# The Victorious Under(dog) World of Heroes and Ancients: Dota 2 and eSports Community

The world of eSports is its own ecosystem- one not many are aware of but should start paying close attention to. With eSports moving into the mainstream, survival-based and battle arena games like Dota and Fortnite have gained immense popularity with the growing generations. Popular with millennials, the Gen Z, and predictably with the ‘Gen-C’ or the Covid-19 Generation, the online eSports community is here to stay and with good reason.

The advent of eSports can be accurately measured by the success of online gaming. A prime example that I want to discuss is the Dota 2 gaming community. [Dota 2](https://blog.dota2.com/) is a MOBA which was published by [Valve](https://www.valvesoftware.com/en/) in 2012. It focuses on a well-known and understood map where two teams of five players compete against each other to collectively work as a team while defending their own "Ancient". It is an extremely challenging real-time strategy game presented on a single map with an isometric player perspective. There are 119 heroes, with 2 heroes added almost every 1 to 2 years, which you can choose from, with extremely varied skills and strengths, power spikes, and bouts of weaknesses putting forward the fact that this game rewards cautious innovation but it also punishes not understanding the game itself.

The popularity of this game can be seen from the fact that it is played as a competitive sport.

Dota 2 greatly differs from average video games as the measurement are in different terms compared to offline, isolated player games. The experience in Dota 2 is like one is playing a team game or a sport as it requires a fundamental skill set and critical thinking with depth, scope, and speed. Like in traditional sports, competitive gaming requires dedicated training and practice, especially true in Dota 2. Taking part in such training and seeing improvement helps individuals to understand that with hard work, often comes results. Experiencing these improvements builds character and cultivates self-esteem, which in turn broadens limitations of what a person can achieve.

With each team made up of 5 players and the ability to strategically pick their avatars to complement their team members’ avatar skills, this is a fierce battle of wits that incorporates the best of skill, memory, experience, and creativity- going much beyond than even a chess game. (The avatars ‘heroes’ are picked based on their skills and attributes and the opponent’s strengths and weaknesses in order to execute the game plan successfully)

The eSports community is almost as old as the video game industry itself, and collectively, they refer to competitive video game play by professional and amateur gamers. The recent years have shown the massive growth in the gaming audience and player engagement which has propelled eSports into mainstream culture due to massive global following and has elevated it as a legitimate professional sport. In 2018, a [Goldman Sachs report](https://www.goldmansachs.com/insights/pages/infographics/e-sports/report.pdf) estimated the global monthly audience for eSports to reach 167 million people, which notably is significantly larger than that of Major League Baseball and the National Hockey League. By 2022, it was estimated that the eSports audience will have reached 276 million people, akin to the NFL’s following today. The main propellant that has ensures this exponential growth are the masses it caters to and the target audience- unlike many existing pro sports, the eSports audience is young, digital, and global. Seeing that more than half of eSports viewers are in a fast-developing and flourishing Asia, 79% of viewers are under 35 years old, it is no surprise that the following is enormous. As predicted, online video sites like Twitch and YouTube have a larger audience for gaming alone than traditional entertainment giants like HBO, Netflix and ESPN combined.

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Based off of John Swales article “The Concept of Discourse Community,” the community of Gamers can be definitively shown to share in the traits of a discourse community. The six criteria that Swales presented show that gamers are a discourse community through goals, communication, participation to provide feedback, genres, lexis, and a degree of expertise. Owing to the methods of gamers, their way of talk, mannerisms, and communication it is evident that they are a legitimate discourse community. Gamers have set common goals amongst the group, which most importantly include “100 percenting”. Playing a game to its full potential is what the online gaming community is passionate about and it is their primary community-oriented objective.

The second criteria of having mechanisms of intercommunication among its members in a discourse community is especially well-met by gamers as they have very effective means of communication. The most common means of communication besides streaming (discussed in detail below) are articles and online magazines about the games that are being played, with the most popular one being the *Game Informer*. With their own dictionary or lexis comprising terms such as NPCs (Non-Player Characters), AFK (Away From Keyboard), MOBA (Multiplayer Online Battle Arena), and MUDs (Multi-User Dungeons), a range of genres that rivals even the Hollywood, and members with significant experience in shaping and creating the online gaming scene, this community is well established in its claims of being a Discourse community.

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The forms of governance in gaming communities range widely. In an autocratic system, the words and opinions of a single character, or of a relatively small sub-group of the larger community, are considered the law. Positions of power are assigned according to seniority which comes from experience with the game and in the organization. Popular clans that may have started as a group and leveled up to elite status are often also leaders of the specific gaming community.

In the analysis of online gaming governance and associated ethical issues, it should be noted that real power is mostly concentrated. The system admins, server owners, and the handy programmers are in popular demand since they are good with technical solutions.

With coveted elite gaming and social circles and how gamers work hard to earn such status, another facet of mass influencing with big viewership bases are live streamers. With the introduction of Internet Protocol Television (IPTV), the eSports community has burgeoned into something akin to a nationality or religion. Creating an unprecedented growth in viewership and community involvement, live streamers dictate and directly influence what is ‘hyped’ and popular. According to Nathan Edge in the [Evolution of the Gaming Experience: Live Video Streaming and the Emergence of a New Web Community](https://www.elon.edu/u/academics/communications/journal/wp-content/uploads/sites/153/2017/06/03NathanEdgeEJFall13.pdf).

Streaming can consist of major tournaments and events- generally, it is made up of a single player or team that broadcasts its games and chats, while explaining their game style and strategies along giving advice to viewers. This unprecedented two-way communication fosters a unique relationship between the streamer and its spectators (Kaytoue et al., 2012). It is a relationship that is crucial to the nurture and growth of this new online community. It also promotes a huge market for merchandise and a growing popularity of street slang and the streamers own curated brand of personality, mannerisms, and favorite things like books, music, and quotes: eSports fans watch live streams of Internet personalities who play their favorite video games and try to emulate their idols, often investing in the trendiest and most in-season ‘brand merch’, creating something of an innocuous popular cult or fanboy/girl following. As live stream video games get popular, watching them has become an entertainment and retail genre on its own (Kaytoue et al., 2012).

This convergence of different technologies, social interaction and community-produced content has created a web community that has a growing following of dedicated fans, some say even larger than in traditional sports, which have been forcefully migrated in a packaged online experience with little success. Research has shown this to be an exponentially growing online community, actively sought out and consumed by the core male demographic aged 18-34.

The immense popularity of survival-based and arena-battle games, growing prize pools for eSports tournaments, the rise of live-streaming, and improving infrastructure for pro leagues have all paved the way for the online gaming community to reach nearly 300 million members by 2022, on par with NFL following today. If one hasn’t already familiarized oneself with this world of greater human connection, friendly competition, strategic thinking, and critical discourse, there has never been a better time to induct yourself as a member of this highly intelligent and inclusively welcoming online community.

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