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Towards a Future Esports Research: Introduction to Esports Minitrack

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Abstract

Research on esports is a relatively new, yet fast-growing discipline with multiple inter- and multidisciplinary perspectives. For HICSS-56, research was solicited from multiple disciplines, including but not limited to business; cognitive science and psychology; information technology; sociology; media studies and communications; law; health, wellness, and medical sciences; and emerging technology. In total, eleven manuscripts from multiple disciplines were received and subjected to peer and editorial review. Of those eleven, five were accepted for presentation and publication. Introduction of the Esports minitrack and the accepted research is discussed.

Keywords: electronic sports, electronic gaming, video games, interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary

1. Introduction

Video game research first emerged in the late 1970s (Hedlund, 2022), however it was not until the late 1990s and early 2000s that esports research emerged as a standalone discipline. While esports research was establishing itself, several important questions arose requiring extensive scholarship and inquiry. These questions included “what are esports,” “how are esports and video games similar and different,” “are esports a sport,” just to list a few (e.g. Jenny et al., 2017; Jin, 2021; Witkowski, 2012). As esports research found its footing and carved a distinct place in the body of knowledge, an increasing number of disciplines also began to explore research connections and overlap with esports (Reitman et al., 2020). Disciplines such as business, communication, media and sport management all began to have large numbers of scholars pivot to conducting esports and video game research, alongside cultural studies scholars who had previously conducted games and electronic gaming research.

Prior to 2023, the HICSS conference had minitracks covering parallel research areas such as Games and Gaming, and Gamification, and in 2023, the Esports minitrack was born. All five of the submitted and accepted manuscripts to the “Esports” minitrack share a focus on competitive electronic sports. In the following section, we will introduce, outline and review these manuscripts.

2. Esports Minitrack

Esports research is a field with conflicting definitions and multiple perspectives. Despite the differences between approaches to esports, all emphasize its technological specificity and competitiveness. In the last decade, esports has ceased to be seen solely as entertainment for the youth and has become the fastest-growing area in sports. This view is supported by the increase in the number of events organized, their popularity among millions of viewers, and the growing number of gamers, gamers’ salaries, and tournament prize pools. Traditional sports are still generally larger in size and reach than the biggest esports, with substantially more revenues and larger player salaries. However, esports is quickly catching up, given the growing number of broadcasted games and events, tournament prize pools, availability of media rights, and increasing advertising and sponsorship potential of esports games. Despite the increasing popularity of esports, the research is still in its nascency. After an initial descriptive stage, the focus shifts from explaining what esports is to a more nuanced understanding of multiple phenomenon present in the industry.

This minitrack aims to provide insight into esports’ theoretical development, application and practical understanding without excluding any methodological approach or scientific disciplines. Conceptual, theoretical, empirical, and methodological contributions that enrich our understanding of esports were all solicited. Submitted research was subjected to double-blind peer review,

and after receiving all reviews, the editorial team proceeded to identify the best research articles.

3. Review of Accepted Research

For HICSS-56, five manuscripts were accepted for presentation and publication. These accepted manuscripts span the gamut, including nearly all phases of creating successful teams, understanding how selected players play esports, identifying and examining various types of esports highlight videos, gambling in digital games and esports, and careers after being a professional esports player.

The first paper (Hong, Hong), *Esports Players' Transition out of Esports: Is There Life After Esports?*, focuses on esports professional players' transitions out of the sport. With thematic analysis, the authors identified four factors—(1) pressure and uncertainty, (2) lack of pre-retirement planning, (3) need for mentorship, (4) need for realism about talent—that should help the industry and stakeholders create solutions for smooth transitions into esports retirement.

The second paper (McCauley), *Smurfs, Silvers & CS:GO: Understanding Smurfing as Prosumers*, uses auto-netnographic approach to examine smurfing in *Counter Strike: Global Offensive* game (CS:GO). The author identified three key themes: (1) smurfing as embedded in the prosumer experience, (2) complex motivations to smurf, and (3) smurfing as cheating, which shows that smurfing should not always be framed as a negative phenomenon.

The third paper (Nyćkowiak, Kołodziej, Jasny, Siuda), *Toward Successful Esports Team: How Does National Diversity Affect Multiplayer Online Battle Arena Video Game*, examines data from 13 *Dota 2* games' tournaments from 2011 to 2018. Researchers found that multinational teams perform better than nationally homogenous teams (including the coaches' nationalities).

The fourth paper (Pyun, Jang, Lee, Ryu, Hwang, Jeong), *Determinants of Esports Highlight Viewership: The Case of League of Legends Champions Korea*, uses game-level data to determine predictors of *League of Legends* game YouTube recordings view counts. Using a multi-level regression model, the authors found that the number of kills, the type of the game (i.e., playoff games, 2nd round games, and 3rd set), and the age of the video clip were positively correlated to view counts.

Finally, the fifth paper (Mattinen, Macey, Hamari), *Gambling in Digital Games and Esports: a Scoping Review*, explores the presence of gambling associated with digital games. Based on the literature review of 132 publications, the authors found an

increase of interest in gambling in digital games in the late 2010s, which can be attributed due to the growing popularity of novel gambling activities, such as loot boxes, esports betting, and skins gambling.

4. Conclusion and Future Directions

In summary, our minitrack consists of five papers that show many faces of esports research. The minitrack approaches esports research from a multidisciplinary perspective that includes (but is not limited to) cognitive science and psychology, information technology, sociology, media studies and communications. It is our belief that all of these interdisciplinary research papers included in the minitrack will set a high-standard for future conferences.

With a glimpse into the future, we are sure that esports will remain a captivating research area due to its popularity and a basis for understanding human nature and behaviors in general. With the rising wave of esports research, we want to emphasize that scientific excellence is the direction through which esports can gain recognition in the scientific community.

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