

From basements to stadiums  
Representations of esports in online newspapers

Bachelor's thesis  
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Tiivistelmä – Abstract <p>Videopelien pelaaminen on kasvattanut suosiotaan räjähdysmäisesti viime vuosikymmenen aikana. Tämä ilmiö näkyy myös kilpailullisen videopelaamisen eli e-urheilun menestyksessä, mikä on nousut uutisten otsikoihin. Suuresta suosiosta huolimatta, videopeleihin ja niiden pelaajiin kohdistuvat asenteet ovat usein negatiivisia ja harhaanjohtavia. Tämä heijastuu videopelaamisen mediarepresentaatioissa, jotka aiempien tutkimusten mukaan perustuvat usein stereotyyppimäisiin yleistyksiin. Median kuvaukset videopeleistä ja pelaajista vaikuttavat siihen, miten videopelaajat rakentavat identiteettiään.</p> <p>Tämä tutkielma tarkastelee videopelaamisen ja -pelaajien representaatioita e-urheilua koskevissa verkkouutisartikkeleissa. Aineistona on käytetty kolmen sanomalehden, Guardian, Los Angeles Times ja The Sun, verkkouutisia. Tutkielmani tarkastelee näissä luotuja representaatioita hyödyntäen kriittistä diskurssianalyysiä. Vertaan tuloksiani aiempiin tutkimuksiin saadakseni selville vahvistavatko vai haastavatko nämä representaatiot aiempia vallalla olevia käsityksiä videopelaamisesta ja -pelaajista.</p> <p>Tutkielmassani selvisi, että sanomalehtien kuvakset sekä vahvistivat että haastoivat vallalla olevia käsityksiä videopelaamisesta ja -pelaajista. Valtaosa kuvauksista keskittyi e-urheilun ja perinteisen urheilun samankaltaisuuteen sekä alan taloudelliseen menestykseen ja potentiaaliin. Osa representaatioista kuvasi e-urheilun uhkana perinteiselle urheilulle sekä terveyttä vaarantavana.</p>	
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## 1 INTRODUCTION

Competitive video gaming, also recognized as esports, has rapidly grown in popularity world-wide over the past decade. In 2014, over 70 million people globally watched esports (Wingfield 2014), and the viewer numbers have since only increased. Many sports teams and other investors have seen an opportunity to reach the younger demographics through esports. The top players are making salaries and winning tournament prizes that can be compared to athletes' earnings. This has not gone unnoticed by established news media such as the NY Times and the Guardian, which have begun to cover esports. In 2015, ESPN2 broadcast a championship match of *Heroes of the Storm*, in which teams of college students competed in *Heroes of the Storm*, a multiplayer online battle arena video game, with a live audience and professional commentators on national television (Jenny et al 2017). This caused an uproar on Twitter, as ESPN's viewers, who are mostly sports fans, voiced their opinions against broadcasting esports on a sports channel. The mainstream media exposure has also led to debates in online news' comment sections over whether esports is a sport or not. Even though esports is already a large, yet growing industry, and its potential has been recognized by investors, it is still finding its place in society. Before the rise of esports, gaming was already a heavily contested topic and it is now in the public eye more frequently than ever.

The increase in the popularity of gaming and esports respectively suggests that the social acceptance of gaming has increased and thus, an increasing number of people identify as gamers. Therefore, the media's representations are also of increasing importance as they affect the public perception of gaming, which in turn affects how gamers negotiate their identity. Furthermore, media's representations are crucial for the industry itself, as it is establishing itself as a competition, acceptable pastime and potential sport activity. In my thesis, I intend to study how gaming in esports is represented in online newspapers and find out whether they reinforce or challenge the existing images and tropes around gaming and gamers, drawing on the framework of critical discourse analysis and previous research on the representations of gaming in the media. While similar research on media's representations of gaming has been done in the past, none have been done in recent years of increased media attention produced by the popularity of esports.

## 2 LANGUAGE AND MEDIA

In this section, I will describe the theoretical framework of this study, first by discussing critical discourse analysis and its key concepts: texts, discourse and representation. Then, I will introduce previous research on the representation of gaming and gamers in the media. Finally, I will briefly describe esports as a phenomenon.

### 2.1 CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

Critical discourse analysis (CDA), which is an interdisciplinary approach to the study of discourse analysis, is concerned with how power is exercised through language. It is based on a view of language, that recognizes it as a form of social practice. Critical discourse analysis was chosen for this thesis, because it provides a flexible framework for analyzing media discourse.

The view of language use as social practice indicates that is an action that people perform rather than an abstract structure (Fairclough 1995: 54, Matheson 2005). Fairclough (1995: 54-55) also argues that language is both socially shaped and socially constitutive, which means that any given text simultaneously constructs and is constructed by the social. In other words, when we use language, not only do we describe the topic at hand, but also ourselves, other people, our social and cultural practices. This notion is focal for this study, as it implicates that language and society are intertwined.

In discourse studies, the term discourse is used on two different levels, which are discourse on a micro level as people using language to interact in the world, and discourse on a macro level as a social construction of reality (Fairclough 1995: 54). In CDA, texts include both written and spoken language, but also visual images and sounds. Texts are multifunctional; in other words, language use in any text simultaneously constitutes social identities, social relations and systems of knowledge and belief (Fairclough 1995: 55). As the data of this thesis consists of online articles, which included images and written text, both are taken in to account in the analysis.

Fairclough's (1995: 93-139) three-dimensional model of critical discourse analysis consists of 1) text, which is the analysis of the word-level 2) discourse practice, which is the analysis of the production and constitution of texts and 3) social practice, which is the analysis of social structures. CDA assumes that language can create change, e.g. change behavior, and thus language becomes a tool of power.

## 2.2 MEDIA DISCOURSE AND REPRESENTATION

News media is in a powerful role in contemporary society. Its power lies in its ways of using language to mediate meanings about society to itself (Matheson 2005: 1). Although these meanings are shared and partly constructed by each member of society and partly by institutions such as newspapers, the power to make them is not shared (Matheson 2005: 2). Media has the power to represent things in particular ways, which are often decided by the dominant groups of society to maintain their position, thus resulting in inequality amongst other social groups (Matheson 2005: 6). Furthermore, media discourse is often naively viewed as mirroring reality (Fairclough 1995: 103-104), when in fact, its mirroring effect is the result of a variety of norms, journalistic and social conventions and implicit presumptions about the world (Matheson 2005: 15-16).

In contemporary societies, the exercise of power often occurs through discourse. Media uses language to construct a view of the world that makes sense to the public by mixing specialist voices into understandable common knowledge. In doing so, it often draws from the ideological structures that support the views of those with the most power (Matheson 2005: 5-6). Thus, language is ideological; words used in social interactions make sense as common knowledge, resulting in people subconsciously reinforcing the status quo of dominant power relations.

Representation is one of the ways the media uses to convey meanings. It can be defined as a constructive practice of portraying someone or something in a particular way (Fowler 1991: 25). This practice is focal in the analysis of the media, because one must decide what to include and exclude in portraying something. In the context of news media, news articles for example generally aim to keep the reader interested enough to read the whole article and thus, often cannot include all perspectives in their representations. Limitations such as this, may lead to one-sided representations of the world, which is why it is important to examine which representations are chosen by the media and which are excluded. Moreover, media representations, as any other case of language use, contribute to the expression and description of identities in the process (Pietikäinen & Mäntynen 2009).

## 2.3 REPRESENTATION OF GAMING AND GAMERS IN THE MEDIA

Despite their popularity, video games have been a controversial topic throughout their existence. Media, politicians and other parties have historically been keen on blaming technological advancements for a variety of social issues, while the gaming industry and its advocates have often taken a defensive stance on the merits and hazards of video games. In this section I will highlight some of the issues

that have been connected to video games by the media, which in turn are reflected in depictions of gaming and gamers.

New media technologies, such as radio, film and television, have all been the subject of social hopes and fears, and video games are no exception (Williams 2003: 524). In his research on American news representation of video games over three decades (1980-2009), Williams (2003: 524) suggests that the utopian and dystopian news frames surrounding games appeared in waves, as the result of the social tensions of the times. Initially in the 1980s, video games were vilified in the media. Playing video games was associated with deviant behavior, such as drug use and theft, and characterized as displacing other productive activities in children's lives, thus hindering their intellectual development (Williams 2003: 540-541, McKernan 2013: 315). As a reactive countermeasure, utopian news frames emerged. These frames presented video games in a positive light; games were keeping children out of trouble, and instead of encouraging violence as a solution, playing games was a way of venting energy and emotions (Williams, 2003: 537-538). Another highlighted benefit was gamers' improved hand-eye coordination.

In the 1990s, the fears regarding video games shifted towards social risks. Technological advancements enabled consumer-friendly pricing of personal computers (PC), which provided even more people with access to games. Improved graphics also allowed more realistic portrayals of violence. Concerns regarding the addictive potential of games arose, among other risks such as children's ability to distinguish reality from the game's fantasy. The release of *Mortal Kombat*, a violent and realistic game for its time, and the Columbine High School massacre of 1999 in Colorado incited fears of violent video game players (Williams 2003: 541, McKernan 2013: 317). Concerns about health were also raised. In the 2000s, the epidemic of obesity in America was often linked to video games by the news media (McKernan 2013: 318-319).

News coverage on video games has presented polarizing views about the benefits and harms to their users. These depictions are also echoed in Hollywood films and television discourses regarding children's gaming. Narine and Grimes (2009: 332-333) claim that young gamers are portrayed as deviant and violent or as talented "cyberchildren", a notion that implies that gaming skills will lead to future professional success. The presumption is that children acquire crucial technological skills through playing games, which they will need in contemporary information economy. On the other side of the discursive conflict is the perception that some children are at risk of developing antisocial behavior through games.

These depictions of gaming and gamers have contributed to the formulation and reinforcement of both positive and negative tropes surrounding them. Maclean (2016: 31) argues that gamers are often misrepresented in the news media due to sourcing practices and routines, especially in terms of gender and age diversity. The use of unfounded tropes may shape identities and act as a self-fulfilling prophecy (Snyder, Tanke & Berscheid, 1997: 655-666). Playing video games is often portrayed to be the activity of adolescent males and representing it as anything else is out of the norm. According to Maclean (2016: 24), female voices in gaming are marginalized and discredited by representing them as “not real” gamers, seeking male attention, or as the victims and oppressors of male gamers. Williams (2003: 531) also noted that when gender was not represented, male gamer was the invisible norm. Maclean (2016: 30) argues, that the marginalization of female voices in gaming constructs men as “real gamers”, which maintains male technocratic privilege, an ideological perspective that naturally associates men with highly skilled technological work.

## 2.4 ESPORTS – PROFESSIONAL GAMING

The academic world has slowly adopted the study of gaming as an increasing number of researchers have shown interest in the field. However, research into the closely related domain of professional gaming or esports has only recently begun to emerge in academics. Initial studies have begun to explore the field from various perspectives and defined terminology. In this study, the term esports refers to “organized video game competitions”, as defined by Jenny et al (2017).

The first instances of esports in the West took place in the early 1990s, when first-person shooter titles such as “Doom” and “Quake” facilitated the organization of online tournaments (Kushner 2004, cited in Wagner 2006). Eastern esports culture developed in Korea through the rapid advancements of broadband infrastructure (Wagner 2006). The early stages of esports in Korea, was dominated by StarCraft, Blizzard Entertainment’s multiplayer-real time strategy game, instead of first-person shooter games. While Western esports held its first tournaments in front of live audiences in 1997, organized by leagues such as Cyberathlete Professional League (CPL), Korea was already broadcasting their esports’ competitions on television (Wagner 2006).

The growth of esports both as a factor in business and a remarkable global cultural phenomenon is attributed to two factors: wide spread access to technology and high-level competition (Jenny et al, Wagner 2006). Computers and other gaming platforms alongside a fast internet connection have become the norm in contemporary households. In the industrial age, physical fitness was valued highly, and sports aimed to measure this quality in its participants. Thus, the emergence of esports as a way

of displaying mastery in a society of information and communication is a natural result of social change (Wagner 2006).

The increased popularity of gaming and the simultaneous rise of esports are indicators of gaming's increased importance in people's lives. In public discourse, casual gaming and esports are often seen as the same activity: people playing games. As public discourse is influenced by media discourse, media's representations of esports affect public perceptions regarding it, which in turn affects how gamers negotiate their identity. Therefore, it is increasingly important to examine these representations.

### 3 PRESENT STUDY

This section will begin with the introduction of the aim and research questions of the study. This is followed by a brief description of the data used in the study. Finally, the methods of analysis are described.

#### 3.1 AIM AND QUESTIONS

This thesis aims to examine how esports and its players are represented in the online articles of three newspapers; the Guardian, Los Angeles Times and The Sun.

The research questions of this thesis are:

1. How is gaming and gamers represented in esports context in the online newspaper articles?
2. Do these representations reinforce or challenge existing images about gaming and gamers?

#### 3.2 DATA

The data chosen for this thesis consists of ten online articles from the years 2017 and 2018, all of which concern esports in some way. Five of the articles are from the Guardian (UK), three of them are from Los Angeles Times (USA) and the final two are from the Sun (UK). The Guardian and Los Angeles Times were chosen to be the representatives of broadsheet newspaper coverage in the data while The Sun was chosen as the representative of tabloid coverage. Ease of access to online articles was the determining factor in selecting the data used in the study.

Both chosen broadsheet newspapers have wide readerships. The British newspaper the Guardian, founded in 1821, reaches over 23 million British adults monthly and was polled as the most trusted newspaper in the UK during October 2017 to September 2018 (PAMCo 2018). The American

newspaper the Los Angeles Times, founded in 1881, has a daily readership of 1,4 million and a monthly online readership of 39 million (Los Angeles Times 2019). Additionally, the newspaper has won over 40 Pulitzer Prizes, which is awarded for excellent performances in newspaper journalism. The Sun is a tabloid newspaper, founded in 1964, and has a monthly reach of 29 million British adults (PAMCo 2018).

### 3.3 METHODS

The analysis is based on Fairclough's (2001: 91-139) framework for critical discourse analysis, which consists of three stages. The first stage is description of text. In this stage, the vocabulary, grammar and textual structures of the articles is analyzed. The second stage is interpretation of relationships between text and interaction, in which processes of text production, e.g. presuppositions and intertextual context, are analyzed. The third and final stage is explanation of the relationship between interaction and social context. The aim of this stage is to examine discourse as part of processes of social struggles.

For this thesis, the main areas of interest lie in the textual level, and therefore vocabulary and grammatical choices were focused in the analysis. Multimodality of texts in CDA was considered by including the analysis of images in the articles. I examined the data by closely reading the articles several times and marking reoccurring patterns, such as specific word choices, using Fairclough's (2001: 91-139) framework to structure the analysis. After this, processes of text production such as contexts and discourse types were identified, interpreted and analyzed. In the last stage of the analysis, the discourses and ideologies represented in the text were explained and then compared to the findings of previous research in the field.

## 4 REPRESENTATIONS OF ESPORTS AND PROFESSIONAL GAMERS

All three newspapers that were examined had similar representations, which both reinforced and challenged existing media images around gaming and gamers. In my analysis, I found three prominent themes in the representations of gaming in esports. The first theme involves gender and age representations in esports. The representations in the data portray esports as predominantly young and male, which reinforces the idea of men as “real gamers”. The second theme highlights the affinity between esports and sports through various comparisons, which affiliate economic and professional success to gaming. The third theme is that of moral panic, in which gaming is blamed for society’s problems (Maclean 2016: 31) through associations with addiction, corruption and violence. In most of the articles, positive images of gaming in esports, such as economic and professional success and affinity to sports, were highlighted, and negative images, such as promotion of violence and risks of addiction, were backgrounded or excluded.

### 4.1 GENDER AND AGE REPRESENTATION

Gender in esports was not emphasized in the written text in most of the articles. The words used to refer to esports professionals were mostly gender neutral, such as *professional gamers* or *players*. However, an impression of esports as a male-dominated domain is produced by the representations of the professionals, amateur gamers and fans. All the professional and amateur gamers referred to or interviewed in the articles were male, which contributes to the impression of esports as predominantly male. Furthermore, this impression is reinforced by the images used in the articles, which portray professional and amateur gamers, industry professionals and fans as mostly young males, even when gender is not included in the text.

Only one of the articles in the data emphasized the gender representation in esports. In this article by the Guardian, the reader is taken on a journey to the esports industry, as the writer describes his trip into the esports scenes of multiple countries. The article describes two different esports events, Intel Extreme Masters (IEM) in Katowice Poland and a League of Legends event in South Korea. In the article’s description of the IEM audience, their gender is emphasized;

Thousands of boys and young men (nearly everyone is male) gather to watch the Inter Extreme Masters finals, a kind of annual Olympics (Hattenstone 2017).

The writer makes an explicit remark about the audience’s gender in brackets, which highlights the audience’s gender and thus gives a strong impression that people who go to esports events are mostly male. Furthermore, the word choices of *boys* and *young men*, signify that the audience is young. The

portrayal of esports audience as young males is reinforced with an image of mostly young male spectators watching the games at the event.

Similarly, in the description of the League of Legends event's audience, their gender is emphasized;

The crowd is young and more than 50% female. This is surprising, because League of Legends, like all eSports, is male-dominated (Hattenstone 2017).

In this example, the words *young* and *female* used to characterize the audience. However, the writer also expresses that he is surprised by the fact that the audience is mostly female, which is indicative of the perception of esports as male. The underlying assumption behind the writer's generalization is that because esports is perceived to be male-dominated, the audience is also expected to be predominantly male. The descriptions of the two esports audiences also suggest that there are differences between Eastern and Western esports audiences.

The absence of female representation in media representations of esports reinforces the invisible norm of male gamer (Williams 2003: 531). Thus, the data appears to support Maclean's (2016: 30) claims about the minimalization of female voices in news discourse, which constructs men as the "real gamers". Williams (2003: 545) also touched on this issue:

If women were stereotyped as being uninterested or unable to grasp technology, men would retain power in that sphere. This is not to suggest that there was some sort of conspiracy to keep women in place. Rather, it is evident that the pursuit of science and technology continues to be socially constructed as male.

The topic of female gaming in this particular the Guardian article comes up frequently. An amateur male gamer is asked, why there are more male players than female, to which he replies:

Girls prefer chit-chatting in a coffee shop. Boys don't do much chit-chatting. (Hattenstone 2017).

In this excerpt, females are represented as drawn to other things other than gaming, thus as uninterested in it. The word choice of *chit-chatting* instead of *talking* or simply *chatting* draws on traditional gender stereotypes of talkative females and action-oriented males. *Chit-chatting* refers to talk or discussion about trivial matters, which the boys do not do. This implies that while the girls are doing something unimportant, the boys are doing something else, gaming.

All the articles, in which age is regarded, portray esports as the domain of youth. Words such as *young*, *youngsters*, *teenagers*, *twentysomethings*, which are indicative of young age, are repeated in the descriptions of amateur players and fans of esports. Images of gamers and fans in the articles portray young people, which supports textual representations of esports as youthful. It is worth noting that only two descriptions of professional gamers mention their age, which suggests that age is not

considered as relevant information in portraying professional gamers or that there is a presupposition that professional gamers are all young adults.

Some of the articles address the issue of age directly. The discourse in these articles depicts that the older generation perceives gaming differently than the younger generation, for example;

(pro gamers)... can seem like an alien concept to those over the age of about 25 (Sheen 2018).

In this example, understanding of esports and gaming is tied with age. The use of the term *alien concept* to those above a certain age, draws a line between generations, implying that anyone above the age of *about 25* does not understand or know what esports is about. It also implies that everyone below that age does.

...the older generation think of esports and gaming as something that people who have failed would do to waste their time, ...older people think games poison the youth and take time from their studies (Hattenstone 2017).

These two phrases in this example are suggestive of the older generation's perceptions on esports. Attributes such as failure, poisoning of youth and waste of time are associated with esports and gaming. These associations therefore imply that the older generation does not see value in gaming, whereas the younger generation does. Similar news frame, in which video games were perceived as bad displacement, taking time away from other more productive activities, was present in Williams' (2003) study. Professionalization of gaming contradicts this view by creating value in gaming, which will be discussed further in the following section.

## 4.2 AFFINITY WITH SPORTS AND PROFESSIONAL SUCCESS

The most prominent theme in the description of esports in the data was the affinity between traditional sports and esports. All the articles associated or compared esports with elements of traditional sports in their portrayals, which builds an image of professionalism and productiveness. This can be seen in the linguistic choices made in the articles. The word *as* is frequently used to make comparisons between esports and sports, which portrays them as equals. As an example of this the phrase, *competition is as real and the lifestyle as intense as it is for any traditional sports star*, recognizes esports' competition as real and comparable to sports, even though the competition takes place in a virtual space and has little physical component to it. Furthermore, the use of the word *as*, portrays a

professional gamers' lifestyle to that of a sports star. While the contents of these intense lifestyles are left open for reader's interpretation, a sports star's lifestyle is commonly associated with immense amount of training, travelling, a healthy diet and a strict schedule, thus implying that these elements are also present in the life of a professional gamer. These kinds of comparisons attributes professionalism and dedication to gaming in esports that is further reinforced by players' comments such as *it's like a job, we're dedicating our lives to this* and *we're not doing this for fun*. These phrases indicate a shift in how gaming is perceived. Words such as *job* and *dedication*, signify that gaming is no longer a fun leisure activity to these players, but instead it is seen as a serious profession that requires commitment, time and effort from the participants to succeed in it. As Narine & Grimes (2009: 333) pointed out, the professionalization of gaming reinforces the idea that child's play may become their work. Because working is generally considered as a productive activity, the view of gaming as a job challenges the perception attributed to the older generation that sees gaming as unproductive waste of time.

Esports affinity with sports is also portrayed in the images of the articles. Many of them are pictures of packed audiences cheering for their team, which resemble a sports match in various ways. Some of the people in the images are standing up, which indicates that they are excited or angry, thus, emotionally invested in the action. This is very common in sports, where fans tend to have a favorite team or a player that they root for or respectively express their dislike for the other team and its players. These images portray esports as evoking similar emotions in people, which also highlight its affinity with sports. Another example of this are images in which players are lifting a trophy, which were rather frequent as well. These types of images are extremely common in the news coverage of traditional sporting events, because they symbolize the achievement and prestige of something that is difficult to do.

On the other hand, some of articles seem to portray esports as a rival of traditional sports, competing in revenues, audiences and talent. An excerpt from The Sun article regarding the football legend, Ruud Gullit's involvement in esports is an example of how the image of rivalry is formed in the texts;

Gullit doesn't see eSports ever overtaking real football (Sheen 2018).

In this excerpt, the verb *overtaking* in this context is indicative of some type of competition that exists between football and esports, which then makes positions them as rivals. Gullit expresses that football will prevail in this competition. Furthermore, the use of the adjective *real* to separate *football* from esports, simultaneously highlights the established position of sports in society, while also implying that esports version of football is neither a sport nor real.

The portrayal of esports as a rival of sports is indicative of the elevated status of gaming in society. Gaming is seen as a threat to sports because it now attracts a wide audience, has increasing revenue and is extremely popular among youth, which could be watching or participating in sports. This concern can be seen in some of the other word choices frequently used in the articles, such as *traditional sports*, which similarly to the use of *real*, highlights the sports' established position in society.

Alongside the affinity with sports, the economic success of the industry is frequently highlighted in the articles. In some of the articles, esports' revenues, player salaries and tournament prize pools were the focus of the text and a total of eight of the ten articles address the economics of esports in one way or another. Perhaps the most prominent features exhibiting this were references to revenue estimations of the industry and comparisons of player salaries and tournament prize pools to those of sports athletes and competitions. For example, the Los Angeles Times wrote as follows:

The just-completed international DOTA 2 championship, for instance, boasted a total purse of over \$25 million, with the majority of that total contributed by individual gamers purchasing in-game items. That adds up to a considerably bigger purse than the ones available for say, the Daytona 500 (\$15.5 million) or the U.S. Open golf tournament (\$12.2 million). And it's several multiples of the total prize pool available to Tour de France competitors, who must cycle more than 2,000 miles over a period of three weeks to claim their share of the winnings. (Ingraham 2018).

In this excerpt, the money involved in an esports tournament is contrasted to the money involved in other large sports events, thus alluding that esports is more lucrative than motor sports, bicycling or golf. These remarks about esports indicate that gaming in esports is associated with profitability, which in turn reinforces the idea of gaming as a productive activity. However, presenting the fact that Tour de France competitors must cycle over 2000 miles for their earnings as additional information, alludes that the esports tournament's prize pool is perhaps undeservedly high for the effort required from the participants.

#### 4.3 ESPORTS AND MORAL PANIC

While representations celebrating the success of esports were the most prominent in the articles, there were four articles that also associated esports with addiction, promotion of violence, corruption and drug use. These representations feed into moral panic, where gaming is blamed for society's problems (Maclean 2016). For example, in one of the articles by Guardian, these ideas are initially presented in the headline: *The rise of esports: are addiction and corruption the price of its success?* Addiction and corruption, serious social and ethical problems, are presented as commodities that the agent, esports, uses in a transaction and in return receives success. It is implied that esports as the agent performing the action, is content with the trade that involves these serious issues, thus casting a moral

judgement. The implication here is that behind esports' success, lie problems of addiction and corruption that are being ignored.

In the article itself, representations of moral panic around gaming are fueled by comparing addiction to gaming to alcohol and drug addictions, which are known to have serious consequences to people's health and behavior.

Lee is in charge of the addiction department at the government-run psychiatric hospital. He used to deal mainly with drug and alcohol addiction but today it's all about gaming. (Hattenstone 2017).

In this example, reported speech of the doctor is used to make a knowledge claim about gaming addiction. The doctor has reportedly said that he has had to deal with drug and alcohol addicts in the past. The use of the phrase, *but today it's all about gaming*, indicates a change in the situation and that the doctor now deals with mostly gaming addicts, thus depicting gaming addiction as a larger problem than alcohol or drug addiction.

The article represents gaming as an addicting activity that leads to deviant behavior. This can be seen in the frequent use of words such as *addiction* and *addict* in the section of the article that deals with issues in gaming and esports, in which it presents addiction and corruption as the "flipside" of esports' success. In this part of the article, the deviant behavior attributed to gaming addiction is described by doctors interviewed for the article, creating an alarming image; *they lose interest in academic work, friends and family; they stop sleeping; they eat poorly or hardly at all*. These unhealthy behaviors are portrayed as being caused by gaming addiction, thus depicting gaming as potentially unhealthy. The portrayal of gaming as addictive causes concerns about health risks and further instigates fears around gaming. These representations reinforce the perception that gaming leads to deviant behavior, a notion that was also present in Williams' (2003) study.

Three articles in the data represent esports as promoting violence. One of the articles depicts video games in general as promoting violence and discrimination in the headline; *Esports will never be in Olympics because video games "promote violence and discrimination" says IOC chief*. Another article introduces esports as a topic through a shooting incident:

A gunman killed two people and wounded 11 others in a shooting at a video game tournament in Jacksonville on Sunday that ended with his suicide. The suspect was himself a gamer who was registered to compete in the tournament. His motive remains unknown. (Waack 2018)

As mentioned earlier, part of the CDA's framework for analysis includes the analysis of the processes of text production. News articles tend to follow the structure of "the inverted pyramid", in which the most substantial or important information is prioritized by presenting it in the beginning of the article. In this example, the article highlights the tragic shooting incident by presenting it as the most important information in the beginning of the article. However, the story of the incident is quickly backgrounded, as the rest of the article deals with comparisons between esports and sports. In this way, the structuring of the article undermines the shocking event by only using it as a bridge to cover the topic of esports, but also alludes that gaming and gamers can be violent.

In the third article, promotion of violence is implied through stories of gaming addicts. A doctor of a private clinic describes these stories, in which the gaming addicts end up killing someone or themselves; *there have been many tragic social cases that are related to game addiction*. The writer draws on the authority of the doctor and creates an image in which gaming and esports is associated with addiction with violent results. As pointed out earlier, these representations, which portray video games as a cause of society's problems, strengthen the moral panic around gaming.

Finally, two of the articles represent professional gamers and esports as corrupted. Both articles make an example of the case of Korean professional *Starcraft* player Life, real name Lee Seung-Hyun. In 2016, he was sentenced to prison for 18 months, fined for 70 million KRW<sup>1</sup> and banned for life from esports for "match-fixing", which is a term used for colluding the outcome of a match. In these portrayals, professional gamers take advantage of the unregulated gambling environment in esports by colluding with organized criminals or other players in order to make a profit, thus representing them as corrupt and dishonest.

"You see a lot of communication between professionals and big punters on these sites," says Maurer. "There are some high rollers on skin gambling sites that are talking to professionals." (Godfrey 2018).

In this excerpt, the communication between professional gamers and wagers reportedly occurs *a lot*. The implicit reason for the communication of these two parties is to fix the outcome of a match to earn money, which is dishonest and moreover, hurts the integrity of the competition. Furthermore, the use of present tense indicates that collusions between professional gamers and wagers is on-going, which suggests that despite the efforts of regulatory bodies, corruption is on-going and frequent in esports.

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<sup>1</sup> KRW stands for South Korean won, which is the currency of South Korea. 70 million KRW is roughly 61 650 US dollars.

## 5 CONCLUSION

This study examined the representations of gaming in esports in the online newspaper articles of the Guardian, Los Angeles Times and The Sun. The focus of the analysis, esports and professional gamers, was necessarily broad as no previous studies had been done on media representations of gaming in a professional context. The analysis used Fairclough's (2001: 91-139) framework for critical discourse analysis, in which attention was paid to lexical choices made by the writers of the texts. The results were then compared to previous research on the media representation of gaming by Williams (2003), Narine & Grimes (2009) and Maclean (2016) to see whether the representations reinforced or challenged the existing images around gaming and gamers.

Three prominent themes were identified from the data. Some of the representations reinforced the existing images and tropes around gaming whereas the others challenged them. Majority of the articles focused on the economic aspects of esports as well as its affinity with sports. These representations of gaming are fresh and challenge the existing ideas of gaming as bad displacement, essentially as a waste of time and money. On the other hand, the articles also portrayed esports as the domain of young males, which reinforces the perception of gaming as a male-dominated field. Although representations instigating moral panic around gaming were present in the data, they were in the minority and often backgrounded.

The data of this thesis consisted of texts of ten online newspaper articles, which is a very small sample, thus the results merely scratch the surface of the topic. Larger studies that include images in the analysis would offer a deeper insight into the representation of esports in the news media. The broad focus of the thesis also affected the depth of the analysis. Focusing solely on either the professional gamers or esports would likely yield more thorough results. Despite its limitations, this thesis provides some insight into the representations of esports and professional gamers in the online newspapers, which affect the construction of gamer identities.

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