EXPLORING MOTIVATION AND IDENTITY WITHIN LIVE STREAMING VIDEO GAMERS

By

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EXPLORING MOTIVATION AND IDENTITY WITHIN LIVE STREAMING VIDEO GAMERS

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The emerging trend of live streaming video games has introduced new opportunities of spectatorship, in which large audiences watch broadcasters, commonly referred to as streamers, play video games for a variety of purposes. A unique and defining characteristic of live streams is that users get to view content as it is being recorded, similar to a live broadcast on television. In the past, video content was pre-recorded and edited before being uploaded onto the internet for viewers; however, live streaming skips the process and provides the viewer with the advantage of observing content and footage as it happens.

As the industry of live streaming and eSports\(^1\) continues to grow exponentially, it is crucial to gain insights on streamers, both amateur and professional, who keep the industry running. While research has been done on the spectators in order to determine their reason for watching and participating in streams, there remains a lot of unanswered questions concerning why streamers are motivated to broadcast their own talents or blunders. Through qualitative interviews, this paper seeks to explore the general motivations that streamers have, and how they

\(^1\) Electronic sports, more commonly referred to as “eSports” is a term used in reference to competitive video game playing, and can be used similarly to terms such as professional gaming, and competitive gaming. (van Ditmarsch, J. 2013).
construct their identity when interacting with a live audience. This study explores one of many factors involving live streaming as a unique form of online communication—by understanding general streamer motivations, one may also begin to understand the identity that the streamer constructs for their channel.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

For those who enjoy the aspect of viewing a friend beat the hardest levels of a video game, the concept of watching gameplay has evolved into a popular trend that has taken to the internet. Accessibility of the internet has allowed gamers to broadcast their gameplay online, either through recorded footage or a live stream. People interested in viewing games can now search and browse through a list of games that are currently being played, and can choose to watch different people going through games while commenting and interacting with the gamer. Gamers that broadcast their content live on the internet are more commonly referred to as streamers. (Hamilton, Garretson, and Kerne, 2014, p. 2) Similar to YouTube, users can view a variety of content on different “channels,” and can subscribe to their favorite channels to be notified when the stream is being broadcasted.

To give an example of viewership numbers for large streaming channels, we look at the game title League of Legends, whose World Championship tournament is streamed annually through channels on Twitch.tv and YouTube. The World Championship totaled 32 million viewers (Beck, 2013) in their 2013 season; almost twice the number of viewers (17.7 million) that watched the National Basketball Association's Finals in the same year. (Kissell, 2013) Aside from tournaments, professional streamers who are skilled in the game, or are widely known for their personality such as Michael “Imaqtpie” Santana, can find an average ranging from 18,000 to 40,000 viewers in peak hours. (Aaron, 2015) While amateur channels do not average nearly the same amount of viewers, many are still as equally motivated, often broadcasting their content on a daily basis in order to attract and gain more viewers.

The sheer numbers seen in online traffic and monetary gains makes live streaming a phenomenon difficult to ignore; however, the most intriguing aspect of this emerging platform
highlights its immediacy in broadcasting, as well as its opportunities for individuals to develop their hobby into a career, enriching the field of broadcasting in a way that previous platforms have not been able to address. Without the ability to edit content, live streamers have the advantage of immediacy—both in producing visible content as well as gaining feedback from viewers with little to no delay. As the internet begins to expand even further, the amount of user-generated content continues to grow even more. While information and traditional media in the past was normally pushed out by institutions and companies, content nowadays can be created and promoted by the average user. Live streams introduces a twist to traditional forms of broadcasting and communication, and thus requires further research in order to contribute to current research on broadcasting and online content creation. In live streaming, the individual is not simply a media consumer. Instead, the individual has the opportunity to take on multiple roles of being a content producer, a communicator, and a discoverer of other networks to share their thoughts, opinions, and gameplay with.

**Goals of the Study:** The objective of the study is to gain a better understanding of streamer motivations and how they construct their identities through live streaming on the platform, Twitch.tv. While a number of studies have been done on the spectator end of live streaming, (Hamilton, Garretson, and Kerne, 2014; Smith, Obrist, and Wright, 2013; Cheung and Huang, 2011) research concerning the streamers’ motivations is scarce. As the industry of live streaming and eSports continues to grow exponentially, it is crucial to gain insights on streamers, both amateur and professional, who keep the industry running. Despite its current success on the internet, little has been done to study and analyze streamers’ motivations for creating and broadcasting their content. Prior studies have examined reasons for why spectators watch and participate in streams. (Cheung and Huang, 2011; Van Ditmarsch, 2013; Hamilton, Garretson,
and Kerne, 2014; Lee, An, and Lee, 2014; Shaw, 2013) However, there remain a lot of unanswered questions concerning why streamers are motivated to broadcast their own talents or blunders, and what it means to be a streamer in terms of identity. Live streaming is a form of online communication that presents itself initially as a hobby but has the potential to grow into a career, as a result, individuals may be incentivized to pursue their passion of broadcasting in ways that previous platforms could not do before. As an overwhelming number of streamers look towards websites such as Twitch.tv to broadcast their own games, this paper seeks to gain a better understanding of general motivations that streamers have, and how they construct their identity when interacting with a live audience.

This study utilized in-depth interviews to gain insight into streamer’s habits, characteristics, and other topics that may factor into identity construction. The interviews asked questions that relate to why they’re interested in streaming, their daily routine, what motivates them or worries them, what are the main purpose of their channel, and their relationship with their viewers. The study compares streamers’ overall motivations with blogger motivations identified in previous studies, and then categorize the streamer motivations into specific categories based on defining characteristics for streams. The interviews also gauged at streamers’ strategies for impression management, and questions involving interactions with other streamers or viewers will be analyzed in order to gain a better understanding of how streamers manage their performances through front-stage and back-stage behavior.
CHAPTER 2
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Impression Management

In Goffman’s *Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, he utilizes a dramaturgical analysis to explain people’s interactions and compares it to a theatrical performance. Goffman explains face-to-face interaction through the analogy of an individual giving a stage performance “in order to project a desirable image,” (Bullingham and Vasconcelos, 2013, p. 101) where the individual, referred to as an “actor,” chooses aspects of their personality to show to their audience. (Goffman, 1959) As an actor, the individual is inclined to perform in a manner that will please their audience and ultimately provide them with a successful experience, or a desirable and well-liked performance.

While Goffman’s work was created with face-to-face interactions in mind, concepts of impressions management are also applicable for communication on the internet. Impression management is defined as, “active self-presentation of a person aiming to enhance his or her image in the eyes of others,” (Sinha, 2009, p. 104) and Goffman (1959) proposes that in order for an individual to appeal to others, they must separate their “front-stage” and “back-stage” behavior. (p. 69) In the real world, a person that is working at a store must display “front-stage” behavior when communicating and interacting with a customer in order to please them and make their shopping experience smooth and pleasant. However, when the employee is off work, they may express opinions and communicate with people in an entirely different manner, and this would be an example of “back-stage” behavior. Dwyer (2007) describes impression management as “the goal-directed conscious or unconscious attempt to influence other’s perceptions about a person, object or event by controlling or managing the exchange of information in social interaction”, (p. 2) suggesting that the individual’s usage of premeditated behavior is necessary
in order to achieve their goals. Separation of front and back-stage behaviors suggest that individuals will act according to their motivations in order to create a performance that will appeal to the audience.

In terms of interaction on the internet, impression management may be seen through a streamer’s selection of content that they wish to post, or the images and links that they share with the audience. As content reflects the streamer’s interests, personality, and opinions, the streamer must be conscious of the items they display on their channel in order to appeal to their audience, which exhibits similarities to the front-stage behavior that may exist in face-to-face interactions. Bullingham and Vasconcelos (2013) suggest that, “the online environment could be seen as a stage with the offline life as the backstage. (p. 103) Furthermore, Goffman’s (1959) concept of impression management are divided into “give” and “give off” signals. The term “Give” is used to describe intentional forms of communication, typically verbal, while “give off” expressions are unintentional forms, such as body language that support or provide more context to the verbal expressions. Both forms of expression must be considered in face-to-face interactions, and are applicable within the platform of live streaming as well. In comparison to bloggers in the past, who could only rely on “giving” expressions as their main method of self-presentation on the internet; live streaming offers both the ability to give a performance, but also much more in the “given off” expression because the audience can see and interpret body language and facial movement. While live streaming interaction may vary from that of previous forms of online communication, Goffman’s concepts of impression management may be important to note in terms of explaining how the streamer presents themselves and their content for their audience.

Impression Management in Computer Mediated Communication

Computer mediated communications (CMC) can be broadly defined as “the process by which people create, exchange, and perceive information using networked telecommunications
systems that facilitate encoding, transmitting, and decoding messages.” (December, 1996) CMC is divided into asynchronous (delayed time) communication and synchronous (real time) communication. (Romiszowski and Mason, 1996) In earlier studies of CMC, a large focus was on asynchronous communication, which made relationship building slower, as “interpersonal effects are expected to be slower in time and develop in proportion to the accumulation of message exchanges.” (Walther, 1996, p. 10) Instances of interpersonal interactions were found through previous studies in regards to online communities, such as the ones found in platforms of social media, mass multiplayer online role playing games (MMORPGS), or blogs. (Tan and Teo, 2009; Williams, Caplan and Xiong, 2007; Hamilton, Garretson, and Kearne, 2014; Nardi, Schiano, Gumbrecht, and Swartz, 2004) However, newer forms of communication over the internet have slowly shifted in ways that allow for individuals to create and grow relationships with one another, despite the lack of visual and non-verbal cues that are typically relied upon in face-to-face interactions. Streaming is a mixture of asynchronous and synchronous communication, combined with the flexibility for interpersonal and mass communication. Moreover, the platform affords more non-verbal communication than traditional CMC, allowing streamers and viewers to communicate with little to no delay, while also providing viewers with more than text-based communication.

Although streaming and blogging on the internet cannot be considered as face-to-face interaction, aspects such as posting hyperlinks, videos, and other tidbits of information reflecting the individual adds a layer of richness and that aids in giving off a sense of identity. However, Nardi et al. (2004) notes that “web sites support rich information but are usually limited in terms of interactivity.” (p. 46) In the case of blogs, asynchronous communication can feel limiting due to the lack of immediate interaction and feedback that one may get from its counterpart. Images
and links can begin to express the blogger’s personality, but still lacks a form of interaction which has been pointed out as a weakness of asynchronous communication. Synchronous communication, in the form of mass multiplayer online games, attempted to bridge this gap as it allowed for immediate interaction between individuals, yet it still maintained a clear distinction between the online and offline identities of an individual, and has even been referred to as a “form of mask in the online environment.” (Bullingham and Vasconcelos, 2013, p. 103)

Live streaming pushes the concept of synchronous communications even further, by providing streamers with a method of connecting with large audiences in a format that bears resemblance to that of traditional mass communication. A drawback of mass communication was a lack of immediate feedback, but live streaming has become a notable phenomenon due to its capabilities of reaching a large audience and being able to interact with them in real time. Live streaming also holds the unique characteristic of being a medium that can capture the attention of large audiences while being hosted by people who may not necessarily be professionals in the field. As online interaction continues to create further methods which intertwine the real world with the online world, the issue of identity becomes even more blurred, and as live streaming provides opportunities to reach audiences of any size without the drawbacks of traditional mass communication, one must consider how differences in content creation and interaction can alter the ways in which identity is formed.

In the virtual environment, online interactions shape an individual’s sense of identity through impression management, as it highlights the idea in which the individual displays certain characteristics or behaviors for the audience to see. By selectively choosing qualities to display in their front-stage performance, the individual carefully shapes their social identity. According to William James (as cited in Abrams and Hogg, 2001) argues that, “people can change their
persona to reflect the social audience and can have as many social ‘selves’ as there are situations,” which can be applied within online communities as individuals utilize the virtual setting in order to form an identity that defines themselves as an individual, while explaining their connections to others in social groups.

Social Identity Theory posits that individuals are motivated to “strive for a positive self-concept,” (Tajfel and Turner, 1979, p. 283) and utilize strategies in order to find a sense of belonging within an in-group through shared characteristics. According to Code and Zaparyniuk, (2010) “the in-group is simply the group in which one identifies, conversely, the out-group are those individuals who are not exclusive members,” (p. 1351) which gives the individual a sense of social identity. The in-group explains the individual’s connections and relationships to other individuals within different circles, and reflects upon characteristics of the individual as well.

Applied to the format of online communities, the concept of social identity has been explored through various platforms such as social media, online gaming, and blogging, (Tan and Teo, 2009; Schau and Gilly, 2003; Moon, Li, Jo, and Sanders, 2006) with results that highlight impression management and the importance of establishing a social identity which reflects the individual’s sense of membership within a group. In a study focusing on blogging identities, Moon et al. discovered that “perceived online social interaction through blog and enjoyment of the blog help users develop virtual social identity online.” (p. 33) Additionally, individuals develop a greater sense of social (virtual) identity as the “commitment to their communities” increase over time. (Moon et al., 2006, p. 28) Their study suggests that interactions with other bloggers develops a sense of membership, creating potential in-groups which help determine the blogger’s sense of social identity. Tan and Teo’s (2009) study provides an alternative perspective from that of Moon et al.’s, suggesting that blogging content combines aspects of the real world
identity into that of the online environment, but supports the idea that in-group behaviors between individuals can form a larger social network over time.

The importance of creating a social identity remains as an important concept in online communities, where individuals seek to find a niche group that shares similar interests and perspectives. The platform of live streaming is no exception; streamers may also find importance in searching for in-groups that reflect their own passions or goals. However, social identity also helps individuals in terms of self-categorization—lending a hand in determining qualities that uniquely describe the streamer’s individual identity. The synchronous nature of live streaming separates itself from previous forms of interaction within online communities, potentially altering the way in which streamers handle self-presentation, or how they choose to perform for their audiences; however, social interactions on the internet influences the methods in which streamers construct and manage their identity.

**Literature on Streaming**

**Brief History of Spectatorship**

Spectatorship has been prominent in traditional sports such as basketball, football, and baseball, amassing crowds of people within an arena to see athletes play at a professional level. Defined as a “an observer of an event, especially a sports contest,” by the American Heritage Dictionary (2016), spectatorship has traditionally been associated with traditional sports, but is also a term that can be used for alternative events and activities that attract a large number of observers, including competitive video gaming. The roots of competitive gaming spectatorship can be found in the 1970’s arcade halls which were easily accessible to the public. Scoreboards on each game kept track of the person with the most impressive score, with each challenger striving to aim even higher for the title of number one. Spectatorship shifted to a more private domain when consoles and computer games began to be accessible at home, where friends would
compete against one another, eventually leading into popular competitive console competitions, specifically for fighter style genres with titles like Street Fighter, or Tekken. (Taylor, 2012) In the most recent times, the combination of PC gaming and the internet have brought forth a new wave of spectatorship and interaction through online gaming in the form of live streaming.

**Origins of Streaming**

Streaming was first seen through the website Justin.tv in 2007, which originated through the idea of broadcasting owner Justin Kan’s life on a 24/7 basis. (Popper, 2014) Dubbed with the term “lifecasting,” recognition of Kan’s project allowed for Justin.tv’s expansion into a larger platform for others to create channels and to share tidbits from their own lives. (Kochanov, 2007) Amongst the available broadcasting categories, gaming branched away from Justin.tv’s idea of lifecasting and took on the name Twitch.tv in 2011 to pave the way for live streaming. The popularity of this category allowed Twitch.tv to see enormous success, amassing 2.1 million streamers by January 2016, and more than 100 million viewers per month. (Smith, 2016)

Coverage of content, varying from amateur streams to professional electronic sports (eSports) tournaments, was so popular that Twitch rapidly climbed to being fourth in peak internet traffic, and was sold to Amazon for a total of $970 million dollars in 2014. (Levy, 2014)

Live streaming popularity is reflected on the huge numbers in traffic and viewership. Thousands of people stop by various channels to spectate, chat, and interact with streamers, and a few studies in the past have explored reasons in which people may be enamored with interacting and spectating another person’s gameplay. A unique and defining characteristic of live streams is that users view content as it is being recorded, similar to a live broadcast aired on television. In the past, video content was pre-recorded and edited before being uploaded onto the internet for viewers; however, live streaming skips the process and provides the viewer with
content and footage as it happens. With its successes in the video game industry, Twitch.tv soon began to host tournaments for competitive games, emphasizing the impact of eSports.

The beginning concepts of electronic sports, or “eSports” came through gaming tournaments, where individuals would show up to a venue in order to compete with others. (Taylor, 2012) eSports is a term used in reference to competitive video game playing, and can be used similarly to terms such as professional gaming, and competitive gaming. (Van Ditmarsch, J., 2013) Defined as a “form of sports where the primary aspects of the sport are facilitated by electronic systems,” (Hamari and Sjoblom, 2005, p. 5) participants would initially compete against one another for first place with computers and equipment set up on stage, while spectators in the venue would travel from various locations to hover and watch in anticipation and excitement. With the introduction of the internet, spectators could watch their favorite games being played at the highest level—all from the comfort of their own homes; concerns relating to transportation, travel, and other expenses were immediately eliminated. The convenience of being able to watch a game—with colorful commentary—was an immense opportunity that allowed for eSports to continue growing. Taylor (2012, p. 9) comments on the impact of the internet in terms of furthering eSports:

The Internet makes scaling niche activities possible. Even though you may be one of only a handful of players in your town who is interested in competitive gaming, by being able to go online and connect—and compete—against others, a nascent eSports community is able to form.

Spectating online competitive gaming continues to rise in popularity, and live streaming took off as a huge phenomenon of web 2.0. Recounting her experience in the first World Cyber Games tournament, Taylor recalls her glimpse into the realm of eSports, noting that the focus of eSports should not simply be a focus on the player, the team, or the game, as they were only “one piece of the puzzle.” (Taylor, 2012, p. 17) Despite her observation, little has been researched
behind player motivation and identity. In a platform where entertainment involves not only spectating gameplay, but the personality and influence of the person playing, the role of being the “streamer” is a piece of that puzzle that still remains relatively unknown. Upon the acquisition of Twitch, Jeff Bezos, Amazon founder and chief executive, mentioned that, “Broadcasting and watching gameplay is a global phenomenon and Twitch has built a platform that brings together tens of millions of people who watch billions of games each month,” (Arthur and Stuart, 2014) suggesting that the development of streaming is only going to get bigger. The low barrier to entry for live streaming makes it possible for all avid computer gamers to set up their own channel and start creating their own content, a phenomenon that is reminiscent of a past trend that took web 2.0 by the storm—blogging.

**Blogging, a Foundation**

Blogging shares some notable similarities with aspects of live streaming as a medium that is easy to create and personalize with content, and is largely known for being a platform in which users could feel comfortable expressing their thoughts and opinions to other users. As a form of internet communication that gives various examples of impression management through photos, links, friend lists, and more, understanding the popularity of blogs and the motivations for blogging provides a glimpse into patterns that serve as the foundational groundwork for uncovering unique motivations within streaming.

Michael Foucault introduced the phrase, “technology of the self” as a way of allowing “individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being.” (Siles, 2011, p. 410) In exploring the “Blogger” identity, Siles uses Foucault’s explanation of “technologies of the self” in order to describe how bloggers chose to express themselves and give others a glimpse of their own identity through the online medium. Siles interviewed users who wrote their blogs
within the earlier years of blogging, between 1995 and 1999, and found two main reasons for the creation of their websites: 1) Describing and reflecting on certain events in their life, and 2) Using the online diary as a means of introspection. As online diarists, their content was highly personal, but was based on the words and the stories that the users wanted to publish which came from the “heart” or “soul.” In contrast, bloggers in the later years chose to share their stories in a slightly different fashion by offering hyperlinks, photos, and different comments that were reflective of more than the heart and soul. By posting media that signaled their interests, hobbies, and humor, bloggers began to show more than the “heart and soul” aspect, but provided “personality” along with their content. The most important difference between what Siles coined as the online diarist and the blogger, is their method of sharing their identity. While the early diarists chose to share carefully worded stories that were reflective and introspective, the later bloggers went for an alternative route, seeking a more extroverted way of sharing their identities through newer methods such as using hyperlinks and different types of media to help reflect who they are. Through displaying pieces of information that reflect their personality, bloggers create a space for themselves in an “open door policy” method where others are welcome or encouraged to “see inside our home or office without actually entering.” These early discoveries help give a broader sense of what bloggers are, and serve as a beginning point of exploration in terms of blogger motivations and identity.

Nardi, Schiano, Gumbrecht and Swartz continue this line research and delve into the reasons behind an individual’s main motivations for blogging. Participants for their study were interviewed on their content, blogging habits, thoughts on blogging, and their use of other communication media in comparison to blogs. The authors observe that “most bloggers are acutely aware of their readers, even in confessional blogs, calibrating what
they should and should not reveal,” (Nardi et al. 2004, p. 45) which supports the idea of bloggers developing a front-stage persona that reflects the good parts of their own personality or identity. In addition, content retrieved from the blogs and the interviews were used in order to interpret the underlying motivations for blogging. Resulting data revealed five major motivations for blogging: documenting one’s life, providing commentary and opinions, expressing deeply felt emotions, articulating ideas through writing, and forming and maintaining community forums. (Nardi et al., 2004) Why We Blog provides an insightful starting point in comparing the similarities between blogging and streaming, as one can look at these major motivations and observe whether or not similar motivations exist within the medium of streaming. While some of the motivations such as articulating ideas through writing, may not directly apply, potential variations of the motivation, such as sharing and expressing ideas through a live-stream, or voicing their opinions and responses based on viewer’s questions and curiosities, should be interpreted similarly as they provide the same function of allowing the content creator to express their own views on a particular subject.

In looking at motivations and behaviors for bloggers, Huang, Shen, Lin and Chang developed a model explaining general motivations behind blogging with five total categories: self-expression, life documenting, commenting, forum participating, and information searching. (Huang et al., 2007) These categories coincide with findings from Nardi et al., and provide a starting point for comparisons to streamers, but they also make note that bloggers do not stick strictly to one motivation, and that there may be overlap between the categories. Additionally, Huang et al. (2007) propose that because “all blogging activities evolve around information created and consumed by bloggers, there are basically two behavioral orientations of blogging: information search and social interaction.” (p. 474) As content is constantly being created and
read by the blogging consumer, the practice bears similarities to live stream content where streamers also follow a pattern of creating their own videos whilst also viewing content from other streamers. This suggests that behaviors such as information search and social interaction may also apply for streamers.

While the previous articles explore the categories of blogger motivations for maintaining and updating their content, Taricani (2007) addresses the instances in which a blogger first starts to involve themselves within the blogging community by explaining that there are “shifts in engagement” that change depending on their level of interest and interaction. (p. 8) The author suggests that there are different phases: joining, employing, transforming, settling, and expanding, and that “members actually feel it is important to contribute and be a part of others’ blogs” (Taricani, 2007, p. 8) the more involved they feel. When studying streamer motivations, it may be useful to refer back to Taricani’s shifts in engagement to determine how, or why most streamers choose to start broadcasting their own content as opposed to being satisfied with viewing and engaging with existing content. A sense of online community and collaboration is highlighted in Taricani’s results because engagement depends on both the content creator and their audience.

In Hamilton, Garretson, and Kerne’s (2014) study on participatory communities within Twitch.tv, they note a strong sense of community based on membership as an “investment of time and personal energy.” (p. 4) Their analysis provided insight into the sense of membership and community through the eyes of streamers, and the prevailing theme uncovered was the idea that streams “develop an atmosphere that reflects the streamer’s attitudes and values.” (Hamilton, Garretson and Kerne, 2014, p. 4) This theme parallels blogger motivations in areas of self-expression and forum participation, as Huang et al.’s study suggests, but also hints at the
possibility of Goffman’s front-stage behavior in the sense that a streamer may choose to portray themselves in a way that shapes the atmosphere in a specific manner.

The reviewed literature suggests that common characteristics within the phenomenon of blogging could correlate with recent trends of live streaming, and give insight as to why streamers choose to create their own content and display it to the world for others to watch. However, developments that change and enhance interactions separate the platform of live streaming from that of blogging—while blogging is limited by the use of images, text, and other forms of asynchronous communication, live streaming is quite the opposite as a medium that allows streamers to interact with their audience with little or no delay in response. The immediacy of the live streaming platform provides viewers with a live performance—a unique advantage that previous online platforms have not been able to fully explore. The “live” aspect of live streaming highlights the importance of impression management, particularly because the platform does not provide a way for streamers to edit their content before showing it to their intended audience. This thesis aims to explore the potential differences that may come with interactions in synchronous communications in live streaming, and how these interactions may affect the way in which streamers construct and develop their identities for their channels.

**Research Questions**

RQ 1: What are the motivations of live streamers in terms of live streaming video game content?

RQ 2: How are online video game streamers utilizing aspects of live streaming to construct their identity?
CHAPTER 3
METHOD

Qualitative In-depth Interviews:

Qualitative methods were emphasized as the main portion of the data. Since a main identifier of qualitative research is described as, “the social phenomenon being investigated from the participant’s viewpoint,” (Williams, 2007, p. 67) the purpose of this paper focuses on the phenomenon of live streaming, and heavily relied on insight and responses from participants that are streamers; therefore, the proposed method for the study consists a series of in-depth interviews.

Qualitative interviews were conducted in order to understand the motivations that may shape the streamer’s identity. According to Creswell (1998), the “essence of this study is the search for the central underlying meaning of the experience and emphasize the intentionality of consciousness where experiences contain both the outward appearance and inward consciousness based on the memory, image, and meaning.” (p. 52) As such, in-depth interviews were conducted to uncover the “central meaning” of live streaming and how the medium shapes interactions and characteristics of the streamer. Interview questions focused on the participant’s stream channel, streaming habits, attitudes, and overall thoughts and experiences on having a stream, in addition to their thoughts about streaming versus other forms of online interaction.

Research gathered from interviews were compared with that of key blogging motivations previously mentioned in order to determine patterns of similarity, as well as new motivations that developed as a result of streaming as a recent platform. Interviews were held in a conversational style, but followed a guided set of interview questions in order to guarantee that each participant answers the same set of mandatory questions. (See Appendix) Before conducting the interview, the researcher also reviewed videos of the participant’s previous streams in order to understand
their content, and to get a glimpse of how they interact with their audience. Observations based on their past videos were compared with the participant’s responses in the qualitative interview in order to spot any major differences between their response and their interactions.

**Participants**

The researcher recruited eleven streamers for interviews through purposive sampling and snowball sampling. While snowball sampling risks of obtaining an unrepresentative sample of the population, it would have been difficult to reach a larger number of professional streamers as some may not be as easily contactable as others.

Characteristics of participants were considered when conducting the interviews, as data saturation will vary based on how similar or how different each participant is. People who share similar characteristics are “homogenous” and will reach data saturation quicker because “individual interviews are likely to overlap considerably in content.” (Bonde, 2013, p. 2) In contrast, people who do not share similar characteristics are “heterogeneous” and researchers will often require larger numbers of participants in order to reach data saturation. Although it is argued that there is no exact number in order to reach data saturation, researchers have suggested number ranges in which data saturation or diminishing returns start to appear. In the case of phenomenological studies, Creswell (1998) posits the range of five to 25, while Morse (1994) suggests that there only needs to be a minimum of six. Kuzel (1992) advises a number of six to eight interviews for homogenous samples, which comes into agreement with Guest, Bunce, and Johnson’s (2006) study, who mention that if they were “more interested in high-level, overarching themes, our experiment suggests that a sample of six interviews may have been sufficient to enable development of meaningful themes and useful interpretations.” (p. 78) Based on these estimations, eleven interviews were conducted to reach data saturation.
Although Twitch.tv is the main streaming platform, streamers use a variety of other forums and online communities to communicate their ideas, and to look for suggestions on how to improve their streams. According to Quantcast’s (2016) reports on Twitch.tv users, the list of frequently visited websites are places such as Plays.tv, Obsproject.com, and Reddit.com, suggesting that they would be optimal places to recruit participants. Sub-forums within Reddit, such as /r/Twitch, /r/LeagueofLegends, and /r/LoLStreams were specific places to recruit participants, as there are many people who actively follow these forums to partake in discussion and exchange in ideas and suggestions. Professional streamers interested in participating were encouraged to ask friends or teammates for their participation as well, adding to the thoughts of professional streamers and how their attitudes and identities may differ from that of the average streamer.

Specific requirements needed to be met before being eligible for the study to ensure that data would be recorded and interpreted accurately. In order to qualify for the in-depth interview, participants needed to meet the following requirements:

- Must own a valid Twitch.tv account for streaming purposes.
- Participants must be located within the United States.
- Must stream at least once per week.
- Participants must stream with a focus on League of Legends (LoL), Overwatch, Defense of the Ancients 2 (DOTA2), Counter-Strike: Global Offensive (CS:GO), or Hearthstone.
- Participants must have at least an average of 10 viewers minimum.
- Participants must be able to be contacted through Skype, Discord, Google Hangout, or any other application that provides voice call and/or video chat services.
- Participants must have videos-on-demand (VoDs) for review on their channel.
- Participants must be 18 years or older.
It was important to meet these requirements in order to obtain data that reflected that of active streamers on Twitch.tv. An active streamer is defined as one who “voluntarily choose to broadcast their play,” (Walker, 2014, p. 439) and often invests in equipment and software to provide higher quality video for their viewers. In contrast, a passive streamer is one that does not place an emphasis in ensuring that their stream quality is optimal for the viewer, and “plays their game session as normal while a live broadcast is streamed out.” (Walker, 2014, p. 439) Active streamers frequently host their activities on websites such as Twitch, and provide entertainment through their commentary, interactions with viewers, and gameplay, which leads to the potential development of their public persona or identity; (Walker, 2014, p. 439) therefore, eligible participants should reflect this definition to certain degree by maintaining a scheduled stream, and having an engaging audience to interact with.

Participants were required to stream a majority of the following games in order to be eligible for the interview: League of Legends (LoL), Overwatch, Defense of the Ancients 2 (DOTA2), Counter-Strike: Global Offensive (CS:GO), or Hearthstone. The reasoning for selecting these specific titles can be explained through their dominance in created content on Twitch from streamers. The image below indicates the top five most watched games on Twitch.tv during December 2016 according to Newzoo. (2016) Through each of the previous months, these games fluctuated and swapped in ranks, but still remained in, or near the top five throughout the year.
According to Statista (2016), *League of Legends* leads in gaming content by the number of hours that are viewed on Twitch.tv, with a total of 103.57 million hours’ worth of content for the month of October 2016. Additionally, it also holds the title of “Most watched video-game live streams on Twitch,” (Loesche, 2016) and the overwhelming numbers suggest that many individuals active on Twitch frequently stream and view content relating to this game. Overall, these titles were also ranked amongst the top five in terms of “Most Watched Video-Game Livestreams on Twitch,” in 2016, remaining dominant despite the release of other popular titles introduced throughout 2016. (Cerrato, 2017)

Due to the popularity of these games and familiarity between streamers, viewers and the researcher, terms, inside jokes, and other sorts of game-related knowledge were understood much easier, and the risk of misinterpretation was not as high during the interview process. As there are multitudes of streamers on Twitch.tv daily, the researcher recruited participants on the platform, in addition to finding participants on online forums or social media platforms that were highly involved with video game live streaming. Due to their popularity, it was slightly more difficult to get ahold of professional streamers; e-mails were specifically sent to professional streamers, and those that agreed to partake in the interview process were also asked at the end of

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IMAGE</th>
<th>RANK</th>
<th>TITLE</th>
<th>TOTAL HOURS</th>
<th>ESPORTS HOURS</th>
<th>SHARE ESPORTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>🎮</td>
<td>1</td>
<td><em>League of Legends</em></td>
<td>81.2M</td>
<td>10.7M</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>🎮</td>
<td>2</td>
<td><em>Hearthstone: Heroes of Warcraft</em></td>
<td>50.3M</td>
<td>6.0M</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>🎮</td>
<td>3</td>
<td><em>Dota 2</em></td>
<td>44.9M</td>
<td>16.8M</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>🎮</td>
<td>4</td>
<td><em>Counter-Strike: Global Offensive</em></td>
<td>30.5M</td>
<td>10.9M</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>🎮</td>
<td>5</td>
<td><em>Overwatch</em></td>
<td>22.6M</td>
<td>1.5M</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
the interview, if they knew of any additional professional streamers who might express an interest in participating in the interview process. Interviews were recorded and transcribed for reference, covering themes that touched on video game streaming and their personal experiences with their own channel. (Refer to Appendix) Transcribed reports were sent back to the original participants for review in the event that misinterpretation or an omission of detail was evident in the transcription.

**Data Collection**

Past research on blogging motivations based on Huang et al. (2007), Nardi et al. (2004), and Sorensen (2009) were applicable in the platform of live streaming, mainly in the categories of self-expression, life documenting, commenting, and community participation. Table 2-1 lists blogging motivations and a short statement describing the motivation. The listed blogging motivations were compared with the responses from the qualitative interviews in order to determine key similarities and differences between blogger and streamer motivations.

Additionally, for the purposes of this paper, professional streamers are individuals that stream on channels that are considered as “Twitch partners” and maintain a regular streaming schedule of three times per week. Twitch partners are considered as professional streamers due to the large number of viewers that they get. The average amount of viewers that Twitch partners typically have are around 500. (Twitch.tv, 2016c) Moreover, they have the opportunity to monetize their channel and gain access to several different perks, such as allowing creating custom chat emoticons and unrestricted video quality. (Twitch.tv, 2016d) On the other hand, amateur streamers are defined as those who do not have Twitch partnership, but maintain a regularly scheduled stream in order to attract a consistent amount of viewers.

Professional streamers gain additional incentive from streaming, which may influence their reasons for streaming. Twitch partnered streamers have the ability to run advertisements on
their stream for money, and viewers who “subscribe” to their favorite channel receive special benefits from being a subscriber. Similar to subscribing to a magazine, viewers who subscribe to a channel receive perks such as an ad-free stream, exclusive emoticons, and unrestricted access to video quality. (Twitch.tv, 2016d) Through these methods of earning revenue, professional streamers may have alternative motivations that separate them from the amateur streamer.

**Self-expression:** also referred to as self-branding (Sorensen, 2009), involves expressing themselves in a way that also makes the “blog a personal brand.” (p. 71) Huang et al. (2007) list video blogs as a form of self-expression motivation because the individual is “likely to express themselves to obtain an identity for social interaction.” (p. 476) Examples of professional streamers that excel in the self-expression category are those who are often well-liked for their personality, such as Michael “Imaqtpie” Santana and Zachary “Sneaky” Scuderi, who have distinct and easily identifiable personalities and catchphrases.

**Personal Archive:** is the term Sorensen uses to describe how the blogging individual documents and shares the everyday events of their personal life. Nardi et al. (2004), use the expression, “document my life” where the primary purpose for these blogs was to “record to inform and update others of their activities.” (p. 43) In the world of live streaming, personal archive examples would be channels in which the streamer is focused on tracking their overall progress or improvement in the game. Frequently, on competitive gaming for games such as *League of Legends, Overwatch, or Hearthstone* streams, there will be titles such as, “Bronze to Platinum” or “Ranked Climb” which focuses on the streamer gradually improving on their gameplay. Streamers dedicated to this type of improvement may place an emphasis on archiving their progress for reviewing at a later date in hopes of spotting any sign of positive development.
Community Participation: is described as involvement within a close circle of people with common interests. Nardi et al. (2004) use the example of a group of poets that were all within a blogging community to describe the idea of community participation, and notes that “comments on blog posts flew back and forth on the blogs, in email, and in person.” (p. 45) Their description of this community showed that interaction between all members was equally important, and that everyone was expected to not only generate content, but to also offer comments and feedback on others’ content. Due to the fact that all streams have a built-in chat system, it would appear that all streams involve community participation, to an extent. However, some chats are more active than others, and some streamers choose to only skim through their chats and not engage in conversation as much as another streamer. Exemplary examples of community participation streams would be ones that try to involve and engage the viewer by making them feel a part of the stream. Streamers often host “viewer games” where they will agree to play a game with selected people from their viewer list, which gives the viewer a sense of participation in more ways than just spectating the streamer. Additionally, streamers that frequently visit other channels to chat and watch other streamers is also an important factor within this category—streamers must be dedicated to their own channel, but also need to spend time in other channels to socialize and keep the “back and forth” communication going. This is different from the Commentary category because it focuses on the constant involvement and feedback within the community, and is not limited to participating simply through comments.

Commentary: as the name suggests, focuses on “using blogs to express their opinions” (Nardi et al., 2004, p. 43), but also points out that it is different from sharing opinions on normal subjects. Huang et al. (2007) names political blogs as a prime example of a commentary motivated blog, and it is suggested that sharing opinions in commentary-motivated blogs will
encourage serious conversations on a specific subject. While there is no immediate parallel to this in the video game streaming community, they still have serious discussions in relation to games, usually involving game mechanics, standard gameplay, and more. Additionally, streamers will offer their knowledge on the game and help newer players improve by reviewing their games and giving them a full commentary play-by-play analysis on the live stream. In this sense, live streaming involves the game, but does not involve the streamer playing the game. Instead, they are choosing to look at one of their viewer’s games, and giving them their honest opinions on what the individual could do to improve.

As an individual who shares a passion for video games and had an interest in live streaming since its beginnings on Twitch.tv, the researcher is relatively familiar with the language and culture of video game live streamers, making interviews easier to interpret and understand, as participants would use specific terms in relation to their stream or gameplay. However, as someone with prior knowledge on the environment of video game live streaming, it was important for the researcher to remain neutral about the topic in order to prevent interviewer bias. As an avid viewer of live streams, conducting interviews with streamers allowed the researcher to see a different perspective. As a result, the researcher was able to analyze patterns in participant responses and interpret them in a multitude of ways.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2-1. Motivations for Blogging</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Huang et al. (2007)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Self-expression</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Life documenting</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Commenting</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Community forum participation</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Information seeking</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 4
RESULTS

From the eleven total participants that were interviewed, responses were recorded and categorized based on previous research on blogger motivations. Responses from each of the participants were categorized within the previously mentioned blogging motivations. When responses did not fit into a specific existing category, they were noted and set aside for further examination. An overwhelming amount of answers fell into two main motivations: self-expression and community forum participation. Due to the amount of answers within the two categories, sub-categories were created to highlight specific themes that participants shared, in addition to uncovering trends that were unique to the platform of live streaming. The self-expression category is divided into the streamer’s focus on either gameplay or personality, while community forum participation is divided into an emphasis on viewer community versus streamer community. Once all responses from participants were sorted within existing categories of blogging motivation, the researcher looked at the miscellaneous responses in order to further determine emerging patterns that were unique to live streaming. As a result, a third motivation involving live streaming as a profession was discovered, in which streamers discussed their motivations for streaming as a career versus those that streamed as a hobby.

Table 4-1. Streamers interviewed, ordered by number of followers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ID</th>
<th>Followers</th>
<th>Twitch Partnered</th>
<th>Gender</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>S1</td>
<td>251</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S2</td>
<td>348</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S3</td>
<td>350</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S4</td>
<td>587</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S5</td>
<td>1,715</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S6</td>
<td>3,015</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S7</td>
<td>4,033</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S8</td>
<td>5,786</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S9</td>
<td>9,774</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S10</td>
<td>31,301</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S11</td>
<td>35,541</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Self-Expression closely links to ideas of self-branding (Sorensen, 2009), and using the medium of blogging as a muse, or a catharsis (Nardi et. al, 2004). It is defined as a way in which people would “express themselves to obtain an identity for social interaction,” (Huang et al., 2007, p. 475) which is applicable to the sub-categories that emerged as participants discussed and explained how specific motivations spur them into shaping their personal community in a specific direction that reflects on characteristics of the streamer. Based on the responses obtained from participants, the Self-Expression motivation was separated into two categories: *gameplay* and *personality*.

Additionally, Community Building emerged as another main motivation for streamers. Within the blogging medium, community forum participation was commonly depicted by a blogger’s level of back and forth interaction with other bloggers that shared similar interests. This form of interaction is paralleled in the live streaming platform, as multiple responses from participants highlighted the concept of creating communities, and the importance of interaction. Participants placed an emphasis on different groups to interact with—some preferred focused interactions with viewers, which will be referred to as the *viewer community*, while others
preferred a focus on interactions with other streamers, referred to as the streamer community. Unique from the existing blogging motivations, streaming as a profession emerged as a new motivation, covering the thoughts and opinions of individuals who seek to stream as a career. Participants were asked about how streaming as a career differs from streaming purely as a hobby. Participants discussed how they separated their front-stage and back-stage behavior as live streamers, and also shared thoughts on how others perceived streaming as a career. Despite the commonalities based on the research conducted on blogging motivations, the platform of live streaming separates itself from past digital platforms such as blogging and social media through new ways of interaction due to its capabilities. Live streaming is a unique medium that stands out from previous mediums, in the sense that it provides streamers with the opportunity to express his or herself on a channel with both visual and audio capabilities while being able to receive immediate feedback from their viewers. As a result, body language, as well as natural language are both used in order to communicate with the viewers on a personal level, as opposed to existing mediums of online communication such as email or instant messaging, which often have slower feedback and are limited in audio or visual cues.

Based on these similarities, Goffman’s dramaturgical analysis—although intended for face-to-face communications—can be applied in the social aspects and interactions within live streaming, as it contains several examples of how an individual may express himself or herself in specific ways to appeal to his or her channel’s audience. Front-stage and back-stage behaviors are seen within these motivations; participants share details of their efforts to impress viewers or, act friendlier or more energetic than usual to appeal and form a positive image of the streamer. Front-stage interactions and responses were frequent for gameplay and personality-focused participants who required a certain level of performance.
Self-Expression

Gameplay

Streamers who are motivated to stream due to gameplay may intentionally “perform” in a manner that seeks to impress the viewer—a successful performance properly indicates that the streamer can display his knowledge and skill within the video game he is live streaming. The streamer chooses to express himself by using gameplay as the center focus of his performance.

Gameplay focused streamers feature comments, guidance, and advice in relation to the game that the streamer is playing. The streamer will typically share tips on how to improve on certain aspects of the game, and viewers may interact by asking them to elaborate on mechanics, information, or other aspects. In this sense, instances of front-stage behavior may form as the streamer expresses his or her knowledge and passion for the games that he or she plays, and is eager to share this information with other viewers who aspire to improve in a particular game.

The front-stage is “intentionally or unwittingly employed by the individual during his performance,” (Goffman, 1959, pg. 486) which streamers such as S8 display through their live streamed content when he interacts—or performs—for the viewers in his channel, using skill and his unique perspective on the game as a method of appeal. S8 expressed his interest in streaming League of Legends because he specialized in streaming non-standard gameplay. Within the community of League of Legends, the term “meta” is short for “metagame,” and is used to describe optimal strategies in order to meet a certain goal within the game. Defined as “all of the decisions, resources, and information that, while not explicitly part of the game, are nonetheless important,” (Duke, 2015) it is also often referred to as “the game outside the game.” (Duke, 2015; Lowood and Guins, 2016, p. 319) If the “meta” is the standard, then the opposite is known as the “off-meta”, which S8 chooses to embrace as the main focus of his channel:
In this case, doing off-meta builds, as I think you’re aware, of AD jungle Malzahar, especially. And that just expanded to a second account with its own set of champions to other supports being added to the main roster, and a host of guides that tend to correlate with the champions being played, including optimizations for particular viewers. So it’s very much a stream that celebrates off-meta stuff, but in a more serious way than what other streams tend to do.

Known as a streamer that “celebrates” the off-meta, S8’s front-stage behavior focuses on ways to solidify his performance as a player that prefers avoiding standard rules or mechanics. S8 mentioned that he creates guides to supplement his off-meta stream, and likes to open up discussion on gameplay and strategy in his chat. When asked about how he sees himself as a player, S8 responded in ways that related to the game—he described the fact that he had partiality towards characters which were “minion masters,” in other words, characters that had the mechanic of controlling something else within the game. S8 chose to express himself through specializing in unique gameplay and characters with a common theme; as a result, viewers in his channel gave him nicknames that reflected not only his playstyle, but his personality as well. S8 recalled each of his earned titles, agreeing that they were all fairly accurate:

The general consensus seems to be “The Untiltable”, “The Terrible CSer,” “The Malzahar Jungle Guy,” “The Diamond and/or Master Player,” is what I’ve been told. […] The Pragmatic. The Spock. These are also what I’ve been called a couple of times. I think that about sums up the major things.

Viewers observe his playstyle, his blunders, and his quirks before describing him with several different titles which support the performance that he is trying to show. Others take a slightly different route by sharing their knowledge and performance within specific games. In various competitive games such as League of Legends, Overwatch, Hearthstone, and more, an individual’s “rank” is an indication of how well they perform on a competitive ladder—the higher the rank, the more skilled they are perceived to be; S11 commented that being “high rank” is important to some viewers, as they will frequently come into the channel and ask for his input. The games are not only a starting point, but a focal point of their stream, utilized as a form of
expression. As such, some streamers look forward to taking an educational or mentoring approach to streaming, because they enjoy the interaction of talking and teaching them how to improve in the game. Thinking about how his stream increased in popularity, S11 reflected:

Oh, my stream is like mostly educational. I was at a high enough rank where I could teach people about the game, and then my gimmick is that I’d teach people about history too at the same time, so I would just alternate between teaching people about these two things, and then that’s why people came to my stream.

Front-stage behavior is usually seen in educational or informative channels—streamers take on a role of mentoring his or her viewers, and content on these streams veer towards being informative for individuals who are eager to learn more about the game. For S11, although the front-stage behavior may be educational and welcoming for viewers who are interested in learning more about high level gameplay, he mentioned that his back-stage behavior will show itself from time to time when he’s in a bad mood:

I get really irritated when I’m tired, so I’ll stream when I’m tired once a month or once every couple of months, and like some viewer will make fun of me, which I normally thoroughly enjoy, and I know they’ll be joking, but I’ll just get really salty about it, like unnecessarily.

Streamers that emphasize gameplay often consciously take steps that avoid showing back-stage behavior. S11 recognized that his irritability from lack of sleep may conflict with the front-stage behavior that he normally presents for his viewers, and commented that he may take viewer comments more personally than he normally would. As a result, participants who focused on gameplay often mention distinctively separating front-stage and back-stage behaviors by putting themselves in a mentoring or teaching position, where they may perceive the viewers as students. Participants shared that they enjoyed helping viewers improve upon their own gameplay using informational commentary as a focus on their front-stage presentation; as a result, viewers feel encouraged or comfortable in asking game-related questions and discussing the streamer’s decision or reasoning behind the actions they take throughout the game.
Personality

Some choose to place a stronger emphasis on their own personality, preferring to build a presence through expressing themselves in a genuine manner. The importance of being genuine and approachable is a large factor within this category of self-expression; therefore, instances of front-stage behavior may still be present, but are exhibited differently from streamers who maintain a focus on gameplay.

Front-stage behavior was also present in participants who were concerned with growing a community around their personality. The follower (viewer) number does not appear to be a large motivational factor for most streamers. Instead, they are spurred by the idea of interaction and being able to relate to viewers within the channel. Front-stage instances varied; some participants shared comments concerning the importance of maintaining energy levels to stay enthusiastic on stream, while others expressed feeling more comfortable with adopting an online persona that was different from their offline selves. Participants such as S10 expressed a common feeling that streamers might have:

The person that people see on stream… That is still me. And that’s how it would be if I was hanging out with people face to face. [...] A lot of Twitch streamers can relate to this because it’s kind of a way to… How do I explain it? It’s kind of a way to still socialize without feeling like you’re stepping out of your comfort zone. If that makes sense. A lot of streamers that you’ll find on Twitch do describe themselves as being introverted, and whether they’re able to separate that from their online and real life persona... you know, it’s going to depend.

S10’s description bears resemblance to S4’s reasons for streaming—he describes himself as a friendly and welcoming person, but admits that he adopts a different persona online because he struggles expressing himself in real life:

I kind of wanted to improve my communications or social talking in general because I have a really different persona online, and if you talk to me online versus in person—in person I can be quite awkward sometimes because I tend to worry about what the other person is thinking or what to expect, even though I shouldn’t be doing that but that’s just how I am, you know?
Adopting a different persona, or displaying a more enthusiastic version of himself was beneficial; S4 reported that he observed improvement with his interactions in the real world because he was able to practice engaging in conversation on the days that he streamed. Gaining an audience was beneficial for S4, who required viewers in order to improve on his own flaws. However, streamers established that there is a difference between growing a community and gaining followers on a channel, and understand the importance of front-stage behavior that still feels relatable and easy to understand. S6 mentioned that as one of her main priorities:

For me, it’s more important to me to develop these relationships than to be streaming just to a big audience, I guess. And…I think especially after seeing these people in person for me—this community is pretty much my main friend group now, right? People that I hang out with and the people that are important in my life, in a sense like a family, right?

S6 expressed the thought that her community is her main friend group, and that it feels almost like a family, while gaining followers and attaining a larger audience does not feel as special. For her, the need to perform and impress an audience was not as important as taking the time to befriend viewers in her channel in a more genuine manner. Another participant, S3, shared similar thoughts, commenting:

If people enjoy what I do, I will probably gain a follower. In the sense of gaining followers, as long as I feel like I did a great stream and attracted a lot of attention and people come, I usually just feel okay with one follower. Maybe even no followers, if I’ve had a great conversation with someone that day.

Participants each shared different levels of front-stage behavior—S4 mentioned adopting a different persona when he streams in comparison to his offline persona, while others such as S6 discussed the importance of being relatable in order to encourage the growth of friendships and to strengthen their personal community. S3 floats in between the other two participants, acknowledging the importance of attracting attention to his channel while also placing value in gaining followers that were truly interested in his channel.
For some, there may be incentives towards front-stage behaviors, especially if they are partnered with Twitch. Professional streamers gain monetary incentive from streaming, and often use this as a source of income. Twitch partnered streamers have the ability to run advertisements on their stream for money, and viewers who “subscribe” to their favorite channel receive special benefits from being a subscriber. Similar to subscribing to a magazine, viewers who subscribe to a channel receive perks such as an ad-free stream, exclusive emoticons, and unrestricted access to video quality (Twitch.tv, 2016d). Through these methods of earning revenue, professional streamers may have alternative motivations for streaming that separate them from the amateur streamer. Although follower counts and donations were not regarded as the main motivations for streamers, those who are partnered with Twitch.tv emphasized the importance of subscribers, and maintaining a steady subscriber count.

The subscriber button allows viewers to subscribe to the streamer’s channel, at a price of $4.99 per month (Twitch, 2016c), where three dollars go towards the streamer and two dollars go towards the Twitch company (Egger, 2015). For streamers that are Twitch partnered, increasing the number of subscribers results in an increase in their monthly income from streaming. S10 described the need to prioritize subscribers over followers since it determines her income; for full-time streamers, it is crucial that the subscriber count stay at a solid number, or increases. She mentioned concerns over financial stress, and that being able to make ends meet is often an important reminder for her. S9 shared the same sentiments as a recent Twitch.tv partner:

Once you get partnered, it actually just becomes the beginning, because now you have to figure out all these things like how to make your stream just as entertaining, and how to keep going, you know?

Although participants S9, S10, and S11 try their hardest to stay sincerely enthusiastic while streaming, the subscriber count is arguably an important motivation that spurs the need for a front-stage performance. Responses from each of the Twitch partnered participants involved
answers that gave a better insight into back-stage thoughts, specifically in terms of income and on concerns of being able to consistently deliver good content for viewers to engage and interact with. S10 hoped that streaming will become a full-time job, and that he can rely on subscribers to continue supporting the hobby he loves the most. While his front-stage performance has the intent of making friends, back-stage thoughts suggest unease with financial concerns of maintaining subscribers looming in the back of his mind. S10 talked about the reality of professionally streaming for a career, and the concerns that full-time streamers must face:

If you talk to any other full time streamer who does this for a living—if they have no other source of income—it’s very stressful. I can get by fine. I have enough, thankfully, but it’s always worrying about… More than anything, it’s the taxes.

When the subject of financial issues becomes a concern for partnered streamers relying on content as a source of income, motivations carry a different weight that may ultimately have an impact on an individual’s front-stage performance. Financial responsibilities may spur professional streamers to create a performance that will consistently and reliably entertain viewers through different strategies such as becoming more energetic, or showing more enthusiasm in order to secure a steady source of income.

Additionally, a unique feature on many live streaming channels is the donation button, which streamers may post on his or her personal channel as an optional method which viewers can use to support the channel even further. Although this also provides a source of money, streamers displayed a sense of modesty in terms of donations; most participants emphasized that donations were not a major motivation, and some participants even voiced that they felt guilty for accepting donations. Respondents agreed on the thought that while they were grateful for their viewers’ support, donations were not necessary; however, they recognized that viewers would urge or encourage them to put a link on the channel as a way for the viewer to give thanks or to show appreciation towards the streamer and the content they create. Several streamers
noted that it was important to understand donations as a more tangible form of support from the viewers, and that it was not meant to be something that could sustain as a consistent form of income. Even when thinking about donations from a financial point of view, streamers that were interviewed did not agree to the idea of donations being a major motivation for streaming, and thus, did not find the use of front-stage behavior to be important in order to gain a larger number of donations. When asked about hypothetical situations where streamers simply tried to gain donations, S2 replied:

I don’t feel like that’s pure, like they don’t have good intentions for their community, like you’re not streaming for them. You’re streaming just to get their money; I don’t like that. I hate that.

The use of front-stage performance to solely generate profit is seen as a negative; streamers understand the meaning and value behind a viewer’s donations, and many participants looked down on others who take advantage of a viewer’s kindness. A frequently mentioned comment was the fact that donations were extremely inconsistent, but that when the streamers do get donations, many reported having strong, positive emotions for the viewer who donated, and being honestly thankful for their contribution. For some streamers, not only is it a sense of modesty, but a sense of personal morals that prevents them from pushing viewers to donate to their channel.

**Community Building**

Community building was another motivation that was prominent from the conducted qualitative interviews. Respondents shared their enthusiasm in creating their own community or joining an existing community, citing various reasons such as meeting new people, or finding people with similar interests to befriend. The search for similar individuals within the large community of Twitch aligns with the conceptualized definition of a “group” that Tajfel and Turner (1979, pg. 283) outline as “a collection of individuals who perceive themselves to be
members of the same social category, share some emotional involvement in this common
definition of themselves, and achieve some degree of social consensus about the evaluation of
their group and of their membership in it.” Applied in the context of live streaming, participants
discussed the importance of fostering or joining communities, and how impression management
influences the individual’s method of forming their social identity within the broad community
of Twitch.

**Viewer Community**

Many streamers brought up the importance of creating a community as one of their
motivations for streaming. Respondents shared thoughts focusing on interactions within their
personal channel, and the significance of building rapport with viewers, which will be referred to
as the **viewer community**. One of the prime motivations for streaming is to create a personal
community that reflects similar values and ideas of the streamer and his or her channel. Shared
qualities, characteristics, and interests bring people together form a sense of community, which
allows for positive interactions between streamers and viewers. By having their stream serve as a
common ground, it creates a social environment that attracts individuals with similar interests.
A common theme amongst respondents was encouraging a positive and open atmosphere in their
channel. S7 mentioned wanting to make a welcoming “relaxed and chill stream”; S3 encouraged
a similar atmosphere for his channel, comparing it to a coffee shop, or a library, where a viewer
could stop by and feel comfortable participating in a conversation, while S9 indicated that he
relies on his humor to encourage an enthusiastic and energetic stream. Respondents categorized
their personal streams by using specific traits to describe their channel, attracting viewers that
may share similarities. Attitudes and values in these channels influence viewers who stay and
interact—S7, who strives to maintain a friendly and relaxing stream, notes that her music choice
influences viewers and helps promote a peaceful atmosphere. S10 emphasized that her main
goals for her community are to consistently interact with her viewers and to promote positivity, and does this by devoting a section of her live stream time to chatting with her viewers, taking note to remember small details that they share. S10 mentions that genuinely caring for someone can make a big difference, and is grateful that she can provide a place for others to unwind and talk about their day. Over time, the daily interactions create a pattern that begins to define each streamer’s community, as S11 indicated, “It’s just that…your communities will shape upon what you decide to do,” adding that the streamer cultivates his or her own community in a way that directly reflects the streamer’s attitudes and values. As a result, the community that emerges becomes one that reflects the attitudes and values that the streamer highlights as part of their performance, creating a group of individuals which can identify with these qualities.

Participants also mention being open to having discussions and conversations with their viewers about more serious topics, highlighting the fact that they are eager to listen to viewers when they are having a bad day, or going through a rough time. S9 indicated the importance of having these interactions in his stream:

I have moments of real talk where I can have real conversation about any number of topics just to make sure that people aren’t only raised by people who degrade other people or prank other people, or basically for lack of better word, shit on other people and be very rude.

These discussions with viewers strengthen the relationship between streamer and the viewer, and encourage a more intimate community, and the sense of a channel’s community is further strengthened when streamers give viewers the opportunity to interact outside of the stream. When a streamer is not live streaming, they are still given the opportunity to engage with viewers through alternative means; however, the use of front-stage behavior may not be as heavily emphasized in these scenarios, as communication outside of the stream may not be considered as part of the streamer’s “performance”. In Goffman’s analysis, interactions between
the actor and the audience outside of the performance is considered the “off-stage,” when front-stage behaviors may not be present, actors may still engage in specific performance to the audience. Although social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter are used mostly for promotions and updates for when the streamer will start streaming, others such as Discord, serve as a main hub of interaction when the channel is offline. Described as a software application that focuses on providing “free voice and text chat for gamers,” (Discord, 2016) Discord is a popular software for gamers to stay connected, as people can create their own servers and invite others to join in ways similar to signing up for an online forum. S8 views his own Discord as an “extension of the stream,” and stated that he loves seeing the growth in number of messages and members in his Discord because it strengthens the relationship he has with his viewers, and helps support his future plans in becoming a game developer. S1 explained his reasons for maintaining a Discord channel:

I thought the Discord would be a good place to post when I’m going live, if I’m going to be late, if I can’t make it at all, if there’s going to be a special event, that’s where I’m going to post it as well; it’s my way to notify the viewers of stuff, and I also thought it’d be great for all of them to just mingle and get to know each other—as well as me getting to know them.

The benefits of maintaining a Discord server continues to highlight the importance of interaction—even when streamers are not live streaming on Twitch, they engage with viewers on a different platform. In this way, the growth of a streamer’s community is not solely reliant on live streaming; it can also be built through other interactions, as streamer and viewer utilize these platforms to interact and share a sense of “emotional involvement” with one another. By focusing on growing the viewer community, streamers benefit through having a steady and faithful group of viewers that typically enjoy the content that the streamer is creating. Over time, the relationship between streamer and viewer will strengthen, especially if the streamer does not
limit interactions to live streaming, but encourages them through other forms of contact through the internet. S2 comments,

I have so many quotes in my Discord and on my stream, and I love when people use those commands. It’s fun, because it starts becoming like an inside joke… And you feel more connected to people because they remember certain things you said that were funny, or certain things that you probably shouldn’t have said and it became funny.

Together, both streamer and viewer create opportunities to strengthen a sense of membership, as the focus on interacting with viewers is important for streamers who are looking to develop their own community or to solidify their channel’s identity on the Twitch.tv platform.

**Streamer Community**

Streamer focused relationships involve the idea of growing a group of individuals who also share similar attitudes and beliefs, but on a greater scale that does not limit interaction to a streamer and his or her viewers. Instead, it encourages participation and interaction from several streamers and their viewers, aiming to collaborate and communicate with others in order to establish a stronger presence as a streamer.

It is common practice for streamers to show support for other streamers through a feature known as *hosting*. When a streamer is about to end his or her live stream for the day, they may choose to automatically redirect current viewers to another streamer’s channel. Hosts are commonly used in tandem with *raids*, in which a streamer will hyperlink the stream URL in his or her chat and send current viewers to the other streamer’s broadcast. Once viewers paste the link to the other stream, or are redirected to the new channel, they will also typically paste a greeting phrase in the other streamer’s channel that signals that a raid is happening. Both are typical forms of interaction on Twitch when streamers choose to support their friends, or other streamers that live stream similar content, and selecting someone to host or raid can be seen as an act of categorization, in which one streamer acknowledges other streamers through the content
they are streaming, or the specific video games that they play. For example, an *Overwatch* streamer may feel more inclined to host or raid someone who also plays the game, and serves as a beginning reference point for the streamer to begin identifying a community (or communities) in which they may belong to.

The benefits of hosts and raids allow streamers to gain a larger amount of exposure, while viewers may be introduced to streamers that they may not have discovered on their own. Growing streamers such as S5 are enthusiastic about hosts because it allows him to talk to a lot of people, and because it introduces new viewers into his channel. Hosts and raids are commonly used as a way to form interactions between streamers, and to begin expanding one’s presence within the Twitch platform. S11 recalls having professional *League of Legends* streamer, Dyrus, host his stream, and how it helped create the momentum and exposure that it needed in order to become popular:

Dyrus rehosted me like three and a half years ago, and he hosted me for like 25,000 viewers and so like the first or second time I turned on my stream, I had like 25,000 something viewers instead of like, 20 or 30 or 40 when I first started streaming. And I was just like, “Holy crap!” So…that’s kind of how it all started.

Hosts from popular streamers create a heavy amount of exposure for the streamer that is being hosted—S11’s channel average skyrocketed, and he credits part of the success to features such as hosting. For streamers aspiring to grow bigger and to gain popularity, big hosts and raids are crucial; S5 comments that they are his favorite moments when streaming, because it gives him the opportunity to network with people that share the same passion and interests.

Aside from Twitch-specific features such as hosts and raids, streamers may also be involved with community participation through alternative means. Twitch teams, commonly referred to as stream teams, are viewed as organizations that support and connect streamers with similar interests and goals. Networking through this method has its advantages—streamers get a
chance to expose their channel to a wider audience, increasing the likelihood of getting new followers or subscribers. Some Twitch teams have hard requirements that the streamer must meet in order to join, while others are more lenient. S9 shared his thoughts on Twitch teams:

Networking is the business term, but the best way to describe it in Twitch terms is just making friends, and a lot of those people on the stream team are people who I’d totally hang out with, or be friends with, or people that I’d support.

Reflected in participant responses is the sense of creating a comfortable environment for others to feel welcomed—there is an underlying theme of providing a place where others are encouraged to join a place where they belong. Key words such as “family” and “close friends” are used alongside positive descriptions and experiences with other streamers, which suggests that not only do participants recognize and identify with one another, but that these relationships have “emotional significance” (McLeod, 2008) as part of social identification within an in-group.

S9 views a lot of his fellow streamers within the team as friends, and referred to them as a second family due to their constant support and encouragement. With over 40,000 total followers, S10 decided to manage her own Twitch team that reflected on her personal channel’s goals of positivity, interaction, and quality content. Although small and selective, S10 expresses that she can develop more intimate relationships with each member on her team. In addition to that, her team hosts special podcast streams that go over the basics of live streaming, and how to begin networking with others on Twitch as a resource for new streamers, or viewers interested in becoming a streamer within the near future. For S10, extending her personal community to one where streamers can feel comfortable is an additional motivator that helps her reach out to even more people. Like channel-driven participation, activity is not limited solely to the Twitch platform—most streamers tend to congregate on the Twitch team’s specific server on Discord to communicate and to meet others. S4 shared his appreciation for joining a team, mentioning that he met a lot of new streamers and developed several friendships after joining his Twitch team.
For streamers looking to gain official Twitch partnership, joining a Twitch team helps increase presence and helps build a streamer’s average viewer count—S5 specifically mentioned that his first step was to join an active stream team, and that his second goal was to be Twitch partnered. Communicating and networking through Twitch teams allows streamers to expand their reach; however, in part of determining the in-group, streamers that belong to one Twitch team may begin to look at out-groups for the sake of comparison. S9 comments on the idea of in-groups in terms of stream teams, justifying his reasoning for selecting the stream team he felt the most comfortable with:

A lot of stream teams are just kind of there just to be under someone’s banner and it doesn’t really feel like a family or a team—like people who are within the same name but don’t necessarily interact with each other or support each other. And that’s not the kind of stream team I’d necessarily want to be a part of as my main stream team.

S9 uses the phrase, “family or a team” to describe the sense of membership that he feels within his current stream team, but is also quick to note that other teams—the out-groups—may not seem as appealing. Recently, Twitch introduced the site function “Communities” aimed for streamers to “connect to their most relevant audiences, and helps viewers to discover content that fits their interests easier and faster than ever.” (Twitch, 2016b) Although implemented for streamers to find and target more specific viewer bases, Communities also allows streamers to unite under a common interest, game, or playstyle. For example, streamers under the “Speedrun” community will all broadcast content in which they are trying to complete the game as fast as possible, while the “Horror” community features content that focuses on horror games. Essentially, Twitch Communities are akin to a genre or a specific characteristic that streamers can choose to identify with, making it a valuable tool for streamers that wish to network and to meet others with similar interests, but also serve as another method for streamers to find an in-group that coincides with their personal motivations or goals.
Regardless of the focus on streamers or viewers, community building appears to be a large factor in supporting the individual’s goals or motivations for creating content on a live streaming platform. When participants successfully determined the social group(s) that resonated with their personal goals, characteristics, or experiences, not only did it give them a sense of belonging within a group, but it also created a sense of orientation for the streamer as a point of “self-reference,” which “defines the individual’s place in society,” (Tajfel and Turner, 1979, pg. 283) forming characteristics or descriptions which are compiled into a social identity.

**Streamers as a Profession**

Combining their passion for video games and interaction, some streamers strive to make a profession out of streaming in order to pursue what they truly enjoy. The phrase, “do what you love,” was mentioned by a few participants who supported turning one’s passion for streaming into a profession. S10 expressed the thought that “if you find something in your life that you really enjoy, just do it while you can,” and recalled her first memories of starting a stream:

> It just kind of started as a hobby, and I was just kind of like, “Hey, I can do it, why not?” […] But people kept on sticking around for some reason and coming back…and here I am, over two years later, still doing this, and now I’m doing it full time.

S10 explains how her stream experienced rapid growth from the continuous support and from new viewers that came by to watch her channel, and humorously adds that her shift into professional streamer was “accidental” because she had no intention of turning her hobby into a career. Similarly, S9’s experience in streaming developed as a hobby as well. Although his stream started off extremely casual, S9 recalled “falling in love” with live streaming and was determined to turn his casual hobby into that of a full-fledged career. However, his path towards becoming a full-time streamer was different from S10’s experience. S9 recalls the struggles of becoming a professional streamer:
I ended up just dropping out of college and pursuing it just because it was a lot of fun and one of the personal mottos I have is just to figure out what you love doing, and figure out how to make it a career. […] I also quit my job so I could pursue full time streaming. In order to do that, I had to move back home because then I wouldn’t have bills to pay, and so the hardest point was probably when you start hearing every other day that you should quit, and you aren’t going to make it […]

While participants such as S9 and S10 were motivated to turn their hobby into a career, they acknowledged the set of challenges that they would have to face. Participants discussed how others do not seriously perceive streaming as a profession, or even a hobby. Some mentioned the lack of support from friends and family when they spoke about their aspirations for streaming professionally, and also voiced their hopes that others would begin to understand Twitch streaming on similar levels to YouTube broadcasting. S11 describes a common perception that viewers, or people unfamiliar with Twitch might have concerning streamers:

You’d be streaming video games to make money; that just sounds fucking easy, which from their point, it is. But there’s a lot of stuff associated with mental health, I would say. There’s a lot of different pressures that streamers feel, depending on who they are, they kind of thing, where you feel pressured to constantly always be like…happy.

He stressed the importance of mental health, and that being a streamer is more than playing video games and talking to people, because it can get taxing having to hold expectations, not just with viewers, but with maintaining relationships with friends and family in real life as well. S5 reported his observations as well:

What I’ve noticed is, when you tell people about streaming—people who have no idea what you do or streaming—often they get a very like, ‘So you’re doing nothing,’ kind of sense or comment.

S5 stresses that streaming should be taken more seriously. Although others may underestimate the amount of work that goes into creating content on Twitch, streamers remain motivated because they feel that streaming will escalate even further in popularity, and are excited to be a
part of a continuously growing platform. Other participants shared that some of them dealt with a lack of support in real life, which affected them as a streamer. S9 expressed his thoughts:

When you have a bunch of personal friends and family members who don’t necessarily understand nor do they support what you’re doing, that gets a little difficult.

He reported feeling discouraged when he first started streaming because his friends and family did not approve of his decision, but was determined to see himself succeed. Additionally, S10 has been streaming since late 2014 but admits that her parents do not know that streaming is what she does for a living. She tells them that she works in a “computer related field,” but doesn’t mention what Twitch is, explaining:

A lot of it is because of a cultural and generation gap; they’ve never ever approved of my playing video games, […] and it was always a point of contention with my parents, especially my mom, because they thought it was a waste of time.

S10 feels that many, like her parents, share this point of view where being a streamer on Twitch is not perceived in a positive light, or even the same way as being a broadcaster on YouTube, but she is hopeful that this will change within the coming years.

In contrast, some participants enjoyed the idea of streaming in a casual sense by treating it simply as a hobby. Drawing on experiences and interactions within the real world, these streamers also gave insight to their personal lives, personality, and how that motivated them in terms of self-expression while streaming. A specific theme consistent amongst most of the interviews was that they each stream because they want to, and because it brings them enjoyment or a sense of fulfillment. S4, who has been streaming for around two years, reflected on a time where he was too absorbed in the numbers:

I always believe when you’re streaming, you’re doing it because you want to. If you focus too much on numbers, which I see a lot of streamers do, they tend to get discouraged a lot.
As a result, he commented about feeling burnt out, or feeling too much pressure to increase follower or viewer numbers as opposed to enjoying being a streamer.

A few streamers shared important and meaningful experiences during their interview sessions, mentioning that those experiences encouraged them to stream, or motivated them to focus their stream in a particular direction. S7 encourages a comfortable atmosphere, and sees her channel as a place for viewers both old and new to chat with her while she streams:

My main goal for streaming is just to have people come to my channel and feel relaxed; have a chill time on my stream because when I was in high school, and when I was going through some of college, I didn’t really have anyone to really talk to. It was a new country for me and a lot of people didn’t get along with me—or I didn’t get along with a lot of people because they simply thought I didn’t speak English. So I thought that if I just provided a chill community for people to hang out in, that would just make me happy because I just want for people around me to be happy.

Glimpses of back-stage behavior become more apparent as streamers incorporate aspects of their personal life or their past experiences into the goals of their stream. S7’s experiences from personal life motivated her to make a difference for people online, and she expressed that it was important for them to feel comfortable interacting with each other. By allowing her viewers to see glimpses of her offline life, S7’s channel does not strictly rely on having a performance. She forgoes the intentional front-stage aspect by aiming to have a channel that is open and comfortable with discussing personal experiences, and as a result, blurs the line between front and back-stage behavior. Other participants shared related sentiments in wanting to provide a positive community because they experienced times where they felt unwelcome, or felt it was difficult to find a place to talk to people. Drawing from previous interactions in the real world or online, personal experiences influence the streamer’s front-stage and back-stage interactions and can determine the attitude or manner in which streamers wish to approach his or her viewers.

Live streaming offers streamers a method of incorporating back-stage aspects, such as real life
experiences, into the front-stage portions of the channel, resulting in a performance that strengthens the streamer’s identity. Responses focused on back-stage thoughts or behaviors that streamers would not typically discuss while live streaming, such as the importance of mental health, and the negative stigma that others may have concerning live streamers.

Words, such as “friendly” and “social” were frequently used when participants were asked to describe themselves; some participants mentioned that they enjoyed striking a conversation with their viewers, and that they were excited whenever new people would visit their stream. However, participants expressed a common distaste for “trolls,” or people who visit streamers to purposely try and give streamers a hard time, but also brought up that over time, they developed a “thick skin” and that most negative comments end up not affecting them. Participants discussed the importance of developing a “thick skin” when interacting with trolls in their channel, and that it may be a necessary characteristic when looking to become a streamer. Although some participants brought up trolls and negativity as one of the negative aspects of streaming, participants often expressed annoyance as opposed to thinking of them as hindering experiences within streaming. S7 mentioned that her viewers often support her by discouraging the negative comments, while S2 commented that she would often try to joke and make light of the comments since she does not want to give them the reaction that trolls are often looking for.

Although participants expressed some downsides to streaming, they each mentioned that factors such as trolls or negativity do not discourage them from continuing their broadcasts or from creating new content. Despite the occasional negativity or lack of support, participants showed a sense of determination in pursuing a hobby that they are passionate about, and some even communicated their motivation towards a greater goal of portraying live streaming as a professional occupation.
Identity, Presentation, and Maintenance

The second focus of this study explores how users construct and manage their streamer identities. Results from the qualitative interviews suggest that participants can be placed on a spectrum that reflects different dimensions of a streamer’s identity, addressing how the streamer views himself, his relationship with the viewer, and how they manage and maintain channel identity. Spectrums in relation to streamer identity are not dichotomous; streamers are free to shift from one to another at any point depending on their goals, such as increasing the number of followers, or by providing a positive and helpful community.

Amateur vs Professional

Based on interview responses, participants described themselves as either an amateur or professional streamer, centering on qualities such as their experience in streaming, or their average follower counts. The success of a streamer often correlates with increasing follower and viewer counts; therefore, amateur streamers acknowledge the need to grow in order to work their way towards becoming a professional. A milestone for most amateur streamers is to obtain Twitch partnership, which is seen as one of the starting points to becoming a professional or full-time streamer. S5 talks about his hopes to further himself as a streamer by sharing his goals:

I have two goals that I want to reach this year—um, the first one being to join a stream team, that’s a community that I really want to be involved in. And the other goal is to be partnered, by the end of the year.

However, not all amateur streamers actively aim to gain a larger follower base. Some participants mentioned that they simply enjoyed the social aspect, and that they saw streaming as more of a hobby or past-time that coincided with their passion for gaming. For S4, he remarks how streaming is a great way to meet new friends, but mentions that he hasn’t considered streaming professionally because he prioritized finishing school and finding a job:
Most of the time at least for me, streaming is a little more of a hobby. And there was a point where I kind of wanted to get seriously into streaming, but after a lot of thinking, I just feel like I don’t have a lot of time [...] I look at streaming as more as like a, “Hey if I have time to spare, I’ll talk to my viewers,” kind of like that.

People who identify as more casual streamers such as S4 typically express their enthusiasm for meeting new people and talking with them, but that they aren’t looking to expand their channel into a larger community. S6 shared her perspective on this aspect as well:

I don’t particularly want to be a full-time streamer. [...] I don’t want streaming to be like a job at all, I just do it when I feel like it because I enjoy it… So I don’t think I could ever be a full time streamer.

S6 elaborated on that thought by stating that when she tried to set a consistent stream schedule, she found herself getting “burned out” and felt that it took away from the enjoyment she got from streaming. A large emphasis is placed on maintaining a stream purely for casual purposes, and as a result, streamers on this end of the spectrum see themselves as people who are less strict with scheduling, and stream whenever they see fit. Similarly, S2 shares that she would still be eager to stream, regardless of how quickly her channel grows:

I’m more of just like, kind of a person wherever the wind will take me. If it doesn’t work out, then that’s okay, something else will come up for me. I’ll still stream for my 150 right now. It’s not really like the following for me—I just like doing what I do. So if I get more followers, or I lose some, I’ll still be doing what I am.

For some, amateur streamers are content with maintaining their channel as a hobby, and use streaming as a method of connecting with more people and make new friends. The appeal of streaming for these individuals is the aspect of building new relationships in a way that doesn’t cut into bigger priorities such as work or academics. S4 explains that while streaming is a fun hobby, he felt that he “didn’t have the time” to dedicate to becoming a consistent streamer, mentioning that he is at a point in life where he wants to finish school and start finding a job relating to his field. S4 goes on to say he is happy to stream as long as he has “time to spare”, and is content with talking to a small group of viewers whenever he happens to stream. As such,
streamers who show more characteristics of being a friend to the streamer will often lack a front-stage personality—while they are interested in making friends, many of them may not feel the need to go through lengths to mask their emotions or to impress visiting viewers.

Other amateur streamers enamored with live streaming culture are eager to devote their time towards expanding their channel and transitioning into becoming a professional streamer; therefore, the need to separate a front-stage and back-stage self becomes an important factor for aspiring streamers that wish to continue growing. S5 shares his progress in striving to become a professional streamer:

I mean streaming is my life, and that sounds very harsh, but it is. Day and night, that’s all I think about. And when I’m gone for even just a few days, I feel very uncomfortable because I’m like, ‘Oh, I want to stream, I want to talk to my people. I don’t want to lose my presence!’

S5 notes that it is essential to keep his presence up by consistently streaming. Although his statements might seem exaggerated, the weight of S5’s words reflect his determination to actively grow a channel in order to progress towards someday becoming a professional streamer. For amateur streamers like S5 who strive to grow their channel in a way that may eventually be their source of income, they begin to separate their front-stage and back-stage behaviors on a more conscious level in order to find ways to attract and appeal to new viewers. S5 comments that he feels that sometimes interactions are “more superficial,” and that “it’s more like acting in ways where it’s more about you rather than the game,” when he is streaming. S5 also shares his dislike for always needing to be conscious of what he is saying while he is live streaming, mentioning that he has to “be very careful about what I say, how I act, stuff like that.” The “superficial” aspect was brought up from some partnered streamers, and S11 acknowledges the use of highlighting personality or a particular characteristic for streaming purposes:
Some people put on a personality, because that’s the way that they stream? And I think that’s absolutely a good thing if you want to do that, because certain aspects of you can be more marketable and entertaining if you exacerbate them […]

S11 points out that some people may highlight certain parts of their personality, or exaggerate specific aspects to make their stream more entertaining, as some streamers may choose to “rage more than they actually do” or take on a humorous and lighthearted approach to serious games. Overall, to appeal or enhance the streamer’s image in the viewer’s eyes, front-stage behaviors highlight positive characteristics of the streamer, such as their level of interaction or their attitude whilst playing a game. On a similar note, S6 compares her streaming interactions with her real-life interactions, observing differences in the way she engages with people:

So I won’t talk in real life pretty much unless you get me talking about something that I find interesting… and I don’t really initiate that usually. But when I stream, I usually try to initiate stuff and talk, so I guess that’s the main difference.

S6 suggests that she doesn’t initiate conversations in real life often, and mentions that she doesn’t like “small talk that much” while she consciously chooses to talk more while she is streaming, since she feels that she’s “put into a position where she should be more talkative.”

Some Twitch partnered participants shared thoughts in regards to seeing themselves as a professional streamer. Streamers that identify as being professional stress the differences and difficulties of pursuing live streaming as a full-time career. Participants mentioned the importance of setting clear boundaries between themselves and the viewer, and that a certain level of privacy needs to be respected in order to maintain a career in streaming. Keeping a level of privacy may be one of the safest ways to prevent revealing too much personal information on the internet, but also makes it easier for streamers to maintain their front-stage performance and identity. When the viewer knows and understands the streamer on a more personal level, back-stage behaviors tend to become more apparent, which may weaken the streamer’s performance.
Although S10 expressed the importance of being genuine and willingness to open up to viewers, she acknowledges where she draws the line, stating, “I’m not trying to cross these boundaries of being a one-to-one personal friend to my viewers because that’s a little too much, I feel.” S10 suggests that while interacting with viewers and being friendly is focused on her channel, she is careful in revealing personal information about herself to her viewers. Maintaining boundaries is an important aspect for professional streamers—too little information makes it difficult for viewers to relate, and too much information risks viewers learning too much about the streamer’s personal life. In an article published by Kotaku, popular streamer “Kaceytron” expressed that it felt “invasive” when fans began to ask more about her personal life, and when one of them eventually found identifying information, which put her privacy at risk. (D’Anastasio, 2017)

As the streams become more popular, or as the follower count increases for a channel, professional streamers may find it increasingly difficult to interact with everyone on a closer basis, which may turn into a disadvantage for streamers who are looking to establish stronger relationships with each of their viewers. S11 explains the consequences of maintaining a relatively large or quickly growing channel:

Your core viewership? They absolutely will care, and they understand because they’re there mostly for you. But the general viewership won’t generally give a shit. They’re just there to view a product, and that’s what they’re there to see, as much as they can possibly see it.

S11 describes that as a result of gaining a large viewer base, the audience may not always be forgiving when the streamer seems to be having a bad, and may voice out their disappointment when the streamed content does not feel entertaining or satisfactory. In a professional live stream setting, the content put out by the streamer is seen as an entertainment product. S11 adds that “Once you give them this quality of product, they expect it all the time, every time. So… that can
be super stressful if you let it get to you,” especially in terms of meeting financial goals, as concerns and responsibilities shift for streamers who are Twitch partnered and rely on their channel for income.

Although many amateur streamers believe that partnership with Twitch is the surefire method to becoming a professional, Twitch partnered participants point out that obtaining partnership is not the end goal. S9 comments, “It definitely makes you realize that partnership is like the beginning of the journey. It feels like the next journey,” and explains that partnership is the first step in transitioning into being a full-time streamer. He goes on to explain other concerns of being a partnered streamer:

Now you have to figure out all these things like how to make your stream just as entertaining, and how to keep going, you know? Trying to get people to interact and also support you by subbing and doing all these things to make sure that you’re growing, and so it’s definitely… If I weren’t as laid back and happy go lucky as I am, I feel like streaming would be relatively stressful because you always need to be innovating and changing […]

A surge in popularity might result from becoming Twitch partnered; however, this brings its own set of challenges for professional streamers to tackle. S9 observes that ever since obtaining his partnership, he is always trying to think of new content in order to keep his viewers entertained, and to attract new viewers with his antics. As subscribers are a source of income—professionals place a great amount of importance on ensuring they can entertain viewers enough to continue getting subscribers each month.

Based on participant responses, the question of how the streamer views himself or herself lies upon a spectrum ranging from the amateur—individuals who are relaxed and look to streaming as a hobby for the purpose of making friends—to the professional—individuals who stream to maintain a steady income as part of their career. The spectrum shifts based on how streamers view themselves as they grow their community and gain more viewers; those
interested in conversing with viewers on a casual level may describe themselves as friends, while others looking for an eventual method of income and success through streaming may describe themselves as entertainers who use different methods to distance themselves from viewers and to maintain the standard streamer-viewer relationship.

**Friends vs Entertainers**

Streamers who seek to make friends may forgo a front-stage in order to emphasize their genuine personality or characteristics. Participants that take this approach to streaming mention being very open about viewers reaching out to talk to them. Viewers are encouraged to engage with the streamer on different social media platforms for conversations, whether it is on a public post through Twitter, or a private direct message through Facebook. *Regulars*, or loyal viewers that always try to watch a specific streamer, will often develop a sense of familiarity with the streamer, and will know or understand some basic information about the streamer, such as their favorite game, their favorite color, or what their personality is like. However, as time passes, streamers develop and strengthen the connection with their viewers on a more personal level, to a point where streamers and viewers identify each other as friends as opposed to strictly a streamer-viewer relationship. S2 describes how she tries her best to befriend all of her viewers, and how it is important for her to interact with them:

> I don’t see the problem with wanting to be friends with people […] If I’m streaming, I want to build a community that’s very close knit with friends, I don’t want people to feel not wanted, or not noticed, and like feel they’re coming just to watch me even if they can’t talk to me, or even if they can’t get a “Hello” back. I like having that close-knit relationship with everyone.

Developing that connection with viewers is an important aspect of her stream, and S2 notes that she is puzzled by streamers who do not make an effort to know their viewers or talk to them. From S2’s description on how she interacts with her viewers, it is implied that she views their relationship as mutual friends as opposed to a streamer-viewer relationship. As these
relationships develop, some streamers are even open to meeting their viewers in real life. S6 shares her experience meeting fellow streamers and viewers at a Twitch.tv convention, and mentioned how she felt it was important to make “connections with actual people,” whom she regarded as a second family. S7 shared her experience with befriending viewers and that she even met her fiancé through her stream, noting that they had met on Twitch, but that she ended up becoming close friends and eventually met each other in real life. She commented humorously about how they met, and likened it to a typical romantic Korean drama, well known for their unrealistic love stories.

On the other hand, streamers that strive to be entertainers may often have front-stage interactions with his or her viewers, as they actively try to grow or retain the number of viewers they have in their channel. Although most participants described themselves as genuinely friendly, some of them noted that there are certain actions or thoughts they keep in mind while they are streaming. S5 describes his thought process whenever he is live streaming:

I think about how to improve streaming, like what can I do to improve not only the quality, but I guess also the entertainment? I think of things to say, kind of? (Laughs) Or how I want to act on stream—or what I can improve on. Whether I need to talk more, whether I need to control my emotions more when I’m tilting—stuff like that.

In this sense, S5 values the importance of separating front-stage and back-stage behavior. While he is friendly both on stream and off stream, he acknowledges that there are difficulties in being too familiar with viewers, contemplating that a “barrier might be needed” between the streamer and viewer. He observes that if he develops a friendship with a viewer, often, they “close the gap” between a streamer-viewer relationship, and the viewer slowly stops coming to his stream, but instead, reach out to him on other platforms such as social media for conversation. For S5, while making friends is a positive, these scenarios risk delaying his growth
as a streamer, and as a result, he has tried to maintain a certain distance to encourage viewers to have reasons to continue visiting his stream.

Some participants were not keen on expressing their channel personality as being different from their “real life” personality—most described their channel identity as similar, but more energetic, or more talkative. S9 gave an example by describing his process of getting ready for a stream:

I had to get into a character a bit. Not even really a character, but it was a bit more tiring just because I wasn’t used to the amount of talking, but past that, it’s been pretty natural for the most part, because like I said—it’s still a part of who I am, it’s just not a part of me that people might see all the time if you know me in real life.

S10 related by sharing her routine, explaining her preparation process before she starts to stream for the day:

I get my tea ready and as I get into the mindset of starting a stream, because it usually involves a mindset of being mentally ready. It’s not because I’m a different person on stream, but it’s more just that it takes more energy than I usually have, just day to day. When I stream, I put in a little more extra effort. So the person that people see on stream is me; I’m as real as I can be, but just amped up a little bit. Because in reality, I’m actually quite introverted; I’m usually pretty quiet. But on camera, I usually amp it up a little bit; I talk a lot more…. I’m a bit more cheerful and chipper, I guess you could say.

In both of these descriptions, participants insisted that their stream personality was a more pronounced, or energetic version of their real life personality. However, based on Goffman’s definition of a front-stage and back-stage behavior, participants such as S9 and S10 demonstrate that they are mindful of their actions on stream, and that they are appealing to viewers by looking or acting more presentable to their audience--some participants are “performing” in order to create a specific image of themselves for their viewers to see.
Social Network vs. Channel Identity

Streamers can use many platform features to define their relationship with their viewers as a social network or as a channel similar to traditional broadcasting. Channel-centric streamers place a large emphasis on growing their own channel through using different methods to express their personality and their interests to viewers who visit their channels. Similar to how individuals may create an online identity through the use of images, hyperlinks, and descriptions on social media platforms, streamers may also utilize these features to highlight positive aspects of themselves in order to strengthen their channel identity. Participants throughout the interviews point out the importance of using visuals or developing an identity for their channel in order for their channel to experience effective growth.

Typical items listed on a channel may include hyperlinks and images that provide a sense of who the streamer is, similar to how these forms of media helped bloggers express themselves on their personal webpages (Twitch, 2016a). Small images, referred to as “buttons” or “panels” on channels serve as a call-to-action for the viewer to learn more about the streamer, or to donate, follow, or even subscribe to the streamer. Answers from the qualitative survey reported several instances of how these hyperlinked images, such as donation buttons, affected their channel. S7 shares her experiences with implementing features on her channel for her viewers:

My stream wasn’t one of those fancy ones that had notifications or anything. I just streamed and I didn’t have a donation button and stuff. I remember people were like, “When are you going to put up a donation button?” So I spent days and nights trying to figure out these little simple settings, because there were no tutorials, there was no one to guide me through it, like how you configure it through Twitch.

Through the encouragement of her viewers, S7 began to create graphics on her channel in ways that reflected her personality or interests, as well as how she wanted to be perceived from viewers. As a lover of cats and bubble tea, she commonly uses these two interests to create an overall identity for her channel—branding it in a way that begins to give viewers a sense of who
she is. On her channel, buttons with light pink font are decorated with tiny illustrations of cats, and her love for bubble tea is also indicated through description copy and the mini-game system that she implements in her stream. Graphics provide a visual introduction to the streamer’s interests or personality, which other streamers have also taken advantage of when setting up their own channel. Custom emoji, for example, is another method in which streamers can extend their characteristics and channel identity even further through visuals that the viewers can choose to use through Twitch’s chat system. By commissioning artists to draw custom emoticons that represent the streamer, their interests, or certain inside jokes that occur in the channel, viewers are encouraged to use these emoticons in Twitch chat, while also help to strengthen the theme of the stream itself.

Aside from using graphics, some participants mentioned solidifying their channel’s identity through the way they present themselves, or by using a theme that is consistent throughout the channel. For example, S9 mentions that his theme takes on the school theme with a humorous twist, where “anything school-related could become a gimmick.” S9’s channel focuses on the quirky antics that he provides, and he labels himself as a “gimmick streamer” in the sense that he always finds opportunities or antics that will entertain viewers. In line with a school theme, S9 chooses to use scenes related to school such as gym class, art class, and the principal’s office as methods of introducing himself as a streamer, or as a way to give viewers recognition whenever they do something to support S9, such as subscribing to him, or hosting him. A major gimmick that he uses is the shake weight, a reoccurring item that S9 uses for moments at a time whenever viewers show their support. Using a green screen with a gym class setting, it is common to find S9 thanking his viewers for subscribing as he shake weights before
resuming his normal stream activity. S9 comments on the first day he got his partnership and how having these gimmicks helped him strengthen identity as a streamer, as well as his channel:

The day I got my partnership, I was literally shake weighting the whole time; I didn’t get any work done. (Laughs) I was literally just doing it for hours because people kept subbing on the first day, and I think there was also the fact that so many other people saw the potential in my stream as well… That was a huge thing.

Overall, participants mentioned having unique traits in their channel that will attract and entertain viewers by utilizing different self-presentation strategies that align with their main motivation for streaming. Lin, Bowman, Lin, and Chen propose that if game interaction were measured in degrees, streams would be separated into low, moderate, and high degrees of interaction. In their examples, the lowest tier would equate to a “one-way performance” where the viewer simply watches the stream without “comments or any interpersonal interactions,” while the highest degree of interaction is described as viewers directly engaging with the streamer, such as playing the game or exchanging friendly banter during the stream (Lin et al., 2017). As streamers have different methods of self-expression, the strategies and the degree of interaction that they may utilize will also shift. As a beginner streamer, S1 shared his thoughts on how to provide interaction through more than just gameplay in his channel:

I wanted to think of other things to add to the stream to make it more… I don’t know—not really unique since everything’s already been done before, but I guess just more interactive. Something to bring more to the table. Like I wanted to play guitar on stream, because that would be cool, but I can’t sing so… playing guitar is not as good without the singing behind it!

Having recently started his journey into live streaming, S1 touches on the struggles of finding methods to stand out amongst the large number of other streamers broadcasting on Twitch. By wanting to “bring more to the table,” S1 suggests that he is looking for a higher degree of interaction with viewers that come by his stream, and he makes an effort to give viewers a glimpse of his own personality and qualities through features in his channel. A glance
at his channel indicates that he covered the basics—quirky cartoon characters in different poses that represent him, a schedule stating his stream times for the week, and links to his social media—but despite this, he stresses finding unique methods of getting people’s attention, knowing that what he currently has will not attract the attention of many long-time viewers. S2, who is another beginner streamer, mentions how sharing her interests and her personality over time encourages viewers to do the same; she utilizes her friendliness and genuine approachability as the strongest characteristics in defining herself as well as her channel:

I like...how they always want to have that instant connection, so they’ll come on Discord and message me, or PM me. They’ll want to talk to me in a more quick way, and I like that interaction with them.

While both S1 and S2 look to highlighting their friendliness and welcoming personality to gain a higher level of interaction with viewers, other participants sought interaction through a different manner, by offering strategical commentary and game-related advice. S8 mentions how many of his comments are “general statements or strategizing what my next move is.” In S8’s scenario, the degree of interaction becomes a lot lower—when making statements about gameplay, the interaction with viewers may be limited as it focuses much more on game content. S8 understands the importance of needing to keep a higher level of interaction to boost his channel’s identity, and voiced concerns for feeling “a bit boring” and not being seen as “entertaining” enough. However, participants each had different methods of encouraging interaction with viewers in an attempt to reach the highest degree of interaction so that they may incorporate the viewers as part of the channel, to a point where the viewers consist of a portion of the channel’s identity.

Alternatively, some participants prefer focusing on social networking features on Twitch, and enjoy interacting with other streamers or creating more content outside of live streaming for purposes such as networking. Networking provides advantages for streamers not just in terms of
growth within their personal channel, but with creating more connections with others in the eSports or live streaming fields where some streamers may aspire to find jobs in. Some participants suggest that streaming is a stepping stone for other things related to the video game industry, and look to network with people online and in real life through streaming.

Initially, S6 looked to stream in hopes of becoming a popular live streaming entertainer while still focusing on content that she enjoyed sharing with her viewers. As she continued streaming, S6 expressed different thoughts, and looked at streaming with the perspective of creating more connections with people, as opposed to concentrating on growing a larger audience for her channel:

So my goals shifted in the sense that I want to develop these relationships now and hopefully turn that into something, rather than turn streaming into something.

For S6, she states that the goal is to continue meeting “really talented musicians, singers, or anything else,” because she has a passion in the music industry—as a result, she has shifted the focus of her stream from live streaming video games to creative, such as piano, karaoke, and learning new instruments. Likewise, S8 shares similar goals for streaming, and looks at the practicality of growing an audience for his future:

I have this Discord full of 200 people who decided this Discord was worth joining. 200! Now we have over 100,000 messages right now? So it’s pretty cool. And this is all working out really well for me, because I plan to be a game designer. And getting an audience as a game designer is SO hard.

S8 expresses the hardships that some may have to endure as an aspiring game designer—it is difficult to attract the attention of others, and even more difficult to find people that will care. For S8, streaming is a way for him to make more connections with others, and most importantly, it is a useful way for him to create a stronger presence.
Others may appreciate a community-centric focus simply for the enjoyment of interaction. S3 enjoys visiting other channels whenever he is not streaming, and uses those days to familiarize himself with their channel and to befriend new streamers:

I try to stay active and relinquish that ability to stream so that I can take those as rest days and just so I can catch up with streamers that I wish to catch up and understand to see what they’re doing, and also learn from them as they stream so that I can further improve my stream as well.

S3 manages his identity based on his interactions and contributions to the Twitch platform as a whole because he places a large amount of value on the exchanges that he shares with other streamers. Although S3 mentions that he enjoys streaming, he willingly gives up the opportunity in order to support other fellow streamers, lamenting how “it’s unfortunate that I can’t stream while watch them and provide content or do both at the same time.” When asked about why or who he supports, S3 responded with streamers whose “personalities are very genuine,” and added that they are often people who have an “immense amount of talent,” which he enjoys watching and interacting with because they have “so much to give.” Although the technical term is “networking”, S3 takes on a much friendlier approach and simply views it as “supporting his friends,” as his purpose is to observe, admire, and hopefully, befriend streamers that he idolizes.

The spectrums introduce components of a streamer that begin to shape the overall streamer identity. Each of the spectrums describe a different dimension of the streamer, and may change and fluctuate depending on the streamer’s goals or motivations for live streaming over time. Participants present themselves differently depending on how they placed themselves on each of the spectrums. For example, those focused on building a stronger relationship within the streamer community will seek strategies that are aimed towards meeting other streamers involved within the same games or interests, as depicted in S3’s decision of purposely giving up
his own stream time in order to socialize and to support other streamers. Similarly, streamers that regard themselves as entertainers will often perform in a manner that appears more professional, or creates boundaries to ensure that relationships with viewers do not grow too personal; therefore, each streamer must develop their own strategies of self-presentation in order to achieve their main goal in terms of streaming. Individuals looking to develop a career in streaming will aim to network and foster a community that reflects their own purposes or goals, while individuals that are more casual or on the amateur side may be satisfied without relying on specific strategies to grow, and instead, may be content with putting out content that reflects their true personality and preferring to create a small circle of friends over time. As more research is conducted, additional patterns may be uncovered, resulting in further spectrums that can be added to create more ways in which individuals can utilize in order to describe parts that make up their streamer identity.
CHAPTER 4
CONCLUSION

Summary of Findings

The area of video game live streaming bears certain core motivations that are shared with
the previous phenomenon of blogging; most notably, characteristics involving self-expression
and community participation. Whether streamers choose to express themselves through their
talent in gaming or through their appealing personality, participants often stressed the importance
of fostering a community, whether it was with viewers, streamers, or both. The essence of social
communities are evident through the interactions within live streaming, and the richness of the
medium allows for a greater sense of interpersonal relationship between streamers and viewers in
a way that is unique from past platforms. As online interpersonal relationships are regarded as
“more socially oriented,” live streaming pushes individuals toward creating more intimate
relationships with other individuals who share a common interest as opposed to impersonal
platforms such as email when used for business purposes only.

Motivations were explored using Goffman’s dramaturgy, as it allows for streamers to
highlight specific characteristics that influence their content and interaction within their
communities or online social spheres. Streamers manage front and back-stage behaviors
similarly to how individuals may manage their behaviors in the offline world when interacting
with different groups of people. This paper proposes that streaming is seen as a performance in
which the streamer (actor) performs for the viewer (audience), and over the course of time,
interpersonal relationships between streamers and viewers develop. Whether streamers are
networking with one another in order to continue expanding their presence, or whether they are
focused on strengthening ties with their viewers, live streaming provides the opportunity for
individuals to search for and to foster meaningful relationships with others that share common interests, experiences, or even goals.

Motivations may vary for individuals who look to streaming as a hobby, as opposed to those that view streaming as a profession. As a result, a streamer’s performance—or what they choose to reveal as their front-stage behavior—may change depending on their primary motivation. Community building as a motivation also influenced streamers by helping individuals determine their sense of social identity through in-groups and out-groups. Between viewer communities and streamer communities that focus on building stronger, emotional connections with other likeminded individuals, community building provides streamers the opportunity to find niche circles that reflect their own personal interests, which impacts the overall construction of streamer identity.

Code and Zaparyniuk (2010, p. 1348) mention that, “While similarities initially attract an individual to a group, this initial attraction enables an individual to recognize their individual,” therefore, the second portion of this paper involves exploring how streamers construct or manage their identity, and suggests using different spectrums to determine how streamers may identify themselves. Characteristics can be placed on a spectrums that describe one extreme to another; for example, a streamer who is new to live streaming and looks to be casual may consider himself as an amateur streaming, whereas an experienced streamer with a set schedule may see himself as a professional streamer. Placed on these spectrums, the paper continues to look at how streamers maintain their identity through unique strategies or interactions with viewers, as well as looking at how affordances on the Twitch platform support the channel identity that makes up a part of the streamer’s overall identity.
Limitations and Self-Reflections

It is important to bear in mind that the findings within this paper are limited, as it focused on qualitative research through purposive sampling. As a non-probability sample that relies on the researcher’s own judgements, purposive sampling may not always accurately depict or reflect the truest representation of the video game streaming community as a whole. While the number of participants and the data gathered provide insightful information in regards to exploring potential motivations and descriptions of streamer identity, additional research will be extremely beneficial, as it can support or refute the observations and findings reported in this paper. However, future research can continue to delve into both motivation and identity even further—the findings presented in this paper are not exhaustive; other factors, such as personality, may affect a streamer’s motivation or the way in which they form their live streaming identity.

As such, quantitative research using The Five Factor Theory, also known as the “Big Five” (Goldberg, 1981) may produce findings that provide an explanation for how personality may affect motivation and identity within streamers. Personality within the realm of online content creation has been shown to play an important role in determining the type of content that is created by each individual. (Correa, Hinsley, and de Zuniga, 2010; Li and Chignell, 2009) Specifically, Li and Chignell (2009) investigate personality through blog content, and found that readers were more attracted to authors “whom they believe have similar personalities,” (p.12) and that the genre of blogs differed based on the personality of the author. The results of the mentioned studies suggest the importance of personality in terms of motivation and how online content is generated by the individual—thus, a streamer’s personality should also be considered in order to achieve a well-rounded understanding that adds to their motivations for streaming, as well as their identity. Additionally, the descriptive spectrums concerning identity are not exhaustive either; future studies may find other characteristics that are helpful in explaining how
streamers choose to identify themselves. Differences between amateur streamers and professional streamers also require much more exploration as a topic. For example, the Work Extrinsic Intrinsic Motivation Scale adapted from Tremblay et al., (2009) may be an extremely beneficial method of finding additional insights as a quantitative measure for work motivation, and may reveal clear differences between amateur and professional streamers.

**Theoretical and Practical Implications**

Offering rich interactions through the availability of non-verbal cues, immediate feedback, and the possibility of broadcasting to large audiences at the convenient press of a button, live streaming also eliminates the need for physical proximity from face-to-face interactions. As a result, the platform of live streaming offers a new and refreshing method of communication and relationship building on the internet through aspects that were weak or absent in prior forms of online interaction.

While blogging motivations served as the groundwork to understanding live streaming motivations, the affordances of live streaming, in terms of having synchronous visual and audio cues, adds a different dimension to the richness of the platform, and are advantageous for individuals seeking to develop interpersonal relationships through online communities in a quicker method compared to previous platforms. This study’s research concerning streamer identity contributes through applying concepts of impression management within CMC by pushing the way in which individuals form interpersonal relationships online in a level that exceeds the capabilities of previous online platforms. As an online platform that emphasizes high levels of interaction between the streamer and the viewer, impression management plays an important part in streamers, their performances, and ultimately, their identity. The immediate interactions and feedback of the platform bears close resemblance to that of face-to-face interactions, where instances of impression management shine. Moreover, the ease of interacting
with viewers and with streamers through features of live streaming create more opportunities for meaningful exchanges which can evolve into emotionally invested relationships over time.

Live streaming is unique in the sense that it offers the common individual a place to broadcast their own content for a small audience, yet the very same platform can also be utilized for large scale eSports tournaments for millions to watch. Although large scale tournaments bear similarities to that of broadcasting traditional sports, live streaming adds an additional element of interaction through the internet, as viewers can also contribute with immediate reactions or responses. No longer is spectating a one-directional platform in which the audience merely observes—live streaming creates the potential for a two-directional form of interaction in which the audience can now participate and influence the content and the direction of the streamer’s channel. Lin, Bowman et al. describe the potentials of video game streaming as “being more inclusive than active play but also a co-constructed social experience with rich interactions between game content, players, and watchers,” (2017, p. 24) inviting people to engage with one another in a way that closely resembles face-to-face interactions. Exploring streamer motivations is beneficial towards the impact of video game live streaming as it provides insight as to why individuals choose to broadcast content for others to view on the internet. However, on a grander scale, exploring this phenomenon allows researchers to also examine live streaming channels as online communities, and why streams are attractive for both streamers and viewers alike in terms of building relationships. As technology continues to improve, the area of online communities continues to change and evolve over time. As such, the relevancy of live streaming as an emerging platform encourages future research to be done, in order to gain a better understanding of the platform, its communities, and the individuals that contribute through their interactions.
APPENDIX
QUALITATIVE INTERVIEW GUIDE

Introduction and motivations for streaming
1. Could you tell me a little bit about yourself first?
2. How would you describe yourself as a streamer?
3. What is your main goal for streaming?
4. Do you have a plan to achieve this goal?
5. Could you share what your favorite and least favorite aspects of streaming are?
6. From your experience in streaming, what do you think your role as a streamer is?
   a. Explain how you came to this answer.

Streaming history and practices
7. What made you decide to start streaming?
8. Is there anyone who inspired you to start streaming?
   a. Can you tell me a bit more in detail as to why they inspired you?
9. Can you talk me through what a daily stream in your channel is usually like?
10. What are some typical interactions that you might have with your viewers?
11. Are these interactions with the viewers very important to you when you are streaming?
   a. Can you explain why these interactions are important?
12. How do you feel when new streamers visit your stream?
   a. How do you feel when they start initiating a conversation with you?
   b. Do you ever start the conversation first?
13. Tell me about your favorite experience so far when it comes to streaming. What made this your favorite moment?
14. Recall your least favorite experience so far in your history of streaming. What made this a least favorite experience?
   a. What kind of impact, if any, did these experiences have on you as a streamer?
15. Do you have a favorite streamer? If so, who is it and why are they your favorite?
16. Apart from your favorite streamer, are there other channels you visit?
   a. Why do you frequent these channels?
17. Have you ever considered not streaming anymore? If so, what was the reason?
18. In the times that you aren’t streaming, but are still playing video games, how is the experience different from when you are streaming?
19. What do you think are important characteristics for a streamer to have? Why do you think these are important characteristics?
LIST OF REFERENCES


Statista. (2016). [Graph illustration leading gaming content on Twitch for October 2016.] *Leading gaming content on Twitch worldwide in October 2016, by number of hours*


BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Denise Lau graduated in summer of 2017 with a Master of Advertising in the College of Journalism and Communications at the University of Florida. In 2014, she obtained a bachelor’s degree at the University of Florida in advertising with a minor in Asian studies and a graduate certificate in web design and communications. As an undergraduate, Denise worked in different jobs specializing in social media and communication, which sparked her interest in online interactions. Combined with her passion for digital gaming, Denise chose to focus her research within this area, specifically in online environments of video game livestreaming.