Investigating crossmedia branding strategies in online game streaming

A qualitative journey into the hearts and minds of today's arising online entertainers

Andreas Berglund
Felix Magnusson
Fredrik Stöckel
Abstract

Special thanks

We would like to acknowledge and thank our supervisor Mikael Söderström for his guidance and commitment. Without the blue margins this thesis would never have been completed. In addition, we would like to also thank Karin Danielsson Öberg for interest and support regarding literature.
1. Introduction ............................................................................................................................ 2
  1.1 Twitch and its community ................................................................................................. 4
  1.2 Terminology .................................................................................................................... 4
  1.3 The Twitch interface ...................................................................................................... 6
2. Related research .................................................................................................................. 6
  2.1 Service innovation .......................................................................................................... 6
  2.2 Crossmedia ...................................................................................................................... 7
  2.3 Branding ........................................................................................................................ 8
    2.3.1 Personal branding ....................................................................................................... 9
3. Through the screen ............................................................................................................ 10
  3.1 A qualitative study ........................................................................................................ 10
  3.2 Sampling of respondents .............................................................................................. 10
    3.2.1 Established and Aspiring streamer ........................................................................... 10
    3.2.2 Sample size ............................................................................................................... 11
  3.3 Data collection .............................................................................................................. 12
    3.3.1 Observations ............................................................................................................. 12
    3.3.2 Interviews ............................................................................................................... 13
    3.3.3 Written interviews ................................................................................................. 13
  3.4 Data analysis ................................................................................................................ 14
  3.5 Ethical considerations .................................................................................................. 15
  3.6 Method criticism ........................................................................................................... 16
4. Behind the screen ................................................................................................................ 16
  4.1 General ........................................................................................................................... 17
    4.1.1 Initial strategies ....................................................................................................... 17
    4.1.2 Visuals ..................................................................................................................... 18
    4.1.3 Schedule ................................................................................................................ 19
  4.2 Interaction ..................................................................................................................... 19
    4.2.1 Communication ...................................................................................................... 19
    4.2.2 Influence on content ............................................................................................ 20
  4.3 Sponsors ......................................................................................................................... 21
    4.3.1 Sponsorship Interaction ......................................................................................... 21
  4.4 Personas ........................................................................................................................ 21
  4.5 Social media .................................................................................................................. 23
  4.6 Streaming networks ..................................................................................................... 24
5. Analysis .................................................................................................................................. 25
  5.1 The Interaction model & Game centric model ............................................................. 28
6. Conclusion .......................................................................................................................... 31
7. Future research ................................................................................................................... 32
References ............................................................................................................................. 33
Appendix 1 - Interview guidelines ..................................................................................... 35
1. Introduction

The new media world we live in today has come a long way in distribution of content. The historical journey from sending runners with information to today's online distribution channels has been possible partly due to the concept of Internet and the continually increasing bandwidth. The increased bandwidth has allowed for more advanced Internet services. Nielsen's Law of Internet Bandwidth (2014) shows an exponential increase in the Internet bandwidth from the year 1983 to 2013, see figure 1. A rise in computer hardware sales over the last few years is also a fact (“Computer Sales Statistics”, 2015), and the numbers keep on rising.

![Graph showing Nielsen's law of Internet Bandwidth (Nielsen, 2014).](image)

A quite new phenomenon made possible due to these advances is online game streaming. This phenomenon brings with it a new kind of digital entertainer, the streamer. A streamer is a person who is live streaming gameplay. The concept is basically that a person plays a game on a computer or game console and by using a third party platform, in this particular case Twitch.tv, streaming of the gaming experience to a wider audience. The more dedicated streamers can be seen as digital entertainers since their goal is to attract as many viewers as possible and reach a wide audience. A combination of the improving technology and the cost of sufficiently powerful gaming systems being relatively reasonable the possibility to broadcast, to stream, gameplay has risen for everyone.

Twitch is a service platform, a website, born in 2007 out of the universal live streaming site Justin.tv. The sole purpose of Twitch is to facilitate live streaming of all sorts of games regardless of platform. Twitch contains everything from PC to PlayStation to Xbox and even real life card or board games to live broadcasts of e-sports events are streamed live. (Blattberg, 2015; Winfrey, 2014)

At the time of writing 543 different games are possible to watch on a live stream on Twitch ([http://www.twitch.tv/directory](http://www.twitch.tv/directory)), see figure 2. Each specific game has its own category on Twitch, and the games with the currently highest amount of viewers are placed at the top of the list.
As the viewer amount increases so does the games position and with that the streamers position in the list.

While many may play the same game, few do it the same way. More than 100 million viewers visit Twitch each month and spend an average of 106 minutes watching streamed games each day. Amazon bought Twitch for $970 million in August 2014. (Blattberg, 2015; Winfrey, 2014; Robinson, 2015)

The users of Twitch live stream their own gameplay or watch others. The mixture of users ranges from professional e-sports streamers to the everyday casual streamer. The two most common attractions are the niched streamer and the more entertainment-oriented variety streamer. By entertainment-oriented we mean they will often focus on entertaining the audience rather than excelling at a particular game. At one end of the spectrum the niched streamer alternates between focusing on winning the game and trying to teach the viewers how to get better at playing the game. Niched streamers usually share game tactics and special features with the

Figure 2 Twitch game directory (http://www.twitch.tv/directory).
viewers. At the other end of the spectrum the variety streamer attracts viewers by playing attractive
and often even early access games as well as being an entertaining person to hang out with. (Blattberg, 2015)

The objective of this study is to create a framework for application in the field of online
streaming of games with the purpose of aiding the individual actor in identifying the core aspects of
reaching a wider audience. Thus, the research question we have formulated is this: What are the
similarities and differences in established streamers patterns and strategies regarding branding
from a crossmedia perspective and how does aspiring streamers relate to these patterns and
strategies? How can these patterns be concretized into a framework used for reaching a wider
audience?

1.1 Twitch and its community

Twitch is based on channels, which is each streamers profile. From the channel all relevant parts
regarding the streamers activities can be accessed, e.g. the stream, personal information, follow
and subscribe button, see figure 3. The subscribe button is a feature that represents an elite
partnership between the streamer and Twitch. This elite partnership makes it possible for viewers
to show their support by subscribing to a streamer’s channel at a cost of $4.99 each month. A
viewer is a person who is watching a stream through Twitch. Interaction between streamers and
viewers is possible through the integrated live chat. Viewers can interact with the streamer and
other viewers through the chat and be directly involved in the gameplay by making suggestions and
sharing their knowledge of the game. The subscribing viewer gets access to a subscriber-only chat,
special icons in the chat as well as any other features decided by the streamer. If a viewer wants
to show support in a non-monetary way, the follow feature is available. Following viewers will get
notified when a stream is live and the total amount of followers is always shown in connection to
the stream. The follower count is a show of interest, which indicates the popularity of the streamer.
This feature works the same way as on other social media. (“Twitch Subscription program”, 2014;
“Twitch: We compete with cable networks”, 2014)

Figure 3 Follow and subscribe buttons as seen on Twitch.

A moderator, or mod, is a person chosen by the streamer to help run the chat. Mods remove
offensive posts and spam and notify the streamer of any questions posted in the chat. (“Twitch
Moderation Guide”, 2013)

1.2 Terminology

Twitch has a rather different way of handling videos compared to other video sites like YouTube.
YouTube content is what is frequently called video on demand (VOD). This means that any content
on their site is available to the viewer at any time. The content creator does not need to be online to
manage these videos; the site itself does it all. The main content on Twitch, however, is not VOD based. While streamers on the site may choose to save entire or partial VOD’s of their streams, it is completely up to them to decide if this is done or not. Another difference in VOD's on YouTube and Twitch is that on YouTube the VOD’s are highly edited while Twitch VOD’s are mostly uncut and unedited. The VOD’s that are brought to YouTube are frequently done so in a highlight format. This format means that you take the best or most memorable moments from your videos and edit them together to form a highlight reel.

Raiding is a method sometimes used by streamers as a disguised guerilla marketing method. Guerilla marketing is an advertisement strategy used to promote service in an unconventional low-budget manner. (Dennisdotter et al., 2008) Raiding means that the streamer spontaneously tells the viewers that they all are going to join another streamers channel and start spamming the chat. This is most often done between streamers that are officially friendly towards one another. The aim of it is to engage the viewers and spread the knowledge of the two streamers but also to transfer viewers to another friendly streamers channel when ending the stream. The buzz created by raiding is good for promotional purposes and the strategy is called buzz marketing. Buzz marketing is creating or taking advantage of something that is trendy at the moment (Dennisdotter et al., 2008). Newly released games and raiding are both examples that we have come in contact with and which have proven to be valuable for acquiring viewers. These kinds of buzz generating content have also proven to be beneficial for getting highlighted at the front page of Twitch.

Hosting is a function provided by twitch where you as a streamer, while offline, can chose to host someone else’s stream on your channel. This is a method used by streamers in order to promote themselves and the hosted streams, since both parties benefit from it. The person hosting a stream receives recognition from the person being hosted who in turn gain viewers from the hosting streams channel. (http://blog.twitch.tv/2014/07/share-your-favorite-content-with-host-mode/)

To assure that the Twitch service is not abused there exists what is called the Terms of Service, ToS. These rules govern everything from age restrictions, to applicable law and venue. Everyone agrees to the ToS when they sign up to the website, it stands as a contract between the registered user and Twitch. Any deviation or abuse of these rules could result in, upon a completed investigation, immediate termination of the account (“Twitch Terms of Service”, 2015). In addition to the ToS, there also exists a behavioral guideline. These Rules of Conduct (RoC) define how you should act when visiting the site. While the ToS governs much of the underlying legal aspects, the RoC is directed more towards common sense and good behavior. This includes rules such as the need to dress appropriately, and not to act hateful against others. As stated in the RoC, any transgressions will assure that your channel will “disappear” (“Twitch Rules of Conduct”, 2015).
1.3 The Twitch interface

The gameplay window takes up the majority of the screen and it is where the gameplay is being shown, see figure 4. Overlapping the gameplay is the webcam which usually only shows the streamer but sometimes there are extra webcams directed towards the keyboard as well. The chat, which is not shown here, is where the streamer, moderator and viewer have the possibility to interact. Sponsors, personal information and social media are placed beneath the gameplay window and are either written or hyperlinked. The hyperlinks redirects to other parts of the streamers network, e.g. social media, sponsors, ads, streaming networks and personal webpages.

2. Related research

2.1 Service innovation

Service innovation is a new way of viewing services that is derived from user-centered design. The service innovation presented is from the point of view of the consumer. It is a value creation process where the consumer is considered a prosumer because of the interaction that takes place between the consumer and the service provider. A prosumer is defined as a co-creating consumer.
The goal with service innovation is a positive experience and through interaction between consumer and service provider the value creation process generates a positive experience. The value creation process is not a physical process; it takes places in the mind of the consumer and is connected to their feelings toward the service provider or brand. The packaging and the overall experience of a service has become more important than any single part, even more important than the main attraction itself. (Kristensson et al., 2014)

The different elements that make up the service innovation are value, consumer experience and context. The value regards the achieving of the goals set by the consumer and is dependent of his or hers, conscious and unconscious, needs. Interaction between a service provider and a consumer is required for a goal to be met and thus value is created. Consumer experience comprises of the thoughts and feelings that are created and associated with the service when the interaction takes place. The context where the interaction takes place is essential for a positive consumer experience since it is connected to the available resources. Resources are products and knowledge and they are needed to generate the value creation process, which in turn provides a positive experience for the consumer. (Kristensson et al., 2014)

The service innovation can be divided into three steps, see figure 5. First there are the resources that make the service possible to perform. Second in line is the value creating process that takes place during the interaction between consumer and service provider. Third is the consumer experience, which in turn delivers the end goal.

When viewing streaming as a service innovation, from the point of view of the consumer, the resources needed are an Internet connected device, sound output device and Twitch. Knowledge of Twitch, the chat and how it works are also considered resources. This results in this value creation process where the viewer/consumer and streamer/service provider, interact. The result of the value creation process is the entertaining experience the viewer gets of watching a stream.

2.2 Crossmedia

According to Ibru & Scholari (2012) crossmedia is content which is adapted and distributed across several media platforms. This is a conscious strategy used for increased promotion and/or revenue (Aarseth, 2006).
The usage of digital delivery channels in crossmedia marketing is cost effective for the producers. This method goes hand in hand with guerilla and buzz marketing. (Ibrus & Scolari, 2012; Aarseth, 2006) Ibrus & Scolari (2012) writes about the transformation of media business models and six fundamental paradigm changes; value, technology, customer, competence, revenue and operational paradigm. The value paradigm switches the focus from products to services. Spreading content across medias is not unique or special within marketing today, it is seen as natural. This paradigm emphasizes social media and the possibility to directly interact with the audience. The technology paradigm shifts the focus from media facilitating platforms to service based platforms. The technology of today become standardized enough to not be in focus, instead it is what is possible to do with the technology that’s becoming important. The service platforms from which everything builds are in focus. The customer paradigm changes the initiative, which means that the customers can control what to experience and connect to. Geographical locations do not matter as much anymore and marketing has changed into a reactive pull strategy. Customers want to engage more and user-generated content is more common. Competence paradigm requires a wider range of knowledge. Content produced needs to be able to adapt and spread over a number of mediums. Revenue paradigm leaves the outdated something-to-everyone approach for the new adapted everything-to-selected way of looking at content distribution and audiences. Operational paradigm pushes a more agile operational structure where identifying changes and adapting to them at an early stage is essential for success. Rabbit holes are examples of the new agile structure. A rabbit hole is a point of entry into the experience that requires no pre-existing knowledge of the surrounding content. The paradigms are not mutually dependent and can stand on their own. (ibid.)

A call-to-action is a migratory cue that prepares, instructs and rewards a traversal within a platform or between platforms. A good example of a call-to-action in this context is raiding. The ultimate call-to-action takes place when the transfer happens and when it positively affects the overall experience. When dealing with non-linear productions, as is the case with streamers, the concept of dependency becomes important. Both the availability of the content and which content that is presented at different platforms will affect the overall experience. An inactive Facebook page in the name of the streamer and no on-demand content, highlight videos, are both examples of dependency that will bring a negative experience. (Dena, 2007)

### 2.3 Branding

The user and his or her online identity stand as a basis for interaction. As these actors move through social media they leave their distinct fingerprints behind, creating an online persona based on their movements. The term persona has different meanings depending on context and in this study the term is used to describe a fictitious character. When other actors discover and perpetuate this image it gains momentum and is spread across the networks. While the term branding comes from the world of product design and corporate identity, it is applicable on the way we present ourselves on the web. Branding is used to distinguish a specific product and create a distinct identity around it and its creator. Tenderich (2013) defines brands as the thing that consumers buy, while products are what companies make. A consumer may easily identify a specific product through its logotype or product design. Alongside all of this a brand usually contains specifics such
as a name, logotype, tagline, or other unique identifying aspects. In many ways the brand works as the reputation of the branded product and consumers will often buy specific products based entirely on the brand they carry regardless of competitors (Sexton, 2009). This brand loyalty is what makes a great brand great. According to Dennisdotter et al. (2008) feelings and values that are connected to a product or brand could very well be more important than the actual product. In her article in the Online Information Review, Jennifer Rowley (2004) notices an apparent decline in online branding. She writes about how, in the case of lower value commodities, brands may become less important in the digital age, yet stay strong in relation to high value products and services. Companies have to constantly monitor customer needs to make sure that they do not cut corners and damage their brand through negligence. The basis of a great brand thus lies in the constant monitoring of consumer wants and needs. Consumers will base their perceptions on whatever information they receive, whether they are correct or incorrect. This means that brand managers must factor in things that may not be a part of the actual company or product if the customer sees it as such. The building of communities is a good way of connecting to the viewers. The communities could be based on consumption or brand. The consumption community is grounded in the common feeling between the viewers that something is worth paying for, e.g. subscribing to a specific streamer. The brand community is a similar occurrence that is grounded in the viewer's common feelings of lifestyles, media habits, choice of games and online interests. It is also common that the members in a brand community interact with each other, e.g. chatting, and spreads information about the brand throughout the community. (Mossberg & Johansen, 2006)

2.3.1 Personal branding

Personal branding is based upon the concept that you and your career is a brand within itself and needs to be marketed accordingly. Although the term has existed for quite some time it has been propelled skyward by the birth and growth of social media. These social networks act as catalysts for the creation of personal brands, where everything you write, share, and link, adds to your online identity. All of these fragments come together to form a personal brand that continuously change as the user explores and interacts with other actors across these networks. While some aspects of this type of branding occur subconsciously as the user limits access to or spread information, most users are cognizant that they are branding themselves online (Labrecque et al., 2011). Branding is inevitable when participating in an online environment. Everything we do online stays with us as old data that lingers on previously visited networks and can easily be found through search engines (Labrecque et al., 2011). The semi-permanence of this data is both its strength as well as its weakness. While it means that a sound and well managed brand will stand the test of time, it also means that mistakes and non-relevant information needs to be weeded out early before it sets a permanent mark. Personal branding is just as much about understanding yourself as it is about understanding the networks you reside in. You need to have knowledge of how your brand is perceived by other actors on whatever network you traverse, and what data you leave behind and where. There also needs to be an understanding of the underlying strategies and tendencies that exist in this medium. Optimizing your brand by filtering and removing old, irrelevant data is a necessity. As such your online brand is an amalgamation of everything you do online, from pictures to status updates, everything comes together to form your online identity.
3. Through the screen

Methods are the essential tools for reaching research goals (Patton, 2002). Our research goal was to find recurring patterns in streamers way of branding themselves in a crossmedia fashion. To reach this goal we have looked at established streamers and compared their habits to aspiring ones by way of observations and interviews. Since one of the goals of the study was to investigate the usage of crossmedia in terms of marketing and personal branding for streamers a problem oriented qualitative study with a predefined research question was applied (Bell & Nilsson, 2000). By studying this phenomenon within the defined area an in-depth understanding is possible to acquire. The predefined object of study was the streamers active on the Twitch platform. The same rigorous approach is used to make cross-comparisons possible and hence to find existing patterns, or perhaps more importantly nonexistent patterns (Bell & Nilsson, 2000; Patton, 2002).

3.1 A qualitative study

Qualitative methods are trying to understand the world from the participants’ point of view (Patton, 2002). This definition is in line with what the goal with this study is, finding out the underlying structures behind successful streaming of games, by investigating the actors within the field to get an inside perspective. The data gathering consisted of observations and in-depth interviews. Using this mixed method approach, combining two different qualitative methods, gave us the possibility to get an increased understanding of the big picture by observations, and then hone in on the points which we found to be of special interest by in-depth interviews. The rest of this chapter will describe our data collection, analysis and the ethical aspects we considered during our investigation.

3.2 Sampling of respondents

3.2.1 Established and Aspiring streamer

We have divided the streamers into two subgroups: established streamers and aspiring streamers. What directly sets these two groups apart is the existence of the subscribe button. To find out what indirectly separates the two subgroups we have chosen to study both of them with observations and interviews as methods. While success can be measured in many different ways, for the sake of this study we have decided upon our own definition. We consider a streamer established when he or she has gone in to a partnership with Twitch and thus has received the subscribe-button. Conversely, the aspiring streamer has not achieved that accolade as of yet, and is most likely new to the site and/or streaming in general. There is also the possibility of the streamer not having any career related ambitions with streaming where they are simply doing it for fun. This group, however, is something we have tried to make sure to exclude from our sample of interview respondents. They are not a part of our study because they have a different goal with their streaming than established and aspiring streamers. We used our observation data in order to identify these factors.
3.2.2 Sample size

Given the availability of streams as a means of entertainment we reasoned that observations would provide adequate initial information regarding the scene and the individuals that inhabit it. As Bell & Nilsson (2000) and Ritchie et al. (2003) states, the number of respondents in the study should be as many as needed to be able to complete the goal of the study with regards to triangulation, reliability and time. Triangulation is defined as the controlling of the existence of found phenomena and the degree of truth in the data by collecting it from several sources with the goal of getting as balanced and complete data as possible (Bell & Nilsson, 2000).

We focused our observations on thirty-nine (39) different streamers and their channels. We felt that with a sample size of thirty-nine we would have a solid core to base our interviews on with good possibilities to utilize triangulation. This aspect was important to us. If it had not been, we might have chosen to go with fewer respondents, which in turn would have significantly affected the results of the study.

Regarding the selection of which streamers to observe, we selected channels and streamers that either already have a substantial viewer base or ones that we considered to be aspiring. This was accomplished by browsing the categories on Twitch. We did not pay any attention to gender or age of the streamers since the core of this study is to examine the underlying structures and strategies involved in the branding regardless of age, gender or ethnicity. We focused on gathering data that was already available to the public e.g. from social media, the actual streams, visible sponsors and such with no social, cultural, political and interpersonal factors limiting our selection of observations (Patton, 2002). By doing this we felt that we would be able to enhance our understanding of the general trends and habits of the streamers while at the same time locating and contacting suitable respondents with whom to conduct our interviews.

Initially we contacted all thirty-nine streamers that we had observed and asked if we could interview them. We got twelve replies back but regrettably only seven of these were interested in participating in our study. The streamers who replied and declined all had limited spare time for things other than keeping their business going which resulted in fallout in our desired sample size. We were hoping to get responses from at least half of the streamers we contacted in order to be able to have full control over our sample size and choose the participants more delicately. The case was however, that we were reduced to using every single person that actually responded to our inquiries. Since a part of this study was to analyze and track the strategies of both established and aspiring streamers, we had to include samples from both of these subgroups in order to gain a coherent understanding of both sides in order to cross-reference the results. We got lucky in the fact that the split between established and aspiring streamers in this study was fairly even.

Cross-referencing is used in two ways in this study. The cross-referencing of the observations notes was done to control that all three observers in the research group interpreted situations the same way. This was done to ensure consistent data gathering, which in turn worked as a base for the cross-referencing done during the analysis. (Bell & Nilsson, 2000)
### Table 1 respondent matrix

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondent</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Focus</th>
<th>Interview length</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Respondent 1</td>
<td>Aspiring</td>
<td>Niched</td>
<td>28 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent 2</td>
<td>Established</td>
<td>Variety</td>
<td>35 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent 3</td>
<td>Aspiring</td>
<td>Niched</td>
<td>16 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent 4</td>
<td>Aspiring</td>
<td>Variety</td>
<td>23 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent 5</td>
<td>Aspiring</td>
<td>Variety</td>
<td>29 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent 6</td>
<td>Established</td>
<td>Niched</td>
<td>Written</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent 7</td>
<td>Established</td>
<td>Niched</td>
<td>Written</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.3 Data collection

The data was collected from three different sources, which makes it possible to cross-reference and triangulate the findings that in turn will increase the validity (Bell & Nilsson, 2000; Patton, 2002; Ritchie, et al., 2003). Observations, semi-structured interviews and structured written interviews were used for collecting data. Since we needed response from established as well as aspiring streamers we managed to include participants from both subgroups and the time for the study allowed for thirty-nine respondents for observation and seven interview respondents chosen based on the results of the observations.

3.3.1 Observations

Observations were used since it will show what the respondents actually do instead of what they say or think they do (Bell & Nilsson, 2000). All three members of the group conducted the observations. The observations were non-participatory covert observations (Patton, 2002) that we used to scan the environment in which these streamers socialize and work and to what extent they utilize both a crossmedia and branding approach in order to promote themselves. In addition, observations were conducted in order to gain an understanding regarding the interaction between the streamers and their viewers in their respective channels on Twitch and other social media alike.

According to Patton (2002) there are eight different aspects to keep in mind while making observations. We found that the following four aspects were usable during our observations. Indirect groupings and interaction patterns are both part of the social context, which we put a heavy emphasis on. The social context was important since a major part of the viewers’ experience generated from streaming depends on the social interaction. An observation can be divided into a beginning, a middle point and a closure point. This structure showed to be of importance while observing, since streamers subconsciously made active choices concerning these three parts and planned their streams thereafter. If we had not included this aspect important behind the scene information would have been lost. The context specific language used has to be identified and understood. Each streamer creates, knowingly or not, a community around their brand and the language used can be very specific subsequently. Had we not dealt with this aspect we would not have understood parts of the interaction between the streamer and the viewer. The same goes for the nonverbal communication. Patton (2002) also emphasizes that it might be more important to catch the things that are not happening, e.g. the absence of a particular or expected activity. As the observations went along we built up an increasing base of data as well as understanding of how
different streamers do things. This knowledge made it possible to notice the absence of things and/or activities, differences between streamers, and use cross-comparison of data as a method for analyzing our data.

3.3.2 Interviews
The interviews contained questions regarding the streamers own take on the business side of their gaming and streaming, how they interact with sponsors, viewers and whether or not they utilize different personas depending on who they interact with. The interview questions were based on the results from the initial observations and on the related research. This was done in order to focus on the relevant issues in relation to our research question. The interviews were conducted through Skype since the study involves international respondents. All interview respondents granted permission for the interviews to be recorded.

As Ritchie et al. (2003) point out the purpose of an interview is to understand the perspective of the interviewee even though the researchers will have a clear sense of what they want to discuss or explore. Ritchie et al. (2003) put emphasis on the different stages of an interview and stress the importance of paying attention to these while designing the research. These stages are arrival, introduction of the research, beginning the interview, during the interview, ending the interview and after the interview. According to them the first three stages help the researcher to ease the interviewee down from the casual everyday mindset to the deeper level where the issue at hand may be properly addressed and explored. The later stages function in the same manner, only reversed.

While designing and conducting our interviews we had these six stages in mind to help us conduct a professional and coherent interview that were neither too formal nor relaxed. We chose semi-structured interviews with regards to the general interview guide approach specified by Patton (2002). The general interview guide involves outlining a set of issues that are to be explored with each respondent. Following Pattons (2002) advice we developed an interview guide, see appendix 1. We specified topics and issues in the interview guide that we used as the framework during the interviews. With this approach we were able to gather information about each individual streamer and their personal view on the specific topics presented. The topics were designed focusing on the non-public information; such as theories and strategies for crossmedia and branding themselves and the specific content they create.

Our interview approach was chosen on the basis of the strengths it presents, particularly since the respondents are able to speak freely about what they feel is relevant to each particular question or statement without any strong external guidance from the interviewer. An interview guideline such as this increases the comprehensiveness of the data while at the same time making the data collection systematic for each individual respondent. (Patton, 2002)

3.3.3 Written interviews
We had two respondents who were unable to talk to us due to time restrictions. Since many streamers in general spend up to twelve hours each day entertaining their viewers, two respondents stated that they simply did not have enough spare time to participate in a live interview. Their individual experience and knowledge was too valuable to not take into account
though and as such we reformatted our interview questions to a written interview format. We realized that as our respondents all have significantly different backgrounds and perspectives we had to be very careful in the designing of our questions. It was not as simple as just converting them straight over from the interview format, they had to be reworked to be less prone to yes or no answers as we would not be able to do any improvised follow-ups or elaboration. We took Jacob & Ferguson’s (2012) thoughts on qualitative interviewing into consideration when phrasing the written interview. The initial questions were made basic to prepare the respondent for the more substantial in-depth questions. In the request for the interview we asked for permission to talk to them again if we felt any follow-up was needed. Through placing the more difficult and, perhaps, personal questions towards the end of the interview we hoped to build trust with the respondent in the beginning of the interview. Questions regarding sponsorships and brand deals were written with care to avoid coming off as overly probing and through that cause withdrawal from the study. Extra care was dedicated towards not making the interview too long to prevent short unmotivated answers. (Jacob & Ferguson, 2012)

The questions were sent out by email to the respondents with a suggested deadline for answering. Having just a few respondents to interview in this manner meant that we managed to avoid some of the pitfalls that come with written interviews (Bell & Nilsson, 2000). The questions were created to account for the different ways these streamers interacted with their sponsors and their viewership. Even though written interviews usually act as a primary means of data collection, we decided to use it as a way to supplement the data we had already gathered through our face-to-face interviews. We felt it was important to again stress the nature of our study so that the respondents understood what we were aiming to do with the data they provided. We also gave each respondent the choice of being anonymous and a possibility to withdraw from the study at any time.

3.4 Data analysis

In producing the actual interview guideline we utilized Patton (2002) and his definition of inductive analysis. Inductive analysis is the discovering of patterns, themes and categories in contrast to deductive analysis where the data is analyzed with regards to existing frameworks. When the observations were completed all notes were compiled and from this data six fundamental themes were identified through cross-sectional analysis (Ritchie & Lewis, 2013). The themes are general information, interaction, sponsors, personas, social media and streaming networks. These themes acted as the foundation for the interview guidelines. The themes were used as a way of thematically grouping data for easier display and analysis.

The interviews were transcribed and that process was initiated directly after the first interview was completed and they were carried out by all three of the group members. Bryman (2011) suggests this approach to be necessary due to the time consuming nature of transcriptions. To ensure consistent transcriptions, which make for easier and more accurate comparisons, we established transcription guidelines. By continuously transcribing the completed interviews, we were able to improve the interview guidelines for upcoming interviews by identifying if there were any missing aspects that might be of relevance to the study. The transcriptions were literal. Ritchie & Lewis (2013) names this part of the research process data management.
The transcribed data was then processed by way of a thematic analysis. Thematic analysis involves pattern recognition and require competency to see patterns in seemingly random bits of information (Patton, 2002). Ritchie & Lewis (2013) calls this stage in the process descriptive accounts and it is presented as the results in this study. Centralized themes and underlying categories are created and are then placed into a matrix upon which the gathered data is applied. Through this matrix the data is organized into the categories for each case. While this is a loosely defined form of thematic analysis, the technique itself does not have any specified procedures. Instead it should be used as a guide for how to start organizing such an analysis. While it may at times be defined as coding by researchers, pattern recognition often stand as the center point in qualitative analysis. We utilized the concept of pattern recognition throughout the process of analyzing our data. (Bryman, 2011)

Ritchie & Lewis (2013) claim that a common problem when grouping fragments of data into themes, the descriptive accounts stage, is the loss of context. To minimize this problem the fragments were color coded, where each respondent was given a specific color, and shortened versions of the interview questions were included in the fragments as well. The color-coded fragments were copied and pasted into the themes established during the analysis of the observation data. Each theme ultimately contained all relevant fragments from each respondent. The copy and pasting took place into a new document in order to preserve the original transcriptions that gave us the possibility to easily trace the fragments to the source, which allows for transparency to others (Ritchie & Lewis, 2013). This allowed us quick and easy access to the context. No indexing of the interview data was done, or needed, since it was already structured from the interview script (Ritchie & Lewis, 2013). This was the case since the foundations, the observation data, were already divided into six themes. A categorization within the themes was done to further structure the data.

When all the data has been inserted into the initial themes and subcategories further processing was done. Ritchie & Lewis (2013) refer to this refinement as the explanatory accounts stage. The themes were refined to portray meaning and turned into clusters, which then were used to develop possible explanations regarding the data. The clusters where extracted by combining the patterns found inside and across the themes. This stage of the research is presented in the analysis section.

3.5 Ethical considerations
Social science research has very strict research ethics to consider. The Swedish authority Vetenskapsrådet (2002) has summarized the ethics into four major parts. They are called the demand of information, concurrence, confidentiality and rights of usage. We had to abide to these demands due to our choice of methods. The demand of information says that the researcher has to inform the participants that they are participating in a scientific study. The demand of concurrence states that the participation in the study is on a volunteer basis and that it is possible to retract the concurrence at any time. Confidentiality and rights of usage handles how the data collected can be spread and used. (Vetenskapsrådet, 2002)

To meet these demands we took extra care to inform the participants of the above stated points in both our initial contact, via e-mail, as well as at the very beginning of the taped interviews. We also asked the participants if they opposed themselves to the taping of the interview. In terms of
the actual data collected we steered clear of specific deals, e.g. sponsor deals regarding income, and focused instead on the overall structure of cooperations with sponsors, other streamers and Twitch. To ensure the anonymity of the participants only selected data will be presented. None of the participants chose to abort their participation and all interviewed participants accepted taping of the interviews.

3.6 Method criticism

While investigating streamers focus groups would have been a valid method to utilize and was one we in fact considered. What eventually made us go in another direction is the fact that many of our considered respondents are located far away from Umeå that would have made the implementation of focus groups too difficult to carry out in the relatively scarce time frame of the study. Quantitative methods were also considered but discarded since we needed an in-depth, behind the scene, understanding of the individuals. With our observations being done on thirty-nine different streamers and our attempts to contact these people only resulted in seven answers we basically had to accept that fact given the narrow timespan of the study. This could affect our results. Five of the interviews were conducted through Skype, with the addition of the two written ones. It seems reasonable to argue that conducting interviews through Skype is a valid method, although, if time and geographical differences had not been interfering we would have preferred to conduct them in person with each respondent. The most apparent good feature about Skype in this case is that it is completely irrelevant where the respondent is located and the time required for the interview is fairly short. In addition, if we had gotten more responses, we would not have had to utilize written interviews. Given the setting, with the combination of written and semi-structured interviews in this case, with relatively few respondents, we took into account the validity and relevance of each answer before presenting it. However, a group of seven respondents cannot guarantee that our results are flawless and we acknowledge that.

4. Behind the screen

Based on the observations of the thirty-nine different streamers we identified the main themes to investigate further to be streaming in general, interaction, sponsors, personas, social media and streaming networks. These themes were defined after observing every channel for one hour each and are what we determine to be the central pillars of game streaming. Within the themes general, interaction and sponsors we decided to divide the information gathered into separate categories within each specific theme. The categories in the general theme were visuals, initial strategies for startup and whether or not they have and use a schedule for their streams. For interaction we divided the theme into two separate categories, interaction with the viewers, and how much influence the viewers have on the content of the stream. With the sponsor theme we made a similar distinction where we used one category for information regarding how the streamer approaches and/or interacts with sponsors, one category for how they market themselves to be attractive to sponsors and one final category concerning whether or not sponsors have any influence on the
channel or stream itself. The rest of the themes were not further divided into categories since we could not find relevant subdivisions. These results were used to design interviews that would help us probe deeper into the underlying structures, strategies and mentality of streamers.

4.1 General

As stated earlier in this paper our aim with the observations was to identify core themes within which to explore the different streamers’ habits and strategies. Other than finding themes, we observed several recurring phenomena. Among these was the wide use of webcams in order to promote visual interaction. Only one of the observed streamers did not use a webcam. Additionally, we found that the interaction in the chat was prominent in all cases, regardless of channel size. We also noticed that a majority of streamers saved their VOD’s for later use. Some reworked them to fit YouTube standards while others uploaded the VOD in its entirety to YouTube. While the reasons for doing so varied, we noted that the viewers appreciated the ability to go back and rewatch certain parts of previous streams, as evident by discussions in the chat. On the other side of this we noticed that certain streamers focused solely on one game or type of game. These niched streamers tended to be exceptionally skilled at the game they focused on. This attracted viewers who wanted to learn to get better at the game by asking questions in the chat as well as observing the streamer play. Moreover, while observing variety streamers we noted that the game choice may have an effect on the number of viewers, a notion we set out to investigate further in our in-depth interviews. While the vast majority of the observed streamers posted notifications about going live, not all had a schedule stating when they could be expected to do so. We noticed a trend in which variety streamers had a stronger tendency than niched streamers to have a fleshed out schedule posted on their channel page. This is not to say that all variety streamers, even amongst the established, had one. But they certainly, from what we could see, focused more on continuity. Other than this, we noticed that there exists another dividing factor amongst streamers. Some streamers that we observed focused on a variety of different games. They usually focused on the game that was most popular at the time, making sure to ride the hype/buzz of that particular game.

4.1.1 Initial strategies

When the respondents were given the question if they utilized any specific strategies when starting up their stream they all had a number of areas they agreed were of extra significance. All the respondents had come in contact with other streams before and through that experience had a good idea of how they wanted their own stream to be designed. The respondents agreed that a unique concept was preferable, to try and find one’s niche in the context. To exemplify this respondent 2 chose to brand his stream as a kind of viking warrior community where new subscribers and donators were greeted in a way suitable to that particular context. For the respondents who fall under the category of variety streamers, the two respondents agreed that streaming a newly released game if you do not have a significant viewer base might affect the viewer count for that particular broadcast. According to respondent 2 the game choice will always be a factor that needs to be taken into account for a variety streamer.
“For variety streamers it’s a little bit different because the audience will fluctuate a lot depending on the game choice.” - Respondent 2

Additionally, all respondents were talking about the importance of being active while the stream is online. This includes interacting with the chat, letting the viewers know what you do in a particular game and why. Basically, utilizing the think-aloud method for the benefit of the viewers. Respondent 3 stated that he always tried to stream as if he had a significant amount of viewers even if that was not the case. He elaborated that this was done in order to build a habit and design a service that would work for an audience of any given size.

Respondent 7 had a part of the initial approach that somewhat deviated from the others. This respondent was already a famous YouTuber so what he did was to announce on his YouTube channel that he was going to try to be the first in the world to beat the game Diablo III. After the announcement he began streaming the preparations and the overall process leading up to the eventual completion. Through this he had obtained a solid viewer base that would come back for his stream. Other than this the overall methods used were in line with what the other respondents have stated.

4.1.2 Visuals

Regarding the visual aspects of the channel as a whole there are some variations in how the respondents reason. The use of a webcam to show yourself in order to enable the audience to watch the streamer react to any and all situations is according to our results something that should be considered as an important aspect for a streamer that is aiming to be popular. Here we find it important to point out that according to our observations there are some channels that contradict this statement, where streamers with a high number of viewers do not utilize a webcam. However, in our thirty-nine observed channels we encountered only one channel where no webcam was used so a fairly strong case could be made that only a minority of established or aspiring streamers chose to broadcast without webcam.

Through our observations we noticed that streamers use custom graphics for their respective channel and in the stream itself. When asked about this the respondents had quite differing opinions on the matter. Respondent 5 clearly stated that too much clutter would only have a negative effect on the overall experience. The same respondent stated that this particular opinion is his own and may differ with someone else. Additionally, he stated that how a streamer manages the channel is strongly related to what their brand or product is. To clarify, for a streamer that is purely focused on being an entertainer with the gaming as a secondary tool, the viewers will be aware of this and they know what they get. In contrast, if a streamer is focused on delivering good gaming experience, those viewers will have different expectations and might find it odd if the actual game is paused for whatever reason. Respondent 5 continues by stating that in his experience there is no best practice regarding the channel design and the overall design of the product being broadcasted, but rather that it comes down to a personal choice, how a streamer chooses to brand themselves and what they consider to be important for their respective channels and brands. Moreover, respondent 4 already had artwork and other related graphics completed when starting up the
streaming carrier. This fact shows that respondent 4 was already aware of the importance of packaging the service.

4.1.3 Schedule

Even though only four of our seven respondents actually used a schedule for when they would stream, all of them were in agreement that a schedule is a vital part in obtaining and sustaining a solid viewer base. As a variety streamer, respondent 2 stated that a schedule was of extra importance, since there are different games being played. In contrast to a streamer with focus on a single game that will have an easier time holding on to frequent viewers due to the continuity. As stated by the quote earlier in this section, the amount of viewers will depend largely on the game choice of the streamer. The argument here is that with a schedule people will always know a particular streamer is online at a certain time, no matter what game is being played. A variety streamer does not have the luxury of having recurring fans of a mainstream game stumbling upon the channel just by browsing that game’s category. Respondent 2 also emphasizes the importance of sticking to the schedule if one is set. Otherwise people may be waiting for the stream to start even though it may not happen which could result in bad publicity and a deficit in viewer count.

“If I was not there the given time I said I was people would tweet me and like: Hey, where are you? You were supposed to be on tonight!” - Respondent 2

Respondent 5 reasoned that providing a schedule for the broadcasts could be compared to the local bus system where you know a certain bus would arrive or depart at a certain time for a specific destination. According to this respondent the same thing goes for creating online content in any context where there are followers or viewers expecting continuity in the publications. This way followers will know when to expect new content, what quality it holds and what the overall experience will bring. Respondent 2 and 3 does not use a set schedule for their streams but states that the viewer base and recurring viewer count would likely be higher if people had a clear understanding of when the stream will be active. Furthermore, they both argue that continuity is an important aspect of streaming in particular and online content creating in general. Respondent 7 has a very strict schedule, which involves streaming every day except weekends and holidays. This respondent argues that the continuity of his broadcasting has contributed a significant amount to his brand in general and to acquiring a stable and high amount of recurring viewers.

4.2 Interaction

The viewers are what make streaming worthwhile, an opinion shared by all of the respondents. A recurring theme we have discovered in our observations as well as gotten confirmed through interviews is the importance of the interaction between the viewer and the streamer.

4.2.1 Communication

It is important to keep continuity in the interaction regardless of the number of viewers watching the channel. When starting their streaming career respondent 1 and 4 said that they started putting words on their thoughts while playing to keep the interaction active. Respondent 5 also used the
same method but instead focused on including call-to-actions to activate the viewers with the goal of expanding the experience:

"...when I wanted them to say something I often made a clear call-to-action, like if I defeated this boss they were supposed to spam 'franker-c' in the chat or something similar. Just because it is a fun thing.” – Respondent 5 (Our translation)

The streamers monitor the chat frequently and the switching of focus between the game and the chat is constant. Respondent 1 says that it can sometimes be hard to switch focus at any given time and it is largely dependent on which game is being played, since some games are very action packed and cannot be paused. The primary interaction between the streamer and the viewer takes place in the chat, but there is also interaction that takes place through messaging systems connected to social media and by e-mail. Depending on the popularity of the streamer the workload associated with viewer interaction differs. Respondent 2 and 7, who have the highest number of followers in this study, have external help to organize the communication. The streamer has to adapt to the chat and make the interaction become one of the primary experiences of the stream. Respondent 2 describes the chat as an important part of the whole experience:

“...the chat is a living breathing thing and you adapt to it and if you allow it, it can be a wonderful experience and will open your eyes a lot. The interaction with the chat makes the show. Without the chat, I might try doing YouTube videos but it would never be nearly the amount of joy that I get from actually interacting live with people...” - Respondent 2

Respondent 5 worked actively on building a mini-community and establishing a relationship with the returning viewers, by learning their names, establishing context specific jokes and terms as well as communicating with each of the viewers directly. The interaction on Twitch is blunt since it’s not possible to cut or edit the content because everything is live streamed. According to respondent 2 this is the fact that makes the interaction organic and it is the uncontrollable moments that makes it, the experience, special. Due to the fact that the streamer has to be active the whole time to keep a positive experience respondent 3 is only streaming during shorter periods of time to be able to keep the focus up and continuously deliver good content.

4.2.2 Influence on content

The viewers have a varying degree of influence on the content of the stream. Respondent 1, 3 and 6 only stream a specific game and their brand is closely associated with that game. Respondent 2, 4, 5 and 7 take the viewers wishes of game choice into consideration but ultimately they decide themselves which game is going to be played. Respondent 7 says that the game chosen has to be enjoyable to be able to play it for a longer period of time. Our observations have also shown that some streamers plays games with their viewers and that a few streamers even have a scheduled day that is dedicated for playing with their viewers. Respondent 4 invites viewers to join in the gameplay whenever possible, the game has to have a multi-player feature for this to happen. Respondent 4 and 5 also invites the viewers to be included in the gameplay via the chat when
playing a single player game. The viewers then get to make choices by writing in the chat and the streamer then follows these choices, e.g. which weapons to use. Respondent 5 encouraged the viewers to actively participate in the gameplay:

“I encouraged them to influence, in Outlast when I reached a crossroads I asked if I should take a right or left. The game was pretty linear but it still provided an experience by allowing them to influence even though it might not matter in the end. When I played Dota I used to ask viewers which character they wanted me to play.” – Respondent 5 (Our translation)

The streamer also has the opportunity to start a poll about which game should be played. The viewers are then invited to individually vote and hence influence the content of the stream. Respondents 4 and 5 sometimes use this approach.

4.3 Sponsors

When we started talking about sponsorships and other forms of promotional marketing we felt that we had to be very open with what information we wanted. We also made sure to tell the respondents that any specific deals or earnings were unimportant for our study. The only thing we were interested in was the underlying strategies and methods for interaction with these actors.

Streamers on a whole receive an exorbitant amount of different deals and offers. Our respondents have had very different experiences of this. Respondent 4 has not really had any sponsorship; instead he has had several indie-companies that contacted him with offers. For the most part this has been to ask him to play their games. One thing that is worth noting is that in this transaction there was no monetary gain, beside the free game.

Respondent 1, who is also a professional player for an e-sports team, talks about another approach. He has been in contact with a rather different method, the promotion of the e-sport teams sponsors more than those of his stream. He talks about how professional players are encouraged to stream. This is done to promote the team’s sponsors even outside competitions. While this means that the streamer himself does not have any power over what sponsorships he promotes, it does mean that he does not have to search them out himself and can focus on streaming.

4.3.1 Sponsorship Interaction

The interaction between streamer and sponsor is as delicate as it is important. Respondent 2 has a very aggressive persona while streaming and he sees this as a double-edged sword. While certain sponsors may find that his persona does not suit their product, there are ones that have found it very suiting. Through his very energetic and aggressive persona he has landed deals with coffee companies that found that his behavior suited their product.

“They will never come to and be like; “Hey would you like to hawk our new scoot-around for babies”. You know, I will never get that because of my persona, but I might get like sponsorship, or like collaborations with like, coffee people, which I have in the past.” – Respondent 2
He also felt that you have to take certain sponsors as a new streamer. While preference and ethics should be at the forefront of such decisions, he argues that new streamers may not always have the luxury of turning such deals down. He talks about getting any sponsorship he could get his hands on, anything to strengthen his channel and through that his brand. This also meant that he got known as an easygoing guy, and he feels that it is due to this he has received so many sponsorships going forward. That is not to say that the interaction between streamer and sponsor always needs to be started by the sponsor. When Respondent 3 spoke of this interaction he brought up that he had come in contact with the opposite. He had contact with streamers that went out and contacted sponsors on their own. Even when they were small channels they still managed to get sponsorships due to their tenacity. To clarify, an acquaintance to respondent 3, also a streamer, had at one time contacted a local company asking them about sponsoring. In exchange for a space on the stream they offered him a discount at their business.

Sponsorships do not have to come only from external companies though. The partnership that is formed between Twitch and the streamer acts as a sponsorship of its own. It allows the viewers to sponsor the streamer directly with a subscription or donation of any amount. This is just as important as the other sponsorship deals. Respondent 3 talks about it and places high value on this interaction. It stands as the very basis of channel support, and it can keep a channel afloat even if sponsorships fail. Thus, it is very important to keep your viewers happy, as they will save you if companies will not.

### 4.4 Personas

Regarding personas the view among the respondents differ. While one respondent has a very distinct persona around which the entire setting around the stream is created, the majority of our respondents are more into just being themselves with emphasis on interacting in a way that suits the viewers, rather than trying to be a totally different person on stream. Most of the answers we have gotten in this section emphasize that being active and interacting with the viewers is the most important part, rather than trying to create a fictional character for the same purpose. According to our observations the persona is largely dependent on what type of streamer that is observed. Variety streamers are more likely to adapt more of an actor approach in a specific game than the professional players.

When asked about personas respondent 5, who is also an established YouTuber, states that only certain interactions on the stream trigger the use of that specific persona. This is due to the energetic nature of the persona, and respondent 5 argues that he would not be able to keep that level of energy and hype up for an extended period of time. Additionally, he emphasizes the fact that he tries to be himself as far possible, with only certain requests from viewers that trigger the more energetic persona. In contrast to this statement, respondent 4 tries actively to be more energetic and as he puts it; ‘goofy’ than he is in everyday life. Respondent 4 adds that if one exaggerates the streaming personality one might encounter difficulties in maintaining that extreme level of emotion or engagement. With regards to that, respondent 4 argues that it is important to be active and interact while at the same time keeping it at a level that feels manageable in the long run. Respondent 1 states the use of a particular persona is nothing he uses. Instead, the focus is on
just providing a good and welcoming environment for the viewers simply by being in a good mood and keeping the level of interaction with the viewers as high as possible.

Respondent 3 states that while he enjoys playing a variety of games on his spare time, the viewers and his community know him as niched streamer, exclusively playing Halo. This affects the persona in a way that viewers expect that specific game to be the core of the streams content. The persona in this case is closely related to the game choice. The same respondent argues that streaming another game to the same viewer base seems pointless since it is the Halo brand that the stream and the persona is affiliated with. While this affects the persona it is also a major aspect of the influence of the viewers on the content produced. Additionally, respondent 3 tries to regularly interact with the viewers in the chat, and if there are moments where there are no openings for that sort of interaction, he utilizes think-aloud where he reflects on the choices being made in the game in order to keep the stream active and attractive to viewers. He concludes the same statement by pointing out the factor of distraction in streaming as an activity. What he means is that it’s easy to overlook and bypass the negative things that might occur while gaming simply focusing on the interaction with viewers and the entertaining aspect of the context.

Respondent 2 has a distinct persona that is a sort of viking warrior that relates heavily to the overall design of the brand in general. For example, new followers are greeted in a celebratory warrior kind of way where they are introduced into the fictional “world” of this particular streamer.

“No, certain things trigger. I have a lot more gimmicks than a lot of other channels do, like if someone subscribes to the channel, I have a voice changer in my mixer, I do a little voice changer thing and I like hail them as a warrior.” - Respondent 2

The persona itself was established when a fan sent this streamer a full scale viking helmet. Respondent 2 states that this particular event was what triggered the entire brand around the warrior kingdom theme. When asked if this persona is active the entire time respondent 2 replies that only certain events trigger it. Additionally, he states that most of the time on the stream it is just him playing games, but if the channel gets raided or someone donates or something to that extent, he will approach the situation as the warrior persona.

4.5 Social media

While the Twitch channel acts as the streamers ‘home’, it is on the external social networks much of the streamer-viewer interaction happens. It is through these networks that sponsorships and viewership arise. While there are many different networks, a few stand above the rest. Twitter and Facebook are the top networks of choice. These are the two that have proven themselves to be the easiest and the best for communicating with so many viewers.

YouTube is sometimes also used, though in a different way. This network does not lend itself well to notifications and short messages. Videos take time to create, upload and finally to render on the site. This makes instant updates impossible and further lengthens the time it takes to get a message out to the viewers. While only Respondent 3 uses YouTube frequently, they all agree that the potential power of the service is something to keep close in mind. Content that is streamed can be reworked into another format and uploaded there. This reaches another set of viewers who may
migrate to Twitch in the future. Content on YouTube is, as Respondent 3 describes it, very optimized. It is rarely full-length streams. Instead it is highly edited highlight reels that show the most interesting part of previous streams. This helps to keep the YouTube-viewers, which is used to more condensed content, pleased. These videos also act as a call-to-action, directing the viewers towards the streaming channel.

While Facebook is at times used for longer important updates, it is not the primary network. When asked, most respondents were in agreement that Twitter stands as the main network for interaction with the viewers. Facebook is primarily used when the character limit on Twitter makes longer messages unpractical. While there are methods to get around this limit, none offer the same ease of use as the base service does. Respondent 2 argues that the reason Twitter is more used among streamers is that:

“...because the character allotment that you get for twitter is so much more attuned to the short attention spans that everyone has now.” - Respondent 2

Respondent 1 is the only one that uses Facebook as the primary network. He frequently posts about his streams and competitions. The fact that Facebook is becoming an outdated network for content creators is something that he has noticed however. He says that while he gets good feedback from his posts, he has noticed a steady decline of Facebook use within streaming and e-sports. This decline is something that all of our respondents have seen. Most respondents use Twitter as a means of notifying their viewer base that they are about to go online on Twitch. It acts as an instant call-to-action for the viewers, sending them straight to the stream. While Twitch itself has a notification system in place for when streams start, it is not always effective. Users that have Twitch on their phone do not always get the notification, and very few check their email regularly enough to catch the start of streams. Twitter is both faster and easier to use, sending their notifications across platforms. Twitter is also used as a way to talk between streamers. They argue, joke and discuss things openly between each other, and any viewers may join in. Respondent 2 feels that this is one of the biggest strengths with the network, the fact that the different groups of viewers can see and interact with each other. It opens up new ways for streamers to gain new followers and strengthen their brands even when not streaming.

4.6 Streaming networks

Members in a streaming network help each other in a number of ways. Respondent 1, 2 and 4 are all part of different official streaming networks and they actively help their fellow members by hosting, raiding and answering each other’s questions.

Respondent 3 and 6 talks about more or less unofficial streaming networks created within genres, e.g. console gaming or a specific game. They try to keep the viewers active within the genre and look at it as switching viewers between each other. Respondent 3 actively tries to implement this by starting to stream when the larger established streamers, within the genre, are finishing off their streams. The viewers have to go somewhere and thus jump to another streamer within the genre, hopefully respondent 3.
Respondent 5 and 7 do not use streaming networks. Respondent 5 claims to not be active enough for it to matter and respondent 7 is too busy with the stream to bother with collaborations.

It is possible to be a member of several streaming networks. Respondent 2 is an active member of several streaming networks and thinks of them as an engaging way to help others as well as self. By raiding other members in the group viewers are transferred within streaming networks. According to respondent 2 the social part of it is important as well:

“...streamers are just like a group of friends, like a book club, you know, it is like 'Hey, we all know each other, we are having fun'...” - Respondent 2

5. Analysis

From the data collected we can see apparent similarities in the overall strategies for branding and communication of the stream as a whole between the established streamers in our study. The most obvious recurring theme is the use of a webcam in order to promote visual interaction with viewers. Only one of thirty-nine observed streams did not utilize a webcam.

We feel that a stream without a webcam lacks the personal touch, which, according to us, is a part of why streaming is entertaining and sets it apart from traditional media broadcasting. Additionally we consider the use of multiple webcams a good option when streaming certain types of games, e.g. real-time strategy games like Starcraft 2. In a case like this one webcam could be pointed towards the keyboard and the mouse in order to showcase the speed of the players inputs while the other shows the streamer.

In relation to this, we notice the use of custom graphics and in six of the cases even logotypes designed for the particular streamer in order to further brand the channel in a professional way. The aforementioned factors are seen more frequently on the channels of the bigger, in our case, successful streamers. The aspiring streamers have less detail surrounding the channel in the form of graphics, logotypes and overall visibility of sponsorships.

Our opinion regarding graphics and visible sponsors on stream is that as we place the webcam in such a central part of the streaming experience, the surrounding artwork also needs to live up to a certain standard. In this case we consider it important to find a good balance for what features work for the particular stream. Too much clutter where none is needed will in our opinion hurt the overall experience rather than the opposite. In this sense, even a stream with good graphic layout can have too much of it, in which case the problem still persists. Thus, we argue that a balance needs to be struck between artistic merit and focused minimalism. We define focused minimalism as the method of stripping down any graphics to their bare essentials. This is done to create a more enjoyable viewing experience. However, we live in a commercial society where monetary gain is of vital importance for everyday life to work. In relation to this, we can see the problem with wanting to show off sponsors in order to obtain that particular income and at the same time trying to keep a more minimalistic approach. We reason that this might be the case for some streamers, particularly the ones who aspire to make it in the business. To clarify, we argue that it is design versus monetary gain in exchange for selling space on your stream that might affect your channel visually.
Another aspect we found to be of importance is the game choice. The three variety streamers we have gathered in-depth information from all emphasized the fact that what game they choose to play will significantly affect the amount of viewers they obtain for each specific session. We argue that one might have a better opportunity to obtain browsing viewers if placed higher up on the list of available streams. With this in mind we can conclude that for variety streamers this is of vital importance, while for a streamer of a specific game or genre the problem does not manifest itself in the same way. The viewer count will not fluctuate to the same extent due to the already established community. Based on these conclusions we argue that another possible dividing factor of the streaming population could be these categories, variety and niched streamers. In addition, since gaining information regarding the choices of a streamer in general and a variety streamer in particular we required an in-depth perspective from within the scene and since we only have three respondents from this group we recognize that our sample might not be one hundred percent reliable in this case. However, by utilizing information from our observations regarding this phenomenon we can see a clear link between game choice and viewer count, regardless of streamer.

Can a case be made that there is an inherent strength in variety regarding game choice? While we have seen that there may be a relation between a variety streamers popularity and game of choice, we do not have sufficient data to come to such a conclusion. We have seen that aspiring streamers tend to stay away from the popular newly released games during an initial period right after launch since a lot of the established streamer tend to only play the newly launched game and hence attract a majority of the viewers. Aspiring streamers seem to benefit from starting streaming the newly launched game a couple of weeks later when the established streamers are done with it. One of the drawbacks we have identified when holding off with playing a game is the risk of it no longer being relevant. As time passes the game sinks further down the ladder of popular games on the Twitch directory, with a decrease in viewer count as a consequence.

Another recurring factor visible in both the observations and interviews is the activity and interaction of the streamers. The streamers differ in the way they interact, since that seems to be closely related to the persona and overall brand of the particular streamer. Moreover, they all see the interaction as a vital part of the content they create. From our interview results we can conclude that without the viewers the streamers would be nothing, hence their emphasis on the interaction with viewers. According to the observations, this interaction can take various forms. Every streamer observed, regardless of viewer or follower count, use shout outs as a sort of recognition of new people following the stream, donations received and they all reply to the chat in the same manner. By this we mean that most replies to the chat happens verbally rather than in writing. What differs between established and aspiring streamers in this case is the amount of responses to queries in the chat, and this, according to our results, is directly related to the number of viewers in the channel and how many are interacting in the chat. No matter how few or many viewers in a particular stream, the general consensus of our respondents is that the interaction between the viewers and the streamer is one of the most vital parts of succeeding in this environment.

We have noted that variety streamers generally have a higher level of interaction with the chat. We think that this might be due to the fact that they have a more unstable viewer base than niched
streamers and that they see the interaction as a means to provide that extra spice to the channel that will lure viewers back. Since the niched streamers spend most of their time playing a specific game, we reason that they will likely gain recurrent viewers simply from users browsing Twitch for that particular game. According to our results we think that variety streamers face more headwind in the sense that the game category they inhabit will differ between streams and thus are less likely to gain recognition in a particular game due to this.

We have observed that the interaction with viewers is not limited to just the Twitch channel. To further build a community, the off-stream interaction is equally important. Streamers who stay in contact with their viewers through social media networks usually have a larger, more established community, than those who do not. While the streamer may focus on different networks, our study has shown that Twitter is the most widely used. Our respondents found the interaction in this network simple and effective. While Facebook may allow for longer messages, we argue that the steady decline in Facebook usage by streamers may be the result of disinterest by the community. There seems to be a consensus amongst our respondents that viewers favor condensed pieces of information. Thus we believe that the bite-sized pieces of information that Twitter allows for is favored by the kind of user that follows these streamers. During our study we have found YouTube to be an effective means of disseminating your content across the networks. Twitch VOD’s are usually full length, multi hour broadcasts that are unable to be embedded on other sites. As such the edited highlight videos uploaded on YouTube acts as a more effective call-to-action for the viewers. We speculate that it brings new members into the community and promotes the channel across the social networks.

The spreading across several social networks seems like a vital concept to enlarge and strengthen a community of streamers. The spreading seems to be following a strategy, it seems to be targeted to the networks where the viewers are expected to be. Instead of using a shotgun approach and spreading everywhere there seem to only be a handful of social medias, which are relevant.

As for the social media activity of the different streamers it seems that twitter has surpassed Facebook. We have seen clear patterns related to this in our observations. Since Twitter offer the possibility to have your tweets posted on Facebook as well, it seems to us to be the logical choice for streamers with the need for a larger number of shorter messages to be communicated. We argue that in this sense sending a tweet is more like sending a text message than making a blog entry. This assumption is made with regards to the ease of access in twitter, and the overall simplicity of the service. While this may or may not hold true, the ability to post automatically to Facebook is a function that makes the use of an account more or less mandatory. To clarify, by posting tweet there is an option of posting that same message to the Facebook wall of a connected account. Furthermore we argue that presence on social media is a good thing when trying market a brand. There is a clear distinction here, had it not been for the automatic post function, the activity among streamers on Facebook would have to be reevaluated. Additionally, the use of YouTube to upload stream highlights seems to be something more and more streamers adapt. However, this presents a problem; the streamer is required to edit a large amount of streaming material to identify the highlights. With time as a limiting factor the quality of the actual streams might be affected. Since two of our respondents had other people handling the off-stream matters a question could be asked
if this is what the field is coming to? Are more and more streamers hiring people to help with the overall running of operations in order to keep the streamer focused on the main product being delivered, that is, the stream? Our guess is that while this might be true for some, there is not sufficient data obtained as of yet to make such a statement. However, it is intriguing to speculate about, since we do not have to go back many years in time to when the general consensus of playing games was that it was a waste of time. By studying this phenomenon of streaming it becomes apparent that the interest for this type of entertainment is increasing dramatically. Even regular people watching television can at times stumble upon commercials for e-sport events being distributed on national television such as TV6 in Sweden.

Continuity and reliability are factors that are emphasized by all of our interview respondents. They all agree that these factors are best adhered to by scheduling streams. Even though particular streamers do not utilize a set schedule, they all acknowledge its importance and the impact it has on a streamers recurring viewers. We feel the bus metaphor used by one respondent is a proper way to visualize the impact a set schedule might have on a stream and with all seven respondents agreeing on its importance we can acknowledge its significance.

Moreover, we feel it to be of importance to critically analyze the number of respondents in this study. Since there were only seven conducted interviews our results may differ if another set of seven streamers are asked the same questions, although we doubt it, since the span of channel sizes in our respondents differ significantly and the results from the interviews are in line with the results from the observations.

The fact that all our respondents consider continuity and a schedule important makes sense to us, the logic behind it is solid. This should however not be seen as a deal breaker since our observations showed that not all established streamers use a schedule. It is preferable but not essential. This also relates to the bus metaphor that does have drawbacks. We find it only to be relevant to viewers who are following a specific streamer. The viewers who are not as loyal followers will not be affected by the continuity of any one streamer.

5.1 The Interaction model & Game centric model

To our surprise we found that the difference between established and aspiring streamers boiled down to nothing more than experience and time. The strategies used where mostly the same, with the exception that established streamers did a better job applying them. Instead we found a much more interesting division, namely variety and niched. While we were aware of these two subgroups, we did not fully understand their importance. It is only after the analysis of our collected data that we fully understand how different their priorities are. It is this separation that makes them an interesting focal point for research.

Based on our results and our interpretation of them we have created two separate models. One for variety and one for niched streamers. For variety streamers, it has become apparent to us when analyzing the results that the vital aspects of obtaining and maintaining a solid recurring viewer count slightly vary from niched streamers. Both models are structured in the same way, having the most vital aspect at the bottom, as a foundation and working our way up we encounter the different aspects noted in the results. We only consider recurring viewer count with these models. The
following model considers variety streamers and assumes the ambition of any individual streamer to succeed in obtaining viewers, see figure 7.

Interaction sits at the very bottom, signifying the importance to deliver continuity in a way other than sticking to the same game. According to the results presented from both observations and interviews we argue that this particular aspect is of special significance for a variety streamer. Interaction in these models encompasses both the webcam and the chat, which are two different aspects of the same interaction.

Above interaction is schedule. While the use of schedule vary significantly between our interview respondents, our observations have shown that variety streamers in particular tend to be more schedule oriented than niched streamers. We argue this to be a direct consequence of the importance of continuity in order to maintain a steady viewer count.

Next is game choice and crossmedia. Arguments could be made here to have these two aspects on the same level as schedule. Both game choice and crossmedia presence are important. However, we believe that there is a slight difference. For variety streamers the game choice is often secondary, and viewers follow the stream for the streamers persona rather than for the game that is played. This is no conclusion that excludes the possibility for variety streamers to obtain stray viewers who are only there sporadically for a specific game. Crossmedia is important in the sense that promoting content across various different medium strengthens the brand if done right.

At the very top of the model are visuals. Our argument here is not that visuals are redundant. On the contrary, based on our data, we claim that visual graphics, logotypes and the overall designing of the channel and the brand is becoming more of a default step to take when striving to build a streaming brand.

Figure 7 The interaction model.
For niched streamers, the model has a different structure, see figure 8. The basic idea is the same however. For a niched streamer, we argue that the game choice is at the very bottom since this is what their entire brand is designed around.

Schedule is placed on the tier above it. Schedule in this sense is not as much a fixed schedule as it is continuity. Regardless of schedule, if a streamer is active in a specific game genre, our observations have shown that viewers will recognize the name of that particular streamer when browsing a specific category. Since the competition among streamers playing the bigger mainstream games is fairly tough, we have noticed that continuity plays a central role in maintaining recurring viewers while at the same time reducing the risk of losing viewers to competing streams simply due to the lack of continuity and activity. Placed alongside schedule is crossmedia. We argue that crossmedia is equally important as continuity for a niched streamer. Transmitting messages across platforms and media regarding the streamer or when a stream is live increases the overall interest. Our observations have shown that streamers active on social media are more likely to attract recurring viewers simply by showing presence and activity on different platforms.

While interaction might be viewed as related to crossmedia in general, in these models interaction specifically targets the interactions happening between streamers and viewers in the channel while the stream is live. The reason that interaction is placed further up for niched streamers is that we argue that the game choice is the primary focus for this subgroup and its viewers. While 38 of 39 observed streamers used a webcam, regardless of niched or variety approach, we can argue that with the game itself at the center of the experience, the ability to see the person streaming is not as vital for niched streamers as for variety streamers. However, the interaction with the chat is connected to the webcam, it makes it easier for the streamer to address queries and statements in contrast to replying in chat. With this said, even though interaction is placed relatively high in this model we still argue that it is something that will strengthen the
stream and not something to overlook and ignore. As with the previous model, visuals are at the very top of the model with the same arguments.

6. Conclusion

Our goal was to find similarities and differences in established streamers patterns and strategies regarding branding from a crossmedia perspective, and how aspiring streamers relate to these patterns and strategies. To clarify, niched and variety streamers exist within both the aspiring and established categories.

What we identified was that there were very few differences between established and aspiring streamers. Their differences are almost entirely based on experience. While they both use the same strategies for success, the established streamer knows how to apply them to greater effect. Instead of focusing on these groups, we shifted our focus to the more unexpected groups we discovered, that are niched and variety streamers. The models we developed show the different priorities that these subgroups have.

With regards to the service innovation model we found that the differences between the two groups are the overall application and integration of all the aspects in order to package and deliver an appealing product in the shape of an experience. However, there are weak spots in these assumptions since the sample size and timeframe of the study only allowed for a limited amount of data to be collected.

The use of the presented framework is in no way a guarantee for success. It is merely a presentation of the patterns that emerged during our study. We argue that by adhering to these themes you may achieve higher level of crossmedia presence and better overall packaging of your streamed content.

In conclusion, we argue that this paper produces a valid contribution to the field of Informatics. We base this argument on the fact that we provide an initial probing into a relatively unexplored field of study, online game streaming. In the contemporary on-demand society we can see a definite future for online game streaming. There are already instances of gaming being broadcast over traditional media such as television. By considering that there are streamers already making a living on it, through donations and sponsorships, we dare to speculate about the evolution of this phenomenon where online game streaming could possibly become a socially acknowledged career choice. From our experience, the general opinion within the society today is still that gaming in general is a waste of time. However, with the development of the phenomenon of streaming we see good possibilities for this fact to change over the course of the coming years.
7. Future research

This study has been an introductory journey into the world of online game streaming. Since this is a fairly unexplored area within research in general and Informatics in particular there are numerous other possible directions to explore. In this study we made the distinction between an established and aspiring streamer and these subgroups are basically a measure of success on Twitch. This study has shown e.g. niche and variety streamers within the original grouping of established and successful streamers. To further divide the demographic into even more precise subgroups is one possible step to further this research. We argue that there is a wide range of aspects to research and evaluate within the online game streaming community.
References


Appendix 1 – Interview guidelines

General Information
Did you use any specific strategies when starting up your streaming channel, if so; what were those and how did you implement them?

In what ways do you interact with your viewers?

How much influence do they have on the content of your streams?

Do you use a streaming schedule and if so; how do you feel this affects your brand?

When and why did you start using a schedule for your streams?

Social Media
As a streamer, how active are you on social media sites?

How do you choose which content to share and on what platform and do you tailor your content for different networks?

Personas
This section is regarding the use of different personas. Personas in this case refer to whether or not you are consciously behaving differently depending on whom you’re interacting with. For example sponsors, viewers and such.

How do you use personas to brand yourself and your stream?

Partnerships
To clarify, we are not interested in the specific details regarding the deals you have with companies or persons, we are merely interested in the underlying structure of the co-operations involved in your streaming.

Where does the interaction between you and potential sponsors start and how important are these kinds of co-operations for your channel and your brand as a whole?

In what ways do you collaborate and associate with other streamers and/or streaming networks and how does this affect your work?