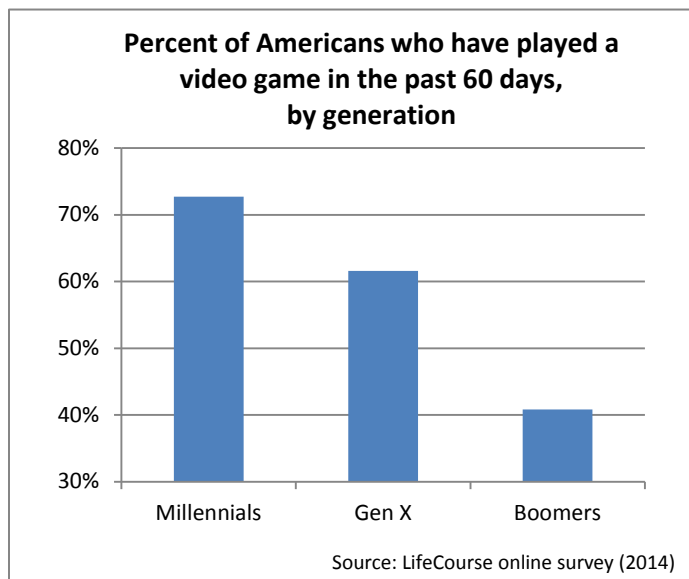# The New Face of Gamers

June 2014

The New Face of Gamers

May 15, 2014

A generation ago, gaming was a heavily stigmatized activity. Throughout the late 1980s and '90s, press coverage evoked images of teen boys zoning out in front of their Nintendo screens as Congressional officials held federal hearings on the dangers of violent video games. The message was clear: When games weren't rotting kids' brains, they were encouraging aggressive behavior and desensitizing players to violence. Educators warned parents that games were addictive and linked them to lower school achievement. Gamers themselves also became the subject of unflattering stereotypes: In the eyes of pop culture, "gamer" equaled "socially inept loner" or "guy living in his parents' basement."

Over the last 15 years, it's remarkable how much these sentiments have changed. 2005 marked the release of the bestselling book *Everything Bad is Good for You*, which argued that media like video games and television didn't deserve their dismal reputation. And today, gaming has become a universal part of our entertainment diet. It's a pastime enjoyed by players of all ages: The majority of Americans (63%) have played a game on a console, computer, or mobile device in the past 60 days. Fully 73% of Millennials have done so, along with 62% of Generation Xers and 41% of Boomers.[1] The younger generations who grew up with video games have played into adulthood, while older generations are taking up gaming for the first time. Gamers are now split fairly evenly by gender: 52% are male and 48% are female.[2] Whether it's building new worlds in an immersive sandbox like *Minecraft,* taking a break with a bite-sized game like *Candy Crush,* or livestreaming one's progress on a platform like Twitch, gaming now has something to offer everyone.

Percent of Americans who have played a video game in the past 60 days, by generation

Source: LifeCourse online survey (2014)

Perceptions about games' effects have also taken a positive turn. Educational games are increasingly being integrated into formal institutions like school and work as instructors and managers use them to engage students and

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[1] LifeCourse online survey of 1,227 U.S. persons ages 13-64. March 12-30, 2014.
[2] Entertainment Software Association. *2014 Essential Facts About the Computer and Video Game Industry.* 2014.

hone the development of new skills. Meanwhile, senior centers and retirement homes are turning to devices like the Wii as a way to keep aging players active and their minds sharp.

Stereotypes of gamers have been slow to catch up with this new reality. In many cases, we still see gamers portrayed as glassy-eyed addicts or isolated automatons. Given how pervasive a pastime gaming has become, it should seem obvious that these negative characterizations aren't true. And in fact, they're completely at odds with who gamers are.

Who Gamers Really Are

According to a recent survey[3]:

- **Gamers lead more social lives than non-gamers.** Gamers (defined as "anyone who has played a game on a digital device in the last 60 days") are more likely than non-gamers to be living with other people. This includes their families, roommates or friends, or significant others. In contrast, non-gamers are more likely to be living alone (16% vs. 10%). Gamers are also far more likely to agree with the statement "My friends are the most important thing in my life" (57% vs. 35%), with 72% saying that they game with their friends. Their sociability also applies to other forms of media: They're less likely than non-gamers to watch TV alone (23% vs. 40%) *and* less likely to prefer to watch this way (21% vs. 36%). Furthermore, they're far more likely to say that they watch video on TV, PCs, or mobile devices when at a friend's (42% vs. 15%).

- **They're closer to their families.** Gamers are more likely to say that they have a good relationship with their parents (79% vs. 63%). Similarly, strong majorities agree that spending time with their families (82% vs. 68%) and parents (67% vs. 44%) are top priorities.

- **They're more educated.** Gamers are more likely to hold a college degree or higher (43% vs. 36%). The same is also true for gamers' parents (52% vs. 37%).

- **They're more optimistic.** Gamers express far more confidence about their abilities and prospects for future success. Fully 61% agree that they are "a natural leader," compared to only 35% of non-gamers. Similarly, 65% say they are "more creative than most people," compared to 43% of non-gamers. Gamers are also much more upbeat about their career aspirations: While 67% of gamers feel "very positive" or "positive" in this regard, only 42% of non-gamers say the same.

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[3] LifeCourse online survey

- **They're more conventionally successful.** Gamers are slightly more likely to be employed full-time than non-gamers (42% vs. 39%). They're also more likely to say that they're working in the career that they want to be in (45% vs. 37%).

- **They're more socially conscious.** Fully 76% of gamers agree that "having a positive impact on society is important to me"—a full 21 percentage points higher than non-gamers (55%). Gamers are also more likely to prioritize socially conscious business practices. A greater share of them agree that it's important that the companies they buy products from support social causes (58% vs. 36%) and that companies treat their customers fairly (82% vs. 72%). Furthermore, they're more likely to feel better about companies that have ethical business practices (78% vs. 65%) and would rather buy from those "that [have] nothing to hide" (81% vs. 66%).

How Gamers Engage with Media

Other figures illustrate that it's gamers who are at the forefront of media change. They are actively using the latest technology to consume content and connect to their peers. Non-gamers, on the other hand, tend to use traditional, more passive outlets. Unsurprisingly, gamers are far more likely to use gaming consoles than non-gamers (68% vs. 12%). But this gap also extends to other forms of recent technology, including tablets (61% vs. 29%) and smartphones (72% vs 50%). Most gamers (68%) also have an Internet-capable device for streaming content to their television, compared to less than a third of non-gamers.

Gamers are far more likely to use these gadgets regularly—regardless of location. The average gamer uses their TV, PC, smartphone, or tablet at home (94%), on vacation (40%), at a friend's (42%), while commuting (19%), at work (20%), or even at restaurants (18%). Compare these figures to those of non-gamers: Only 18% use their devices on vacation, 15% do so at a friend's, 4% while commuting, 10% at work, and 6% at a restaurant. In almost every instance, gamers are three times more likely to use their devices when outside their household than non-gamers.

Gamers with smartphones are also using them to engage in a wider range of activities involving both the consumption and production of content. Almost all—91%—text "often" or "sometimes" (versus 83% of non-gamers), while 82% regularly use their smartphones for social media (versus 58% of non-gamers). Meanwhile, over three-quarters (76%) of gamers watch videos "often" or "sometimes" on their smartphones—almost twice the share of non-gamers (41%). Fully 43% of gamers have livestreamed an event on their phones, compared to only 13% of non-gamers.

Gamers' inclination towards livestreaming isn't just limited to those with smartphones. Overall, they're far more likely than non-gamers (59% vs. 21%) to agree that they watch more

livestreaming content now than they did than last year. And more than a third of gamers—36%—say that they would rather livestream television than watch it live. Only 18% of non-gamers would agree.

These preferences and behaviors reflect broader shifts that are remaking the media environment. Consumers are increasingly moving away from traditional television and consuming more entertainment content online. According to Nielsen, the total 18- to 34-year-old primetime television audience declined 9% from 2011 to 2014, driven by a decline in broadcast viewers. Over the same period, average tune-in frequency also fell, with broadcast declining by 12%, and cable by 5%. Several networks and shows popular with young adults have lost ground: The audience sizes of Comedy Central and ESPN shrank by 24% and 22%, for example, while the program reach of *Tosh.O* and *Family Guy* dropped by 53% and 31%.[4]

At this point, competitive websites are as successful as TV networks and shows at reaching 18- to 34-year-olds. Interactive platforms like Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, and Instagram attract enormous amounts of traffic that easily rival—or surpass—the pull of traditional entertainment. In February 2014, for example, Facebook and YouTube reached 27 million and 25 million young adults, respectively. That's comparable to the 33 million young adults who watched Fox during the same month. But websites also boast more repeat visits and higher time spent: That month, users viewed Facebook an average of 21 times, but tuned into Fox a mere 3 times. Meanwhile, they spent an average of 276 minutes on online gaming websites and 169 minutes viewing online video—figures that dwarfed the number of minutes they spent watching any broadcast or cable network.

Perhaps the best illustration of where rapidly changing entertainment preferences and gamers meet is Twitch—the gameplay streaming site that has gained 45 million monthly users and 1 million active streamers in just three years. By some measures, it's already the fourth most-trafficked Web property in the U.S.—behind Netflix, Apple and Google, but ahead of Facebook, Amazon, and Hulu.[5] Nearly half (49%) of Twitch's visitors are 18- to 34-year-olds.[6] In many ways, gamers' tastes can be interpreted as a bellwether of media's future.

To be sure, like everything entertaining and engaging in life, gaming is best practiced in moderation. No one would deny that some players can go overboard or that playing too much can interfere with people's lives. But this is a relatively small issue in the broad context of gaming. The majority of gamers (63%) play for less than 10 hours a week, with the most popular option among respondents being "3 to 5 hours a week" (24%).[7]

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[4] Nielsen. "Twitch TV Media Engagement Analysis: 2011-2014 Online and TV Viewing Trends." February 2014.
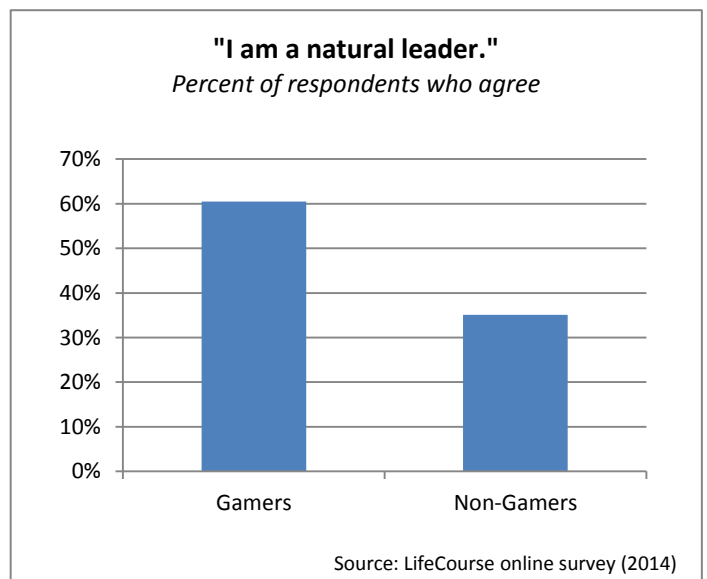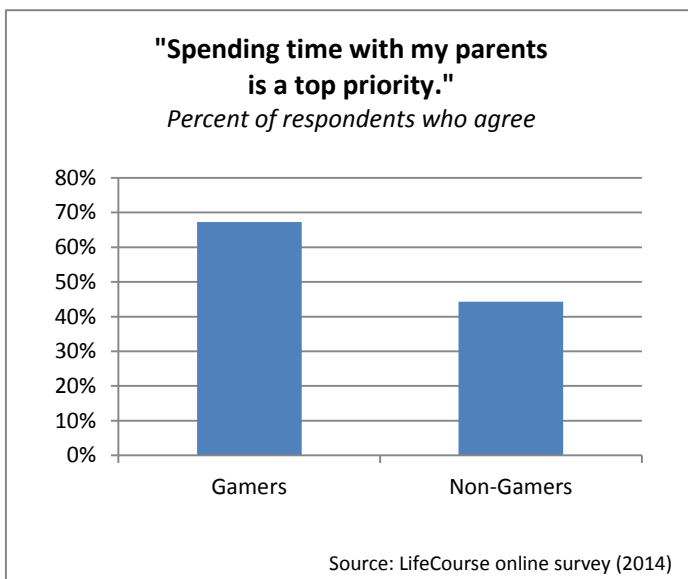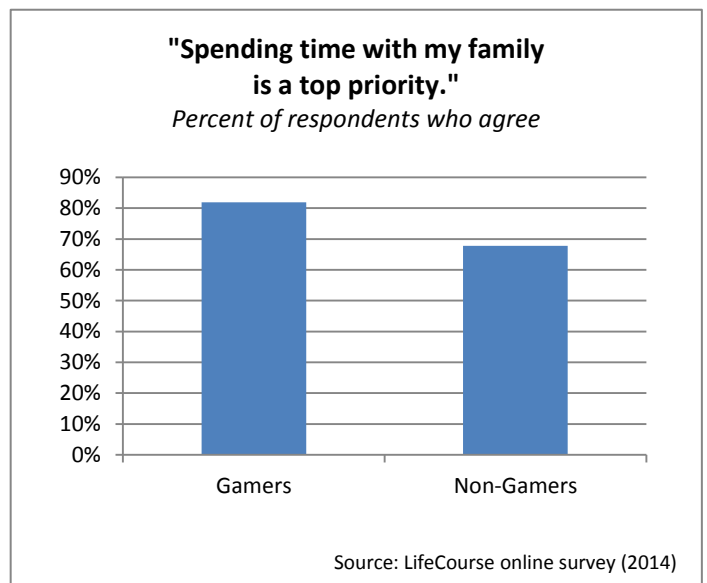[5] Drew Fitzgerald. "**Apple Quietly Builds New Networks**." *The Wall Street Journal*. February 3, 2014.
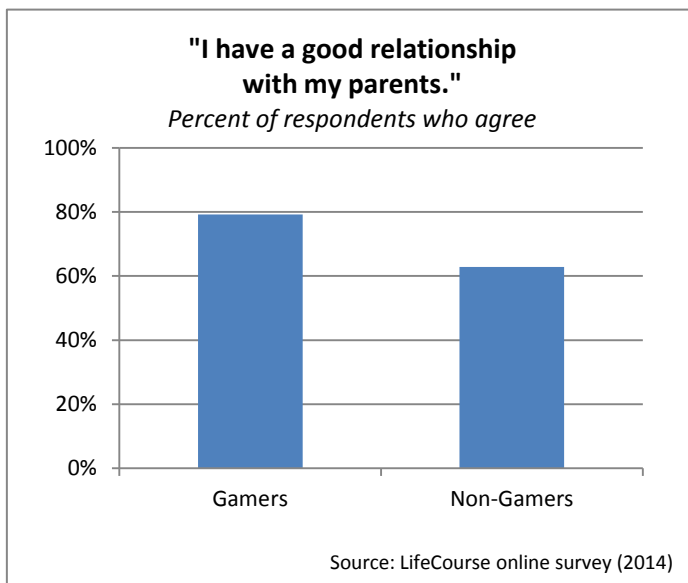[6] Nielsen
[7] LifeCourse online survey

It's also important to acknowledge that being a gamer today doesn't necessarily imply participation in traditional gaming culture. Today, casual gamers who play bite-sized mobile offerings are counted alongside devotees who line up for the latest console release. But this 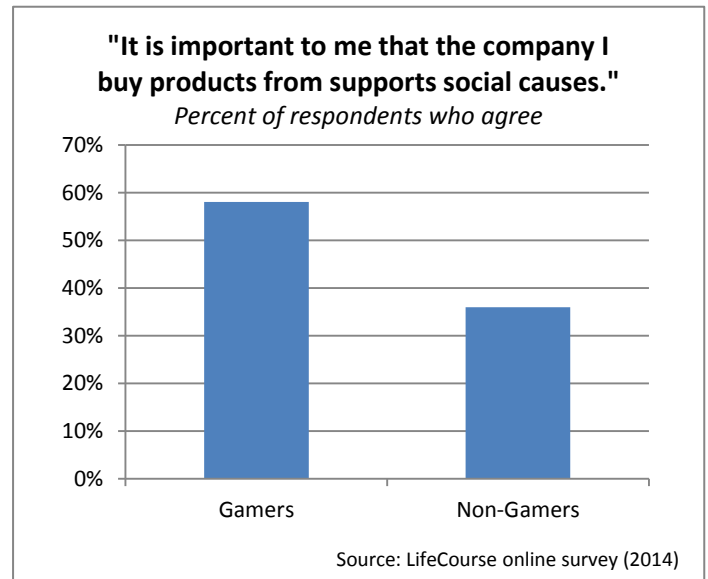in itself is a testament to just how mainstream an activity gaming has become, with selections diverse enough to accommodate a wide range of tastes and levels of investment.

For most players, gaming is a positive force in their lives. It's a way to relax, have fun, learn new things, and connect with friends and family. It's at the cutting edge of a whole new way that Americans are interacting with technology, in which the virtual behaviors and digital literacy skills that we once considered training for the real world *are* increasingly the real world. Gaming offers a road map for who we are becoming and where society is going—and it's time that perceptions of gamers moved past tired stereotypes and were recalibrated to reflect this much richer reality.

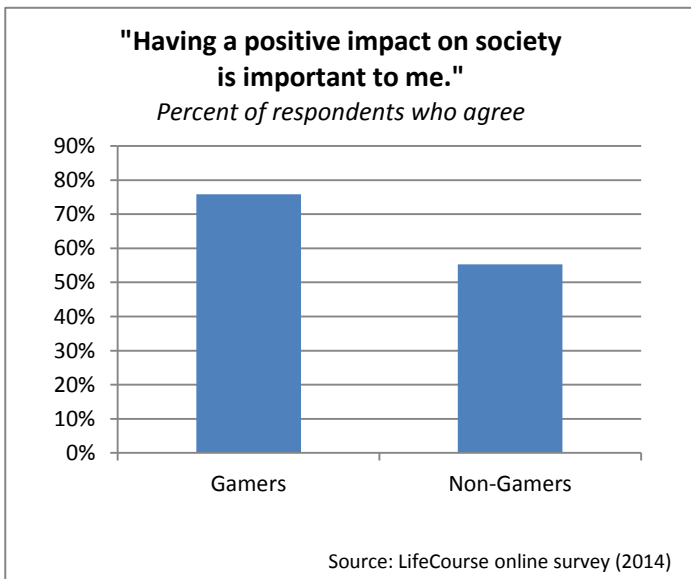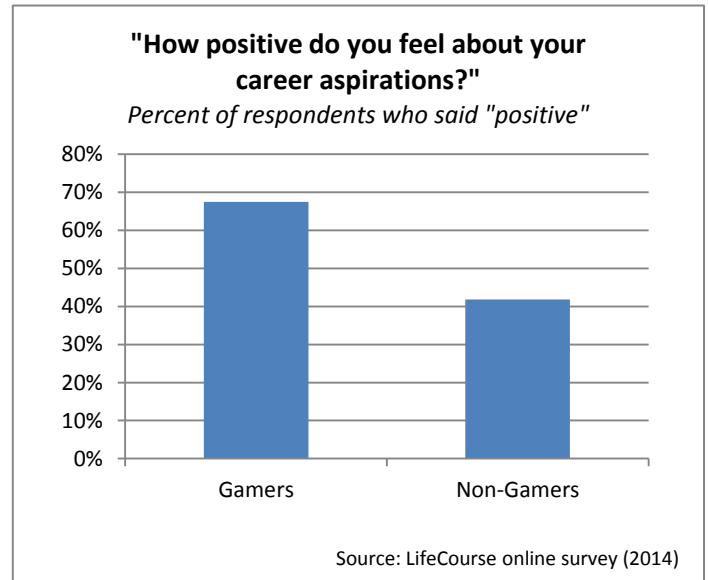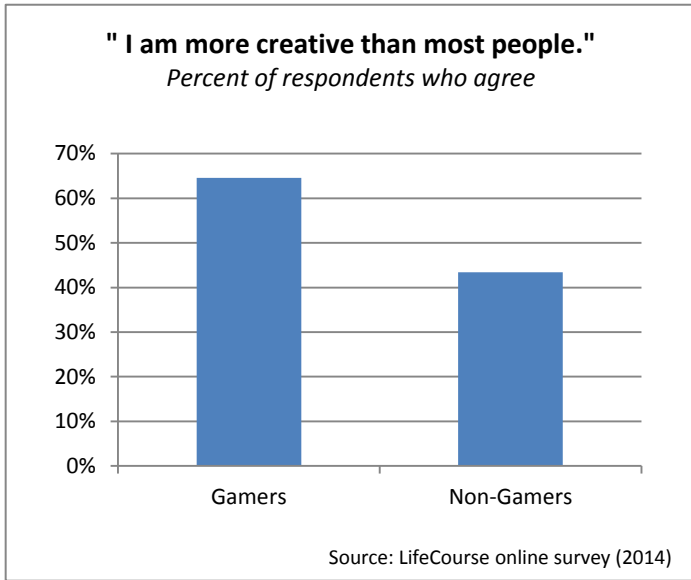## APPENDIX

"My friends are the most important thing in my life."
Percent of respondents who agree

Source: LifeCourse online survey (2014)

"I watch video on a TV, PC, smartphone, or tablet when at a friend's."

Source: LifeCourse online survey (2014)

"I have a good relationship with my parents."
Percent of respondents who agree

Source: LifeCourse online survey (2014)

"Spending time with my family is a top priority."
Percent of respondents who agree

Source: LifeCourse online survey (2014)

"Spending time with my parents is a top priority."
Percent of respondents who agree

Source: LifeCourse online survey (2014)

"I am a natural leader."
Percent of respondents who agree

Source: LifeCourse online survey (2014)

" I am more creative than most people."
Percent of respondents who agree

Gamers: ~64%
Non-Gamers: ~43%

Source: LifeCourse online survey (2014)

"How positive do you feel about your career aspirations?"
Percent of respondents who said "positive"

Gamers: ~67%
Non-Gamers: ~42%

Source: LifeCourse online survey (2014)

"Having a positive impact on society is important to me."
Percent of respondents who agree

Gamers: ~76%
Non-Gamers: ~55%

Source: LifeCourse online survey (2014)

"It is important to me that the company I buy products from supports social causes."
Percent of respondents who agree

Gamers: ~58%
Non-Gamers: ~36%

Source: LifeCourse online survey (2014)

"It is important to me that the company I buy products from treats their customers fairly."
Percent of respondents who agree

Gamers: ~83%
Non-Gamers: ~72%

Source: LifeCourse online survey (2014)

"I feel better about a company that has ethical business practices."
Percent of respondents who agree

Gamers: ~78%
Non-Gamers: ~65%

Source: LifeCourse online survey (2014)

"I'd rather buy from a company that has nothing to hide."
Percent of respondents who agree

Source: LifeCourse online survey (2014)

Percent of respondents who personally use a game console

Source: LifeCourse online survey (2014)

Percent of respondents who personally use a tablet

Source: LifeCourse online survey (2014)

Percent of respondents who personally use a smartphone

Source: LifeCourse online survey (2014)

"Do you have an internet capable device for streaming content to your television?"
Percent of respondents who said yes

Source: LifeCourse online survey (2014)

Percent of respondents who go to social networking sites on a smartphone "often" or "sometimes"
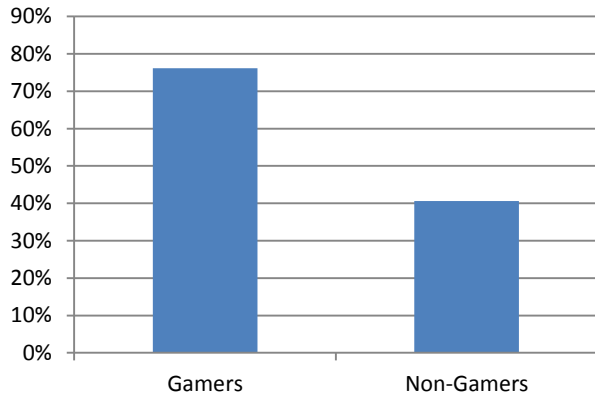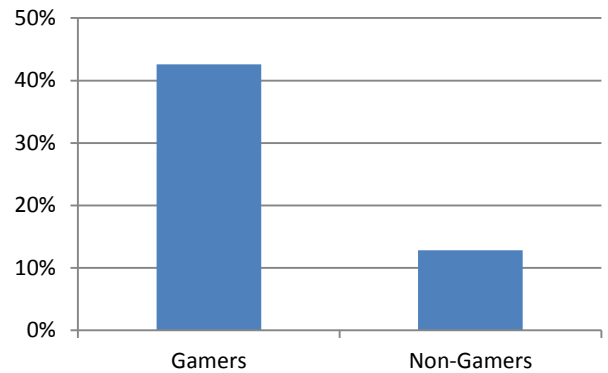

Source: LifeCourse online survey (2014)

Percent of respondents who watch videos on a smartphone "often" or "sometimes"

Source: LifeCourse online survey (2014)

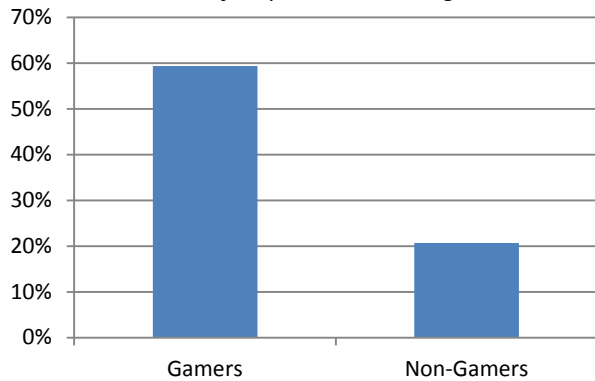**"Have you ever watched video of a live event on a smartphone?"**

Percent of respondents who said yes
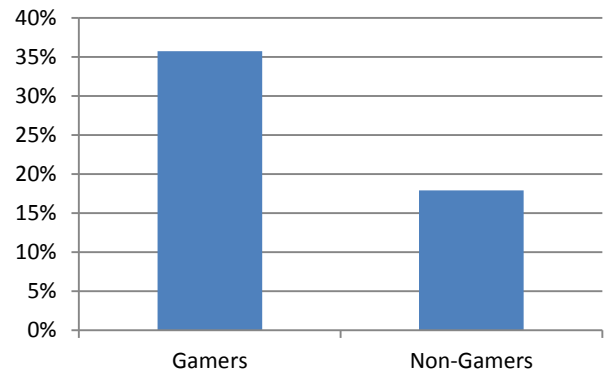

Source: LifeCourse online survey (2014)

"I watch more livestreaming content now compared to last year."

Percent of respondents who agree

Source: LifeCourse online survey (2014)

"Given a choice, I'd rather watch a program through live streaming than conventional television."

Source: LifeCourse online survey (2014)