Fame! I wanna stream forever: Analysis and critique of successful streamers' advice to the next generation

Mia Consalvo
Concordia University
Department of Communication Studies
Montreal, Quebec, Canada
mia.consalvo@concordia.ca

Kelly Boudreau
Harrisburg University of Science and Technology
Department of Interactive Media
Harrisburg, PA, USA
kboudreau@harrisburgu.edu

Nick Bowman
Syracuse University
S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications
Syracuse, NY, USA
nbowman@syr.edu

Andrew Phelps
University of Canterbury (and) American University
HITLabNZ (and) AU Game Center
Christchurch, NZ (and) Washington, DC, USA
andymphelps@gmail.com

Abstract

This paper examines community-created online 'how-to' videos that offer advice for video game streamers and content creators. The goal of this study was to investigate how successful streamers encourage newcomers and/or smaller streamers to "grow" on Twitch, examining such factors as the advice they offer, the evidence that such advice works, and their reasons for sharing such information. More critically, how does the creation of such videos further entrench those creators as successful and thus, able to deploy "streaming capital" to buttress their claims? While the initial focus was on Twitch, this research led to a wider-ranging exploration—following the advice of successful streamers was to employ other platforms in combination, as the field of live streaming has extended far beyond Twitch itself.

1. Introduction

Individuals live streaming themselves playing videogames has been a growing activity since at least 2011, when the Twitch platform rebranded itself from Justin.tv and began focusing on video game play. Such activity exploded during the lockdown phase of the COVID-19 pandemic, when huge numbers of people were asked to work from home (if they were able), to isolate themselves from family and friends, and to move their socialization online. [1][2] Not surprisingly, many of them began playing games with one another online, as well as streaming those games to other people. While the majority of those streamers will never make any money from the practice—and for many that isn't the goal anyway [3]—a subset has always been interested in how to grow their streams, and perhaps earn a living, gain friends, and influence, from doing so. Yet as with other digital platforms, there is no set path to follow for success. Twitch offers a "creators camp" for new streamers, with basic articles and short videos explaining the "etiquette" of Twitch and the "101" of how to start streaming (i.e., "need for good lighting" or the importance of engaging with viewers). However, less prevalent in these videos is advice on how to gain viewers, or improving the technical aspects of one's stream.

Into this vacuum have stepped more experienced streamers, creating their own guides. With provocatively titled videos "one simple trick" or "How to REALLY grow your channel," we questioned how these videos and their creators were selling the idea of becoming successful on Twitch. To that end, the goal of this study was to investigate how successful streamers (e.g., those with hundreds or thousands of concurrent viewers) encourage others to "grow" on Twitch—presuming growth to be an unalloyed good. What is the advice they offer, along with evidence that the advice works, and their reasons for sharing such information? How do their suggestions further support the shifting practices that content creators across multiple platforms now employ? How does the creation of such videos further entrench those creators as successful, able to deploy "streaming capital" in order to buttress their claims? Finally, how is the culture surrounding streaming games shifting in response to platform algorithms and discoverability?

URI: https://hdl.handle.net/10125/102919
978-0-9981331-6-4
(CC BY-NC-ND 4.0)

2. Prior literature

Although a considerable amount of research is accruing about who stream gameplay and why, there is comparatively little on how such streamers learn their craft. Early work by Johnson and Woodcock [4] suggests that many early streamers came from YouTube or were games journalists or eSports athletes, but since that time many newer streamers have started their channels from scratch [19]. Given the predominance of participatory culture online [5], where groups come together to support various types of content creation, it is not surprising that many such new streamers would turn to online tutorials and other guides on sites like YouTube to learn more about the multiple elements of their craft, such as how to solve technical issues, the best games to stream, or ways to interact with viewers. Indeed, similar participatory cultures have arisen around other gaming related activities, such as independent game development and strategy guide creators.

For example, research on indie game developers found that developers often turn to other developers for help. Consalvo & Paul [6] found that indie developers created and used spaces such as r/gamedev to debate how much to price their games at, and the logic behind those decisions. Further, they debated the merits of marketing tactics such as Kickstarter campaigns and how to build a community for a game before it even released. Similarly, Consalvo [7] explored the world of videogame strategy guide creators on YouTube, showing how they amassed significant amounts of gaming capital by being first or most thorough in explaining how to play various games, but how that capital and their livelihoods were dependent on constantly updating their information, due to the shift in games to being constantly updated services rather than wholly completed products.

To understand the ecosystem surrounding videogame streamers and how they learn to stream, as well as how others can capitalize on that need, we turn to Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital [8], as well as his concepts of habitus and field. We also draw on Christopher Paul's notion of "wordplay" [9] to analyze the rhetoric that surrounds gameplay.

To better understand the practices and beliefs of contemporary society, Bourdieu argued there were multiple forms of capital that people relied upon and that circulated in culture, beyond the financial. His conception of "cultural capital" for example includes one's accumulated cultural knowledge, which helps to define one's status and power in a society (Bourdieu, 2020). From this broad definition, we conceptualize streaming capital as a person's accumulated knowledge about streaming, which potentially affords them status and power in the larger streaming community. While this might at first seem to be the raw accrual of capital from success on the platform (i.e. gaining an audience and deriving financial success and/or associated fame), the streamers in question discuss both the accrual and application of this capital in multiple converging and overlapping streams such as: perceived skill in a given game, the application of humor or dialog to create a welcoming and 'live' environment, the management of followers, and the interconnectedness of Twitch with other platforms, and others. Thus, we do not attempt to pre-define this capital and instead we explore how the notion of "streaming capital" is performed in videos, and how viewers may or may not confirm it.

Bourdieu expanded on how capital circulates by developing the ideas of habitus and field. Briefly, a field comprises a space within which "actors strategize and struggle over the unequal distribution of valued capitals and over the definitions of just what are the most valued capitals." [10] Likewise, "the habitus consists of the practical mastery of skills, routines, aptitudes and assumptions" which draw upon a particular set of values, practices and dispositions. [11] From these definitions we can see how streamers might strategize over how to obtain various forms of capital, or how sharing knowledge can also lead to the accumulation of certain types of capital. Finally, Paul's concept of wordplay identifies how games "persuade, create identifications, and circulate meanings"— something that streamers also do, in how they create a language to reflect their own status within and among game steamers. [9] We modify that definition to focus instead on how instructional streaming videos likewise persuade, create identifications and circulate meanings through various techniques. This literature helped us to identify the following research questions for this study:

- RQ1: What advice do top-ranked videos offer for streamers on how to be "more successful" on Twitch?
  - How does that advice differ from Twitch's official advice for how to be successful on the platform?
- RQ2: What streamer capital, if any, do successful streamers deploy in order to convince others to take their advice?
  - How did the rhetoric of authenticity fit this framework?

3. Methods

To better understand the advice that streamers are giving/receiving, we engaged in the following steps. On YouTube, we searched for tutorial videos using

keywords and phrases including “how to be a twitch star,” “how to be a better streamer” “how to grow on Twitch” and “how to gain more followers on Twitch.” Searches were specifically focused on videos that discussed how to grow as a streamer who played videogames—we did not focus on live streaming of other content. Given the surge of streaming and viewing that happened during the pandemic, we decided to focus on more recent videos, but also wanted to see if advice changed from before that time. We decided to investigate videos made in 2019 (to see if pre-covid advice differed) to the present, focusing on videos with high view counts, defined as having at least 20,000 views. We also followed the YouTube algorithm, investigating videos that it suggested to us. We were particularly interested in videos that were aimed at “smaller streamers” or “new streamers” and that were not simply technical tutorials but were focused on audience growth and/or building one’s Twitch community. We determined that for a pilot study we should gather at minimum a dozen videos. After viewing multiple such videos, we noticed that YouTube was selecting the same content creators either with slightly different videos, or older videos. This suggested that we had found at least some of the most popular or viewed videos for analysis.

Ultimately, we selected 14 videos for deeper analysis (see Appendix 1). These 14 were made by 12 different content creators (we selected two videos from each of two different streamers due to their content, which focused specifically on both “actionable steps” and how to stream to 0 viewers, as well as a reaction video to another streamer’s video). Of those 12, four presented as women and eight as men, representing both the breakdown of Twitch streamers generally as well as who are the most popular/lucrative streamers. Not all streamers were active on Twitch - at least one had moved to YouTube Live and one appeared to have quit streaming entirely. All videos were made between August 19, 2019 and January 15, 2022, however, the majority were either released in 2020 (7) or 2021 (5). Videos were limited to examples that featured English-speaking streamers. Additional demographics such as LGBTQ+ status, race, and geographic or cultural background of the streamer were not explored, although this is a compelling area for further study.

Individual videos ranged in length from 1 to 49 minutes in length, although most were in the range of 15 to 20 minutes. Views ranged from a low of 37,476 (for an established YouTube creator who decided to try streaming for 100 days) to several videos with more than one million viewers as of this writing: “Pokimane’s Top Five Tips for Small Streamers!” had 1,811,110 views; “How to Grow on Twitch: 10 Tips and Tricks to Go Full-Time!” from EagleGarrett had 1,699,926, views, and Stream Scheme’s “32 EASY Tips to GROW From 0 Viewers on Twitch!” had 1,005,660 views.

All videos were viewed at least twice, and coded for creator name, video title, date published, number of views, YouTube channel subscriber numbers, number of “likes” for the video, video length, and the content creator’s streaming profile name if it differed from the YouTube channel name. Videos were analyzed with the following questions in mind:

- What advice is being offered?
    - What evidence (if any) is given to justify the advice?
    - What means of persuasion/rhetorical devices are used?
- What justification is offered for making the video?
- How are viewers/viewing community/chat discussed?
    - How is the social aspect of streaming conceptualized?
- Who is the presumed audience for the video?

4. Data Analysis & Results

After viewing our 14 target videos and coding accordingly, we present and discuss below common features of the videos central to addressing our core research questions above.

4.1 Why do streamers make these videos?

Given their high viewer counts as well as the multiple channels we identified that were dedicated to tutorial style videos, we believe that “How to stream” videos are an accepted part of the culture surrounding game streaming as well as game culture more broadly. Following Bourdieu, they also form part of the “field” that game streaming occupies, an element that is normalized and expected, just as early walkthroughs of videogames were found on the GameFAQs site in the past. [12] As such, these videos have become a fixture on YouTube, forming a set of game streaming paratexts for viewers to consume that are both endlessly updated and changeable yet at the same time stable and reassuring. They can be made by anyone, but a video gains credibility through a set of signifiers including the creators’ own Twitch success as well as the video’s view count, the creators’ YouTube follower count, and the number of comments and likes on a video, all of which can help the video be found via search or algorithm.

Beyond the expectations that an individual might be interested in contributing to the culture surrounding streaming, why would content creators take time away

from their own Twitch stream and its related activities to make such videos? We found several reasons - both implicit and explicit—for streamers to make such content. These included 1) being asked for this advice from their stream audience; 2) claims that they were bothered by bad/old advice for how to grow as a streamer and wanting to correct the record; and 3) doing it as part of their own business practices. These reasons are not exclusive - more than one can apply to the same streamer and the same video - and may not be the only reasons for making such videos. However, they were the top three we identified.

Critically, these motivations overlap with, yet also stand apart from, the more commonly discussed and analyzed platformization aspects of Twitch itself [20], which encourages everyone to stream as much as possible and implies that anyone can become a monetized streamer with status and/or audience at a scale of their own choosing. Multiple scholars have explored the various aspects of online labour/playbour [21][22][23], and in some sense these how-to videos are representative of these economics: they must be regularly updated due to shifting platform requirements, they are a form of free advertising for the platform itself, etc. Yet at the same time they are a reflection of the values of the platform itself as described by those the platform has crowned worthy.

4.1.1 Viewers (as streamers) ask them for advice

A common refrain at the start of such videos was that the creator made the content in response to viewer requests for advice about the craft. For example, in the most highly watched of the videos, Pokimane begins by announcing that she is going to address the question she is most frequently asked, "how can I get more viewers, follows, and grow on Twitch?" Similarly, EagleGarrett starts by explaining that he is a full-time streamer, and "gets asked all the time how I did it" and so he has made this video to explain his process. In such situations, viewers can be asking either in the role of being potential streamers themselves ("how can I too have this success?") or simply via curiosity as to how the streamer achieved their success. In either case, creators are acceding to the wishes of their viewers and communities and not doing such videos to seemingly "brag," but rather to share the "hints, tips, tricks or secrets" they have found useful in their own work.

4.1.2 They see bad or dated advice out there

Another justification that video makers offer is their wish to correct old and/or bad advice about how to become a streamer that is still possibly circulating. HeyShadyLady points out that the Twitch "meta" is constantly evolving, and so too must streamer approaches to growing on the platform, suggesting that advice can be considered stale if it is even a year or two old. Senpai Gamer likewise claims that his strategies and (therefore) videos are better than others because they are more recent—they consider the current landscape of streaming—which, he argues, has changed tremendously in just the past few years.

Sometimes advice isn't necessarily considered "bad" but is less than useful because it comes from someone less successful than the video maker in question. For example, Ludwig, who has 3.1 million Twitch followers, began his video by claiming that he'd "never really seen a big streamer talk about this stuff" and that his own credentials came down to "growth"—at that time he was the 42nd biggest streamer on Twitch, and more importantly he had achieved that growth over the past couple of years. To buttress his point, his video shows a graph depicting a steady increase in views from late 2019 through the time of the video, made in February 2021. For Ludwig then, useful videos are made by people demonstrably successful on the platform in question, and his own success validates his efforts. Further supporting his claim is Senpai Gaming's reaction video to Ludwig's own video, where Harris Heller (Senpai Gaming) watches and confirms that Ludwig's success is indeed recent and "his resume is important" and not a "flex" - it is instead a marker for the validity of his advice and his streamer capital.

Finally, some successful streamers validate their own "how to" videos by discrediting others' videos, either explicitly or implicitly. A notable example here is Disguised Toast's "this ONE trick will make you a famous streamer," where he claims that he's "seen a lot of videos and guides and threads" for how to do this, but there is one problem with them: "they are all written by very irrelevant individuals." Disguised Toast has 2.6 million followers on Twitch, suggesting that his advice would therefore be more relevant than anyone else's. Interestingly, Toast's video was made in November 2021, meaning he has discounted Pokimane's March 2020 video despite her 9+ million followers on Twitch, and Ludwig's 3.1 million Twitch followers as well. Despite their larger followings, Disguised Toast plays the role of provocateur, insinuating he knows best, and can therefore confide the "real deal" to viewers, which is conveniently only "ONE trick" (although an alternative read could suggest that the "ONE trick" is itself a meme playing on the perceived success of clickbait advertising that often uses similar language).

4.1.3 It's good business for them to offer advice

Finally, whether explicitly acknowledged or not, creators know that making such videos can be good for

their own streaming business. Some have clearly leaned into this role, creating separate YouTube channels specifically for tutorial videos, such as Stream Scheme, whose YouTube channel contains dozens of videos on topics including how to set up OBS studios software, the most important stats for Twitch growth, the best games to stream, and how to choose a good username, among many others. Stream Scheme currently has 160,000 followers on YouTube, indicating there's a wide audience for that work. Similarly, Ashni's video on how she made more than $10,000 a month as a small streamer explains that two of her revenue streams included coaching other streamers and writing an ebook on how to stream. Ashni argues that such routes are available even to smaller streamers, but this is clearly mostly beneficial for Ashni herself, who also promotes her "Stream Coach Academy" which will help participants learn "proven strategies" for a $500 fee.

No matter the reasoning for why a creator chooses to make these videos, they reward those who make the most viewed versions. Yet as many of the creators point out, there is a limited shelf life for this kind of advice, demonstrating that creators will either need to regularly update their efforts by making new videos, or risk their advice being seen as irrelevant. In an ecosystem built on views and likes, no one wants to be identified as providing bad advice, or perhaps even more problematically, old and stale suggestions.

4.2 'How to be more successful'?

Although the videos viewed are not carbon copies of one another, many do recycle the same sorts of advice, usually of the practical sort that is noncontroversial. They do have different views on a few practices (such as the growth potential of raids, for example), and many feature some cautionary tales of the toughness of the business. Finally, they all offer strong views about the relative discoverability on Twitch, and how growing one's social side (attracting viewers, interacting with communities) can be financially (if not interpersonally) rewarding.

4.2.1 Nuts and bolts issues

Some advice that creators offer is evergreen and never goes out of style, as the advice was less about style and more about function. But videos diverge in the amount of practical, detail-oriented advice they give. Some of this relates to their organizational structure—longer-form videos obviously have more time to delve into the details of streaming. For example, both Stream Scheme and HeyShadyLady used longer videos (28+ minutes) to convey a multitude of tips, including technical advice about how best to combat stream lag, getting familiar with streaming software before going live, the best microphones to use, and so on. Similarly, they suggested paying close attention to how a stream is named, stream tags, and how to network but do so 'authentically' i.e. by joining communities one is 'genuinely interested in' (as opposed to joining random discord servers in order to promote one's stream) and avoiding those crass self-promotion tactics. This information is often presented as "actionable advice" or "practical tips" that viewers can put into effect right away. These are also suggestions that are largely non-controversial and show up in both official Twitch creator camp videos as well as in older YouTube videos. Although many other elements of how to become successful can and do change, these components provide a reassuring core of 'quality content' for streamers to strive for, an unchanging element in the field of game live streaming. While particular tips in this area might become refined over time (such as the need to carefully select the name of one's stream), this "nuts and bolts" information serves as the foundational knowledge for all streamers to follow.

Another consistent recommendation found across videos is the advice to make a schedule for streaming and stick to it. This is advice that past research has also identified and has remained stable over the years. [13] For example, Stream Scheme, HeyShadyLady and EagleGarrett all mention the critical importance of making a schedule and being consistent with it, even if it means streaming only 1 or 2 times a week. As all of them explain, to build a following, viewers need to know where and when to find you, and without a consistent schedule that simply isn't possible. Yet here we see a shift emerge from the "always be streaming" advice of four or five years ago, and the resulting discussions amongst streamers of mental and physical health issues that accompanied such heavy workloads. [14] Nearly all the content creators in this newer sample cautioned against over-streaming or "grinding" away the hours on stream, simply in order to be viewed. HeyShadyLady pointed out that limiting one's stream time can "build scarcity" into your brand, pushing viewers to look forward to and plan around your next stream, rather than skipping them "because you stream all the time." She also points out that this will help streamers "avoid burnout" in their own lives. For those who can't commit to an extensive or consistent schedule, EagleGarrett suggests being honest in your schedule by listing both "definite" and "maybe" streaming times. Stream Scheme takes this argument to its extreme, arguing that if someone can't commit to a regular streaming schedule, it might be better to become a YouTube content creator instead,

with a goal of releasing one or two videos a week, but when/how they are produced is not locked in.

4.2.2 Sociality as key to success

Advice becomes more complicated when creators turn to discussing the social aspects of game streaming. Part of this is likely due to the purpose of such videos, and the assumed intent of those viewing them—the wish to "grow" a stream—by which is meant to (singularly) gain more viewers, followers, and/or subscribers. There are a multitude of ways to talk about this aspect of streaming, which can be contradictory or work at cross purposes. For example, Vonix talks about his 100-day streaming experiment, concluding that by the end of that time, he had assembled a group of "friends" that he told things he "wouldn't even tell my own parents." Stream Scheme suggests inviting friends and family to view one's stream, not only for the views but also to share something you are proud of doing. Yet viewers are more than people to chat or joke with, or even form strong bonds with—they are also potential revenue drivers and credibility markers (a primary marker for stream success is followers). Far more of the creators talk about strategies to "grow viewership" with the underlying assumption that those views aren't just fun, they come with dollars attached. For example, Ludwig mentions that audiences tend to be more generous in their support of smaller streamers than larger streamers, in part because of the more direct interactions and personalized attention they likely receive. Here already we can see a divergence in conceptualizing streaming as being successful because of the "close community" that is formed, versus a group of viewers being more financially generous with smaller streamers.

That bifurcation between "followers as friends" and "followers as financial gain" only becomes more pronounced once creators start discussing how to find more such viewers. Obviously, there is a need to speak in generalities, but it often leads to advice that sounds similar to how developers of free-to-play games talk about "acquiring users." Here, video creators mention multiple methods, although they feel divorced from the "close community" mentioned by Vonix. One such workaround to streaming to no one, for example, is to ask friends and family to create Twitch accounts, and then have them view your stream when you go online. Whether or not they participate is beside the point (although having friends chat and welcome strangers can add a layer of social presence to the streams [15]) - the point is to bump one's stream above all the other streamers who are "streaming to no one" in the game's listings on Twitch. People become products that add value to one's stream.

Additionally, several videos suggest finding other streams that you enjoy and joining Discord servers for those streams to meet people, as well as actively participating in online communities of interest to you (such as for Skyrim fans, for example) as a way to find potential viewers for your stream. That said, all the videos warned against doing this simply for instrumental reasons. EagleGarrett is quick to point out that you shouldn't be in these spaces "simply to advertise" and instead one's participation should be "authentic," which will seemingly lead to greater success (although we could question the authenticity of joining a community only to later exploit it commercially). HeyShadyLady even warns viewers that they should do these things with "no expectations," but doesn't mention the contradiction of strategically doing something, but with no hope for it to work out (which would be *de facto* non-strategic). Here again, user acquisition becomes a game to play, where one must engage in particular methods, but not admit to one's motives, in order to remain "true to their self," and so hopefully gain rewards later. Being social might be personally rewarding when live streaming, but it also comes with its own set of 'tips and tricks' that instrumentalize the activity.

4.3. New Twitch meta

A key element of recent videos is their acknowledgement of the ways that the Twitch algorithm has made it difficult – if not impossible – for newer and/or smaller streamers to be found by potential viewers. Many creators demonstrated this by going to a game category and actively scrolling while admonishing viewers not to end up this way—to instead use their (obviously successful) ideas. Indeed, one common suggestion offered by multiple creators was to identify and stream "undersubscribed games"—meaning games that could be considered popular but didn't have many people streaming them. While some streamers have likely always tried this tactic, that language is new to the platform. These suggestions also point to how creators must continually adapt to platform mechanics, resulting in content that now collapses into marketing.

4.3.1 Cross-platform work

Although not every video explicitly addressed it, the majority made mention of a "new Twitch meta" for how to gain success on the platform—whether by mentioning the meta by name, or through discussing the need to circumvent the "terrible" discoverability of the Twitch platform. As Disguised Toast argued, it was pointless (at least, from a financial perspective) to be one of thousands streaming to no viewers. His suggestion was to avoid that fate entirely by first

building up a following on another platform, one with better *discoverability*. Indeed, that term was used by nearly everyone, and no one considered Twitch to be a good place to be discovered—Twitch was good for those who already have streamer capital, but a poor platform for building that capital. Rather, the majority felt (even if not as strongly as Disguised Toast) that streamers needed to stream, but stream judiciously, with an eye to marketing or promoting their streams via other venues. Most of Ludwig's video was dedicated to exploring this topic in depth, showing through a PowerPoint presentation how he had spent the past three months, with only part of it being on the primary game-streaming activity (with time also allocated to business and other platforms). Most critically though, his advice centered on turning one's live stream into YouTube videos, which have, as he argued, "built in growth mechanics" because they aren't ephemeral like streams, and stood a better chance of being discovered days, weeks or even months past their release, unlike streams, which are live (although streamers do have the ability to record VODs of their streams, all video creators agreed such recordings were useless for discoverability).

Beyond simply archiving one's streams on YouTube for potential views, Ludwig advocated for "formatting your streams around your YouTube videos"—employing specific structures, topics and tactics that would make cutting them into YouTube videos more effective. Additionally, one's streaming footage could be mined for "clips" to spread across Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok, along with additional content on those sites to further build one's brand, which as EagleGarrett noted needed to be "consistent across platforms." Stream Scheme further clarified that any streaming content should be distinct from a person's personal accounts (i.e., a separate YouTube channel dedicated to a person's streams), in order to "avoid being doxxed."

The larger message was that being a "Twitch streamer" meant much more than being familiar with that platform. Instead, one needed fluency in multiple platforms in order to succeed. As Stream Scheme mentioned, to be successful you needed to learn the way each platform worked and "play the game." Although live streams often served as the raw material for this later repurposing, content posted to other platforms is not simply static storage of older game footage. Rather, other channels should be thought of as primary sources of content delivery as not all game streaming is "live." [16] For instance, Ludwig pointed out that in addition to the hours he listed as work, he was "always on" Twitter, because he would "lose out on [audience] growth" if he wasn't around to comment and reply to those in his network.

4.3.2 Increasing collapse between marketing, content creation

One message that becomes clear after viewing these videos and watching successful streamers is that there is no distinction anymore (if there ever was) between one's content and one's marketing efforts. Instead, there has been a collapse of those categories, such that one's stream *is* one's marketing, and the "real," "unique" or "authentic" elements are the carefully identified detail or minor twist that each person is instructed to bring to their stream, which then forms part of their advertising pitch. As somewhat mentioned already, there is an irony such that nearly all creators urged streamers to both "find your niche" or "the special thing that you do" but only in concert with "the tried and true" that others have perfected. At most, prospective streamers could aim for employing Ludwig's "yoink and twist," where you take someone else's idea, make a slight change in it, and then use it on your own stream. In a sense, the *de facto* advice given in all 14 videos is to do whatever it is that the streamers before you did.

4.3.3 It's hard work, takes years, but MY advice will work

A final element worth highlighting is how creators approached the difficulty that streamers would face if they did indeed want to become professionals and/or "make it big" via game streaming. Most were careful to distinguish that their videos were meant only for those interested in "growth," and that the path to success was usually long and difficult. Even in her 1-minute video, Valkrae warned viewers "Do not quit your job, or get a real job first. If you want to make money from it, HA! You have to do this for years and years"—a point that leads one to wonder who could afford to undertake such a level of un/underpaid work for such a long period of time. Others were not quite so blunt, but pointed out the years they had put in, the things they had tried, and so on, before achieving some success. Broadly, the advice they offered was often couched as "learn from my own mistakes" and potentially circumvent that process. Yet creators also inserted elements of what could be termed "tough love" as well. For example, Ludwig told viewers to write down three things they would need to truly grow (a firm date to start, concrete goals, and 3-5 streamers they wanted to emulate/admired). He even inserted a brief break in the video for viewers to write them down. Upon returning, he announced that if you did not write something down the best thing you could do was … "QUIT." Similarly, Senpai Gaming mentioned at the end of his video that he wasn't worried about anyone watching his videos and then surpassing him

because “the vast majority of people won’t put in the work or effort to succeed.”

Such tactics serve multiple purposes—for those who do indeed ‘put in the effort’ it is a reassurance that they ‘have what it takes’ to succeed. For those who don’t, it may spur them into doubling their efforts, or at most finding other videos with different tips. But in either case, the rhetoric invoked is one of meritocracy, where those who work hard and do the right things (i.e., follow the advice being given) are potentially rewarded. Even if, as all streamers state, it can take years and years, and the simple math proves that most of those watching the videos will never actually achieve similar success, the claims made persuade them that they might, indeed, make it if they simply work hard enough.

4.4 What streamer capital do successful streamers deploy to claim authority?

While each of the streamers present their versions of ‘how to become successful’ based on their individual experiences and different markers of success, their authority to dispense such advice is firmly grounded in several metrics including their own subscriber numbers [4], how often and long they’ve been streaming [13], and audience support evidenced in livestream chat or comment threads [24]. Results here are analyzed not by using streamer comments but rather, by analyzing these respective data points.

4.4.1 Subscriber, views, and likes

Considering only YouTube and Twitch.tv subscriber numbers, the streamers we’ve reviewed span a wide range of popularity, from Pokimane’s 6.69M YouTube subscribers and 9.2M Twitch subscribers to xTwoShoes’ 11.k YouTube subscribers and 7.6k Twitch subscribers. Yet both consider themselves successful enough to share videos on how to become a successful streamer. Other streamers are less consistent across platforms, for example demonstrating greater success on Twitch (AussieAntics has 801k subscribers) than on YouTube (294k subscribers), but they nonetheless demonstrate a level of success beyond the average streamer on either channel and therefore could be perceived as an authority in streaming tactics on a particular platform.

Different platforms provide various methods of tracking audience engagement such as counting the views and likes of a video on YouTube. However, these metrics may be deceiving as a marker of authority, as a view is counted each time the video is played but does not track re-views by the same viewer. This could account for the disparity in views and likes numbers one sees on videos such as HeyShadyLady’s “how to get started on Twitch in 2021” where their views are listed at 550,730 views but only 37k likes (although it is not uncommon for online videos to have more views than likes, given that the latter represents more effort than the former and that some might not want to indicate that they use “how to” videos when setting up their own streams). Depending on what metric the viewer deems important would determine the level of capital they perceive the streamer to have, and accept their advice based on their perceived authority to do so—raw views could represent broad message spread, while specific likes (as a form of phatic communication, [17]) could be seen as active community endorsement. Thus, while there is a level of authority displayed in these cues on behalf of the streamer, it is also communicated to the viewer in these other, visible metrics confirming (or negating) authority from the viewers perspective.

4.4.2 Audience Response

Another metric that streamers (and viewers) use to situate their authority within the frame of doling out advice on how to be a successful streamer can be found in the video comments or livestream chat logs, such as comments thanking Stream Scheme for their “brutally honest” advice, to viewers telling Vonix that his video was inspiring. Comments that are, for the majority, overwhelmingly positive signal to new viewers that the advice that is being given has legitimately helped others and that they too should follow the advice in the video. When the comments are less favorable, mixed support, or filled with viewers’ own advice (as is seen in the comments on Valkrae’s video), it could work against the streamer’s authority in sharing their advice based on their experiences and perceptions of successful streaming—somewhat ironic given that such sharing could also serve as a signal that a given stream has a high level of social presence (i.e., that streamers and viewers have a strong interpersonal relationship). So, while the streamer who chooses to share their tips bases them (and the video) on their own sense of authority, audience response can be an additional marker that boosts the streamer’s authority for other viewers.

4.4.3 Frequency & Longevity

A frequent framing found throughout the videos is when streamers establish their authority via their streaming frequency and longevity. Afterall, who would take advice from someone who hasn’t been able to sustain their success beyond the initial rise to the top. From Vonix, who states they’ve been making YouTube videos since they were 9, to Pokimane mentioning they’ve been streaming for 6 years, pointing to their longevity in the practice of streaming (or similar activities) enables streamers to claim

authority not just in how to create a successful stream, but how to maintain it over time, be it on one platform or across multiple platforms that afford different types of content. It also speaks to their ability to adjust to change over time and sustain their success despite the changes in technology and platform regulations—all related to the streamers discussing updating their advice videos according to these changes.

These are only three of the ways the streamers we've viewed claim authority over the advice that they offer to those who seek to develop successful streaming careers, but it clearly demonstrates that authority to make such claims is grounded not only in the streamer's sense of their own capital, but in their audiences support as well.

5. Differences between advice given and observed microstreamer content

In contrast to all the advice and streamers analyzed thus far, there has also been significant work over the last few years exploring 'microstreaming' or streams that are broadcast to very few individuals, often as low as single digits or even an audience of zero. [3] This work finds that many smaller streamers are happy with their size or might desire some growth but do not harbor dreams of becoming famous on the platform. Yet Disguised Toast calls out this phenomenon specifically in his video, using a rhetoric of failure—essentially describing the vast sea of small streams as something that 'no one will ever see.'

Disguised Toast also makes note of the fact that most viewers will search on Twitch for streams from 'high to low' with the assumption that 'streams with large viewer counts have better content.' Admittedly, his video is aimed specifically at an audience that is interested in Twitch growth, but the rhetoric and worldview of growth equaling success is one that pervades and surrounds the platform in most contexts. Disguised Toast regards this as failure, and points to discoverability issues and boring content as key points - but for the microstreamers themselves, many other motivations and contexts are driving their use of the platform. Yet Twitch removed the ability to search specifically for small streams [18] in the Just Chatting area (i.e., sorting low to high viewer count), and seems generally uninterested in these numerous small streams, perhaps because they are less monetized by the platform itself.

6. Conclusion

To answer our original research questions, we turn to Bourdieu to better contextualize our findings. When looked at through the lenses of habitus and field, we see several key findings emerge from this analysis. First, the field that comprises live streaming of games has expanded from platforms such as Twitch or YouTube Live to encompass Twitter, Instagram, YouTube and Discord servers—the role of social media has become essential. Tutorial creators all confirm this, arguing for livestreams to be architected specifically for later hosting on YouTube or clipped and tweeted. These ecosystems become a series of interlinked nodes for one's personal "brand" to spread, with each working to enhance the streamer's growth and discoverability.

In the habitus, we witness large/successful streamers strategizing how to maintain their position—with one way being acceding to viewer requests to explain their success, boiled down to a formula, or list of tips and tricks. This also results in the collapse of content and marketing, ensuring all content is marketing material, and all marketing is entertaining content. Tutorial video creators promote their own success and streams by sharing their secrets, safe in the knowledge that few will actually succeed and challenge them for viewers, or have the luck they did in getting ahead. As Ludwig concludes, "the rich get richer." Yet such a view makes for a terrible "how to" video, and so the tough love warnings are always sandwiched with the rhetoric of hard work, the belief that if followed, it must be possible for the viewer to achieve the same success as the creator. The videos are often less of an invitation for others to succeed, and more artifacts from already "made it" streamers to reinforce their clout to a wanting audience.

Finally, video creators trade in streaming capital as part of their work, both demonstrating it and gaining it, if enough viewers like what they make. They draw on their growth, they reference their hard work, they name drop the famous friends or collaborations they have, to convince others that their advice is the best. And viewers reward them, bestowing views, likes, adding comments, and requesting even more such videos, to keep them at the top, where they can continue to stream, evolve, and perhaps even make more such videos.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors would like to thank Samuel Smyth, graduate assistant at the AU Game Center, for his aid with data collection and analysis.

REFERENCES

[1] Alex Leith and Erin Gheen. 2021. Twitch in the time of quarantine: The role of engagement in needs fulfillment. Retrieved June 15, 2022 from https://doi.apa.org/record/2022-05375-001

[2] Jason Murdock. 2020. Twitch usage surges during coronavirus lockdown, surpasses three billion hours watched. *Newsweek*. Retrieved June 15, 2022 from https://www.newsweek.com/twitch-amazon-viewership-statistics-growth-streamlabs-report-coronavirus-covid19-1495912

[3] Andrew Phelps, Mia Consalvo, and Nick Bowman. 2021. Streaming into the void: an analysis of microstreaming trends and behaviors utilizing a demand framework. In *Proceedings of the 54th Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences*, 2863–2872. DOI:https://doi.org/10.24251/HICSS.2021.349

[4] Mark R. Johnson and Jamie Woodcock. 2019. 'It's like the gold rush': the lives and careers of professional video game streamers on Twitch.tv. *Information, Communication & Society* 22, 3 (February 2019), 336–351. DOI:https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2017. 1386229

[5] Henry Jenkins. 2019. *Participatory Culture: Interviews.* New York: Polity Press.

[6] Mia Consalvo and Christopher A. Paul. 2018. "If you are feeling bold, ask for $3: Value Crafting and Indie Game Developers," *Transactions of the Digital Games Research Assocation,* Vol. 4, No 2. http://todigra.org/index.php/todigra/article/view/89

[7] Mia Consalvo. 2019. "Clash Royale: Gaming Capital," *How to Play Video Games,* edited by Nina Huntemann, New York: NYU Press, pp, 185-192.

[8] Pierre Bourdieu. 2020. Habitus and Field, General Sociology, Volume 2, Lectures at the College de France (1982-1983). Cambridge, England: Polity Press.

[9] Christopher A. Paul,.2012. *Wordplay and the Discourse of Videogames*, New York: Routledge.

[10] David Swartz. 2020. Bourdieu's Concept of Field. *Oxford Bibliographies*. Retrieved June 15, 2022 from https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780199756384/obo-9780199756384-0164.xml

[11] Chris Barker. 2004. The SAGE Dictionary of Cultural Studies, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. p.81

[12] Mia Consalvo. 2007. *Cheating: Gaining advantage in videogames.* Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

[13] Max Sjöblom, Maria Törhönen, Juho Hamari and Joseph Macey. 2018. "The ingredients of Twitch streaming: Affordances of game streams," *Computers in Human Behavior,* Vol. 92, pp. 20-28. https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0747563218304965

[14] Steffan Powell, January 28, 2022. "Twitch: Concerns over streamers' mental health," *BBC,* https://www.bbc.com/news/entertainment-arts-60109997

[15] Luc Chia-Shin Lin. 2021. Virtual gift donation on live streaming apps: the moderating effect of social presence. *Communication Research and Practice* 7, 2 (April 2021), 173–188. DOI:https://doi.org/10.1080/22041451.2021.1889190

[16] Lin, J-S., Bowman, N. D., Lin, S-F., Chen. S. (2019). Setting the digital stage: Defining game streaming as an entertainment experience. *Entertainment Computing,* 31. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.entcom.2019.100309

[17] Rebecca A. Hayes, Caleb T. Carr, and Donghee Yvette Wohn. 2016. One Click, Many Meanings: Interpreting Paralinguistic Digital Affordances in Social Media. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media* 60, 1 (January 2016), 171–187. DOI:https://doi.org/10.1080/08838151.2015.1127248

[18] Fursnek. 2020. Did Twitch remove sorting Low to High viewers? It has completely disappeared for me, anyone else? *r/Twitch*. Retrieved June 15, 2022 from www.reddit.com/r/Twitch/comments/ice3i4/did_twitch_remove_sorting_low_to_high_viewers_it/

[19] T. L. Taylor. 2018. *Watch me play: Twitch and the rise of game live streaming*. Princeton University Press, Princeton ; Oxford.

[20] Quick Start Guide to Streaming on Twitch. Retrieved August 27, 2022 from https://www.twitch.tv/creatorcamp/en/setting-up-your-stream/quick-start-guide-to-streaming-on-twitch/

[21] Ailea Merriam-Pigg. 2022. Metagaming Attention: Defining the Metagame Through the Economy of Attention on Twitch. *Popular Culture Studies Journal* 9, 2 (2022), 55–68.

[22] Richard A. Lanham. 2007. *The economics of attention: style and substance in the age of information*. University of Chicago Press, Chicago.

[23] Julian Kücklich. 2005. Precarious Playbour: Modders and the Digital Games Industry. *Fibreculture Journal, Iss 5*

[24] Jeongmin Kim, Kunwoo Park, Hyeonho Song, Jaimie Y. Park, and Meeyoung Cha. 2020. Learning How Spectator Reactions Affect Popularity on Twitch. In *2020 IEEE International Conference on Big Data & Smart Computing*, 147–154. https://doi.org/10.1109/BigComp48618.2020.00-84

Appendix 1

HOW TO GROW YOUR STREAM - TITLES ANALYZED

Creator	Video title	length	date created	views	YT subs	video likes #	twitch handle	Twitch subscri	YT subs #	YT Comment #
Pokimane	Pokimane's Top 5 Tips for Small Streamers!	15:59	March 24, 2020	1,811,810	6.69M	110k	Pokimane	9.2M	6.69M	9100
Disguised Toast	this ONE trick will make you a famous streamer ...	15:15	November 28, 2021	487,199	3.65M	32k	Disguised Toast	2.6m	3.65M	972
Vonix	I tried to become a twitch streamer in 100 days	11:30	June 29, 2020	37,476	85.6k	1.7k	Vonixx	3.9k	85.6k	175
Valkrae	how to ACTUALLY become a STREAMER	1:00	January 15, 2022	648,782	301k//3.6	66k	YT streamer		301k//3.67M	392
EagleGarrett	How to Grow on Twitch: 10 Tips and Tricks to Go Full-Time!	23:43	August 19, 2019	1,699,926	37.1k	63k	EagleGarrett	39.3k	37.1k	3594
AussieAntics	How to Grow as a Stramer | From Zero Viewers to Full-Time	13:56	December 26, 2020	71,652	294k	5.7k	AussieAntics	801k	294k	1712
Ludwig	DON'T START STREAMING BEFORE WATCHING THIS	49:01	February 9, 2021	722,917	3.03M	49k	Ludwig	3.1M	3.03M	2034
Senpai Gaming	How to REALLY Go From 0-1000 Twitch Viewers	10:13	September 20, 2020	663,206	640k	36k	Senpai Gaming	167k	640k	2489
Senpai Gaming	Reacting to Ludwig's 'How to Grow on Twitch' Seminar	19:23	February 4, 2021	361,986	640k	19k	Senpai Gaming (on YT)			1491
Stream Scheme	32 EASY Tips to GROW From 0 Viewers on Twitch!	28:38	October 5, 2021	1,005,660	159k	55k	eljayem_	30.7k	159k	2562
Stream Scheme	How to Stream to 0 Viewers and GROW Your Stream in 2022!	12:18	September 15, 2020	846,140	159k	44k	eljayem_			3507
HeyShadyLady	how to get started on twitch in 2021 | beginnner's guide to strea	40:44	September 25,2020	545,710	33.4k	37k	heyshadylady	12.6k	33.4k	1624
xTwoShoes	How to ACTUALLY GROW on Twitch [2022]	13:31	January 17, 2021	383,790	11.1k	21k	xtwoshoes	7.6k	11.1k	1696
ashni	How I Made $10k+ Per Month As A Small Twitch Streamer	18:21	July 31, 2020	187,863	41.1k	7.9k	ashnichrist	17.7k	41.1k	449