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The Rise of Esports

by

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The popularity of esports: Esports and Traditional Sports

Part 1: Introduction to video games and esports

In today's digital age video games have quickly and swiftly taken over popular culture due to their popularity as well as their influence. While video games are relatively new compared to traditional sports such as basketball or football that have been around for hundreds of years, video gaming is taking a calculated leap of faith in becoming among the ranks of the next hot sport. To some, video games may not be seen as competitive, physical, or even requiring teamwork like a traditional sport would. Video games have been transforming as technology has allowed them to for almost 50 years and will continue to expand and evolve as time goes on. Video games are more popular than ever before and as long as money fuels and is refueled back into video games they will continue to occupy the minds of children as well as adults everywhere. With a new culture, demands new rules and regulations for the ideals of how to go about treating video games in today's society, together with the future society. Esports are the future that casual players and competitive players alike have been longing for. Whether you are a spectator or a professional gamer, video game esports are easy to rally behind and easy to love. The public's interpretation of esports is slowly starting to change, but now more than ever before esports can coincide with traditional sports. Although traditional sports continues to have millions of viewers each year, they are losing popularity due to the gain of interest of esports. Electronic sports have been rapidly gaining in popularity because of a new generation of gamers, video games have become competitive, personable, and enjoyable for the player.

Esports are electronic sports also known as competitive video gaming. Competitive video gaming spans across numerous platforms of PC (Computer), Xbox One, Playstation 4, or Nintendo's Switch or Gamecube. There are numerous categories that games of esports can fall under such as Multiplayer Online Battle Arena (MOBA) which are games that require intricate strategies to outsmart and outmaneuver your opponent. (MOBA) games are similar to the ideals of chess and stress the motive of trying to always be one step ahead of your opponent an example being *League of Legends*. *League of Legends* is a team based game in which five players play against five players in a battle of strategy and wits on a battlefield. Every player has the ability to play as a "champion" with unique abilities specific to that champion. Champions need to have chemistry with one another in order to be successful in defeating the rival champions on the other team, teams need to work together to defeat the other team. Another popular category of competitive gaming are player vs. player (PvP) games in which one or more human players face off against one or more human players, PvP games can be split up into subcategories of fighting games like *Super Smash Brothers*. *Super Smash Brothers* is a fighting game in which players must knock other players off of a fighting platform and deplete their "stocks" or lives. There are over "70" fighters in the game, most are crossovers from other Nintendo games. The second subcategory is sport themed games that are also player v. player like the soccer franchise *FIFA*. (Pizzo 110) *FIFA* is a realistic soccer game in which one player can take control of every player on the field therefore setting up for passing plays and shots on net. Last but not least is the battle royale game mode, namely *Fortnite*. *Fortnite* has revolutionized the industry because of its appeal to any and all age groups and also the fact that it is free to play. *Fortnite* is a battle royale type game in which 100 people are dropped onto a shrinking island. The twist is that a

storm creates smaller circles pushing players to move into a tighter area forcing them to eliminate each other. In order for success in *Fortnite* a player must properly and efficiently use materials, weapons, and other necessities survival is the name of the game when it comes to *Fortnite*.

With all these categories of games esports still had to start somewhere. Officially esports made Debut with its first video game tournament of *Space Invaders* in 1972. In the earlier years, competitions were not as close to being as complex as games are now with so much strategy and thought that must occur during the course of the game. Esports has been measured to expand and test the farthest capabilities of the human mind. “Esports research provides an ideal opportunity to further advance research on the development and assessment of human expertise.”(Pluss) This tournament paved the way as a pioneer of the esports world and will live on for many years to come into the future. Tournaments began the modern video game culture and eventual development into esports as we know them today. Competitive tournaments soon came into play when cash prizes started from a grand prize of “a year long subscription to the Rolling Stone magazine.” (Consolazio) then soon increased in 1997 when John Carmack a developer of *Doom* gave away his Ferrari Testarossa as a prize. This event in 1997 created major controversy as it was one of the biggest prizes given away in competitive gaming and a for sure sign that gaming was on the uprise. By 2018, *The International 2018* a *DOTA 2* tournament had a prize pool of \$25,532,177. “The total esports prize money awarded to \$110.6 million.”(esportsearnings.com) The prizes for these esports have reached into the millions of dollars also with attention and popularity from third party companies who are looking to cash in on the payout. Similar to traditional sports, companies can sponsor teams, individual athletes,

arenas, or through press coverage. The same is for esports with companies such as Intel, Coca-Cola, Red Bull, and Mountain Dew, to name a few. These companies are promoting themselves on sites like Youtube and Twitch with appeal set upon those who don't consume media traditionally. Meaning that the younger generation who gravitate towards esports usually aren't watching cable television primarily news networks (traditional media). Even though esports are struggling to make their mark on television it shouldn't be considered bad. But advertisers need to understand that a new generation is gaining news and its media differently from those who were born 30 years ago rather than 15 years ago. The modern day videogames can almost always be represented as any video games whether they are products of their father companies of Sony, Microsoft, or Nintendo. These companies have developed certain strategies that contain components within games that are able to appeal to a wide community. Along with appealing to a wide community of players and spectators it also needs to have the potential to evolve and develop according to the communities needs and wants with a slight spark of creativity into the games. These companies have worked tirelessly to find ways that communities will contribute their time into watching esport events. Spectators consume their time within esports for a reason and not something else because they can relate to those who are able to play the games professionally. With the origin of video arcades in the late 1970s have continued to keep the spirit of gaming alive with the genre of fighting games. These games were mostly arcade games that kept younger kids in the 1970s and 1980s within an arcade rather than their own homes as video games have allowed them to do today.

Fast forward years later esports have taken off into numerous categories with gamers who live stream for wide arrays of audiences using specific streaming platforms. As well as

professional gamers who can represent teams and compete in tournaments that have a stadium setting where fans can go to spectate just like any other traditional sport. I will look to examine how esports have gained national and international fame as well as looking at how esports have been able to amass such a steady but increasing economy that has transitioned into a billion dollar industry. With the three categories I have discussed earlier I incorporated three video games that have helped to make esports what they are today. *League of Legends*, *Fortnite*, as well as *Super Smash Brothers*. These titles have revolutionized the industry and have been battle tested to help keep the esports scene thriving.

There are many different sides to esports as discussed earlier but I will focus in on gamers who use streaming platforms to broadcast their playing abilities to viewers who can directly relate to gamers through chat features and watch their favorite streamer who competes on their favorite game. The other side I will look to research is how professional gamers compete at tournaments while representing their respective club. The casual gamers who use these streaming platforms can be motivated to like and appreciate esports so much as a regular sport by being influenced by these certain features of streaming platforms.

Streaming websites such as Twitch.tv draws in around 15 million viewers everyday, many of those who come to watch their favorite streamers play their favorite games. Twitch.tv is a video game broadcasting website where anybody has the ability to stream. Viewers have the ability to interact with “streamers” through donations as well as the chat mechanism within the program. “Twitch was recently purchased by Amazon for almost \$1bn and has become emblematic of shifts with the digital media economy.”(Johnson) Spectators who are interested observe streamers who they find to be personable and can relate to. This can cause them to give

donations, subscribe, or follow their channel thereby increasing the popularity of the channel.

Esport professional players can also be streamers, these esport professionals have the ability to interact with their fans and receive donations as well, while training for esport events. Another streaming website that is highly associated with gaming is Youtube, Youtube is where videos can and are shared on almost any topics. Youtube is different from Twitch because Twitch is streamed live while Youtube videos are pre-recorded, processed, and edited for viewers.

The youth culture of the United States nowadays is completely different than that of even fifty years ago. Technology has become an ordinary and daily occurrence within almost anyone's life. Technology also brought up the development of video games which have evolved into the electronic phenomena we know and love today. Within the present day people constantly use their phones and are too distracted to engage with reality. This is not an issue but is the culture that we have built around ourselves for generations and generations to come. Esports can be part of that future as coinciding with traditional sports while technology and culture both improve and expand with time. Gaming has taken that same approach and must keep up with the culture that is presenting itself through esport competitions. Spectators have discovered the new chain of interest when it comes to advancing technology with the development of esports. Video games as a whole have changed many aspects of culture. Within the United States for example games have developed ideas for books, movies, and even television shows. Education through video games is also a tool for military personnel within military simulators to accurately simulate real life scenarios that can occur on the battlefield for military personal. Video games have grown to become a crucial part of life for young people, but now statistics have shown that most gamers are ages 18-34. This signifies that gamers have

been around since when video games first started to make a push in the 1980s and onwards. Those who have grown up with that as their culture still continue to respect and follow video games today even as they age and evolve.

Part 2: eSport Professionals compared to traditional sport athletes

Sports have been around for as long as man looked to compete against one another in a battle of physically and mental superiority. Often times in front of crowds full of spectators rooting for their favorite team or athlete to come out as victorious. Similar to a traditional sports, esports require muscle memory and practice. Another valid point is that since there is no defining factor to which and how much physical demand an activity must have in order to declare it a sport it is not fair to rule esports as not valid. Esports require you to move your fingers on a keyboard while moving your hand with a mouse on a desktop. This in itself is considered physical activity and can be classified as a sport due to its competitive nature. A sport is defined as “an activity involving physical exertion and skill in which an individual or team competes against another or others for entertainment.” Although at first glance esports can look like a waste of time by sitting down and playing with your hands on the keyboard. Esport athletes train themselves, and their reactions must be fluent and quick to be a step above that of their opponent. It is a constant battle on trying to one up the one upper, similar to traditional sports. Muscle memory is highly sought over and is needed to compete in games such as *Super Smash Brothers*, *Fortnite*, and *League of Legends*. This shows that esports can be classified as a sport due to the fact of physical activity gone through with dexterity of the hands as well as competing against a team with the ultimate goal of winning a competition. Esports may be ruled

as sports to some under the same roof that poker or chess are played, but almost every esports can be considered to be a mind sport in the sense that you need to outthink your opponents moves similar to traditional sports. While esports take countless hours of practice and determination from players, you cannot forget about the pure talent of the players that is looked at and claimed to be god given talent. A way that has been deemed valid to determining reaction speed of esports players are actions per minute or (APM). APM measures how many actions are measured and conducted within a mouse and keyboard in a minute. In an interview with Matt Weber who is a director of operations for Team Liquid he released his take on how watching an esports professional is truly a work of art. He discussed that the average professional hits upwards of “300 APM easily.” Managing all of those actions while conducting various tasks to become victorious is a talent that only the professional players can handle. Another skill that needs to be involved in team play to be successful is voice chat. Voice chat systems are now able to connect teammates across the globe using specific consoles. Voice chat is an evolving system that adds another aspect that can coincide to traditional sports with communication being a vital point for cooperating on certain games. According to “Understanding Esports from the Perspective of Team Dynamics” it is revealed that players learned different strategies or different cultural perspectives while playing online with people of different cultures. Although you may not win “the unique experience of suffering though a defeat made them grow up and become better people intellectual, mentally, and emotionally.” Esports give us the advantage of talking to one another no matter how far away, as well as the transport of ideas through a microphone.

Teams that win are rewarded with prize pools that are cash rewards for coming in different places. This is sometimes a bonus, but if it is a lower ranked team with less money it

may be the only thing that they can gain as money. So winning is a huge deal in part of gaining a good reputation as well as staying afloat financially, most of these pros need this money as they will train just for this moment and refuse to lose. Most esports players have a base salary and can survive off of that salary. Society is slowly but surely accepting the fact that esports will soon be declared a real sport as the events and entirety of it gains popularity by the day. This is proven as the United States government back in 2013 officially recognized Esport athletes as professional athletes. With The United States recognizing esports athletes as professional athletes has allowed international esports athletes to represent their country across the seas in the United States. But these international athletes are on a tight leash as they are only allowed to “enter the United States on B-1 business visitor visas, only as long as they receive no salary or payment other than prize money.” (natlawreview.com) This puts international athletes in a tight spot because most of their money is made due to a guaranteed salary, as the industry has expanded however athletes have been allowed to travel on a P-1 visa. “While some gamers are being granted athlete visas, P-1A visas are still an inconsistent and unreliable option for many professional gamers entering the country to compete.”(Brannon) As the esports grows and continues to develop with tournaments and coverage of the sport helps the cause for international athletes to travel into the United States. There is a loophole in the P-1 visa that does not clearly define what “athlete” and “sport” are. Even now Universities are recognizing professional esports and are even granting scholarship money to kids who are able to come play on their Esports teams. Schools such as Boise State, Georgia State, and University of California-Irvine grant scholarships and can even fill in scholastic fees. (Scholarships.com). Universities across The United States have been paying out the average esports players around “\$4,800 in tuition

awards a year.”(National Association of Collegiate Esports) With some esports student athletes receiving almost half off tuition, universities are slowly starting to realize the popularity and the money that can be obtained from having esports teams to represent their schools just as any other traditional sport team would.

Teamwork is a huge aspect of being successful in any games that you might play, even traditional sports feature teamwork, teamwork that is a requirement in order to be successful and have any chance to win. Normally team games have about five or six players on each team depending what game is being played, and requires each player to play a different role to help and support the team. Chemistry and “division of responsibilities” are crucial to how efficiently a team operates in the heat of battle. While a single player may play perfect within a PvP game, it is the larger team games that require teamwork are the more enjoyable to watch and to entertain the masses of crowds at events as well as those watching from their computer screens. Games such as League of Legends, Dota 2, and Smite require role players just like how traditional sports are played like basketball with a point guard to bring the ball over half court and a center to grab rebounds under the basket for their team. Each player in both esports and traditional sports relies on their teammates to perform and play into their roles. As well as being able to correctly communicate with your teammates via voice chat to effectively communicate strategies in order to give the team its best chance. Just as basketball is played, when a man isn't playing defense he gives an open lane for the man with the ball to shoot or drive to the basket. An esports team will struggle if one of their players is slacking or not performing up to par with the competition easily taking advantage, like in League of Legends if a solo player is not working with their teammates it will prove catastrophic for their team. “Group cohesion is

shown to have critical relevance to team performance when the teams work in highly stressful and task oriented environments.” (Charbonneau & Wood, 2018) “Teamwork skills that are incorporated into these games are also proven to help with social development skills as well as offline behaviors between groups and one on one person relationships”.(Freeman & Wohn, 2017) With every team comes a team leader tha must “grab the bull by the horns.” Having a team leader or captain is vital to a team's success, someone who is able to rally the troops and promote teamwork to the fullest. Being captain is no easy feat as to overcome adversity is always challenging no matter what team or sport is being played. These captians have important jobs requiring their professional teams to perform at high levels just like any other sports team. Esports have professional teams just like other sports. Examples of teams are Cloud 9, Team Dignitas, Faze Clan, and Optic Gaming to name a few who are just like any other professional organization. They consist of housing for their players, team nutritionists, coaches, and advisors to help them deal with how much time is healthy to be allocated to esports a day. Just like training for traditional professional athletes, esport athletes are on a strict regimen of a practice schedule of 6,7, or 8 hours a single day dedicated to training for an event. All looking for the prizes of 100,000\$ and up depending on what esport games is being played. These teams are so similar to any other professional sports team with interaction with fans, scouting out competition, strict practice schedules, and participating within tournaments. These teams go through main seasons of there particular game and hopefully do well enough to be invited to tournaments where the real cash prizes are awaiting for the taking.

Esports can now be compared to traditional sports such as baseball and basketball. This is because esports use the same market strategies to “understand the degree to which eSport

spectators are motivated similarly to traditional sport spectators.” According to “eSport vs. Sport: A Comparison of Spectator Motives” a study in South Korea was conducted to determine the exact reasons why spectators chose to attend esports events. Among the main categories were overall interest in the sport, interest in the player, sense of accomplishment when the player wins, role model of the player, the environment of the sport match, drama, opportunity to socialize with others at the match, excitement, and aesthetics of the game. These categories can relate back to reasons why a spectator would watch their favorite player on Twitch or Youtube. Spectators begin to get to know the personality and backstory of their favorite esports player which causes them to begin to cheer for them, as well as develop a sense of pride while getting behind their favorite athlete, and get to know them through their streaming profile. This in essence gains popularity for the streamer as well as for esports game. The population of gamers is very high, roughly “28%” of the population in the world are classified as active gamers, half of those spend money within in-game purchases called microtransactions. These microtransactions rack up an enormous amount leading to about 1.1 billion dollars while playing their favorite video game titles. 2.2 billion people commit their time to playing video games casually or competitively. This is a huge number of gamers across the world who participate in these team games every single day. Casual players who make up most of the population of gaming after playing play these games that lead to them to watch esports over other activities which gains more popularity. These casual players leads to consistent watching on streaming sites who are looking to get better and are intrigued by the sport as well as those who are perfecting it on a much higher scale. “These casual players, while spectators of eSports tournaments are not necessarily gamers, the majority of esports consumers are casual players who meet each other in

games randomly and become a team spontaneously, continue to be the most important segment of esports consumers and the main target of marketing.” esports are divided into different categories of games such as multiplayer online battle arena, fighting games, battle royales, real time strategy games, and sports themed games. This produces a wide net that can be cast out for viewers with a better chance that it will spark interest with the variety of different types of games that are being played. Esports have already been recognized as a real sport in countries like South Korea where fans take esports more serious than they do in the United States at this current point in time. Most of the studies that are done will be done through South Korea which treats esports more like a traditional sport than it is here.”Esports is the third-most popular sporting activity in South Korea.” This is because the work ethic and determination are related back to typical and even old school Korean culture where they are committed to work tirelessly to perfect any activity that they take pride in or need to prove themselves through constant and strict work ethic such as gaming. Now with gaming becoming so huge overseas it is hard to ignore how much money can be made from playing these video games. As well as the huge backing of statistics and popularity that players of these games can gain while playing.

Traditional sports and esports can also be looked at as just as important as other sports leagues like The National Football League (NFL), Major League Baseball (MLB), or the National Basketball Association (NBA). This is because esports have more than enough viewers to hang with the traditional sports. “Esports had roughly 84 million viewers in the United States in 2018, while the MLB has just under that with 79 million viewers”.(Casselmann) Esports have the ability to gain so many views because the sport isn’t favored in one country or another like baseball, or cricket. Esports are a universal language that all gamers have the ability to speak

and can grab the audience's attention. In 2020 esports are projected to be watched a total of “11 billion hours.” The majority of these esports spectators has an age range of “18-34 which makes up 73 percent of total views of esports.” Although esports have a rather low revenue draw in compared to other U.S. major league sports an evolving industry along with its sponsors who have ridiculous amounts of money will continue to match these numbers and soon to surpass them in the future years to come. For comparison according to Newzoo, “a leading provider of games and esports analytics identified that the NFL was able to gain a revenue of 14\$ billion in 2017 while esports was only a fraction of that sitting at 345\$ million. While the prize money for a 2018 DOTA 2 tournament still sat at 25.5\$ million about 10\$ million dollars more than the 2018 Daytona 500 champion.(Newzoo) A point to add that esports are relatively easy to pick up and start watching. According to studies done the key to esports being able to sustain an increase in the market would be to ”improve communications with fans in social networks and at amateur competitions. All this will make esports a highly profitable business”(Lockhman) Since Twitch.tv is free to watch with internet access is much more manageable to try and find online then rather with cable television which is more difficult to find and much less common. The argument is certainly there that can be made “that esports are the world’s fastest-growing sport and is the first sport, outside of football (soccer), that is truly global.(medium.com) Another part of esports that is also increasing the popularity is the gambling that is done by third party sites on esports. Esports gambling and betting has also become a common occurrence as it has become a regulated industry. It operates the same way as traditional sports, with the same odds.

Esport professionals with their fame and fortune

Twitch streamers and viewers are more alive and have more numbers than ever before. This is because viewers are able to escape the stressful “tension release motivation is so closely linked to achieving a sense of escape from everyday life.” (Sjöblom) These streamers can amass inconmensurable amounts of money so quickly as people watch and are soon to donate in order to feel apart of their community. Two streamers and video producers that have changed how videogames are viewed are Ninja, and PewDiePie.

Esport professionals are able to make so much money due to the amount of popularity and endorsements they receive from outside companies just like with traditional sport athletes. For example Tyler “Ninja” Blevins who is a professional eSport professional and streamer makes over 500,000\$ dollars every month due to his popularity and fame on twitch.tv. His popularity soon got him spots on Fortnite professional circuits where he would compete for hundreds of thousands of dollars while still attracting his fans from twitch in the first place to gain even more popularity to the esport of Fortnite. Fortnite is the ideal game for a family atmosphere and household it is a game that is rated E for everyone creating a perfect game that does not hold any age restrictions and can create a community that will not be barred by age as most video games have been in past years. After Ninja has been able to receive an endorsement from companies such as Red Bull for recognizing his talent as well as his popularity it increased his popularity, fame, and stock to make hime worth over 10\$ million dollars net worth. Ninja started out as a esport pro but quickly made the transition over to fortnite after the game came out, that with a combination of skill of talking to a community all through a webcam instantly made him a huge internet personality. Ninja’s rise to fame and popularity also took off after he was able to combine his skills in fortnite with the culture of pop stars Drake and Travis Scott as

well as professional sport athletes Jujú Smith-Schuster of the Pittsburgh Steelers. With this stream of different famous people connecting on one platform in one game broke the twitch.tv streaming records at 628,000 people simultaneously watching Ninja's channel at one time, breaking the old record by nearly 200,000. (Newzoo)

On the other hand PewDiePie is a Youtube content creator who makes, edits, and uploads videos rather than streaming them live on Twitch. His subscriber rank on (Youtube.com) is 3rd overall with almost 100,000,000 million subscribers sitting closely at 95,000,000 million. He is able to partner with Youtube as well as the advertisements that each video shows to earn close to a million dollars every month. PewDiePie (Pewds) is credited to have earned 10\$ million from advertisements alone in 2016. Pewds success quickly exploded as his channel on Youtube was the first to get 10 billion views. Soon after he was rated by Time magazine to be among the list of 100 Most Influential People in 2016. Pewds easily used gaming and the notion of popular games to his advantage along with his funny and witty style to rake in the subscribers and be rewarded as the third highest subscriber count on all of Youtube.

To conclude esports are paving the way for a new type of athlete and a new type of sport that will soon be recognized by people all around the world. The money and popularity is well within the picture and has the capability to expand dramatically and with force in years to come as long as the video game culture is well and alive as all the facts support that it will be.

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