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ESports: a Review of Foreign and Russian Media Resources

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Abstract. Millions of people all over the world watch ESports matches and follow the news about favourite teams and players. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic ESports market has received unprecedented growth of audience. The present paper is aimed at exploring and comparing specific features of ESports internet resources development around the world. The author observes the most visited ESports sites in such countries as South Korea, China, the USA, and Russia. Also, this article examines website traffic statistics to analyze the popularity of ESports internet resources among an audience. The data is based on the number of views and visitors for each country during the day, month, and year. The study showed that the Asian ESports media market prefers to use video format for providing content compared to the USA and Russia. The USA and Russia still use text and video formats.

Keywords: cybersport media space, online journalism, media consumption, games, streaming, network communications

Conflicts of interest. The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

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Киберспорт в интернете: обзор российских и зарубежных медиаресурсов

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Аннотация. Миллионы людей по всему миру смотрят киберспортивные матчи и следят за новостями киберспортивных команд и игроков. Благодаря пандемии COVID-19 киберспортивный рынок получил беспрецедентный рост аудитории. Цель исследования –

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выявить и сравнить специфические особенности развития киберспортивных интернет-ресурсов в тех странах, где наиболее развит киберспорт. Рассматривается контент сайтов Южной Кореи, Китая, США и России. Дается статистика посещаемости как маркер популярности киберспортивных интернет-ресурсов среди аудитории. Приводятся данные о количестве просмотров и количестве посетителей сайтов для каждой страны (в течение дня, месяца и года). Установлено, что азиатский спортивный медиарынок предпочитает использовать видеоформат для передачи контента. Иная ситуация в США и России, которые по-прежнему отдают приоритет текстовой информации, сопровождаемой видео.

Ключевые слова: киберспортивное медиапространство, онлайн-журналистика, медиапотребление, игры, потоковое вещание, сетевые коммуникации

Заявление о конфликте интересов. Автор заявляет об отсутствии конфликта интересов.

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ESports culture around the world

With sporting events across the globe cancelled in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, ESports and video games have received increasing popularity as people look for alternative entertainment.

When the first video games were made, most people had never come in contact with a computer. Certainly, no one had their personal computers in their homes. With the advent of home computing in the 1980s, suddenly computers were everywhere. What could computer manufacturers do to make computers more fun and accessible? They could include games. Games and home computers have gone together from the beginning [1]. However, there were experiments with the home screen and games before, in the 1950s. But it was not technically possible to connect the mass audience of television with game behavior at that time the effect of interactivity was not enough [2. P. 315]. Everything changed with the advent of personal computers.

Today, more and more people are taking video games seriously as a new kind of competitive sport. Called ESports, professional video game competitions are drawing massive and turning the best players into worldwide celebrities [3]. The term ESports includes not only video game competition but as in regular sports, there are strict rules and different leagues for male and female players. ESports is like a snowball rolling down the side of a snowy mountain. Over the years the tournaments have grown into a billion-dollar business. Playing video games is no longer just a fun activity people do with their friends. Through ESports, gamers have found a way to earn a living with favourite pastime. And the best players are able to win great fame and fortune [4. P. 28].

One of the first large online competitions took place in South Korea. In the 1990s internet cafes were very popular around the country. The youth spent a lot of time there playing online games. The space strategy game called StarCraft became so popular that online matches were broadcast on Korean TV. The game soon deve-

loped into an incredibly popular ESports league. The StarCraft series is still popular in South Korea that some players have made playing the game into a career. Some players make over \$100,000 a year playing the game! [4. P.10].

In Korea, ESports has, for a long time, been more than gaming. Korea was one of the early adopters of the ESports trend and in the year 2000, became one of the first nations to officially license pro games, create the Korean e-Sport Association (KESPA) as well expand the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism to encompass the growing industry of Korean ESports [5]. In 2020, the Cybersport industry is a billion-dollar industry where South Korea is in the center.

In China, the ESports industry has been developing since the early 2000s but it has become popular only last years. Nowadays China is the world's largest market with revenue of more than \$385 million in 2020. No government has publicly backed the growth of ESports more than the Chinese. The link between sport and the state is closer than in the rest of the world, as China has implemented a centralized approach for elite development [6]. The government supports cybersport growth inside the country as a source of national pride. Chinese teams now regularly take part in international competitions such as the League of Legends World Championship. The success of players is a proven way to demonstrate China's soft power and international goodwill.

The earliest known video game competition took place in 1979 in the United States at Stanford University for the game *Spacewar!*, and eight years later 10,000 participants attended Atari's *Space Invaders* Championship [7]. The U.S is the number one market for video games making up the majority of PC, mobile, and console sales in the world but not looking that ESports in America is less popular than in Asia or Europe. America should pack stadiums like our European and Asian counterparts to sit and watch a video game competition and this will be a massive global sensation. According to fresh statistics, American ESports market will grow to more than \$196 million.

Europe shows audience growth by 7.4% compared to the 2019 year. It reached 92 million by the end of 2020. M&A activity in the gaming and ESports space has also been increasing. Several large deals involving European companies were completed during 2020, including Take Two's acquisition of Codemasters for almost \$1 billion and Platinum Fortune's purchase of Jagex for \$530 million [8].

Russian government officially recognized ESports as a national sport in 2001. It became the first country to acknowledge ESports on this level, but economic and political turbulence has set the country back from achieving its ESports potential. In 2018 Russia was ranked only eleventh in the global gaming market by the number of players and amounts spent. Given the CAGR of 14.9 per cent, the ESports market in Russia was forecast to increase from under 27 million U.S. dollars to over 57 million U.S. dollars between 2019 and 2024. In total, Russia's games and eSports industry would reach approximately 2.8 billion U.S. dollars by 2024 [9].

A comparative analysis of foreign and Russian cybersport internet resources

The interwoven elements at play in the ESports ecosystem – of competitive gameplay, live-spectating, and media content creation, production, and consumption – make ESports fandom a complex yet rich topic for study [10]. The nature of

media consumption in the cybersport industry seems to be different than in traditional media. Why is it so attractive to consumers? The secret is that social media game companies use gaming experience to motivate and increase the engagement of players. The most popular ESports media platform is Twitch.tv. It specializes in video streaming of computer games. Thanks to the ability to communicate directly with your idols during the games, Twitch.tv actively engages the audience in the gameplay [11].

For Russian, such interaction technology is newer than abroad. So comparative analyses between major representatives in industry and our country can show important tendencies in its development.

Popular Korean, Chinese, American, and Russian websites dedicated to ESports were chosen for the present research. One of the reasons why eSports is so popular in these countries is its media presence.

In contrast to Germany, for example, where the public perception of ESports is still in its infancy, there are stations that specialize in reporting and organizing various ESports events. One of the best known: OnGameNet (OGN) [12]. The website is focused on video content. All video clips are posted on their YouTube channel which audience is more than half a million subscribers. OGN is visited by almost 6 million users in the year and by 16000 users daily (Table 1). The total number of views reaches 20 million per year.

Table 1

OGN statistics

	Per day	Month	Year
Views	66 400	2 000 000	24 000 000
Visitors	16 600	498 000	5 976 000

Source: own results.

In China, the ESports media market is concentrated on its own streaming platforms: Douyu, Bilibili, and Huya. The competition between these platforms to attract new users to their channels means that it is now the optimal moment to market that live content. There are no almost websites dedicated to cybersports news. The author chose the official site of ESports: esport.sport.org.cn. Also, China does not use YouTube for providing content. According to the received results, the number of users is only 430 per day and 154800 per year. It has only 616 800 views per year (Table 2).

Table 2

ESport.sport.org.cn statistics

	Per day	Month	Year
Views	1 720	51 400	616 800
Visitors	430	12 900	154 800

USA ESports media market differs from Asian. First of all, content is represented not only in video format but also we can see articles that are popular among users. American websites also use social networks such as YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. For the article author chose the popular cyber-

sport resource theScore esports. It has about 2 060 visitors per day and 691 200 during a year. The total number of views reaches more than 1million (Table 3).

Table 3

theScore esports statistics			
	Per day	Month	Year
Views	3 520	98 300	1 179 600
Visitors	2 060	57 600	691 200

The Russian ESports market is closer to American media culture. The difference is that we have not so many internet resources dedicated to ESports news. Although cybersport.ru has a huge audience, the total number of visitors reaches 43 million during a year (Table 4). It is more than half as much as South Korea has. The number of views reaches 200 million.

Table 4

Cybersport.ru statistics			
	Per day	Month	Year
Views	564 610	19 509 754	234 117 048
Visitors	183 236	3 619 195	43 430 340

Conclusion

ESports market is an economic phenomenon that has influenced all areas of modern life. The culture of consumption transforms with great speed. As a result of the annual unprecedented growth of ESports audience, new methods and patterns of interaction are formed. The results of the research showed that the Asian cybersport media market prefers to use video format to provide content. Most spectators use streaming platforms to watch games. The USA and Russia are more similar in making cybersport content, but only Russia showed a high percentage of visitors and views. However, if we compare streaming platforms we will receive a completely different picture. The question remains open whether Russian ESports media will change its media strategy or not?

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