

# **Brand Publics and Online Video Game Streaming**

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## Abstract

### Brand Publics and Online Video Game Streaming

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Live streaming is becoming a large industry where the consumption of entertainment in a group setting is becoming more and more popular. As streaming is a new phenomenon, little research has been done into uncovering how the process comes together as a whole. While some research exists into streaming, little has been done into the motivations of the viewers as well as how streamers attract and maintain viewers, two important keys that are essential for the maintenance of a streaming website. A video game streaming website named twitch.tv was examined for this research. Field notes were taken from the website itself and interviews were conducted with both viewers and streamers. Streamers form personal brands in order to attract viewers. The viewers themselves form brand communities and brand publics form over time. Understanding how streams are consumed will give the entertainment industry and streamers information on how to maintain and better serve viewers.

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## Introduction

Entertainment has always been a large and constantly evolving industry where changes in the cultures of society lead to different types of entertainment needs (Jenkins, 2003). It has been shown that the Internet plays a large role in providing entertainment in modern society and that it is replacing more traditional sources of entertainment (Hong, 2007). A recent trend that has emerged has been live streaming, where individuals will open a window into their lives, permitting an audience to view streamers completing a variety of tasks, which range from mundane day-to-day activities, such as eating meals or sleeping, to specific activities. The latter category encompasses all types of activities, ranging from hobbies, such as music and gardening, to actions performed solely for shock value, for example, binge eating. What is common between all these streams is that the development of technology has provided a platform that allowed streamers to host a virtual gathering area for individuals who are interested. With streaming becoming an increasingly popular means of entertainment, understanding what is appealing regarding streaming and how streams can be used as a means of reaching many consumers is important. This is also an important area to be researched as elements of personal branding, communities of consumption and brand publics are present.

In order to examine online streaming, twitch.tv, a video game streaming website is chosen as the context. While twitch began solely as a video game streaming website, it has evolved to include the streaming of what they have labeled “creative”, where streamers can demonstrate the process of making their creations. This can include the arts, fashion and makeup, as well as many other topics. While twitch is a new and emerging phenomenon, some aspects of the website have seen some examination, such as factors regarding the change in viewership over time of a stream (Kaytoue et al. 2012) as well as the characteristics of the viewers and streamers of twitch (Nascimento et al. 2014). However, the latter study focused on their behavioural patterns of viewers, leaving a large gap in understanding how this system works as a whole. This gap is the underlying motivations of the viewers who watch these streams. While one study began an investigation into the motivations behind twitch, their findings only scratched the surface (Sjöblom and Hamari, 2016). They discovered that information seeking, tension release and social and affective motivations exist among the twitch audience. This thesis aims to further explore these motivations in added depth. Also, understanding what types of individuals watch

and participate in streams will share some insight into why the system is able to function and how it functions as a whole and how twitch is able to generate an economy even when no fees are present. As no fees are associated with twitch, understanding why viewers contribute their money to the economy is an area of interest. It is important to understand the other side of the screen as well, and determine the role of the streamer in attracting and maintaining viewers in their streams. These topics will be the primary investigation of this thesis.

This thesis will aim on expanding on Arvidsson and Caliandro's (2015) brand public theory by using a new social media platform, which differs from the Twitter platform that was previously examined. A brand public is an organized, mediated online space where a brand is the focal point of communications produced by the users. These communications are used as a means of self-expression and are not meant to create dialogue between users, rather as a means of promoting status or standing out from other users. This thesis also discusses the implications of this new context to the theories of personal branding and communities surrounding them. Streamers form their own personal brands in an attempt to differentiate themselves from other streamers and become more attractive to viewers. Groups of viewers will band together and form communities with the personal brand of the streamer being the focal point of this community. Twitch cannot be labeled solely as a brand public or a brand community, as both exist within twitch, which will be demonstrated in the results. Better understanding the functioning of twitch and its consumers will give insight into the evolution of entertainment consumption and possibly the direction entertainment consumption will take in the future. This thesis will also give insight into what types of activities viewers will undertake during their consumption of streams. Since technology is driving the development of new entertainment methods and streaming is still in its infancy, many practices can be implemented by both twitch and streamers in order to better serve their audience, generate more value to its participants, and generate more revenue for both the streaming website and the streamer.

## **Research Context**

Video games have been a source of home entertainment since the early 1970's, where developments in technology produced a boom in video game platform and video game production (Baer and Burnham, 2001). The worldwide video game industry in 2016 was an estimated \$91 billion (Takahashi, 2016). Initially, they served as a personal source of



entertainment for consumers who could either consume them alone or socially with few other players (Smyth, 2007). With further developments in technology, primarily the Internet, video games became more of a social phenomenon where additional players could be reached easily (Smyth, 2007). But the fact still remained that video games in the home setting were consumed through primary use of the consumer (Sjöblom and Hamari, 2016). This began to change with the introduction of online video games, where players were no longer bound by geographical location. Video game companies began attempting to create online video games in the early 1990's, but were only successful in the latter parts of the decade due to the development of better technologies, such as fast and stable Internet connections for home consoles (Egenfeldt-Nielsen, Smith and Tosca, 2015). This was followed by the birth of video game live streaming in 2011, where video games evolved from not only a personal consumption tool, but also generating a viewing experience for those experiencing them second hand. While new to the home video game environment, the second hand enjoyment of video games had been previously seen in another market, which was in the arcade setting, where an environment was created for video game enthusiasts could play with or watch others (Sjöblom and Hamari, 2016).

Online video game streaming has become one of the largest field of online streams over recent years (Cook, 2014). The largest website that streams live video games is twitch.tv (Cook, 2014). Created in June of 2011, twitch was the first website that streamed solely video games. In August 2014, twitch was acquired by Amazon for \$970 million, where at the time twitch had slightly over 40% of the live streaming traffic in the USA and had over 55 million users (Cook, 2014). This number of users has almost doubled to this day, having over 100 million from all around the world (Cook, 2014). Twitch allows streamers to host their own channel in which they are free to play the video game of their choice with some exceptions of games with content that is either too graphic or sexual in nature. Each channel is equipped with a feed of the video game being played as well as a chatroom where both viewers and the streamer can use. An example of this can be seen in image 1. There are over 2 million broadcasters who stream on twitch (Twitch, 2017), however, around 95% of viewers tune into the same 10% of streamers (Kaytoue et al., 2012). While having a webcam and microphone is not required, the vast majority of streamers use these tools in order to provide more information about them as well as communicate with viewers.

Image 1: Twitch Channel Example



It is important to note that there are no fees associated with twitch. As opposed to many live streaming websites, all content on twitch is free, but viewers have the option of donating to the streamers if they choose. This however, has not stopped an economy from forming, in which streamers can make livings from their channels. Streamers who bring in large amounts of viewers make over six figures and streamers as a whole generated over \$60 million in 2015 (Greco, 2016). Having this much capital flow through twitch, when in theory, there are no real financial costs associated with it for the viewers, shows the uniqueness of this environment. A pay what you want system is in place with twitch, where consumers can pay any amount in order to receive the product (Kim, Natter and Spann, 2009). Twitch has a pure pay what you want system, meaning not investing money into the system will not have an impact on the accessibility of the service. Many viewers choose this option of not paying anything. However, this differs from a traditional pay what you want system, as donating is done in a social setting, where other viewers will be exposed to the amount donated along with the opportunity to provide a message that will be exposed to the audience. This provides viewers with additional motivations to donate money, such as exposure to a large audience, where the transfer of money is no longer about the service at hand. More regarding motivations to donate money will be discussed in the results.

In the next section, I will discuss personal brands, followed by communities of consumption and brand publics. It is important to understand how personal brands form and what value can be derived from them in order to understand how this in turn attracts and retains

viewers. Additionally, understanding how brand communities form, attract members and what benefits a community of consumption can add to a consumer of twitch will not only increase the feelings of attachment to a brand, in this case a streamer, but also generate additional value for the streamer himself/herself. Finally, differentiating a brand community from a brand public will provide insight into the functioning of the brand public and the different type of value a brand public can generate.

## Literature Review

### Personal Brands

*Personal Brands.* Aaker (1996) theorized that brands could exist outside the material world and could apply to a person or a group of people as well. Peters (1997) coined personal branding. He discussed how an individual can use what makes himself/herself unique, his/her beliefs and his/her actions in a way to market them. It is the individual's responsibility to establish his/her personal brand. Personal branding was a term once referred to as only applying to celebrities, or those who hold important titles such as politicians (Rein, Kotler and Shields, 2007). However, this notion can be seen as applying to everyday individuals and is an important staple in the personal marketing of one's self (Shepard, 2005). Personal brands should be seen in the same light as a product's brand, where certain expectations will be made of an individual when they create their own brands, as one forms expectations when acquiring a product with a brand name (Arruda, 2003). Producing a personal brand poses a challenge as opposed to a product brand, as most product brands are established and focus on features of the product (Labrecque et al., 2011). Kotler (2000) states that a normal brand and a personal brand have the same underlying tones, where they promise to deliver features, benefits and services to the consumer. These features, benefits and services will take different form in the case of a personal brand, as many personal brands do not offer physical products themselves. Therefore, they must tailor their actions in order to deliver these factors. Personal brands must adhere to the norms of the industry that they are present in (Parmentier, Fischer and Reuber, 2013). This poses some challenge, as Parmentier et al (2013) also state that personal brands should be unique while following the rules and social norms of the specific industry, especially when the market is already saturated with individuals pushing forth their personal brands.

Personal brands are composed of four elements: attributes, benefits, values and personality (Kapferer, 1992). It is the responsibility of the marketers themselves to develop these characteristics and put them forward (Kapferer, 1992) in order to provide a distinctive personal brand. Benefits of personal brands include distinguishing one from others. This allows one to hold a place in a target's mind and associates specific qualities with a person (Peters, 1997).

There exist many social reasons to why people create their own personal brands which include self-expression and establishing friendships (Shepard, 2005). This shows the importance of personal branding when in a social situation, which is the context of the twitch website which offers access to an abundance of individuals putting forth personal brands and finding a unique angle to one's brand can be the deciding factor in attracting viewers.

In the context of online interactions, some issues arise. First, a salient brand identity is hard to form in a virtual setting. As information is limited, the brand image that the developer wants to put forward may differ from the interpretation of the viewers (Labrecque et al., 2011). This means that any and all actions carried out by an individual can be seen as an extension of his/her personal brand. An example of this would be the YouTube celebrity PewDiePie, who lost several sponsorships, including one with Disney, over anti-Semitic humor (Maloney, 2017). These actions caused a shift in his personal brand, where negative characteristics were now associated with him. This however, did not destroy his popularity as he still has a large following. While experiencing some backlash, PewDiePie shifted from YouTube to twitch as a means of content creation, suggesting that part of twitch's audience base may be attracted to negative personality traits in streamers. In an environment such as twitch, where personal brands are a primary means of attracting viewers (Magnusson, Stöckel and Berglund, 2015), improper maintenance of said personal brand will have disastrous consequences on not only the viewer base, but the credibility of a streamer and his/her future in the streaming industry.

In the social media world, personal brands play a role in the differentiation of the many competing producers of user-generated content. Personal brands act as a representation of uniqueness, which is essential when attempting to fill an existing gap. Consumers of this personal brand are experiencing the qualities that have been put forward by the creator of the brand as well as managing the relationship among consumer and creator (Shuker, 2010). This suggests that personal branding goes beyond just the expectations of a consumer and the promises of a product in the online world and personal brands undertake a responsibility of relationship development and maintenance.

*Personal Brands and User-Generated Content.* User-generated content, or UGC, is defined as “the sum of all ways in which people make use of social media”. The term, which achieved broad popularity in 2005, is usually applied to describe the various forms of media content that are publicly available and created by end-users” (Kaplan and Haenlin, 2010, p.61). Kaplan went further into this definition of UGC by saying it had to meet three criteria, which are that the content must be published on either a public or private website which is accessible to either everyone or a selective group. The second criterion is there must be some creative element to the content, therefore, the user must have made the content himself/herself and not used the works of someone else. The final criterion is that the content must be created outside the boundaries of a company (Kaplan and Haenlin, 2010). This paints a distinct picture of what UGC entails and does not entail, where focus lies on the individual creating content without the influence of companies and therefore is his/her own creative products. This also limits where UGC can be produced, as by definition, social media websites must fall in the domain of Web 2.0 and therefore, UGC must exist in the virtual world. A big difference between UGC and content created by companies is the amount and production speed, where UGC is produced in much higher quantities and at a faster speed (Cha et al., 2007). With the availability of a multitude of social media websites, creating UGC has become easier, partly due to the development of technology and the Internet (Burgess and Green, 2009). This comes at a cost of information overload where the sheer number of UGC creators makes it hard to match the needs of the consumer with the information provided (Akehurst, 2009). Simply put, with the availability of UGC and the differences in what each individual UGC can offer, consumers of UGC may find it hard to find what is they are searching for. This can lead consumers of UGC to waste time with content unrelated to what they were searching for. UGC has been a driving force for the development of social media platforms and has even converted some websites into social media sites themselves due to the popularity of this type of website (Ellison, 2007).

UGC focuses on the interests of the content producer, which has resulted in a tremendous amount of variation in content. UGC gives creators a means of self-expression, where their creations represent their hard work and creativity and shares this with the general public (Sun, Dong and McIntyre, 2017). However, a general norm of UGC is that while some will experience viral status, bringing in millions of viewers, most will go almost unnoticed and not receive much attention (Cha et al., 2007). Social influence plays an enormous role in the success of content in a

cultural setting (Salganik, Dodds and Watson, 2006). This shows the important role the crowd of viewers plays in the UGC domain, as they will dictate the success of content by their views. Although, quality of the content also plays a partial role in the success of content, as it has been seen that high and low quality content was evaluated congruently, even in the presence of opposing social influence (Salganik, Dodds and Watson, 2006). Word of mouth also plays a large role in the success of UGC when it comes to finding information on goods (Goldenberg, 2001). As there are few restrictions on what can be created, UGC can serve several roles, depending on the intent of the creator. All UGC act as a service to consumers, which can either take form as a source functional, emotional or social value (Sheth et al. 1991). Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) offered a classification of social media websites based on their self-presentation/self-disclosure, which can range from low to high, and social presence/media richness, which falls either in low, medium or high. They clarify the definition of self-presentation as “the acoustic, visual, and physical contact that can be achieved—they allow to emerge between two communication partners” (Kaplan and Haenline, 2010, p.61) while the defined self-discloser as “the conscious or unconscious revelation of personal information (e.g., thoughts, feelings, likes, dislikes) that is consistent with the image one would like to give” (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010, p.62). Social presence/media richness is the amount of information that can pass through a medium at a given time (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). Twitch does not solely fall into one of these classifications due to the difference between viewers and streamers. Both viewers and streamers fall into the medium category for social presence/media richness, however, where they differ is the self-presentation/self-disclosure. Streamers would fall into the high category while viewers can fall into either the high or low category, depending on the type of viewer they are. This would suggest that twitch fulfills different roles as a social media platform, resembling a social networking site for streamers and a social networking site or content community for viewers (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). This would explain the different actions taken by viewers while consuming twitch, depending on their motivations for using twitch as a social media platform. As seen in other social networking sights, users with similar interests will come together and form communities of consumption in order to improve their consumption experience. Communities of consumption will be explored in the next section.



## Communities of Consumption

*Online Communities.* The term community is complex. While most are aware to what a community is, the exact definition of a community is hard to give. There exists a difference between a neighbourhood and a community, where being present in a physical area does not constitute as being part of a community (Jones, 1997). What distinguish these settlements from a community are the feelings of belonging (Jones, 1997). These are physical communities, as they take place in the real world. Virtual communities also exist, where the Internet serves as the location of gathering of the community (Blanchard and Markus, 2004). Sense of community has four elements to it, being the feelings of membership, feelings of influence, integration and fulfilment of needs and shared emotional connections (McMillan and Chavis, 1986). This sense of community is present in physical communities and virtual communities alike and the process of developing this online community is what is essential for its survival since the interactions are virtual (Blanchard and Markus, 2004). Both physical and online communities have a central focus of said community. This can be as simple as a common interest shared among the members of the community, or can be more complex, where members share more than just interests, such as values or beliefs. This shared social capital among members will determine the ties to the community (Kavanaugh et al. 2005).

When looking to join a community, the initial attraction of the community is the central theme of said community (Kozinets, 1999). Initial engagement by members of a community will predominantly be information search, as no ties exist to said community at the moment (Kozinets, 1999). Through interaction with community members, ties to the community will strengthen, giving members a stronger feeling on belongingness (Brodie et al. 2013). Online communities generate social capital for their members (Ellison, Steinfield and Lampe, 2007). Social capital is defined as “relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition” (Bourdieu 1986/2011, p.21). Social capital is derived from the relationships formed between members of an online community (Wiertz and de Ruyter, 2007). This shows the importance of existing members in a community, as they will play an important role in the retention of new members. Two-way interaction between community members is a driving force in the expansion of virtual communities.



The use of online communities in marketing is growing. More and more companies are attempting to create online communities in order to develop their brands (Fournier, 2009). There are many reasons why having an online community is beneficial to brands, such as providing a location where users can talk about common interests. They also create values among users and establish what is acceptable as behaviour (Schau, Muñiz and Arnould, 2009). Finally, they encourage participation of all members and encourage the formation of relationships among the users (McWilliam, 2012). There exist many types of online communities, all of which have their own norms and accepted behaviours. These norms and behaviours are determined by the type of community and the members they are trying to attract (Preece, 2001). Kozinets (1999) classifies online consumption communities into four categories, based on their social structure and group focus. An online consumption community with loose social structure and information exchange as the group's focus would be a board, while tight social structure with information exchange as the group's focus would yield rings and lists. When the focus of the group is social interaction, a community with loose social structure would be a room while a community with tight social structure would be a dungeon. McWilliam (2012) suggests a positive relationship between online community strength and brand strength in the product world

Measuring the success of an online community poses a challenge, as many dimensions exist for said community. Preece (2001) lists a few characteristics that a successful online community should have. These characteristics fall into two categories, sociability and usability. A successful online community should have many active members who are willing to interact with each other. In order for this to occur, an easy to use platform must be in place in order to provide members a simple means of interacting with one another. In order to achieve the previously mentioned success, members of online communities must be motivated to interact with one another and share their knowledge. Chui et al. (2006) say that the biggest challenges online communities face is having their members share their knowledge. They argue that it is a mixture of social capital and social cognitive theories that motivate the sharing of knowledge in online communities. Wiertz and de Ruyter (2007) found however that even though most participants in online communities have never met, they were willing to share more information in an online community as opposed to a face-to-face setting, suggesting that participants feel strong connections to one another in an online community. They found that this only applied for quantity of information shared, where the quality of information might be lacking. This means

that it is a combination of the ties between members in a community along with the expected outcomes, be it as a community or of the individual themselves that will cause members to share their knowledge.

*Brand Communities.* A brand community is defined as “a specialized, non-geographically bound community, based on a structured set of social relationships among admirers of a brand. It is specialized because at its center is a branded good or service” (Muniz and O’guinn, 2001, p.412). Muniz and O’guinn (2001) went further in their definition and stated that a brand community must be composed of three elements: shared consciousness among its members, a set of traditional behaviours, and a sense of responsibility for other members. As previously mentioned, the term community is complex and contested. Since Muniz and O’guinn’s theory is the most commonly used theory in marketing and brand communities and is a primary focus of this thesis, their theory will be used.

Brand communities can exist in both the physical and virtual world, but have recently gained more popularity in the virtual setting. Brand communities offer a mutually beneficial connection between a brand and the consumers of said brand. For the consumer, brand communities create a social environment for the consumption of products. This will lead to help when required for the consumption of a brand (Schau et al., 2009), where experienced users of the brand may offer insight into proper practices in consumption. Consumers also develop an identity with the brand, which strengthens the ties to this brand (Cova and Cova, 2002). This identity is common among all members of the brand community as a whole, creating a uniform set of beliefs and attitudes toward the brand. This leads to an enhanced consumption experience as a whole for the consumer and provides a sense of increased personal power (Cova and Pace, 2006). These brand communities are particularly beneficial to companies as value is added to their products or services without any input from the company themselves, as the everyday consumers are now an active part of the value chain (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2009). While marketers can focus on developing these brand communities to maximize the added value to consumers, self-regulated brand communities will still be beneficial to the company. Companies also gain value from the brand community itself. Brand communities use word of mouth to spread information regarding a specific brand in between their members, particularly in the online environment (Brown, Broderick and Lee, 2007). The strengthening of ties with a specific

brand achieved through a brand community leads to higher levels of brand loyalty. Also, brands may use the members of the brand community as a source of innovation and as a means of product development (Füller, Matlzer and Hoppe, 2008).

The driving factors behind a brand community are the consumption of the brand itself and the interactions that are shared between its members (Kozinets, 1999). Members in a brand community will not only trade opinions and ideas, but also share feelings of personally knowing other members, even in the event of never actually meeting (Muniz and O’guinn, 2001). This leads to personal relationships forming between members of a brand community. Not every member is required to interact with every other member; however, these interactions are required to maintain the brand community (Kozinets, 1999). Carlson et al. (2008) proposed that a brand community can exist without the presence of social interactions. They suggested that the perceived shared relationship with all users of the brand was sufficient to create a brand community. This shows the importance of the social environment in the formation of brand communities, but also suggests that different social aspects can be used in the formation of brand communities. Therefore, the term brand community may be more complex than initially envisioned. While brand communities are present in twitch, this does not paint the entire portrait. As different types of viewers exist, not all of them have a primary motivation to join or form a brand community. Instead, they become members of a public, with the brand as a focal point of this public.

### *Brand Publics.*

Gabriel Tarde (1898) first proposed the construct of the public in an essay. A public is a group of individuals who center on a common element with mediating elements. The members of a public do not need to share any bonds with one another aside from the underlying element that formed the public in the first place. Members of a public are strangers to one another (Warner, 2002). Publics tend to form around forms of media, such as newspapers or magazines. This means some members of a public may not even be aware that they are a part of this public, for example, an individual who likes a certain product’s Facebook page. A public’s life is

determined by the media of which the members follow, meaning that a cease in the existence of the media will result in the eventual demise of the public (Tarde, 1898).

The type of relationships among members in a public is weak. Communication between public members is what Taylor (2004) labels as social imaginary. Social imaginary focuses on the experience of a community as a whole, through identity of a common element. Therefore, no direct interactions have to occur between members of the public, meaning that communications issued by members of the public may not have any human target, but be more of a general statement regarding one's experience with the central theme of the public. Interactions among members of a brand public may not even be considered as direct interaction, for example, a retweet on twitter yields no direct communication among users. However, both direct and indirect communications exist between members of a public (Warner, 2002) and both are required to sustain a public. While these direct communications may not be aimed at one single member of the public, they are aimed at a large group within the public, which may or may not incorporate every member of the public. An example of this would be an article in a fitness magazine for those interested in power lifting. These interactions leave members of the public with little knowledge of one another and give no indication whether these two members will interact again (Zappavigna, 2011).

In recent years, the rise in the popularity of social media platforms has led to an increase in the number of publics. Kaplan (2010) defined social media as "a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content" (p.61). This definition of social media fits the format of twitch, as twitch meets both those criteria, with similar platforms to twitch, such as YouTube, being mentioned by Kaplan in his article. Many different social media platforms exist and are used today, which gives a rise to a variety of publics. The social media platform creates an environment where it is not only easy to create a public, but also facilitates the potential member's search and following of publics. These online publics were originally considered communities, but research has found that social media platforms such as Instagram (Marwick, 2015), Twitter (Arvidsson and Caliandro, 2015; Papacharissi et al.,2012) and Facebook (Langlois et al., 2009) are better characterized as forming publics. Social media publics use a virtual communal space in which members form an affective identity with the

public and use this space for self-expression (Zappavigna, 2011). This virtual space allows members of the public to come together and voice their opinions in regards to a central topic, which is the focus of the public as opposed to direct conversations held amongst members (Zappavigna, 2011).

A brand public, which has a self-explanatory definition, is a public with the center of focus being a brand and is a recent term coined by Arvidsson and Caliandro (2015), which they distinguished from a brand community. They described a brand public as “an organized media space kept together by a continuity of practices of mediation that are centered on a mediation device such as a hashtag” (Arvidsson and Caliandro, 2015, p. 742). Prior to this, online brand gatherings were viewed as communities, even though the platform and interactions among members did not fit the traditional definition of a brand community (Arvidsson, 2013). The term public has existed for over 100 years, but has only recently been applied for in respect to a brand recently (Arvidsson and Caliandro, 2015). Brand publics have only been observed on social media, where companies’ products create a central focus which is the requirement of a public (Arvidsson and Caliandro, 2015). A brand public is sustained by a mediating source as opposed to a brand community, which is sustained through personal interactions among members (Arvidsson and Caliandro, 2015). Another difference is the lack of identity gained in a brand public as opposed to a brand community. Members of a brand public will voice different opinions of the brand and a consensus is not necessarily reached among members (Arvidsson and Caliandro, 2015). This leads to heterogeneity of opinions that are long existing and unresolved. In this situation, forming a strong identity with a brand is impossible as no clear understanding to what a brand signifies exists (Arvidsson and Caliandro, 2015). This heterogeneity of opinions does not exist in a brand community, which results in a common understanding of brand of what the brand entails and creates a sense of belonging among members and promotes identification with the brand (Arvidsson and Caliandro, 2016). A final distinction between a brand public and a brand community is the value that is added to the brand itself (Arvidsson and Caliandro, 2015). In the case of the brand public, publicity is generated about the brand through the communications of the public, where in a brand community, the value lies in the identity created within the members of the community and the links they form with the brand (Arvidsson and

Caliandro, 2015). In the case of twitch, the individual streamer's channel, in particular the chatroom acts as both the place and the mediation device that are required to be considered a brand public. The chat room allows members of the public to express themselves, which can take the form expressing views, thoughts and emotions. Emoticons also act as a mediation tool to an extent, where the underlying meanings of emoticons allow for the expression of thoughts and emotions. These messages do not have particular targets, but allows for members of the public to share a collective affect in response to a brand, in this case the streamer.. Research on brand publics have been quite limited and only been conducted on brands that produce physical products; however there exists no literature that would suggest that this theory would be inapplicable to personal brands, which will be explored in this thesis.

Twitch is a complicated phenomenon where brand communities, brand publics and personal brands all exist. Streamers play an important role in twitch as they have the responsibility of attracting viewers and creating content. But how exactly is this achieved? Understanding which of these elements attract what types of viewers will demonstrate the underlying motivations to watch and continue watching streams. This in turn will shed light on the reasons viewers will spend their money on this system.

## Methods

### Data Collection

As this exploratory research was done into a recent form of social media, data was collected from two sources. The first source was data collected from the website itself and the second was interviews with actors involved in the twitch phenomenon, which consisted of both viewers and streamers alike.

For the data collected from the website, two distinct sources were observed. The first was the built-in chat function, where inputs from viewers could be observed and recorded. A primary objective was to understand how viewers communicate using the chat. To achieve this, a Netnography was conducted. Due to the uniqueness of the platform, the Netnography followed methods of both Kozinets (2002) and Arvidsson and Caliandro (2016). Kozinets (2002), who originally coined the term Netnography, focused on the interactions among individuals in an online setting. This analysis is conducted by examining direct conversations between individuals in an online setting. This technique is traditionally used in forums and websites. This technique only covers a fraction of the dialogue produced in the twitch chat rooms. Therefore, an adapted version of Netnography was required, which Arvidsson and Caliandro (2015) used in their exploration of Twitter as a social media. Since social media platforms produce publics as opposed to communities, the communications in this setting had no direct targets and therefore direct communication between individuals was minimal. Therefore, analysing the undertones of the messages gives insight into the underlying motivations of the posters. As twitch was found to have a new method of communication which Ford et al. (2017) named crowdspeak, the researcher first observed twitch chatrooms prior to collecting any data.

## Field Notes

The second source of data collected from the website was from the webcam and audio of the streamers themselves. As the streamers are actively involved in their game, most choose to respond to chat through speaking as opposed to typing. This gives more information compared to typing alone, as extra cues are available, such as voice-related cues (tone, pitch, volume) as well as body-related cues (posture, gestures, movements). These additional cues provide insight into the mannerisms of the streamers as well as their personality as they react to the various stimuli, which can be produced by the video game, chatting with viewers or anything else they decide to put on their stream. Additionally, media used by the streamers was analysed. This was any sort of media provided by the streamers throughout their stream and usually took form of music played while the streamers engaged in their game or YouTube videos played by the streamers. This data was gathered through video recordings and screen shots of the twitch feed. The screenshots were cropped in order to eliminate unrelated noise. Field notes were compiled live during the stream and screenshots were added post-stream into the field notes to give further context. A total of 142 pages of field notes were collected, which was comprised of both typed notes and images in a Microsoft word document.

As twitch contains a large quantity of streams, a few criteria were put in place to best address my research question. An iterative categorizations process was undertaken in order to separate streams by size. I labelled streams as one of three sizes, small, medium or large. In order to determine the boundaries for the stream sizes, the time it took to fill one page of the chat was examined. If it took longer than 60 seconds on average to fill the chat, the stream was considered a small stream. If it took between 15 and 59 seconds on average to fill the chat, the stream was labeled as medium. Finally, anything below 15 seconds to fill the chat was considered a large stream. Using these criteria, it was found that what constituted a small stream was viewers under 200 on average. A minimum of 20 viewers on average was also taken into account for this category, as under that many viewers tended to produce chat with a small number of interactions, which did not provide fruitful data. The next category was the medium stream, which consisted of between 201 and 2,000 viewers on average. The large category of streams had over 2,000 viewers on average. The first two categories of streams were the primary focus of the research as



the large group provided saturated data early on as they act purely as a public. Research into the average number of viewers in an active channel resulted in between 400 and 2,200 viewers and therefore, these parameters were close to fitting in with what is considered an average channel. The second parameter was that the primary language and the language used in chat had to be English. This was for the convenience of the researcher, where data collected in other languages could not undergo proper analysis. As streamers come from five continents, a large variety exists in the primary language used. However, a large majority of streamers are North American, which also holds true for the viewer base and therefore English is used in most streams and therefore representative of what can be called a normal stream. In order to not limit the data to streamers of one specific video game genre, many types of video games were examined. This included first person shooters (FPS), multiplayer online battle arena (MOBA), massive multiplayer online (MMO) and strategy games. Finally, the gender of the streamer in the observed streams was male. A 2015 survey found that over 70% of all streamers were male, while only 19% were female. Number alone was not the only reason for this criterion, but also the way interactions take place in the streams. Nakandala (2016) found that chat interactions differed in female video game streams compared to male streams, where female video game streamers received more objectification as opposed to male streamers. Therefore, they should be observed independently.

## Interviews

Semi structured interviews were conducted with participants, which were both viewers of the streams and the streamers who were the hosts. A total of thirteen interviews were conducted, where nine were viewers and four were streamers. In order to recruit participants, a forum post was made on the twitch subreddit asking for volunteers for an interview. Those who agreed were asked if they knew anyone else who would be willing to conduct an interview, which resulted in more interviewees. Streamers were contacted through personal message on twitch directly. The age range of participants was between 22 and 33 and were primarily male. A survey that twitch conducted on their viewers found the average age range of users was between 13 and 34-year-old (Grubb, 2016) males (Statista, n.d.), therefore the interviewees fell into the average. A

breakdown of participants of the interviews with viewers can be found in table 1, while information on the streamer interviews can be found in table 2. A copy of the interview questions for viewers can be found in Appendix A while questions for streamers can be found in Appendix B. Interviews were either conducted in person, or over Skype at the convenience of the interviewee. The in-person interviews were recorded on a cellular phone and transferred over to a computer and then immediately deleted from the telephone. The Skype interviews were

Table 1: Viewer Interviewees

| Name     | Age | Gender | Donated To a Streamer | Time Watching Twitch |
|----------|-----|--------|-----------------------|----------------------|
| Viewer 1 | 32  | M      | N                     | 6 months             |
| Viewer 2 | 27  | M      | Y                     | 2 years              |
| Viewer 3 | 29  | M      | Y                     | 4 years              |
| Viewer 4 | 24  | M      | N                     | 2 years              |
| Viewer 5 | 24  | M      | N                     | 1 year               |
| Viewer 6 | 30  | M      | N                     | 1 year               |
| Viewer 7 | 22  | M      | N                     | 2 years              |
| Viewer 8 | 31  | F      | Y                     | 4 years              |
| Viewer 9 | 33  | F      | N                     | 2 years              |

Table 2: Streamer Interviewees

| Name       | Age | Gender | Donated to a Streamer | Time Watching Twitch                 | Channel Followers |
|------------|-----|--------|-----------------------|--------------------------------------|-------------------|
| Streamer 1 | 26  | M      | Y                     | 7 months streaming, 3 years viewing  | 1656              |
| Streamer 2 | 28  | M      | Y                     | 1.5 years streaming, 4 years viewing | 882               |
| Streamer 3 | 30  | M      | Y                     | 1 year streaming, 2 years viewing    | 945               |
| Streamer 4 | 27  | M      | Y                     | 1 year streaming, 4 years viewing    | 684               |

recorded with Audacity software. Interview files on the computer were password protected, as well as the word files with the transcribed interviews. Interviews lasted between 32 and 96 minutes. All guidelines issued by the Concordia Ethics Board were followed in order to guarantee the safety and wellbeing of the participants.

## Data Analysis

An inductive content analysis was performed in order to examine the data at hand, which Elo and Kyngäs (2008) describe as a process involving “open coding, creating categories and abstraction” (p109). To uncover these motivations of viewers to watch and donate towards video game streamers, the communications of both streamers and viewers would be primary targets for analysis. Data was analyzed by finding common and recurring themes. Coding was employed in order to give meaning to data. Chamaz (2001) describes coding as creating a critical link between data and theory. An initial coding of data yielded 13 codes. Second cycle coding, which is described as reconfiguring and combining codes into larger overarching codes (Saldaña, 2015), was used in order to reduce the number of codes. This was achieved by creating overarching codes that encompassed the meanings of different types of codes into a larger, overarching meaning. This allowed information to be classified into one of the three existing theories, which were brand community, brand public and personal branding. A list and example of codes used can be found in table 3. Codes were derived to display the different motivations that underlay behaviours, as motivations were the primary focus of this study. Motivations were divided into three subgroups: prosocial, mischievous and expressive. The motivations of both viewers and the streamer were examined. Additionally, a code was developed for the streamers alone if they were attempting to develop or express their personal brand.

To adequately examine data in depth, data was separated into two subgroups: community and public. To achieve this, messages were analyzed in accordance with the foundations of publics and communities; therefore the target and the message were examined in order to classify the communication as belonging to either public or community. Data related to online communities was evaluated based on Muniz and Oguinn's (2001) three characteristics of brand

community, being shared consciousness, traditional behaviours and responsibility towards others. These three characteristics had to be present in order to classify data as falling into the brand community field. This allowed for an interpretation of the importance and strength of the online communities formed through twitch. In order to examine data from the public aspect, the frequency, public impact and meaning of the message was examined. As this social media platform differentiates from the classical social media platforms in respect to users, in this case the viewers, having no personal space of their own, the way they use chat had to be examined differently from Arvidsson and Caliandro (2015). As the chat could be used by anyone on twitch, there is a shared public space which results in less exposure of each unique individual. The frequency indicated solely the number of times a message would appear in chat. The public impact was the number of individuals that were using the same message. This is similar to the retweets that Arvidsson and Caliandro (2015) examined. Finally, the meaning of the message was examined, where motivations that go beyond self-expression can be uncovered. The reason for examining the frequency and public impact was to determine the spread of the message on the public. The larger the frequency, the more exposure the message had, which could have an effect on the public impact, especially in a situation where the chat consisted of a large audience and went by at a fast speed. The public impact indicated the spread of the message and gave insight into what was deemed worthy to spread by the public and what was ignored. This indicated topics of particular interest to the public and some of the public's thoughts towards the brand. The meaning of the message was examined in order to determine what was being said about the streamer's personal brand. This demonstrated the public's opinion regarding the streamers and their brand, or if anything was meant by the message at all, which was not always the case.

Table 3: Code Types Examples from Interviews

| CODE TYPE                               | EXAMPLE  |
|---|--|
| Prosocial Behavior / Community Building | And then there is the element of interaction, questioning why you did this instead of that or why are you there instead of here as well as building a personal relationship with them as if they were a friend in quotation marks we shall say. To be like hey how are you doing? How was your day? Or whatever.   |
| Mischievous Behaviour                   | I do see people like... probably... doing things in a harmful way just to get people annoyed or to yell at you. But they probably want to make it funny. But I do see it people do that and actually 1/3 to 1/2 of the comments are like that.   |
| Self-Expression (No Target)             | Mainly chat for me is a whole bunch of people either saying a whole bunch of random stuff  |
| Prosocial Donation Incentive            | I spend hundreds of hours on their content but do not give them a dollar. I felt that nothing is free in this world and they have to make a living. I respect them doing this and allowing us to see all this free content and the realization that I spent so many hours on this, the realization of maybe I should chip in and help them out because if you go down to the dollar value, even if you spend 10\$ on something you spent 100 hours, the ratio is very insignificant and does not really affect you.            |
| Mischievous Donation Incentive          | And there are people who um... donate money just to get under the skin like QuickyBaby, who was begging everyone to stop tipping him and then people would just tip him more. So he got really mad and he had to... well not mad mad angry mad, but he had to turn off the PayPal just to stop receiving the money and that is hilarious.  |
| Personal Brand (Streamer Only)          | I kind of get teased a bit for being very PG. I'm openly Christian as a streamer which I do not believe a lot of people are. And so, I think there is some association there. It's not necessarily something I talk about a whole lot, but I definitely think that when people think about me, they think on the PG side of things. I tend to be a little bit... I guess... ignorant when it comes to a lot of stream things, like people who are very heavy on knowing what streamers are up to, what other people are doing. |

## Findings

### Viewers

*Types of Viewers.* A common theme through all interviews was the initial motivation of individuals to begin watching twitch, which is the video game itself. All interviewees described their initial reason for watching twitch as wanting to see video games played at either an elite level, wanting to learn how to improve their own playing, or as a means of consuming the experience of playing the video game second hand as they lacked either the time or resources to play the video game themselves. Therefore, initial motivations to watch video game streams can be divided into two groups: entertainment and education. Both these motivations can be present in an individual, as seen through viewer 3, who not only wanted to see his favourite video game played at the highest level, but also wanted to learn and improve his own playing.

The game was definitely much more attractive to me than the streamer because before I started watching streamers, I was hooked on the game itself [...] He played [League of Legends] with some of the best. He was great at the game and there was so much I could learn from him.

While this is what originally attracts viewers, their motivations can change over time. This change in motivation will depend on the type of viewer that they evolve into over time. The initial viewing of twitch is similar to the first steps of joining an online community. In both cases, the primary motivation is information search. In the case of twitch, viewers are first interested in how others play video games with the prospect of gaining knowledge and improving themselves.

In order to understand why viewers continue watching twitch, it is first important to classify them in different categories, as their motivations vary depending on which group they fall. Four distinct groups of users of twitch were identified: the prosocial viewers, the mischievous viewers, the expressive viewers and the lurkers. What group a viewer will fall into is determined by their communications in the chat.

*Prosocial Viewers.* The first group thrive on prosocial interactions. The prosocial group members have pleasant conversations with one another. They attempt to create meaningful relationships with one another. Conversations between members of this group can be related to anything, ranging from the specifics of a video game to the situations of everyday life. Friendships form between these members, which leads to repeated interactions between the members, meaning they frequent the same channel or channels over a period. While not limited to, prosocial groups tend to be more common among the subscribers of a streamer, meaning that the commonality shared between the viewers might be what is responsible for having them converse in the first place. Not only do they have pleasant conversations with one another, but they tend to be supportive of the streamer as well, offering encouragement and thanks for their time and effort put in creating entertainment for other people. Viewer 2 described how prosocial viewers interact.

Because they are not only playing the game, although some streamers may do a walkthrough of everything they are doing but with everything going on in chat, the conversation veers and the focus is not necessarily the video game, I'm sure you pick up a few things here and there no doubt, but it's not "I want to learn a game, I want to be better"; it's "I want to watch this person because the chat gets away from the actual game."

This can also be seen through their donation messages, as they use this as a means of thanking the streamer. An example of a prosocial donation can be found in image 2. Since they both contribute to the streamer through subscriptions and donations, they seem to have no reservations about giving the streamer money through various means. While one gives them certain additional privileges (subscription), the other tends to be a selfless way of giving to the streamer. However, some ulterior motives may be at play as they do get recognition from the streamer and their name does appear in big in front of the stream, meaning there may be a selfish motive of this group donating, which is recognition and establishment of wealth or class. Prosocial twitch members are the viewers who are going to be forming brand communities with one another. They develop social capital through interactions and the formation of relationships

with other viewers and the brand, in this case the streamer. This in turn leads to the formation of brand communities around the streamer.

Image 2: Prosocial Donation



*Mischievous Viewers.* The group who engages in mischievous behaviour seems to have one goal in mind, which is to ruin the viewing experience of the viewers or try to get a rise out of the streamer. This is accomplished by trolling the stream, which can take many forms. In the case of the viewers, this usually takes place in insults or spamming offensive messages in chat, or just spamming annoying things in general. Viewer 4 gave his account of interacting with one of these viewers.

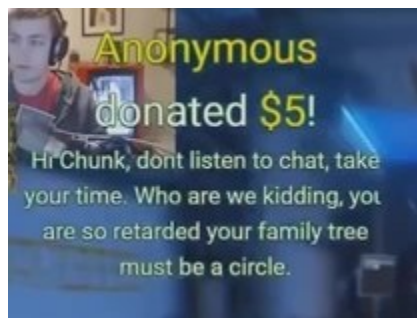
We were having these different ideas on these different things and I was trying to do it in a debate way, but this person starts to not do it in an adult way and call names and stuff and that frustrates me a lot because you cannot argue with a 12-year- old. Yeah... it happens a lot actually.

While similar practices do exist for the streamer, since the streamer does have the power to ban anyone in his/her stream, therefore insults directed at streamers tend to be coy or not too offensive. This is sometimes accomplished by spamming emotes, which is defined as using the same emote over and over again, after a particular event, usually in response to the streamer messing up or losing his/her temper, or by giving him/her a donation with an insulting or offensive message, which the streamer cannot truly condone, as this is a source of his/her income. Viewer 1 described how a part of the audience does not want the streamer to succeed. "But then, when he fails, there is this whole other group of people who are happy and the people who wanted to see him succeed get mad." An example of an insulting donation message aimed at



a streamer can be found in image 3. The mischievous group's interactions take form of encouragement to continue the frequency of their behaviours or on the quality of insult they have provided. These conversations are short lived and not maintained over a long period. The number of viewers tends to be what attracts trolls to certain channels, where a larger channel tends to positively correlate with the number of trolls, since there are a larger number of viewers to be disturbed. As they do not form brand communities due the lack of social capital production, mischievous viewers are associated with brand publics. The brand public allows for the existence of mischievous viewers, as no consensus of opinion is required in a brand public, therefore, negative opinions are allowed to be held to an extent, if they do not violate the core values of the brand; for example, many streamers will ban viewers who post racist remarks.

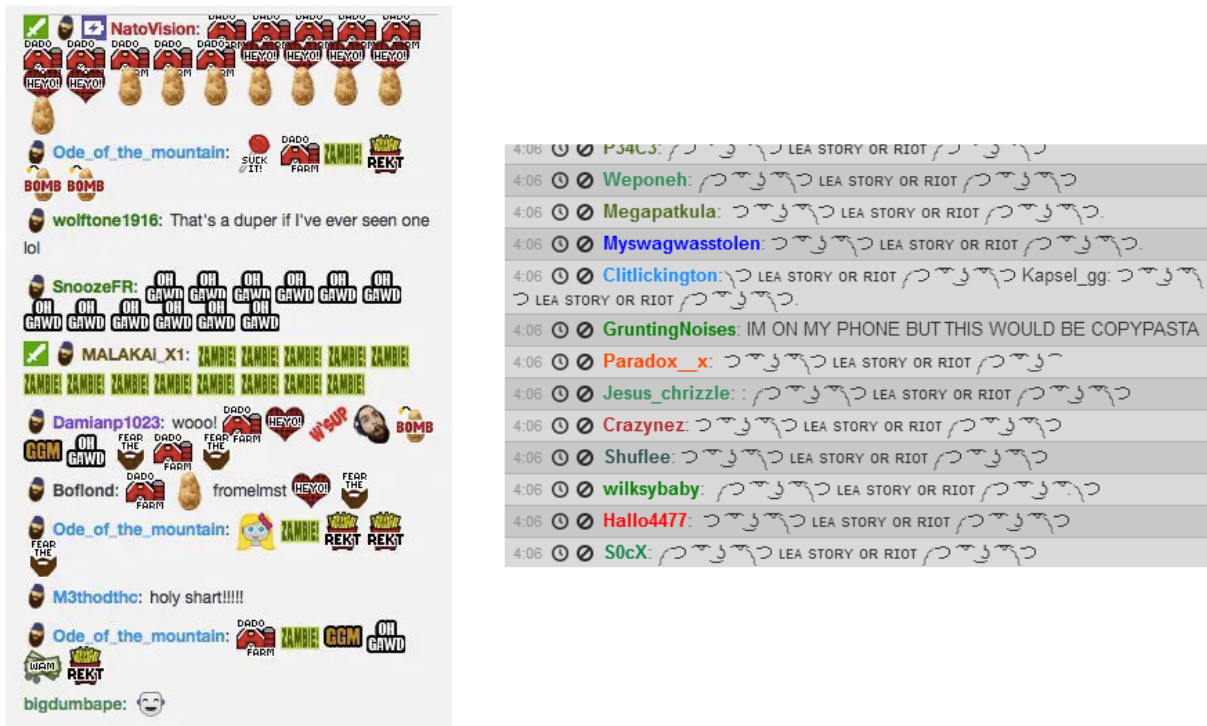
Image 3: Mischievous Donation



*Expressive Viewers.* The group that engages in random expressive behaviour participates in chat, but their messages usually do not have any particular targets, nor do they create conversations between members. The messages tend to be memes or “copy pasta” (emic term for copying and pasting the same messages repeatedly). These viewers aim to create messages that will be copied and pasted over and over, sometimes with a meaning behind them, sometimes totally random. Examples of this can be found in image 4. These messages tend to be like viral videos, where one can take off for no apparent reason while others are not copied and pasted at all. Similarly, there tends to be fads about what is acceptable and what is “old”, where the life cycle of what is okay to be spammed is short, but can come back into popularity. It seems there exists a large amount of randomness to these individuals, but there is some observable criterion to what this group will spam, which is humour and not being too offensive. These individuals use the chat as

a means of self-expression, where visibility is the contributing factor to their messages, therefore, large messages or emoticons are frequently used. Viewer 4 sometimes engaged spamming behaviour. Interestingly, he was not able to give a clear reason why he would engage in the behaviour.

Image 4: Emoticon (Random) and Copypasta (With a Meaning) Spam by Expressive Viewers



Hmm... Well I did a couple of times. It's fun and I do not know why... it is just a fun thing to do, it fulfills something, it makes me happy. And sometimes I feel it's a reaction to the streamer's, what he was talking about or doing or something like that and sometimes related to the real-time issue or real world. [...] I see some clever comments there and I would copy and paste. I rarely do it myself.

Expressive viewers use the public as a means of exposure and demonstrate that no concrete opinion is required to be part of a brand public. As some of their messages are not even related to the brand in question, some members will use a formed brand public as a means of exposure to a crowd by riding the wave. This suggests that the openness of a brand public attracts members

who are not interested in the brand at all, but rather the audience that the public has managed to generate.

*Lurkers.* The final group of viewers are the ones that do not use the chat function. Their motivations for continuing to use twitch lie either in the video game itself, or for the entertainment generated by the other groups of viewers. Viewer 5 was identified as a lurker as he stated: “I like to just watch the video game itself. I do not really go into the chat. I like to read the chat and see what people are saying, but I mainly pay attention to the gameplay”. Some lurkers also derive entertainment from the chat itself, as was the case for viewer 7, who stated, “Trolls can be funny... they can be mean too. They say some funny things. They make me laugh... if they are smart.”. These viewers are an important part to the brand public as they not only consume the brand, but also create an audience for the active members in the public, in this case the viewers who use the chat function. Since active members use the public as a means of self-expression, passive members are required in order for a public to function.

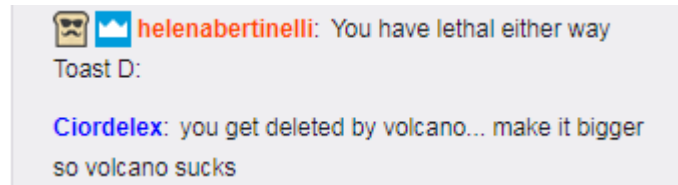
*Viewer Rituals.* There are certain prompts which viewers will respond within a certain manner. These can be done throughout streams on a macro level or can be specific to certain streams. An example of this is whenever a dog is heard in the background, the appropriate response is FrankerZ, which is an emoticon for a dog face in chat. This response has been examined in different streams across different video games. While many similar situations, such as a donation or subscription appearing, can lead to a response, each streamer has their own emoticon as a response to this event. An example of this is an emoticon of an arm flexing whenever someone donates or subscribes in Incon’s stream, who he himself will also flex for the camera. There also exist responses completely unique to one streamer. An example of this is whenever the streamer Kibler brings his dog Shiro on screen, the response is a personal emoticon that Kibler has set up that is Shiro’s face. This shows that rituals are not only common in brand communities but present in brand publics as well. For the brand communities of twitch, each community will develop its own cues to take actions which are related to the personal brand of the streamer. In the case of the public, these rituals give opportunities to the members to feel unity. While opinions may differ in the public, simple actions such as typing VROOOM when a vehicle is audible in the background are undertaken by the different types of viewers in the public. This creates feelings of belongingness to the public and the crowd in general.

## Donations

*Selfless Donations.* The motivations to donate and subscribe can be separated into two groups: selfless and selfish. The selfless motivation is the simpler of the two, where users feel grateful for the content provided by the streamers and compensate them out of appreciation. Viewer 2 stated that nothing is free in life and that they are at a point where they can afford to spend \$5 on something that they frequented for several hours a week. The option to provide any amount of money gives the donor the option to provide a large or small donation size and therefore he can tailor the amount based on his/her own appreciation of the streamer. The donor can also feel thankful towards the streamers themselves and not donate for the sake of content. Viewers can be thankful to the streamers themselves for either advice provided in regards to improving at a video game or by helping viewers in their everyday life struggles. Viewers also want to provide additional opportunities for streamers, as this will allow them to increase their number of viewers, which would ultimately lead to additional exposure which can help them achieve their streaming goals. This can take place by providing funding for better streaming equipment or for traveling expenses, such as plane tickets, allowing streamers to attend events and network. This will ultimately allow the streamers to further develop their personal brand, a role viewers play a significant part in. The range of these donations is the largest as some donors feel greatly appreciative of the streamers and therefore are willing to donate larger sums of money. This can also be dictated by the financial situation of the viewer, as mentioned by viewer 5.

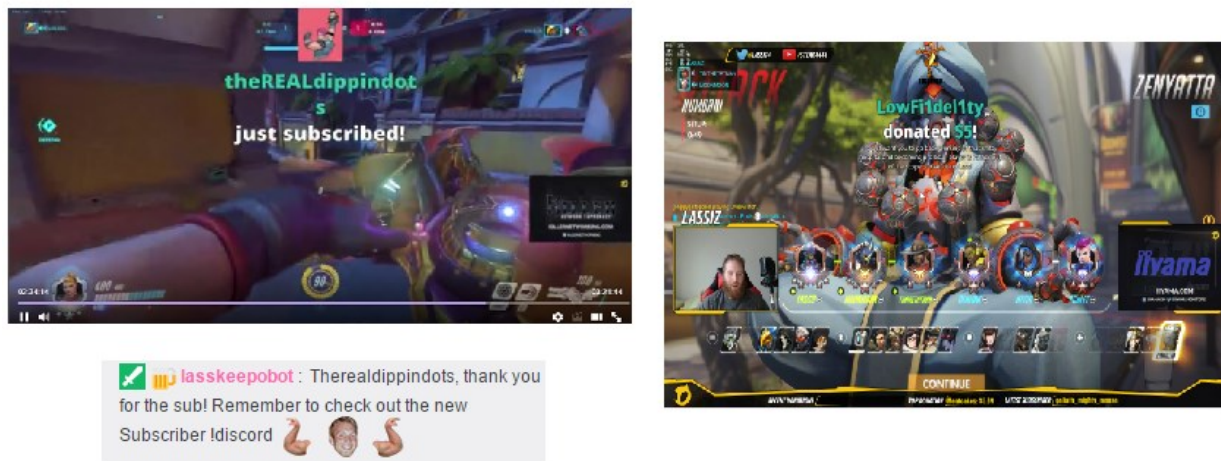
*Selfish Donations.* The selfish motivation can be divided into two categories, those related to personal gain and those related to self-expression. If a viewer subscribes, he/she gains some channel specific benefits. This comes in the form of an icon beside the viewer's name as well as access to the channel specific emoticons. The subscriber status can be seen as an indication of class, where these viewers become distinct from the other viewers. An example of the icon beside the viewer's name can be seen in image 5.

Image 5: Subscriber vs Non-Subscriber



These people are perceived as being closer to the streamer as they are acknowledged on an individual level by the streamer. This feeling of exclusivity may be the reason behind why some people decide to subscribe, however it is still seen as supporting the streamer as the some of the subscription fee goes to the streamer. Many streamers hold giveaways for specific members of their viewer base, who are usually those who have subscribed. These giveaways take the form of either game specific items, or physical items to be sent through the mail. Some streamers also hold giveaways for monetary-based goods, such as gift certificates to certain websites. Additionally, when donating or subscribing to a streamer, the viewers gets distinction as their name appears on big on the stream and a personalized message in chat dedicated to them, which can be seen in image 6. It is common courtesy for the streamer to personally thank the subscriber or donator vocally, which gives more recognition. This distinguishes the donor from other viewers as he/she is the sole focus of the viewers and the streamer.

Image 6: Subscription and Donation Exposure



“One of the reasons is to... appear there, like maybe just to attract attention, and together with a donation, you can make a comment or something and they, the streamer would notice you and react to that and that is one way to get attention.” –

Viewer 9

Donating money is also an indication of financial wellbeing, which is particularly apparent in large donations. Large donations tend to attract a greater deal of attention as they do occur less frequently than smaller donations. Streamers will usually have a different donation sound or image for larger donations, which indicates that a larger amount was donated, which further distinguishes the viewer who donated.

The second selfish reason to donate is self-expression, where the donation message will be targeted at either the streamer, in an attempt to get a reaction out of him/her, or towards other viewers. These donation messages can be an attempt at humor, but more often than not, are an attempt to pass an insulting or frustrating message, which is typically considered trolling. By donating a sum of money, the donor has direct access to the attention of the streamer and therefore the streamer is unable to ignore the message compared to if it only appeared in chat. Streamer 2 shared his experience of playing a horror game and at one particularly emotionally involved moment, one of his viewers donated so that the sound for the indication of a donation would frighten him.

I was playing a really scary game. And my chat knows I have a loud and crazy donation sound. I was at a super intense part and had a one dollar donation. I jumped back and said oh my god and almost screamed. It really freaked me out.

Interestingly, streamers seem to be opposed to these types of donations on the surface and vocally condone them, but do not take any measures to prevent them in the future, such as banning some keywords in donation messages which would prevent them from being read on screen. This might be explained by streamers not wanting to deter certain donation incentives; however, this might be impacting their personal brand negatively. These donations tend to be small in nature, usually just being the minimum required in order to have their message on screen. Selfish donations are a means of self-expression in the public. This gives the opportunity to members of the mischievous crowd to expose messages to the brand and entirety of the

audience, as the message will appear on stream. This will expose even those who do not follow the chat to whatever message the donor decides. Examples of both selfish and selfless donations can be found in table 5.

Donation incentives do not have to solely fall into one distinct category, as donations can have multiple meanings behind them. For example, a viewer can be thankful for the content produced by a streamer, but decide to leave a trolling message for the streamer as a means of self-expression or enjoy the recognition associated with having his/her name and donation amount on screen.

Table 5: Donation Messages and Their Motivations

| Donation Message Type  | Donation Message   |
|------------------------|--|
| Selfless               | Hey Sneaky just wanted to say thanks for all the entertaining content. Just lost a good friend to cancer but your stream always seemed to keep a smile on his face so take this donation as a thank you from me. Thanks Sneaky and keep up the good work.  |
| Contextualized Meaning | The donor is happy with the entertainment being produced by the brand and therefore is giving money because he/she is grateful.  |
| Selfish                | Hi Kolento... hehe... yes you are.   |
| Contextualized Meaning | A joke had started that the streamer who received this donation, This NL looked like another streamer, Kolento. Donors used this opportunity to call him Kolento, as it visibly bothered him and he would have a negative reaction on stream. Many donations of small amounts occurred as the streamer was upset in order to attempt to put him in a worse mood. The donor's desire to aggravate the streamer and have the streamer's reaction viewed by the public led him/her to donate money. |

## Streamers and Stream Content

### *Personal Brands of Streamers.*

There exist two types of streamers on twitch, professional video game players and personality streamers, who are also referred to as variety streamers by the twitch community. Professional



video game players compete competitively in their respective video game, which usually takes form of participating in tournaments organized by the creators of the game. They play only one game as they need to maintain a certain level of competitive play in order to remain at the top of the competitive scene. The second category is the personality streamers, where streamers will put forth certain aspects of their personality in order to attract viewers. This can take form in different ways, such as streamers who focus on telling jokes and being funny, while others take on more of a role of an intellectual and stimulate meaningful conversations with the viewers. Viewer 5 described two of his favourite streamers, which he likes despite their differences in personality.

Different streamers do it differently. Let's go back to this nice guy QuickyBaby. He is really serious and answers questions. And sometimes when people troll him he does not get it. And these people achieve their purpose. That can be joyful or frustrating, that depends. And there is another Youtuber called Anfield, not Airfield. He is the funny guy, not as informative. He interacts with the viewers a lot and does not feel uncomfortable when people are trolling him and he calls them back or yells at them but not... just being sarcastic, not in a dirty way. I cannot think of a particular event he does something... but this is a thing in his channel and it happens a lot in his channel.

There are some that even focus on negative personality traits, such as rudeness or sarcasm as a means of attracting viewers. These personality traits are combined with additional elements, such as symbols and customs in order to create a personal brand for the streamer. The categories of professional gamer and personality streamer are not mutually exclusive, as many streamers incorporate elements of both those categories, as viewers tend to enjoy streamers who are both talented at a video game and are able to provide entertainment through means outside the video game. However, as seen by observing the top streamers of twitch, it seems that being a professional gamer, and therefore good at a certain video game, tends to attract larger amount of viewers. Table 4 shows the top 10 human streamers on twitch according to Social blade, a website dedicated to tracking social media views. A human streamer is when a single person is the host of the stream and plays the video game. A non-human streamer is any stream that falls outside this category, which could be a tournament hosting stream, an AI controlled stream or



many other variations where one human is not the streamer. Nevertheless, there are personality streamers who are in the top for attracting viewers, therefore, both characteristics can be used in attracting viewers. This however was not reflected in data collected from the interviews. Many viewers, as well as current streamers, suggested that talent alone in video games is not enough to attract viewers and they are adamant about the importance of personality.

“The first and foremost is that you have to be good with people. You can be the best player in the world and anyone who watches twitch can tell you this, like if you have no personality people are probably not going to watch you.” –Streamer 3

Motivations for streamers differ greatly amongst themselves. Some streamers have a desire to build a community and create social interactions not only among viewers, but with themselves as well. This was reflected by STREAMER 1, who considered himself a people’s person and enjoyed connecting with new people.

My biggest thing is people, like I really really enjoy people and so this combines my pastimes with my ability to talk to people, communicate with people, share our stories, that type of thing.

The structure and reach of twitch allow for viewers and streamers worldwide to connect with one another and act as an opportunity for individuals located around the world to connect with one another as the Internet eliminates the constraining physical boundaries. Other streamers use twitch as a means of self-expression through the creation of unique content.

Table 4: Top 10 Human Twitch Streamers

| Name             | Followers | Channel Views | Streamer Type | Type of Game Played |
|------------------|-----------|---------------|---------------|---------------------|
| Imaqtpie         | 1,765,297 | 217,750,099   | Professional  | MOBA                |
| ShadbaseMurderTV | 57,398    | 201,855,742   | Professional  | Creative (Art)      |
| TSM_TheOddOne    | 870,639   | 195,617,255   | Professional  | MOBA                |
| Dyrus            | 1,286,630 | 193,639,058   | Professional  | MOBA                |
| LIRIK            | 1,707,355 | 184,466,497   | Variety       | Variety             |
| Nightblue3       | 1,924,755 | 174,209,669   | Professional  | MOBA                |
| Nl_Kripp         | 1,010,883 | 170,407,552   | Professional  | Card Game           |

|                   |           |             |              |         |
|-------------------|-----------|-------------|--------------|---------|
| sodapoppin        | 1,462,567 | 160,345,870 | Variety      | Variety |
| asiagodtonegg3be0 | 391,376   | 155,121,338 | Professional | MOBA    |
| Trick2g           | 1,049,605 | 119,582,317 | Professional | MOBA    |

STREAMER 4 had used several other platforms to create UGC, such as the vlogs in the past. Twitch provided him a platform where he could create UGC centered on video games, a passion of his.

I have dabbled in YouTube a bit beforehand. I have also had a lot of... I do not know if you remember blocktv back in the day. I used to do that with a webcam to do my own live shows from my bedroom. So I always had that broadcasting thing going on in my life. I found out about twitch and kind of went along with it because video games and live streaming are fun to me.

As twitch has few restrictions in regards to video games, streamers can play the games they desire and share this experience with viewers, where entertainment does not have to be restricted to playing the games well, but playing them in an entertaining style. Viewer 5 dictated that he enjoyed when streamers did “stupid things” which he referred to as actions in a video game that are not always beneficial, but have humorous consequences. “If you have a streamer who is really dedicated to the game as a pro but is willing to do something absolutely stupid out of entertainment purposes then it’s still... entertaining.”

Streamers can play video games in ways that differ from the simple attempt to win strategy and play a video game in a uniquely tailored way. Some streamers use their means of reaching large amounts of viewers as a means of giving back to the community. An example of this is the group of streamers who participate in Awesome Games Done Quick, who have a bi-annual week long stream to raise money for Doctors Without Borders and the Prevent Cancer Foundation. They raised over \$16 million over the 16 events that were hosted. While this is probably the largest charity related stream on twitch, many individual streamers will hold daylong events encouraging viewers to donate directly or give all donations they receive that day to a charity which they either have a tie with or is a cause they personally believe in. It is important to note that a common underlying motivation for all streamers is financial gain. While

this may not be their primary motivation, all streamers accept and encourage donations and many streamers hope that streaming alone will be a means of financial support, eliminating the need for an additional source of employment.

*Brand Types of Streamers.* The personality traits exhibited by streamers tends to be a reflection of the mood of the chat and therefore the type of viewers they are trying to attract. A streamer will decide to show certain personality traits in order to develop their own personal brands. In doing so, they attempt to attract viewers who would endorse this brand. Streamers who uses positive personality traits are community oriented streamers while streamers who focus on negative personality traits are trolling oriented streamers.

*Community Oriented Streamers.* A streamer who is known for his/her cheerfulness will attempt to attract viewers from the prosocial group as he/she would be most likely to get along with and be amused by this trait, which was the case for STREAMER 1 as he stated in his interview. STREAMER 1 used this trait as a foundation for the online community that he was creating, hoping to attract good natured viewers in order to discuss everything, ranging from video games to everyday life. His entire streaming focus is on creating positive human interactions among his viewers and himself.

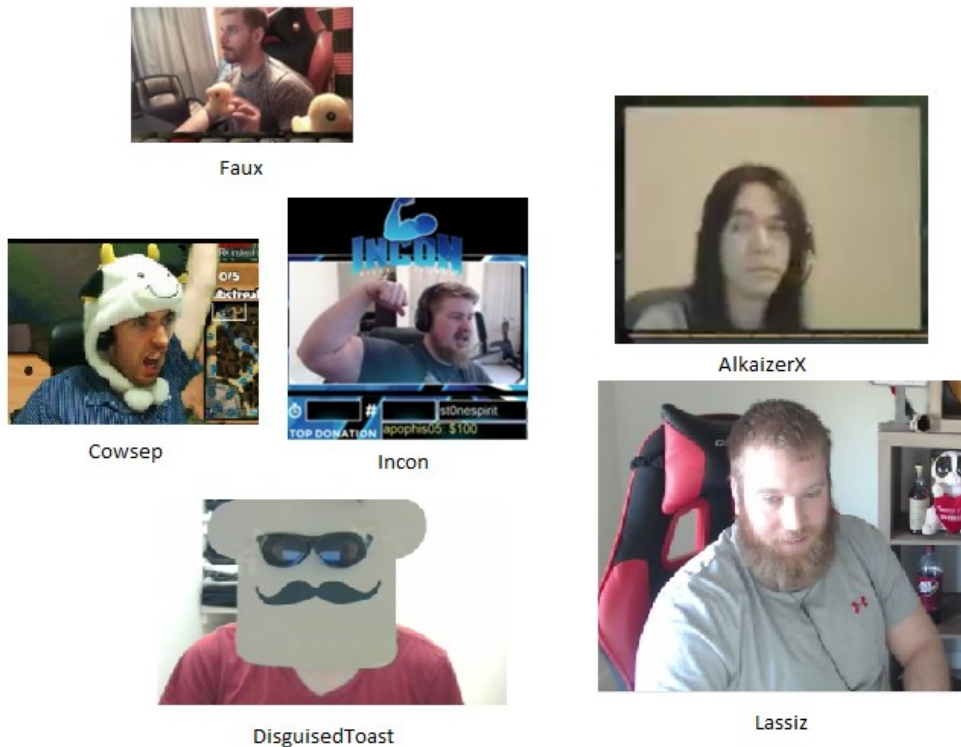
*Mischievous Oriented Streamers.* An opposing view would be streamers who display the characteristic of being judgemental or get angry easily. This tends to attract viewers from the mischievous group because the reactions of the mischievous group fit well with how the streamer reacts in situations. An example of this type of streamer was mentioned by viewer 6, who spoke of a streamer who encouraged his viewers to insult himself and other viewers so that he could retort back. This insult-laden environment attracts viewers who want to throw insults around as this is their method of generating entertainment for themselves and the environment of the stream permits such behaviour without consequence.

An interesting finding is that physical appearance plays little role in attracting viewers. Some of the streamers examined placed little effort into their physical appearance, not to the point of a lack of personal hygiene, but they were either unshaven or dressed casually. Other streamers put more work into their physical appearance, but either being well groomed or

showing off a fancy wardrobe. Physical appearance may just be an aspect of the personal brand being put by the streamer, where he/she attempts to be viewed as just another person as opposed to a celebrity in order to be able to relate to his viewers better, where others attempt to show class and wealth through their physical presentation. However, this seemed not to be a decisive factor in determining the number of viewers, as both these types of streamers had many viewers. A collage of a few streamers and how they decide to present themselves can be seen in image 7.

*Public and Community Maintenance by the Streamer.* The streamer is in charge of creating and maintaining an environment that will not only attract viewers, but keep them returning in the future. This is accomplished in two connected ways, by creating entertainment through playing

Image 7: Streamer Appearances and Their Personal Brands



the video game and creating an environment and mood where viewers feel comfortable. The former element is accomplished by either playing the game at a high level, or exhibiting their personality through playing the game, or a combination of both. This suggests that a wide variety exists in streamers themselves, which in turn suggests that the motivations of viewers to watch streams vary greatly from individual to individual. For example, some viewers are content with

watching the game played at a professional level. These chat rooms tend to be slower, which means the ratio of lurkers to active participants in chat is higher in this type of streams. Some streams do not even have a webcam showing the streamer, while other streams have little to no speech coming from the streamer and some streams have a combination of both these elements. The use of media, such as music, also helps shape the environment of the stream. Many streamers will play music as either a means of creating atmosphere for the video game they are playing, such as playing tense music during a horror video game, or as an expression of their personal brand. Streamers will play music that they enjoy, giving the viewers more insight to who they are as a person. STREAMER 2 even took this further and stopped playing music at the request of one of his viewers who did not share a similar taste in music.

I have a certain viewer who does not like my taste in music so I rarely do play my music and if so, it is at 5% volume so they do not hear it [...] You want to please your viewers. I listen to hip hop and this certain viewer doesn't like hip hop but he has also been with the stream since the beginning [...] and I do not mind not playing my music.

This resulted in him showing that he was an accommodating person, which is an important aspect of his personal brand. This suggests that while media can add to a stream, it is not an essential part and if used, or ceased, strategically, can have a positive impact on the viewers. This was backed up by many of the viewers, in particular viewer 5, who stated that music choice is more of a reason to turn off someone's stream as opposed to turning it on. "I am not going to tune into a streamer just because of the music he plays. I might turn a streamer off if I do not like the music they are playing or if they are playing... if they have annoying music."

### Streamer-Audience Interactions

*Mood of the Chat.* A mood is created in chat through the messages sent in chat. This mood is representative of the participants in chat. The mood can be pleasant, which encourages friendly conversations between viewers, toxic, which is laden with offensive messages and insults, or neutral, which is filled with random memes. An example of each of these moods can be seen in

image 8. Usually, chat is composed of a mixture of these elements, but the primary mood will be what is being used most in chat. Moderation of chat, by either the streamer or appointed moderators, is important in keeping the mood of the chat aligned with the environment the streamer is attempting to create, as this will appease the viewer type that the streamer is attempting to attract and maintain. The level of moderation varies from stream to stream. This results in different norms to what is acceptable in certain streams and what are inappropriate behaviours. Breaking these unwritten social rules can result in either a warning, where multiple warnings will result in further disciplinary actions, a period where no messages can be sent (a mute) or a permanent banning of the use of chat in the channel. The effectiveness of these punishments depends on the sustained enforcement of disciplinary actions due to the facility of obtaining a new account, where consistency will dictate.





### *Differences among Stream Sizes*

Small streams begin with either prosocial or mischievous viewers, depending on what type of viewers the streamer is attempting to attract. What maintains the viewers is the ability to chat easily with the streamer or other viewers, as the few viewers in the stream leads to fewer items in the chat. In the case of the prosocial group, this is where the online communities begin to form as the streamer will focus on the few available viewers and chat with them. This is similar for the mischievous group; however, no real community forms, but targets are easily reachable. In the initial stage, viewers have more exposure to each other and the streamer, and the streamer can focus on each individual viewer. Conversations held by viewers tend to be open to everyone and unless a message is only directed at one person the @ (which will highlight a message for a selected viewer whose name follows the @, making it easier to see for them) will not be used.

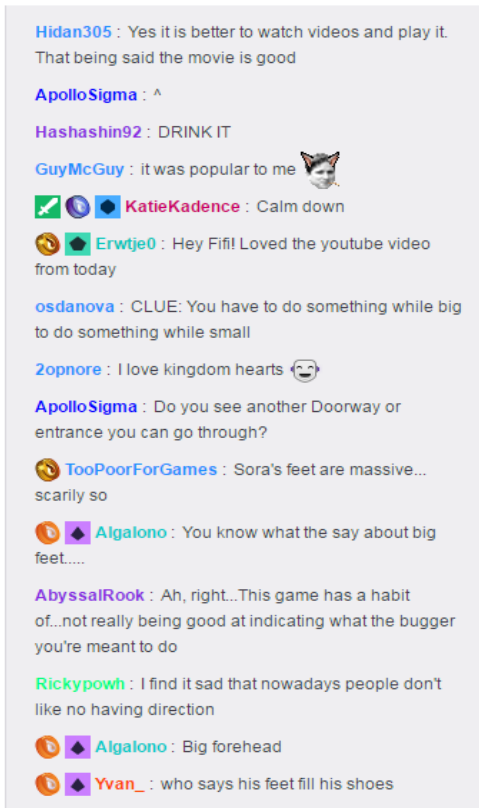
Medium streams have a mixture of prosocial or mischievous members with an addition of expressive viewers that use the chat, which yield a higher overall number of inputs in the chat. The result of this is that communication becomes harder between viewers and the streamer can no longer reply to every message. While conversations among members will still occur, a different type of message begin to appear. This is the type of message that has no targets, but is still used as a means of gaining exposure. The result will be one of two things: emoticons, which stick out from normal chat, and longer messages, which take up a large amount of space and therefore are easily identifiable. At this stage, the channel retains some elements of an online community, but it also has elements of the brand public. The @ function becomes used more frequently, which reduces the number of participants within conversations to two viewers. The channel hosts a mixture of both a brand community and a brand public.

In large streams, the conversations among viewers are almost non-existent. The channel's chat becomes a competition ground for individual viewers who have a limited space and therefore resort to using the previously described messages as a means of self-expression. An example of the three types of chats can be found in image 9. As the number of viewers grow, the original members of the online community will begin to decrease due to increase in difficulty of communicating and therefore, the channel no longer meets their needs. As communications lose their targets and messages begin to be used for self-expression as opposed to direct

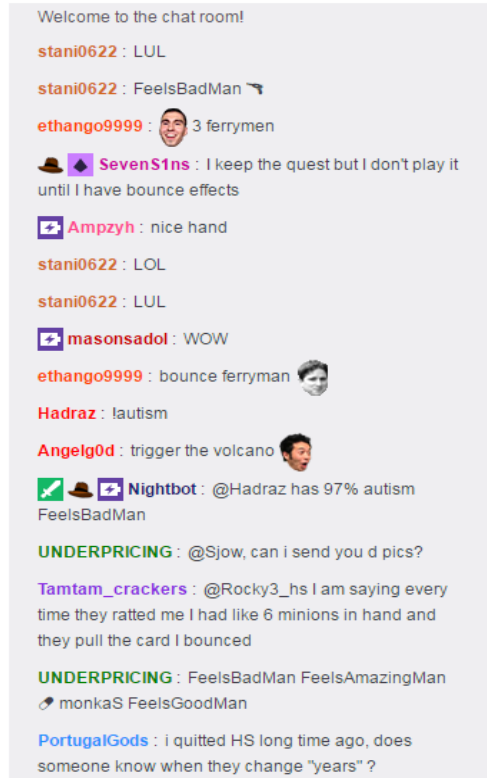


communication, the channel becomes a brand public. Some of the original members of the community remain; however, normal community functions, such as communications among the community members, become harder to complete due to the clutter being produced by the masses of the public. The channel is a pure brand public.

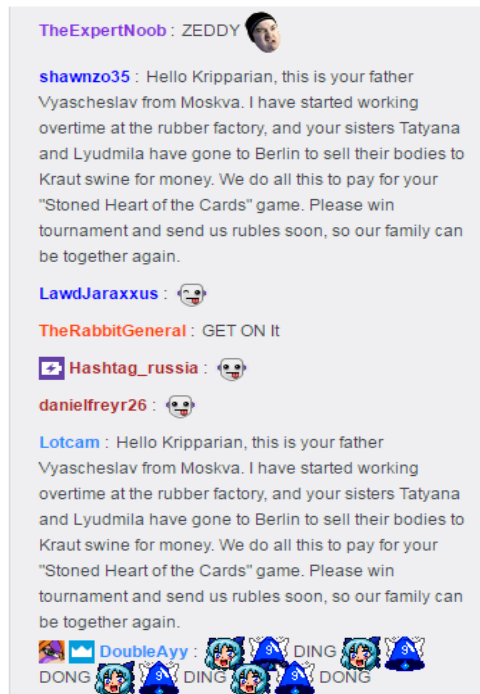
Image 9: Evolution of Chat Messages and Number of Viewers



82 viewers



1843 viewers



5487 viewers

## Discussion

### Theoretical Implications

The primary theoretical implication of this thesis is to expand the Arvidsson and Caliandro's (2016) Brand Public theory. As it is an emerging theory, simply replicating the findings reinforces the existence of the brand public. Additionally, the brand public was observed in a social media setting that differs from examined by Arvidsson and Caliandro (2016). While brand publics were theorized to exist on every social media platform, more investigation needed to be done as Twitter was the only social media platform that was examined in the past. Twitter provides ephemerality of comments and conversations, where interactions in chat in the setting of twitch disappear and are replaced with new inputs. While this backs up the types of communications seen in brand publics, ones in which communications are not aimed at a person, but the crowd, it also suggests that leaving a physical record is not what is important in the brand public, but rather the short exposures to the crowd. This also demonstrates the importance of the crowd in the public, as having an audience is a motivator for posting in the chat in twitch. Passive members in the crowd are an important aspect of brand publics in general, for as the number of passive members grows, so will the number of active members. This also shows that not every member of the brand public have to be engaged in the brand, as some members just use the brand public as a means of communicating to a large audience.

Another unique aspect to this study is linking the brand public to a personal brand. While many similarities exist between brands and personal brands, the fundamental lack of a physical product separates these two groups. In their study, Arvidsson and Caliandro (2016) examined Louis Vuitton, an established brand that offers a variety of physical products. Even though streamers do not produce physical products, brand publics formed around their channels. This demonstrates that it is the underlying principles of the brand that are important in the formation of the brand public. In the case of twitch, this could be seen as the streamer's personal brand being put forward, which were the personality traits they decided to put forward.

Finally, the origins of brand publics were uncovered. Size plays a large factor in the formation of publics. This is due to the amount of inputs into limited space. As many social

media sites contain large amounts of connected members, communications in a common space are difficult. Initially, a space allocated to a brand on a social media platform will begin as a brand community, where interactions amongst members will be the driving factor in this community. This changes as the number of members increases and conversations become difficult to maintain as the number of members increases. This leads to the evolution of the space to a brand public, where communications take on a different role and messages with targets become rare.

### *Managerial Implications*

#### *For Entertainment Providers*

Streaming websites have demonstrated the importance of communication when consuming entertainment. Many older media of entertainment, such as television, can use this opportunity to add an additional feature, a chatroom, to their media. For example, each television channel could receive an individual chatroom so that viewers can interact with one another as the television show progresses. A recent phenomenon known as second screen incorporated social networking applications to the consumption of television (Courtois and D'heer, 2012). Their results showed that consumers are interested in consuming television socially via a mediation device, in this case a tablet application. However, the tablet application in this case deterred from the traditional passive method of consuming television, as they would have to focus both on the television and the tablet. In order to circumvent this issue, the application would need to be built directly into the television set. This idea can be applied to other sources of media. This would require a network to be set up within these older mediums of communication, such as connecting televisions to the Internet to create the possibility of implementing a chatroom. Communication has always been a desire among consumers of entertainment, as seen by the many message boards dedicated to different forms of media. Therefore, offering a simple method of achieving this would be beneficial for consumers. Streaming websites have also shown the benefits to being able to interact with the actors involved in the production of entertainment. Entertainment providers could organize either in person or virtual meetings with their celebrities where consumers could engage in conversation with the celebrities. These meetings would go beyond a simple sit-down and Q&A, the brand and the audience would engage together in an activity while talking. This would be harder to achieve outside the Internet due to the amount of people

and limited space around the celebrity, but could be accomplished with smaller groups. This would also lead to a strengthening of the personal brand of the celebrity as well as a stronger brand community.

### *For Streaming Websites*

As a large subsection of the viewers maintained their viewership due to the relationships and communities formed with other members, facilitating the prosocial viewers' ability to carry out community functions would be beneficial in retaining this type of viewer. This could be achieved by creating a built-in forum into each streamer's channel that the streamer has the ability to give access to viewers of his choice. The moderation of who is allowed to post in the forum is important, as members of the mischievous group will attempt to disrupt the community activities.

To appease the mischievous group, streaming websites can introduce a subsection of the website dedicated to the best insults or trolling moments caught on stream. This will have limitations though, where only instances of trolling that are not truly harmful to either the streamer or other viewers would be encouraged. This means anything that trolling that involves racism, sexism or any taboo subjects will be condemned, as these subjects tend to upset some viewers. The whole focus of this would be to highlight the moments that non-trolls enjoy, while encouraging the trolls to be creative and create their own content. An example of this would be the "turn up for what" trolling that some viewers would use on streamers. A viewer would ask a streamer to turn up the for what option in their game and the streamer would look through the options looking for the for what option. The turn up for what is a reference to the lyrics of song and no such option exists in the video game. While this wastes a small portion of the streamers time, many viewers find this humorous and streamers even are amused when they catch on to the trolling. Viewers would submit clips of their favourite moments that revolve around negativity and some would be selected and published on the website. This would also be beneficial for the lurker group, who would have an additional source of content to consume.

As the expressive group are looking to spread messages to a large crowd, a way to encourage this behaviour would be to give a feedback response option to everyone. This could be achieved in a way that if a message is clicked on, the option of sending a feedback emoji to the

sender. There could be a few emojis available, such as a laughing face or a heart. The emoji would only temporarily appear on the message sender's screen and disappear in a few seconds. What this would accomplish would be an easy way to give recognition to an individual in response to a message, not requiring much input from the lurkers in order to convey their enjoyment of comments, but would also give feedback to the poster that his/her messages were viewed and consumed by the public.

In order to better serve streamers, aiding them in establishing their personal brands and viewer bases would be beneficial to the streamer. Streaming websites tend to promote streams with the highest amount of views. This leads to those who already have large audiences being on the front page and therefore, gives those streamers additional exposure. No additional information is present besides the name of the streamer, what he/she is streaming and the number of viewers. What could be done by the streaming can be divided into two parts. The first would be to promote other streamers. This would require segmenting streams by what they have are offering, in the example of twitch, what type of streamer they are. Then, more information could be offered on their personal brand. Streamers would publish a small description of who they are and what their streams offer. This would reduce the information search for viewers and would lead to easier pairings of viewer types with appropriate streamers. The second way in which streaming websites could help out streamers would be to offer streamers more freedom in their personal brands. This could be accomplished by offering additional tools to streamers so that they can personalize their channels further and create a unique environment. In the case of twitch, this could be accomplished by offering additional channel specific emoticons to streamers. Some of these emoticons could be used by non-subscribers in that specific channel.

#### *For Streamers*

Forming a unique and attractive personal brand is essential for the survival of a streamer on streaming websites in general. As streaming websites offer a large diversity of streamers, establishing a unique selling point is critical. As in the case of twitch, 95% of views are accounted for by 10% of streamers. This means that attracting viewers from the beginning is a challenge. In order to form a good brand image, it is important to make the decision on what exactly the brand will represent and therefore what type of viewer will be attracted. This means prior to beginning streaming, determining what personality characteristics will be put forward

and what behaviours will be acceptable. Brand development can also be done outside of the streaming website by using other forms of social media. Using multiple platforms, such as tumblr to keep a blog, will attract viewers who also use that social media platform and will create additional marketing tools to create awareness regarding the brand. This tactic has been done by many streamers who achieved high popularity.

As both a brand community and a brand public are essential parts of twitch and both generate revenue for different reasons, it is important for the streamer to embrace both the community and the public. In respect to the brand community, as the streamer is the brand at the focal point, it is important for the streamer to interact with these viewers. This however goes beyond simply interacting with members of the community. The streamer must make members of his/her brand community feel like they are true fans, which will result in feelings of exclusivity and strengthen ties to the brand. This can be achieved by giving them access to the built-in message board, or other social media platform created by the streamer that would go beyond simple text, such as an audio based social media platform such as discord. An example of this was Burger King Norway, who after producing a new Facebook page, offered a free big mac, a product of their largest competitor, to anyone who unfollowed their current social media page and promised not to join their new one. Their motives were not only to identify the “true Burger King fans” but also as a means of reducing the amount of trolling on their social media pages. As consensus does not necessarily have to exist in a public, many individuals used this to express negative opinions of Burger King, even though these beliefs may have not been held and users were only attempting to bring attention to them.

In order to create a better brand public in their chat, a streamer can encourage spamming. It is important for a streamer to properly identify that there is indeed a public present before encouraging spamming. In order to accomplish this, the streamer must analyze what types of communications are being used in his/her chat. A simple technique that can be used is to examine if the messages have targets and if most of them do not, then a brand public is present. As previously seen, spamming does not have to relate to the brand, therefore encouragement of spamming of any kind would work. While most streamers discourage spam, as it takes up resources and creates clutter, encouraging spamming would cause the viewer base to increase and therefore attract more viewers. Since the community members will have their own area

where they be a community and the mischievous viewers use means such as donating in order to assure their messages reach the audience, all subtypes of viewers would be happy and therefore stay in the channel.

#### *For Marketers*

As twitch is bringing in a large, segmented audience who share similar interests, this would be a great opportunity to target this audience with focused advertisements. Currently, streamers have the choice of showing advertisements on their channel, but many choose not to as it would affect their personal brand. A similar strategy to Youtube could be implemented where advertisements would play when a stream was initially loaded. Streamers could also be used as a medium to advertise products as they could take the role of endorsers. Many different types of products could be advertised by streamers. This can include new upcoming games, products required in gaming, such as keyboards and chairs and even consumables that are used during gaming, such as energy drinks. As these streamers are not of celebrity fame, the cost to enlist them would be significantly lower as compared to a celebrity of another class, such as a television star.

#### **Limitations**

The scope of this research was to determine the underlying motivations of viewers to watch the average stream. In order to classify the average stream, many exclusion criteria had to be employed. While 70.9% of twitch streamers are men, this leaves 29.1% of twitch streamers that fall into another category. The second biggest demographic of streamers are women, which make up 19.5% of streamers. While viewer communications have been shown to differ from streams that have a male streamer (Nakandala, 2016), female streamers still represent a significant part of twitch as a whole. Female streamers have been found to focus of different types of characteristics when forming personal brands (Labrecque, Markos and Milne, 2011). This might mean that additional typologies of streamers exist outside the male gender. Therefore, communities and publics might form differently in response to these different types of streamers.

Certain subgroups of the population were less likely to give interviews than others. While the prosocial group, random group and lurker group were all represented, no member of the mischievous group would agree to an interview; however, this might be due to their personality



type. While interviewees were able to give accounts to witnessing acts of trolling, first hand answers from a member of the mischievous group would have provided more insight into them. Literature does exist on Internet trolling though, which does give insight into their mindset. Trolling has been examined over multiple social media websites and message boards and underlying motivations have been observed as either a way to combat boredom (Varjas et al., 2010), or a way to have fun (Shachaf and Hara, 2010). The evidence collected did not suggest that trolling functions differently on twitch, however, direct interviews with trolls could have confirmed this.

No streamer that was officially partnered with twitch agreed to an interview. When streams meet certain criterion, which are size and frequency of streaming, they become official partners of twitch. As indicated by the criterion of size, these streamers tend to have large viewer bases and have gone through the process of properly establishing themselves. Information from this type of streamer may have shown what measures have already been taken to maintain online communities as the number of viewers increases. Interviews with this type of streamer would have added an additional level of validity to the data.

### **Future Research**

While this was just exploratory research into twitch, there exist many areas where in depth analysis can be conducted to better understand streaming. With this study leaving an unexamined 29% of streamers, the next logical step would be to examine this area, in particular female streamers, as they account for the next largest segment of streamers. While this topic has been examined in the past, such as the differences in treatment towards female streamers (Nakandala, 2016), there is still much to investigate, such as how female streamers create communities in comparison to male streamers. An investigation into why female streamers continue streaming in a harsh environment full of criticism and insults would be interesting as well. The other group of streamers would be interesting to investigate as well, being the non-human streamers. Results showed the importance of the streamer in forming online communities, however, removing the streamer from the equation still results in viewers, which would suggest that there potentially exist additional factors in forming a viewer base. With a non-human

streamer, no interaction can take place between audience and streamer. Perhaps some of the vocal audience members assume the role that the streamer previously filled in maintaining the public.

Streams could be studied over a period of time, which would give insight into the formation of brand publics. The cross sectional data collected showed that small streams start off as brand communities and large streams are brand publics. It would be interesting to examine the shift over time from small stream to large stream.

Another area would be to examine the shifts in brand loyalty as a brand community expands. When a brand community is in its initial stage, the streamer is able to better monitor and respond to members. This diminishes over time, as the number of participants in the community and public increase, which results in additional inputs in the chat. The resulting impact is the streamer being unable to respond to every member. Examining the decay of brand loyalty over time and the resulting impact on the brand community itself would offer insight into the importance of community management, by either the brand itself or members representing the brand in personal branding, particularly when the brand is one individual. This could also be an opportunity to examine motivations to why individual members of a brand community would want to volunteer their time to the development of a brand, particularly in the case where the brand is an individual.

Finally, Streaming is an unregulated industry, where aside from a simple suggestion from twitch to not over stream, there are no policies in place to protect the streamer. An unfortunate incident led to the death of a streamer who was performing a 24-hour stream to raise funds for charity. The competition in the streaming industry is fierce and no job security exists for the streamer. Therefore, the jobs stresses of streaming must be examined and regulations must be put into place in order to ensure the well-being of streamers in the future.

## Appendix A: Viewer Interview Questions

- 1) Please tell me a little about yourself.
- 2) How long have you been watching streams on twitch?
- 3) What motivated you to start watching streams on twitch? Probe: How was your viewing experience in the beginning?
- 4) Do you have any plans for the future for your stream?
- 5) Why do you think people enjoy watching videogames online? Probe: What do you think viewers get out of watching a stream?
- 6) What do you think are the important factors for having a successful stream?
- 7) What do you think motivates a person to subscribe or donate to a streamer? Do motivations differ depending on the size of the donation?
- 8) Besides videogames, what types of media do you hope streamers share on their streams?

### Community

- 9) Please share some memorable experiences you had interacting with other viewers.
- 10) How do your viewers interact with each other? Probes: Do they get along? Do they do any activities in particular with each other? Are they supportive of one another?
- 11) Can you think of any events you would like to have with a particular streamer or viewers of that stream in the future?

### Brand Public

- 12) What types of messages are generally posted in a twitch chat room? Do these messages have targets? Do people typically respond to one another's messages? Are the messages in chat dependent on the streamer in any way? Probe: How is this similar/different from normal conversations?
- 13) What do you think motivates people to post in the chat?
- 14) How important is moderation in the chat rooms?

15) How would twitch be different if there was no built in chat room?

#### Personal Brand

16) Please select you favourite streamer in your mind. What comes to mind when you think about this particular streamer?

17) Why are they your favourite streamer? Why do you enjoy viewing their stream? Do you think others enjoy watching their stream for the same reasons?

18) Would you consider streaming yourself? Why or why not?

If yes to question 18:

19) How would you present yourself as a streamer.

20) Could you think of anything that you would do that would distinguish yourself as a streamer?

## Appendix B: Streamer Interview Questions

- 1) Please tell me a little about yourself.
- 2) How long have you been streaming on twitch?
- 3) What motivated you to start streaming on twitch? Probe: How was your streaming experience in the beginning?
- 4) Do you have any plans for the future for your stream?
- 5) Why do you think people enjoy watching videogames online? Probe: What do you think viewers get out of watching a stream?
- 6) What do you think are the important factors for having a successful stream?
- 7) What do you think motivates a person to subscribe or donate to a streamer?
- 8) Besides videogames, what types of media do you share with your viewers during your stream?

### Community

- 9) Please share some memorable experiences you had interacting with your viewers.
- 10) How do your viewers interact with each other? Probes: Do they get along? Do they do any activities in particular with each other? Are they supportive of one another?
- 11) Can you think of any events you would like to have with your viewers at some point in the future?

### Brand Public

- 12) What types of messages are generally posted in a twitch chat room? Do these messages have targets? Do people typically respond to one another's messages? Are the messages in chat dependent on the streamer in any way? Probe: How is this similar/different from normal conversations?
- 13) What do you think motivates people to post in the chat?
- 14) How important is moderation in the chat rooms?
- 15) How would twitch be different if there was no built in chat room?

## Personal Brand

16) What do you think comes to mind when they think of (streamer's name)?

17) Why do you think people watch your stream over others?

18) How do you like to present yourself while streaming?

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