

“GOLD GOLD GOLD”: gambling-like elements on Twitch and Kick

Eva Grosemans

Media Culture and Policy Lab, KU Leuven
Parkstraat 45, 3000 Leuven
Belgium
eva.grosemans@kuleuven.be

Robin Bosmans

Department of Communication Sciences, KU Leuven
Parkstraat 45, 3000 Leuven
Belgium
robin.bosmans@student.kuleuven.be

Rozane De Cock

Media Culture and Policy Lab, KU Leuven
Parkstraat 45, 3000 Leuven
Belgium
rozane.decock@kuleuven.be

Maarten Denoo

Media Culture and Policy Lab, KU Leuven
Parkstraat 45, 3000 Leuven
Belgium
maarten.denoo@kuleuven.be

Bieke Zaman

Media Culture and Policy Lab, KU Leuven
Parkstraat 45, 3000 Leuven
Belgium
bieke.zaman@kuleuven.be

Keywords

Video game streaming, gambling-like elements, Twitch, Kick, content analysis

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Gambling-like manifestations are increasingly appearing in video game streams, including enthusiastic responses to loot box openings, randomly obtained prizes from spinning wheels, and wins in real gambling games. The “slots” category on Twitch, displaying various gambling games, has garnered over 1.3 million followers. Previous research has indicated that gambling-like elements in streams may influence viewers to imitate the streamers’ behavior (Grosemans et al. 2024). This could be explained by the Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura 2008), in which people imitate online

Proceedings of DiGRA 2025

© 2025 Authors & Digital Games Research Association DiGRA. Personal and educational classroom use of this paper is allowed, commercial use requires specific permission from the author.

behaviors, especially when these are rewarded. Twitch recently updated its gambling policy to prohibit the streaming of unlicensed gambling sites in jurisdictions that lack sufficient consumer protection (Twitch 2022). However, being a platform with seven million monthly live streamers, it may be challenging to regulate this ban. These policy changes paved the way for new platforms to jump the bandwagon and promote gambling content. Kick, established in 2022 as a competitor to Twitch, is a prime example of such a platform. Supported by the online casino Stake.com, Kick continues to allow for sponsored gambling content, convincing many Twitch streamers to join the new platform. With them, a lot of viewers also switched to Kick (Browning 2023).

To examine the novel and underresearched topic of gambling-like elements in video game streaming, a qualitative content analysis was conducted on Twitch and Kick. Twelve streamers were analyzed: eight who showcased paid-for loot boxes (in games such as *Counter-Strike*, *EA Sports FC 24*, and *Apex Legends*), two who streamed in-game casino content (*Grand Theft Auto*), and two who streamed on both Twitch and Kick. Popular English-speaking streamers were selected using various APIs, based on metrics such as their average number of viewers and total hours watched. Two different modalities were analyzed: Video On Demand (VOD) to investigate the content of the stream, and livestreams to explore the context of the stream (e.g., chat messages). Each streamer was included in the dataset at least four times, between 15 March 2024 and 15 April 2024. Screenshots and field notes were collected during data collection and later analyzed inductively. The researcher did not interact with the chat during data collection, and streamers were not informed about the study, in order to preserve the naturalism of the setting (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008). Names of chat users were anonymized during data analysis.

The results provided some interesting insights into the use of gambling-like elements in video game streams. First, superstition surfaced when interacting with gambling-like elements, such as chanting the words “GOLD GOLD GOLD”, “let’s go”, or the game developer’s name, in hopes of striking gold. Some even spoke to the slot machines as if they could influence the outcome. Losses were often disregarded, or followed by curse words directed at the game. Second, loot box opening challenges were observed, such as an “XXL Win Challenge” where participants continued opening loot boxes until they received a gold quality skin. This resulted in one participant having to unbox over 2000 loot boxes to get the desired prize. Third, streamers involved their viewers in the process, by unboxing boxes sent by viewers, by commenting on viewers’ loot box openings, or by using the word “we” instead of “I”. Despite this, most streamers discouraged viewers to buy loot boxes, with one streamer advising: “Chat, don’t do this! You will lose money and it is not worth it in the end.”

In addition to loot boxes and in-game casinos, other gambling influences were present. For example, viewers could predict the outcomes of challenges, like the “Pick’em” challenges in *Counter-Strike*, or were exposed to other types of gambling-like activities, such as fantasy sports or bingo games, during loot box unboxings. Some streamers streamed on both Twitch and Kick, typically starting with “regular” gaming content on Twitch, inviting viewers to switch to Kick after a few hours. Once on Kick, the content shifted to gambling games, such as slots on Stake.com, which often served as a sponsor for the stream. Even chat emoticons are becoming more gamblified: with examples such as Pepe the Frog (a popular Internet meme) playing a slot machine, or emojis showing viewers’ predictions.

In conclusion, gambling-like influences on video game stream platforms extended beyond the mere display of gambling-like items. Streamers demonstrated superstitious and magic thinking, even anthropomorphizing gambling activities. Viewers were able to co-labor in play (Smith et al. 2013), by participating in the gambling(-like) actions or by using emojis to display their predictions. Some streamers used the popularity of Twitch to lure their viewers to Kick, allowing them to stream gambling games without restrictions and sometimes even sponsored by (illegal) gambling websites. Perhaps contradictory, streamers warned their viewers against the negative effects of gambling-like activities. Future research, using in-depth interviews of focus groups, could investigate the experiences of both streamers and viewers with regard to the streaming of these gambling-like activities.

REFERENCES

- Bandura, A. 2008. "Social cognitive theory of mass communication". In *Media Effects: Advances in Theory and Research*, edited by J. Bryant and M. B. Oliver, 94–124. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Browning, K. 2023. "Gambling, Risky Pranks and Lucrative Contracts: Inside the Streaming Site Kick". *The New York Times*.
<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/12/02/technology/kick-streaming-twitch-gambling.html>
- Eriksson, P. and Kovalainen, A. 2008. *Qualitative methods in business research*. London: SAGE Publications Limited.
- Grosemans, E., De Cock, R., Bradt, L. and Zaman, B. 2024. "More than loot boxes: the role of video game streams and gambling-like elements in the gaming-gambling connection among adolescents". *Journal of Gambling Issues*.
- Smith, T., Obrist, M. and Wright, P. 2013. "Live-streaming changes the (video) game". *Proceedings Of The 11th European Conference On Interactive TV And Video - EuroITV '13*, 131–138. <https://doi.org/10.1145/2465958.2465971>
- Twitch. 2022. "An update on gambling on Twitch". *Twitter*.
<https://twitter.com/Twitch/status/1572347129192132611s=20&t=DOFJW2e1cYtOdYsm1pGh6Q>