

NOT CONTENT TO JUST BE A GAMER:  
A MOTIVATION ANALYSIS OF GAMING CONTENT CREATORS  
ON YOUTUBE AND TWITCH

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by

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## ABSTRACT

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YouTube and Twitch have become the homes for watching others play video games. Previous studies show that consumers of content on these new media channels harbor similar motivations to television viewers (Rubin 1981; Sjoblom and Hamari 2017). But what motivates players, a new class of media producers, to perform for an online public?

This study analyzes content creators' motivations through an innovative dual approach. We conducted interviews with small-audience gamer-creators (N=11) guided by both the uses and gratifications approach and by self-determination theory. The study found that producing content primarily gratified a gamer-creator's social and personal integrative needs, as well as their affective needs. The study also found that creating content on YouTube and Twitch provided the gamer-creator with an environment conducive to intrinsic motivation through the satisfaction of their autonomy, competence, and relatedness needs.

Although research on content creators is in its infancy, the dual approach that the study develops may provide a useful basis for future studies on gamer-creators as well as content creators in other spheres.

**KEY WORDS:** Uses and gratifications, Self-determination theory, Content creation, YouTube, Twitch, Motivation, Video games, Social media.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT.....	iii
TABLE OF CONTENTS .....	iv
CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION .....	1
CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW .....	3
Uses and Gratifications .....	3
Self-Determination Theory.....	8
A Dual Approach.....	12
CHAPTER III: METHOD .....	14
Study Design and Procedure .....	15
Sampling.....	16
Analysis Plan.....	17
CHAPTER IV: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION.....	19
Uses and Gratifications .....	19
Self-Determination .....	23
CHAPTER V: CONCLUSION.....	27
REFERENCES .....	29
APPENDIX .....	32
VITA.....	36

## CHAPTER I

### Introduction

YouTube and Twitch have transformed the world of video games without actually being platforms for games at all. Millions of viewers tune in daily to watch various creators play games and comment on their experiences—genres known as live streaming playthroughs and recorded “Let’s Play” videos. At the time of writing (Fall 2020), 15 out of the top 20 categories on the live-streaming platform Twitch are dedicated to the streaming of video games, such as *Among Us* (2018) with 306,000 viewers, *Phasmophobia* (2020) with 211,000, and *Minecraft* (2009) with 106,000, to name a few (Twitch, 2020). YouTube is also a hotbed for video game content, with creators such as Markiplier, Ninja, and PewDiePie, whose channels boast tens of millions of subscribers each. These new media platforms allow any individual media consumer to become a content creator, and for video games that means that the player can become a performer.

Initial research in this area has focused on answering the question of what motivates viewers to watch others play video games and to engage in chat and feedback on gameplay streams (Hilvert-Bruce, Neill, Sjoblom, & Hamari, 2018; Sjoblom & Hamari 2017). Their focus on viewers follows an approach established for newspapers and television.

Viewer motivation has been shown to be vital to understand the usage of media by audiences and society generally (Katz, Gurevitch, & Haas, 1973; Rubin, 1981). Rather than conceiving of viewers as passive receptors of media content, studies of viewer motivations consider users as active agents (Rubin, 2009; Ruggiero, 2000). There must be a motivation for the user, a need within themselves that they can use media to gratify.

The uses and gratifications approach analyzes those psychological or social needs from various angles (Katz et al., 1973). This approach has been extended to social media broadly and to viewers of video gameplay on YouTube and Twitch in particular (Hilvert-Bruce et al., 2018; Sjoblom and Hamari, 2017). Studying user motivation enriches understanding beyond text and technology to human interaction, thereby intertwining the individual with media.

However, discussion of U&G or motivation for video game content on YouTube and Twitch had overlooked the content creators themselves until recently Zhao, Chen, Cheng, & Wang, (2018) utilized self-determination theory to determine what motivated Twitch streamers to continue to broadcast regularly. This new class of producers, spawned by social media, may have motivations that differ from viewers. Moreover, their motivations may complicate or diverge from the intentions of old media producers who were understood through political economy generally. The new class of producers has thus become a vital piece of the puzzle. This study expands upon Zhao et al. (2018) by interviewing gaming YouTubers and Twitch streamers, by considering initial motivation as well as ongoing motivation, and by analyzing motivation through self-determination theory in conjunction with the uses and gratifications approach. These enhancements deepen understanding of performer motivation and broaden the scope for studying what motivates media users.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **Literature Review**

Despite the abundance of viewers now tuned into gamers on YouTube and Twitch, research on users in this area remains a budding niche within media studies. Four significant studies have appeared since 2017 (Hilvert-Bruce et al., 2018; Sjoblom & Hamari, 2017; Sjoblom, Torhonen, Hamari, & Macey, 2017; Zhao et. al., 2018). They build upon two distinct traditions of research on media user motivation, which both draw from research in psychology, uses and gratifications, and self-determination theory.

First, U&G analyzes gratifications sought and obtained from the perspective of individual needs that are gratified through one's usage of media. (Katz et al., 1973). The second tradition is based on the binary categories of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, which Locke and Schattke (2019) summarize. To bridge these parallel currents of study and to better understand content creation, this study adopts a more recent approach from the field of psychology, SDT.

#### **Uses and Gratifications**

The uses and gratifications approach looks to understand how an individual's perceived needs are gratified by their usage of media. Palmgreen (1984) explicitly translates motivation as the gratifications sought and obtained by the individual user. The gratifications that are sought by individuals are meant to fulfill one or more of five classes of needs: cognitive, meaning a need to learn or improve; affective, meaning emotional needs; personal integrative, meaning needs relating to one's self-image, confidence, or status; social integrative, meaning one's needs to interact with and connect

with others; or tension release, meaning one's needs for stress-relief or relaxation. (Katz, Gurevitch, & Haas, 1973).

Five basic assumptions undergird the U&G approach, according to Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch (1973). First, one should assume that audiences are active and that an individual's media use is goal-directed in some fashion. Second, one should assume that the connection between one's choices involving media are linked to the gratification of their needs. Third, these media choices are important because of the large variety of competing sources for one's attention we presume are present. Fourth, it is reasonable to assume that individuals are aware of their own interests and needs when using media. Fifth, it should be assumed that audience orientations are separate from the cultural significance of mass communication. Each of these assumptions points towards the importance that the individual consumer plays in the U&G approach. Audiences are active agents who invariably choose what media to partake in.

The U&G approach was initially utilized to analyze the motivations for TV usage. In his attempt to understand the relationships between age and television viewing motivations, and the relationships between television viewing motivations and viewing behaviors, Rubin (1981) looked to determine the reasons why different people chose to watch television. In determining a user's level of television viewing, level of attachment to the medium of television, and the perceived reality of television, Rubin found that there were positive relationships with each of the five classes of needs: cognitive, affective, personal integrative, social integrative, and tension release needs that are set forth by the U&G approach.



Papacharissi and Rubin (2000) extended this approach to determine users' motivations for using the Internet. In analyzing the motives for the usage of computer-mediated communication, Papacharissi and Rubin found that users who were satisfied with life, or those who were comfortable with and felt valued in interpersonal contexts, primarily used the internet to gratify cognitive needs. Meanwhile, those who were less satisfied with life or felt less valued or comfortable in interpersonal contexts utilized the internet simply to pass the time, or as an alternative avenue for communication that fulfills social integrative needs. These findings demonstrate the importance of the variance of the individual's psychological profile on their usage of a specific medium. Even though people may use the same medium, in this case the internet, not everyone will utilize it in the same ways.

Granic, Lobel, and Engels (2014) compared genres preferred by video game users to the benefits the player receives. They found that first-person shooter games were associated with enhanced cognitive performance; puzzle games were associated with improving players' moods and promoting relaxation; and multiplayer games, whether competitive or cooperative, promoted the development of social skills and positive social behaviors. While not using the U&G approach specifically, these findings do resemble what we might expect to see in relating video game usage to the five categories of needs: cognitive, affective, personal integrative, social integrative, and tension release.

Online audiences pose an interesting development for the U&G approach. In his 2000 examination of uses and gratifications, Ruggiero notes that there are three elements of the Internet that differentiate it from traditional media as related to users: interactivity, demassification, and asynchronicity. Each of these is a core component of many new

media, including video games and social media. The interactivity of new media allows users to control and exchange their own roles within the communication process (Ruggiero 2000), allowing users to become both senders and receivers of messages. Internet audiences are thus supremely active (or interactive) compared to radio, television, and film. Furthermore, “demassification” allows users to have a large variety of media to choose from, rather than being confined to viewing the same media as the rest of the mass audience (Ruggiero 2000). Asynchronicity, the notion that senders and receivers of electronic messages can access them at any time that is convenient to them, also expands audience choice (Ruggiero 2000). Each of these facets are integral to both video games and social media, which include YouTube and Twitch. Video games must be interacted with to be experienced; YouTube likewise incorporates the comment function and Twitch offers an interactive chat window. Although broadcasts of gaming content is concentrated on YouTube and Twitch, each has myriad user channels that can be accessed at any time. Each individual’s experience of online gaming content is therefore unique to them.

Three recent studies focus on viewers of Twitch gaming content. To understand why people would want to watch others play video games instead of playing the games themselves, Sjoblom and Hamari (2017) looked to establish connections between cognitive, affective, personal integrative, social integrative, and tension release needs with four specific types of usage that were related to watching video game streams: hours watched, streamers followed, streamers watched, and streamers subscribed to. They found that each of these five classes of needs were significantly related to these four categories of usage. In a sense, they echo Rubin’s (1981) finding that there were positive

relationships between the salience of television viewing, a user's amount of viewing, affinity for television, and the perceived content realism.

Elsewhere, Sjoblom, Torhonen, Hamari, and Macey (2017) extend Granic et al.'s analysis of video game genres to Twitch viewers of different livestream genres. They found that both casual and competitive streams had positive associations with affective and tension release gratifications; all but speedruns and talkshows were associated with cognitive gratifications; casual streams were associated with personal integrative gratifications; and both casual and competitive streams were associated with social integrative needs.

Hilvert-Bruce, Neill, Sjoblom, and Hamari (2018) studied motivation for viewer participation in Twitch livestreams. The platform allows viewers to chat and react to the main video in a side window that is visible to other viewers and to the performers. The researchers looked to build upon the existing classifications presented by the U&G approach by determining eight motivations for participation in live-streams: entertainment, information seeking, meeting new people, social interactions, social support, sense of community, social anxiety, and external support. They found that these eight motivations contributed in at least one of four indicators of live-stream engagement: emotional connectedness, time spent, time subscribed, and donations made (Hilvert-Bruce et. al 2018). Note how the expansion to eight motivations appears to uncover two more basic categories of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Entertainment, information seeking, and social anxiety emanate from within, whereas meeting new people, social interaction, social and external support motivate from outside the person. The next section considers this more abstract, binary approach to motivation.

While gamer-creators are producing their own media, they must still consume media content to do so. The needs presented by U&G should therefore be applicable to the creators as well. While they typically refer to consumers of content, the findings of studies above lead us to our first research question:

***RQ1: How does creating and sharing gaming content online gratify cognitive, affective, personal integrative, social integrative, and tension release needs?***

### **Self-Determination Theory**

The brainchild of Ryan and Deci (2000), Self-Determination Theory (henceforth SDT) investigates the inherent growth tendencies and innate psychological needs within people. SDT delves into motivation and its components through examining biological, social, and cultural conditions that are capable of both enhancing or undermining a person's inherent capacity for psychological growth, engagement, and wellness in both general and specific contexts. SDT is not only meant to examine the psychological needs of a person, but also the environments that can support or hinder these needs.

Consequently, they argue that motivation can't be treated as a singular concept, as people can be motivated to perform the same task for wildly different reasons, such as a perceived value in performing the task, or of possible external coercions. SDT supplies a differentiated approach to motivation by asking what kind of motivation is exhibited at any given time.

SDT developed from studies that distinguished intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. In a foundational study, Atkinson (1957) defined motivation as a summation of three variables: motive, expectancy, and incentive (p. 360). In doing so, expectancy and incentive form a semblance of extrinsic motivation. Expectancy involves cognitive

processes aroused by specific cues involved in a situation, and incentive relates to rewards or punishments. Motive, defined as "...a disposition to strive for a certain kind of satisfaction...", is emblematic of intrinsic motivation and the internal forces that power it (Atkinson, 1957). Intrinsic motivation begins with the pure enjoyment of doing something. Locke and Schattke (2019) define intrinsic motivation as "...liking or wanting an activity for its own sake divorced from any specific outcome level." Rather than being motivated by what the activity can bring a person, intrinsic motivation is based upon the enjoyment of the process of doing.

Locke and Schattke (2019) define extrinsic motivation as the process of doing something in order to accrue some future value or to avoid possible future disvalues. Extrinsic motivation often seems to revolve around financial status and monetary rewards or losses; however, this should not be the only factor to be considered. Things such as non-monetary awards, nomination, employment, and family matters can all be considered extrinsic motivations as well. Extrinsic motivations will always be present for content creators, as the platforms of Twitch and YouTube will give their creators the option to monetize their content. However, that extrinsic motivation is admittedly secondary for small-audience creators.

As the relationship between the base five needs categories presented by U&G and the intrinsic/extrinsic distinction has not been clarified, we propose that the psychological theory of self-determination should be utilized as well. As a media studies approach, Uses and Gratifications primarily analyzes the gratifications sought and received by an individual through their consumption of media. As a psychological theory however, Self-Determination Theory looks to analyze motivation itself.

According to Ryan and Deci (2017), there are three specific needs that are inherent in every person: a need for autonomy, in which one's behaviors are self-endorsed or "self-determined;" a need for competence, in which one feels able to operate within a context effectively or efficiently; and a need for relatedness, in which one feels connected to others within their specific environment or context. While these are the three inherent needs of human beings, SDT also examines whether the environment an individual inhabits includes affordances of choice, consistent and reasonable challenges, or the caring involvement of others (Ryan & Deci, 2017). In the context of video game content creation, SDT offers a useful tool for comparing the environment of the game itself (the source of content) to the platform of release chosen by the creator. U&G may not address those differences as cleanly.

It is the gratification of the needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness that forms the condition to elicit and sustain intrinsic motivation, according to SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2000). For one to be truly intrinsically motivated, all three of these needs must be satisfied. However it is more likely that one will be extrinsically motivated in most circumstances. According to SDT, while intrinsic motivation is pure in that it is internally driven, this does not mean that extrinsic motivation is purely external. Due to this, Ryan and Deci (2000) propose that the level of internalization and regulation of specific values and processes vary at any given time. What many would consider extrinsic motivation is simply the least autonomous form of motivation in that the behavior of an individual is motivated by and dependent upon external rewards or punishments (Ryan & Deci 2017).

Media researchers have begun to apply the broad psychological approach SDT to the field. In their study designed to explicitly define "enjoyment" in relation to media,

Tamborini, Bowman, Eden, Grizzard, and Organ (2010) found that enjoyment was the satisfaction of psychological needs in addition to the idea of “pleasure seeking” that has typically defined enjoyment. In justifying the usage of SDT, Tamborini et al. (2010) found that the satisfaction of autonomy, competence, and relatedness needs was appropriate in that “...the combination of these dimensions is a reliable indicator of the phenomenological experience that our respondents called enjoyment,” (p. 769). This study also discusses how the U&G approach “...explains enjoyment as need satisfaction, [however] it still limits enjoyment to a mere pleasure response,” (Tamborini et al., p. 761), thereby necessitating the usage of psychological needs proposed by SDT.

With a specific focus on the platform Twitch, Zhao et al. (2018) found that “...if the platform could satisfy intrinsic and extrinsic needs of live streamers” (p. 411). They found that the more Twitch satisfied a creator’s psychological needs (task enjoyment and challenge seeking), the better a creator’s performance expectancies from the platform would be, therefore increasing the likelihood they would continue to broadcast on Twitch. This pioneering study of video game content creators provides a useful finding of how Twitch is structured to grow creator motivation.

However, Zhao et al. (2018) deviate from SDT in pursuit of their narrow inquiry on Twitch. SDT focuses on the creation of an environment conducive to intrinsic motivation, whereas Zhao et al. compared intrinsic to extrinsic motivation with questionable classifications of each type. They classify relatedness needs (social benefits and feedback) as facets of extrinsic motivation, when according to SDT, the combined satisfaction of autonomy, competence, and relatedness needs determines true intrinsic motivation. Zhao et al.’s unique categories in fact point to the need to bridge SDT with

U&G motivation study. Moreover, their focus on how Twitch as a platform influences broadcasting intention overlooks the more basic question of why creators create content in the first place. Our study will address this question utilizing the three core components of SDT in tandem with U&G.

SDT posits that one becomes intrinsically motivated through the satisfaction of their inherent psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Rather than one seeking the gratification of these needs through media usage, an environment that satisfies all three of these needs is conducive to intrinsic motivation. As such, we propose our final research question:

***RQ<sub>2</sub>: Does content creation provide an environment conducive to intrinsic motivation through the satisfaction of the gamer-creator's needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness?***

### **A Dual Approach**

We propose performing the U&G and SDT approaches in parallel, like two camera angles upon the same subject, for three reasons. First, SDT provides a useful complement to U&G for the new subject of content creators. As Tamborini et al. (2010) proposed, the basic U&G approach can explain concepts like enjoyment as the satisfaction of affective needs for media content consumers. However, media use is simply assumed, given its prevalence in the modern world. The further step the media user takes to create content cannot be so assumed. Creators represent a fraction of media consumers. Although it is true that video game content creators are still consumers, as they play video games released to a mass audience (and as a result the U&G approach is still applicable), the additional motivation to perform for others demands new



consideration. To conceptualize the inherent psychological needs of performance we turn to SDT. Combining this perspective with the established U&G approach paints a clearer picture of the complex motivations for these gaming content creators.

Second, maintaining the integrity of each approach in parallel produces results that can be compared simply to previous studies. Synthesizing some new, combined approach also adds theoretical speculation beyond the scope of this project. A large quantitative study might require a new approach or separate collections, but our method is well suited to a dual approach.

Third, a dual approach paints a more holistic picture of motivation. While the U&G approach views obtaining gratification of a user's needs as motivation (Palmgreen 1984), SDT looks to analyze if an environment is conducive to motivation through the satisfaction of inherent psychological needs. Needs that are gratified do not necessarily represent motivations themselves, but rather indicate a factor in motivation. Therefore, we define motivation as the satisfaction of an individual's psychological needs through gratifications actively sought or provided by the environment of content creation, in accordance with the dual approach.

## CHAPTER III

### Method

This study uses semi-structured in-depth interviews with open-ended questions that were conducted with gaming YouTubers and Twitch streamers. Given the variation and complexity of motivation for each individual, in-depth interviews allow for detailed information to be gathered through the flexibility provided to both the researcher and the interviewee (Wimmer & Dominick, 2011). Adjustments can be made on the fly to answers the researcher is not prepared for and gives the interviewee the space to provide as much or little detail as they like in response to relevant questions.

It should be noted that large surveys have been the dominant method used to study motivation for the U&G approach. Rubin (1981) and Papacharissi and Rubin (2000) each utilized surveys that were administered in person, while online surveys have been utilized in many U&G studies since (Hilvert-Bruce et al. 2018; Sjoblom & Hamari 2017). These studies posted surveys to social media platforms such as Reddit, Twitter, Facebook and Twitch to allow for a large amount of data to be gathered quickly (Hilvert-Bruce et al., 2018; Sjoblom & Hamari, 2017).

However, large surveys lack depth and openness. Even with the inclusion of open-ended questions, the surveys used to study the streaming phenomenon have been administered online, which invariably limits the amount of detail in answers provided by respondents.

Conducting in-depth interviews circumvents these weaknesses by asking open-ended questions and allowing for the interviewee to both take the time that they need to answer the question and respond in whichever way they feel is necessary. These

interviews are typically less structured than surveys as well. This allows the researcher to ask follow-up questions that can gather unique information about a creator's motivations from each member of the sample. This interview method allows our study to provide detailed information regarding the motivations of gaming content creators, at the cost of generalizability of the data. This is deemed an acceptable trade-off for this qualitative study.

### **Study Design and Procedure**

This study looked to analyze the motivations of video game content creators through the use of in-depth interviews conducted virtually. Given that the population our sample is drawn from is made up of video game content creators whose public presence is primarily through online, virtual media environments, virtual interviews are well suited for the study.

Discord and OBS were the primary tools used to conduct and record these interviews. Created in 2015 and primarily marketed towards online gamers, Discord allows for communication between any person who uses the app via voice or text chats at any given time, regardless of location. Discord's convenience and its lack of social formality allows for casual conversation. We also wanted to make sure that the interviewee felt as though they can be themselves, without pressure from the study, and with potential bias minimized.

The screen capture software Open Broadcasting Software (OBS) was used to record each interview. Initially released in 2012, OBS allows for the recording of one's screen, or specific windows, and audio. Interviewees were alerted that the interview was being recorded for research but kept private. Records were anonymized by coding each

interview by number and storing files and transcripts separate from the coding list.

Quotations from the interview were thus anonymized.

### **Sampling**

The sample was drawn from a population of video game content creators. By this, we mean that our population are those that are creating video game content through gameplay on the platforms of either YouTube or Twitch. A nonrandom snowball sampling method was used to gather a sample for this study.

This study primarily focuses on small-level video game content creators. To be included they must post to YouTube or stream their gameplay on Twitch at minimum twice per month. This relatively low minimum suits smaller content creators who do not have the resources required to edit and stream high volumes of content. Creators with large audiences may constitute a distinct category closer to traditional broadcast television. According to Iqbal's 2020 article covering YouTube's usage statistics, the top 10 gaming channels by subscribers ranged from 17.1 to 35.1 million.

Through the use of snow-ball sampling, we built a sample of 11 gaming YouTubers or Twitch streamers, and conducted interviews from November 2020 to January 2021. Previous qualitative studies using in-depth interviews have not been conducted involving the motivations of gaming YouTubers and Twitch streamers.

For background information, we began our interviews by asking the creators what games they typically prefer to play as a gamer, if this taste was reflected in their content, and what their preferred platform for creation was between YouTube and Twitch. Of those in the sample, six creators (CC1, 2, 3, 5, 8, & 11) stated they primarily focused on first-person shooter games for content. Four stated they had no focus on genre (CC6, 7, 9,

& 10), while one creator stated that they focused on horror games for their content (CC4). Eight out of the eleven creators interviewed stated that their primary platform was Twitch, while the other three creators listed YouTube as their primary platform. The average creator years active for this study was 3.6 years, with the shortest time active being 10 months, to the longest time active being 11 years.

Yet this did not mean that each of these creators exclusively used one platform or the other. Of the Twitch creators, three stated that they also consistently posted content onto YouTube as well, particularly highlights of their Twitch streams in the form of compilation videos to promote their Twitch channel. The other five Twitch creators all stated that they would like to be able to create content on YouTube, however, lack of access to video editing software and of time required to edit act as barriers to this desire. The three YouTube creators each stated that they preferred to produce content on YouTube, however each of them also produced content via Twitch. When asked for what reason, one creator stated that "...the value of a YouTube channel is so much more massive than a Twitch channel," and that "in 10 years all my Twitch streams are gone. In 10 years, my YouTube videos will still be there." (CC9). While the focus of this study was not to determine what makes a creator choose one platform over the other, our findings add to Zhao et al.'s 2018 study of the question and prompt future motivation studies in this vein.

### **Analysis Plan**

Each interview conducted was recorded through the capture software OBS and stored on both the PC's hard drive and an external hard drive; from here, each interview was reviewed and answers to questions were coded for further analysis. Theoretical

thematic analysis was used in this study. This method of analyzing, discovering, and reporting patterns found within the data is seen as both a common and useful approach for qualitative studies (Braun & Clarke 2006). Theoretical thematic analysis tends to be driven by the theoretical interests of a study, allowing one to code for specific research questions, while also establishing themes before, during, and after analysis is performed (Braun & Clarke 2006). As we coded responses according to both themes that are set beforehand, as well as any that may arise in the process of the interviews, this study is both inductive and deductive.

As our interview questions are clearly separated between the U&G approach and SDT, our initial themes will also be separated along these lines. There was a category in place for each classification of needs presented by both theories, as well as for miscellaneous responses. Additional themes were added based upon emergent patterns or themes within the answers of each of our interviewees. We coded the initial categories for the U&G approach according to the classes of needs set forth by Katz et al. (1973): cognitive, affective, personal integrative, social integrative, and tension release needs. Likewise, we coded the initial categories involving SDT with the categories of needs set forth by Ryan and Deci (2017): autonomy, competence, and relatedness.

## CHAPTER IV

### Results and Discussion

#### Uses and Gratifications

In this study, we sought to understand what cognitive, affective, personal integrative, social integrative, and tension release needs were gratified by the creation of gaming content on YouTube and Twitch. Through the use of snow-ball sampling, we were able to interview eleven different gaming creators who self-identified as having small audiences.

We found that social integrative needs were overwhelmingly the primary needs gratified by the creation of content on these platforms. The need to connect with others was mentioned in some way by all eleven participants. The importance of either being a part of or building one's own community was also mentioned by each participant, demonstrating a core component of gaming content creation. CC1 in particular launched their own organization with a friend, looking to build the community they would want to be in themselves. Statements like this were common with all eleven creators, with some variation of wanting to create a community or wanting to provide an audience with a space to hang out or talk. To begin with, all eleven creators stated that they primarily focused on cooperative or team-based competitive multiplayer games such as *Rainbow Six Siege* (2015) or *Minecraft*, a sandbox style game in which players can interact with one another in virtually any way possible. The nature of these games means that they will interact with other players who may become part of the creator's community organically through said interactions. This result agrees with Sjoblom et al. (2017) who found that casual and competitive streams gratified social integrative needs for viewers. Our study

thus finds that content creators choose the multiplayer genre of games for the same motivation of social integrative needs as players and viewers do.

Social interaction was at the heart of almost every participant's responses. Content creators looked to either interact with their own viewership, with other creators, or both. The impact of the community was so strong, in fact, that the affective needs gratified by content creation were often derived from these interactions rather than from the act of streaming or creating a video. Ruggiero (2000) found that users becoming both senders and receivers of messages constituted an interactive audience. Content creation opens a channel for speech and chat—means of interaction that appear to surpass gameplay in social importance. The creators who primarily utilized Twitch in particular looked to create connections within their respective channel's communities and use them to make new friends, help them build their confidence, and help them in their times of need. This was evident with some creators' responses, stating that they began streaming because it was their only way to interact with other people (CC4, CC7), and that they have "...been able to interact with other people and make more friends, make new friends, and even talk to really better streamers..." allowing them to grow as a person as a result (CC7). This result compares favorably to Hilvert-Bruce et. al.'s (2018) study that found that meeting new people, social interactions, social support, sense of community, and social anxiety were all viewer motivations to participate in Twitch streams. We can say that it is likely that the creators' social integrative needs mirror the viewers'.

Personal integrative needs were also prevalent within each respondent's results, although not to the same extent as social integrative needs. In particular, content creation gratified needs to strengthen both confidence and status. Each of the eleven creators



interviewed classified themselves as small creators, in that they were making little to no income from their content. However nearly all stated that they see content creation as their primary career or that they aspire to become content creators as their career.

Seemingly all therefore want to improve their status as a content creator. As CC2 stated confidently, "...I got from tiny streamer to small time. Can I work my way up to medium if I put effort into it? I can do this [become a career creator] and I want to show that."

Other needs for status are done in the form of challenges, with one respondent stating that they streamed a newly-released game for 48 hours straight as a "publicity stunt," stating that "...I wanted the developers to notice that I did it because I was the only person who did it." (CC7). This idea of status can also be seen in the emulation of more prominent creators that they themselves are fans of. For example, a small creator interviewed for this study said, "I kind of want to strive to be [a prominent streamer] because I look up to some of them...they're a huge inspiration...I want to kind of follow in their footsteps" (CC10).

Content creation was found to strengthen confidence among those who otherwise lacked it—another segment of personal integrative needs. Our findings were similar to Papacharissi and Rubin (2000) who found that those who weren't as satisfied with life or less comfortable in face-to-face situations often used the internet as an alternative. While this was true of some of the creators interviewed for this study, these same creators also noted how creating content had improved their self-confidence overall as a result. One creator interviewed stated that "...when people would call me ugly and fat, I would let it affect me a lot," yet over time "...I've seen an increase in my confidence, because I stopped listening to the haters, the trolls, and all those people that were saying that about

me.” (CC4). The act of creating allows creators to become more confident as they put themselves in the social eye, allowing them to develop self-acceptance. This was a trend seen in the creators who stated that they were less satisfied or less comfortable with life, that they create content not just as an alternative to in-person communication, but rather to allow them to find themselves and build their own self-confidence.

With regards to affective needs, content creation gratified the need for the creator’s happiness as well as, perhaps surprisingly, the need to make others happy. One creator stated that “...when I hit the stream button, I do it to make myself happy and make other people happy,” (CC8). Some creators push through their bad days “...because I know there’s people out there that I could probably reach that has depression, and to show them they’re not alone,” (CC4). Creators “...want to be someone that someone can bring a smile to their [viewers’] day,” as other creators did for them when they needed it themselves (CC10). The affective need to bring happiness to others is demonstrative of the inseparable relationship between the creator and the viewer. As we stated earlier, almost any personal integrative or affective need gratified by content creation depends upon a creator’s audience. For many of those interviewed, the impact that creators can have on their audience is a driving force behind their own happiness. The pleasurable or emotional experiences the creators detailed in the interviews all were mirrored by their perception of a similar gratification for their audience.

Elsewhere, while creating content alleviated some tension and stress for a few of the creators interviewed, the majority stated that the act of creating, be it a video or live-stream, often made them anxious or stressed. Editing videos especially did not alleviate any tension for creators as it is time-consuming and somewhat tedious. While some of the

creators interviewed stated that they produced content to learn more about content creation, this gratification of cognitive needs through content creation was not prevalent or a primary reason to create, as any knowledge or skills creators sought were typically gratified through consumption of media rather than their creation of it.

In sum, of the five categories of needs posed by the U&G approach, only three were seen to be consistently gratified by the creation of content. Social integrative needs were far and away the most important and involve a close relationship between creator and viewer. The personal integrative and affective needs gratified by the creation of content are also dependent upon the creator's community, as they can only be given or received from the approval of their communities. Cognitive and tension release needs were not strong motivators for gamer-creators. Social integrative needs are thus found to be paramount for small creators of video game content on Twitch and YouTube.

The need to be creative, however, did not fit neatly into the categories provided by the U&G approach. We now turn to consider results from an alternative approach.

### **Self-Determination**

Our second research question looked to determine if content creation satisfied the gamer-creator's needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, by providing an environment conducive to intrinsically motivated behavior.

The gamer-creator's need for autonomy was shown to be conducive to their intrinsic motivation. The idea that their choice to make content is self-endorsed, and that their content is something they have complete control over, was prevalent through each interview. Responses reinforcing this include the likes of "...Twitch has been a really great thing, because it's like 'Okay, I'm no longer working for a giant corporation, I'm

making my own stuff,” (CC3), and “...it’s something that I can do that I have a lot of leeway with it. I don’t have any brand telling me ‘hey, make sure you don’t say these specific things...’ I don’t have someone breathing down my neck telling me what to do,” (CC1). For the creators interviewed, those who were not currently employed outside of content creation also found the ability to set their own hours for work appealing, further gratifying autonomy needs. Having full control over the content that they are producing is an important factor in the gamer-creator’s intrinsic motivation.

The drive to create itself expresses a deeper kind of autonomy. Eight of the eleven content creators we interviewed expressed a need for creative expression that was gratified through creating content on either YouTube or Twitch. Examples of this included “...creating content is art...adding all the little snippets of music and memes and something, that’s all the fun part, finding things to build your project,” (CC5). When asked about the effects of monetization, another creator responded with “...I never want to go into a state where all I care about is how much money I make off the content, because I feel like that would limit my creativity and would change who I am as a person,” (CC7). Other examples included some variation of “I’m a creative person,” and “I can portray my own art style.” This need for creative expression exemplifies autonomy through the creator’s dual role as media producer and media performer. Uniquely artistic production and the distinction of playing the primary role satisfy the need for action and recognition as an autonomous individual. This basic need is difficult to represent in the U&G approach but becomes prominent for SDT.

Second, we found that the need for relatedness was prevalent across each of the eleven interviews in two ways. First, as we stated earlier, the connection between a

creator and their communities is a core component of a gaming-creator's motivation to continue to produce content. Second, relatedness is satisfied by relationships with other creators in addition to the creator-viewer dynamic. For the creators interviewed, every collaborator also was or became an autonomous creator. One participant stated that both they and their roommate "...started streaming at the same, and starting to stream with him, we would play Minecraft, and we just stream and watch each other," (CC11). When asked about the role that Twitch and YouTube communities played in their desire to make content, one participant stated that "...it definitely was like the Twitch and YouTube community, I can find other people who have had similar struggles that I have had. And that's very comforting...they're like family to me almost" (CC7). That final comment points to the important role social media plays in developing relationships outside the family circle. Only through fan communities does broadcast media compare to the social motivation cultivated by social media, confirming the appropriateness of the name itself. The gratification of the need to relate, not only through the creator's viewers but also through other creators, clearly builds the gamer-creator's intrinsic motivation to produce content.

Third, the gamer-creator's competence needs are indeed satisfied through content creation. A majority of the creators interviewed for this study stated that they love creating content because they can demonstrate their skill progression and view themselves getting better over time. This skill progression has both to do with their skills as a gamer and their skills as a creator. Regardless of which skill category they referred to, the creators wanted to see their skills improve for both their sake and their viewer's sake. Similar to what we described in terms of personal integrative and affective needs,

satisfying competence needs is somewhat dependent on the viewers. Whereas U&G considers this aspect of creation within the framework of isolated cognitive challenge, the SDT notion of competence elucidates the connection of skills to the communal context of social media. As content provides creators with a digital representation of their skills, we can comfortably say that content creation satisfies the gamer-creator's competence needs as well.

Our findings agree with the more general motivation study of Tamborini et al. (2010), who found that the satisfaction of autonomy, competence, and relatedness needs by an activity formed a reliable indicator of what is known as enjoyment. As enjoyment is seen as the satisfaction of the three core needs of SDT, we can also assume that enjoyment and intrinsic motivation go hand in hand with one another.

Lastly, some of our findings fell in line with Zhao et al. (2018). In particular, the 48-hour stream performed by CC7 demonstrates challenge-seeking, a facet of intrinsic motivation. The desire for self-presentation, another of Zhao et al.'s facets of intrinsic motivation, was also present within the eleven creators interviewed. Other factors they considered were only relevant to a comparison of platforms and departed from the SDT approach. Through utilizing the more general categories of SDT, we were able to garner a better understanding of creator motivations that may have been overlooked by Zhao et al.'s 2018 study.

As all three of the needs proposed by SDT tend to be satisfied by content creation, we should be able to say that creating gaming content on YouTube and Twitch provides the content creators in this study an environment in which they are intrinsically motivated to continue to produce content.

## CHAPTER V

### Conclusion

This study is limited in some regards. This is a qualitative study that makes use of snow-ball sampling to find creators and therefore invites future studies to confirm our results more broadly. For instance, one could use our findings as a baseline for a large, quantitative study that generalizes about the gaming creator population as a whole.

We only interviewed creators who identified as “small” creators. Though some were receiving some income from their content, the majority earned little to no income. Future studies should compare motivations between small creators such as those interviewed in this study and medium to large creators on YouTube and Twitch. We believe that this could be an important area to research regarding creator motivations because they involve significantly different types of online communities.

This study’s focus is also limited to content creators producing gaming content on YouTube and Twitch, the two predominant platforms for the genre. We believe that our findings and our dual approach could also be used as the basis for studying creators across a variety of platforms and content types, be they vloggers, podcasters, etc. Only a handful of motivation studies of creators have been carried out with the SDT approach, and virtually no U&G studies consider gamer-creators. Our field has focused heavily on consumers of media, and rightfully so. However, as new media render content production easier and more accessible, understanding creator motivations will grow proportionally. Understanding the relationship of creation to consumption, to which our study only begins to contribute, adds a third, synthetic dimension to the subject.

Through this study, we have found that creators of video game content with small audiences on YouTube and Twitch are primarily motivated by the desire to participate in

a community, especially to distinguish themselves there through unique expression. To those who see social media as individual competition for likes and attention, it may be surprising that communal belonging plays a more prominent role than status or potential revenue. In fact, all motivation is strongly mediated by the presence of online gaming communities.

Through the U&G approach this study found that creating content gratifies social integrative, personal integrative, and affective needs. Each of these needs are largely dependent upon the relationship between the creator and their viewers. A complementary approach through self-determination theory showed that the creator's needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness were all consistently satisfied, which demonstrates an environment conducive to intrinsic motivation. Extrinsic motivators such as money, status, and nonvirtual friends were extraneous factors that had no immediate effect on any of the creators' motivations to produce content.



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## APPENDIX

Study: “Not Content to Just be a Gamer:

A Motivation Analysis of Gaming Content Creators on YouTube and Twitch”

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1. General Questions (Provides background information about the interviewee)
  - a. What name do you create under, and why?
  - b. Do you create content in conjunction with anyone else?
  - c. What genre of video games do you typically choose to play?
    - i. Is this reflected on your YouTube/Twitch Channel?
  - d. When did you first begin to post content to YouTube/Twitch?
2. Questions About Platform (This will allow us to understand platform choice for creators)
  - a. Do you post content to both YouTube and Twitch?
    - i. If yes, which would you consider the primary platform and the secondary platform? Why?
    - ii. If no, why do you decide to focus on one platform?
3. General Content Creation Questions (Provide a base understanding of the creator’s process for creating content)
  - a. How often do you upload gameplay content?
  - b. Timetable
    - i. How much time does it typically take to make one recorded session or stream?
    - ii. How much of that time is spent preparing to record or stream?

- iii. If uploaded to YouTube, how much time per video do you typically spend editing your content?
  - c. How have your skills as a content creator improved from the time you began?
    - i. How much effort do you put toward learning about the art and technique of content creation?
- 4. Questions of Gratifications and Motivations
  - a. What exactly are the Twitch/YouTube communities like?
    - i. What role did these communities play in your desire to create content?
    - ii. Are there any benefits you want for yourself that can be received from these communities?
    - iii. Have you made any new, meaningful relationships through creating content?
    - iv. What is your own channel's community like?
      - 1. If both a YouTuber and a Twitch streamer, ask if there is a difference between their channel's community on each platform.
  - b. What emotions do you feel when performing for your content?
  - c. How does having viewers affect the way you play?
    - i. Does performing publicly make you want to improve at the game itself? Why or why not?

- d. What do you find challenging or stressful about creating content on YouTube or Twitch?
- e. What do you find rewarding about the process of streaming or making videos?
  - i. Is it more or less of an escape than regular gaming?
    - 1. Do you game or create content as an escape from real-world situations?
  - ii. How does monetization affect the content that you create?
    - 1. If creator does not make money off of their content, ask them how the idea of monetizing their content affects them.
  - iii. (If a YouTuber): How much do you express your own creativity through your editing? (Why do you feel this way?)
- f. How has being a content creator affected your self-confidence?
  - i. How does having your channel affect your sense of mastery over the games you play? Over your life in general?
  - ii. How is your self-image on your channel different from your self-image in face-to-face interactions?
  - iii. How does your status in the world of Twitch and/or YouTube affect how you feel about yourself?
  - iv. Does being a content creator give you a sense of control over your own life? Why or why not?
  - v. Is there a sense of accomplishment provided by creating content that you otherwise wouldn't get?

- g. How important to you is the recognition of your followers?
  - i. How do you feel about influencing others, as a creator?
- h. How have friendships or family relationships affected your creation of content?
  - i. What is it that you feel drives you to continue to keep creating content?

**Final Question:** Are there any other creators who you think would participate in this study?

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