

# Images of E-Sports in Chinese Newspapers <sup>†</sup>

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**Abstract:** We analyze the reports and comments in newspapers on e-sports using T.A. van Dijk's news discourse and discuss how Chinese newspapers present the configuration and the construction of e-sports. The method of reporting e-sports follows the viewpoints of cyber games. Such viewpoints regarding e-sports as cyber games in media-mediated communication are socially accepted. Through the presentation of these viewpoints, a model of the coverage of e-sports is constructed. E-sports have gained government support, and the media constructs an image of e-sports as an information technology industry because of their technological nature.

**Keywords:** e-sports; cyber game; image study

## 1. Introduction

E-sports have emerged and developed rapidly on a global scale. With internet-based games as the core, competitions in e-sports have become a global industry. For example, the World Cyber Games (WCG) represent one of the world-class e-sports competitions, organized by the South Korean government and Samsung with worldwide recognition. E-sports have been developed in China for more than ten years. Using electronic software, the game sets an environment for competitive battle, emphasizing fairness. The games in e-sports require sophisticated skills that require mental and physical abilities for self-fulfillment. These abilities include hand–eye coordination, operational accuracy, multitasking under time limits, and others. Psychological abilities such as rapid response capability, precise analysis, low anxiety under stress, and tactics are also essential in e-sports. In 2003, the Chinese State General Administration of Sports listed e-sports as one of the 99 official sports. However, the e-sports movement in China does not measure up with other sports. The players lack systematic support and usually seek sponsorship independently. Players who wish to compete in international competitions sometimes give up due to visa issues. This occurs because a number of players participate in illegal cyber games for prize money on behalf of their country. Thus, China has a peculiar administrative system. Athletes of e-sports belong to the state and their club. Although the players compete abroad on behalf of themselves or sponsors, they compete for the country as well. Since this is a new field, many provisions have not yet been introduced, compared to other sports. Moreover, there is not much support, a factor which is related to traditional Chinese social values.

Chinese parents consider e-sports and gaming as improper professions and think winning championships does not ensure a future. Traditional values still lead people to believe that the right path for their children is to study and that playing games is just for entertainment. The media's attitude toward e-sports also follows parents' stereotypes. They tend to regard playing cyber games as an "Internet addiction" that endangers physical and mental health. In 2004, China's State Administration of Radio issued the "Prohibition on broadcasts on cyber games notice", restricting the broadcasting of cyber game programs. This has caused the general public to perceive e-sports as negative. Although Chinese society is gradually diversifying, the atmosphere has changed since ten years ago. Parents



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are beginning to understand e-sports owing to their innovative campaign and being a profitable industry. Thus, we attempt to answer the question 'How can the Chinese media shape the image and social values of e-sports?' in this study.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Categories of Cyber Games

There are many types of cyber game platforms. The first includes console games that need additional monitors and machines or devices such as a cassette, CD, or other storage media to play arcade games, street fights, Dance Revolution, Taiko, and many other games. The consoles include Nintendo's NES and Wii, Sony Play Station, and Microsoft's Xbox. There are handheld game consoles that are compact in shape and lightweight, such as Nintendo's Game Boy and Sony's Play Station Portable (PSP). Personal computers are also a type of console with a keyboard, mouse, and other external devices used mainly to play online games via the internet. Online games are classified into three types. The first one is the web game, with a web-style interface. Plants vs. Zombies, Happy Farm, and Angry Birds are web games. The second one is multiplayer role-playing games that accommodate numerous online players at the same time with real-time interactions through conversations. Due to the sense of belonging to the community and online dating features, this type of game has gained much popularity. The third is LAN games, for which a computer is set up as a temporary game server while other computers involved in the game connect to the host. The server computer acts as a client and a server while in charge of handling the game data. Such games are restricted to a given number of players at a time. The players cooperate or compete with each other, and the e-sports events are mostly carried out through such games.

### 2.2. Concept of e-sports

There is no academic definition for e-sports thus far. The only difference between e-sports and playing online games is the inclusion of competition. Thus, the concept must be elaborated to differentiate e-sports from simple game playing. E-sports are intellectual competitions using software and hardware. Through exercise, players are trained to improve cognitive ability, responsiveness, hand-eye coordination, determination, and teamwork. In fact, similar to other sports, e-sports are focused on professionalism with an emphasis on physical and mental exercise and teamwork. There are obvious differences between e-sports and cyber games.

Online games are essentially for leisure and entertainment. In a virtual environment, users play virtual characters to pursue what cannot be done in reality and to experience the enjoyment of playing other roles. In the early stage of the game, the amounts of money and time spent in each level of the game are pre-designed. Thus, regardless of the player's technical ability, the only requirement is to comply with the rules of the game. If players invest more money in the game, they can be upgraded to the next level faster in order to gain advantages over general players. In e-sports, there are no such shortcuts. Players only rely on their skills, because e-sports involve fierce competition. Similar to traditional sports, e-sports players must improve their speed, response, and handling of the electronic equipment through hard work performed daily and drills to obtain good results. Since the opponent is a human, there is no way to predict what the opponent will do next.

The current global e-sports tournament events consist of four main categories: FPS (First-Person Shooter), RAC (Race Game), RTS (Real-Time Strategy), and MOBA (Multiplayer Online Battle Arena). In this study, online games are also included, considering the historical development of e-sports.

### 2.3. Image of e-Sports in Media

An *Image* is interpreted as a mental representation or attitude. When we see an object, its image is retained in our memory even after this object is out of sight. This memory of an image is recalled when a similar object appears. Lippmann stated that people cannot

come into contact with every person or thing [1]. Boorstin explained that an image of any object (especially a person) is an artificial impression or reproduction of an external form [2]. To cope with this situation, people need to develop a simplified cognitive process to group things with the same or similar qualities together and create a set of images. Then, people use this image to assess the memory of the group. Lippmann believed that images are pictures in minds, similar to a map. An image influences perception of people and things and their roles and positions in society. For people who do not experience things directly, images that the media shapes and forms become critical. Many empirical studies have found that the mass media have the power to shape an image for the public. The relationship between real sport and its digital adaptation is significantly influenced by technological advancements [3]. E-Sports is not only about the computer games and playing itself, but it can also serve as a means of satisfying various needs [4]. From the communication point of view, the media is an important tool for the construction of reality. When reproducing social events or issues, the media select, edit, and dramatize them based on their standards and rules.

### 3. Study Design

To analyze the image of e-sports in newspapers, we use the topic derivation method of T.A. Van Dijk's news discourse qualitative analysis of materials. T.A. Van Dijk analyzed the three macro-rules of news discourse: deletion, generalization, and construction. The study design for this research is as follows.

The research object in this study was the "China Core Newspapers Full-text Database". e-Sports were recognized by the Chinese State General Administration of Sports as one of the 99 official sports in 2003, and the "Prohibition on broadcasts on cyber games notice" was issued by China's State Administration of Radio in 2004. Search results confirmed that e-sports coverage by the media has increased significantly since 2004. In 2001, there was only 1 report, but 14, 42, and 102 reports were found in 2002, 2003, and 2004, respectively. Thus, data for this research were retrieved from the reports published from 1 January 2005 to 31 December 2014. We searched the database with the keyword "e-sports" and excluded any unrelated e-sports reports. In total, 575 reports were collected as a result.

The collected reports were encoded with dates, press numbers, newspaper companies, and layouts. The Chinese media is different from those of other countries because of the party newspaper. In previous studies, party newspapers were rarely taken into account. Referring to the previous literature, we calculated the frequency of adjectives used to describe the image of e-sports in the media. The adjectives were classified into positive and negative ones to code for the analysis. Before analysis, we randomly selected and coded 50 reports, accounting for 8.7% of all reports. The pilot coding result showed 86% credibility based on mutual consent among experts.

### 4. Results and Discussion

#### 4.1. Numbers of Reports

The numbers of reports on e-sports published in the media from 2005 to 2014 are 85 (in 2005), 110 (2006), 87 (2007), 82 (2008), 47 (2009), 46 (2010), 37 (2011), 8 (2012), 36 (2013), and 37 (2014). The number of reports increased from 2005 to 2008 but has decreased since then. In 2008, Beijing hosted the Olympic Games. Since e-sports are included in the official competitions in the Olympic Games, the media has not paid much attention to them since 2008. In 2006, "People's Daily" had four reports on e-sports, which was the highest number of reports by the newspaper since 2003, when e-sports became an official sport. "People's Daily" usually speaks for the government's attitude on certain topics. Reports in 2006 reflected the government's policy for e-sports. The largest number (14) of reports were published in the "Chengdu Daily", as the world's largest e-sports platform, Global Gaming League (GGL), was held in Chengdu in 2008. In 2012, due to instability and uncertainty with respect to clubs, well-known players retired. Even though the Association of China e-Sports was founded by professional e-sports players to promote the development and support of e-

sports clubs and professional players, clubs disappeared due to reduced sponsorship. With their dual nature of games and sports, e-sports again faced the challenges of social values.

#### 4.2. Content of Reports

A total of 40 newspapers published 575 reports on e-sports content. "Chengdu Daily" published 6.6% of the total number of reports, "China Information World" 4.7%, "China Culture Daily" 4.2%, "Science and Technology Daily" 4.2%, "Beijing business daily" 3.7%, "China Press and Publishing Journal" 3.1%, "China Sports Daily" 3.1%, "Computer World" 2.8%, "Popular Science news" 2.6%, "Popular Computer Weekly", 2.4%, "Beijing daily" 2%, "Guang Ming Daily" 1.7%, and "Computer Partner World" 1.7%. Based on the content analysis, the following trends were found: (1) Within a decade, words describing e-sports in the newspapers became neutral, while negative adjectives were used more than positive ones. This shows that the media coverage of e-sports was one of misunderstanding with prejudice, which caused the public to have no exact understanding of e-sports. (2) The reports revealed the lack of awareness and professionalism in e-sports. (3) The government did not support the development of the e-sports industry, but the local governments of Chengdu and Sichuan Provinces did for their local events. (4) The number of reports in online newspapers was greater than that in sports newspapers. Compared to sports newspapers, online newspapers paid more attention to e-sports and considered e-sports as an extended form of the IT industry rather than a sport.

#### 5. Conclusions

The stereotype positing that "Learning is the noblest of human pursuit" has been accepted, as traditional scholars have influenced people for a long time. Such a philosophy is engrained in the education system and media campaigns. Chinese society has become muted to such a philosophy. As a result, family and society limit themselves in choosing a new way of life, which hinders the development of e-sports. The definition of Chinese newspapers and social media differs from that of Western newspapers. To some extent, the Chinese media represents the official governmental views. In this situation, people involved in organizing e-sports games have been excluded from official mainstream media coverage, and it has not been easy for them to draw the attention of the media and gain government support. For the Chinese Government to develop e-sports, the media needs to overcome the stereotypes of e-sports and have a more positive outlook on this issue. Otherwise, permanent negative stereotypes will remain, further affecting the perception and values of e-sports in the future and consigning it to be an underdeveloped sport.

Similar to track and field sports during the agricultural era and motorsports during the industrial era, the world can foresee the potential of e-sports and is investing in the development of this high-value sport. e-Sports have a positive impact on the development of the technology industry. Therefore, the technology industry needs to improve the performance of hardware and organize sound competition. In China, the media portrays online games with a negative image. If a member of a Chinese family plays e-sports as a lifelong career, the family and society will oppose it. It is necessary to advertise the fact that e-sports are not just for entertainment but represent a new industry and sport which need to be campaigned for by the mass media.

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