People Unite Through Play: An Infographic and Description Linking the *Social Streamer* to Gaming's Interconnected Social Media Ecosystem

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Introduction

With the exponential growth of both the video game community and live streaming, we as communication professionals are presented with an opportunity to capitalize on these two technological advancements. This project addresses that opportunity.

Gaming takes on three forms: casual, competitive, and entertainment. Each serves its individualized purpose, but when used together the three are able to shape what game enthusiasts aspire to become ***Social Streamers.***

Livestreaming provides the power of immediacy and transparency. When gaming and livestreaming are combined with social media opportunities arise for gaming enthusiasts to learn, master, and potentially generate financial revenue through a new wave of content generation and promotion. This project addresses this wave by providing an infographic and commentary on how to capitalize on it.

Background

Gaming

Gaming has blossomed into one of the most profitable entertainment industries in the world – closing in on $115 billion this year (venturebeat.com)**.** As a relatively new contender, gaming has exceeded all expectations and is beginning to take over mainstream culture. In order to understand the phenomenon, it is important to look at its recent history.

While the first game machine may date back to 1940, it isn't until the era of arcade gaming that gaming begins to speak to this project. Consider, for instance, that in 1973, Atari's first real electronic video game Pong spread across the world. Arcade machines began emerging in bars, bowling alleys and shopping malls. (techcrunch.com)

The nature of gaming alone sparked competition among players – duking it out for the top spot on leaderboards. Gaming's biggest benefactor of technological advancements at the time was Intel's microprocessor which introduced us to human-to-human shooters. As this technology opened up new possibilities, companies were quick to join the gaming craze and soon we would see consoles brought to homes at an affordable price.

The idea of online multiplayer was introduced with the increased availability and potential of the world wide web. In 2000, Sega's Dreamcast was released as the first net-centric device to gain popularity, but fell quickly due to the expensive costs of access. Then at E3 2002, Microsoft unveiled plans to establish an online gaming service for Xbox. After its release, Xbox Live became the world's first broadband-connected gaming platform. The globalization of gaming exploded directly alongside online accessibility. Eventually, games became available to buy, play, and download entirely through online networks.

Portable game systems arose and flourished in the early 2000s, but quickly declined with the introduction of mobile gaming. Smartphones and app stores hit the market in 2007, leading to the industry's entrance into mainstream pop culture. Contrary to the typical gamer of the past, peer involvement has begun to spread rapidly. More and more people began to actively engage on social media -- uploading walkthroughs, reviews, and progress videos of their favorite games.

As home and online gaming boomed, so too did the development of this modern gaming community. Today, the internet has become the foundation of modern globalization and nothing short of cultural consciousness. In regards to the gaming community, this only continues to connect players from around the world. The message is clear for brands: *people unite through play*. In fact, more than half of frequent gamers believe they are better connected with friends and family through multiplayer games. (pewinternet.org) According to the ESA Computer and video games industry report for 2015, 3.2 billion people have Internet access and at least 1.5 billion of them play video games. (ESA)

Live Streaming

Live streaming refers to online streaming media simultaneously recorded and broadcast in real time to the viewer. It allows you to broadcast anything you are doing without delay or edit. 63% of millennials watch live content – 42% create it. (emarketer.com). In 2018, more people watched streamed gaming content than HBO, Netflix, Hulu, and ESPN combined. Sources believe video streams will dominate 82% of internet traffic in 2020. (Cisco) Inspiration for live streaming roots back to television and YouTube but is distinguishably uncensored, unedited and unrehearsed. Streaming has become an effective tool in campaign strategies, identity creation, and talent showcasing. There is a plethora of opportunity in livestreaming,

making it an excellent medium for most brands to capitalize on. Essentially, the four key benefits of live streaming include urgency, authenticity, interactivity, and reach.

The gaming community is internet-centric and tech savvy, quickly adopting livestreams as a driving force of marketing. Amazon's Twitch.tv claims dominance in the realm of virtual game streaming with over 15 million active daily users. (twitch.tv) YouTube Gaming released in 2015 stands as Twitch's only direct competitor. While content creators play the game of their choice, viewers tune in and chat live with streamers as well as each other. Twitch accounts for nearly 40% of live streaming traffic in the United States and 1.8% of all internet traffic, trailing only behind Google, Apple, and Netflix. (twitch.tv).

While the nature of competition has long been a part of video game culture, professional gamers did not see a large popularity surge until the introduction of live streaming. Now, "eSports" is a term coined for professional competition through video games. eSports takes form as organized, multiplayer video game competitions between professional players.

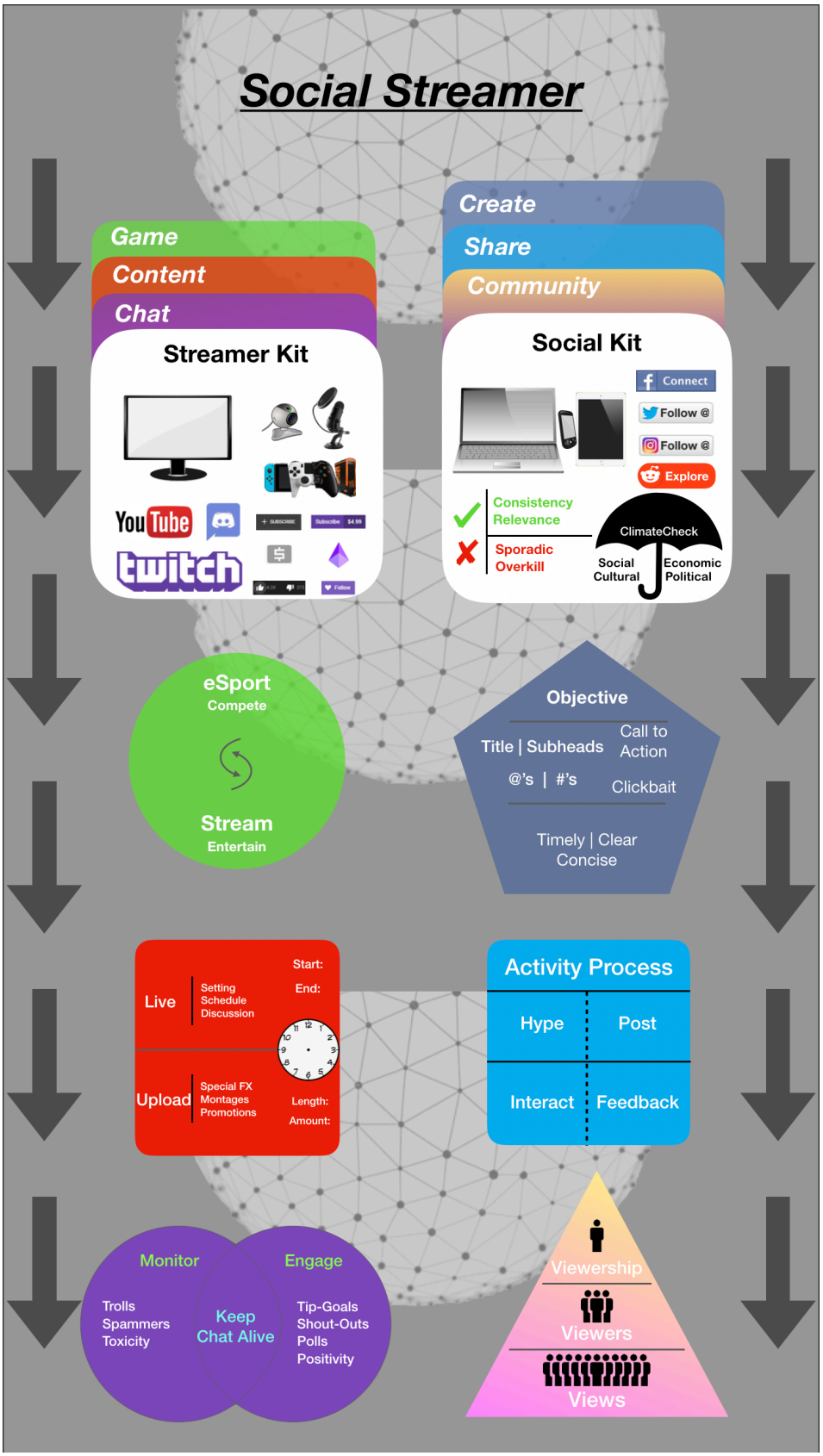
Gaming's popularity falls close behind that of traditional sports. In fact, eSports has become the fastest growing sport in modern history. To illustrate, the League of Legends World Championship captivated over 33 million viewers in 2017, a fourth of what the Super Bowl attracted. Fortnite hosts tournaments with over a million dollars in prizes for participants.

Creative Public Relations and Communication Management

Gaming's creative industry demands creative PR and communication management. The industry itself is a big, small world that is very much in touch with trending advancements. In return, possibilities for creative PR are endless, but come and go quickly. In order for public relations experts to capitalize on this idea, they need to weave themselves into the community.

The intersection between gaming and public relations proves to be enigmatic compared to that of other industries. "Gaming public relations is notably distinct from other forms of entertainment PR primarily due to the incredibly dedicated and passionate fan base, which generates a need for extended product campaigns that help bring fans and game makers together," Brandon Smith of Maverick PR explains. "Few other industries experience neither the breadth nor depth of this admittedly very cool phenomenon apart from movie cult-followings like Star Wars, or the Lord of the Rings trilogy."

Perhaps the key focus regarding the two has been following a traditional PR model. Keeping gaming for gamers has always fit the bill for large companies such as Nintendo, EA or Blizzard. Naturally, the industry only continued to boom and now possesses well over 1.4 billion gamers around the world (statista.com)**.** Today, ordinary approaches to game marketing and PR no longer work efficiently and communication professionals are learning to adapt and succeed. The low development costs of mobile gaming flooded the market's demand for games and livestreaming guided the industry into the mainstream. Console and mobile gaming have taken their own paths, but both have contributed to the uprising of entertainment. One may capitalize on any path gaming may take as long as they remain relative to trending times.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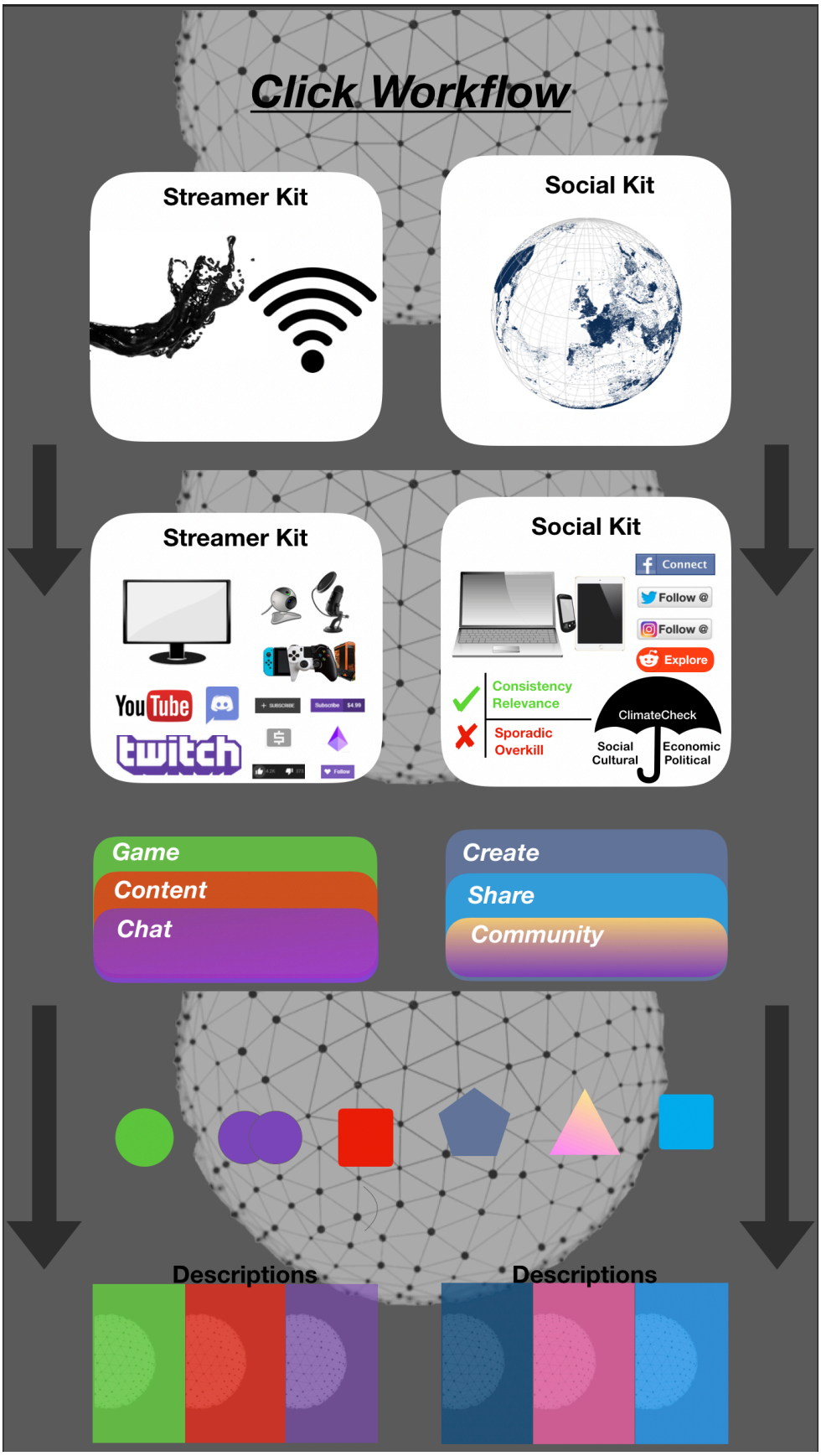
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Infographic Breakdown

Social x Streamer Kit

Necessary Equipment

Stream: Computer | Webcam | Microphone | Gaming Platform(s) | Monitor(s)

Social: Laptop | Cell Phone | Tablet

Online Platforms

Stream: YouTube | Twitch | Discord

Social: Facebook | Twitter | Instagram | Reddit

Scanning the Environment

Prepping content on social media should not go without thought. Prior to posting, it is recommended you scope out the social, cultural, economic, and political climate of your socials. That is, that you do what strategic public relations and other communication mangers do—namely, "scan the environment."

Understanding the community's vibe keeps you consistent and relevant without seeming scheduled. Additionally, one needs to understand when to let a subject go and what topics to stay away from; overkill is the hardest hitter on streams.

Seamless Integration

Being able to weave gaming through the interconnected social media ecosystem is no easy task, but is crucial in maximizing one's reach. Each individual entity of the digital world is crucial as long as they are used together and in context. Therefore, one must find the highest priority outlets related to their industry and demand one's presence accordingly.

Game

Gaming currently takes on two forms: eSports and Streaming. For the sake of competition, it is likely to pursue a career in eSports and compete around the world with the best players. If one is more interested in entertainment, the world of streaming is readily available for anybody to begin. For the desire to become a successful social streamer, a balance between competition and entertainment needs to be implemented. In return, one may reap the benefits of each entity and allows the gamer to grow and develop not only with the game, but with the gaming community.

There are many chances for both amateur and professional players to compete and earn money. There are professional teams and clans that you can sign with or you can simply represent yourself. Tournaments, skirmishes, and leagues may be entered, limited only by individual qualifications mandated by each entity.

As a streamer, it is essential to remain competitive regardless of your stream's style. While eSports have dominated the competitive realm of gaming, Social Streamers need to learn from professionals and implement new tactics and strategies in order to generate quality content. The main reason people enter one's stream is to be entertained. In order to set yourself apart from the competition, it is key to recognize how your personality, gameplay, and vibe rubs off on the viewers. Find your niche, then build off of it; social streamers should always seek to learn and grow as a person and a gamer.

Content

Production Review

A review of your content should be taken to grade its timeliness, length, and clarity. Social media is a powerful tool and needs to be treated as such; good and bad content are both susceptible to virality. Prior to a livestream, one should always check his/her surroundings and preparations.

Live Preparation

Once a stream goes live, every action you perform is permanent. Therefore, it is essential to prepare for the session. Your location and environment need to be unique, yet not draw too much attention. Your workspace needs to be quiet and contained so that your microphone does not pick up any unwanted sounds. A series of discussions need to be prepared in case you need them. It may not be too difficult to keep conversation with one's chat, but viewers become more loyal when actively engaged. Finally, a schedule should be set so viewers know when you will be streaming next along with how long it will last.

Edit Presentation

Once a livestream ends, it is time for the editor to begin his or her work. In order to successfully promote one's stream, it is good to present a condensed and edited video clipped directly from the source. This is the important time in which the editor can preemptively decide how the video will be presented. If the stream brings the community together through comedy, an editor will pull the funniest moments of dialogue and cut the rest. Clipping has become the best promotion for social streamers and should be integrated on all platforms.

Once you've obtained adequate clips, you may then edit as you please. You have much more control over what content is distributed; therefore, you may remove things such as swears, controversial topics, etc. Additionally, you may add your own special effects and put together unique montages and promotions for your stream. Full-feature edits should not exceed 20 minutes and clips for social media should not exceed a single minute.

Each social media platform has its own time constriction and size requirements, so using them together is the best possible way to push your content. Instagram is typically held to one-minute videos along with 1600x1600 pictures. Twitter has a 160-character restriction on text with more flexibility on media. When choosing the proper content for each social media entity, one should always begin by looking at the restrictions of each site.

Chat

User Interaction

As the focal point of a stream, one should remain active with the chat. This becomes challenging to balance as it forces you to direct your attention away from the gameplay. There are several strategies commonly used by streamers to keep up with their chat. Tip goals, shout-outs, polls and more can all be employed throughout one's workday in order to keep their viewing engaged. If chat isn't monitored well, it is likely for you to see a decline in viewer participation. Positivity is recently recognized as a key factor in maintaining relevancy on Twitch.tv after the strong backlash of the Internet's harmful nature. Elevate positivity and support the chat without coming across as greedy for cash.

Trolls and Spammers

In a protected realm on anonymity and lack of repercussions, we are presented with a new wave of toxicity. There is one primary goal for streamers: keep the chat alive. In order to do so, they must find a balance between engagement and exclusion. Trolls and spammers are phrases coined for those who prove to be a nuisance to the online community. Therefore, it has become commonplace for users to be muted, banned, or reported at the streamer's request. In fact, many content creators hire moderators as well. Through Twitch.tv's interface, streamers are allowed to select somebody to gain access to such control.

Create

Prior to every post, content creators need to ask themselves two questions: "What message am I trying to deliver?" and "What is the objective of this post?" One must not flood their socials with content, but rather publish every post with a purpose. One's following will grow because of content quality, not quantity.

From here, it is important to insert the proper tags and labels. In order for your post to gain the most traction, it needs to be categorized and released to a relevant demographic. Six elements of a post need to be recognized: title, subheads. @'s, #'s, call to action, clickbait.

Titles are given to provide context. Keywords and hashtags are used to help your post be found easier. Perhaps the most overlooked tactic is a call to action. Having consistency in these small characteristics of your post help create a better page personality. The post's title needs to be attention grabbing and directly address the post. Subheads may be used for clarifying information. Anybody who is involved in the post should be mentioned. A call to action should be either listed in your post or on your profile. Clickbait, when used correctly, can maximize your reach as long as it is honest clickbait. NEVER mislead your viewers.

Share

The process of sharing content must undergo four stages to obtain maximum reach. The first stage consists of hype. Prior to any post, the utilization of Snapchat and Instagram stories allows one to build anticipation and invoke consumer interaction simply by teasing content. Using the story feature on most socials, you may post temporary (typically 24 hours before being removed) content that makes one's following more engaged with your content. It is here where you can hint at unreleased information.

This should generally be applied as a short prequel to the second stage – the post itself. Now it is time to publish one's work. Here simply lies the final product of edited content. While content creators tend to focus solely on the success of a post, they fail to understand that each post is an opportunity to grow.

The feedback and interaction stages of post-production are key essentials when growing a gaming community. Reading comments analyzing likes/views gauge how you are trending, while interaction with your direct target demographic gives you a closer connection with your strongest critics. Once your content is uploaded, it is time to live in the comments section. Reply to those interacting with your content. Shout people out. Do anything to show the viewers that you care. In order to improve your content, take constructive criticism from your viewers, no matter how harsh. Analyze the number of likes, views, and comments and compare them on a weekly schedule.

Community

Views, Viewers and Viewership

Growing an online community has never been a stronger form of income than it is now. However, it is very easy to take advantage of those who you do not interact with in the real world. In order to capitalize on this new wave as a Social Streamer, one needs to have a better understanding of their audience. There are three levels at which the audience is viewed by a streamer, each of which serve key purposes.

Views can simply be understood as numbers. Streamers look at the number of views that a post may have and directly correlate that to how much money they will be collecting. This is the least personal perception of one's audience and is best used only when considering the monetization of one's content.

The transition from views to viewers is much more personal. Here, streamers recognize each individual as somebody that is taking time out of their day to support your channel. In order to develop a strong relationship and a loyal following, understanding your audience as viewers is key; it allows your content to be much more personal.

When one's stream grows to a certain point, it may become difficult to interact with each and every viewer demanding attention. While this becomes a plateau point for most, it may also become a turning point for your stream. When you hit this viewer hiatus, you may begin to consider viewing your audience as a collective. A sense of community is formed when a streamer begins to interact to his audience as a viewership. The community's collective is used to ask questions and comments and the content creator may address them as a whole.

Monetization

Perhaps the question asked by most in the world of watching other people play video games is: how do they get money? First, subscriptions are offered to improve the aesthetic of their viewing experience. Special emoticons are unlocked and exclusive content is offered thanks to their partnership with Amazon Prime. The rate for a membership goes for $4.99 per month and half of that goes directly to the streamer of your choice. Once partnered with Twitch, as discussed below, one can take a 60/40 split on the subscription payout.

Secondly, streamers make money through donations. "If channel subscriptions are the equivalent to holding season tickets for your favorite sports team," said Twitch CEO Emmett Shear, "Cheering is like getting a crowd wave started during the game." Twitch's online currency is called a "bit" and is equivalent to 1.4 cents. From there, .4 cents on the bit is sent to Twitch and the remaining cent is given directly to the content creator. Additionally, Twitch provides the option to add a PayPal option, allowing donations to be sent directly to the streamer of choice.

Third, monetizing one's stream through advertisements is rather fickle. While each provide third party revenue to those with a substantial following, partnered streams are required by an NDA to not discuss payout. What we do know, however, is that advertisements typically range between two and ten dollars per view.

In order to monetize advertisements on Twitch, one must become a Twitch Partner. As a pre-requisite, one must have an average concurrent viewership of 500+ people and broadcast at least three times per week. Once partnered, streamers can expect anywhere from $0.70 to $2.50 in effective cost per 1000 views/impressions (eCPM).

Additionally, streamers can generate revenue by compiling footage of their stream into unique and creative YouTube videos. Here, streamers can make an average of $0.90 eCPM for video banner ads and $6.50 for pre-roll video ads. Additionally, sponsorships can supplement one's stream. It is difficult to determine the payout from one's partnership and is a rather unknown variable to streaming income.

Dominance of Owned Media

Coined as the digital media trifecta, paid, owned, and earned media are commonly today used together to attract strangers, attract customers, and attract loyal fans – respectively. Today, owned media demands a top spot in this newfound hierarchy. In order to thrive in today's heavily connected gaming ecosystem, one needs to utilize the following platforms: Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, Twitch and Reddit. Ideally, the more platforms that one is hosted on, the greater his/her reach becomes. As a result of such, paid and earned media will soon follow. However, one must first be able to integrate his/her video content seamlessly through all socials. From there, it is easier to promote new upcoming ventures you seek directly to your loyal following.

Ninja

Tyler Blevins, commonly known by his online tag Ninja, became the first gamer to be featured on the cover of ESPN Magazine and has become the face of eSports. While he has been a professional gamer since the early days of Halo, his popularity and $500,000+ monthly revenue came only when his entertaining and competitive style clashed with the latest trending game Fortnite. Fortnite's "Battle Royale" consists of 100 people landing on a singular map and competing to be the last man standing. This game's playstyle is largely responsible for the surge of game streaming and has begun a new generation of gamer.

What makes Tyler the face of social streaming isn't entirely his talent or character. Instead, it is the public actions he has taken in order to maximize his reach. Beginning with merchandise in his early days of streaming, Tyler always sought new ways to remain relevant. Charity streams gained the attention of nonprofits and the public while celebrity roasts kept content fresh and a new outlet for income. The rebranding of his own image by dying his hair bright blue was a tactic made to help the public better recognize him. The key to success is remaining proactive in your efforts and learn from your mistakes.

Conclusion

As entertainment's newest industry, gaming thrives by doing what it does best; generating content. Regardless of how the content is released to the public – whether it may be the physical act of gaming itself or viewing others interact with the game – the product is its own selling feature. The future brings endless opportunity with the evolution of augmented and virtual reality alongside a plethora of technological advancements we have yet to encounter. This infographic provides insight to our generation's modern *Social Streamer*. Its consumer-centric approach highlights many traits and characteristics of the gaming community, most of which will remain forever-prevalent. They very static nature of gaming's tightly connected and ever-expanding social ecosystem demands the attention of every global communication specialist. Consumers are easy to attract and easier to maintain when weaving one's content through the community. Regardless of industry, one thing will always stand clear: **players unite through play.**

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