An Examination of the Effects of Source Gender on Perceived Credibility of Esports Shoutcasters

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Esports broadcasters, known as shoutcasters, are an important part of the professional gaming industry. The credibility of these shoutcasters is an area that is understudied, yet critical from a production, consumption, and administrative standpoint. There are few women in this role, and research has shown women who work in the gaming industry may face hostility and toxic masculinity. Audience views of casters have not been empirically tested. Following the source credibility theory, the purpose of this study was to explore gamers’ perceptions of trustworthiness and expertise of male and female shoutcasters in the professional gaming industry. A quasi-experimental design was employed in which gamers (N = 239) were recruited and randomly assigned to one of two groups. Each group watched a video of a League of Legends match and evaluated the casters, either (a) two males or (b) one male and one female. Participants did not perceive differences in casters’ expertise levels but did have a small significant difference with the female caster being perceived as more trustworthy than the male. While controlling for gamer identification and involvement, there were no significant differences in a female/male pairing’s expertise and trustworthiness in comparison to the all-male pairing. Discussion centers on the findings with consideration that esports are often a noninclusive space.

Keywords: communication, gaming, caster, source credibility model

Professional esports leagues, such as those for popular games such as League of Legends, Overwatch and Dota 2, among others, comprise a professional League of Industry that touts highly paid gamers and attracts worldwide audiences who consume esports via digital streaming or television at remarkable levels. The most popular esports matches garner 1 million or more views regularly, with a few reaching >5 million viewers, such as the 2022 League of Legends World Championship, which had 5.1 million viewers at its peak (Simic, 2022). These online or televised esports events are similar to traditional televised sports in that they utilize in-match announcers who explain the action to the viewing audience as it takes place. In these events, the broadcasters, colloquially known in the gaming community as “shoutcasters” or simply “casters,” are critical to the viewership, providing detailed commentary to the fast-paced technical action. The casters’ abilities to explain the game, provide entertainment, and analyze the action are important for the success of each event broadcast, whether live television or streaming platforms, like Twitch, YouTube, or Facebook Gaming. As esports audiences and broadcasting continue to grow, the role of the caster has become a coveted media position and has a high impact on the audience enjoyment of the event (Kempe-Cooke et al., 2019; Tsung-Han Sher et al., 2018). Thus, from a production and administration standpoint, the audience’s perceptions of casters, including their credibility, are important factors when considering the growth in casting opportunities, hiring practices, and ratings.

Like the history of sports journalism and traditional televised sports, where broadcasters were traditionally men, female casters may face similar struggles to break into the esports industry (Darvin et al., 2021). The professional esports industry, and electronic gaming as a whole, has historically been male-dominated and a documented history of reflecting male hegemony, including many gender inequalities, and the online environment in which these games take place is often viewed as sexist, hostile, discriminatory, and toxic (e.g., Consalvo, 2012; Darvin et al., 2020; Fox & Tung, 2014; Nakandala et al., 2017; Rogstad, 2021; Ruvalcaba et al., 2018). Numerous researchers examined the challenges of women entering the esports discipline as executives, gamers, or game producers, from a management, media, or business perspective (e.g., Darvin et al., 2021). One segment of professional gaming management that has not been explored is the media and broadcasting side of the industry. Casters are broadcast journalists akin to the broadcasters of professional sports. The perceptions of the audience of esports should be considered because of the documented inequities and challenges with diversity with the esports industry (Darvin et al., 2021). Knowing if there is a barrier from the audience perceptions will assist in paving the way for female casters.

To understand the value of studying gender within broadcast journalism, it is important to consider that the gender of the media members often dictates the type of coverage being discussed and influences the users’ perceptions of credibility of the source. Source credibility theory (Hovland & Weiss, 1951; Hovland et al., 1953) provides a framework to understand how users perceive casters. Credibility, including trustworthiness and expertise of these casters is necessary for them to achieve and maintain their positions. Women in traditional sports journalism are often viewed as less competent or less informed; their credibility is frequently questioned (e.g., Cole et al., 1981; Etling & Young, 2007; Mudrick & Lin, 2017; Ordman & Zillmann, 1994; Toro, 2005). Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore gamers’ perceptions of male and female casters’ credibility (trustworthiness and expertise) in the professional gaming industry.

There is limited research on female administrators or decision makers in the esports community (Darvin et al., 2021), which leads to a gap in understanding how women are perceived as casters, with scant research on casting in esports overall. With the esports
industry growth and history of underrepresentation, it is critical to assess the media side and casters. This research will educate decision makers on gamers’ views of casters and add to the limited scholarship on casters and women in esports.

**Literature Review**

**The Gaming Culture**

To consider casters and their effectiveness, with focus on female casters, it is important to first understand the culture of the esports industry (competitive gaming). The literature on the culture of esports and gender is extensive (e.g., Consalvo, 2012; Darvin et al., 2020; Fox & Tang, 2014; Nakandala et al., 2017; Rogstad, 2021; Ruvalcaba et al., 2018; Taylor & Stout, 2020). These studies often follow feminist theory, hegemonic masculinity theory, treatment discrimination, or identity theories and assert that elements of the industry are heavily masculinized, from the games themselves (Ratan et al., 2015; Voorhees & Orlando, 2018), or male-dominated such as the professional level gamers, designers, and executives of the esports leagues and companies. Others have focused on the structural inequalities of the competition at the highest levels (e.g., Xue et al., 2019). Rogstad’s (2021) review of literature on gender and esports, which classified the research into the three broad themes (hegemonic masculinity in esports, online harassment, and negotiating gendered expectations), demonstrated the issues facing women within the esports environment. The review noted that female gamers were considered minorities in esports and faced online harassment frequently, often in the forms of sexual harassment via online play. If male gamers have traditionally negative views of women in the esport space, their views of female casters may also be negative.

Moreover, although the numbers of female gamers are rising (Entertainment Software Association, 2019), the male-dominated gaming culture may lead to dropout by young, talented gamers (Rogstad, 2021), and eventually less professional female gamers based on the esports meritocracy view (Siutila & Havaste, 2019). This is important to consider as, similar to traditional sports broadcasting, former stars, in this case former professional gamers, are often employed as broadcasters upon retirement (Tani, 2018).

From a managerial standpoint, Darvin et al. (2021) interviewed women executives and gamers to understand their challenges with working in esports. They found there were key themes echoed by interviewees: (a) breaking the “glass monitor,” (b) toxic “geek” masculinity, (c) hostile sport environment, and (d) “mental” (grit). This qualitative study provides a basis for understanding how women esports managers or gamers perceive their industry. Although this study did not interview any casters or assess media members, the other executives deemed the industry environment challenging, hostile, and toxic. With these lines of research (e.g., Darvin et al., 2021; Rogstad, 2021), it is apparent the esports industry can be an unwelcoming, harassing, and hostile environment for both casual gamers and high-level gaming employees. It remains unclear how the most front-facing employees, the casters, are viewed by gamers. Casters are the face (or voice) of the industry and most face-forward part of gaming, outside of the professional gamers themselves. Thus, how casters may be perceived by their audiences, given the environment, is important for the industry.

**Esports Media and Role of Casters**

As noted earlier, esports spectatorship levels, whether online or television, can be massive. While the viewership numbers compare to traditional sports, the viewing of esports differs from traditional sports. Spectator motivations to watch esports events are generally similar to motivations around watching sporting events (Pizzo et al., 2018), but there are aspects of the esports industry that do not function in the same way due to the differing nature of the activities. Hamari and Sjöblom (2017) define esports as a form of sports that occurs in an electronic medium. They further discuss the distinction between events happening in the “real world” in contrast to esports being played in a “virtual world.” The fact that esports are totally computer mediated leads to differing consumption and broadcasting patterns from traditional sports and opens up a new area of inquiry. The reliance of esports on online broadcasting is noted as one of the most significant differences between traditional sports and esports (Hallmann & Giel, 2018). Broadcasting in esports also typically occurs in a different way than traditional sports. The majority of professional gaming broadcasting and viewership occurs on YouTube or Twitch.tv rather than on cable or satellite television (Clement, 2023). The video game streaming platform Twitch.tv is consistently in the top 50 most visited Websites in the world, and most visited computer and video Website (Semrush, 2023).

The esports industry is vast, with different games and professional leagues being broadcast or streamed on multiple platforms (Nielsen, 2019). Because of the global nature of the industry, there is an abundance of streaming games that utilize casters. For the professional matches, two to four casters are utilized per game, suggesting there is plenty of room for growth and equity in the profession. Casters describe the event as it takes place, explaining the technical aspects of the match, including strategy and gameplay. Unlike traditional sports, the casters are not seen on the screen very frequently, as there are no stoppages in play or commercial breaks. Professional gaming also features “sideline” reporters, similar to those in traditional sports, who interview gamers before and after matches. Casters are considered one of the most important aspects of the online experience by viewers (Kempe-Cook et al., 2019; Tsung-Han Sher et al., 2018). The increasing ratings and viewing options within the professional gaming industry present esports leagues and broadcasting platforms with needs to securing broadcasting fees, opportunities for advertising revenue, and the need to produce high-quality content and production with talented esports announcers (casters). Research on esports casters is in its infancy, with few studies to date. Of those, they include studies on challenges of esports casters (Kempe-Cook et al., 2019) and comparisons of an esports broadcast to a traditional sports broadcast (FIFA World Cup) (Turtiainen et al., 2020), where casters were part of the review. All point to the value and importance of the casting and quality of casters being a significant role within the professional broadcasts.

Compared with the numbers of games being streamed at a time, the number of female casters and broadcasters is small, including only a few well-known names. Indiana “Froskurinn” Black (caster for League of Legends European Championship Oceanic Pro League, China’s League of Legends Pro League), Ainhoa “Noa” Campos (Spanish LVP Superliga), Carmen “Carmelina” Junquera (Baltic Masters), Christine “Potter” Chi (Counter-Strike: Global Offensive or broadcast analyst), and Lauren “Pansy” Scott (Counter-Strike: Global Offensive) are among those who are casters or broadcast analysts for specific events (Yang, 2022). Other women work in the media industry in roles as studio host, such as Sue “Smix” Lee and Rachel “Seltzer” Quirico. Many of these women were former gamers themselves. Recently, the Overwatch League’s Kickoff Clash Qualifier featured the first all-female cast when Victoria “VikkiKitty” Perez and Rosemary...
“Neddra” Kelley were casters for the June 2022 United States’ broadcast (Yang, 2022). Despite the headway for the women, the challenges remain. As most of these events are streamed online platforms, such as Twitch, viewers can comment and chat with each other throughout the match on the screen, providing opportunity to weigh in on the competition, as well as the casters. Thus, we need to examine the culture of video gaming and its audience’s perspectives as a possible influencer in the disparity.

**Theoretical Framework**

**Source Credibility Theory**

The source credibility theory describes the degree to which someone receiving information perceives the source as credible, positing that the credible sources influence individuals through persuasion (Hovland & Weiss, 1951; Hovland et al., 1953). Building on Hovland and Weiss (1951) and Hovland et al. (1953), Ohanian (1990) defined the different dimensions of source credibility into two main factors: trustworthiness and expertise. They examined the communication effectiveness and credibility of celebrity endorsers in advertisements of products. If an individual is not seen as an expert or is not seen as a trustworthy source, observers are not likely to involve in the advertisements.

Research examining different news sources showed men are typically perceived as more credible than women in communicating information (e.g., Armstrong & McAdams, 2009; Weibel et al., 2008). In industries with well-defined gender roles, such as sport, it may be even harder for observers to see women as being as capable as men (Coakley, 2020; DiCaro, 2021). Esports may fit this category, considering the past research that highlights gender exclusivity, harassment, and toxicity for females online (see Rogstad, 2021).

**Gender and Credibility in Sports Journalism and Broadcasting**

The distinction between men and women in sports journalism has been studied extensively, with focus on the hegemonic masculinity environment of sports and perceptions of females in these roles. Research examining different news sources showed men are typically preferred and deemed a more credible source, specifically in the roles of print journalist (Cole et al., 1981), sports reporter (Etling & Young, 2007; Ordman & Zillmann, 1994), and sports broadcaster (Hahn & Cummins, 2014). Researchers found female reporters were seen as “less informed about sports generally” than were their male counterparts by participants (Ordman & Zillmann, 1994) and for women to be perceived as credible in covering men’s sports, women needed to be seen as less attractive (Hahn & Cummins, 2014). These numerous findings consistently reveal sports audiences perceive men to have a higher credibility than women.

Gunther et al. (2011) were one of the few to find men and women equally credible in their quantitative analysis, but their qualitative approach also found participants had biases toward women in sports broadcasting. Baiocchi-Wagner and Behm-Morawitz (2010) also found their participants viewed men and women to be equally credible in a quasi-experimental design about sports media print reporters. They followed social identity theory to understand credibility and persuasiveness and used an undergraduate student population to see whether articles written by women were more favorable than those written by men.

In examining past literature on women in media of the historically male-dominated sport of American football, researchers also found disparities among genders. Mudrick and Lin (2017) studied the perceived trustworthiness and expertise of female sports print journalists. Their major finding was the perceived incongruence when females cover masculine sports and vice versa. The implications of these studies reveal that in an industry where women are generally seen as “lesser,” they are also seen as incompetent and are perceived as individuals who lack knowledge about the subject. This was echoed in the latest research from Luisi et al. (2020), whereby participants rated men higher than women in expertise when broadcasting a football script. Thus, we base our hypotheses on these lines of research.

**Identification and Involvement**

When evaluating perceived credibility, the identification and involvement of audience members evaluating the source are important factors that may influence how they perceived the source. An individual’s involvement (oftentimes operationalized as consumption) and identification may influence one’s perceptions and behavior (Trail et al., 2000). Past sport communication studies have studied this influence. For example, Mudrick and Lin (2017) utilized reader loyalty, sport news consumption, and sport involvement in their study comparing perceived credibility of male and female print journalists. Similarly, Lim et al. (2012) studied effects of a participant’s past football knowledge and experience on an individual’s evaluation of credibility of a given message in a football news article. Lim et al. determined that people who ranked highly in knowledge of football saw the biased article as less credible than those who did not have knowledge of football. This suggests that past experience and expertise on a topic may affect an audience member’s perception of a message or source’s credibility.

Thus, we measured and controlled for individuals’ involvement with games as consumption via experience as a gamer. Finally, gamer identification as a determinant of level of interest in gaming may influence perceptions. Identification is defined as “an orientation of the self in regard to other objects, including a person or group that results in feelings or sentiments of close attachments” (Trail et al., 2000, p. 165). We are interested in gamers’ identification with gaming as a whole, as well as the particular game in the study, as both could impact perceptions about casters.

**Summary and Hypotheses**

The gaming market is growing rapidly, and opportunities for more streaming and casters within the professional space are on the rise. However, growth in the female segment is potentially limited due to the historically sexist nature of the games and environment, including perceptions by viewers of female gamers and casters. As such, the casters play an important role in helping provide background information as the voice of sports. The limited number of women, their influence on, and their perception by gamers in the aforementioned role have not been examined. Many of these credibility studies were conducted in men’s sports and only a few on broadcasting a live sporting event specifically. None to date...
have explored the professional esports environment and their casters. To understand gamers’ perceptions of the credibility of male and female casters, we utilized a quasi-experimental design to test the following four hypotheses, comparing different broadcasts and shoutcaster combinations (male vs. female casting same broadcast; two male casters vs. a male and female caster broadcast):

Hypothesis 1: Participants will perceive the male shoutcaster to have more expertise than the female shoutcaster.

Hypothesis 2: Participants will perceive the male shoutcaster as more trustworthy than the female shoutcaster.

Hypothesis 3: Participants will perceive the pair combination of two male casters as having greater expertise than a pair combination of a female and male shoutcaster, when controlling for involvement and identification.

Hypothesis 4: Participants will perceive the pair combination of two male casters as having greater trustworthiness than a pair combination of a female and male shoutcaster, when controlling for involvement and identification.

Methods

To test the proposed hypotheses, we utilized a quasi-experimental design to measure gamers’ perceptions of casters’ credibility (expertise and trustworthiness) based on casters’ gender (male or female) with two conditions (Group 1: video with two Male Casters; Group 2: video with one Male and one Female Caster). An edited video of a League of Legends match was used as the treatment, and gamers were recruited via purposeful social media recruitment with snowball sampling. Each aspect of the method will be discussed in turn.

Participants

Participants of this study were League of Legends gamers, aged 18 years and older. After Institutional Review Board approval, online surveys were distributed on social media to targeted groups. The researcher created a recruitment post message ("I am researching different aspects of the esports industry and League of Legends. Please take 10 minutes to fill out my survey if you are familiar with League of Legends, and feel free to pass it on to other gamers that you may know") with the survey link inviting individuals to participate in an online study about gaming and League of Legends. The true purpose of identifying gender differences on credibility was not conveyed. The survey link was posted in various League of Legends fan groups on Facebook and the researchers’ personal social media pages (Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, and Instagram). Participants were encouraged to share the survey with any other gamers that they knew, and the majority of responses were gathered through use of this snowballing technique. Notably, several staff members from the development community of Riot Games (the gaming company that developed League of Legends) retweeted the post to their followers, providing great reach and targeted audience of participants.

Procedures

The study was conducted via an online Qualtrics survey, which included a video component. Participants followed a three-step process over the duration of 10 min. Participants were randomly assigned to one of two treatment groups and: (a) completed a presurvey to assess involvement and identification as a gamer and League of Legends fan, (b) watched a 4-min esports League of Legends competition video with two casters (either two men casting or a mixed cast of one male and one female caster), and (c) completed a postsurvey about the video to assess perceptions of the casters, demographics, attention checks, and dummy questions. The procedure is detailed as follows:

Presurvey

Participants first completed a 10-item survey to determine their identification levels and consumption of esports.

Treatment

After completing the presurvey, participants were randomly assigned to one of two groups and tasked with watching a 4-min compilation video clip of the 2019 League of Legends European Championship. The groups were:

1. Group 1 watched a video containing voices of two male casters (male/male) and
2. Group 2 watched a video with a mixed-gendered cast (one male and one female shoutcaster; male/female).

Each video segment was edited to have two casters, rather than one, to maintain realism of a true broadcast. The casters were not shown on the screen, only the game avatars. The male and female casters in Group 2 allowed for comparison of Hypotheses 1–2. To test for group differences of all-male cast compared with mixed cast (Hypotheses 3–4), one male caster was the same in both groups to allow for consistency. That is, each group had the same male caster, then either another male or a female caster to allow comparisons of the mixed group credibility compared to the all-male group. Four minutes was the chosen duration as it was adequate time for each caster in the video to showcase his or her ability, yet was short enough to keep the survey duration reasonable. Both videos (male/male and male/female) were edited from roughly the same parts of the match to control for differences in excitement levels between the two videos at various points in the match. We utilized the League of Legends European Championship because it is one of the most popular esports events of the year and had a female caster. The spring split of the tournament (from which the video was drawn) was viewed by 27.6 million people (Miceli, 2019). The casters could be deemed credible and trustworthy, given the high level of the event. The roles of the sportscasters could be defined as “play-by-play” (the announcer that covers the technical aspects of the game) and “color” (the announcer that provides relief and background information) casters; however, these roles in esports are not as strictly defined as they are in traditional sports.

Postsurvey

After watching the video, participants answered questions about perceptions of trustworthiness and expertise of the casters. The participants were not provided the casters’ names or images during the video, so credibility items were gender based in the directions. That is, in the mixed-cast group, the participants were asked to “rate the female caster” on her trustworthiness/expertise and “rate the male caster” on his trustworthiness/expertise, separately. In the all-male group, the participants were asked to “think about one of the casters in the video and rate that person on the items below,” then “think of the other caster and rate that one on the items below.”
CREDIBILITY OF ESPORTS SHOUTCASTERS

Instruments

Perceived Source Credibility Items
Gamers’ perceptions of two forms of source credibility were measured—trust and expertise. Source credibility items were rated on a 1–7 semantic-differential scale from Ohanian (1990), measuring the caster’s level of trustworthiness (dependability, honesty, reliability, trustworthiness, and sincerity), and expertise (qualified, knowledgeable, skilled, experienced, and expert). See Appendix for semantic items. Ohanian’s third area of source credibility, attractiveness, was excluded because casters in esports are not seen on the screen throughout the matches and there are no breaks for commercial or analysis like in traditional sport.

Demographic and Descriptive Items
We also included demographic items and a series of questions measuring a variety of nonessential factors to provide decoy questions, such as rating the game play in the match, and three attention check items to ensure individuals were paying attention to the study (e.g., “select 5 on this item”; identify which two teams are playing). Those that missed attention checks were eliminated from the study analysis.

Inclusion Criterion and Control Variables
As a metric of inclusion criteria and to control for the potential effects of past esports or gaming knowledge, participants reported their expertise and participation in League of Legends and gaming activities. We measured identification with six items, three each for League of Legends identification and gamer identification on a 1–7 Likert scale (Trail et al., 2003). Participants indicated their consumption by the average hours per week spent playing League of Legends, watching esports or video game streams, and watching League of Legends. Participants also responded to if they had previously watched the match being studied (yes/no/not sure). Because our purpose was to examine gamer’s perceptions of casters’ abilities, people who were deemed knowledgeable and involved with the game were the most qualified participants to judge the credibility or esports professionals. Thus, inclusion criteria included self-identified gamers or League of Legend fans by scoring at least a 4.0 average on either the gaming identification or League of Legends identification questions. As 4.0 is the midpoint of the scale, those who reported 4.0 or more agreed with the statements that they identify as a gamer or League of Legends fan, and thus were included as participants.

Data Analysis
Data were exported from Qualtrics into SPSS (version 26) for analyses. Reliability of the identification and credibility questions was assessed (α > .70 threshold) (Murphy & Davidshofer, 2001). A correlation matrix for these factors was also created. Correlations that were statistically significant or >.80 were noted. Before testing the hypotheses, groups were compared to meet assumptions of normality and homogeneity of the groups via Levene’s test (non-significance, p > .05) and Box’s M (nonsignificance, p > .001). For Hypotheses 1 and 2, paired sample t tests were run to assess the statistical significance of the differences of means between the expertise and trustworthiness scores of the male and female casters in the male/female group. Each participant in Group 2 rated the male caster and the female caster on expertise and trustworthiness; these average scores by factor were used for the paired t test. For Hypotheses 3 and 4, we utilized multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) to assess impact of the casting groups (all-male group vs. mixed group) with perceived trustworthiness and expertise scores of the casters with the covariates of identification and involvement scores. Identification was assessed through League of Legends identification and gamer identification scores. A combined involvement value was created for each individual based on hours spent watching League of Legends, watching esports, and playing League of Legends.

Results
Participant Characteristics
A total of 239 surveys were deemed usable (n = 111 in Group 1; n = 128 in Group 2), from the original 518 completed surveys. Participants were excluded if they were not 18 years old or older (n = 18), had an incomplete survey (n = 232), spent <200 s on the survey (indicating they could not have watched the entire video; n = 7), or did not meet inclusion criteria, scoring below a 4.0 on either identification section (n = 13).

Descriptive statistics were calculated for each group (Table 1). Most of the respondents were White (77%) males (79%) and averaged 23 years old. Most participants were current college students (62%), ranging from associate degree students to doctoral students. Participants in both groups were highly involved in League of Legends and gaming (M = 32.44 h per week spent on playing and watching). The descriptive group makeup showed no statistical differences, to allow for group comparisons.

Survey Reliability
Cronbach’s α test produced .75–.81 values for all measurement items. Items for League of Legends identification (Cronbach’s α = .80), gamer identification (α = .75), overall expertise (α = .81), and trustworthiness (α = .76) were all found to be reliable based on the standard Cronbach’s α level of >.70 (Murphy & Davidshofer, 2001). The correlations for the identification, involvement, and credibility factors were low, but significant correlations of involvement and identification with expertise and trustworthiness suggested they remain appropriate as covariates (Table 2). Strong correlations between expertise and trustworthiness were expected as they are theoretically similar concepts, both measuring types of credibility.

Descriptive Statistics
Descriptive statistics for expertise and trustworthiness scores for the female caster, male caster, male/female group average, and male/male group average were calculated. The credibility means in the different groups were above the 4.0 mean, indicating the casters were seen as experts and trustworthy. The average scores for identification between groups were consistent with gamers being highly identified.

Tests of Hypotheses
For Hypotheses 1 and 2, we ran paired sample t tests to determine whether the differences of means for expertise and trustworthiness were statistically significant between the male and female caster based on the perspectives of the gamers in the male/female group (n = 128). The participants rated the female caster in the female/male group as moderately high in expertise 5.76 (SD = 1.18), while the male scored similarly as 5.80 (SD = 1.04). The t test showed no
significance in the difference of means ($p = .83$). For trustworthiness, the participants rated the female caster in the group as 5.67 (SD = 1.05) and the male as 5.47 (SD = 1.08). A t test showed that this difference of means was statistically significant ($p = .01$).

For Hypotheses 3 and 4, a one-way MANCOVA was conducted to determine differences in trustworthiness and expertise of the all-male group compared to the mixed group, while controlling for involvement, gamer identification, and League of Legends identification (Table 3; $N = 239$). To ensure homogeneity, Levene’s test indicated equality of variances for the two groups for trustworthiness, $F(1, 219) = 0.735$, $p = .392$, and expertise, $F(1, 219) = 0.091$, $p = .763$. Box’s M test was also not significant ($p = .733$). Neither of the differences of means were significant, which rejects both Hypothesis 3 and Hypothesis 4. There was not a significant effect of group on trustworthiness or expertise scores at the $p < .05$ level, $F(2, 215), p = .547$, partial $\eta^2 = .006$. Although adjusted mean credibility scores were higher for the male pairing, Hypotheses 3 and 4 were not supported as differences were not significant.

### Table 1 Descriptive Statistics for the Personal Background, Involvement, and Identification Variables With Respect to Groups ($N = 239$)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Background variable</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Male/male caster group ($n = 111$)</th>
<th>Female/male caster group ($n = 128$)</th>
<th>Total ($N = 239$)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>$N$</td>
<td>$%$</td>
<td>$N$</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
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<td>17.8</td>
<td>20</td>
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<td>Transgender</td>
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<td>1.9</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>Prefer to self-describe</td>
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<td>0.9</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Prefer not to say</td>
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<td>1.9</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Noncollege students</td>
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<td>40.0</td>
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</tr>
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</table>

### Table 2 Correlation Matrix Including League of Legends Identification, Gamer Identification, Involvement, Expertise, and Trust

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors</th>
<th>League of Legends identification</th>
<th>Gamer identification</th>
<th>Involvement</th>
<th>Expertise</th>
<th>Trust</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>League of Legends identification</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.201**</td>
<td>.406**</td>
<td>.248**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gamer identification</td>
<td>.201**</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.063</td>
<td>.177**</td>
<td>.228**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involvement</td>
<td>.406**</td>
<td>.063</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.163*</td>
<td>.839**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expertise</td>
<td>.248**</td>
<td>.063</td>
<td>.177**</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust</td>
<td>.228**</td>
<td>.059</td>
<td>.163*</td>
<td>.839**</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Significant at .05 level. **Significant at .01 level.

### Table 3 Adjusted Means and MANCOVA Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Estimated means with control</th>
<th>SE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Expertise</td>
<td>Male/male casters</td>
<td>5.86</td>
<td>0.089</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male/female casters</td>
<td>5.78</td>
<td>0.084</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trustworthiness</td>
<td>Male/male casters</td>
<td>5.71</td>
<td>0.088</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male/female casters</td>
<td>5.60</td>
<td>0.083</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In regard to the covariates, controlling for gamer identification had no effect on trustworthiness, $F(1, 216) = 0.006, p = .938$, or expertise scores, $F(1, 216) = 0.046, p = .831$. League of Legends identification, however, did have a statistically significant effect on both trustworthiness, $F(1, 216) = 7.1$, $p = .008$, and expertise, $F(1, 216) = 6.69$, $p = .01$, suggesting the more the participant identified with League of Legends, the more trustworthy and expert they found the caster. Involvement did not affect trustworthiness, $F(1, 216) = 1.082$, $p = .299$, or expertise, $F(1, 216) = 1.239$, $p = .267$, scores.

**Discussion**

The number of streamed or televised professional esports matches is at an all-time high, leading to an increase in related opportunities in esports casting production. Yet, within the gaming industry, there is a strong history of a male-dominated culture, which in many cases has been shown to impact the development, entry, and opportunities of women into segments of the industry, including professional gamers and ancillary game industry staff members, such as game producers and developers (e.g., Darvin et al., 2021; Harvey & Shepherd, 2017; Legault & Weststar, 2018). There is a lack of female esports casters, and we sought to explore whether there were differences in viewer perceptions of the credibility of casters based on gender.

Participants in this study identified little to no differences in credibility between male and female casters, either individually or with an all-male cast compared to a male–female cast. Additionally, the participants rated the female strongly in both trustworthiness and expertise (>5.0). In fact, the female caster was perceived as slightly more trustworthy than the male from a statistical standpoint, although the difference was minimal and is not practically meaningful. These results were unexpected because they did not align with previous gaming studies on women’s role in esports (e.g., Luisi et al., 2020; Mudrick & Lin, 2017). It is surprising that there was no significant difference in expertise scores between the males and females, because past studies have shown women journalists to be less equipped to cover “male” sports than men (Mudrick & Lin, 2017) and women to be seen as less of an expert in male-dominated activities (e.g., Ordman & Zillmann, 1994). The difference between the perceived credibility and expertise of men and women is even more significant in a general sense, as many communication studies have found that typically, men are perceived as more credible and expert communicators (Armstrong & McAdams, 2009; Weibel et al., 2008).

It is promising that participants rated the female caster highly on both trustworthiness and credibility, suggesting that when given an opportunity on the professional level, a female caster and a male caster have similar credibility levels and participants did not distinguish between the two casters. The female caster may be a more skillful caster or have more knowledge than the male counterparts to get to the level of professional caster, but that will need to be investigated with future studies. The knowledge and skill required to explain the fast-paced League of Legends game to viewers may also influence the credibility of the casters. That is, perhaps the audience recognizes the abilities of casters and thus rates the female higher than the male because they are impressed with her knowledge. To be a quality caster and hired at the top events, the person needs to be an expert in multiple areas of the games, whereas a player may not be an expert in all areas. In games like League of Legends, one could specialize in a specific/main category of play. However, given the lack of differences in credibility by the gamer participants who regularly watch and play esports, this suggests the culture from a management level may be affecting women’s hiring in casting roles. The results should also be considered in relation to the participants. This sample was mostly male participants and reflects a positive outlook for comparison to other media credibility studies. Also, as an 18 years and older group, as well as highly educated group (many in college), perhaps there is more acceptance of the female caster. This may coincide with Baiocchi-Wagner and Behm-Morawitz’s (2010) study on credibility of print journalists who found no differences between male and female journalists while studying college students.

In determining whether the gamers perceived an all-male cast to be more credible than a male–female cast, participants responded with high perceptions of expertise and trustworthiness for both groups and we found no significant differences. The results of this study show that including a female caster in a group did not affect overall perceptions of that announcing group, and that both cast groups were highly rated in credibility metrics. This is a promising finding for the industry, as it may inform administrators with hiring authority that having a woman in this role will not negatively affect the credibility strength of the overall group.

The MANCOVA results point to differences from League of Legends identification in influencing trustworthiness and expertise perceptions. This may be attributed to a high level of knowledge of the game, so participants recognized quality commentating, or it may be that many of the individuals who completed this study may have known the casters, as they are fairly well known in the League of Legends community. By utilizing professional casters, we sought to provide a baseline for future research in the area of esports casting. If the casters for the prominent League of Legends games were not viewed as credible, then the likelihood of unknown casters to be given future opportunities.

**Theoretical Implications**

Our research extends the growing literature on gendered differences in credibility of broadcasters, adding to the esports casting literature at the same time. Traditionally male-dominated fields, such as sports broadcast media, have shown mixed results of credibility of broadcasters. Our findings of perceptions of a professional esports caster can serve as foundation for future studies. Further, casters are a critically important aspect of the professional esports viewing experience. The more we can understand viewers’ perceptions of casters, the better the broadcasts and quality of events will become, and possibly an increased call for female casters and diversity. There is a dearth of research on casters (e.g., Kempe-Cook et al., 2019; Tsung-Han Sher et al., 2018; Turtiainen et al., 2020), but our study adds to this area, and the first to do so from a critical perspective of examining the role of gender within the esports culture.

**Practical Implications**

Source credibility of assessing the caster as trustworthy or an expert is information that that can inform both broadcast and gaming companies on how their audiences are perceiving casters and whether online casters are seen differently based on their gender by professional gaming spectators. A metric of success for a professional gaming spectators. A metric of success for a

provide a basis for understanding the audience and perhaps the future direction of production and casting opportunities for women. Therefore, in this study, the female caster was scored as more trustworthy than the male caster, which contradicted our hypotheses. Even if this result is not representative of the population, it is still socially noteworthy that the female caster was seen as more trustworthy than her male counterpart in this instance. This study helps demonstrate that women have the capacity to be seen as trustworthy in the professional gaming industry. Further, the implications of this study extend beyond casting into the general esports industry by demonstrating men and women can be perceived equally in the esports industry. Leadership staff can point to this exploratory study as an example of audience with strong perceptions of female casters.

**Limitations and Future Research**

As noted as an explanation of results, the experimental design followed previous source credibility studies and focused on professional casters, who may have been known to the community influencing their perceptions, which could be a limitation. However, it does allow a baseline to be provided; that is, in this case, a professional caster was deemed trustworthy and an expert. Future research should replicate this study with an unknown caster, to determine whether results are supported. We also did not assess the attractiveness of the casters (although they were not visible in the segments we utilized in the experiment). Attractiveness is another area of the source credibility theory which may influence audience perceptions, and one that is frequently discussed in professional sport broadcasts. Thus, future researchers should investigate the role of attractiveness of the casters. Additionally, our recruitment was of individuals aged 18 years and older who were well educated. This group’s perceptions may differ from younger gamers or those with less education. Further, the nationality of the participants should be assessed to determine whether there are cultural differences in perceptions of female casters. Future studies that compare various demographics of participants would be warranted.

Our exploratory and baseline assessment for the esports industry is in an area that requires substantial investigation. This work can be extended into several different studies regarding gender and esports. Because this study was mostly male participants, a similar study with more female participants would be beneficial to determine whether differences in participant gender influence perceived trustworthiness and expertise of male and female casters. Previous research has shown differences between participant gender and perceived credibility (e.g., Flanagin & Metzger, 2003). Researchers could utilize content analysis to assess the comments on Twitch about the female casters, which may also provide robust and honest opinions, because the spectators are in an anonymous environment. Finally, additional gender studies to examine barriers to entry into the esports industry are needed in other aspects of the professional esports industry, including casting, players, and management for women or other underrepresented or historically marginalized groups. Gender is only one factor in creating a diverse, equitable, and inclusive environment. Thus, researchers should focus on the gender and racial composite of casters, to ensure opportunities for women of color.

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Appendix: Survey Items

Credibility Items

Expertise
- Qualified—Unqualified
- Knowledgeable—Unknowledgeable
- Skilled—Unskilled
- Expert—Not an Expert
- Experienced—Inexperienced

Trustworthiness
- Reliable—Unreliable
- Trustworthy—Untrustworthy
- Dependable—Not Dependable
- Sincere—Insincere
- Honest—Dishonest

League of Legends Identification

I consider myself a “real” League of Legends fan.
I would experience a loss if I had to stop being a League of Legends fan.
Being a fan of League of Legends is very important to me.

Gamer Identification

I consider myself a “real” gamer.
I would experience a loss if I had to stop being a gamer.
Being a gamer is very important to me.

Gaming Consumption

On average, how many hours per week do you spend playing League of Legends/watching League of Legends/watching esports?