


Chapter 25

Following the Trail of eSports: The Multidisciplinary Boom of Research on the Competitive Practice of Video Games

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ABSTRACT

Despite eSports' relatively long history, the attention paid by academia to this phenomenon has been much more recent and is still in an embryonic state in all of the views. The scientific production has grown because of the global success associated with the widespread growth of live events and the large following of competitions retransmitted via streaming. This article aims to offer a literature review of the research carried out on eSports to date, based upon a systematic review on the sample of selected research. The results confirm the growing variety of approaches to the issue, but also a clear dominance of computer science perspectives rather than to sport science or game studies. While showing some balance between qualitative and quantitative approaches, the prevalence of theoretical perspectives may be taken as a sign of struggle for consolidation as a field. Finally, a discussion about main matters and an author and institution average profile are also provided.

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INTRODUCTION

There is a general consensus that establishes the birth of electronic sports (eSports), that can be defined as the competitive practice of video games as a sport spectacle (Hutchins, 2008; Carrillo, 2016), in the arcade salons of the 80s (Gómez, 2007; Taylor, 2012; Borowy and Jin, 2013) as small face-to-face events. The subsequent parallel development in the West and Asia (Wagner, 2007) followed a similar path through the formation of organizations, the creation of competitions and their growing following and participation. However, the relevance of eSports in Asia and especially in South Korea was far greater and more consolidated than that of the Western world, a situation which continues today (Huhh, 2008; Jin, 2010; Taylor, 2012). Revenue figures and market size of the video game and eSports industries help to contextualize the dimension they have reached and to understand the interest aroused in academia to stimulate the scientific production. The approximately 2,200 million players worldwide (McDonald, 2017) and the \$101.8 billion generated by the video game industry in 2016 together with the \$493 million generated by eSports in 2016 (Warman, 2017), –\$940 million according to Goldman Sachs (Elder, 2017)– depict the clear boom currently experienced in interactive entertainment and the eSports. The latter are, however, still at an early stage and those involved must define and consolidate their own industry, which is expected to undergo enormous growth in the future (Jin, 2010; Taylor, 2012; Elder, 2017; SuperData Research, 2017).

Thanks to the evolution of information and communication technologies (ICTs), led by the internet, and the global rise of video games, there are favourable conditions for the appearance of another type of consumption (Hartmann and Klimmt, 2006; Seo, 2013). This consumption is associated with a type of user that has not been measurable until now: the viewer. This user is interested in watching others play or compete. By 2016, an estimated 665 million users viewed video content related to video games (SuperData Research, 2017). These data demonstrate two key factors for the research developed in this article. The first is the current context of the video game as a cultural and creative product and industry, consisting of content that is fully embedded in society and globally widespread (Roig et al., 2009). The second has to do with the multidimensionality of terms for the consumption of video games, developed especially thanks to online multiplayer options, spectator mode¹ and the possibility of retransmitting matches, especially through streaming.

The convergent nature of eSports (Jin, 2010) has facets of product and industry that are cultural, creative and consisting of content, entertainment, media, business, spectacle and sport. This meant that researchers have approached it from as many disciplines as the facets mentioned. Other than a starting China local bibliometric analysis (Guorui, 2012), until now, no work has focused on eSports research by itself to know how, when, where and by whom has been developed. This paper aims to review, catalogue and analyse these scientific contributions from their inception to the present moment of the phenomenon's social and mediatic boom. In order to reach this, and considering the corpus is in its early stages, an exploratory and descriptive approach is the most accurate tool to show a panoramic view of eSports academic field. This view will act as a maturity indicator of the existing works and as a way to clear the ground for coming more specific analysis. The results showed below will typify not only how eSports are being studied but its authorship and the academic fields interested in them as well as the lacks observed among the existing literature. The selection, filtering, analysis and interpretation efforts developed throughout this work are guided to build a delimited and substantial starting point.

The structure that the article follows from here is divided into four well-differentiated parts. The first part contains the objectives and the methodology used in constructing the reference sample and

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