International gaming: Comparative survey research on digital gaming (Panel)

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ABSTRACT

Computer and console gaming has become a major entertainment sector around the globe. Still, the diffusion rates and the general acceptance of gaming vary between countries. There is some anecdotal evidence that there are countries and regions which are more open to technological advancement and gaming in particular. However, until now, researchers had to rely mostly on market research and industry information when trying to identify the state of gaming in their respective countries. In a unique effort to solve the problem of missing cross-national research, this panel brings together several international teams of researchers, presenting several large-scale surveys in a comparative manner.

KEYWORDS

Survey, Representative Data, Comparative Research, International Data, Diffusion, Use

THEMATIC FOCUS AND PANEL STRUCTURE

Computer and console gaming has become a major entertainment sector around the globe. Still, the diffusion rates and the general acceptance of gaming vary between countries. There is some anecdotal evidence that there are countries and regions which are more open to technological advancement and gaming in particular. However, until now, researchers had to rely mostly on market research and industry information when trying to identify the state of gaming in their respective countries. Comparative research on the spread of gaming and gamer demographics from independent sources is scarce, but as the area of games research matures, this type of data becomes crucial for understanding the wider context of gaming in different societies and nations, and the potential influence of culture, policies and available infrastructure on the use of digital games.

In a unique effort to solve the problem of missing cross-national research, this panel brings together several international teams of researchers, presenting several large-scale surveys in a comparative manner. The countries under analysis include Finland, Belgium, Germany, Taiwan and Singapore, offering insights into varying types of societies and markets and their adoption of gaming. The studies include data both on adolescent and adult gamers, based on solid, large scale samples with hundreds or even thousands of respondents in each country. Methodologically, the studies are based on CATI (Asia, Germany) surveys, CAPI (Belgium) surveys, controlled mail surveys (Finland) and paper & pencil school surveys (Singapore). The comparisons between countries allow for a comparative view on computer gaming, which reveals striking differences between various world regions. Reasons for differences are debated on the basis of cultural aspects as well as market conditions.

The panel will be divided in three topical sections. The panelists will (a) give an overview of international studies on gaming, including methodological aspects, then (b) present the findings of the studies in a comparative fashion, and finally (c) discuss the possibilities, but also the pitfalls of comparative survey efforts in the field of digital games research. The last presentation is also intended to trigger a discussion on the necessity, aims and methods of further international research.

PANEL PRESENTATIONS

International comparative research: An overview

In the introductory presentation, we will give an overview of the international efforts in games studies so far. Based on typologies of comparative research in other fields of communication research, central studies and approaches will be identified and categorized. From this overview, the lack of comparative survey work will become apparent. As an answer to this desideratum, we will present some recent survey studies coming from Singapore, Taiwan, Germany, Belgium and Finland.

Findings from Europe and Asia: The surveys

In the second part of the panel, we will discuss the findings of the surveys. Individual presentations of the respective country teams will include (a) the basic outline of these studies (sample, the aims of the research, methodology), (b) diffusion rates and base data on gaming according to standard socio-demography (age groups, like adolescent gamers vs. adults, gender etc.), (c) gamer types, genre preferences and (d) some information on country-specific idiosyncrasies.

Finally, we will present an overview of all the survey data in a comparative fashion, highlighting some interesting differences of the individual countries under analysis.

Beyond the global gamersphere?
National and cultural specifics of digital gaming

In the final part, we will discuss the lessons learnt from the cross-cultural comparisons. While the discussion will draw on the empirical data and the identification of factors for country- and cultural-specific differences, it will not be limited to the description of national data, but focus on some pressing methodological and theoretical considerations: Can findings be easily transferred between countries and regions - if we realize that the situation is completely different and that the countries are obviously in different stages of development? And do we need more regionally or culturally bound research that goes beyond the idea of universally transferable findings?

The aim of this part of the panel is to start an open discussion, and hopefully gather more country groups being interested in collecting and exchanging international survey data on games.