Australian Game Live Streamers and Viewers on Twitch

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Keywords
Twitch, live streaming, Australia, community, culture, attitude

ABSTRACT
When a user financially supports the Twitch channel we're currently watching, a small video clip pops up in the corner of the streamer's broadcast. It is a short excerpt from a famous advert for the so-called "Lube Mobile", an Australian mechanic and repair service that comes to your home. The service's catchy tune and name that begs for double entendre have combined to make it an unintended source of humour amongst young Australians. In the channel's accompanying textual "chat" window, meanwhile, the subscriber icons - for viewers who financially support the stream - all represent well-known Australian foods and snacks. The custom "emotes" in this channel - Twitch's term for "emojis", small artistic representations of faces or other graphics - also exhibit a distinctly Australian flavour, with endearing purple koalas in a variety of poses (smirking, carrying a heart, crying, and so forth). Also included is a graphical representation of the letters "OH NOR", representing a supposedly Australian pronunciation of "oh no". Watching the channel it becomes clear that in this live stream such Australian identity markers occupy an interesting dual role - they simultaneously explicitly mark the channel out as being "Australian", but they also allow the streamer to reflect with seemingly genuine amusement on noteworthy, archetypal or idiosyncratic elements of Australian culture and history.

Many streamers reveal their country of origin and facilitate discussions about national cultures and differences with their viewers - yet beyond a few studies (e.g. Montardo et al., 2017; Sixto-García & Losada-Fernández, 2023) national or cultural distinctions or identities in game live streaming practices and experiences have yet to be studied in much detail. This is most likely due to the implicit and assumed "American-ness" of the quotidian live streamer on Twitch (Taylor, 2018; Ruberg, 2021; Johnson, 2024) - itself an American company. Yet what makes live streaming so distinctive is the ability for anyone, from almost any country, to develop something akin to a personalised television channel, and broadcast its material globally. Hjorth and Chan (2009:11) stress the value in studying "regional-specific forms of media literacy, creativity, intimacy and labor", and there is thus potentially significant value in

understanding and addressing these in the live streaming context. Scholarship on live streaming is dominated by the North American context, and to a lesser extent the mainland Chinese context, and so studies of other nationalities – their broadcasters, viewers, communities, cultures, and everything else – will show us key counter-currents on these sites and their users, as well as the global perceptions of the nationalities and cultures building digital fame and digital sociality on such platforms. Given this context, how, then, are Australian live streamers faring on Twitch, and who is watching them?

This paper seeks to answer these questions. Specifically, it offers a first study of the motivations and interests of Twitch viewers - both from Australia and abroad - who watch live streamers from Australia. After a brief review of current research directions in digital Australian gaming and live streaming, we relate our methodology, which involved distributing a survey to 779 viewers of Australian live streamers. From this data our discussion then has three parts. Firstly, we explore the central role of community in the attraction of Australian live streamers, showing that Australian viewers appreciate the opportunity to forge social connections with their compatriots, while non-Australian viewers find Australian Twitch communities to be no different from any others. This demonstrates clearly for the first time that nationally-specific Twitch streams can offer (or fail to offer) different rewards to users - even those who share a language - depending on their national backgrounds. Secondly, we discuss live streaming channel culture, showing that both Australians and non-Australians are strongly drawn to the cultural elements of Australian live streaming. Unlike the community discussion, this finding demonstrates that nationally-distinct parts of a Twitch channel can also offer the same thing to viewers, irrespective of their national background - but that this is still contingent on a strongly-presented national identity. Thirdly, we turn from culture to attitude, and note again how viewers both domestic and abroad expressed a strong appreciation for the attitude of Australian live streamers, often emphasising their humour, their authenticity, and how unlike other live streamers they are perceived as being. Here we delve more deeply into the norms of live streaming and live streamers, showing how the Australian live streamer appears a novel and distinct type of broadcaster who stands in some ways alongside, but in some ways very far away from, live streaming norms. Overall our paper thus demonstrates that nationality, and the presentation and articulation of that nationality, are vital elements in Twitch streaming which have rarely seen much attention. We also shed light for the first time on Australian live streamers, and Australian live streaming viewers, neither of which have been studied before.

BIO
Dr Mark R Johnson is a Senior Lecturer in Digital Cultures in the Department of Media and Communications at the University of Sydney. His research focuses on Twitch.tv and game live streaming, as well as esports, game production and consumption, and gamblification in digital games. He has published in journals such as "Information, Communication and Society", "Media, Culture and Society", "Games and Culture", and "Convergence". Outside of academia he is also an independent game developer best known for the roguelike "Ultima Ratio Regum", and a regular games blogger, podcaster, and commentator.

James Baguley is a graduate from the Department of Media and Communications at the University of Sydney. He completed his undergraduate thesis in Digital Cultures on the sociotechnical strategies employed by online videogame fandom on Discord. Currently starting a PhD, he is keenly interested in online subcultures and sociality, and plans to conduct research into the dynamics of relationships between creatively-oriented entities (e.g. video-makers, videogame developers) and their audiences.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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