

The Communicative Value and Challenges Faced by Commentary in Esports

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ABSTRACT

This paper is grounded in communication studies and media theory perspectives. Key Analysis of the Information Dissemination Function, Contextual Emotional Construction Function, Cultural Transmission Function, and Industry Synergy Function of Esports Commentary, Revealing the profound dilemmas encountered by esports commentators in the process of professionalisation, standardisation, and sustainable development, and propose a viable improvement pathway and development direction for addressing the relevant issues.

KEYWORDS

Esports; Commentary; Communication value

1 Introduction

Esports is one of the most dynamic cultural phenomena of the digital age. From its origins as virtual gaming entertainment on the internet to becoming a globally recognised competitive sport today. In terms of user numbers and the scale of events, esports possesses immense power. Esports has also fostered a new form of cultural expression and social interaction. This manifests itself in every conceivable aspect of daily life at all times. Concurrently, the standardisation and mainstreaming of the esports industry, coupled with the increasingly prominent role of esports event broadcasting systems. Commentary serves as the core medium throughout the entire event's communication process. To a large extent, it determines spectators' perception of the event, the mobilisation of their emotions, and their cultural identification.

2 Literature review and theoretical foundations

2.1 Current state of research on esports commentary

A significant number of academic studies have already addressed issues related to esports commentary. Overall, however, it remains in a relatively weak state. Overseas approaches often focus on media dissemination and fan culture perspectives, the primary analysis focuses on how to enhance the sense of immersion and belonging during the viewing experience, highlighting commentary on how it shapes communities ^[1]. A small number of studies have applied traditional sports commentary models to esports to investigate how commentary influences audience satisfaction. Some studies focus on the national perspective, exploring the linguistic characteristics, pragmatic strategies, and professional ethics of esports commentators ^[2]. Although expressions specific to esports commentary have been proposed, most of these are statements about the current state of esports commentary rather than explanations of the pathways for dissemination. Theoretical frameworks are mostly fragmented references, failing to form a systematic explanatory system. Most focus on explaining how to deliver commentary, while there is less discussion on how commentary can serve cultural dissemination or cultural reproduction, or even facilitate the transmission of ideas through commentary ^[3].

2.2 Relevant theoretical foundations

Applying the “uses and gratifications” theory from communication studies to analyze the motivations behind viewers' engagement with esports events and their focus on specific commentators reveals an understanding of audience needs. Therefore, the design of commentary content should effectively communicate by addressing the motivating factors at the audience's demand level. Agenda-setting theory reveals how linguistic referential techniques influence audience attention toward specific scenarios in competitive arenas. As the commentator serving as the voice of the game, they are neither mere spectators on the sidelines nor purely neutral outsiders. Rather, it involves being present at the scene, selecting and amplifying events and details to guide the audience's thinking toward one or several specific points. Moreover, it can almost be said that it is precisely these spoken words that provide the audience with the crucial moment for speech. Framework theory posits that commentary is not neutral transmission or descriptive language dissemination; it is saturated with meaning, involving numerous aspects such as narrative style, rhetorical devices, and value assumptions. Within the narrative framework constructed for this purpose, the success or failure of a team fight is

transformed into a process of heroic triumph or fateful defeat through certain justifications ^[4]. In traditional sports commentary theory, models concerning the “information-entertainment” equilibrium attribute and commentator role positioning—such as objective recorder, emotional guide, and expert analyst—provide a potential reference for the characterization of esports commentators ^[5].

3 The diverse communication value of esports commentary

3.1 Information decoding and cognitive guidance value

Most esports titles are built upon an extremely intricate and complex system of rules, relying on precise skill execution and profound strategic thinking. This often results in professional players' actions and team coordination occurring at speeds far beyond the comprehension of the average spectator. In this context, commentary serves as a cognitive intermediary that helps everyone clarify the issue. By promptly providing everyone with a comprehensive skill set for a specific operation, determining map control through designated terrain, and conveying knowledge about who should obtain which resources and why teams are arranged in such a manner, translating game mechanics into familiar tactical frameworks in people's minds, transforming the abstract into the concrete. It addresses the questions of “what happened, why it happened, and what it means.”

3.2 The value of emotional rendering and atmosphere creation

The value of esports tournaments lies not only in their technical and tactical aspects but also in their rich dramatic tension and immense emotional impact. This is achieved through the commentators' synchronous celebration—a symphony of speech tempo, volume, intonation, pauses, and choice of words. At a pivotal moment, or following a spectacular team fight, or during a comeback, or as a broadcast highlight, pace, volume, and pauses all come into play, and it is precisely this expressive variation that determines whether a particular statement can inspire people to shout with fervor or evoke a response of restraint and desolation from the audience. Stirring various emotions within the audience evokes profound emotional engagement in every spectator, creating a deep emotional resonance within their souls. In this context, coupled with the semi-transparent nature of bullet comments and the immersive atmosphere created by their sheer volume, the commentator emerges as the master of the entire virtual scene. This process achieves a “synchronous carnival,” forging an emotional resonance among viewers. Even when apart, we can still feel connected. The final outcome of the game is merely a trivial symbol.

3.3 Cultural construction and community cohesion value

Unlike sports referees who call fouls or determine the validity of calls, esports commentary is a form of cultural production. After years of broadcasts, viewers have memorized a vast array of distinctive phrases, catchphrases, wordplay (“memes”), and various forms of playful language, which have spread throughout the audience community. Moreover, it has become a label for a certain segmented identity. Many people use phrases like “this move is so satisfying” or “absolutely brilliant” to express their approval of certain actions. In essence, they are weaving their personal preferences into the fabric of narrative production. Moreover, by naming players, defining their representative tactics, and sharing their backstories, we participate in crafting the narrative of esports legends. This approach ensures that matches aren't solely about measuring victory or defeat. Through commentator-driven storytelling, competitions gain deeper textual significance—embodying themes of perseverance, resilience, and breakthroughs.

3.4 Commercial promotion and industry-driven value

Commentary serves as the content monetization segment within the esports industry chain, featuring inherent advertising placement opportunities. Whether through on-air mentions, soft recommendations, or contextual references, seamless integration can be effortlessly achieved. Brand logos and product names may appear frequently in commentators' daily commentary, generating significant commercial value. Commentators' evaluations of players and teams impact their public image and commercial influence. Positive assessments boost player popularity, driving merchandise sales, endorsement deals, and other aspects of the fan economy. The viewing experience and discussion buzz surrounding an event largely hinge on the commentators' ability to command the narrative. Often, even unremarkable matches can generate massive traffic and become trending topics thanks to the commentators' witty remarks. This marks a new type of esports event distinct from traditional sports competitions. The platform's traffic volume, user dwell time, and paid content conversion rates are all closely tied to commentators. As such, commentators themselves serve as content creators, driving content production and amplifying the industry's value. They profoundly

influence multiple aspects including event operations, brand marketing, and user growth.

4 Core challenges facing esports commentators

4.1 The challenge of professional imbalance

The professionalism of esports commentators lies in their thorough understanding and insight into game mechanics, their ability to analyze tactical and technical issues, and their skill in effectively handling unexpected events during matches. However, due to the existence of “technical-oriented” and “entertainment-oriented” commentators within the gaming commentary industry, technical-oriented commentators tend to focus on data-driven and technical analysis. To some extent, this approach may be rather obscure and difficult for the average person to understand. Meanwhile, “entertainment-style” commentary focuses on guiding viewers through emotional engagement, tone, and linguistic humor. This approach often leads to situations where the commentary context spirals out of control, resulting in overly emotional outbursts or excessively gimmicky performances. Striking a balance between these two aspects is challenging. On one hand, it may result in commentators failing to delve deeply into the game's background story; on the other, it prevents commentary from maintaining long-term freshness. As the game version undergoes iterative updates, the knowledge of game commentators must also be continuously updated and refined to avoid misjudgments or rambling during commentary.

4.2 The absence of norms and the challenge of language ethics

Esports commentary exhibits strong linguistic segmentation, featuring numerous gaming slang terms, abbreviations, and internet-derived expressions. While this approach may foster a sense of community among existing fans, it also creates barriers that make content inaccessible to new audiences. An excessive reliance on “memes” as a cultural phenomenon can lead to linguistic homogeneity and stylistic monotony, potentially undermining linguistic creativity and expressiveness. Additionally, some commentators during live broadcasts abuse their right to free speech by humiliating players, disclosing their private information, or making malicious remarks about off-field matters—practices that readily provoke widespread viewer dissatisfaction. Additionally, certain comments themselves—whether they involve gender discrimination, regional prejudice, or descriptions of physical appearance—can easily cross the boundaries of social ethics. In the absence of unified professional standards and terminology guidelines, boundaries can easily become blurred. Under the influence of traffic-driven rules, some commentators may sacrifice the seriousness and public nature of their broadcasts in pursuit of sensational topics to attract attention. Language standardization directly impacts an individual's professional image and, more significantly, affects the brand image of the event and the reputation of the entire industry.

4.3 The challenges of technological evolution and multi-media adaptation

Advancements in communication technology are driving a shift in content consumption patterns. Short-video platforms demand concise, impactful commentary with key highlights delivered upfront. Commentary must balance coverage of the main stage with multiple camera angles while presenting differentiated information. During interactive livestreams, commentators need to adapt their focus and adopt new delivery styles in response to fragmented audience questions, demanding greater production awareness from content creators. Traditional monaural, linearly structured narration models are ill-suited for fragmented, personalized, and interactive content consumption patterns. They require cross-platform content planning capabilities, employing distinct stylistic approaches and information densities tailored to different media characteristics. Following the adoption of new technologies like virtual reality and augmented reality, content creators will further need to transition from “sound-dominated” approaches to “spatial storytelling.” Consequently, the ability to embrace these new technologies will also influence whether narration can be effectively received by audiences.

4.4 Challenges of an immature professional ecosystem

The professionalization of esports commentary has yet to take shape. Most commentators have not undergone rigorous onboarding training or ongoing skill development and updates, relying instead on personal experience and opportunities provided by platforms for cultivation. Without clear standards and development paths for career advancement, it becomes impossible to retain talent, and career development lacks both longevity and stability. The notion that esports commentary is a short-lived career path is quite common, with many viewing it as something one can only do for a limited time. They fail to recognize that it also holds long-term development potential. The commentary

industry lacks a standardized compensation system and corresponding welfare benefits, making it easy for concerns or difficulties to arise during work. Compared to traditional sports commentary, esports commentary still lacks sufficient authority and professionalism, and its social recognition remains to be enhanced. The collaboration among clubs, event organizers, and platforms in talent development and rights protection remains inadequate, resulting in a fragmented esports ecosystem with numerous unstable factors.

5 Countermeasures and outlook

5.1 Strategies for addressing challenges

5.1.1 Internal enhancement

The professional development of esports commentators requires a systematic foundation for talent cultivation. Only through scientific education and training can a steady stream of commentators with comprehensive skills be produced. At present, the industry largely relies on individual experience and self-taught methods, lacking a unified knowledge framework and competency standards. This has resulted in a wide variation in the quality of commentators' capabilities. Colleges, vocational training institutions, and esports clubs can collaborate with major game companies to develop specialized courses covering game mechanics analysis, tournament tactics, communication theory, verbal expression techniques, mental adjustment skills, and on-the-spot improvisation. This approach enables tiered training from beginner to advanced levels. Additionally, training content must be updated promptly to reflect version changes and tournament developments. Regular live drills and experience-sharing workshops should also be conducted to ensure commentators possess strong control over match situations and the ability to deliver logically structured commentary. Beyond professional skills, it is imperative to strengthen ethical education for commentary practitioners, enhancing their professional integrity and sense of responsibility. They must not lose their most valuable commentary composure by speaking recklessly out of excitement or anger. Finally, establish a performance evaluation and certification system for relevant personnel. For those who complete the training, staff will be granted corresponding professional qualifications to meet the industry's entry requirements.

5.1.2 External standards

The lack of industry standards has resulted in low credibility and social recognition for esports commentators. The esports industry requires an authoritative association to spearhead the development of the "Professional Conduct Guidelines for Esports Commentators," in collaboration with major tournament organizers, live streaming platforms, and media outlets. These guidelines must clearly stipulate fundamental principles for commentators to adhere to, including specific requirements for speech and conduct (such as prohibiting discriminatory language), prohibiting the dissemination of unverified external information, and ensuring transparency in advertising placements within the commentary industry. Commentators must exercise their right to free speech responsibly. Information concerning actual game events must not be disclosed recklessly. They must safeguard user privacy and uphold the fairness, impartiality, and integrity of competitions. Establish professional service standards for esports commentators, reinforcing fundamental principles and prohibitions regarding linguistic expression, factual reporting, information verification, and privacy protection. Specific regulations must be detailed for certain contextual content, with prohibited terminology clearly defined. Commentary must be objective and impartial, and no non-compliant information may be disseminated.

5.1.3 Ecological development

The long-term development of the esports commentary industry requires a comprehensive industry ecosystem for support. Relying solely on market forces cannot fully resolve the current issues of unstable compensation, lack of security, and limited career paths. Clubs, event organizers, and live-streaming platforms—the three key stakeholders—should adopt a long-term perspective. While prioritizing their own performance, they must avoid blindly chasing popularity and traffic. Together, they should establish robust mechanisms for talent development, including fair compensation distribution and career advancement pathways. This includes providing dedicated commentator funds or career development programs, guaranteeing base salaries, purchasing health insurance, and subsidizing professional training costs. Such measures will alleviate financial burdens and eliminate career anxieties among practitioners. Establish distinct commentary roles categorized by function, including technical analysis, emotional engagement, and hosting/narration positions. Develop differentiated evaluation systems and career advancement pathways to fully meet practitioners' employment needs based on their areas of expertise. Extend contract periods to reduce the turnover of top commentators and enhance the sense of belonging among industry professionals. Increase the proportion of resources

allocated to commentators and events, thereby enhancing their bargaining power and social standing. Explore revenue-sharing models for commentators to enable them to participate in the profit-sharing pool. Through collaborative efforts to foster a healthy ecosystem, esports commentary will evolve from a temporary “performance role” into a permanent “professional position.” This transformation will cultivate a virtuous cycle where respecting masters, supporting original content, and protecting rights become the norm, thereby injecting a steady stream of fresh vitality into the esports broadcasting system.

5.2 Future development trends outlook

As audiences become increasingly segmented, commentary will also exhibit a layered structure, with specialized analytical roles further differentiated. Analytical commentary is geared toward hardcore players, delivering cutting-edge data and skill breakdowns, produced by data analysts with deep game expertise. Home commentators enhance regional emotional bonds and team recognition, while entertainment guest commentators cater to a relaxed and enjoyable viewing experience. AI-assisted commentary applications enable commentators to quickly grasp relevant information and provide corresponding perspectives. By broadcasting this content to viewers before the match begins, it offers audiences more opportunities to understand the rules. AIAIHUS2Q provides real-time broadcasts of player data, win rate predictions, and skill cooldown alerts, offering suggestions to commentators. Multilingual real-time subtitles enhance the viewing experience for audiences across different countries and regions. Virtual commentators deliver 24/7 uninterrupted commentary, serving as a complementary presence. In today's globalized world, cross-cultural communication skills are one of the essential competencies everyone needs to possess. When encountering different viewpoints, we should approach them with goodwill, respecting the linguistic habits and characteristics of various groups, and avoid letting regional perspectives influence our own discourse. Going forward, teams of commentators should also establish their own multilingual commentary teams, just like any other team. Ultimately, esports commentary will no longer be the voice of a single individual, but rather an intelligent, professional, and globalized communication entity.

6 Conclusion

As a vital entry point in digital sports communication, esports commentary transcends mere event narration. Its value lies in how it sparks human thought and understanding through information transformation, in stirring emotions rather than delivering dry information relay, in creating culturally recognizable symbolic meanings that foster cultural identity, and in promoting the interconnected development of competitive activities, technology, and humanities. Amidst the boundless possibilities of the future, esports commentary faces both greater opportunities and challenges. Yet adhering to ethical standards in communication, enhancing professional expertise, and prioritizing technological innovation remain the essential principles for unlocking its potential to become more mature, inclusive, and influential.

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