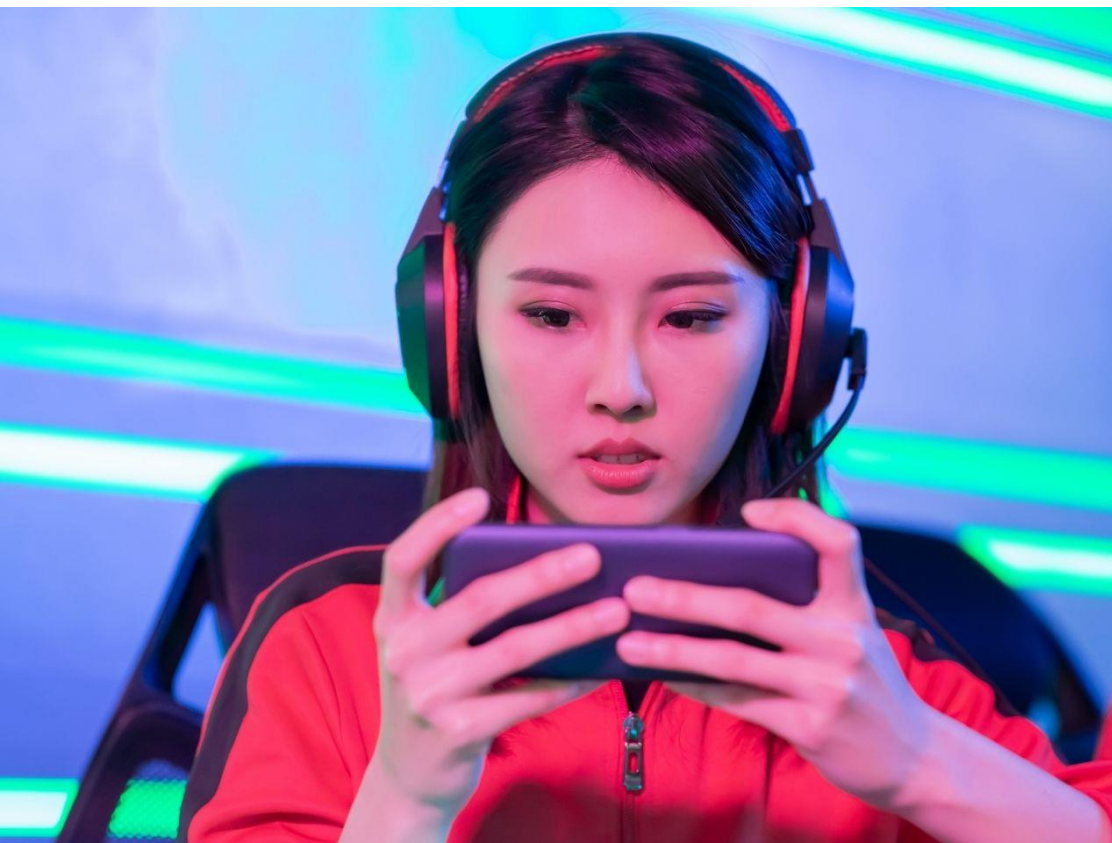


Ricardo Ruha

## Influencer and caster relationships with developers in mobile FPS games



Esports Business

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## **Abstract**

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**Title of the Publication:** Influencer and caster relationships with developers in mobile FPS games

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**Keywords:** influencer, caster, developer, mobile, FPS, games, esports

This thesis aims to study the influencer and caster relationships with developers in mobile FPS games. Different parties were contacted and utilized for providing as detailed results as possible. The main resources for that purpose were the Critical Force and AFK Creators network. However, some difficulties were faced during this process which limited the general potential of the results. Luckily, enough data was managed to collect after all.

For the theory, various sources were explored, which was a bit challenging since this kind of research does not seem to be available. However, the found data aims to include aspects that support the research in general. Mainly these are related to factors in common such as gaming, competitive gaming, esports, content creation, modern professions, and collaborations around that. These topics cover information worldwide to various continents.

Besides the theory, the main tasks in this project were planning, creating a survey, and putting it into use. In addition, interviewing and analyzing the results with found theory data strived to provide valuable data for future plans.

In the end, the reliability and validity of the work were measured from various points of view. There exists genuine value. Even though it provides partly deeper insights, the study area is truly wide and has space for further investigation.

## Tiivistelmä

**Tekijä:** Ruha Ricardo

**Teoksen nimi:** Influencer and caster relationships with developers in mobile FPS games

**Tutkintonimike:** Bachelor of Business Administration, Esports Business

**Avainsanat:** vaikuttaja, selostaja, pelinkehittäjä, mobiili, ensimmäisen persoonan ammuntopeli, pelit, e-urheilu

Tämän opinnäytetyön tarkoituksena on tutkia vaikuttajien ja selostajien yhteistyötä mobiili FPS-pelikehittäjien kanssa. Useisiin tahoihin otettiin yhteyttä yksityiskohtaisten tulosten saamiseksi. Tärkeimmät resurssit tässä yhteydessä olivat Critical Force ja AFK Creators -verkosto. Prosessin aikana ilmeni kuitenkin joitain vaikeuksia, jotka rajoittivat tulosten kokonaispotentiaalia. Onneksi lopulta tietoa onnistuttiin keräämään kuitenkin tarpeeksi.

Teoriaosuutta varten tutkittiin erilaisia lähteitä, mikä oli hieman haastavaa, koska tällaisia tutkimuksia ei näytä olevan saatavilla. Löydetyillä tiedoilla kuitenkin tavoiteltiin näkökulmia, jotka tukevat tutkimusta yleisellä tasolla. Nämä näkökulmat liittyvät pääasiassa yhdistäviin tekijöihin, kuten pelaamiseen, kilpapeleamiseen, e-urheiluun, sisällöntuottamiseen, moderneihin ammatteihin ja niitä ympäröivään yhteistyöhön. Nämä aiheet kattavat tietoa maailmanlaajuisesti eri mantereilta.

Teorian lisäksi yksi tämän projektin päätehtäviä oli suunnittelu, kyselyn luominen ja käyttö. Lisäksi haastattamalla ja analysoimalla tuloksia löydettyjen teorian tietojen valossa pyrittiin tuottamaan arvokasta tietoa tulevaisuuden suunnitelmia varten.

Lopuksi työn luotettavuutta ja pätevyyttä arvioitiin eri näkökulmista. Aitoa arvoa on havaittavissa. Tutkimus tarjoaa osin hyvinkin syviä havaintoja, mutta tutkimusalueen laajuuden vuoksi lisätutkimuksille on myös tilaa.

## **Forward**

Whoever shows interest in this document is bestowing a great honour for me. Humbly, I cannot take all the glory from making it exist, and therefore I am thankful for all parties involved. First, I want to sincerely thank my employer Critical Force for supporting me by providing a list of different Business Finland research packages. In the beginning, I was going in quite a different direction with the thesis. Coincidentally this explicit topic met excellently with my own interest. Particularly I want to thank Taneli Roininen for helping with practical matters regarding the research topic and Business Finland. Also, I want to thank Watkins Lam for his support to reach the target segment of the community. I truly appreciate all the consulting since I am aware of how busy and hardworking person Wattie is. I want to also acknowledge my tutoring teacher Janus Pitkänen. He has been a great support all the way from the first year until the very end. It has been a pleasure cooperating together. I also want to thank my connections in the United Kingdom, especially my lecturer Matthew Huxley and Jamie Wootton from AFK Creators.

Implementing this research was a nice challenge, not just thesis point of view but also from a limited resources point of view. Time is a finite source, but with thorough planning, anything is possible such as this work. Besides this project, my time has been consumed by part-time work, association activity, tutoring and personal hobbies such as content creation and sports. Ambitiousness can be a source of strength but also a load when divided into multiple interests.

A network of any kind is a valuable source. You never know when you are going to need it, but the natural interest and activity of meeting people will provide a positive resource. The value of this resource is immeasurable. I am genuinely grateful for the position I stand in now.

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## List of Definitions

Caster – A person who casts or comments on content that is most likely broadcasted as well. This is a common feature when broadcasting sports or esports on TV or other digital platforms such as Twitch or YouTube.

Content Creator – A person who creates different kinds of content, mainly on digital platforms. For example, videos about gaming, music, art, tricks, sports etc.

Critical Force – A game developer company from Finland with a current focus on mobile FPS games. The company has two offices, one in Helsinki and one in Kajaani.

Critical Ops – Is a product and the game of Critical Force game developer company. The game is a first-person shooting game played on mobile devices such as mobile phones and tablets.

ESL – Electronic Sports League is an organization which is specialized in esports tournament organizing held all over the world. It is globally the greatest and oldest gaming event organizer. Their twitch channel is also viewed more than competitor organization channels.

Esports – Electronic Sports is a competitive scene of gaming. Competition is implemented in virtual platforms. It has similarities with traditional sports such as team and association activity, practicing, coaching, tournaments, sponsorships, prizes, awards, championships, nutrition, recovery, ergonomics etc.

FPS game – First Person Shooter game is a game that is played from the first-person perspective. Many times, it provides a feeling that you are "looking around with your own eyes". Besides the virtual surroundings, most likely, there are visible hands and guns on the bottom of the display.

Game Developer – A company that creates and develops various products, which are mainly games for different platforms such as PC, console, and mobile devices.

Influencer – A content creator with a notable influence on a community. It may exist unintentionally or on purpose. There might be different goals with the power of influence. Many times, these goals are implemented in collaboration with various brands and organizations.

Loot box – Virtual content, many times a case which provides random skin of a certain selection. The value of the loot is based on the odds. Valuable loots have a lower drop chance which makes them rarer.

Skins – This is the appearance of virtual items such as guns, knives, and gloves. These skins are many times seen as products and a way of monetization of FPS games. Skins do not provide any competitive advantages, but those do provide fancy cosmetic features.

Streamer - Is a person who broadcasts various content via virtual platforms such as Twitch.tv, YouTube, Omelet Arcade, Trovo, etc. Many times, this content is related to gaming, music, art, handicraft, live events or just chatting with viewers.

## 1 Introduction

This research is implemented for a mobile FPS company called Critical Force. The purpose of the research is to improve the current relationships with their influencers and casters. Besides that, there are other goals such as the creation of new networks, applying and improving new working policies and methods. Making possible acquisition of new cooperation would be valuable as well. I had an opportunity to explore Critical Force's list of different research topics. This list is part of a research package made in collaboration with Business Finland Oy, and the chosen topic of mine was on the list.

There is a personal interest in this research area that provides higher motivation towards the topic. The essential goal of this research is to provide beneficial data for my employer, Critical Force. If the goals of Business Finland are met as well, it is a notable plus. From my personal point of view, if this research will not become sealed, I hope that other influencers and casters, despite their level, could utilize my thesis and learn something beneficial from my findings.

Generally, the esports and the gaming scene are not over-saturated with information. Therefore, in the beginning, the goal was to find any convenient data to support the purposes of the research. Even though the research focuses mainly on influencers and casters, it concerns gaming and esports as well. Thankfully, there are potential sources regarding influencing, influencer marketing, spectating habits, spectator motivation, participatory theories, following culture, game live streaming, global gaming, esports as a profession, the Finnish esports scene, and its growth. There are a relatively vast amount of general references about esports and gaming in Finland. Those cover the previous and the current status. Regarding this precise topic, it is convenient to use the available information of Critical Force and AFK Creators. Both companies are providing home websites with reliable and public information.

Hopefully, this document would be found by parties with interest in casting and or influencing in cooperation with gaming developers. Most likely, like-minded persons with gaming and esports backgrounds can understand all modern-day terms, abbreviations, and sayings. However, for the sake of thoroughness and thoughtfulness, it would be equal to serve a mutual understanding. Therefore, a comprehensive glossary of gaming and esports terms is provided at the beginning of this document for preventing possible confusion for the reader.

The level of professionalism with influencing and casting may vary between different respondents. Also, the possible future development and adjustments require a different amount of attention and effort. Therefore, it is essential to provide a general understanding of casting and influencing as professions. Knowledge of the available segments in gaming and esports are propitious aspects. With that kind of foundation, it is easier to picture it around the individuals involved. Different viewer and follower communities vary, so perceiving the broader scale should provide better insight.

## 2 Background

Even though Critical Force is an international organization including employees from all around the world, its roots remain in Finland. Therefore, it is convenient to enlighten a bit of the history of the company and their product, Critical Ops. Also, the general status of gaming, esports, casting and influencing in Finland are introduced a bit. The focus should not be too heavy on the Finnish scene because the company's general reach and influence are way more expansive. Since the survey of this research is essential for the outcome of the study, it should be introduced. Also, the survey's key elements, ideas, and goals are pointed out for an improved understanding. Leaving such awareness out would damage the general integration of the project.

### 2.1 Objectives

For development, the priority is to serve the interests of the commissioner, Critical Force. From various steps, reaching and contacting different influencers and casters is a highly essential goal. Ensuring a decent response rate and acceptable quality of answers is a challenge since it relies highly on the respondents. Succeeding with the negotiation of potential incentives could secure possibly better results. Investing personal capital or resources is an option if necessary. Consultation from the head of the community side of Critical Force is highly valuable due to explicit knowledge and experience. Therefore, it should not be neglected.

Another key goal is to maintain a reasonable schedule. Being in touch with the relative parties will grant awareness of different processes such as the distribution of the survey. Tracking the survey results itself provides a real-time response amount. A larger amount of responses delivers more data, but the collecting requires more time. Also, a greater amount of data takes more time to analyze.

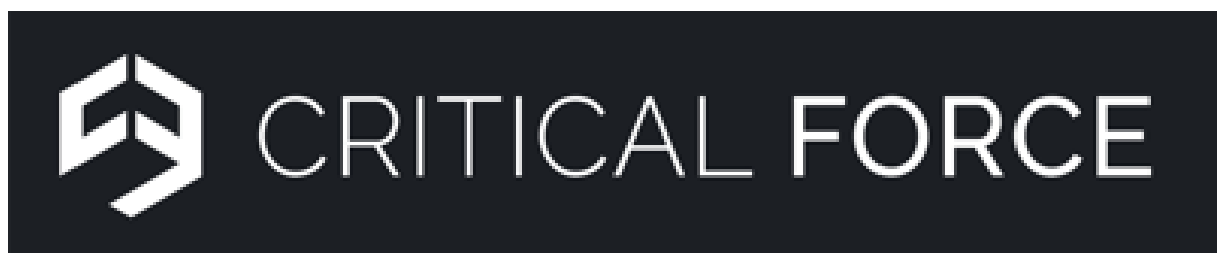
The survey must have enough questions for providing decent data. However, it cannot have too many questions since the respondents are mainly youngsters who could find it too time-consuming. It takes around five to ten minutes, depending on the respondent and the length of the open answers. The questions of the survey are divided into segments for making it clearer. Questions at the beginning provide data of the used platforms, background, experience, and success. The second segment maps data about opinions and the experience in collaborations, and the last

segment relates to connections. The main goal of the survey is to figure out influencers' and casters' satisfaction with current collaborations with Critical Force and other similar organizations. With the collected data, there should be potential for improving the relationships with the company.

Creating a solid theoretical background will improve the general credibility of the whole study. Therefore, utilizing all relevant data for supporting this purpose is important. Credibility is a valuable aspect of this research since it is part of the foundation of the whole project. The final crucial point of focus is creating data that can be used for developing purposes. This will require combining all the parts together as a report. It should display a professional appearance, be easy to access and be convenient to use.

## 2.2 Commissioner

Critical Force, formerly known as Critical Force Entertainment, is a Finnish mobile game company that develops and operates the best online shooter games for mobile devices. Critical Ops, formerly known as Critical Strike Portable, is the company's flagship game which is closing in on the 100 million downloads milestone. The game is available for iOS and Android from the Apple App Store, Google Play, and Amazon Appstore. Critical Ops is a competitive and tactical first-person shooter game, and its primary game mode is a five versus five defuse game. The evolving competitive scene in mobile esports makes Critical Ops one of the early pioneers. Critical Ops CIRCUIT, a competitive mobile esports league, is powered by Critical Force, Compact Esports and Gizer. Besides that, CF has some of its own influencers casting the games. (Critical strike portable, N.d; We create awesome games for mobile platforms, N.d; Critical ops circuit season 3 is live, 2021; Critical ops FPS mobile game hits 96 million downloads and launches new event 'Lone wolf' with a cinematic trailer, 2021)



Picture 1. (a picture from the home website of the Critical Force)

### 3 Methodology

Cooperation, association, and different kind of collaboration can be investigated by researching various academic sources. Those sources provide only general information, which is not that convenient regarding the purpose and the goals of the research. However, it will support the overall form of the thesis from an academic point of view. Mainly such information is related to theories and terms which can be applied to the current contexts. The required information relates to people with gaming backgrounds. To be more precise, an influencer and or caster experience is necessary to provide any actual valuable information for Critical Force. Since the essential data of the research is gathered from human experience, one of the main tools to implement this is by creating a survey. The survey's primary focus is on qualitative research. However, with a more significant amount of participants in the questionnaire, it may provide quantitative value as well. When considering the overall picture of the project, which is to study and improve influencers' and casters' relationships with the developer, quality and concreteness provide more value than quantity. Of course, with a higher amount, the results are possibly more reliable. However, quantity itself does not guarantee reliability if the response quality is poor. The reason for highlighting quality is the fact that it should provide factual data which can be used for development. This is the most convenient way to benefit Critical Force developer company.

My exchange studies offered true potential since my networks at Staffordshire University provided a lead. I found a British content creators agency called AFK Creators. According to the meeting, they collaborate with over a hundred creators worldwide, such as Canada, the United States, Mexico, Brazil, Argentina, Norway, United Kingdom, Germany, France, Spain, Italy, United Arab Emirates, China, Korea and, Australia.



Picture 2. (a picture from the home website of the AFK Creators)

The planning of the project was started in late April, and the goal was to finish the thesis plan at the end of May. According to the plan, there was time to polish it in early June when the survey had to be ready as well. I consulted my colleague Wattie, the head of the Critical Ops community, to ensure that I have not missed any vital aspects. After the last survey testing, there was nothing significant to add. For clarity, the questions were divided into sections and sub-sections by using letters and numbers. A few more follow-up questions were added, and some forms of the questions were edited to create a more suitable combination and entirety. The goal is to gather valuable information to prevent extra effort by asking for refinements afterwards. However, sending messages is relatively effortless and fast whenever necessary.

The first step of the actual thesis process was to map out the possible leads, networks and sources of all available and reachable influencers and casters. The next step was creating a survey and testing it before releasing it for final distribution. Consulting professionals, such as my colleague, had a fostering effect. It helped to polish the result and lure more convenient data from the influencers and casters. The purpose of the survey was to find out the background of gaming and esports, possible cooperation and relationships with game developing companies, potential collaboration, and associations generally with any gaming or esports related organizations.

Providing a possible incentive for influencers and casters outside of the current networks was an option if the primary method was not providing the wanted results. According to my colleagues, the existing networks would not require extra incentives. After analyzing the survey, the next step would be interviewing some of the participants for more in-depth information. Possible new networks and leads are pros that could require interviewing as well. The final phase was writing a report and using the data for creating beneficial conclusions for potential future implementations.

### 3.1 Participants

As qualitative research, the people involved with the survey do not require any specific or strict features regarding age, gender, location, or academic background. The most valuable aspect of these people is simply their background, experience, opinions and obviously passion towards gaming. However, as an influencer or caster, a professional level of gaming is not necessary as long as they have a proper understanding and knowledge of this particular area. Having a general

insight is most likely beneficial as well. The common thing between these participants is their passion for gaming or esports. There exists a genuine interest that drags them part of this scene. A notable perk would be a remarkable experience or success since those aspects are more likely to provide convenient data. With such background, it is evident that the methods they have been using are working. For example, large and successful organizations and the people associating with them must be operating effectively and using the right policies to achieve such position, visibility, and respect.

Based on the data found via the survey, the next step was to implement possible interviews with some of the respondents. The information of the survey had to be analyzed before proceeding. There existed a possibility that interviewing would not be necessary if the gathered data was sufficient. According to the plan, the goal was to collect all the required data during June and July. Starting early as possible would be beneficial since people tend to go on holidays during summer and the reachability would become possibly more challenging. That could have caused unwanted urgency with all upcoming steps. The presence of the COVID-19 pandemic has not been a genuine concern since the concerning steps were implemented remotely. Therefore, it did not generate any additional challenges. Generally, remotely interviewing is faster than live interviews since there is no need to travel for it. Face-to-face interviewing is also practically impossible since the research participants are living all over the world. It would require consuming an unnecessarily large amount of private capital to be fulfilled.

### 3.2 Project resources

The project resources of the thesis are my contract with Critical Force, network among the company, network of my home university KAMK, networks of my exchange studies via Staffordshire university and network with content creator agency from the United Kingdom called "AFK Creators". KAMK's supervising resources are mainly connections and networks with local or national stakeholders. Also, the teachers of the KAMK and their possible personal networks may be used as a resource. Besides that, there are physical resources such as the KAMK library's materials and books. Critical Force's project resources are mainly the company's employees and existing networks with influencers and casters.

I have an instant connection to my colleagues during the week via the inner communication system, Slack. Some of the colleagues are reachable even out of the working hours. Also, low entry

contact exists with the other connections as well, such as the teachers at my home university or lecturers at Staffordshire University. During the 2021 spring semester in the United Kingdom, I had exchange studies, which provided valuable connections regarding my thesis and other future purposes.

I discussed the possible outcomes of the research with my employer, Critical Force. By the time, there were no reasons to raise the confidentiality of the project. However, if anything controversial would have occurred, providing NDA, a non-disclosure agreement for all accessing parties of the confidential materials would have been an option if necessary. Doing two different versions of the same work would have required more time and most likely interfered with the overall quality of the thesis. Quality is highly essential and, therefore, it is one of the keystones of professional implementation and results.

Monetary costs were not required. However, if the original plan had not provided enough results, an incentive could have been a possible solution. For example, a raffle to a gift card or actual money. I was prepared for negotiating on a case-by-case basis with the Critical Force as well. The idea was to arrange possible in-game rewards for the participants, such as gun skins or loot boxes.



Picture 3. (a picture from the home website of Critical Ops)

## 4 Theory

FPS games have been a significant part of esports in general for a long time. There are games such as Counter-Strike, Call of Duty, Player Unknown's Battlegrounds, Fortnite, Overwatch, Apex Legends, and Rainbow Six Siege, just to name some (Esports Earnings, 2020). Multiple developers of the mentioned games above have been transmitting and expanding to the esports scene on a mobile game platform. Besides CODM (Call of Duty Mobile), PUBGM (Player Unknown's Battlegrounds Mobile) and Fortnite Mobile, C-OPS (Critical Ops) has a remarkable esports scene in mobile gaming. To be precise, Critical Ops is the first FPS game in the world on mobile gaming. Critical Ops was first time released in 2015. As mentioned before, influencers and casters are quite closely involved with the esports scene as well. At least, that is the case in the Critical Ops scene.

### 4.1 The esports and mobile esports relevance for a game developer

Esports is getting vastly popular along with other traditional sports. For example, the esports event "Intel Extreme Masters 2017 Katowice" was viewed by 46 million people. However, it is not typically viewed from television as other sports content. The generation of TV watchers is notably older than the people that watch esports. Therefore, there are not that many TV channels or TV programs that broadcast esports content. On the other hand, "this generation of people" do not watch TV almost at all but rather online stream providers. One of the most used platforms for esports broadcasts is Twitch.tv. (Mikrobitti 2018). Since esports is included mainly in the lives of this generation of people who are very likely to play games as well, it is relevant for game developers to be involved with esports. The attitude towards games is generally more acceptable and receiving among the younger audience. This makes the esports audience also an ideal target audience for the gaming industry.

"The results of the study indicate that the consumers of esports and review game video content are likely to make game-related purchases" (Hamari, Macey, Sjöblom & Törhönen, 2019, p. 18). This study was implemented online for respondents mainly from Finland with a background in gaming and games. Such purchasing behaviour is not necessarily attached to our roots when it comes to gaming. However, different games have variable demand, and that is likely to vary between the continents. For example, Asia and Europe generally have different kinds of game production, such as anime-style and non-anime-style.

"It was also interesting to see how the ESL was made up not simply of a top-tier competitive layer but actually built around a majority of beginner and amateur players. With a total member number of around 2.4 million and running a wide range of tournaments in a variety of games (not simply the standard titles you see at most esports tournaments), the ESL was much more broadly constructed around computer games and esports writ large than simply a pro-outlet. " (Taylor, 2012, p. 144). ESL is an enormous organization capable of promoting esports on a vast scale since having plenty of resources and capital for the implementation. It might not be a gold mine for everyone, but at least the scene has potential for notable visibility, possibilities, and positive impact. By focusing not only on professionals, the market is obviously much larger and possibly also more profitable. Having a low entry-level encourages new gamers to hop into a more competitive scene. It also offers surroundings to challenge and improve one's own skills. At least there is a chance to gain good experience and having a good time with like-minded people.

There are multiple game developers around the world managing and organizing their esports leagues. For example, Epic Games has Fortnite World Cup and Fortnite Championship series. Activision has the Call of Duty League. Riot Games has the League of Legends World Championship, and Psyonix has Rocket League Championship Series. Blizzard Entertainment has an Overwatch League. Besides that, they have at least Global StarCraft II League in collaboration with afreecaTV. Apparently, "Player Unknown Battlegrounds", aka "PUBG", does not have its own league on PC. Still, the game's mobile version seems to have multiple leagues organized by various external, daughter or mother organizations. All the companies mentioned above are at the top of the world with enormous resources and funds. Despite that, it is not seemingly uncommon to have esports organized in collaboration with other companies. (List of esports leagues and tournaments, N.d)

Critical Ops has an esports league as well. It is called "Circuit". The increasing popularity of competitive mobile gaming is evident. Nowadays, nearly everyone has a mobile device and is at a younger age than before. Entering the world of competitive gaming is easier than ever since the platform is way more acquirable due to the prices. For example, when comparing the cost of mobile devices with game consoles, laptops, or personal computers. Also, fewer peripherals are required since you do not play with the keyboard and mouse or gamepad. Fingers are enough.



Picture 4. (a picture from the home website of Critical Ops)

#### 4.1.1 The global and national point of view

Since the world is growing and new education opportunities are widening into esports, the general support and acceptance of gaming and esports are notably rising. For example, there are at least one University of Applied Sciences in Kajaani, Finland. One University in the United Kingdom and another one In the United States. Kajaani University of Applied Sciences (KAMK), Staffordshire University and Shenandoah University provide full degree education. Besides those, there are numerous courses and other education possibilities offered by various schools or organizations. (Tradenomi - esports business, N.d; Esports, N.d; Esports management BBA, N.d)

"Recognition by the ministry and universities will undoubtedly boost the e-sports industry, attracting more graduates to the field and expanding the potential for employment" (Beijing Review, 2020). It is like a domino effect, and the more and greater parties enter, the more credibility and interest the esports scene is absorbing.

In Finland, one of the first courses was held 2016 at the Ahlman-institute in Orivesi. Nowadays, even the Finnish Defense Forces have accepted esports as one of the options at their sports school. However, the approval of esports during military service requires a professional level of skill. According to SEUL, the Finnish esports association, there are approximately only 30-40 full or semi-professional esports athletes in Finland. (Mikrobitti 2018). Most likely, that amount has

risen during the past few years. New organizations are getting involved with esports all the time, especially sports teams from ice hockey and other sports. For example, Pelicans from Lahti, HIFK from Helsinki and Super Jymy from Vuokatti. (About us, N.d; HIFK-uutiset, N.d; Pelicans ja ENCE esports yhteistyöhön, N.d)

Also, fast-food chains such as Kotipizza have supported esports. Finnish Esports League (FEL) and Kotipizza started collaboration in early 2019. It was first seen at the LanTrek gaming event at the exhibition and sports centre in Tampere. LanTrek is a commonly known event in Finland and one of the biggest on a national scale. Kotipizza has a vision and will to promote esports to expand the audience of the scene. Making the scene to be taken more seriously and helping gamers with esports is a goal as well. Contributing to the technology and lifestyle scene is already familiar for the company. They introduced the "Kotibotti"-application in 2017. (Ylä-Anttila, 2019).



Picture 5. (a picture from the home website of HLTV)

Besides the organizations mentioned above, teleoperator Telia has entered the Finnish esports scene as well. In 2019 at Assembly Digi-festival, they announced about building a new esports league called "Telia Esports Series". The series supports professional gaming but also entertains people who are not that familiar with the scene.

According to their vision, the

goal is to create a path that opens opportunities for potential and gifted gamers. Apparently, in Finland and Northern countries, the situation as a professional gamer often requires a lot of luck to be noticed by an international organization. According to Niklas Segercrantz from the Telia Finland esports team, "It is like jumping from street hockey to NHL. The path to the top is missing because we lack a national quality series as we have in ice hockey. We want to start building this league, which provides the path to become the top of Finland and that way also gate to global opportunities. That offers a chance to become the top of the world." Telia Esports Series is an ongoing esports series where players can compete and evolve. Telia's vision is to attract all level

competitive players from grassroots to number one teams. The series is run in collaboration with the "Assembly" event, in which Telia nowadays own the majority. "Finland has lacked a visible and quality, competitive series which could draw viewers from outside of the scene and provide a clear goal-oriented path for amateurs to measure their skills against the national top. In the future, the series is providing possibilities to greater tournaments worldwide for professional teams". The plan is to have qualifiers online, and finals live. During the past years, esports has grown, and the amount of professional gamers has been increasing. According to Statista, the German research organization specialized in the market and consumer data, Finland was the world's fifth successful esports country regarding won price money in 2018. The United States was number one. Telia's vision is to make Finland the top of the world, and establishing Telia Esports Series was the first step in that direction. "Spanish are famous for football, and we want Finland to be known from esports in the future. According to population ratio, Finland has plenty of F-1 and rally drivers; why not also esports professionals", states Niklas Segercrantz. Finland's premise for becoming the number one esports country is possible due to the necessary competence and infrastructure. The foundation is notably better when compared to most other countries in Europe. "There is a long way from fifth place to the top of the world, but goals have to be high in order to accomplish great matters". (Ylä-Anttila, 2019). A notable recognition regarding Finnish esports was entering national betting. Nowadays, there is a possibility to bet on esports teams and their results on the Veikkaus website. (Mikrobitti 2018)

#### 4.1.2 Big step for esports

"The International Olympic Committee (IOC) has made its biggest stride yet into the world of esports with the launch of the Olympic Virtual Series (OVS)." (Palmer, 2021). Traditional sports such as motorsport, baseball, cycling, sailing, and rowing registered for mass participation initiative in 2020. Various global sports organizations such as the "International Cycling Union", "World Baseball Softball Confederation", "International Automobile Federation", "World Rowing", and "World Sailing" are supporting OVS. Besides that, "International Basketball Association", "World Taekwondo", "Tennis Federation", and FIFA have verified their interest for the future. Some people would like to see FPS games in the Olympics. Unfortunately, the time does not seem to be ripe enough yet, since shooting games are seen as "accepting violence", which is against the ideologies of the current IOC. (Palmer, 2021) However, every positive step for electronic sports is an improvement. Since influencers and casters are often involved in esports, general approval and

recognition are beneficial for the scene. Maybe someday in the future, FPS games could also be seen in the Olympics as part of these sports mentioned above.

#### 4.1.3 Esports and gaming careers at Asia – China & Korea

In 2003, esports was approved as a formal sports competition item by the General Administration of Sport. Thirteen new esports or gaming professions were announced by the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security in April 2019. Currently, at least 500 000 people in China are involved in the esports industry. Around only a sixth of them have completed a bachelor's degree or higher but 86 per cent of that portion is earning between one to three times more than the local average. (Beijing Review, 2020)

Local governments such as Shanghai, Beijing, and Shenzhen promote supportive policies to develop the esports industry. Greater demand for gamers has occurred, and it has caused a shortage of suitable talent. New business areas, for example, online shopping and influencers, have diversified the forms of employment. (Beijing Review, 2020). Gaming is not seen as a hobby of the jobless anymore. Top gamers, influencers and casters may earn decent money for making a living out of the scene. However, it is much easier said than done since it requires many different skills and cooperation with other parties.

"With the boom of eSports, star players have accumulated hundreds of thousands of fans, and the increase in the number of fans directly influences companies who own online game teams." (Jin, 2010, p. 96). Gaming at a high level may offer a more stable income when working for a team owned by a company or organization. Different companies have started to notice the visibility and value of esports and the players of the scene. This is not just in Korea but all over the world.

"Achieving pro-gamer status does not, of course, guarantee financial success or celebrity-level fame. While several top players have made a fortune, most of the pro gamers have no substantial earnings or fame. Pro gamers face other challenges as well, such as low job security, the risk of changes in their employment status when team ownership shifts, and commodification and/or exploitation." (Jin, 2010, p. 92). In Korea, people generally believe in hardworking and long days, and so do the pro gamers in the Korean esports scene. This creates a phenomenon where the competition between fellow rivals is very intense. Potential oversupply could not pay off even while working hard since many other hard workers are also in the scene. Perhaps, exploring the options abroad could offer potential possibilities.

Sometimes a change of the team's ownership may be beneficial, but sometimes it is like rolling the dice. As a pro gamer, it is bringing another form of insecurity from the job point of view. Some organizations create their own teams but buying a team is a common option as well in Korea. This kind of action aims to promote the image of supporting digital media, youth culture and esports. It is likely to provide a nice kick up for the investing organization. (Jin, 2010)

"Players involved in professional gaming are often celebrities supported by major corporate sponsorship and enthusiastic and loyal fans. Many young Koreans aspire to be pro gamers, and this admiration contributes to the existing national passion for games." (Jin, 2010, p. 99). People tend to admire other people with advanced skills in an area they are keen on. This phenomenon is likely to create fandom and followership. Creating content as a professional gamer is likely to inspire many gamers, especially those with competitive backgrounds or interests in esports. There is a particular influence, and with proper utilization, it might provide excellent results. Once again, this would be good for game developers since cooperation with such influencers is a door to joint new achievements.

Professional gaming careers are not likely to last that long since new contenders with younger age and faster reaction times are occurring all the time like mushrooms during the rain. Approximately these careers last around a few years. Therefore, it is relevant to consider future options after a professional career. The background and knowledge provide an excellent and fundamental foundation of the competitive scene of esports. This is the reason for some ex-professionals for moving into casting. However, one does not have to be a professional gamer in order to become a caster. Since casters do have specific skills and abilities for making the viewing experience of the game better, it is an aspect that game developers should not neglect. Cooperation would provide various possibilities and support mutual interests.

Critical Ops game has players all around the world, including Asia. There are plenty of people into gaming and esports, and therefore the market has potential. Since the competition about visibility and success is challenging in Asia, providing options regarding influencer or caster collaboration from developers could be seen as a valuable opportunity.

#### 4.2 Casters and the benefits of casting

Casting is one of the new generation gaming careers, and it is becoming more and more popular among gamers. It may start as a hobby or voluntary work or end up into a full career after years

of experience. However, one common thing is that all those gamers have a passion for the game they are casting. Casting is quite challenging, especially under pressure during fast or tight situations happening in the game. It is often notably more natural to cast as a duo. That enables having a pause for thinking or moistening your mouth with water or other beverages. Generally, casting is challenging work, and it does not suit everyone. Currently, there is more demand than supply for casting since there is a lack of available and decent casters. (Manne, 2018, p. 28-29)

The interaction between the casters and the viewers is also essential. The personalities between the casters should match and create entertaining entirety since casting is mostly about entertainment. Casting provides more content besides the actual gameplay that people are viewing. This feature is profitable for game developers and other organizations involved. Creating more hype and good vibes around the game is excellent visibility and utility for growing. This kind of activity and cooperation should be supported and promoted since it benefits multiple parties besides the developers of games. Casters can gain more experience, feelings of trust, appreciation, and support. The community can have a wider and more diverse variety of different casting, which provides more content and possible new role models. In the end, everybody has a unique personality and something different to offer. (Manne, 2018, p.29)

The casting of an esports game has similarities with the casting of real-life sports. Basically, the only difference is that the athletes of the sport are virtual and controlled by players with their controllers. This is one of the closest areas when compared with traditional sports and live commentary. (Brookey & Gunkel, 2015)

### 4.3 Influencer platforms

There are multiple platforms for influencers to utilize for their goals and goals of the cooperative companies, such as gaming developers. Obviously, those social media platforms have their own pros and cons, depending on the target audience and the purpose. When it comes to the gaming scene, the most popular platforms are at least Twitch, YouTube. Discord, Twitter, and Reddit are popular among gamers but not the most suitable for content creation when it comes to videos or broadcasting. However, those often work well as support besides video platforms, for example, for announcements and other posts or memes. Another aspect is to utilize the platform of the influencer, which has the most convenient target segment and volume of visibility. (Roth Emma, 2017; What are the best social media platforms to reach gamers on, 2020)

Being an influencer is a modern form of making a living, not just regarding in gaming scene but also generally in all content creation. However, there has been content creation for at least as long as the internet was invented. The utility of this multiverse has been growing during the past decades, and more people are implementing it more professional way and organized than before. One of the aspects is that the industries and companies have noted the value and power of influencers such as game developers. (Beijing Review, 2020)

#### 4.3.1 Pros and cons regarding influencing

Regarding Jarrar, Awobamise and Adebola's study "Effectiveness of Influencer Marketing vs Social Media Sponsored Advertising", generally sponsored advertisements are more effective than influencer marketing. This must be related to the size of the volume. However, sponsored marketing requires capital, and the audience might be much more significant in volume but not that accurate as a target. Obviously, a more substantial amount of capital provides more reach, and more reach offers a higher probability. Sponsored marketing does not generally have any other limitations except money.

Marketing via influencers may be seen as a limited audience since it only consists of the existing followers, which limits the amount of reach. (Jarrar, Awobamise, & Aderibigde, 2020). Also, it might not generate that much of a new audience. Of course, this highly depends on the popularity of the content creator since it affects the size of the audience.

Even though influencer marketing would generate fewer engagements than sponsored ones, it does not mean fewer sales. Generally, influencer marketing creates more sales than sponsored marketing. (Jarrar, Awobamise, & Aderibigde, 2020). This aspect should not be neglected. The right influencer with a proper audience makes a way more accurate segment to target when it comes to sales, at least.

The audience of the influencers is more loyal, and the people trust the opinions of the content creator. A genuine interest in the community generates it. People generally admire or appreciate, or respect the person they are following. This aspect is likely to make the most significant difference in the sales of products and services that a content creator promotes. (Jarrar, Awobamise, & Aderibigde, 2020).

"Fandom can weave the passions people feel about a game, a genre, a character, a designer or developer together with their sense of identity. It can publicly perform otherwise internalized values and commitments. Being a fan forms a powerful node through which social affiliations and connections with others are formed." (Taylor, 2012, p. 188). Generating a community of gamers into fans is probably the most profound state and highest level to acquire. As an influencer or caster, this is quite beneficial and, of course, for the game developer as well. Passion is a strong incentive since it is an internal motivator, not an external one. External motivators such as giveaways etc., are not lasting in the long term, at least if excessively executed since it does not create a genuine bond. Fans are likely to make good atmosphere and grapevine, which drags new interest. In the best circumstances, word of mouth generates plenty of popularity. However, it can backfire the same way, therefore maintaining respect and avoiding public controversies is essential. It is impossible to please everyone since everyone is not simply sharing the exact same preferences. Hereby when confronting a negative atmosphere, providing attention as little as possible may cut the wings of the gossips and statements lacking proper argumentation. Of course, ignoring does not always work, but being thoughtful and maintaining focus on the good aspects that matter offers the right direction.

#### 4.3.2 Influencer marketing in Russia

"The analysis of the primary data showed that influencer marketing is a growing and efficient tool among Russian speaking audience." (Markunas, 2020, p. 51). There are millions of people in Russia, commonly consuming media that is heavily focused on Russian language content. Generally, the English language level is relatively low, so the mother tongue is obviously a more effective way of reaching. To be more precise, there are around 146 million people in Russia, so the content provided in their language has certainly an effective reach. "It is reasonable to make influencer marketing a part of multichannel strategy..."(Markunas, 2020, p. 52). Depending on the product, campaign, or whatever the purpose is, the influencer with a target audience provides excellent potential.

There are plenty of Critical Ops players in Russia, which is one of the most notable player communities of the game. The Russian scene is already proving promising results regarding the collaboration with [kamk.gg](https://www.kamk.gg) and implementation of competitive tournaments. These tournaments are cast in the Russian language. Exceptional skill level has been discovered in Russia already, so

this kind of support is definitely a step forward from the Critical Force developer company. Headhunting potential influencers and casters for further collaboration should be profitable.

#### 4.4 Why do people watch gaming people?

"Streaming is an interesting context for participatory online media, spearheaded by services such as YouTube, that have put the traditional consumer into the role of a content creator." (Hamari, Macey, Sjöblom & Törhönen, 2019, p. 7). Streaming is becoming a relatively low threshold to entry since it does not require that much nowadays. You do not necessarily need a computer, and a mobile phone is enough for that since those have become quite powerful. There are plenty of options with reasonable prices. Also, the market for used phones has become more popular, at least regarding IOS products. However, globally Android devices are truly popular since the price range is notably wider, and there are plenty of decent models with low prices.



Picture 6. (a picture from the home website of Lifewire)

These aspects mentioned above provide a notable supply of various streams with extensive content, which offers plenty of options to choose from for exploring. Also, as a beginner, it is a convenient platform for learning from other streamers and content creators. Even as an experienced or known influencer, it does not hurt to keep an eye on the competitors or fellow streamers.

There is always a good reason to look around, embrace and try new things. This kind of gaming community creates a different kind of participatory experience, such as a viewer interacting with the streamer or an influencer collaborating with other fellow streamers. (Stream scheme guides, N.d)

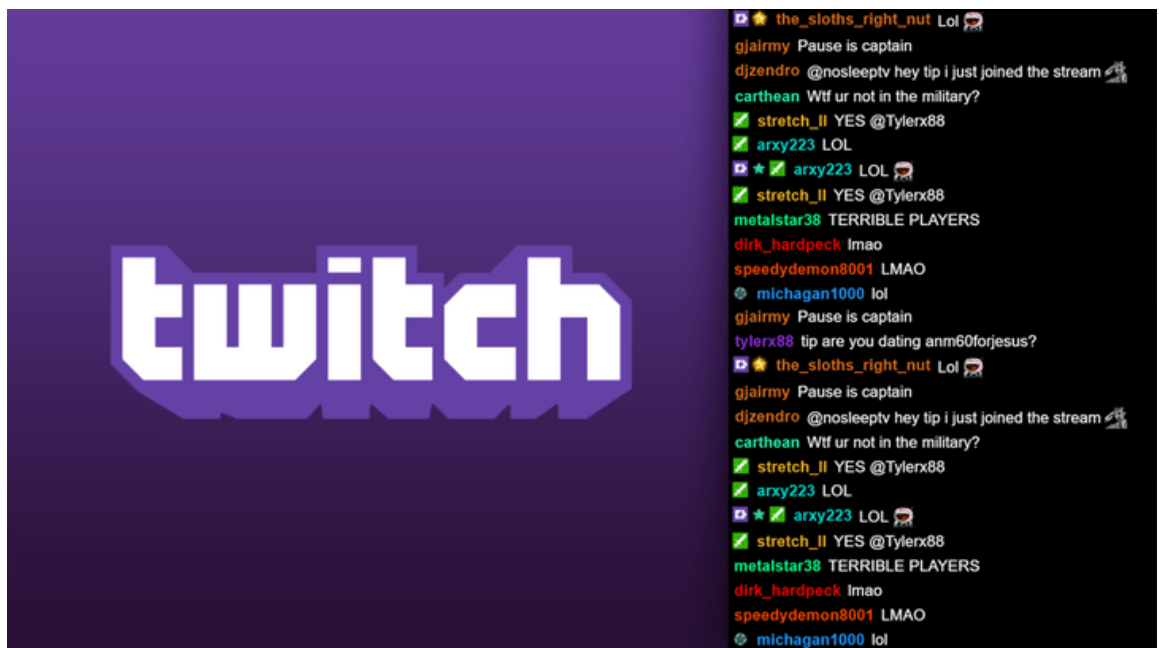
"One might regard streaming as yet another form of broadcast entertainment akin to online videos, but for many users, it is a more manifold and holistic communication channel than mere video media content, particularly due to the high levels of interaction. Due to the live-broadcasting nature of video game streaming, it offers a unique relationship between the media creator and media consumer, thus facilitating communication between the two." (Hamari, Macey, Sjöblom & Törhönen, 2019, p. 7-8). This kind of connection and interaction is exceptional compared to any other form of online content or marketing. Chatting with your favourite streamers makes the experience way more personal, and it creates a feeling of relevance. This kind of participation and interaction provides a propitious climate for an influencer. People are paying more attention which makes the viewers generally prone to under the influence. "Today, millions of people watch others play games on the internet." (Hamari, Macey, Sjöblom & Törhönen, 2019, p. 9).

Gamers are often quite competitive, and it fascinates many people to watch other people competing as well. Competitive gaming or esports is a markedly popular category in, e.g., Twitch and YouTube. It provides a comprehensive experience of professional-level gaming and extraordinary situations that a regular gamer could not execute by itself. It may also offer excitement, especially if you are a fan of a particular team or organization which is competing against another one. Some people make it even more exciting for themselves by betting on the results. "The democratized process of content creation on video game streaming platforms such as Twitch allows for the existence of many types of content. In this context, video game-related video content such as "let's plays", and esports have become especially popular." (Hamari, Macey, Sjöblom & Törhönen, 2019, p. 10).

Besides watching, chatting, betting, or competing, some gamers prefer even more interactive streams. There are plenty of influencers and content creators that provide gaming with the viewers. Depending on the game, it may be funny or competitive. For example, there are party games that enable multiple players to join simultaneously, making it appealing. Multiple games do offer options for hosting private rooms or sessions as well. Some influencers like to provide a different kind of interaction by providing a contest for the viewers. That could be playing against viewers as "challenge me" or "try to beat me" in the game. Having a chance to compete against a streamer

provides a lot of excitement for the viewers. Some streamers are not just influencers but also celebrity-like, which makes it highly appealing for many gamers.

"Live-streaming is an interactive form of internet-based multi-media entertainment that has grown rapidly in popularity worldwide since 2011. Live-streaming has become so popular that, in some cases, there are more people watching others do activities, such as play computer games than doing the activity themselves." (Hamari, Macey, Sjöblom & Törhönen, 2019, p. 11). Watching other people gaming may be educative as well, depending on the approach angle and the strengths of the influencer or content creator. Analytical personalities like to break every moment into words and describe what they are seeing or noticing. Justification, why they are doing specific actions can be genuinely interesting. Thinking out loud may come in handy regarding such an approach. However, it might be sometimes difficult to multi-task gaming, streaming, speaking, and thinking in an analytical way. Failing with that could provide hilarious moments, which is also good content.



Picture 7. (a picture from the home website of OneTwoStream)

"Some past research has explored live-streaming consumption motivations including tension release, escapism, and acquiring knowledge, however, social-based motivations such as needs for interaction, connection, and community, have not been studied within the context of live-streaming." (Hamari, Macey, Sjöblom & Törhönen, 2019, p. 12). Obviously, there are multiple reasons to watch streaming content made by influencers or analyzed by casters. One thing in common is gaming. Even though the social motivations have not been studied as mentioned before, the

direction is evident. Such features are the catch and the motivation for plenty of gamers when it comes to live-streaming. Anyone who has spent some time in Twitch could tell from the chat that the interaction is the thing. However, some viewers prefer to watch without interaction. It is quite common among people who put the stream in the background while doing something else as well.

"Multiple and ordinal linear regression analyses identified six motivations which helped to explain live-stream engagement: social interaction, sense of community, meeting new people, entertainment, information seeking, and a lack of external support in real life." (Hamari, Macey, Sjöblom & Törhönen, 2019, p. 12). This information was gathered from Twitch users by online survey form. According to the results, live streams have a more substantial social aspect than generic media such as TV. Anyhow, the amount of viewers of the influencer or content creator has affection. Smaller amounts mean slower chat and better interaction, while in more significant numbers, the chat feed rolls so fast that it is difficult or impossible to keep up with the reading.

"When I watch someone else play a computer game, I am often activated internally as a player. I may feel the excitement, tension, remembrances of my own similar play moments. Watching may inspire me to get back to my own machine and play." (Taylor, 2012, p. 186). It does not only apply just to computer games but most likely to any virtual game. Such experience, as mentioned above, is a valid aspect to keep in mind and another substantial reason to collaborate with influencers and casters. Watching such content has the potential to generate a solid stream of new player acquisition. An increasing amount of players are likely to provide more income which is the idea of any business. Utilizing multiple ways to generate revenue is vital since without income, there is no capital, and without capital, you cannot hire resources. Without resources, there is no production, and without production, there is no company.

"Sometimes it's educational, and you want to learn how to play a game better. Sometimes it's about entertainment and loving the personality of a streamer. Sometimes it's what I call ambient sociality and wanting something on in the background to keep you company." (Taylor, 2020, p. 115). In the end, the reason for interest may be caused by various aspects. However, there must be something to motivate the viewer to return. Without this value of content, there probably will be not that much popularity or growth in the future. What makes it worth watching? There is no one clear answer, but there are undoubtedly various ways to succeed in the scene. People and gamers have a broad spectrum of needs. Those may change depending on the mood or even the time of the day. Nonetheless, in the long term, these preferences hardly variate that much, at

least not permanently. The bottom line is that when the needs are met with the considering content creator, influencer, or caster, and one becomes interested. It is likely to last.

#### 4.5 Professional gaming and influencing

"Professional online game players—gamers who play each other for money rather than just on the computer for fun—have become an ever-increasing part of young people's day-to-day lives through televised online game competitions and game shows (Anderson, Funk, and Griffiths 2004; Whang 2003)." (Jin, 2010, p. 81). Nowadays, many professional gamers create content through the internet and therefore also become influencers. Becoming a professional gamer is difficult but being a content creator or influencer is also a challenge of its own. Nonetheless, the potential celebrity life that the professional status is likely to provide is a decent running start for being an influencer. Gamers like to improve their skills, therefore following professional gamers and their playstyles offer valuable content and information which promotes skills of one's own.

"It is reasonable to position pro gamers as a labour force comparable to media workers and/or knowledge workers who hold independent, creative, techno-savvy, and media-related jobs." (Jin, 2010, p. 86). Being an influencer is more than just broadcasting or gaming at a high level. If externalizing is out of limits, branding requires effort and learning a lot of new skills. Broadcasting itself requires handling different applications and software. The more creativity, the broader the spectrum of applications is required. For example, different scenes, green screen technology, background music, stream alerts, soundboard, additional information, interactive stream rewards, voice changers are excellent ways to add more content. These are commonly used among streamers. At least many times, advanced streamers utilize such features.

Besides these skills mentioned above, graphical skills and video-editing skills will be helpful. Nowadays, there are plenty of free templates for overlays, panels, logos, banners and even video intros. However, there are many other content creators using the same templates. Therefore, in the long term, from a brand point of view, it would be more personal and unique when made from scratch. Conveniently, the internet offers a lot of helpful guides and videos on how to learn to use various applications, video, and picture editors.

Some aspects are beneficial as a professional gamer. "Unlike traditional sports where fans may never have actually played the game themselves, in computer gaming, the path to pro gaming fandom is often born directly out of their own experience with a title." (Taylor, 2012, p. 188).

Basically, there is already an existing connection and thing in common between the professional gamer or content creator and the audience. This aspect in common is likely to be very beneficial from a community creation point of view. However, if the influencer happens to transfer into new games, it might become problematic. Is the audience more interested in the game or the person who plays it? If the personality and value of the content are strong enough, it does not make that big of a difference in which games the influencer broadcasts. Of course, the general genre of the games is most likely affecting, e.g., horror games, shooters, story games, fighting games, strategy games, fantasy games etc. People have certain preferences, and therefore it is easier to focus on one to few options.

When it comes to mobile FPS content creation, Critical Ops has notable demand, but the content supply is clearly not saturated. There is plenty of room for new influencers and casters in that scene, ready to be taken. Since there is supply in other mobile FPS games, headhunting these creators for collaboration could be worth a shot. The aspects in common are a mobile platform, shooting in the game and a competitive scene. A new potential game community is most likely to provide growth for any content creator. It would benefit the Critical Ops scene as well to fill the demand.

## 5 Research results

Multiple operating models were implemented during this research. There were at least three clear objectives. A study of written sources and databases such as various research and articles. Data collection from convenient sources via questionnaire and interviewing some of the participants for more in-depth data. Besides that, I consulted my colleagues, lecturers, and connections whenever required. One of the sources did not generate the results I was hoping for. Unfortunately, that was not possible to anticipate since these issues occurred due to internal challenges of the concerning organization. Despite that, I managed to collect plenty of data even without that resource.

### 5.1 The results of the written data sources

It was easier to find data regarding influencing when compared to casting. The aspect which narrows down the sources is gaming. There are plenty of casters in traditional sports, but not that many in the scene of gaming or esports. Casting in esports is a challenging area, and it slightly lacks people since it requires a specific skill set.

Besides gaming in general, there is another thing in common between casters and influencers. That is esports. The competitive scene of gaming is something that gathers various gamers into joint activities. It can be casting, content creation, influencing, playing, broadcasting, watching, or interacting etc. These gamers share quite similar interests and backgrounds in the end. Obviously, the line gets dimmer if the term "esports" is not defined. However, without taking a stand on which level of competitiveness counts as esports, I believe that generally, we can agree that you do not have to be professional in order to implement esports. Same as in traditional sports, you can compete without being a professional. There are different levels of skill, and that is alright.

Some of the content creators or influencers might be professional-level gamers or ex-professional players who are currently not hired into any roster of organizations or teams. Especially in Asia, the rosters change quite a lot, and therefore it is convenient to consider other forms of income besides the organization and team activity. However, one does not have to be a professional

gamer to be a professional content creator, influencer, or caster. A proper amount of knowledge and the right connections should provide genuine potential.

Another valid point to be highlighted is the fact that collaborating with game developers is undoubtedly always beneficial. However, it requires proper communication between the parties. In the best-case scenario, it could be like a healthy symbiosis. Influencers and content creators are able to execute more exclusive content and reach personal and joint goals possibly faster. Casters are able to gain experience in more professional surroundings and express themselves in the area they are generally sharing excellent knowledge. Since these professions mentioned above do have in-depth expertise and personal experience in interaction and dealing with the audience and community of gamers, it is wise to review the opinions of these people. A game developer can target the audience and community more accurately or even create new user acquisition. Constant visibility and positive atmosphere provided by these collaborative people is something to cherish. With such a collaborative activity, new gamers and new content creators, influencers, and casters could find their way to the community. Publicly showing support is likely to awaken common interest and encourage people to join and try new things.

Esports is a popular way to connect with the community. Gamers, especially the younger ones, seem to be eager and competitive. All the time, gaming youngsters want to improve and be better than their fellow gamers. In the community, you can often encounter comments such as "1v1 me" or "lets 1v1", at least in the Critical Ops scene. That means one versus one competing. However, this kind of activity does not always improve healthy sportsmanship since some people just want to humiliate or subordinate other players. Therefore, promoting esports should consistently be implemented by fostering good manners and professional behaviour.

## 5.2 Background of the survey

All the discovered data during the research should be harnessed with the results of the survey. This way the information provided by the survey can be analyzed better. If there are any repetitive patterns with respondents' behaviour, it would be easier to detect due to proper background research. One goal is to process information based on the research. That process should provide a supporting foundation besides the survey. Since this research explicitly concerns influencers and casters who work with games and or esports, familiarizing with the related topics does not go to waste for sure. For enlightening the bigger picture, it is beneficial to explore thoroughly but

not too in-depth in order to prevent side-tracking from the purpose. Since creating a survey is not complicated, coming up with the questions was not that difficult. However, a slight consulting and testing polished the final form, ready to use.

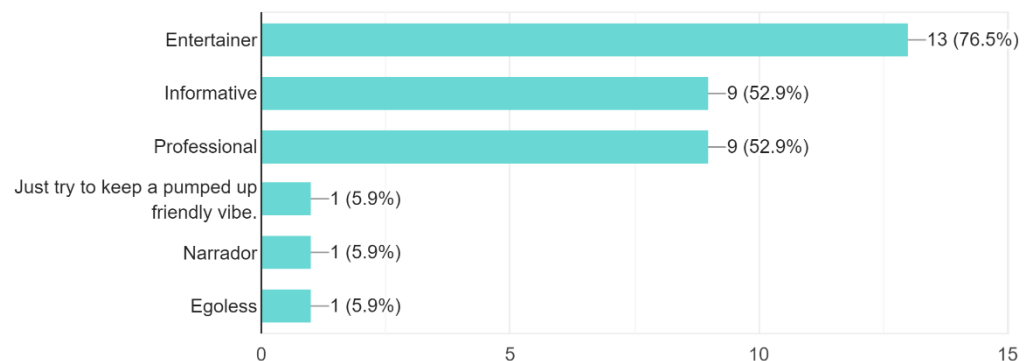
### 5.3 The results of the survey

Around 70 per cent of the respondents identified themselves as influencers, and 30 per cent both caster and influencer. The majority of them are using YouTube as a platform but also Twitch, Trovo and StreamChamp were mentioned. The average age of the respondents is relatively young since around 80 per cent of them are from 16 to 25 years old. The amount of followers is generally really notable, from few thousand to even tens and hundreds of thousands of followers.

These influencers and casters enjoy doing the stuff they do regarding this gaming scene. They want to support the game and grow the community. Having a concrete connection and capability to communicate with the developers is seen as a positive aspect. Also, connection with fellow influencers and casters has a positive impact. For example, there is a possibility of chatting and sharing in exclusive Discord groups. These kinds of participatory aspects create a feeling of pride in own status and privilege. Developers are generally respected for caring about the community, feedback, and opinions.

B-4.) What kind of influencer / caster you are?

17 responses



Picture 8. (a picture from the summary of the survey)

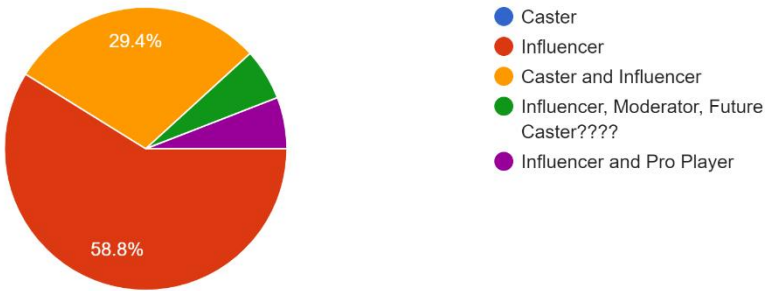
The point of the survey was to study the influencers' and casters' relationships with developers. The majority of the participants seemed to be satisfied and had challenges figuring out anything

to improve. Instead of that, feedback and developing ideas were offered multiple times. In the end, what matters the most in the relationship is the aspect of being listened to and noted. Feeling that your opinions make a difference creates value. A couple of concrete suggestions regarding C-OPS were influencer merchandise such as a T-shirt and individual player muting possibility in the game.

Few participants would like to receive advanced support such as help in channel growth or actual pay. However, cooperation means improving mutual interests, which should benefit both parties in some way equally. Generally, in-game currency and items were appreciated. One of the responders had a great experience with a collaborative promotion video which was successful. With proper resources, this could be worth doing.

The outcome of the survey was generally pleasant. There are responses totally from 17 unique participants from various regions such as North America, South America, and Europe. The number of received responses was nearly double, but there were few duplicates and one overkill. I believe this happened unintentionally for most people. The likeliest cause was refreshing the page multiple times after submitting, which is a relatively common habit of making sure that the survey was sent. In order to correct the statistics, I had to go through all the responses and remove the duplicates manually.

A-3.) Are you a caster, an influencer or both?  
17 responses



Picture 9. (a picture from the summary of the survey)

## 5.4 The results of the interviews

I managed to arrange a few one-on-one voice calls with the influencers and casters. I am thankful that some of them were able to spare time for this project. It was valuable for this research since I got notably more in-depth information. Generally, I got a similar positive expression of the experience related to the influencers and caster relationship with the developer. The participants are pleased about the influencer program and the possibility to cooperate with the developer organization.

The collaboration with developers seems to provide insight, for example, a better understanding of why certain features and updates are implemented. Even though there are no real negative sides to the cooperation, there is room for more comprehensive support. Providing education, e.g., with marketing and other valuable knowledge regarding influencer activity, was mentioned. Some of the participants involved are finding themselves young and inexperienced. These influencers are mainly just enjoying gaming and sharing with the community, which might be lacking proper direction or plan in the end. Being competitive is one aspect of the background, and as a skilful player, it attracts positive attention. Based on the interviews, success in the competitive scene provides confidence and happiness.

Doing casting for Critical Ops started with the intention of trying something new and having fun at the same time, according to the interviews. Eventually, while gaining more experience, it has become more appealing, and the general performing more professional. Apparently, there could be sometimes more regularity when it comes to communication. This is not necessarily related to casting itself, but rather due to hectic days or even weeks.

Material or virtual content benefits seem to be an excellent addition but are not seen as an actual necessity. At least one of the participants is still missing a critical ops shirt even though been involved with the program for a long time. However, it did not appear to be crucial. Some suggested ways to show recognition were influencer emblems and an in-game tag. A separate stream channel next to the feature channel was mentioned as a potential motivator as well. Having t-shirts and other merchandise displayed with casters or influencers during streams was seen as a way of support too.

Few in-game features were suggested during the interviews. One concrete feature would ease the interaction with the community. This would include the possibility to send party requests without having to add the player. Apparently, the adding procedure might cause frustration when

implemented repeatedly. Another mentioned in-game feature was related to the user interface. It could be updated to be more user friendly since it apparently feels slightly rigid. However, no concrete solutions were stated. Having pre-loadouts was mentioned too. It would mean having multiple pre-saved loadouts, which could be switched swiftly.

## 6 Conclusions

The planning of the work was started early, and therefore no real rush ever occurred. Every step of the plan was implemented in time. Even though there was enough time, some aspects were out of my hands, and I just had to try my best for as good results as possible. I contacted multiple people on an early state to scout if the project was worth implementing, and apparently, it was. One certain thing was that it is done for my employer Critical Force which makes me thankful. Even though this research was implemented by me alone, it included plenty of other people and communication with various parties. I enjoyed working and getting to know different people. Generally, it has been an eye-opening and educative experience. I am looking forward to implementing the found data for future plans with Critical Force.

### 6.1 Reliability and validity

The primary emphasis was on qualitative research, but since I managed to gather data from seventeen unique respondents, it possibly also provides quantitative value. Besides that, I managed to arrange interviews with a few participants, which provided better qualitative value. However, there are some pros and cons regarding the qualitative aspects. Even though I contacted AFK Creators many times from the beginning, I did not receive any concrete results from their side. This was due to challenging timing caused by rearrangements in their management. However, communication with the contact person was relatively smooth, so I believe there is a chance for collaboration in the future. Because of this, a portion of potential respondents was left out. Despite this setback, I reached many decent influencers and casters with notable audiences or viewerships. The highest follower amounts were under two hundred thousand, which are significant numbers. Even though all the participants mainly focus on Critical Ops, they are in the mobile fps scene after all. Therefore, the results are quite applicable regarding the mobile fps scene in general.

Despite which specific mobile fps game a particular influencer or caster is involved with, they are involved in the same scene. The participants of this research are worldwide from various continents, which provides qualitative value due to the broader spectrum of nationalities. Therefore, the work is providing international value as well.

## 6.2 Cogitation

Even though the results are somewhat satisfying, there is room for further study. A follow-up study could be worth a shot. For example, in the existing network of Critical Ops, more personal methods of contacting some influencers and casters could provide even better results. Communicating in group chats is not as personal as direct messages. Even though both methods were implemented, more personal targeting could have provided more impressive results.

Having a focus on totally different mobile fps games would be worth investigating as well. However, approaching cold leads might be a long shot without actual networks regarding other games. However, our network in Critical Ops has at least one notable content creator involved with another mobile fps game developer. A more personal approach could be worth trying.

Based on this research, it appears to be worth providing and taking care of influencer and caster relationships. These participants have demand and motivation for collaboration with developers. Such opportunity seems to be valued as a particular privilege. Even though this privilege provides notable benefits, there exist areas for development. The relationship, in general, does not have any outstanding issues. Since the influencers and casters of this mobile fps scene mainly care about the community and the game itself, the suggested development targets are related to those aspects. These suggestions could be reviewed by the developer team and evaluated if those are in line with our own vision. However, there is clear approval for support and recognition from the developer side. That would be appreciated and seen as a positive feature. The level of experience regarding influencer and caster activity has relevance. Even with a decent viewership, finding the proper way to implement might require expertise support for more professional results. Having fun and enjoying the stuff which is implemented regarding these tasks is satisfying when it provides results. Apparently, it does not always provide a clear path for sufficient professionalism. With the support of the developer, there could be keys to improvement.

There is a preliminary plan discussion about going through the results of this research with the team, which is in touch with casters and influencers. That way, it is more convenient to determine and evaluate which feedback should be highlighted. After this, we are able to provide a possible proposal for potential development areas. Improving the general relationship with existing collaboration and collecting follow-ups could be beneficial during future development.

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## Appendices



## Influencer and caster relationships with developers in (mobile FPS) games

(Survey made by Ricardo "Tappi" Ruha for Critical Force and Esports Business degree thesis)

\*Pakollinen

A-1.) What is your "alias" or nickname in gaming / esports scene? (e.g. Ricardo "Tappi" Ruha) \*

Oma vastauksesi \_\_\_\_\_

A-2.) How old are you? \*

- Under 16
- 16-18
- 18-20
- 21-25
- 26-30
- 31-35
- +40

A-3.) Are you a caster, an influencer or both? \*

- Caster
- Influencer
- Caster and Influencer
- Muu: \_\_\_\_\_

A-4.) On which platform you work on? \*

Twitch

YouTube

Omlet Arcade

Muu: \_\_\_\_\_

B-1.) What you like about being a caster / an influencer? \*

Oma vastauksesi \_\_\_\_\_

B-2.) What makes you passionate about gaming / esports? \*

Oma vastauksesi \_\_\_\_\_

B-3.) What are your strenghts as an influencer / a caster?

Oma vastauksesi \_\_\_\_\_

B-4.) What kind of influencer / caster you are?

Entertainer

Informative

Professional

Muu: \_\_\_\_\_

B-5.) In your opinion, why people like to follow / listen / watch you?

Oma vastauksesi

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C-1.) If you are a influencer, how many followers / subscribers you have roughly on each platform?

Oma vastauksesi

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C-2.) If you are a caster, please elaborate on your experiences?

Oma vastauksesi

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D-1.1) Do you cooperate with Critical Ops? \*

Yes

No

D-1.2) If you cooperate with C-OPS, what are the best parts? (if you don't then type "I don't") \*

Oma vastauksesi

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D-1.3) How about the worst parts while cooperating with C-OPS? (anything we could improve or do a different way?) \*

Oma vastauksesi

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D-2.1) Which game developer companies or esports organisations you cooperate / work with? (outside of C-OPS, if you don't just type "none") \*

Oma vastauksesi

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D-2.2) If you responded "No" in the previous question, have you had any cooperation in the past? (which developer companies or esports organisations?)

Oma vastauksesi

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D-2.3) What are the best parts working with X esports organisation / developer company? (outside of C-OPS) \*

Oma vastauksesi

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D-2.4) How about the worst parts while cooperating with X organisation / company? (anything they could improve or do a different way?)

Oma vastauksesi

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D-3.1) How often you cooperate with these tasks? \*

- Full-time
- Part-time
- Multiple times per week
- At least once per week
- Few days a month
- Monthly
- Less than monthly

D-3.2) Do you know people in your network which cooperate around these tasks outside of C-OPS? \*

- I only have networks around C-OPS scene
- I know just some names outside of C-OPS scene
- I know few people outside of C-OPS scene
- I know multiple people outside of C-OPS scene
- Muu: \_\_\_\_\_

D-3.3) Which influencers or casters you know outside of C-OPS, and what is your relation with them? (if none, just type none) \*

Oma vastauksesi \_\_\_\_\_

D-3.4) Could you arrange a meeting with your fellow influencer/caster outside of C-OPS? (e.g. Discord voice or text or any other platform?) \*

- Yes, sure
- I can provide their contact info
- Not sure, but I could try
- I don't have any valid contact information
- No
- Muu: \_\_\_\_\_

Free word, feedback, regards etc. (Also thank you for filling the survey all the way, I appreciate it a lot!)

Oma vastauksesi \_\_\_\_\_

Lähetä