Analysis on the Motivation of Live Game Streaming Audience—Taking League of Legends Live Streaming as an Example

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How to cite this paper: Wendi Wu. (2023) Analysis on the Motivation of Live Game Streaming Audience—Taking League of Legends Live Streaming as an Example. Journal of Humanities, Arts and Social Science, 7(1), 179-182. DOI: 10.26855/jhass.2023.01.025

Received: December 20, 2022
Accepted: January 16, 2023
Published: February 9, 2023

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Abstract
This research would take audiences of live game streaming as subjects of the study. Besides real-life research, the paper uses the "Uses and Gratifications" theory to obtain these audiences' motivation and their behavior on live game streaming. Users' demand generates motivation. Through in-depth interviews, the paper summarizes five significant motivations for audiences to watch online game streaming: the pursuit of presence, entertainment and recreation, communication and seeking identification, improving game skills, and pursuing stars. Game live-streaming can effectively satisfy its audience regarding decompression, emotional, social, and personal integration needs. For two different types of live-streaming audiences, the apparent difference between them lies in the level of cognitive needs. For example, game players tend to focus more on the game itself and improve their understanding of the game by watching the live broadcast. On the contrary, non-players will focus more on anchors themselves to satisfy their curiosity about the unknown content.

Keywords
Live Game streaming, Uses and Gratifications, Using motivation, Using behavior

1. Introduction
Each change in media technology has brought about different degrees of change in the communication research field. New media's emergence and rapid growth have built a brand-new media environment. For example, streaming provides a new form of audience participation. In this process, the two-way real-time communication: the live video screen from the anchor and the live chatting of the audience, blurs the boundary between the information sources and the receivers, therefore achieving the integration of producers and audiences. The emergence of live streaming has brought new development to the "Uses and Gratifications" theory. At the same time, live game streaming develops rapidly as a product of the new media environment.

In 2011, the world's first live game streaming platform, Twitch TV, was born in the United States. Live game streaming has high user stickiness and long viewing time. With the increasing scale of Chinese game live-streaming users, its game market has become the most significant focus of the global game industry. According to the report by Avery Consulting, the market size of China's game streaming reached 13.9 billion yuan in 2018, and the user size of China's game streaming platform reached 260 million people. China's live game streaming users mainly concentrate on e-sports games, and the attention to domestic e-sports game events continues to rise. According to the official data released by League of Legends developer Riot Game, in 2020, over 300 million Chinese viewers...
and 3.02 million foreign viewers watched the 10th Worlds held in Beijing, which was the most popular final of all time.

Therefore, this paper focuses on the usage motivations and need satisfaction of live online games audiences, exploring their dual identities and what level of need satisfaction they obtain during the process.

2. Relevant Research of Live Game Streaming

Scholars have studied game live-streaming audiences from multiple perspectives. In "Live in Your World, Play in Ours": The Spaces of Video Game Identity, Sheila C. Murphy (2004) mentions that online games use video technology to provide players with interactive experiences and subtly influence gamers' behavior by the way and characters they play.

In the article Why do people watch others play video games? An empirical study on the motivations of Twitch users, Max Sjöblom (2017) surveyed 1,097 Twitch TV viewers about their platform usage behavior and analyzed results from a "uses and satisfactions" perspective. Max divided the Twitch TV audience's usage motivations into five categories: cognitive, emotional, personal integration, social integration, and stress relief. These motivations inform this paper's examination of audiences' usage behavior. Also, the exploration of the internal logic between different types of viewers' usage motivations has implications for interpreting the usage behaviors of this paper's interviewees.

3. Research Method

This thesis will use snowball sampling to select viewers of the League of Legends live broadcast as interview subjects. Through in-depth interviews, we aim to understand viewers' needs satisfaction during watching game live broadcasts and the motive triggering their use behavior, refine the factors that influence viewers' continuous use in a specific game live streaming platform and explore the new form of "use and satisfaction" theory under the live game broadcast. The interviewees were five audiences of League of Legends live game streaming. Among them, three played League of Legends, and two had no experience with the game, representing the two main types of current online game streaming audiences (see Table 3-1). The interviews were semi-structured and semi-open; all five were conducted online by phone or through social media such as WeChat. A total of over 5,000 words of textual material was collected. The content of the interviews mainly includes the viewing situation of the live game streaming platform, the motivation and viewing behavior of live game streaming, the satisfaction of needs while watching live game streaming, and the overall impression of the live game streaming.

Table 3-1. List of Interviewees

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Identity</th>
<th>Interview time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lisa</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Non-&quot;League of Legends&quot; players</td>
<td>2022-2-24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kyoyo</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Non-&quot;League of Legends&quot; players</td>
<td>2022-3-2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>77</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>League of Legends players</td>
<td>2022-3-6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Molly</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>League of Legends players</td>
<td>2022-3-8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aurora</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>League of Legends players</td>
<td>2022-3-9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. The Motivation of Watching Live Game Streaming

Through interviews, the author found that all interviewees have more than three years of game live-streaming viewing experience and have explicit personal opinions about mainstream game live-streaming platforms in China. Five interviewees have many common points regarding the motivation to watch the game live-stream.

4.1 Pursuit of Presence

Streaming is a highly ornamental media form that primarily enables the "restoration of the physical world," which allows its audience to exchange information in an increasingly visual process (Xu Weiyi, 2016). There are two primary forms of live streaming of the current League of Legends game: anchors taking matches and providing real-time commentary on their ongoing games, and broadcasting the professional e-sports league. Viewers can watch live streaming of games or matches collectively and feel the visual stimulation of "playing the game," which
cannot be provided by other forms of media like communication through text, voice, or pictures. For example, when a player makes a great action in a game, the live chatting section is full of “6666” or “xxx fighting,” which will make audiences feel like watching games together with tens of thousands of people and make up for the loneliness of watching TV at home alone.

“Like matches, not watching the live streaming feels like a loss of excitement. It just feels like there will be a delay if you don’t watch the streaming, and you can’t discuss matches happily with your buddies.” (Interviewee: 77)

“Because of the large number of audiences at the match, the atmosphere was warm and passionate, which made people had a little bit of the feeling of watching games at stadiums.” (Interviewee: Lisa)

Live streaming makes the information it carries more specific and expressive, providing viewers with a more live and interactive experience. Pursuing presence is one reason that prompts most viewers to watch live online games.

4.2 Entertainment and Recreation

The need for entertainment is human nature (Zhang Shiyao, 2017). With the ever-accelerating pace of life and the rising pressure of study and work, users are increasingly eager to obtain pleasure and stimulation by accessing and using media in their free time to seek psychological entertainment.

“When you open the app, it recommend channels on the home page. Then I will browse and click in to the page due to boredom.” (Interviewee: Molly)

“My classmates recommended me to watch EDG, and I found it interesting. It just so happened that I was in my senior year of high school, under a lot of pressure, so I felt very relaxed watching this after I got home.” (Interviewee: Kyoyoo)

Faced with the pressure of reality, viewers choose to watch the League of Legends game live streaming and spend hours immersed in the game world created by anchors, thus escaping briefly from the complex and arduous reality. The demand for entertainment and recreation also pushes people to open online game live streaming.

4.3 Communication and Identity Seeking

Watching live streams is a way to get closer and stay in sync with friends.

“Some anchors are interesting and famous, so friends will recommend them to me, then I will go to watch because of curiosity, like Yaoshui Ge.” (Interviewee: 77)

In addition, when watching live broadcasts, audiences can express their support to their favorite anchors by sending them virtual gifts on their channels. By constantly sending gifts, audiences have a greater chance to interact with the anchor, such as thanking gifts, saying the audience's ID, and responding to the audience's specific requests. This process of sending gifts and receiving thanks reflects the audience's desire for attention and recognition from the anchor.

“Generally I send cheap gifts to my favorite pro-players when I watch their streaming. It is really accomplished!”(Interviewee: 77)

4.4 Improving Game Skills

For viewers with corresponding gaming experiences, watching live game streaming is a significant way to improve their gaming skills. The live-streaming platform does not have any rigid requirements for its anchors. Users can become anchors if they pass specific registration procedures and have a computer, cell phone, and microphone. However, most anchors who can survive in today's relatively saturated live game market are high-level players who deeply understand the game they are broadcasting.

“The live streaming is more interactive. You can communicate with anchors. If you have operational questions, just directly send it in live chatting, the anchor is likely to answer you.” (Interviewee: 77)

4.5 Star-chasing

Live streaming is free from spatial limitation as a form of media that delivers information to audiences in real time. Fans can see their favorite celebrity anchors without being physically present (Wu Mengting, 2016). The rise in popularity of live game streaming has undoubtedly brought an influx of viewers with no gaming experience to channels. For these viewers, the personal charisma of the anchor is more attractive than the game operation.

“The important thing is not the live, but the anchor you subscribe.” (Interviewee: Molly)
5. Conclusion

After in-depth interviews with five interviewees, this paper summarizes five motives for audiences to watch live game streaming: the pursuit of presence, entertainment and recreation, communication and identity seeking, improving game skills, and star-chasing. According to Maslow’s hierarchy of needs theory, this paper classifies audiences’ needs while watching live game streaming into five categories: cognitive needs, stress relief needs, emotional needs, social needs, and personal integration needs. Through interviews, regardless of whether the audience ever played the game, they are similar in the stimulation and decompression they can feel by viewing the game live-streaming and the need to gain recognition. Thus, game live-streaming can effectively satisfy its audience regarding decompression, emotional, social, and personal integration needs. For two different types of audiences, the apparent difference between them lies in the level of cognitive needs, i.e., game players will tend to focus on the game itself and improve their understanding of the game by watching the live broadcast. In contrast, non-players will focus more on anchors to satisfy their curiosity about the unknown content.

References


