

The Social Effects of Twitch.tv

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Introduction:

The inseparably linked rise of massive multiplayer video games and the expansion of the internet have resulted in the video game streaming service twitch.tv. On Twitch, anyone may make an account and download the appropriate software then stream themselves playing a game to their heart's content. Twitch offers its streamers advertising opportunities of which the revenue is shared between the company itself and the streamer. Also many streamers offer shoutouts to viewers who pay for a monthly subscription or donate. One of the most popular features of the website however is the live chat feed that any viewer (with occasional restrictions) can interact with the streamer. All of the facets of twitch.tv have had an incredible impact on the video gaming subculture and have made the eSports scene flourish. As with all other live forms of media, twitch and streaming has had its share of problems as well. Copyright battles between streamers and corporations have near brought the site to a halt. Also, security issues for the personal information of the streamers is inevitable from live streaming themselves. In this essay, I will discuss why twitch has such a positive impact on the gaming community, and why it is important to focus on all of its problems as well.

Background:

Twitch.tv was originally founded under the name Justin.tv by its founder Justin Han in 2005. It was moderately successful for a short time, and in 2007 Han himself was one of the first victims of Swatting attacks, which will be discussed later in detail. Since then, twitch has become designated for the exclusive streaming of video games. "58% of Twitch users spend more than 20 hours a week watching videos on its site." (Cook) The Twitch community is often linked now with the YouTube gaming community, gaming being the most viewed category on

YouTube. Most popular YouTube gamers have boosted their own careers with additional twitch streaming. One of the most popular YouTube gaming networks the Yogscast do annual Christmas Livestreams during the month of December to raise money for the Oxfam Charity.

Potential Benefits:

According to a twitch streamer who goes under the username Destiny, who streams up to 60 hours a week, a twitch streamer only makes about 1000 a month from direct ad revenue. A majority of their income comes from the subscriber system split with twitch 3\$/2\$ for each subscription, and other sponsorships totaling at potentially \$100k a year. This amount of money from spending a majority of their time streaming means that they no longer need other sources of income. The economic ramifications of this are that now someone who previously could not have lived off of practicing for eSports tournaments and honing their craft now can. It opens up the enormous and vibrant community of video game competition that we see today. Most video game developers encourage their games to become eSports or even design them to, as they will keep the game in the conversations of internet forums and other online spaces for much longer times, and create a lasting bond between players, their teammates, and the game.

Legal and Ethical Issues:

Streamers and twitch often end up in messy and sometimes controversial legal battles. One that almost shut down many streamers was the issue of music copyright. The rules are unclear when it comes to what is considered fair use in the use of music. Many streamers enjoy putting music overtop of themselves while playing and commenting on a game, but on occasion the streamer will get a strike for that music being copyrighted. When this happens the recording of the broadcast may not be allowed to play audio. This is a severe hit to the streamer when it

comes to monetizing these clips later. It has led many people to consider whether or not it is even ethical to enforce intellectual property law in this way.

There may be some unethical dealings from the side of the streamers as well. Since a lot of ad revenue is dependent on the amount of viewers a streamer has at once, they may find ways to artificially boost their numbers. This is known as viewbotting, and can be very hard to detect. This is essentially stealing from Twitch as it is lying to advertisers about how many real people they're advertising to. Often, the only people who can detect such viewbotting are viewers themselves who do calculations and analysis privately and then out the streamer publicly. There have been a few instances of someone viewbotting someone else's channel in an attempt to ruin their reputation. Twitch and its streamers are in tighter and tighter quarters as the demand and the money involved in streaming goes up.

Security Concerns:

The major problem with streaming one's life over the internet is unsurprisingly the danger that streamer's personal information is in. One popular, but incredibly dangerous method of revealing that a hacker has taken someone's information is by calling in a report to the police that a shooting or stabbing has taken place at the target's address, nicknamed swatting. This results in the police or special forces appearing at the streamers house live to be streamed for all their viewers to watch. On a few occasions the streamer has been arrested themselves after the police found illegal drugs under their possession. This sort of public embarrassment is breeding ground for trolls and internet pranksters that will laugh anonymously at other's expense, and is a problem in any large crowd type of community.

Social Problems:

Along with streaming you're entire life to the internet often comes some personal issues to be leaked onto camera. Since many streamers spend their entire day streaming a lot of their personal life is broadcasted live for the world to see. In one instance, a streamer Reynad recounted partying escapades that occurred between himself and some other streamers at a tournament.⁴ This kind of "Twitch drama" as it has been dubbed by users of the site may attract a lot of attention, but it often puts these people in precarious positions as their every move is now judged and may determine the future of their online career and Twitch reputation. This is just a small part of the more broad social issue that comes along with any kind of social media. The ability for information to leak or be spread rapidly makes it hard for people to contain an uninterrupted reputation of themselves. This has benefits and downsides. The benefit is that people will now have a more realistic view of public figures or celebrities, but at the same time the privacy of individuals is infringed upon. Privacy is useful to people to regulate how they present their personal life to society, but it also allows them to keep some sometimes dark secrets. These ups and downs of publicities are just a part of the package that streamers sign up for when they join the streaming community.

The social side of Twitch from the point of view of those who watch streams is the live chat feed. The ability to interact en masse with a streamer is very exhilarating to some, however anonymity often incentivizes people to say harsh things. Much of the language and jokes used in chat feeds is crass and often cruel. Mostly this is harmless, but there have been occasions when streamers would ban certain words in attempt to curtail this. In one instance, a streamer named Trump was upset with bullying in his channel, and banned the words "F*ck

Trump".⁵ In response to this people in the chat began writing Tuck Frump to get around it. This kind of bullying will likely never truly stop, but people will learn to deal with it over time.

Further Required Research:

Many other social facets of twitch are worth looking into. Looking to the future of competitive gaming, we may see not a complete switch but a balance between esports and physical sports. Opening up this window, allows kids who were never able to feel self-worth from playing physical sports may have that opportunity now with video games. It would be interesting to research if psychologically being successful at video games has the same effect as physical sports.

Conclusion:

Twitch is one of the most important websites currently ranking at 4th highest traffic at peak hours. It will continue to be as popular as it is now, but won't receive mainstream widespread notoriety and financial success until it can work out some of the legal problems and insure an inclusive atmosphere. However, the real question is, can they do this without removing some of the charm that comes with their unregulated video game community.

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