Twitch: Analysis as a Medium of Communication and Relation to Speech and Text

Abstract

This essay will discuss the characteristics of Twitch as an online video livestreaming platform and whether it is a successful medium of communication for users of Twitch. An analysis of the 'language' used in Twitch represented by the emotes will be discussed. David Crystal's seven formal properties of speech and text will be used as guidelines to compare Twitch's style of communication. Lastly, Twitch's impacts on society and further effects will be listed and explained.

1. Introduction

Twitch is the world's top live streaming platform, which primarily focuses on video gaming content, in addition to other genres such as music videos and real life broadcasts which has come up in popularity over the years. As Twitch continues to grow, communities of speech and text create new types of vernacular new media communication in the form of emotes or as Crystal (2006) describes it, netspeak.
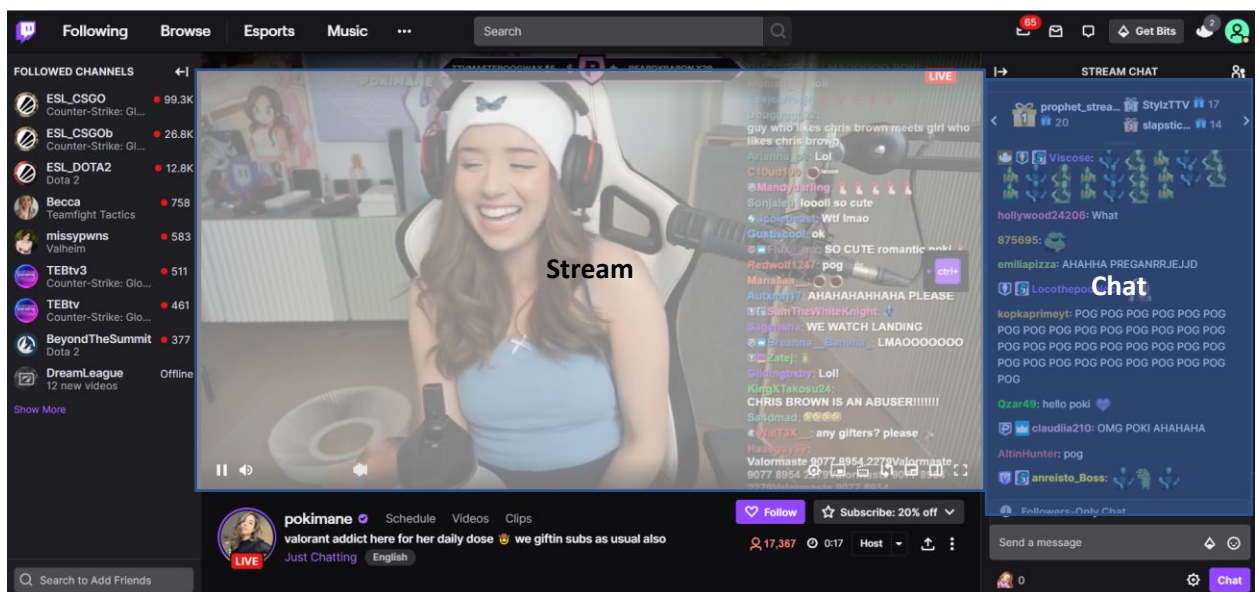

Figure 1: A layout of a Just Chatting stream

From Figure 1, viewer interaction with the streamer, or main mode of communication comes from the chat bar where they can type what they want and everyone watching the stream would see the text sent. This is usually a one-way communication as the streamer would be unable to respond or acknowledge to every single message sent by the viewers. The streamer communicates through audio from the stream when he speaks to the viewers, but he may choose to reply into the chat but due to the nature of texts coming and going within 3 seconds of reading a text, it often gets lost in the sea of messages.

There are different types of streaming, which in turn affects the communication between users and viewers. The two distinct ones are Just Chatting (Figure 1) and Video Games (Figure 2), where Just Chatting engages in more interaction with the streamer. Users reply to the topic of the moment chosen by the streamer and there is a healthy viewer-streamer relationship. However, during gaming, the streamer is more focused towards the game and would not pay as much attention to what the chat is saying and thus it is more of a one-sided interaction, but viewers could engage in conversations between each other and there is that sense of camaraderie built by standing within the streamer's community.
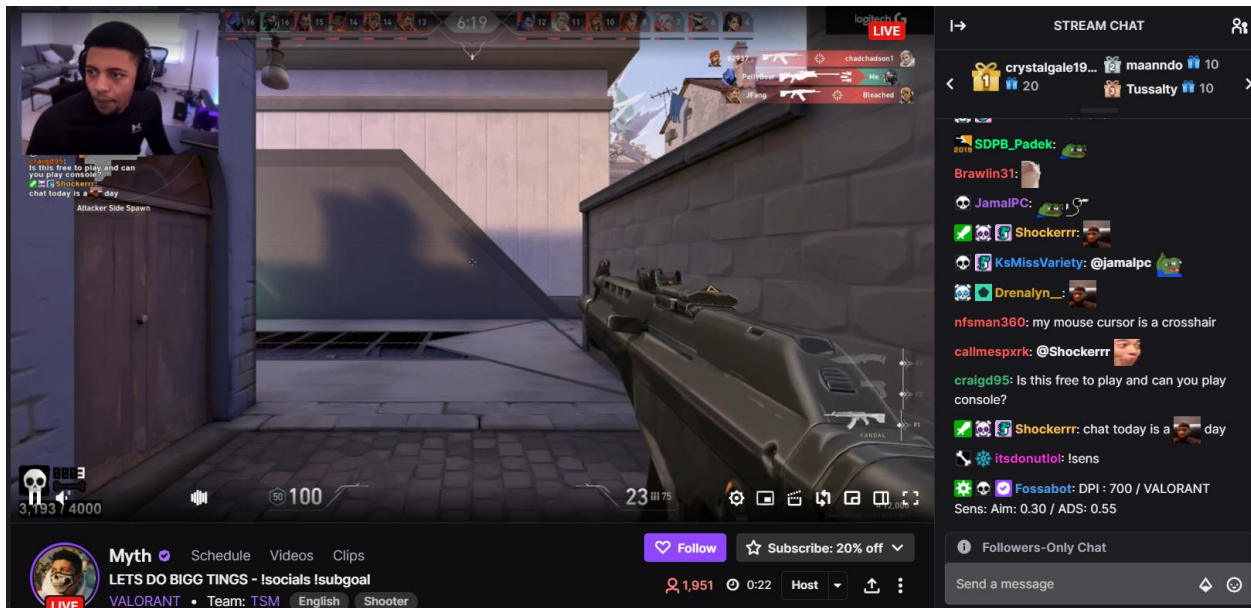

Figure 2: A layout of a gaming stream

2. Summary of Literature

As described by Crystal (2006) in which 'Netspeak' was coined, to describe the vastness of language use in the respective internet communities where vernaculars of English appeared. Crystal (2006) is aware that several researchers have classified Netspeak as a written form of a

spoken language although this view as problematic since it diminishes several salient features of spoken language.

Twitch is synchronous (Hope, 2019) and uses as much emotes as it can to convey meaning which signifies that there may be a language at play that outsiders of this Twitch community would not be aware of and thus a sense of identity is brought about. This language, although written, can be spoken and will be described in further detail in Section 4.

3. Usage Statistics

With reference to Twitchtracker.com, as of February 2021, official Twitch numbers see constant exponential growth with the average concurrent viewers at 2.2 million compared to 2019 – an increase of 69%. (See Figure 3)

According to Businessofapps.com, Twitch was outperforming its traditional counterparts in the US, Fox News in comparison only had 1.5 million viewers in peak concurrent viewership. As a result of the coronavirus, social distancing measures put into place caused viewers to turn to Twitch to shut out the boredom, further driving up the viewership numbers in April 2020, where the highest ever recorded peak viewership was at 4 million. Broadcasters and streamers also increased in number with a 12% increase in their numbers.

TWITCH ACHIEVEMENTS THROUGH THE YEARS

2020	2019	2018	2017	
1,116 BILLION minutes watched ▲69%	660 BILLION minutes watched ▲18%	560 BILLION minutes watched ▲58%	355 BILLION minutes watched ▲21.5%	27,000+ partnered streamers ▲100% from 2
6.9 MILLION monthly streamers ▲90%	3.64 MILLION unique monthly broadcasters ▲7%	3.4 MILLION unique broadcasters every month in average ▲70%	2+ MILLION unique monthly broadcasters ▲18% from 2015	150,000+ affiliate stre
2,117,000 average concurrent viewers ▲69%	1,256,000 average concurrent viewers ▲17.5%	1,070,000 average concur. viewers over 2018 ▲43%	124 MILLION total clips, that have been viewed over 1.7 BILLION times	106 minutes spent dail Twitch per user ▲25% fr 2012
87,500 average concurrent live channels ▲77%	49,500 average concurrent live channels ▲20%	41,111 average concurrent live channels ▲67%	15+ MILLION unique daily visitors	100+ MILLIONS uniqu viewers per month as o 2017
45,365 partners ▲28% (source)	35,580 partners ▲32% 2017			

Figure 3: Twitchtracker viewership numbers

Users of Twitch are mainly male, with a dominating 65% of its users being male and Twitch themselves removed this statistic in 2017 as it did not show themselves in such a good light where in terms of the age split, however, these stats show a greater percentage of Twitch users falling into younger age categories, with 73% in total falling into the two brackets aged under 35. (See Figure 4)
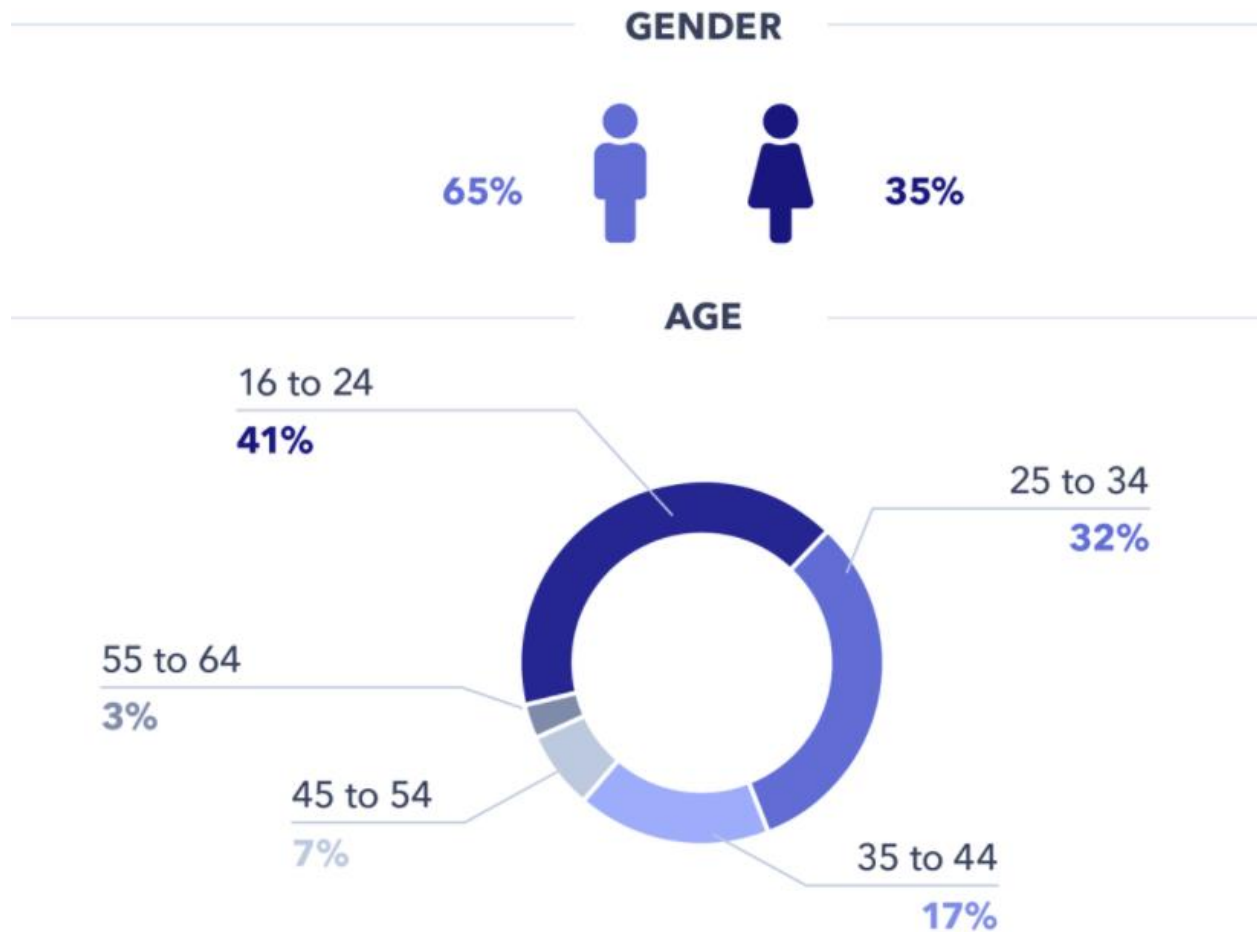
Figure 4: Twitch user demographics

4. Characteristics of Twitch and New Kinds of Communication

Although communication on Twitch is centered around emotes, (see Figure 5), it is not largely symbolic as words are typed in order to send these emotes out into the chat. However, Twitch's base emotes do not account for the wide range of meanings that someone might want to convey and thus the expansion packs of FrankerFaceZ and BetterTTV are available for viewers and streamers to express themselves better through Google Chrome Extensions. These new emotes act like animated emotes in the chat and provide a whole new level of expressing themselves and can be referred to be Twitch users as 'Twitchspeak'. As anyone is able to create these Twitch emotes, the language is ever growing via the expansion packs and thus a new kind of communication is born.

Emote Code	Emote	Meaning
:Kappa:		Sarcasm or wry humor. Kappa is our signature emote.
:HeyGuys:		A casual greeting. Used when joining chat, or when welcoming someone to a stream.
:LUL:		Laughter. The emote version of Laugh Out Loud.
:CoolStoryBob:		Our version of "Cool story, bro." Used sarcastically when someone is saying something unimportant or babbling.
:4Head:		:Laughter, but in a slightly mocking way. Often used as pity laughter when someone tells a lame/dad joke.
:FrankerZ:		DOG! Used where there's discussion about a dog or when a dog is shown on stream. Generally, dog stuff.
:Jebaited:		For when someone is "baited or tricked". Often used in games where the player is surprised or lured into

Figure 5: Twitch Base Emotes (Twitch, 2021)

Looking at just the names of these emotes in Figure 5, a non-viewer of Twitch would not be able to understand the full meaning of the emote and while if we look at just the emote itself, the result would be similar. Therefore, this creates a community of speech within Twitch users where only they would be able to comprehend and use these emotes freely within their daily speech and the average person would not understand their words, even though it might seem that they are speaking English. Alexander (2021) notes that as he starts to learn 'Twitchspeak', he picks it up faster than learning any other language since he feels like he is part of a large community that encompasses him.

5. Seven features of Crystal (2006)

Twitch is problematic where linguistic analysis in distinguishing Twitch from the average digital media is contradicting as its features are not conclusive. For example, Twitch can be argued to be both speech like and text like as both speech from the streamer and text from the viewers via the chat box causes properties arising from both sides to appear. It is time bound when the streamer talks and whatever is spoken only happens during that time while also being space bound due to the nature of the chat box being readable at any time.

Twitch is also both spontaneous and contrived where there is no time lag when the streamer speaks and viewers can instantly reply to whatever happens on the stream. A situation where it is contrived would be when viewers would take a moment to come up with personalized messages or when streamers would think of content to spice up their broadcasts thus they have some time to prepare for this.

Twitch is also both prosodically and graphically rich as the streamers can speak normally using various accents or tones, languages while the chat speaks in emotes easily understandable by the average Twitch viewer and a meaningful conversation arises out of this and thus it is socially interactive. There are no holds barred when communicating during the stream via the chat except when racist, misogynic or any other hate or hurtful speech is used and this would result in bans from Twitch moderators. (Twitch 2021) Thus Twitch can be elaborately structured where rules and laws are put in place to prevent bad behaviour among its users.

Face-to-face conversations are rising in trend now with CodeMiko (Aquino, 2021) being a pioneer in such streams where streamers engage in a talk show or interview and discuss various topics in front of their audience, similar to a live talk show, however the audience is able to talk amongst the chat.

6. Effects on Society

In recent events, US Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez played a popular game Among Us on Twitch and saw a audience of 439,000 viewers. In comparison, when her counterparts Donald Trump and Joe Biden stream on Twitch for campaign events, total views peak at around 6,000 and 17,000, respectively. This shows the power of Twitch and gaming combined even though politics are the main goal, for her to increase voter outreach among Americans.

7. Conclusion

Twitch is an unparalleled form of streaming platform that ranks number one among its peers and it is not hard to see why as Twitchspeak is beginning to take over the world due to the sheer number of users on Twitch every day. The speech-like and text-like features make it a powerful medium of communication tool in today's era as it continues to grow in numbers.

8. References

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