will present findings from ongoing interviews and qualitative research investigating gaming podcasts as a new media industry, highlighting the multitude of motivations creators in this industry have, as well as the different strategies they utilize to achieve these goals. In doing so, this presentation will highlight the myriad of ways gaming podcast creators do what they do – as well as the ways the disparities in the industry perpetuated by platform powers present obstacles which they must overcome in order to achieve success.

The gaming podcast industry is one which has attracted a variety of creators from various new media industries, gender, racial, and sexual identities and socio-economic backgrounds. This is unsurprising considering both podcasting and gaming content creation have been viewed as like “the wild west” (Quirk, 2015) or “the gold rush” (Johnson & Woodcock, 2019) by the creators in these fields. These creators view the industries as neo-liberal meritocracies where hardworking creators are rewarded in proportion to their labour (Johnson & Woodcock, 2019, pp. 344-345, Sullivan, 2018, pp. 47-48). This meritocratic perspective contradicts many scholarly perspectives on the medium however, and it is this contradiction that forms a key part of this research project’s analysis. This paper will present preliminary findings on one aspect of the research project. Specifically, it will focus on the different levels of “success” creators have in the industry, and how ideas of “success” are being articulated and understood.

Inspired by a quote from one of the interviews which this research is based on, these creators will be broken down into three broad categories: “hobbyists”, “hustlers”, and “professionals”. Hobbyists are creators who participate in podcasting as an activity on the side – their gaming podcasts are not related to their day job or primary source of income. Professionals are the creators who produce gaming podcast(s) as part of their day job or career. In between these two types sits the Hustlers – creators who are not currently Professionals but are attempting to become so, either via leveraging their existing networks, cultural capital or through other means such as paid advertising. I will explore the perspectives and lives of these creators focusing on their discussion of two important aspects of the field. Firstly, I will highlight the ways creators self-reflect upon their labour and the ways that they attempt to convert or monetise this

Proceedings of DiGRA Australia 2023

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labour. These comparisons will be compared to similar self reflections in other fields of gaming content creation including studies of Twitch Streamers, game creators and cosplayers in order to show the differences that set the perspectives of podcast creators apart. Secondly, I will highlight the ways that the creators view the field of gaming podcasting. More specifically I will examine their perspectives on how success is achieved – what paths and tools can be utilized to do so – as well as the specific challenges that these creators may face. These perspectives will be framed in terms of previous research into creator perspectives of success in the fields of podcasting and gaming content creation further building on existing research while also highlighting how the field of gaming podcasting may set itself apart.

Looking at this important topics through the lens of these three types of creators provides us with the opportunity to further highlight the differences and similarities in the beliefs, perspective, and attitudes of gaming podcasters. In doing so, this abstract not only further situates the field of gaming podcasting as one worthy of study that exists firmly in the gaming content creation sphere, but also highlights the complexity and diversity of creators and perspectives that exist within the field.

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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