

Career, Hustle or Hobby? The Lives of Gaming Podcast Creators

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INTRODUCTION

Gaming podcasts are a growing medium, with over 24,000 different shows present in the *Games* or *Video Games* categories on Apple Podcasts (Misener, 2021) – representing the largest subcategory in the platform’s leisure section. Despite this they remain an underexplored area of gaming content creation. While research has investigated individual podcast formats (most notably of actual play shows like *Critical Role*) a more holistic analysis of the field of gaming podcasts has not yet been conducted. This paper will present findings from ongoing interviews and qualitative research investigating gaming podcasts as a new media industry, highlighting the multitude of motivations creators of podcasts – which discuss video games and games more generally – in this industry have, as well as the different strategies they utilize to achieve these goals. In doing so, this presentation will highlight the myriad of ways gaming podcast creators create their shows, the challenges they face, and how these shows fit into the larger gaming content creation sphere.

The gaming podcast industry is one which has attracted a variety of creators from various new media industries and diverse gender, racial, and sexual identities and socio-economic backgrounds. This is unsurprising considering both podcasting and gaming content creation have been viewed as like “the wild west” (Quirk, 2015) or “the gold rush” (Johnson & Woodcock, 2019) by the creators in these fields. Many of these creators view the industries as neo-liberal meritocracies where hardworking creators are rewarded in proportion to their labour (Johnson & Woodcock, 2019, pp. 344-345, Sullivan, 2018, pp. 47-48). This meritocratic perspective contradicts many scholarly perspectives on the medium however, and it is this contradiction that forms a key part of my research project’s analysis. This paper will highlight these contradictions by examining the production process of creators – showing the ways their work and success (or lack thereof) challenges the idea of a meritocracy in the field.

Analysis of the production processes will focus on the discussion of two important aspects of the field which were raised in conversation with the creators. Firstly I will highlight the ways creators self-reflect upon their work and how they attempt to convert or monetise this labour. These reflections will be compared to similar self-reflections in other fields of gaming content creation including studies of Twitch streamers, game

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designers and cosplayers in order to show the differences that the background of a creator can have on their perspective of their labour. Secondly I will highlight ways the creators view the field of gaming podcasting. More specifically I will examine their perspectives on how “success” is achieved – what lore has been created around the paths and tools can be utilized to do so, and how accurate or attainable do they believe these ideas to be. I will also highlight the variety of supplementary projects which they use to support their work – be that streaming, other podcasts, or work outside the gaming field. Just like the background of the creators, their ongoing work outside of the podcast is an important factor in understanding their perspective on the industry they inhabit. These perspectives will be framed in terms of previous research into creator perspectives of success in the fields of podcasting and gaming content creation further building on existing research while also highlighting how the field of gaming podcasting may set itself apart.

Looking at these important topics provides us with the opportunity to further highlight the differences and similarities in the beliefs, perspective, and attitudes of gaming podcasters. In doing so this presentation not only further situates the field of gaming podcasting as one worthy of study that exists firmly in the gaming content creation sphere, but also highlights the complexity and diversity of creators and perspectives that exist within the field.

ENDNOTES AND BIBLIOGRAPHY

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