

Chapter 4

eSports Media

ABSTRACT

eSports media, in contrast to legacy media (print, linear broadcasting), are almost exclusively creators and disseminators of digital content. They can take the form of live competitions on streaming platforms such as Twitch, videos of gameplay and interviews on YouTube, or coverage of the latest League of Legends Spring Championship. The gaming industry is bullish on the potential for eSports growth out of the endemic online culture associated with gaming. However, the value of eSports media rights compared to traditional sports pales in comparison. This chapter considers the current and future landscape of eSports media, starting with an examination of Twitch's pivotal role in promoting and supporting competitive gaming on the streaming platform. It will describe the integration between game publishers and their extensive "do-it-yourself" media operations, as well as the ways independent endemic and mainstream media cover the industry and monetize content.

INTRODUCTION

In 2007, Justin Kan attached a webcam to his head and began live-streaming every second of his day, including an interview with National Public Radio: "This is really what it's like to be Justin Kan or ... follow Justin Kan around all day every day" (Sydell, 2007). At a time when MySpace was just as significant as Facebook, Kan's Justin.tv seemed to be more aligned with the phenomenon of reality television than a pioneering digital

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innovation. Nonetheless, just three weeks into the venture the website was already bringing in steady advertising revenue. Kan told NPR that he had plans to expand and had already received a \$50,000 investment from a venture capitalist, who explained “their ultimate plan is to make a sort of a Web TV channel that has hundreds of different people walking around with cameras on their heads” (Sydell, 2007).

However, instead of an army of reality TV stars, it was gamers such as Tyler “Ninja” Blevins who began to use the site to share video gaming activities in real time, and Justin.tv pivoted to eSports, launching Twitch in June 2011. Three years later, Twitch was purchased by Amazon, outbidding rival offers from Google. Amazon chief executive, Jeff Bezos, explained to The New York Times what might not have been obvious to a mainstream business audience: “Broadcasting and watching gameplay is a global phenomenon and Twitch has built a platform that brings together tens of millions of people who watch billions of minutes of games each month” (Wingfield, 2014).

This investment has paid off as Twitch has become a giant in ecommerce. In 2018, Twitch had the 6th highest streaming traffic worldwide after Netflix, HTTP Media Stream, Raw MPEG-TS, and Amazon Prime; more than Facebook Video (Geeter, 2019). In considering the nexus between eSports and media, Twitch is not only a highly profitable pioneer in eSports dissemination, it has established itself as an intrinsic component of the business model for game publishers, leagues, players and the emerging independent media that cover professional gaming. Some credit the explosion in the popularity of eSports with the advent of Twitch: “When it comes to the broadcast of big events, they have a stranglehold on the market... just refer to them as the ESPN of eSports” (Breslau, cited in Hoppe, 2018). This chapter considers the relationship between eSports and the unique mediasphere in which it has emerged; one that is digitally native, deeply integrated, often user-generated in the true spirit of Twitch streamers, and distinct from traditional media forms. It brings together millions of content providers with hundreds of millions of viewers in an online dialogic relationship that has never existed, until now.

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