Five Dollars for Charity and for Myself: How Games Done Quick Charity Events Embrace Warm-Glow Giving

Stephen Tsung-Han Sher
Indiana University Bloomington
Bloomington, IN,USA
stsher@indiana.edu

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InfoSocial'19, April 12–13, 2019, Evanston, IL, USA.

Abstract
Games Done Quick is a speedrunning marathon for charity held twice a year. Games Done Quick is the largest donor to both Prevent Cancer Foundation and Doctors Without Borders, their two main beneficiaries, with over $\$19.3$ million donated to date. Despite their massive success, little work has been done examining Games Done Quick and the motivations of their donors. Through 18 semi-structured interviews with Games Done Quick stakeholders and ethnographic fieldwork done at a recent Games Done Quick event, this work documents how donations are handled by Games Done Quick and explores how Games Done Quick embraces and advertises the "impure" altruistic motivations of donors.

Author Keywords
Speedrunning; Games Done Quick; Charity; Non-profit; Live streaming; Impure altruism; Warm-glow giving

Introduction and Background
Games Done Quick (GDQ) is a biannual week-long charity marathon held by speedrunners, a video gaming subculture. To date, GDQ has raised over $19 million for Prevent Cancer Foundation and Doctors Without Borders and is the largest donor for both these beneficiaries [13]. These charity marathons are live streamed 24 hours a day throughout the event on Twitch.tv.

Speedrunning is the practice of completing a video game in the shortest amount of time possible by abusing glitches, exploits, and unintended strategies [17]. Speedrunners run almost every conceivable game from classic retro games such as Super Mario Bros. to recent games such as Spider-Man for the PS4, to indie and obscure games such as Celeste and Spongebob Squarepants respectively.

GDQ holds two charity events every year: Awesome Games Done Quick (ADGQ) in January benefitting Prevent Cancer Foundation and Summer Games Done Quick (SDGQ) in June benefitting Doctors Without Borders. GDQ has quickly gained popularity over the years, with the most recent GDQ event, AGDQ 2019, having 2200 attendees, averaged 150000 viewers [18], and raised over $\$2.4$ million. GDQ has raised more than $\$1$ million in every event since 2015 [20].

Despite GDQ becoming a large online phenomenon in the gaming community, there has been little attention from the academic community examining this subculture. As one of the first studies on Games Done Quick, this paper to examines how Games Done Quick handle donations from both a technical operations perspective and from a social perspective by understanding the "impure" altruistic motivations behind donations.

Related Literature

Technology use in online charity and non-profit work has been a study of interest among scholars. Internet technologies has allowed charity organizations to reach larger audiences and operate on a larger scale all without the limitations of physical distance [15, 23]. Online charities has also been shown to be more effective than face-to-face and direct mail strategies [14]. Recently, a study examining motivations behind viewer donations to online live streamers identified participation in solving offline social issues via fundraising for charity to be a large motivating factor [22].

Online information and communication technology has been examined for its significance in the operation of non-profit organizations. Notably, online technologies has been identified to play a central role in the legitimization of philanthropic crowdfunding campaigns [19]. Non-profit volunteers were observed to have communication-intensive practices and faces communication difficulties, and design opportunities to alleviate these difficulties were also identified [21].

Speedrunning has been a recent topic of interest in academics. Scholars have examined speedrunning for its practices in path-finding optimization [9, 16] and hardware serial interface manipulation [10]. Speedrunning has also been examined for its expansive gameplay practices in both technical and social settings [5], transformative gameplay experiences [8], social dynamics within the speedrunning community in their redefining of "cheating" [4], and commitment towards community-defined rules and goals [5].

Methods

This study conducted 18 semi-structured interviews [11] with different stakeholders of GDQ. Our inclusion criteria was to have attended or viewed SDGQ 2018. Interviews were conducted over Discord, a voice and text-based social media platform commonly used by speedrunning communities. Interviews averaged 56.4 minutes (SD = 8.6 min., min = 29min., max = 97 min.). Participants had been following speedrunning for an average of 7.17 years (SD = 2.71 years), and attendees of GDQ events averaged 6 GDQ events attended (SD = 3.5 events).

The author also attended ADGQ 2019 as an attendee to take on-site ethnographic observations [12] and participate as an audience member [7]. The author was also given a

tour of behind-the-scenes operations of the event, including how donations are handled and processed, by GDQ's director of operations. Field-notes and reflective notes were taken for analysis.

Interview transcripts, observations and reflective notes were analyzed using a grounded theory approach [6]. The author engaged in open and axial coding to identify emergent themes in the data. Code groups developed through this process included donation motivations, donation significance, audience interactive elements, social interaction and significance, social support, viewing appeal, viewing motivation, and successful elements of GDQ runs.

The Journey of a Donation

Donations to GDQ are all done online through GDQ's donation webpage. Each donation has multiple components. Each component is outlined below:

Payment Information
Donors are asked to provide basic information expected of a monetary transaction. This includes their email address, donation amount, name to be shown on the public donation tracker, and payment information.

Donation Message
Donors are given the option to leave a message to be selected to read out loud by the host of the event. These messages are aggregated and first passed through filter to remove donations with blacklisted words. The donations are then sent to the donation station at GDQ where volunteers read through the messages and can accept (send to next stage of checking), ignore (not sent to the next stage but still published on the public tracker), or reject (donation is still accepted but the message will be removed). Accepted messages are then filtered again by the head donation volunteer for a second check before sending it to the host. Hosts will then read through the donations and decide which donations to read out loud during the event.

Donation Incentives
Each donation can be partitioned to be sent towards donation incentives (eg. a donation of $\$50$ can be partitioned to place $\$20$ towards incentive A and $\$30$ towards incentive B). Donation incentives include contributing towards goals for extra games being featured at the event (eg. $\$60000$ goal for Octopath Traveller to be added to the event), extra game content (eg. $\$5000$ goal for the Hollow Knight runner to showcase the Path of Pain, and optional high-difficulty obstacle course in the game), or bidding wards for character or filenames (eg. filename for The Legend of Zelda: Majora's Mask run, winning bid was $\$3871$ for the name "My Dude").

Prizes
Each donation with qualifying amounts is automatically entered to a raffle pool for game-related prizes (eg. donating a minimum of $\$40$ between The Legend of Zelda: Majora's Mask and Bomberman 64 runs will enter the donor for a God of War II Kratos Statue collectible).

Impure Altruistic Motivations for Donating

From interviews and the author's personal experience donating to GDQ, supporting the charity is definitely a motivation for donating, but it is not the only motivation at play. Donations are often coupled with motivations for wanting their message to be read at the event, winning certain prizes, and wanting to influence the event by contributing towards donation incentives to see a certain extra game or content be featured at the event. Motivations may also include social legitimacy and support. For example at AGDQ 2019, Vulajin was stepping down from his long-time GDQ staff position. He also donated $\$5000$ unanonymized with a mes-

sage and was immediately read by the host when received. The audience and the staff gave him a standing ovation and received numerous hugs and words of appreciation from others. Additionally, all participants who attended GDQs mention using donation messages as a way to show their support to friends who are running games at GDQ. P5 explains *"I always make sure [to donate] during a friends' run to give them extra support like 'Hey, I'm here, I'm watching'*.

The author also donated at ADGQ 2019 due to social-related motivations. On the final day of the event the Twitch chat had coordinated to all donate $\$5$ when the timer hit exactly 3 hours during the Super Mario Odyssey run. The author donated $\$5$ as planned to both support the charity and wanting to be part of the movement that broke the $\$2$ million milestone. The author shared this experience afterwards with phrases such as "we all donated $\$5$" and "we broke $\$2$ million", the first time the first author used "we" when describing the achievements of GDQ — previously the author used "they" when describing past GDQ achievements.

These selfish motivations for donating — getting donations read, prizes, donation incentives, social acceptance — are exemplars of the the economic theory of *warm-glow giving* [1, 2, 3] — people donate to receive a "warm glow" of self-fulfillment and satisfaction. While people do donate to GDQ for "pure" altruistic motivations to support the charity, the "impure" altruistic motivations often dwarf the "pure" altruistic intentions. GDQ fully embraces these warm-glow giving motivations by heavily advertising "impure" altruistic components of GDQ — prizes are often showcased in-between runs, hosts advertise and push for donation incentives to be met, donation incentives are showcased on a banner at the bottom of the stream. Participants who had volunteered as hosts talked extensively about how they are asked to plug donation incentives and prizes during down time in the stream. P16 explains that as a host *"you have to keep pushing those incentives because those games have to be met."*. P16 also took pride in the fact that bonus game incentives are always met at GDQ, saying *"I can't remember the last time a bonus game hasn't been met"*.

Conclusion

Games Done Quick is a massively successful charity event able to consistently raise over $\$1$ million for charity in the span of a week twice a year. The exact mechanisms in which GDQ is able to garner large viewership and donation participation is still largely unexplored. This paper takes a first look into the roles donations play in GDQ and the motivations behind donors of GDQ. Donations serve multiple purposes: a charitable act, relay a message to be read, put money towards an incentive, enter for prizes, show social support, for social acknowledgement. The majority of these are motivated by "impure" altruistic intentions to receive warm-glow satisfaction. GDQ has seemingly fully embraced warm-glow giving and heavily advertises these donation incentives at their events.

Communication for Change in the Digital Age

Twitch has become a massive platform for creators to live stream and share their content with any and all viewers. Games Done Quick, hosting their charity marathon on Twitch, has been able to reach hundreds of thousands of viewers, promoting speedrunning and their charity beneficiaries. With already over $\$19.3$ donated to charity, and with seemingly many more years of GDQ events to come, GDQ will inevitably grow their viewer base and raise millions more for charitable causes. This work, in addition to serving as a first look into the socialtechnical systems of Games Done Quick, also contributes to the growing academic interest into online live streaming culture and the parasocial relationship between streamer and viewers.

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