The Unintended Consequences of Using Twitch as a University Professor

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INTRODUCTION

Twitch.tv is a popular streaming website wherein people from all around the globe film themselves watch others do a variety of activities- most notably- play videogames. Already much has been written about Twitch audience participation (Carter and Egliston 2018; Vosmeer et al 2016), the role of Twitch in popularizing eSports and eSports culture (Scully-Blaker 2016; Karhulahti 2016) and the platform's contribution to popular cultural discourse (Pellicone 2017; Johnson and Woodcock 2018; Taylor 2018). And, as any professor in gaming has likely experienced firsthand, is a massively popular media source amongst university students.

In the late autumn of 2018, I decided to advertise to students that I had a Twitch stream dedicated to game analysis, although I had actually started streaming a year prior. My decision to announce my stream came from research which demonstrated the benefits of having social media interactions with students (Villanueva 2011; Cesarano 2018). I hoped that my stream would have positive impact on the education and professional development of both myself and my students. Specifically, I had the personal objectives of increasing my exposure to videogames students would reference in class but I had no previous exposure to and to figuring out why Twitch is such a popular platform. More importantly, I wanted to use my stream to sharpen students' critical and analytical skills by watching how I deconstructed games, and I wanted to increase my accessibility for students who work off campus, have care responsibilities, or are otherwise unable or willing to approach me on university property. Whilst I met all these objectives in varying degrees of success, what was more interesting was the unintended outcomes which cropped up after three months of streaming. These unintended outcomes, which are detailed in depth under 'Findings' are: developing my own personal celebrity around campus, gaining a following amongst those working in the videogame industry, influencing other professionals to start streaming, and getting concern from other professionals about the potential for harassment.

This extended abstract presents research-in-progress on Twitch and videogame streaming by examining the unintended consequences of using the platform as a university professor. The research details my experiences as a Twitch Affiliate and university professor through the use of reflexive journaling methods to highlight and

discuss the side effects of having a moderately successful Twitch stream outside the classroom on the classroom environment. Addressing the DiGRA 2019 conference theme, this extended abstract is about the side-effects of ludo-mixing multimedia, extra-curricular material into higher education. At the end of this abstract presentation, audiences will walk away knowing more about the effects of Twitch on university classrooms, as well as what to consider should they wish to start their own stream or advertise their current stream to students.

METHODS

This extended abstract uses reflexive journaling as its methodology. Reflexive journaling has been used in teacher training and pedagogical practice to examine the role of personality and identity work which goes into teaching (Bukor 2015; Hubbs and Brand 2005; Spalding and Wilson 2002). The method was chosen for this extended abstract because it allows for not only a documentation of teaching practice, but also for critical reflection on the role of the individual doing the teaching. In fact, "the reflective journal provides a vehicle for inner dialogue that connects thoughts, feelings and actions (Hubbs and Brand 2002, p.62)." The practice is, in effect, a way of looking into the writers' mind and glimpsing a bird's eye view of what was happening at a given moment.

Reflective journaling is particularly useful as a method because it involves the teacher/writer in the process. Unlike postmortems or other ways of examining pedagogy, reflective journaling allows the writer to place themselves in the process. Having an account of the self and the identity work which goes into teaching was important for documenting how my own personality likely influenced and shaped the experiences I had with students on Twitch.

What the method practically amounted to was spending some time after the stream had ended, and while the video was being exported to YouTube, to jot down my thoughts and feelings toward the game, the chat, or the stream. Occasionally, when some real-life event would happen outside of the stream, I would go back at a later date and add to my notes. For example, the day after streaming *Marvel's Spider-Man* (Insomniac 2018) on January 31st, I had a student I'd never seen before knock on my office door to say they are a fan of the stream. I went back and added this event to my notes for the previous night as the event seemed significant.

The data contained in this abstract currently comes from the journal entries of 7 streams detailed below. The content of the streams varies as my Twitch channel is a variety stream dedicated to illustrating user research methods in game development. The point and purpose of the stream at large isn't super relevant for the methodology or this abstract, but it is worth giving a glimpse into the typical stream frequency and content. As the study is currently incomplete, more data points will be added before the DiGRA 2019 conference.

The journal entries were then reviewed using a thematic analysis to extract 4 major themes: personal celebrity, industry buy-in, influencing others to stream, and concern over potential harassment. These themes will be discussed in Findings below.

Date of Stream	Game Played
2 January 2019	*Red Dead Redemption 2* (Rockstar Studios 2018)
3 January 2019	*Abzû* (Giant Squid Studios 2016)

10 January 2019	*Assassin's Creed: Odyssey* (Ubisoft Quebec 2018)
14 January 2019	*Depression Quest* (TheQuinnspiracy 2013)- with special guest research psychologist [redacted for anonymity]
19 January 2019	*Assassin's Creed: Odyssey* Pt 2 (Ubisoft Quebec 2018)
24 January 2019	*God of War* (SIE Santa Monica Studio 2018)
31 January 2019	*Marvel's Spider-Man* (Insomniac 2018)

Table 1: Stream dates and game included in this abstract.

PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

The emergent findings from my reflective journal entries are that the most interesting part of Twitch streaming as a professor is not in the achievement of my initial, planned pedagogical outcomes but rather in the unexpected. As mentioned in the introduction, there were four unexpected outcomes which I think are interesting for a DiGRA audience: personal celebrity, industry buy-in, influencing others to stream, and concern over potential harassment. I will briefly detail what each of these entail.

Personal celebrity references two instances in which I had students in-stream or in person tell me they decided to sign up for my classes or the university program I teach in, because of my stream. Industry buy-in covers the instances in which I have had professionals currently working in the games industry join my stream as a viewer and engage or interact with the stream content and the other viewers. Influencing others to stream covers two separate occasions when I've had private messages from other streamers explaining that I influenced them to start their own streams. And finally, concern over harassment is a theme which emerged whenever I'd explain my stream to non-streamers and non-viewers. A genuine concern over my safety, health and wellbeing was occasionally expressed because of a reputation Twitch has in breeding toxic gamer culture.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this extended abstract covers the ludo-mix of involving Twitch streams in higher education. It presents data gathered through the use of reflective journaling to discuss the unintended consequences of having a Twitch stream as a professor. The abstract presented 4 preliminary results: personal celebrity, industry buy-in, influencing others to stream, and concern over potential harassment which will be discussed in depth at the conference. Overall, audiences will walk away after hearing this abstract delivered knowing more about the positives, negatives and unintended consequences from involving Twitch streams in teaching.

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