

Chapter 8

Marketing to Gamers: The Effects of Video Game Streams on Consumer Attitudes and Behaviors

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ABSTRACT

Video game streaming has introduced to consumers a new method of creating branded content. Popular streaming platforms receive millions of broadcasters and viewers every month, and the current chapter examines the influence of this type of user-generated content on consumers' attitudes and behaviors. The goal of this study is to understand how video game streams function as a marketing tool. To investigate this, a quantitative survey was designed and measured participants' video gaming habits and their perceptions of credibility, usefulness of content, group identification, and purchase intention. Heavier gaming habits were found to be positively related to perceived credibility in a user-generated stream condition. Group identification and stream familiarity were found to be positively related to perceived credibility. These findings hold implications for using video game streams as a marketing tool as heavier gamers were found to perceive user-generated streams as a credible source of information.

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INTRODUCTION

Video game streaming has become a popular source of video game information and entertainment, as it allows viewers to see actual video gameplay in real-time. Attracting more than 100 million unique viewers each month, *Twitch* (2016) is arguably the most popular streaming platform (About *Twitch*, 2016). *Twitch* (2016) gives video gamers a platform to broadcast feed of their own video game play, which can include commentary from the streamer in the form of voice only or a composited video featuring the streamer. Each stream also has its own chat room, where viewers can interact with other viewers and the streamer. *Twitch* (2016) can be considered a social media, describing itself as a social video platform for gamers.

Game streaming has introduced a new method to consumers for creating branded content (Holt, 2016). Positive, organic, and brand-centric content generated by consumers, such as game streams, is believed to positively influence brand equity and consumer attitudes towards the brand (Tuten & Solomon, 2015). Game developers benefit from the marketing streaming provides. Walker (2014) labeled streaming as a form of crowdsourcing by the video game industry, as streamers are essentially providing marketing for video game titles through their streams and blurring the boundaries between consumer and producer (Bauer & Gengenhuber, 2015). However, the most popular streamers can earn income by partnering with *Twitch* (2016) and receiving a portion of ad revenue, sponsorships, and subscriptions and donations from stream viewers (Aaron, 2015).

Twitch (2016) and other streaming platforms are popular sources for consumers interested in video games to gather game-related information. Streaming platforms have managed to achieve significant engagement levels with video game titles, as millions of people are engaging with video games in real time through playing and spectating (Smith, 2014). Social streaming platforms facilitate brand engagement by allowing consumers to create branded content and socialize around that content. Highly engaging consumer-generated content that is distributed through social media is valuable to brands (Tuten & Solomon, 2015). Video game companies should begin incorporating streams into their digital marketing strategy if they have not already, because streams can highly influence consumers' product-purchasing decisions (Pearson, 2014). For example, within the first week of the release of *Call of Duty: Advanced Warfare* (2014), developed by Activision, there were 75,000 unique broadcasters, 6 million viewers, and a total of 327 million minutes watched on *Twitch* (2016), making it the most streamed console game, at that time, on *Twitch* (2016) during its first week of release (Evangelho, 2014). This is significant because video game publisher Activision had 6 million unique earned brand impressions. Streaming could potentially influence consumers' decision to buy a game, and every game stream acts as an advertisement for the game (Harper, 2013).

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