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Playing, Posting, Competing: An Activity System Analysis of Twitch Esports Events

Introduction

For my semester-long research project, I plan to study the world of esports tournaments, specifically those hosted on Twitch. Esports tournaments are organized, competitive video gaming events where players or teams compete in popular games for recognition, entertainment, and sometimes substantial prizes. Twitch, a live-streaming platform, has become a central hub for broadcasting these tournaments to large online audiences.

My particular access point into this research site is through a Twitch streamer named "ohgawdkate" who regularly organizes and hosts esports tournaments for their online community. As a viewer and participant in these events, I have access to both the live tournament streams and the chat interactions that surround them. This allows me to observe not only the competitive structure of the tournaments but also the ways players, viewers, and hosts communicate in real time.

One key source that provides context for this site is Twitch's Community Guidelines, which outline expectations for communication, competition, and moderation during live events ("Community Guidelines").

Connecting to the Framework: Activity Systems in Esports

To explore the role of writing and rhetoric in this research site, I will use Kain and Wardle's concept of Activity Systems as my framework for analysis (Kain and Wardle). According to Kain and Wardle, an activity system is a set of people, tools, rules, and shared goals that work together in a particular context to accomplish specific tasks. Within this system, communication is not random but purposeful; it is how members coordinate, create, and sustain their collective work.

In the context of esports tournaments, the activity system includes several interacting elements: players, organizers, viewers, the streaming platform, the games themselves, and the digital tools (like Discord, Twitch chat, or bracket software) that keep the competition running smoothly. Written and rhetorical practices such as tournament announcements, chat interactions, bracket updates, and post-tournament discussions are essential for managing participation, maintaining

fairness, and building community identity.

By analyzing esports tournaments through the lens of activity systems, I hope to better understand how writing and rhetoric function as organizing forces in fast-paced, highly mediated online competitions.

Proposed Research Methods

To answer the question “What is the role of writing and rhetoric in this research site?” I will collect at least four pieces of primary research throughout the semester, including both textual analysis and participant observation.

1. Analysis of Tournament Announcements: I will collect and analyze written announcements or posts that introduce upcoming tournaments. These texts often include details about dates, rules, formats, and sign-up instructions, which reveal how writing structures participation and sets community expectations.

2. Analysis of Live Chat Logs: During tournaments, Twitch chat serves as an active rhetorical space where viewers, players, and hosts communicate. I plan to analyze samples of chat logs from one or more tournaments to explore how language performs community-building, strategic commentary, and moderation in real time.

3. Observation and Field Notes from Live Tournaments: I will attend (virtually) at least two live tournaments, taking detailed notes on the rhetorical practices I observe, including spoken and written communication between hosts, players, and viewers.

4. Interview with the Tournament Host: I plan to interview the Twitch streamer who organizes these events to better understand their goals, challenges, and rhetorical decisions in designing tournaments, communicating with players, and managing a live audience.

Together, these methods will allow me to map the rhetorical dimensions of esports tournaments as activity systems, revealing how digital communication practices make competitive gaming communities possible.

Works Cited

“Community Guidelines.” Twitch, 2025, <https://www.twitch.tv/p/en/legal/community-guidelines/>.
Kain, Donna, and Elizabeth Wardle. “Activity Theory: An Introduction for the Writing Classroom.”
Naming What We Know: Threshold Concepts of Writing Studies, edited by Linda Adler-Kassner and Elizabeth Wardle, University of Dayton, 2015, pp. 267–283.