Performances and publics while watching and live-streaming video games on Twitch.tv

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Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of

Master of Philosophy (Engineering)

April 2019

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Abstract

Twitch.tv is a video live-streaming website that launched in 2011 with content centred mostly, but not exclusively, on the playing of video games. Streamers or broadcasters play games in real-time often accompanied by a face camera and audio, while viewers or audiences watch them and interact through a text chat. This study responds to the small, but growing literature surrounding Twitch, and addresses the relative lack of ethnographic research on the topic. Previous research on the platform has focussed thus far on technical aspects of the platform, however user-focused qualitative research on the platform has started to emerge, making this research both timely and relevant.

This thesis considers how, and to what extent, the social practices of users contribute to the concepts of ‘networked publics’ and ‘social performance’. It draws on the work of danah boyd and Erving Goffman and considers the usefulness of their theoretical contributions to help contextualise the forms and amendments associated with platforms like Twitch. The analysis emerges from an ethnographic study conducted completely online that features reflexive participant observation, semi-structured, open-ended interviews conducted via email, and in-depth observations of participants’ channels.

The thesis is divided into three thematically-organised main data chapters that then feed into a discussion that draws them together to consider a larger conceptual framework. The first such data chapter, ‘Twitch as a Social Media Platform’, argues that the platform demonstrates its role as a social networking site through evidence of matchmaking and mental health. The second main chapter, ‘Twitch as a hobby-profession’, addresses casual and serious leisure and considers the platform in terms of personal investment,
branding, and streamer motivation. The third main chapter, ‘Interactions of Streamers and Viewers’, considers the different types of interactions displayed between various users including parasocial relationships and how audiences may hold power on Twitch.

Overall, the thesis offers insight into platform use and it characterises Twitch as a user-led participatory space for like-minded individuals who interact in particular ways in a shared community of practice. The interactions exist along a flexible continuum of differing levels of intimacy where users can lurk, actively participate, and network on both personal and professional levels. Audiences are critical for the platform to function, for communities to flourish, and for streamer success. Streamers build rapport and construct ‘authentic’ brands to attract viewers and promote loyalty and sincerity, and users are seen to actively shape and shift extant social structures and practices over time. Ultimately, users find meaning, produce a sense of community belonging, forge social networks, and shape their own identities in relation to others.

The thesis concludes that Twitch somewhat paradoxically is both fleeting and robustly sustained by its contemporary community of practice. This community is produced and maintained through interaction and performance that shapes the construction of Twitch’s publics, with Twitch itself acting as a large participatory public as well. Performative sociality and networking are understood as key driving forces for Twitch, offering a rewarding space to make relationships, participate in self-care, share in leisure, and build potential livelihoods, with entertainment becoming a pleasing secondary function.
Declaration

This is to certify that:

i. the thesis comprises only my original work towards the Master of Philosophy (Engineering) except where indicated in the preface;

ii. due acknowledgement has been made in the text to all other material used;

iii. the thesis is fewer than 50 000 words in length, exclusive of tables, maps, bibliographies and appendices.

Signed,

Naomi Eleanor Isobel Robinson
If justin.tv can succeed, then nobody has an excuse.

It was a terrible idea.

- Justin Kan, Founder of Justin.tv
Acknowledgements

As I peruse the final version of my thesis, I feel inclined to reflect on my journey. This degree broke me – literally – but I can honestly say, I’m so thankful it did. I’m stronger, I know who I am, and I found my love and appreciation for academia again. It’s strange because you hear horror and triumph stories in academia and graduate research, but boy, I had no idea that I would be impacted so dramatically. This was one hell of a ride, accompanied with successes, burdens, pride, anxiety and panic attacks, anticipation, existential crises, and self-discovery. There are some people I need to thank for getting me through.

Firstly, I could not have submitted without my supervisors, Martin Gibbs and Tamara Kohn. Both of you provided a lot of support and inspiration while I was conducting my research and writing. More importantly, you allowed me the autonomy and space that I needed to work in a way that was comfortable to me. I also thank you for understanding the many things that slowed the progress of this thesis. As someone who felt lost in the world of academia, you have both given me an enormous about of confidence in myself. I hold your advice in high regard and honestly don’t know what I would have done had I not had you wholeheartedly on my side. Thank you, both.

To my family, thank you for unconditionally supporting me – especially in the height of crippling anxiety. Dad, I hope you are proud of the ‘engineering’ part of my degree, even though you probably still feel inclined to try and correct anthropological terms! Mom, even though I’m pretty sure you still don’t know what I’ve actually been doing this whole time, I do know that it doesn’t matter because you are the best person to hear out my frustrations, the first person to offer guidance and you are constantly remind me to trust my intuition. To my older brothers, after I’ve finished sleeping for about a year, Daniel, we’ll buy tickets to another concert, and Zak, we’ll catch up on ALL the series, and of course, have a celebratory Stargate marathon. I love you all.

To my friends who were there for me during both the good and bad moments of this degree. I have no idea where I would be without you.
Special thanks to John Parsons, whose company across the ether meant more than I could ever express. Also, to Safia Roscoe, your friendship and guidance is, and will continue to be, something I treasure deeply.

To Hannah Gould, Lisa Rullo, Nathan Wells, Ethnoforum, Monica Minnegal, and the other post-grads I had the pleasure of meeting during my candidature, from the bottom of my heart, thank you.

I owe a lot to Dave Erasmus, whose work ethic, creativity, thoughts and character have inspired and motivated me immensely throughout this journey.

Additionally, I would like to thank Marcus Carter for answering a random email from an honours student; I can honestly say I would not have taken this path had it not been for our conversation.

I have a debt of gratitude to the internet, many online content creators, and video games for keeping me company on long nights of editing.

Finally, to the girl that started this degree excited to research and unwilling to back down. Despite it all, you did it.

Thank you all so much - Naomi xx
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Chapter 1 – Introduction

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Today as you read this thesis, we, as a collective, are more connected than we have ever been. Technology continues to advance and adapt, and people both react to, and are responsible for, this innovation. With this modernisation comes a massive transformation of broadcast media and popular culture. The internet has widened the landscape for creativity, entrepenurship, leisure, careers, and sociality. Arguably, the internet and the technological tools that bolster our constant march towards the future have become increasingly embedded in nearly every aspect of our everyday lives. This high-tech evolution has led to countless online platforms that have created a multitude of ways and spaces to enjoy a vast array of content. Despite our disparate interests, and the ways we use these different mediums and online platforms, similarities emerge between people who seemed removed from one another at first glance.

As you continue to read this thesis, you may or may not have an interest in the online realms that are lived by many. The internet might be a part of your daily life, or you might only go online out of necessity or only on occasion. For my participants, the internet has offered opportunities extending across entertainment, social, personal, and professional practices to name a few. The platform they use was a place to find a sense of belonging, to explore diverse types of interactions, and to build relationships that are often constructed from genuine interests, authenticity and participatory engagement. From their position, technology is a tool for social, cultural and fiscal growth and is wielded based on their motivations, and a response to the potential of the platform they
are using. While they lead separate lives, and live in different countries, these people were all involved in the massively popular live-streaming website Twitch.tv (from here referred to only as Twitch). Designed uniquely for video game enthusiasts, this real-time video website was the sole case study for this project and was examined ethnographically. While not being representative of all platforms, or all users on Twitch, the following thesis will tap into a subset of unrelated but similar individuals, to articulate the impact of this live-streaming website on their lives and vice versa.

1.2 SCOPE

Social media, and the internet more broadly, is constantly evolving. This applies to Twitch which added new features, made changes to the interface, and saw shifts in popular games and content being streamed several times over the course of this research. In this ever-changing way, Twitch offers particularly exciting alternatives to the gaming landscape that existed before streaming. That is, live-streaming elicits new modes of, and changes to, experiencing the internet and social practices around games. Burroughs and Rama (2015), note that streaming (and by extension studying streaming) is important because it, “blurs the boundaries between the production and consumption of gaming and virtual worlds”, where Twitch exists simultaneously as the current and future of gaming (pp. 2-3). Projects examining distinctions between online and offline interactions, such as Boellstorff (2008), Taylor (2006), and Miller (2012) to name a few, have discussed how online and offline realms cannot be easily separated. Streaming websites like Twitch take this lack of distinction further. That is, the platform is both ‘virtual’ and ‘real’, where there are no tangible boundaries between face-to-face interactions, networking, sociality,
and gaming experiences (Burroughs and Rama 2015, p. 2). Additionally, Burroughs and Rama (2015) consider that the cultural and social impacts of such a transformative media must be researched with regards to how users embrace and participate on streaming media (p. 4). It is this idea, of continuous adaption and individuals using streaming platforms for different reasons and in different ways that makes researching Twitch compelling.

As such, a driving force behind this study was understanding how users have impacted these changing technologies, and how these platforms are affecting the way users socialise and exist online as an extension of themselves. The internet has become intimately entwined in the everyday lives of many people around the world. There are countless platforms producing enormous amounts of unique content, thus uncovering how and why people watch and navigate live-streaming platforms and streams offers an opportunity to discover more intricacies about the social worlds at play. Moreover, when it comes to our social lives, it is important to interrogate whether anything has changed with our experiences in light of platforms like Twitch. That is, are the platforms themselves providing new types of interactions, ways of interacting, and spaces for people to behave differently, or is it the users who are taking advantage of tools provided to them to act as they always have (see Sacks, 1992)? Further, delving into whether technology has changed the way people engage with one another is crucial for understanding the current technological climate and trends in academic scholarship.

Twitch is a very specialised platform, which simultaneously redefines and generates new ways to experience video games. In response to these new experiences in and around
video games, this project was designed to understand the way people use Twitch. I must emphasise that this thesis is depicting the human actors in these virtual spaces. While this thesis is a representation of my participants, I acknowledge that any claims or descriptions are not representative of all users or all streaming platforms. Instead it is a snapshot of the lives of these people at a specific time and space, and under a particular set of circumstances. Broadly, this thesis uses Twitch to speak about the people who engage with these technologies, and the two-way relationship between people and social media. More specifically, however, the following thesis explores the complex social structures that exist within Twitch and the ways people navigate these structures. I intend to create an open discourse for discussing how the motivations, interactions, actions and perceptions of users aid in the construction and maintenance of networked publics and constitute cultural performances online. Through the examination of Twitch as a social media platform, discussing streaming as a profession and as a hobby, and examining the interactions between users, this thesis aims to bring the users to the forefront, rather than the system, games, mechanics, or technology.

1.3 RESEARCH PROBLEM

In this study, I consider how, and to what extent, the motivations and interactions of users, social dynamics, and the relationships they build, contribute to the concepts of networked publics and social performances. As such, this thesis draws on the work of danah boyd (2011), unpacking her definition of networked publics, and questioning the suitability of this framework for live-streaming platforms like Twitch. Additionally, cultural performances and performances of identity will be discussed in regard to both
streamers and viewers with reference to the work of Erving Goffman (1956). To thoroughly understand these two major concepts – networked publics and performances - I consider the social, public, personal, and professional aspects of Twitch. Firstly, this thesis establishes how Twitch acts as a social media platform providing unexpected mental health benefits and cultivating meaningful relationships. Following this, it will consider how users categorise streaming as a hobby and as a profession with reference to branding based in authenticity, personal and fiscal investments, and community ties. Finally, through the examination of streamer-audience relationships, channel success, social networking for growth, parasocial relationships, influencers/micro-celebrities, and communities of practice will be addressed. By examining these fundamental social practices, this thesis will add to the current scholarship on Twitch, and challenge current discourses surrounding networked publics and identity performances online.

While Twitch is a website dealing with video games, this research focusses on streamers and audience members, rather than the game that is played. Further, this project was designed in response to a relative lack of ethnographic or cultural/socially focussed research on Twitch. However, since then these approaches have been steadily growing, and thesis builds upon that work. Until recently, scholarship focused on Twitch was largely concerned with examining the platform through analysis of the technology or by creating models/designs, rather than understanding the people using the platform. Further, research into the participatory nature of the platform, specifically regarding meaningful interactions, communities, relationship roles, and the way people use the platform is also incredibly timely and important. By situating Twitch within the context of online video content and social media, this project aims to provide an ethnographic
account of user experiences. That is, the project intends to understand not only how the platform operates, but how people use the platform in both intended and unexpected ways.

In summary, using Twitch as the sole focus of this research, I examined the experiences of Twitch users to provide conceptual understandings of publics and performance. The following thesis will utilise ethnography to inform the relationship between users and the platform they engage with on a daily basis. I hope that the findings from this project can usefully contribute to the growing academic discussions of Twitch, and by proxy, live-streaming and gaming research, in relation to studies of social media use more generally, hobby-profession dynamics, and audience-streamer interactions and motivations.

1.4 WHAT IS TWITCH?

In recent years, the world has seen a significant shift in new media forms. Just as the introduction of broadcast media impacted print media, the rise of live-streaming websites has altered the landscape of popular video entertainment. The beauty of live-streaming video sites is that content is user-generated while being specific, local, national and international in nature (Burroughs and Rugg 2014, p. 374). While video content online is not a new phenomenon, live-streaming has emerged as a popular mainstream entertainment form in recent years. There are countless applications and websites with live-streaming capabilities that capture real-life moments which are then seamlessly and immediately streamed to anyone with an internet connection. The website that arguably started the revolution, or at the very least, reinvigorated real-time videos, and is still a driving force, is Twitch.tv. According to Payne (2018), Twitch accounts for roughly 2%
of all traffic online landing it fourth after Netflix, Apple and Google, and over 43% of all video live-streaming traffic (p. 290). Further, Twitch holds a steady grip on the gaming industry, with the ability to influence game purchases through the clout of popular streamers which has resulted in new relationships between broadcasters, gamers and developers (Johnson and Woodcock, 2018). As such, Twitch has well and truly solidified its place online.

The platform emerged from a parent site, Justin.tv – a website that began in 2007 with one man broadcasting his life 24/7 to the internet from a camera attached to his hat (Sydell, 2007). The platform grew from one channel to a streaming platform hosting a variety of content such as music, sport, games and real-life categories (Spikler, Ask and Hansen 2018, p. 3). Eventually, the gaming side of Justin.tv tipped the scales in popularity compared to other content being produced, and in 2011 a real-time platform for video game content branched off and Twitch.tv was born (Payne 2018, p. 290). The fast growing and hugely popular platform has since made its mainstream presence known when Amazon bought the website for close to one billion USD in 2014 (Smith 2017).

Twitch can be accessed on smart devices, gaming consoles including PlayStation and Xbox, and personal computers – the latter was the sole device used for this research. When a viewer navigates their way to the purple décor of Twitch, they see a home page of featured content (see Figure 1). Included on this page are several live-stream options that are underway at that time, featured games that people are watching, and the top live channels for the different gaming devices. This homepage appears to be largely region specific, so in my case study the page revealed Australasian broadcasters, championships
and content. Without logging in, a viewer can search or browse for the content they want to watch through certain categories. While in the past, this included only game, channel, and video options based on viewership, at the time of writing, this had expanded to include ‘communities’ and a ‘creative’ tab to explore the most popular live content.

Typically, on Twitch, once a viewer picked a stream to watch, they would be watching something that looks similar to Figure 3. The majority of streamers play games which are broadcasted live to anyone with an internet connection. In the same interface, audience members or viewers, watch and comment through the live chat box. Their comments can be directed to other viewers in the chat or to the streamer – in which case the latter can respond verbally. Typically, the viewer sees a video of the game being played at the same time as a smaller video of the broadcaster. Not everyone will have a camera turned on making themselves visible, much like not everyone has a microphone on to interact audibly. Gameplay is not the only content available on Twitch. Other video game related content includes competitive gaming or eSports tournaments, Twitch creative such as real-time art, talk shows, music, and ‘in real life’ or ‘IRL’, which was introduced while fieldwork was conducted. The ‘IRL’ section is essentially an ‘anything goes’ category, with streamers filming as they walk around their local town, read books, cook, or simply chat to their viewers while doing nothing else. These different sections coupled with the multitude of games and the number of streamers on the platform – which sits at roughly 2 million unique content creators per month (see Twitch Advertise 2018) – opens doors to a diverse and seemingly endless range of content to view.
Figure 1. Screenshots of Twitch.tv homepage featured content from 21/09/2017.
Figure 2. Example of stream. Captured from Summit1g’s stream on 19/09/2017.
Without an account on Twitch, individuals can watch streams accompanied by advertisements and see, but not participate, in the chat. There are certain benefits however, when you move from no account to a free account, and then again to a paid account. When you create a free account, you gain the ability to follow channels to be notified when they go live, join the chat, and start a broadcast. Payment comes into the equation on two fronts – supporting a streamer and upgrading your account. The first is when users upgrade to a Twitch Turbo membership for $8.99 per month, that provides videos free from advertising and access to other internal features such as the use of custom emoticons. Remembering that Amazon is now Twitch’s parent company, there is another option, Twitch Prime, included with Amazon Prime subscriptions for $5.99 a month, and provides users with advertisement-free viewing, one free channel subscription each month, and interface upgrades in chat in conjunction with free game content and game discounts. The second way users outlay money is by supporting streamers. For some streamers like Summit1g in Figure 2, Twitch can become the primary means through which they make a living. This is made possible through subscriptions and donations from viewers as well as advertising revenue, partnerships and sponsorships from companies. If a user wants to support a streamer fiscally, they can pay a $4.99 monthly subscription fee, where part of the subscription fee is allocated to Twitch itself. Alternatively, they can ‘cheer’ or tip a streamer with Twitch currency known as ‘bits’ or they can donate any amount they choose through third party sites like Patreon, StreamLabs and PayPal, where the whole sum of donations is given to the channels.
The fast growing and hugely popular platform has approximately 140 million unique users per month, and 15 million unique daily users with peak concurrent sitewide viewers reaching over 2 million (Twitch Advertising 2018). According to statistics provided by Smith (2018), Twitch users fall mostly within 18-49 years of age with approximately 73% of users categorised as millennials\(^1\). Further, it is a male dominated space. In 2017, it was reported that 75% of users identified as male, and the other 25% identified as an all-inclusive, ‘other than male’ (see, Smith 2017), however, in December of 2018, Twitch has stated on their advertising website this number has increased to 81.5% and 18.5% respectively (Twitch Advertising 2018). The popularity and growth of Twitch has pushed other websites, in particular YouTube, to echo features readily seen on Twitch including more prominent gaming content and channels (Gandolfi 2016). Live-streaming videos have quickly become a necessity for many companies, and YouTube is no exception with the live component of YouTube expanding rapidly. According to Business Insider in 2017, YouTube Live was growing and quickly catching Twitch gaining more streamers per month with Twitch is still generating more money per stream (Elder and Gallagher 2017). YouTube even added additional revenue avenues for streamer funding through ‘Sponsorships’ for gaming channels (see Statt 2017). In 2018, it was confirmed that even with YouTube Live being the second most popular video live-streaming site, it was steadily losing concurrent viewership while Twitch and other streaming services were gaining viewers (Perez 2018). The power struggle that is unfolding between these online platforms and new technologies entering the arena highlights the continuing popularity of

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\(^1\) People born between 1980s to the mid-1900s or early 2000s (see Benckendorff and Moscardo, 2009).
live-streaming services. As such, this is an incredibly exciting time for live-streaming technologies – especially those which involve video games. Whether it is the new avenues to market products, paths to earn an income, entertainment spaces or ways socialise, the promises of innovation also promise unique ways in which people can respond.

1.5 ORIGIN STORIES

At this juncture, I would like to bring my participants to the centre of the stage. To gain a sense of the environment these people navigate daily, I would encourage all readers who have not fully grasped my articulation of the platform, to take a moment to browse Twitch before continuing. In this section, I present the origin stories of the people I communicated with because their initial and continued use of Twitch gives a snapshot into the role the platform plays in their lives. This entire thesis, beginning with this section, places importance on the immediate common ground and sense of belonging to a community that these individuals experience through their engagement with the platform. That is, I acknowledge that this sample of individuals may not represent every user on Twitch, other online platforms, or the version of Twitch that exists whenever you are reading this thesis. Instead, I offer insights into specific individuals at a particular point in time and examine their lived experiences.

Twitch is a space for like-minded individuals to come together through their common interest of games, creativity and entertainment that, as the research presented in this thesis will show, becomes habitual and an important cultural stake in their lives. In addition to having a history of playing games for most of their lives, my participants
provided three main reasons for initially using the platform. First, they were directly
introduced to the website by a friend or family member who already used Twitch.
Second, users indicated discovering Twitch through intentional word-of-mouth online.
That is, participants were engaging in other online content such as YouTube, social
media or gaming forums and followed popular personalities, games or conversations that
led them to the website. Finally, finding Twitch was accidental for some users. This
included the random nature of the internet resulting in participants watching video
footage of gameplay and tracing it back to a live-stream. Other users explained they
accidentally pressed the share button on a console while playing a game, or that they
were unexpectedly hired by a streamer to create graphics and animations for their brand
and consequently went “down the rabbit hole from there”. Whether through a personal
connection, common interest online, or luck, all users found a platform that they now
used regularly.

To complete my participants’ origin stories, it is important to consider what it is about
Twitch that kept them interested and using the platform. From our conversations, I was
able to gleam two categories of motivation for Twitch users that were not always
mutually exclusive: entertainment and social purposes. The entertainment value of the
platform is what I would consider as the designed intention of the platform. Twitch was
created to provide outlets for individuals to watch others play games and to play games
with an audience. Some of my participants adamantly articulate that they like Twitch for
that very reason, as it is a tool to enjoy and experience video games. Additionally,
entertainment motivations stemmed from the vast variety of content available. Different
streams encourage diverse types of experiences from streams that could be relaxing,
informative, high energy, or amusing. These experiences could change depending on the base interests of the user, e.g. watching for a streamer, for a game or for an event. Further, the nature of live-streams permits no two videos to be identical, even when watching the same game or the same streamer, and as one participant articulated, “Every time a game is played it won’t be like the last time”. Additionally, a recurring response for continued use was that Twitch offered immediate interaction with streamers, where there was an understanding that it was an environment that had other people who also enjoyed video games. The platform offered a space where people could be actively involved in content creation as it took place while feeling more connected to the content creators and to other viewers. The ease in which people could use the platform also played a role in users returning to the website after their initial visit.

Due to the participatory and user-led environment that Twitch offers, the social side of the platform is an attractive aspect for users in addition to the entertainment factor. Users who prioritise the social potential of the platform enjoy the sense of belonging and meaningful interactions. Additionally, users indicated a strong preference to watch streams to interact through public chat and private messages. These interactions exist on many levels of intimacy where relationships can evolve from acquaintances to tangible friendships, with different power dynamics at play between users. The Twitch community can subsequently be broken into smaller subsets and mutual interests, which, coupled with the scale and variety of the platform, makes it highly possible to find a niche which fits.
For viewers who may or may not also stream, there is a plethora of content available for consumption. Thus, when it comes to the decision of what broadcast to watch, some of my participants watch content that they can relate to, that is featured or recommended, or that sparks an interest. While being selective is not a priority for some users, others choose specific streams. For instance, some argued that the personality of the streamer was of the most import, and if they were playing a game they liked, or the gameplay was good, that was a bonus. In the case of watching for a streamer, a majority of users indicated that they chose the streamer based on personality relatability and shared characteristics with the streamer. Others only watched to see games they enjoyed playing, games they could not or would not ever play, or to see expertise or different ways to play a certain game.

In addition to the fleeting nature of a live-stream, and the need (to an extent) to be present and watching a stream as it happens, many of my participants urged the importance of a streamer interacting with the audience. While they are still watched, the chat in larger, popular streams draw in thousands of viewers, and according to the responses received from my participants about their past experiences, they can become incredibly populated with messages and quite toxic. As a response to this and wanting to interact with a streamer as much as possible, most of the people I spoke with opted to watch smaller streams. This means, that in an effort to avoid the toxicity that is present on the platform, my participants actively sought to participate in spaces that were more manageable or did not have that trend. Further, when responding, users endeavoured to speak of Twitch in a positive light. Notably, they spoke of the benefits to their mental health and social well-being thanks to the platform. Though interactions on and through the platform were
evident, engagement did not necessarily require active interaction. Some users choose to lurk and do not chat with others or the streamer and are simply there to watch the stream unfold.

With a steady and strong internet connection and while watching on their chosen device, my participants actively used Twitch for several hours on a daily basis. A select few did not use it as regularly, but still watched streams and navigated to the platform most days of the week. In some cases, the website was running all day in the background like a radio as participants carried out other tasks. Twitch holds an important stake in the lives of many of my participants. This is because the technological affordances aid the social ones. While people use the platform differently, Twitch is designed in a way that encourages relationships to form between users. On a base level, this occurs through streamer and audience separation. However, this relationship is one that not only nurtures the creation of communities from like-minded individuals but becomes a space for collaboration and co-existence. It results in a space where people feel connected and want to experience and evolve together.

As mentioned earlier, in this chapter, I examined the human factor of Twitch by qualitatively engaging with the observational nuances of the perspectives and actions of my participants gained while conducting fieldwork. To thoroughly examine individualised experiences on Twitch, user interactions, motivations, and the different uses of the platform will be considered in further detail in the chapters below. Subsequently, the purpose of this thesis is to provide an understanding of how and to what extent users impact and alter conceptualisations of cultural performance and
networked publics. With some knowledge of what this thesis argues, what Twitch is, and an introduction to the people using the platform, this chapter will end with the thesis structure.

1.6 THESIS STRUCTURE

Chapter 2 of this thesis defines and explains key concepts and provides background and context for this project through a literature review. To do this, I firstly provide a survey of the current Twitch scholarship which highlights the gap to which this project is a response. Following this, definitions of periphery concepts, including communities of practice, parasocial relationships, social media and hobbies, will be outlined. These concepts are underlying topics that will then be the basis for discussions of performance and publics. These two main concepts will each be defined and situated within the context of this project by applying them to current Twitch literature and scholarship from relevant literature, such as online communities, social media, online video content, and gaming research. This chapter indicates that Twitch is becoming increasingly popular in academic fields and online research. A large proportion of the current literature is concerned with the platform, system and design. More recently, some studies have begun to focus on the people who use Twitch. However, even when this is the case, the research is often just beginning to scratch the surface, and is geared to look at eSports, power relations and participation. Performance and networked publics, as defined by this project, have not yet been examined for Twitch.

Chapter 3 describes the methods used for this project and justifies their use. Firstly, a discussion of ethnography and debates around the method being used for online research
opens the chapter. Following this, I offer a breakdown of the techniques implemented over the course of this research. Specifically, this includes initial observations and reflexive consideration of my position as a researcher. This is followed by the rationale for the semi-structured, open-ended interviews that I conducted, and a description of the in-depth observations and ‘lurking’ that occupied part of the research.

In Chapter 4, I present and discuss data from my research that indicate Twitch as a social media platform. This chapter looks first at the making of friends and then at mental health, which is discussed colloquially rather than medically. The first considers how some people use Twitch solely to find friends and relationships, where viewing streams can sometimes be secondary to making connections. The latter examines the explicit and implicit ways in which Twitch becomes a space for mental health therapy. Chapter 4 is placed before Chapter 5 for two reasons. First, it is concerned with all users despite a focus on the viewer side of interactions and motivations – this is because all streamers are viewers, but not all viewers are streamers. Second, understanding Twitch as a social media platform and the way people engage with the platform on a fundamental level through shared interests lends itself to understanding the hobby-profession dynamics.

In three sections, Chapter 5 considers the social structures and motivations of streamers who engage with Twitch as a hobby and regarding gaining a profession from streaming. The first is a brief review of relevant scholarship regarding leisure and hobbies. Second, the financial and time commitments of streamers will be discussed. Finally, streamer branding and profiles will be examined and followed by a discussion about streamer motivations and audience catering.
The penultimate chapter will consider both the implications of Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 to illustrate the social dynamics between Twitch users. These interactions and relationships exist from four perspectives – viewer to viewer, viewer to streamer, streamer to viewer, and streamer to streamer. In each of these sections, concepts such as communities of practice, parasocial relationships, participatory networking, and the social roles of users will be discussed.

The final chapter of this thesis is a discussion that will provide analysis of the conceptual framework. The conclusions and discussions of the previous chapters will be used to speak to the broader conceptual implications. Here, ideas about networked publics and performance are explicitly explored to address my initial research interests. Before ending with concluding remarks, Chapter 7 provides a discussion of the limitations of this project including the style of interview, recruitment issues and restricted sample of participants, in addition to, suggestions as to the path of future research on Twitch.tv.
Chapter 2 – Literature Review

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter is broken into four sections that will position this project within a broader landscape of current research. Firstly, a literature review of Twitch scholarship will be provided. With an understanding of the trends of current scholarship regarding the platform, I will then provide definitions of underlying concepts discussed in this thesis. For conciseness, these include communities of practice, parasocial interactions, social media/networking, and hobbies/leisure. These periphery concepts are important as the findings and claims inform the larger conceptual framework, creating a deeper understanding of publics and performances. The second half of this chapter is dedicated to defining publics and performances. This will be achieved through a discussion of how these concepts have been addressed in relevant research and in Twitch scholarship in particular. This survey of relevant literature will reveal three gaps which this thesis will address: the limited (but growing) scholarship using ethnographic techniques, and the lack of Twitch research explicitly examining networked publics and few addressing performance as they are defined below.

2.2 TWITCH LITERATURE

To begin, there is a small but growing body of published research on Twitch. Throughout the course of this project, I sourced any articles that mentioned the keyword, ‘Twitch.tv’. This resulted in scholarly books and papers, many of which were proceedings from conferences. The literature at the time of writing this thesis can be divided into two categories. On the one hand, we have qualitative studies and research that either examine
or call for the social aspects of Twitch to be examined. On the other, the more frequently used quantitative approach focusses on the technology or system; this category will be discussed first.

2.2a Technology and Twitch

Quantitative data analysis is a typical tool for Twitch research, often looking at the statistical properties of streaming and user activities in a quantifiable manner (Jia et al. 2016). In addition to statistical trends, a common theme is researchers concerned with increasing the quality of user experience through changes to the infrastructure, designing models and finding solutions for issues in the system. That is, many researchers have examined the technical side of the platform to plan for the future evolution of similar systems or improve the current systems in place.

One of these studies is Claypool, Farrington and Muesch (2015), who built a website crawler to automatically retrieve information from the Twitch API\(^2\) and gathered data about bitrate and aggregate numbers based on internet traffic, viewing trends and stream numbers. Similarly, Nascimento et al. (2014) provided a model to predict the statistical behaviour patterns of users as they switched between broadcasts and the number of messages sent in chat. Deng et al. (2014; 2017) followed this route, using an API to gain insight into Twitch trends and geo-distribution, indicating the predictability of viewer

\(^2\) API – Application Programming Interface are functions in place that allow applications to gather data from operating systems. For Twitch, that allows access to information like active video streams, their descriptions, number of viewers etc. (see Kaytoue et al., 2012; Aparcio-Pardo et al., 2015).
trends based on variables such as the popularity of games and channel allocations based on popularity.

Others focussed on adaptive bitrate streaming to reduce the cost of infrastructure, algorithms to influence resolution, and the bandwidth needed to transcode the live-stream videos and ultimately increase the quality of user experience (Pires and Simon 2014; Chen et al. 2015; Aparicio-Pardo et al. 2015). Likewise, Zhang and Liu (2015) discussed the fluctuating nature of crowdsourced streaming with a focus on the architecture and technical patterns dependent on how the audience was deciding to watch (i.e. event and streamer driven viewership trends). Using mostly the data collected from the Twitch API, they noted that delay of the data being transferred (latency) of the chat was shorter than the long latency of the stream, and because of this, there is an impact on the quality of experience for the viewer. Pan, Bartram and Neustaedter (2016) were also interested in the chat behaviours of viewers and designed a visualisation tool to aid streamers and game designers.

With developers and usability as the endpoint for their data, Falchuk and Panagos (2016) proposed a framework to provide real-time patterns, indexing, and searching capabilities for relevant matches to watch. Using a similar method of data collection, to gain data on viewer numbers, stream popularity, and general metadata, Pires and Simon (2015) discussed system bandwidth peaks and argue that their findings could be used to improve systems in identifying popular streams more readily. Yang et al. (2013) had viewers in mind when testing and creating algorithms that would help recommend videos to users based on their preferences and past viewing behaviours on the platform. The first
published study of Twitch by Kaytoue et al. (2012) offers similar findings after using web crawlers and statistical analysis, concluding that a game can become more popular on Twitch based on new releases and tournaments and that the audience of a stream can be predicted at the start of the broadcast.

To summarise, the technology focused Twitch research often used tools such as data scrapers, web crawlers and APIs, and most involved conducting statistical analysis to predict behaviours and trends or improve a system. That is, this research is regularly directed towards providing a program, algorithm, design, or model through the examination of resolutions, bit-rate, frame rates, and statistics. Providing data, frameworks, and solutions, these studies are aimed towards improving Twitch infrastructure for the quality of user experiences, industry, developers, or future platforms. These studies may be able to predict viewer trends or network performance and provide models or designs with users in mind. However, they shed little light on the experience of a Twitch user from the perspective of users. The tendency for studies to focus on the technical aspects, misses the unique ways people use the platform, and how their use deviates from a fundamental function of the platform as a source of entertainment.

2.2b People and Twitch

While focussing more on the behavioural side of Twitch, but still using quantitative and statistical methods are studies such as, Sjöblom et al. (2017) who, through surveys, consider the psychological impacts of Twitch. Concerned with spectating play and the relationship of game genres, content, and viewer gratification, they note that the type of
content streamed has a stronger impact on user gratification than the genre of game
streamed. In earlier research, Sjöblom and Hamari (2016) examined viewers on Twitch,
specifically identifying five types of motivation: cognitive to acquire information or
knowledge; affective to have an emotional experience; personal integrative to enhance
status or credibility; social integrative to enhance societal connections; and tension
release for escape. Gros et al. (2017) also consider the motivations and behaviours of
users, by creating a model to investigate information, entertainment and social aspects
through expenses, gratification, and that amount of time spent on Twitch. Seering, Kraut
and Dabbish (2017) statistically consider moderation tools in Twitch chat to encourage
and discourage certain behaviours. With a focus on imitation and deterrence theories,
researchers found that people were more likely to imitate certain messages they see in
chat. Users with more status had more influence, and when a certain type of behaviour
such as spam was banned, users responded by decreasing those behaviours.

Smith, Orbrist and Wright (2013) conducted an observational study which compares
Twitch to interactive television. Notably they discuss that spectating video games adds an
element of passivity where video games traditionally involved active engagement. In this
case, Twitch offers viewers the ability to co-pilot the play of video games in a new way.
This sentiment of passivity also reads true to the tradition of console gaming with non-
players spectating and commenting on the gameplay in living rooms around the world.
However, Deng et al. (2014) also make the link to broadcast media such as television,
where they argue that gameplay will have a mainstream presence on television
broadcasts. Twitch is not a traditional media like television or radio, nor is it traditional in
the sense of how video games had been experienced in the past. This is due to Twitch
converging communal, passive and interactive media types (Sjöblom et al. 2017).

Spilker, Ask and Hansen (2018) similarly open a dialogue of social practices and structures of participation with a focus on Twitch challenging traditional media studies concepts including spatial and affective switching.

Ramirez, Saucerman and Dietmeier (2014), discuss the nuances of Twitch Plays Pokémon, a collective attempt to beat a Pokémon game. The authors use Gee’s (2012) (G)ame/(g)ame theory, where the latter is the media itself (Pokémon) and the former is the social system based around the game. This study was a preliminary insight into a Twitch community that made sense of the metagame through narrative, where people actively and passively participated, and identified as particular player archetypes gaining knowledge through experience (Ramirez, Saucerman and Dietmeier 2014). To provide implications for design, Hamilton, Garretson and Kerne (2014) examine the participatory nature of Twitch through an ethnographic investigation. Like the current study, the authors consider viewers watching based on the content, the streamer, or the community, along with the differences in participation based on the size of the stream. Further, they highlight the importance of social interactions and shared histories in fostering communities.

Twitch studies that have considered the people instead of the platform conclude that the participatory nature of the platform fosters a sense of community (and shared identity) where meaningful interactions occur in smaller streams (see Hamilton, Garretson and Kerne 2014). Some studies consider Twitch as a space containing affective relationships of expertise/mentorship and learning/apprenticeship (see Burroughs and Rama 2015).
From previous Twitch literature, we can also consider videos to have viewing peaks, where popularity is a dynamic response to game releases, updates, and events. Notably, 90% of views fall on a small number of popular broadcasters, leaving many small-scale streams with far fewer viewers (Deng et al. 2015). Supporting these findings are studies that state, “the content is mainly consumed by a small fraction of very assiduous streamers” (Nascimento et al. 2014). The current study examines smaller streams and is therefore concerned more with meaningful interactions based on viewer-streamer relationships.

In more recent research, the social activities of users have begun to surface, such as Consalvo (2016), where gameplay is performed differently based on geographical location, the platform used (where spectator expectations play a role) and whether play is embedded in hobby or professional motivations, branding and performing failure. The professional lives of gamers is also addressed by Johnson and Woodcock (2017) through interviews with broadcasters achieving or aspiring to rise to professional level while examining socio-technical challenges that accompany these new career avenues such as digital intimacy, content creation, production-consumption narratives, and internet celebrity status. Consalvo (2017, p. 177) examines paratexts and Twitch, and questions when a text becomes para-, by looking at game modifications, or ‘peripheral add-ons’ and the branding of professional streamers on Twitch. Specifically focussed on eSports tournaments and the dynamics of spectating, Taylor (2016) considers the changes in audiences using Twitch and the commodification of streaming, expansion of audience power, and hybridised texts existing between players and spectators. The conference abstract of Vosmeer et al. (2017) also considers the new audience positions Twitch has
facilitated. Video games no longer require interactive engagement, and the authors question what motivates viewers and how one might define participation and interaction in these new positions. Finally, Recktenwald (2017), while considering transcribing Twitch broadcasts, noted the cross-modal communication differences between audiences and streamers. Due to streamers needing to switch attention between the chat and the game, and with the addition of broadcast delays, messages instantly become highly contextual and responses from streamers may be selective and disjunctive. Whereas spectatorship is more stable, with audiences able to focus on both chat and the streamer in real-time.

Providing an introductory exploration of the behavioural trends around the consumption and performance of live-streaming on Twitch, Gandolfi (2016) suggests that Twitch is not simply a space of spectatorship, but that it engages audiences with different motivations for watching. Focussed on the streamer, Gandolfi (2016) describes three trends. Firstly, streamers who consider themselves as professionals are motivated by the challenge and are less likely to interact; accepting the audience help would hinder their persona of an expert in the game they are playing. Secondly, streamers who are entertainers want to exhibit their skills but also interact with audiences. Finally, streamers who rely heavily on interaction and audience insights prefer an exchange between themselves and those that watch, effectively using emotional companionship to cultivate an audience (Gandolfi, 2016, p. 77). Mental health and disabilities have made their first appearances in Twitch research with Johnson (2018) examining the positive and negative factors impacting streamers of this demographic and addresses economic, emancipatory and entrepreneurial opportunities.
Burroughs and Rama (2015) emphasise the importance of researching websites like Twitch. They argue that Twitch represents the future and present of the video game experience, where production and consumption are incredibly entwined, and that it fundamentally alters the landscape of gaming. Live-streaming also blurs the line between virtual and real, and makes the distinction between social networking, face-to-face communication and spaces for participating in gaming unclear (Burroughs and Rama, 2015, pp. 1-5). The call for research from current academics looking at Twitch stretches from examining the economic and industrial ramifications, to affective relationships for the active participation of audiences, to the implications of communities of practice, expertise, mentorship, learning, spectatorship and play. It is with the research and findings of this sub-section – people and twitch – that the current project holds direct correlation. The current study, while considering user motivations and interactions is not concerned with the implications for design and industry, but rather the relationship the users have with the technology in socially meaningful ways – namely, through the examination of publics and performance which will be discussed below.

2.3 PE RIPHERY CONCEPTS

With an understanding of the trends in current Twitch scholarship, and in order to position this study further, I will define here some periphery concepts discussed at various points in this thesis that will, in due course, help build the foundational of the larger conceptual framework.
2.3a Communities of Practice

According to Wenger, McDermott and Snyder (2002), communities of practice, in simple terms, are knowledge-based social structures. The authors write, “communities of practice are groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis” (Wenger, McDermott and Snyder, 2002, p. 4). That is, there are three levels of engagement; mutual engagement where members interact with one another, while sharing a joint enterprise in the form of a common endeavour, with access to a shared repertoire of common resources (Barton and Tusting, 2005, p. 2). The purpose of a community of practice is to produce, develop, and exchange knowledge. Community members have a certain expertise or passion for a topic, where there are no clear boundaries. These communities are maintained through a shared passion, a sense of commitment, and identification with the group. Additionally, they change, grow and end organically, and will continue based on relevancy, the value of the community, and a common interest to learn (Wenger, McDermott & Snyder, 2002, p. 42). Knowledge acquisition in these communities is a social process that involves collective learning experiences that differ based on the position of the individual (new/veteran) where members gain more authority within the community as they learn (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Hildreth and Kimble, 2004). A person might be motivated by the domain and wish to aid in its development, some are drawn to be a part of a community (interacting with like-minded individuals), and others are drawn to learning more about their passions while contributing in a meaningful way, or understanding what tools, techniques and
structures work for a particular practice in order to perfect their own practice (Wenger, McDermott & Snyder, 2002, pp. 44-45).

In massively multiplayer online video games, players become active participants in communities of practice, and through them, people begin to understand themselves and the world from the perspective of that particular community (Steinkuehler, 2004, p. 524; Taylor, 2006). This new age of participatory online culture, from video games to forums, and from video content to blogs, all offer the right ingredients to elicit communities of practice. Miller (2012) comments on the internet and the many platforms it brings providing embodied knowledge that can potentially transcend time and space provoking a myriad of diverse and dispersed connections (p. 4; 17). Finally, in the face of the internet, new technologies that promote borderless connection and communication provide a space for smaller networks to exist within larger communities. As such, the network of practice model offers a scenario where a person could belong to multiple overlapping communities of practice with the internet representing a constellation of interconnected communities (Hildreth and Kimble, 2004, pp. xii-xiii).

2.3b Parasocial Interactions

Parasocial interaction was a concept developed by Horton and Wohl (1956), in an effort to describe unequal media relationships. That is, parasocial relationships describe the one-way relationships between audience members and personalities in the public eye - television, radio, silver screen, celebrities, and online media (Ferchaud et al., 2017, pp. 89-90). This concept details how audiences engage with these on-screen personalities as though the relationship was reciprocal eliciting a deeper connection. People participating
in parasocial relationships act as if they have close, intimate, personal relationships with the public personas who become an integral part of their social sphere (Hu, Zhang and Wang 2017, p. 596). Often, individuals in these relationships identify strongly with the public figure and have a need for companionship in some form. As Schramm and Harmann (2008) note, parasocial relationships can be built on disliking or hating a media personality in addition to the adoration or social attraction that define the concept.

Research has also considered the media personality’s role in parasocial relationships, where they create and maintain the illusion of a reciprocal relationship while they invest far less personally than audience members. Using visual cues, personality shifts/performances, eye contact and speaking directly to cameras, are all techniques to establish an impression of a two-way relationship (Labrecque, 2014). Having two or more media personalities interacting with each other in addition to the audience also aids in viewers becoming invested in the relationship and makes the conversation feel mundane and thus more real (Ferchaud et al., 2017, pp. 89-90). While examining Twitter – but applicable to Twitch - Marwick and boyd (2011) discuss how parasocial interactions are often imaginary in the fan’s mind, however the public nature of the internet makes some of these interactions and relationships visible and public, and brings communication between the two parties closer, thus making the parasocial connection stronger (p. 148).

2.3c Social Media and Social Networking Sites

Bertot, Jaeger and Grimes (2010) note that social media is a term that can refer not only to technological tools that provide spaces for user-generated content but also the content
created by them. Additionally, the type of platform categorised under the banner of social media extends across blogs, micro-blogging services, photo and video sharing sites, wikis, social networking sites and more. Social media enables people to post and broadcast information in real-time, promoting spaces for communication, sociality and the formation of communities through common interests and goals. Further, as they are built on social interaction, platforms that are classed as social media are participatory and collaborative (Bertot, Jaeger and Grimes, 2010). A notable feature of social media is visibility, where public and private communicative boundaries are blurred. This extends further than just the post, to other behaviours including likes and favourites, follower and friends lists, and content viewed. Additionally, the ability to edit a post before and/or after publishing, the persistence of posts through archives, and associations with other people are also important characteristics of social media platforms (Utz, 2014; Treem and Leonardi, 2012).

According to boyd and Ellison (2008), on a fundamental level, social networking sites are online platforms with three characteristics. First, people can create both public and semi-public profiles that exist in a restricted system. Second, individuals can curate lists of connections with other users. Third, people can display, read and navigate these connections and the lists of other users (boyd and Ellison, 2008, p. 211). Social networking sites have been essential for networked co-presence online – providing ways to engage, communicate, learn, play, and share - that is embedded with work and leisure practices in increasingly wireless and online environments (Hjorth and Richardson 2014). In recent years, Miller et al. (2016) have shifted the definition by suggesting that social media are the spaces for group sociality that exist somewhere between private and
publics spheres of communication. Of particular importance is the content of the posts of the platforms and the understanding that not all social media is used in the same way globally. As such, they introduce scalable sociality as a new flexible definition synonymous with social media. In their explanation, they posit that sociality online can be scaled from most private to the most public, and from the smallest group to the largest group, where a social media site can essentially be classed based on the needs of a user rather than the platform. Additionally, scalable sociality does not need to involve an individual’s use across different platforms but can occur within one platform. That is, any given social networking site is a bridge between public broadcasting and private interactions (Miller et al., 2016).

2.3d Hobbies and Leisure

Leisure according to Cohen-Gewerc and Stebbins (2013), can be defined as, “uncoerced activity engaged in during free time, which people want to do and, in either a satisfying or a fulfilling way (or both), use their abilities and resources to succeed at this” (p. 31). This project capitalises on the serious leisure perspective (SLP) provided by Stebbins (2009; 2015a; 2015b; 2017). The SLP provides a framework that breaks leisure into three interconnected but still somewhat distinct categories: casual leisure, serious leisure, and project-based leisure. For this project, the two of import are casual and serious. Where casual leisure is concerned, there is an immediacy to the activity, in that it is fundamentally rewarding with immediate gratification. This type of leisure enlists pleasure seekers and those indulging in enjoyment who do not need any specialist training (Zygmunt, 2017). Casual leisure is usually short-lived, has roots in entertainment
and relaxation, and can transform into serious leisure when a certain level of expertise, skill, or knowledge is obtained through participation (Stebbins, 2015). Serous leisure is, “the systematic pursuit of an amateur, hobbyist, or volunteer activity that is sufficiently substantial, interesting, and fulfilling for the participant to find a (leisure) career there, acquiring and expressing a combination of its special skills, knowledge, and experience.” (Stebbins, 2015, p. 11).

Additionally, serious leisure has six main characteristics: the need to persevere; the opportunity to follow a career; significant personal effort; durable benefits; community and social world (ethos); and, a distinctive identity-based in this community (Stebbins, 2015, p. 13-14). Within the serious leisure framework, amateurs have professional counterparts where hobbyists do not (Cohen-Gewerc and Stebbins, 2013, p. 39). A serious leisure career has the potential to become a livelihood, achieved via significant personal effort and the activity becoming appealing to the point of transformation with the person becoming an occupational devotee (Stebbins, 2017, p. 57). Devotee work, as Stebbins (2017) notes, is self-enhancing, with an intense positive attachment formed. Further, devotees are motivated to do these tasks and core activities by deep cultural values including to: be successful; gain some level of achievement; have freedom of action; be autonomous/individual personality; and, have active involvement. In these conditions, the work-leisure distinction is nearly or completely eradicated. Importantly, leisure professions, who are public and client focussed are those which you are more likely to find making a living through leisure such as public-centred professions located in entertainment, arts, sports and scientific fields (Stebbins, 2017, p. 156).
2.4 PUBLICS

The first major conceptual focus of this thesis is ‘publics’, a concept that has its beginnings in the hands of Habermas (1991) and Anderson (2006), with the notions of ‘the public sphere’ and ‘the public’ with each considered as imagined communities. Further, it can be stated that people who share a common understanding, collective interest, and shared identity can construct a public (Livingstone, 2005). Traditionally, publics are often associated with citizen engagement in institutional or political sectors (Roberts, 2014). However, this can be extended to consider publics as participatory environments where different types of identities of actors overlap, forming a collective public body that performs sociality, and is rooted in complex and continuous contestation and negotiations (Somers, 1993).

Publics, according to Warner (2002), have seven main characteristics. First, they are self-organised, in that they are both constructed by, and a space of, discourse. Second, publics are encompassed in relations between strangers who engage in social participation. Third, public speech is simultaneously personal and impersonal, with an understanding that the public speech is addressing oneself and strangers at the same time in different ways. Fourth, publics exist through attention, that is, they are constituted the moment they are acknowledged. Fifth, publics act as social spaces created by reflexive circulating social discourse, in the sense of sender-responder conversations. Sixth, publics act in the temporality of their motion, that is, publics are ongoing, not static, and are boundless. Finally, a public involves contextual imaginary world-making (Warner, 2002, pp. 50-82).
As cultural categories that aid in shaping the social aspects of life, such as relationships and identities, publics, according to Newman and Clarke (2009), are rooted in the self-awareness and knowledge of the individuals participating in the public. These individuals construct and maintain spaces through action, making publics mobile and fluid. Publics are entrenched in meaning based on membership or identification of its participants with a larger shared group and are dependent on the circumstances of creations, for example, motivations, time and place (Newman and Clarke, 2009, p. 12). While some of these characteristics still rein true, the definitions of publics have altered in light of the internet and social media. These technologies have broadened the media landscape while tearing apart the structure and boundaries of the public sphere, thus making social participation and communication easier through technology (Roberts, 2014; Habermas in Fuchs, 2008). The convergence of culture that is facilitated by the internet results in different types of media, both new and old, colliding. According to Ito (2008), the consumer and the producer find their power dynamics have shifted, and with it, publics can sustain and nurture the growth of both personal and professional media based on innovative communication. Further, these new technologies have altered the way people gather, communicate, and network with, and through, media (Ito, 2008).

2.4a Networked Publics

Virtual publics are spaces of discourse which are mediated through technology and computers. These publics are symbolically created, where groups of individuals participate in similar social interactions and collective imaginaries because of the liberating, transparent and open nature, built on a sense of belonging (Jones and Rafaeli,
Networked publics refer to a culmination of interconnected cultural, social and technological advancements that promote active engagement with, and through, digital media, and involves complex networks of communication, sociality and shared experiences and knowledge (Ito, 2008, pp. 2-3). Similarly, networked publics can be defined as publics that already exist, being redefined by social networking technologies and media, but also different types of publics coming together through networks (boyd, 2011). Pre-technology publics sometimes separated ‘publicness’ and public spaces from publics. However, networked publics includes the space constructed through these modes of networking and the imagined collective that comes to fruition from a crossover between the technology, the people using it and the practice of using it (boyd, 2011; Marwick and boyd, 2014).

The textually dependent element of these types of publics (i.e. the storytelling and discourse driven nature) are not geographically bound and allow diverse social publics to be shaped and people to gain relevance through telling stories and sharing alternatives (Papacharissi, 2015). With the ability to form and dissolve networked publics through imagined or physical communities, people themselves must imagine and process communications from faceless connections and become either one with, or one separate from, these imagined publics (Vivienne, 2016). The internet is not just about what people post, but what others post about them. Individuals can collect multiple digital identities based on familiarity, intimacy, or knowledge of particular publics and the interactions between different parties (Taiwo, 2010; Vivienne, 2016).
As such, boyd (2011) considers networked publics to have four defining properties. First, persistence is when there is a permanence to the digital presence of posts. Second, replicability, where online content can be reposted or reproduced but can also be altered. Third, scalability lends itself to the possible visibility or the viral nature of content spreading across networks and media. Fourth, and final, searchability, which permits to the ability to find content when one searches for it (boyd, 2011, p. 49). These factors are complimented by the three dynamics that shape networked publics: invisible audiences, collapsed contexts, and the blurring of public and private. That is, “not all audiences are visible when a person is contributing online, nor are they necessarily co-present”, “the lack of spatial, social and temporal boundaries makes it difficult to maintain distinct social contexts”, and “without control over context, public and private become meaningless binaries, are scaled in new ways, and are difficult to maintain as distinct” (boyd, 2011, p. 49). In the final chapter of this thesis, I will draw heavily on these factors provided by boyd, to clarify where Twitch stands in the changing landscape of social networking and networked publics.

2.4b Publics on Social Media and in Video Content

In several social media studies, publics are considered quite readily regarding political engagement on social media with hashtags. Additionally, the notion that, “publics are assuming power and actively shaping how sociality plays out on social media networks and communities”, makes networked publics an important concept to define accurately, because people continue to experience life online more readily (Motion, Heath and Leitch, 2016, p. 25; see too, Rambukkana, 2015). This is compelling when one takes a step back to studies conducted nearly a decade ago when video websites were steadily
growing in popularity. For example, Jenkins (2009) discussed the circulation of minority content on YouTube – particularly pertinent due to the small streamer demographics of this project – and noted the while the video content was being shared through networks, it was also creating ‘niche publics’.

Much like Twitch impacting television and broadcast media, Uricchio (2009) considers the influence of broadcast technologies on publics coming full circle. Where people used to participate in larger publics, television, radio and recordings helped niche publics become the norm. Now, it has shifted back into mass viewing publics facilitated by webcams and bringing into question the future of television (Urichhio, 2009). As Ito (2008) comments, and with boyd’s definition of networked publics in mind, “bloggers, webcams, and camera phones now upload a steady stream of information to the Internet – information that can be easily searched, tagged, and reblogged” (p. 13). With the development of these so called ‘affective’ technologies, intimacy became more public and palpable, and communities built online came to act as intimate publics (Hjorth, 2011). As such, network media can be understood to blur private and public boundaries, and with people opening their lives to public scrutiny, there is an increasing a loss of privacy online that feed the desires of people to see behind-the-scenes of everyday life (boyd, 2011). Additionally, networked publics, according to Marwick and boyd (2014, p. 1062), complicate privacy with people unable to manage or control the information flow:

“Privacy in social media cannot be entirely maintained and established by individuals, as it is not wholly dependent on individual choices or control over data. This networked context is determined
through a combination of audience, technical mechanisms, and social norms. Because contexts shift and overlap over time, privacy is an ongoing, active practice”.

Today, the evolution of online video has moved passed the initial use of webcams and low-quality cameras, and into high definition videos with high production value. Whether people are broadcasting original content that is recorded and edited or streamed in real time, the accessibility of laymen and professionals alike also adds to the discussion of privacy. Websites that produce individualised content, such as videos, blogs, and art, create a web of networked publics where the consumer is a part of the process through active participation. In this sense, the interactive nature of the internet age in a space that encourages the creation of content open to the public, showcases the dynamics of a new online culture, one filled with innovation, and above all else, with an unpredictable nature. To take this one step further, and with Twitch in mind, sites that offer both internal and external avenues to join in conversations about creators and content (e.g. live chat, private chat, social media, forums and servers), allow publics to intervene in real-time as well as before and after events (Lovink and Niederer, 2008).

2.4c Publics in Twitch Literature

A select few Twitch studies have begun to examine related concepts such as identity and community. However, networked publics have not been discussed. Due to the young age of Twitch, and the initial focus on the system, this social and user experience research is relatively preliminary but still offers useful insights into the sociality surround play, spectatorship, and motivations. Of import here, however, is research considering virtual
third places. Drawing on the work of Oldenburg (1999), third places are public places of sociality that form communities, and traditionally, spaces that are away from work or home, where conversations are normally accompanied by a playful atmosphere.

Hamilton, Garretson and Kerne (2014), through ethnographic methods presented during a conference they note that Twitch acts as a virtual third place where participatory communities are formed through socialisation and where users have shared identities based on mutual streamer or stream content preferences.

2.5 PERFORMANCES
Defining the second concept of focus, performance, is a task that requires an understanding of the works of Goffman (1956) and Turner (1988). When I speak to performance, I am not referring to a musical performance that must occur at an event, rather, I am interested in social performances that exist in the mundane. I am speaking to the shaping of identities and communities through performances (Fowler 2004). Firstly, Turner (1988) described performance regarding drama in public action and derived from a sequence of symbolic acts. Additionally, Turner (1985, p. 187), considers the following:

“...his performances are, in a way, reflexive; in performing he reveals himself to himself. This can be in two ways: the actor may come to know himself better through acting or enactment; or one set of human beings may come to know themselves better through observing and/or participating in performances generated and presented by another set of human beings.”
We are conscious participants in performances, where our behaviour in public, private, and in-between are dictated by context-based interactions and meaning is placed on all parties. Goffman’s (1956) dramaturgy theory, informs us that performances are in the everyday through the presentation of self. Performance, according to Goffman (1956), is all about human action with an emphasis on situation and position in each interaction. It is an information exchanged between an observer and performer, that involves different regions of interaction – front, back, and off stage – all eliciting different types of performances, and impressions on the observer. In simple terms, front stage refers to our interactions and behaviour in the presence of an audience. Aspects of activity in this region can be emotionally amplified or reduced situationally. Back stage is the way you act when you are under the impression you are no longer in front of an audience. As such, any restrictions or expectations that impact the way we behave in the front stage are no longer factors. Additionally, when performing on the front stage, people can be informed by the back stage. Finally, off stage is an outside region that encompasses everything other than front and back, essentially a space for individual actors to interact with audience members where the ongoing performance is different from the one actively taking place in the front and back regions situationally (Goffman, 1956, pp. 66-86).

Kendall (2002), in expanding on Goffman’s work, suggests that while we can adapt our social performances, depending on the situation, people do not necessarily view their presentation of self as performative. She continues, by noting,

“To some extent, our performances of identity acquire their meaning precisely from the belief that they are not performances. We organize
social life to allow us to tell meaningful stories about ourselves, while accomplishing a “sleight-of-hand” concealment of the distance between the “I” that tells the story and the “I” about whom the story is told” (Kendall, 2002, p. 8).

In speaking about Goffman’s framework for performance regarding symbolic interactionism (and by extension, Herbert Blumer), Bainbridge (2010, p. 175), considers three principles to symbolic interactionism:

“(1) humans act in terms of the meanings things have for them, not the objective nature of the things themselves; (2) meanings are created and sustained largely through social interaction, and (3) the person actively modifies and applies meanings. These principles strongly shape the individual’s own identity, what a person means to himself.”

The importance of performances of identity being entrenched in meaningful interactions is an essential paradigm to understanding the motivations of people in all aspects of life. Schmidt (2013) prompt readers to remember that identities are socially constructed in an ongoing process in response to, and shaped by, other people. Further, through meaning we engage in self-narratives that build identities encouraging the notion that on some level, our identities are constructed on through the fictional, symbolic and imaginary (Vivienne, 2016, pp. 45-47). When it comes to digital media, Marwick (2013), notes that identities can shift even further into the symbolic through customisation and that the non-existent dichotomy between offline and online identities is caused by the deep, embeddedness of the internet in our social worlds.
While this thesis is not about video games, understanding play as performance is pivotal for analysing streamers on Twitch. Play, if considered a key element in the process of manufacturing social order, can simultaneously reinforce and contest social normativity (Lewis, 2013, p. 26). Further, according to Lewis (2013), play requires recognition and embodiment by humans, instead of the ability to articulate conceptually or verbally; which is why play and humans are dependent on performance, as people recognise and become patterns through performative actions. This recognition also extends to the effects play has on sociality and personality, and in this way, the self-awareness people have during play is performative, and play is key to human reflexivity (Lewis 2013, p. 27). As Cohen-Gewerc and Stebbins (2013, p. 77) consider, playing is an important performative action to recreate and alter authentic expressions as well as improve the way we present ourselves in social networks.

Play has also been considered in terms of virtual worlds and avatars. According to Pearce (2009), virtual worlds, are performative and participatory spaces, where networked play spaces as those containing co-performance. Further, there is a relationship between a group and individual identities formed through intersubjective, co-performative play (Hjorth, 2011). In massively multiplayer games, for example, avatars and characters possess agency and personality, which is constructed by a player, “through a combination of representation and improvisational performance over time, through play” (Pearce 2009, 198). In the case of Twitch, streamers are performing as players and as their streaming persona. In the final chapter of this thesis, I will focus heavily on Goffman’s dramaturgy theory, and performing identities online. In particular, understanding the
changes that occur via performativity situationally depending on the type of interaction and whether this interaction is from a user or streamer perspective will be a priority.

2.5a Performances on Social Media and Online Video Content

Having already highlighted some of the nuances around performances online and with regards to play, it is necessary to discuss social media and online video content with more specificity. Many scholars discuss new media technologies providing spaces for embodied performances (Miller, 2012; Taylor, 2016; Hine, 2015). People performing online are often searching for cohesion rather than a separation from their physical offline life and body (Miller, 2012, p. 8). Additionally, online performances are often routed in creating and maintaining social conformity (Miller et al., 2016). Ferchaud et al. (2018) take note of how content creators on YouTube carefully managing their authentic performances to create the illusion of a two-way relationship in parasocial relationships. This can easily be applied to the idea of an authentic real-time streamer putting their performance on public display for the world. While discussing the user-generated content of YouTube, Elsaesser (2009) noted that the clusters of communities made on the platform fuelled on the chaotic sea of creativity and egoism were the makings of self-performance and self-presentation (p. 181).

In this era where social media permeates the lives of many people with internet access, Papacharissi (2015) reminds us, that individuals live through performances, arguably now more than previously. As such, Hogan (2010) positions self-presentation performances as a multiplicity of simultaneous situation-based performances in the traditional sense in tandem with social media as asynchronous exhibitions of self. This is supported by
Schmidt (2013), who details networked identities as repositories of information due to the constant updates that accompany online culture and the fluctuations in self-presentation with deliberate changes made to suit technological constrictions, platform structures, community rules, social objectives and the relationships between these factors (pp. 368-371).

Self-presentation on social media has been discussed further by Mendelson and Papcharissi (2011, p. 252), who argue that, “identity is performed, in its many iterations, in contexts that are both virtual and real, mediated or not, offline or online”. The malleability of online technology provides spaces for the relationships and interactions of individuals to exist across the same or different networks, at varying degrees of intimacy, privacy, communication, sizes, locations, and common ground (Papacharissi, 2011, p. 307). These technologies also provide the tools needed for identity to be performed online with more control and more imagination. Each interaction a user has online is a ‘face’, where particular ‘faces’ are situational. Due to the possibility of multiple identities and networks existing simultaneously for people to perform online, the complexity of self-presentation increases tenfold. As Papacharissi (2011), this is because individuals engaging with content exist in many different networks that have different levels of privacy and varying degrees of intimacy, and in the process of combining people to make a unique audience and community, social spheres are blended. Finally, on social media, there can be an element of coercion or pressure to visually, and publicly, showcase their performative identities – both individually and collectively (Rettberg, 2014).
2.5b Performance in Twitch Literature

Performance literature concerning Twitch largely details research concerned with a very technical side of video games and streaming, such as system or algorithm performance (Pires and Simon, 2015; Zhou et al., 2015; Kaytoue et al., 2012). On the opposite side, literature also speaks about performance by referring to a player’s performance much like the performance of a sportsman during a match (Jia, Shen, Epema and Iosup, 2016). A select few have explored performance in terms of ‘let’s play’ type videos having a performance element that alters gameplay and viewership based on the audience. Smith, Obrist and Wright (2013), for example, consider let’s play performances, where streamers have an incentive to avoid disappointing their audience, in which they consider the incentive as a performative layer distinct from the play.

Similarly, Gandolfi 2016, considers streamers performing for their audiences in different capacities, varying levels of participation and immersion, and in multiple forms including whether the streamer was an entertainer and whether interactions were game-based. Consalvo (2016) considered streamers who use Twitch regarding performed gameplay and failure. She focused on how the streamers dealt with failure through entertaining reactions, using it for their ‘brand’, but also, how the streamers’ audiences reacted. More recently, this extended to understanding performance of gender and gaming skills of popular female streamer on Twitch (Consalvo, 2017). In a doctoral consortium paper, Pellicone (2016) aimed to understand the performance of play on Twitch through the individual and as a space of practice, through field analysis, ethnography and quantitative analysis.
2.6 CONCLUSION

This chapter provided a survey of relevant literature to contextualise the current study. The following thesis will bring these bodies of literature together by systematically using these interrelated concepts to build on one another. In the first instance, the periphery concepts – communities of practice, parasocial interactions, social media and leisure – will be featured in the data dissemination chapters. They will be used as the basis for understanding the digital sociality taking place on the platform, the varying dynamics between different users, streamers and audiences, and to gain insight into the practices and investments involved in participating on the platform as a broadcaster and as a viewer. These four concepts will then help shape the arguments brought to the forefront of the discussion chapter, where the larger framework of networked publics and performances will be examined explicitly.

Additionally, there are two main gaps this study fills. First, lack of ethnographic and user focussed research. Few studies at the time of this research had taken an ethnographic approach despite the use of the method in other online and digital media studies contexts. Further, studies were only beginning to put the spotlight back on the sociality of users rather than the technology. Therefore, as a response to the body of literature available on Twitch, the current study implemented ethnographic techniques to understand complex social structures. Additionally, the ethnographic contribution of this thesis, as will be discussed in the next chapter, offers not only a fluency to interpret between immersive and observational information of the platform, but involves the reflexive writing of the culture of Twitch. The second gap, a lack of research on performance and publics on Twitch. Under the umbrella of performances and publics, it is possible to see the many
intricate interactions, various ways of participating, and user motivations, as this thesis intends to showcase. Twitch scholarship still has a long way to go before we start to see tangible developments in understanding performance and publics. This project will draw heavily on boyd’s understanding of networked publics. Similarly, this thesis will use Goffman’s dramaturgy theory and identities as a basis for discussing performance. To address these concepts, the research question is as follows:

*How do social interactions and motivations of users affect the construction of publics and performance on the platform Twitch?*

To summarise, this project ethnographically examines Twitch with users in mind rather than focus on the technical aspects of the platform or focus on the games being played. The broader significance of this project lies in advancing our knowledge of the relationship between people and technology. That is, by examining how people use the platform, I am also questioning the impact people have on live-streaming and social networking sites, and vice versa. I am studying both the intended and unexpected ways people use Twitch under a guise that by researching the human factor of Twitch, findings have the potential to be applied across platforms. Thus, there is the potential for this study, and future ethnographic studies of Twitch, to contribute to usability, industry, not to mention, academic discourse on digital experience. The following chapter will further explain the methodological approach for this study.
Chapter 3 – Methodology

3.1 INTRODUCTION

“Consider, he says, two boys rapidly contracting the eyelids of their right eyes. In one, this is an involuntary twitch; in the other, a conspiratorial signal to a friend…Contracting your eyelids on purpose when there exists a public code in which so doing counts as a conspiratorial signal is winking. That's all there is to it: a speck of behavior, a fleck of culture, and voila! - a gesture.”

- Geertz on Ryle, 1973, The Interpretation of Cultures

This notable example discussing the crux of interpretive anthropology, is one that lends itself to ethnography; in that the task of ethnography is to find meaning in action through thick description. A wink, as opposed to a mere twitch, is ostensibly embedded in culture, even though they are same physical action. I open with this example, because the ethnographer is concerned with the wink, and in taking on the title of ethnographer for this study, I am researching Twitch.tv but not the twitch. As the previous chapter mentioned, in large, this study is in response to the relative lack of ethnographic research on Twitch. However, it is certainly not the only reason for method choice. In this chapter, I provide an account of the methods implemented to address the research question: How do social interactions and motivations of users affect the construction of publics and performance on the platform Twitch? A discussion of ethnography and ethnography’s place in online research can be found immediately below. Following this, I will provide details about my initial observations and supply a reflective prose which situates me within the field. The processes involved in the semi-structured, open-ended interviews will then be described alongside in-depth observations and lurking.
3.2 ETHNOGRAPHY

“We cannot live other people’s lives, and it is a piece of bad faith to try. We can but listen to what, in words, in images, in actions, they say about their lives…It is with expressions – representations, objectifications, discourses, performances, whatever – that we traffic…Whatever sense we have of how things stand with someone else’s inner life, we gain it through their expressions, not through some magical intrusion into their consciousness” (Geertz, 1986, p. 373).

Ethnography at its core, is found in narrative, in writing (Clifford, 1986). In fact, as Ingold (2014) points out, ethnography literally means ‘writing about people’. However, ethnography is not simply writing down what is observed, but is a process that involves interpretation, description, and provides context with the aid of cultural knowledge and narratives (Dicks et al. 2005; Neuman 2014; Dourish 2016). The shortcomings of viewing ethnography merely as a tool for gathering data is important, because it misses the analytical and theoretical nature of the methodology where conceptual claims are made that incorporate not only observations but the relationship between them (Dourish and Bell, 2011). Further, ethnography is not just entwined in the representation of the culture being studied, but equally, in the cultural perspective of the ethnographer and the audience in which they are writing (Dourish and Bell 2011 with reference to Anderson 1994). As Bruner (1986) notes, ethnography deals with, “on the one hand, our experiences of ourselves in the field, as well as our understanding of our objects; and on the other hand, our objects’ experiences of themselves and their experience of us” (p. 14).
Through these layers of reflexive interpretation, ethnography moves beyond explicit observations and into implicit meaning where ethnographic writing has the capacity to not only contextually draw from meaning, but create meaningful social environments (Clifford, 1986).

As people have shift their social lives online, ethnographers have followed. While buzz words such as, ‘digital ethnography’, ‘virtual ethnography’, ‘cyber ethnography’, ‘online ethnography’, and ‘internet ethnography’ are readily used, an argument this thesis prescribes to is one that contests that these distinctive types of ethnography do not actually exist, and that ethnographic research methods do not change, but rather seamlessly translate to new environments. That is, generally, ethnography already adapts and changes depending on the requirements of the fieldwork sites regardless of whether it is of the digital variety (Boellstorff et al. 2012; Dourish 2016). This argument is augmented by the internet being increasingly embedded in everyday life and culturally relevant, leaving little room for online and offline distinctions to be made (Shumar and Madison, 2013). Further, scholars have long had discussions about the increasingly mobile nature of people. For example, Marcus and Fischer (1986) discuss multi-sited ethnography, Gupta and Ferguson (1997) consider a move from ‘the field’ to a ‘mode of study’ that could include multiple locations, and Castells (1996) details stepping away from studying fields and into the ethnography of networks which is more open and dynamic, and would focus on nodes, connections and flows.

As an approach that has anthropological beginnings but is by no means monopolised by the discipline, ethnography does not have a standardised set of rules and regulations and
could be considered a stance instead of a universal set of methods (Shumar and Madison, 2013). Thus, because of the internet, the notion of having a measured and tested formula for conducting ethnography has not only proven difficult but is relatively pointless. What can be definitively said however, is that ethnography of the digital is multi-modal and multi-spatial (Hine, 2015). That is, it combines oral narratives, written text, images, and videos, and links a multiplicity of people, communities and spaces (both physical and ethereal) (Shumar and Madison, 2013; Waldron, 2012). Additionally, people have different experiences of, and on, the internet that can occur with friends or strangers, in real-time or archived, and while at an office or on a train (Hine, 2015).

The internet is ever-changing, flexible, boundless, and diverse, providing a complex task for ethnographers seeking to delve into the cultural phenomena that lie just beneath the surface of ‘the online’ and the inevitable relationship with ‘the offline’. Hine (2015) reminds us, “no single solution to doing ethnography for the internet will be found, because what the internet is can vary so dramatically” (p. 8). It is Hine (2015) who also speaks of the importance of ethnography for internet research, and the possibility of drawing on autoethnographic and reflexive ethnography when you consider the embeddedness and individualised experience of the internet. Further, when writing, ethnographers should be aware that the words they write are influenced by their own cultural frameworks, and at the very least the ethnographer cannot in good conscious write themselves out of the portrait (Dicks 2005). This will be discussed further in the section on reflexivity below.
Concerned first and foremost with the people who use the platform and their experience as users, this study employed certain ethnographic research techniques over ten months to gain meaningful data. The first of these, was a preliminary exploratory stage of observations which chartered the landscape of the research and informed the design of the study. The main data for this project, however, was obtained through open-ended, semi-structured interviews and in-depth observations. These two intertwined components provided context, meaning, and clarity, for the behaviours and perceptions of Twitch users, and will be discussed for the remainder of this chapter.

3.3 INITIAL OBSERVATIONS AND REFLEXIVITY

I have always played video games and have always found refuge on the internet. The relationship I had with these cultural and social artefacts progressed over the years to the point that my academic and personal interests shared common threads. Having a strong personal connection with these technologies encouraged me to try and find a deeper understanding and bring further meaning to the social world in which I was embedded. Prior to beginning this research, I did not have an extensive knowledge of Twitch, navigating to the platform only out of curiosity a few times after it was mentioned by a participant from a previous study. However, my knowledge of similar platforms, and of the content being produced was rich and gave rise to this project. Soon after beginning my candidature, I embarked on what was essentially an informal scouting mission. It was a very general examination of Twitch, to understand the platform functionality, but also the basic trends of games and channels. Additionally, it acted as a testing ground for designing the recruitment method for the interviews and for finding the best way to record data for this project.
I would strongly argue, that being a gamer, and being deeply embedded in the internet for most of my life, are benefits to research such as this. Ethnographers need to be embedded in a culture enough to understand it but removed at the same time to remain linked to their academic and professional responsibilities (Bruner, 1986). Further, in games research, as Sunden and Sveningsson (2012) address, a large percentage of researchers have a history of playing games themselves and this expertise offers more than just a passion for the topic. It can be said, that during research, a familiarity or intimacy with a group of people, field site, or expertise/knowledge of a phenomena, is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, there is a potential for previous knowledge to hinder a project because a researcher who has been embedded in a particular community may miss important taken-for-granted assumptions and nuances that a stranger might see, and thus the researcher might not gain the insider perspective because they have long held that position (see Sunden and Sveningsson 2012, pp. 32-33). However, on the other hand, previous experiences and knowledge, aid in fieldwork, for instance, by gaining access, building rapport, having a language in common, and understanding the subtleties and nuances in meanings. Further, this familiarity helps streamline the research by saving time because understanding the fundamentals and learning cultural cues is already achieved, where a novice may have to spend extra time learning while potentially missing other phenomena.

3.4 SEMI-STRUCTURED, OPEN-ENDED INTERVIEWS

This project was interested in user habits and perspectives on their experiences, motivations, interactions, relationships and thoughts on the Twitch itself. Interviews as Boellstorff et al. (2012) details, build on rapport, and in turn, allow participants to speak
about their lives more freely. Due to this, participants in one-on-one interviews can openly discuss topics they normally would not feel comfortable discussing with peers (Boellstorff et al. 2012). When ethnographers conduct computer mediated or online research, as Garcia et al. (2009) consider, it is possible to use online and offline interviews or a combination of them both. It could be said that offline interviews and observations give the opportunity to check the participant identity and gleam insight into how they construct their online presence comparatively against offline (see Garcia et al., 2009). However, if we consider Twitch as a somewhat closed field site, and the very nature of participating online requiring personal performances, the process of online interviews being conducted alongside observations was a key component for gaining a deeper understanding to participants in this study.

During the design of this project, the initial aim was to interview participants face-to-face or with the aid of Skype. However, when the first round of interviews was conducted via email, to maintain consistency, and following in the footsteps of past research such as Hine (2015), all interviews were conducted through email correspondence. Once research officially commenced, potential participants were recruited exclusively through a Twitch sub-forum on Reddit.com where an advertisement was posted periodically throughout the study. The advertisement was a short, casual message detailing who was interested and why. The post invited people to express their interest by sending an email to the researcher, and all respondents of the Reddit post were then directly asked to participate. While there were many responses on the Reddit post itself, some were phishing or accusing the researcher of phishing, and others, once detailing experiences about Twitch on Reddit, did not want to participate further.
Once consent was gained, and to facilitate the researcher-informant relationship, interviewees were sent a similar set of starting questions before they were encouraged to participate in a conversation back-and-forth. To gain the most usable data in the first response email, these initial questions differed depending on whether they had already provided information in their response post on Reddit or in their cold-contact email. These initial questions included information on when and how they started playing video games, how they started using Twitch, and how they used the platform. A mock email can be found in the appendices for reference. After the opening set of questions were answered, the interview was open to follow the lead of the participant or any interesting train of thought that they organically mentioned. The interviews always ended with an open-ended question inviting them to share stories and experiences. The interviews were thematically coded after each email response and were unpacked before beginning observations on their channels.

There were no location restrictions or selection criteria except English proficiency and participants being at least 18 years of age. All participants have been anonymised, and at the conclusion of the project, 21 participants aged between 18 and 38 (17 males; 3 females; 1 transgender female) were interviewed. Of the 21, 18 were streamers who have been categorised as small-scale streamers, that is, approximately 10,000 or fewer followers, see Table 1. For perspective and showing the exponentially expanding nature of the platform, the top Twitch streamer based on followers (not paid subscribers) at the time this fieldwork was conducted was Syndicate, who had over 2.4 million followers (Socialblade 2017). However, when writing the final version of this thesis in 2019, that title now falls to ‘ninja’ with 13.5 million followers (Socialblade 2019).
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*Table 1. Demographics of Interview Participants*
The methods used in this project were heavily influenced by Hine (2015), where she explains that in traditional ethnographic interviews, participants might be inclined to bring attention to their immediate surroundings to contextualise the points they are trying to make. With email interviews, this is also the case, because participants can respond with links and attachments to provide explanations or examples (Hine, 2015). For example, I encountered interviewees attaching their question responses in large essay-like Microsoft Word documents, images of their computer set up, providing links to their Twitch accounts, YouTube channels with compilation videos, or linking a YouTube video in lieu of answering a question.

Drawing further on Hine (2015, p. 79), she discusses the importance of participants being comfortable and able to respond in a convenient manner to encourage open communication and explains:

“The ethnographer also needs to be aware of the possible connotations of different choices of medium for the interview, as this may shape the responses that interviewees give...In an ethnography for the Internet, the interview medium is not just chosen according to how interviewees will respond “best,” but as a component of building ethnographic understanding in itself and as a part of inhabiting the field.”

That is, participants in this study, were interviewed about a website they use, and most, used the internet every day for extended periods of time. As such, it could be a reasonable assumption that most would prefer to interview online. Ultimately, this was the case,
opting for the text-based communication. Some of the drawbacks of only conducting email interviews will be discussed at the end of this chapter. These semi-structured, open-ended interviews were one of two major avenues of data collection, the other, in-depth observations, are discussed below.

3.5 IN-DEPTH OBSERVATION AND LURKING

A common method seen during ethnographic approaches is one intrinsically routed in finding meaning and connection, participant observation. It is a technique that requires countless hours in personal contact with participants where transcripts, notes or videos are analysed for verbal and non-verbal specifics (Gunter, 2000). The in-depth observation for this study was lurking. The reason I am hesitant to use the word ‘participant’, but still consider this research as ethnographic is because of the communication with the participants being observed whom I had also conducted interviews with – this dialogue brings meaning (Garcia et al., 2009). Lurking, as Heath et al. (1999), suggest, while a justified method on its own and often encouraged at the beginnings of an ethnographic inquiry online, cannot be considered ethnographic. Lurking is not the same as participating, despite many users themselves not actively participating and choosing to ‘lurk’ in the same way I did (Heath et al., 1999). However, lurking alongside interaction/communication with participants moves lurking into ethnographic territory, from passive analysis to active engagement (Hine, 2005; Daniel, 2011). Further, in the height of the internet age, Hine (2015) notes, that ‘mutual visibility’ might not be possible or appropriate all the time, and ethnographers might instead contact group members through different mediums than the one being observed, for example,
email. Online ethnography has been known to have two main elements, a participant-based component and a screen-based component, lending itself to the idea that lurking might be necessary for ethnographic research online (Taiwo 2010).

During this study, those users who were interviewed were also the focus of these in-depth observations. I did not use the follow function on Twitch for any of my participants to preserve anonymity. Instead, I was aware of their posting schedule and followed announcements on other social media platforms. These observations had three components: (1) the dashboard profile on their Twitch channel; (2) chat on the videos; and (3) video content. Deciding on the most appropriate route for saving data while observing live-streamed video was one that offered much contestation in the design of this study. I considered finding a method to save videos. However, in the end, I considered that in normal ethnographic situations, a researcher will travel to their field site, and conduct their research while writing fieldnotes when the situation permitted. In considering all the options, the archive system on individual Twitch channels was the best route. If activated on a channel, the archive system allowed the video of the stream to be recorded alongside the chat playback, to be viewed after the live event. To keep the project within reasonable time constraints, and huge depositories of video files, I relied heavily on this system – which could be considered one of the larger constraints of this project. One of the benefits of the archive system was that videos were sometimes watched a second time with a focus on the stream first and chat second and allowed more content from users to be analysed through pausing and rewinding. Additionally, some participants would be live on the platform concurrently because certain times were popular for streamers to broadcast. This meant that I sometimes did not watch every
single stream, or it was watched through the archive system after it was originally broadcast. While Twitch is supported on multiple platforms, I conducted this research on a personal computer – specifically an Alienware Area-51 gaming computer. Fieldnote recording was aided by multiple screens, where I toggled between typing notes and speaking to an audio recorder for later playback.

3.6 ANALYSIS

Participants entered the project at different times but for all of them, a process of analysis took place. First, an interview would be conducted, the information gathered, and then analysed for themes. Then, observations would begin, and once sufficient data was obtained, which varied depending on streaming frequencies and length, the fieldnotes were analysed. Data from both interviews and observations were then collated and analysed for thematic similarities and coded to reveal reoccurring phenomenon. For example, patterns in interactions or motivations would be gleamed, and considered against understandings of periphery concepts and the larger conceptual framework of publics and performances.

3.7 SUMMARY

To summarise, this project used ethnographic techniques, including open-ended, semi-structured interviews conducted via email, and in-depth observations. After fieldwork had concluded, 21 people participated and of those, most were categorised as small-scale streamers. It should be noted that there were some methodological limitations to this study that will be discussed at the end of the thesis. The following chapters will address the data that was collected using these methods.
Chapter 4 – Twitch as a Social Media Platform

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The primary purpose of Twitch is as an entertainment platform. At a very basic level, there are two sides of the coin – a user is someone who wants to be entertained by video game content (viewer) or a user plays video games for entertainment (streamer).

However, the ways people use Twitch stretch far beyond these categorisations. This chapter is the first of three main results chapters that will ultimately lead to an argument regarding the impact of these social and cultural experiences on the performance of identities and networked publics. To do this, the thesis examines three connected themes: (1) Twitch as a social media platform, (2) Twitch as a hobby-profession, and (3) viewer-streamer dynamics on Twitch. In the following chapters, I will discuss the standard and alternative avenues of sociality. I will begin to address and unpack the data from both the interviews and the observations, providing important insights into the behaviours and motivations of Twitch users. However, for continuity, this chapter will focus on all users (both streamers and viewers), Chapter 5 will focus more on the streamer, and Chapter 6 will then draw conclusions on the sociality between different types of users on the platform. Throughout these chapters, case study examples from participants will be provided to breakdown the social experiences of users and provide immediate context. The conclusions of these chapters will then be used as the basis for further analysis that will lead to the final discussion chapter that will explicitly answer the research question.

In this chapter, I argue that Twitch acts as a social media platform by facilitating a multiplicity of interactions and social exchanges in both expected and surprising ways.
Much like YouTube, Twitch is a video culture that is dependent on user-generated content and a co-creative, participatory environment (Rotman and Preece, 2010; Burgess and Green, 2009). According to Dijck, 2013, the growing popularity of social networking sites caused the private lives of creators and large-scale media consumerism to collide. This, in turn, made space for the new generation of online careers to emerge – the authentic content creator that now had the looking glass firmly pointed back at them (Dijck, 2013). Twitch utilises a chat interface and a follower/subscription system, that help this social media for gamers place an emphasis on immediate audience interaction. However, due to the real-time content being produced, opposed to other social media that do not have live-streaming as an essential component, Twitch faces communities of practice having to exist around technological and cultural barriers including internet speed and time zones (Miller, 2012). This also lines up with broadcast media shifting networked publics into a direction that allows people to turn their social interests towards local or more accessible talent – whether accessible refers to the content creator or the content created will be discussed later (boyd, 2011). Twitch shares many characteristics with other social media platforms with similar structures that prompt some type of broad community and then further niche communities through participation and communication. However, while opening this conclusion for further discussion, this chapter will provide additional evidence that the platform explicitly and implicitly facilitates both designed and unexpected cultural productions, including the production of friendships and spaces for mental health therapy where making friends and mental health benefits and almost never mutually exclusive.
4.2 MAKING FRIENDS

Social media as a service is a connective media, a place to perform sociality, to collaborate with colleagues and to make or maintain friendships (Dijck, 2013). According to Motion, Heath and Leitch (2016), social media is often thought of as some way to remedy a disconnected world, however, they are also legitimate spaces of co-production where friends can form and strengthen social bonds, connect, relate, socially emote, and enhance their lives. As an online environment built on an immediate sense of community, Twitch pushes interactions from stranger or acquaintance level encounters into the realm of tangible friendships and relationships between users. In the introduction, I highlighted the social aspects of Twitch being held in high regard by my participants. The knowledge that every time they use the platform, it will be accompanied by this instantaneous common ground that can then be split into further niche categories allows Twitch to become a space for users to make connections easily. These relationships are fostered through different modes of communication and adherence to cultural norms (Seering, Kraut and Dabbish, 2017). The connections made by streamers will be discussed in the following chapter. However, I will note that streamers network with other streamers in a way that crosses the professional and personal boundaries simultaneously because many, if not all, streamers consider their stream a hobby regardless of whether they are making a career or not. Additionally, streamers also take some regular audience members and promote them to a higher level of relationship above other viewers and subscribers as channel moderators (see Spikler, Ask and Hansen, 2018). If we consider only viewers creating these bonds for the moment, while initially interacting as a response to being in the same stream or enjoying the same game, relationships can readily evolve to
incorporate non-game related content. Friendships are then nurtured through the public chat interface, private messaging, as well as, other social media mediums, but most commonly, Discord – a free voice and text application (essentially Skype for gamers). With users spending countless hours online and the possibility of anyone with an internet connection using Twitch, there is a world of opportunity for those who are seeking real interactions.

It is in this borderless way that Twitch elicits a lived experience for people. This lived experience and interactions can have profound impacts on users. When considering geographical isolation or various other impeding factors, such as those affecting mental health that will be discussed in more detail in the next section, this is especially the case. Twitch can simply act as a public social third space, however, for some people, Twitch is not only an escape from everyday life but a tool to experience certain phenomenon for the first time or to help facilitate social interactions. The two examples directly below, display the importance of Twitch for broadening social and cultural knowledge of users and allowing individuals to be social in a way that suits their needs.

_The one thing I’ve noticed on my time on Twitch is that there are many types of people. That may sound silly to someone who’s been somewhere in the world, but as a person who lives in a small town compounded with not leaving the house that much anyway, it has been extremely impactful to me. In my few travels, I have never seen so many piercings and tattoos on so many body parts or hair dyed so many colors. It has made me realize that there more people in the world other than the ones I see every day._ - P9
[Twitch] helps me a lot with scratching my social itch in a fairly comfortable way. I don't really like being around people more than necessary in real life - even my best friend of several years, who I originally met in person, is someone that I only keep in touch with through texting. It's not that I hate people, but it's really taxing for me to be around them. Twitch gives you a sort of filtered or watered down interaction with people - and I just find that watering down to be the most palatable form of socializing for myself. – P17

For several participants, including those above, exposure to the platform helped them gain cultural and social knowledge and new ways to view the world around them. Additionally, many participants were not intending or expecting to become embedded within the Twitch community. If we turn our attention back to communities of practice, the absorption of embodied knowledge that provoke diverse connections (see Miller, 2012), and remembering the three elements of participation – domain, community and practice we can draw comparisons. Some people, like channel moderators and regulars are motivated to sew the soil of the community being built, to help it flourish. Others, like P17 are interested in interacting with other people and being a member of the community. Finally, some learn or contribute meaningfully way (Wenger, McDermott & Snyder, 2002).

Additionally, Twitch offering a new way to take part in and be around video games, opened opportunities for conversations and interactions to take place at varying degrees of intimacy. In this community of practice, I would consider, on a very basic level, three types of interactions that fall on a continuum: lurkers/observers, active participation and personal engagement. This spectrum is fluid, and a user does not need to conform to any
one of these categories. Instead, users can have many simultaneous interactions and relationships existing across the continuum. On one side, are self-defined ‘lurkers’, who watch the stream and read the chat, but they do not engage in the conversations or only on occasion. These users are still legitimate participants if only on the periphery, and help the community grow through other actions such as promoting the stream elsewhere through word of mouth and other unspoken activities (Ramirez, Saucerman and Diemeier, 2014). In the middle, are those who join in the chat on occasion, have a few acquaintances, or like P17 above, are involved in filtered interactions. On the far end, are those who create and maintain relationships with other users, such as the two cases below.

I've made friends, just by participating in chat with streamers and other users. I guess after a while, that friendship blossoms. We're not just talking about the stream in chat, but we're also talking about our days. – P11

There is another man, who I struck up a romantic & sexual relationship with about two months ago...I've had a fair amount of sexual interaction on Twitch from other men. I have only had one sexual relationship; the others were either come-ons and/or discussions. But still, a woman on Twitch is outnumbered so men are easy to talk to...We've talked several times through our consoles (like a phone call)...We've both expressed feelings of caring towards each other but stopped short of an official I love you. That would be too much for me because I am still very married & in love with my husband. - P5

The first participant example is a very typical and a basic way to speak about the friendships that develop over time on Twitch. P5 on the other hand is an example of an
even more intimate relationship cultivated on Twitch. In this case, P5 has never physically met with this man, or any of the other men she has entered sexual relationships with on Twitch in the past. This participant highlighted important parts of sociality on Twitch. Firstly, during her interview, she made clear that there was a difference between sexual interactions, which are much larger in numbers for her, and sexual relationships, which are more intimate. This distinction bolsters the idea that Twitch is a space for superficial and deep relationships, as well as, important and necessary interactions. The second way P5 explains a nuance of the platform is in the way she describes fake friends, acquaintances and no longer associating with some users. This puts a spotlight on the fickle nature of vast online spaces. On Twitch, people are transient. They can find people and communities they like, but none of it is ever completely fixed in time and space. This means relationships can blossom very quickly thanks to the shared interests and common ground but can also break down easily. Depending on the level of personal investment and type of relationship a user has, these shifts in social interactions can leave lasting impacts on the people participating in them.

I end this section with discussions of building relationships, because most participants indicated the way new friends, partners, or simple social interactions on Twitch have impacted their daily lives and mental health in a positive light. This will be discussed below.

4.3 MENTAL HEALTH

Having discussed how people participate and cultivate relationships on Twitch, there is still more to showcase in the debate of Twitch as a social media platform. To take it one
step further, and perhaps in an unexpected direction, we could consider a stream as a therapist’s chair, albeit a flexible one that comes in many different forms but always with the purple Twitch logo sitting across from them. That is, Twitch provides a space for mental health to become a popular discourse while broadcasters and viewers alike, become pseudo therapists – whether intentional or not. To display how mental health is featured on this game-focused website, this section will provide a series of case studies to aid in understanding the crossover between spectating/streaming play and having meaningful interactions that impact mental health in surprising ways. It should be noted, that all the examples I received from participants about mental health were positive. Interestingly, while it was never an aim of this project to seek discussions of mental health, without prompting, it became an underlying theme during the interviews. From a broadcaster who was a therapist in the past creating ‘Twitch Therapy’ sessions in his streaming schedule amongst normal gameplay streams. To a spur of the moment support group for someone who had lost, and never openly discussed the death of his daughter, after a broadcaster played a story-based game about cancer. Finally, to people with anxiety, bipolar, avoidance disorders and other disabilities who have found confidence and normalcy by streaming and interacting with like-minded individuals.

In recent years, many debates in popular media and academia have arisen concerning negative connotations of mental health and the internet/video games. However, positive examples are also prevalent, for instance, Durkin and Barber (2002) who conclude that video games can have a positive effect on healthy adolescents, with gamers scoring better on measures including family closeness, positive mental health, and social engagement and networks. Jordan (2014) considers the connection between video gaming and
violence, noting that some video games are relational and personal, making them places for relationships to form, be nurtured, or end. According to Benkő (2017), there are positive health benefits for performing a leisure activity, with personal fulfilment, stress coping mechanisms and the mind all showing encouraging impacts.

Recently, Johnson (2018) explored the opportunities Twitch live-streaming offers for people with mental health issues and disabilities, addressing the positive impact for digital entrepreneurship, empowerment, inclusion and finding a community. This is the only study regarding Twitch to speak to mental health, and it correlates well with the results I indicate below. When I speak to mental health in this thesis, it is a broad term that is not being approached from a medical perspective, but a colloquial one. I am addressing mental health in the manner which echoes how the concept was spoken about by my participants. For example, discussing mental health as an all-inclusive term for negative attributes that somehow impacted their social lives and mental well-being, where their Twitch use has had a positive effect on their mental health. For the remainder of this chapter, I will provide examples of these instances, to understand why the participatory nature of the platform has inadvertently made it a space for mental health therapy.

It seems like the vast majority of people have been on the outskirts of social circles for their entire lives, all of a sudden they have a place to gather and talk about things they love without needing to be ashamed about it or self-conscious about it...I have also seen a lot of people who have had a rough life and are just looking for some companionship and acceptance. These people are almost always still gamers, but sometimes they are in a bad place
mentally and are looking for any sort of social interaction to help themselves have a semblance of a normal relationship. - P1

As I touched on earlier, the instantaneous sense of community with like-minded individuals is one of the defining aspects of Twitch. Consequently, the benefits to mental health can move from a periphery aspect of the platform to the forefront. Even people like P1 above, who mainly used Twitch to stay connected to his brother in another state, noticed the impact Twitch can have on people. Twitch becomes a space of comfort and acceptance for many of my participants, as well as, a way to stay motivated and feel less lonely when users are out of work or in a social slump. P5 below is an example of this, articulating the big part Twitch plays in her life.

Basically, I do it for the interaction with other people. I am currently disabled and unable to work (bipolar disorder) and I missed coworkers and people to interact with. I've made a lot of friends and get to geek out on a game I love. I've made some very nice connections with people that I never expected...I am motivated by my new friendships and I feel like I belong somewhere, which being disabled, I have felt like I didn't for some time. I'm home by myself a lot so this has been really, really good for my mental health. Especially because my identity for many years was in my work. I am very grateful that Twitch exists. - P5

Noticeably, many of my participants expressed that they had, or they knew someone who had anxiety, depression, personality disorders, physical ailments, or other social or physical barriers that impacted their daily lives. Through Twitch, these people found a sense of belonging and connection. This connection could be unexpected but welcome, as
is the case for P5 or it could be an active manifestation of the needs and wants of someone like P9 below, who, due to geographical isolation, social issues and some conditions, is unable to find interaction in any other way. Another participant echoed similar thoughts to these, explaining that the comfort of having the Twitch interface between him and sociality, helped him gain normality in the face of the uncomfortable social life he lacked before logging in.

*I am in a rural area and have anxiety issues and depression, so not only do I not get out, I have no place to go even if I do...* When my Internet connection afforded me the ability to watch Twitch earlier last year, I immediately became attached to watching people play video games...In addition my anxiety has led me to have very limited interaction in my life; I haven't even actually had a girlfriend (& all that comes with it if you can guess what that is). This has made me more infatuated with females in general. Every aspect fascinates me, from appearance to personality all the way down to mannerisms. Twitch combines my two favorite things in the form of watching women (or girls if you prefer) play video games; watching gameplay & observing females in their relatively normal setting. Not doing anything special, just doing what they like doing; most of the time being themselves. – P9

Some of the most surprising ways mental health came to the forefront of this research were made possible by the positive environment Twitch cultivates for gamers. During my time on Twitch, I noticed different streamers raising money for various charities and causes. In addition to this, because many of the people I interviewed were more inclined...
to watch smaller streams, there was a sense of intimacy and safety involved, where most users were watching for the personality of the streamer and wanted to feel connected in some way to them. This will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 6. Twitch became a safe haven for the game enthusiasts I interviewed. It was a space where they did not feel instantly judged or misunderstood by those who did not share their interests. An example of unintended pseudo therapy sessions can be found below. However, the participant that stood out the most when it came to mental health on the platform was a former therapist who quit his job to pursue a streaming career on Twitch by creating dedicated group therapy sessions that were incredibly beneficial to the community he is trying to help.

This alternative use of Twitch shifts significantly from the core purpose of the website, of being entertained by a game being played. However, on a platform bursting at the seams with content that is never the same, and when the platform is driven by the users, the unexpected becomes expected.

[Speaking about streaming an indie game, That Dragon, Cancer] One of my followers nearly lost his daughter to cancer. He was sharing his story with all of us in my chat. His relationship with his wife was really bad during that time, and he was struggling a lot with it. He kept all of his anger and frustration about the situation to himself for several years. He had to take breaks while watching the stream, and eventually, he let it all out and said he wanted to be able to help anyone going through something similar. My followers who stayed were super supportive to him. I'm super happy that he was able to use my chat as an outlet for all of those difficulties he has had…my chat was totally cool with me going through, what I wanna call the
kickstarter room. Its a room in the game with a bunch of messages from backers. A lot of them were messages to friends/family members who are fighting or lost their fight to cancer. I started tearing up at the messages to father's and at that moment felt comfortable enough share my own story with chat. - P11

In the above case, not only did this stream unexpectedly become a place for effectively a stranger to bare his soul but much like those who participate in the Twitch group therapy sessions, people are met with others going through a similar experience or a support system. P11 would not normally play an indie game like the one in this instance, but because he did, and the way he was able to help this man and others by sharing his own story, makes that moment one of his favourite moments since becoming a streamer.

There are more examples than this, but for now, I end this section on mental health by considering that while these were positive and beneficial moments, this is certainly not a universal. Additionally, what needs to be acknowledged is that while toxicity is prolific on many online platforms, the data collected during this study was, in general, positive. That is, during analysis toxicity did not emerge as a theme because this was a participant-driven project, and the information analysed was dependent on how participants reported their experiences. Those who mentioned toxicity only spoke of it in passing, preferring to focus on the good aspects of the platform. As such, when it is discussed in this thesis, it is through participant accounts of previous experiences and will be brief. However, the notion that all participants reported having toxic experiences on the platform does indicate the presence of toxicity on Twitch, even though I did not explicitly collect data on the matter.
4.4 CONCLUSION

To conclude this chapter, Twitch at a very fundamental level, requires the active engagement of at least some of its users to function in the way it was designed. This active engagement also classifies Twitch as a social media platform that helps communities of practice flourish. As a participatory and collaborative space, not only is Twitch a source of entertainment, but it also becomes a legitimate space to fulfil social needs. On one end of the spectrum, people can choose not to participate but still feel like they are a part of something bigger. On the other, are tangible relationships that require emotional investments. As such, interactions and relationships on Twitch can exist across a continuum, where any type of relationship is possible at different levels of intimacy. In this study, which is only representing the people I interviewed at a certain time in their lives and on a platform that is always changing, the social side of Twitch had some very positive impacts on users. Simple interactions became key triumphs for those with disabilities and disorders, and the non-face-to-face setting helped others find confidence to chat and make personal relationships. This platform fosters a space that has all the effective characteristics of other social media, while also offering innovative ways for social practices to unfold. In a society that is heavily invested in social networking sites and finding human connections, live-streaming thrives as an example of instant gratification. Twitch offers a variety of niche one-off experiences and holds an important role moving forward as it balances the precarious position of transience and building lasting communities that can adapt contextually and learn to exist across multiple spaces, constantly in flux.
Later in the thesis, these ideas and specific interactions between different types of users will be discussed explicitly. Where this chapter did not distinguish between viewers and streamers, the following chapter will focus more on the perspective of the streamer. Of note, however, is that all streamers were also viewers.
Chapter 5 – Twitch as a Hobby-Profession

5.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter, I concluded that through the many social structures surrounding communities of practice, Twitch acts a social media platform. This can be taken one step further when we consider the motivations and decisions people make with regards to their Twitch use, however, this time while specifically focusing on users who stream. By looking at the hobby-profession dynamic of small-scale streamers, we can begin to see further into the social networking that acts as the backbone of the platform. Whether they had made a serious leisure career, were working towards that goal, or had no desire to move beyond a hobby, there were still significant investments in time and money, effort exerted, brand building, and community decisions that need to be examined.

5.2 HOBBY PERCEPTIONS

Recalling the different types of leisure mentioned earlier, some of my participants appear to fall in the category of casual leisure because their use of Twitch is immediately rewarding, pleasurable, an activity that needed no experience or prior knowledge, and informal in nature (Cohen-Gewerc and Stebbins, 2013). For others, specifically streamers, they can be seen as engaging in serious leisure as amateurs, hobbyists or volunteers. Streaming required certain skills, knowledge and equipment that enabled broadcasting on the platform to become an organised and meaningful effort that had the potential to become a livelihood (Cohen-Gewerc and Stebbins, 2013). Remembering that through significant personal determination, a positive attachment to a particular activity and a desire to achieve success autonomously, the work-leisure distinction essentially
disappears, and thus Twitch has the potential to be both work and leisure simultaneously (Stebbins, 2017). Further, the public and audience-focused nature of live-streaming alongside the creative and entertainment factors associated with the platform make it an ideal environment for leisure professions (Stebbins, 2017).

Despite speaking about eSports, Taylor (2012, p. 100) provides a helpful understanding of the transformative process of hobbies. Taylor explains that people who play professionally often still consider it a hobby because even when earning a living, there was still the notion that being a competitive eSports player was temporary and potentially not stable, and her participants would always have their options and contemplate their life outside of this activity. Further, in constructing their vocational identities justifying their livelihood as leisure was an integral part of their process to construct identities (even more so in an activity that exists on the fringe of traditional careers) (Taylor, 2012, p. 100). This case correlates well with my participants. Twitch promotes entrepreneurship, creativity, autonomy, and a symbiotic community. However, even as online platforms like Twitch take on traditional media and traditional careers, this new generation of online public figures work hard to try and make a steady income from a self-made and incredibly temperamental leisure activity. Further, while providing details about their view on Twitch as a profession, my participants found it difficult to separate it from a hobby and viewed potential income from streaming as a supplement to their income rather than the sole revenue. Notably, the streamers commented that they would not continue to stream if they no longer enjoyed broadcasting or they believed it would not be possible to stream unless that passion and enjoyment existed.
Participants who did not see this leisure activity becoming a livelihood often spoke about the possibility pragmatically. They emphasised finding a traditional job as a priority, worried that making a steady income from streaming would be difficult. Further, the monetary and time commitments required to become an affiliate/partner on Twitch – the point where you can monetise your account and receive special features to help the channel grow – is quite demanding. Others questioned the feasibility of succeeding given the massive scale of the platform, the work required to acquire a sizable audience which was compounded by competition from the vast horde of other streamers.

Those of my participants who wanted to make streaming a career were also aware of the large task in front of them. However, they still felt that being completely self-sufficient in earning money via Twitch would eventually be achieved. To become a full-time streamer required immense personal effort and sacrifice. Therefore, my participants stressed the importance of streamer motivations, and believed that those who were trying to broadcast first and foremost for the money rather than a love of video games would not succeed. As such, most of the streamers I interviewed reiterated that they were on the platform to be around similar people, have fun, and if it grew into a career, then that was an added bonus.

5.3 INVESTMENTS

Like many hobbies, participants spend a significant amount of time and money to make using the platform possible, more enjoyable, or to improve the quality of their Twitch experience. For all users, whether streamers or just viewers, there are technical necessities to use the website. While Twitch is available on multiple devices, the main
affordance of a steady internet connection is required to stream smoothly. Further, if you are a viewer, having a gaming console, smart phone, or personal computer were needed to watch streams. The specifications of personal computers increased if the user was a streamer, because on a very basic level, to play certain games and stream, a personal computer needed to have the appropriate internal hardware. Additional periphery equipment and software were also purchased by streamers to increase the production value.

Four of my participants of different popularity provided photos of their Twitch computer set ups and can be found below arranged by the number of followers in ascending order. Whether a coincidence, it appears that set ups become more streamline with professional gear, and less cluttered as their following increases and their hobby becomes more serious.

![Figure 3. Participant set up for 150+ followers.](image)
Figure 4. Participant set up for 1000+ followers.

Figure 5. Participant set up for 2000+ followers.
In general, most, if not all, streamers will list their equipment specifications and brands on their Twitch profile in the event viewers are looking for a particular product, or in some cases, in an attempt to gain sponsorship from certain products. The equipment can easily stretch well into the thousands of dollars, and this investment could be considered professional because it is often top of the line gear. However, it is not as easy to claim that all streamers with a custom-built computer and semi-professional equipment are trying to foster a career. From personal experience, and as discussed in previous research (see Postigo, 2016), a large amount of money for high-quality equipment and time is frequently invested when gaming. As such, financial investment often accompanies
games and hobbies. Alternatively, some people stream without using top of the line equipment, instead using the bare minimum, utilising the equipment around them to make unconventional set ups for streaming, or a combination of some quality peripherals with makeshift creations, such as, P11 below who is also Figure 3 above.

For streaming, I hook it up to an Elgato HD capture card that's hooked up to my computer. When I stream, I use a webcam, the Logitech C270, with a home made green screen behind me so that the game shows up behind me. The stand for the green screen is made of pvc pipes. I use two lamps to light the green screen with parchment paper to mask the lights. My setup is a little unconventional and set up in my living room to my tv and a second monitor.

– P11

Stebbins (2015b; 2009) highlights that money is not the only commitment measure that separates devotees from other leisure participants with the large energy and time investments playing a significant role. Streaming also takes up a considerable amount of time. The amount of time a person streams is not dependent on the number of followers they have. As small-scale streamers, my participants were relatively relaxed with regards to when and how long their broadcasts lasted. The first factor to note, is that some of these streamers had jobs and other commitments that impacted the times and length of the stream. For example, some would come home from work, eat their dinner, and then stream, with no schedule other than what their life permitted, or they would stream whenever they decided to play a game. However, for most streamers, the time they streamed was largely dependent on viewership. That is, they were streaming to be
watched and depending on where they were in the world, and where their viewer-base resided, there were peak and off-peak times to stream.

For this reason, from the perspective of my participants, it is important to have some form of schedule, because most streamers attempt to foster connection with their audience through regularity. For viewers to return – especially when you consider the number of streams occurring at the same time – having consistent broadcasting schedules helps viewers decide whether they enjoy the stream. It is also important for people know the times a streamer is going live, rather than being unable to watch some streams because there was no planned stream (Nascimento et al., 2014). Additionally, it is a streamer’s prerogative to adjust their scheduling to meet the demands of the audience (see Chen et al., 2015).

*Streaming Twitch is like everything else, it's a roller coaster. You have ups & downs, highs & lows. The biggest low I hit was when I got a new job & started working full time. I had to change when I streamed & how long I could stream, I lost my entire audience over night. I'm still not back to where I was before I was working full time, it's been hard to climb back up.* – P8

As was previously discussed, the working hours of Twitch streamers is extensive because success on the platform demands long broadcasting hours and long periods of offline work as well (see Johnson and Woodcock, 2018). The amount of time afforded to one streaming session by my participants would extend anywhere from an hour to ten consecutive hours, with most falling within 3-6 hours in one session, but not necessarily the only session in a day. The least number of days in a calendar week to stream was 3-5
days. However, this was a select few, with every other participant streaming every day of the week. If we consider this timeline alongside stream preparation, the time streamers use to watch other streams when not broadcasting, interacting/promoting their audience outside a stream, and in some cases recording YouTube videos for several hours, this quickly becomes an excessively time-consuming for a hobby. Another narrative that began to emerge amongst the smaller streamers I interviewed, was that despite this large online and offline effort, Twitch as a platform did little to aid the visibility and growth of smaller channels. Many spoke of their concern and frustration about their streams not being watched (even by those who followed and subscribed), as they were not partnered with Twitch yet.

The financial and temporal investments streamers put into their broadcasts when gaming and streaming, becomes something definitively in the realm of serious leisure. However, there are other ways in which these small-scale streamers shape the communities they are building and create their brand. The following section will discuss the latter.

5.4 BRANDING

The profiles and branding for these small-scale streamers are important parts of understanding the effort involved in a time-consuming leisure activity like Twitch, especially if they are taking it seriously and pushing to make streaming a career.

Branding in this thesis is discussed in a colloquial manner as something that is built by users and recognisable by people embedded in digital environments. Branding practices are an important characteristic of streaming as it simultaneously establishes a broadcaster’s place on a platform and creates a distinct identity online that help attract
followers to their channel (Hu, Zhang and Wang, 2017). That is, it is a way for streamers not only to build a name for themselves but attract a community that understands and recognises what a streamer represents (Consalvo, 2016). Important to this study is the notion that because larger streams have the possibility to become toxic environments, smaller streams often positively brand themselves in a way that explicitly positions them as not a large stream (Johnson, 2018). Additionally, with public figures online, they often build their brand identity specifically to be consumed by the audience and carefully construct it under the banner of self-representation and authenticity to be more relatable (Marwick and boyd, 2011; Senft, 2008). This authentic branding also helps engage the audience, foster a connection, and facilitates the appearance of openness, honesty and commitment to audiences (Miller, 2012). If users volunteer their true selves, or at least parts of themselves online, communities are more likely to flourish on a foundation of trust and common ground (Dijck, 2013). However, this authentic persona also promotes parasocial interactions which will be discussed further in the next chapter. This makes some viewers think they know specific streamers on a personal level because they know what the streamer looks like, their mannerisms, behaviour, voice, opinions, and personality. From a streamer’s perspective, they only see a username and comments in the chat, and it takes a significant amount of time and effort to make a personal connection. To form a deeper connection, streamers need to imagine the person behind the username. Many viewers tend to forget there is not a mutual connection, and that if a streamer responds charismatically to them, it is not necessarily an indication of friendship. Streamers then have to set boundaries and navigate the feelings of their audience.
Branding often starts before a stream even begins, on their Twitch profiles and social media presence. There were three types of profiles for Twitch users in my study. The first, those who do not have any theme or branding, and no social media linked; this is normally users who are not streamers or use the platform to share their gameplay rather than seriously stream. The second, are profiles with a small amount of customisation, such as picture banners and profile pictures but no external links. Finally, for streamers who are engaged seriously, they will have a theme to their profiles of varying degrees of professionalism with banners and digitally created graphic designs. In these profiles, there are social media links, donation links, a list of top donators, information about their set up, rules for stream behaviour, streaming schedules, and frequently asked questions.

Streamer brands stretch beyond their profiles to the content of their stream. Twitch is a platform that puts the focus on the content creator and encourages realness while building niche communities. Many of my participants adhered to this notion and created their branding around authenticity. They strategically displayed a version of themselves because there was less preparation involved and the content became genuine and more relatable. Streamers who build their brand authentic self-representation, in most cases, showcase a high energy or amplified personality that can change over time. As P19 discusses below, her brand and her channel have grown in more ways than in follower numbers.

“If I didn’t look the same, I wouldn’t believe that last year Becky [pseudonym] streamer was the same as this year Becky streamer. When I started, my streamer personality was rather quiet and soft-spoken, high-pitched and girly. My appeal was how awkward I was...My channel simply has a much stronger identity in all ways. I’m louder, more ridiculous, and
my skin is much thicker... The channel overall appears more professional, I’d like to think. It has a much more consistent graphic appearance that manifests in overlays, panel graphics, emotes, etc. Additionally, sound, video, and lighting has improved with upgrading equipment... Overall, I feel more freedom to be myself, or at least a specific slice of the spectrum of myself, to be opinionated, to be silly. - P19

While talking about branding and authenticity, it is appropriate to mention the users I interviewed who specifically chose not to stream. Some did not have the time, or the equipment needed. However, others consider their personality not right for broadcasting or the need to stream with other people to be entertaining. These individuals were potentially unaware that many broadcasters showcase a carefully crafted version of themselves for consumption. As Walker (2014) comments, a streamer is constantly building their identity and this public face can change depending on many factors including on-air personality, whether they are playing with other people, and game being played.

The final part of branding to be dissected is audience catering in the video content streamers produce. Just like when people stream, what they stream is often dependent on their audience. Some streamers only stream one specific popular or niche game, building their brand on the fact they are a FORTNITE streamer, for instance. While the consensus among my interviewees was that streamers would not continue if the enjoyment were not there, some streamers have considered themselves as selling out because they are sticking to a brand they built and a popular game to grow, despite wanting to play different games. Others have built a brand on variety streaming, where they have the freedom to
play whatever game that was of interest. However, even these players tap into what their community prefers and attempt to balance the randomness with the demand of the audience. When a streamer is known for playing certain games or schedule, they need to tread lightly when changing their content because followers come and go very easily in a space with endless other content available. Expectations from audiences and pleasing them makes a smaller streamer’s job difficult and requires them to sacrifice either growth or authenticity. However, once a streamer reaches a certain height and following, and depending on the relationship between streamers and their community, broadcasters can begin to make changes in content and schedule without losing viewership.

Serious streaming not only requires a significant amount of time and money, but also a connection with the audience watching the videos, and knowledge of the broader gaming and streaming trends. The motivations behind why streamers continue, and whether they anticipate a career from this, also impacts streamer choices and ultimately the growth of their channel.

5.5 MOTIVATIONS AND COMMUNITY

I have already touched on a main characteristic of Twitch streamers enjoying playing games and sharing it with other people. However, there are more reasons why streamers continue to use the platform. In particular, the social experiences while gaming makes Twitch streaming worthwhile for my participants; connecting with people from all over the world, meaningful gaming experiences, and a sense of belonging are all held in high regard. The most rewarding outcome from Twitch for many of my participants are the communities being shaped around these streamers. This is supported by previous research
that found the most important aspect of user experience on the platform is sociality and communities of practice (Sjöblom & Hamari, 2017). Meeting new people during this enjoyable leisure activity helps streamers connect to unique individuals. Further, having a shared identity and a streamer actively engaging with their viewers are catalysts for these communities forming (see Hamilton, Garretson and Kerne, 2014; Walker, 2014). Additionally, being present in the moment and interacting in real-time as Twitch permits, promotes community formation through co-experience, communication interfaces and active participation (Spilker, Ask and Hansen, 2018). The relationships and interactions between users will be spoken about in the following chapter in more detail. For now, I offer examples of some of the more profound impacts of creating these communities.

Streamers I spoke with enjoyed spending a significant amount of time with their audiences, with many having emotionally connected relationships. The communities they created were filled with people who, through regular engagement, become close friends, sometimes closer than family. Their streams helped create communities that extended beyond the platform, with members helping each other, supporting one another, all while laughing, crying, and growing. As people change and a time moves on, the shape of the community changes with viewers, moving on from Twitch or to different viewing circles. Streamers can sometimes be a major catalyst in these shifts as discussed in the previous section, but they can also re-brand. This articulates the ever-changing transience of Twitch and the communities that reside on the platform.

_Twitch has become a large part of my life, for better or for worse. A habit and a place where I am seen. As someone who works from home, travels_
often, and feels very disconnected from the world at times, it’s a rare constant in the everchanging landscape of my life. It’s a place where I am experienced through the eyes of others and in this way, I exist. I am also able to provide the service of entertaining and acknowledging others. The channel is a hub, of sorts, where they may make their own connections amongst themselves and become cocurators of the culture by participating in the chat. – P19

The example from one of streamers above, not only highlights the multiplicity of networks and communities, and the way they can crossover, but the significant positive impact, where they not only appreciate sociality, but their existence and purpose in life is acknowledged. Knowing and fostering these communities creates new pathways for helping others through video gaming both explicitly and implicitly. The streamer behind Twitch therapy sessions, and others who stream to collect donations for charity, along with simply providing a space, alter user experiences around games and elicits tangible interactions and relationships. While they have genuine beginnings, fundamentally, these communities also act as an audience of consumers who are potentially funding the streamer who can earn money through donations and subscriptions. As such, an interesting power dynamic plays out between viewers and broadcasters that will be discussed in the next chapter.

5.6 CONCLUSION

To conclude this chapter, streamers have a passion for what they are doing, and the genuine connections they are making through interactions. As a form of serious leisure, streaming involved investments in money and time, as well as, a significant amount of
effort in creating a brand that is often based on authenticity. Motivated by enjoyment and connection above all else, streamers continue using Twitch for the communities they are building and maintaining and the potential to turn their hobby into livelihood. The following chapter considers the dynamics between different users, including the reciprocal relationships streamers hold with other streamers, and the reliance on audiences in which a power imbalance exists.
Chapter 6 – Interactions of Streamers and Viewers

In the previous two chapters, the social nuances of Twitch began to be teased out through discussions about social media, relationships, mental health, communities of practice, serious leisure, identity and new generations of careers. The thread that pulls each of these together is the complex sociality that takes place through co-experience on this user-driven platform. As such, in this chapter, I discuss the interactions between users explicitly because live-streaming platforms are dependent on their content creators and viewers. To do this, the notion that viewers and streamers have different needs that change situationally will be at the forefront of the discussion. This final results-heavy chapter is addressed from two perspectives – the viewer and the streamer – that each have two subcategories that display the dynamics of interacting on Twitch; viewer-to-viewer, viewer-to-streamer, streamer-to-viewer, and streamer-to-streamer.

6.1 VIEWER-TO-VIEWER PERSPECTIVE

As has been discussed earlier, from the position of a viewer, one of the most appealing aspects of Twitch is the other users of the platform. Sometimes, as shown in Chapter 4, viewers create meaningful friendships. The social media platform pushes the idea that people can connect deeply and superficially with others across communities on Twitch. However, there are some deeper insights to be gained about users making these connections, specifically, the channel/platform choice, the technical constrictions, and the possibility for these relationships to extent across platforms.

Firstly, a sentiment expressed throughout the interview process was that most of the time, viewing choices were purposeful based on the personality of the streamer, the game being
played, or the audience atmosphere. In communicating through the Twitch chat interface within individual streams, the content of the stream, and the other audience members communicating in chat impact whether a user actively engages in the discourse, and by extension, whether they watch specific streams. As Johnson (2018) and this study noted, larger streams often become full of spam or toxic in nature. This is because these broadcasts have large numbers of people actively participating making it difficult for streamers or viewers to converse or read comments. Additionally, the internet has always been a space for trolls to unleash chaos on the world through exploitation to unfairly destroy another user’s character or get an emotional reaction from others (Buckels, Trapnell and Paulhus, 2014). On Twitch, trolls still roam free, and while channels have moderators to try and make viewers adhere to community guidelines it becomes difficult to police in large streams (Johnson, 2018). As such, the presence of trolls and spammers is a typical reason to avoid certain streams. However, my participants also emphasised the importance of authentic and relatable personalities, and due to the communities streamers build often holding similar values to the curated persona they have created, the possibility to find friends is potentially a guarantee rather than a chance. At the end of the day, the decision to watch a stream is dependent on the motivation of the user. The viewer that is a lurker, is happy on the sidelines being entertained. People who only engage on occasion still have positive interactions, but socially-inclined active participants are those who benefit from the co-experience and engage in friendly banter and friend making. The content of Twitch conversations extends beyond the stream they are watching or occurs regularly enough that it moves past acquaintances. Nascimento et al. (2014) noted chat topics were diverse and dependent on the niche community in which
the conversation was occurring. In addition to comments directed to, or about, the streamer performance and game strategies, the current study has themes of personal events (both mundane and special), popular culture, current events and more.

The interactions I have described thus far, have not necessarily been discussed regarding where, and how far, they extend. That is, many interviewees explained that their interactions and relationships exist only online and limited to certain streams but across periphery platforms like Discord, Twitter, YouTube and Reddit. As Kendall (2002) contends, online relationship quickly become verbally intimate due to distance and anonymity which can sometimes make the transition to offline friendships difficult. When this is the case, if user relationships do not extend beyond the platform itself, they can recognise familiar usernames and conversations can, but do not always, become personal. Additionally, people can exist within groups or cliques on Twitch, in the sense that some people befriend others based on the same channel in common, where the same group of individuals watch the same streams often enough to be recognised or actively organise plans to watch specific channels. These groups are not rigidly defined, giving members the opportunity to participate in multiple networks and move freely through these communities. Streamers also aid in bringing communities together and introducing new groups to one another which will be discussed further later in the chapter. While relationships have thus far been discussed in the online context, it is important to remember that Twitch expands into offline spaces. Through events and conventions including streamer IRL meet ups, Twitch Con and PAX to name a few, users can meet in person. However, these events are not always needed, with users organising planned trips and arranging to meet each other as P1 below explains.
There are actually several people that I've had an opportunity to meet in person, it's been really cool to hang out and have a drink with people that I've talked to for a while online. I've met people from New York, Virginia, Canada and in October I'll be making a trip to Florida to meet up with someone from the UK. Some of these people I would honestly consider friends even though I've never met them in person. As I was typing that out, I found myself wanting to use the phrase "in real life" but kept deleting it. I'm not 100% sure why though, maybe my view of interacting with people online has changed from what it was a few years ago. – P1

Unlike Gandolfi (2016), who determined that Twitch rarely fostered new friendships or collectively shared the consumption of streams, my participants readily making friends and colleagues, clearly indicted the opposite. While it should be noted that social media has changed what we categorise as friendships and the meanings attached to them, it does not make them any less real (Snodgrass et al., 2011). Further, while both offline and online sociality are mediated in some way, Chambers (2013) considered how interpersonal communication and digital intimacy were subject to established and changing social and technological structures. On Twitch, the friendships are built on intimacy, shared passion and sincerity that separate these relationships from others that are less substantial. Finally, online connections and friends help users reflexively build their identity by becoming an imagined audience and serving as a public to which participants adjust their performances to meet the standard of the imagined collective and guide behavioural norms (Chambers, 2013).
6.2 VIEWER-TO-STREAMER PERSPECTIVE

As much as Twitch is about audiences building and sustaining communities, a streamer’s popularity and relevance as was discussed above, there are also important insights about viewer behaviour towards streamers. Keeping in mind that my participants indicated that the ability to interact and impact a stream in real-time was an attractive element of the platform, some important social dynamics become apparent and will be discussed in detail in the following two sections. Further, interactions with, or acknowledgment from, streamers were readily sought after by many of my participants.

This is attempted, and sometimes achieved, through several methods. First, general and personal inquiries, like asking how their weekend was, if they liked the new Kendrick Lamar track, or offering advice or encouragement in a game that was being played. Remembering that this is all occurring through text chat, viewers often try and make these connections as though they were speaking on a personal level to someone they know well. This is where parasocial interactions come into the discussion. These unevenly distributed relationships exist between a public figure and a viewer where the latter gains a warped emotional attachment to the former (Ferchaud et al., 2018). In a constant effort to make their perception a reality, some viewers consider themselves equals in the relationship and get frustrated when the streamer does not reciprocate their attempts, especially if the streamer interacts with someone else. Alternatively, a few viewers I interviewed had the desire to interact with a streamer in a power play with other audience members, as well as, self-gratification of their message being seen by the audience but still most importantly, the streamer. These people are often those who
would attempt to offend or shock (linking back to trolls), but also includes those who say positive or complimentary comments.

*It is not as easy to get the broadcaster’s attention, and unless you donate money to them and put a message on the screen, it depends on the broadcaster...I used to be obsessed with getting her to notice my messages in chat without actually having to donate money. It has worked a few times and I’ve clipped and saved almost every instance for posterity...I’ve given up on trying to be recognized, and simply type random things in the chat, spam a positive thing or two to counteract the negative spam, or have sporadic conversations with other users. - P9*

In most cases, my interviewees expressed that they watch a streamer, and interact with them because they were people whom they would want to be friends with. They are drawn in by their personality, attitude and the vibe of the community they build. This is by design and will be explained below.

**6.3 STREAMER-TO-VIEWER PERSPECTIVE**

As was discussed in Chapter 5, through a conscious effort to cultivate and maintain relationships with their viewers, Twitch streamers carefully create their brand based in authenticity. Offering personal details about their lives to be consumed by their target audience helps users carefully construct their presence online. What aids streamers in creating these bonds and parasocial relationships with their audience, is the new wave of online public figures known as ‘microcelebrities’ or ‘influencers’. Microcelebrities are considered individuals who are trying to obtain a following by posting content on social
media (Senft, 2008). Marwick (2013) highlights the mindset and techniques associated with being a microcelebrity, where followers are considered fans or an audience that require constant management and the calculated construction of online self-presentation that appeals to, and changes because of, other users. Notably, this becomes a representation of non-actors as performers who seem more real than traditional celebrities (Senft, 2008). Success comes when self-representation and self-branding lean on each other; that is, the edited self becomes a brand that is promoted through digital media (Marwick, 2013). The title of influencer is bestowed upon ordinary people who share their personal lives and engage with large followings in both online and offline spaces and across various platforms – influencers are microcelebrities that have a monetary component to their presence through advertisements, donations and sponsorships (Abidin, 2017). As such, all streamers (including small-scale streamers like the ones in the current study) can be considered microcelebrities, however, they only reach the category of influencer once they have a large enough following to turn their hobby into a viable livelihood such as Syndicate and Ninja mentioned at the start of this thesis.

Further, in their quest to be watched and build their communities, streamers are required to encourage participation and arguably focus more on their audience than the game being played. As such, a vital part of a streamer’s success (both in terms of followers and nurturing a network and community) relies on their viewers. This important role simultaneously generates a space where the broadcaster appears to hold the power, while the audience and interactions with viewers are critical for continued growth. As was the case with the current study, streamers often exuded a welcoming and relatable atmosphere (Hamilton, Garretson and Kerne, 2014). This is because streamer
authenticity, like other online content creators that inject some level of ‘realness’ into their content, promote qualities like openness, commitment and sincerity which potential viewers gravitate towards (Miller, 2012). Parasocial relationships then become a biproduct of streamers offering enough personal information that nurtures deeper connections including a sense of loyalty with their viewers (Ferchaud et al., 2018; Hu, Zhang & Wang, 2017). Streamers also purposefully rebrand and change their online identities as they are led by their experiences and in response to the wants and needs of their viewers (Vivienne, 2016). Twitch then becomes a space for an interesting tension between authenticity and the fact broadcasters are carefully crafting these brands while showing the viewer only what they want them to see. The symbiotic nature of viewers and streamers pushes smaller streamers to brand the type of space they want to create early in their broadcasting journey which is often a reflexive process of publicly presenting a version of themselves as it is the easiest road and most appreciated by the audience. This branding encouragement is present because, as Lin and Sun (2011) note, an imagined audience can influence choices made.

In larger streams, this power play is one routed in business, because keeping an audience funds their serious leisure activity. However, in smaller streams, it appears that monetary motivations are not the most important reasons for building close relationships with their audiences. From my interviews, it was clear that streamers are very aware of their audience, the importance of genuinely interacting, and their role in building and maintain their communities. However, it is not as simple as a streamer speaking to the audience; it is a careful combination of understanding audience needs, adjusting banter, energy, communication, and the seriousness of gameplay. For most streamers, interacting with
the audience takes precedence over the game because they value people investing their
time to watch the stream. Knowing that audience members could be watching someone
else stream, or be spending their time elsewhere, streamers are motivated to interact
sincerely with their viewers. Some streamers even begin to see their regular viewers as
friends (Hamilton, Garretson and Kerne, 2014). Through active engagements with
viewers and other streamers, broadcasters expertly shape a network that provides a safe
and friendly space to share, a support system and a creative outlet (Walker, 2014).

Interacting with my audience to me, is more important than playing the
game. If someone is going to take time out of their day to come watch my
stream and interact with me, I will be engaging with them. It’s one reason
why I think my followers like me so much. – P4

Previously I mentioned that in larger streams, it becomes difficult for audience members
to interact. More viewers, results in more messages in the chat (including spam, trolls and
emoticons), making it nearly impossible to be interactive with every viewer. However, in
smaller streams, every person feels like they can be seen, and the streamer can respond to
a higher percentage of comments. If a smaller streamer does not respond to a viewer who
attempts to interact with them, most people will feel ignored. Additionally, if a streamer
is focused on gameplay alone, my participants questioned what the point was in using
Twitch, suggesting a platform like YouTube would be more appropriate.

I haven’t seen a streamer with any kind of real viewership that isn’t
interactive. Like, if you want to make money at it, you’ve got to interact with
your stream. I’ve seen people absolutely horrible at a game but they are
funny and interactive so they are popular. It is different if you are really
good at a game, but even then, being interactive to some degree is still very
important...I can go to Youtube and watch a walkthrough, even one with
narration. With twitch I get live interaction, play by play...it’s like watching
sports; at times like watching a movie, at least for me. – P5

When speaking specifically about Twitch, Burroughs and Rama (2015) explain that all
live-streaming platforms create communities of practice, that encourage a production of
learning for members through mentor-apprentice roles. As mentioned earlier, streams that
are growing will often utilise viewers in their community to become moderators during
their streams. A full study on moderators is beyond the scope of this study, however,
these individuals offer important insight into streamer-viewer relationships. Moderators
have more power than others watching. With their authority in the community they
ensured that chat rules were followed, blocked individuals from posting, removed spam
messages, but also helped keep interactions between community members going (see
Seering, Kraut and Dabbish, 2017).

My mods are people I trust, consider my friends, and people I know are
invested in me and in the success of the channel. Modding is a strange thing,
because it is a weird status symbol that many viewers find desirable as a
bragging right. However, it’s much more like an unpaid job. At least for my
mods, I expect a lot from them and they are incredibly giving with their time
and energy. I am so lucky to have the mods that I have. – P17

Moderators essentially perform administrative duties on behalf of the streamer and thus
add to shared identity of the stream. That is, the streamer manufactures a personal,
authentic brand, the community reflects that brand, and the people participating in the stream are attracted to that brand because they are searching for a sense of belonging. Interacting with viewers is a defining factor of being a streamer, however, networking with other streamers also has great advantages for the success of a stream.

6.4 STREAMER-TO-STREAMER PERSPECTIVE

Interacting is the crux to a good streamer. However, the conversation is not limited to interactions with and between audiences, but also includes streamers with other streamers. In the first instance, this plays out in a fairly simple way if we consider streamers as viewers. Earlier in the thesis, I introduced the spectrum of engagement for Twitch users where they lurk, actively participate, and create personal relationships. However, this spectrum misses a significant interaction for streamers - professional relationships. This section will focus on the interactions that exist within this category, that is, it will discuss networking between streamers.

In many ways, discussing networking and professional relationships implies a streamers’ want to make money and a career from streaming. While this is true, I will consider these terms as including those who want to grow their communities, with the knowledge that many of my participants indicated that they were simply having fun while streaming. There is an understanding with streamers, that to increase success and growth, connections need to be made with other streamers. This is supported by previous research that noticed, not only do streamers surround themselves with other broadcasters, but they often have similar content which makes it easy to collaborate with one another (Churchill and Xu, 2016).
According to information provided by my participants, mutually beneficial streamer-streamer interactions come in many forms including, channel raiding, hosting, and subscribing to other channels. Raiding is when a stream ends, and that streamer (and their community) will raid another broadcast, entering the chat to posting ‘hype’ or spam to boost the stream viewer numbers, energise the audience, and potentially introduce new viewers to new channels. Hosting is when a channel is not live, but they host another streamer to broadcast it to their channel. Finally, subscribing and donating to another streamer shows support for the channel and encourages other people to stream or donate. Streamers (and other users) can also gift subscriptions to users, allowing people who do not want to spend money they ability to show their support fiscally.

I think, as a small streamer, you have to collaborate and meet other streamers to grow. If I depend entirely on organic growth, I'll never grow because I'm at the bottom of the streamer list. If I find other streamers who stream similar things with a similar sized audience, we can share our communities and grow together. I maintain these relationships through an active Discord channel for the most part, as well as a social media presence. I try to keep up with what they do and what they're up to, hopefully they do the same for me. If they're on Discord, I can hang out with them and chat with them, making them a welcome part of my community. – P8

The internet and Twitch are capricious places with a significant amount of content, therefore visibility is key, with the most exposure often coming from the social networking side of the platform. Knowing the right people at the right time can aid immensely in boosting one’s community and channel to the next level. Once again, other
social networking platforms also play a large role in promoting other streamers. For my participants, this streamer-streamer relationship is not normally one that is motivated by channel growth. Instead, it is a two-way relationship, where streamers will help each other because they are acutely aware of the social dynamics and density of Twitch. When it comes to small streamers supporting and encouraging one another, they share tips and advice, help fellow streamers by moderating their channels, and stream together to gather a wider audience. Notably, the streamers who are networking and growing together are nearly always friends. This friendship is built on mutual respect and common ground.

6.5 CONCLUSION

To conclude, this chapter expanded on the sociality of the platform that was introduced in the previous chapters. The four connected user social dynamics – viewer-to-viewer, viewer-to-viewer, streamer-to-viewer, and streamer-to-streamer – indicated the overwhelming complexities and interconnectedness of Twitch communities. Navigating these dynamics on a core level is possible if we understand that streamers and audiences are in a co-dependent relationship, and that any one user can shift between roles as users of the platform, streamers, or viewers (sometimes more than one at a time). Often computers (and Twitch) are portrayed as an unlikely matchmaker (Kendall, 2002). In reality, wherever communities of practice exist, so too must relationships. According to Hu, Zhang and Wang (2017), different levels of personal and group identification are essential building blocks for online communities, where intense interactions, and experiences on an individual and collective level help shape broadcaster and viewer identities. Belonging to a community of practice, as Churchill and Xu (2016) suggest, means that Twitch users find meaning and a sense of fulfilment in shared passions and
pleasure in personal and collaborative success. Much like communities, audiences are not pre-existing, inert objects but ongoing constructions that seize, represent and capitalise on varied and complex meaning-making (Taylor, 2016). That is, rather than being passive, audiences are active participants, and help shape the content being watched, and the dissemination of information after an event (Behrenshausen, 2012). Further, Twitch exists under the predication that the audience will engage with not just the content and streamer, but also other members of the community (Spilker, Ash and Hansen, 2018). Finally, frequent interaction between all parties involved on the platform has been shown necessary to attract and maintain audiences, and help self-identification processes unfold (Hu, Zhang and Wang, 2017).

Twitch has thus far been analysed in relation to nuanced ideas about social media, serious leisure, communities of practice, and social relationships. In the final chapter of this thesis below, I will demonstrate the ways these factors help us conceptualise social performances and networked publics on Twitch.
Chapter 7 – Discussion

7.1 INTRODUCTION

As Eklund (2016) tells us while speaking to video games but applicable to Twitch, the interplay between users and technology has a historical tendency to be investigated in terms of technological advances creating new platforms, content, experiences, practices and audiences to the entertainment genre. Additionally, as new and old users join forces, the world sees a stimulation in advancements resulting in an exponential expansion of, and changes to, technologies and platforms propelled by human practices (Eklund, 2016). Technology and human sociality are not static, and digital technologies have impacted, and been impacted greatly, by humans (Miller et al., 2016). In this way, social processes become a significant part of the development, use and design of technology (Liff and Lægran, 2003). Studying Twitch, therefore, can tell us a lot about the social practices of people, but also explore how the users are innovating new ways to use the platform and how that might impact technology, culture, and social constructs. Further, in discussing technology and the internet, Hine (2000) considers interpretive flexibility, where technology performs differently contextually and situationally; within a bounded social space online, technology, and how we define or redefine ourselves in the face of it, is malleable in nature. This opens the door for Twitch, which offers exciting explicit examples of a sub-culture of lived experience that is breaking down social norms while reinforcing others. In this final chapter, I will take the opportunity to use the global website as a stage to examine conceptual understandings that extend beyond Twitch – networked publics and social performances. Firstly, I will provide summaries of findings from the three data chapters of this thesis. Following this, I will use these findings to
explicitly address networked publics and social performances, and end with potentials for future research and concluding remarks.

7.2 FINDINGS SUMMARY

This project set out to ethnographically examine how social interactions and motivations of users affect the construction of publics and performance on Twitch. In the previous chapters, I used the themes of social media, serious leisure and user interactions to systematically examine the social structures and participatory practices of the platform from the perspective of my participants. In this thesis, I refer to social networking sites through the work of boyd and Ellison (2008) as having three main features; individuals construct partially or entirely public profiles in a confined system, have a list of users with whom they connect, and negotiate these connections and those of others within the confined system. On a definitional level, Twitch expresses all three of these features providing personalised channel profiles, lists of ‘followers’ and ‘followings’ and the ability to explore the networks of other users. While Twitch is fundamentally an entertainment platform, it is also a user-generated, participatory platform that is dependent on co-experience and interactions between users across the niche streamer communities. Remembering the work of Miller et al. (2016) who introduce scalable sociality to understand social media existing on two connected scales, one between private and public spheres, and the other between small and large groups. For example, Instagram is often public and open to strangers whereas Snapchat is used privately between friend groups. Additionally, scalable sociality can be used within a certain platform. In the case of Twitch streams, we see public broadcasting to large audiences on one end of the scale, and small private conversations between individuals and small
groups on the other. However, we also see large public displays of personal interactions and small public conversations on the smaller streams. That is, on Twitch, sociality can be scaled in all directions at varying degrees of publicity, privacy, intimacy, and in small, medium and large groups of users.

At the beginning of this thesis, I referred to the work of Burroughs and Rama (2015) who emphasised how Twitch fundamentally alters the digital media landscape, embodying current and future of video game experiences, where production and consumption are intertwined. Further, live-streaming blurs the boundaries between virtual and real, and makes the distinction between social networking, face-to-face communication and spaces for participating in gaming unclear (Burroughs and Rama, 2015). From the current research, it seems that for Twitch, this involves communities being built that are simultaneously fleeting and sustained. There is an immediacy that accompanies live-streaming, yet communities of practice remain in their wake, returning for future streams and connecting via other social media in between broadcasts. Audiences and streamers perform roles that enable the viewers to impact the content being created in real-time. Additionally, the participatory nature of the platform – the interactions, sociality and networking performed by users becomes the main function of Twitch. While entertainment is still an integral part of the website, the success and continued use of Twitch comes down to the human actors in the environment connecting with each other. These people develop collaborative spaces, where they nurture and belong to multiple communities, cultivate different online presences and continue to innovatively use the technological affordances to their social (and sometimes professional) advantage.
As many studies of social networking sites have indicated, people leave digital footprints and traces of their online actions, and dwell in these online spaces (Marwick, 2013; Chambers, 2013; Snee et al., 2016; Pink et al., 2016; Miller and Horst, 2012). My participants sought a sense of belonging and connectedness with other like-minded individuals. Twitch, for both streamers and viewers, was a place they invested enormous amounts of time, money, and energy participating in leisure activities. As such, users have lived experiences while broadcasting and watching streams, where engagement can be casual and serious. In the discussion of leisure, this thesis drew heavily on the serious leisure perspective from Stebbins (2009; 2015a; 2015b; 2017). The two relevant types of leisure are casual and serious, where casual is entrenched in instant gratification, enjoyable and does not require specific expertise. Serious leisure on the other hand is an organised pursuit of a substantial activity that is fulfilling, requires special skills and has three categories: amateurs, hobbyists, or volunteers. Further, casual leisure can transform into serious leisure through perseverance, and serious leisure has the opportunity to become a livelihood. On Twitch, the importance of streaming being enjoyable for participants, and a self-defined hobby, was evident whether or not users were actively attempting to peruse a livelihood. From the perspective of the participants in my study, the effort and sacrifices of using the platform were worthwhile because being a streamer (and an audience member) were deeply entrenched in meaningful sociality that became a valuable part of their lives. Further, the platform offered the opportunity to build authentic brands, customise their space on Twitch, cultivate an online identity, network with other likeminded users, and create communities, with the prospect of changing these factors in the future.
My study has produced many insights into how and why the platform has been used by participants, here I provide some of the main characteristics uncovered about Twitch. First, interaction is not a by-product but a main function of Twitch which is a participatory space for like-minded individuals to interact and share in communities of practice. Second, the platform has the capacity to act as a matchmaker, a space of positive mental health benefits, and social networking site. Third, there is a flexible interaction continuum that occurs at different intimacy levels. These include lurkers/observers, active participation, personal engagements and professional networking. Fourth, audiences are the most important players in the game of community building and maintenance, streamer growth and success, and are critical for the platform to exist. Fifth, there are different interaction dynamics between users – viewer-viewer, viewer-streamer, streamer-viewer, and streamer-streamer. Users are motivated to interact in real-time, and audience interaction is the most important aspect for both the streamer and viewer. Streamers build rapport and brands around authenticity to attract viewers and promote loyalty and sincerity. This can lead to viewers developing a deeper one-sided personal relationship with streamers (parasocial interactions). Additionally, small-scale streamers need each other to grow, and are motivated for this networking based on mutual respect, friendship and reciprocity. Sixth, streaming is a leisure activity with the potential to become a livelihood. This involves significant financial, social, and time commitments for streamers and viewers alike. Seventh, much like the technological features of the platform changing, users actively shape and shift social structures and practices over time. Further, users fluidly find meaning, forge social networks, participate in communities of practice, and shape their own identities in relation to others. Having
summarised the information from the previous chapter, I will now explicitly address networked publics and social performances.

7.3 PUBLICS

In Chapter 2, I broke down the characteristics of traditional publics and networked publics. In this section, I will consider the properties of both types of publics and address them with regards to their appropriateness for Twitch. According to Warner (2002), traditional publics are self-organised; involve interactions between strangers who engage in social participation; are in spaces where public addresses are simultaneously personal and impersonal and accompanied by knowledge that address people at the same time in different ways; exist when they are acknowledged; move in social spaces that require reflexive circulation of social discourse before and after an address; are temporary in that they are ongoing and boundless; and finally, involve contextual imaginary world-making. For Twitch, this traditional definition applies: (1) Twitch is a user-led environment, (2) stream audiences are often groups of strangers and friends alike, (3) the platform provides content creators with a public arena to address large groups of people in personal and general capacities where different viewers are receiving the streamer in varied ways depending on their motivations, (4) communities are born the moment the streamer and viewer acknowledge each other, (5) the publics can be the stream where users reflexively circulate community practices, speak on behalf of the streamer and connect different streams and information together, (6) the communities are always changing, have no fixed boundaries and exist past when a stream ends, and (7) that without imagining an audience, the streamer does not have a reason to undertake the performative task of streaming.
Earlier in the thesis, networked publics were understood in terms of the totality of interconnected cultural, social and technological advancements that promote active engagement with, and through, digital media, and involve complex networks of communication, sociality, shared experiences and knowledge (Ito, 2008; Quinn and Papacharissi, 2014). When it comes to Twitch, results of the current study indicate that the intense real-time participatory nature of the platform shares these features because Twitch allows a multitude of intrinsically linked publics to exist through complex interactions and social structures. Further, Marwick and boyd (2014), noted that the space created through modes of networking and imagined collectives online from this crossover between technology, the people using it and the practice of using it constitutes a public. That means that Twitch is definitively a public in and of itself, that has the ability to elicit new innovative publics with it.

Networked publics are also publics that already exist, being redefined by social media, but also different types of publics coming together through networks (boyd, 2011). Twitch is a transformative digital media that has given rise to new ways of experiencing and socialising around games, and has acted as a mecca for games related entertainment therefore supporting this definition as well. The communicative component of Twitch, involving strong user-to-user interactions and cross-platform promotions also helps the platform display the discourse driven nature of publics, with networks and communities being boundless, and communities and user identities being shaped by imagined audiences. As Papacharissi (2015) contends, diverse social publics are shaped by, and people gain relevance through, storytelling and sharing alternative discourses that are not geographically bounded (Papacharissi, 2015).
The vastness of Twitch makes finding a community that suits a viewer highly likely. As such, shared imaginaries, a sense of belonging, and social interactions can be found in a variety of contexts. The heavy communication component of the platform, and the way people communicate with each other through chat and direct messages contributes further to dense networks that exist across Twitch. However, due to many of these interactions and relationships playing out in the public arena, and streamer’s creating public personas – whether authentic or not – opens them to scrutiny that can be shared and perpetuated either positively or negatively through these networks and communities. Here is where we see the interesting opportunities Twitch and other streaming sites offer, because we have a multiplicity of interactions and performances that shape publics while existing as a public in and of itself. Jenkins (2009) considered the creation of networked publics, but also the notion that they can never amass huge viewership due to the enormous size of these platforms and the amount of content available. Undoubtedly, this is the case for Twitch, where many publics are created in and across a sea of channels and content.

On paper, Twitch slots easily into definitions of publics as highlighted above. However, when it comes to the explicit defining properties of networked publics as provided by danah boyd, some tensions arise. Boyd (2011) considered four defining properties. The first property is, persistence in that there is a permanence to the digital presence of posts. Second, replicability, where online content can be reposted or reproduced but can also be altered. Third, scalability, that denotes the possible visibility or the viral nature of content spreading across networks and media. Finally, searchability, which permits to the ability to find content when one searches for it (boyd, 2011). While Twitch can be understood through the fundamentals of more traditional publics, the platform lacks certain
properties outlined for networked publics. As such, there are some amendments that need to be made. Regarding persistence, Twitch streams are not permanent unless the archive feature is toggled on or clips/highlights are saved and available on channels. However, the communities in some senses are persistent and permanent is the way they cross stream sessions and other social media. Similarly, replicability is not possible except in the case of clips and highlights from the stream, however this does not include the stream chat, and is not the full stream. Additionally, no two live-streams are ever the same. The third feature, scalability, can be applied for Twitch, with the vast network of communities and fans across social media able to promote and circulate streams. Finally, searchability is possible to the extent of searching for specific streamers or categories but requires a more convoluted road to find specific content. If this definition cannot be changed, Twitch may well be something else entirely; an evolutionary mutation of networked publics. However, this thesis suggests that if one was to consider Twitch within the framework of network publics, the definition needs to be expanded or changed. Here, networked publics could be defined with regards to: (1) persistence, where permanence is not necessary but instead longevity is achieved through communities keeping these publics alive that is not dependent on continuity but consistency; (2) replicability is replaced by strategic knowledge and practices, where skills, history and experiences aid in similar events and discourses unfolding; (3) scalability remains; (4) searchability remains; and (5) interactivity which denotes the interactions between people, technology, and social practices and the interconnectedness of these factors and other publics.

Additionally, boyd (2011) provided three elements that shape networked publics – invisible audiences, collapsed contexts and the blurring of private and public realms. On
Twitch, imagined audiences play a huge role in how users construct their online presence, and lurkers are always present online. Live-streaming platforms have interesting social structures that are contextually dependent, where some technical constraints make it difficult to cultivate communities, such as stream time, content, and platform support. Finally, the blurring of public and private boundaries is particularly relevant to Twitch, especially when considering that streamers are on a public platform, but they purposefully divulge personal information to appeal to potential viewers and users engage in intimate interactions. In the face of public socialising online, privacy becomes coordinated, commodified, and communal (boyd and Marwick, 2011; Dijck, 2013; Quinn and Papacharissi, 2014). Uricchio (2009) noted that participation in publics has come full circle thanks to broadcast technologies – larger publics shifted to niche publics thanks to television, radio and recordings, however, more recently websites like YouTube indicate the return of large-scale publics. However, in the case of Twitch, it appears that both large and small publics exist. As a final note, Turner (2016) and Banet-Weiser (2012) while discussing how networked publics are able to be readily created due to the affordances of digital media, noted that there is a tension between collective dimensions and individualised tendencies of the internet. In particular, they mention identity expression through personal web presences where social power accompanies visibility, with social media providing a structure for the public and private performance of self (Turner, 2016; Banet-Weiser, 2012). Additionally, what is also interesting is that, publics participate in joint performances because they become social manifestations of their personal views and feelings (Dayan, 2005). Twitch displays many different layers of both individual and shared experiences, with different social roles and interactions playing out
across networks and communities. This section placed Twitch within the conceptual frameworks of publics and networked publics. The following section will discuss performances.

7.4 PERFORMANCE

In this internet-based study, social performances were abundant. As Pearce (2009), highlights, in our daily lives, we live in a dramaturgical culture, and the internet houses complex performative spaces where all users are both performers and audiences. Further, online platforms elicit spaces of public co-performance, that blur the distinction between performer and audience because all users in the culture are undertaking performative participation (Pearce, 2009). While online platforms are performative infrastructures, they act as a mediator rather than a facilitator, shaping performances of sociality (Dijck, 2013). More than this, digital media helps people self-identify through, “performances structured by their interaction with constantly changing, and not necessarily human (machines, networks, objects), others” (Slater, 2002, p. 537). Through performing identities – which is an act of self-reflection – individuals can gain understanding of themselves, their environment and others (Lewis, 2013). Initially, in this thesis, I commented on the fact that personhood and performance could seldom be separated. I draw largely on Goffman’s (1956) dramaturgy theory, to consider performance as a reflexive social task that is done situationally in the context of others. In the meaningful interactions between observers and performers, there are different actor position in the front, back, and off-stage. Technology and the internet provide a rich environment for identity performances in a variety of online and offline contexts. The malleability of online technology provides spaces for the relationships and interactions of individuals to
exist across the same or different networks, at varying degrees of intimacy, interaction, sizes, locations, and common ground (Papacharissi 2011, p. 307). According to Papacharissi (2011), technology and social media act as tools for individuals to have more control in their performances of self, the distance between front and back stage, and what they contextually choose to reveal. When we are dealing with the internet, online identities shift further into the symbolic, because people are able to customise and easily participate in multiple online spaces (Marwick, 2013). Additionally, no online situation is the same, with many types of audiences, and people performing on many different stages. This blurs social worlds and lessens the dichotomy of privacy/public boundaries for the performance. When considering the branding of many streamers based in authenticity as mentioned above, this is a particularly interesting position to consider. As common knowledge from the perspective of streamers and viewers, connecting with viewers is important and creating a personal brand that seems real is crucial for building audiences and communities. As was discussed earlier, a streamer puts themselves in a position to be judged, presenting versions of themselves based on what appears to be authenticity, where viewers can learn more personal details every time they watch a live-stream. This is normally a carefully constructed performative decision by the streamer, to promote sincerity and a sense of belonging to entice potential viewers to return for the next session and invest their time and money. What live-streaming website offer is real-time content that is unedited which encourages this idea that the person they are watching is a fairly realistic representation of themselves; the performance is believable, even if the performance is more fiction than fact. Further, the commodification of identities online occurs in established spaces, where self-branding exudes a sense of authenticity that does
not seem like a part of a corporate world even though it is incorporated in that space (Turner, 2016; Banet-Weiser, 2012). Our performances of identity are shaped by our experiences with and around other people, where our perceptions, feelings, social cues, interactions, relationship roles, expectations and more play a role in the ongoing process of identity-making (Schmidt, 2013). The super pliable platform helps people easily switch between the multiplicity of social masks being performed by any one individual (see Zoonen, 2013). Because of this fluid expression, streamers are also giving the opportunity to rebrand if needed. The real-time entertainment platform is similar to traditional mass media consumption practices but coupled with encounters on an enhanced chat room and the opportunity to influence and be influenced by the content creates a transient environment where users can perform sociality while watching a stream (see Haridakis and Hanson, 2009; Olejniczak, 2015).

Returning to the dramaturgy theory, unlike other social media that potentially turn into exhibitions of a person’s identity and life (see Hogan, 2010), Twitch offers support for the traditional characteristics of performing identities based on situation activities. We could consider the back stage of a stream when a streamer is in the comfort of their own home, and the webcam is off, front stage performances occurring during a stream, and off-stream potentially existing in private Discord chats, in other streams, on other social media, or conventions. Alternatively, the front stage could indicate day to day performances irrespective of the stream, applicable to all users online who are cultivating authentic performances and constantly adjusting their self-presentation based on the community with which they are currently engaging.
Ultimately, Twitch has an interesting pattern, of simultaneously transforming the way people experience entertainment and the cultural practices that surround it, while also reinforcing some traditional definitions. The platform separates itself from other social media, networked publics and social performances while also embedding itself further with those categories; it becomes a juxtaposition that somehow works. The essence of a single live-stream existing only in the moments it is created seemingly contradicts the way the communities of practice come together. No two streams are the same, and no streaming community ever remains the same. Streamers are the core subject of these communities, who cultivate these communities temporally through their authentic-inauthentic brands encouraging active participation from their audience. It is a dynamic and moving system, where the meaning of the community, and what it means to be a part of the community, exists only within the context of a particular streamer, and their audience at any given time, and based on the unique emergence of social norms within the flexible individual streams. That is, the stream is the process by which communities and relationships are created and maintained in individualised participatory environments. Streamers need to answer to their audience, and thus, while it might appear that these communities and publics are formed by the streamer, the streamer only becomes a performer in the presence of a viewer. Therefore, the symbiotic nature of streaming is revealed, where an audience, in collectively acknowledging a space to engage with other viewers and streamers, cultivate a public that promotes the performative streamer who is essentially bestowed responsibility to foster the public built around their brand.
7.5 LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

There were several limitations to the research design of this thesis. Due to feasibility issues and constraints at the time this project was undertaken, there were some methodological issues. While ethnography was the intended method, the way techniques were implemented were not ideal. Even though the interviews and observations still provided valuable insight into Twitch, there were some issues. First, the sample of participants was essentially restricted to a set of people who were engaging with Twitch-related content on Reddit forums. This decision made the project feasible with time constraints, however, in future projects, the recruitment process will be vastly altered. Second, the sample was restricted to users with relatively small followings – this is by no means a bad thing in-and-of itself. However, the presence of largely popular and mid-level broadcasters could have offered fantastic comparisons, including a thorough analysis of toxicity that was unable to be achieved in this study. Third, this research would have ideally included face-to-face interviews or real-time responses through instant chat as the interview was stagnated and delayed through email. Finally, as mentioned previously, this study on live-streaming relied heavily on the archive system. In some cases, channels did not offer any videos to view, and in others that did have videos available, portions of audio were muted due to copyright. Not watching in real-time for all videos was a large regret of the study, however, that was not possible as most streams were broadcast at the same time of day.

For future research, an extended initial period of in-depth participation with streams is recommended to become a familiar face in the communities being studied and aid in participant recruitment. Large scale data scraping for a long period in addition to finding
a more feasible way to conduct and record participant observations will be well served for future research. Use of software to record video content might be needed, although not entirely necessary. Recording also brings ethical concerns into question, because despite these broadcasts being public, it breaks an implicit right of a live-steamer to delete or not archive a broadcast to encourage audiences to be present and experience the event as it happened in real-time. Finally, recruitment should cross different social media platforms, with calls for participation occurring on Discord, Twitch, Twitter, and more.

7.6 CONCLUDING REMARKS
To conclude, this thesis aimed to examine how, and to what extent, interactions and motivations impacted the construction and maintenance of publics and performance on the live-streaming website Twitch. Drawing on ethnographic techniques, ten months of fieldwork were undertaken which included participation, semi-structured, open-ended email interviews, and in-depth observations of videos, chat, and profiles on the website. This research was addressing a gap in the current scholarship on Twitch, as well as providing important insights into human sociality online that extends beyond the niche community of video gaming. Technology needs humans to adapt and change the way technology is used, because in turn that symbiotic relationship pushes technological innovation. In this project, by considering Twitch as a social media platform through matchmaking and mental health, and by examining the hobby-profession dynamics of streamers, this thesis made several conclusions, some of which were listed at the start of this chapter.
Ultimately, data addressing networked publics and socially based performance pushed questions of authenticity and community to the forefront. Much like Twitch, live-streaming and online video content changed the face of broadcast media, the social practices of people, and their motivations while using the platform, it appears that conceptualising networked publics and social performances is both appropriate and in need of updating. Building on the definitions of these phenomena, Twitch puts a focus on the temporary nature of publics that are built on constantly changing communities. These communities are proximally based around streamers. However, these streamers are dependent on their audience. Otherwise, their fleeting performance would become relatively redundant. As such, audiences manufacture these publics around online performances of authenticity, in semi-structured but flexible communities.

While this was a snapshot of the online lives of individuals who used Twitch, this thesis intended to provide insights into the relationship between humans and technology, and contribute to the growing conversations concerning Twitch, social networking, and games research. Future research lies with mixed and ethnographic methods being used to understand this co-dependent relationship, as other scholars have just begun to do. I believe there is particular future potential in conducting longitudinal studies that could follow streamers of different sizes over long periods of time – such research could offer the most meaningful data for understanding sociality online.
Appendix A

Sample Email 1:

Hi X,

Thank you so much for getting in touch! I have a few admin things to get out of the way, but then it would be great to chat to you.

I have attached three different things. One is a statement about the research for you to take a look at, the other two are consent forms (you only need to complete one of them, whichever is easier for you).

Once you send it back, we can start talking!

Naomi

Sample Email 2:

Fantastic, thank you so much!

The questions below are to start us off, and then we can respond back and forth. Feel free to tell me anything that comes to mind even if it isn't answering a question.

But first, could I have your age, gender, and the country where you live?

Remember this is very informal, stories are great, just tell it how it is. Be as detailed as you like for the prompts below:

Have you always played games?

How and when did you start using Twitch?

What device do you use?

How often/when do you use Twitch?

Do you stream, watch or both?

What types of content/games do you enjoy to stream or watch, and do you play the games you watch?

Do follow particular streamers or events?

Do you chat with other users on Twitch and/or with other users about Twitch in other places online or offline?

Why do you keep using it?

Do you have any funny or interesting stories? Or something that has really stuck out to you over the years?

Speak soon,

Naomi
CONSENT FORM

"Live Streaming Video Games on Twitch: Performance, Personhood and Publics"

Name of Participant: ____________________________
and/or
Username of Participant: ____________________________
Email of Participant: ____________________________

Name of Researcher(s): Naomi Robinson (Post-graduate);
A/Prof Martin Gibbs (Supervisor); A/Prof Tamara Kohn (Supervisor)

1. I consent to participate in this project, the details of which have been explained to me, and I have been provided with a written plain language statement to keep.
2. I understand that after I electronically sign and return this consent form it will be retained by the researcher.
3. I understand that my participation will involve a semi-structured interview and observation and I agree that the researcher may use the results as described in the plain language statement.
4. I acknowledge that:
   (a) the possible effects of participating in the interview and observation have been explained to my satisfaction;
   (b) I have been informed that I am free to withdraw from the project at any time without explanation or prejudice and to withdraw any unprocessed data I have provided;
   (c) the project is for the purpose of research for a thesis, however data collected may be used in further publications;
   (d) I have been informed that the confidentiality of the information I provide will be safeguarded subject to any legal requirements;
   (e) I have been informed that with my consent the interview will be recorded and I understand that recordings will be stored at University of Melbourne and will be destroyed after five years;
   (f) my name and/or username will be referred to by a pseudonym in any publications arising from the research;
   (g) I have been informed that a link to the final thesis will be forwarded to me, should I agree.

I consent to this interview being recorded ____________________________ Yes or No

I wish to receive a link to the final thesis ____________________________ Yes or No

Participant Signature: ____________________________ Date: ____________

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Human Ethics Application 1646807.1 version 2, date 01/02/2017
CONSENT FORM Script

"Live Streaming Video Games on Twitch: Performance, Personhood and Publics"

Name of Participant: ____________________________________________________________
and/or
Username of Participant: ______________________________________________________
Email of Participant: __________________________________________________________

Name of Researcher(s): Naomi Robinson (Post-graduate),
                      APProf Martin Gibba (Supervisor), APProf Tamara Kohn (Supervisor)

1. I consent to participate in this project, the details of which have been explained to me, and I have
   been provided with a written plain language statement to keep.
2. I understand that after I electronically sign and return this consent form it will be retained by the
   researcher.
3. I understand that my participation will involve a semi-structured interview and observation
   and I agree that the researcher may use the results as described in the plain language
   statement.
4. I acknowledge that:
   (a) the possible effects of participating in the interview and observation have been explained to
       my satisfaction;
   (b) I have been informed that I am free to withdraw from the project at any time without
       explanation or prejudice and to withdraw any unprocessed data I have provided;
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       further publications;
   (d) I have been informed that the confidentiality of the information I provide will be safeguarded
       subject to any legal requirements;
   (e) I have been informed that with my consent the interview will be recorded and I understand
       that recordings will be stored at University of Melbourne and will be destroyed after five
       years;
   (f) my name and/or username will be referred to by a pseudonym in any publications arising from
       the research;
   (g) I have been informed that a link to the final thesis will be forwarded to me, should I agree.

If you agree to the above, please copy and insert your details in the following statement:

I, Insert Full Name Here and/or Insert Username Here, on the date of DD/MM/YYYY understand the
details of the study and the above conditions and consent to participate, have the interview recorded
and (wish or do not wish) to receive a link to the research findings via email at this address Insert
Email Here.

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Human Ethics Application 1646807.1 version 2, date 01/02/2017
PLAIN LANGUAGE STATEMENT

"Live Streaming Video Games on Twitch: Performance, Personhood and Publics"

You are invited to participate in the above research project, which is being conducted by Naomi Robinson (post-graduate student) under the supervision of A/Prof Martin Gibbs of the Department of Computing and Information Systems and A/Prof Tamara Kohn of the School of Social and Political Sciences, both based at the University of Melbourne. This project will form part of a Master's thesis, and has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee.

The aim of this study is to understand social structures, participation, interactions, identities, spaces, and places on Twitch, and will be conducted from June 2016 to June 2017. Particularly, this project is interested in how people identify with, and how they use, Twitch and play games in general. If you agree to participate, you would be asked to contribute by participating in an interview with Naomi at least once at a time that is convenient to you. The conversation would be conducted either by text (chat, email or Skype) or video/voice chat on Skype. Under your consent, the semi-structure interview/conversation will be recorded and should take an hour.

Participation is completely voluntary, and if you agree to participate you are free to withdraw at any time. All personal information will be kept confidential on a password-protected computer using pseudonyms unless you request otherwise. Once the thesis arising from this research has been completed, a link to the thesis will be provided to you.

As such, the data will be kept securely in the Department of Computing and Information Systems for at least five years after the completion of the thesis and/or any other publication derived from the thesis. If after this set amount of time the data is no longer useful to the student researcher, it will be destroyed according to university protocols.

If you would like to participate, please indicate that you have read and understood this information by signing the accompanying consent form, filling the relevant details of the consent prompt or providing verbal consent and return it to the researcher.

Should you require any further information, or have any concerns, please do not hesitate to contact the student researcher, Naomi Robinson: naomir@student.unimelb.edu.au, or her supervisors, A/Prof Martin Gibbs: martin.gibbs@unimelb.edu.au or A/Prof Tamara Kohn: kohn@unimelb.edu.au. Should you have any concerns about the conduct of the project, you are welcome to contact the Executive Officer, Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC), The University of Melbourne, +61 3 8344 2073.

Kind Regards,
Naomi Robinson

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References


Gandolfi, E. (2016). To watch or to play, it is in the game: The game culture on Twitch.tv among performers, plays and audiences. *Journal of Gaming and Virtual Worlds, 8*(1), 63–82.


Author/s:
Robinson, Naomi Eleanor Isobel

Title:
Performances and publics while watching and live-streaming video games on Twitch.tv

Date:
2019

Persistent Link:
http://hdl.handle.net/11343/227046

File Description:
Performances and publics while watching and live-streaming video games on Twitch.tv

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