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Understanding the Motivations of Esports Fans: The Relationship Between Esports Spectator Motivations and Esports Fandom Engagement

Joshua Barney

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UNDERSTANDING THE MOTIVATIONS OF ESPORTS FANS: THE RELATIONSHIP
BETWEEN ESPORTS SPECTATOR MOTIVATIONS AND ESPORTS FANDOM
ENGAGEMENT

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
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Abstract

This research study examined the motivations people have to watch esports and how these motivations are related to engagement in esports communities, fan identity, sense of community, messages shared in communities, and spectating preferences. Previous research regarding esports and why people watch it was used to create three categories for esports spectating motivations: skill-based motivations, entertainment-based motivations, and relationship-based motivations. Quantitative analyses were performed after collecting survey data from college students at UNLV and additional fans from esports communities. The results showed that there were positive relationships between the various motivations and all aspects of esports fandom engagement, showing how fans have varying motivations to watch esports. Further analysis of the data showed that relationship-based spectator motivations play a more significant role in esports fandoms and is the only motivation that is a significant predictor of all aspects of fandom measured. Fans with relationship-based motivations also prefer to watch esports in-person compared to watching online, while fans with entertainment or skill-based motivations did not have a preference. This study helps provide insight into esports fandoms and the significance that social interaction, parasocial relationships, and communication have on esports communities.

Keywords: esports, fandom, fan engagement, fan identity, sense of community, spectating motivations, spectating preferences, video games, gaming culture

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Dedication

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Esports are becoming a large, cultural phenomenon that is starting to influence various aspects of our modern society. Millions of people tune in and watch video game competitions, making esports a tremendously popular activity. Esports can consist of small, local gatherings or large-scale events with teams from across the globe. Scholars have identified esports as a highly competitive activity between players with unique exchanges between human actors and digital technology (Hamari & Sjöblom, 2017). Digital technology can provide virtual spaces for human players to interact with each other and can also regulate the rules of video games. Similar to many athletic sports, esports consist of games, matches, competitions, tournaments, leagues, and organizations that contribute to a large collection of competitive gaming opportunities. Esports are a growing phenomenon that combines video games, competitive sports, and media entertainment.

While esports could be considered a smaller part of a larger video game industry, esports are expected to have tremendous growth in the next few years. There were roughly 335 million people who watched esports in 2017 and analysts expect that there will be 646 million viewers by 2023, almost doubling the number of esports spectators in just six years (Reyes, 2019). The exponential growth found in the esports industry could be attributed to the growing popularity of video games. Video games are becoming one of the most popular methods for consuming media entertainment. The executive director of Microsoft's gaming department has stated there are over 2.5 billion people who play video games and gaming is a large contributor to the global entertainment industry (Spencer, 2019).

For communication scholars, learning more about esports and its fan communities provides an opportunity to examine how online communities are formed and the messages that

are expressed in these communities. Researching esports communities also provides a way to look at how people identify as a fan and feel a sense of belonging in a virtual community. This is important to study since esports are vastly gaining popularity and are starting to influence society outside of the video game industry. The video game industry has surpassed both the music and movie industries combined for generating revenue (Mitic, 2020), which helps showcase how popular video games are in our current society. Esports help contribute to the popularity of the video game industry and learning more about esports fans can help bring insight into video game fan communities. Esports communities mainly use online communication for interaction and researching esports provides a way to learn about the unique nature of online-based communities.

Esports, as a result of its growing popularity, have affected various aspects of society. In 2018, the U. S. Army announced it would create an esports team to try and boost recruitment from gamers, as well as show that there are a variety of people who play video games competitively (Suits, 2019). Due to the popularity of esports, there have been unprecedented discussions surrounding the definition of sport and the types of activities that could be considered a sport (Scholz, 2020; Taylor, 2012). The International Olympic Committee (2017), the organization in charge of the Olympics, has contributed to these discussions by stating esports could be considered a sport and competitive gaming could one day become part of the Olympic Games. While debates about whether esports could be defined as a sport persist, esports clearly provide entertainment value for those who enjoy spectating competitive video games.

The similarities between sports and esports have provided unique opportunities for competitive video gaming during the global pandemic as a result of COVID-19. When traditional sporting events were unavailable during the pandemic, ESPN broadcasted esports to make up for

the lack of live, athletic sports content (Peters, 2020). The adaptability of sports TV networks by using esports provides a great example of the accessibility of esports. Many esports competitions are hosted online and, as a result, anyone with an internet connection can spectate and participate in esports competitions. The large growth in the esports industry could only be possible through the internet by creating many opportunities for both fans and players (Taylor, 2012).

Alongside the sporting industry, the popularity of esports has also influenced various educational institutions. Colleges across the United States are forming esports programs and are even offering scholarships for esports players (Keiper et al., 2017). Alongside universities, esports are also influencing high school. Many high schools are adding esports programs to their available opportunities for students to promote STEM learning and provide other educational opportunities (Rothwell & Shaffer, 2019). Esports becoming integrated into various educational institutions showcases how playing competitive video games are starting to have an impact on communities outside of the video game industry.

The esports industry is starting to affect multiple aspects of society and, as such, deserves the attention of scholars to try and understand this phenomenon. For communication scholars, examining how esports fans are motivated to watch esports, alongside how they engage with fan communities, can provide insight into the role that communication has for esports fans. Learning more about different aspects of esports can be useful for understanding what can be gained from this activity and how it can affect individuals and their relationships. Studying esports communities provides an opportunity to examine how people use online communities to express identity and socialize with other people. While esports are a relatively small part of video game culture, this niche activity is gaining popularity and showcases how gaming and play converge in our modern, technologically centered society (Taylor, 2012).

Due to its rapid growth, researchers have attempted to study esports and the various communities associated with them. Much of the published literature surrounding esports is about how esports compare with traditional, athletic sports. Examining esports using methods of analyzing traditional sports has provided a gateway into learning about esports and the effects they have on society. By comparing esports with traditional sports, scholars have been able to learn more about the motivations that people have for spectating traditional sports and esports (Cushen et al., 2019; Hamari & Sjöblom, 2017; Trent & Shafer, 2020; Xiao, 2020) as well as the fandoms within these different competitive gaming communities (K. A. Brown et al., 2018; Cushen et al., 2019; Reysen & Branscombe, 2010).

While there is a growing interest in studying esports, the total amount of research on them is relatively small and fairly recent. Reitman et al. (2020) found that the first research study about esports was published in 2002. As such, our academic knowledge of competitive gaming has only been established within the past two decades. According to Hamari and Sjöblom (2017), the vast majority of research studies before 2017 were conducted using qualitative methods and have limited our general understanding of esports. The present study will seek to join a relatively small amount of research to learn about esports, their fans, and communities associated with them. Consistently studying esports and its fans will help uncover how esports continues to influence society and those within video game communities.

There are many reasons why it is important to study esports and its fans. People who identify as a fan are unique since they actively seek out esports related content and exhibit behaviors in their lives that are associated with esports. In other words, esports fans engage with esports and the communities associated with them by incorporating activities in their everyday life to enjoy their esports interest. According to Sandvoss et al. (2017), studying fans can provide

unique insight into everyday life due to the widespread nature of being a fan in our modern society. By studying how fans engage with esports and esports communities, we can get a better understanding of how this activity can help fulfill the social needs that are associated with esports.

Studying esports fans can also provide a greater understanding of video games and video game culture. Taylor (2012) discusses how studying esports can showcase the challenges surrounding gaming cultures and the struggles within these communities as video games become more of a mainstream activity in society. As an extension of video game culture, esports communities may contain many similar cultural characteristics found within many video game communities. Studying esports fans will provide a way to further our understanding of esports, video game subcultures, and how communication plays a vital role in the experiences associated with being an esports fan.

In the next chapter, I will discuss the literature that has been published about esports. Specifically, I will review the development of gaming culture and its relationship with esports, the ways that people can watch esports today, the motivations that people have for watching esports, and fan engagement regarding esports fandoms. This literature review will be followed by an in-depth look at the methods in chapter three. The methods will outline what variables are being measured and how they are being analyzed in this research study. Following the methods section, the results chapter will provide the data generated by the analyses. The discussion section will follow the results and provide some of the key findings from this study. Lastly, the conclusion chapter will provide some of the limitations of this study as well as directions for future research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Esports and Gaming Culture

To get a better understanding of esports and the significance that its fandoms have on video game communities today, it is important to have an understanding of video game culture and the development of video games. Schwartz (2017) affirms this notion with a claim that studying esports should be placed within the context of video game history to understand how gaming culture has developed in society. Video game culture is unique in that there are communities, norms, and lifestyles centered around specific digital technology. Gaming culture contains content and themes that can provide a critical perspective about everyday life and has its own set of notable events and controversies similar to other cultures (Dovey & Kennedy, 2006; Shaw, 2010). Video games and gaming communities have been a place for people to express identity and engage with complex issues regarding social life (Shaw, 2010; Taylor, 2012, 2018).

Understanding how video games emerged and became integrated into society can provide insight into modern-day esports, its fan communities, and the influence that esports has in society. First, I will explore the anxieties surrounding video games when this digital technology was introduced in society. Next, I will review the stereotypes that have been perpetuated in society surrounding people who play video games, which provides context for video game communities today. Lastly, I will discuss how video games are becoming more embraced in popular culture and the effects that arise as a result of this acceptance.

Moral Panic of Video Games

While many people today associate video games with play and entertainment, early conceptions of video game technology were very different. In their analysis of video games and media coverage surrounding them, Williams (2003) describes how video games were constantly

discussed alongside various ways in which this technology could negatively affect people. These discussions about how video games could be a threat to society were similar to discussions about other types of digital technology being introduced to the public, like radio and TV. Whenever new digital technology was introduced in society, the media would discuss the potential, negative consequences of using the technology, creating what Baym (2010) refers to as a moral panic that results from concerns about how technology will threaten the social order. For example, researchers have found that the introduction of video games was met with controversy, fears, and panic surrounding the negative effects that they could have, including how video games could be detrimental to the health and social experiences of people, especially kids, who play them (Schwartz, 2017; Wartella & Reeves, 1983; Williams, 2003).

Research has helped uncover how early video game technology was addressed by the media. The media would typically frame video games as a threat in two ways. First, video games were often discussed as something that could replace more productive activities, especially for youth (Wartella & Reeves, 1983; Williams, 2003). The negative effects that new technologies can have on children is a common theme since children are seen as innocent and impressionable (Baym, 2010). Researchers have found that discussions about video games and children would often lead to a narrative about parents, especially single mothers, who needed to do more for their children besides letting video games be a “babysitter” (Villani, 2001; Williams, 2003). Not only was this an argument about how video games could prohibit children from being productive, but this was also a call to action for parents that they needed to do more for their children besides letting them play video games.

A second threat surrounding video games proposed by the media was that video games could harm people’s well-being and health. Various claims that video games negatively affected

a person's health were brought up, including how video games can lead to a sedentary lifestyle that can produce cardiovascular and diet issues (Dietz, 1996; Dorman, 1997). Fears that playing video games can trigger seizures in children were commonly brought up (Dorman, 1997; Helfgott & Meister, 1983) and there were concerns that kids would be too addicted to playing video games to socialize with others (Griffiths, 1997; Schie & Wiegman, 1997). Many people also associated video games with violence which created assumptions that playing video games caused people to perform violent behaviors (Griffiths, 1997; Schie & Wiegman, 1997; Williams, 2003). Many researchers have focused on studying video games and their relationship to violence due to concerns that the interactive gameplay elements of video games make them more threatening and influential than TV and movies (Lin, 2013; Shao & Wang, 2019).

While many media outlets had voiced their concerns about video games, many of the fears associated with video game technology have been based on unsubstantiated claims (Williams, 2003). Over time, researchers have gained a better understanding of how video games affect people, including how they provide benefits to players. Some of the benefits that have been supported in recent research include effective cognitive stimulation to improve spatial skills (Bavelier et al., 2011; Uttal et al., 2013), experiencing positive emotions or improving one's well-being (Granic et al., 2014; Ryan et al., 2006), and facilitating social experiences to build relationships with others (Gentile et al., 2009; Granic et al., 2014). While recent research helps provide a better understanding of the potential effects of video games, the original fears voiced by the media have had their own influence on video game culture.

Stereotypes and Video Games

The media representations about video games, regardless of whether they were true or not, have resulted in various stereotypes being created about people who played video games.

For example, stereotypical assumptions resulted in video games being framed as an activity for males who enjoyed violent behavior (Paaßen et al., 2017; Williams, 2003). Being a “gamer” soon became a homogeneous identity centered on males that obsessively played certain types of video games (Shaw, 2011). In their analysis of the development of video games and video game culture, Kocurek (2015) provides information regarding how video game culture became a male-dominated space. Their analysis showed how, historically, using digital technology was often considered a masculine activity. Video game content was typically associated with military interests or athletic sports. The assumption that gamers are predominantly male has influenced contemporary video game culture and contributes to the social experiences and inclusionary efforts of modern-day esports (Taylor, 2012, 2018).

With video games being stereotypically associated with violent males, gaming culture quickly became a place that generated negative experiences for underrepresented groups. Women, members of the LGBTQ+ community, and people of color often experience harassment in video game communities and typically distance themselves from gaming culture due to harassment and the lack of accurate representation in gaming (Gray, 2017; Paaßen et al., 2017; Peebles et al., 2018; Richard & Gray, 2018; Shaw, 2011). Various video game communities, including esports, have lacked adequate representation and have been mostly made up of young males (Ruvalcaba et al., 2018; Taylor, 2012, 2018). Even though there is research that supports how there are no differences in performance based on gender in esports (Shen et al., 2016), women struggle to succeed in esports due to harassment from other players and the lack of opportunities (Ruvalcaba et al., 2018; Taylor, 2012).

Even though video games had been traditionally associated as an activity for young males, a diverse group of people play video games today. Recent reports have shown that the

average age of people who play video games is 33, with women making up roughly 46% of people who play video games (Entertainment Software Association, 2019). Many underrepresented groups have used video games as a way to connect and form communities. Queer gamers have been described by Sundén (2009) as important and an integral part of gaming culture. Xbox Live has been used as a way for black, lesbian women to connect with others and resist patriarchal aspects of gaming communities (Gray, 2017). A wide variety of people play video games; however, the reality of video game culture is that underrepresented groups are constantly having to form private groups to escape the patriarchal hegemony found in gaming culture (Gray & Leonard, 2018; Taylor, 2012). The existence of various gaming communities by underrepresented groups helps show that there is more to video game culture than just young males playing violent video games, but this also demonstrates how gaming culture is made up of complex social contexts.

Societal Acceptance of Video Games

While discrimination and other violent behaviors surrounding stereotypical video game culture have continued to persist, video games are gradually becoming a more mainstream, popular culture activity. We learn from Baym (2010) that new technologies, after a period of uncertainty and panic, can often become heavily integrated into daily life resulting in a phenomenon called domestication. Domestication does not get rid of all the anxieties surrounding a particular technology, but rather the technology becomes so common that using it is an ordinary part of life for many. This process of domestication can be seen happening with video games as more people are using them now than ever before (Paaßen et al., 2017; Spencer, 2019; Williams, 2003).

Video games have drastically increased in popularity due to smartphones and the accessibility of online gaming. This increased popularity of video games has resulted in many people arguing that we need to stray away from traditional gamer stereotypes due to their inaccurate depictions of people who play video games today (Peeples et al., 2018; Williams et al., 2008). For example, past work from Taylor and Witkowski (2010) have examined that women have had an increased presence at in-person gaming events which demonstrates the growing heterogeneity of video game culture. The increased inclusionary efforts found in the video game industry can provide positive opportunities for players; however, some inclusionary efforts can also create problems concerning accurate representations of underrepresented groups (Euteneuer, 2016). While improvements surrounding inclusion are starting to occur within video game communities, the history of video game culture still haunts many modern-day gaming communities (Taylor, 2012).

Livestreaming and its Influence on Esports

Alongside a brief history of gaming culture, understanding what video game livestreaming is and its development over time can provide insight into esports and its communities. Video game livestreaming is a relatively recent phenomenon that consists of a person playing a video game while simultaneously broadcasting themselves online so that other people can watch (Sjöblom & Hamari, 2017; Taylor, 2018). While this activity is made possible with the internet, spectating other people play video games has been a common activity for a long time. Before the internet, arcades were a prime location for socializing with others while watching other people play video games competitively (Taylor, 2018). While arcades became less popular over time due to people playing game consoles at home, livestreaming has

reinvigorated socializing with others while spectating gameplay online (Sjöblom & Hamari, 2017; Taylor, 2018).

Video game livestreaming is unique in that it combines two specific entertainment mediums, specifically live broadcasting and video games, which creates an engaging media platform that is not found in other media like TV or radio (O'Sullivan & Carr, 2018; Wohn et al., 2018). Livestreaming allows a special form of communication to occur, known as masspersonal communication, which blends interpersonal communication and mass media broadcasts (Hilvert-Bruce et al., 2018; Nascimento et al., 2014; O'Sullivan & Carr, 2018). For example, a person who is livestreaming can share a message to everyone who is watching, but they can also respond to specific users and answer questions that are given in chatrooms. Modern technology has created opportunities for interpersonal communication to be broadcasted publicly and mass communication to be more personalized (Chaffee & Metzger, 2001; O'Sullivan & Carr, 2018). This blend of communication has created dramatic shifts in our understanding regarding mass media communication theories (Chaffee & Metzger, 2001).

People who livestream themselves playing video games, known as streamers, can communicate with people who are watching them, known as viewers, through chatrooms found on online platforms (Sjöblom, Törhönen, et al., 2019). While many websites can store previously streamed content, watching a stream as it is happening live is a defining feature for viewers and heightens the enjoyment that people get from watching this type of content (Taylor, 2018). Various websites allow people to stream themselves playing video games. The most popular video game livestreaming website is called Twitch. Twitch is a very popular service that people use every day. In 2014, analysts reported that Twitch had more internet traffic than Facebook, Amazon, and Hulu (Hoelzel, 2014). While music, talk shows, and sports can be broadcasted

(Twitch, n.d.), video game livestreaming is the primary content for which Twitch is known (Sjöblom, Törhönen, et al., 2019).

Some of the most popular social media companies have created livestreaming services specifically for broadcasting video games. In 2015, YouTube created a streaming platform for video games to compete against Twitch (Webster, 2015). YouTube eventually merged its standalone video game livestreaming service with its main website by incorporating different livestreaming services, like membership subscriptions and interactive chatrooms, to standard YouTube channels (Hernandez, 2018; Perez, 2018). Facebook has also developed services for video game livestreaming. In 2018, Facebook announced that it would provide more services for video game livestreaming (Olebe, 2018) and eventually released a video game livestreaming app in 2020 (Schiesel, 2020). With YouTube and Facebook joining the livestreaming market, more people can watch or stream video game content than ever before.

The content found on livestreams is unique and depends upon each streamer and their community. Streamers can manage more personal interactions with viewers if there are a small number of total viewers, while a larger audience allows for viewers to chat amongst themselves about the streamer or strategies surrounding gameplay (Hamilton et al., 2014). Twitch chatrooms can fill up with spammed messages, emojis, and memes, but these seemingly insignificant messages are similar to the cheering and shouting found in traditional sports and reflect the excitement of viewers (Ford et al., 2017; Taylor, 2018). The communities that are developed over livestreaming motivate both streamers and viewers to continually engage with this entertainment medium. Twitch, and other livestreaming platforms, provide more than just entertainment for viewers. These websites are locations that allow people to come together and create some of the largest video game communities in history (Churchill & Xu, 2016).

Interacting with others and feeling like one belongs to an online community are some of the most consistent and influential reasons why viewers continue to engage with livestreaming content (Hilvert-Bruce et al., 2018). Livestreaming communities have been characterized as third places, a concept from Oldenburg (1997) describing locations that people regularly go to, like cafes or bars, to hangout and socialize for leisure purposes (Hamilton et al., 2014). The internet has made it possible for people to be constantly connected to different communities, forming large networks centered on individual users (Blanchard & Horan, 1998; McEwan, 2015). As a result, online communities can provide meaningful ways for people to spend their free time and can influence how people maneuver through their social lives (McEwan, 2015).

This research highlights how livestreaming has been highly influential for the development of online communities surrounding video games, including esports. These online platforms are a primary way in which esports are consumed by people today. While competitive gaming has been around before the internet, online livestreaming has had a large contribution to what esports are today. Livestreaming has rapidly increased the development of esports and the growth of competitive video gaming could not be possible without the innovations of livestreaming content (Johnson & Woodcock, 2019; Nascimento et al., 2014; Taylor, 2018). Livestreaming, coupled with the development of in-person esports events, provides context into how esports and its fandoms continue to grow in popularity today.

Methods for Spectating Esports

While innovations surrounding livestreaming and the internet have allowed esports to become a global phenomenon, competitive video gaming has been around for decades. The first known esports competition took place at Stanford University in 1972 where students hosted a competition for one of the first known video games, *Spacewar* (Schwartz, 2017; Taylor, 2012).

This relatively small gathering of students demonstrates the earliest history of video game competitions when esports consisted of gaming enthusiasts coming together for competitive play. As video games would continue to develop over time, the size and prevalence of competitive gaming events would follow suit.

In their analysis of esports development, Taylor (2018) described how esports have progressed over a series of three different periods. The first stage of esports development was centered on gaming enthusiasts who facilitated various esports communities that promoted competitive, yet amateur, competitions. As these competitions became more recognized by video game communities, the development of esports shifted to the second phase described by Taylor. This second phase consisted of establishing infrastructure and organizations specific to esports, which created more formal competitions compared to previous efforts. Continual innovations in video games would contribute to the increased popularity of these competitive video game events. The emergence of the first-person shooter genre of video games, specifically the game *Doom* from 1993, launched an increased demand for in-person local area network (LAN) events and gaming competitions (Schwartz, 2017; Taylor, 2012). Technological advancements for networking and the internet allowed esports to rapidly grow into the global phenomenon that it is today, resulting in the third phase of esports development described by Taylor. This third phase, reflecting the current state of esports development, portrays esports as a form of mass media entertainment with high levels of production value for video game competitions catered to a global audience.

With esports becoming an activity that is admired by a global audience, the ways people can spectate esports content are becoming increasingly more accessible. A combination of being able to watch esports both in-person and online has created many opportunities for spectators to

continually watch competitive gaming. In the esports industry, attending in-person events and watching livestreams are some of the most popular ways to spectate competitive video game competitions. Each of these methods provides unique opportunities for those who want to be engaged with esports related content.

Spectating in Person

Since the first competitive video game competition at Stanford in 1972, hosting in-person competitions has been a staple for the esports industry. Local do-it-yourself (DIY) gaming competitions have been at the heart of esports since the earliest days of competitive video games (Taylor, 2018) and LAN parties are an integral part of esports development (Taylor & Witkowski, 2010). By attending esports competitions in-person, people can feel validated with their esports hobby and can improve their online esports experiences as well (Seo, 2013). Major cities across the U.S. (e.g., Las Vegas, New York, Los Angeles) have constructed esports arenas and these arenas have also grown in popularity throughout Europe, China, and South Korea (Jenny et al., 2018). Esports arenas, like the HyperX Esports Arena in Las Vegas, allows gamers to come together to play video games, perform gaming livestreams, and spectate esports in a live environment. Esports arenas can help local gaming communities thrive by being a place to socialize with others and enjoy meaningful spectating experiences.

Spectating Online

Many of the methods of spectating esports online stem from media technologies that have been utilized throughout our society. Innovations in media technology can create drastic changes in how communication is performed and the type of content that can be distributed (Baym, 2010). Esports can be spectated online in similar ways that traditional sports are currently watched, like using live broadcasts, videos on demand (VODs), smartphone apps, and social

media (Anderson, 2018; Taylor, 2012). Esports broadcasts typically have commentators to discuss the game and display statistics while a game is being played, which provides meaningful information for those watching online (Taylor, 2018). This information helps spectators keep up with what is happening in the game to learn more about how professionals are playing the game. Social networking sites allow information to constantly stay online, which makes esports content easy to find by being able to search and share across networks (McEwan, 2015). Social media allows people to perform a wide range of actions to create and share esports content. Innovations in technology create more affordances for people to utilize technology in ways that were not previously possible (Bucher & Helmond, 2017).

While in-person esports events pioneered the current esports industry and continue to grow in popularity (Taylor, 2018), video game livestreaming has allowed esports to grow exponentially. Alongside watching esports live using the internet, people can watch pre-recorded videos on video platforms like YouTube. Having VOD's easily accessible online provides opportunities for more people to become fans of competitive video gaming (Telecom et al., 2015; Vera & Terrón, 2019). The widespread reach that is available on social media platforms allows communities to be able to form and share information quickly (Baym, 2010). Online communication and social media opened the door for many esports organizations that were originally limited with traditional methods of sharing content (Taylor, 2012, 2018). Competitive gaming content, either through livestreaming or pre-recorded videos, has allowed the esports organizations to drastically gain popularity and thrive in the current technological age (Taylor, 2018).

Motivations for Spectating Esports

To better understand esports, researchers have sought to learn more about what entices spectators to continue watching. Some motivations have been consistent in previous research and this study will group similar motivations based on the experiences they provide for spectators. The three groups of spectator motivations are skills (i.e., appreciating professional skills and knowledge acquisition), entertainment (i.e., drama, novelty, and escapism), and relationships (i.e., social interaction and vicarious achievement). I will first review skills-based spectator motivations that are related to the high-level gameplay found in competitive video gaming. I will then review motivations that are centered on how esports provides entertaining experiences for spectators. Finally, I will conclude by describing motivations that are related to the personal connections that spectators have with others.

Skill-Based Spectator Motivations

Some spectator motivations that have been consistent in previous research are related to the high-level skills found in professional gameplay. Many spectators watch esports to appreciate the masterfully displayed skills of professional players as well as learn how to better play the video game themselves (K. A. Brown et al., 2018; Cushen et al., 2019; Hamari & Sjöblom, 2017; Seo, 2013; Sjöblom, Macey, et al., 2019). These motivations are centered on admiring the skills that are demonstrated at the professional level but also relate to how spectators can learn how to develop their own skills. These motivations are closely related to each other, for acknowledging that professional esports players have high skill levels is only apparent when a person spectating knows the video game being played and how skills are demonstrated within the virtual world (Hamari & Sjöblom, 2017; Sjöblom, Macey, et al., 2019).

Watching professionals can consist of admiring the skills of the player or showing support for the player themselves. Instead of only watching esports competitions, many

spectators supplement their esports related content by watching professional players on livestreaming platforms, like Twitch, where viewers can watch professionals outside of structured competitions (Cushen et al., 2019). Many professional esports players become celebrities in online communities with recurring fans that continually follow the player (Seo, 2016). Some professional esports players end up retiring from competitive gaming but still produce content and occasionally participate in competitive gaming environments. For example, two of the most popular livestreaming celebrities are Tyler Belvins and Michael Grzesiek, known respectively as Ninja and Shroud. Ninja and Shroud originally participated in esports competitions, but now livestream full time to provide content for their fans. While these gamers are not currently involved in esports leagues, they are still highly skilled at video games and receive thousands of spectators during their livestreams.

The knowledge that spectators can gain while watching esports content can vary. Knowledge acquisition can be centered on understanding the video game being played or keeping up with the various information about the esports scene, such as player information or statistics concerning competitive esports leagues (Seo, 2013). Due to the influence that learning has on spectators, esports livestreams try to display additional information on screen so that people can learn more about the gameplay and, consequently, return for more content (Taylor, 2018). Many spectators gain knowledge from watching esports and then try to mimic the professional players when playing the games themselves to get better at the video game (Cushen et al., 2019; Qian, Wang, et al., 2019; Seo, 2016; Taylor, 2018). As this research shows, admiring professional esports players and acquiring knowledge about the video game to improve one's gaming skills are motivating for many spectators.

Entertainment-Based Spectator Motivations

Additional spectator motivations that have been consistently found in previous research are related to the amusement and leisure opportunities for spectators (Seo, 2013; Sjöblom, Macey, et al., 2019; Sjöblom & Hamari, 2017; Xiao, 2020). These motivations are tied to the notion that esports provide a pastime for spectators that brings pleasure and fun into their lives. There are three motivations that are related to providing entertaining experiences for spectators: watching suspenseful gameplay, being able to watch new players or teams, and providing opportunities for spectators to get away from the problems of their everyday life (e.g., escapism).

Watching dramatic events that naturally take place during competitions is a common reason why people want to watch esports (Qian, Wang, et al., 2019; Sjöblom, Macey, et al., 2019; Xiao, 2020). Similar to traditional sports, some games and competitions are decided at the last second, with defining moments for those who become champions. These moments provide high levels of suspense for spectators, which are highly motivational for people to continue watching esports content (Xiao, 2020). While these dramatic experiences have been found to be motivational by some researchers, Hamari and Sjöblom (2017) discovered that drama, while a necessary component of watching esports for some, is not necessarily a large factor when it comes to continually watching esports content for others.

Researchers have described novelty as another motivational factor for spectators. Novelty refers to how new players or teams become a part of esports competitions. This motivational factor has been found to be apparent for spectators, especially those who have been long-time fans of esports (Hamari & Sjöblom, 2017; Sjöblom, Macey, et al., 2019). As esports continue to grow, more players and teams will enter competitions. The initial uncertainty surrounding how well new players and teams will perform allows long-time spectators to be motivated to see how

events turn out. These players can provide new strategies to games and even change how the rest of the competitors play.

Esports, like many other hobbies, provide opportunities for people to escape from their everyday lives. Using esports as a form of entertainment to distract people from reality has been a consistent motivational factor for esports spectators (Hamari & Sjöblom, 2017; Seo, 2013; Sjöblom et al., 2017; Xiao, 2020). Many people who watch esports focus on the various events surrounding the highly competitive video game environment. The intense gameplay, as well as the commentary from esports analysts, help people forget about the worries associated with their everyday life (Sjöblom et al., 2017). Escapism is not just associated with watching virtual gameplay. Being able to go to esports arenas can also be a way for people to escape from their everyday routines (Seo, 2013).

Relationship-Based Spectator Motivations

There are many opportunities for spectators to form relationships, whether that be with other spectators or feeling connected to specific players or teams. Being social with other fans and feeling a connection to specific players or teams can be highly motivational for people to continue watching esports (K. A. Brown et al., 2018; Qian, Zhang, et al., 2019; Sjöblom, Macey, et al., 2019; Taylor, 2018). These motivations demonstrate that esports can be a social activity that allows spectators to feel like they are a part of a group. The relationships that can be found in esports can provide meaningful incentives for spectators to watch esports.

Being able to socialize with other people is important for some spectators, especially those who have attended in-person esports events (Sjöblom, Macey, et al., 2019). While social interaction was a clear motivator for some spectators, some studies show otherwise. Some research has found that some spectators prefer to watch esports by themselves and do not

consider the activity a social experience (Hamari & Sjöblom, 2017; Xiao, 2020). These studies showed that while many spectators are capable of socializing while watching esports, the available means of communication (e.g., Twitch chatrooms) are not as effective as in-person communication which can diminish the motivation of social interaction.

While livestream chatrooms can provide a space for people to communicate during competitions, many esports spectators turn to different social media platforms to socialize with others. Spectators can fulfill their social motivations by using various online platforms (e.g., Reddit, Discord) to form relationships with others in online spaces (Taylor, 2018; Xue et al., 2019). The utilization of technology for facilitating discussions in communities can create unique social structures (Dovey & Kennedy, 2006) and those who enjoy the social opportunities in online communities can be continually motivated to spectate esports. Keeping up with esports competitions could allow someone to stay up to date on the discussions that are occurring in online communities.

Spectators showing support for a specific team or player provides another motivation to watch esports content that is highly relational. An emotional connection that a spectator has to a specific player or team is referred to in previous research as vicarious achievement. In many sports, fans can identify with their favorite players and teams in a way that they feel successful when their team does well or failure when their team does poorly (Hirt et al., 1992). The relationship that spectators can have with players or teams can make spectators feel as if they are alongside their favorite players or teams (Qian, Wang, et al., 2019). This connection has been found by researchers to be important and is highly motivating for people to continue watching esports (Qian, Wang, et al., 2019; Sjöblom, Macey, et al., 2019).

Another way to think about vicarious achievement is with parasocial relationships. The concept of parasocial relationships was first theorized by Horton and Wohl (1956) and are described as one-sided relationships between individuals and media characters or celebrities. While originally theorized around the relationships people develop with TV characters, parasocial relationships have been used to examine the relationships people develop with traditional sports teams and athletes (W. J. Brown et al., 2003; Sun, 2010). More recently, the concept of parasocial relationships has been used to examine video game streamers on Twitch (Leith, 2021). When associated with online interactions, parasocial relationships are highly influential. Previous research has shown that parasocial relationships can influence users to be more engaged on social media (Tsotsou, 2015; Yuksel & Labrecque, 2016) and can help people develop a sense of community online (Keng et al., 2011).

We learn from Sun (2010) that the attachment towards a particular team can be conceptualized as a parasocial relationship. Since vicarious achievement is centered on the relationship that someone has with a particular team, another way to phrase vicarious achievement is with parasocial relationships. The identification that people have with teams can be highly influential for social interaction. Many fans identify with a particular sports team in order to feel a sense of community towards a specific social group centered on fandom (Sun, 2010). These teams and opportunities for social interaction are also found in esports. Some professional esports organizations (e.g., Team Liquid, Cloud 9, G2 Esports) have teams for different video games with some of the best players in the world. Someone who has developed a parasocial relationship with an esports organization could be a fan of all their teams across different types of video games.

The identification process can make certain teams seem like the “good” team to root and can result in suspense whenever these teams play against rivals or “evil” teams (Trent & Shafer, 2020). The clash between teams, and their associated fans, can result in aggressive tensions that could motivate spectators to continue watching esports (Hamari & Sjöblom, 2017). Spectators can also be fans of specific players, regardless of the team or organization that they play for. For example, spectators who were fans of Ninja and Shroud when they participated in esports competitions could cheer for these specific players. Fans could interact with each other online and discuss how their favorite player performed in a recent competition. Becoming a fan of a particular player or team can provide personal and social benefits for esports spectators, which influences the motivation to continue watching esports content (K. A. Brown et al., 2018; Reysen & Branscombe, 2010).

Esports Fandom

While being a fan was found to be motivating for esports spectators across research, there are not a lot of studies about the nature of esports fandoms specifically. Some research has compared esports fandoms with traditional sports fandoms (K. A. Brown et al., 2018; Cushen et al., 2019; Reysen & Branscombe, 2010), but the research looking into esports fandoms by itself is slim. While there is a small amount of literature for understanding this specific fandom, there is plenty of research on media and entertainment fandoms. There are many concepts found in previous fandom research that could easily be applied to esports and esports fan communities. Looking into research discussing media fandoms can help illuminate various characteristics of esports fandoms.

Fandoms consist of a group-level, social identity shared by individuals that provide social, cultural, and emotional influences on fans within these communities (Fuschillo, 2020;

Hirt et al., 1992; Reysen & Branscombe, 2010). Fandom can be thought of as a multidimensional phenomenon, with one aspect of fandom centered on actively participating in fan communities and another aspect centered on a personal perception that one belongs to a community (Tsay-Vogel & Sanders, 2017). Some scholars have made the argument that fandom is the participatory and interactive aspect of fan communities while the term fanship is used when describing how a person identifies as a fan of something (Reysen & Branscombe, 2010). Other researchers have argued that the separation between the interpersonal and intrapersonal elements of fandom is misleading as these are closely related and connected phenomena (Sandvoss et al., 2017).

The act of participating in a community is an important characteristic of fans and their role in fandoms. According to Jenkins (2006), fandoms are a type of convergence culture, meaning that fans are actively involved in the cultural formation process within the communities that they are a part of. Learning more about esports fans and the communities they interact with can help uncover how esports fandoms are created and maintained through communication. Examining esports fans and how they engage with esports, identify as an esports fan, and feel a sense of community can help demonstrate the role of communication involved in esports communities.

Fandom Engagement

Engaging in communities is an important characteristic of fandoms. Fan engagement has been described in previous research as the way in which people vigorously consume media content compared to normal consumers while actively participating in communities and identifying with the fandom (Jenkins, 2006; Tsay-Vogel & Sanders, 2017). By actively participating in a fan community, fans are exhibiting a form of fan engagement. Rather than just passively enjoying something, fans are proactive in expressing their association with their fan

interests. Those who are fans will make an effort to incorporate their fan activity in their everyday lives. Fan engagement is significant for understanding fandoms as a communication phenomenon. Communication is an integral part of fandoms as fans use communication to participate in communities and express their identity by performing fan behaviors.

The behaviors that fans exhibit compared to passive audiences are a key characteristic of fan engagement. Yoshida et al. (2014) expand upon the behaviors that fans exhibit in their analysis of fan engagement with sports fans. According to Yoshida et al., there are three main types of behaviors that fans demonstrate. The first types of behaviors that fans perform are nontransactional behaviors. These behaviors consist of a range of activities where the fans don't receive something as a result of their actions (e.g., vicariously celebrating when teams win, supporting a fan community, expressing support of the activity through word-of-mouth). The second type of behaviors are transactional, which is when a fan receives something as a result of their actions (e.g., attending games, buying products endorsed by players, purchasing apparel with sports logos). The third type of behaviors that demonstrate fan engagement are related to the relationship that a person has with a team. These include activities people do to maintain a connection to their favorite team. Fan engagement is complex, yet important for understanding fandoms. Recognizing the frequency that people perform behaviors related to their fan interest can be useful for learning about how fandoms influence people and their relationships.

Engaging in fan communities has been drastically easier due to the internet since people from all over the world can come together to form global communities (Peeples et al., 2018; Plante et al., 2014; Sandvoss et al., 2017). Online platforms provide an easy way for fans to be able to share content and interact with others. Many fan communities have easily integrated digital technology and social media as a primary method of communication since many of these

communities were originally organized by identification rather than physical location (Jenkins, 2006). With esports being strongly associated with online video games, many esports fans are already familiar with using the internet for connecting with others. This makes it relatively easy for esports fans to engage with esports and fan communities.

Various online platforms allow people to engage with a community and express themselves in different ways. For example, most Twitch streamers allow for spectators to subscribe and gain access to unique emotes, which are small images that can be posted on Twitch to show one's affiliation with a specific streamer (Taylor, 2018). People can post these emotes across different Twitch channels to show their affiliation and support as a fan. Popular esports competitors, like Ninja and Shroud, have social media accounts with millions of followers and utilize online community platforms (e.g., Discord, Reddit) to create places for fans to interact with each other. Using unique platforms for specific players or teams can provide opportunities for fans to communicate with other fans with similar interests.

Esports Fans and Identity

While fan engagement is an important activity for people in fan communities, being able to express one's identity is an important aspect of fandoms. Fandoms consist of a group level, social identity and online communities are a way for fans to be able to express how their identity aligns with others in the community. People who identify as a fan can acquire a sense of belonging by being a part of a fandom and magnify their self-identity by socializing with other fans (Fisher & Wakefield, 1998; Plante et al., 2014; Reysen & Branscombe, 2010). People who consider themselves serious fans are more likely to include fandom engagement into their concept of self while casual fans will not be affected by fandoms in the same way (Groene & Hettinger, 2016).

Identity expression is an important aspect of understanding fandoms as a communication phenomenon. We learn from Faulkner and Hecht (2006) that there are various layers of conceptualizing identity and that identity can be seen as communication. According to Faulkner and Hecht, identity can be expressed based on behaviors that a person exhibits or the way that a person thinks of themselves. It can also be defined based on the relationships people have. Communities themselves can also be associated with certain identities based on how society defines identities. These conceptualizations of identity as communication can help shed light on how esports fans use communication by being a part of fan communities. Being a part of a fandom can be a way for people to express identity and communication plays an integral part in the way fans think about and express identity.

Expressing identity and communicating in virtual environments have historically been predominant features of video games and gaming culture. By using online gaming, people have been expressing their identity in video games long before social media was a thing (Taylor, 2018). Many gamers have already grown accustomed to interacting in virtual environments which could make engaging in fandoms online easier or more natural. Alongside socializing in global communities through virtual means, Tsay-Vogel and Sanders (2017) found that engaging in a fandom can result in stronger appreciation and enhanced knowledge acquisition concerning what people are fans about. These findings show that engaging in fandoms can result in benefits that are similar to the motivations people have for spectating esports.

Sense of Community in Esports Fandoms

Alongside identity expression, fandoms have generated opportunities for people to acquire a sense of community. We learn from McMillan and Chavis (1986) that a sense of community is related to the feeling that people have regarding how they think they belong in a

community and that their needs will be met through the relationships with other people in the community. Having a sense of community is important for people as they feel like they are influenced by the community they are a part of and they feel a strong emotional connection to the community (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). Online communities operate very differently compared to offline communities, yet virtual communities still provide many of the same benefits regarding a sense of community compared to in-person environments (Abfalter et al., 2012).

Similar to in-person communities, online communities consist of various social structures and roles that people enact to generate a shared space for community members. We learn from Baym (2010) that the different roles people enact in online communities depend upon the behaviors that they exhibit in the community. Baym continues by stating how the most common type of community member in online communities are “lurkers,” which are people who constantly read and check what is available in online communities but never posts or contributes original content. Other types of community members are more active for the community than lurkers. For example, online communities found on Reddit have users who are designated as moderators. These moderators review the content that gets posted to ensure that it fits with community guidelines and enforce disciplinary action (e.g., deleting posts or banning users) for people who break the rules. Online communities contain various social structures, like roles and rules, to help people gain a sense of community and understand how they fit within the community.

Video games have been a platform for generating communities and social groups for a long time. While arcades used to be the standard location for communities to form around video games, the internet and social media are the most common places for community interaction

today. Today, esports communities provide unique benefits for fans to socialize and be a part of an esports fandom. Frequently contributing to discussions, regardless of the specific content, is an important way for people to feel included in an online community (Théberge, 2005). For many fans, esports are more than just a hobby or a pastime, but rather a part of who they are (K. A. Brown et al., 2018). There are a wide range of identities found in gaming communities and the formation of esports fandoms is a result of the various identities and narrative processes found in the communication within these spaces (Xue et al., 2019).

Esports fan communities, as places for people to express identity and gain social support, are prime locations to learning about how communication plays a role in online communities today. Online communities continue to be places where fans can learn more about who they are and express themselves. Esports are unique as a result of video games becoming more popular with mainstream culture. This rising interest in competitive, online video games has created opportunities for the esports industry to thrive. As such, esports fan communities are drastically growing in size which influences the social interactions found in them. Studying esports fan communities provides a way for scholars to learn about how communication plays an important role in both community formation and community regulation with an activity that grows alongside the developments of digital technology.

Study Overview

This research study seeks to understand the relationships between the motivations that fans have to watch esports and their level of engagement with esports fandoms. While previous research has examined what these motivations could be, there have not been studies that attempt to view how these motivations are related to participating in esports fandoms. This study will measure the most common spectator motivations found in previous research, how strongly

spectators identify as fans, how often they engage with esports, and how they prefer to watch esports. The most common motivations for spectating esports described in the research were related to skills, entertainment, and relationships. These different motivations could influence the engagement of fans and the type of interactions that are found in esports fandoms. Therefore, this study will seek to understand the following research question:

RQ1a: Is there a relationship between skill-based esports spectator motivations and esports fandom engagement?

RQ1b: Is there a relationship between entertainment-based esports spectator motivations and esports fandom engagement?

RQ1c: Is there a relationship between relationship-based esports spectator motivations and esports fandom engagement?

This study is also seeking to understand the relationship between spectator motivations and the degree that people identify as a fan. While interacting with others provides opportunities for people to participate with the esports fandom, some people might identify as a fan without feeling the need to participate in fan-like behaviors within communities. Examining how the motivations for spectating esports correlate with fandom identity could provide insight into what types of motivations are common for people who strongly identify as a fan. As such, this study will also seek to understand the following:

RQ2a: Is there a relationship between skill-based esports spectator motivations and esports fandom identity?

RQ2b: Is there a relationship between entertainment-based esports spectator motivations and esports fandom identity?

RQ2c: Is there a relationship between relationship-based esports spectator motivations and esports fandom identity?

This study is also seeking to understand how fans feel a sense of community with fan communities and esports fandoms. Besides engagement and identity, the feeling that people belong to a community can provide additional knowledge about esports fan communities. To gain additional insight into how fans feel like they are a part of the community, this study will examine how feeling a sense of community correlates with the motivations for watching esports. As such, this study will also seek to understand the following:

RQ3a: Is there a relationship between skill-based esports spectator motivations and esports sense of community?

RQ3b: Is there a relationship between entertainment-based esports spectator motivations and esports sense of community?

RQ3c: Is there a relationship between relationship-based esports spectator motivations and esports sense of community?

Alongside understanding how esports fans experience a sense of community, it is important to understand the types of messages that are expressed by community members. Since these esports fan communities are centered around fans generating content for other fans, it is important to get an understanding of what types of messages are expressed. These messages could relate to the motivations that people have to watch esports, which is why this study is seeking to understand the following:

RQ4: Is there a relationship between messages in esports communities and esports spectator motivations?

Finally, understanding how fans prefer to watch esports can also be insightful. If fans have a preference on whether they want to watch esports online or in-person, then it could correlate with what motivates them to watch esports. Spectating esports online provides a different experience compared to watching esports at a live venue. Spectators who prefer one type of spectating method compared to another could be motivated to watch esports content differently. As such, this study will also seek to understand the following:

RQ₅: Is there a relationship between spectator preference type and esports spectator motivations?

Chapter 3: Methods

This study utilized an online survey (see Appendix C for full survey) to examine the proposed research questions. A survey was chosen for this study for multiple reasons. One strength of using an online survey is that a greater number of potential respondents are capable of participating in the study, which results in a larger sample size and a reduced effect from sampling error (Baxter & Babbie, 2003). Online surveys also provide a relatively cheap and quick way to learn information about participants. While there are general concerns that online surveys are not as effective at representing everyone compared to other methods (Baxter & Babbie, 2003), using online surveys can be useful for learning about people in specific types of communities. For example, online surveys can be beneficial for learning about communities that primarily communicate on online platforms (Baxter & Babbie, 2003). Because this research is dealing with online communities surrounding esports, it makes sense to use an online survey. This research study received approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB; see Appendix B for permission materials) before gathering participants for the study. The survey took roughly 30 minutes for participants to complete.

Participants

Seeing as this study is examining the relationships between esports spectator motivations and fandom engagement, participants for this study needed to have previously watched esports and consider themselves fans. Participants needed to be at least 18 years old to take the survey. Participants also answered screening questions to show: (1) they have watched esports online and/or in-person and (2) they consider themselves fans of esports. Responses that answered negatively to these questions were not included in the analysis. Since there are specific criteria for the participants that are included in this study, non-probability sampling methods were used

for this research. Even though probability sampling methods can be more representative for a larger population, non-probability sampling methods are suitable for studies surrounding a specific population (Baxter & Babbie, 2003).

Participants were found using a combination of different types of sampling methods. First, a convenience sampling method was used with students enrolled in the research pool through the Communication Studies department at UNLV. Convenience sampling consists of using available participants that are easily accessible and is a common sampling method for research at universities (Baxter & Babbie, 2003). For this study, students that completed the survey were able to receive extra credit in the communications course they were enrolled in. Alongside the utilization of convenience sampling, this study also used snowball sampling to reach eligible participants. Snowball sampling consists of asking people to invite others who could participate in the study and is a good way to find people when the research has specific criteria for participants (Baxter & Babbie, 2003). Posts were created on various social media sites that provided additional participants for this study. These posts contained the survey link, as well as encouraged people to share the survey with other potential participants (i.e., snowballing). Participants found from the snowball sample were not compensated for completing the survey.

A total of 175 participants successfully completed the survey and were included in the analysis. Of these responses, 102 participants were found through convenience sampling at UNLV while 73 were found through snowball sampling. The responses of these different data sets were combined together for the analysis. A description of this participant sample is found below.

Demographics

Participants were asked a series of demographic questions regarding their age, gender, race, and education. Table 1 (see Appendix A) separates this demographic data between the snowball and SONA samples to show the differences between the sample sets. When combined together, the collective age ranged from 18-59 ($M = 23.27$, $SD = 6.46$). The majority of participants identified as male ($n = 120$, 68.6%), followed by female ($n = 51$, 29.1%), other ($n = 3$, 1.7%), and one participant who preferred not to answer. All participants who responded with the other category indicated that they identify as non-binary. Participants were also asked about their racial/ethnic identity. The majority of participants identified as Caucasian ($n = 97$, 55.4%), followed by Asian ($n = 44$, 25.1%), Hispanic ($n = 34$, 19.4%), African American/Black ($n = 16$, 9.1%), Pacific Islander ($n = 11$, 6.3%), Native American ($n = 4$, 2.3%), and other ($n = 3$, 1.7%). Participants were also asked about the highest level of education that they have obtained. The majority of participants indicated that they are currently in progress for a Bachelor's Degree ($n = 97$, 55.4%), followed by a high school degree/GED ($n = 28$, 16%), a completed Bachelor's Degree ($n = 23$, 13.1%), in progress for an Associate's Degree ($n = 15$, 8.6%), an advanced degree ($n = 6$, 3.4%), some high school completed ($n = 4$, 2.3%), and an Associate's Degree ($n = 2$, 1.1%). The majority of those who selected that they have completed an advanced degree indicated that they have a Master's Degree.

Esports Experience

Alongside their demographics, participants were asked to provide information regarding their experiences with esports. Participants were first asked to describe the different esports they have watched before, the esports games that they play, and the esports that they consider themselves a fan of. Table 2 (see Appendix A) provides an overview of the responses regarding these experiences with esports. The table lists different video games and the number of

participants that stated that they have watched esports for the game, the number of participants that play the game, and the number of participants that consider themselves fans of the esports for the game. While games vary on the amount of their popularity, generally there are more people who have watched esports for a game than the number of participants that have played the game. Additionally, more participants have generally played a particular game than there are fans of the esports for the game.

Participants were also asked on how they have previously watched esports and where they interact with others to discuss esports. The vast majority of participants have watched esports online ($n = 174, 99.4\%$) while less people have watched esports in-person ($n = 56, 32\%$). Participants were also asked about where they interact with others to discuss esports across various social media and in-person. The most popular way participants interact with others is through Discord ($n = 103, 58.9\%$), followed by interacting with others in-person ($n = 97, 55.4\%$), Twitter ($n = 90, 51.4\%$), Reddit ($n = 81, 46.3\%$), Instagram ($n = 50, 28.6\%$), Other ($n = 16, 9.1\%$), and Facebook ($n = 15, 8.6\%$). The most common responses for the other category included YouTube and Twitch chatrooms.

For participants who have watched esports online, few have paid money to watch esports ($n = 12, 6.9\%$) while more participants have made donations while watching esports online ($n = 33, 19\%$). The majority of participants watch esports online on Twitch ($n = 144, 82.8\%$) and YouTube ($n = 142, 81.6\%$), with few participants watching esports on Facebook ($n = 17, 9.8\%$) and other platforms ($n = 2, 1.1\%$). Participants were also asked about how frequently they watch esports. For watching esports online, the majority of participants indicated that they watch esports sometimes ($n = 72, 41.4\%$), followed by participants indicating that they watch often ($n = 49, 28.2\%$), very often ($n = 44, 25.3\%$), and seldom ($n = 9, 5.2\%$). For the 56 participants that

have watched esports in-person, the majority indicated that they go to in-person esports events seldom ($n = 26, 46.4\%$), followed by participants indicating that they go sometimes ($n = 24, 42.9\%$), often ($n = 3, 5.4\%$) and very often ($n = 3, 5.4\%$). Lastly, participants were asked about their preferences for watching esports. Most participants indicated that they prefer to watch esports online ($n = 128, 73.1\%$) while a smaller number of participants prefer to watch esports in-person ($n = 47, 26.9\%$).

Procedures

The survey was created and made available for participants through the online survey platform called Qualtrics. The students who are taking the survey for extra credit used the research participant system at UNLV called SONA. The SONA system grants access for students to participate in research studies and is linked to their student accounts. For participants found outside of UNLV, they accessed the survey by using a link posted online. The analysis of survey data consisted of techniques used in other research studies to ensure the confidentiality of data, such as getting rid of identifying information once it is no longer necessary, using identification numbers for participants instead of personal information, and creating separate data files for any other identifying information (Baxter & Babbie, 2003).

While there are differences regarding how participants were found, all participants received the same survey so that there are no variations in the survey data. The survey started by providing an informed consent form that participants needed to complete to show that they are voluntarily participating in the study. Once they agreed to participate, each participant received a series of demographic questions related to their identity and previous experiences with spectating esports. Once they filled out their demographic information, participants were asked questions

regarding their preferences regarding online and in-person spectating, motivations for watching esports, engagement with esports fandoms, and their fan identity.

Measures

This study utilized various methods of measurement to examine the relationships between fans and their spectating preferences, motivations to watch, the level of engagement that fans have with the esports fandom, and the degree that people identify themselves as fans of esports. What follows is a discussion of each measure that was used for analysis.

Esports Spectator Motivations

Esports spectator motivations were measured using a modification of the Motivation Scale for Sports Consumption (MSSC) by Sjöblom, Macey et al. (2019). The MSSC was originally developed by Trail and James (2001) to measure motivations to watch traditional sports but has been updated since its original publication to improve the effectiveness of the scale. Sjöblom, Macey et al. (2019) adjusted the MSSC to include language catered to esports and is the reason that their modification of the MSSC is being used for this study. The MSSC has been used in previous studies to effectively measure spectator motivations for watching esports (Hamari & Sjöblom, 2017; Sjöblom, Macey, et al., 2019).

The MSSC is comprised of various subscales to measure different motivations to watch a sport. For this study, seven out of the 10 subscales in the MSSC were used to measure esports spectator motivations. Three motivations from the MSSC that were not measured in this study (aesthetics, physical attractiveness, and enjoyment of aggression) were inconsistent for spectators in the previous literature about esports and, as such, do not seem applicable for this study. Each subscale uses a 7-point Likert scale for measurement (1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*). Participants were asked to rate statements related to their motivation to spectate esports.

For the analysis, this study grouped similar motivations by combining the scores of each subscale and finding the average between the reported motivations. The motivations were be grouped by the following categories.

Skill-Based Esports Spectator Motivations. Motivations that are included in this variable deal with the high-level abilities associated with competitive gaming. There are two spectator motivations that relate to skills in esports. The first motivation is related to the appreciation that people have for professional esports players. The MSSC uses a subscale of three questions to measure this motivation. The subscale has been reliable in previous research ($\alpha = .83$) and contains questions like “I enjoy watching a skillful performance in the game.” The second spectator motivation related to skills is associated with learning more about how to play the video game. Many esports spectators enjoy watching esports to learn from professional players to enhance their own skills, a motivation labeled as knowledge acquisition in the MSSC. There are three questions in the subscale used to measure this motivation and have been reliable in previous research ($\alpha = .85$). Measuring this motivation consists of questions like “I can increase my understanding of the strategy by watching the game.” In this study, the two subscales were combined together to create a single variable of measurement regarding skill-based motivations. When the subscales were combined together, the full scale for skill-based spectator motivations was found to be reliable ($\alpha = .86$, $M = 37.66$, $SD = 4.06$) in this study.

Entertainment-Based Esports Spectator Motivations. This variable is comprised of three motivations from the MSSC. The first motivation being measured is labeled as drama and is related to the intensity and uncertainty found in competitive environments. The subscale to measure drama has been reliable in previous research ($\alpha = .83$) and consists of four questions. This subscale contains questions like “I enjoy it when the outcome of the game is not decided

until the very end.” The second motivation included in this variable is labeled as novelty. This variable is associated with new players or teams joining esports and provides opportunities for spectators to see exciting changes within the esports scene. The subscale to measure novelty has three questions and previous research has found it to be highly reliable in previous research ($\alpha = .89$). Novelty is measured using questions like “I like having the opportunity to watch a new team or player.” The last motivation being measured in this group is called escapism and is related to how watching esports allows people to be distracted from their everyday life. The subscale to measure escapism has been reliable in previous research ($\alpha = .89$) and consists of items like “The game provides an escape from my day-to-day routine.” The escapism subscale contains three questions. In this study, the three subscales were combined together to create a single variable of measurement regarding entertainment-based motivations. When the subscales were combined together, the full scale for entertainment-based spectator motivations was found to be fairly reliable ($\alpha = .79$, $M = 57.90$, $SD = 7.37$) in this study.

Relationship-Based Esports Spectator Motivations. There are two motivations that are centered on the relationships that esports fans can have. The first motivation within this category is the motivation for socializing with other people. The subscale for measuring the motivation of social interaction is highly reliable ($\alpha = .93$) and consists of three questions. The subscale measuring social interaction contains questions like “I enjoy interacting with other people when I watch a game.” The second motivation that is grouped within this category is labeled as vicarious achievement and is concerned with the connection that a person has with a particular team or player. The subscale measuring vicarious achievement is highly reliable ($\alpha = .88$) and consists of three questions. Questions to measure the motivation for vicarious achievement consist of items like “I feel a personal sense of achievement when the team or player does well.”

In this study, the two subscales were combined together to create a single variable of measurement regarding relationship-based motivations. When the subscales were combined together, the full scale for relationship-based spectator motivations was found to be reliable ($\alpha = .86$, $M = 30.91$, $SD = 7.26$) for this study.

Esports Fandom Engagement

For this study, measuring esports fandom engagement is understood as examining the frequency of behaviors that are performed by fans to interact with esports and other fans. Measuring esports fandom engagement was accomplished by using a section of the Fanhood Measure from Groene and Hettinger (2016). The original Fanhood Measure contains 20 items measuring the strength of a fan interest; however, this study used only five questions that were designated to specifically measure the frequency of fan behaviors. Participants were prompted with the phrase “How often do you do the following” for items like “E-mail or online chat with others regarding your fan interests” or “think about your fan interest”. Participants answered using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *never* to 5 = *very often*). The Fanhood Measure was found to be highly reliable in past research ($\alpha = .94$). For this study, this variable was found to be reliable ($\alpha = .84$, $M = 14.20$, $SD = 4.52$).

Esports Fandom Identity

The extent that a person considers themselves a fan of esports was measured using a modification of the Membership in Fanbase subscale by Tsay-Vogel and Sanders (2017). The subscale comes from the Dimensions of Fandom scale, a measure that contains two subscales. The first is the Membership in Fanbase subscale used to measure the extent that a person identifies as a fan. The second is called the Contact with Fanbase subscale and is used to measure the extent that a person communicates with others who are also fans. Since Esports Fandom

Identity for this study is examining how strongly a person identifies as a fan, only the Membership in Fanbase subscale was used. The Membership in Fanbase subscale was originally created to measure the Harry Potter fandom, but the wording was changed for this study to measure esports.

There are a few reasons why the Membership in Fanbase subscale was used for this study. While the Membership in Fanbase subscale has not been previously used to measure esports fandoms, there has been research discussing how both traditional sports and esports fandoms behave similarly to other types of media fandoms (K. A. Brown et al., 2018; Gantz & Wenner, 1995; Pegoraro, 2013). Previous research has also discussed how the similarities between video game audiences and other media-based fan communities can create opportunities for media fandom literature to be applied to gaming culture (Crawford & Gosling, 2009; Gosling & Crawford, 2011). As such, the Membership in Fanbase subscale appears to be a good fit to examine the extent that people identify as a member of the esports fandom. The entire Membership in Fanbase subscale consists of 13 questions and contains questions like “I think the esports fanbase is a good thing for me to be a part of,” “I see myself as belonging to the esports fanbase”, and “It is important for me to be a part of the esports fanbase.” The subscale uses a 7-point Likert scale for measurement (1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*). The Membership in Fanbase subscale was found to be highly reliable in past research ($\alpha = .97$). For this study, this variable was found to be highly reliable ($\alpha = .97$, $M = 63.93$, $SD = 18.25$).

Esports Sense of Community

The extent that a person considers themselves a member of esports fan communities was measured using an adaptation of the Sense of Community Index 2 (SCI2) by Abfalter et al. (2012). The SCI2 originated from the work of Chavis et al. (1986) but was adapted and used by

Abfalter et al. to measure a sense of community for online-based communities. The SCI2 consists of four sections totaling 15 questions to measure various elements regarding sense of community. Each section uses a 4-point Likert-type scale for measurement (1 = *not at all* to 4 = *completely*).

The first section is used to measure membership in a community and contains three questions. This section was found to be fairly reliable ($\alpha = .75$) and consists of questions like “I get important needs of mine met because I am part of this community.” The second section is used to measure the influence of the community and contains two questions. This section was found to be fairly reliable ($\alpha = .70$) and consists of questions like “I can trust people in this community.” The next section is used to measure the fulfillment of needs for integrating with the community and contains five questions. The section was found to be fairly reliable ($\alpha = .86$) and consists of questions like “Fitting into this community is important to me.” The last section is used to measure the shared connection found with community members and consists of five questions. This section was found to be reliable ($\alpha = .86$) and consists of questions like “It is very important to me to be a part of this community.” The four subscales were combined together to create a single sense of community measurement for this study. When these subscales were combined together for this study, the full scale was found to be highly reliable ($\alpha = .93$, $M = 32.65$, $SD = 9.72$).

Messages in Esports Communities

A new measure was created for this study to examine the different messages that are shared by fans in esports communities. This measure uses a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = *never* to 5 = *very often*) to examine the frequency of each type of message. Nine questions were created which correlate with the different spectator motivations to watch esports. Three questions were

created about skills-based motivations and consist of questions like “I discuss strategy for gameplay online.” Three questions were created about entertainment-based motivations and consist of questions like “I talk about how new players or teams will perform.” Three questions were created regarding relationship-based motivations and consist of questions like “I cheer on my favorite team or player.” For this study, this variable was found to be reliable ($\alpha = .87$, $M = 28.44$, $SD = 7.65$).

Spectator Preference Type

The last variable being measured in this study is the type of spectating experience that fans prefer when watching esports. Participants were asked with a single item related to their favorite spectating experience, specifically with the question “How do you prefer to watch esports?” Participants then chose whether they prefer to watch online or in-person.

Data Analysis

This study used multiple types of statistical analyses to examine the relationships between the variables. First, correlations were used to examine all components of RQ₁, RQ₂, RQ₃, and RQ₄. A correlation provides a way to view the relationship between two continuous variables and is one of the most frequently used types of statistical analysis (Baxter & Babbie, 2003). Using correlations made it easier to understand the relationship between esports spectator motivations for fans and their levels of engagement, fan identity, sense of community, and messages.

The next statistical analysis that was used in this study was a *t*-test. A *t*-test is used to look at the relationships between a continuous variable and two levels within a categorical variable (Baxter & Babbie, 2003). Since RQ₄ is examining the relationship between esports

spectator motivations (continuous) and the preferences of fans on whether they prefer to watch esports online or in-person (categorical), a *t*-test was used.

The last type of statistical analysis used in this study was a regression analysis. A regression analysis was used to learn more about how the different spectator motivations were predictors of the various aspects of fandom measured in this study. This was done to learn more about how much each spectator motivation has an impact on esports fandom. The regression analyses helped contribute to uncover more about RQ₁, RQ₂, RQ₃, and RQ₄.

Chapter 4: Results

Before examining the research questions, *t*-tests were performed on each variable based on the two different data sets. This was performed to see if there were any substantial differences between the responses provided by the convenience sample from SONA and those found online through snowball sampling. *T*-test analyses found that there was a significant difference between the two data sets for three of the variables. Participants from the snowball sample ($M = 6.48$, $SD = 0.56$) versus participants from the SONA sample ($M = 6.13$, $SD = 0.72$) were significantly different on reported levels of skill-based motivations to watch esports, $t(172) = 3.48$, $p = .001$. Participants from the snowball sample ($M = 3.24$, $SD = 0.89$) versus participants from the SONA sample ($M = 2.55$, $SD = 0.80$) were also significantly different on reported levels of fan engagement, $t(173) = 5.35$, $p < .001$. Lastly, participants from the snowball sample ($M = 5.47$, $SD = 1.29$) versus participants from the SONA sample ($M = 4.53$, $SD = 1.36$) were significantly different on fan identity, $t(172) = 4.60$, $p < .001$. These *t*-test show that those from the snowball sample reported, on average, higher levels of skill-based motivations, fan engagement, and fan identity compared to those from SONA. There were no other variables that were significantly different between the two data sets.

While these *t*-tests show a significant difference between the data sets for these variables, this also isn't too surprising. Those from the snowball sample are likely more invested in esports compared to the students from the SONA sample. As such, it makes sense that they would have higher levels regarding their levels of fan identity and fan engagement. While there were differences between the two data sets for some variables, the responses will still be combined together to analyze the research questions based on the collective sample for this study. The

responses from the different data sets were similar for the majority of the variables and combining the responses will help produce more efficient statistical analyses to interpret the data.

RQ1: Spectator Motivations Related to Esports Fandom Engagement

The first research question examines whether there is a relationship with the motivations that fans have to watch esports and their frequency of fan-like behaviors related to esports. A correlation was conducted between the various spectator motivations and the level of esports fan engagement that participants reported. RQ_{1a} looks into the relationship between skill-based spectator motivations and the level of fandom engagement. A positive relationship was found between people motivated to watch esports for skill-based reasons and their level of engagement with esports as a fan ($r = .29, p < .001$). The analysis shows that there is a significant relationship with a medium effect size. Additionally, RQ_{1b} examines entertainment-based motivations to watch esports and how they are related to fandom engagement. A significant, positive relationship with a medium effect size was found between those influenced by entertainment-based motivations to watch esports and their level of fan engagement ($r = .32, p < .001$). Lastly, RQ_{1c} asked whether there is a relationship between relationship-based spectator motivations to watch esports and reported levels of fandom engagement. A positive relationship was found between relationship-based spectator motivations and levels of fandom engagement ($r = .40, p < .001$). This correlation was found to be significant with a medium effect size.

To further explore the relationship between motives to watch esports and fan engagement, a regression analysis was performed. The results of the test were significant, $F(3,170) = 14.22, p < .001$. However, only the relationship-based motive contributed significantly to the model ($\beta = .30, p < .001$). Entertainment-based motives ($\beta = .14, p = .09$) and skill-based motives ($\beta = .13, p = .12$) were not significant.

RQ2: Spectator Motivations Related to Esports Fan Identity

The next research question looks into whether there is a relationship between the different motivations to watch esports and how strongly a person identifies as an esports fan. A correlation was performed between the various esports spectator motivations and the reported levels of fan identity. RQ_{2a} examines the relationship between skill-based motivations and fan identity. A positive relationship was found between those influenced by skill-based motivations and how strongly a person identifies as an esports fan ($r = .37, p < .001$). The analysis shows that this is a significant relationship with a medium effect size. RQ_{2b} asked whether there is a relationship between entertainment-based spectator motivations and fan identity. A positive relationship was found between entertainment-based spectator motivations and reported levels of fan identity ($r = .42, p < .001$). The analysis shows that this relationship is significant with a medium effect size. Lastly, RQ_{2c} looks into whether there is a relationship between relationship-based spectator motivations and esports fan identity. A significant, positive relationship with a large effect size was found between relationship-based spectator motivations and the level of fan identity that participants reported ($r = .50, p < .001$).

To further explore the relationship between motives and fan identity, a regression analysis was performed. The results of the test were significant, $F(3,170) = 27.08, p < .001$. The relationship-based motives contributed significantly to the model ($\beta = .37, p < .001$). The entertainment-based motives were also statistically significant ($\beta = .20, p = .01$), but not as strong as relationship-based motives. The skill-based motives ($\beta = .15, p = .05$) was at the threshold of statistical significance and was the weakest predictor compared to the other motivations.

RQ3: Spectator Motivations Related to Esports Sense of Community

The third research question is examining how various spectator motivations to watch esports are related to the sense of community that participants experience with esports fan communities. To test this, a correlation was conducted between spectator motivations and the sense of community that was reported by participants. RQ_{3a} examines how skill-based spectator motivations are related with esports sense of community. A significant, positive relationship with a small effect size was found between skill-based spectator motivations and sense of community ($r = .25, p = .001$). Additionally, RQ_{3b} looks into how entertainment-based spectator motivations are related with sense of community. A positive relationship was found between entertainment-based spectator motivations and sense of community ($r = .34, p < .001$). The analysis shows that there is a significant relationship with a medium effect size. Lastly, RQ_{3c} examines the relationship between relationship-based spectator motivations and sense of community. A significant, positive relationship with a medium effect size was found between relationship-based spectator motivations and sense of community ($r = .43, p < .001$).

To further explore the relationship between motives and sense of community, a regression analysis was performed. The results of the test were significant, $F(3,165) = 15.78, p < .001$. The relationship-based motives contributed significantly to the model ($\beta = .35, p < .001$). The entertainment-based motives were also statistically significant ($\beta = .17, p = .04$), but were not as strong as relationship-based motives. The skill-based motives ($\beta = .05, p = .51$) were not significant.

RQ4: Messages in Esports Communities and Spectator Motivations

This fourth research question is examining the relationship between the frequency of messages shared in esports communities and the spectator motivations for fans to watch esports. To test this, a correlation was performed between the frequency of messages and the various

spectator motivations. There is a positive relationship between the messages shared by esports fans and levels of skill-based motivations ($r = .32, p < .001$), entertainment-based motivations ($r = .42, p < .001$), and relationship-based motivations ($r = .61, p < .001$). The data shows that each of the spectator motivations are significantly correlated with the messages in esports communities. The analysis also shows that the relationship for skill-based motivations and entertainment-based motivations with messages shared in esports communities have a medium effect size while the correlation for relationship-based motivations has a large effect size.

To further explore the relationship between motives and messages, a regression analysis was performed. The results of the test were significant, $F(3,170) = 40.65, p < .001$. The relationship-based motives contributed significantly to the model ($\beta = .52, p < .001$). The entertainment-based motives were also statistically significant ($\beta = .18, p = .01$), but were not as strong as relationship-based motives. The skill-based motives ($\beta = .07, p = .34$) were not significant.

RQ5: Esports Spectating Preference and Spectator Motivations

The last research question is examining how spectating preferences for watching esports either online or in-person influence motivations to watch esports. A t -test was performed between the spectating preference of participants and each category of spectator motivation. First, a t -test was used to examine spectating preferences and skill-based motivations. Participants who prefer to watch esports online ($M = 6.24, SD = 0.68$) versus those who prefer to watch esports in-person ($M = 6.37, SD = 0.66$) were not significantly different on their reported levels of skill-based motivations to watch esports, $t(172) = -1.05, p = .29$. Next, a t -test was used to examine spectating preferences and entertainment-based motivations. Participants who prefer to watch esports online ($M = 5.74, SD = 0.71$) versus those who prefer to watch esports in-person

($M = 5.92$, $SD = 0.80$) were not significantly different on their reported levels of entertainment-based motivations to watch esports, $t(172) = -1.39$, $p = .17$. Lastly, a t -test was used to examine spectating preferences and relationship-based motivations. Participants who prefer to watch esports online ($M = 4.96$, $SD = 1.23$) versus those who prefer to watch esports in-person ($M = 5.68$, $SD = 0.98$) were significantly different on their reported levels of relationship-based motivations, $t(172) = -3.55$, $p < .001$. Only relationship-based motivations provided a significant difference in spectating preferences whereas fans with skill and entertainment-based motivations did not show any significant differences in spectating preferences.

Chapter 5: Discussion

This study provided the opportunity to explore how esports fans participate in fandoms, how communication can facilitate a fan identity, and how motivations influence spectator preferences. This was done to gain a better understanding of the role that fandoms, identity, and communication have on esports and gaming culture. Overall, the data from this study suggests that spectating motivations have a prominent influence on esports fans and their involvement in esports fandoms. More specifically, relationship-based motivations have a significantly influential impact on esports fandom compared to other spectating motivations. What follows in this chapter is a discussion regarding how the various motivations for watching esports influence fan engagement, identity, sense of community, messages, and spectating preferences.

Bridging Interpersonal and Intrapersonal Elements of Esports Fandom

To start, I will first discuss how the motivations are associated with fan engagement and fan identity. The frequency of fan-like behaviors and how strongly a person views themselves as a fan are significant contributors to fandoms. It is through engagement and identification that fandoms exist and allow people to express themselves as more than just normal entertainment consumers. Engagement and identity have been found to be interconnected aspects of fandom that influence people and how they view themselves (Groene & Hettinger, 2016), which is why it is important to examine both these aspects of fandom and the influences that spectating motivations have on them in esports fandoms.

The data suggests various implications regarding fans and their levels of engagement with esports fandoms. Initial examination of the data shows that there are positive relationships between each spectator motivation and fan engagement. For this reason, support for all aspects of RQ₁ was found in this study. Further analysis of the data through the regression analyses shows

that while correlations were found with all of the spectating motivations, only relationship-based motivations were found to be significant predictors of fan engagement. While this study utilized a cross-sectional design and can't prove that any of the motivations can predict future behaviors over time, the regressions analyses help explain how the different motivations each may have influenced the variation in survey responses. As such, the regression and correlation analyses together help show how those with relationship-based motivations to spectate esports are likely to exhibit fan-like behaviors more frequently compared to other esports fans.

These results provide unique insight into understanding the types of people that actively participate in esports fan communities. People that frequently perform fan-like behaviors are likely watching esports because of the opportunities for social interaction and parasocial relationships. We learn from previous research that fans use social media more than non-fans to engage in conversation and develop parasocial relationships (Tsiotsou, 2015; Yuksel & Labrecque, 2016), so it makes sense that esports fans would also have higher engagement to develop these social relationships. For these fans, it is likely that interacting in esports communities and socializing with other fans are part of the esports spectating experience. This is consistent with previous research that examined esports fans and the significance that social interaction has on their spectating habits (Sjöblom, Macey, et al., 2019). As a result, relationship-based spectating motivations are important influences that drive engagement in esports communities more prominently than other spectating motivations.

This helps demonstrate how watching esports can provide meaningful social experiences beyond simply watching another person play a video game. We learn from previous research that fans acquire unique social benefits by developing parasocial relationships with certain sports teams (Sun, 2010), and this study further shows how this can apply to esports fans. Fans that

continue to watch esports for relationship-based reasons are satisfied with the social (i.e., communicative) opportunities of esports fandoms, which contributes to why these fans remain esports fans. This reiterates the findings from previous research demonstrating the influence that social relationships have on spectators continuing to watch esports (K. A. Brown et al., 2018; Qian, Zhang, et al., 2019; Sjöblom, Macey, et al., 2019; Taylor, 2018). With the variety of social opportunities for esports fans, esports fandoms can be a way to keep people interested in spectating esports as a long-term hobby, while also helping them to sustain their own need to belong (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Qian et al., 2020).

Another way to examine this finding about relationship-based motivations and fandom engagement is that esports fandoms can provide a way for fans to get more out of their media consumption of esports. This would build on existing fandom research by Tsay-Vogel and Sanders (2017) who found that people who are a part of a fandom experience more enjoyment of their media consumption compared to other types of fans. For these fans, it is possible that being a part of esports communities makes watching esports more exciting. Participating in esports communities can provide a way to further the enjoyment of relationship building and social interaction found in esports, which can help people become long-term fans (Tsay-Vogel & Sanders, 2017). Fans with relationship-based motivations satisfy their needs by building relationships and continually interacting with other fans, which demonstrates how relationship-based motivations are significantly influential for esports fans. The impact that relationship-based motivations have on esports fans and their engagement in fan communities is a unique finding from this study that helps demonstrate how some fans utilize communication to satisfy their spectating needs.

Alongside the findings of fandom engagement, the data from this study also suggests important implications regarding the different motivations for watching esports and how strongly a person considers themselves a fan. The analysis of the data shows a positive correlation between each spectator motivation and reported levels of fan identity. This provides support for all components of RQ₂ and helps demonstrate that esports fans can have a variety of spectating motivations. Similar to the findings from RQ₁, relationship-based motivations are the most influential compared to the other motivations. Further analysis of the data suggests that each spectator motivation predicts fan identity; however, relationship-based motivations are the strongest predictors of fan identity compared to the other motivations.

The data about the various spectator motivations and fan identity provides needed insight into esports fans and their spectating motivations. Fans that are motivated to watch esports because of the opportunities for social interaction and parasocial relationships are likely to have a stronger fan identity compared to other spectators. This strong connection between relationship-based motivations and fan identity is important for esports fandoms as it is likely that fans can develop a stronger fan identity by utilizing social interaction and parasocial relationships. With fandoms being heavily associated with identity (Jenkins, 2006), it makes sense that developing a stronger fan identity is associated with relationship-based spectating motivations and increased engagement in and communication with fan communities. This would align with previous research showing how people communicate in fandoms to help construct their social identities (e.g., Fisher & Wakefield, 1998; Plante et al., 2014; Reysen & Branscombe, 2010). Video game communities have historically provided many opportunities for social interaction and identity expression (Gentile et al., 2009; Granic et al., 2014; Taylor, 2018), and this study helps show how esports fandoms can provide similar experiences. Identity is inherently centered in

communication (Faulkner & Hecht, 2006) and the data from this study suggest that esports fandoms are rooted in communication through the social interaction and parasocial relationships that motivate fans. As individuals seek to satiate their need to belong (Baumeister & Leary, 1995), esports communities and spectating events become prime locations for connection and communication.

Additional insight can be gained when comparing the findings on fan identity with the data on fan engagement. The differences between the strength of one's identity as a fan and the levels of fan engagement across the various motivations is a unique finding from this study that helps clarify previous research regarding fandom and fanship. Some scholars argue that fandom is the interactive and socializing aspects of fan communities while fanship is the process where someone identifies as a fan, making these aspects of fandom separate phenomena (Reysen & Branscombe, 2010). Because skill and entertainment-based motivations were found to be predictors of fan identity but not fan engagement, it could be inferred that there is a divide between these aspects of fandom, wherein people identify as fans but don't feel the need to engage in fan communities. However, it is important to consider that relationship-based motivations were found to have the strongest correlations and are the greatest predictors of both fan engagement and fan identity. Because relationship-based motivations play a more significant role in predicting both engagement and fan identity, it could be argued that these aspects of fandom are more associated with each other than previous claims trying to separate fandom and fanship. This would provide support that fan engagement and fan identity are closely related phenomena tied to social interaction (e.g., the need to belong), and parasocial relationships.

As such, these results help support the idea that the interpersonal and intrapersonal elements of fandoms are "complementary, intrinsically connected parts of the same ecosystem of

analysis” (Sandvoss et al., 2017, pp. 8–9). With relationship-based motivations being stronger predictors than skill or entertainment-based motivations, it is also clear that the desires for social interaction and building parasocial relationships provide meaningful opportunities for those who consider themselves esports fans. Engaging in social interaction and maintaining parasocial relationships are achieved through communication, which signifies how communication is highly influential for esports fandoms. In this way, the role that communication plays in esports fandoms could help bridge the divide between the interpersonal elements of fandom and the intrapersonal aspect of being a fan.

Sense of Community and Messages Associated with Motivations

Alongside fan engagement and fan identity, it is also important to consider how spectating motivations are associated with one’s sense of community and the messages that are shared in esports communities. Sense of community is highly important when it comes to fandoms and plays a significant role in how people feel like they are included in a social group (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). The frequency of messages that people share across communities is also important as it helps people establish themselves as members of these communities (Théberge, 2005). As such, it is important to analyze how the motivations influence these different yet connected elements that are associated with esports fandoms.

Analysis of the data shows a positive correlation between all the spectator motivations and feeling a sense of community with esports. As a result, support for all components of RQ₃ was found in this study. Further analysis of the data showed that relationship and entertainment-based spectator motivations were predictors of fans feeling a sense of community. Relationship-based motivations were stronger predictors of feeling a sense of community compared to

entertainment-based motivations, which aligns well with the previous findings regarding fan engagement and fan identity.

Feeling a sense of community is rooted in having a connection to others, which is why it makes sense that relationship-based reasons to watch esports would be the most prominent motivation compared to the other motivations. Online communities have been places for people to develop parasocial relationships and acquire a sense of community (Keng et al., 2011), so it makes sense that this would also apply to esports fandoms. The common role of relationship-based motivations across fan engagement, fan identity, and sense of community is an important finding from this study as this evidence builds up how social interaction and parasocial relationships have a large influence on fan communities. Previous research has shown how people form online communities based on shared interests (Baym, 2010; McEwan, 2015), and this study helps show that relationship-based motivations are highly influential for the development and continuation of esports fan communities.

Esports fans participate in fan communities to help satisfy their social needs (Qian et al., 2020), and the impact that relationship-based motivations have on engagement, identity, and sense of community help demonstrate that these motivations are influential for esports fans and their experiences with fan communities. Esports fans with relationship-based motivations actively utilize communication to engage in fan communities, build relationships with other fans, and feel a stronger sense of community compared to fans with only skill or entertainment-based motivations. Previous research has found that those who have more engagement in online communities have a higher sense of belonging in those communities (McEwan, 2015; Nonnecke et al., 2004), so it makes sense that esports fans with relationship-based motivations would have a stronger sense of community.

Entertainment-based motivations being predictors of both sense of community and fan identity, but not fan engagement, provides additional insight into the role of spectating motivations that is unique from this study. One possible explanation for this is that these fans enjoy feeling connected with others and think of themselves as strong fans, but don't feel the need to actively participate and contribute to discussions in communities. This would be in line with the nature of online communities and the predominant role of lurkers in communities as discussed by Baym (2010). Previous research has shown how lurkers don't participate in online communities because they don't feel the need to contribute or remain silent for other entertainment purposes (Baym, 2010; McEwan, 2015; Preece et al., 2004). It is possible that those motivated by entertainment-based motivations consist of more lurkers compared to fans motivated by relationship-based motivations since social interaction is not as much of an inherent need for entertainment-based fans as it is for fans with relationship-based motivations. Previous research has not examined how some spectating motivations are associated with a lack of engagement (i.e., being a lurker), so examining how some fans are less engaged due to their spectating motivations is a unique finding from this study.

The data about the different motivations and frequency of different messages that people share provides additional insight into esports and its fans. Analysis of the data shows that there is a positive correlation between each spectator motivation and messages shared in esports communities, which provides support for RQ4. Relationship-based motivations provided a significantly larger effect size in the correlation analyses, which shows how those with relationship-based motivations communicate with others more frequently. Additional analysis shows that relationship and entertainment-based motivations are significant predictors of messages in esports communities while skill-based motivations are not. Relationship-based

motivations are much stronger predictors compared to entertainment-based motivations even though both were found to be statistically significant. When examining these findings alongside the previous research questions, it is clear how consistent and influential relationship-based motivations are in the development of fan engagement, identity, sense of community, and communication of messages.

The messages variable in this study measured the frequency of different types of content shared in esports communities based on the corresponding motivations. Since relationship-based motivations were the most significant predictor across all these types of messages, those motivated to watch esports for relationship-based reasons communicate more frequently than other fans regardless of the type of content being shared. One way to examine this finding is that the type of content shared in messages across esports communities is not as important as the continued act of communicating and sharing messages. This would coincide with findings from previous research stating how the frequency of messages in online fandoms is highly important as it helps individuals develop their identity in fan spaces (Théberge, 2005).

Rather than depending on specific types of content being discussed, many esports fans might contribute to online discussions to maintain a presence in online communities. We learn from McEwan (2015) that people in online communities perform various behaviors to build and maintain their relationships across online networks. Communicating in online discussions, regardless of the specific content being discussed, appears to be a way for esports fans to maintain their connections online. This is a unique finding from this study that helps show how communication is utilized by esports fans, regardless of the specific type of content, to maintain a presence in online communities. Continually adding to discussions can help fans feel like they are contributing to a larger community (Théberge, 2005), which helps fulfill their social

motivations for watching esports. It makes sense that those with relationship-based motivations will likely share more messages compared to other fans since it is through sharing messages that these fans satisfy their needs to socially interact with others.

These findings of how relationship-based motivations play a more significant role in both feeling a sense of community and higher frequency of messages provide unique insight into esports fandoms. Specifically, how one's spectator motivations can influence their frequency of communication and feelings of inclusion in esports. Esports fans have an inherent need to feel like they belong (Qian et al., 2020), and esports fans that have higher levels of engagement are likely to have a stronger bond with esports communities. Those with relationship-based motivations are more likely to engage in fan communities and utilize communication to feel connected with the esports community. These findings are unique from this study and help demonstrate the importance that communication has on fans and their experiences with esports communities. Fans who utilize communication more frequently in esports communities are more likely to develop their relationship-based motivations, which positively influences their fandom engagement, the strength of their fan identity, and their sense of community.

Spectating Preferences Influenced by Motivations

Alongside the findings about spectating motivations and fandom, the data also provides unique insight into how fans prefer to watch esports based on their spectating motivations. Analysis of the data shows that fans with skill and entertainment-based motivations to watch esports did not have significant differences on whether they prefer to watch esports online or in-person. This is a unique finding from this study since these results do not fit with previous theories regarding how esports fans seek out opportunities to watch games in-person to feel validated in their hobby or improve spectating experiences (Seo, 2013). Rather than

contradicting these previous claims completely, the results of this study help contribute to a greater understanding of how spectating motivations can influence why people might be indifferent to watching esports online or in-person.

For fans motivated by skill-based reasons to watch esports, there are a few reasons why there aren't significant differences in spectating preferences. Even though watching esports in-person can help provide a validating experience, there are many features to online spectating that allow users to learn more about the skills being demonstrated in the game. Esports broadcasts utilize various opportunities to provide information to spectators, like live commentators and visual additions on-screen, which makes more information available to people watching online (Taylor, 2018). These provide additional sources of information for spectators to learn about the skills being demonstrated in the game by professional players. Spectating esports online also means that fans can watch the game close to their TV or computer, which makes it easier to see everything going on in the game. All these advantages with online spectating can make those with skill-based motivations have no preference regarding how they watch esports as there are benefits to watching both online and in-person.

There are some possible explanations as to why fans with entertainment-based spectator motivations would not prefer to watch esports either online or in-person. One possible explanation is that being able to feel connected to thousands of people while watching esports online can strengthen the experiences associated with drama, novelty, and escapism. The internet makes it easier for global audiences to come together to watch esports and watching esports online might help spectators feel like they are watching intense matches alongside hundreds of thousands of people around the globe. Watching online also provides opportunities for fans to use chatrooms and spam messages alongside thousands of other people at the same time, which

can help increase the entertaining aspects of watching esports (Ford et al., 2017; Taylor, 2018). Fans with entertainment-based motivations might appreciate the mass flood of messages in online chatrooms as it might contribute to the entertainment experiences. The lack of preference for those with entertainment-based motivations helps demonstrate how online platforms can provide enjoyable entertainment opportunities for esports fans that rival the experiences of watching esports in-person.

For fans motivated by relationship-based reasons to watch esports, the data shows that there was a significant difference in spectating preferences. Fans motivated by relationship-based reasons to watch esports prefer to watch in-person events compared to watching esports online. This provides some support for RQ₅, although the lack of spectating preferences for those with skill and entertainment-based motivations provides a more complete understanding of RQ₅. Examining how esports fans can have varying spectating preferences based on their motivations to watch esports is a unique finding from this study that helps demonstrate how fans can have different experiences based on the way they watch esports.

There are a few reasons why fans with relationship-based motivations would prefer to watch esports in-person. Those motivated for relationship-based reasons might prefer to attend in-person events to feel like esports as a hobby becomes a more real experience. This would coincide with the previous claims regarding how fans attend esports events in-person to feel validated in their esports hobby (Seo, 2013). It is also possible that those with relationship-based motivations feel like the available means of communication found online do not provide a sufficient social experience, which coincides with previous research regarding the limitations of communicating online in Twitch chatrooms during esports livestreams (Hamari & Sjöblom, 2017; Xiao, 2020). Being able to interact with other people in-person might provide a more real

experience for esports fans that have relationship-based motivations, which is why these fans might prefer to go to in-person esports events.

Another reason why fans with relationship-based spectator motivations would prefer to go to in-person events is to further develop the parasocial relationships that fans have with players and teams. Much like how Comic-Con is used by fans in traditional media fandoms to socially interact with other fans and meet professionals in the industry (Hanna, 2019), fans attending esports events can socialize with other fans and meet with esports players. Fans seeing players in-person might provide more meaningful experiences due to the parasocial relationship that fans have developed with players. Being able to physically see players can make the esports experience more real, causing those with relationship-based motivations to prefer to watch esports in-person compared to watching games online.

These findings regarding the spectating preferences of esports fans can also be highlighted when examining the circumstances of those who participated in this study. This study was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, which possibly could have influenced people's perceptions regarding their spectating preferences. During the pandemic, many in-person esports events were canceled and there was a lack of opportunities for fans to meet face to face. It is quite possible that the inability to go to in-person events amplified the desires of those with relationship-based motivations to attend these types of esports competitions. Since those with relationship-based motivations are highly associated with esports fandoms, their spectating preferences help uncover the types of experiences available at in-person esports events.

Motivations as Predictors of Esports Fandom

Fan engagement, identity, sense of community, frequency of messages, and spectator preferences are all components that influence esports fandom. While positive correlations were

found between each spectating motivation and all these aspects of fandom, additional analysis of the data through the regression analyses shows that the spectating motivations have varying roles as predictors of fandom. As a cross-sectional study, it is important to note that this study is limited in being able to claim that any of the motivations can predict fan behaviors over time. Even though there are limitations on being able to predict future behaviors, the regression analyses do help provide meaningful insight into the influence that the motivations had on the survey responses from this study. The differences between the spectating motivations as contributors to the behaviors of fans is an important finding from this study and contributes to a greater understanding of how spectating motivations influence esports fandoms. What follows is a brief discussion of each spectator motivation and how it can predict involvement in the various aspects of fandom measured in this study.

While there were positive correlations found between each aspect of fandom being measured in this study and skill-based motivations, further analysis shows that skill-based motivations were only a predictor of fan identity. Even then, skill-based motivations barely met the threshold of being considered a predictor of fan identity from statistical analysis. As a result, skill-based motivations have the weakest relationship with all the aspects of esports fandoms measured in this study. The lacking influence of skill-based motivations on esports fan communities is a unique finding from this study and suggests that skill-based motivations are not as influential in the development of esports fandoms compared to entertainment or relationship-based motivations. A possible explanation for this is that fans with skill-based motivations might view esports as a tool that helps improve one's abilities in the video game. For these fans, there wouldn't be an inherent need to build relationships or socialize with others since spectating esports would be used more for one's personal development in the game. This would help

explain previous research findings about how some people watch esports alone and do not consider esports a social experience (Hamari & Sjöblom, 2017; Xiao, 2020). Having no desire for social interaction when watching esports isn't a bad thing. Rather, this finding helps show how watching esports is an activity that caters to a variety of people.

Entertainment-based motivations seem to play an important role in esports fandoms. Positive correlations were found in all the analyses and entertainment-based motivations were found to be a significant predictor in all the aspects of fandom measured in this study, except for fan engagement. While fan engagement is typically a defining characteristic of fandoms, the fact that entertainment-based motivations predict all other aspects of fandom measured in this study is significant. We know that many people utilize fan communities to feel connected to others but don't feel a need to actively participate in discussions (McEwan, 2015) and it appears that fans with entertainment-based motivations fit into this type of community member. Fans with entertainment-based spectator motivations thoroughly enjoy the community aspect of esports compared to those with skill-based motivations. As a result, entertainment-based motivations contribute more to fans and their involvement in esports communities compared to skill-based motivations.

Across all the various aspects of fandom being examined in this research, relationship-based spectator motivations proved to be the most influential. The correlations across all the analyses were the strongest with relationship-based motivations and further analysis showed that relationship-based motivations are a significant predictor of all of these elements of fandom. Relationship-based motivations are concerned with social interaction and parasocial relationships, which are heavily influenced by communication. As a result, this study helps

provide support on how social interaction and parasocial relationships play a dominant role in the development of esports fandoms.

With relationship-based motivations being a larger predictor for various aspects of fandom, it is likely that those currently participating in fan communities are motivated to watch esports for relationship-based reasons. This is important to consider when thinking about identity expression and how people have their voices heard in gaming communities. Previous research has shown that women, members of the LGBTQ+ community, and BIPOC have experienced harassment and are typically silenced in gaming communities (Gray, 2017; Paaßen et al., 2017; Peeples et al., 2018; Richard & Gray, 2018; Shaw, 2011). These inhospitable environments are likely significant barriers for people to develop relationship-based motivations for watching esports and contribute to the persistence of patriarchal hegemony found in gaming communities.

In order to have more diversity in esports and esports fandoms, it is important that fans can develop relationship-based motivations without conflict. This is why the development of smaller, more inclusive gaming communities is essential for esports and its fandoms. Many of these fan communities are created for people to build relationships based on gaming while also escaping the hegemony of traditional gaming communities (Gray & Leonard, 2018; Taylor, 2012). Having fan communities that provide opportunities for underrepresented groups to freely express themselves might help more people be motivated to watch esports for relationship-based reasons.

This is significant as more opportunities for people to develop relationship-based motivations will help contribute to more fan engagement, stronger fan identity, and an increase in communication from underrepresented groups in esports. Contributions from underrepresented groups are highly important to the continual development of esports and esports fandoms,

especially since gaming is becoming a more mainstream activity in popular culture (Paafen et al., 2017; Williams et al., 2008). Esports and gaming culture are rapidly growing, and relationship-based spectator motivations could be highly influential in these developments. This is especially relevant when considering how prominent relationship-based motivations are in predicting engagement, fan identity, sense of community, and the utilization of communication.

Combining Spectating Motivations

Alongside the findings about spectator motivations and the influence they have on esports fandoms, it is also important to discuss how the motivations were successfully measured in this study. This study combined seven different motivations from previous research to create three spectator motivation groups. Combining motivations is a unique endeavor compared to other studies about esports fans and was done to examine the similarities between spectating motivations, as well as an attempt to create an explanation of spectator motivations that was more succinct. All of the spectator motivation groups provided reliable measurements for this study, which helps provide support to how spectating motivations can be classified as either skill-based, entertainment-based, or relationship-based. The successful combination of spectating motivations is a unique outcome from this study and helps provide an understanding of the ways that spectating motivations can be based on similar experiences.

Admiring the skill of professional players and knowledge acquisition are two spectating motivations from previous research that were combined together to create the category of skill-based motivations for this study. Previous research had made claims that these motivations were centered around similar phenomena (Hamari & Sjöblom, 2017; Sjöblom, Macey, et al., 2019), but no study had combined these together to create a single variable of measurement. This study produced reliable measurements when combining these motivations, which helps provide

support to the claims that these motivations are similar. In fact, these motivations produced a slightly more reliable measurement when combined compared to when they were separated in previous research. This further demonstrates the similarity between these skill-based motivations and how combining these motivations helped produce more reliable measures for this study.

The motivations of drama, novelty, and escapism were combined together in this study to create the category of entertainment-based motivations. Even though this motivation group contains three separate motivations instead of two, these motivations combined still generated a reliable measurement for this study. This helps show that there is a connection between these motivations. The combined measurement produced a slightly less reliable variable compared to the individual measurements of drama, novelty, and escapism, which shows that combining these motivations was slightly less successful when compared to the combination of the skill-based motivations. While combining these three motivations wasn't as successful as the skill-based motivations, this study still produced statistically reliable results. As such, there is still some support to the combination of these entertainment-based motivations for a single measurement.

Social interaction and vicarious achievement were two motivations that were combined together to create the measurement of relationship-based motivations. When combined, these motivations created a reliable variable that was used to successfully analyze the importance that these motivations have on esports fandoms and communication in esports communities. Similar to the entertainment-based motivations, the combining of these two motivations into a single variable of measurement was not as successful as the combination of skill-based motivations. The reliability of the combined relationship-based motivation variable was not as strong as the individual measurements, yet it still produced statistically reliable measurements that meet the

standards of reliability for quantitative research. As such, there is still some support in combining these motivations into a single variable of measurement.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

This study examined esports fans, their motivations for watching esports, and how these motivations influence various aspects of esports fandom. This study is unique in that measures from previous studies about spectating motivations were combined to examine their association with fan engagement, identity, sense of community, messages, and spectating preferences. This study also focused on how esports fans utilize communication and build fan communities that satisfy their relational and community needs based on their spectating motivations. While this study generated knowledge towards understanding esports and fan communities, there were also some aspects of this study that could have been improved. Additionally, the knowledge produced from this study can help future researchers to discover more about spectating motivations and esports fandom. For this chapter, I will start by discussing some limitations from this study that could have influenced the results produced from the analyses. Then, I will focus on future directions and what should be considered next for research on esports spectating motivations and esports fandom.

Limitations

There were a couple of limitations found throughout this study that will be addressed in this chapter. The first limitation is concerned with the combining of spectator motivations. While the combining of measures for different motivations still produced reliable results and could be considered a strong outcome from this study, the combining of some motivations was not as successful as others. Specifically, the entertainment and relationship-based motivations produced slightly less reliable measures when combined than when examining the reliability of the individual motivations. The combined measures were still successful for this study since the combined measures still produced reliability coefficients that are greater than .70, which is the

standard for reliability that researchers should strive for (Baxter & Babbie, 2003). Still, the combination of measures could have slightly influenced the analyses performed in this research. The skill-based motivations, however, produced a more reliable measure when combined together than examining the skill-based motivations separately, which shows how the combination of motivations was still successful for this study.

Along similar lines of examining the effectiveness of the spectating motivations, another possible limitation of this study is that spectating motivations are not mutually exclusive. Participants can have a variety of spectating motivations and were not categorized or separated into groups based on their spectating motivations for analyses. As a result, the responses from fans who scored high in all the motivations were put together with the same fans who scored high in only one of the motivations. This could have possibly influenced the results to accurately describe the outcomes of individual motivations. One possible way to adjust this would be to categorize participants based on their highest-rated spectating motivation. Alternatively, participants could be placed in various groups to examine how different spectating motivations influence each other (e.g., how would examining a group of participants with high scores in entertainment and relationship-based motivations compare with a group of participants with high scores in skill and relationship-based motivations).

Another limitation of this study can be found in the differences of samples. This study collected participants from SONA and through snowball sampling by reaching out to esports communities. While these different samples produced similar responses for the majority of variables, there were a few variables where the different samples were different. Specifically, the snowball sample had higher reported levels of skill-based motivations, fan identity, and fan engagement. This is not surprising, however, given that those from the snowball sample are

made up of esports fans who are actively showing their involvement in esports fandom by taking the survey. While there were differences between samples, these samples were still combined for the analysis of the data and could have had a slight influence on the results.

Examining the demographics of participants can show another way in which these samples were different. Participants from the snowball sample were mainly white men, with the snowball sample being 89% male and 82% white. This demonstrates a lack of diversity from the snowball sample and further shows how many video game communities are made up of mostly white men (Ruvalcaba et al., 2018; Taylor, 2012, 2018). The SONA sample was much more diverse, with only 54% of participants being male and the majority of participants being Asian (37%). The responses of these different sample sets were combined for this analysis, but having a more diverse set of participants from the snowball sample could have produced slightly different results.

This study collected responses from participants during the COVID-19 global pandemic, which could also have had an effect on the responses of participants. Since participants were limited in being able to attend in-person events due to health regulations, the desire for attending in-person events could have been amplified in the survey responses. The survey results showed that those with relationship-based motivations prefer to watch esports in-person, but this finding could have been influenced by the pandemic. Additional studies surrounding esports fans and their spectating preferences should be conducted when fans are not limited in being able to attend in-person esports events to examine the full extent of how spectating motivations influence spectating preferences.

The last limitation to be discussed in this chapter deals with the messages scale. The messages scale was a newly created scale for this study that was designed to examine the type of

content expressed in messages in esports communities. There were three questions created based on each of the spectating motivations, which resulted in a nine-question scale. The idea was to examine the type of content people discuss in esports communities based on their spectating motivations. This was done to see if there was a correlation between one's spectating motivation and the types of content that they engage in.

Unfortunately, the messages scale was unable to generate reliable subscales to examine messages based on motivation type. The entire nine-question scale produced a statistically reliable measure that examined the frequency of messages expressed in esports communities, but this study was not able to categorize those messages based on the spectating motivations. Having different questions based on the spectating motivations or having more than three questions for each spectating motivation could have produced more reliable subscales to examine the content participants engage in based on their spectating motivations.

Future Directions

Despite the limitations discussed in this chapter, this study still produced insightful results that could help future researchers. There are a few directions that future researchers can take based on the knowledge gained from this study. One future direction for future researchers is to uncover more about relationship-based motivations. This study found that relationship-based spectator motivations were highly significant for esports fans and their involvement in esports fandom, but there is limiting research on how people develop specific types of spectating motivations. We learn from McEwan (2015) that people usually join online communities as lurkers, which may influence their development of relationship-based motivations. McEwan also describes how online communities have a unique combination of characteristics (e.g., tenuous membership, fairly egalitarian social structures, moderation, etc.). These unique aspects of online

communities could also influence the ways that community members engage in social interaction and develop parasocial relationships. Researchers are encouraged to examine different types of esports communities on various online platforms to examine how fans can socialize with each other and develop relationships.

Continuing to study how relationship-based motivations influence fans can help further our understanding of esports fandom and how the need to belong contributes to the facilitation of new relationships in gaming communities. We know that feeling connected with others is highly associated with the socializing of esports fans (Qian et al., 2020), and continuing to examine the influences of social interaction and parasocial relationships can help uncover more about the social opportunities that are available for fans to facilitate new relationships. By learning more about how people develop and satisfy relationship-based motivations, we can learn more about how people become esports fans and develop new relationships online.

Additionally, future researchers should continue to explore the spectating motivations of esports fans. This study produced statistically reliable analyses by combining previously researched spectating motivations and future researchers should continue to explore the similarities of these spectating motivations. Future researchers should continue to experiment with combining motivations to gauge the effectiveness of combining measures, as well as examining other spectating motivations that might have an influence on esports fans and their participation in esports fandom. Researchers can experiment with combining motivations and lowering the number of questions in the measures in an attempt to lower the length of surveys. Having shorter surveys can help with the response rate of participants, which can result in larger sample sizes (Baxter & Babbie, 2003).

Lastly, researchers should examine spectating motivations and the communities of specific esports. While this study asked participants about the type of games they play and the esports they have watched before, the questions of the survey were designed to ask about esports generally. As such, the responses for the survey could be about fans and their experiences with esports broadly rather than how they engage in specific esports communities. It is likely that different esports communities provide varying social experiences since people have varying preferences on video games. Having surveys with questions about specific esports could help demonstrate how esports is made up of a variety of different communities. Not only would having questions about specific esports provide insight into different video games, but it would also provide insight into the types of fans that are attracted to different esports. Recent research has attempted to examine how there are varying types of esports genres that can influence players and their behaviors (Jang & Byon, 2020), and it is possible that these different esports genres could also influence the relationship-based spectator motivations of fans. Future researchers should explore these possibilities by examining specific esports.

In conclusion, this study explored the motivations of esports fans and how those motivations influence fans and their engagement in the esports community, the strength of their identity as a fan, their sense of community, the messages they share in fan communities, and their esports spectating preferences. An online study was conducted and quantitative methods were used to analyze the survey data. This study found that fans with relationship-based spectating motivations were significantly more likely to utilize communication in esports communities compared to fans with skill or entertainment-based motivations. Fans with relationship-based motivations also prefer to watch esports in-person, while fans with skill or entertainment-based motivations have no preferences in watching esports online or in-person.

The findings from this study are significant because they help uncover more about different types of esports fans, the ways in which communication is used by esports fans, and how those with relationship-based spectating motivations are significant contributors to esports fan communities compared to fans with different spectating motivations. These fans enjoy the meaningful social activities available in esports communities and utilize communication to maintain their relationships in these communities.

Appendix A: Tables and Figures

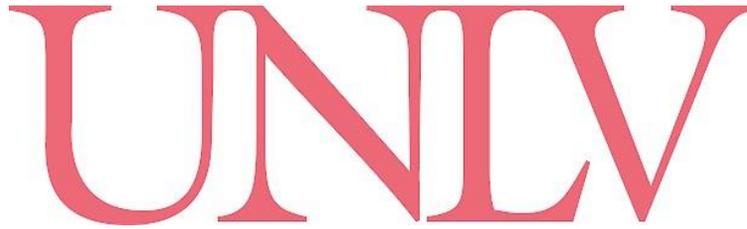
Table 1. Demographics for Snowball and SONA Samples

Variable	Snowball	SONA
Age	18-59 ($M = 24.58, SD = 7.13$)	18-51 ($M = 22.33, SD = 5.80$)
Gender		
<i>Male</i>	89% ($n = 65$)	53.9% ($n = 55$)
<i>Female</i>	8.2% ($n = 6$)	44.1% ($n = 45$)
<i>Non-Binary</i>	2.7% ($n = 2$)	1% ($n = 1$)
<i>Prefer not to answer</i>		1% ($n = 1$)
Race		
<i>White/Caucasian</i>	82.2% ($n = 60$)	36.3% ($n = 37$)
<i>Asian</i>	8.2% ($n = 6$)	37.3% ($n = 38$)
<i>African American/Black</i>	4.1% ($n = 3$)	12.7% ($n = 13$)
<i>Hispanic/Latinx</i>	5.5% ($n = 4$)	29.4% ($n = 30$)
<i>Pacific Islander</i>	4.1% ($n = 3$)	7.8% ($n = 8$)
<i>Native American</i>	1.4% ($n = 1$)	2.9% ($n = 3$)
<i>Other</i>	1.4% ($n = 1$)	2% ($n = 2$)
Education		
<i>B.A. (completed)</i>	31.5% ($n = 23$)	
<i>B.A. (in progress)</i>	26% ($n = 19$)	76.5% ($n = 78$)
<i>High School/GED</i>	19.2% ($n = 14$)	13.7% ($n = 14$)
<i>Advanced Degree</i>	8.2% ($n = 6$)	
<i>Associates (in progress)</i>	6.8% ($n = 5$)	9.8% ($n = 10$)
<i>Associates (completed)</i>	2.7% ($n = 2$)	
<i>Some High School</i>	5.5% ($n = 4$)	

Table 2. Participant's Experiences with Esports

Video Game	Esports Participants Have Watched		Esports Games Participants Play		Esports Participants are Fans	
	<i>n</i>	Percent	<i>n</i>	Percent	<i>n</i>	Percent
Call of Duty	95	54.3%	88	50.3%	73	41.7%
League of Legends	79	45.1%	58	33.1%	57	32.6%
CS:GO	73	41.7%	44	25.1%	38	21.7%
Fortnite	72	41.1%	50	28.6%	35	20.0%
Super Smash Bros.	72	41.1%	67	38.3%	49	28.0%
Rocket League	66	37.7%	56	32.0%	42	24.0%
Overwatch	58	33.1%	36	20.6%	26	14.9%
Valorant	52	29.7%	36	20.6%	30	17.1%
Rainbow Six Siege	44	25.1%	34	19.4%	18	10.3%
Halo	36	20.6%	34	19.4%	24	13.7%
Fifa	35	20.0%	35	20.0%	28	16.0%
Apex Legends	34	19.4%	36	20.6%	14	8.0%
PUBG	32	18.3%	21	12.0%	16	9.1%
Madden	26	14.9%	31	17.7%	21	12.0%
Street Fighter	25	14.3%	16	9.1%	16	9.1%
Starcraft	24	13.7%	14	8.0%	6	3.4%
Hearthstone	23	13.1%	14	8.0%	9	5.1%
Dota 2	22	12.6%	9	5.1%	6	3.4%
Smite	11	6.3%	10	5.7%	3	1.7%
Gears of War	9	5.1%	7	4.0%	4	2.3%
Other	25	14.3%	16	9.1%	14	8.0%

Appendix B: IRB Permissions and Materials



**UNLV Social/Behavioral IRB - Exempt Review Exempt
Notice**

DATE: October 12, 2020
TO: Natalie Pennington
FROM: Office of Research Integrity - Human Subjects
PROTOCOL TITLE: [1667954-2] Understanding the Motivations of Esports Fans
ACTION: DETERMINATION OF EXEMPT STATUS
EXEMPT DATE: October 12, 2020
REVIEW CATEGORY: Exemption category #2(i)

Thank you for your submission of Revision materials for this protocol. This memorandum is notification that the protocol referenced above has been reviewed as indicated in Federal regulatory statutes 45CFR46.101(b) and deemed exempt.

We will retain a copy of this correspondence with our records.

PLEASE NOTE:

Upon final determination of exempt status, the research team is responsible for conducting the research as stated in the exempt application reviewed by the ORI - HS and/or the IRB which shall include using the most recently submitted Informed Consent/Assent Forms (Information Sheet) and recruitment materials.

If your project involves paying research participants, it is recommended to contact Carisa Shaffer, ORI Program Coordinator at (702) 895-2794 to ensure compliance with the Policy for Incentives for Human Research Subjects.

Any changes to the application may cause this protocol to require a different level of IRB review. Should any changes need to be made, please submit a **Modification Form**. When the above-referenced protocol has been completed, please submit a **Continuing Review/Progress Completion report** to notify ORI - HS of its closure.

If you have questions, please contact the Office of Research Integrity - Human Subjects at IRB@unlv.edu or call 702-895-2794. Please include your protocol title and IRBNet ID in all

correspondence.

Office of Research Integrity - Human Subjects
4505 Maryland Parkway . Box 451047 . Las Vegas, Nevada
89154-1047 (702) 895-2794 . FAX: (702) 895-0805 .
IRB@unlv.edu

SONA Recruitment Post

Study Name: Understanding the Motivations of Esports Fans: The Relationship Between Esports Spectator Motivations and Esports Fandom Engagement

Study Type: Online (external) study. This study is an online study located on another website. Participants are not given access to the Study URL until after they sign up for the study.

Duration: 30-45 minutes

Credits: 1 Credit

Abstract: This UNLV research study is interested in how individuals are motivated to watch esports and how this relates to their spectating preferences, participation in fan communities, and their fan identity.

Description: The purpose of this UNLV research study is to better understand how motivations for watching esports are related to spectating preferences, engagement with esports fandom communities, and fan identity. By sharing your experiences with spectating esports and being a fan, you will contribute to developing a better understanding of esports and esports fan communities.

Eligibility Requirements: You must be at least 18 years old and have previously watched esports either online or in-person. You must also consider yourself an esports fan in order to participate.

Additional Study Information

Participant Sign-Up Deadline: 24 hours before the study is to occur

IRB Approval Code: *TBD*

Direct Study Link: <CREATED IN SONA>

Date Created: *TBD*

Researcher Information

Researcher: Joshua Barney, 702-895-5125, joshua.barney@unlv.edu

Principal Investigator: Natalie Pennington, 702-895-5133, natalie.pennington@unlv.edu

Email, Facebook, and Reddit Recruitment Post

Hello (name optional, included in emails but not Facebook or Reddit post):

We are seeking participants for a UNLV research study we are conducting about motivations for viewing esports. We are hoping that you may be able to help us out by sharing about this study with those you know who would be eligible to participate and completing the study yourself if you find you are eligible. To participate, you must be at least 18 years old, consider yourself a fan of esports, and have watched an esports competition either in-person or online. This link will take you to the survey to fill out, which we anticipate will take 30-45 minutes to complete. Participation will help us to gain a better understanding of how community forms around esports and fan engagement.

We appreciate you taking the time to read our message, if you have any questions about the study you can reach out directly to the PI, Dr. Natalierose Pennington:

natalierose.pennington@unlv.edu

Thank you,

Josh Barney & Natalie Pennington

Appendix C: Survey

Understanding the Motivations of Esports Fans: The Relationship Between Esports Spectator Motivations and Esports Fandom Engagement Survey

Informed Consent

<INSERT HERE>

- Yes
- No (skip to end of survey)

Qualifications Check

Please select all the ways you have watched Esports

- In-Person
- Online
- I do not watch esports

SKIP LOGIC: If participants say I do not watch esports, send to end of survey

Do you consider yourself an esports fan?

- Yes
- No

SKIP LOGIC: If participants say no, send to end of survey

Individual Demographic Block

Please enter your current age in years: _____

Please identify your gender:

- Male
- Female
- Transgender Male
- Transgender Female
- Other (please specify) _____

What is your racial/ethnic identity? Please select all that apply.

- Caucasian
- African American/Black
- Asian
- Hispanic/Latino(a)
- Native American/Indian
- Pacific Islander
- Other (please specify) _____

Please indicate the highest level of education that you have completed:

Less than high school
High school graduate
Some college
2 year degree
4 year degree
Professional degree
Doctorate

Esports Background Block

What esports have you watched? Select all that apply.

League of Legends
Dota 2
Smite
Starcraft
CS:GO
Valorant
Rainbow Six Siege
Apex Legends
Overwatch
Halo
Gears of War
Call of Duty
Fortnite
PUBG
Hearthstone
Rocket League
Super Smash Bros.
Street Fighter
Fifa
Madden
Other (please specify) _____

What esports video games do you play? Select all that apply.

League of Legends
Dota 2
Smite
Starcraft
CS:GO
Valorant
Rainbow Six Siege
Apex Legends
Overwatch
Halo

Gears of War
Call of Duty
Fortnite
PUBG
Hearthstone
Rocket League
Super Smash Bros.
Street Fighter
Fifa
Madden
Other (please specify) _____

What esports would you consider yourself a fan of? Select all that apply.

League of Legends
Dota 2
Smite
Starcraft
CS:GO
Valorant
Rainbow Six Siege
Apex Legends
Overwatch
Halo
Gears of War
Call of Duty
Fortnite
PUBG
Hearthstone
Rocket League
Super Smash Bros.
Street Fighter
Fifa
Madden
Other (please specify) _____

Where do you interact with others to discuss esports? Select all that apply.

Reddit
Twitter
Facebook
Instagram
Discord
In-person
Other (please specify) _____

Have you watched esports online?

Yes

No

Display logic (if yes): Where do you watch esports online? Select all that apply

Twitch

YouTube

Facebook

Other (please specify) _____

Display logic (if yes): Roughly, how many esports competitions have you watched online?

Have you attended an esports event in-person?

Yes

No

Display logic (if yes): Roughly, how many esports competitions have you watched in-person? _____

CORE SURVEY QUESTIONS

Spectator Preference Type

How do you prefer to watch esports?

Online

In-person

Esports Spectator Motivations

Please select the option that best describes your experiences when watching esports. (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree)

Skill-Based Esports Spectator Motivations

The superior skills are something I appreciate while watching the game.

I enjoy watching a well-executed performance.

I enjoy watching a skillful performance in the game.

I can increase my knowledge about the activity.

I can increase my understanding of the strategy by watching the game.

I can learn about the technical aspects by watching the game.

Entertainment-Based Esports Spectator Motivations

I enjoy the drama of close games.

I enjoy it when the outcome of the game is not decided until the very end.

I enjoy the uncertainty of close games.

I enjoy the dramatic turn of events that the game can take.

I enjoy the novelty of a new team or player on the professional scene.

I like having the opportunity to watch a new team or player.

The opportunity to watch games with a new team or player is fun.

The game provides an escape from my day-to-day routine.

The game provides a distraction from my everyday activities.
The game provides a diversion from “life’s little problems” for me.

Relationship-Based Esports Spectator Motivations

I enjoy interacting with other people when I watch a game.
I enjoy talking with other people when I watch a game.
I enjoy socializing with other people when I watch a game.
I feel a personal sense of achievement when the team or player does well.
I feel like I have won when the team or player wins.
I feel proud when the team or player plays well.

Esports Fandom Engagement

How often do you do the following? (1 = never, 5 = very often)

E-mail or online chat with others regarding your fan interest.
Read fan interest related material (e.g., books, magazines, etc.).
Think about your fan interest.
Contact members of your fan interest.
Visit websites related to your fan interest.

Esports Fandom Identity

Please select the option that best describes your experiences with being an esports fan. (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree)

I plan to remain a member of the esports fanbase for a number of years.
Overall, I am very attracted to being a part of the esports fanbase.
I think the esports fanbase is a good thing for me to be a part of.
I see myself as belonging to the esports fanbase.
In general, I’m glad to be a member of the esports fanbase.
The esports fanbase is a good thing to belong to.
I feel like I belong in the esports fanbase.
Generally, I feel good when I think about being a member of the esports fanbase.
I feel at home and comfortable in the esports fanbase.
It is important to me to be a part of the esports fanbase.
The esports fanbase is a part of me.
I feel strongly attached to the esports fanbase.
I often think about being a member of the esports fanbase.

Sense of Community

The following questions about community refer to the esports fan community.

How important is it to you to feel a sense of community with other community members?

1 = Prefer not to be part of this community, 6 = Very important

How well do each of the following statements represent how you feel about this community? (1 = Not at all, 4 = Completely)

Reinforcement of Needs subscale

I get important needs of mine met because I am part of the esports fan community.
Esports fan community members and I value the same things.
The esports fan community has been successful in getting the needs of its members met.
Being a member of the esports fan community makes me feel good.
When I have a problem, I can talk about it with members of the esports fan community.
People in the esports fan community have similar needs, priorities, and goals.

Membership subscale

I can trust people in the esports fan community.
I can recognize most of the members of the esports fan community.
Most esports fan community members know me.
The esports fan community has symbols and expressions of membership such as clothes, signs, art, architecture, logos, landmarks, and flags that people can recognize.
I put a lot of time and effort into being a part of the esports fan community.
Being a member of the esports fan community is a part of my identity.

Influence subscale

Fitting into the esports fan community is important to me.
The esports fan community can influence other communities.
I care about what other esports fan community members think of me.
I have influence over what the esports fan community is like.
If there is a problem in the esports fan community, members can get it solved.
The esports fan community has good leaders.

Shared Emotional Connection subscale

It is very important to me to be a part of the esports fan community.
I am with other esports fan community members a lot and enjoy being with them.
I expect to be a part of the esports fan community for a long time.
Members of the esports fan community have shared important events together, such as holidays, celebrations, or disasters.
I feel hopeful about the future of the esports fan community.
Members of the esports fan community care about each other.

END OF SURVEY MESSAGE

Thank you for your participation.

If you have any remaining questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to reach out to the PI:

Dr. Natalie Pennington at: natalie.pennington@unlv.edu

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Curriculum Vitae

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Teaching and Research Interests

Student success, student-centered instruction, online accessibility, oral communication, new media, online communities, role of technology in education, multimedia, gamification, game studies, livestreaming, esports, and video games.

Education

- | | | |
|------|---|------|
| M.A. | Communication Studies, University of Nevada, Las Vegas
Thesis: <i>Understanding the Motivations of Esports Fans: The Relationship Between Esports Spectator Motivations and Esports Fandom Engagement</i>
Advisor: Dr. Natalie Pennington
GPA: 3.93 | 2021 |
| B.S. | Communication Studies, Dixie State University
Capstone: <i>Influence of the Internet on College Students' Information Learning and Research Processes</i> | 2018 |
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Academic Teaching Experience

Graduate Teaching Assistant. Teaching both hybrid and online classes for COM 101. Three sections during each fall and spring semester. Lectures, office hours, and grading all assignments over the semester. University of Nevada, Las Vegas (2019--).

Temporary Teaching Faculty. Taught one section of COM 101 for a summer semester online. Video lectures, office hours, and grading assignments. University of Nevada, Las Vegas (Summer 2020).

Academic Research Experience

Research Assistant, with Dr. Natalie Pennington. Assisting with data collection and analysis. University of Nevada, Las Vegas (Spring 2021)

Presentations

Poster Presentation. Presentation of thesis project at the GPSA Research Forum. University of Nevada, Las Vegas (Spring 2021)

Other Academic Experience

University Workshops Attended:

Using Multimedia and Creating Engaging Videos in Online Courses. University of Nevada, Las Vegas (Fall 2020)

MythBusters: Demystifying Rumors and Myths in Online Education. University of Nevada, Las Vegas (Spring 2020)

Pedagogy & Building Courses Online. University of Nevada, Las Vegas (Spring 2021)

NCA Sessions Attended:

Great Ideas for Teaching Students (G.I.F.T.S.) (Fall 2020)

Communication During Gameplay (Fall 2020)

Graduate Elective Courses:

CIT 608: Integrating Technology in Education and Learning

CIT 648: Issues and Methods in Online Learning

COM 789: Organizational Communication and Collaboration

COM 750: Rhetoric and Everyday Life

COM 789: Critical Communication Pedagogy

Technology Experience

Canvas Learning Management System. Hybrid and online courses, student assessments/evaluations, communication with students (2019--).

Zoom. Meetings, virtual office hours, recording audio and video files, screencasting (2019--)

WebEx. Meetings and attending university workshops (2020--).

Qualtrics. Survey creation and distribution (2020--).

SPSS. Data analysis (2020--).

Organizational Memberships

National Communication Association (NCA) (2020--)