Chapter 27
Career Transitions of eSports Athletes: A Proposal for a Research Framework

Markus Salo

University of Jyväskylä, Jyväskylä, Finland

ABSTRACT

eSports has boomed, the number of eSport athletes has grown rapidly, and many teenagers aspire to a have career in eSports. However, eSports athletes' careers involve many problems, such as career-entry difficulties, straining life habits, burnout, premature retirement, and post-career dilemmas. Despite a growing research interest in eSports, a void of knowledge exists regarding eSports athletes' career aspects. To address the gap in research, this paper aims to take an initial step by proposing a framework for eSports athletes' career transitions. The framework combines two approaches from sport psychology and sport literature. The framework can help eSports athletes, coaches, and other stakeholders have and maintain long-lasting and healthy careers.

INTRODUCTION

eSports (or electronic sports) refers to the competitive level of computer, video, or console gaming activities. Recently, a more thorough definition has been introduced: eSports is "a form of sports where the primary aspects of the sport are facilitated by electronic systems; the input of players and teams and the output of the eSports system are mediated by human-computer interfaces" (Hamari & Sjöblom, 2017, p. 5). Some of the most common individual- and team-based game genres for eSports include real-time strategy, multiplayer online battle arena, first-person shooter, racing, fighting, and sports games (Olsen, 2015)[1]. Recently, eSports has boomed: eSports tournaments sell out full stadiums, single events can reach over 30 million TV and internet spectators (Hollist, 2015), and one of the eSports leagues, the Electronic Sports League (ESL), reported approximately 7 million players competing in its games (ESL, 2017).

Several high-profile players have accomplished making a living or even wealth through eSports; therefore, being an eSports athlete is sometimes portrayed as a dream job for youths (The Strait Times, 2015). For example, the top eSports athletes have earned more than two million USD of prize money in addition to their salaries and sponsorship rewards (eSports Earnings, 2017). However, in reality, life as an eSports athlete is simultaneously characterized by career turbulence; straining life habits related to social relationships, mental pressure and ergonomics; burnout; premature retirement; and post-career dilemmas (CNBC, 2014; Hollist, 2015; Kotaku, 2015). For instance, numerous famous eSports athletes have reported great success and wealth, followed by burnout and retirements only in their mid-20s (iQ Intel, 2016). Such stories can often involve demanding daily practice taken to extremes, neglect of other areas of life, the disappointment of losing, and unconditional commitment to eSports that may lead to mental exhaustion and physical injuries (The Score, 2016). Therefore, studying eSports career progression is needed to move toward efficient, sustainable, and healthy eSports careers.

Researchers have paid very limited attention to the eSports athletes' career aspects. Apparently, only one study provides initial insights about eSports gamers' perspectives and suggests that future research should study how eSports athletes progress their careers (Seo, 2016). Thus far, eSports research has focused merely on comparison of eSports and traditional sports (e.g., Jenny, Manning, Keiper, & Olrich 2016), social practices (e.g., Carter & Gibbs, 2013), and eSports spectators (e.g., Cheung & Huang, 2011). Career progression in eSports appears to be a black box: it is unknown how individuals initiate eSports activities, how they become professionals, how they retire, and what kind of challenges they face during their careers. Thus, this paper aims to address this previously unmapped area by proposing a research framework for eSports athletes' career transitions. The framework combines two adapted approaches from literature on sport careers and sports psychology: sport career transitions (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2003) and athletes' career narratives (Douglas & Carless, 2006, 2008).

As a contribution, this paper aims to take an initial step towards understanding not only the eSports athletes' road to success but also the road away from success. This aim is in line with the previously recognized view that eSports is in need of a theoretical framework (Adamus, 2012). The proposed framework can function as a tool for athletes, researchers, and practitioners to study, explain, educate, and steer eSports athletes' careers. In practice, such understanding can help athletes, coaches, and their stakeholders to reach long-lasting careers and avoid problems during and after their careers (Bruner, Chandler, & Spink, 2008; Pummell, Harwood, & Lavallee, 2008). This paper also attempts to open possibilities for future research to examine the dilemmas related to eSports careers.

ESPORTS LITERATURE

Gaming and eSports-related activities have a long history (Bartle, 1996; Wagner, 2006). Particularly, there are two important eras of eSports: the pre-internet and internet eras (Lee & Schoenstedt, 2011). Although Lee and Schoenstedt (2011) focused on sport video games, the two eras are applicable also to other genres of eSports. Whereas the former era involved smaller and more local activities related to traditional computer, video, and console games, the latter era opened the doors for global real-time multiplayer gaming, online and offline tournaments, TV and web broadcasting, spectators, player rankings, incomes, and jobs and careers (Lee & Schoenstedt, 2011; Seo & Young, 2016; Seo, 2016; Taylor, 2012).

Due to the implications of the internet era, eSports has received growing academic interest. Researchers have aimed to investigate the specific characteristics and notions of eSports. Seo (2016) has compiled

Related Content

Missing Part of Halal Supply Chain Management
Ratih Hendayaniand Yudi Fernando (2019). *Advanced Methodologies and Technologies in Business Operations and Management (pp. 1117-1127).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/missing-part-of-halal-supply-chain-management/212185

A Practical Approach to Managing Multinational Teams
Natalia García-Carbonell (2019). *Managerial Competencies for Multinational Businesses (pp. 108-125).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/a-practical-approach-to-managing-multinational-teams/209234

The Effect of External Factors on Financially Distressed Companies: An Analysis on Borsa Instanbul
Aslihan Yetimand Bekir Elmas (2023). *Bankruptcy and Reorganization in the Digital Business Era (pp. 149-170).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/the-effect-of-external-factors-on-financially-distressed-companies/320307

The New Service Realities: Challenges, Opportunities, and Initiatives
Pratap Chandra Mandal (2024). *Journal of Business Ecosystems (pp. 1-14).*
www.irma-international.org/article/the-new-service-realities/342110

Do Authentic Leadership and Transformational Leadership Promote LMX in a Context of Political Instability?: Case of Tunisian Companies
Istabrak Ben Abdallah, Amira Sghariand Jamil Chaabouni (2021). *International Journal of Responsible Leadership and Ethical Decision-Making (pp. 7-22).*
www.irma-international.org/article/do-authentic-leadership-and-transformational-leadership-promote-lmx-in-a-context-of-political-instability/304866