



Research Article

THE METEORIC RISE OF ESPORTS. WILL IT CONTINUE?

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ABSTRACT

It is no doubt that with free access to multiple streaming platforms watching professional players play video games online has become easier, and the success of the growth of E-sports is kind of owed to that. E-sports has already become one of the most popular viewership categories in media consumption regarding sports with numbers already beating the NFL (National Football League) in the US. This paper aims to conclude whether this momentum will continue or it will proceed towards stagnation as the case with the viewership of other sporting events. The success and explosion of E-sports lies upon the benefits of the foundation of online gaming: on demand competition and interaction, as technology is catching up it is also attracting on demand spectators. Popular streaming platforms like twitch already have cultivated audiences approaching numbers of up to 5 million who spend approximately 106 minutes a day watching live streams which is more than prime time TV networks like CNN manage to pull in. Overall the global E-sports audience is estimated to be 300 million and shows no signs of slowing down as this number is expected to double to 600 million in the next three years (Bountie Gaming, 2018, Medium.com). Overall after looking over the data already collected worldwide and an online survey conducted through the help of a google form concluded that this massive global phenomenon known as E-sports shows no signs of slowing down. As more and more people over the world gain cheaper access to internet, it is very hard to think that the viewership numbers will ever decrease. Even though the audience for E-sports is predominantly found online, TBS and ESPN have already started investing in E-sports and began broadcasting major events in order to gain a slice of the viewership, this shows that others will soon follow suit.

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INTRODUCTION

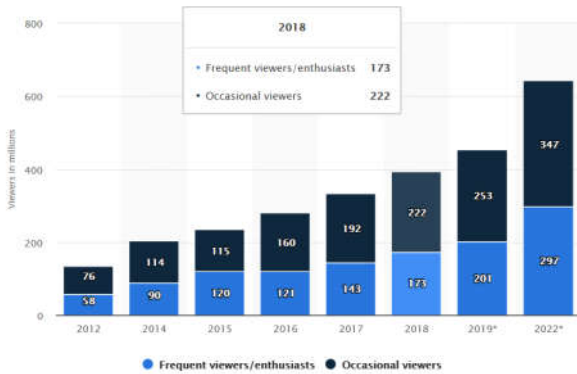
E-sports which is short for Electronic sports is the name assigned to professional competitive gaming. Basically, a form of competition involving video games. Mostly esports takes the form of inline multiplayer games played between professional players and teams. The keyword being professional, as it takes a lot of practice to get good at them, some players even training for years on a single game. Some of these games like DOTA 2 and Star Craft require immense strategy and coordination so much so that most professional teams hire a manager while competing in pro tournaments, to analyse and suggest counter strategies when competing professionally. In 1972, esports commenced with the videogame Space war for the first time at Stamford University (Bountie Gaming, 2018, Medium.com). The grand prize was a yearlong subscription to the rolling stone magazine, esports has come a long way since then with prize pools reaching as high 100 million dollars for the recent fortnite tournaments. Online Gaming began in 90s when World Wide Web made

messaging, networking a reality for global players. Nintendo and Blockbuster started sponsoring the Video Game World Championships as the internet popularised PC gaming. In 2017 the total amount of prize pool money amounted out to 110.6 million dollars among 3765 tournaments, the biggest prize among them being 24.6 million (Bountie Gaming, 2018, Medium.com). Just like in conventional sports people gather in overcrowded arenas to watch a few athletes play their favourite sport, esports has managed to create a similar following in a shorter amount of time. Back in 2013 the United States Government recognized League of Legends players professional athletes (albeit reluctantly) after a lengthy campaign by Riot and other's to get LoL's players get recognized as professional athletes. This was more than just an empty title this meant that international players could travel and stay in the United States on working visas the same kind that get issued for Olympic athletes(Sykes, Tom, 2013, www.pcgamer.com). This was a groundbreaking moment for esports as this was a nation's government recognizing the game as a sport which some people still find it very hard to do.

Viewership Data: In 2013 the NBA finals between the the Spurs and Miami Heat was aired on abc network and drew 26.3 million viewers that same year the world final of League

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of Legends was streamed on twitch(an online streaming site that you have to know about in order to navigate to) in the game's third year of competitive existence it was able to draw a viewer count of 32 million, almost 20% more than the American Broadcasting Company(Dorsey Patrick, 2014, ESPN).



Source: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/490480/global-esports-audience-size-viewer-type>

It is quite clear that with easily accessible free online streaming services, esports is able to pull in many more viewers than traditional sports. Moreover to participate in esports one needs to first get hold of a computer and an internet connection, which is not true for conventional sports like football, cricket or basketball where you need a field or a pitch. Let's Plays on youtube are also getting more attention with youtubers like Jacksepticeye, Markiplier and twitch personalities like Ninja and Shroud garnering and developing huge audiences on their respective platforms.

Comparison to Real world Sports

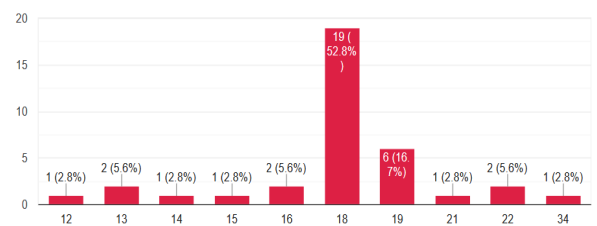
For conventional sports we will look at the NBA, for esports we'll look at the LCS (League of Legends Championship Series), the league that represents the highest level of competition in the game in the US, Europe. The NBA has 30 teams across the US and Canada, they are split into two conferences who play against each other during a season from October to April, the whole season culminates in a playoff tournament that decides the champion of each conference as well as the overall league champion. LCS on the other hand has 20 teams across the US and Europe, which are split into 2 divisions based on continents, league play occurs on a set schedule of about 4-5 months out of the year, also culminating in a playoff series determining the North American and the European champion, as well as a separate tournament that decides the world champion, so leagues and seasons of both the leagues look similar, but what about the teams themselves? Coming back to the NBA example again each team has to a member of the larger National Basketball Association (NBA) an approved group which is recognized as the real deal in basketball. MOBA teams don't really work like that, they work better. These teams are admitted to major championship events after winning their way through a qualifier challenger series, basically playing their way up the ranks to become a recognized group within their game, this way the MOBA system actually promotes the best player meritoriously and democratically rather than forcing players into a specifically recognized team before they are allowed to play. In both cases though, the teams are privately owned organizations or groups of people who are supported through merchandizing and

sponsorships. Just like in conventional sports only the best of the best receive these sponsorship deals, but compared to major sports athletes the salaries of esports players are still very low, but the last few years have seen this change with top players earning upto 7 figures in sponsorships and tournament play. Both Conventional sports and esports teams have managers, coaches, starters, reserve players, referees, these are also the roster requirements of esports tournament play and similar to traditional sports there are strict rules about everything to how many players from a team can play to how many players can act as reserves in case something happens to the A team. (NBA.com, 2019, NBA Media Ventures, LLC (US)).

For this we will look at the NFL where 46 players are allowed to dress for every game with 11 offensive players and 11 defensive players, every position has a backup and a few extra. Now we will look at MOBA tournaments, each team has a maximum of 10 players with 5 players in the arena at all times and one backup for every player. These players are constantly connected with each other and are not randomly collected from the corners of the world. Also just like baseball players are restricted from having a picture of the baseball on their uniforms, MOBA players cannot have certain skins on their ingame characters that may distract or mislead the opponent. Keybinding and mods are heavily controlled in MOBAs in the same way baseball players cannot modify their gloves, helmets or bats to give them a special advantage during competition. MOBA players also have to be in peak physical form with hyper fast typing and clicking speeds with unremarkable hand eye coordination, some players often receive injuries from years of rapid keypresses and clicking. And above as mentioned the US now recognizes LoL players as professional athletes, making them no less than athletes in traditional sports. (Major League Baseball Advanced Media, LP. July 22, 2015).

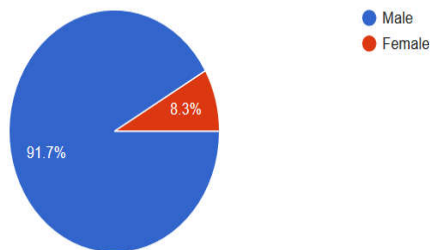
Survey Conducted: An online survey was conducted by me which concluded the very results anticipated, that the esports momentum is in no hurry to slow down. The below section will display the questions asked in the survey and the summarized results, and also what they mean.

Q1. Please Enter your Age



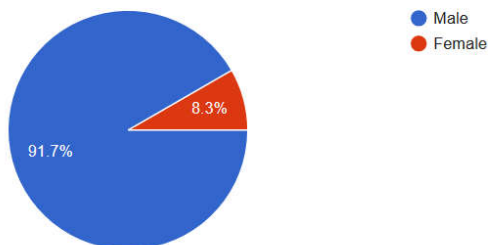
As we can see the most responses were from people who were 18 years of age which is the age where most people either discover video games or regularly start playing them. The people who are regular at playing video games eventually will get better and are unlikely to stop playing.

Q2. Gender



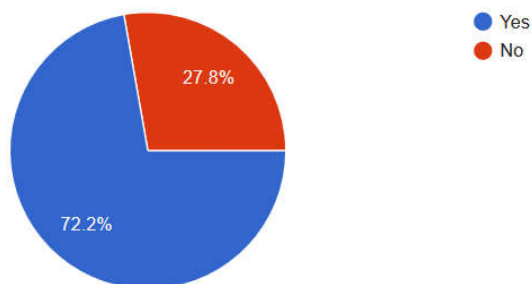
As represented in the pie chart above, gaming even as a hobby is still male dominated. Thus, we see games with high action more and more as they appeal to men more than women as the market is heavily male dominated, but this is slowly changing, there are a number of twitch streamers who are female.

Q3. What Genre of Video Games do you enjoy playing the most?



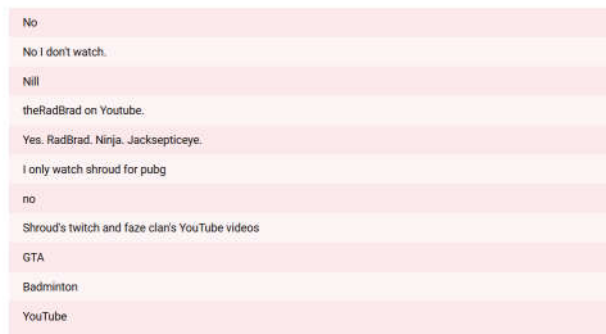
This is one of the most important questions I asked in the questionnaire. This shows that the majority of the people enjoy playing massively multiplayer games more than any other genre. At their core all human beings crave connections, and through the they can meet, play and compete with like minded players from all around the world, even if their friends are not interested in games. This question highlights the importance of internet to the gaming community. Thus the rush of competition and adrenaline that you experience when playing massively multiplayer games is also one of the major reasons this genre is so popular.

Q4. If you were a Professional Player, would you Consider Making a Career of Your Talent?



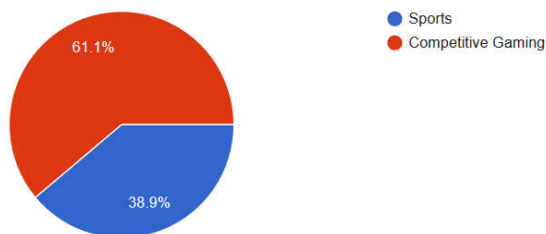
Here we can see that the people of the world are shifting their opinion about gaming. 72.2% of the members who participated in the survey believe that they would consider having a career in esports. So we can see that the idea is gaining mainstream acceptance.

Q5. Do you watch Let's Plays on Youtube or Twitch if so which ones and whom?



As we can see most people watch youtubers or streamers oriented towards gaming, thus this is evidence to their large audience.

Q6. Which do you feel is easier, getting good at sports or competitive gaming?



This is also evidence to one of the points mentioned earlier, that gaming is much more easier to get into than conventional sports, all you require is a computer and an internet connection.

Q7. Please Describe your Memorable Gaming Moment if any?



This was a question to analyse how gaming makes an impact on somebody's psyche. If you truly enjoy something, you are bound to have good memories of it.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the esports momentum is likely to continue, with revenue generated being doubled in 2018, from 2017, no other industry in entertainment shows such growth. This also shows the decline of viewership of traditional sports with an aging audience. People are rapidly moving towards streaming services instead of TV, this trend can also be seen in movies as a good number of people now just wait for the movie to show up on platforms like Netflix. All in all esports

is on an upward trajectory and it shows no intent of slowing down.

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