What's the hype about esports?

*A qualitative study about esports consumer motivation*

Zining Chang

Psychology, bachelor's level
2019

Luleå University of Technology
Department of Business Administration, Technology and Social Sciences
Sammanfattning


Nyckelord: esports, åskådare, Uses and Gratifications, konsumentmotivation, kvalitativ studie, intervju
Abstract

Esports as a spectator sport has gained a significant audience during the last decade, attracting almost half a billion viewers worldwide and input from large well-known companies, but the reason as to why people watch esports is still not well studied. Adopting uses and gratification approaches - which is an approach that focuses on the audience and view them as active consumers, the aim of this qualitative study is to learn about what factors influence peoples’ motive to watch esports, as well as how esports is being defined by people and how it is consumed. Ten people who are interested in esports participated in semi-structured interviews. The result showed that hedonic gratification, social gratification, utilitarian gratification and technology gratification all can have impact on the consumption of esports. The respondents consider esports as a good way to pass time and to be entertained. They gain social satisfaction when interacting with likeminded people. In games, they are able to document and show their progress, and to present and share information about themselves in relation to esports. Most of the respondents look forward to the future of esports.

Keywords: esports, spectator, uses and gratification, consumer motivation, qualitative study, interview
Introduction

Esports is organized video gaming where the participants compete on various virtual platforms (Candela & Jakee, 2018; Jenny, Manning, Keiper, & Olrich, 2017; Pizzo et al., 2018). The earliest esports scene began to bloom in the 1990s with first person shooter games and now it has developed to include a variety of game genres such as massive multiplayer online role-playing games (MMORPG), multiplayer online battle arenas (MOBA), real-time strategy (RTS), battle royale games, fighting games and much more (Candela & Jakee, 2018). With the rapid growth of esports in the last decade, this new form of entertainment has been developed for people of all ages and attracted almost half a billion viewers from all over the world and have a projected revenue of more than one billion dollars in 2019 (Pannekeet, 2019). Many people, especially gamers, also like to watch esports. Now they can easily access professional matches by visiting websites or streaming platforms such as Youtube and Twitch. There, they can follow the championships and interact with likeminded esports enthusiasts. They can even give feedback to the players as well as the organizers in real-time. Esports as a viewer sport has gained substantially attention despite its young age but the reason as to why they watch esports is not well understood.

Similar to traditional sports, there are professional gamers, professional teams, professional leagues, and even institutions that offer scholarships for practicing and competing in esports (Choi, 2019; Jenny et al., 2017). Esports games usually have pre-game and post-game analyses, as well as interviews with gamers who participated. When the match starts there are on-air teams that work to optimize the viewer’s experience, as well as commentators who explain and highlight moments from the game. Professional gamers may have sponsorship from different companies, and even salaries for those who have contract(s) through either an organization or partnership (Candela & Jakee, 2018; Jenny et al., 2017). Tournaments or other form of matches have rules and ladders, and gamers can compete through different leagues, just like traditional sports championships (Hamari & Sjöblom, 2017). Despite the similarities, there are ongoing debates on whether esports should be categorized as sports.

Esports is still a relatively new invention and is a developing area. Studies on esports are therefore rare (Pizzo et al., 2018). Researchers often discuss what esports are, the difference between esports and sports, and the future of the esport industry. Furthermore, existing studies focus mostly on people who play the games rather than people who enjoy esports as a spectator sport, and the reasons as to why they chose to watch esports are not well understood. There are very few conducted qualitative studies about esports consumers’ attitudes and opinions about esports, which is the focus of this study.

Background

The history of esports
Esports first grew its reputation in the 1990s with first person shooter games where the goal is to strike down opposing team players with strategic combat. Because of the rise of popularity
among this genre of game, players would gather at their local PC café and participate in local-area network (LAN) events (Borowy, 2012). These events made it possible for computers to be connected locally with limited distance and allow people to play competitively together. Companies quickly realized the potential of connected game play and made the game easier to navigate and compatible with multi-play option. In 1997 the first professional digital gaming league was created in the US (Borowy, 2012). The organization, known as Cyberathlete Professional League (CPL), was inspired by sports teams and designed jerseys with their logo. By 2005 they had traveled to ten countries and even had finals that were broadcasted on MTV (Borowy, 2012; Candela & Jakee, 2018). In the early 21st century, esports took South Korea by storm and the industry flourished. South Korea was also one of the earliest countries to decide to broadcast esports on television and other media. This normalization made a big impact on the growth of esports compared to other western countries. In recent years, larger companies such as Samsung, Coca Cola, Intel, as well as wealthy individuals have started to invest in esports because of the large audience that esports have and continue to expand. In 2018, League of Legends, one of the biggest games in esports, removed the possibility of being eliminated from the league because of lost matches (Candela & Jakee, 2018). This change ensured teams’ involvements in different championships and in its esports scene, functioning as an insurance to teams’ franchise gains and stability. The new possibilities even attracted traditional sport investors such as Cleveland Cavaliers, the New York Yankees, the Houston Rockets, Madison Square Garden, and other well-known organizations (Candela & Jakee, 2018). Nowadays there is no lack of organized tournaments and championships all around the world.

**Esports vs sports**

Traditional sports are dominated by football, basketball, hockey and other sports that mainly utilize human physique. Unlike esports where the player’s quality is measured by reaction time, game knowledge, multitasking, strategizing and other mental activities. Esports, although only having a fraction of the traditional sports’ market value in 2015, has already surpassed the viewership of Major League Baseball (MLB), National Basketball Association (NBA), and National Hockey League (NHL) (Candela & Jakee, 2018). Despite the fact that esports are growing at an exponential rate, it is still a newly acquired entertainment by the international audience, and not widely accepted as a sport. Debates about esports and traditional sports started in the late 1990s with the launch of Online Gamers Association at the Sports Academy in London (Borowy, 2012; Candela & Jakee, 2018). The English Sports Council rejected the proposal of accepting United Kingdom Professional Computer Game Championships as a sport. Jenny et al. (2017) have compared the central features that an activity must have to be considered as a sport and found that esports fulfil the criteria; include play, be organized, include competition, be comprised of skill, have a broad following, but with two criteria that are debatable. One of the unfulfilled criteria is that a sport must “include physical skills - skillful and strategic use of one’s body”. Esports does not require being physically fit to affect the outcome of the game. It can be argued that esport players are still using physical means to control the interface of the game and that it can still be very exhausting for players. Compared to traditional sports, esports to a greater extent require fine motor skills and have a higher demand for mentation (Hamari & Sjöblom, 2017). Other forms
of games such as Dance Dance Revolution (DDR) and similar type of games require players to stand on a dance pad performing physical movements to win the game, and newer games that are compatible with virtual reality and motion controller (i.e. controlling with motion) often require players to take physical action in order to manoeuvre in the game. The other debatable criterion is “have achieved institutional stability where social institutions have rules which regulate it, stabilizing it as an important social practice” (Jenny et al., 2017). Esports in their current forms do not have the institutionalization compared to traditional sports, that is esports lacks the governing bodies that can set the standardized rules and developments across all esports. Still, esports are not universally accepted as sports, but there is substantial support for their inclusion.

**Theoretical framework**

**Consumer motivation**

During the last decades, video gaming and online gaming have grown to be the biggest leisure activity (Hamari & Keronen, 2017). In the United States, more than 59% of the population play video games (Hamari & Keronen, 2017). The reason why people play games is because gaming is a multipurpose leisure information system that not only satisfy our hedonic needs, but also is something that we enjoy, and is perceived as having functionality that may be useful in our work and life (Hamari & Keronen, 2017).

When researching about consumer motivation, one of the well known approaches is Uses and Gratifications Theory. This theory is particularly important in studies involving new media such as Internet, video game, blog and online social networks (Sundar & Limperos, 2013). Uses and Gratifications Theory focuses on users’ experience and needs for entertainment consumption, viewing the consumer as active rather than passively engrossing what is given (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1973; Ruggiero, 2000; Sundar & Limperos, 2013). According to Katz et al. (1973), research in this field is concerned with “(1) the social and psychological origins of (2) needs, which generate (3) expectations of (4) the mass media or other sources, which lead to (5) differential patterns of media exposure (or engagement in other activities), resulting in (6) need gratifications and (7) other consequences, perhaps mostly unintended ones”. Although at that time, the researchers focused mainly on traditional media such as radio, television, newspaper, magazine and comics. They proposed the idea that humans have innate needs that must to be satisfied by media (Katz et al., 1973), and this also includes esports viewership which is one of the means that can satisfy an individual’s need for gratifications. The theory has been developed by other scholars since its debut, and has been used as one of the well-known approaches to study the connection between audience and media context. Often using self-reporting questioners or surveys, the approach has been used to examine traditional media, media content and emerging media, and to explain phenomena such as social media addiction, social communication, culture and much more (Ruggiero, 2000; Sundar & Limperos, 2013; Spinda & Puckette, 2018). Uses and Gratification theory has, however, rarely been used to study esports consumers’ motivation.
Although there is no one universally known model that represents this theory, numerous studies and theories have been developed using the Uses and gratifications approach (Ruggiero, 2000; Sundar & Limperos, 2013). One model based on uses and gratifications approach is developed by Gan and Li (2018) which summarizes the essential gratifications for studying consumer motivation (see Figure 1), these being *hedonic gratification* (enjoyment and escapism obtained from interacting with an entertainment), *social gratification* (interaction with others), *utilitarian gratification* (information sharing and self-presentation) and *technology gratification* (the extent that technology helps its users to express and communicate with each other). They conducted a quantitative study with 279 WeChat users to learn about how different gratifications affect their continuing intention to use the chat program, and found that technology gratification is ranked highest, followed by hedonic gratification and utilitarian gratification. The study has been cited 20 times since its publication, though previous research has mostly focused on consumers’ motivation toward other social media, consumer behavior and education. When applying Gan and Li’s model for Uses and Gratification Theory to esports, *hedonic gratification* may be perceived as simply having fun from playing or spectating a game and helping to pass the time while engrossing in something that they may not experience in real life. When consumers enter the world of esports it opens up new interactions and social topics that they may share with the community and gain *social gratifications*. For people who actively engage in the esports scene, they may gain knowledge and help them to hone their skills in-game. Games often track their progress and achievements, making competition visible with other players, and may even influence how they are being perceived within the community, thus satisfy their *utilitarian gratification*. Esport viewers often have more social media presence because most of the matches are streamed in digital space, making it easier for fans to participate in discussions, share opinions, and connect with likeminded people, all of which can satisfy their *technology gratification*. All four types of gratifications may influence why esports are being consumed by people.

There is no known model that is designed to specifically study esport spectators’ motivation. Most of their interaction and viewership are through online platforms, and because of the similarity between esports spectatorship and traditional spectatorship, Motivation Scale for Sport Online Consumption (MSSOC) can be viewed as a relevant model to use for investigating underlying motives for esport fans’ online consumption (Brown, Billings, Murphy & Puesan, 2018; Hamari & Sjöblom, 2017). MSSOC is a relatively new model developed by Seo and Green (2018) based on Uses and Gratification theory. The model categorizes and measures the motivation for sport fans’ online consumption, and consists of ten facets that are relevant for sport online users’ motives: Information, Entertainment, Interpersonal communication, Escape, Pass time, Fanship, Team support, Content, Economic and Technical knowledge (Seo & Green, 2018) (see Figure 2).
Figure 1. Research model developed by Gan and Li (2018), presenting the contributing factors to continued usage of social media.

The MSSOC model has been adopted and cooperated to more than 90 published studies, often examining the relationship between social media and sports fans’ consumption of the social media (Li, Dittmore, Scott, Lo & Stokowski, 2018; Taniyev, Ishaq & Gordon 2018), the value of sports digitalization (Jurisch, et al., 2014; Xiao, et al., 2017), and consumer attitude towards media campaign (Jensen & Limbu, 2016). Out of the 90 publications, one used a modified version of the MSSOC model to conduct a quantitative study about esports. The study compared the difference between traditional sports consumers versus esports consumers (Brown et al., 2018). The researchers gathered 1319 survey responses of American esports consumers during a period of six months, asking about their usage frequency of both traditional sports and esports, as well as social media interaction associated to traditional sports and esports. They found that both traditional sports consumers and esports consumers are similar in that they both actively engaged in the search of sports entertainments with similar motivation, but the motivation for esports consumption are ranked much higher than traditional sports, but does not incorporate sports as part of their identity like traditional sports.
fans. Until now, the 10 facets of sport online users’ motives have not been used in a study with qualitative approach to investigate esports consumers’ motivation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Facet</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Information</td>
<td>Motive to get large volume of sport information and to learn about things happening in the sport world</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entertainment</td>
<td>Motive to enjoy sports and to have fun through use of teams’ Web sites</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpersonal communication</td>
<td>Motive to share experience and knowledge with other fans in terms of sports</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Escape</td>
<td>Motive to feel less anxious and to get relaxation through navigation of teams’ Web sites</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pass time</td>
<td>Motive to spend free time and to pass the time away through use of teams’ Web sites</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fanship</td>
<td>Reason that one considers oneself a huge fan of particular sports and teams</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team support</td>
<td>Motive to show support for favorite team through use of teams’ Web sites</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content</td>
<td>Motive to see photos and download media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic</td>
<td>Motive to get promotional incentives that a team provides</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical knowledge</td>
<td>Motive to learn more specific knowledge of rules and skills</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2. Operational Definitions of 10 Facets of Sport Online Users’ Motives (Seo & Green, 2018).

Another quantitative study using Uses and Gratification approach involving esports as a spectator sport is conducted by Hamari and Sjöblom (2017). They sent out questionnaires to people who watch esports on the Internet and received 888 valid responses. In the questionnaire, they asked participants about team related achievement, game knowledge, skill of players, social interaction and other factors that may cause frequent esport consumption. They found that “…escaping everyday life, acquiring knowledge from esports, novelty and enjoyment of aggression were positively and statistically significantly associated with the frequency of watching esports” (Hamari & Sjöblom, 2017, p. 219). The authors discussed a few factors that may be the reason for why people watch esports, for example the game’s aesthetics (pleasing to the eye, easier for untechnical viewer to enjoy), team rivalry (inciting the viewers), the player’s ability to obtain game knowledge; and factors that do not seem to be prominent in esports such as drama happening in the playing field. They also found that the majority of the respondents are males below 25 years of age. Hamari and Sjöblom (2017) noted that there is a lack of qualitative studies involving esports consumers’ motivation, and that a qualitative approach would be beneficial for a better understanding.

Aim and research questions
The purpose of this study is to understand esports fans’ opinions and attitudes towards esports, and how this new form of entertainment is being consumed. The main research questions are:
1. How do esports consumers define the term esports?
2. How are esports being consumed?
3. What are the motives for esports consumption?
4. What are esports consumers’ thoughts about the future of esports?
5. How well are uses and gratification theories matching the needs of esports consumer?

**Method**

**Choice of method**
Semi-structured interview was chosen to capture the esport consumers’ motivation, where the respondents were encouraged to speak their thoughts freely and in-depth about the chosen topic (Howitt, 2010).

**Selection of data**
This study used purposive sampling for optimal data quality and relevance (Howitt, 2010), meaning the interviewees contains only experienced respondents, and in this study this means people who are actively engaged in esports and the esports scene. The goal of this study is to understand the motivation for esports consumer, not the general public’s opinion about esports, hence the choice of the target group. A message with information about the study was sent out through social media platforms, such as Facebook and game forums, as well as group chats targeted to gamers on Discord. Possible respondents were informed that the interview will be in English and through video call. They were also informed that all the recorded data being collected in the study would be deleted and only used for research purpose, and that they would remain anonymous. Respondents were recruited through snowball sampling and contacted through social media. Respondents who took part in the interview were asked whether they knew other people who might be interested in the study. A few people were nominated and participated in the interview later on. This resulted in a total of ten respondents from United States, Australia, India, Brazil, Sweden and China. Among them, two were interviewed in a physical location in Sweden, the rest of the respondents were video-interviewed through Skype, Facebook and Discord. Four respondents were female and six were men, with an average age of 23.5 years. For more information about the respondents, see Table 1. Respondents were asked to tell how long they had been involved with esports, and the average experience in years was 4.5 years. They also rated their own skill level in the game that they are interested in on a scale from one to six, one being the lowest. The average skill evaluation was 3.3, which means that they consider themselves as average players in terms of skills. The respondents were asked to rate their own fan scale on a scale of one to six, one being the lowest. This is to find out to what extent do they see themselves as fans of esports. The respondents scored on average 4 on the fan scale, meaning they consider themselves somewhat more dedicated to esports than average consumers.
Table 1.
*Information about the participants.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Experience</th>
<th>Game skill evaluation</th>
<th>Fan scale</th>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Experience</th>
<th>Game skill evaluation</th>
<th>Fan scale</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>6 years</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0.5 years</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>9 years</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4 years</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>5.5 years</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10 years</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>4 years</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1 years</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Average experience years</th>
<th>Average Skill evaluation</th>
<th>Average fan scale</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Data collection**

An interview guide was developed with inspiration from the MSSOC model, but in the context of esports. The interview guide consisted of a total of 17 questions with follow up questions (see Appendix 1). The first part of the interview guide was formed around the 10 factors of sport online users’ motives (Seo & Green, 2018), then the order of the questions was arranged in general-to-specific order to make the questionnaire logical. The questions are mostly theoretically driven because it is based on the MSSOC model, but partially also have an inductive approach because there are open questions that are not theory based, but rather trying to generate new and unexpected data. Respondents were asked general questions such as “what is esports for you” and then more specific questions, such as “how much time do you spend on watching esports every week”. There were two instances where respondents encountered words or phrases that they did not understand, which was then explained in simpler words. The interviews were carried out following the ethical consideration suggested by the Swedish Research Council (2017). During the interview, the respondents were given information about the aim of this study, as well as information that the interview would be audio recorded. They were asked if they are confirmed to being interviewed and they were given notice as to when the audio record would start. Those who were interviewed in physical locations, they were invited for coffee at their chosen place, and the interviews were recorded with a smartphone. For those who participated online, the interviews were recorded with Audacity. Very few notes were written down during the interview to remain focus on the respondents. The questions were asked mostly in their order, but with some flexibility depending on how they responded. The respondents were encouraged to answer thoroughly, and to clarify when there was uncertainty. They were also informed that they could stop or pause the interview if they wish, as well as asking questions if they were unsure. The length of the interviews varied from 15 to 25 minutes and when finished, the respondents thanked for participation.

**Data processing and analysis**

All ten interviews were transcribed to verbatim transcripts, meaning the interviews were written down faithfully and explicit as what is being told (Howitt, 2010). The collected data were then categorized and compared to the MSSOC model (Seo & Green, 2018) in order to see similarity and what might be the lacking areas for esports fans. The transcribed interviews
were summarized in an Excel table and presented descriptively. Each answer was invented with keywords and short sentences, which allowed for categorization of the responses; as well as allowing a clear comparison to the MSSOC model. The summarized data and the transcribed interviews were then compared with uses and gratification theories to gain a better understanding.

The author of this study is well invested in the field of esports and have years of personal experience, which may have colored the view on esports, but also made the communication between respondents easier and more natural. In this study, the respondents are sometimes referred to using the gender nurture noun “they”. There are instances where respondents of different genders have expressed similar opinion, other times the gender-neutral noun is used for an individual person in order to obscure the identity. It is also used to reduce the stigmatization surrounding gender in esports, especially that there is no significantly differences between the genders in consumption of esports (Hamari & Sjöblom, 2017).

**Result**

The responses from the interviews are categorized into different categories, they are: The definition of esports (how the respondents define the term esports); Information & content (ways that respondents obtain information about esports, and what content is being consumed); Entertainment (how esports is an entertainment for the respondents); Interpersonal communication (communication about esports); Escape & pass time (how esports is being enjoyed and for how long do they consume it); Fanship, team support & economy (interaction between the consumer and the esports fandom); Technical knowledge (how is esports used to obtain knowledge about esports games); The general opinion towards esports experienced by esports consumers; and The view of the future.

**How do esports consumers define the term esports?**

The interview started with a very open-ended question, respondents were asked what esports is for them, and all ten respondents mentioned that esports contain competitiveness. Some also mentioned that there are teams competing against each other, that the game is online, and that there are viewers watching the game. Out of ten respondents nine acknowledged esports as sports. They expressed that esports are just like real sports except that the competition is carried out on games, it contains victory conditions and it requires skills and strategies from players to gain leverage. Some respondents also view esports as entertainment. They also see esports as an opportunity for future career, and some think of it as a hobby. Esports can also be viewed as a form of education in the sense that players can learn from watching professional matches:

“If I'm about to play something right now, and I want to try something new, I just go and search these players and try to find out what trick they're doing, so it's like… Tutorials. They might be doing it for themselves, but I'm here for learning.” (Respondent 3).
The respondent who disagreed that esports should be counted as sport thought so because players are not athletes, and they think that esports should be categorized as its own. Others who compared esports with traditional sports expressed that traditional sports contain some form of physical activity, and the activity is carried out in the real world instead of digital space. One respondent expressed that traditional sports and esports are very much alike:

“I think it draws a lot of comparison, I mean there's definitely differences, obviously, gaming houses, it's different to sports, in terms of like the pros, you can't really do the venue thing where you can go to venues like general sports, but I would say it's pretty much the same thing, just obviously, in sports you're using more of your own body like to play the sport, it’s just still with the mental game to real sports, and then with gaming it's probably like a little bit more leaning in the mental side than the actual physical body level, where you can do it because everyone's pretty much on a level playing field inside of the video, again, no big difference.” (Respondent 8).

Traditional sports are often viewed as something that require physical fitness, and esports require mental wisdom. Esports are also easier to get in to, all players are in equal platform, anyone can participate without years of training. Two respondents mentioned that, like real athletes, professional gamers sustain job related damage, for example bad eyesight, sore hands, or tendons. Some suffer mental distresses and performance related problems before matches similar to athletes.

**How are esports being consumed?**

All the respondents have given their way of obtaining information about esports, as well as what type of content they watch. Half of the respondents actively sought out information about esports very frequently, from daily to several times a day. The places that they search information are mostly in new media, such as websites and applications. The most mentioned places are YouTube and Twitch, followed by various smartphone applications. None of the respondents searched information about esports in traditional media such as TV and radio. When asked about their thought about the platforms that esports exists in compared to traditional media, most expressed that it is more convenient. Traditional media are slower than new media, and requires more equipment before being able to watch. A respondent expressed a very interesting view, stating that “TV and radio are kind of dated as platforms, TV survives somewhat because of incentives to keep it alive” (Respondent 8). On the other hand, most respondents seem to think that new media is decentralized and is not controlled by a governing body, users are able to choose what they wish to see:

“If you compare to YouTube for instance, you can choose exactly what you want to watch, whereas with TV they have schedule, for a day, they have a certain number of shows that are playing, and it's very hard to fine-tune that for everyone.” (Respondent 2).

“I would say traditional media is controlled by big organizations, and there’s like these twitch users, and all these guys are like people like you and me, you know, just regular people who are trying their- showing their skills and all.” (Respondent 3).
The respondent think that new media allow users to have more freedom in choosing the entertainment to consume. Few respondents (three) think that the method for acquiring information about esports is not convenient in general, and two of them think there are room for expansion. When asked about the ways that they require information, two of the respondents mentioned that they acquire information via notification system from their source of information, it updates automatically when there are news. It also happens that some get their news about esports from friends. Although they all watch esports, world championships - which is one of the biggest annual events in esport, is much more appreciated than normal matches. When watching the games, especially games that one also plays, it is much easier to relate to. A respondent said that “I'm watch it is for game or whatever, maybe I feel competitive as well, even though I'm not at that level, but just like, I enjoy the competitiveness, watching people in competitiveness” (Respondent 8). The esports that the respondents mostly watch are League of Legends (named eight times), Overwatch (named three times), PlayerUnknown's Battlegrounds (named twice) and Super Smash Bros (named twice), and various first-person shooter games such as Counter-Strike and Apex Legends.

What are the motives for esports consumption?

Entertainment.

Obtaining pleasure from esports can be very different depending on the person, in this study all the respondents reported that they experienced joy from consuming esports. For most people, it is fun and entertaining to watch esports, whether they actively sought out games to watch or just putting the game on and let it play in the background. Almost all of the respondents (eight) think that esports are interesting to watch. Additionally, some also think that it is a good way to learn from the best of the best, to gain knowledge. One respondent said that being able to practice the newly learned tricks in the games and being successful because of it is extremely fun. Respondents also feel a sense of connection when playing with friends, not to mention the fact of being close to likeminded make them feel more positive. Playing the games in general is a fun and entertaining activity for respondents, they can forget about their real life and escape to a fantasy world, and get instant satisfaction in succeeding in-game. It is very rewarding to see themselves slowly getting better at the games that they play, for some respondents they even wish to enter the professional league. Being active in the esports community also kept them to stay relevant with the topics, as well as having more things to discuss with other esports fans. They feel happy when the team or players that they support win a game, especially winning a championship, and this happiness can also be shared with likeminded people.

Interpersonal communication.

Interpersonal communication is about the communication that occurs between people. All the respondents reported sharing and communicating with other friends who have the same interests in esports, but the degree varies. Some have acquired friends through esports and have more friends who are active in the fandom, others work in the industry or actively interact with the game, and therefore talk more often about esports. A few respondents have been actively consuming esports before, but now must put aside the interests for other things in life, such as work and study. The most discussed topics for the respondents are game
matches, players, and new changes to the game of interests. One respondent talk to friends about strategies seen in esports, and anticipate rare things that happen in esports. For example, the respondent said, “once in a while I see something weird happen, like someone (viewer) is giving someone (streamer) like $2,000 over stream, and I'm like, you know what, this guy gets some people do crazy things” (Respondent 3). Another respondent was introduced to esports by friends, once started watching the matches they instantly became interested in the game, and eventually also started to play. Out of the ten participants, three people have attended physical esports venues, they think that the feeling and atmosphere are completely different than watching it at home. A respondent expressed their feeling about being in physical venue and watch esports: “it's fun. it is just so much fun, because of the fact that it's being surrounded by people who are talking the same language that I do, essentially” (Respondent 4). Being surrounded by people who share the same interests make them more “hype” and interested in the game and the community. Other respondents expressed that they want to attend the physical venue, but don’t have the possibility because of the geographical limitation (for example needing to fly overseas).

**Escape & pass time.**

Most of the respondents watch esports because they themselves are active in the game that they watch, and also consider it as a source of education, partially learning game strategies and learn about new things happening in the game. “I want to know what they did, how to… you know, what the tricks are so I can imitate those same exact things when I am playing. It's more of an educational thing for me” (Respondent 3). The respondent feel that by watching the professional gamers play improve them much more than just trying to figure it out themselves. All the respondents have played the games that they watch at some points in their lives, and some of them still actively play the games.

The time spent on esports varies for respondents, five of them watch more when it’s world championship or tournaments season. The lowest watch time for the respondents is half an hour per week, and maximum up to 20 hours per week. For the most of them, it is hard to estimate the exact watch time, as it varies depends on the season and whether it is a match that they are interested in. Factors that may affect their interests can be whether if it’s world championship, have team/players they support, or in-game characters that they like. A respondent expressed that:

“I kind of like the hype that goes on, sometimes, not always, but, it's like if your favourite team has been in a slump for a long time, you maybe stop watching, and then they make a comeback and just power through that (matches), which kind of just happened with both of my favourite teams, so It can be very interesting.” (Respondent 2).

Two respondents mentioned that they will let the match play in the background whether they are actively watching or doing something else, it is a form of relaxation for them. One said that sports is a weak point for them, and esports allow them to immerse themselves into something that they could never have done in the real world, and sports being a big interest for them, it is very natural that esports also became a big interest. The participants said that:
“Watching esports, is something, like, I can actually, you know, not only understand but talk about and do so competently, even if I can't, I can still, you know, like put my heart put my soul into it. I enjoy that.” (Respondent 4).

**Fanship, team support & economy.**
Nine out of ten respondents named either the team(s) or the player(s) that they like, the one who didn’t mention any expressed that they do not have any favourites. Interestingly, when asked if whether they consider themselves as esports fans, only eight answered yes. The other two expressed that they do not watch it regularly and should not be considered as fans, one of them stating for example that “I'm a fan of league of legends, I cannot say that I'm a fan of esports 100%” (Respondent 9). Few of them have bought team related merchandise, some are content creator that produce game related products, others showed support toward esports through different types of social media promotion. Few never participated in any form of support towards either the game or the team, but consider playing the games and participate in discussions can also contribute to the fandom. Four of the respondents never bought anything that is either game or team related things.

Out of the nine people who gave support to the team(s) and player(s), three were dedicated to specific players because of their skill, and two of them also mentioned that the players have good personalities, as well as understanding their audience and produce interesting content. Other respondents are generally impressed by the team’s skill and how the matches are being played out, therefore becomes inspired and want to learn and become better at the game. One respondent also said that they watch esports because it is considered as national sports, and there are teams that represent a country, which is the reason they watch world championships. When asked about how respondents are feeling about the importance of fandom compared to the game itself, the majority (seven) answered that they think that the game is more important. If there is no game, then there wouldn’t be a fandom. Most seem to share the view that the game is more iconic and memorable than the fandom. But two also argued that the fandom is what made the game survive, fans have created much more content than the game itself and sustained the game through the years. One respondent thinks that both the game and the fandom are important:

“I think they're both interesting in their own ways. It’s like the game is very engaging to play, so it weighs a bit more, because the game would still be interesting without the content, but at the same time, the content is what makes esports engaging. Without the content around the interesting people and whatnot, then esports wouldn't be very interesting.” (Respondent 2).

Although the responses towards the fandom are mostly positive, two respondents mentioned instances where the fandom have had negative impact on their feelings towards esports. One mentioned that there are players who are rude and insensitive, cursing and sabotaging a game for all other players, or destroy the friendly atmosphere in a discussion. Another said that there are players who think they can be as good as professional players and try crazy strategies that doesn’t work for normal players.
**Technical knowledge.**

Technical knowledge is the knowledge about the rules of the game, the game terms, players and other esports related knowledge. In general, the respondents showed interest in the skills displayed in professional matches, four out of ten respondents said specifically that they want to learn tricks, strategies, and skills to improve themselves in the games of their interests, two said it is interesting to see how far the professional gamers can push the limit of the game. Especially in world championships, that’s where the new and fresh strategies come in, which is one of the reasons why it attracted more viewers. Interestingly, respondents reported that sometimes a player’s personal attribute can also influence the motivation to learn and to consume esports:

“I can learn some skills from the game, and when I play Overwatch I can use the skills. And sometimes I feel that the player is good-looking and skilled, I like it so… I want to play as good how good as them” (Respondent 6).

“Their personality is very great. For example, do you know Dafran from overwatch? He's the kind of that- good guy that, he can talk to you when you're watching these streams, like he's very outgoing and he's very great, and sometimes he would show us something else interesting to us.” (Respondent 1).

Respondents also discuss about the games with their friends, sometimes exchange the experience and help each other. Because most of them are still active in playing the esports games, so they retain more technical knowledge than those who have lower participations.

**The general opinion towards esports experienced by esports consumers**

The respondents seem to have a very positive attitude toward esports overall, but at the same time they seem to be very aware that this attitude is not shared in the general public. Respondent 9 said on the topic of esports being more viable that “I think esports is not harmful, but yeah, it's just one choice of your life, so I think it's fair if you want to be a professional player”. One respondent said that esports are viewed as something that could destroy a young person’s life because of how easy it is to become addicted to. Two respondents also said that there are damages that professional gamers in particular can be affected by. One of them expressed concern to both mental health and physical health, saying that being seated inside all day is not healthy, contracted professional gamers may have staff member that takes care of them and remind them to do physical activity, but normal esports players do not have that luxury. The respondents also said that being connected nowadays make people feel more alone, because there is no physical contact, and friends may not be able to see each other face to face. The other respondents expressed that the fast changes to the games and that the games are constantly updating can also cause stress, professional gamers who can’t keep up the pace will be considered not relevant, or being unable to cope or advance in skill, all these factors can contribute to player burnout:
“I’ve heard friends say that for instance that League of Legends is very hard to keep up with, and there are a few players that have been in the scene for a long time, Faker, Bjergsen, and so forth, but generally speaking it’s very hard to stay relevant in those games, and I think that takes a toll on players.” (Respondent 2).

Four of the respondents also stated the fact that professional players, or esports players in general, are very young. This is not a particular positive fact, because they might be in school and figuring out their lives, but esports changed them so profoundly that it may damage their future. One of these four respondents said that it is harder to be a professional gamer when one become old, because things change for them. Respondents seem to understand that esports is not an interest shared by many yet, one said that they would not talk about esports with their real-life friends because they wouldn’t understand, and another said that esports is still very niche within the sport world. Respondent 5 said that for older generations, esports might be something unimaginable: “it (esports) definitely become more and more mainstream, and probably in the future to… but for dominance I’m not sure. I don’t think elder people can accept it in short time”.

What are esports consumers' thoughts about the future of esports?
Regarding the future of esports, five out of ten responded that esports will definitely dominate the sport frontier and shared a positive view about esports. They said that the times are changing, as more and more people learn and get to know about esports, maybe even participate in it, the industry will grow accordingly. One respondent said that esports might need a better definition if it want to open up to more audiences: “because of the policy is not clarified that esports is sports or not, so maybe that's not the mainstream people want to watch, that’s why they don't show (esports) on TV. But I definitely want to watch that on TV” (Respondent 9). There are hopes for esports to be more dominating in the future, expressed by one respondent as:

“It's very easy to get into this, you know, everyone can do it. We can just start streaming from our house, I think it will take over sports in future. It's easy, anyone can get into it, and they don't have to have years and years of practice, I think it would take over sports, like real sports, like really soon it will be like the major sports.” (Respondent 3).

Other said that it depends on what is defined as esports and in which country, they said that as the technology develops so will the esports market, for example virtue reality is a new form of entertainment that combines the physical and the digital world. There is also a difference on the advancement of esports in different country, so it’s hard to determine the future of esports. Respondent 8 said that “Internationally, like Europe or North America, yeah I would say this (esports domination) is probably for sure, locally, no, it's a bit handicapped due to the population and logistics”. Few respondents think that esports will remain as a small part of sports and will not grow any bigger. As for professional gamer to become a regular career, the majority of the respondents think that esports will become more accepted and more viable, as well as its associating jobs such as within broadcasting, gamer, and production. Respondent 3 said that:
“Like engineer, doctor, and you can also become a streamer. Right now, people are kind of hostile to it, you know, parents will not let their kids do it, but I think in the future it would be more acceptable and people will actually taking this as a main job.” (Respondent 3).

There are also three respondents who said that professional gamer is a very hard job to get into, it requires a lot of time and skills before being able to earn money and rely on it to survive, not to mention the burnout rate, stress, and possible damage to health. Respondent 9 said that “I think professional player requires really high level skill, and actually I think there's kind of smart. They're kind of similar to sportsman I think”. Esports might be easy to participate in, but it is not for everyone.

**How well are uses and gratification theories matching the needs of esports consumer?**

Uses and gratification theories seem to cover all the relevant area of interests when conducting research about esports consumers’ motivation, despite the fact that they are not designed specifically for esports. The uses and gratification approach in this qualitative study constructed a clear image of the user base and showed reasons as to why they enjoy esports. It can be argued that both Gan and Li’s MSSOC model (2018) and Seo and Green’s 10 facets of sport online users’ motives (2018) do not investigate factors such as passion and addiction, which are some of the new findings from this study. But until there are new theories being created and specifically targeting to esports, uses and gratification approach can be considered as a valid way to study about esports consumer.

**Discussion**

The goal of this study is to understand the motivation for esport consumption, along with consumers’ definition of esports, how it is being consumed, and their view of the future of esports.

**Results**

According to earlier research, the definition of esports can be summarized as organized competitive video gaming (Candela & Jakee, 2018; Jenny et al., 2017; Pizzo et al., 2018). Comparing to the responses gathered from the respondents, this definition can be confirmed. Data collected from the respondents seem to suggest that esports should contain a few main elements: 1) exist in a digital platform, such as a computer game, or console game; 2) must have the ability to connect to other players; and 3) the game must have competitive elements, which also imply that there are victory conditions or comparison factors. The respondents often draw direct comparison of traditional sports such a football or basketball to the system that esports also display. For example, there are spectators who view the game, there are different team of players, the game is being transmitted with commentators allowing for easy understanding, and there are structures that host the teams (gaming houses, leagues). Sometimes the comparison is so obvious that respondent thinks it is evident enough to explain that esports is sport. Esports as a newly emerged industry has been influenced by traditional sports (Choi, 2019; Jenny et al., 2017). This idea is shared among the participants in the
current study. Few of the respondents see esports as a potential career, and therefore they see it more as a platform for education. Others may simply consider esports as a mean to aid them in getting better at the game of interest. Esports are also viewed as a hobby and entertainment.

Although esports lack a governing body like traditional sports do, such as the International Sociology of Sport Association (ISSA) and the International Olympic Committee (IOC) that sets the requirements and rules for the system of sports (Jenny et al., 2017), this does not seem to affect how esports are being viewed and consumed by people. But it can be a hazard for people who want to pursue a career within this new field of opportunity. There is no well-known overarching organization that provide aid for professional gamers and people who work in the industry, instead, they rely on other established systems in the society to support esports. However, new organizations are being created to function and fill in the void, one example being the World Esports Association (WESA) (Oelschlägel, 2016; World Esports Association, 2016). The definition of esports is also not universal and may vary, especially in the emergence of newer technology such as virtue reality that combines both the physical and digital world. As of now, esports are defined as competitive games that are being played online by players. As the future of esports continue to evolve, so will the definition of esports.

The playtime across the respondents is not evenly distributed on the consumption of esports, at the lowest around half an hour per week, and up to 20 hours per week. These numbers are just roughly estimated time reported by the respondents, during the interviews, most of them had troubles giving the exact number, but it can simply be that they do not actively count the hours spent on esports. The time being invested in esports also varies depending on season, most respondents would watch more games when there are big events such as world championships. What this does entail is that all the participants are drawn to esports in different ways, and that there are factors that affect consumer watch time. World championships are often one of the biggest events during a year. In it, professional gamers from all over the world gather on stage and compete for the best player and team. This is expressed and appreciated by the respondents, and correspond with the results found by Hamari and Sjöblom (2017) in the sense that it is a way to escape from reality. As reported by some participants, they themselves may not be able to perform as well as professional players, but they can experience the competitiveness and learn from them. Hamari and Sjöblom (2017) found that there are no significant relations in players’ skill and the watching frequency. In this study, it is shown that the consumers’ interests towards esports played a role in how much time they are spending on esports. If a person is active in-game and in the fandom, then there is higher chance that the person will spend more time on esports. This coincide with Choi’s (2019) finding on the factors that may influence consumers’ motivation, which suggests that passion is one of the biggest contributors to esports consumption. He also mentioned that addiction is also a strong factor for more frequent consumption, but it is a factor that is not examined in this study.

When asked about the platform that they use to obtain information about esports, most respondents said that they use the Internet to get updated about esports news. The information comes from specific websites or smartphone applications. The frequency and initiatives seem
to be on par with how much interests they currently have on esports. But interestingly enough, even for respondents who do not actively partake in esports fandom, they still have the habit to watch esports and view it as a way of relaxation; others would watch when they get notification, or just happen to see the matches in their newsfeed. This partially differ from the principle definition of Uses and Gratification Theory (Katz et al., 1973; Ruggiero, 2000; Sundar & Limperos, 2013), where the consumer is the one actively searching out entertainment to consume. The respondents however can be seen as the initiators for choosing esports rather than other means of media, esports is part of their interests, and therefore being actively chosen. It seems like that people who get notification, or are shown esports in their news feed, are more likely to watch it, even if they are not active in the fandom anymore. The technologies enable users to be in control and chose for themselves. This is in itself is already a form of satisfaction (Sundar & Limperos, 2013). The participants gain the satisfied needs of the technology gratification (Gan & Li, 2018), which motivates them further in the consumption of esports.

It can be concluded that the participants consume esports because they want to improve themselves and want to obtain gratification and relaxation, they need to be entertained, and to communicate with others, especially likeminded people, and like to belong to something. Using Gan and Li’s model for Uses and Gratification Theory (2018) to understand the motivations for the respondents, it is clear that all four type of gratifications affect their consumption of esports. Hedonic gratification is about the perceived enjoyment and the need to pass time. Most of the respondents spent a significant amount of time with their computer, and esports are one of the main media for them to search for fun and relax during their leisure time. They are able to find hedonic gratification in their consumption of esports, which also contribute to the continuation of such entertainment (Gan & Li, 2018). Although there is also a prioritization, i.e. if they consider other things to be more important, such a job and study; then they prefer to fulfill the more important aspect of life rather than enjoyment. They chose to consume esports because it is as very sociable activity and fulfills both their need for social interaction and maintain their social presence. With esports, they are able to reach a large audience of likeminded people, often associated with a certain game, they are able to gain more friends effortlessly because of the convenience that the platform and the technology provide. However, in Hamari and Sjöblom’s study (2017), they found that the social aspect of esports does not have too much influence when it comes to watch frequency. Based on the answers from the respondents in this study, it can be concluded that social gratification indeed influences their motivation for watching esports, as the majority of them have friends who share the same interests, some of which are active participants in the esports community.

Games, as well as websites, may track users’ progress and display achievements which can fulfill the respondents’ utilitarian gratification. Essentially, users are able to present themselves in a desired way, document their lives, and to share information with others. According to Gan and Li (2018), being able to share information is very important, as well as other aspects of the utilitarian gratification. Esports not only offer the ability to do so, but they are also deeply rooted in the culture within esports. For example, the respondents brought up the level they are in-game and what rank they have within the competitive scene of a game.
Some also feel a sense of pride in the time they spent in esports. All this information is able to be tracked in different games and displayed for users. Esports also have a media appeal, it can be the aesthetics of the game, the user interface, functions that provide helpful information, all of which please the users and contribute to the continuation of usage (Gan & Li, 2018).

There are more forms to participate in the esports fandom rather than just spectating the games. It can be creating fan art, video, cosplay (a form of dress up), shoutcasting (commentating fan game), and other form of content creation, which few of the respondents have experience of. The majority of the respondents have shown appreciation of esports on social media by watching or sharing information about esports, though very few have attended physical venues. All of these can be seen as a form of identity building and way of sharing information, and coincide with the uses and gratification approaches (Ruggiero, 2000; Sundar & Limperos, 2013). Ruggiero (2000) discussed also that the use of computer has played rules in fulfilling one’s gratification in social identity and interpersonal relationship. This may be the cause of why they chose to support and display belongingness with merchandise, as well as in-game achievements. Respondents also experiences a sense of community, especially in the physical presence of other esports players. The fandom may also have negative impact on esports fans’ experience, for example, as reported by some of the respondents, people being rude in a game or overestimate themselves. Despite that, it seem that the passion they have towards esports outweigh the negative side. Most respondents also share a positive view of the future of esports. Esports in the future may be considered as real sports by the general public, and the image of professional game would also be perceived as equal as athletes. They wish to see esports develop into a real and viable career.

Methodology
Uses and gratification theories can be considered a good starting point to examine esports consumers’ motivation. It provided items that should be considered when conducting a study about consumer motivation. It is also more practical than theoretical in the sense that it can show the inadequate area in a clear manner. Naturally, there are limitations in this study. Despite the fact that the participants are from different parts of the world with a somewhat even gender distribution, the small number of participants (ten) cannot be generalized and represent how the esports fandom experience esports, as well as their motivations for esports consumption. The interviews are also relatively short, this limits to the gathered in-depth knowledge. Because there is also a lack of knowledge in the research about esports, not to mention that this is a new field of study. There are very few sources to obtain qualitative study about esports, and in turn influence how this study is formed. However, there are informative qualitative data being generated from this study, and can be considered as useful in future studies about esports consumer.

Conclusion
Esports as a new and exciting industry have a lot of potential for more exploration and discovery. It is also a new field of study. There are lots of things about e-sports that are not well understood, such as esports fan culture and professional gamers’ physical and mental
health. This study tackles the question regarding esports consumer motivation. It is found that uses and gratification approach can be a good way to gain insight of esports consumer, and users often use new media to consume and to communicate within the fandom. Most of the respondents view esports as real sports, and they often use digital platforms to find and consume esports contents. Esports for them is a good way to relax and to be entertained, and they appreciate the company of likeminded people when consuming it. Some people are attracted to esports because of fanship, others consume esports because they themselves want to improve their techniques in games. The respondents are positive about esports’ development and hope to see it grow even more. The future of esports is bright and hopeful, and more and more people are getting to know about it every day, and with that, more studies are also needed about esports.
References


Appendix 1

Interview guide
1. What is esports for you?  
   How would you describe esports for people who don’t know what it is?  
   There are discussions regarding whether esports is sports, do you think esports is sports?
2. Do you see yourself as an esport fan? On a scale of 1 to 6, how much of a fan are you?  
   How long have you been an esport fan? What esport fandom(s) are you currently engaged in?
3. Do you have any favorite esports team? Do you consider yourself their fans?
4. Do you watch their match? How? Have you ever been to a tournament physically?
5. How much time do you spend on watching esports every week?
6. Do you buy merchandise? Or other form of support toward the team or the game?
7. Why do you watch tournaments? What motivates you to watch esports in general?
8. Do you play the games from esports? If yes, how good are you at the game? 1 to 6.
9. Do you think that the game itself is more important, or the fandom surrounding the game is more important?
10. Do you actively engage in conversations? Discuss with other fans? Meet up? Viewing party? Content creator?
11. Do you have friends who are also active in the esports fandom? Do you discuss about the games?
12. Where do you get the information about esports?  
   Do you think it is convenient to get information about the things that you are interested in?  
   How often do you check it?
13. What is your opinion about traditional media such as tv and radio, compared to the platforms that esports media exists in.
14. Has esports changed you in anyway?
15. Do you think esports will dominate the sport frontier in the future?
16. Do you think professional gamer will be a viable profession the future?
17. Do you have anything else that you want to add to the discussion of esports?