Twitch Streamers and Their Relationships with Viewers: Marketer Paradise or Threat to Consumer Privacy?

**Participant Profile**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Lab</th>
<th>Status</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Marketing</td>
<td>Started streaming Twitch in 2012, and live streaming since 2013.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>Marketing</td>
<td>Started streaming Twitch in 2013, and live streaming since 2017.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Retail Worker</td>
<td>Started streaming Twitch in 2012, and live streaming since 2017.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Student</td>
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Preliminary Insights: Emerging Themes

Engagement with viewers is desired and expected.

- Many streamers saw their responsibility to be entertainers, and by extension to interact with their viewers. These interactions could range from asking about their viewers day, to personally venting about things going on in the streamer’s personal life.
- Most streamers’ main goal was to engage with the viewers, not only because it is fun, but because it is the best way to keep the stream going. “If you're not talking, if you're not interacting, it's hard to keep anything going.”
- Many of the streamers outwardly expressed that their desire to engage and entertain was what brought them to streaming in the first place. “I'm a really outgoing person, and I really like sharing my experiences of gaming, and I love interacting with people.”
- Streaming is seen as a form of social networking for some streamers, wherein they refer to their viewers as “friends” something unique in the parasocial interaction literature. “I started streaming because I loved the interaction, and playing the game, and having people put in their input, things like that. It was solely finding friends.”

Engagement creates and facilitates an environment that prompts parasocial interactions and (some) self-disclosure.

Most are positive, but some are not.

- Streamers take steps to create distance between their “real life” personalities and their stream personalities. Some taking it a step further and portraying themselves with virtual avatars (V-Tubers) thus creating a persona similar to those expressed in Horton & Wohl’s first exploration into parasocial interaction (1956).
- “I think for some people [streaming] is a bigger act than it is for others. You’re definitely having to tap into a creative side of yourself.”
- Each streamer mentioned positive outcomes from their experience as streamers and the relationships they formed with people they have never met in real life. “(Learning that my stream is) “actually getting you through your cancer”, was the most heartwarming experience of my life knowing that I’m actually helping someone by just playing games and just being my goofy self...”

Engagement prompts privacy protection behaviors regarding the streamers’ own PII but not necessarily that of their viewers.

- Streamers take explicit actions to protect their own and their family’s privacy. “We don’t put pictures of our little one, and we make sure that the background does not [have family pictures].”
- “One of the reasons why I wanted to do V-Tuber, because I was afraid of getting my IP address leaked.”
- Most streamers took a passive stance when it came to their viewers. “I can’t really be fully responsible for what they type in chat”
- Some, however, did want their viewers to be safe. “It’s important for people to understand my personal information, like addresses, their real name, or just share stuff that’s very personal to them, I will not talk about on stream because that is a separate matter.”

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- The parasocial interaction was not limited to just the viewers. The streamers also expressed that they had close relationships with their viewers.
- “Because I’m a small streamer, I know most of my regular viewers and some of them are really close friends...”
- Many of the streamers mentioned being a part of micro-communities within Twitch wherein they can more easily engage in these parasocial relationships.
- “Viewers can become friends, can become part of the friend group because we’re such a small community to begin with...”
- Not all of the interactions are positive though. Some streamers were hesitant to engage in relationships with viewers and other streamers.

**Method & Analysis**

- Eight Semi-Structured Interviews with Twitch Streamers lasting 45 – 60 minutes
- The interviews covered three main areas: Content of streams, Privacy, and Monetization
- Interview transcriptions were analyzed using open-coding (Chavez and Belgrave 2012) to identify emerging themes
- The analysis is still in progress

**Discussion/Implications**

- Engaging with viewers is seen as necessary for success as a streamer, but this can lead to the streamers being put into uncomfortable situations when it comes to privacy.
- Streamers represent a possible course of action for Twitch to self-regulate as a means of protecting streamers and viewers.
- When examining online privacy laws moving forward, policy makers must understand the unique nature of Twitch as a means of two-way instantaneous communication. They must understand that there are different considerations for streamers and viewers.
- Marketers interested in Twitch may want to look to micro-influencers on the platform who have considerable pull with a dedicated and diverse audience.
- Researchers should consider the unique experience of women on the platform and how they undergo a unique challenge in terms of engagement and interactions.
- Future researchers will want to examine the unique relationship between viewers and streamers, wherein there is a potential two-way parasocial relationship.
- Future research should look at both viewers and moderators as potential subjects of study to understand their perceptions on the other side of these relationships and their privacy protection actions.