Are You Watching Video Gaming? Why?: The Motivation Behind Viewing eSports

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Introduction
In recent years, video game streaming and viewership has grown to incredible heights due to the increased availability of streaming websites. Prior to companies like Twitch.tv and Hitbox.tv players were forced to take screen captured videos and post them on sites such as Facebook.com and Youtube.com. The rise in viewership and consumption has not only challenged the definition of sports but it has also started to impact the viewership of “traditional” sport.

It is estimated that more than 70 million people watch eSports during 2013 (Warr, 2014). While NFL football remains the most viewed sport in the United States, eSports have begun challenging the NFL for the number one sport to watch (Schwartz, 2014). In 2013, 11 million people watched the World Series of Baseball and about 26 million watched College Football's BCS Bowl (Espn, 2014). These numbers pale in-comparison to the 32 million people that tuned in to the LoL Season 3 World Championship (Schwartz, 2014).

In this study, we investigate a League of Legends (“LoL”) player’s motivation to view LoL eSports rather than play online in order to determine how eSport viewership can be increased. We adopted Alderfer's ERG Theory in this study in order to determine whether a player is more concerned with Existence, Relatedness, or Growth for their online viewing motivator.

Participants
In this study we focused our attention to both male and female viewers. Within the LoL community, Riot Games reports more than 90% of players are male (Gallegos, 2012). Following this information, we attempted to create a focus group mimicking these statistics and had seven male participants and one female participants. According to Riot Games, 85% LoL players are between the ages of 16-30 (Makuch, 2012). While a large majority of the participants were college students, the group did include a current high school student, and three College Graduate Students. LoL players, according to Riot Games, consists of 60% of players that have completed or are currently enrolled in college (Gallegos, 2012). The final characteristic of the participants was skill level. The skill levels of the players varied and included a representative of the five major player skill levels: two Bronze rank players, one Silver rank player, two Gold rank players, one platinum rank players and, two Diamond rank players. We did not include any members of the Challenger and Master rankings because they are normally the people streaming or participating in the tournaments being viewed.

Method
We began our study with qualitative research in the form of an eight person focus group involving players of all genders, skill levels and, ages. The focus group lasted about one and a half hours and took place at our university. Following the focus group, we reviewed the recordings of the focus group multiple times in order to begin coding the information and looking for words that were repeated. We transcribed the material in order to perform open coding, axial coding, and selective coding and categorized the results into themes under the ERG theory.

Findings
The most common words stated throughout the focus group in terms of motivations were: develop skills, learn skills, community, excitement, entertaining, private, favorite team, favorite player and, escape. So we used this finding to create the main categories under the ERG theory (Safety, Anonymity, Team Affiliation, Player Affiliation, Community, Learning Skills, and Developing Skills).
After the open coding of the transcription we had to figure out the relation between the words spoken and the person speaking. To do so, we organized the categories established through the open coding procedure and we used the variable of skill to organize the participants. Following, we charted the number of times each word was spoken by each member of the respective skill groups. We then documented the results.

The result from the focused group interview indicate that the player motivation to view LoL stems from: 1) the excitement of watching the online games; 2) the feeling of victory the individual gets from watching their favorite team win a match; 3) to develop existing game play skills and strategies, and; 4) the level of competition and the competitiveness of the online play. The lowest rated factors of our ERG viewership survey were: 1) Do you feel safe to truly express yourself online; 2) Is interaction with other fans while watching an event important, and: 3) are you a different person online because of the anonymity LoL provides. After charting our material gathered during the coding process, our findings were that each level of player cared about different aspects of the online viewing.

Bronze player’s motivations for viewing LoL were focused on the existence and growth factors. Bronze players felt safe in asking “stupid” questions to the better players because their identity was unknown. Bronze players also watch the game to learn and develop skills more so than they watch for a team/player affiliation. At the silver rank, players started to focus more on relatedness which was of little interest to the bronze player. At the gold rank, players stopped being concerned with the existence of the online viewing and started focusing on relatedness factors, while still being concerned with growth. The platinum players showed no interest in the existence factors and started becoming less interested in watching to learn new skills but were more focused on the relatedness factors. Diamond players reportedly stopped watching LoL for any existence and growth factors and focused solely on the relatedness factors.

Conclusion
Based on our findings we were able to prove that our hypothesis was incorrect. We have determined that the motivations for LoL viewership changed depending on the rank of the player. Our study shows that the better a player is, the more likely they are to watch LoL for the competitiveness of the online play and team affiliation than they are to watch the game to improve their play styles or for the anonymity.

Future studies would involve creating a survey based on these results and distributing the survey to all different levels of players. We would also like to continue our research by doing more focus groups with participants all belonging to the same rank. This would help strengthen our research and further enable us to determine what the motivations for viewing esports is and to discover if eSport viewership will affect traditional sport viewership in the United States.