

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Background of Study

Over the last decade, esports (electronic sports) have grown considerably. According to Newzoo (2019), esports revenue has reached \$1.1 billion per year by 2019, and "its vibrancy has drawn brands and organizations for sponsorship across every industry," in terms of viewers of esports, in the year 2019 alone, a total of 397.8 million has been reported. It will continue to rise in the year 2020, totaling 435.9 million viewers which around 215.4 million are classified as enthusiast viewers (people that consume professional esports content at least once a month).

With the rise of esports itself, the pro players or esports athletes have achieved celebrity status and stardom just like traditional sports athletes would. The appeal of pursuing an esports career then, among aspiring young gamers, is unsurprising, given the tremendous earning potential and the recognition and renown rewarded to the best esports players (Banyai, Zsila, et al., 2020). Cash awards for esports athletes can include event participation and prize pool, team salary (average approximately \$3,000–5,000 per month, with top tiers athletes earning up to \$15,000 per month), sponsorship money, streaming, media rights, merchandise, and tickets are all possible sources of income (Newzoo, 2019). Esports as an industry, just like traditional sports, is still overwhelmingly male-

dominated, with females making up a smaller percentage of participants, fans, and workers (Entertainment Software Association, 2018).

While the proportions may appear to show a lack of interest initially, current research suggests that female involvement has increased in recent years. For example, Females' interest in esports has consistently grown in recent years, with female viewerships of esports events increasing from 23% in 2016 to more than 30% in 2018 (Darvin, Vooris, Mahoney, 2020). In the case of video game players or gamers, consistent, extensive polls have revealed that at least 40% of gamers are female (Paaßen, Morgenroth, Stratemeyer, 2017). These trends reveal information supporting the claim that video game interest is more evenly distributed across male and female gamers and that females are interested in participating in esports scenes. Despite all this, the esports industry still has a significant gender gap.

The gender disparity between male and female athletes within the esports industry becomes more apparent when we focus on the esports athletes themselves. The most recognizable names of esports athletes across different platforms of games would rarely include female ones. In terms of cash earnings, according to *esportearnings* (2021), there are no female athletes within the top 300, and the first female on the list sits at 366th place, with the next female player sitting at the 750th.

The gender stereotype in traditional sports persists, resulting in a general notion that women are inferior athletes and biased media depictions of female

athletic abilities, particularly in sports that require strength, power, and speed (Chalabaev, Sarrazin, Stone, Cury, 2008). However, this trend has been questioned and challenged during the last few decades. Girls and women have begun to embrace physical strength and athletic skill in the notion of femininity, overcoming restricted, negative, and restrictive beliefs and ideas that they should not participate in sports, sweat, display aggressiveness, or compete. As a result, conventional female stereotypes have been gradually transforming and evolving. This trend is expected to continue as women and girls no longer feel compelled to choose between athleticism and femininity (Wilde, 2007).

In the case of esports, because of the unique nature of this sport, gender stereotypes are more difficult to comprehend. Despite the lack of physical contact, aggression is still an element of esports, and spectators and players recognize the benefits of aggressive gameplay (Kim, 2017). Through this evolving notion of female athletes both in traditional sports and esports then, prejudices that hinder female participation appear to be less valid in this online environment since esports lacks significant physicality demands, and winning an esports game does not involve physically defeating an opponent (Jenny, Manning, Keiper, Olrich, 2016). However, as the esports and video gaming industries grow in popularity, a solution is needed to reinforce and build the industry's basis; removing the perception that female gamers have disadvantages, which will allow female athletes to enter the male-dominated gaming market, might be the answer (Kim, 2017).

While female gamers had shown before to take half of the gaming demographic, they are often invisible in the gaming community. Studies on gender representation in video games have shown that male characters are more frequently represented than female ones. Female gamers are left with character options that are hardly realistic and frequently sexualized; this issue of female characters' portrayal is directly related to them being objects of desire rather than subjects. As a result, instead of minimizing gender differences, this representation continually makes them worse (Kruthika, 2020).

According to a survey from Reach3 Insights (2021) on the experience of female gamers, it is found that harassment is still a big part of the gaming experience for them, with 59% of participants saying they avoid revealing their gender in order to be left in peace. The next point the survey mentions is that 77% of women have to deal with some form of unwanted behavior while gaming, whether it is their competency being questioned (70%), that they are falling victim to gatekeeping (65%) or that they are being patronized (50%).

In terms of media coverage, even though the mainstream news media do cover the video game industry, few news organizations have journalists or space dedicated to gaming; this led to esports scenes and the video games industry having their own niche alternative news media to spread most of the industries news and information (Jenkins, 2010). Game journalists tell customers about what is going on in the video game business, just like a political reporter informs readers about what is happening in the political world. According to Maclean (2016), gendered images of gamers are perpetuated across gaming and

mainstream media. In the United States, this negative framing of gaming culture in the past further contributes to the narrative of a male-dominated presence within the gaming culture and further marginalized female gamers and developers in the industry.

Before the growth of the video game industry as a popular media, the discourse regarding video games and esports mainly focus on fundamental topics such as determining a good definition that is suitable for academic studies on esports (Wagner, 2006; Marelić, Vukušić, 2019), the evolution and development of esports (Olsen, 2015; Holden et al., 2017) or focus on addiction and problematic use of video games (Müller et al., 2019). An existing study has established a fundamental understanding of this rapidly evolving entertainment medium. Scholars have recently begun to pay attention to the gender issue in esports, and research in the discourse of video games and esports has started addressing the marginalization of female gamers and toxicity within the gaming culture (Paaßen, Morgenroth, Stratemeyer, 2017; Phidd, 2019). They are analyzing the gender gap, the lack of female participation in sports, and the competitive gaming scene (Ruotsalainen, Friman, 2018; Kim, 2017; Peng, 2021).

This research then aims to look at how online articles from news media and gaming news outlets in the United States constructed the discourse on the female gaming experiences in esports within their writings. Two news publishers (one of the news publishers mainly focuses on non-gaming-related news but sometimes touches on the subject in the form of Forbes, while one is mainly focuses on gaming related news in the form of PC Gamer) have been chosen.

Multiple online news articles related to female gamers experience in the esports scenes from each publisher have been chosen and will be analyzed and compared to investigate the authorial voice of each publisher on the subject. The findings will also be discussed how female gamer in general and as esport athletes is framed within the gaming culture.

### **1.2 Research Question**

Based on the reasons for choosing this topic and the background of the study, this study intends to answer the question:

1. How do these articles represent female gamers in the esport scenes?
2. How do the authors position their stance on their article on the female gaming experience?

### **1.3 Purpose of the Study**

The purposes of the study are:

1. The representation of female gamers in the authors' article in the esports scenes discourse.
2. Authors stance on female gamers experience in their article.

## 1.4 Scope of the Study

This study focuses on multiple online news articles from two different news publisher that discussed female gamers experience and females in esports scenes.

### 1. PC Gamer

- Ward, F. (2020, June 29). *On being a woman in esports*. PC Gamer. <https://www.pcgamer.com/on-being-a-woman-in-esports/>
- Hetfeld, M. (2021, May 20). *A new survey shows 59% of women hide their gender while gaming to avoid harassment*. PC Gamer. <https://www.pcgamer.com/a-new-survey-shows-59-of-women-hide-their-gender-while-gaming-to-avoid-harassment/>
- Ong, A. (2021, November 14). *The PMS Clan blazed a trail for women in competitive gaming*. PC Gamer. <https://www.pcgamer.com/remembering-the-origins-of-the-trailblazing-pms-clan/>

### 2. Forbes:

- Gardner, M. (2021, March 19). *The Ugly Hatred Faced By Women In Esports, And How We Fight Back*. Forbes. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/mattgardner1/2021/03/19/the-ugly-hatred-faced-by-women-in-esports-and-how-we-fight-back/?sh=328debb037d8>
- Gardner, M. (2021, October 19). *G2 Esports Unveils First-Ever All-Female Team For 'Valorant'*. Forbes.

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/mattgardner1/2021/10/19/g2-esports-unveils-first-ever-all-female-team-for-valorant/?sh=8e14b4594358>

- Heitner, G. (2017, June 8). *How 6 Female Esports Players Went From Having Nothing To World Champs.* Forbes.

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/darrenheitner/2017/06/08/how-6-female-esports-players-went-from-having-nothing-to-world-champs/?sh=c362bfd124ff>

### **1.5 Significance of the Study**

The writer hopes that this research will deepen the current understanding and advanced further discussion on the relatively limited space that women have in competitive gaming cultures in terms of presence, visibility, and participation roles. Also, the writer hopes that this research will be helpful as reference in future researchs in gender gap on gaming discourse.