Play, Watch, Create: Unpacking Community Views on Esports, Game-Related Content Creation, & Gameplay Careers

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INTRODUCTION

Esports (electronic sports) is a rapidly growing industry, with millions of spectators tuning in. In 2022, Newzoo reported an estimate of 261.2 million viewers and 2,469.5 million who are aware or esports, a 21.3% and 30.7% increase from 2021, respectively (Newzoo, 2021, 2022). This growth in esports interest is reflected in the videogaming literature, with much research investigating and debating the likes of esports as a sport (Bányai et al. 2020; Hong, 2022; Zhao et al. 2024), and esports as a legitimate career (Bányai et al. 2020; Bihari & Pattanaik, 2023; Hong, 2022; Kim & Thomas, 2015; Meng-Lewis et al. 2022; Smithies et al. 2020; Zhao et al. 2024). However, esports is only one part of the picture, with many viewers watching non-competitive videogaming content (Formosa et al. 2022; Newzoo, 2024). Game-related content has yet to be thoroughly explored in the literature, with some beginning the exploration by discussing "let's players" (Kreissl et al. 2021) and live streamers (Johnson, 2021; Johnson & Woodcock, 2017). Despite the limited research, many argue that game-related content plays an imperative role in the maintenance and growth in videogaming culture and community (Johnson, 2021; Johnson & Woodcock, 2019; Kreissl et al. 2021; Newzoo, 2023). Therefore, the present study looks to explore both esports and game-related content from the videogaming community; specifically, we investigated how the gaming community define and describes esports and game-related content. Further, we investigated the stance the community has regarding gameplaying as careers (e.g., professional esports players,

professional streamer) and their reasons why they are considered as real jobs. We used a mixed-methods cross-sectional study design in the form of an online survey; participants described esports, game-related content and gameplay careers before completing several 5-point Likert scale questions about esports themes found in the literature (Formosa et al. 2022). Participants (N=85) consisted of recreational players (64.7%), game content consumers (15.3%), game content creators (12.9%), amateur esports players (2.4), and professional esports staff (coaches, event organisers; 2.4%), with 71.8% of participants being men (n=61) aged 16-44 years. Participants came from one of the following 18 countries: Australia, Canada, China, France, Germany, Hong Kong, India, Malaysia, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Philippines, Russia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom, and United Stated. Data were analysed using Template Thematic analysis, one samples t-tests, and one samples proportion tests. Results showed that esports was considered a type of game-related content (*competitive content*) rather than a separate phenomenon, with 'game-related content' being the umbrella term. Esports participation and events were also found to exist on a spectrum of 'professionality'; participants and events may be high-level and career-like but may also be smaller and of an amateur or semi-professional level. Game-related content consisted of 4 content themes: *extension of video games; vicarious gaming, competitive content;* and *fan made media*. The 4 themes also included subthemes relating to *gameplay* and other depictions of gaming actions, as well as discussion of videogames such as *news*, *essay/analyses/retrospectives,* and *game theory/lore*. In addition, participants identified 3 unique areas of gameplay work: *esports, game-related content,* and *game testing*; income and exchange of skills and services were the primary sources of justification. Our findings depict a wider scope of content around videogames and the gaming community, presenting an in-depth and comprehensive understanding of the elements and types of content that can be found, created, and consumed by the gaming community and professional gameplay workers. Further, the identification of game-related content encapsulating content such as esports provides further context regarding behavioural overlap amongst esports professionals and game-related content creation (e.g., live streaming; Bányai et al., 2020; Kim & Thomas, 2015; Meng-Lewis et al., 2022; Zhao et al., 2024). Future research should further investigate the role and purpose of game-related content in the context of the gaming community such as *information dissemination* establishing community boundaries and morals (Gabriels & De Backer, 2016) or *essays* and *game theories* building social connections through similar interests (Ridings & Gefen, 2004). In addition, further exploration is needed to establish paid gameplay work as legitimate professions, identifying job characteristics and classifications in organisational categorisation systems to ensure these workers have standardised work protocols and workers' rights.

BIO

Louise H. Trudgett-Klose is a PhD candidate at the University of South Australia and a member of HIGHER (Healthy, Inclusive Gaming, Hobby, and Esports Research). Her research focuses on the experiences of game players and the gaming community. In addition, Louise approaches videogaming research from an organisational psychology perspective, exploring gameplay as a career and resulting implications such as work health and safety, workplace harassment in the form of cyberbullying (in- and out-of-game), and sexism in the gameplay workplace.

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