An Experimental Examination of the Effects of Source Gender on Perceived Credibility of eSports Casters

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The eSports industry is growing immensely with a $1.1 billion global market in 2018 (Russ, 2019). eSports, including the professional league championships watched by millions of viewers, have garnered much attention. Despite the popularity, it is widely noted that the video gaming culture is male-dominated and overtly sexist (Fox & Tang, 2014; Nakandala, Ciampaglia, Su, & Ahn, 2017; Ruvalcaba, Shulze, & Kim, 2018). One segment of professional gaming that has glaring gender disparities is the media and broadcasting side. Like in traditional televised sports, broadcasted eSports events have announcers who explain the action to the viewing audience. These announcers are colloquially known in the gaming community as “shoutcasters” or simply “casters”. Most frequently, casters are men, although women are beginning to enter into these roles. Perceptions of broadcasters, including their credibility, are important factors when considering the growth in casting opportunities. The gender of the media members often dictates the type of coverage being discussed and influences the users’ perceptions of credibility of the source. Source credibility theory (Hovland, Janis, & Kelly, 1953) provides a framework to understand how users perceive casters. Women in traditional sports journalism are often viewed as less competent or informed (Mudrick & Lin, 2017; Odrman & Zillmann, 1994) and credibility frequently questioned. There is limited research on women in the eSports community and a gap in how women are perceived as casters. With the eSports industry growth and its gender-biased climate, it is critical to assess the media side and casters. The purpose of this study was to determine whether or not gamers perceived significant differences in the credibility (trustworthiness and expertise) of male and female shoutcasters in the professional gaming industry. An experimental design was employed in which gamers (N = 239) were recruited online and randomly assigned to one of two groups. Participants watched a video of a League of Legends match. One group (n = 111) watched segments of the match which featured a pair of male shoutcasters commenting, while the other group (n = 128) watched segments with a male an a female shoutcaster. After watching the video, participants evaluated the casters, providing perceptions of source credibility (trustworthiness and expertise) rated on a 1-7 semantic-differential scale (Ohanian, 1990), measuring the caster’s level of trustworthiness (dependability, honesty, reliability, trustworthiness, sincerity), and expertise (qualified, knowledgeable, skilled, experienced, and expert). Gamers also provided their identification levels (Trail et al., 2003). The gamers were largely men (79%) about 22 years old, consumed eSports on average 32 hours per week and identified as gamers (M = 5.45/7.00). Through t-tests, we found that participants did not perceive differences in expertise between the male and female caster, and a small significant difference (p = .01) in that the gamers found the female caster to be more trustworthy than the male. MANCOVAs revealed that while controlling for League of Legends identification, gamer identification, and involvement, there were no significant differences in a female/male pairing’s expertise and trustworthiness in comparison to the all male pairing. Implications will be discussed.