

# research snapshot

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## Esports consumer views on match-fixing: Effects on gambling awareness and game integrity

### What this research is about

The increasing popularity of video games has created an interest in esports betting, which is betting on the outcomes of professional video gaming the same way someone would bet on a sports event. Esports also comes with new ways for players to cheat, such as using software that is not part of the game, or hacking opponents. Match-fixing, when a player intentionally loses so that someone can win a bet, happens in esports as it does in real life sports. If gamblers and viewers start to believe that a sport or esports is losing its integrity due to match-fixing, that industry will be negatively impacted. This research focuses on discovering the beliefs and understanding that esports consumers have about match-fixing.

### What the researchers did

The Esports Integrity Coalition (ESIC) sent a survey on SurveyMonkey to people on the mailing lists for associated organizations, offered the survey on social media, and advertised the survey in esports news outlets during May and June of 2017. The survey was intended for people who participate in the online gaming community and/or esports betting to determine their opinions on how cheating in esports competitions should be dealt with. Nearly 91% of responses came from people who are part of the online community for the game *Counter-Strike: Global Offensive* (CS:GO).

The survey included one qualitative question about the respondent's views on cheating in esports. The researchers analyzed the responses to this question for this study. 1321 respondents answered this question, and the researchers analyzed all responses that mentioned match-fixing as a form of cheating.

### What you need to know

The money available from betting on esports (professional video game competitions) can influence some players to engage in match-fixing. The researchers analyzed survey responses from people who participate in online gaming communities, either as spectators or bettors, on their views toward match-fixing in esports. Respondents thought that match-fixing was harmful to the gaming industry, but also thought that it was less severe than other forms of cheating. They suggested that it should not have heavy punishments, especially if the player is young or in great financial need. Many respondents overlooked some of the complex influences on esports betting, suggesting that there needs to be more information available to game spectators.

The researchers conducted inductive thematic content analysis to look for patterns in the data. Inductive analysis means the themes came entirely from the data, rather than fitting the data into an existing theory. They found five thematic categories of information. These categories were: attitudes to types of cheating, punishments for cheating, conditions that make cheating acceptable, the relationship between cheating and gambling, and the regulations that should be in place in esports.

### What the researchers found

One major theme was that respondents do not believe that cheating to lose (such as match-fixing) is as much of a threat to competitive gaming as cheating to win. They believe that the punishments for

cheating to lose should be comparatively minor, such as receiving a fine or being banned from the current competition. Many respondents thought that intentional loses were difficult to prove when players were not betting on themselves, and did not mention the potential outside influences on match-fixing, such as players being bribed to lose.

There were also many answers that suggested that respondents were focused on esports as a closed system within games, and did not consider the economic influences on these online worlds. A minority of respondents were aware that match-fixing has serious negative consequences for esports because it impacts many people and it is difficult to detect. Most respondents did believe that match-fixing negatively affects the integrity of esports, and it was noted that match-fixing could become a larger problem as esports become more profitable.

Respondents were more sympathetic to match-fixing done by young and impressionable gamers, and when match-fixing took place in smaller and less important competitions. The tolerance for cheating behaviours also varies according to game rules and norms. Esports gamers are also not comparable to professional athletes because they may not be making a living wage from their efforts. Respondents argued for reduced punishments when gamers threw the match out of financial necessity. Overall, these findings show that many esports participants do not necessarily understand all the complexities involved in mixing gaming and gambling.

### How you can use this research

This research addresses the varying opinions in the esports community about how severe cheating is. The findings can be used to develop educational tools for esports fans about the complicated motivations and practices behind esports betting. Providing educational opportunities for players and fans could help to create a standard for how match-fixing is treated in competitive gaming. The researchers hope that their findings may be used to influence further research, perhaps addressing communities other than CS:GO, which was overrepresented in this study. The survey was distributed to a disproportionately

American audience, so research that focuses on other areas may have different results.

### About the researchers

**Brett Abarbanel** is the director of research at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, International Gaming Institute, jointly appointed at the UCLA Gambling Studies Program. Dr. Abarbanel is also a founding director of the Nevada Esports Alliance, and editorial board member at *International Gambling Studies*.

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