INTERACTIVITY, ETHICAL BEHAVIORS, AND TRANSMEDIATION IN ESPORTS: AN ANALYSIS OF POKÉMON THROUGH USES AND GRATIFICATIONS THEORY

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Abstract

Nintendo's *Pokémon* is a family-friendly transmedia franchise that recently added esports to its diverse forms of entertainment. This thesis analyzes how the esports practices of *Pokémon* maintain an inclusive community along with the cultural values and ideology of its company. Elihu Katz et al.'s framing of uses and gratifications theory is used to analyze *Pokémon* esports practices and its transmediation because it emphasizes the importance of fulfillment and belonging for media consumers based on their needs. By examining *Pokémon* esports competitions through uses and gratifications theory, I argue *Pokémon* increases interactivity, promotes ethical behaviors, and expands its brand value across media to address its community's specific needs. My research furthers the work of media studies scholars Yu-Ling Lin et al., Tanner Higgin, Henry Jenkins, and others. By examining how *Pokémon*'s gaming franchise is inclusive and accessible to players, the thesis broadens existing scholarship on the social, ethical, and entertainment aspects of esports.

Introduction

Play brings together communities through traditional games or contemporary

esports. Esports, or electronic sports, are streamed competitions between skilled online

video game players. Esports include a variety of competitive formats based on

cooperative play or individual participation. In some instances, esports can lead to a

career for players. Esports are becoming ubiquitous given their ability to occur almost

anywhere, including in individuals' homes, at game stores, at town halls, and at large

convention centers. Esports offer social interactivity via online live streaming platforms

like Twitch.tv[1] (see fig. 1) and YouTube (see fig. 2), and on social media platforms like

Instagram, Twitter,[2] Snapchat, Facebook, and Reddit, and on television networks like

ESPN. For esports to function effectively, exposure and interactivity are essential for

members of the gaming community.

Nintendo's *Pokémon*, is a newer franchise in esports that includes an interactive

and competitive, role-playing video game about Pokémon, or "Pocket Monsters."

Pokémon, the game series initially created by Satoshi Tijiri[3] in 1997, creates exposure for

its esports through its global popularity. To promote new avenues of exposure while

maintaining the *Pokémon* franchise's core cultural values, *Pokémon* adapted to esports

culture by increasing tournament interactivity and moderation for players and spectators

through live streams and social media. The company also uses positive brand value and

aesthetics to support its transmedia storytelling. Examining these aspects of *Pokémon* and

its success can build on game scholarship by strengthening the bridge between game

studies and transmedia studies.

Pokémon thrives in esports, in part, because of the games' narratives and gameplay, which facilitate convergence. The *Pokémon* series mostly focuses on collection and combat, following the journey of a *Pokémon* Trainer[4] (the player) who wants to become the *Pokémon* League Champion.[5] The Trainer collects and trains a team of *Pokémon* for battle against other Trainers, Gym Leaders,[6] and rival teams. *Pokémon's* tagline,[7] "Gotta Catch 'Em All," reflects the game's designers, Satoshi Tajiri and Shigeru Miyamoto's,[8] goals for players to catch and collect as many *Pokémon* as possible. The process of catching and collecting *Pokémon* has changed little since the beginning of the series.[9] Keeping the catchphrase formula, *Pokémon* adds stability to the video game franchise grounded in players' familiarity with its relatively unchanging play mechanics. These consistent gameplay procedures enhance the convergence necessary to sustain a transmedial game world. *Pokémon's* transmedial structure resembles Henry Jenkins' term convergence or "the flow of content across multiple media platforms, the cooperation between multiple media industries, and the migratory behavior of media audiences who will go almost anywhere in search of the kinds of entertainment experiences they want" (Jenkins, *Convergence Culture Where Old and New Media Collide* 2). The *Pokémon* franchise tells its story through television shows, movies, and video games. While the flow of content between different media platforms—the game, the stream, and the social media accounts—facilitates storytelling in *Pokémon* esports.

Pokémon esports consist of *Pokkén Tournament*,[10] the Video Game Championships (VGC), and the Trading Card Game (TCG). *Pokémon* promotes both regional and worldwide *Pokémon* esports championships, with the latter held in the largest venues[11]. Generally, *Pokémon* competitions have players battle against others in

different time zones or in-person competitions that are scheduled daily worldwide with few restrictions on when games can take place. Within a *Pokémon* competition, a player's set is made up of Legendary *Pokémon* (very rare and powerful *Pokémon* referred to as myths), Mega Evolutions (temporary evolutions that makes a Pokémon more powerful), and regular Pokémon (common characters). The 2019 competitions used *Pokémon Ultra Sun and Ultra Moon*, while the 2020 competitions use *Pokémon Sword and Shield*. The characters and video games used within the *Pokémon* esports competitions determine the level of interactivity between the player and the game. The entry level is open and keeps the player challenged enough to stay in the game as he or she continues to excel.

Within *Pokémon* esports there is both a personalized and inclusive approach to competitions. *Pokémon* provides a casual environment for players because they can participate in competitions officially sanctioned by *Pokémon*. In *Pokémon* esports, the *Pokémon* League oversees competitions of all sizes for all skill levels of *Pokémon* players, enforcing its Code of Conduct and Inclusivity Policy. According to the Official *Pokémon* website, the company's core values are "integrity, honesty, responsibility, and professionalism" ("The Professor Program Core Values"), and these are evident in the live streamed competitions. Also, the Play! *Pokémon* Code of Conduct is available online for viewing and explains what is and is not appropriate in the *Pokémon* esports community (see fig. 3). *Pokémon* created its Code of Conduct to proactively address unethical behaviors in its esports community. As interactivity is a vital component of esports, interactions between groups of people can lead to unethical behaviors online which can be managed through *Pokémon's* Code of Conduct. Generally, *Pokémon* esports competitions allow players of different skill levels to feel included through the

league's management, company values, and code of conduct's inclusivity policy. This emphasis on player inclusivity provides a community where people of all backgrounds can feel welcome, which furthers recent scholarship in game studies on toxicity and guidelines against unethical online behaviors.

Although *Pokémon* adopted aspects of popular esports competitions, such as grand venues, a governing league, and a player code of conduct, *Pokémon* games offer players the option for solo competitive play or online play with others. Game Freak[12] offers non-playable characters (NPCs) within the story of *Pokémon Sword and Shield* and the online option of battling a friend or random opponent. Competing against an opponent face-to-face is a different challenge, requiring strategies not usually used when playing casually. For example, the 2019 VGC Master's tournament shows how players use in-depth strategies to battle in *Pokémon Sun and Moon*. At the beginning of the tournament, player Hirofumi Kimura[13] shuffles through pieces of paper, as the commentators remark on his preparation for the competition. It is likely that taking notes on his competitor, Naoto Mizobuchi,[14] allows Kimura to strategize his play long before he even steps on the stage to battle. As is common among top tier players, Kimura and Naoto spend time strategizing and training a party of *Pokémon* that can earn them a victory. For instance, Kimura uses an Umbreon[15] (see fig. 4) in his party that invigorates the crowd as it is rare to see a non-Legendary or Mega Evolution *Pokémon* at a tournament. His unusual choice for the competition excites the audience and creates a viral moment that gives *Pokémon* esports competitions further exposure. For game scholarship, this example echoes Stephanie Boluk and Patrick LeMiuex's arguments

about competitive and complex gameplay, specifically how this type of gameplay can challenge players' expectations.

Beyond promoting the franchise through its esports, *Pokémon* utilizes nostalgia as a form of affective economics that creates a community through its branding and products. In affective economics, "the ideal consumer is active, emotionally engaged, and socially networked. Watching the advert or consuming the product is no longer enough; the company invites the audience inside the brand community" (Jenkins, *Convergence Culture* 20). *Pokémon* creates nostalgia through several products, such as Pikachu merchandise with different themes (e.g. sakura tree season, graduation, marriage, etc.), *Detective Pikachu* (a film featuring older generations of *Pokémon* characters), and new video games that feature *Pokémon* from older video games in the franchise. *Pokémon* accumulated many fans over the years with some participating in *Pokémon* esports competitions. Moreover, the brand value of the *Pokémon* franchise is continuously increasing due to its franchising.[16] As the *Pokémon* brand value continues to be profitable, money is spent to ensure *Pokémon* fans can play in esports competitions.

Overall, my project illustrates how a family-friendly franchise, such as *Pokémon* might add to current connections between transmedia and game scholarship. With uses and gratifications theory as the dominant framework, I accomplish my research, in part, through examining *Pokémon* and scholarly works related to its goals to increase interactivity through live streaming platforms and embedded chat channels,[17] broaden ethical game play through moderating social media, and increase its brand value via community building and advertisements. This project seeks to create a framework for

scholarship to examine the beneficial role a family-friendly, culturally authentic[18]

franchise can play in esports.

Methodology

Given the integral nature of play in esports, transmedia storytelling allows play and computation to contribute to the continued success of esports. Miguel Sicart details play as "a form of understanding what surrounds us and who we are, and a way of engaging with others. Play is a mode of being human" (1). Play increases experiences in a community such as video games or stores. Play is a core part of being a member of society and integral to one's well-being. More specifically, some scholars note that play acts as social integration for different individuals as the term is defined as "how strongly a person is connected to one's social group" (Griffiths et al. ch. 1.3). Thus, play, and by extension community building and social integration, are foundational to esports.

While metagaming can be defined simply as the concept of making a game out of a game, esports more accurately reflects the broader definition offered by Stephanie Boluk and Patrick LeMieux of "the practices within, around, outside, and about videogames" (329This definition, coupled with Sicart's work, suggests that play includes esports audience's experience. Thus, connecting Sicart's theory of play to metagaming provides a different understanding of play experiences that move beyond a game's intended use and design. Furthermore, Boluk and LeMieux use the experience of the venue to frame the extent to which community building can develop through an experience that is attention-grabbing and captivating. Therefore, Sicart's community building[19] aspect of play is also encapsulated within the definition of metagaming. Spectators' access to an embedded chat channel during a live stream of a competition is a form of metagaming due to the spectator interaction in an embedded chat channel was not something *Pokémon* intended to happen upon the creation of the video game. Game

scholars Boluk and LeMieux acknowledge that metagaming sometimes transcends what the game's creators originally intended. Esports are practices that sometimes operate beyond their game's original design. *Pokémon* also encourages competitive gameplay in its games via added online features Wi-Fi functionality in Nintendo consoles allows players to interact online by battling one another or trading *Pokémon,* for example.[20] Therefore, internet technologies facilitate metagaming around *Pokémon* in the form of esports. Boluk and LeMieux's *Metagaming* examines several established and skill-intensive esports, including *Dota 2*, while my analysis of *Pokémon* aims to include more casual and easily accessible games within esports scholarship.

My research synthesizes recent video game scholarship with uses and gratifications theory to determine how *Pokémon* esports succeeds in esports as a family-friendly franchise. Uses and gratifications theory is used to analyze *Pokémon* esports because it relates to transmedia storytelling and participatory culture. Uses and gratifications theory describes a set of "the social and psychological origins needs, which generate expectations of the mass media or other sources, which lead to differential patterns of media exposure (or engagement in other activities), resulting in need gratifications and other consequences, perhaps mostly unintended ones" (Katz et al. 510). In essence, a player or spectator chooses to interact with media to fulfill one's needs. Both uses and gratifications theory and transmedia storytelling focus on the audience's active participation in transforming the media. Thus, a player and spectator will continue to seek out the aspects of the *Pokémon* franchise that suit one's needs, in turn, leading to higher profitability and focus from the company in those arenas. *Pokémon* focuses on diversity and inclusivity, thus resulting in a successful family-friendly, culturally

authentic franchise. The aspects of uses and gratifications theory that align with my thesis are personal integrative needs, social integrative needs, tension release needs, intrinsic cultural and aesthetic enjoyment (510-511). Uses and gratifications theory has a fifth need, cognitive needs, which was not investigated in this thesis because there is already extensive research on video games and their cognitive effects (Kourakli et al.; Ang et al.; Rauschnabel et al.; Schutter and Malliet; Mishra et al.).

My study builds on the work of Jonathan Sherry et al., which draws on uses and gratifications theory to study video games and players. Sherry et al. conducted focus group interviews amongst 96 participants between the ages of 18-22 and surveys amongst 1265 participants between the ages of 18-23. The study sought to determine which of the following uses and gratifications theory concepts aligned with video game users: arousal, challenge, competition, diversion, fantasy, and social interaction. The primary reason individuals cited for playing video games was social interaction, followed by fantasy, diversion, and arousal, respectively. Social interaction was significantly ranked higher than the next most cited reason. This study is relevant to *Pokémon* esports scholarship because it successfully encapsulates all aspects of uses and gratifications theory, resulting in an increased understanding of fan- and player-base(s).

Within this thesis, personal integrative needs include credibility, self-esteem, reinforcement of personal values, personal identity, models of behavior, and gaining insight to oneself. I argue that *Pokémon* effectively addresses these needs in the following ways: *Pokémon* esports encourages female players to feel comfortable by creating an inclusive environment, thus allowing them to meet the needs of personal identity through appropriate models of behavior; the Play! *Pokémon* Equality, Equity, Diversity, and

Inclusivity Policy (see fig. 5) promotes fans or players from any background[21] to feel valued, which in turn promotes one's self-esteem; *Pokémon* esports reinforces and achieves Albert Bandura's social learning theory's positive models of behavior; through its participatory culture, *Pokémon* esports reinforces players' personal values, insight to oneself, and stabilization of personal identity; and finally, through participation in *Pokémon* esports, players can potentially achieve credibility, status, and increased self-esteem.

The social integrative needs I examine include community building, affirmation, social empathy, reinforcement of values, membership of valued social groups, companionship, sense of belonging, identifying with others, and social interaction. I illustrate evidence of these needs with the following examples: *Pokémon* esports creates a safe environment for community building, the reinforcement of positive values, and the growth of social empathy through inclusive play; *Pokémon*'s leadership explicitly focuses on taking action against unethical behavior, as outlined in the Play! Code of Conduct; embedded chat channels facilitate the social interactions and community building; *Pokémon* esports competitions foster fan participation.

Next, the tension release needs examined through the lens of *Pokémon* esports are entertainment, diversion, and relaxation. Throughout the thesis these needs are addressed in the following ways: through examining of Lin's research on video games' ability to serve as a form of tension relief; by reviewing Boluk and LeMieux's concept of "metagaming" and it's fulfillment of enjoyment; through analyzing of the relaxation embedded within the casual level of gameplay available through *Pokémon* tournaments; by applying Sicart's theory of play, which encompasses many of the tension release

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needs; and finally, through examining Juho Hamari and Max Sjoblom's research results that indicate that escapism is positively related to having more engaged and frequent fans.

Lastly, I delve into intrinsic cultural and aesthetic enjoyment needs, which include broadening cultural horizons and expanding aesthetic exposure. Specifically, these needs are examined in *Pokémon* esports through: (1) the aesthetics of *Pokémon* gameplay, (2) the global accessibility of *Pokémon* merchandise both online, in stores, in cafes, etc., (3) the layout of the live streaming esports competitions, 4) the use of kawaii culture[22] to accurately represent *Pokémon* characters.

Increasing Interactivity: *Pokémon*'s Success in Building a Community

Interactivity is an important concept because it, in part, determines if and how

players participate in *Pokémon* esports. Johnathan Corliss claims that interactivity is the

centerpiece of video game studies, from which all other scholarship stems (7).

Interactivity consists of two or more individuals partaking in a social exchange, such as

communicating online during gameplay and esports events. I define interactivity in this

way to focus on social interactions within the *Pokémon* esports community. For esports,

interactivity includes the ability to watch, chat, and play in competitions and tournaments

via live streams so that a player or spectator of any skill level can participate. A lack of

interactivity in esports may drive away a player and diminish *Pokémon*'s ability to

successfully leverage one's personal and social integrative needs, tension release needs,

and intrinsic cultural and aesthetic enjoyment (aspects of uses and gratifications theory).

In general, interactivity during gameplay has clear connections to uses and

gratifications theory. For example, Yu-Ling Lin et al. emphasize the importance of

human interactivity in scholarship by examining how interactivity affects players'

enjoyment and motivation for playing video games (73). Lin et al.'s study consists of 40-

60-minute interviews with inter-rater reliability. The 120 participants include men and

women between the ages of 18-29 in either undergraduate or graduate school. The results

show how interactions in gaming communities allow players to build relationships with

each other and benefit from the intrinsic pleasure of fulfilling their tension release needs

(Lin et al. 85). Additionally, the research demonstrates that "as far as gamers are

concerned, their motivation for gaming can be said to stem from the interactivity" (Lin et

al. 73). This thesis seeks to demonstrate the role of community in fostering the type of interactivity that motivates fans and players to participate.

While Lin et al.'s study focuses on gaming broadly, interactivity satisfies a player's needs through competitions, live streams, and embedded chat channels. As game scholars William A. Hamilton et al. note, live steaming technology is an integral part of esports because it increases player interactivity and, in turn, fulfills players' social needs. Esports competitions are often broadcasted live on platforms like Twitch.tv and YouTube. According to Hamilton et al., "Live streaming combines high-fidelity computer graphics and video with low-fidelity text-based communication channels to create a unique social medium," (1315). Live streaming in its current form enables public broadcasts of live audio and video streams alongside a shared chat channel. The ability to interact with other players via streaming platforms addresses players' social integrative needs through interactivity and community engagement as well as tension release needs through entertainment. For example, the 2019 *Pokémon* World Championships used live streaming so that spectators could watch these competitions live while interacting with one another synchronously through embedded chat channels (see fig. 6). This example furthers Hamilton et al.'s claims about interactivity in live streams by demonstrating how *Pokémon*'s esports streams support player and spectator social interactions.

Live stream embedded chat channels afford the *Pokémon* community a means to communicate, thus fulfilling players' social integrative needs, including identifying with others and becoming a member of a valued social group. For example, when watching the live stream of the *Pokémon* World Championships on YouTube, a fan can discuss the match in the comments section or the live chat during the match. Tim Wulf et al. asserts

that Twitch.tv provides users the opportunity to simultaneously watch streamers play the game while socially interacting with streamers and other viewers through a chat room (3) (see fig. 6). A viewer may provide live commentary to the streamer throughout the duration of the live stream, allowing a player to potentially benefit from encouragement or suggested strategies (see fig. 7). Therefore, embedded chat channels facilitate spectator-player communication, creating a unique online gaming community.[23] The use of live streaming platforms in *Pokémon* esports follows the same (if not similar) model as other online gaming communities—it supports social interaction and community building, and thus, meets a player's needs based on uses and gratifications theory.

Another aspect that increases *Pokémon*'s interactivity is the franchise's use of vernacular creativity in their online platforms, which keeps audiences engaged. Jean Burgess defines vernacular creativity as "the wide range of everyday creative practices (from scrapbooking to family photography to the storytelling that forms part of casual chat) practiced outside the cultural value systems of either high culture or commercial creative practice (qtd. in Taylor 33). This form of digital storytelling allows the ordinary person to record online memories through live streaming (Burgess 6). To further this point, Burgess explains how digital storytelling "transforms the everyday experience into shared public culture" (9). Vernacular creativity is foundational for analyzing video game live streaming and provides an opportunity for players to publicly satisfy their social integrative needs as a community. For instance, a live streamed *Pokémon* esports competition is no longer a private experience, but instead, a public one. Not only is the streaming experience public during posting and live chat, but also as it is archived by its media platforms ("Understanding Media" ch. 11). *Pokémon* esports furthers vernacular

creativity through social media as digital archives. A fan can access the recorded live streams at any time to re-watch their favorite moments or watch a competition he or she could not watch live. A strength of Burgess's approach to understanding the circuits of production and consumption is the emphasis on seeing not only the creation of videos but sharing and discussion as a form of social networking (Burgess 3). Thus, recorded esports competition streams expand the definition of vernacular creativity[24] because they function as a way of storytelling fan experiences through both the video and chat features. By applying Burgess's vernacular creativity and digital storytelling theories to esports, memory preservation's impact on interactivity in gaming communities like *Pokémon* is evident. Thus, vernacular creativity in *Pokémon* esports fulfills the community aspect of social integrative needs as the creation of new memories is tied to interactions between people online.

Part of increasing interactivity is making esports accessible and *Pokémon* does this through inclusive and comprehensive caster commentary. The *Pokémon* World Championships competition adds a layer of commentary during live streamed events. During each *Pokémon* esports live stream, the official host and commentators make sure to describe each moment in a way that anyone could understand. For example, professional commentators during the 2019 *Pokémon* World Championship VGC Master's Division Final describe the uniqueness of using an Umbreon as most players tend to use Legendary *Pokémon.* How official hosts and commentators explain each battle reveals that the *Pokémon* community wants to make its competitions accessible to anyone who may not be familiar with how the games work. For example, through comprehensive commentary (i.e. the combination of official host commentary and

embedded chat commentary), new and potential players can listen and absorb the information provided by the host while using the commenting within the embedded chat channels as a supplement to what the official host is saying. While this provides a much-needed foundation for new and potential community members, comprehensive commentary can lead to the audience blindly agreeing with and parroting commentators and adding to the debate of play options rather than focusing solely on the player's actions. Even with this potential drawback, however, *Pokémon*'s comprehensive commentary has created an inclusive community of audiences at all skill levels.

Pokémon esports use a variety of venues for competitions to enhance the audience's experience, which allows the franchise to meet players' personal and social integrative needs. Lavish, large venues are a component of Stephanie Boluk and Patrick LeMieux's discussion of how esports competitions transcend video games because these locations accommodate the growing scale of the audience and offer an experience that cannot be achieved by watching online. Boluk and LeMieux describe the atmosphere in which a *Dota 2* tournament took place in Benaryoa Hall in 2012. This expansive hall included box seats, a full audience, and two teams competing in the event. The grand display of this esports competition demonstrates that the community is invested and that the league wants to put on a show for players and spectators. Boluk and LeMieux state that the addition of these venues mixed with high-risk competitive play styles[25] provide a grand and sublime environment for gaming (3564). *Pokémon* esports tournaments often include large arenas and high-risk play; however, *Pokémon* esports tournaments also take place in small shops and offer play for many different skill levels. These practices allow *Pokémon* esports to fulfill players' personal and social integrative needs. High-risk play

addresses self-esteem and status, while inclusive online competitions in small and large venues contribute to community building and a sense of belonging.

Furthermore, *Pokémon* esports competitions take place in multiple venues or ancillary buildings that offer alternative activities, fulfilling players' social integrative needs. For example, the 2019 *Pokémon* World Championships were held in the Walter E. Washington Convention Center[26] in Washington D.C., USA, a venue with numerous ballrooms. In these rooms, *Pokémon Go*, *Pokémon: Let's Go, Pikachu!* and *Pokémon*: *Let's Go, Eevee!*, and *Pokkén Tournament XD* events took place. These side events allow players to participate in games outside of the main stage battles between the best players in the world. These extra activities are often casual, consisting of *Pokémon* gameplay in a more relaxed and less high-risk setting, thus promoting a sense of belonging and satisfying players' social integrative needs.

Furthermore, *Pokémon* extends Sicart's theory of play, which is the interactivity amongst individuals engaging in a game. The theory of play and uses and gratifications theory continues through the official Pokémon Instagram page, which updates both devoted fans and occasional viewers on the physical location of the competition, where to watch the live stream of the event online, highlights from the competition, the winners of each division, and creates a sense of community that is integral to play and players' social integrative needs. As a fan or occasional viewer is able to easily access the tournaments online, he or she will be able to primarily view the stage during the live stream. However, for the fan who can attend in-person, the competitions will provide an opportunity to experience the venue within a community, allowing *Pokémon* fans to partake in events at a competition outside of watching a battle, thus satisfying community

building. *Pokémon* fans have access through the *Pokémon* League to attend events at all levels digitally or in-person, therefore increasing the interactivity of *Pokémon* esports competitions. *Pokémon* esports competitions act as an example of Sicart's theory of play.

The interactivity provided through memorable in-person experiences in *Pokémon* esports competitions fulfills both social integrative needs and intrinsic cultural and aesthetic enjoyment. Further expanding upon Sicart's theory that play creates community, a fan who can attend the 2019 Pokémon World Championships in person has the opportunity to watch battles live, purchase merchandise, take pictures with the designated mascots, play classic games like *Pokémon Snap,* and trade cards with other players. For those watching a live stream, the audience can create unique memories by watching moments in competitions live and discussing the events within the embedded chat channels. In-person and live stream experiences both provide the opportunity for a memorable viewing experience in their own way. As discussed by Sicart, who views play as more than merely interacting with board games, video games, or other concrete objects and instead, encompassing broader daily interactions with other individuals (18). Play beyond games describes how an audience can tie in this experience to life outside of merely playing the game alone or with others. This experience is something that can allow the audience to have a better understanding and appreciation of the franchise. Through this scholarship, the extra attractions that are separate from the competition begin to matter.

While some scholars address interactive practices such as play, metagaming, vernacular creativity, and live, embedded chat channels, few, if any, bring these concepts together to comprehensively analyze a family-friendly video game franchise.

Synthesizing these concepts along with uses and gratifications theory reveals the importance of a franchise that reaches a large demographic while being successful. Increasing interactivity's relevance to uses and gratifications theory is through the fulfillment of social integrative needs, personal integrative needs, and tension release needs.

Promoting Ethical Behavior in the *Pokémon* Esports Community

Promoting ethical behaviors in esports enables *Pokémon* to meet a player's personal and social integrative needs as well as cultural enjoyment. Enforcing and promoting ethical behaviors while simultaneously moderating toxic behaviors maintains *Pokémon's* presence in the esports community as a family friendly franchise. Video game scholars Sonam Adinolf and Selen Turkay define toxicity as "a term that refers to negative behaviors including harassment, griefing (e.g., gaining enjoyment from intentionally making other players annoyed), trolling, cyberbullying, and intentionally opposing other players" (366). These negative behaviors can lead a player to feel stressed, affecting her gameplay and leading to a cycle of negative experiences known as a stereotyped threat. To promote ethical behaviors means creating a safe space for players online without fear of negative experiences. *Pokémon* also ensures player inclusivity, fulfilling players' intrinsic cultural enjoyment. Respecting different cultures, backgrounds, and race is important when expanding *Pokémon* since toxicity can lead a person away from the franchise. The accurate and balanced representation of marginalized groups is integral in pinpointing from where unethical behavior originates, which is one of the necessary steps to creating an inclusive environment. Thus, *Pokémon* esports can achieve success in this regard by limiting unethical online behaviors through the following methods: moderating live streaming chat rooms, reporting users using hate speech to the live streaming websites or social media apps, and banning a player for repeated toxic behaviors to ensure it does not continue.

While a complete overhaul of unethical behavior in the esports community is an enthusiastic goal, limiting players' exposure to racism, misogyny, and homophobia is not

an easily achievable feat. Elizabeth Hackney, along with many other scholars, believes

that legislators, presumably in the United States of America, have not sufficiently dealt

with the complex issues regarding both explicit racism as well as a lack of diversity

amongst video game characters (890). Addressing the issue is one of the first steps

toward a solution. According to a survey conducted by the Anti-Discrimination League

(ADL), 62% of players said companies should do more to make online spaces more

inclusive and safer (see fig. 8) (Ingersoll 28). Therefore, when racist comments flood live

streams during an esports competition, powerful figures in esports (both players and

corporate sponsors) should acknowledge the problem. Acknowledgement is the first step

towards censoring misogynistic and racist behaviors, which can decrease toxicity and

increase the company's success. Much of the video game scholarship surrounding

unethical behavior in esports discusses the problem rather than creating a solution, while

this thesis illuminates how *Pokémon* has implemented effective policies to combat the

issue.

Because *Pokémon* aims to provide a family-friendly environment of ethical

gaming, it is crucial to determine how to create, continue, and promote such an inclusive

environment. Albert Bandura's work on social learning theory can partially explain how

both media and society within *Pokémon* esports affect one's behavior. Bandura is a

psychologist and Professor at Stanford University who is credited with founding several

original theories that were inspired by his experimental research. One of these is social

learning theory, which suggests that behaviors demonstrated by other people in one's

environment often, in turn, shape that individual's behavior. In this theory, the initial

behaviors themselves are often the result of other environmental factors, including the

media. Thus, individuals tend to socially respond in a feedback loop that perpetuates existing stereotypes and behaviors (Poepsel ch. 8). Bandura's theory informs the ideas put forth independently by video game scholars Hackney and Tanner Higgin about ethical behaviors in gaming.

As stereotypes from society are often portrayed in video games, harmful representations of marginalized groups can affect a player's behavior. Higgin's work is relevant because his research on the lack of adequate representations of black characters connects discrimination towards black players and other marginalized groups to unethical behavior online that must be regulated within *Pokémon* esports. Specifically, Higgin analyzes representations in massively multiplayer online role-playing games (MMORPGs) to see why the games lack adequate representations of black characters. Higgin determines that societal discrimination against black communities is integrated into MMORPGs through stereotypes. Some of these stereotypes include gang-related behavior or sports players while black women are invisible (Higgin 1-19). Higgin finds that negative gaming environments contradict tension release needs and personal integrative needs, leading some individuals to reduce their interactions with these online video games. Higgin states that despite character customization in MMORPGs, a player may not view blackness as a suitable identity given in-game stereotypes. The work of gender studies and game studies scholar Gabriela Richard supports Higgin's work, noting that "87% of customized characters in a massively multiplayer online game are male, and 92% are white" (Richard 83). With the majority of characters appearing to be white or white-passing men, it can be difficult for marginalized groups to select an accurately representative character. Higgin and Richard's scholarship are relevant to *Pokémon*

esports because the research highlights the importance of ethical gameplay to the continued growth of *Pokémon* esports and to how game scholars study the role of fictional representations in esports broadly.

Aligning with esports scholarship on the importance of identity ethics, *Pokémon's* Code of Conduct and Inclusivity Policy demonstrates leadership's awareness that unethical behaviors negatively influence esports communities and individual players. Hackney analyzes video games and the importance of a player identifying with one's character in video games. Hackney discusses how players need accurate and respectful representations of themselves (including race) in games. Similar to Higgin's research, Hackney's scholarship furthers conversations about a lack of diversity in video game characters and how this stems from a lack of representation in society. Hackney uses the example of video game character customization options including physical attributes such as body type, skin tones, and even species to make her arguments (865). A lack of accurate representation in video game characters can make minority players not want to play a game or feel unwelcome in its spaces. Accurate player representation through game characters then can fulfill a player's personal integrative needs for self-esteem and a sense of belonging.

Moreover, society has a great influence in how unethical behaviors manifest in esports communities. As researched by Bandura, Hackney, and Higgin, race and society are intertwined, which is why scholarship should continuously evaluate ways to achieve shifting intrinsic cultural enjoyment from games. Video game scholar Jason Bainbridge extends the research of Bandura, Hackney, and Higgin by proposing *Pokémon* and

Japanese culture intertwine and affect one another. Bainbridge describes the relationship between *Pokémon* and Japan as

> …[a] personal, almost spiritual relationship with a mass-produced imaginary is
> what constitutes *Pokémon*'s social network, connecting both *Pokémon*'s creators
> and its audience not only to the national imagination of Japan itself but also to the
> particular concerns of that nation, its relationship to the environment and its larger
> place in the world. (3)

Incorporating the culture of *Pokémon* is important to understand the intended purpose of the game from the creator Tajiri, as current esports scholarship focuses primarily on racist, homophobic, and misogynistic online commentary without considering the culture of the games themselves.

Toxicity, including racism and misogyny, go against *Pokémon's* ideology and a player's personal integrative needs and intrinsic cultural enjoyment. The discounting of minorities in esports coupled with the issue of toxic participants and spectators has led to many forms of discrimination including racism, homophobia, and antifeminist campaigns in online spaces. As stated by Donghee Wohn and Gou Freeman, "Esports is still experience centric – how players feel about themselves and their connection with others may drive them to sustain, support, or leave this area" (12). Player comfort and inclusivity are critical aspects of esports competitions and esports cannot exist without a steady increase in participation. Still, *Pokémon* esports prize diversity because of the various qualities eclectic groups bring to the community. The Play! *Pokémon* Diversity, Equality, Equity, and Inclusivity Policy states, "Diversity, equality, equity, and inclusivity…strengthen and enrich us, our players, organizers, and the Play! *Pokémon*

program globally" (1). This policy promotes the idea that anyone can feel welcome in the *Pokémon* esports community, thus reinforcing the personal integrative needs of players.

Reporting toxic behaviors online (embedded chat channels, social media, and forums) is one way to decrease the amount of unethical behavior in esports and fulfill players' and spectators' personal integrative needs. Generally, individuals may submit a report if they feel their rights have been violated by unethical behavior. After a report has been submitted, the report will be reviewed either by machine learning algorithm, an administrator or expert team. In esports, reporting players may result in a ban that prevents those players from utilizing the game for days, weeks, years, or indefinitely. Permanent bans happen if the behavior is repetitive and egregious. In some cases, specific restrictions are enacted such as only banning the player from using either or both voice and text features (Adinolf and Turkay 367). Resources that block a toxic player from continuing bad behaviors influence another player's experience. Play! *Pokémon* Standards of Conduct detail what violates the franchise's standards, the disciplinary actions that take place, and the appeal process to create a community that fulfills players' personal integrative needs. Additionally, *Pokémon* has a three-step process which includes a written warning, probation, and suspension; however, a player has the opportunity to submit a written appeal (not to exceed 500 words) and supporting documentation within 14 days. Reported players' rights are not reinstated until after a decision is made ("Play! *Pokémon* Code of Conduct). Because *Pokémon* esports competitions have a thorough process for eliminating unethical behaviors, game scholars should acknowledge the importance of a large franchise taking a proactive stance on instilling ethical behaviors.

When racist behavior exists online, regulation is imperative to stop the cycle of discriminatory behavior against minority players, fans, developers, etc. otherwise this behavior can prevent players from achieving their personal integrative needs. One type of regulation proposed is automated responses to unethical behavior. As Hackney points out, games strictly played on consoles are easier to regulate because "programmers can create concrete levels of code that can filter through inappropriate behavior" (889). However, online games are more dynamic and difficult to regulate. As many *Pokémon* esports players are young and train online on the Nintendo Switch console, Nintendo has implemented extensive parental control options for regulating what players can play and communicate with others online when training for esports competitions. Specifically, Nintendo offers automated filters through the Nintendo Switch Parental Controls™ application to restrict a child from "Communicating with Others" ("Nintendo Switch Parental Controls™"). The implementation of the Nintendo Switch Parental Controls™ to allow a parent to monitor a child's activity on the Nintendo Switch enacts Hackney's research on implementing new technologies to combat unethical behavior. While Hackney puts the responsibility of regulation on the company, Nintendo gives the power to the user to regulate their online environment.

  Pokémon is inclusive not just through the policies and practices of its organization but also through the community's supportive behavior in YouTube commentary. The *Pokémon* esports community supports Kaya Lichtleitner,[27] the TCG Master's 2019 *Pokémon* World Champion (see fig. 7). Despite her age and gender, the community's YouTube commentary expresses interest in continuing to see her succeed in *Pokémon* esports. This is surprising given the toxic perspective that female players are inadequate

compared to their male counterparts. For instance, in an analysis completed by Hanhan

Xue et al., it is commonly believed that a male player tends to master gaming skills and

other technical prowess while a female is reduced to an incompetent player and

perceptually framed as lacking seriousness when playing competitive games (855). A

woman could be discouraged from striving for the top level of esports because of such

toxicity and the delegitimization of her accomplishments simply due to her gender. Xue

et al.'s findings relate back to the term stereotyped threat, which results in a lack of

confidence in ability and desire to continue to play the game. This inequality is

unfortunately mirrored within *Pokémon* esports competitions; however, the YouTube

example provides support for *Pokémon* esports' ideologies about inclusivity and

diversity. The example also supports Higgin's message about the importance of

examining community inclusivity in gaming. Because uses and gratifications theory

suggests a player returns back to these mediums if one's needs are met, *Pokémon*'s

promotion of a largely inclusive community through proactive leadership helps foster its

growing fan base.

In order to fulfill a player's personal and social integrative needs video games

must work to disrupt gender inequity and cultural appropriation. *Pokémon* has created

gender inclusivity amongst the "Pocket Monsters" and human characters in the game (see

fig. 9) and sought respectful cultural representation. Focused on gender ambiguity and

representation, Emma Westecott argues that minimizing "the layers of codified

expression" allow players to safely embody their identity (Westecott 236). Similarly,

cultural appropriation can reinscribe racial inequity. Upon recognizing the problematic

representation of the 1996 Jynx "Pocket Monster", *Pokémon* redesigned the character in

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1999 and eliminated the racial stereotyping in the character's original design (see fig. 10).

Additionally, the gender ambiguity of *Pokémon* Trainers allows a player to choose to be

represented by a trainer that may have similar physical characteristics to the player, while

also possessing the skills or special qualities in which a player is interested (see fig. 9).

Pokémon's game world suggests that players creating characters in their own image is

equally important to "Pocket Monsters" not embodying cultural stereotypes. While

gender inequality and cultural appropriation is pervasive in society as a whole and esports

more specifically, *Pokémon* seems to strive for inclusivity and equality. Applying

Bandura's social learning theory to *Pokémon*'s efforts toward equitable representation

suggests that its esports community is more apt to promote gender inclusivity and racial

equity in their communities outside esports.

Furthermore, *Pokémon* errs on the side of the aggrieved as evidenced through the

process for the offender being banned during the investigation and appeals process. Thus,

establishing a space where an individual can feel comfortable enough to report negative

experiences improves the longevity and success of *Pokémon* esports competitions. The

player must also feel comfortable and included in one's character choice as an inaccurate

representation can keep the player from engaging in the game and in the community. For

Pokémon, it prioritizes a safe and inclusive community that promotes ethical online

behavior in its esports competitions amongst each fan. Moreover, without an inclusive

community, *Pokémon* would not be adhering to its core cultural values or ideology. The

source of and ways to prevent unethical behavior affect the players and without the

players, esports would not exist. Additionally, scholars such as, Bandura, Hackney,

Higgin, enforce the importance of understanding where unethical behaviors stem from

and how to combat these negative behaviors.

***Pokémon*'s Brand Value as a Transmedia Franchise**

Scholars view the *Pokémon* franchise as a phenomenon because it is a transmedial and culturally influential brand that embodies uses and gratifications theory. The brand value of *Pokémon* determines how the franchise will continue to grow in esports, increase fan participation, and allow Nintendo to continue as a transmedial brand. Since brand value is the perceived future value of the company, *Pokémon* can strengthen its presence in esports by building upon the franchise's core profit areas and transmediality. Overall, the brand value of *Pokémon* provides longevity to Nintendo and its fan base and serves as an esports model of a socially important transmedial franchise.

Pokémon's positive brand value is reflected through a combination of its diverse product range and the franchise's advertising.[28] *Pokémon* is one of the highest-grossing franchises of all time and understanding its preeminence in the entertainment industry is important for understanding how the franchise entered esports. According to Jason Bainbridge, "on the eve of its tenth anniversary in 2006, *Pokémon*, Inc. had made $25 billion internationally" (3). And yet, *Pokémon*'s success has not peaked even after ten years, and the franchise continues to achieve unprecedented growth. Comparatively, few franchises have succeeded to the extent that *Pokémon* has as evidenced through its ability to achieve transmediation. *Pokémon* rivals other global franchises, including *Star Wars* and Marvel,[29] therefore making it unique amongst esports franchises (Hutchins 1). *Pokémon* is one of a few game franchises to have so ubiquitously proliferated other markets. Thus, *Pokémon*'s unique global market should be of interest to esports scholars who focus on digital entertainment and the economic dimensions of video games.

Pokémon's brand value can be captured through the depth of its product line's success, and in the breadth of areas in which the franchise is established. *Pokémon* has an anime that has become the most successful video game adaption (Bailey 1). Furthermore, the *Pokémon* franchise includes the world's best-selling toy brand, a card game, an anime film series, a live-action film, books, manga, music, merchandise, and a theme park. The *Pokémon* franchise also boasts a large store in New York (see fig. 11), a *Pokémon* themed café in Tokyo (see fig. 12), and pop up shops globally. For instance, the *Pokémon* Center Tokyo DX (see fig. 13) is a department store stocked with *Pokémon* merchandise such as camping attire, utilities, and holiday-themed merchandise. Also, the *Pokémon* Café Tokyo offers *Pokémon* themed dishes, drinks, and limited merchandise in the same location. The *Pokémon* franchise offers merchandise for both the youth market as well as the nostalgic fan. Game scholars can benefit from the *Pokémon* franchise's transmedial presence by exploring the impact extratextual engagement has on esports.

Pokémon is a transmedial franchise that transcends video games. Media scholar Henry Jenkins has researched and written extensively on the topic of transmediation, specifically considering fans' interactive responses to transmedia and how the various elements of a franchise interact and exponentially build upon each other (Jenkins, "Transmedia Storytelling 101"). *Pokémon* is a transmedial franchise through its video games, television shows, movies, manga,[30] stores, restaurants, and merchandise, and now, esports. *Pokémon*'s slogan matches Jenkin's concept of participatory culture, as fans collect and engage in all of its various forms of media. Collecting is at the heart of *Pokémon* as exhibited by its catch phrase, "Gotta Catch 'Em All," which simultaneously facilitates its transmediation (Long 144). Jenkins states, "Younger consumers have

become information hunters and gatherers, taking pleasure in tracking down character backgrounds and plot points and making connections between different texts within the same franchise" (qtd. in Long 13). Thus, the ideas of collecting and engaging in the franchise takes on a more complex form beyond simply collecting the playing cards.[31] Collecting every part of the *Pokémon* franchise has been lucrative, and with the addition of esports, the franchise has furthered its successful transmediation into a new area of industry. The brand value of *Pokémon* allows us to address several ideas that are relevant to esports scholars including the psychology of (digital) gaming and economies.

Transmediation allows for players' intrinsic cultural and aesthetic enjoyment needs to be fulfilled through marketing. The merchandise includes pictures of the *Pokémon* and uses bright colors to draw the attention of the audience and to project a happy atmosphere. For example, the official merchandise of the 2019 *Pokémon* World Championships featured a Pikachu, the most recognized *Pokémon*, in a safari outfit holding binoculars, which is aesthetically pleasing to many individuals. *Pokémon* uses elements of yokai culture as kawaii culture, which can be described as "lovable" or "cute" traits (Bainbridge 10). This aesthetic when applied to *Pokémon* and Japanese culture generates consistent global success for the franchise and satisfies intrinsic cultural and aesthetic enjoyment. For instance, Pikachu has pink cheeks which are a notable facial attribute of the kawaii culture therefore *Pokémon* is using the unique aesthetic to increase its popularity globally (see fig. 14). Bainbridge's kawaii aesthetic showed through Pikachu's design demonstrates Jenkins' term transmediation as Pikachu has become the global mascot for *Pokémon*. The success of kawaii aesthetics for *Pokémon*'s brand value is unique as aesthetics plays a large role in how consumers perceive the games regardless

of the medium. Specifically, the *Pokémon* franchise succeeds in providing cultural and

aesthetic enjoyment through its effective art styles, graphics, and layout of their esports'

live streams. Incorporating attractive aesthetics to a game can increase the fan base and

its participation in a game or its community. *Pokémon's* kawaii aesthetic is colorful, cute,

and motivating to a fan through its reinforcement of intrinsic cultural aesthetic

enjoyment. Specifically, when a game character smoothly performs a move, the graphics

of *Pokémon* games captivates a player or spectator. Since its inception and now in its

esports competitions, *Pokémon* capitalizes on its kawaii aesthetics through cute

characters.

Furthermore, *Pokémon's* ability to effectively proliferate all segments of the

market is a form of lovemark. The term lovemark, coined by Kevin Roberts, means that

certain brands' trademarks garner extreme loyalty that mimics the love and connection

that individuals usually attribute to family and friends. The strong emotional connection

that some brands elicit enable those brands to thrive, as the fan base gladly anticipates

future product releases. *Pokémon's* brand value encompasses the idea of a lovemark

through its widely anticipated trailer drops via the *Pokémon* website and stores, as well as

a fan base consisting of loyals[32] that continues to seek out both novelty and nostalgia in

Pokémon's products. *Pokémon's* ability to elicit the loyalty of the lovemark suggests that

the company is highly capable of having its fan base satisfy their social integrative needs

through participatory culture and membership in a valued social group.

In some cases, *Pokémon* advertises online through esports live streams on

Twitch.tv and YouTube, which are integral to social integrative needs satisfying

consumers' through community building on these platforms. Namely, Phillip Napoli

discovered "User-generated content such as comments, ratings, and reviews also has become an important source of added value for organizations involved in the production and/or distribution of more traditional institutionally-produced content" (18). User-generated content[33] is important because *Pokémon* uses YouTube and Twitch.tv to broadcast its esports competitions, which provides feedback to the franchise from fans that helps the company to address both the positive and negative aspects of its competitions. After having a positive experience, a consumer who has been so successfully persuaded to purchase and enjoy a product will sometimes try to persuade a friend to buy the product too, also known as grassroots convergence[34]. This exchange extends the reach of advertising within the broader community (Poepsel ch. 10). With *Pokémon*, a consumer may suggest that a friend purchase a video game so that the pair may play remotely together. Moreover, *Pokémon* can utilize the user-generated content to receive feedback from a consumer while also gaining attention from *Pokémon's* fan base. *Pokémon* esports, user-generated content, and uses and gratifications theory are connected through the audience seeking out *Pokémon* to fulfill their needs while actively participating during *Pokémon* esports competitions.

One example of *Pokémon*'s brand value developed through live streaming is the Twitch Plays *Pokémon* (TPP) phenomenon. This Twitch.tv live stream can be described as "a Twitch bot [that] would play and complete *Pokémon* Red, controlled entirely by viewers who ordered the bot to press certain buttons by typing commands in the live chat" (Frank 2019). A games and culture author, Andrew Cunningham, details the reasons why Twitch Plays *Pokémon* (TTP) was created in the first place: a social experiment (2014). Fans popularized *Pokémon* on Twitch.tv through Twitch Plays

Pokémon (TPP), a social experiment live streamed event made possible through the Wi-Fi and player versus player (PVP) features. Namely, sixteen days after its launch TPP garnered over 36 million views, 1,165,140 active players, and over 9 million inactive players, with a peak of 100,000 people participating simultaneously (Ramirez et al. 1). T.L. Taylor (2018) states, "Twitch Plays *Pokémon* (TPP) was the first breakthrough that took the chat functionality of the site and letting users input game commands via it, facilitated collective play" (43). The creators decided to stream a playthrough of the emulated version *Pokémon* Red on Twitch.tv. Twitch Plays *Pokémon* included a level of interactivity between the audience and streamers through commands such as "up", "down", "left", and "right" (Cunningham 2014). The example of TPP is relevant as it is a further example of transmedia storytelling within the *Pokémon* brand. TPP is another way for the story of *Pokémon* to be told through player-spectator participation that can be found in a similar way in esports embedded chat channels through live commentary and interactive conversations during the competitions. TPP provides a positive experience that fulfills player-spectator's social integrative needs such as valued membership, by watching and participating in group play of *Pokémon* Red. The player-spectator had full control over one's experience whilst playing *Pokémon* Red. Participating in embedded chat channels like TPP, allows the audience to play the game while in other live streams a viewer watches the player make all the decisions. Cunningham and Taylor explained how a player-spectator's ability to experience an interactive stream can allow a stronger sense of community as opposed to a viewer who is restricted to watching gameplay. Further, social engagement and community building are the primary focus of *Pokémon* esports competitions as opposed to a singular focus on high-level displays of skill (Hamilton et

al. 1323). TPP provides a unique example of how *Pokémon* utilizes fan participation to create a sense of community amongst its fan base, thus extending beyond the narrow focus of high skill-based games and rather broadening to an inclusive family-friendly franchise.

As technological interactivity has played an integral role in expanding the audience for esports, in turn, the participatory culture enhances the audience's experience and fulfills the social integrative needs including community building. William A. Hamilton et al. completed an ethnographic investigation of TPP to examine the motivations of each player, the medium, and its participatory culture. Hamilton et al. completed a series of 11 interviews of Twitch.tv streamers and four interviews of streaming viewers; audio and video chat interviews which lasted one and two hours. The interview material was then analyzed through a grounded theory analysis, along with field notes from ongoing interactions with the streamers, resulting in 1700 total data points. *Pokémon* fans were able to utilize both *Pokémon* and computing knowledge to create a unique, interactive gaming platform (Long 28). Hamilton's research into the participatory culture that led to the creation of TPP blends into Jenkin's concept of transmedia storytelling. Hamilton et al.'s study of TPP is vital to understanding participatory culture translation through live streaming and the examination of players motivation and cultural computing with the inclusion of TPP.

Twitch Plays Pokémon also provides a useful example of *Pokémon's* layout, which tends to be universally appealing as it effectively mirrors traditional aspects of artwork that has also served as a form of rhetoric. A researcher at Northwestern University examined the layout of TPP and how it mirrors more traditional artwork,

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including religious paintings. The similarities between the layouts are based around the positive aspects of aesthetics described above. Eric James states, both TPP and traditional artwork follows "the rhetoric of arrangement that visually situates objects in relation to one another, often for the purpose of establishing contrasts and alignments" (2018). Thus, *Pokémon* is able to effectively leverage the placement of each part of the layout to streamline the audience's experience. Given that the live streams rely on many similar aesthetic aspects to TPP, James' perspective strengthens *Pokémon's* ability to meet uses and gratifications needs.

Community building and participatory culture are vital to *Pokémon*'s continued success in esports, and this creates a connection between the social integrative needs of uses and gratifications theory and Nicholas David Bowman et al.'s research. Video game scholars Bowman et al. completed their research using the drive theory of social facilitation through a 2x2x2 mixed factorial design. The first two variables were the audience presence: either an individual was playing alone or was part of an actual audience. The second two variables were player skill rated as either high or low. Finally, the third set of variables were based upon game challenge as either low or high (Bowman et al. 48). Foremost, this study's relevance is that the external support of an audience can improve a player's performance (Bowman et al. 48-55). The connection between social integrative needs and the drive theory of social facilitation is vital for considering participatory culture in esports and the brand value of the *Pokémon* franchise.

As *Pokémon* esports competitions add to the brand value of the franchise, the emotional desire to spend money on its products is directly related to the social integrative needs of emotional fulfillment and a sense of belonging. Video game scholars

Donghee Wohn and Gou Freeman completed research using two surveys that analyze this relationship. The first survey examined the relationship between playing video games and spending money on platforms used by players to live stream *Fortnite*. The second investigated this relationship more generally across numerous video games as opposed to one game. The results showed that spectator spending habits strongly correlate with the perceived relationship and emotional connection they have with the player-streamer. Wohn and Freeman's research connects *Pokémon* and the community building aspect of a player spending money on attending esports competitions and buying merchandise. Monetary engagement shows the emotional connection one must have with a franchise to engage in its esports.

　　　Pokémon's esports competitions are archived for viewing on social media platforms, contributing to the social integrative needs of interaction and tension release needs of escapism and relaxation. These live stream archives increase *Pokémon's* brand value through advertising, thereby satisfying tension release needs as a viewer can relax when re-watching one's favorite competitions. The social media platforms allow for Jenkin's concept of participatory culture through vernacular creativity and transmediation. Sharing each of these battles throughout the internet is a vital component of marketing these competitions and an opportunity to earn more revenue. The connection between integrated marketing by Bainbridge achieving transmedial marketing by Jenkins is a connection that uniquely describes how *Pokémon* esports connects to the family-friendly and approachable brand image.

　　　As *Pokémon* esports gains popularity, through play the audience achieves tension release needs of entertainment and relaxation. The essential reward of play provides a

foundation for complex product lines (qtd. in Vrtana et al. 412) and is reflected in

winning an esports competition, meeting another player at one's skill level, or even

community building through conversing with other fans of *Pokémon* online, etc.

Although *Pokémon* is designed for multiple skill levels, frustrating moments exist in

terms of challenges created in the game. Yet, overall, *Pokémon*'s ideology with their

games is to create relaxing and enjoyable experiences for players. The ideology of

Pokémon is relevant to brand value as the esports competitions extend the research of

Roberts' lovemark term by transferring this loyalty to its esports fan base, thus addressing

areas relevant to media studies scholarship.

As *Pokémon* serves as an outlet for an individual to relax, this quality is also one

of the reasons for increased viewership and participation, thus fulfilling personal

integrative needs, social integrative needs, and tension release needs. Juho Hamari and

Max Sjoblom utilized the Motivations Scale for Sports Consumption (MSSCF)

questionnaire to determine how to define esports. The results of the four-week study from

888 participants surveyed demonstrated that knowledge of the game, novelty, aggression,

and escapism were positively correlated to the viewing frequency of fans. Specifically,

escapism links to the fulfillment of uses and gratifications theory's tension release needs.

Due to *Pokémon*'s family-friendly image, the idea of relaxation serves as escapism in a

fictional world is a way for people to enjoy *Pokémon* esports.

Participatory culture in *Pokémon* esports competitions fulfills the social

integrative needs and intrinsic cultural and aesthetic enjoyment of fans. This framework

considers the interactions between the fan base online and in-person. While creating a

live stream is important for remote viewers', creating a memorable experience for those

who can attend live is equally as important. To grasp the aesthetics and interactivity of the game, it helps to understand the layout of the game display. The focus of the live streams is to ensure a viewer can engage with the actual battle. A clean layout of the live stream can help a viewer to follow along easily and to prevent any potential instances of confusion, which increases game value through ease of use. Therefore, *Pokémon* focuses on creating a clean and easy to watch its esports competition live streams that allow the viewer to focus on the competition. Therefore, creating a live stream format that is aesthetically pleasing, while allowing the audience to simultaneously engage in an embedded chat channel, is important to esports scholarship. While *Pokémon* streams are not necessarily unique, the incorporation of kawaii aesthetics is distinctive and opens esports to a broader demographic, thus making esports more inclusive.

The 2019 *Pokémon* World Championships VGC Master's Division fulfills players and spectators' aesthetic enjoyment in uses and gratifications theory through a universally appealing aesthetic (for example, organized layout and clear video quality). The YouTube live stream display contains two boxes at the top to display each player, third box below to show the parties of each player, and two *Pokémon* logos on each side of the third box (see fig. 15). Once the battle begins, the display will change to showcase the battle, the players' reactions, how many wins each player has, and how much time is left ("2019 *Pokémon* World Championships: VGC Masters Division Finals "). *Pokémon's* family friendly brand adds to video game scholarship on aesthetics by demonstrating the success of an esports game rooted in kawaii culture aesthetics. *Pokémon* esports successfully parallels aspects of the esports live stream layouts while providing its own cute and inclusive artwork.

In addition to considering traditional aesthetics, another more interactive form of aesthetics can affect player motivation and interactivity and further contributes to both social integrative needs, namely community building, and intrinsic aesthetic enjoyment. Affective aesthetics are incredibly important for the atmosphere based on the different facets that complete the aspects of this term. The definition affective aesthetics within the in-person medium would include the audience cheering, the stage set up in the convention center, and the banners for the players (Taylor 167). Affective aesthetics strengthen the community surrounding the *Pokémon* esports competitions. Thereby, affective aesthetics builds upon a strong brand value by increasing participation and community engagement. *Pokémon*'s use of affective aesthetics enables each fan and player to build *Pokémon*'s transmedia presence through participatory culture, thus combining the scholarship of both T.L. Taylor and Jenkins in a way that is unique.

As the *Pokémon* franchise extends its transmedial umbrella, the stable connection with the audience it's esports competitions fosters a sense of belonging that fulfills social integrative needs and self-esteem that satisfies personal integrative needs. One example that accurately displays affective aesthetics is the battle between Naoto Mizobuchi and Hirofumi Kimura, which showcases the aesthetics of play styles and graphical prowess of the game. During the match, the audience erupts in applause and the embedded chat channels express its admiration for Kimura when he uses an Umbreon in the battle, which is an example of the affective aesthetics. Kimura takes a chance using an Umbreon because most players only use Legendary *Pokémon* or *Pokémon* with the ability to have a Mega Evolution. When an audience member is present in the convention center, a viewer gets to experience the reveal of Umbreon in the crowd and join in the uproar, while an

individual watching at home can only correspond through the embedded chat channel. The crowd's uproar causes Kimura to smile proudly before going back into a more serious competitive mode, thus demonstrating the audience's effect on the player as well ("2019 *Pokémon* World Championships: VGC Masters Division Finals"). The surprise reveal of Umbreon can also be referred to as live stream suspense, which is when spectators expect the unexpected to happen (Karhulahti 10). When watching an esports competition at the highest level, a fan may anticipate certain actions, but the way certain moves and characters are utilized is sometimes unexpected. While a viewer can cheer from home, the difference is similar to watching a concert from the crowd as opposed to watching virtually. Overall, the battle demonstrates how part of the experience is engaging with all the senses, thus exemplifying the basis of affective aesthetics and its important role in participatory culture and brand value.

Furthermore, the audience and participation positively affect the esports player's skill level. These outside forces draw together the community, thus, adding a more integrated level of involvement in the battle. Furthermore, the audience members do not benefit alone from this participatory culture, but also each player. For example, research from Bowman et al.'s study has shown that audience participation increases effort, which also leads to increased skill (Bowman et al. 61). By drawing together and strengthening community involvement through a combination of affective aesthetics and participatory culture, *Pokémon* is able to increase its brand value through meaningful socialization. *Pokémon* esports competitions effectively demonstrate the dynamic circular relationship between affective aesthetics, participatory culture, and player skills through the lens of uses and gratifications theory.

Moving forward, *Pokémon* brand value has created a community where players of any demographics can come to experience esports competitions that prioritize safety, fun, and inclusivity, thus satisfying the relaxation and entertainment elements of tension release needs while simultaneously building upon the sense of belonging and social interaction elements of social integrative needs. Moreover, interactivity is important because of the opportunities that *Pokémon* can have to further expand its brand by using esports as a marketing tool. Increasing interactivity also allows fans a new viewer to have an easy time finding accessible ways to watch the competitions, interact with another fan online or in-person, and compete with others at the same skill level. *Pokémon* already has a unique place in the esports community due to its positioning[35] as an inclusive, culturally authentic, and family-friendly franchise. Overall, *Pokémon* esports competitions continuously building community through its high brand value, allowing a player to enter a safe space where one can satisfy one's tension release needs of escaping real world issues to fully enjoy a transmedial franchise's esports competitions.

Overall, the brand value of *Pokémon* and its relationship to esports can be connected via transmedia storytelling. As *Pokémon* has established itself as a transmedia storytelling franchise through its merchandise, video games, television shows, movies, stores, restaurants, and now esports has been added to under this large umbrella of the franchise. The importance of analyzing the brand value of *Pokémon* is due to the addition of esports, now this form of entertainment is positively adding to the franchise's success and fulfills the personal integrative needs, social integrative needs, intrinsic cultural and aesthetic enjoyment, as well as tension release needs established by uses and gratification

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theory. *Pokémon's* brand value highlights how loyals can use participatory culture to extend the transmediation of a family-friendly franchise entering esports.

Conclusion

Pokémon effectively entered esports culture by increasing tournament interactivity with metagaming and participatory culture, promoting ethical behavior on social media and in embedded chat channels, and expanding brand value through transmediality and affective aesthetics. Uses and gratifications theory provides a distinct and effective framework for examining *Pokémon*'s successful integration into esports as a family-friendly, culturally authentic model. An interactive form of play is demonstrated through *Pokkén Tournament*, the Trading Card Game (TCG), and the Video Game Championship (VGC). Play is the precursor to success because it builds a fan base, ensures a company's relevance, and creates longevity. The *Pokémon* franchise's unique ability to tap into the concept of play allows the franchise to achieve success through three methods: increasing interactivity, promoting ethical online behaviors, and recognizing brand value's importance in transmediation.

Interactivity is a key component of esports, and *Pokémon* effectively uses this component to fulfill the personal integrative needs, social integrative needs, and tension release needs of fans. A dynamic form of play also fits in with Miguel Sicart's philosophy and in turn, fulfills social integrative needs (18). In the 2019 *Pokémon* World Championships VGC Master's Tournament, Hirofumi Kimura uses dynamic play and likely applies it to his strategy to give himself the best chance he has at winning the world title, thus fulfilling the personal integrative needs of status and self-esteem ("2019 *Pokémon* World Championships: VGC Masters Division Finals"). Both players find a way to fulfill Sicart's philosophy of play with an understanding of the competition and

are ready to engage with one another, thus achieving community building and social interaction.

Right now, *Pokémon* provides interactivity for smaller competitions. On the other hand, given the pandemic of COVID-19, competitions of any size are likely to be restricted for the next two years. To adapt, research examining the feasibility and acceptability of online competitions, as well as if these competitions also serve to fulfill uses and gratifications theory, can be an arena for esports scholars. Further, scholars can evaluate the effectiveness for alternative marketing strategies on aspects such as participatory culture.

With the implementation of Nintendo Switch Online, Nintendo is keeping up with the popularity of apps like Discord[36] to communicate while playing video games online. Looking ahead, adding *Pokémon Sword and Shield* to the Nintendo Switch Online app will increase interactivity. Given misuse of online voice chat, as with recent hackings through Nest cameras,[37] Nintendo must take the necessary steps to prevent similar instances (Gandel 2019). The Nintendo Switch Online app could enforce a two-factor verification[38], similar to the options allowed in Google and newly implemented with Nest. Incorporating more security can help with the interactivity for the community by allowing every member to feel safe. Albert Bandura's social learning theory is vital due to *Pokémon* esports' young demographic because of how they might repeat witnessed behaviors. Future scholarship could consist of surveying the parents of young *Pokémon* competitors on how they feel about their children being a part of the esports community and interacting with others. Also, further research can focus on other technologies that can be used to further protect and secure interactions.

Pokémon esports leadership enforces a positive and inclusive environment for its community, which gives new information to esports scholarship as current research focuses on the negative aspects of toxicity within the community. In applying uses and gratifications theory, analysis demonstrates that the positive environment that *Pokémon* esports leadership enforces successfully fulfills its community members' needs in the following ways: the tension release needs of entertainment, emotional release, and relaxation; intrinsic cultural enjoyment needs of broadening authentic cultural values and providing fair representation; and personal integrative needs of models of behavior and self-esteem. *Pokémon* esports uniquely relies on age-based divisions instead of gender specific divisions. Therefore, *Pokémon* conveys the message that a player can be skilled regardless of gender. As describe previously, balanced representation is crucial to *Pokémon's* esports success as it allows people a safe place to enjoy *Pokémon*'s online community.

Issues concerning race and gender leads to a discussion of the importance of accurate representation within video games. For *Pokémon,* the inclusion of character customization introduced in *Pokémon X* and *Y* is a step forward but not the solution, as prescribed by Tanner Higgin. The inclusion of different skin colors within games is crucial because a player can identify with the character while satisfying the personal integrative needs of identification, self-esteem, and insight to one's self. Research needs to continue conducting interviews to determine what a player of any race, sexuality, gender, and/or disability would feel comfortable as representing one's group.

Limiting unethical behavior has created success for *Pokémon* in esports by creating a safer environment that satisfies the personal integrative needs and intrinsic

cultural enjoyment of the community. Currently, *Pokémon* moderates toxic comments through human moderators, which has been somewhat effective to date. The concern is when increasing the member base and longevity, the platforms will gain more traffic, which in turn, may lead to the human moderators having difficulty keeping track of all the comments efficiently and in a time effective manner. To move forward, automated moderators will be useful as *Pokémon* continues to expand therefore, future research should look at artificial intelligence (AI) moderating live streams. The purpose of Albert Haque's research is based on distinguishing between human and bot troll profiles. Haque from University of Texas at Austin collected 38 million data points from TPP and "using clustering and distance-based methods, we use contextual data such as the group's current goal, the current time, and the username to classify each point as an anomaly" (2014). The study's algorithm is a potential first step towards being able to automate the removal of trolls and specific comments from these individuals or bots. *Pokémon* implementing an algorithm is a step that is integral to future esports scholarship especially given the current need to hold more competitions predominately online.

The *Pokémon* franchise is unique to the esports community due to its success in transmedial marketing. Joseph Tobin's work identifies how *Pokémon* captures a younger audience as well as the nostalgia for older fans at a magnitude not seen by another video game in esports (34). One example that proves *Pokémon*'s longevity is the website *Polygon* having a section solely dedicated to *Pokémon* ("*Pokémon"*). Another example includes *Pokémon*'s inclusion in the *Guinness Book of World Records* in 2016 for the best-selling JRPG series, first video game on the cover of *Time* magazine, *Pokémon X and Y* being the best-selling 3DS game, and *Pokémon Black and White* being the most

pre-ordered Nintendo DS game to name a few of their accolades (2016). *Pokémon*'s positive brand value can be attributed to their diverse products, inclusive community, and family-friendly atmosphere that has added esports to its transmediation.

On the other hand, while *Pokémon* continues to have many loyals, the franchise received mixed reviews with the release of *Pokémon Sword and Shield*. One of the major complaints includes the removal of the National Dex[39]: a list of all Pokémon from the beginning of the series. Therefore, the elimination of the National Dex diminishes value of the *Pokémon* tagline of "Gotta Catch 'Em All" because a player can no longer catch all Pokémon. Additionally, the storytelling falls flat and lacks interesting human characters and unique Pokémon. Because *Pokémon* relies on its characters for popularity, relevance, and longevity, the removal of the National Dex can dismantle the foundation of *Pokémon*. As Game Freak's lack of transparency becomes more apparent, Nintendo must step in to prevent the franchise from dismantling itself. Alienating a part of *Pokémon's* fan base eliminates future viewership and participation in esports competitions due to *Pokémon Sword and Shield* being the video game used in the tournaments.

An individual may play *Pokémon* video games for the fulfillment of the intrinsic cultural and aesthetic enjoyment, however there are times when the graphic aspect of the video games does not meet expectations. For instance, when playing *Pokémon Sword* and *Pokémon Shield* in a battle, there are instances of severe lag[40]. Alternatively, the aesthetic enjoyment is embodied through Fernández-Vara's statement, "the juiciness of a game is the amplified (and at times excessive) audiovisual feedback that the player receives after every interaction" (6). The importance of having graphics that are engaging, improves the player's experience and transmediation. Scholars could complete research consisting of

surveys or interviews to determining reasons a player stopped playing a particular game.

Through determining the importance of intrinsic cultural and aesthetic enjoyment in

graphical prowess, scholarship can expand research on the fan's experience.

Pokémon's pleasing aesthetics contribute to the positive brand value by creating

visually affective products as well as creating a culture surrounding the artwork,

therefore, fulfilling the intrinsic cultural aspect of uses and gratifications theory. Game

Freak and Nintendo could further consult the creator and current executive producer of

Pokémon, Satoshi Tajiri. Tajiri has not been a part of the creative team for *Pokémon* for

the last six years, and a notable dip in quality has developed since being promoted to

executive producer. Tajiri being involved more in the creative process could bring

Pokémon back to its roots and may renew relevance and interest from its older fanbase.

Additionally, Ken Sugimori, the artist of the original 151 *Pokémon*, which authentically

represented Japanese culture (see fig. 16), has not been a part of Game Freak's team since

2014, likewise Tajiri has been pushed to the background. Bringing back the original artist

could also renew an interest in the franchise as Sugimori would be creating brand new

Pokémon for future video games. The aesthetic enjoyment that stems from the successful

art style of the *Pokémon* characters and its artwork on diverse merchandise as well.

Overall, *Pokémon* creates a sense of community through play. As discussed by

Sicart, "a form of understanding what surrounds us and who we are, and a way of

engaging with others" (1). Personal integrative needs are achieved through *Pokémon's*

policies, reinforced through Bandura's social learning theory, and increased through

Jenkins participatory culture. Social integrative needs are satisfied through a combination

of community building and inclusivity of play, which is facilitated through *Pokémon*

unique leadership outlined in the Play! *Pokémon* Code of Conduct, witnessed through live streaming, embedded chat channels, and esports competitions. Tension release needs are fulfilled within Stephanie Boluk and Patrick LeMieux's concept of metagaming by integrating casual game play, thus providing support for Juho Hamari and Max Sjoblom's research regarding escapism's positive correlation to audience engagement. Intrinsic cultural and aesthetic enjoyment are addressed through the accurate representation of art styles within *Pokémon* games, global accessibility of the merchandise, the aesthetic appeal of the live streaming layouts, and the accurate representation of "kawaii" culture. Future research can continue to delve into the important aspects of interactivity, ethical online behaviors, and brand value as pieces of successful esports research.

Notes

1. Twitch.tv is a live-streaming platform that was created in 2006 and is primarily used to live stream video games. It is the largest live streaming platform in the world and has been a subsidiary of Amazon since 2014.

2. Twitter offers a different approach to social networking, allowing users to "tweet" 140-character messages to their "followers," making it something of a hybrid of instant messaging and blogging. Twitter is openly searchable, meaning that anyone can visit the site and quickly find out what other Twitter users are saying about any subject. Twitter has also been useful for marketers looking for a free public forum to disseminate marketing messages. (11.2)

3. Satoshi Tajiri was born in Machida, Tokyo on August 28, 1965. When Tajiri was 16 years old, he won a video game contest sponsored by SEGA. In the early 1980s, Tajiri created the magazine Game Freak with a group of friends and would go on to meet Ken Sugimori, who would later design all *Pokémon* characters. He created *Pokémon* in 1996 and is the creative director now. ("Bulbapedia")

4. A *Pokémon* Trainer is a character who leaves home around the age of ten to catch, train, nurture, and battle with *Pokémon*. In general, this is an expansive term to pertain to anyone who owns a *Pokémon*.

5. A *Pokémon* League Champion is a character who has defeated all Gym Leaders, the top four trainers in the fictional country, and the current *Pokémon* League Champion to become the highest ranked *Pokémon* trainer.

6. A Gym Leader is a character who battles Trainers to test their strength and capability as a *Pokémon* Trainer. These battles take place in a large building that the Gym Leader is required to maintain. If a Trainer defeats the Gym Leader, the Trainer will be awarded with a Gym Badge and will proceed into the *Pokémon* League.

7. A tagline is a catchphrase designed to sum up the essence of a product (Tanner and Raymond ch. 5.4).

8. Shigeru Miyamoto is a world-renowned video game designer and creator, who created *Mario* and *The Legend of Zelda*. He collaborated with Tajiri by pushing the idea of more than one game, emphasize trading aspects, players linking with friends to catch all *Pokémon*. ("Bulbapedia")

9. To illustrate this point, the catching and collecting gameplay featured in Niantic's *Pokémon Go* (2016), an augmented reality mobile video game, earned Niantic $1.4 billion internationally from consumers (Ankit and Vivek 1).

10. *Pokkén Tournament*, which is a fighting video game using play styles from an arcade game *Tekken*, while VGC & TCG are what will be referenced when *Pokémon* is discussed unless stated otherwise

11. For example, the Round Table Games *Pokémon* Joust League is held at Round Table Games, which is a small video game store in Carver, Massachusetts. On the other hand, the 2020 *Pokémon* Oceania Championships take place in the Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre ("2020 *Pokémon* Oceania International Championships").

12. Game Freak is a Japanese video game developing company that created *Pokémon* and is owned by Nintendo.

13. Hirofumi Kimura is the runner-up of the 2019 *Pokémon* World Championships VGC Master's Tournament. He aimed to "create a team with an advantage against three teams popular in overseas, XRay / RayOgre / XernDon, and not with a disadvantage against Lunala team popular in Japan" (Victory Road 2019).

14. Naoto Mizubuchi is the winner of the 2019 *Pokémon* World Championships VGC Master's Tournament. In 2015, Mizobuchi was invited to the 2015 *Pokémon* World Championships after placing in the top 8 at Japanese Nationals (2019). He would go on to place 4th at the 2015 *Pokémon* World Championships (2019).

15. Umbreon is a dark-type *Pokémon* that is from the species of Moonlight *Pokémon*. Umbreon was introduced in Generation 2 and is a possible evolution of the *Pokémon* Eevee. The player must have high friendship and evolve the Eevee at night to get an Umbreon. ("Umbreon Pokédex: stats, moves, evolution & locations").

16. Franchising is "the coordinated effort to brand and market fictional content within the context of media conglomeration" (Jenkins, *Convergence Culture Where Old and New Media Collide* 326).

17. According to Hamilton et al., an embedded chat channel appears adjacent to the live stream video and allows the audience to "send messages to the streamer and to others in the chat" (1316).

18. Culturally authentic can be defined as a contrast to hybrid: a hybrid mixes two or more cultures... while authentic... is culturally informed (Brown 6).

19. The importance of the social aspect of play is also supported by media studies scholar Paul Booth (Location 1081).

20. The integration of Wi-Fi was a result of keeping up with other consoles from Sony and Microsoft integrating this concept to their own consoles.

21. social, economic, ethnic, skill level, cultural, racial, age, and gender

22. Kawaii culture began as an "underground literacy trend in youth culture, incorporating *burikko ji* (fake child writing) and *koneko ji* (kitten writing) that was then commodified by Sanrio, most notably in *Hello Kitty,* and proliferated so that each Japanese prefecture and company today now has its own *yuru-kyara* ("funny mascots"), that take part in cuteness competitions observed by expert judges" (Bainbridge 10).

23. A New Literacies Perspective is present when discussing the importance of online chat rooms and participating in video games can help expand the online communities in esports. As expressed by Donald Leu Jr. et al., "Technology opens new possibilities for communication and information... redefine literacy practices while they communicate on a chat board associated with a website or participate in virtual reality role-playing games" (1).

24. *Pokémon's* representation of the term vernacular creativity also touches on Kathleen Yancey's term envisionment. Envisionment can be described as "the ability of someone to take a given technology and find a use for it that may be at odds with its design" (Yancey 319).

25. High-risk competitive play means that play that is occurring at the highest level of esports competitions. For instance, during a *Dota 2* tournament the competitive play is incredibly skilled and high-risk moves are used for the purpose of winning as opposed to more casual play where the strategies may be more subdued and careful.

26. Additionally, the Walter E. Washington Convention Center (where the 2019 *Pokémon* World Championships took place) (see fig. 4) can hold 500 to 42,000 attendees with 703,000 square feet of exhibit space ("Walter E. Washington Convention Center") whereas other much smaller venues such as comic bookstores are about 750 square feet.

27. A successful female competitor in *Pokémon* esports is the TCG Master's 2019 *Pokémon* World Champion, Kaya Lichtleitner from Germany.

28. A comprehensive definition of advertising focuses three primary facts: the "messages" put forth are used to increase exposure to and knowledge of the company's brand, to lead to engagement with services and purchases of products, and finally to encourage loyalty (Poespel ch. 10).

29. Hutchins compares *Pokémon*'s primary target audience to *Star Wars*, which was first a book series, Marvel, which began as primarily a comic book publisher, and *Harry Potter*, which also began as a book series.

30. Manga are "Japanese comic books and graphic novels considered collectively as a genre" ("Merriam-Webster").

31. Matt Hills's definition of fandom is demonstrated through the description of the *Pokémon* community. The definition of fandom includes "passionate, enduring, and socially organized fan audiences" (Hills 73).

32. Loyals consist of "the most dedicated viewers of a particular series, often those for whom the program is a favorite. Loyals are more likely to return each week, more likely to watch the entire episode, more likely to seek out additional information through other media, and more likely to recall brands advertised during the series" (Jenkins, Convergence 76).

33. Another useful framework to explore this concept is Jim Ridolfo and Dànielle Nicole DeVoss's term rhetorical velocity. This term refers to "the understanding and rapidity at which information is crafted, delivered, distributed, recomposed, redelivered, redistributed, etc., across physical and virtual networks and spaces" (Ridolfo and DeVoss 6).

34. Grassroots convergence is "the informal and sometimes unauthorized flow of media content when it becomes easy for consumers to archive, annotate, appropriate, and recirculate media content" (Jenkins).

35. Positioning is how consumers perceive a product relative to the competition. (Tanner and Raymond Ch. 5.4),

36. Discord is an app used to communicate via voice, text, and video with friends and different communities.

37. A Nest camera is a security camera used to protect the home.

38. A two-factor verification is a second log-in that is not purely password based like using a fingerprint, a code sent via email or text, or face identification.

39. The elimination of the National Dex becomes more frustrating as Game Freak said it cut back on including the National Dex to improve the graphical component of the games, a promise that was not delivered.

40. Lag is "the delay between an input event and the feedback of the event's result, ubiquitously impacts human interactions with computers" (Metzger et al. 20).
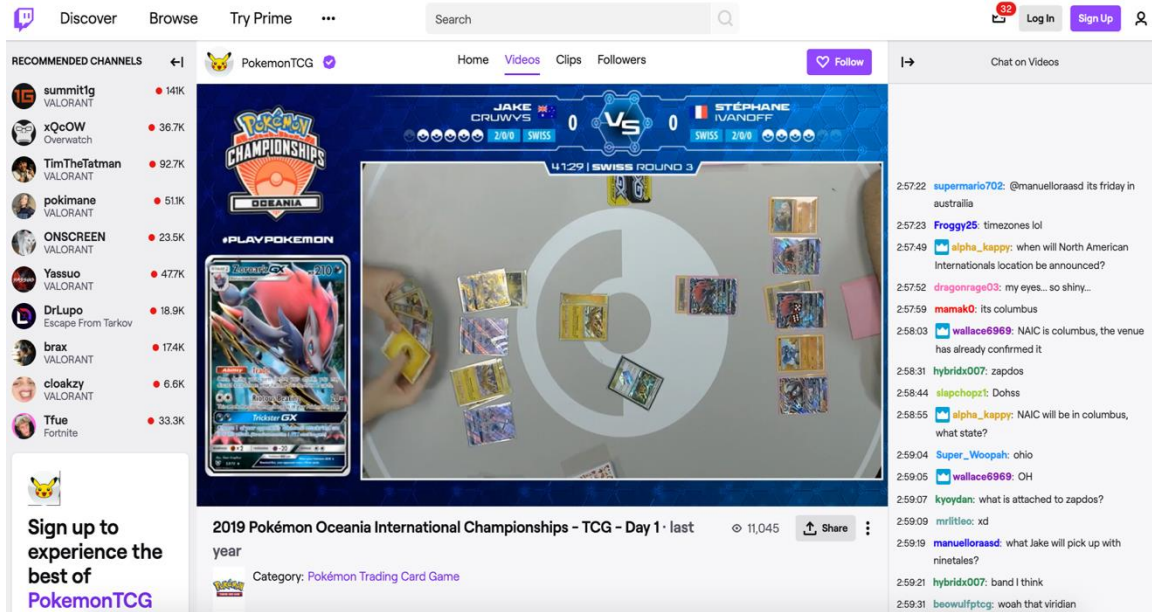
Fig. 1. Still of TCG Day 1 (2:59:38) from: Twitch.tv, "2019 *Pokémon* Oceania International Championships." *Twitch.tv*, uploaded by The Official Pokémon YouTube Channel https://www.twitch.tv/pokemontcg/video/380682292?filter=archives&sort=time
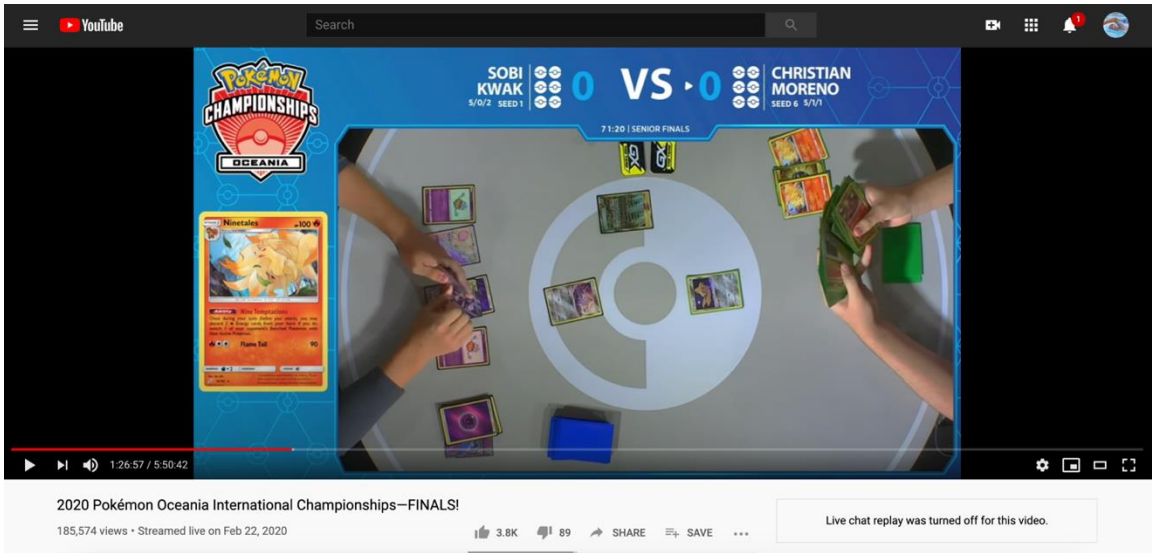
Fig. 2. Still on YouTube 2020 *Pokémon* Oceania International Championships –
FINALS! (1:26:57) from: "2020 *Pokémon* Oceania International Championships -
FINALS!" *YouTube*, uploaded by The Official Pokémon YouTube Channel,
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EvJDJHBjvHY&t=5346s

Play! Pokémon Standards of Conduct

ENGLISH VERSION

Date of last revision: March 9, 2020

1 Introduction

As a game of skill, Pokémon is enjoyed for its complex strategies, entertaining characters, and atmosphere of friendly competition. To ensure that this atmosphere is maintained, Pokémon Organized Play has developed the following Standards of Conduct for all who participate in the Play! Pokémon program, whether as a player, Professor, or event attendee.

It is the responsibility of all Play! Pokémon program members to familiarize themselves with these Standards, and to promote and exemplify them at all times during their participation.

2 The Spirit of the Game

While one objective of a Pokémon tournament is to determine the skill level of each player involved, another is to ensure that every participant has fun. It is this attitude that Pokémon Organized Play wishes to promote at Play! Pokémon tournaments.

Adherence to the Spirit of the Game helps to ensure that all participants, including players, spectators, and event staff, can enjoy and participate in each Play! Pokémon tournament to the fullest.

The Spirit of the Game should guide the conduct of players, as well as Pokémon Professors as they interpret and enforce the rules.

2.1 Tenets of the Spirit of the Game

2.1.1 Fun

As a game, Pokémon is meant to be fun for all parties involved. When a game ceases to be fun, players find other things to do. By contributing to a safe, friendly atmosphere, participants can be instrumental in helping those around them enjoy their experience.

- Players should refrain from causing unnecessary delays to games or engaging in behavior that may negatively impact the experience of those around them.

2.1.2 Fairness

Players should act with fairness and honesty during every game. Above all, a player should prefer to lose a game than to win by cheating.

- Should players realize that a mistake has been made during gameplay, they should make their opponent or a judge aware immediately.

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Fig. 3. Still from Play! *Pokémon*, See Play! *Pokémon* Code of Conduct

Fig. 4. Umbreon from: *"*Umbreon Pokédex: Stats, Moves, Evolution & Locations." *Pokémon Database*, 23 Feb. 2020, pokemondb.net/pokedex/umbreon.

Play! Pokémon Equality, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusivity Policy

The Pokémon Company International is committed, in its role as the sanctioning body of Play! Pokémon tournaments worldwide, to fostering an environment that is inclusive to all participants regardless of factors including but not limited to age, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender, and/or disability.

Diversity, equality, equity, and inclusivity are important to us. They strengthen and enrich us, our players, organizers, and the Play! Pokémon program globally. We want Play! Pokémon events to be a place for players and fans of all backgrounds. We aim to treat everyone in our programs fairly and to recognize and respond to their individual needs, while striving to provide a fun and fair environment for all participants.

Building a truly diverse and inclusive program is a long-term and ongoing process to which we are fully committed. We recognize that this is a core area for the program and one which we must continuously monitor and strive to improve.

Our aim is to build a culture and community that actively promote learning, openness, fairness, diversity, equality, equity, inclusivity, and general good sporting behavior. All members of the Play! Pokémon community—players, fans, parents, Professors, organizers, and attendees in the Play! Pokémon program—have a role in making this a reality.

Pokémon, its agents, sanctioned persons, and entities will consider all people on merit and will not take part in or tolerate discrimination, victimization, or harassment on the grounds of:

• Age	• Religion, belief, or lack thereof
• Disability	• Sexual orientation
• Gender identity or reassignment	• Socioeconomic status
• Marital or civil partnership status	• Education
• Pregnancy or maternity	• Citizenship status
• Race, color, nationality, or ethnic or national origin	• Political affiliation

Who is covered by the policy?

The policy covers all individuals on the Play! Pokémon staff, and all players, organizers, Professors, and attendees at officially sanctioned Play! Pokémon events.

Responsibilities under the policy

All people sanctioned by The Pokémon Company International to conduct official Play! Pokémon activities share responsibility for ensuring the policy is followed.

All contracted event organizers and Professors are expected to adhere to and ensure that this policy is in effect at events at which they officiate.

All players, staff, parents, and attendees are responsible for their personal behavior in relation to all aspects of this policy.

All contracted event organizers and Professors must be made aware of the contents of this policy and are expected to support and promote it.

Document last reviewed: March 6, 2019

Fig. 5. Still from Play! *Pokémon*. See Play! *Pokémon* Equality, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusivity Policy.

Fig. 6. Live Embedded Chat Channel of TCG Day 2 from: Twitch.tv, "2020 *Pokémon* Oceania International Championships." *Twitch.tv*, uploaded by TCG *Pokémon,* https://www.twitch.tv/videos/555711636
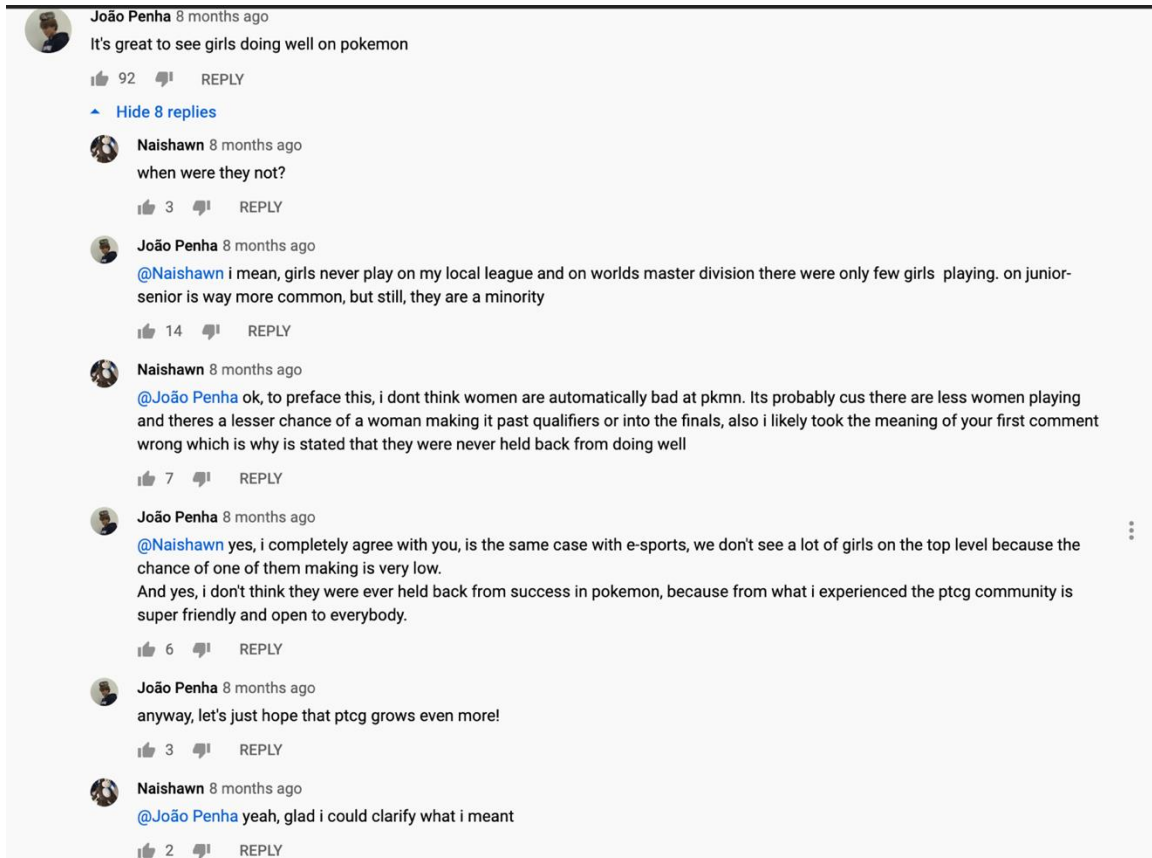
Fig. 7. YouTube Comment Section users expressing interest in continuing to see her succeed in *Pokémon* esports competitions from: "2019 *Pokémon* World Championships: TCG Senior Division Finals." *YouTube*, uploaded by The Official *Pokémon* YouTube Channel, 18 August 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hn_c0M-QU8U.

Figure 20. Agree with Statements. In the survey, players were asked whether they agree with various statements about the state of gaming.

Source: ADL/Newzoo 2019 Online Game Survey
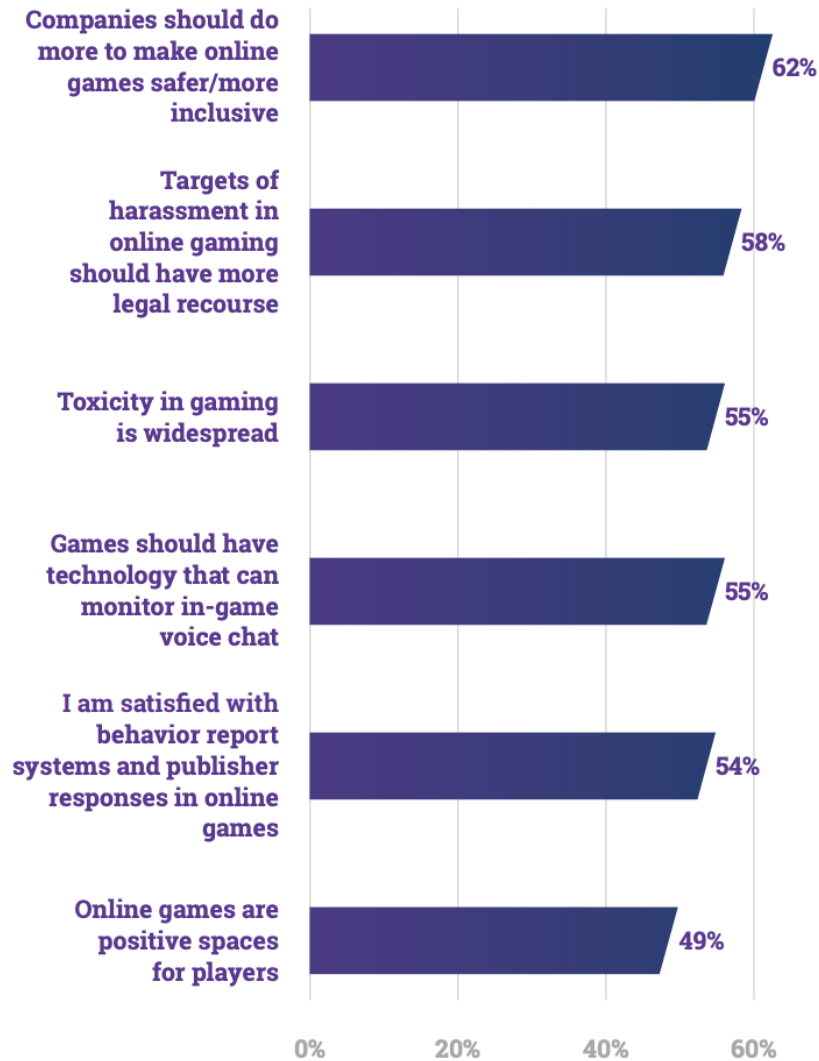
Fig. 8. Agree with Statements from: Ingersoll, Christina. "Free to Play? Hate, Harassment, and Positive Social Experiences in Video Games." *Anti-Defamation League: Center for Technology & Society*, July 2019, https://www.adl.org/media/13139/download.

Fig. 9. *Pokémon* Gym Leader from: "All *Pokémon* Gym Leader & Kahuna Themes [GEN 1-7]." *YouTube*, uploaded by ObitoTube, 27 November 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K8F-BjrGsKA.

Fig. 10. Jynx character, 1996 Red, Blue, Yellow; Jynx, 1999 Gold, Silver, and Crystal from: "Jynx". *Wikipedia* https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jynx. Accessed 24 February 2020.

Fig. 11. *Pokémon* Center in New York, from: mewisme700. "With Countless Hours of Research, I Give You..." *Live Journal*, 22 October 2017, https://pkmncollectors.livejournal.com/22912038.html

Fig. 12. Pikachu's Yellow Glory Sandwich and Pikachu Mascot from: Nahobm. "*Pokémon* Cafe Tokyo: 'Permanent' *Pokémon*-Themed Cafe." *Japan Web Magazine*, 6 Mar. 2020, jw-webmagazine.com/tokyos-new-pokemon-cafe-is-opening-in-2018-15833c81711d/.

Fig. 13. *Pokémon* Center Displays from: Yusuke-S. "6 Best *Pokémon* Centers and *Pokémon* Stores in Tokyo." *JW-Web Magazine*, 17 March 2020, https://jw-webmagazine.com/pokemon-centers-and-pokemon-stores-in-tokyo-fa08ce522cd2/
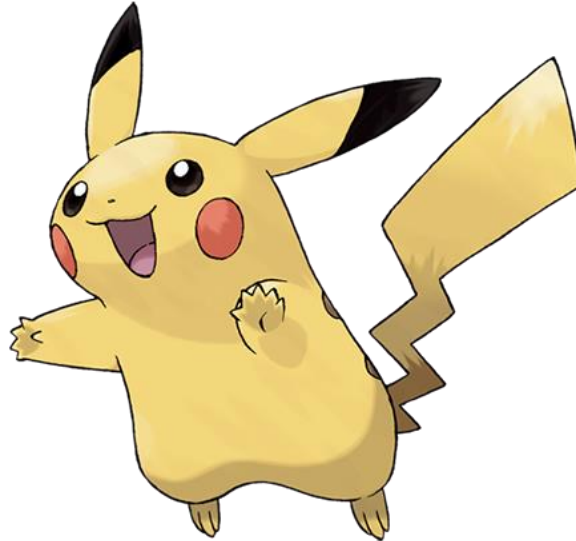
Fig. 14. Pikachu, from: "Pikachu #025", *Pokémon*,
https://www.pokemon.com/us/pokedex/pikachu. Accessed 19 April 2020.
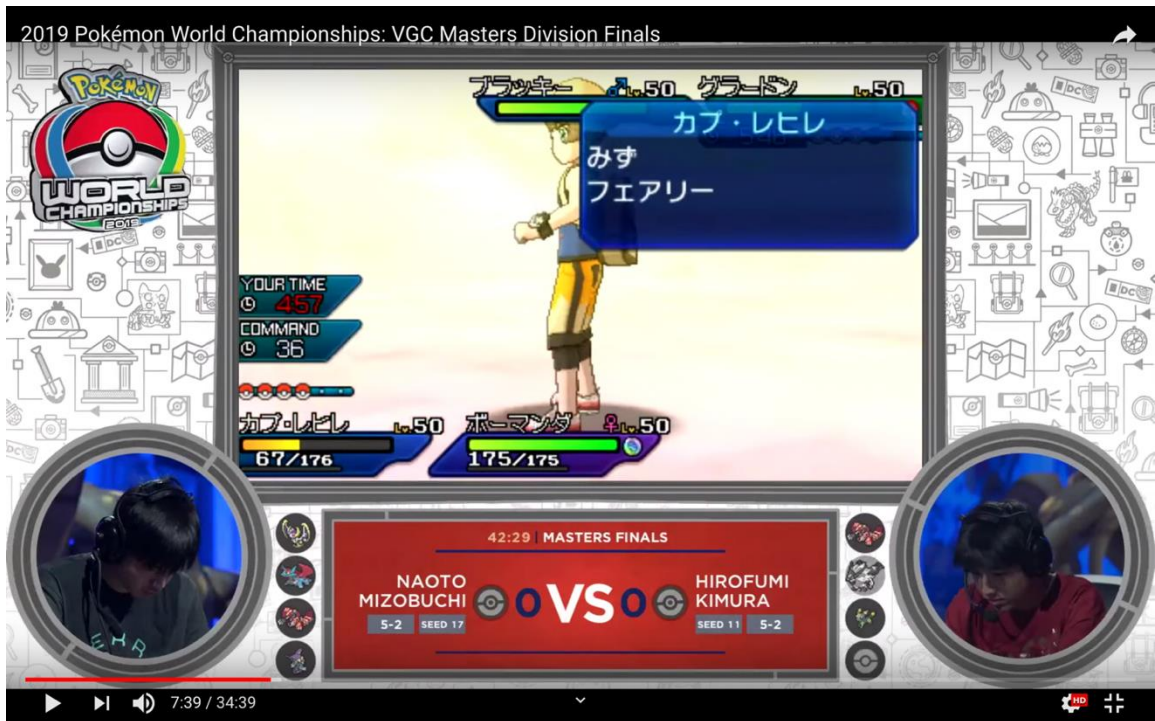
Fig. 15. "2019 Pokémon World Championships: VGC Masters Division Finals."
YouTube, uploaded by The Official Pokémon YouTube Channel, 18 August 2019,
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hBBjcnADWDI&t=1134s.

Fig. 16. Original 151 *Pokémon* by Ken Sugimori from: "Hyrule in a pokéball."
Pinterest, https://www.pinterest.com/pin/342414377898746323/, Accessed 18 March
2020

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