VIDEO GAMING SPECTATORSHIP: WHAT DRIVES GAMEPLAY WATCHING ON YOUTUBE?

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ORIGINAL SCIENTIFIC PAPER / DOI: 10.20901/ms.12.23.3 / SUBMITTED: 1.4.2020.

ABSTRACT *This article addresses the phenomenon of gameplay video watching on YouTube. The study investigates what drives people to watch gameplay videos and what gratifications they seek in performing the activity of gameplay viewing. To this end, the authors adopted the uses and gratifications theory (UGT) and a qualitative methodology involving three online discussion groups with 100 members of international gameplay communities. While the results pinpoint the attractiveness of the player as the most important motive, other reasons, such as preview and learning aspects or substitution for the real game, also appear to be important. The qualitative approach enabled to uncover unique aspects of the motives of watching YouTube gameplay videos. In this respect, five distinctive types of gameplay viewers are identified* – Spectator, Performer, Selector, Viewer, and Substitutor – *where each of them seems to engage in such practices with specific motives and accompanying gratifications.*

KEYWORDS

GAMEPLAY VIDEOS, SPECTATORSHIP, YOUTUBE, GAMING PLATFORM, USES AND GRATIFICATIONS, DIGITAL GAMES

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ORIGINAL SCIENTIFIC PAPER / DOI: 10.20901/ms.12.23.3 / SUBMITTED: 1.4.2020.

INTRODUCTION

Trends in the global video gaming industry indicate that the number of online video gaming viewers has grown exponentially across the world in the last few years, and the same growth is expected for the future (PRNewswire, 2019, April 5). As part of this trend, uploading gameplay footage and streaming video games have become very popular activities on different media platforms, such as Twitch and YouTube, which both provide these services for free (Villapaz & Mueller, 2015). Services like the YouTube Gaming platform have induced several changes in the media landscape and in content related to video gaming (Sjöblom et al., 2017). Looking at the numbers, in January 2020, YouTube Gaming had more than 83 million subscribers uploading, streaming, and watching video games (YouTube, 2020). The number of viewers of this content increased from around 609 million globally in 2016 to 743 million in 2019 (Anderson, 2018). In 2016, about 2% of all daily trending videos on YouTube were focused on gaming and were largely fueled by a younger audience (Mediakix, 2016). Gameplay broadcast via YouTube or similar platforms, which offer a combination of digital gameplay and video, has become a new hybrid genre (Burgess & Green, 2018; Burwell, 2017) and a typical representative of "homecasting" (van Dijck, 2007), where spectators watch gameplay from home or on their personal mobile device.

Spectators are defined as those who remain engaged by watching and not necessarily interacting directly with the game (Cheung & Huang, 2011). Spectatorship as such is not new to the gaming world; it has been present since the early days of arcade games, when people would gather around to watch live gameplay (Taylor, 2016). Today, although video games are primarily designed for playing in the privacy of a living room, they are increasingly attracting spectators too (Sjöblom & Hamari, 2017). Such large–and growing–crowds of viewers suggest that gameplay watching is not a mere fad or type of niche entertainment; it is becoming a general trend (Sjöblom et al., 2017) constituting a new digital culture (Deuze, 2006).

While quite a lot has been written about why people tend to play video games and how this affects their daily lives (for a detailed meta-analysis of why people play, see Hamari & Keronen, 2017), we know much less about gameplay watching and the motives behind this activity. However, the explosive popularity of video game streaming suggests that watching others play video games represents a novel process in digital media consumption caused by the rapid development of accessible online video content that merits more scholarly attention.

Research on the phenomenon of gameplay watching still has significant potential to contribute to the trending domain of game research in the fields of media, communication, and information sciences (e.g., Sjöblom et al., 2017). The scarce literature on game viewership mostly centers on the video streaming audience on the Twitch platform, and research on YouTube's gameplay footage and gaming audience is particularly rare. Dominating the existing research are, for instance, investigations into the simultaneous presence of players and viewers (Anderson, 2017; Wulf et al., 2020), identification and

ORIGINAL SCIENTIFIC PAPER / DOI: 10.20901/ms.12.23.3 / SUBMITTED: 1.4.2020.

classification of video game spectators (Cheung & Huang, 2011), exploration of the reasons for watching competitive video gaming (Hamari & Sjöblom, 2017) or mapping of the experience of the video game audience (Corbett, 2009), and examination of pre-defined motives and gratifications of live-streaming viewers (Gros et al., 2017; Hilvert-Bruce et al., 2018; Sjöblom & Hamari, 2017; Sjöblom et al., 2017; Wulf et al., 2020). The latter example represents the strongest stream of research addressing the *why* of gameplay watching (e.g., Sjöblom & Hamari, 2017). This research is rooted in the uses and gratifications theory (UGT) (Katz et al., 1974) and provides useful insights into the socio-motivational engagement of gameplay audiences. On the downside, however, studies dealing with the motives and gratifications of gaming audiences have often been adaptations of studies on social networking sites (e.g., Hilvert-Bruce et al., 2018), leaving little room to uncover motives that are unique to this particular hybrid genre (Kaye, 2010).

To address these gaps in the literature, our study focuses on the people who watch pre-recorded video gameplay. For this purpose, we adopted UGT as a guiding framework in a critical way (Steiner & Xu, 2018). This allowed us to observe game watchers on YouTube and gain insight into why people watch videos of others playing video games and the extent to which their motives or the gratifications they seek are unique compared to those identified in other online contexts. We employed a qualitative methodology involving three online discussion groups with 100 members of gameplay communities. Following the reasoning of Corbett (2009), who argued that video games, to a certain extent, reflect a theatrical situation of which spectatorship is a definitive element, we expected that certain motives could be quite specific to the particular situation of gameplay watching. Thus, by uncovering the gratifications sought without making prior assumptions about them, we aimed to understand why people watch gameplay videos, what gratifications they potentially seek from the specific activity of gameplay viewing, and how this, in turn, affects their daily lives.

In sum, our study's contributions lie in our attempt to fill three voids in the literature and practice of video gaming and new media. First, our study adds new insights about video game spectatorship, which is quickly becoming an important new element in a broader ecosystem of media consumption (Orme, 2021). Explaining the unique motives for gameplay watching can allow for exploring and understanding the associated behaviors and psychological effects of watching video gaming (e.g., Steiner & Xu, 2018) and, thus, provide a better understanding of the role of spectators in co-creating video gameplay meaning (Bowman, 2018). Since most gameplay video watchers are young, this research may also provide insights into youth culture and ways of consuming media, thus dictating a new media literacy (e.g., Burwell, 2017; Smith & Sanchez, 2015). Second, implementing the UGT framework through a qualitative lens allows for uncovering the specifics of gameplay watching that are defined by new societal and technological impacts that have been neglected often in the UGT research (Sundar & Limperos, 2013). For instance, a priori UGT models are mainly able to present only those gratifications that already exist in the UGT research, while exploratory research could produce new insights (Dhir et al., 2017) foremost in newly emerging hybrid genres, such as watching gameplay videos. Third, instead of following previous studies on gameplay watching on Twitch, we

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focused on YouTube, a relatively understudied social media site (Khan, 2017). It plays an important role not just as a go-to site for general video watching (Khan, 2017) but also as the most popular video sharing website for pre-recorded "Let's Play" (LP) videos with gaming content (Smith et al., 2013), which is widely used by gamers (Burwell and Miller, 2016) as well as other types of audiences (Arthurs et al., 2018).

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND OF GAMEPLAY WATCHING

Online gameplay videos and spectatorship

Video games are primarily designed for players, but the players are not the only ones engaging. Gameplay watching has become one of the most popular forms of online digital entertainment (Burwell, 2017), and the audience members, although not actively playing, are considered an important part of the social situation of gaming (Downs et al., 2014). While gameplay watching or spectatorship can take many forms (e.g., watching games at tournaments and in public places, over-the-shoulder watching; Cheung & Huang, 2011), this relatively new form of spectatorship is defined in the context of watching games via online videos.

Among the young audience that tends to watch gameplay the most, this hybrid genre is commonly known under the above-mentioned LP and normally includes gameplay footage with simultaneous commentary, which is either audio or video recorded to capture the player's reactions (Burwell, 2017). Gameplay videos appear in other forms as well, such as speed runs, walkthroughs, tutorials, and top plays reviews. The idea of gameplay videos is simply to capture and show gameplay with added commentary by the players; it is not to create stories or narratives but to display the process by which "players engage with and appropriate games to fit their specific play styles and preferences" (Glas, 2015, p. 83). Gameplay videos, and LP videos specifically, contain an interesting aspect of meaning-making. That is, the commentary not only reveals how a player is playing the game but also what he or she feels and knows about the game (Burwell, 2017). Thus, in the LP videos, the important source of enjoyment for the viewer is what the player adds to the gameplay to create the experience, which is then experienced by the audience (Burwell, 2017; Smith et al., 2013).

Engaging audiences: Viewers, performers, spectators

As Burwell and Miller (2016) observed, LP is an invitation to the audience to join in the gameplay in one way or another. Thus, in terms of the viewing experience, LP viewing can be discussed within the spectacle/performance paradigm, which explains media use in an increasingly performative, consumerist, and media-intensive society where different forms of media are omnipresent in our daily lives (Gosling & Crawford, 2011). In this context, gameplay viewing has been presented as a reproduction of either theatre spectatorship (Corbett, 2009) or early film–specifically Gunning's cinema of attraction–where the event of gameplay, an exciting spectacle, is interesting in and of itself (Glas, 2015; Menotti, 2014).

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The audience watching the gameplay footage is by no means passive; viewers are eager not just to participate in conversations about the meanings of games and gameplay (Burwell, 2017) via gaming paratexts (Burwell & Miller, 2016) but also tend to engage in vicarious play, which unfolds in their minds parallel to the active play (Cheung & Huang, 2011). Furthermore, according to the spectacle/performance paradigm, the audience's activity is hidden in other aspects of gaming (Gosling & Crawford, 2011). One such aspect is using the media as a resource for constructing and maintaining one's social identity and being part of the gaming community, and another is the everydayness of gaming, which is reflected in conversations and identities of people around the world (Gosling & Crawford, 2011).

Overall, the research on video gameplay spectatorship has established that this new hybrid clearly supports the experience of viewing, which implies that experiencing media integrates both the activities of viewing and using (Roig et al., 2009). Since it can be assumed that viewers of gameplay videos seek to gain certain value and gratification, rather than being passive observers, the theoretical framework of UGT seems to provide solid ground for tapping into the reasons why individuals use gameplay videos in any context (Hilvert-Bruce et al., 2018).

Principles of Uses and Gratifications Theory

UGT, which was formally established in the 1970s, is an audience-oriented theory underpinned by the assumption that individuals' selection and usage of media is active and goal-directed and that certain psychological and contextual factors can influence how individuals use media to gratify their needs and wants (Katz et al., 1974). The motives for media use are products of psychological dispositions, social factors, and environmental conditions (Katz et al. 1974), while gratifications are manifested as perceived fulfilments through activities, such as media use (Palmgreen, 1984). Palmgreen (1984) distinguished between *pursued gratifications*, which encourage behavior such as media use, and *received gratifications*, which are a result of the behavior and do not necessarily match the gratifications sought. Understanding motives or pursued gratifications can allow for comprehending and addressing the negative effects of watching different media content (Strizakova & Krcmar, 2003). As Katz et al. (1974) argued, it is the understanding of social and psychological sources of needs that generates expectations of mass media and other media, which then leads to different media exposures that, in turn, gratify the needs but can also produce unintentional consequences.

UGT's central assumption, thus, concerns the predictive power of motives in terms of an individual's media use, choice of medium, and time spent with the medium (Dhir et al., 2017). Apart from the factors researched in traditional UGT, researchers are increasingly acknowledging that the characteristics of new media technologies tend to impact audiences' gratifications and change their habits or cause them to form new ones (Sundar & Limperos, 2013). More generally, scholars have extracted three categories of gratifications that are relevant for new media use: (1) process, (2) socialization, and (3) content (e.g., Dhir et al.,2017; Peters et al., 2007). Process gratification relates to inclusion in the process itself, especially with time-passing activities, rather than in the content

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itself. Socialization gratification is experienced through interaction and relationships, while content gratification is characterized by information sharing and learning (Peters et al., 2007).

Over the years, UGT has provided a useful framework for the systematic study of media use. However, within its capacity to evolve, UGT remains open for continuous updates, revisions, and refinements and is exposed to the challenges of new media technologies and newly emerging (hybrid) genres (Steiner & Xu, 2018). Increasingly, UGT is being used for studying the Internet (Dhir et al., 2017) and specific online contexts including new media technologies and genres, such as online games (Sherry et al., 2006), social media (Alhabash & Ma, 2017), video sharing (Chiang & Hsiao, 2015), and more recently, gameplay watching via live video streaming (Hilvert-Bruce et al., 2018; Sjöblom & Hamari, 2017; Sjöblom et al., 2017).

Questioning the motives and gratifications of gameplay viewing

Most studies have employed a general, standardized approach for measuring uses and gratifications by adapting pre-existing scales of media use (Dhir et al., 2017; Kaye, 2007). In the context of video gameplay viewing, Hilvert-Bruce et al. (2018) researched what motivates engagement in live-stream gaming via Twitch with eight motives derived from social media research: entertainment, information seeking, meeting new people, social interactions, social support, sense of community, social anxiety, and external support. In contrast, Sjöblom and Hamari (2017) and Sjöblom et al. (2017) followed a broader UGT pool of motives for using old and new media and focused on five categories of motives for engaging in live streaming on Twitch: cognitive, affective, personal integrative, social integrative, and tension release. All of these studies suggested that *entertainment* (affective category) and *information seeking* (cognitive category) are the most significant motives for gameplay viewing on Twitch. In the context of YouTube, one study similarly identified relaxing entertainment alongside information and self-status seeking as the most important motives (Khan, 2017).

Some scholars have called for further inquiries to develop a more robust understanding of how individuals engage with new and emerging hybrid genres (Kaye, 2010). Thus, the novelty and various specifics of new technologies, media, platforms, and genres urge researchers to understand and uncover the uniqueness of gratifications per outlet and the implications (e.g., Alhabash & Ma, 2017; Kaye, 2010; Steiner & Xu, 2018). For example, Alhabash and Ma (2017) suggested that social media platforms have more room for a *diverse set of gratifications* sought and obtained from their use when they are new and perceived as more specialized. Furthermore, Burwell (2017) noted that gameplay videos are in themselves highly diverse in terms of their aim, content, and ways they are made– again, implying that various gratifications can relate to watching these videos. Following the reasoning above, the current study is aimed at answering the following research question: What are the motives and gratifications sought while watching gameplay videos on YouTube, and how do they resemble or differ from those researched in previous studies on gameplay video watching?

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METHODOLOGY

Study design and method

Our study was qualitative and intended to grasp gratifications sought from gameplay watching in an exploratory manner. In selecting a qualitative method, we were not attempting to generalize uses and gratifications of gameplay viewing but, rather, to obtain data from a small group of people belonging to gaming communities to gain an in-depth understanding of their thinking and practice of gameplay watching. With this aim in mind, we selected asynchronous online group discussion as our research method, which seemed to be a highly appropriate approach for gathering data on the topic at hand (Ullrich & Schiek, 2014). As Schiek and Ullrich (2017, 2019) reported, individuals tend to use asynchronous communication when they want to share an unusual experience and determine its meaning or attempt to study themselves.

Sample and data gathering procedure

For the purpose of our study, we decided to tap into pre-existing social groups – namely, members of gaming communities. As Stewart and Williams (2005) noted, taking advantage of groups that already exist online is a common and successful sampling approach. In our case, we wanted to focus on geographically dispersed individuals with prior gameplay watching experience.[1]

Our online group discussions were both public and non-public debates with international users, who were either open-forum participants or members of certain closed groups (the latter were on Facebook). We selected an open type of discussion to allow for an unlimited number of debaters (Schiek & Ullrich, 2019). In such settings, participants are normally not required to introduce themselves (e.g., Schiek & Ullrich, 2019); thus, their gender, age, and other demographic information was not gathered.

Three asynchronous online group discussions were initiated in the spring of 2016 in a span of six days: a Facebook-based discussion with 85 participants, a discussion on Reddit (subreddit/r/letsplay) with seven participants, and a discussion on the Path of Exile forums with eight participants. Thus, in total, there were 100 participants, with an average of one or two posts per participant, similar to Schiek and Ullrich's (2019) experiment on asynchronous online group discussions.

Table 1. **Sample of participants in online discussion groups**

Type of discussion group	Number of participants	%
Facebook-based	85	85%
Reddit-based	7	7%
Path of Exile forums	8	8%
Sum:	100	100

[1] Participants were recruited by one of the researchers, who is a gamer herself. She approached dedicated fans of gaming who frequent various forum discussions about gaming.

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Participants were asked to answer three general questions and were then encouraged with some additional sub-questions. The first general question asked whether they watch YouTube gameplay videos and why. We also wanted to know what they enjoy the most about watching and on which occasions they tend to watch them. In addition, it was underlined that we were not interested in video streaming (Twitch) but in gameplay watching on YouTube. The participants were informed that their answers would be analyzed for academic research purposes only and that their identities would not be revealed in the reporting of results. Such research allows participants to be quite open and responsive, with minimal questioning from the facilitator (Stewart & Williams, 2005).

Data analysis

To analyze the answers, we used thematic analysis based on a coding process recommended by Silverman (2001). The data were inspected for words and phrases reflecting gratifications sought and obtained. The codes were first developed at a latent level using a smaller sample of participants and were then further developed and refined by coding all answers corresponding to each theme. This process ensured that the themes were mutually exclusive and that the coded data and extracts best represented each theme. Furthermore, if a particular person listed more than one gratification in their answer, this answer was coded in both themes and types of gratifications. The themes were developed by the analyst who conducted the group discussions and was familiar with the context. They were then checked by the second coder and refined following a discussion.

FINDINGS: FROM GLORIFYING GAMERS TO SUBSTITUTING THE GAMING EXPERIENCE

Numerous themes and subthemes emerged from our analysis, indicating that the participants watched gameplay videos on YouTube for several very different purposes. The most prominent one was to follow a specific player or gamer personality, the second was to get some kind of help or advice, and the third was to preview games. Other critical purposes were entertainment and substituting the personal gaming experience. Trivia, background noise, and competitive sport were less significant in the sample (for details, see Figure 1).

When analyzing the most frequent purposes, we identified five distinctive personas from the data to understand the motives of gameplay watchers as persons: *Spectator*, *Performer*, *Selector*, *Viewer*, and *Substitutor*. These personas are not mutually exclusive; one person can embody a combination of personas. Nevertheless, each type of viewer seemed to prevail in specific types of motives and gratifications of gameplay watching.

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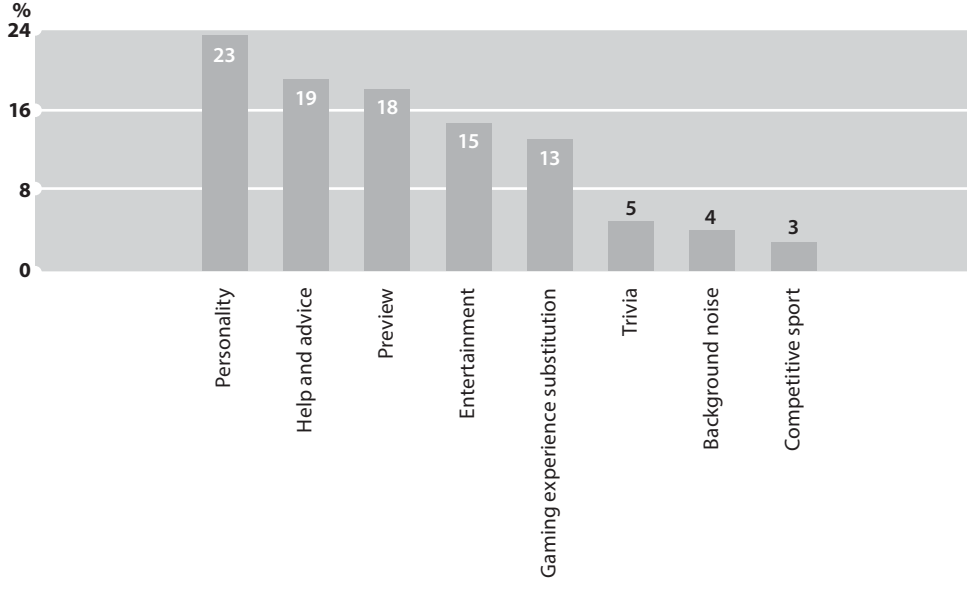

▲ *Figure 1.*
Frequency of the main purposes of gameplay watching (in %)

Spectator

This viewer, who reported being motivated to watch gameplay videos primarily because of the person creating and/or narrating the videos, has a very specific perception of his or her own activities. To *Spectator*, the player or performer and the context that he or she creates with his or her meaning-making activities is much more important than the actual game:

I think I speak for a lot of people when I say, I don't watch Let's Play for the game itself. It's usually the person playing the game I watch for. I watch for the personality of the content creator more than anything.

Spectator enjoys watching the players' reactions and hearing about their experience of a game; he or she can get immersed in the narrative. *Spectator* can also develop a close attachment to the player despite the lack of direct social interaction in the relationship. *Spectator* believes that the person playing the game in the footage lends a personal touch or feel because he or she can observe the player's reactions. It is as if "you have a friend you're playing with." However, *Spectator* is also very selective about whom he or she decides to watch:

I only watch a select few people. And they usually all play in the same group together. I love them because they're hilarious people if they're playing alone, but they're so, so much funnier when they're together, and they make me laugh so much.

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Performer

This is a viewer with a very different motive for watching gameplay. For *Performer*, viewing is motivated primarily by a desire to receive *help* and *advice* regarding his or her own playing. In that sense, watching YouTube videos feels like a walkthrough when he or she is seeking help or trying to finish a game with a 100% score. Compared to *Spectator*, *Performer* has a specific perception of gameplay watching. *Performer* understands the video as *a source of advice* whenever difficult gaming situations must be resolved:

What I like most about the videos is really the help. Seeing the other gamers play from start to end helps me pick my options for how I want to do the mission, and it helps me go back to areas if I missed something important.

For *Performer*, seeing other gamers play helps him or her create his or her own approach to playing the game and learning the technique of playing. As one participant admitted, "I watch stuff to get better. Like, I'll watch videos about League that have strategies or insights from people that are significantly better than I am."

Selector

This persona seems to be a very rational one. *Selector* would mainly watch gameplay to acquire information about a new game before deciding whether to buy it. For *Selector*, gameplay watching seems to be more rationally contextualized within the general framework of the gaming industry, exemplified as follows: "The game industry has gotten huge and expensive, so I like to know what and for how long I'm getting into something before dropping $60+ on it."

Another example is as follows: "I usually watch the gameplay/reviews of new games to get ideas about whether I want to buy a game." This shows a very pragmatic purpose of watching gameplay–namely, a preview. It is not the gamer as a person that is at the forefront; rather, the costs associated with the game, in terms of time and money, seem to trigger gameplay watching.

Viewer

Contrary to the above, *Viewer* watches gameplay videos primarily for entertainment and relaxation. For *Viewer*, watching video gaming is similar to watching television; that is, he or she watches videos mostly at the end of the day, just before going to bed, or to avoid boredom: "I usually watch videos on my days off with nothing to do and at night before bed."

Alternatively, it appears that *Viewer* also considers watching to be a great stress-reliever: "They help the stress and are a great way to unwind. They keep me entertained, especially if it's a You-Tuber I like." Thus, for *Viewer*, watching is a means of escapism, either from the busy outside world or from, in a social sense, an empty everyday life.

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Substitutor

This persona is quite specific to the YouTube channel. For *Substitutor*, watching in a way that seems to replace gaming itself is the core motive for gameplay watching. *Substitutor* is usually not an actual player, and his or her reasons for not being able to play are quite diverse: either because of financial limitations, lack of time to play, not owning a console, or lack of skills. For instance, one participant stated, "I don't have much gaming time, and I'm really stressed most days. Watching is easier." Another participant stated, "I don't have any friends to play games with, and I don't have to waste money on a game when I can just watch it."

Therefore, for *Substitutor*, watching is either an easy way out or an ersatz for playing the real game.

Remaining categories – from learners to passive viewers

The other three categories of purposes–trivia, background noise, and sport competition–seemed less common in our sample. The trivia category contained those who viewed gameplay videos as a way of learning about a game or the industry in terms of story, production, user experience, etc.:

I tend to watch people who can offer me greater insight into the game: either developers, journalists, or fans who have been playing a game or series for far too long. For example, there is a group of three men who repeatedly play every Metal Gear game, giving a kind of director's commentary to it, drawing attention to story themes, character motivations, things that were scrapped or changed, its flaws, etc.

A smaller number of participants evinced very different motives as compared to those stated above. Instead of actively watching, some used gameplay videos as background noise while doing other chores, treating them much like podcasts. As one participant stated, "I'll usually watch them as background noise while I'm playing another game or working, or when trying to sleep, oddly enough."

The last purpose was a much more competitive one. Here, a primary reason for watching video games was to follow competitive matches or recaps, much like a regular sport. These participants watched gameplay videos on YouTube due to a time difference or unavailability of the live content: "I watch mostly competitive stuff. I don't watch Let's Play unless I'm stuck somewhere."

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Several interesting findings emerged from this study on YouTube gameplay watchers. By tapping into motives or gratifications sought, we first noticed that these YouTube gameplay watchers had some similar motives to both gameplay watchers on Twitch and spectators of other YouTube content as well as audiences of more traditional media. This positions video gameplay spectatorship as a unique media experience situated between traditional viewing and game playing. On the one hand, viewers tend to watch these

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videos to entertain themselves and experience the "story" behind the game; on the other hand, they want to satisfy the cognitive need to acquire information and new knowledge of how to play a game. In this regard, our study detected some particularities to YouTube videos in the sense that viewers can get more gratification by having the ability to view, review, and analyze a pre-recorded video several times over. That being said, YouTube gameplay videos can further be understood as cultural artifacts worthy of closer analysis and reflection that might not be possible in the rush of live-streamed gameplay (Burwell, 2017). This corroborates the findings of Sjöblom and Hamari (2017), who determined that seeking help and advice is not at the forefront of live-stream gameplay watching and that viewers driven by this kind of motive seek to fulfil such needs through other sources, such as recordings on YouTube.

Meanwhile, participants' motives for watching video gameplay also reflect the valuing of creators and their personalities–motives characteristic of the *Spectator* persona and rather unique to YouTube gameplay watching. Although the motive to observe the creator can also be found in the case of games live-streamed via Twitch, our findings reveal a subtle difference in the purpose of watching. For Twitch users watching live streams, the player's personality seems primarily important due to social interaction and a sense of belonging to a community that manifest while the game is being played and live-streamed (e.g., Anderson, 2017; Hilvert-Bruce et al., 2018). However, for YouTube users, who mostly watch pre-recorded videos, the ways in which the player engages with and appropriates the game are at the forefront (e.g., Burwell, 2017; Glas, 2015). This indicates a subtle form of voyeurism and an interesting attachment to a person whom one has never met or had any contact with and, thus, positions gameplay watching on YouTube as a distinct media spectating experience.

Two sets of motives not fully captured in existing uses and gratifications typologies of live-streaming gameplay audiences relate to the *Selector* and *Substitutor* personas. First, for *Selector,* previewing a game to decide whether the game is worthy of his or her attention and financial investment is the prime motive. This is another type of cognitive motivation that is obviously best met via watching YouTube recordings rather than live-streaming. Viewers have the possibility to experiment and explore unknown territories before reaching a decision. Thus, recordings also work as trailers or advertisements for a game (e.g., Menotti, 2014). Second, *Substitutor* is rather unique to the YouTube gameplay watching domain because the motives of this persona do not appear in previous UGT research on gameplay watching. *Substitutor* is motivated to watch for the opportunity to feel and enjoy the game through vicarious play and imagined participation.

Against this background, our research makes several theoretical contributions. As our study shows, not all motives and gratifications can be neatly placed in the existing typologies of UGT, even when they have already been adapted to gameplay watching. Although few motives are unique per se, the qualitative approach revealed subtle but important differences in the case of YouTube gameplay watching compared to live streaming. This clearly implies the need to challenge the established genre labels in media research and understand how and why new hybrid genres are evolving and gaining

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prominence. Our study's contribution is in providing grounds for understanding these new forms and developments by exploring audiences' motives and uncovering subtleties in the reasons why people consume specific media and genres.

As our findings suggest, the experience of vicarious play is very important for YouTube gameplay watchers, first, due to its "fandom" effect (i.e., becoming a fan of a particular player) and, second, because of a vicarious achievement without personally experiencing stress and drama. Thus, these new types of videos effectively alter the meaning of gaming by becoming paratexts themselves (Burwell & Miller, 2016) with the potential to also affect the development of video game culture.

In relation to wider media research, our study separates YouTube as a particular media platform that is markedly different from traditional outlets, such as television or movies, as well as from live-streaming gameplay videos. As Glas (2015) concluded, the success of this particular hybrid genre is based on the fact that play practices on display seem to be very meaningful to the audience in several ways. In this regard, an implication of our study is that types of gratifications–namely, help and advice and, to a certain extent, preview–are quite important for YouTube gameplay video watchers. Burwell and Miller (2016) argued that pre-recorded gameplay videos convert the playing of the game into a series of representations that can be reviewed and analyzed multiple times. This is important not just in terms of learning new strategies for playing a game but also in terms of having an opportunity to "reflect, at a distance, on games and gameplay" (Burwell & Miller, 2016, p. 120). Thus, this might be what most sharply distinguishes the motives of YouTube and Twitch users, and it has wider implications for mobilizing digital media literacy practices (Burwell, 2017).

CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS, AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This study employed the UGT approach in the context of YouTube gameplay video watching. Although we identified several motives and gratifications sought that fall into categories similar to those used in previous UGT studies, our qualitative approach for uncovering motives and gratifications helped us define certain subtle differences in what characterizes particular categories. Our findings also suggest that some motives might be triggered by the technological characteristics of the medium itself, as suggested by the gratifications related to seeking help and advice and preview. These gratifications are, for example, not at the forefront of live-streaming gameplay but, instead, are strongly connected to the fact that videos featured on YouTube are usually pre-recorded. Similarly, the motives and gratifications related to personality are associated with more emphasis on following a particular gameplay persona and fandom than (para)social interactions and closeness, as is the case in live streaming on Twitch. To sum up, with the rapid evolution of digital technology and culture, one's interest in, and gratifications associated with, certain genres are becoming much more complicated. Therefore, the straightforward study of motives using pre-defined categories must be revisited and

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re-defined to reflect the ambiguity and specificity of newly emerging and converging media consumption practices.

Importantly, this study was not without limitations. First, a thicker description of viewers and their characteristics would give the uncovered motives even more merit and provide a richer foundation, both for scholars and game producers and developers, for better understanding YouTube gameplay video watchers. Furthermore, although we tried to add some new perspectives to the UGT approaches for studying new media forms, more empirical evidence is needed to reinforce our findings and conclusions. Second, it would be meaningful to explore unintended gratifications, which can add to a better understanding of viewers, and the effects that such gratifications have on viewers' daily lives. These unintended features would provide deeper insight into the role of YouTube game playing within the everyday lives of different types of personas. For now, we can only speculate as to the extent to which gameplay watching is really a feel-good activity and to what degree it emerges as an activity with which people can have a more ambivalent relationship with outcomes or feelings that are not necessarily positive. Third, future research could provide more insight into the technological specifics of YouTube as a medium for gameplay watching and how they affect viewers' motives, which our study did not specifically address.

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GLEDANJE VIDEOIGARA: ŠTO POTIČE GLEDANJE IGRANJA VIDEOIGARA NA YOUTUBEU?

Urša Golob :: Medeja Kraševec :: Tanja Oblak Črnič

SAŽETAK *Ovaj se znanstveni rad bavi fenomenom gledanja videa na YouTubeu koji prikazuju igranje videoigara. Studija ispituje što ljude potiče na gledanje igranja videoigara te koje zadovoljstvo u tome traže. Autori se pozivaju na teoriju koristi i nagrada* (uses and gratifications theory – *UGT*) *te se koriste kvalitativnom metodologijom. Autori su proveli tri* online *grupne rasprave sa 100 članova međunarodne* gaming *zajednice. Iako se u kao najvažiji motiv gledanja ističe atraktivnost igrača, važni su i drugi razlozi, poput promatranja i učenja, ali i zamjene za pravo igranje. Taj kvalitativni pristup omogućuje otkrivanje jedinstvenih aspekata motiva gledanja igranja videoigara na Youtubeu. Tako je u ovom radu identificirano pet različitih vrsta gledatelja* – promatrač, izvođač, onaj koji bira, gledatelj *i* zamjena – *pri čemu se svaki uključuje u gledanje videoigara zbog specifičnih motiva i pratećeg zadovoljstva.*

KLJUČNE RIJEČI

GLEDANJE IGRANJA VIDEOIGARA, GLEDANJE, YOUTUBE, PLATFORME ZA IGRANJE IGARA, TEORIJA KORISTI I NAGRADA, DIGITALNE IGRE

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