Feature development for esports broadcasts with a focus on the intermission between matches

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ABSTRACT

In a world where esports is growing quicker than ever and is looking towards traditional sports for guidance, taking a look at the format of both esports broadcasts and online streaming in general can give beneficial insights. This paper aims to evaluate if the format of esports broadcasts should no longer let itself be influenced by traditional sports and instead follow the habits and motivations behind esports’ online viewership itself. With a focus on the breaks and intermissions between matches in esports broadcasts, this paper takes a closer look at user behaviour during these specific timeframes and how to leverage these insights for feature development on broadcasting platforms. To best understand the online esports audience, a qualitative research method was employed. Semi-structured interviews with six viewers of esports and four industry professionals were conducted in order to gather valuable data. What can be seen from the study is that the biggest contribution for enjoyment when watching esports is the aspect of seeing skilled teams and individuals face-off in a quality oriented production. The motivation of being inspired and learning from watching esports is greatly valued. The study also reveals that viewers are more interested in individual esports competitors rather than teams. As an outcome, future broadcasting platform features should focus on learning how specific individuals succeed and where others do not. Features for the breaks and intermissions of broadcasts should have a strong focus on sound rather than visuals as viewer behaviours indicate that they want to do other activities simultaneously. Content that can be consumed using only sound during breaks is therefore advised even though the visuals should not be forgotten completely.

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Feature development for esports broadcasts with a focus on the intermission between matches

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1 INTRODUCTION
Electronic sports, more commonly referred to as “esports”, was first mentioned during the late nineties. The first reliable source which used the term was a 1999 press release where Eurogame spokesman Mat Bettkington compared esports with traditional sports [1]. Although this is one of the first mentions of the term “esports” it is a phenomena that existed earlier than 1999. It began during the arcade games era with the first official tournament being held in 1980 by the company Atari, featuring their own arcade game Space Invaders, which had around 10,000 participants [2].

However it wasn’t until 1993, when the first-person shooting game “Doom” and its successor “Quake”, released in 1996, that esports started to grow. Together with the emergence of the Internet players and teams of players started to compete in online tournaments. These online tournaments led to several professional gaming leagues being formed with the “Cyberathlete Professional League” (CPL) being the most influential one. CPL had its first tournament in front of a live audience in 1997 and after that professional computer gaming was considered an emerging spectator sport [1].

Since then the esports community has grown immensely and now hosts professional tournaments on a regular basis, rivaling those of traditional sports in terms of viewership. Esports viewership has grown from ~134 million unique viewers in 2012 to ~300 million viewers 2016, worldwide. It is estimated that this number will increase to around 600 million viewers by 2020 [3]. Although the revenue of esports isn’t anywhere near traditional sports yet, its growth is following an even faster trend than that of viewership. The revenue is expected to grow from $194 million in 2014 to $1.5 billion in 2020 globally, an increase of more than six times its size in the same amount of years [4].

Esports broadcasts have looked the same for many years with Twitch.tv being the undisputed choice for where viewers watch esports streams [5]. Twitch.tv has not seen any big competition in recent years and with no real reason to shift their value proposition, the broadcasts and viewing experience have remained the same. Znipe.tv (Znipe esports AB) is looking to change this. Their vision is to revolutionize how esports is presented and viewed, and consequently challenging Twitch.tv to become the preferred broadcasting option. Their strategy revolves around giving more power to the viewer through customisation and including more features in the broadcasts themselves.

One area which Znipe is looking to change is how the breaks between matches during esports tournaments can be optimized. When there is a break during traditional sports, there is often “studio time” where experts analyze and talk about the current game, or other games that are airing simultaneously. This does not cover the entire breaks however and the rest is usually filled with commercials and advertisements. The same way of filling breaks with content is present in esports broadcasts. However, as of now the breaks and intermissions during esports broadcasts are usually not filled completely with content. One reason for the entire break not being used is simply that the breaks are too
long. The current structure of how to handle breaks is
 taken from traditional sports which are usually
 broadcasted on television as well, where long breaks are
 often filled with other content such as advertisement. In
 esports there is a similar “studio time” as in traditional
 sports and commercials are also present. But one major
 difference in esports broadcasts is that all most matches
 of a tournament are broadcasted through the same video
 stream. Whereas in traditional sports broadcasts, every
 match is often a separate stream. This results in esports
 broadcasts having more, as well as longer, breaks. These
 long breaks are more often than not under utilized by the
 broadcasters leaving viewers with a countdown screen
 until the break is over.

 The research from this paper works to deliver valuable
 data which can be used in shaping a relatively young
 industry. It investigates whether or not the format of
 traditional sports broadcasts is suitable for esports as a
 whole. To cater to a rapidly growing industry, social
 sustainability must be considered as the community
 grows larger each year. In a world where future
generations are born as digital natives, esports need to
 insure that it can support the capacity of current and
 future generation participation. As accessibility is a big
 part of social sustainability it is also of importance that
 entities within the esports industry to keep this in mind.
 Entities need to help shape the community so that
everyone, regardless of background, can become a part
of this growing community. With this said, social
 sustainability has not been the focus of this research. The
 key goal of this research is to provide intelligence for
 streaming platforms to make educated decisions around
 feature development for the esport community.

 2 RELATED WORK
 2.1 Esports growth

 In Wagner’s [1] research he states that the emergence of
 esports is a logical and irreversible consequence of our
 transition from an industrial society to a communication
 and information based one. He argues that professional
 sport players compare their competencies in the use of
 information and communication technology, the same
 way as traditional athletes compare their competencies in
 other ways. The definition of esports that this paper will
 use is the one Wagner defines:

 “esports is an area of sport activities in which people
develop and train mental or physical abilities in the use
of information and communication technologies”.

 Andreassen and Arons [5] describe the growth of esports
 and analyze what has contributed to this growth. In their
 research they conclude that the foundation which esports
 has grown upon is the constant development of new
 technologies. Through better and faster internet
 communication, streaming of esports have been made
 possible where Twitch.tv has been a significant factor in
 making esports, and streaming, what it is today. The
 study also highlights a recommendation that entities
 involved with the creation and streaming of esports
 should continue to value the views of their customers/viewers as they have been a part of the
 creation of the entire industry.

 2.2 Comparisons with traditional sports

 There has been a great deal of research performed on the
 subject of whether or not esports should be considered a
 sport and on the differences and similarities between
 esports and traditional sports.

 Karakus [6] performs a comparison between esports and
 traditional sports focused on the salaries earned by
 esports professionals, the interaction between these
 professionals and their fans and lastly the differences
 between fan loyalty in the fields. He points out that the
 possibility for professional esports players to stream
 themselves playing, when not currently in a tournament,
is something unique for esports. The streaming is usually
 carried out on the platform Twitch.tv and brings a level
 of personal connection between the professional and his
 or her fans that does not exist in traditional sports.

 Examples of this can be found in research conducted by
 Smith et al. [2] which looked at the online streaming
 communities that has formed around different types of
 content online. Through these examples they highlight
 the fact that video games traditionally have been
 something users participate in actively but with online
 streaming it gains an element of passivity. They argue
 that this malleability of activity and passivity is one of
 the success factors for online streaming.

 Going back to Karakus’ research [6] and the comparison of
 fan loyalties within esports and traditional sports, he
 finds that fans within esports have a tendency to switch
teams between seasons. This is a major difference from
 traditional sports where switching team is frowned upon
 and no matter how badly your team performs you stick
 with them. In esports a lot of changes can happen
 between seasons. Players might swap teams, new
 sponsors could take over and re-brand teams which often
 results in the team brand itself not being as strong as the
 brand of the individual players. Karakus argues that this
 is the reason for fans switching teams. The fans’ loyalty
 is attached towards personalities within the teams rather
 than the teams themselves.

 Sell [7] investigates esports broadcasting and situates it
 within the larger sports media industry. He evaluates
 what role broadcasting of traditional sports has played in
 shaping the esport industry. The study examines what
 broadcasters within esports have borrowed from prior
 sports media. In his research he finds that the esports
 industry is in constant conversation with the sports
 industry through different channels such as media,
 commentary and revenue. A clear result of this is the
 format on which commentators are presented in esports.
The esports industry has looked at traditional sports to
 find a format for commentators that quickly creates a
 recognizable formula that sponsors and fans alike can
 appreciate.

 Fox news recently tried a “commercial-free break”
during the world series of baseball and instead cut to its
 studio team for the entire break [8]. This was something
 new and it was appreciated by both the viewers and
 broadcasters alike. One important point Fox made of why
 they tried this was that commercial breaks invite viewers
to change the channel which sometimes leads to the viewers not changing back at all. This behaviour has been studied and confirmed by for example Moriarty et. al. [9]. This behaviour could also be true for breaks in esports broadcasts but is yet to be studied.

In early November of 2016, Blizzard Entertainment announced what they called the “Overwatch League” [10]. Blizzard Entertainment is a division of Activision Blizzard and has a long history of esports tournament support for its games. With the Overwatch League their aim was to take esports to a new level of professionalism and do what they can to “allow Overwatch esports to achieve its full potential”. By looking at traditional sports, more specifically the NFL, Blizzard Entertainment hopes to build a similar league for Overwatch and esports. Teams within the league will be representing individual cities, giving the fans a possibility to support their local team. The teams will have opportunity to sign players which then are guaranteed a minimum baseline salary and benefit packages.

2.3 Viewer motivation

The different reasons why people would want to view esports has been the subject of several previous papers.

Shaw et. al. 2013 [11] explore what factors motivates people to watch esports. By using the Sport Fan Motivation Scale and the Motivation Scale for Sports Consumption, together with questions about users esports behaviour, they analyze motivations on the basis of subgroups (such as age, gender, ethnicity etc). In their research they find that esports fans want to watch compelling matches of excitement and unpredictability, impressive in-game tactics and team strategies together with aesthetics that makes it clear what is taking place. They also found divergences of what factors were the highest rated in different subgroups, indicating that the esports fanbase is not homogenous.

Lee et. al. [12] studies esports viewing motivation as well as the relationship between these motives and viewing satisfaction focused around the game of League of Legends. In their research they found the motivation of enjoying the dramatic situations occurring within the games to be the highest rated viewing motive. Viewers with a strong sense of team attachment and fans who watched League of Legends to get better at the game showed the highest level of satisfaction. The factor of commenation seemed to have a profound effect on the viewing satisfaction as well, a result which is further verified by Cheung et al. [13]. Their research shows that not only does having experienced commentators play a big part in the experience of the spectator’s, but having professionals in charge of the game camera, deciding what you as a spectator see, is also significant for the viewing experience. Indicating that viewers of esports is not purely interested in the players or the teams.

See [14] concludes that what is most valued by esports consumers is the entire experience associated with the esports consumption. He explores the experience as a whole and shows that it is not created by one entity alone. There are several market actors such as game creators, event coordinators, commentators and broadcasting platforms that all contribute towards the value network of esports. Seo argues that companies within this value network should shift their focus from the games themselves and focus on the collaboration and management of the esports experience.

2.4 Purpose

The streaming format accompanied by the nature of esports and how it differs from traditional sports and television brings into question the structure of the broadcasts used today. In this paper, the role of the broadcasting platforms in the value network of the esports experience and the structure of the breaks and intermissions during streaming broadcasts are further investigated. Thus the purpose of this research is twofold.

• Finding aspects of importance for feature development, focused on breaks and intermissions of esports broadcasts, based on viewing motivations and trends within broadcasting.
• Increase the possible contribution from broadcasting platforms to the value network which is the esports experience.

2.4.1 Research question

This research will focus on the following research question:

- What are the implications for the development of features for the intermission between matches in esports streaming broadcasts according to viewing motivations and trends?

2.4.2 Sub question

In addition to the main research question this research will also explore the following sub question:

- How does the viewing motives for esports differ from those of traditional sports?

3 METHOD

3.1 Semi-structured interviews

When researching an area based on people’s experiences, feelings, values and perception that underlie and influence behaviour, qualitative studies are often used [15]. As the goal of this study was just that and due to the fact that most previous studies found had researched esports in a quantitative matter, the method of choice for this study was of the qualitative sort.

To investigate user behaviour when watching esports broadcasts, six semi-structured interviews with esports viewers were conducted. To get a better insight into the esports scene and to fill in the gaps of previous studies, two semi-structured interviews and two email interviews were conducted with people from the esports industry. The reason for two of the interviews being conducted via
email was due the interviewees not being able to meet in person, as well as the interviewees personal preference.

One of the many strengths of using interviews is that questions can be prepared beforehand resulting in that the data from different interviews can be compared. The reason for going with semi-structured interviews rather than structured interviews was because they allow the researcher to modify the questions during the interview [16]. The questions for all of the interviews was based upon the previous quantitative studies and their data, presented in the theory section.

3.2 Data analysis
After collecting the data from the interviews a thematic analysis approach was chosen. This analytic approach was chosen to analyze and structure the data and is a common method of data analysis within qualitative research. Thematic analysis is used to find themes and patterns within qualitative data and therefore was a good fit for this study [17].

4 RESULTS
4.1 Interviews with users

4.1.1 User backgrounds
In total, six users participated and all six were male between the age of 23 and 28. All of the participants had either studied or were studying within the IT field. Half the users have either finished their studies or have chosen to start working without finishing their studies. Two of these 3 users work as IT developers whilst the last one work within the field of UX design. One of the users which was studying was working as a graphic designer for CMORE during hockey and football broadcasts, resulting in a lot of interaction with traditional sports and their broadcasting format. All six users spent a considerable amount of their spare time in front of the computer, either playing video games or watching esports. One of the users spent most of his time viewing other people streaming themselves while playing but also tune in to watch esports every now and then.

4.1.2 The interviewees relation to traditional sports
A total of five participants also spend time watching traditional sports where the different sports they viewed was hockey, american football, soccer and baseball. One of these five users watched a significantly lower amount of traditional sports than the other four, viewing around one or two matches a month. The others follow their sport a lot more, catching most of the matches during the different seasons, often ending up watching more than ten hours of traditional sports per week.

When asked about why they follow traditional sports the overarching response was to be entertained. This entertainment could however be broken down into more specific aspects. The most common aspects out of these was the entertainment from watching the sport be played at the highest level in a competitive setting as well as following a specific team, watching them become a stronger unit. Two users pointed out the high quality of broadcasts that are present in traditional sports and one of them stated that the combination of sports at a high level and broadcasts with high quality brings the most entertainment.

“Sports at a high level, combined with a high quality production is the best part of traditional sports.” - User 6

Another user pointed out that his dedication to the team gave him a feeling of him being a part of that team, as well as the team being a part of him. This connection made the user feel like he was winning if his team won and that feeling of victory was the reason he watched traditional sports.

When discussing the less attractive parts of traditional sports, all five users thought that commercials in general and the amount of commercials was one of the worst aspects of traditional sports. Some users stated that the amount of commercials in traditional sports has reached an unreasonable level. One user took the example of NHL’s “power break” that was added a few years ago. NHL claims it is a way to get faster paced hockey, while the user saw this break as nothing else than an excuse for more commercial.

“They say it is a way to let people rest so that the hockey will be more fast paced but this is nothing more than an excuse for more commercial.” - User 5

Another part that one user in particular felt contributed to less enjoyment was when the commentators were bad. He elaborated and explained that the commentators should contribute something extra. The user gave an example of commentators that only focus on what is happening on the screen and pointed out that what they are doing is just telling him what he is already seeing for himself. The user wanted the commentators to have information that he did not already have, which could be statistics or information about the players activities outside of the field. The example here was a specific player that had started an organization that the user found interesting and later could read about. Another point that a user brought up was the lack of freedom to watch anything he like in traditional sports. He explained this by bringing up the fact that when a season is over you can’t really watch more since there isn’t a lot of video on demand in traditional sports due to broadcasting rights. He also stated that during the sport season he felt restricted as he couldn’t follow his team or specific players when they did not play a game. He said that he would love to be able to see them practice to become better players and teams and then see that practice pay off in actual matches. A few other aspects that were brought up less frequently than the previous ones was the feeling of losing when your team lost and that it is usually expensive to watch traditional sports.

All of the users usually watched traditional sports alone but some of them got together and watched it with friends every now and then. Two users brought up Super Bowl as such an example of a fixture enjoyed together with friends. The activities surrounding the event
including cooking together – making it into a bigger activity than just watching the game.

4.1.3 esports viewing habits

The amount of esports the participants watched ranged from one to over twenty hours per week. Participants with a particularly high amount of viewing hours attributed this to a specific tournament taking place that week. The most common esports viewed amongst the users was “Counter-strike: Global Offensive” (CSGO) that five out of the six users watched. Three of the participants watched Overwatch, two watched Dota 2, and one of them followed Hearthstone. Five of the users pointed out that the games they watched has changed over time as some of them had previously followed games such as StarCraft 2, Quake and Counter-strike 1.6.

All six users used Twitch.tv as their main platform for viewing esports live and stated that this was due to Twitch.tv being the biggest platform available. One user mentioned that no matter where you find information about esports online, links more often than not lead to Twitch.tv. Habit was another big reason for Twitch.tv being the platform mostly used amongst the interviewee’s as most of them had never used another platform to view esports. This together with Twitch.tv working on all digital devices such as TVs, computers, tablets, and mobile devices made it a clear winner out of the platforms mentioned. YouTube was also mentioned by one user when it came to video on demand rather than live matches. Two users mentioned that they had once or twice watched esports through the game client but this was not a regular thing. One of those users had watched Dota 2 through their game client once and mentioned that he had a great experience. However, the availability to watch a match in the game client had not been available since then. He felt let down as he believed the game client would offer this on a regular basis from there on out. When it was available the user had payed for a compendium containing all sorts of different information about the tournament and he got access to the client. When using that specific client the user had been able to steer the camera himself if he wanted to, choose commentators from different countries, vote on who he thought would win, and pick his own all star team. The platform allowed users to continuously earned points when watching, voting and participating in any way and these points could be used in the game. If you watched a replay you could see how intense the match was at different times as this was indicated on the seekbar. The user said that all these features made the experience much more enjoyable and immersive.

The interviewee’s all watched esports alone at home most of the time and usually did something else at the same time. The most common activity while watching esports was playing a game of their own at the same time but activities such as doing laundry or cooking was also mentioned. Half of the interviewees mentioned that they sometimes communicate with friends and watch the game together from different locations.

All participants put more focus on the esports matches when the games were more important. What was deemed important was bigger tournaments, matches with teams or players the users found interesting, or matches later into tournaments such as the finals. When these kinds of matches were shown many users stated that they would put all of their focus on the match and sometimes watch it on a TV as you would with traditional sports.

When asked about the motives behind their esports viewing the participants answers revolved around entertainment and inspiration. The biggest source of entertainment was watching professionals compete in a game that the interviewee’s also play and have a relation to. Coordinated teams with highly skilled individuals was mentioned as one of the most enjoyable thing to watch. There was also mentions of the casters and their important role for the broadcasts. If they were not perceived as professional it could lower the entertainment level of the experience. Inspiration, being the other big motive for esports viewing amongst the participants, was also due to the fact that users play the games themselves. The users gave many different examples of this and said that watching professionals play can teach you a lot of tricks. They could relate to the professionals in a different way than in traditional sports when professional players end up in situations similar to ones the users had been in previously. They could then learn how the professionals handle that specific situation and become better at the game themselves. The inspiration motive was something that was a clear difference in motives behind watching traditional sports and esports. The interviewees watch esports for entertainment and to become better at the game. They watch traditional sports purely for entertainment and not because they want to get better at that specific sport.

A feeling of uncertainty of where to find information about upcoming tournaments and what rules apply in what tournament were aspects mentioned about what parts of esports are currently less than ideal. This is a result of a absence of an overarching organisation that overlook esports as a whole or even the different games, such as FIFA for football. The interviewee’s said that they were not always sure where to find what information and that this sometimes led to them missing content. Some users had a few sources for information such as specific sites but no user had a single place where they could get all of the relevant information.

The interviewee’s mentioned the post game discussions that take place in both esports and traditional sports as something highly positive. However, many thought that there wasn’t enough of this in esports and would like to see this become a industry standard. They wanted an analysis of the game that had taken place together with statistics of both teams and players, much like in traditional sports.

The interviewee’s were then asked more about the most prominent differences and similarities between traditional sports and esports. The most common similarity that was mentioned was the competitive setting and the entertainment. One user said that even though esports and traditional sports take place in different settings, it is still a competition between the best of the best. All users mentioned the entertainment that comes from watching esports but two of them also mentioned that traditional sports usually feel more professional.
They said that it feels like the people behind the broadcasts in traditional sports know what they are doing and have been doing it for a long time. This is something the two users felt led to less problems during the broadcasts in traditional sports.

A sense of lavishness was described in relation to traditional sports. One user felt that the tone within esport broadcasts varies between different tournaments. He describes the range from silly and laid back, to professional, and at times rather pompous. He brought up examples from different broadcasts and in one of them there had been a segment in the broadcasts where all the casters had been replaced by puppets. They still talked about the game that had taken place and nothing else had changed, just the presence of puppets. This was an example that the user felt had been done just because they could and he thought that it didn’t add anything to the broadcasts. He then talked about another example where there had been a more laid back feeling in the tournament but in this example it had not been taken too far. The casters talked with each other between the games just as the user talks to his friends when watching with them. The resulting feeling according to the user was that it felt like he was watching the game with his friends and not alone.

Complexity was another key difference between traditional sports and esport and one of the more negative parts of esport in general, according to three of the users. They mentioned the higher complexity of the basic knowledge for different esports games versus the complexity of the basic rules in many traditional sports. One example was football versus StarCraft where one user had watched a StarCraft tournament without ever having played the game. He didn’t know anything else of the game other than that the goal is to destroy the opponent’s base and army. The user experienced uncertainty and confusion every time people cheered during the match because he could not understand why they were cheering. In football however, if a person understands the basic rule of putting the ball in the other team’s goal scores you one point, the user can then understand and enjoy watching the game. If the referee blows the whistle and everyone stops running, you know that something happened that is not allowed. This difference in complexity led to many of the interviewee’s saying that it is often, but not always, hard to follow an esport where you have never played the game yourself.

4.1.4 Team and player association

The interviewee’s were asked about whether or not they follow specific teams or players within the esport scene. Four out of the five users who watch traditional sports follow specific teams in those sports but only one out of those four followed specific teams within esports. That user said that he felt like the fan base of traditional sports is more “logical” due to the teams being local. He noted that there is more “heart” in the fan base of traditional sports when people support their local team and it contributes to a “we versus them” feeling. He continued to say that when there were teams in esports where all players are from the same country he got the same kind of feeling and preferred when this was the case. For this reason this user follows esport teams that contain Swedish players. This seemed to be in line with the other users as well. While they did not follow a specific team at the time of the interview, they had followed Swedish teams in the past. They also stated that the reason for previously following teams such as Ninjas in Pyjamas (NiP) in CSGO, and Alliance in Dota2, was solely because they represented Sweden – their country of origin.

When it came to following specific players rather than teams within the esport scene, the interviewees had a bigger interest. Four of them had specific players that they preferred to watch for various reasons. For example, the player had high individual skill, were entertaining to watch, played in a way similar to the interviewee, Swedish origin, or a combination of these. Two users followed specific players personal Twitch streams simply to follow their career during off season. One participant said that if two of his favourite players would move to new team, he would most likely start to follow that team instead. This was because he had a bigger interest in the individual players than the team and organization.

4.1.5 Views on intermissions

The users had different experiences with breaks and intermissions during esport broadcasts and their description of what is usually showing up on the stream varied. They all brought up commercials and ads, and pointed out that there are usually ads that have already been aired several times during the same broadcast. There was also mentions of countdown screens or messages such as “we will return shortly”. Lastly they mentioned discussions and analysis. One user pointed out that what is shown during breaks depends on the tournaments but that the most common thing is usually advertisements.

The users behaviour during these breaks relied heavily on what was shown in the stream. Most users either did something else at their computer such as focusing entirely on the game they were playing, tabbing into another site or similar. Two users said that if they are watching the stream with 100% focus and a break comes up they usually go away and do something else during the breaks, such as go get something to drink. If the stream features some form of post game discussion two participants would stay and watch the stream. The other participants said that they would leave the stream running but do something else while listening to the discussion. This was under the circumstance that the participants thought the commentators added something to the experience, rather than talking about things not relevant to the tournament. In that case most users would mute the stream, just as they would if there was advertisement.

No user said that the current format of breaks is good when asked about it. However, five out of the six users stated that the current format can be good at times and there was only one user that thought the current format didn’t add anything at all to the viewing experience.

“The content I get to see during the break does not give me anything” - User 6
The clear trend amongst the other users was that they did appreciate when there were professional casters discussing and analysing the previous match. There was also a trend showing that less content the stream showed, the more the users would lose interest.

The impact on the viewing experience was, just as the user's behaviour, dependant on the content showed in-stream but was in most cases small. As stated above the users would often shift their focus towards something else and not mind the stream that much during the break. One user said that if the content was bad he sometimes turns of the stream completely.

“If the content is bad then I might turn of the stream completely and not turn it on again.” - User 5

While another user pointed out that he felt that breaks adds to the feeling of “live”. He thought that as long as the breaks are not longer than 15 minutes, they could result in an overall positive addition to the viewing experience.

When the users were asked about what they would want all breaks and intermissions to be like in esports they all had similar answers. All of the users said that what they enjoy the most is when the event has a panel of experts that discuss and analyse the matches. They want them to talk about what just happened in the previous game and mention the upcoming match in broad strokes. They did not want too much discussion about the upcoming match and only wanted to hear things like “Team A is weak in this particular way, maybe team B can use this to their advantage”. One user explained that this was due to the experts having all the facts about the previous game since that just happened. Regarding the upcoming match, there are very few facts and so their analysis is not based on facts in the same way.

“I do not think that they should put a lot of focus on the upcoming match but rather focus on what just happened. Anything can happen in the next match so their speculations is pretty much just them guessing.” - User 3

The users said that having the experts and commentators look professional is important so that the tournament or event does not feel cheap. The users stated that it affects the overall experience positively and it makes it feel more legitimate. One user mentioned that in traditional sports everything around the broadcast has a premium feeling and it adds to the entertainment value. He said that this premium feeling does exist in esports but that he wants it to become more established even in smaller events.

Several users also mentioned that even though discussion and analysis are great, they didn’t want that to take up more than 10-15 minutes and if the break were longer than that, they wanted something else. Content that was mentioned were highlights from the tournament in general such as showing of the biggest plays. A specific team’s “road to the final” or similar, highlighting that specific team’s victories throughout the tournament. Lastly, one user wanted more information about the teams and players in upcoming matches and would like to see some rivalry be created. The user gave an example of showing how the matchups between the two upcoming teams have gone previously. Also, if a player has left team A for team B, that fact should be mentioned as well.

The users were asked about how they felt about having interactive content and features during the breaks and this question split the users somewhat. One user said that he would not use an interactive feature personally but he could see other people using it. Another user said that interactivity can be good but that features such as polls are not good at all. This was due to people not always voting in the same mindset and he couldn’t be sure if everyone voted seriously. This resulted in the user having a high source criticism towards the poll results and so the poll did not give him anything of value. The same user did however say that he loves when tournaments and events use Twitter as an interactive tool during breaks. The experts can answer questions during the breaks that they gather from Twitter and discuss topics chosen by the viewers. He also said that it would be great if this could be even further adopted so that users could ask to see a specific clip. The experts could then bring up that clip, explain what happened and discuss it. The user that had previously used the ingame client for a Dota 2 tournament said that the interactivity with that way of watching was the best part. He loved that there was a broad variety of features and that he as a user were in control.

Another feature that was brought up during the interviews were statistics tied to esports. Even though four of the five interviewees that watch traditional sports look up statistics in those sports frequently, the interest in esports statistics was low. Only two of the total users looked up statistics occasionally and out of the other four only two said that they found statistics interesting if presented. The last two users stated that they had no interest whatsoever in statistics when it comes to esport. One user said that it would be interesting to be able to pick and choose what statistics are shown and compare those statistics between different players, also of his own choosing.

Lastly, the interviewees were asked about their thoughts on commercial during broadcasts. There was a clear trend amongst the users that even though they all stated that they understood why the commercial is there, they did not like it. The users said that any commercial that would cover an area of the screen, no matter how small, during the actual match was a big issue. This was due to information being lost or even the thought of information that could be lost.

“Even if the ad covers a small area of the screen I can’t know for sure that anything important isn’t taking place there or that I’m not missing anything.” - User 6

The interviewees had no issue with advertisement during the breaks of the broadcasts or when the stream is showing the casters. Product placement or advertisement such as “this tournament is brought to you by…” was also fine according to the users.
4.2 Interviews with industry professionals

4.2.1 Industry professional backgrounds

Out of the four industry professionals interviewed for this thesis two of them work at DreamHack and the other two works at Black Molly entertainment. Bas Bruinekool and Michael Fuxborg from DreamHack works as Vice president and project leader respectively. Bas is running the north american department and is overseeing the expansion of DreamHack in USA and Canada. Michael, being the project leader for DreamHacks Dota2 league “Dreamleague”, works a lot with other organizations and keep up the connections and communication needed with other people in the business. Niklas Kronquist and Ulf Nordlund are both CEOs at Black Molly entertainment and both of their focus is on the broadcasts. Niklas describes the task as “I’m either designing a show or I’m trying to sell one”.

4.2.2 Comparisons with traditional sports

Both the industry professionals and esports fans interviewed for this research were asked about their perceived differences and similarities between traditional sports and esports. Besides the athletic differences, the lack of an overarching organization such as FIFA, NFL or NBA was mentioned. In esports it is instead the different companies that make the games that “own” that specific esport, which is a big difference from traditional sports. In traditional sports, there are no companies or organization that “owns” football the same way Valve own Dota 2, where Valve can do whatever they want with their game. Another difference mentioned was the different lengths of seasons in traditional sport and esports. While a football season can go on for several months it still has months when it is “resting”. In esports the next season starts as soon as the previous one ends. Michael also brought up that in esports the fans can be a lot closer to the professional players than in traditional sport. This is thanks to professional players streaming themselves when there is not a tournament currently underway and the players seem to put a lot of effort in taking care of their fanbase. He continued by giving an example of Twitter where it is not uncommon to get a personal answer from a professional esports player. In traditional sports on the other hand, he had a hard time seeing Ronaldo personally answering a Tweet from a fan.

A similarity that was mentioned was the way the broadcasts look as all interviewees stated that esports have been heavily inspired by traditional sports in this area. One can also see this in the way esport teams market themselves now versus how they marketed themselves before. Michael explained that in the early days of esports there were “clans” while today we have “teams” with matching clothing branded with the team colors just like in traditional sport. Michael also said that even though no one in the industry will claim that esports haven’t been influenced by traditional sports he is tired of the comparison between the two.

“Esports is strong enough on its own to stop comparing itself to traditional sports” - Michael Fuxborg.

4.2.3 The current and future development of esports

The interviewees were all happy with the development that esports has made during the past years. According to them this is thanks to a lot of companies with money which have come to realize that the scene has a lot of interest, exposure and audience retention. Through this rise in investments and sponsorships, the scene has matured and has become more professional.

Michael pointed out that esports goes in cycles, for example in 2011 the scene’s popularity grew when StarCraft II entered the scene. But since then StarCraft has lost a lot of the interest from the users and CSGO showed up to fill that space. He believes that there will always be something new in esports and that we will not be sticking with CSGO for the coming 10 years.

The interviewees all looked positively at the future of esports, believing that it will continue to grow in the same direction as it is doing now. Niklas was not sure esports have been making all the correct choices along the way and that it is important to not forget how esports started out.

“As long as esports keep the core values, I look positively at the future and the current development.” - Niklas Kronquist

Bas shared a prediction about the upcoming years stating:

“I think esports is hitting its first plateau. We will level out viewership in 2019 and it will be up to event and esports suppliers to provide a clear, unique and differentiating experience.” - Bas Bruinekool

He continued by saying that having just an event will no longer be enough. We will see big providers fail as they have grown quickly but have not prepared to cope with a plateau and deflation in content. He believes that we will be entering the phase of what he calls "ultimate professionalisation" around year 2022. Esports will follow in the footsteps of large traditional sports where there is a wealth of knowledge surrounding consumerization.

4.2.4 Online streaming

The relationship between the growth of esports and the growth of online streaming was brought up as something defining for esports. Niklas said that without the growth of streaming, esports would still be a basement project.

“Streaming has been the foundation on which the development of professional esports has been built upon” - Niklas Kronquist

The development of streaming has moved forward fast and all the interviewees saw this as positive. Niklas said
that it is now time to slow down and look where we should be focusing our efforts.

“We who work with producing content for the broad esport community needs to adapt to the viewers and not the other way around” - Niklas Kronquist

Both Ulf and Bas see the level of connection with the target group as the biggest possibility with online streaming. Since it is possible to track viewership globally all the way down to an IP address the possible marketing power makes this a highly coveted resource. Ulf said that due to this great possibility with streaming, and the fact that technology has moved forward reducing the entry barriers significantly, there are now a lot more competition within the scene. For esports this means that there are more and more tournaments each year but there is still just a fixed amount of days each year as well as a fixed number of teams. This leads to the teams not being able to be in all tournaments and so they often choose tournaments with bigger prize pools. As described earlier, esports fans are captivated by those with a high skill level. As a result, the audience tends to follow their preferred teams no matter the tournament they are in. This infers that it is not the tournament that is the driver of viewserhip but the calibre of teams within it. This makes it possible for new companies with considerable amounts of money to quickly attract most of the teams to their event, possibly running other competitors over in the future.

4.2.5 Online streaming vs traditional linear television

When comparing traditional linear television with online streaming the interviewees pointed out that traditional television is falling behind. Michael stated that there is no longer what he calls “prime time” due to online streaming. In light of how our way of living has changed as a result of the internet, people are now used to the concept of video on demand. People decide when their own “prime time” is and they expect content to be available anywhere and at any time. This does however put pressure on content providers since users value a lot of available content as well as a constant stream of new content. Ulf pointed out that due to this there exists so much content online that users can be extremely picky with what they choose to watch. If something is not of high enough quality or entertaining enough the users can find something else without much of an effort. Michael also mentioned this and it makes him believe that the biggest thing with online streaming will not be esports. Since there is not always esports tournaments available there is not a constant stream of content. Therefore he believes that the biggest thing in online streaming will be casual streaming, when people stream themselves and create their own brand and channel. All of these casual streamers will fill the space left due to lack of new sport content and will thereby dominate the online streaming scene.

Traditional sport has started to tap into the power of online streaming during recent years and the interviewees see both differences and similarities between stream ed traditional sports and sport. Michael noted that streamed esports is free and available for everyone, whilst streamed traditional sport usually takes some form of subscription. However he is unsure how long a free to air model will last. Broadcasting rights is starting to become increasingly important within the esport scene.

“We already see some actors going exclusive with YouTube while some are going to Twitch. The more actors that show up, the more YouTube and Twitch will become like Viasat and Canal+.” - Michael Fuxborg

He explained further by saying that if you want to see swedish football you pay for a subscription for Canal+; if you are interested in english football you go for Viasat. He believes esports might end up going in the same direction in the future with different subscription models for different providers.

4.2.6 The intermissions

The interviewees were asked about the current format on breaks and intermissions during esports broadcasts, why they look as they do and if they see room for improvement. All the interviewees stated that the breaks are necessary and will most likely never disappear completely even if both Bas and Michael believe the breaks will become shorter. As of now the main reason for the breaks is to let the teams and the people working at the event rest between matches and to get the setup working for each new match. Since a tournament or event in esports can be live for over 10 hours at a time the people working at the event and the teams will at some point need to rest. Bas also brought up that for DreamHack specifically, they are contractually obliged to have a break every sixty minutes. Michael also mentioned that there are a lot of factors that can affect the duration of the breaks, more so than in traditional sports.

“It is not hard to change the football if something goes wrong which it rarely does. It is a lot more common that a computer acts up and need to be swapped out.” - Michael Fuxborg

The breaks are also used to give the sponsors some exposure for the money they are investing in the event or tournament. Depending on the tournament or event there is different numbers of sponsors and they all need to get something for their money. There is also other content shown in the breaks but what kind of content and how much of extra content there is, also depends on the tournament. Ulf stated that there is always room for improvement but a lot of it comes down to how much money the event organizer has. He brought up an example of a tournament containing eight competing teams. He said that if you want to be able to show interviews with the teams during the breaks this needs to be recorded before the tournament goes live. As such, there needs to be “media days” where this material is recorded and that this takes a lot of time and money. He made the point that even if all material is recorded during one single day, that would take more resources in form of production teams resulting in a higher cost.

According to both Bas and Michael, DreamHack is currently looking into ways of increasing the entertainment value of the breaks.
"We have been actively looking at how we do break entertainment in our arenas and in our broadcasts. Using pre-produced content during breaks and showing new content rather than always showing a countdown timer. But this is an active development that will require a lot more time to finalize." - Bas Bruinekool

The reason behind this relates to an issue which all interviewees discussed — that viewership becomes significantly lower every time there is a break, no matter if the break is one or twenty minutes long. This problem lowers the value that the organizers can offer their sponsors since a lot of people stop watching the stream during breaks. Michael said that their goal is to have a steady number of viewers during the full duration of the broadcasts, rather than having big ups and downs during the breaks. The reason for this, he explained, is because their statistics of viewership would increase greatly. These statistics are presented to sponsors and shows what kind of exposure they would get for investing in their events. Good statistics would result in more sponsors and investments.

4.2.7 Trends

When asked about what trends could be seen during broadcasts it became clear that even if the interviewees thought that it is easier to track trends in online streaming, it is still somewhat limited. While in traditional television viewership numbers are based on estimates, the viewership in online streaming can be tracked much more accurately. Michael explained that Twitch.tv can see how many users are watching at any given time and their country of origin. Information around gender, age or similar data cannot be extracted unless a person has signed in with an account. Typically the sign-up process requests that a user disclaim such information, however there is always exceptions where people falsify information. He continues by stating that if you manage to combine an account such as a Facebook account with the viewership it could add a lot of value. Facebook information could be used to target specific groups of users during broadcasts.

One trend mentioned by all interviewees, was the changing viewership during breaks. As mentioned above the viewership during breaks goes down significantly regardless the length of the break.

“Even if there is a break for three minutes users choose to do something else, they get bored extremely fast.” - Michael Fuxborg

Bas stated that DreamHack tracks too little data and that it is something they have a large interest in improving. He also pointed out that their own research into this has not gone very far. They had however still been able to find out that rebroadcasted content still works very well live.

“We know that people hate breaks but love content. Other than that our research has not gone very far. We have however noticed that rebroadcasted content still works very well live.” - Bas Bruinekool

5 ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

5.1 Viewing motives and habits

There were clear similarities between the results from the qualitative interviews conducted in this study with the many quantitative research studies done previously. The users mentioned coordinated teams with highly skilled individuals as one of the most enjoyable things to watch. In short, they want to see the game be played at the highest level possible which is in line with both Shaw et. al.’s [11] and Lee et. al.’s [12] research. None of these two other studies mentions inspiration directly as a motivator but one could argue that the reason why users want to see high-end strategies is partly because of inspiration. From the interviews in this study the inspiration motivation from watching esports was clear and the users highly valued the learning aspect of sport, most likely due to they all playing games themselves. This viewing motivation differs from those of traditional sports where none of the users watched to get better at the sport themselves.

When it came to viewing habits of the users interviewed and how they watch esports, a clear trend emerged. Most of the time the users watch esports while doing something else simultaneously, not giving esports their full focus. This is another difference between traditional sports and esports from the viewing habits of the users that also watched traditional sports. The users stated that they rarely do something at the same time as they are watching traditional sports as they give the match their full focus. Another trend shown from my interviews as well as when interviewing the industry professionals was of viewership during the break. Users rarely watch the streams during breaks if there is a lack of content. The combination of these trends make the breaks during streams a clear weak point of broadcasts as users’ focus on the broadcast can easily be lost. This is what both Fox news [8], Moriarty et. al. [9] and other research on user behaviour during breaks in traditional television show. Even though their research only investigates and show that this behaviour is true for traditional television, it seems to hold some truth for online broadcasts as well.

As the users interviewed in this study described the same behaviour during breaks, it shows the importance of having content for the users during these intermissions. The content during breaks which was most appreciated in this study were the post game discussions and analysis that tournaments sometimes have during the breaks. But as shown in both Lee et. al. [12] and Cheung et. al.’s [13] research this kind of content needs to be done right. If the users do not find the casters and experts in the broadcast to be professional enough it will lower the satisfaction level.

5.2 Team and player attachment

Another aspect of importance to discuss based on the results is the users level of team and player attachment. In the theory Lee et. al. [12] comes to the conclusion that users with a strong sense of team attachment lead to a higher level of satisfaction. In the interviews of this study the users explained that they did not put a strong
emphasis on teams within esports but had a strong team attachment within the traditional sports scene. The users had however had a higher sense of team attachment within esports previously and had followed certain teams when they started out watching esports. Their motivation for doing so was similar to the motivations they mentioned about following specific teams in traditional sports; some sort of connection towards the team, such as the team representing their homeland of Sweden or containing a lot of Swedish players. In esports, where a lot of players stream themselves between tournaments, it is however a lot easier and more common for users to follow a specific player rather than a team as shown by Karakus [6].

This fan loyalty toward specific players rather than whole teams seems true amongst the users in this study as well. Four of the users had specific players they found more interesting to watch and two of them followed those players personal streams outside of tournaments. One possible explanation to why most users no longer follow teams and now follow specific players instead could be tied to the time the users have followed a certain esport. When users start to watch esports they rarely have much to go on in terms of what teams and players are active in the scene. Users might then seek out teams they can connect with, such as teams from the same country as themselves. After watching more esports, they get to know the individual players within the scene. With the possibility to follow the individuals they find interesting, they do just that and lose interest in teams as a whole.

If Blizzard Entertainment's Overwatch league [10] becomes a success more esports organizations might adopt a structure more similar to that of traditional sports. It will then be interesting to see how that will affect the team and player attachment amongst the esports audience. Players may have less motivation to produce personal streams because they have a steady income from their contracts. Self-promotion may not be as important and as a result we may see a shift in player and team attachment. Where the team attachment is increased thanks to teams being tied to cities, as viewers can root for their local team. While the esports audience might find more of an emotional connection with teams the attachment towards individual players could decrease.

5.3 The current format of broadcasts and intermissions within streams

One of the biggest strengths of the streaming format is the ability for viewership to be tracked much more closely than in traditional television. What is clear from the results is that it is highly requested by companies to improve this further so that viewership demographics can be tracked. However, using big data for such targeting brings into question the ethics of that power. In one end, one could argue that it is unethical to target users like this and that users are being exploited. On the other hand, one could argue that this targeting brings value for both the companies and users by allowing the companies to show relevant information to the users. Regardless, streaming is here to stay and it seems as it will only keep on growing in the future. The format of the stream then comes into question as we move from traditional television into the world of online streaming.

According to both the users and the and industry professionals, today’s streaming format regarding the breaks and intermissions is far from optimal. Both Michael and Bas stated that the intermissions are a problem due to them resulting in fluctuating viewshippers numbers and DreamHack is looking into ways of solving this. But as Bas explained, it will be a lot more time before this development can bear fruit, at least on a event level. From a broadcasting platforms perspective, this could potentially be an opportunity to do just as Seo [14] concludes in his research: Assist the collaborative design and management of the esports experience and increase the value that a broadcasting platform can bring to the industry, by providing a solution to this industry wide problem.

One solution can be interpreted from the user interviews: Even though most users stopped watching the stream during breaks, they all left the stream running in the background if they found the content to be enjoyable. This was usually the case with post game discussions where users could take part of the content without watching the stream itself, it shows that not all content is consumed visually. Because of this, it may not be beneficial to focus on content that demands the users to use visual consumption, but rather focus on stimulation through sound during the breaks.

As shown in Sell’s [7] research, as well as in this study, esports has been heavily influenced by traditional sports. However, as the format of broadcasts in esports has been influenced by traditional sports it is important to remember that traditional sports is traditionally shown on linear television. Since linear television and online streaming are broadcasted and viewed in two different settings, the question whether or not it is the correct choice for esports to still take inspiration from traditional sports arises. Michael’s statement that esports is strong enough to stop comparing itself to traditional sports together with Niklas’ statement that it is not always correct to try to be something else, further increases the relevance of said question. Staying with the old ways of measuring success of broadcasts and focusing solely on visual stimulation, could be wrong for online streaming.

Both Andreassen and Arons [5] and Niklas said respectively that esports should keep listening to its users and adapt to them rather than the other way around. As most users watch esports on their computers whilst doing something else, this should be embraced by the entities within the value network of esports and it could be time to go in another direction from traditional sports and television.

5.4 Method discussion

The research methods chosen in this study, semi-structured interviews and email interviews worked well for the purpose of answering the research question. The choice of qualitative methods, rather than quantitative, was so that the quantitative data already collected in previous studies could be used as a complement. The qualitative data from this study also
reinforce the results from many previous quantitative studies.

The industry professionals provided valuable insight to the esports scene. If this research piece were to be conducted again, a larger sample of industry professionals for interview purposes should be employed. While the email interviews contributed useful data, their limitations included the inability to open a two way real time dialogue. Had all of the interviews with industry professionals e been held face-to-face, there possibly could have been even more valuable information extracted.

Another aspect that could have improved the results would be to not only rely on the quantitative data and results from previous studies. Having a quantitative method in this study as well as the qualitative one could have had an impact on the results. An example of data that could have been used is data from an actual broadcast, so that this study also could have analysed the viewership numbers during breaks and intermissions.

Lastly the diversity of participants in this study could have been more varied, especially gender diversity. As esports is still a male dominated industry it stands to reason that most participants would be male. However as the study ended up with no female participants it could have had an impact on the results if a larger effort towards finding participants of both genders had been present. Although women are a minority within the industry their input on, experiences with and participation in esports are just as important as that of men.

5.5 Future research

There is still a limited amount of studies conducted within the field of esports and online streaming resulting in many unexplored areas. One area of further interest is the viewership motivation of inspiration and learning. A study focused around the effects on a player’s skill and skill improvement, related with the amount and type of esports said player is watching, could be of interest.

To further this paper’s research, a study exploring how well in-stream features during breaks would work if an emphasis on sound was embraced would be a good complement. Statistics of how many of users today that are only listening to the stream rather than watching during breaks, would help such a study. Lastly, a study around how the measurement of viewership during online broadcasts could be improved in the future would also be of interest.

With the additional goal to answer the following subquestion:

- How does the viewing motives for esports differ from those of traditional sports?

The biggest motives for viewing esports amongst the users were entertainment and inspiration. The learning aspect of esports was highly valued and a clear difference in viewing motives from traditional sports. Another difference between esports and traditional sports was that users showed a higher interest in specific players rather than specific teams. This could also be of importance when developing features for esports broadcasts in general.

When focusing on the breaks, the current feature available that is the most appreciated by users is the post game discussion and analysis. Based on the interest in individual players, discussions and analysis should put an emphasis on individuals and not only focus on teams. This appreciation for post game discussion and analysis is only true when the commentators are seen as professional by the viewer. Having subpar commentators is one of the worst aspects of both esports and traditional sports according to the users. As quality is of utmost importance and that no content is often better than low quality content, feature development should not be rushed. This is because users have a wide selection of content available and can easily pick and choose what suits them best.

A majority of the users do not watch the stream during breaks and instead do something else during that time. If they find the content interesting and can take part of the content by just listening, most users leave the stream running in the background. This could be of high importance when developing features for the intermissions as the user’s behaviour indicate that features that does not require the users to watch the stream during the break will be more appreciated.

As esports continue to grow it is vital for actors within the scene to continuously listen to the ones that have shaped, and will continue to shape, the industry as a whole – the users.

6 CONCLUSION

This research study aimed to answer the following research question:

- What are the implications for the development of features for the intermission between matches in esports streaming broadcasts according to viewing motivations and trends?
7 REFERENCES


