Chapter 8

The Future of eSports:
Future Research Directions

ABSTRACT

Predicting the future is a difficult and, arguably, impossible task. This final chapter builds on the past and present and explores macro-level trends and how they may impact the future of eSports. This includes issues related to data privacy, blockchain, artificial intelligence, virtual reality, 5G wireless, and major policy and regulatory issues that may challenge eSports. Together, these trends offer a framework to map out how eSports may impact both business and society. The final section of this chapter synthesizes the detailed research questions from each chapter to guide future research in the field of eSports.

INTRODUCTION

The first seven chapters of this book focus on the past and the present of eSports. They explore the roots of eSports, the technological advancements and the economic model that is enabling its explosive growth. They also explore the societal issues both fueling and challenging eSports. This includes evidence associated with the impact of eSports on physical and mental health and wellness; and issues associated with race and gender rooted in the culture of gaming and eSports. However, given the complex social, technological and economic dynamics involved, this book did not attempt to predict the future of eSports, as any forecast is inevitably doomed. The only question is how wrong it will be.

With that caveat, the final chapter explores the macro-level technological and social trends that impact eSports. This includes emerging issues such as data privacy, blockchain, artificial intelligence, virtual reality, 5G wireless and major policy and regulatory issues challenging eSports. Overall, analysts anticipate that eSports will begin to adopt some of the structural dimensions that drove the growth of traditional sports. This includes introducing independent global governance to offer oversight and coordination. It also includes developing "home" markets, so that teams can access revenue linked to ticket sales, merchandising and local sponsorships.

FUTURE TRENDS AND IMPACT ON ESPORTS

Trend 1: Big Data and Privacy

Today, data is collected by every digital transaction, whether it be a credit card purchase, a text, a Google search or a keystroke. This data is used to predict behavior and reveal preferences. However, with big data, comes big questions about personal privacy which will likely continue to amplify over the next decade with the emergence of the "the internet of things" (IoT), wearable technology and the continued expansion of digital media.

However, recent massive data breaches, like the hack of 40 million Target customer accounts; the hack of 200 million credit files on Equifax or Facebook's Cambridge Analytical data scandal that involved using the personal information of 87 million people for political purposes, has highlighted that personal user information is big business. The economic model underlying the eSports ecosystem, including keystrokes to online streaming behavior, is anchored in collecting and monetizing the information of participants and fans. The result: eSports faces the same risk as Facebook. An early example of this risk is when the E-Sports Entertainment Association (ESEA), a private company that runs eSports tournaments, had hackers release the stolen emails, private messages and phone numbers of 1.5M accounts (Vanian, 2017).

The result of these data scandals led different jurisdictions to respond with personal privacy legislation that had far-reaching implications on any company that collected user information. For example, the European Union's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) defines personal information and establishes the age of consent at sixteen. This creates a significant challenge

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