

You are now live on Twitch

Centralizing the online community
through a livestreaming service

Samuel Kenneth Davey

AINT354 Design for Entertainment
Systems

Samuel.davey@students.plymouth.ac.uk

<http://Samodavey.github.io>

ABSTRACT

Within this paper I analyze the live streaming platform known as Twitch.tv^[1] and discuss how it has been able to strengthen the relationship between streamers and their audiences in turn bringing the online community closer together. I mention many different aspects in how the community gets involved when watching livestreaming developers, bot controlled streams or play Twitch integrated games. I then break this down and evaluate whether the discussed formats are truly bringing the online community closer together, distancing the community further or if livestreaming is perhaps just a phase which will fade away. With a constantly evolving market it is vital that developers are aware that the community is an important asset to their projects and they should remember to not become too disconnected from their target audience.

Keywords

Twitch, Livestream, Community, Interaction, Audience, Cooperation, Connection, Socialize

1. INTRODUCTION

Within the last decade the phenomenon of watching people play video games has risen in popularity exponentially whether it's pre-recorded or live people are attracted to watching others master areas of a game where they may not be able to^[2] or play it in perhaps a more entertaining fashion. This paper will be discussing the many factors on how Twitch.tv has been an influence on the video game market and made a social impact by bringing people into a sense of community in the online world. There will be 3 elements of Twitch streaming that will be discussed: Developer livestreams, Bot Controlled Streams and general video game streams followed by analyzing the positive and negative factors to these elements. Then by breaking these points down it will be possible to determine if Twitch has made an overall constructive effect on bringing the online community closer together, this could include consumers becoming more involved with developers through game development streams, game playthroughs controlled by the audience or being more involved with game streamers through conversations or with other fans by setting up fan pages discussing knowledge passed down from their favorite streamer to possibly improve the way they could play the game.

2. FIELD

The online community within the gaming world today is something that is ever growing and evolving and therefore requires an online platform which can cater to its needs. This report primarily focuses on the social aspects of livestreaming on Twitch, so other livestreaming platforms such as Facebook live will not be discussed because this is a platform which is solely built upon a social networking site not involved within the gaming community.

3. KEYPLAYERS

This paper will be highlighting 3 different key players within the field of livestreaming, these include:

- **Manifold Garden – William Chyr**
- **TwitchPlaysPokemon – (Anonymous Developer)**
- **Hearthstone – Trump (Jeffery Shih)**

3.1 Developer Livestream – WilliamChyr



Fig.1 Manifold Garden

WilliamChyr is a well-known game developer who livestreams development on a game he plans to release to steam known as 'Manifold Garden' and often will converse with his audience whilst working on the project. With his knowledge of physics and history of artwork within the abstract world he aims to make 'Manifold Garden' a game which allows you to "Witness infinity in first-person", an Escher-esque world of impossible architecture^[3]. He also highlights to players with his new game to think more outside the box with this quote about this game "You start off learning about gravity, and in the end, you end up thinking about the shape of the universe itself".

He essentially brings the online community closer together by creating an exciting learning environment for viewers by providing useful tips and tricks he uses within his stream, and in turn via conversation in chat he is able to learn from his viewers who may be more familiar with certain mechanics he wants to add to his game. Through this act of cooperation, he manages to bring people within the community from different backgrounds who wouldn't normally be able to communicate with each other together to collectively learn from each other within this large-scale project.

His contributions towards his Twitch channel have inspired many other independent developers to follow his example and make game development a much more social and open activity bringing the developers and their consumers to a friendlier and more informative relationship.

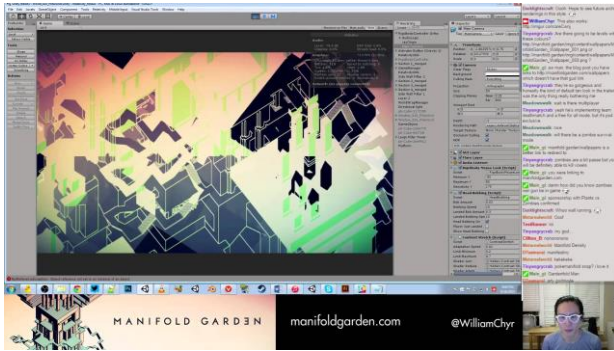


Fig.2 WilliamChyr streaming

3.2 Bot Controlled Stream – TwitchPlaysPokemon

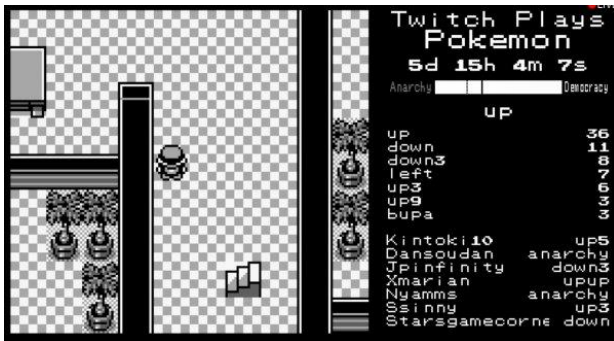


Fig.3 TwitchPlaysPokemon livestream of Pokémon red

TwitchPlaysPokemon took on the community by issuing it a challenge to complete games from the Pokémon series by using a bot which follows instructions that viewers give it via the stream chat. After the second day of the stream being live it went viral and total viewership raised to 175,000 and once again after another 3 days continued to rise exponentially to a total of 6.5 million total views [4]. Naturally the very idea of having thousands of viewers in control of the game was a chaotic concept, so to keep the peace the creator of this ‘online game’ (An anonymous Australian programmer) implemented a democracy system to make it possible for the viewers to eventually, over time, complete the game.

This new democracy system gave the viewers the opportunity to cast their vote on what the next action should be within the game (Whilst the voting took place the game would temporarily be paused within the emulator to prevent any other elements in the game affecting their progress). This small “proof of concept” evolved into a massive collaborative project in a matter of days managed to form this separate group built up on fans of the stream who would make artwork, discuss events within the stream, and generally make new friends.

3.3 General Video Game Streamer - Trump



Fig.4 Livestream of Trump playing Hearthstone

Jeffery Shih, otherwise known as Trump is a video game streamer who primarily plays the game ‘Hearthstone’ to his audience on Twitch. He has gained his fame and fan base from his large amount of success within the game’s professional league and his plethora of knowledge on the game and its mechanics. In Blizzard’s 2013 Stream awards he was labelled as “Most Educational Stream” and came second in the “Favorite Hearthstone Stream” category.

With his history of attaining a degree in management and finance he used this to his advantage within the game ‘Hearthstone’ which requires a large amount of card management, statistics and expected value (EV) calculating and as a result has become very successful with the game. And so, with his knowledge through his livestreams he would educate his fans on how to build stronger decks and generally play the game in a more competitive manner.

As his fame continued to grow so did his fanbase, so much so that due to his popularity fans banded together to form an unofficial fan site on him [5] to which they were able to talk to each other on message boards, arrange when they wanted to watch Trump’s next stream or even look at updated versions of Trump’s decks to see how they could improve their own game.

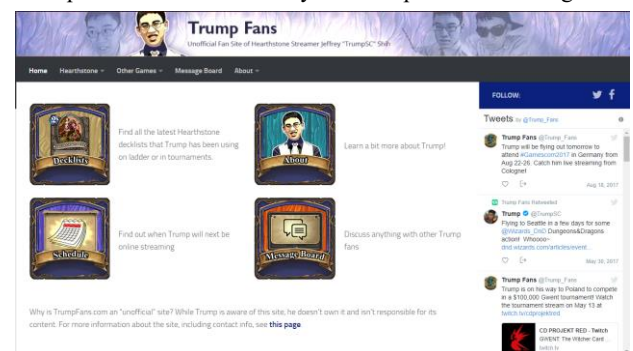


Fig. 5 Trump unofficial fan site

3.4 Summary

To define a sense of community it is set out by four distinct components: membership, influence, fulfillment of needs and emotional connection [6]. One example of this would be TwitchPlaysPokemon and how it became a colossal success due to its content, interactivity with the audience and availability. Since the subject matter was on the famous series Pokémon, it managed to attract a large following of older gamers who have an emotional connection with this series and had a strong need to revisit it once more, and since the livestream was made to be running 24 hours every day it easily fulfilled the audience’s requirements.

What made TwitchPlaysPokemon so incredibly unique was how many individuals could develop their membership within this ever-growing community through personal investment and yielding feelings of the right to belong. Fan pages are constantly updated on the latest events that occur in the stream [7] along with discussion boards on sites such as Reddit [8], however what made this community really stand out was its own sub culture filled with references to key events that viewers shared together during the stream and even made songs and artwork based off these events (E.g. Praise the helix fossil).[9]

Influence from members of this growing community played a massive factor into how the channel functioned, for example many of the viewers would often discuss in the chat how they wanted to complete the game (E.g. Collect certain Pokémon before completion) so with these newfound fan sites and message boards people would often group up try and collectively achieve their goals.

However a negative factor would be that many of the users within the stream would not appear to be ‘human’, unfortunately due to the game’s popularity there were a few members of the community who found more pleasure in making the progress of the game go much slower through the use of bots and spamming tools (A few eyebrows would raise at the sight of a username like “8_1337_689_1337_8”) [10]. But until there was official moderation for the channel looking out for these bots the channel would frequently find itself overrun by them, thankfully however with the collective efforts of the Twitch player community they have been able to overcome any attempts at halting or derailing the project’s progress.

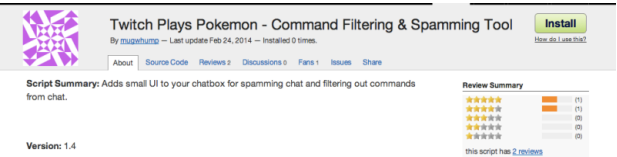


Fig.6 Example of a spamming tool used in TwitchPlaysPokemon

WilliamChyr was successful in forming his own community by using his channel to attract the needs of game developers looking to enrich their own abilities within the field, despite not attracting that certain emotional connection he was certainly able to tackle the needs of viewers by almost walking through each step of his development process as if he was giving an open topic lecture to his audience. This meant viewers could chat with him directly about any inquiries about the game, coding patterns, level design, etc. and he would willingly answer them as part of his stream.

The negative aspect to his streams however would be his availability to livestream, viewers would only have an hour and thirty minutes to ask him any questions they had, which is quite a small window of time realistically as some developers wouldn’t be available to watch the stream due to unavailability (E.g. Time zone issues) which damages his viewer count for anyone not within the US time zone alone.

Trump comes across as quite an uncommon streamer as within the gaming community he gained his viewership due to his well earned celebrity status within the professional league of ‘Hearthstone’ so with that alone his viewership grew by the thousands. But what made his channel so distinctly different from every other streamer was his own availability, he livestreams himself playing the game every day and long enough for viewers outside of the US to be able to watch as well, therefore fulfilling the needs of his audience by providing enough content to keep his audience content.

There is only one point that could be highlighted about Trump’s stream which can be seen in a negative light and that would be his availability to answer questions. Due to his overall popularity and number of concurrent viewers being so large when streaming he can’t answer everyone’s questions as they tend to flow into the chat window in the hundreds whilst live

and often go ignored which can naturally be a little frustrating for some of his fans.

Table 1: Comparisons of Livestreams

<u>Category\ Name</u>	<u>WilliamChyr (Developer Stream)</u>	<u>Twitch Plays Pokémon (Bot Controlled Livestream)</u>	<u>Trump (General Video Game Streamer)</u>
Interaction with audience	Talks to audience members	Entire stream controlled by audience	Talks to audience members
Followers	4,793	391,038	806,970
Channel Views	251,578	73,103,212	98,022,303
Availability	Monday – Friday: 3pm to 4:30pm	24 hours	Every day: 12pm to 8:30pm

Fig.7 (Statistics gathered from Socialblade & Twitch Channels) [11]

3.5 USP

The livestreaming website Twitch has been able to make watching others playing video games entertaining, a concept which is quite baffling for many people understandably yet somehow it has hooked hundreds of thousands of people into sitting at their computers to watch a stranger play games for a long period of time. The initial hook that Twitch has to begin with is the limited amount of competitors it has against it that could beat the quality Twitch was offering, currently the only competing livestream gaming sites are ‘Youtube Gaming’ [12], ‘UStream’ [13] and ‘YouNow’ [14]. Originally named ‘justin.tv’ a startup which began in 2005 (Then renamed to ‘Twitch’ in February 2014) was one of the first of few well-polished livestreaming sites, but what grabbed people’s attention was this concept Justin.tv wanted to get across of ‘lifecasting’ a concept which became very popular as the price of webcams and broadband was plummeting [15].

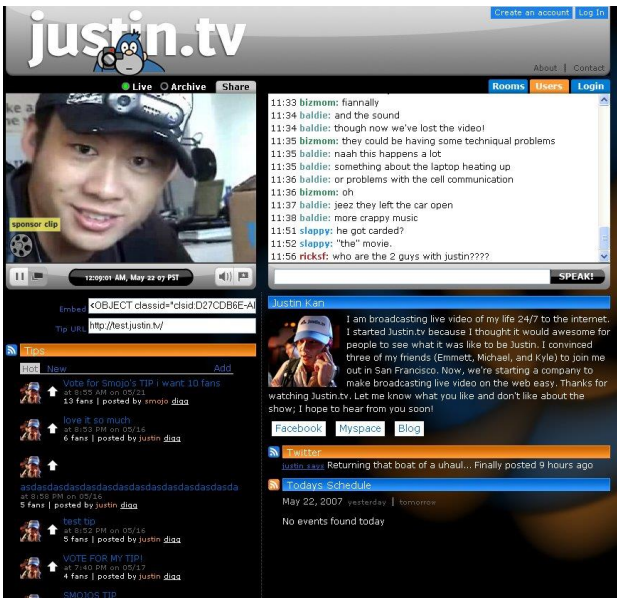


Fig.8 Justin.tv in 2007

E-commerce giant Amazon saw the potential within Twitch after reviewing the site's growth over the years, saw the popularity of one stream known as 'TwitchPlaysPokemon' skyrocket in popularity by the millions but most importantly in a report taken by Qwilt [16] in April 2014 it was highlighted that throughout that year Twitch was shown to be the superior livestreaming site within the United States. Along with this positive sign of popularity for Twitch on August 6th, 2014, Twitch introduced an updated archive system, higher quality video streaming, increased server backups, highlights from past broadcasts and a new video manager interface. [17]

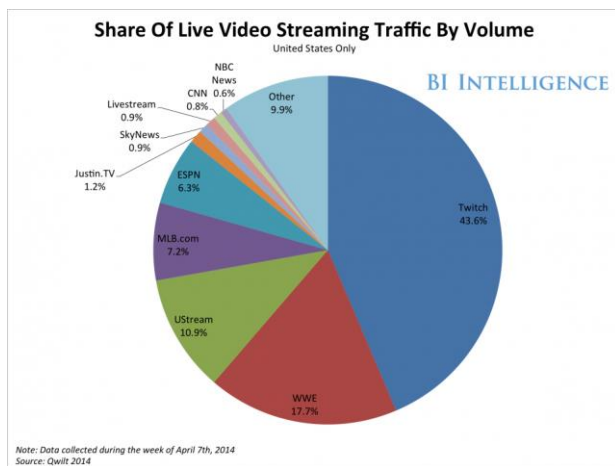


Fig.9 Report of Live video streaming traffic throughout 2014 using BI Intelligence [15, 18]

Therefore, by August 25th, 2014 Amazon would acquire the company for \$970 million. With the e-commerce giant now at the head of the site even more resources (E.g. Amazon Web Services) could be focused on Twitch.

Although for our team based project if we were to livestream our development process in a similar fashion as 'WilliamChyr' we may not from the beginning be able to attract a massive following but perhaps with enough time we may be able to form a small following.

3.6 Technologies/Approach

With all the data that has been gathered it could be summarized that the best method to bring an online community closer together would be through the bot controlled stream. This is decided mainly upon the stream's availability and overall popularity, although there may be some streams which have a larger audience per stream it would be said that the TwitchPlaysPokemon channel was able to form more of a sub culture inside and outside Twitch. So, what could be taken from this is perhaps allow the viewers more control over the stream and they will create their own fun moments to share amongst the other audience members.

4. CONCLUSIONS

As a result of reviewing my research, the general approach would be preferable is to build a product which we can share with a wider online community through Twitch and perhaps include a sense of interaction (Like that of WilliamChyr). If this was to prove successful perhaps then I would like to continue this type of development which brings the consumer and developers to a closer understanding as well as promoting the game that is being made.

One key feature that would be interesting and entertaining about our solution would be that from a budding developer's perspective we would be learning more alongside the audience slowly growing our knowledge throughout time which could be an entertaining factor. There is certainly potential for perhaps new forms of interaction between viewers and streamers that could be possible but until these are experimented upon it is not possible to perceive if these would be successful.

5. REFERENCES

- [1] Twitch. 2017. Twitch. [ONLINE] Available at: <https://go.twitch.tv/>.
- [2] Andy Sowards. 2017. *The Rise of Twitch TV and Live Gaming - InfiniGEEK*. [ONLINE] Available at: <http://infinigeek.com/the-rise-of-twitch-tv-and-live-gaming/>.
- [3] William Chyr Studio. 2017. *MANIFOLD GARDEN | Reimagine physics. Explore the Infinite.* [ONLINE] Available at: <http://manifold.garden/>.
- [4] Twitch Plays Pokémon - Wikipedia. 2017. *Twitch Plays Pokémon - Wikipedia*. [ONLINE] Available at: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Twitch_Plays_Pok%C3%A9mon.
- [5] Trump Fans - Unofficial Fan Site of Hearthstone Streamer Jeffrey "TrumpSC" Shih. 2017. *Trump Fans - Unofficial Fan Site of Hearthstone Streamer Jeffrey "TrumpSC" Shih*. [ONLINE] Available at: <http://www.trumpfans.com/>.
- [6] Hamilton, W., Garretson, O. and Kerne, A. (2017). [online] Available at: <http://ecologylab.net/research/publications/streamingOnTwitch.pdf>
- [7] Mave. 2017. *TwitchPlaysPokémon / Twitch Plays Pokémon - Let's Get Organized!*. [ONLINE] Available at: <http://twitchplayspokemon.org/>.
- [8] reddit. 2017. *Twitch Plays Pokémon*. [ONLINE] Available at: <https://www.reddit.com/r/twitchplayspokemon/>.
- [9] Sam Barsanti. 2017. *Praise Helix: The strange mythology of a crowdsourced Pokémon game*. [ONLINE] Available at: <https://games.avclub.com/praise-helix-the-strange-mythology-of-a-crowdsourced-p-1798266812>.
- [10] Patricia Hernandez. 2017. *Not Everyone Playing 'Twitch Plays Pokémon' Appears To Be Human*. [ONLINE] Available at: <https://kotaku.com/not-everyone-playing-twitch-plays-pokemon-appears-to-1530921548>.
- [11] YouTube, Twitch, Twitter, & Instagram Statistics - SocialBlade.com. 2017. *YouTube, Twitch, Twitter, & Instagram Statistics - SocialBlade.com*. [ONLINE] Available at: <https://socialblade.com/>.
- [12] YouTube Gaming. 2017. *YouTube Gaming*. [ONLINE] Available at: <https://gaming.youtube.com/live>.
- [13] Ustream. 2017. *Video Games Live: Stream & Watch Gamers Free / Ustream*. [ONLINE] Available at: <http://www.ustream.tv/explore/gaming>.
- [14] YouNow.com. 2017. *gaming | YouNow - Broadcast Live*. [ONLINE] Available at: <https://www.younow.com/explore/gaming>.
- [15] Business Insider. 2017. *The Story Of Video Game Streaming Site Twitch - Business Insider*. [ONLINE] Available at: <http://uk.businessinsider.com/the-story-of-video-game-streaming-site-twitch-2014-10?r=US&IR=T>.
- [16] Qwilt. 2017. *Qwilt - Open Edge Cloud - Open Caching - Operator CDN*. [ONLINE] Available at: <https://qwilt.com/>.
- [17] Twitch.tv - Wikipedia. 2017. *Twitch.tv - Wikipedia*. [ONLINE] Available at: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Twitch.tv>.
- [18] BI Intelligence. 2017. *BI Intelligence - Business Insider Research Subscription Service - All-Access Membership*. [ONLINE] Available at: <http://www.businessinsider.com/intelligence/bi-intelligence-all-access-membership?IR=T>.