

ARTICLE

Feeling the nation together: Offline esports spectatorship and the sensorial imagined community in China

Supplementary File**Interview guide and observation protocol**

Manuscript ID: AC026180028

Feeling the Nation Together: Offline Esports Spectatorship and the Making of a Sensorial Imagined Community in China

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Note on the contents of this file

This file contains the research instruments used in the study: a semi-structured interview guide and an observation protocol with a blank event-record sheet. It does not contain completed fieldnotes, audiovisual recordings, or interview transcripts. Those records remain confidential under the consent arrangements approved by the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences Ethics Committee of City University of Macau (Approval No. FHSS250256). De-identified excerpts already appear in the manuscript. Further information is available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Part I. Semi-structured interview guide

The guide was organized around the four analytical dimensions of the sensorial imagined community (spatial anchoring, sensory synchronization, bodily co-presence, and narrative negotiation). Questions were kept open so that themes not anticipated by the guide could still be followed. Interviews were conducted with 11 participants (one core organizer and ten spectators). The mean duration was approximately 78 minutes. One interviewee (I-06) had attended with a friend and had no prior involvement in the community; that participant could not speak to most items below, and the interview was not quoted in the analysis.

A. Opening and background

Remind the participant of the study purpose, the voluntary nature of participation, the right to withdraw, and the use of a participant code in place of a name.

How did you come to this community and to these cinema screenings?

How long have you followed League of Legends or LPL events, and in what ways have you usually watched them (home livestream, social media, previous offline gatherings)?

Why did you attend these particular S15 screenings? What were you hoping to get from being in the room rather than watching online?

B. Spatial anchoring

Walk me through arriving at the cinema. What did you notice first about the hall, the entrance, the posters, or the objects people were carrying?

Did the space feel like an ordinary cinema, a competition venue, or something else? What made it feel that way?

Did you wear or carry anything related to a team, a region, or the event? Did other people respond to those objects?

Where did you sit, and did seating seem to mark any difference between regulars and newcomers?

(Organizer only) Why was a commercial cinema chosen, and how was the hall prepared before doors opened?

C. Sensory synchronization

How does watching in this hall compare with watching a livestream at home, in terms of attention, time, and feeling?

What happens in the room during the opening sequence (theme song, animation, host introductions)?

Can you describe a moment when the whole room seemed to react together—noise, silence, or a sudden change in volume?

When commentators or spectators spoke of a “Chinese team” or a “China versus Korea” frame, what did that do to the atmosphere, if anything?

Which moments from the match do you remember most clearly afterward, and why those?

D. Bodily co-presence

What did your own body do at tense or celebratory moments? Did you notice yourself copying people nearby?

Was there physical contact with people you did not already know (high-fives, a hand on a shoulder, standing together)?

What did that feel like at the time, and afterward?

How did the room look and move after a win, and after a loss?

Is there anything about being physically present that online chat or danmaku cannot replace?

E. Narrative negotiation

How did you take the official broadcast narrative of regional glory or “fighting for the LPL”? When did it land, and when did the room push back?

What local jokes, memes, or catchphrases circulated in the hall or in the WeChat group during and after the match?

In post-match talk, how were wins and losses explained? Did people link play style to region or nation?

What happens in the days after a match? What, if anything, keeps the group together once the screening is over?

Some spectators enjoy the event without reading it as patriotic. How do you see that distinction in your own case, if it applies?

F. Closing

Is there anything about the screening or the community that the questions above missed?

May we contact you once if a factual point needs checking? Confirm the participant code and the interview date.

Part II. Observation protocol and event-record sheet

The first author adopted a participant-as-observer role at four offline cinema screenings in Zhuhai (Yaolong International Cinema, Yingbin Plaza branch; Chengfeng Cinema, Qianshan branch) during the 2025 League of Legends World Championship, and joined the associated WeChat group (344 members) from October 14 to November 9, 2025. This produced 23 hours of offline observation. Attendance figures in the manuscript are on-site estimates, not ticketing counts. Observations were written up as fieldnotes and, where permission had been obtained, supported by audiovisual recordings. Completed notes and recordings are not reproduced here.

Observational foci

- (i) Spatial configuration and material culture: hall layout, lighting, sound, posters and banners, support items, clothing, seating.
- (ii) Interaction and emotional expression among organizers, core fans, and general spectators, including moments of convergence and of refusal.
- (iii) The ritual sequence from pre-match warm-up through the match to post-match talk, including online–offline crossover via the WeChat group.

Blank event-record sheet

One sheet was completed for each screening. The fields below are the instrument. Filled sheets are withheld.

Event no. / date / cinema / estimated attendance

Pre-match: spatial setup and warm-up

During match: sensory and bodily responses (time-stamped where possible)

Narrative talk in the hall and in the WeChat group

Post-match: dispersal, lingering talk, objects taken away

Researcher memo (analytic, not a transcript)

Analysis note. Fieldnotes and interview transcripts were sorted into the four a priori dimensions named above. Representative de-identified quotations appear in the manuscript. No additional raw records are released with this file.