

Beyond the Desk: Professional Qualities and Hosting Strategies in Contemporary Esports Broadcasting: Taking League of Legends Hosts as Example

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ABSTRACT

Esports has become one of the most dynamic sectors of global media, where hosts serve not only as commentators but also as cultural mediators and community figures. Unlike traditional sports commentary, which prioritizes authority and neutrality, esports hosting emerged in participatory ecosystems such as Twitch, Bilibili, and YouTube, where immediacy, humor, and interaction are essential. This paper examines League of Legends (LoL) hosting through case studies from the LPL, LCK, LEC, and LCS, focusing on Iris (Xiran), Christina (Songqi), Wendy (Xiaan), Ji-seon (Park Ji-seon), Sjokz, Quickshot, and Dash. The study identifies three core professional qualities: updated game literacy, personal development, and improvisational skill, and three strategic orientations: seizing hot topics, aligning with international standards, and cultivating personal style. Drawing on McLuhan's media ecology, Hofstede's cultural dimensions, and Nida's functional equivalence, the paper argues that esports hosting reflects a hybrid communicative paradigm where credibility and relatability must coexist in real time.

KEYWORDS

Esports hosting; League of Legends; media ecology; Multilingual communication; Cultural mediation; Integrated media; Professional qualities; Audience interaction

1 Introduction

Sports hosting has long been defined by institutional authority and standardized narration. Traditional commentators, such as Martin Tyler at the FIFA World Cup or Zhang Bin at the Beijing Winter Olympics, embodied neutrality and clarity but often lacked interactivity valued by younger, digitally native audiences.

By contrast, esports-particularly League of Legends-developed in participatory media cultures. On platforms like Twitch and Bilibili, audiences actively shape discourse, making hosts not only narrators but also entertainers, cultural mediators, and symbolic peers. Figures such as Iris and Christina in the LPL, Sjokz in the LEC, and Dash in the LCS illustrate how esports hosting blends tactical analysis with relatability and humor.

This paper examines esports hosting within the framework of media convergence, guided by McLuhan's media ecology^[1], Hofstede's cultural dimensions^[2], and Nida's translation theory^[3]. It asks three questions: How does esports hosting differ linguistically from traditional sports? What professional qualities define successful LoL hosts? And what strategies sustain engagement in a globalized, participatory environment?

2 Research on language communication in sports hosting

2.1 Traditional sports hosting

The previous work in sports hosting focuses on authority and accuracy, neutral, and has used a communication style adapted to a mass broadcast audience. For football, basketball, the Olympics, etc., the commentators' speech must be faithful descriptions with situating the action of the sport in statistical or historical terms. Typically, the rhetorical register, is serious and there is a low density of humor or colloquial language. While hosts perform the role of expert, journalistic narrators through which they bring the spectacle of sport into the viewers' experience, they seldom perform as fellow fan with the viewers.

For example, the FIFA World Cup 2022 in Qatar, the English commentator Martin Tyler in his commentary style was restrained and very informative, complementing real-time statistics with anecdotal football historical references – and providing sufficient evidence, without playing it up. The 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics also demonstrated how this model can play out in the Chinese setting. Host Zhang Bin presented to a national television audience of millions with standard Mandarin focused on clarity and inclusivity. His style was indeed without comedic irony, explaining the scoring and athletes but avoiding anything digressive into pun, or cultural insider jokes. These illustrate how traditional sports hosts are supposed to be "cultural transmitters," manifesting authority of the national media^[4].

It is efficient to keep the social credibility yet, it is still somewhat retro in a digital age, where the socialization in the milieu of interactivity makes the audience younger and sometimes considers the older commentary style as old fashion, rigid or even banal. This contributes to distance the host from the audience discourse. Therefore, traditional sports broadcasting has experimented with participatory journalism – recent NBA Finals have experimented with social media

interaction, where sideline hosts respond to fan questions in real time. This shows traditional sports adopting features of esports broadcasting – but that the discourse style of traditional sports TV revolves around neutrality and authority ^[5], setting traditional sports apart from esports where interactive and humorous features are also adopted at birth.

2.2 The distinctiveness of esports hosting

Compared to traditional broadcasting, esports hosting presents an entirely different model of broadcasting. As esports is emerging from the participatory environment in the digital ecosystem, e.g., Twitch, Bilibili and YouTube, it is different in terms of discursive practices by not being simply viewed as passive users but as a co-creator of discourse, then the language style for esports hosting is in the mix of technical analysis, humor, slang and close involvement. Hosting implies also simultaneously serving the role of expert, entertainer and community mediator.

This is obvious even in LCK (League of Legend Champion Korea). Jeon “Caster Jun” Yongjun is well known as his impassioned commentary tying strategies and emotions, and Ji-seon (Park Ji-seon) who facilitates culture and language divides when translating Korean and English in international tournaments. Such is her translation which conforms to Nida’s principle^[3] of functional equivalence, where not only the plain meaning but the humor and affective feelings are translated to create an affective response in global viewers akin to what the Korean audiences enjoy.

The LEC (League of Legends European Championship) is the other example we have of separateness. Eefje “Sjokz” Depoortere plays on a sweet combination of interviewing interviewee + smart talk + allusion to internet memes or social-media phenomenon + generates community feel. Trevor “Quickshot” Henry is his serviceable partner in balancing as his stories serve a much more analytic standpoint to situating things in the context of Europe’s history of competing long before LoL was a thing. Jointly, they illustrate that hosting an esports requires a toggling of seriousness vs. playfulness in accordance with context.

League of Legends Pro League (LPL) exemplifies both professionalization and cultural currency. Iris (Xiran) and Christina (Songqi) bridge strategic review and Internet culture with a conversational tone, punctuating their serious business reviews with their generation’s Internet buzzwords from Bilibili. At the 2024 World Championship (S14), Wendy (Xiaan) also appeared in Chinese broadcast segments, where she showed resilience during delays by improvising with humor and conversational interaction, sustaining audience engagement despite technical interruptions.

All of these suggest McLuhan’s media ecology principle that “the medium is the message” ^[1]. Esports hosting is formed not only through contents but also through the platform upon which it is hosted. Different from the top-down of other sports where authority is conveyed, the hierarchy in esports hosting blurs from top-to-down, aligning the host with both expert and co-equal status. Being simultaneously believable as an analyst and relatable as a member of the community has worked particularly well for gaining younger, more digitally native fans.

2.3 Current state of sports hosting

The current state of sports hosting reveals an ongoing hybridization between traditional and esports models. As media convergence accelerates and audiences’ fragment across platforms, hosts must now integrate the authority of traditional broadcasting with the interactivity and cultural resonance of esports. This dual pressure has reshaped expectations: viewers demand both rigor and relatability, both credibility and community ^[5].

From the more traditional perspective, we’ve also seen broadcasters adopting some of the ideas from the esports space. For instance, in the NBA 2024 Finals, sideline hosts followed social media feeds and answered fans’ questions during a game in real-time, presenting fan interactions even in a typical broadcast. Analogously, state media commentators did the same for esports when it entered in the medal competitions for the 2023 Asian Games in Hangzhou as well, trying out new words from the internet and fancy graphics on screen, aiming for a young audience, yet keeping the appearance of institutional power at all times. Thus, media institutions are adapting, in a certain way, to the participatory expectations of esports.

Esports has also absorbed aspects of traditional sports professionalism. In the LCS, structured analysis with data visualization and post-match interviews has become routine, reflecting the influence of mainstream sports coverage. In the LPL, hosts such as Iris (Xiran) and Christina (Songqi) have introduced formal opening monologues and clear storylines reminiscent of CCTV broadcasting. At the same time, they remain highly interactive on platforms like Bilibili and Huya, responding to live chat and referencing fanmade memes. This blend illustrates the need to balance analytical authority with digital relatability.

From a theoretical perspective, this hybridization illustrates McLuhan’s media ecology in practice: as new digital platforms reshape communicative environments, even established sports must evolve ^[1]. At the same time, audiences increasingly expect authenticity and emotional connection, consistent with Rowe’s ^[6] argument that media sport is a cultural performance rather than just a technical report. Esports hosting exemplifies this convergence most vividly, as it was “born digital” yet increasingly borrows institutional practices to sustain legitimacy.

In sum, the present stage of sports hosting demonstrates that authority without relatability risks alienation, while entertainment without credibility risks trivialization. The convergence of traditional and esports practices signals the rise

of a new communicative paradigm, where multiple strategies coexist and adapt to shifting technological and cultural landscapes.

3 A study on the professional qualities of esports hosts in the context of integrated media — taking league of legends hosts as an example

3.1 Up-to-date game understanding

Up to date game knowledge is one of the most important attributes a League of Legends (LoL) host requires on a platform with a field full of moving parts. LoL is not a sport where the rules remained unchanged for at least the lifetime of a rule book. On the contrary, frequently updated patches and balanced champion (champs for short) and item design updates change game play and strategies within mere weeks. Such transformations entail that hosts must assume the role of a mediator—adapting the technical description to content narratives for mixed heterogeneous audiences ^[7].

The 2025 LPL First Split illustrates this challenge. An important mid-season patch had adjusted jungle itemization and pushed the meta from early-game aggression to composition with scaling. Iris (Xiran), Christina (Songqi) framed the shift not with reporting of patch numbers but situating changes in larger narratives. For instance, in placing the updates into a “five-on-five orchestra” metaphor, they articulated the champion synergies they introduced in ways that resonate with classic Chinese playstyles. Using the storytime communication mode, Iris and Christina adopted Nida’s principle of functional equivalence ^[3], where communication aims to achieve the same influence, not exact replica, of the original. Incorporating the metaphor and history, Iris and Christina provided clarity for newcomers while offering depth for veteran fans.

Younger hosts such as Wendy (Xiaan) contribute by taking on a peer-learning role. Rather than speaking only as an authority, she often raises the kinds of questions casual viewers might have—for example, whether a patch affects a player’s champion pool or how a draft strategy adapts to new updates. By pointing these questions, she reflects audience curiosity while prompting players to share expert perspectives. This approach shows Rowe’s view ^[6] of media sport as a cultural dialogue, where meaning emerges through interaction between professionals and the public.

Similar trends can be seen all over the world. Jeon “Caster Jun” Yong-jun in the LCK integrates tactical language and performance-oriented inflection to make fans both knowledgeable about and emotionally invested in the game, while Trevor “Quickshot” Henry in the LEC situates champion selections with respect to European history or other historically meaningful moments of European metagame, such as “he brought up those memorable teams”. Both reflect McLuhan’s insight that “the medium is the message”^[1]: esports as a live digital medium emphasizes immediacy and narrative flexibility.

Up-to-date game understanding is not simply about memorizing patch notes. It is a communicative skill that integrates technical accuracy, narrative imagination, and cultural sensitivity. For hosts, credibility derives not only from knowing the mechanics but from their ability to bridge the expert domain of professional play and the broader fan community. In a volatile industry, game literacy forms the bedrock upon which all other professional qualities rest.

3.2 High-quality personal development

In addition to technical abilities, the professional positioning of hosts is reliant on the individuality building, such as charisma, feeling, professionalism and multi-platform adaptability in a media environment under integrated conditions, where broadcast media, social media and short media all coexist. Hosts are not measured according to their performance in the matches any more. Rather, they are measured by the consistency and dependability of the image they project in numerous interactions contexts ^[5].

One specific example we highlight is Iris (Xiran), she is known for her calm stage presence, and we found in conversation that she still has excellent emotional intelligence, especially during her ability to balance a request for strategy with consideration about other players’ feelings. For instance, during the 2024 World Championship qualifier (S14), Though not on the European main stage, she contributed to the official Chinese-language coverage, where her trilingual flexibility in Mandarin, English, and Korean allowed her to balance tactical analysis with empathetic interviews, reinforcing her role as a cultural mediator.

On the other hand, Wendy (Xiaan) is part of the new wave of hosts who extend themselves more extensively across platforms with cross-platform identity management, providing her personal updates, commentaries in short videos and live streaming moments of inspiration on Weibo as well as Bilibili. Her identity management helps to keep the same lively and affable presentation for both online audience and the fans during performances, thus bolstering her closer connection to young viewers whose consumption of esports content are usually confined in online spaces. The third example bears witness to Hutchins and Rowe’s ^[6] claim that digital sport flattens the broadcast and networked community distinction, thus demanding hosts to sustain credibility across contexts.

In contrast, Christina (Songqi) represents the firm professionalism of the LPL’s middle generation. She enjoys a reputation for reliability and coolness, particularly in tense competitions or mechanical stoppages. Although she is less

experimental than younger counterparts, Christina's stability offers comfort and familiarity in a fast-changing world, in keeping with Rowe's ^[6] observation of sport commentaries as cultural reassurance amid uncertainties. As shown from her example, personal growth happens in a multidimensional way: a host is praised for empathy and interactivity in some aspect, trust and stability in the others.

Abroad the same phenomenon is visible. Eefje "Sjokz" Depoortere in the LEC has established a broad portfolio beyond being a host—she also runs podcasts, advocates on behalf of her community, and supports that community. In the LCS, James "Dash" Patterson used his time as a host to cast a wider digital net for himself: producing talk shows, providing fan engagement through collaborative content. Both depict Taylor ^[7] claim that professionalization in esports as well as in conventional gaming takes into consideration not just technical proficiency, but also active branding management.

To summarize, a successful host must take personal growth seriously, almost as seriously as the competitive landscape. They must develop into known characters with known levels of familiarity, who are grounded by a kind of trust that depends on consistency and communication, which aligns with both a user's expectation for digital validation and with stage presence in a digital setting.

3.3 Strong on-the-spot performance

Hosting also requires a high level of ability to function in an unforgiving, live and unpredictable environment. Unlike any recorded content, esports events are inherently volatile: technical glitches, servers going down or emotional blow outs can halt the flow of a broadcast in an instant. In this situation, the hosts' improvisational ability, poise and creative skills can become the biggest asset or hindrance in keeping the audience in suspense. On-stage success is no accident – it is the result of practiced skill and professional preparation.

In the 2024 League of Legends World Championship knockout stage in Paris, technical delays—common in large-scale esports—were effectively managed by hosts through humor and audience interaction, underscoring the importance of improvisational skill in live performance. Wendy (Xiaan) chose not to let anger take control but switched to humor and cracked jokes with the casters and players on stage, as well as interacted with the fan base via the lighthearted comedy. She used her turn-taking break to elaborate how flexibility and wit can turn stall time into a rich signaling resource. It bears the spirit of McLuhan^[1] media ecology: as time convenience reigns in the virtual space, instabilities are built-in structure, not an anomaly.

In the LPL, experienced hosts like Iris (Xiran) and Christina (Songqi) have also shown resilience. When a domestic series was disrupted by network issues, Iris improvised with a quick "meta recap" of recent patch changes, while Christina kept the audience engaged with lighthearted remarks. This mix of analysis and humor helped sustain attention and reinforced their credibility as cultural mediators. As Rowe ^[6] notes, audiences value authenticity as much as information, and such unscripted moments create a sense of realism that strengthens the bonds between fans and hosts.

Similar approaches can be found elsewhere. Jeon "Caster Jun" Yong-jun, in the LCK, heightens tension with narration, so that slow and paused games maintain drama. Sjokz, in the LEC, turns pauses into live Q&A, while Trevor "Quickshot" Henry keeps players entertained with tiny tales of analysis. At the LCS, James "Dash" Patterson has developed his lightning fast banter to keep downtime (technical or otherwise) to a minimum and the community engaged on-stream.

Strong in-the-moment execution completes the host's dual duties of performer and cultural authority, necessitating emotional self-management, generative improvisation, and professional preparation, which turns uncertainty to advantage. In the process, a host keeps the live element of esports ticking along and solidifies the intimacy and sense of shared moment, absent from traditional sports, of digital sport.

4 Hosting strategies of esports hosts in the era of new media

4.1 Seizing hot topics and fostering positive interaction

Furthermore, in the era of new media, viral memes, hashtags, and videos are shaping the audience's consumption habit of e-sports. On the platforms like Weibo, Bilibili, Twitch, Twitter/X, in addition to being the audience, the fans are shaping their perspectives of e-sports by posting the contents as we speak, which is always one of the most fun moments in viewing live streams. For a host, this scenario puts him in a tough position on how to incorporate the hottest trends in the official stream and consolidate the audience's energy while maintaining its "serious" image. Those hosts who can capture the viral discourse and move it in productive engagement are best positioned ^[5].

The LPL provides clear illustrations. Hosts like Iris (Xiran) and Christina (Songqi) often bring memes or trending jokes into post-game interviews. When a champion became the subject of a viral parody, for instance, Iris turned it into a playful interview question, encouraging players to share their take. This approach both acknowledged fan creativity and brought community humor into the official broadcast. Wendy (Xiaan) follows a similar path, drawing on fan culture but steering clear of divisive themes. By turning online trends into constructive dialogue, LPL hosts reinforce their connection with a digitally native audience.

Examples of this practice exist elsewhere internationally as well. Within the LEC, a common method is asking Eefje

“Sjokz” Depoortere which question from social media to pick and then playing it for her when she enters the live feed. Eefje “Sjokz” Depoortere selects each one, and carefully edits them to reflect a community perspective while filtering out those that seem negative. Trevor “Quickshot” Henry quotes from memes generated by Twitch chat during his streams, albeit framed in analytical or comical ways, in order to avoid offending his viewers. For instance, in the LCK, Ji-seon (Park Ji-seon) performs another model: she recognizes fan emotion but expresses it through elegant language, translating spontaneous response to fit the demands of the institution.

Theoretically, McLuhan’s ^[1] notion that the medium is the message also applies. The deliberate choice of language signals inclusion: when hosts switch between Mandarin, English, and Korean, they communicate a symbolic invitation for audiences across cultural boundaries to participate. This inclusivity consolidates esports’ identity as a global cultural product, positioning leagues not just as national competitions but as cosmopolitan stages.

To put it shortly, to be international is much more than to be translated: to perform international multilingualism, cultural awareness, professional openness, as to present broadcasts in a way that will resonate with people all over the world. Acting as a mediation between languages and cultures, hosts make international the very nature of esports, validating the cultural activity as genuinely global.

4.2 Aligning with international standards

Esports itself is a very cross-national activity — professional league and global esports tournaments such as the League of Legends World Championship attracts participants and spectators from dozens of different nations. Such transnationality requires hosts to be linguistically fluent, intercultural sensitive, and professionally adaptable. Being able to align with national conventions is not only a question of fluency in a language but also a question of symbolic communication – of making visible that the culture of esports is a part of the world’s cultural space ^[2].

This need became more acute when the 2024 World Championship (S14) was set in Berlin, Paris, and London. Iris (Xiran) had a trilingual capability because she could speak interviewees in Mandarin, English and Korean. For instance, interviewing LCK players in Korean; for World broadcast, doing English framing; for Chinese broadcast, doing Chinese framing. The smooth code-switching here show Hofstede’s ^[2] cultural dimensions in action: accommodating Korean high-context politeness, Western low-context directness and Chinese national representation expectations. And her behavior represented that multilingual hosting cannot be simply translation, but active cultural negotiation.

The LCK also presents yet another model in Ji-seon (Park Ji-seon). She has established herself not only as a host but also a translator through employing Nida’s ^[3] functional-equivalence principle, that is, translating while retaining humor, tone and emotion as she chose. For instance, her translation when an outside player made a joke in an interview was not what she actually said but it also reflected humor, tone, and affect, so that Korean fans felt the same result. This is how, instead, she instituted the principle of translation as cultural mediation, thereby sustaining the inclusivity of the LCK stage.

Finally, even Leagues within Europe and North America achieve alignment with the international audience. Sjokz, of the LEC league, navigates multilingual interviews and rephrases lengthy answers into a relatable English tone, while also keeping in mind the cultural contexts of the players. Trevor “Quickshot” Henry’s work toward stories about players are adapted for an international audience. His storytelling relies less upon jargon-heavy English. Within the LCS, professional values include the way in which James “Dash” Patterson tells stories that are accessible not just to domestic but also global fans. Taylor ^[7] uses these examples to point to how the professionalization of esports involves learning to become cross-culturally accessible as much as to attain technical mastery.

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4.3 Highlighting personal style and enhancing individual competence

The broader contexts around esports broadcasts, formed by international norms and memes culture alike, aside, the longer-term career prospects for a host ultimately hinge on establishing their own personal brand and ongoing professional development. For esports hosters, unlike many other commentators, even “even-handed,” career longevity is a combination of their own charisma and a need to reflect ongoing professional self-development. Fans do not merely engage with the game, they develop affections for the communicative personae of the most preferred hosts whose manner becomes a feature of the pleasure service ^[7].

The LPL offers a spectrum of styles. Wendy (Xiaan) brings a youthful and approachable energy, often using light humor and trilingual greetings to engage international audiences. Her casual expressions make her especially relatable to

younger fans on platforms like Bilibili. By contrast, Iris (Xiran) conveys a more authoritative yet warm professionalism, supported by her trilingual skills and empathetic interviews, which resonate with both seasoned viewers and newcomers. Christina (Songqi) represents steadiness and reliability, offering reassurance during tense or technically disrupted moments. Together, they demonstrate how diverse styles can coexist and complement one another within the same league.

Abroad, style also matters. Eefje “Sjokz” Depoortere in the LEC is well known for developing her own brand through a blend of composed professionalism and relatability, further cemented by social media presence and community advocacy. Trevor “Quickshot” Henry is known for his fast-paced energetic narration, which takes analytical content and turn it into dramatic storytelling. In the LCS, James “Dash” Patterson puts stock in having a quick sense of humor and doing much to improvise narration while demonstrating charisma and also managing broadcasts in a coherent manner. In the LCK, Ji-seon (Park Ji-seon) has been praised not only for her empathetic style of interviewing but also for her culturally sensitive translating that led to her emerging as a type of representative figure of Korean esports more broadly than being merely a translator.

Theoretically, Hofstede’s^[2] cultural dimension of individualism v/s collectivism may shed light into this case. It is likely that hosts will be in a position where they have to weigh in developing a strong sense of personal identity (individualism), with the need to represent the league or region (collectivism). To continue our Wendy story, she displays her playful identity but with the collective responsibility of representing the LPL brand. Analogously, Sjokz employs charisma at the person and authority at the institution level as face of the LEC.

Meanwhile, McLuhan’s^[1] media ecology reminds us that the style of delivery is inseparable from the message. A host’s humor, tone, or linguistic choices influence how audiences interpret both the game and the cultural identity of the league itself. Style is not decorative; it is constitutive of meaning. By enhancing personal competence—through language skills, improvisation, or digital media engagement—hosts ensure that their style is not superficial but anchored in credibility.

To conclude, we find that personalizing style and reinforcing competence are mutually reinforcing approaches. An identifiable style secures attention in the competing mass media space and, consequently, only persistent competence turns this attention into durable trust. The esports hosts who combine an individual personal style with professional behavior serve as good examples of two-faceted host function: the mediator/entertainer. As the industry’s main talent at the intersection between change and scope, their applicability becomes relevant.

5 Conclusions

Esports hosting demonstrates how communication has evolved under media convergence and globalization. While traditional sports emphasized neutrality and authority, esports has developed a hybrid model that combines professional rigor with interactivity and relatability^[5].

This study identified three essential qualities for League of Legends hosts: up-to-date game understanding, which allows complex patch changes to be translated into accessible narratives^[7]; personal development, which extends credibility through empathy, brand-building, and cross-platform presence; and on-the-spot performance, which enables resilience and authenticity during live unpredictability^[6]. In addition, three strategic orientations—seizing hot topics, aligning with international standards, and highlighting personal style—illustrate how hosts thrive in participatory and transnational contexts.

Ultimately, esports hosts are not just narrators but cultural mediators. They bridge expertise and relatability, national identity and global inclusivity, institutional authority and fan culture. As esports continues to expand, the communicative practices of its hosts will remain central to shaping audience experience and legitimizing esports as a global cultural form.

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