The Evolving Landscape and Future Outlook of E-sports Commentary

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Abstract: *The domestic e-sports industry has witnessed rapid growth, leading to the emergence of talented individuals. As e-sports expands, its prominence and influence increase significantly. Concurrently, the gaming industry experiences substantial development, giving rise to dependent sectors. Gaming commentary stands out, operating at a more formalized scale. This paper analyzes the rapid development of the domestic e-sports industry, highlighting talented individuals and industry growth. It explores the expanding prominence and influence of e-sports, particularly in the gaming industry. The study delves into the evolution of gaming commentary within the sports commentary domain. Additionally, it investigates the rising trend among broadcasting and hosting majors pursuing careers in e-sports commentary. The research offers valuable insights into the dynamic nature of e-sports commentary and its connections within the industry.*

Keywords: *e-sports; broadcasting and hosting arts; comment; regularization*

1. Introduction

Competitive gaming has a rich history can be traced back to the earliest computer and arcade games. These games have provided players with the unique experience of engaging in intense combat scenarios, fostering a culture of competition and skill development. While initially lacking tangible rewards for winners beyond personal pride, there has been a significant increase in interest and participation in competitive gaming. This surge in interest is accompanied by a highly competitive environment where players strive to prove their abilities and achieve recognition within the gaming community.

Organized tournaments have emerged in response to the growing demand for a more formalized structure within competitive gaming. However, it is important to note that players have primarily initiated these tournaments, needing a comprehensive framework to encourage broader participation and professionalization. As competitive gaming becomes more mainstream, there is a need for further formalization, regulation, and infrastructure to support its growth.

This paper examines the evolution of competitive gaming, its current state, and its potential for future development. By analyzing the historical progression of competitive gaming and understanding its current landscape, we can gain insights into the trajectory and potential for continued growth and significance within the realm of professional gaming. In doing so, we hope to shed light on the opportunities and challenges ahead, contributing to a deeper understanding of the dynamics of competitive gaming as an emerging industry.

2. Development of e-Sports

Although the development of competitive play in the early 90s was initially slow, the mid-90s release of Quake revitalized the first-person shooter (FPS) community. It brought attention to Johnathan "Fatal1ty" Wendel, one of the earliest eSports stars. However, the release of the real-time strategy (RTS) game StarCraft in 1998 truly propelled eSports into the mainstream.

The beginning of the 21st century marked a flourishing period for gaming competitions as the Internet and personal computers became more accessible worldwide. In 2000, the World Cyber Games (WCG) and the Electronic Sports World Cup (ESWC) emerged as major annual tournaments, fundamentally shaping the tournament structure throughout the following decade.

During this time, the rapid development of the international eSports industry gained recognition and acceptance in China through the Internet. Subsequently, the government began to liberalize regulations and review eSports thresholds, leading to a resurgence in the industry.

Substantial progress in China's eSports industry occurred in 2009. This progress included the establishment of professional competition venues, the creation of the largest eSports network platform in China, the organization of the country's first eSports league, and the integrating of mainstream online game projects into the eSports movement. As a result, trust in eSports continued to grow, and the industry witnessed significant expansion.

Throughout this period, several prominent eSports teams emerged in China, participating in various domestic and international tournaments while achieving impressive results. For instance, Meng Yang became the Fatal1ty Great Wall DOOM3 Challenge champion in 2004, securing a 1 million RMB prize. In 2005, Li Xiaofeng clinched the WCG World Warcraft Championship, winning a 1 million RMB prize. Additionally, the WNV team won China's first Counter-Strike (CS) world championship in the third season of the World E-sports Games (WEG). In 2006, Li Xiaofeng secured back-to-back WCG Warcraft world championships. Notably, the WCG World Finals took place in Chengdu, China, in 2009, where Chinese players Wang Danyanwen and Lu Weiliang competed against each other in the Warcraft finals, marking a historic moment as the first time players from the same country faced each other in the WCG world finals.[1]

2.1. E-sports are booming

Since 2010, the development of eSports has experienced explosive growth, leading to a significant increase in online viewers. eSports events have become increasingly professional, transitioning from small-scale games with limited funding to attracting substantial capital investment. As early as 2003, the State General Administration of Sports included eSports as the 99th national sports competition program in China, and in 2011, it was designated as the 78th national competition program. Throughout this period, the development of eSports has maintained rapid growth.

In 2020-2022, the development of China's eSports industry will notably benefit from expanding mobile eSports online games and the overall eSports ecosystem. The threat of viruses has led to a significant increase in the online entertainment time of eSports consumers, thereby driving the revenue growth of eSports online games and broadcasting platforms. While the virus has posed challenges to the offline segment of the gaming industry, the number of viewers has increased due to the organization of numerous offline gaming events since the first half of 2020. This trend is optimistic news for all stakeholders in the eSports industry.

2.2. E-sports competition officially

In 2022, eSports successfully officially entered the Hangzhou Asian Games as a recognized sport. On December 16, 2022, the 38th Plenary Assembly of the Olympic Council of Asia (OCA) held in Muscat, Sultanate of Oman, approved eSports as an official sport for the 2022 Hangzhou Asian Games. The Hangzhou Asian Games Organizing Committee reported and discussed the proposal to include eSports as an official event during the OCA plenary session after reporting to the Chinese Olympic Committee. The OCA, in turn, approved the Hangzhou Organizing Committee's proposal to optimize the competition events, adding two additional events, namely eSports and Breakdancing, while keeping the total of 40 significant events unchanged.

Both Sports and Chess fall into the "Intellectual Sports" category, while Breakdancing belongs to the "Sports Dance." This means that eSports and Breakdancing will be officially included in the competition program of the Hangzhou Asian Games. Further details will be discussed in subsequent meetings, such as the number of medals and the specific competition format. Following its selection as a demonstration sport at the 2018 Jakarta-Jumbo Asian Games, eSports will now be recognized as an official sport at the Asian Games for the first time, and medals will be awarded accordingly.[2] Today marks a significant milestone for China's eSports program, highlighting the country's strong commitment and support for the industry. The acceptance and recognition of eSports within the public sphere continue to grow.

3. E-Sports Commentary Emerges

The current esports industry offers an incredibly conducive environment, with technology and the live-streaming industry continuously evolving and advancing. The industry's growth also leads to the emergence of various positions that ride the wave of its success. In terms of commentary, traditional sports industry commentary has reached a level of maturity, while esports programs are trailblazing new paths in the field.

The Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security recently released an analysis statement on the employment situation in the electronic industry, pointing out that due to the rapid development of the domestic and international esports industry, the number of operating esports teams (including clubs) in China has exceeded 5,000, with approximately 100,000 full-time esports athletes.

Compared to the booming global esports industry, China's domestic professional esports commentators are still in the early stages of their development and growth. According to media reports, just around 1,200 officially recognized professional esports commentators are currently in China. Zhu Junhe, an associate professor at the Shanghai Sports Institute and the head of the esports commentator program, mentioned that there is still a significant gap within the esports commentator industry, presenting numerous opportunities. Platforms such as Tengcompetition Sports and Douyu actively select and train esports commentators in domestic colleges and universities.

Zhu Junhe revealed that since the Shanghai Sports Institute introduced the esports commentary profession, there has been a significant number of student applicants each year, with a recruitment ratio of approximately 10 to 1. Previously, many esports commentators were recruited from the player base, and most did not come from broadcast backgrounds, resulting in a relatively unorganized early stage for the profession. However, with the increasing demand for commentators, the tendency to cross over to esports commentating without prior broadcasting experience has decreased. The field is gradually becoming more formalized and professionalized. Presently, a certain level of Mandarin proficiency is required for gaming commentary work, and hosts are also expected to obtain announcer-level qualification certificates.

3.1. The gaming commentary industry is good for broadcasting majors

The gaming commentary industry is currently undergoing specialization and expansion. Esports is similar to traditional sports, aiming for higher, faster, and stronger performances. This pursuit transcends to esports viewers with high expectations for commentators, seeking the highest quality viewing experience for every game. Although this demand has fueled industry growth, it has also brought some challenges. The audience has a low tolerance for commentator mistakes, and these errors can impact a commentator's career for a long time. As the viewer count increases, the pressure on esports commentators intensifies. Moreover, the diversification of gaming programs presents a significant test for commentators.

As a result, the market increasingly values broadcasting students with excellent language skills, including organization and style. It is important to note that as esports becomes more specialized, optimizing specific terminology becomes essential, requiring profound linguistic abilities and sensitivity to words. For instance, during the 2023 Asian Games qualifiers, optimizing certain game commentary terms led to discussion and restrictions among commentators. However, the standardization of language and the regulatory requirements for game commentary terminology are necessary for esports to gain wider recognition and scale. Established commentators may face difficulties in adapting to these changes, but it is a crucial step that must be taken. On the other hand, new commentators and aspiring esports commentators can embrace this opportunity. Broadcasting majors, in particular, already have experience in language standardization during their studies, making it easier for them to adapt to this specialized terminology.

Broadcasting and hosting majors have contributed significant talent to various commentary industries. The ever-changing nature of the esports industry requires commentators to keep up with shifts in game genres and within the games themselves. For the more traditional broadcasting industry, esports commentary offers a new frontier. With many tournaments emerging, the demand for talent continues to grow, extending to the broadcasting industry as well.[3]

Pingzi, a well-known gaming commentator in China, has witnessed significant transformations within the gaming commentator industry in recent years. In the past, many esports commentators were recruited from the player community, and most needed a background in broadcasting, resulting in a

somewhat disorganized industry in its early stages. However, the industry is now becoming more demanding, and the chances of entering esports commentary without prior broadcasting experience are decreasing. According to Pingzi, esports commentary is gradually moving towards formalization and specialization. He notes that esports commentators now require Mandarin language proficiency certificates, and hosts need to obtain host certificates, which were not required in the past.

In terms of training, colleges and universities are actively selecting and training individuals for commentary roles. Some retired professional players from esports clubs also transition to become commentators. Pingzi suggests that entering the commentary industry through school recruitment is an option worth considering for those with a passion for the game and a desire to express themselves.

Zhu Junhe, another commentator, also perceives the changes within the esports commentator industry. He notes a gradual increase in the proportion of commentators with backgrounds in broadcasting and hosting. Large-scale tournaments like "League of Legends" and "King of Glory" set higher standards for commentators and value education and professional training. These shifts in the commentator industry highlight the growing professionalism and specialization within esports commentary.

3.2. Development of gaming education

E-sports education has gained significant attention as the industry faces a shortage of professional talent, making it essential to bridge the talent gap. Currently, e-sports education in China primarily focuses on junior college programs. E-sports clubs are expanding their collaborations with colleges, universities, and educational institutions to address this issue. Additionally, these clubs maintain their youth training reserves.

In terms of content development, a model that combines the expertise of professional teaching material writers from colleges and universities with the practical experiences shared by professional players is being implemented. This collaborative effort aims to create more professional and higher-quality educational content. Talent cultivation efforts go beyond training youth players for professional teams. They also encompass the development of talents across the entire e-sports industry, including tournament management, club operations, anchor hosting, and player cultivation. These are crucial components of the education system provided by Net Athletics Technology.

Live game broadcasting has always played a significant role in the e-sports industry, and there have been considerable advancements in the transformation of the anchor economy. For instance, Hangzhou e-sports digital entertainment town has introduced anchor brokers and other pan-entertainment enterprises. This model involves training anchors and injecting funds into the anchor economy, allowing for the replication and expansion of this approach. The live broadcast platform serves as the primary channel for disseminating e-sports content, greatly enhancing the intellectual property (IP) value of e-sports players and game anchors. It also fosters a robust ecosystem driven by fan engagement through individual live broadcasts, which has become the primary business model for live broadcast platforms through prop consumption and e-commerce transactions.

Compared to Twitch's business model, which relies on user fees and advertisements, the South Korean platform AfreecaTV has a business model based on advertisements and value-added services. This model is more suitable for the domestic business environment, with advertisement revenue expected to become a vital income source for live broadcasting platforms. In the future, competition for the rights of anchors and tournaments will continue to be a focal point for live broadcasting platforms. The current decentralized competition pattern driven by capital is anticipated to transition towards a more centralized approach.

4. The Future of Gaming Commentary

Educational institutions are increasingly prioritizing college students, recognizing the fresh talent they can bring to the gaming commentator industry. Aspiring commentators receive guidance from experienced professionals through training programs, allowing them to minimize potential career detours. While large-scale e-sports events have gained significant attention, a talent gap exists, especially for smaller and medium-sized events. This presents an opportunity for college students majoring in broadcasting and hosting to explore a new direction for employment in the e-sports commentator industry.

The rise of e-sports commentary also has a ripple effect on other fields. Personalized live broadcasting is the primary form of e-sports explanation, and the influence of fans plays a crucial role in its market expansion. Hosts leverage e-commerce platforms to promote various products during live broadcasts, such as snacks, clothing, and gaming peripherals. This form of product placement serves as a means of advertising. When fans receive content from their favorite personalized live broadcasting rooms, they engage with the endorsements.

As a product of the Internet industry, e-sports will continue to drive China's e-sports market growth. While the growth rate of mobile competitive games slows down and PC competitive games reach their peak, the intense commercialization of tournaments will enhance the expansion of the gaming ecosystem. This, in turn, will provide lasting support for the industry's growth. Revenues from e-sports games will remain the primary source of income for the e-sports market for the foreseeable future, as demonstrated by the overall changes in China's e-sports market.

In 2022, China's e-sports industry revenue amounted to 144.503 billion yuan, marking a 14.01% year-on-year decline, the first decrease in five years. The number of e-sports users 2022 was approximately 488 million, showing a marginal 0.33% year-on-year decrease. Specifically, the revenue of e-sports games in 2022 was 117.802 billion yuan, reflecting a 15.96% year-on-year decline. The overall market downturn can primarily be attributed to a decline in users' ability and willingness to pay for e-sports. However, it is projected that by 2027, China's e-sports industry market scale will exceed one trillion yuan, reaching approximately 1.4 trillion yuan, signaling a positive trajectory for the industry's future.

5. Conclusions

It is crucial to acknowledge that the growth of e-sports is closely intertwined with the internet. In contrast, the advancement of e-sports commentators is contingent upon the evolution of e-sports competitions. An unfavorable incident or controversy can tarnish the reputation of e-sports, impeding its further development. To ensure the continued healthy development of e-sports competitions and e-sports commentaries, it is imperative to eliminate undesirable elements and focus on fostering positive impacts on society. As the saying goes, "Take the essence and eliminate the dregs." Therefore, those of us involved in e-sports commentary must consistently enhance our skills, dedicate ourselves to advancing e-sports, and strive to become exceptional sports commentators with a positive influence. Through these efforts, we can fuel the growth and success of the e-sports industry.

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