

## Qualitative Investigation of Cognitive Dissonance in E-sports among Generation-Y in India

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### ABSTRACT

*Cognitive Dissonance is a psychological theory that studies the discomfort felt by an individual, holding conflicting ideas, beliefs or values. E-sports is a form of sports competition using video games. E-sports often takes form of organised, multiplayer video game competitions, particularly between professional players and individuals or as teams. Understanding the extent to which e-sport operates similarly to traditional sport, it is important to think about how cognitive dissonance skews our perception about people and situation even when it comes to e-sports. Some online spectators or fans are instilled at an early age the value of loyalty, but undying loyalty can also prohibit authentic and truthful discussion. What are the fans to do about cognitive dissonance created by rooting for a player online because of their 'amazing gameplay' even though the player do not pass the individuals personal moral test. We have interviewed 20 individuals using in-depth interviewing technique and this paper discusses the findings by the authors.*

**Keywords:** *E-sports; Quality investigation; Cognitive dissonance; Generation Y.*

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### 1.0 Introduction

Electronic sport, shortly written as e-sports is a type of sport in which the primary aspects of competition are enabled by electronic systems; the input of players and teams as well as the performance of the e-sports system is mediated by interfaces between human and machine.

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There is an existing body of research in e-sports, the millennium also known as Generation Y or simply Gen Y and its association with e-sports and e-sports research in both India and worldwide. There is also plenty of work based on the study of what motivates the crowd to spectate e-sports and when and how e-sports got a substantial increase. Given all the above works and analyzing them, this paper explores the cognitive dissonance observed in e-sports, and this is where our research gap lies. Cognitive dissonance is a state of contradictory thoughts, values, or attitudes, particularly in relation to behavioral choices and change of attitude. In simple words, when a person experiences inconsistencies in his / her attitudes and behaviour, this can lead to something known psychologically as cognitive dissonance. Spectators can watch a gamer because the game played by the player is exciting, or because of many other reasons. It may be likely, however, that the player is not a person of personality with whom the spectator likes to share a relationship in real life. The player can be an exact opposite person to what he / she portrays online. The main focus of this research is therefore to analyze these variants and what viewers think of them. Although for this reason, this paper discusses detailed understanding various aspects which are discussed further in detail.

## **2.0 Literature Review**

### **2.1 History, evolution and status of e-sports**

Considering the history of gaming with e-Sports, e-Sports can be divided into two eras: the arcade era and the Internet era. Popular e-Sports games in the former period (from the 1980s to the 1990s) included NBA Jam and VirtuaRacing (Esports, 2020). The first e-Sport event held was known to be a major event for the arcade game ' Space Invaders ' which was an event held in 1981. The second landmark can be seen as the tournament games which took place in Seattle in October 28, 1981. The event invested more than \$200,000 on organizing and promoting the tournament, and at that point the e-Sports industry had never seen so much money put into a single event. The next major milestone for e-Sports is seen as televising the contests. A program called Starcade was transmitted between 1982 and 1984, featuring numerous competitive gaming competitions and interviews.

Until early 1990, e-Sports continued to operate on a smaller scale, mostly due to technological lack. Many e-Sports games gained popularity as the Internet grew across local area networks. The technology also allowed internet play, which was part of the reason why two well-known game genres used today were developed: Real Time Strategy (RTS) and FPS (First Person Shooter). The Red Annihilation Tournament and

the Cyberathlete Professional League (CPL) FRAG Tournament both held in 1997, used the most of this technology. Two major events; D. Devil calls these cases as the birth of today's established e-Sports without arcade games. The number of events continued to grow steadily until 2000, which within e-Sports is seen as one of the highest peaking years. The creation of the games such as Doom in 1993, Warcraft in 1994, Quake in 1996, StarCraft in 1998 and Counter-Strike in 1999 are few of examples that created important milestones in the growth of e-Sports.

Another highlight in e-Sports ' history is the introduction of live streaming on the Website Justin.tv, now known as Twitch.tv, in 2007. This allowed all professional players and all tournaments to display online matches rather than big television shows – making it much easier to reach viewers (Olsen, 2015). The popularity of e-Sport has grown dramatically in the following years, with tournaments held around the world concentrating on the different genres of games. Launch of the Riot Games game League of Legends in late 2009 as the next e-Sports highlight. Today, the game is regarded as one of the leading e-Sports games which attracts players and viewers from every corner of the world. This can be seen in 2013 where the World Finals of the League of Legends had the biggest e-Sport tournament in the world, with 32,000,000 online viewers during the competition. The development of e-Sport can also be seen as a prize pool, while the 2014 International Tournament exceeded a total prize pool of more than 10 million dollars. In recent years, sports and games have gone the mainstream, making a core form of entertainment around the world from lively Global sports revenue projections through 2022. Even though e-sports once represented a subset of sporting culture, it has grown into an entire industry unto itself. This change was motivated by a growing number of mainstream outlets including ESPN, Michele Jordan, Drake and DJ Marshmello, and at least partly by the frenetic rise of a game, Fortnite which has recently been released in 2017. According to the Business Insider Intelligence projections, the overall e-sports viewing is expected to increase at a 9% compound annual growth rate (CAGR) from 454 million in 2019 to 646 million in 2023. The pop culturing of sports has led to the explosions in investment and profits in e-sport. E-sports have largely reached this stratosphere due to the social dimension of live streaming and play. Different streaming platforms such as Twitch and YouTube Gaming provide viewers with direct links to their players and teams, while more mainstream social networks have allowed these connections to survive and grow. The remarkable audience and spectator growth of e-sports is a direct result of a deep-rooted experience in the media, says Peter Warman, CEO of Newzoo. Most competitions and events have huge crowds, and businesses will monetize these e-sports fans directly. As this began last year, the early learning is

constantly expanding. As a result, 2019 will be the first trillion-dollar year for sports, a market in which all sectors continue to attract brands. According to Newzoo GlobalReport (2019), for the global e-sport industry, 2019 marks a major milestone which will surpass the \$1 billion mark for the first time. Nonetheless, 2019 will have a substantial \$1.1 billion in revenues, which will rise year-over-year by + 26.7%. Sponsorship is the world's biggest revenue for individual e-sporting activities, raising \$456.7 million in 2019. The report states that by 2022, the overall e-sports audience will reach 645 million. The e-sports market is expected to hit US\$ 1.8 billion in 2022 on its present path. If any one of the variables speeds up, revenues hit \$3.2 billion in a more optimistic scenario (Newzoo Global E-sports Economy Report, 2019)

## **2.2 Generation Y/Millennial and E-sports**

The number of fans is growing rapidly, with E-sports booming. The biggest audience segment is Millennial. Often known as Generation Y or 'Gen Y,' millennial – a group comprising individuals aged 24 to 35 years old – have gained prominence because target marketers have not been able to fully understand (Sliwka, 2018). This has become a reality for the world of e-sports as well, the first generation to embrace e-Sports. With the vast majority of players and fans belonging to this age group – about 60% – companies are now asking what is the best way to effectively get their messages across and keep them loyal to their games and brands (Sliwka, 2018). According to Corey Austin's findings, who is a digital strategist, the average consumer day comparable to the social media takes a portion for console gaming alone – 51 minutes versus 50 minutes Facebook. But while the growing interest reaches nearly every generation, Millennial and Gen Z offer the real opportunity. In fact, according to his report, 58% of millennial have video games played over the last 30 days, and a fifth of those players have spent about 20 hours (roughly 5 hours a week) playing. They're 25% more likely to play on a regular basis than Gen X. This trend is even higher for the younger generation. It is tempting to lump Millennial and Gen Z into a single group of youths, particularly when their practices overlap with gaming. E-Sports is a growing global trend particularly common among Millennial. Many researchers identified Millennial as the main e-Sports viewers, with a focus on those aged between 18 and 35 years. Deloitte reports 75% of the spectators are Millennial, and 82% are males. They also seem to offset the hours spent watching other traditional sports by fans who spend about four hours a week on events or entertainment related to e-Sports. E-Sport betting is also becoming more popular with the growth of e-Sports and its popularity is growing among better people between the ages of 21 and 35. Nielsen reports indicate that 61 per cent of e-Sport betters are Millennial. The worldwide trend of e-Sports is only gathering

more momentum and is pushed for thousands of years, and it's powered by millennial. While e-sports dominate Asia, Europe and the United States, Canada is constantly increasing in the professional competition sector and many Canadian millennia are considered legitimate career option.

In other than the major tournaments, the players use screen sharing sites such as Twitch to increase their enthusiasm. Twitch is an online streaming platform designed for gamers to upload their content while playing live games, and has built a million-strong community of viewers (Sliwka, 2018). Twitch reports that 55% of its users are millennial and their streamers are capable of winning subscribers and advertising to earn revenue. Although professionals achieve this in the course of their competitive seasons, Twitch is an amateur gamers outlet to stand by and earn additional money. Today, much talk around e-Sports tends to focus on the gaming community itself introspectively. Nevertheless, the huge market opportunity that the e-Sport industry brings to the national table has been ignored. It is notoriously difficult for centuries to hit advertisers searching for an entrance into the sensory bubble of millennia. The e-Sports industry's facilities are untapped and as more people are involved in gaming and consider e-Sports as a workplace, businesses will remember the pent-up options that this sector has. Group or event sponsorships, network advertising, or publicity for games are all ways in which brands can expand their scope and grab more of the centuries-old market. When less millennial consume content through traditional means such as television, radio, newsprint and as they become even more segmented online, advertisers have a strong case for investing time and money in e-Sports space. Although e-Sports is fuelled by the millennial playing, competing and buying into the sport; it is also anticipated that Generation Z will pursue the millennial route of participating in this industry. The KidsSay Trend Tracker estimates that 89 per cent of Generation Z (children aged 8-15) own a game console in the United States, with many buying more than one. By the time they reach post-secondary school, they will have logged into their gaming console thousands of hours and lauded other e-Sports pioneers as role models of modern day.

### **2.3 E-sports in India**

E-Sports Federation of India (ESFI) currently run e-sports in India. Their main goals are to encourage, coordinate, train, educate and manage e-sports in India. This looks forward to providing training and developing a sustainable eco-system for e-sports in India and not just for organizing events and tournaments (Parkar and Dhabade 2018). The ESFI looks into official organization in complete and sole in charge of all e-Sports matters in India and to guard and enforce rules in co-operation with the States e-

Sports Associations/Federations of the country and in full and complete collaboration with the Indian Olympic Association, to select and control the Indian e-Sports Contingent to the Olympics, Asian Games, Common Wealth & SAF Games and various International competitions under the patronage of the IESF, OCA, IOA other Federations Associations and to stimulate the interest of the people of the country in promotion of e-Sport. Its mission is to Lead, Grow and Support e-Sports in India. Another Indian player is Nodwin gaming, the country's leading and most known sports business. NODWIN gaming has played a crucial role in the sport's development over the last decade (Parker and Dhabade 2018). It has partnered with ESL and ESWC to popularize the country's competitive gaming. NODWIN also provides online content for sports and games, including e-sports facilities and a showcase of games and gadgets.

India won bronze in a special category at the Asian Games 2018, which ended in September, although it didn't count in the official medal tally: it was in the Hearthstone collectible card-based video game tournament (Forbes India 30 Under 30 Article, Tripathi 2018). Tirth Mehta (23) from Gujarat has built some kind of history by winning the country's first electronic sports trophy (Forbes India 30 Under 30 Article, Naandika Tripathi). Nodwin Gaming's managing director, Akshat Rathee, who promotes e-sports in the country and has built the scene since 2014, said audiences are increasing, whether digitally or physically present at events. The company, which has exclusive licensing agreements with the world's largest e-sports organization, Electronics Sports League, and, among others, E-sports World Convention, was in the news earlier this year when mobile gaming firm Nazara Technologies acquired a 55% stake. "Though the competition on the Indian servers is considerably lower than that on Chinese servers, which is lower than the US servers, which is still lower compared to the European servers, India has come a long way," says Manish Agarwal, CEO of Nazara Technologies. According to competitive gaming resource website e-sports Earnings, as of October 31, 285 players from India had earned \$216,761.38 in various tournaments and games, ranking India at number 64. "The market is doubling every year and is expected to speed up even more," says Rathee. Agarwal, of Nazara Technologies, credits the increase in gaming and e-sports popularity to the low data rates and the growth in internet connections. "In gaming, a good internet connection plays a major role and has been responsible for the growth of online gaming in India. Players used to face a lot of difficulties while connecting some years ago," says Agarwal. "There has been an upsurge in the number of high-end mobile phone users after the 4G rollout in India and dropping data costs have helped in the growth of this sector."

Today, India is in the near-becoming USD 1.5 billion E-sports market at a world number 17. The Indian E-sports market, though largely unstructured, is growing rapidly,

valued at around \$818 million (Singal, 2019). Worldwide, the number of online gamers has risen from 20 million in 2010 to 250 million in 2018, while the number of game-developing companies has increased from 25 in 2010 to 250 in 2018. One point that is very interesting was that India is so huge that even if it does well in one city it would have a huge audience. There are 37 million gamers in Germany. It is projected that by 2020 India will have 628 million players. In the next few years alone, gaming and e-sports over India will also grow 2-5 fold. This is far from the gaming market in other countries like China or USA, but it represents a huge opportunity (Forbes India 30 Under 30 Article, Tripathi 2018).

#### **2.4 E-sports and cognitive dissonance**

Cognitive dissonance is a state of contrary thinking, morals or attitudes, especially with regard to behavioral choices and attitude change. In simple words, when a person experiences inconsistencies in his / her attitudes and behaviour, this can lead to something known psychologically as cognitive dissonance. During the cognitive dissonance process information of the triadic model is applied. Psychological tension or disagreement emerges when one of the variable of the model is modified. In other words, a person is indecisive, 'caught in two minds', this is psychological dissonance (Ireland, 2018). Dissonance is an efficient way to make a difference, because an individual is driven to restore equilibrium between components. It is important to think about how cognitive dissonance skews our perception about people and situation even when it comes to e-sports. Some online spectators or fans are instilled at an early age the value of loyalty, but undying loyalty can also prohibit authentic and truthful discussion. What are the fans to do about cognitive dissonance created by rooting for a player online because of their 'amazing gameplay' even though the player do not pass the individuals personal moral test. It may be likely, however, that the player is not a person of personality with whom the spectator likes to share a relationship in real life. The player can be an exact opposite person to what he / she portrays online. It may be likely that the player should be involved in activities which may be immoral to the individual's eyes. Nevertheless, the person is still engaged online with that gamer. Let's just assume a player cheats for instance, which is the wrong thing to do for an athlete as per the consumer. However, he/she does enjoy watching the player cheat online, though. In-fact they spectate them because of that reason claiming that "it's entertaining to watch them cheat, although, they do get banned for that" as responded by one of our interviewee. Another such example could be the general belief that it would be harmful for eye and even mental health to look at the screen for too long. Though, Gamers claim it helps to concentrate

and build focus because they must be very conscious as they have to keep a good attention over the game. In fact there are lots of games that need mental application and a lot of brainstorming to win. Thus, cognitive dissonance can be observed here. Considering the degree to which e-sport functions in a similar manner to traditional sport, it is also important to develop marketing strategies for the same, and therefore also to consider cognitive dissonance in e-sports.

### **2.5 Research gap**

In the literature review we established that there are several studies on the history (Borowy and Jin 2013) evolution (Wagner 2006) and future (Business Insider Intelligence projections) of e-sports, Millennial/Generation Y and their relation with e-sports and Image of E-sports in India. Regarding e-sport and its association with cognitive dissonance there is, however, a lack of literature. We could not find an extensive study that addressed this area. The analysis hence goes further and tries to understand this field.

### **3.0 Research Methodology**

The author conducted the study using in-depth interview methodology. An in-depth interview is an interview in which a single respondent is examined to find out basic attitudes, opinions and feelings by a professional interviewer (Stokes and Bergin, 2006).

#### **3.1 Sampling characteristics**

In the 18-25 age group from Gujarat a total of 20 participants were interviewed with equal number of males and females. Grounded Theory has been approached with inductive approach. It ensures that the recommendations need to be updated according to the findings after each interview and that interview should be overridden if data is repetitive.

#### **3.2 Protocol and process**

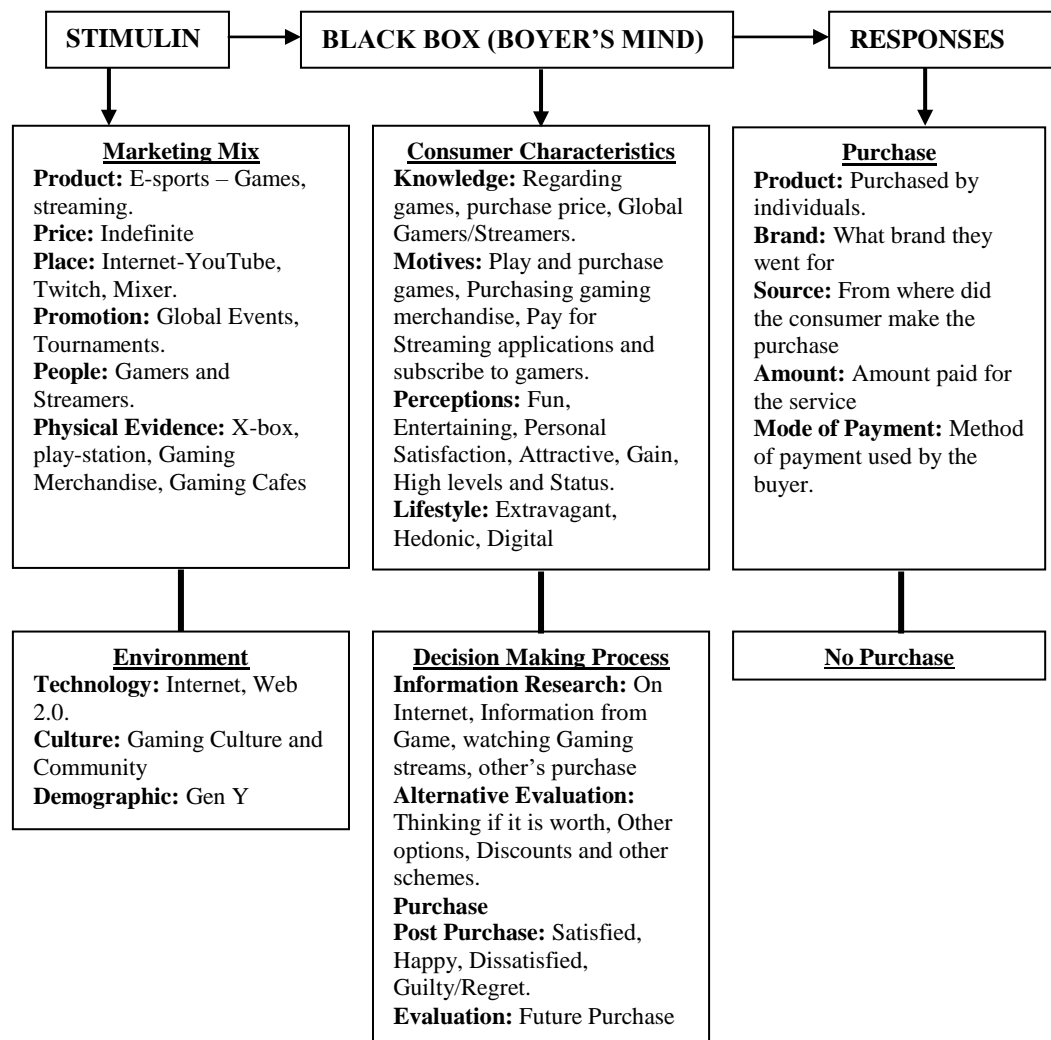
At a suitable place and time, the respondents were interviewed. With audio recording, each interview lasted about 15 to 30 minutes; field notes were taken for further study. The in depth interview focused mainly on asking questions to the respondents regarding the reasons to Play or stream e-sports, how much time do they spend for the same, purchases made over e-sports, reasons and specifications to purchase, how they decide what to buy, where do they get information, how much they pay and how much they are willing to pay in future, their post purchase evaluation and



weather they are willing to make future purchases or not. Questions relating to why they do so were also asked so as to gain information regarding what motivates people to engage into e-sports activities.

#### 4.0 Data Analysis and Results

**Figure 1: Model Demonstrating Cognitive Dissonance in E-sports Among Gen Y in India**



Source: Authors own compilation

Themes were established after careful analysis of all the data collected from interviews to explain the qualitative data. Various respondents responded to different questions and they are further noted. Based on the in-depth interview, we developed a model (Figure 1).

**Table 1: Themes and Evidence**

Category	Themes	Evidence
Purpose to play.	Source of fun, relaxation or escape boredom.	“I play online games because they’re very fun and interesting. It’s a good leisure activity.” “After coming home I’m tired and want to forget about college and work stuff so I start playing games.”
	Part of interest or hobby.	“I’ve been playing video games since childhood and always loved it. I can never stop playing.” “I can spend all night playing my favorite games. I do. Even if I’ve a bit of free time I open my phone and start playing.”
Factors motivating to spectate gaming streams.	Source of entertainment and learning and communication with gamer.	“Gamers are very funny and that makes the streams very entertaining to watch. I also watch them because I want to see their techniques and strategies so that I can improve my gameplay.” “These gamers are live and we can share our comments anytime during the stream. So we can communicate with the gamer live. It’s like we talk to our friends on video calls.”
	Cannot play the game themselves.	“There are a few games that are expensive or may require a good PC. So when I cannot get a game. I watch it online.”
Reasons of making purchases or subscribe to streams.	Making it more attractive and interesting.	“Playing for free is cheating. It cuts off the entertainment received through that game.” “I want my clothes and guns and character look attractive in the game. I want to gain high levels as well.”
	Subscription is way to join the community.	“I become part of the gamers group when I subscribe (pay) to him. Then I can even play with him.” “When I subscribe to him, my name pops up on his screen and he will give me a shout-out. I get recognized by a famous person.”
	Streams may be a part of welfare activity.	“Gamers do live streams during crises like the Australian fires and they will donate the money that is earned through that stream. It’s for a good cause so people pay.”

*Source: Authors own compilation*

The model consists of 3 central interdependent categories with sub-categories. Stimuli, Blackbox and Responses were the three main categories. This can be explained

simply as Input-Buyer's mind-Output. Two factors, the marketing mix and environmental factors were analyzed by stimuli. The marketing mix here in relation to e-sports considered the 7 P's in service marketing; where Product was games and streaming services, Price being indefinite, Place where the service was available included internet, Youtube, twitch and mixer, Promotion included global events and tournaments, People acquiring the service were gamers and streamers. Furthermore, under Physical evidence of service were availability of products for gaming such as X-box and playstation included. It also includes the gaming merchandise available in the market and gaming cafes as well.

Technology, cultural and demographic aspects are included under the environmental factors influencing the stimuli. Technology included the internet and web 2.0, while cultural factors covered the gaming culture and community. Demographic consisted of the generation Y.

The second main classification was Black box which is 'The Buyer's Mind' and it comprised of two aspects, Consumer Characteristics and Decision making process. Consumer Characteristics embraced the Knowledge an individual had regarding e-sports activities, Motives of what purchases to make, their Perception on those purchases and the Lifestyle of the consumers which was generally extravagant, hedonic or digital. Decision Making Process studies Information research done by the individual and the sources from where information was gained. It also included Alternative evaluation done by the individual, purchase and post purchase analysis and future Evaluation. The Buyer's mind influenced the Output which would result to either Purchase or No purchase. Purchase factor covered the product purchases, brand of the product, source, amount and the mode of payment opted by the consumer.

Themes were developed, as mentioned earlier, after careful analysis of all the data collected from interviews to explain the qualitative data. The themes are discussed further extensively in Table 1.

## **5.0 Limitation and Scope for Future Studies**

This research is of a qualitative nature; future studies may be carried out to quantify parameters and measures. This research focuses on a specific age group residing within an urban area. Similar studies can be carried out on different age groups and in small, semi-metro towns. In addition, future studies in other emerging countries can be created, and intercultural issues can be studied.

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