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# **Live Streaming as a Career:**

A Qualitative Analysis of the Growth and Challenges of Live Streamers

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**4th Semester Thesis - M.Sc. in Economics and Business Administration/Marketing**

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# Abstract

This preliminary research paper sought to investigate the growth development of live streamers on the live streaming platform Twitch.tv. This paper utilized an inductive research method, and drew from several fields of study to examine the different stages of development which the top one hundred live streamers of May 2023 exhibited. It was found that live streamers go through several stages of brand development, audience management, networking and reinvention. All these observations were contextualized with preexisting research and theories. The paper also found that live streamers exposed themselves to a lot of stress and abuse, which could have terrible effects on their mental health.

# 1.0 Introduction

In the world of online entertainment, no other sector has grown quite like live streaming has in recent years. The most popular amongst these sites, Twitch.tv, receives millions of viewers each day, who tune in for hours to watch their favorite streamers. Though gaming is among the most popular topics that people tune in for, other topics such as art, philosophy and companionship are also enticing the interests of the Twitch consumers. This has opened the door to a new kind of influencer, one that this paper would argue differs in crucial ways from influencers from other services such as Instagram and Tiktok.

These new kinds of influencers, called live streamers, have garnered massive fan bases and lore surrounding them, spawning supplementary content creators and communities from them. Some draw thousands of fans, spending collective millions of hours watching the streamer playing games, eating food and otherwise entertaining their audience. Some of the more successful live streamers generate income totaling in the millions of dollars each year and have the ear and respect of thousands of fans. This has made live streaming quite the desirable profession.

However, despite the rapid growth of this industry, and the millions of dollars that flow through it, there is little research on how one successfully markets oneself as a live streamer and secures a sustainable income. Little information exists about the ecosystems of live streaming platforms, and the kinds of rules and practices that exist within it. Though there is some research about how one becomes an influencer in general, these are mostly related to short format influencers such as Instagram and Youtube content creators, not longer format live streamers.

This has resulted in hoards of prospecting live streamers, disproportionately young people, throwing themselves into the proverbial meat grinder. Most enter the field without any idea of how to conduct themselves, how to energize their audience or how to sustainably grow their channel. This has led to some of the highest turnover rates within any industry. Those who do survive the initial culling and manage to foster some following, are often subject to mass scrutiny and harassment which can create lasting scars on the psyche of the individual. This paper argues that this does not have to be the case.

Though the live streaming industry can seem random, with live streamers rising and falling seemingly overnight, there must be some method to the madness just as with every other

industry. This paper seeks to examine these methods and present them as a guide that can lead to success.

To achieve this, an investigation of those who have already succeeded and their methods, will likely produce some insight. By examining some of the largest live streamers, of different genres, and their rise to prominence as subjects, this paper will study the commonalities among them. These commonalities will be contextualized with currently existing theory and thereby used to offer recommended actions to increase one's chances of success. By shedding light on the general obstacles and opportunities that these live streamers faced, one should be able to generate a model that can lead to a more sustainable strategy within this new industry.

## 2.0 Synthesis

### 2.1 Literature review

There has been considerable research and development into influencers over the past ten years. Influencers have gone through several evolutions as they developed with the internet; from “*micro-celebrity*” in 2008, to the modern term of “*influencer*” (Yesiloglu and Costello, 2020). A great deal of research has been done on influencer history (Sinnig, 2019), how to use them (Biaudet, 2017), why influencing works (Risius and Beck, 2015), how to measure their success (Mitchell, 2021)(Yew *et al.*, 2018), what audiences want from their influencers (Guo, Zhang and Wang, 2022) and what influencer archetypes there exist (Gross and Wangenheim, 2018). However, most of this research has been from the perspective of marketing managers and audiences, not from the perspective of the influencers themselves.

It feels as if there is an underlying thought, that once the correct metrics are found then the path will reveal itself. That so long as an influencer can obtain the correct number of followers, views, clicks, or if they can project the correct attitude or provoke the right emotions in the audience, then everything will fall into place. This could be because these papers are written from a marketing or communications perspective, since how a person became a successful influencer is not their concern. However, for those who wish to become influencers, this material is not helpful. It is akin to telling a hopeful restaurant owner that they should “make delicious food” or “keep costs low”; sound advice, but ultimately unhelpful.

Furthermore, a lot of the literature speaks about influencers as a broad category (Biaudet, 2017), removing them from the ecosystem in which they exist. This is like saying that a fast food joint and a 5 star restaurant are practically the same, since they both serve food. Influencers are products of their environments and heavily shaped by the platform in which they inhabit. Therefore, what counts as success and how one archives it varies wildly depending on the platform. It is for this reason that this paper has decided to focus on a specific group of influencers called live streamers, a type of influencer which creates long form live content on the internet.

Concerning live streaming, academia has little to nothing to say. Some articles have been written about teachers who live streamed during the COVID-19 lockdowns (Chen *et al.*, 2021), and others about the general live streaming ecosystem, especially relating to the treatment of

women (Ruberg, Cullen and Brewster, 2019). However, this paper could not find any academically sourced material on the process of how one becomes a live streamer, or which practices one can take to increase one's chances of success. This is something this paper hopes to remedy.

## 2.2 Problem formulation

As mentioned earlier, there is little to no academic resources on how one becomes and develops one's live streaming career. However, there are many non-academic resources to be found on the internet. Popular live streamers host "*master classes*" on how to become a live streamer (Blevins, 2022), while other successful live streamers criticize the same classes (DeAngelo, 2022). There is also a horde of web sites which provides tips and guides on how to become a live streamer (Giovanni, 2023)(Sandra, 2022)(Freeman, 2019)(ProfGuide, 2021). However, many of these articles give incredibly broad, simplistic and, sometimes, erroneous advice. Some sites also seem to have a conflict of interests, as they insist the reader needs expensive gear to become a live streamer; gear which the site conveniently sells (Giovanni, 2023). Worse yet, most of these articles are not sourced, nor base their findings or thoughts on any pre-existing academic studies. This is something this paper seeks to amend.

It is the hope of this paper that by observing the live streaming ecosystem, growth journey of currently successful live streamers and tying observations to marketing, brand and innovation theory, one can create a model which will provide a more complete understanding of the live streaming environment. This can assist hopeful live streamers better refine the methodology of their creative process, and avoid the general pitfalls which plagues new live streamers. To this end, this paper has developed the research question:

**What are the common steps in live streamer growth on Twitch.tv, and which theories and research can explain them.**

## 2.3 Background

### 2.3.1 History of Live Streaming

As the internet transitioned from the field of academics to the general population, so did the application and development of the technology therein. One of the most influential developments is arguably the development of video technology and broadcasting (Hall, 2022). With faster and more stable internet connections combined with better video quality, the realm of entertainment has been revolutionized in ways previously unthought of. Sites like youtube.com allowed independent creators to make content for both passion and/or profit. However, one area of online entertainment is arguably significantly different than other others; that of online live streaming.

Live streaming as a pastime is very new, and sustainable income from streaming is even newer than that. In its earliest form, circa 2012, live streaming was known as 'let's playing' (Nguyen, 2016). Here entertainers, usually youtubers, would record themselves playing a game which they would upload with minimal editing. These videos created a feeling of authenticity, as the player's reactions to winning or failing would feel genuine. This new medium would open the doors for a new generation of online celebrities, such as Game Grumps (Grumps, 2023), Jesse Cox (Jesse Cox, 2023), and PewDiePie (Forbes, 2023b). (Nguyen, 2016)

'Let's play' became fundamental in establishing what would become standards within the live-streaming ecosystem (Nguyen, 2016). Videos were long and without editing in order to convey authenticity. They were often video game focused, almost serving as a showcase for games and their features as a trusted, authentic middle man. It also caused the field to be male dominated which still plagues the live streaming community to this day (Clement, 2023). It also showed creators that one's success was less dependent on how many people watched their content, but rather how much engagement they could elicit from their audience (Nguyen, 2016). Back then, the way one measured this engagement was in the Youtube comments, where fans could express themselves and share their opinions with other viewers. However, this was a slow system, where one could not see the live reactions to one's comment. This created a barrier between the viewer and the creator. This would change with the introduction of Twitch.tv and the live chat format. (Nguyen, 2016)



Twitch.tv was not the first live streaming platform on the internet, in fact Twitch.tv was a gaming focused spinoff from the streaming site Justin.tv (Cook, 2014). However, as gaming was such a popular streaming topic, Twitch.tv quickly overshadowed Justin.tv and became the main streaming site. This was cemented when Twitch.tv was acquired by Amazon in 2014 (Kim, 2014). Pre 2014 live streaming was still rather niche, and though technology had caught up with the medium to create stable and smooth connections, it was still hard to make a sustainable income from live streaming. After the Amazon acquisition, the introduction of subscription perks, such as Twitch Prime, and other promotions lead to the rapid expansion of the platform (Twitch, 2023a). Furthermore, the integration of the Twitch Donation Alert system - which used a text-to-speech program to read messages attached to donations - allowed viewers to receive instant gratification and feedback after donating money to their favorite live streamer. This would help foster the parasocial relationships, which have become central for the growth of any live streamer. (Eric, 2021)

### 2.3.2 Parasocial Relationships

Parasocial relationships are an interesting quirk of human empathy and social relationship building. Parasocial relationships are one sided relationships where one person will develop a friendship with another person who will or can not reciprocate. These relationships are most commonly formed with people of some celebrity; such as head of states, actors and fictional characters. These one sided bonds can sometimes feel as real and deep to an individual as a reciprocated relationship, and individuals can feel real betrayal when the object of their affection disappoints them. This can have positive effects such as increasing the acceptance of minority groups (McLaughlin *et al.*, 2018), but can also lead to irrationally angry outbursts (Heritage, 2022). Parasocial relationships are quite the double edged sword to build one's online brand upon, but it is hard to argue that one can succeed without it. Having an audience's trust and admiration will translate into brand loyalty and financial gain for live streamers. (Hoffner and Bond, 2022)

Despite the one sided nature of parasocial relationships, it does not mean that it is created passively. Much like any other relationship they are built on a foundation of trust, only that the trust building is one sided in this case (Hoffner and Bond, 2022). To do this, the parasocial provider needs to create a brand that reflects this trustworthy nature. This is reflected in studies which seem to indicate that some of the most desirable traits for live streamers are warmth, passion and humor; all traits which communicate an open nature (Guo, Zhang and Wang,

2022). The loss of the veneer of openness was likely one of the major downfalls of James “Phantom10rd” Varga. At the time the seventh largest streamer on Twitch.tv, Varga was caught up in a scandal of promoting a gambling site (McCormick, 2016). The resulting banning from Twitch.tv and loss of trust with his fans effectively ruined his career overnight.

This is why it is important for the parasocial provider that they never break from the brand which they create for themselves, if they wish to reap the benefits of such relationships. How one constructs and maintains such a brand, and the physiological effects it might have on the individual will be covered later in this paper.

### 2.3.3 Current Twitch.tv Ecosystem

At the time of writing, Twitch.tv has on average 70.000 concurrent channels and 2.300.000 concurrent viewers depending on the time of day, with a total live streamer count of over 16.000.000 (Streamscharts, 2023). The concurrent number of viewers is just the average, as the peaks and valleys fluctuate by 300% depending on the hour. This speaks to a market that is oversaturated with participants, all competing for the eyes of consumers.

The best hours for streaming will depend extremely on the audience and in which regions one is trying to appeal to, but highest viewership seems to be between 07:00-15:00 UTC (May, 2023). This is likely because there is some overlap in this time period between the U.S and European market which are the biggest markets on Twitch.tv (Dean, 2023). Therefore, it would be advisable for new live streamers to consider streaming within these hours but avoiding the streaming schedules of larger live streamers who they might compete with for the same viewer base. Though the market is large and the marginal cost for the addition of another individual live streamer is low, the viewers only have so many hours in the day.

In order to assist in the growth of smaller live streamers on their website, Twitch.tv features affiliate and partnership programs. These programs give individual channels access to special features that can increase viewer participation in chat and as well as providing alternative methods for one’s audience to financially support one’s channel (Twitch, 2023b). However, this is not an entirely altruistic program. Though designed to grow one's channel on Twitch.tv, becoming an affiliate means reducing one’s ability to grow on rivaling live streaming sites such as Youtube. So one should consider carefully if one wishes to be part of the program, as it might limit one’s reach on other platforms. (Kukucka, 2022)

Twitch.tv also has some issues in the method of how it disseminates content to its users. The way content is disseminated on other platforms is via a complicated algorithm, which finds commonalities between content to estimate a viewer's preferences (Bishop, 2018). On Twitch.tv, users pick categories based on games or genre, and the Twitch.tv displays streamers of that category based on the number of current viewers (Irwin, 2022). This is referred to as the "*KingMaker system*" (Irwin, 2022), due to its propensity to favor larger live streamers. By offering recommendations based on viewer count rather than content, new live streamers have little opportunity for notoriety and growth. This often presents an obstacle which most new live streamers find impossible to overcome. (Irwin, 2022)

## 3.0 Methodology

### 3.1 Philosophy of science

#### 3.1.1 Paradigms

This project will be conducted with a functionalist paradigm. This paper will assume that the actions taken by the live streamers are, for the most part, intentional with a specific purpose in mind.

To help illustrate what this project's paradigms are, the FISl graph will be implemented (Figure 1). The FISl model states that social organizations can be broadly categorized along two axes: Functionalism, interpretivism, interactionalism and structuralism. For the purposes of this paper, the first two will be expanded upon. (Kuada, 2012, p. 72)

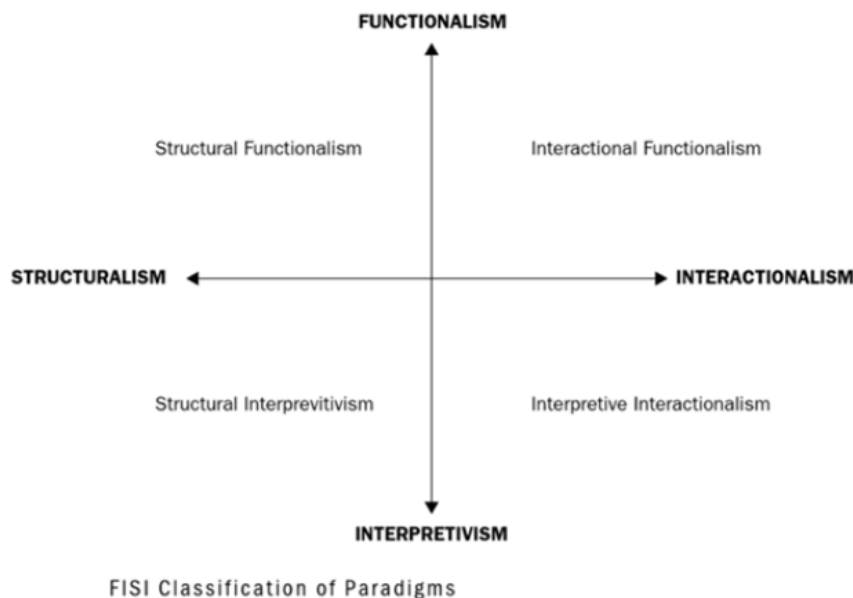


Figure 1: FISl Graph (Kuada, 2012)

Interpretivism states that social organizations form, because of the individual's perception of their role within the group and who counts as part of the group. This means that actions of the individuals are directed primarily by their interpretive motivations, not by cold rationality. These interpretations are in constant flux, reinvented, and are shaped both by the environment and the

other members of the organization. This makes these kinds of paradigms generally very constructivist. (Kuada, 2012, p. 77)

Functionalism, conversely, states that organizations are created logically and to serve a function. As such, their actions are dictated by their ability to fulfill their function, and often react based on external forces. These kinds of paradigms are often positivistic and often advocate for high levels of objectivity. (Kuada, 2012, p. 76)

This belief in goal oriented action is something that appeals to this paper. The idea that the actions of people are goal oriented, rational and able to be examined objectively is something that makes intuitive sense. This is something that will be expanded upon in the ontology chapter.

### 3.1.2 Ontology

This paper has elected to use critical realism to serve as its ontological foundation. Critical realism is the framework that reality can be understood in terms of three worlds: the Real, the Empirical and the Actual world.

The Actual world is where the one human consciousness exists. Here, the human experience, concepts and feelings, which contextualizes so much of everyday life, can be found. The Empirical world is the world of things outside human observation. Here the physical aspects of reality exist, such as atoms and other physical forces. For a human living in the Actual world, direct access to the Empirical world is impossible. The nature of human existence entails that humans cannot experience empiricism without using metaphors or concepts to explain it. Therefore, the closest humans can get to understanding the Empirical and Actual is via the examinations of the mechanisms that they radiate within the Real world. (O'Mahoney, 2016)

The Real world is the place where the relationships which exist within the other two worlds can be found. It is where the causal relationships of the Empirical world and the concepts of the Actual world collide. These mechanisms are the only real way in which humans can access the Empirical world. By examining these mechanisms, one can estimate the nature of the empirical and social structures. For example, although financial systems are not physically present, their effects on human society are very real. (O'Mahoney, 2016)

This union of ontological realism and epistemological relativism is something that is appealing to the paper. Though the social dynamics of live streaming and audience management can be very

relativistic, they do exhibit some degree of rules and causality. This is what this paper hopes to investigate going forward.

### 3.1.3 Epistemology

For the purposes of this research, this paper will be using the True Justified Belief (TJB) epistemological model and utilizing inductive reasoning.

The TJB is a model which states that for one to have knowledge about a claim, one must fulfill three criteria. The first is truth, as in what one claims has to be conducive with the empirical world. Second is justification, as in one must have a reason to believe something based on relevant evidence. Lastly, one must have a genuine belief in one's claims. (Ichikawa and Steup, 2018)

For example, Throckmorton can see a sheep standing on a hill in the middle of a field. Throckmorton proclaims that he has knowledge that "*there is sheep in the field*". In this case one can reasonably say that Throckmorton does have knowledge. He believes there is a sheep in the field, he justifies his belief via sight and there is in fact a sheep in the field. This is what is appealing to this paper, the intuitiveness of this model for knowledge. TJB makes sense on a human level and is easy to understand and communicate. (Ichikawa and Steup, 2018)

However, the model is not infallible. Returning to Throckmorton, imagine that the sheep on the hill is no sheep at all, but rather a fluffy dog mistaken for a sheep. However, behind the hill, out of Throckmorton's line of sight, there is a sheep grazing in the field. Would Throckmorton still have knowledge about the existence of sheep in the field? Most would argue no, but it does fulfill all the criteria of the model. These are called Gettier problems, and pose a large problem for the TJB model. (Ichikawa and Steup, 2018)

However, this can be explained via the epistemological relativism that Critical Realism speaks of; that since one cannot have direct access to the empirical, one can only make guesses (O'Mahoney, 2016). This is something this paper can live with, and will do its best to minimize the risk of running into a Gettier scenario.

## 3.1 Research strategy

For this research, this paper has elected to utilize an inductive research method based primarily on qualitative data with supporting quantitative data.

The intent of this paper is to investigate the practices of live streamers, in order to create a model which can map out key points in their career. These key points will then be analyzed and explained by other pre-existing theories from fields such as economics, psychology and communication. This should serve the ultimate goal of this paper; serving as a preliminary study to create a more scientific based business road map for future entrepreneurial live streamers. If not, let it serve as an academic conversation starter on the topic of live streaming from the perspective of the live streamer.

To this end, this paper has decided to examine the career history of the top one hundred most viewed live streamers on the web site Twitch.tv as of May 2023. Twitch.tv was chosen as it is the biggest, oldest and most popular English speaking, live streaming platform on the internet as of the date of writing (Bennett, 2023). Being the biggest, oldest and most popular, it would stand to reason that the site would have the most data dating the furthest back of any other live streaming website. It was also chosen due to the limitations of the researcher of this paper, as they do not speak the languages of other competing sites (Chernavina, 2022). It is the hope that despite the lack of non-english speaking live streaming sites, the findings will be universal and therefore similar outside of Twitch.tv. The reasoning for the one hundred live streamer sample, is that since they have enjoyed great success on the platform they must therefore be doing something right, which warrants investigation. They also live stream diverse content on their channels in different styles and mannerism; meaning that the commonalities found will not be specific to the genre the live streamer is in, adding to the universality of the similarities found.

The data on the streamers will primarily be collected via statements from individual streamers. This primary source data will take the form of majority qualitative data, as the experiences of the streamers is what will be examined during this project. Secondary sources about live streamers and live streaming ecosystems will come from articles, data banks and academic papers. This will be a mix of majority qualitative and some quantitative data, as the quantitative data will serve to further verify the claims and analysis derived from the qualitative. For both cases, the data search will be mostly online, as the nature of live streaming is a digital medium and academic articles often have an online release. Due to the online nature of live streaming and the culture surrounding it, finding valid and reliable can become an issue. As mentioned earlier, most do not write academically and some do not source their claims. To limit this issue, this paper will only use online articles who source their claims, or can be verified by other sites.

Once the data has been collected it will be examined for universal properties within it. These properties will be categorized into key points in the career of live streamers. These key points will be organized in a chronological model and contextualized in order to create a cohesive and understandable narrative. This does not mean that every live streamer examined followed each step in the order layed out. However, the majority did and this paper would argue that the order presented is the best order of actions to maximize career success. This is because each step builds on the previous ones to create a solid foundation.

These key points will then be supported by pre existing theory and research in order to explain, refine and legitimize the findings. This will be presented alongside findings, rather than having a separate section in order to maintain narrative cohesion and due to limitation of space. These theories will be gathered from academic journals or libraries, to ensure their legitimacy. These theories will range from innovation, market, business, and communication theory, depending on the subject's demands. This data will be collected primarily from academic publications, in order to ensure some degree of viability.

This paper has also elected not to delve deeply on the ethics of becoming a live streamer for the duration of the analysis. Of course this paper will not advocate for criminal behavior regardless of how effective they may or may not be. What this paper specifically refers to is that the ethicality of fame, social relation, exploitation and other related topics will not be discussed in depth during the analysis. Any ethics related discussion during the analysis is mainly focused on how this creates a more sustainable career for the live streamer, not because it is right or wrong to do.



## 4.0 Analysis

### 4.1 Expert/Companion Spectrum

After some analysis, it is the opinion of this paper that all live streamers fall broadly within a spectrum, with experts and companions at either end. This is based largely on the observations of live streamers and the traits that viewers have identified as appealing (Guo, Zhang and Wang, 2022), as well as a report on live streamer audience behavior (Hamilton, Garretson and Kerne, 2014).

Experts are live streamers that are watched because they are considered experts within their field. They are watched because viewers want to hear their insights or witness their skills. These kinds of live streamers are judged mainly on their ability to perform, and their popularity is heavily intertwined with the popularity of the field of their expertise. For example, the best e-sport athletes in the game of Tetris will only be able to grow as big as the popularity of the game will allow. At this end of the spectrum you find your e-sport celebrities and athletes, political commentators, artists and ect. (Hamilton et al. 2014)

At the other end, the companions are streamers who act as friends and offer companionship. The immediate real world equivalent would be Japanese host clubs, where the 'hosts' offer companionship and attention in exchange for monetary compensation, or to encourage the spending on commodities which the club offers (Matsui, 2022). Here streamers are judged on their ability to generate trust, and entertain their audience. Humor and warmth are highly valued skills in this field, as are any other skills which are useful for socializing and making friends. Unlike experts, companion live streamer's growth potential is far less dependent on the popularity of the topics that they live stream about, as the audience is there for the live streamer themselves. (Hamilton et al. 2014)

One should keep in mind that this is a spectrum and not a binary. Most of the experts have socializing skills, and most companions often have exceptional skills. However, where one falls on the spectrum is not based on which skills one possesses, but rather based on the main value proposition that the live streamer offers. This becomes a valuable model when one attempts to define which kind of streamer one wants to be.

## 4.2 Step One: Experiment

The initial steps which one should take on the road to become a live streamer, is similar to those of any other industry; finding one's value proposition. It is the opinion of this paper that it is preferable to look inwards first, as it is better both in terms of productivity and mental health to utilize the skills that one already possesses rather than to emulate others. This is because creating a streaming career is a long term process which will require many hours of labor. As such, to increase one's chances of success, one needs to find a process which causes the least amount of mental friction to avoid burnout. (Gold, 1985)

The greatest advantage that one has at this stage of the live streaming process, is that one has little to nothing to lose. Without a stable fan base, one is free to experiment with formats, content and scheduling. It is important to clarify that when this paper says experimentation, it does not mean theorizing (Holgaard et al. 2020). One can examine the streaming market and make predictions of what might work, or how one can add additional value to the platform. However, unless these theories are tested by utilizing them in an actual live stream, then they are worth little. The streaming ecosystem is one in constant flux, and success is often a matter of providing the correct content at the right time. Many of the most successful live streamers currently provide content which is different from the kind they started out with (Restream, 2022). Additionally, live streaming is an occupation which will take years to establish. On average, the top ten most subscribed live streamers on Twitch.tv took 7.8 years to achieve their current status, though most achieved notoriety after two to three years (Cook, 2021). So one has to be ready to make a long term commitment if one wants to live stream professionally. (Holgaard et al. 2020)

This process of experimentation is in fact so important that it supersedes the acquisition of quality equipment. One of the most asked questions for up-and-coming live streamers to their seniors is what equipment they should get before streaming. The answer is some variation of just to get started and worry about the quality of the equipment later (Crutchley, 2023). Once one has developed their style and brand, then one can concern themselves with the acquisition of higher end equipment. That being said, one should possess the following basic equipment: a computer powerful enough to run the streaming program and whatever other activity one wishes to live stream, camera, and microphone. (Holgaard et al. 2020)

Finally, one of the most important elements that a new live streamer should implement, is a regular and consistent live streaming schedule. Given the random nature of live streaming, one has to optimize one's chances of exposure. It is recommended that one live streams at least three times a week, with each session being two to three hours long (Nielsen, 2022). The advantages of a consistent schedule are two fold: it makes streaming a habit which can help with the physiological stress that it might incur, and it makes it easier to generate a fan base as they can schedule their free time to tune it to one's stream (DegoBear, 2016). The knowledge of when the next stream will happen can also generate excitement within the viewers, who will share this excitement with their friends, allowing for the capture of a larger audience. To find which time one should live stream will depend heavily on what one is live streaming, and to which region they are intent on live streaming to. Therefore, it is best to start with what works best for the individual live streamer schedule and then consult the analytical data, which most live streaming platforms offer their users. Once again, experimentation will be a useful tool to find the best solution for the individual (Holgaard et al. 2020). It will take some trial and error to find the perfect time, but since one does not have a fanbase at this point, there is little to lose from experimenting.

Keeping a consistent schedule can be a difficult task, especially the older and more responsibilities one has accrued (Appendix C, 3:13). For those that can not keep such a schedule, developing one's brand and fanbase on another site might be preferable. This is a strategy that many Youtubers use, where after developing their brand on Youtube diverged into live streaming as a supplement to their Youtube income, and to connect with fans. As Youtube has a much more forgiving video upload schedule, this can be a good place to start for those who are unable to keep a consistent live streaming schedule. The same goes for e-sport athletes who build their fan base through tournaments and competitions rather than through live streams. Some notable examples of people who established themselves outside of streaming are Calvin Cordozar Broadus Jr. aka Snoop Dog (Twitch, 2023c), Michael Grzesiek (Forbes, 2023a), and Hassan Piker (Polhamus, 2022).

Whether one wants to start on Twitch.tv or migrate from another platform, one should make sure to acquire the user name of one's channel on as many social media platforms as possible. Acquiring an account on the web sites Youtube, Twitter and Instagram with the same name as one's Twitch.tv account should be prioritized. This consistency of brand recognition across multiple platforms will become useful in the next step of the model, as one tries to spread awareness of one's live streams. (Liu *et al.*, 2017)

## 4.3 Step Two: Define And Energize

### 4.3.1 Brand

Once a degree of consistency in streaming material and scheduling has been established, it becomes necessary to look inwards. Reflect on which material works, why it works, and how one can differentiate oneself from others in the same niche. To this end a value proposition canvas model can provide good insight into both one's own material, and the value that competing live streamers provide (Osterwalder *et al.*, 2014).

When crafting one's live streamer brand, this differentiation from others is what needs to be communicated and cultivated. Ideally, viewers should be able to get a general idea of what one's value proposition is after a few seconds of contact. In the high speed world of internet entertainment, audience touchpoints are incredibly brief and every second counts (Bascur, Rusu and Quiñones, 2019). To attract the most potential viewer possible, one should ensure that the brand communication lines up with the customer expectation, so viewers are not disappointed when they investigate one's channel. (Išoraitė, 2018)

It is also highly recommended that one establishes a look and style to go with one's brand. Make sure that the aesthetic style one develops is complementary to the brand one is trying to communicate. This will assist in being recognized in video clips and recordings of one's live streams outside Twitch.tv. For example, one can coordinate one's outfit, hair, and backdrops to project one's brand message. Another particularly effective method is adopting a mascot to serve as a representative of the stream. Animals are common but inanimate objects are also useful, especially since they can stay within the camera's frame without moving. (Išoraitė, 2018)

Ultimately, the goal of the live streamer's brand is to communicate that one's channel is a space for certain people, a so-called "*third place*" (Hamilton, Garretson and Kerne, 2014). Whether it be a place to hang out or to witness amazing feats, one's actions, demeanor and feel should signal that one's channel is a place for them to spend their time and money. It is therefore important to know which kind of viewers to expect and how to deal with them appropriately. (Išoraitė, 2018)

It is important to remember that this is still in the early stages of one's brand development, and as such is still likely to be subject to much change and experimentation. One's brand and image

might change as one's value proposition and content solidifies. Therefore, experimentation similar to those in step one is encouraged when crafting one's brand. (Holgaard et al. 2020)

### 4.3.2 Audience management

Taking an active role in managing one's audience is something that should be done as early as possible, as neglecting to do so can cause problems to fester and grow. Neglecting to manage one's audience can result in creating a toxic environment for one's intended audience, and taint one's brand. Such environments can direct harassment towards both the live streamer and the audience itself. It can also result in a passive audience who is less willing to subscribe or donate, making it harder to achieve a sustainable income. (Andujar and Salaberri-Ramiro, 2021)

First, one should seek to establish the kind of relationship that one wants to have with the audience. How one intends to interact with one's audience quickly becomes a foundational pillar to one's brand, and quickly establishes the consumer expectations that will carry the stream forward. This can take a lot of forms such as: projecting high/low energy, welcoming every new subscriber or reading all/some comments. (Wang and Li, 2020) Even aggressive or combative behavior with one's chat can on occasion elicit a positive response from the audience. After establishing what the audience can expect from the channel, one should also take care to establish what is expected from their audience. (Andujar and Salaberri-Ramiro, 2021)

Setting and enforcing boundaries is one of the most important tools at the disposal of a live streamer (Crutchley, 2023). Telling the audience in no uncertain terms what kind of behavior is acceptable, which kinds of jokes are not welcome, and which topics are off limits will go a long way to shape one's community. Some of the most common boundaries that live streamers set for their channel, outside those of the Twitch.tv terms of service, are: no making sexual comments about the streamer, no talking about specific topics, and no bullying. A lack of enforcement can create an environment so toxic that it will repel all current and potential viewers who do not thrive in such hostile places. This can limit growth and result in loss of revenue for the live streamer. It can also cultivate an environment which will both encourage and attract bad actors, much in the same way that a work environment that tolerate sexism have increased cases of sexual harassment (Russell and Trigg, 2004). Sometimes this can develop into cases of full scale stalking (Browning and Hill, 2022) or filing false police reports, ending in the deployment of SWAT teams to one's house (Dodgson, 2022). (Salty, 2019)

It is important to remember that once boundaries are set they must be enforced. Lack of enforcement can result in loss of control of the community or encourage others to ignore other boundaries and rules. Commonly, rule breakers are punished by losing their chat privileges, or with temporary/permanent suspension from the channel. The enforcement of the rules will be the job of the live streamer initially, but one should prioritize recruiting some community moderators. Community moderators (mods) are members of one's community, who are tasked with enforcing community rules and guidelines in exchange for extra privileges. Mods are valuable on a number of levels. First they often work for free, considering their elevated status in the community as payment. Second, enforcing rules can often foster resentment in viewers. By delegating unpleasant tasks to others, one can gain a degree of separation and plausible deniability. Mods can also spot and initiate new rules as problems arise. One should pick moderators with extreme care, as they are an affiliate of one's brand. Their elevated status within the community can go to their head, leading to an abuse of power. Therefore, one should be ready to remove unruly moderators swiftly. (Cai and Wohn, 2023)

This leads into the subject of lurkers and haters. Lurkers are viewers who watch one's live streams, but neither donate nor engage in chat. Lurkers are not a detriment to one's channel in the same way they would be for other businesses. Having one hundred lurkers in one's chat does not diminish the enjoyment of the other viewers, in the same way that ten lurkers would in a supermarket. In fact lurkers increase view count and might spread awareness through word of mouth, which is positive for the channel. However, they are not entirely fully productive either. They do not contribute to the social atmosphere which live streamers want to foster nor they do not provide direct financial support.(Batt, 2021)

These kinds of users often do not engage with the live streams, because they either feel like they will not be heard or are content in just watching. Possible ways one can energize these users would be posing questions which require little commitment and/or protect their anonymity, such as chat polls. Calling lurkers out for their inactivity is generally not productive, as this has backfired in the past (Mehta, 2021). (Andujar and Salaberri-Ramiro, 2021)

Haters, as the name implies, are viewers who are generally hostile towards a live streamer. Haters come in many forms, such as trolls and spammers and their motivations range from genuine targeted hatred, to having fun at someone else's expense (Buckels, Trapnell and Paulhus, 2014). If left unresolved, they can turn one's audience space into a hellish plane of negativity, bullying and generally hostile to all community building. Ultimately, haters are looking

for reactions in their targets, so the best course of action is to ignore haters and then remove them (Appendix C, 3:32). Therefore, unless one has built one's brand around confronting haters, it is advisable to deal with them swiftly and decisively. Employing a mod team and auto-banning key words are generally the most effective response (Golf-Papez and Veer, 2017). As mentioned before, moderators can be recruited from one's fans and are therefore often free, and auto banning users who use certain words will keep the negativity to a minimum. (Andujar and Salaberri-Ramiro, 2021)

### 4.3.3 Dissemination

Once a decision is made on what kind of brand and audience one wants to cultivate, it becomes necessary to spread that brand. This is best done on other platforms than Twitch.tv mainly due to how the "*KingMaker*" system tends to disfavor smaller live streamers (Irwin, 2022). Though Twitch.tv are taking some steps to mitigate this issue, the algorithm on other sites are better suited to finding users who enjoy more niche topics. At these other sites one can upload recordings of one's live streams, inform fans about live streaming schedules and reach new fans. Editing techniques can also be applied to videos to reduce redundancy, highlight excitement or set tone. It is therefore recommended that one invests in some video editing resources to increase the effectiveness of one's videos.

It is important to remember that regardless of which platform one is on, there should always be a way for viewers to find their way back to the live streaming channel. This is usually done by adding links in the descriptions of the video, or in the "about section" on the social media account page. It is also a good idea to mark one's videos with a logo or watermark. This is advisable because when the video is uploaded to other sites without one's knowledge, any interested party can still find their way to the channel. It is also advisable to add a link to one's video catalog when uploading a short clip. This will expose whoever was interested in the clip to the rest of one's content. This is also where the early acquisition of accounts and uniformity of brand across other platforms will prove useful. The more similar one's brand is across platforms the easier it is to find one's channel, meaning one can cast a wider net. (Sedej, 2019)

## 4.4 Step Three: Networking

Just as in offline spaces, networking is one of the most effective ways to boost one's career. Though not strictly necessary to achieve success, networking allows one to make friends, learn

new skills and make connections. In the live streaming ecosystem, networking is even more important than in most other fields. This is because where networking in other industries might open the possibility to earn more income or make the right connections, networking in the live streaming industry often grants direct access to the audience of another live streamer.

This not only increases one's brand awareness but can facilitate the siphoning of audiences from other live streamers. It can also form cooperative relationships which can increase notoriety and content quality. It is also advisable that one reaches out to businesses in order to acquire sponsorships to supplement one's income. This chapter will be divided into two sections; one analyzing streamer networking and the other on how to network and acquire sponsors.

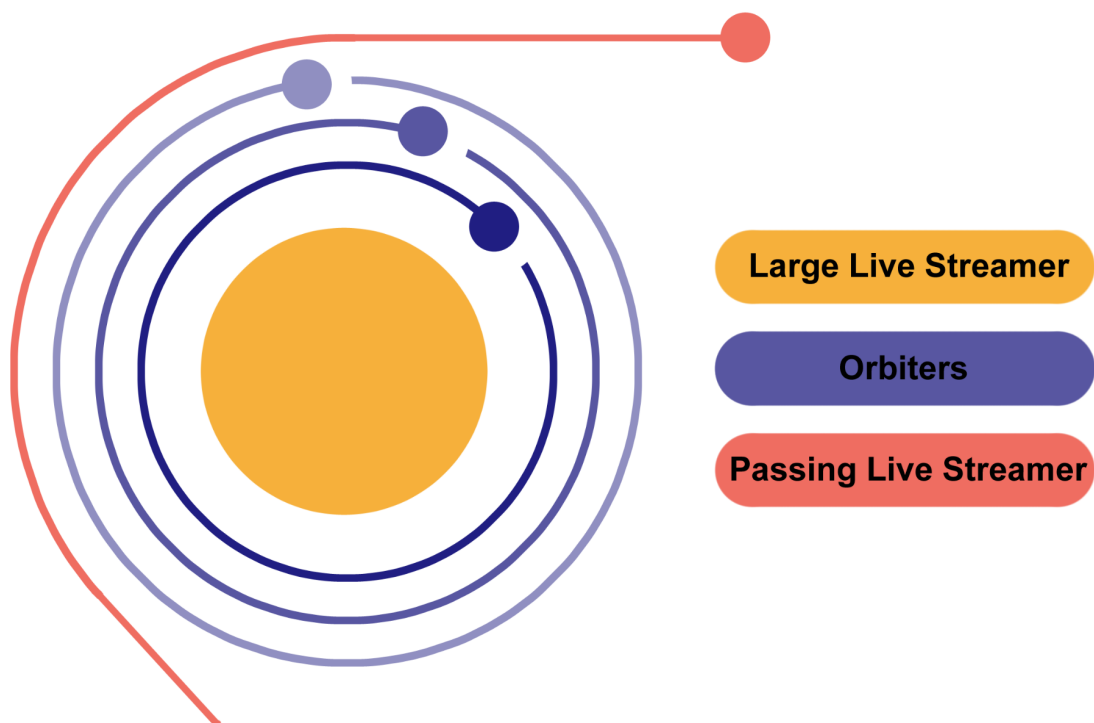
#### 4.4.1 Live Streamer Networking

During the research of this paper a pattern began to appear. It seemed that through networking two forms of non-sponsor relationships began to appear: orbiters and groups.

##### **Orbiters**

The orbiter relationship is one that is very common with larger live streamers. These relationships are centered around a large live streamer, whose popularity functions as a gravity well which attracts other smaller live streamers. Most pass through with little to no attention from the larger live streamer, but some become fixtures within the community of the larger creator. These are called orbiters in the live streaming community; as they remain within the popularity gravity well of the larger live streamer. This relationship is illustrated in figure 2. The word derives from the online slang for people who follow people, in the hope that their proximity to the person will reap a reward (NDTV, 2018). These kinds of relationships almost exclusively happen within the same niches of the live streaming ecosystem. Art live streamers will congregate with other art live streamers, as will gamers and political commentators. It is very rare for someone to orbit outside their own niche, as the nature of the relationship tends to select for aligned topics.





**Figure 2:** Orbiter Relationship Visualization - Project adaptation, designed By Elo Halldórs

For orbiters there are many benefits. While staying within the orbit, the orbiter can take advantage of the exposure that they will receive from the larger live streamer. This exposure can allow the orbiter to siphon off some of the audience of the larger live streamer, who either wants a more curated experience or wishes to have a larger role in a smaller community. This can lead to an exponential growth and many live streamers' careers have been made via the association with another larger live streamer.

One would be forgiven for interpreting this as a parasitic relationship, where smaller live streamers leeches of the audience and popularity of the larger live streamer. However, this is not the case. In fact, the relationship is very symbiotic and beneficial for the larger creator. Orbiters are a great source of content, which can be used to enhance the quality of the live streams of the larger live streamer. Orbiters can be selected to fill roles that the larger live streamer needs, such as comic relief, hype man or a foil. By platforming orbiters one can increase the entertainment value of the streams to such an extent that it will more than compensate for the loss of viewers to the orbiter; providing value to all parties involved. Noteworthy examples of this is the art live streamer RubberRoss, who live streams with a

rotating cast of smaller streamers (RubberRoss, 2021). However, these kinds of relationships are not without risks.

Due to the difference in popularity, the power imbalance is often immense in favor of the larger live streamer. Depending on how long the relationship has lasted, the orbiter's audience might have significant overlap with the larger live streamer. This means that if the larger live streamer decides to break the relationship for any reason, it might have disastrous consequences on the orbiter. Orbiters can also cause damage to the larger live streamer via slander or in any other way undermine their brand. They also can pose a risk to one's brand via PR collateral, which will be expanded upon later.

### **Streamer Group**

Here a number of similarly sized live streamers come together, in order to create superior content than what they could on their own. By streaming together one can offer a more dynamic streaming experience for the viewer by adding more people to the mix. Live streamers can work off each other by commenting, joking, and generate the excitement of competition by playing games together. For companion live streamers, it creates an environment where the viewer is not only getting access to one parasocial friend, but an entire parasocial friend group. These kinds of groups are also very beneficial for the individual live streamer's psyche.

The marginal cost of planning streaming material for one person stream versus planning for a two person stream is often negligible, and it only gets smaller with each additional person. This means that members of the group can take turns in finding streaming activities, or develop new ways of engaging with the audience. Thus, the total mental cost of each live streamer is further divided between each member. It also allows for each member to specialize, taking roles within the group which is best suited for them, mimicking social dynamics one sees in offline spaces. A live streamer group can also grow to an immense size such as the Hololive, a group with over 70 live streamers forming into sub groups covering several niches and regions (HoloLive, 2023).

Network groups are not without costs. Schedules need to be coordinated in order to maximize group stream time, which can conflict with offline life. The biggest cost this paper would argue, is the risk of tying one's brand to a group. Being part of a group means that one often surrenders some of one's personal brand and growth development in favor of the group. It also means that any PR problems any member has, will spill over to the rest of the group (Grayson, 2021c).

Interpersonal conflict with other members within the group can also damage one's brand and

mean loss of audience, as they are forced to pick sides in the conflict (Bhattacharya, 2022). Therefore, it is important when considering joining or creating a group that one gets to know one's partners, and get familiar with their social dynamics. Each one of the previous problems also becomes harder to handle as the size of the group increases, adding more variables to each problem.

When creating or joining a live streamer group one should seek out other live streamers of similar size. Though finding someone of a larger size can be possible, the resulting power imbalance can result in the group taking on a more orbiter relationship. The members should also be within one's same niche, as to better integrate the audiences of both groups (Churchill and Xu, 2016). In order to maximize the amount of collective stream time, it is advisable to find people within or close to one's timezone. This is why some live streamers, in order to minimize planning friction and optimize group dynamics, relocate to live together (DownToQuest, 2023) (OfflineTV, 2023).

Regardless of whether a live streamer is an orbiter or part of a live streaming group, by having relations with other live streamers, one exposes oneself to what this paper has called 'PR collateral'.

### **PR Collateral**

'PR collateral' is a phenomenon which this paper has dubbed instances where one suffers second hand damage to one's public relations, through another adjacent person's public relations disaster. This is to say, that if a person acts in a way which will garner them ill will from a large number of people, those who associate with the person will also receive ill will via their association. The initial cause of the ill will can be real or imagined, so long as enough people believe that the claim is legitimate. Common initial causes of the ill will are: criminality, betrayal of trust, and bad faith interpretations of statements. Once the controversy has grown large enough, those associated with the person will be expected to take a stance on the issue. The bigger the scandal is, the less of a connection is needed for one to be expected to take a stance.

This issue can be understood as an expression of human social nature in the act of social marginalization or exclusion. Social exclusion is a phenomenon which has existed as long as human societies have (Mishan, 2020). The act of social exclusion, humiliation and marginalization is a tool which has often been used to shape human behavior, shape societal

opinions, and enforce social conformity throughout history. This phenomenon is not exclusively used on macro levels of human organization, but also on micro levels such as friend groups or social gatherings (Benenson *et al.*, 2011). It does not have to be a top down implementation, but can also be bottom up from each member. It also serves a function of social self identification; through the exclusion of the 'other' one can reaffirm one's identity with the group (Benenson *et al.*, 2011). The internet has taken this human behavior and put it in overdrive. (Wilczyńska, 2021)

The internet has allowed people to access nearly all human knowledge, at speeds unprecedented in human history (Hemp, 2009). However, the method for how individuals process information has not kept up with the speed of inflow. This means that as humans acquire the information, they process it and form opinions on them immediately, especially if the information is relevant to a group they identify with (Lelkes, 2020). Therefore, to avoid being overwhelmed by the inflow, the processing method has to be streamlined. This would explain why a majority of people share links to articles that they themselves have not read (Gabelkov *et al.*, 2016). (Wilczyńska, 2021)

From this, one can hypothesize that live streamers - especially companion streamers - are expected to participate in this social practice. The reasoning for this is, as viewers develop parasocial relationships with a live streamer, they begin to see the live streamer as a part of their own social group. Due to the nature of parasocial relationships, there is a fair amount of audience projection and assumptions about the opinions and thoughts of the live streamer (Hoffner and Bond, 2022). This means that when the audiences' image of the live streamer does not line up with their actions, the resulting misalignment can cause a large negative response from the audience (Rishabh, 2021).

One possible way to avoid these kinds of scenarios is to enforce a hard boundary. Stating that one will not talk about certain issues that can lead to PR collateral, and limiting the amount of networking one does. This however, is not guaranteed to work (Appendix C, 4:28). Another response is to be proactive by preparing a crisis communication strategy. Mei *et al.* (2010) suggests a strategy of keeping one's ear to the ground, to monitor adjacent channel's communities in order to anticipate and circumvent rumors and slander that might affect them. Dialogue and framing are useful tools in order to manage one's audience and settle the matter (Siah Ann Mei, Bansal and Pang, 2010). Regardless of the topic, it is inadvisable to be publicly neutral or silent on an issue. Remaining silent on a topic can be interpreted as a 'deafening

silence', in which the audience might interpret that the live streamer is taking the opposing side, since they are not aligning with the viewer. This can cause both sides of an argument to turn on the live streamer. Instead it is better that the live streamer chooses the path of least resistance and rebuilds with whatever is left of one's fanbase. (Austin and Jin, 2018)

#### 4.4.2 Sponsor Networking

Just as with live streamer networking, reaching out to potential sponsors should be done as soon as one has established one's streaming brand. The extra income from sponsors can decrease financial stress, and increase potential live streaming time one can perform. Though one cannot expect to attract many sponsors until one has reached at least one hundred concurrent viewers, it is still advisable that one becomes familiar with what kinds of sponsors one wants and where to find them (Poore, 2021).

The first question one should ask oneself is "*What kind of sponsor should I take?*". Sponsors are not just a company that throws money at a streamer but a reflection of who the live streamer is. The live streamer is attaching their credibility to a company when they take on a sponsor (Xu, Kim and Billings, 2022). Thus, if the sponsor is antithetical to the brand of the live streamer, it could have serious detrimental effects. This is partially the reason why it is advisable to define one's brand before any intense networking of any kind. It is therefore highly recommended that one does extensive vetting of any company which one has intentions of cooperating with, to avoid any kind of brand blow back. (Gross and Wiedmann, 2015)

The first type of sponsors a smaller live streamers are likely to get are affiliate programs. Affiliate programs are where a sponsor provides the affiliate partner with a link or code which can be used when purchasing a product (Frankenfield, 2016). Every time a consumer uses the code or link during purchasing, the affiliate partner receives a payout. These are very popular within the industry, as they are beneficial to both parties whilst carrying minimal risk. The affiliates are incentivised to sell and advertise as much as they can, as that's how they get paid, while sponsors do not have to manage the affiliate since they do not have to pay them if nothing is sold. (Hayes, 2022)

Due to the no risk nature of affiliate programs, it is relatively easy to acquire one. There are multiple sites which can assist in finding affiliate programs for a multitude of products. Some are more dubious than others, so take care to read the contract fully. There is also the issue that once a viewer has purchased an affiliate product, they likely will not purchase it again for a long

time. This means that as a consistent source of income, one can either take on more affiliate programs or look for another kind of sponsor. (Perzynska and Dunham, 2023)

A second way one can obtain a sponsor is via outreach. By approaching individual companies, commonly via e-mails and phone, one can propose a sponsorship (Poore, 2021). This is likely going to be the most common way that smaller live streamers will obtain their first sponsor, and likely not for a large compensation. However, proving that one is capable of handling sponsors early in their career, will increase confidence in both current and future sponsors and could pay dividends later. As one's channel grows, this method will become less necessary as sponsors will seek large live streamers out on their own. (Johnson and Woodcock, 2019)

A type of sponsorship unique to live streaming is gameplay sponsorship (Poore, 2021). Here a sponsor will pay live streamers to play a game while, contractually obligated to, say positive things about the game. The formula for these kinds of sponsors tends to be (viewers) \* (time) \* (hourly rate). For example, if the rate is \$0,05 and 5000 viewers watch 2 hours of the stream, then the total pay will be \$500. There are also more classic banner ads and one time payouts sponsor deals, similar to other industries. The kind of contracts and income one can expect from sponsors can vary wildly, as they are determined largely by a live streamer's size, reach, niche and the advertised product itself. Therefore, it is advisable to examine and negotiate the contract thoroughly, to find if it is something that is right for the live streamer. (Johnson and Woodcock, 2019)

## 4.5 Step Four: Rebrand

During the research for this paper an interesting pattern began to appear. The higher up the live streamer ranking one went, the more likely a live streamer was a companion type live streamer (appendix A). Though some expert streamers did find themselves in the top one hundred spots, most specialized in a small number of very popular games such as League of Legends or Counter Strike. Upon further inspection it was found that many of the companion live streamers had been expert live streamers in the past, but had made a switch at some point in their career. Why did these channels move away from being experts who focused on a specific topic or game, and move towards more companion variety content?

One explanation is that doing the same thing over and over is tiring, so changing one's style is a way to renew one's interests. This is very common in every profession, especially in the creative

ones (Hayler, 2022). Another possible explanation could be that the reach and popularity of an expert live streamer is limited by the subject of their expertise.

The reasoning for this is that the audience of the expert live streamer watch their live streams, because they have an interest in the subject that is being streamed. Therefore, a small live streamer can capitalize on the interest in a subject to grow their channel. Conversely, should the interest of a subject decline, it will drag the growth of the channel down with it. This means that so long as a live streamer is tied to a single game, topic or issue, so is their growth potential. Companion live streamers are not tied to a single topic as their value proposition is centered on themselves and not their expertise; allowing them to grow independently. This can have a reverse effect, where the popularity of the live streamer will drive up interest in the topic. An example would be the political streamer HasanAbi, who saw a large growth spike leading up to the U.S presidential election of 2020 (TwitchTracker, 2023). This is just a theory and would require more testing to prove definitively.

Regardless of reasoning, one should approach rebranding slowly and with great care. To refocus the core value proposition onto the live streamer themselves, it is advisable to implement a person-centric branding model. By changing the content of the live streams from a single topic to a greater variety of content, one can reframe the audience's focus onto oneself. This allows the audience to get acquainted, trust and develop a deeper parasocial relationship with the live streamer (Cederberg, 2017). The goal is to get the audience to come for the live streamer, and not for the topic. (Gorbatov, Khapova and Lysova, 2018)

If implemented properly the new audience, which one's rebranding was designed to attract, will supplant the older audience (Kleppinger and Cain, 2015). The real challenge is to carry over as much of the old fanbase to the new one, as some loss of audience is to be expected. This is why haste is ill advised, as the sudden change in content can cause the audience to complain or even revolt. In the case of the latter, purging of one's fan base might be required to prevent the spread of negativity within the community and consolidate social capital (Gandini, 2016). (Gorbatov, Khapova and Lysova, 2018)

## 5.0 Discussion

### 5.1 Stress and Addiction

The amount of stress reported by people has been steadily increasing, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic (Abramson, 2022). Therefore, live streaming is for many people a desirable profession. Live streamers project an image of a leisurely life, where one plays games all day, and is accountable to no one. It is understandable why this job description is attractive to so many, especially to younger people (Macdonald, 2022). In truth, live streaming can be one of the most stress inducing jobs there is.

Live streaming is a job which requires hours upon hours of work for negligible pay, which directly tied to one's popularity (Grayson, 2021a). Creating the same content day after day with little to no change can quickly become monotonous, and this quickly saps away all desire to continue live streaming. Even the constant need to perform is something that will drain a person, even if the performance is being oneself.

As one becomes a larger live streamer more of one's income is derived from live streaming. As mentioned earlier, it is recommended that one streams at least two hours, three times a week (Nielsen, 2022). However, for career live streamers, they tend to live stream a median of over one hundred and seventy hours a month (Appendix A). This effectively makes it a full time job - making it hard to have a second, non-passive, source of income. This can apply pressure onto the live streamer to keep streaming against their will, if they want to maintain their new lifestyle. This can be mitigated through saving money or investing in passive income. Although this is unlikely to solve the problems of the live streamer, it can create a cushion which can allow one to recover and return to either live streaming or the general job market. The real damage done to streamers, this paper will argue, is the additive nature of fame and social media.

Social media addiction is a real phenomena, one that is increasingly becoming relevant in modern society (Haynes, 2018). The rewarding feeling of people liking a post or laughing at a video can be both physically and psychologically addictive. This can prove a large problem for live streamers, as the positive feedback from the audience can quickly become an addictive obsession. This is not to speak of the mental effects of having near constant flow negative feedback. This constant fluctuation between the highs and lows of positive and negative



feedback creates a scenario similar to that of a casino (Haynes, 2018). Overexposure to this state of mind will eventually have detrimental effects on one's mental health.

Studies have shown that excessive use of social media sites like Facebook can harm one's mental health (Riehm *et al.*, 2019), increase feelings of unwellness (Kross *et al.*, 2013), and increase the chances of developing depressive disorders (Ilakkuvan *et al.*, 2019). All these stem from the same underlying circumstances which can be found in abundance in live streaming. Being the center of a social space, receiving instant and constant feedback back breed anxiety. Additionally, the playing of video games for several uninterrupted hours without moving can lead to bad physical health as well as video game addiction. This would partially explain why so many successful streamers struggle with other types of addiction or mental health issues (Greenbaum, 2021). Furthermore, it would seem that the spread of negative mental health does not stop with the streamer.

As mentioned earlier in this paper, parasocial relationships are very common in live streaming spaces (Hoffner and Bond, 2022). Seeing live streamers as friends is one of the main growth drivers for a live streamer's career, as reflected in the viewers' desire for traits such as warmth and humor (Guo, Zhang and Wang, 2022). However, by seeing a live streamer as a friend, it also means that they have certain expectations in regards to their behavior and morals, just as with a real friend. This means that these expectations of who the live streamer is in the minds of the individual audience member, often run afoul of reality. When this happens the result is often negative (Bachhuber, 2023). There is also the risk of attracting obsessive fans who will either criticize every action one takes, or obsessively defend the live streamer from any perceived slight against them (Lee, 2022).

"*Hate raids*" are a phenomena where a large number of users, some numbering in the hundreds, enter the chat of a targeted live streamer, in order to hurl insults and harassment at a person (Appendix C, 3:29). Needless to say, having hundreds of people throw abuse at a person is not good for their mental health (Tsymbal, 2022). Hate raids happen both organically or with coordination, and can take place over several days. The reasons why someone would join a hate raid is varied, but a common one is due to a perceived attack on a group or their parasocial friend (Grayson, 2021b). Feuds between live streamers have caused hate raids before (Appendix C, 4:41), but even the association with a hated person can lead to being raided. This is partially the reason why PR collateral was mentioned in the networking chapter of this paper. By distancing oneself from other people one can mitigate the risk of fans suddenly

turning on oneself. This can also be bad for the live streamer, as never getting too close to people can result in a lonely existence.

## 5.2 Female Live Streamers

Most streaming platforms came out of gaming spaces (Edge, 2013). As such, these spaces are mainly catered towards a male audience as opposed to a female one. In fact, gaming spaces, particularly online ones, have earned a reputation for being hostile to women in general (Lorenz and Browning, 2020). This hostile environment has created a paradoxical space for women on live streaming platforms. (Ruberg, Cullen and Brewster, 2019)

As mentioned earlier in the paper, some of the most important attributes that a streamer can have is warmth of personality, humor, expertise and passion (Guo, Zhang and Wang, 2022). However, what was not mentioned was according to the study the most important factor was beauty. The reason this was not mentioned earlier was that this paper does not wish to discourage people insecure about their appearance from pursuing their ambitions and create a model for all people. However, as the referenced study explains, beauty will attract more viewers and will also create a 'halo effect', where people will believe that if a person has one positive attribute then they also have other non-related positive attributes (Kendra Cherry, 2013). The same applies to streamers.

Given this, one would assume that women would have an advantage in beauty. As most of the population is heterosexual (Herman, Flores and O'Neill, 2022) and Twitch.tv is a male dominated space (Clement, 2023), it stands to reason that the beauty of a woman would be more effective than the beauty of a man. There is some truth to that statement; attractive women seem to have an easier time standing out in the earliest stages of the live streaming development model.

However, as the beauty standards for women are much higher than those for men, the cut off point for what counts as an attractive woman is much higher than those for men (Ramati-Ziber, Shnabel and Glick, 2020). As such, women are under much more pressure to invest time and resources into their appearance. If they fall beneath the cut off point, then a negative 'halo effect' would take place, and the audience might become hostile. This high evaluation of beauty from the male audience might cause them to devalue other traits like expertise. This would explain why some women within the streaming industry feel that their opinions and skills are not valued (Wright, 2021). However, this alone does not make a paradox.

The paradox arises from the fact that one would expect that the most successful live streamers on Twitch.tv would be dominated by attractive, sociable women with expertise within their field. However as of writing this paper, of the top 50 live streamers only three are women (Appendix A). This is further confounding given that of the top performing male live streamers receive 64,7% of the total gifted subs, but female live streamers receive 54,9% of weighted average number of gifted subs (Markov, 2022). How could there be such a disparity?

One explanation, which this paper thinks is likely, is the rampant sexism that female live streamers report. Sexulizing remarks, slurs as well as general harassment is a constant problem which plague live streamers, but it seems to be particularly prolific for women and minority communities (Lorenz and Browning, 2020). Unfortunately, this is not a new phenomenon. Hostility within the gaming community towards women is almost as old as the industry itself, with one of the last bigger outbursts being the infamous 2014 GamerGate harassment movement (Greengard, 2023). The existence of a hostile work environment would largely explain why women would not be able to reach the top of the live streaming ranks, as the burnout from the harassment would cause them to quit halfway up the ladder.

Another possible reason could be the existence of a 'glass ceiling' effect within the live streaming space (Kagan, 2017). As previously explained, the fourth step is to rebrand the stream by realigning the value proposition less on the content of the stream and more on the live streamer themselves. According to a study, different attributes would be rated differently depending on the sex of the viewer and the live streamer (Todd and Melancon, 2017). Interestingly, both male and female viewers would rate male live streamers expertise higher than those of their female counterparts. This could indicate that the glass ceiling is a negative variable when successfully rebranding oneself; that it is more difficult for the expertise of female live streamers to be valued. This is reflected in reports of women receiving harassment from their audience when speaking out on or confronting sexual harassment and assault (Ritschel, 2021).

This paper does not have any definitive answer as to why this lack of success for female live streamers exists. This would require more research both into the unconscious biases of viewers, as well as an examination into why live streamers of all genders quit. Hopefully research of this kind would be able to shed more light on the nature of the live streaming ecosystem and help remedy this hostile space.

## 6.0 Limitations

### 6.1 Data

As laid out in the methodology, this project was conducted primarily via the use of qualitative data. Though this is very common in research that investigates social spaces and dynamics, the addition of more quantitative data would have been greatly appreciated. Accurate data on stream length, days of streaming, turnover rate for new live streamers and their average income are but a few of the variables that were unavailable, which could have added considerable knowledge to this research.

It is likely that this information has already been collected by the data analysts of Twitch.tv, but they seem unwilling to share this data with the rest of the world. It would also be difficult for outsiders to gather this data, given the size of the web site and the number of new accounts being continually created. This paper also imagines that users would be less than willing to answer questions on how and why their dreams were dashed.

This project welcomes any future researchers to expand on this project, and remedy this lack of quantitative data, for without it this project remains incomplete.

### 6.2 Perspective

This study was conducted by observing the behavior and histories of live streamers, and drawing inferences from said observations. Though this paper believes that this insight is valuable, there is a lack of perspective. This paper is very much an outsider looking in. More interviews from streamers of different stages of development would have been a great addition to the insight this paper could have provided.

Questioning new live streamers on their motivations for entering the profession, how they understand their value proposition, and techniques for dealing with lack of progress would serve this research well. From these, one could infer common patterns of failure, point out psychological stressors, and develop new ways to educate on value understanding. For mid to large live streamers, probing questions about their self image as live streamers, their techniques on how to handle audiences, and networking dynamics would have addressed some of the lingering questions this paper had.

Even if this data would not have been valuable to this research, the data bank itself could have proven useful to other academic fields. Communication, gender studies, and psychology researchers could use the data bank to provide insight and solutions to problems this paper had not even considered.

Furthermore, this paper decided to observe primarily live streamers from the platform Twitch.tv. This meant that much of the data had a very western live streaming perspective. Though the more classical entertainment industry is very western dominated, this does not mean that the same is the case for the global live streaming industry. China for example has several live streaming platforms which are primarily smartphone based, which challenges a lot of the conclusions this paper came to (Chernavina, 2022).

Furthermore, the Chinese internet is somewhat isolated due to the so-called "*Great Firewall*" which blocks a number of competing live streaming sites (Kerner, 2022). It is likely that local culture can affect how one is expected to act and which characteristics are more well received on the internet. Again, the isolation of the Chinese internet has created a culture with different humor and user expectations from the more mainstream internet (Han, Rong and Zeng, 2021). One can also infer that other regions of the internet - though not as isolated as the Chinese internet - would likely have developed their own specific subcultures.

Further research into these fields would have to become necessary in the future; either to prove the universality of the findings of this paper, or to prove that a more localized approach is needed.

## 6.3 Mental Age and Health

Mental health and its care is a topic that has taken increased importance in administrative and economic research as of late. Good mental health makes good workers, better consumers and great citizens. Stress is a source of many diseases, lack of productivity and will eventually kill a person if not treated. The effect this has on children is even more pronounced, as stresses on the psyche can become permanent, manifesting in low self confidence, neuroticism or worse. It is for this reason that this paper highly discourages anyone under the age of twenty five to pursue a career in live streaming. (Bhakta, 2021)

To say that live streaming is a stressful occupation is an understatement. Being asked to perform for hours a day while being expected to keep things new and fresh is mentally

exhausting. Always searching for new content can enforce a rat race mentality, in which participants can not mentally disconnect from their work after live streams. This means that live streamers cannot relax or unwind, giving their brain the time they need to recover from the stresses of their work. This piles up until one breaks under the pressure, usually with disastrous results. However, this is not the worst mental damage. (Arteo, 2023)

Stress can be reduced by taking vacations or reducing work loads, the same cannot be said for social harassment. An interesting quirk of the human experience is the phenomenon of negativity bias (Vaish, Grossmann and Woodward, 2008). Negativity bias, as the name implies, is when people are more willing to remember and internalize negative feedback over positive feedback. This means that even though a live streamer has a thousand viewers showering them with praise, the few instances of criticisms or harassment will stand out in their mind. This can develop into a form of masochistic empiricism, where the more a comment hurts a person the more likely the person is to believe the comment to be the truth. This can have similar effects on the psyche as continuous bullying would have. (Wolke and Lereya, 2015)

For these reasons, this paper argues that for one to withstand the continuous pressure and attacks on one's mental health one should develop a lot of mental fortitude. To resist the constant harassment, will require a good and grounded sense of self and self worth, something that can take decades to develop. A good social structure to lean upon during times of great stress is also something this paper would highly encourage. Further into these factors would be highly encouraged, to ensure the mental health of future live streamers.

## 6.4 Relevancy

As part of this paper methodology, the research was conducted by observing the actions of the top one hundred most subscribed live streamers on Twitch.tv and finding commonalities. From said commonalities a model was constructed to serve as a road map, and validated by pre-existing theories. This is arguably not a bad methodology for investigating the ecosystem of a platform, but is it still relevant to the modern live streaming ecosystem?

As mentioned earlier in this paper, there was a disagreement regarding the live streaming “*master class*” hosted by Richard ‘Ninja’ Blevins (Shrivastava, 2022). One live streamer, Jeremy ‘DisguisedToast’ Wang, asserts that in the modern environment one does not begin one’s live streaming career by live streaming. Instead, one builds one’s brand elsewhere such as Youtube,

Instagram or in tournaments, and then moves over to a live streaming platform with one's established audience. If this is the case, then this entire paper would prove irrelevant. For even if the research was done perfectly, it would only instruct how to market oneself in a bygone era.

## 7.0 Conclusion

This paper was written to serve as a preliminary study into the methods which live streamers can market themselves. Considering the rising popularity of live streaming as a profession, it was strange that there existed no research on how to develop as a live streamer.. There was plenty of research on what metrics one should strive for as a live streamer, but not how to reach them. This was not acceptable, as instructing people on how to achieve a goal is just as important, if not more so, than informing them what the goals are. This is why the research question of this paper was **“What are the common steps in live streamer growth on Twitch.tv and which theories and research can explain them.”**

This paper found that the most viewed live streamers all showed similar patterns during their early career. These live streamers' brands could be broadly categorized on a spectrum, with experts and companions at either end. The first step was that they experimented when constructing their brand, going through several adjustments over the course of years. Others developed their brand on other platforms first, and then moved to Twitch.tv along with their fan base. They would also develop good habits which made streaming easier.

The second step was a refinement of the brand and equipment, solidifying and establishing consumer expectation. They would also establish the rules of conduct with their viewers in order to foster a comfortable space for the intended audience.

Third step was how they would network. Inter live streamer relationships, such as orbiters and streamer groups, showed how creating connections is symbiotic for both large and smaller live streamers. It also highlighted the common kind of sponsorship one can expect at early and mid stages of one's live streaming career.

The fourth step, rebranding, live streamers would refocus their core value proposition away from a game or topic, and onto themselves. It was theorized that if a live streamer ties their value proposition to a topic, one's growth will be limited by the interest of that topic. Therefore, in order to secure their growth, they had to rebrand themselves and make them as a live streamer the value of the streams.

However, this paper also found that live streaming is not a very hospitable space. Harassment and discrimination was common, and it would affect minority groups disproportionately. The well-being of live streamer's mental health became an increasing concern during the



investigation of this paper. Though this paper offered some guidance on how one could mitigate this harm, it is outside the expertise of the researcher and would require further research.

While researching this paper, it became clear how much untapped research there was to be found. Research in personal branding, audience management, social dynamic, and internet culture, are some of the areas which this paper saw could benefit from examining live streaming from the perspective of the live streamer. Therefore, this paper will advocate for further research into these topics. This should also expand to other live streaming platforms outside of Twitch.tv. This could serve in finding knowledge in cross cultural studies and management.

To conclude, this paper did find that there was some structure to the development of live streamers. That there are stages the live streamers go through in order to develop their live streams and their brands. It was also found that though no one had examined the whole development journey of live streamers, there had been research written on topics similar to each stage. Though this paper has not found all the possible knowledge available within this topic, it hopes to begin the conversation; to be the first drop of water, in a large stream.

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