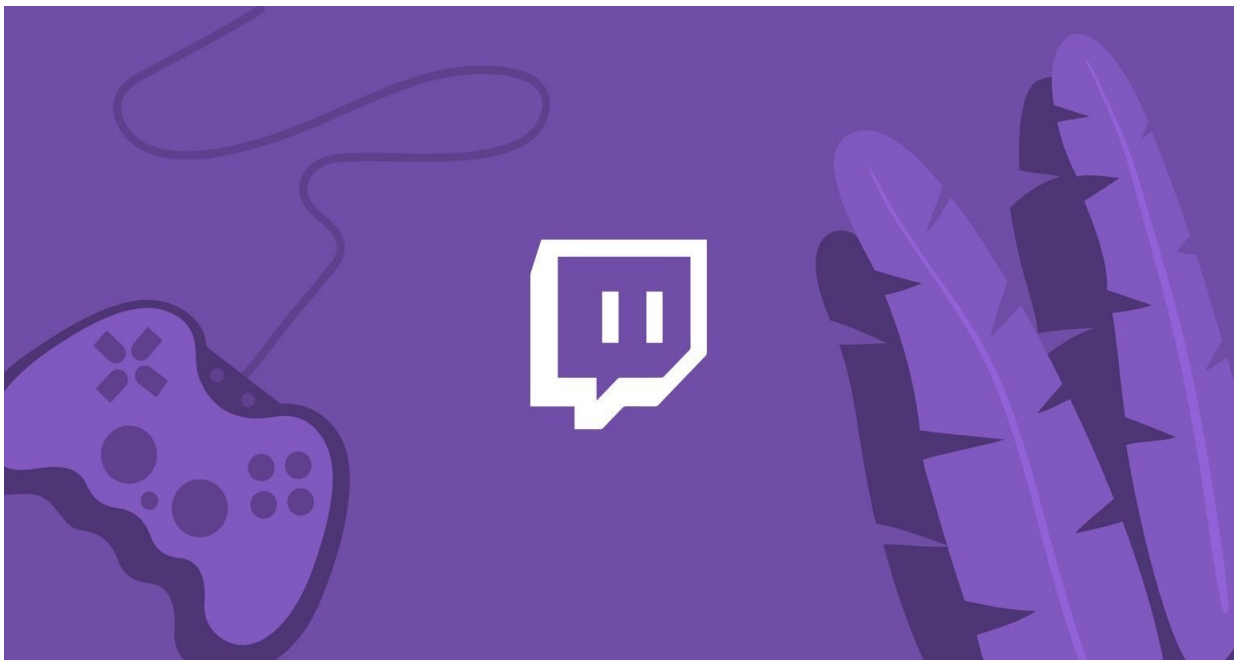


Understanding the Dynamics of Online Gift-Giving Behaviour: An Exploratory Study

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Abstract

This study aims to explore the underlying dynamics of gift-giving behaviour on Twitch, focusing on the differences in viewer types regarding gift-giving behaviour and motivations. This was done to enlighten the research gap of why people donate to streamers. Previous research focused on different viewer types and their intentions to watch streams. However, research has yet to understand the differences in gift-giving behaviour among different viewer types. Understanding this phenomenon can help us better understand the complexity of streamer-viewer relationships.

This exploratory research study made use of a mixed-methods approach to investigate the dynamics of gift-giving behaviour among four different viewer types, namely "Try Before You Buy," "Antisocial Viewers," "Loyal Lurkers," and "Social Viewers". Data was collected through semi-structured interviews and an online survey. Overall, 15 participants were included in the study for further analysis.

Reasons for gift-giving were shown to be unique for each viewer type. VT1 showed to use gift-giving as a way to show emotions towards the streamer, appreciate the content, as well as give back to the streamer. VT2 showed to mainly donate to avoid ads and pay for the streamer's work. VT3 used gift-giving to show appreciation for the content, ensure future content, and pay for the streamer's work. VT4 mainly participate in gift-giving to improve the streaming experience for everyone. Another vital variable influencing gift-giving behaviour showed to be streamer size based on viewership and followers. Overall, small streamers were preferred by viewers when participating in gift-giving, as viewers perceived them as being more grateful and being able to have more personal interactions.

Results indicate that gift-giving goes beyond financial support, encompassing actions that show appreciation, ensure future content, and enhance the overall stream experience, showing the complexity of streamer-viewer relationships and gift-giving behaviours. These findings might help streamers, content creators, and masspersonal media platform providers to understand their viewership better, as well as foster more robust connections to their viewers, encouraging gift-giving behaviour while also building a stronger and more engaging community.

Keywords: gift-giving, live streaming, parasocial phenomena, qualitative exploratory study, viewership

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Introduction

Online content creators are around us more than ever. With the introduction of Web 2.0, especially YouTube, new forms of creators arose (Scolari et al., 2021). Media actors like influencers, bloggers, vloggers, camgirls, gamers and live streamers are just a few examples of online/web creators who have been around us for a while. Everyone who uses some form of social media can become a "professional" content creator. Online creators are native social media users who made posting online their profession. They build up communities, online and offline, as well as closely interact and engage with them through the content they are putting online (Cunningham & Craig, 2021).

The increasing popularity of live streaming led to an increased awareness and interest in the unique environment of live streams. Twitch's online broadcasting platform is one of the largest, with an estimated 7.63 million streamers broadcasting monthly (TwitchTracker, 2023). Live streaming is "the act of broadcasting video in real time over the Internet and is a new genre that encompasses both interpersonal and mass media interaction" (McLaughlin & Wohn, 2021, p. 2). O'Sullivan and Carr (2018) refer to live broadcasting formats as masspersonal media. Even though the introduction of new media, especially the introduction of social media, is not new and has provided users with greater interactivity than traditional media (e.g., TV) (McLaughlin & Wohn, 2021), masspersonal media, like live streaming platforms, offer an even greater level of intimacy through live social interactions and seems almost to mimic live encounters with the streamer. It allows the viewer to actively engage with the broadcaster and other users via live chat and gift-giving functions. This real-time interaction allows content creators to form and create content alongside and in collaboration with their viewers. The interactivity further allows creators to build close and intimate connections with their followers (Gardner & Lehnert, 2016).

The viewer-streamer relationship remains largely parasocial, regardless of viewers' affordances and the possibility of socially interacting with the streamer (McLaughlin & Wohn, 2021). Parasocial relationships are described as one-sided and stand out through their feature of broad reach and restricted access (Kowert & Daniel, 2021), which can also be observed during live streams regardless of their increased interactivity level. Nonetheless, the unique situation and relationship between streamer and viewer are often referred to as being more than simply parasocial. Kowert and Daniel (2021) suitably describe this relationship as being of a "one-and-a-half-sided" nature. The live chat and gift-giving function are key functions of most live-

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streaming platforms (Haimson & Tang, 2017; Lessel et al., 2017; Li & Peng, 2021), which allow users to experience the interaction on an interpersonal level (McLaughlin & Wohn, 2021) and might result in perceptions of a reciprocal relationship.

Even though the concept of PSR and gift-giving are not new, for most people, why people engage in gift-giving remains unclear. Online gift-giving is the act of sending virtual gifts to live streamers in exchange for real money. Viewers can use gift-giving to win other viewers' and the streamer's attention (Li & Peng, 2021). Previous research suggests that viewers use gift-giving to promote their relationship with the streamer and improve their feelings of superior social status (Hamilton et al., 2014; Oh & Choi, 2017; Yu et al., 2018). Many aspects might trigger gift-giving behaviour in viewers, like streamers' and live scene characteristics, but also different levels of viewer engagement (Li & Peng, 2021).

In previous research, gift-giving is often described as the act of donating to and financially supporting streamers. However, traditionally, gift-giving can also be seen as a social event, observable not only online but offline and has been present since the beginning of human civilisation (The Psychology of Gifting, n.d.). People are said to use gift-giving as a way to establish or ensure future connections with others (The Psychology of Gifting, n.d.). It is a tool which helps people express their feelings and appreciation towards others, show love and affection, as well as build and improve relationships (The Psychology of Gifting, n.d.).

Studies have examined live streams in various ways, including reasons for watching them (Hu et al., 2017; Speed et al., 2023), observing parasocial phenomena (Kowert & Daniel, 2021; McLaughlin & Wohn, 2021), and online gift-giving intentions (Li & Peng, 2021). Previous research gives an overview of why people like to watch streams, as well as acknowledges the potential of parasocial phenomena and its correlation to online gift-giving intentions. However, even though previous studies found gift-giving to be a way of promoting streamer-viewer relationships, often, research seems to assume that most viewers participate in gift-giving because they want to befriend the streamer, are outgoing or want others' attention.

The findings of previous research seem to focus on engaged viewers who experience a PSR towards the streamer to some degree and who will end up donating in order to enhance their social status and relationship with the streamer. Focusing solely on one type of viewer rather than determining if there are different viewer types potentially leaves out a significant percentage of viewership. Research already suggests that only some viewers have the same characteristics

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and show different forms of viewer behaviour. Speed, Burnett, & Robinson II (2023) pointed out four different viewer types on Twitch, namely ‘try before you buy’, ‘antisocial viewers’, ‘loyal lurkers’, and ‘social viewers’. These viewer types showed different reasons for watching streams, different viewer behaviours, and opinions about gift-giving. This research might show that different viewers not only belong to different viewer types with unique reasons for watching streams but also show different motivations and behaviours when it comes to gift-giving.

Research has yet to differentiate between viewer types and their emotional background, attitudes, motivations, and perceptions towards gift-giving behaviour. Taking a closer look at the different viewer types when researching gift-giving behaviour might help answer the question of why and if people engage in online gift-giving when not being an active chatter or not wanting to build a relationship with the streamer. This study aims to address this gap by investigating gift-giving behaviour and motivations based on viewer types through the following research questions:

RQ: What are the dynamics of viewer gift-giving behaviour and viewer types in live streaming?

- 1. What are possible motivators and reasons for viewer gift-giving in streams?*
- 2. What are the commonalities and differences of viewer types regarding gift-giving?*

The following chapters will examine the different concepts of gift-giving and viewer types to answer the proposed questions. This is done to examine users’ attitudes, opinions, and beliefs regarding gift-giving on Twitch by taking a closer look at previous research and highlighting research gaps. Afterwards, the research design and procedure of the study will be described in more detail to give an insight into how this study approached answering these questions. The findings will be stated, discussed, and compared to past research findings in the results and discussion section. Lastly, the study outlines the contributions of the findings, discusses the limitations, and suggests topics for future research based on the findings.

Theoretical Framework

Other than traditional mass media platforms, live streams allow viewers to engage actively and in real-time. People can attempt to communicate with the streamer and other viewers via a live chat function, donate money or use other forms of gift-giving, which, in turn, changes the experience for others and the streamer. The possibility of interacting with a public figure through messages provides a feeling of approachability and communication between equals (Rihl & Wegener, 2019). Through gift-giving, interactions are even more likely, and the viewer can catch the attention of the streamer more easily. It further might increase the possibility of familiarity, increasing the likelihood of the streamer recognising and reacting to the viewer. Kowert and Daniel (2021) point out that the increased accessibility of the streamer and the potential for both parasocial and reciprocal communication fundamentally change the nature of parasocial relationships and make them unique to live streaming settings.

Gift-Giving – more than simply donating

Gift-giving in live streaming can come in various forms, such as subscribing, donating, using bits, or simply providing feedback in the chat. However, it is important to note that gift-giving options often require real money to be spent or collecting channel points by continuously watching the stream and, therefore, ads. What has been sent in the chat can easily be overread or get lost in the mass of messages. To increase the chance of being noticed by other viewers and the streamer, people can use paid options to highlight their message. When a viewer donates, a banner usually appears in the chat, and an alert is visible in the live stream for all to see. By subscribing, viewers can share their monthly anniversary and may receive a personalised message from the streamer. The higher the donation, the more time the streamer spends thanking the donor. Frequent donors are usually more familiar to and easily recognised by the community and the streamer.

The traditional view of gift-giving

Gift-giving has existed since the beginning of civilisation (The Psychology of Gifting, n.d.) and has long been understood as a social action that confirms relationships and social interactions (Chakrabarti & Berthon, 2012). It releases oxytocin in an individual, which signals trust, connection, and safety (APA, 2022). Gift-giving is part of modern rituals and sociocultural contexts, which indicates its importance throughout humanity (Chakrabarti & Berthon, 2012;

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Ruffle, 1999). Belk (1976) identified that gifting could function as communication, social exchange, economic exchange, and socialisation. According to Ruffle (1999), emotions significantly impact gift-giving behaviour, and people often have various expectations towards the recipient when giving a gift. The act of gift-giving can lead to different reactions and may be used to achieve specific outcomes. Sometimes, people use gift-giving to balance out a perceived inequality or to ensure good service in the future (Ruffle, 1999). Traditionally, gift giving can include gifting to give someone something without being asked and not expecting anything in return, to validate a person or event, to support someone, or to balance out a perceived debt.

Even though the traditional view of gift-giving focuses on offline gift-giving behaviour, gift-giving intentions and behaviours can also be applied in different contexts. The act of fans sending letters, gifts, artwork, or other forms of appreciation to their favourite celebrities is widely known. In some cases, celebrities respond by sending autographs or making “unpacking” videos to get in touch with their fans and appreciate their gifts. With the rise of online social media and the importance of gift-giving throughout history, it is unsurprising that gift-giving has made its way into the digital world. Now, people have even more opportunities to interact with their idols and participate in gift-giving in multiple ways at any time.

Online Gift-Giving Behaviour

Most streamers cannot be compared to celebrities, which makes it difficult to reason the gift-giving behaviours of viewers to those of celebrity fans. Looking at Twitch donation notifications, it becomes clear that many viewers donate and express their gratitude through messages. Some even share personal stories about how the streamer has helped them during difficult times. Studies suggest that gift-giving is a way to gain attention and improve social status (Hamilton et al., 2014; Oh & Choi, 2017; Yu et al., 2018) but seem to leave out personal and emotional reasons. The question of why people want to gain the attention of the streamer and others by donating money remains.

Yu et al. (2018) found that increased viewer engagement positively correlates with gift-giving behaviour. Social interactions that lead to higher gift-giving behaviour are mainly based on streamers doing what viewers request, answering questions, or telling interesting stories (e.g., Lee et al., 2019; Lee et al., 2018). Others found different indicators for gift-giving behaviour, like emotional attachment and streamer characteristics (Li & Peng, 2021; Wan et al., 2017) and social motivations (Yu et al., 2018). Others found that value co-creation and flow experience,

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which influence loyalty and, in turn, positively influence gift-giving behaviour (Huang et al., 2019), trigger this behaviour. Other indicators for gift-giving behaviour include observing others' gift-giving behaviour (Zhu et al., 2017), parasocial relationships, and social presence (Wohn et al., 2018). Another reason for gift-giving showed to be to improve the content, fulfil the desire of interaction, or pay for the entertainment value (Wohn et al., 2018). People might feel the need to participate in gift-giving to even out the streamers' affordances to entertain their viewers, balancing out their perception of what they get and what they give. According to this assumption, viewers also might engage in gift-giving to ensure good entertainment in the future, as streamers could use the money to invest it in new games or equipment to increase the quality of the stream, ensuring a higher quality streaming content and entertainment for the viewer (Wohn et al., 2018). In turn, gifts might result in gratitude, increasing the receiver's or streamers' commitment and appreciation (Ruffle, 1999).

Summarising previous research, individuals who regularly watch Twitch and actively participate in the chat tend to feel a sense of closeness to the streamer and are socially motivated to engage in the chat and gift-giving behaviours. Additionally, those interested in co-creating content and entertainment are more likely to engage in gift-giving behaviour. This behaviour is typically observed in streams where the streamer is responsive to the chat, shares interesting stories, has a pleasant personality, and follows viewers' requests.

Even though the study by Wohn et al. (2018) includes the possibility of donating without wanting to build an emotional connection to the streamer, we still do not know which kind of viewer is most likely to donate out of which reason. Previous research has identified various indicators for gift-giving behaviour. However, there is a lack of research on the individual and shared levels regarding gift-giving intentions. This study aims to fill this research gap and gain a better understanding of gift-giving behaviour, trying to look beyond donating and determine whether different motivators influence different viewer types to engage in gift-giving.

Different Viewer Types

Previously, research focused on the possibility of different viewer types when it comes to why people are watching live streams. Studies showed that people's watch behaviour and preferences can be classified into different viewer types. Schuck et al. (2022) found five viewer types, namely *system alterer* (who want to influence the stream and setup; they are socially active to

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fulfil their interests), *financial supporters* (strong willingness to donate to create or maintain a good stream quality), *content observer* (have a desire for an undisturbed stream viewing experience; social interactions with others or streamer are not of interest), *streamer-focused observer* (have an interest in the streamer; little to no interest to following the in-game events but most interested on the streamer's game experience), and the social players (who are interested in gamification elements of the stream, like unlocking achievements and collecting points).

Wohn and Freeman (2020) found four different viewer types in online streams that streamers identified, namely viewers who *feel they are part of the family*, are *fans*, *trolls* or *lurkers*. These viewer types are mostly limited to the viewers that are active in the chat and the streamer gets in contact with, identifying three categories for active viewers and only one for the inactive ones. Seering et al. (2017) also identified four different active viewer types in gaming streams, namely *helpers* (want to help the streamer to get to the streamers desired outcome), *power seekers* (want to have an impact on the game, regardless of helping or hindering the streamer), *collaborators* (want to collaborate with other viewers and the streamer), and *trolls* (want to hinder the streamer). Again, this type of viewer classification concentrates on the active chatters.

Speed, Burnett, and Robinson (2023) identified four distinct viewer types watching Twitch and examining motivating aspects of them. They categorised the viewers into (1) *Try Before You Buy*, (2) *Antisocial Viewers*, (3) *Loyal Lurkers*, and (4) *Social Viewers*. Each group showed different attributes in different domains, including gift-giving intentions. This study will focus on the viewer types of Speed et al. (2023), as their viewer types seem to include most of the other viewer types presented before to get a clear overview. All viewers have one thing in common - they enjoy watching live streams and have specific reasons for doing so. While Twitch is predominantly known for gaming streams, there are numerous other categories, such as music and just chatting, among others. Interestingly, the just chatting category emerged as the most popular Twitch streaming category in 2022 (Statista, 2022). Therefore, this study does not solely focus on the gaming category but tries to include the overall viewer and gift-giving behaviour in streams in general.

Try Before You Buy

The Try Before You Buy viewers are said to watch streams for entertainment and to get an insight into the game they intend to buy and play. They interact with streamers and others with similar gaming experiences with a specific video game. These viewers enjoy online social

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interactions with others via the chat function, but the streams also help them decide which games they want to play in the future. Even though they appreciate online social interactions, they are not necessarily interested in building connections with the streamer but are more interested in the content created. This type of viewer shares similar characteristics with the social viewers but focuses more on the content of the stream rather than the streamer. This viewer type is expected to participate in gift-giving and social interactions while highlighting the importance of quality content. They are expected to donate to ensure future content, as well as to show appreciation for the content.

Antisocial Viewers

Usually, the antisocial viewers watch streams for gaming entertainment and reject social interactions on the platform. They further do not seek to form any emotional connection to the streamer or their community. Solely, the performance and gameplay of the streamer seem to be of importance. In the study of Speed et al. (2023), these viewers showed no interest in participating in any gift-giving behaviour. In this study, this viewer type is not expected to show any gift-giving behaviour or any form of social interaction. This type is assumed to have a slightly negative attitude towards gift-giving behaviour.

Loyal Lurkers

This viewer type is shown to consume content related to their favourite streamers but tends to avoid the chat for several reasons. Even though they do not socially interact with other viewers, they tend to build an emotional connection to the streamer. Entertainment and parasocial relationships were shown to be high motivators for this viewer type to watch the stream. Even though information about their attitude towards gift-giving was absent, they are likely to show gift-giving behaviour in some form. Because of their emotional connection towards the streamer, this viewer type is expected to participate in gift-giving to build a personal connection to the streamer.

Social Viewers

The social viewers showed strong social motivations to watch and use the platform to create and support social communities with other streamers and viewers. Many showed to be streamers themselves, like interacting with both other viewers in the chat and the streamer and appreciate being part of a supportive and positive community. They also showed high correlations with

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wanting to support their favourite streamers. In this study, social viewers are expected to participate in gift-giving and want to build a connection to the streamer and community.

Even though Speed et al. (2023) did not focus on the gift-giving part, some viewers reported strongly disagreeing with the statement, "I feel uncomfortable with giving streamers money just for playing games". It indicates that in some form, some people participate in gift-giving behaviour. In which way and out of which motivations viewer types participate in gift-giving will be further investigated in this study.

Parasocial Relationships

Intimate connections to media performers are defined as parasocial relationships (PSRs) and parasocial interactions (PSIs). Traditionally, PSRs have been conceptualised as one-sided, primarily positive, intimate connections with a person based on repeated encounters (Horton & Wohl, 1956). The media user is said to extend emotions, interest, and time in the relationship with the creator. In contrast, the creator is said to be unaware of the other's existence. One example of a PSR is how heavily people can get emotionally attached to their favourite TV series and certain characters on the show. Traditionally, there is no reciprocal interaction between the two, although one person develops an emotional connection to the other (Kowert & Daniel, 2021).

Interpersonal relationships are formed after repeated encounters as individuals get to know each other better and share experiences (Altmann & Taylor, 1973). PSRs are formed similarly, as things experienced by the content creator on stream are seen as 'shared experiences' by the viewer. This increases the perceived familiarity with the creator and lets the viewer feel closeness and intimacy, as well as a sense of understanding of the media persona (Rubin & McHugh, 1987).

Many studies on parasocial relationships have focused primarily on celebrities and possibly popular streamers, at least not differentiating between streamer sizes and their impact. Therefore, possibly ignoring the vast majority of Twitch streamers. The given definitions and explanations of PSRs in other studies often reveal an inherent power imbalance. In streams with fewer viewers, social interactions between viewers and streamers are more frequent and possibly more intimate than those with popular streamers with over 200 average viewers, showing fewer signs of imbalance. When a streamer has around 20 viewers, the relationship between the streamer and viewers becomes more personal, as evidenced by instances where streamers know their viewers

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by name and are emotionally invested in their lives. This change in interaction can also impact viewer gift-giving behaviour, which may vary based on the size of the streamer's audience.

In summary, previous findings and research gaps highlight the complex interaction between streamers, viewers, and their gift-giving behaviour in live streams, acknowledging the importance of gift-giving motivations and the impact of technologies and PSRs on gift-giving dynamics. The current study aims to contribute to this field of study by focusing on gift-giving motivations on an individual level while also trying to find specific patterns of gift-giving behaviour in viewer types. By doing so, the study contributes to the understanding of characteristics of viewer types that might, as well as streamers' community size, influence online gift-giving behaviours and intentions.

Methods

Research Design and Procedure

This study aimed to understand the complex and parasocial streamer-viewer relationship in depth, focusing on viewers' gift-giving behaviour and motivations. To do so, this research uses a qualitative exploratory study design. Exploratory study designs help investigate a phenomenon, providing a deeper understanding of the underlying factors and possible relationships (George, 2023). This study design is used to investigate patterns and trends in gift-giving of viewer types which have not been investigated in detail before. It is further used to formulate hypotheses and guide future research.

The initial study design consisted of semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews were chosen as they allow for flexibility during the process but still provide a certain level of consistency, allowing a more straightforward comparability in the analysis process. It further allows for an in-depth view of the experiences, perspectives, and context of participants and might provide unexpected insights (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Dovetail Editorial Team, 2023). Even though this process allows for more flexibility, it is important to note that they also tend to be less controlled. Interviewees might provide useless information or drift off, making it hard to get back to the initial topic (Dovetail Editorial Team, 2023).

During the data collection process, an online survey was introduced to generate more participants. The survey consisted of open-ended questions and statements to allow for a deeper understanding and capture the nuances of gift-giving behaviour and reasoning while also getting a clear assessment through the statements. As open-ended questions in surveys often provide less input than face-to-face interviews and do not allow asking follow-up questions, the statements were used to see whether their answers correlate with how they evaluated the statements. Combining both approaches allows for capturing a wide range of information, including emotions, motivations, and nuances, which may not be visible through purely quantitative methods. Furthermore, combining experimental and qualitative methods allows for integrating quantitative and qualitative data, providing a more holistic view of the study topic (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). The exploratory study design helps to get a better understanding of gift-giving dynamics and helps to lay the groundwork for future research, but it also comes with limitations. Even though it gives a better understanding, it lacks conclusive results, which might be biased and not generalisable.

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At the beginning of the interviews and the online survey, participants were introduced to a consent form (see Appendix A). After reading the form, participants were given the opportunity to ask any remaining questions. Once all questions had been answered and participants agreed to take part in the study, they were asked to describe their viewing habits. This involved self-evaluating their viewer behaviour and responding to thirty-six statements from Speed et al. (2023) (see Appendix B). These statements were used as Speed et al. (2023) identified that certain statements correlate with certain Twitch viewer types. Participants needed to rank the statements on an 11-point Likert Scale, ranging from 'least like me' (-5) to 'most like me' (+5). Statements which were related to gift-giving and viewer behaviour (e.g., "I feel uncomfortable with giving streamers money just for playing games" or "I want to support the streamer that I watch") were followed by additional questions. This was done to gain more insight into participants' gift-giving behaviour and attitudes, which helped formulate further questions during interviews.

After answering the thirty-six statements, as well as answering the follow-up questions, participants were provided with a general definition of gift-giving in the traditional context. They were then asked about their gift-giving conceptions, behaviours, intentions, and hopes. This was done to get a further understanding of their perception of online gift-giving. The questions asked were based on previous research findings of online gift-giving intentions and were based on the researcher's experiences in Twitch communities. Interviews and open questions were used to get a clearer perspective on how people participate in and perceive gift-giving. Examples of questions asked are "For what reasons are you gifting online?", "Do you share your sub-anniversaries, and if so, why?" and "Does your gift-giving and chat behaviour differ depending on community/streamer size?". Overall, the themes of the questions asked can be organised into four main categories, namely: gift-giving, parasocial relationship, stream size differences, and streamer-viewer relationship. Participants were asked about their behavioural differences depending on streamers' size (subscriber count/viewer count) as streamers openly shared their experiences with changing viewer behaviour depending on the streamer's popularity. These questions were all based on the previously introduced research findings regarding online gift-giving and parasocial relationships, as well as traditional gift-giving behaviour.

To learn more about Twitch users' gift-giving behaviour, it was essential to also learn about their opinions about and behaviour regarding gift-giving, parasocial relationships, as well

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as how they see their streamer-viewer relationship, and how the streamer size might influence their behaviour regarding gift-giving in more depth. Therefore, follow-up questions like "Please elaborate why you might feel uncomfortable or comfortable with people feeling close to streamers" were included. As three interviews were held before the online survey was introduced, follow-up questions and answers that stood out in the interviews were already included in the survey. Even though the study had to make use of an online survey, the online survey introduced both raking statements and answering open-ended questions, allowing participants to answer questions freely and allow for more insight. Further, statements based on previous research and the three interviews were introduced at the end of the survey. For example, "I donate to be recognised by and build a connection with the streamer" was based on the findings of Li & Peng (2021) and Hamilton et al. (2014).

At the end of the online study, participants were asked to rank statements on a five-point Likert scale regarding their intentions on gift-giving behaviour. These statements were created based on previous research findings on gift-giving intentions, as well as indications of interviewees. The platform Qualtrics was used to record the online survey, and the survey can be found in Appendix C.

Participants, Recruitment, and Data Collection

A total of 20 participants participated in this study. Participants were contacted via WhatsApp, Reddit, or Twitch, as well as the platform *SONA system*. *SONA system* is an experiment management system of the University of Twente, which allows students and researchers to share their studies and gather participants. Participants get credit points for participating, as some study programs require students to participate in research studies. People donating on Twitch were directly messaged through the "whisper function" and were informed about the study and asked to participate. On Reddit, a post was created explaining the study and including the Qualtrics link to the survey, as well as asking to message the researcher to participate in the interviews directly. This post was shared in three different groups concerning Twitch and live streaming. The Twitch group had around 1.7 million followers, the livestreaming group had around 1.7 thousand followers, and the last livestreaming group had around 2.4 million followers. Further, snowball sampling was used to find more participants. Overall, three interviewees were recruited through WhatsApp, and one was recruited via Sona System. One survey response was collected through

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snowball sampling, three via WhatsApp and the remaining survey responses were collected via Reddit.

Participants were selected based on the requirements of donating on Twitch and/or being subscribed with at least tier 1 to at least one streamer and watching streams regularly, which can range from ‘just started watching streams regularly’ and ‘already watching streams for a while’. Additionally, participants in this study needed to be between the ages of 18 and 35. This age range is in direct correlation to the current demographics of Twitch users, as most Twitch viewers are reported to be between the ages of 16 and 34 (Twitch Advertising, 2021). This provides the opportunity to reflect the average viewer type in this study. Participants are diverse in multiple demographical aspects, like gender, educational background, and residence, as it was not expected to falsify the data collected. Based on these criteria, five participants were excluded, and the sample for further analysis consisted of 15 participants with a mean age $M_{age} = 26.47$ ($SD_{age} = 4.14$), 11 participants were male (73.3%), and four were female (26.7%).

Four of the participants took part in the interview, whereas eleven filled out the online survey. Two interviewees showed to be social viewers, one belongs to the antisocial viewers, and one scored highest on the viewer type loyal lurker. All viewer types were represented in the online survey at least once. To ensure participants stay anonymous, the title of the interview recordings was anonymised, and interviews were transcribed and deleted after transcription. The online study was conducted anonymously. The Ethics Committee BMS has approved this study.

Preliminary Quantitative Data Analysis

To investigate the collected data from the online survey, the data sets were exported from Qualtrics to the IBM Statistical Program for Social Sciences (SPSS) 28 and checked for missing values. Participants who did not provide informed consent and did not answer at least 50% of the online survey were excluded from future analysis. The limitation was set as the first half of the survey still gave valuable insights into the gift-giving behaviour of that person. Only one person included for further analysis completed 50% of the survey. All other participants included scored 98% or higher. The raw data sets were prepared for further analysis, and values and labels were adapted. In SPSS, the mean scores of each participant for the different viewer types were calculated and can be found in Table 1. Demographical values were examined, and the frequency, means, and standard deviation for age and gender were computed. Afterwards, the

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viewer-type scores of every participant were calculated. This was done to examine the participants' viewer type and, later, be able to examine possible correlations between gift-giving behaviour and viewer type. This was not only done for the online survey but also for the interviews, as interviewees were asked to evaluate the statements to figure out their viewer type as well.

Qualitative Data Analysis

All interviews and online responses to open questions were transcribed and uploaded to ATLAS.ti. This platform was used to identify important topics and themes to process and categorise the information. This platform was used as it allows the analysis of qualitative data to be more efficient through visualising data and codes, helping identify themes and patterns in the data. The data analysis was based on qualitative content analysis, according to Kuckartz. Kuckartz is known for modernising qualitative content analysis, according to Mayring, and allows for partially quantitative analysis (Kuckartz & Rädiker, 2022; Audiotranskription, 2021). The qualitative content analysis further allows for a hermeneutic approach and helps to understand and interpret the qualitative data (Kuckartz & Rädiker, 2022).

In the beginning, an open coding method was used to get a better understanding of the responses. A codebook was created to get a better overview, and codes and categories were adjusted and analysed. This was done using the hermeneutic cycle, which also asks for multiple passes to understand and analyse the text in more depth, lower the risk of biases and increase validity and reliability (Kuckartz & Rädiker, 2022). It is important to note that possible biases cannot be excluded from the analysis completely. The list of codes and their definition, which were used to code participants' responses, can be found in Appendix D.

Results

In this chapter, we will present the primary findings of the study. We will closely examine each viewer type and compare the findings with those of the other viewer types. This will help us understand if there is a connection between gift-giving behaviour and intentions among viewer types.

Viewer Types

This study aimed to analyse gift-giving behaviour based on different viewer types and characteristics. To do so, the viewer types were analysed based on the statements provided by Speed et al. (2023), which indicate high correlations depending on certain viewer types.

The mean scores of each participant display tendencies towards certain viewer types (Table 1). Four participants scored highest on viewer type 1, "try before you buy" (26.7%), with a mean score of $M_{VT1} = 1.62$ ($SD = 1.20$), two on viewer type 2, "antisocial viewers" (13.3%) ($M_{VT2} = .16$, $SD = 1.52$), four on viewer type 3 "loyal lurker" (26.7%) with a mean score of $M_{VT3} = 1.78$, $SD = .81$), and five on viewer type 4 "social viewers" (33.3%) ($M = 2.09$, $SD = .91$). Three participants, who scored highest on viewer type 4 also scored relatively high on viewer type 1, and two who scored highest on viewer type 1 also scored high on viewer type 4. The interview participants represented viewer types 4, 3, and 2. Viewer type 4 was represented twice. Refer to Table 2 for a visual overview of each participant's highest score for each viewer type.

Overall, multiple participants demonstrated elevated scores across a range of viewer categories. In line with these findings, most participants self-evaluated their viewer behaviour into multiple categories during the survey and interviews. Including the answers participants gave, these findings might indicate that viewer behaviour depends on the stream category, the streamer, and other variables. This leads to the assumption that the viewer types might not be seen as fixed categories but are more likely to function as guides on a spectrum or allow for multiple viewer types depending on multiple variables.

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Table 1

Mean Scores for Viewer Type in Participants

	Try Before You Buy	Antisocial Viewer	Loyal Lurker	Social Viewer
ID1	2.41	.93	1.90	2.36
ID2	.00	1.43	1.20	3.21
ID3	2.06	-2.36	.40	2.00
ID4	.94	-.36	.60	3.07
ID5	1.82	-.29	1.70	1.57
ID6	2.71	-1.79	1.70	3.00
ID7	1.00	.07	2.60	.07
ID8	1.88	1.50	2.30	1.21
ID9	-1.47	2.79	2.10	1.43
ID10	2.35	-.86	1.10	1.57
ID11	2.00	1.36	2.90	2.00
ID12	2.82	-1.21	1.80	3.14
ID13	.59	2.29	2.20	2.14
ID14	2.76	-1.21	1.00	3.07
ID15	2.41	.14	3.20	1.43

max. score = 5.00

min. score = -5.00

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Table 2

Overview Viewer Types

	VT 1	VT 2	VT 3	VT 4
ID 1	X			
ID2				X
ID3	X			
ID4				X
ID5	X			
ID6				X
ID7			X	
ID8			X	
ID9		X		
ID10	X			
ID11			X	
ID12				X
ID13		X		
ID14				X
ID15			X	

VT1 = Try before you buy

VT2 = Antisocial viewer

VT3 = Loyal lurker

VT4 = Social viewer

Overall Findings

Early on, it became apparent that streamer size made a huge difference in the understanding of parasocial relationships and gift-giving behaviour. Participants mentioned their gift-giving and chatting behaviour heavily depending on the streamer size. Overall, differences in streamer size were mentioned 34 times and were observable across all viewer types. Although participants in this study preferred smaller streamers when it came to gift-giving behaviour, they still enjoyed watching streams with bigger communities. Viewers reported being less active in chats of bigger streamers, as messages were more likely to get lost and go unrecognised. They were more likely to chat in streams of smaller streamers where the community was better known. Higher-value gifts were given to smaller streamers as they could identify better with them, and interaction was easier. The main reason why they preferred to donate to smaller streamers was that they had more appreciation for the gifts. An antisocial viewer stated that they did not understand why people donated to streamers or felt close to them but understood it better if the streamer was

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small and did not reach many people, as the interaction and communication seemed to be more personal. Interestingly, even though most participants reported to participate in gift-giving actively, most of them also showed to be aware of the possibility of parasocial relationships and reported to be aware of the one-sided nature of streams.

In general, all types of viewers, except the antisocial viewer type, expressed a desire to support or give something back to the streamer they were watching. Social viewers scored the highest in this regard, while try before you buy viewers scored the lowest out of the three groups who reported supporting the streamer (See Appendix E, Diagrams 1 and 2). Most participants did not consider streamers to be celebrities. Only a few streamers are recognised as celebrities, as they are widely recognised in their home country or internationally for their significant contributions to the development of YouTube and Twitch as we know them today. Despite this, many individuals outside of the niche community are unfamiliar with most (well-known) streamers.

Like antisocial viewers, people who are not familiar with this type of masspersonal media are also often surprised about people's willingness to donate to streamers. If these people started watching, they could potentially be categorised as antisocial viewers. However, every viewer started to watch streams at some point and potentially developed their current viewer type over time, possibly starting to watch, not interacting with others, and not donating. This assumption would raise the question of whether viewer types are formed over time, how they are developed, and what made them open up to gift-giving over time.

Gift-Giving

Participants mentioned various reasons why people give gifts to streamers. One of the most obvious reasons was to offer financial support. However, this study aims to look past this and determine why viewers want to support streamers financially.

The top three reasons mentioned by multiple participants across viewer types were 1) *to show appreciation for the content and work of the streamer*, 2) *to ensure future content*, 3.1) *to contribute positively to the chat or to be entertaining* and, 3.2) *paying streamers for their work*, as people do for other (streaming) services. An overview of the frequency of participants mentioning their gift-giving motivation can be found in Table 3.

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Participants reported using donations or other forms of gift-giving as a way of compensating for streamers' work and time. They value the content created by streamers and enjoy their presence due to their humour and personality, among other things. Just like paying for other entertainment and streaming platforms (e.g., Netflix or YouTube Premium), donating to streamers allows them to continue streaming, ensuring future content, as well as allowing streamers to increase the quality of the streams.

Gift-giving was also reported to be done for fun and entertainment purposes. It adds to the whole stream experience, allowing viewers to contribute to the overall stream by making streamers do something or adding funny messages that make the stream more enjoyable. Participants reported teasing streamers for fun, and gifts can be given to show support and loyalty and express feelings towards the streamer, spreading positive feelings and happiness.

Gift-giving is not limited to financial support. Viewers can show support in other ways, such as being active in the chat, helping with the game, and sending real gifts to PO boxes, among other things.

“Gift-giving might exceed just donating money or subs. But gift-giving on Twitch is sending some form of gift, like money, bits, or real presents to the streamer. Some streamers have a PO box where people can send real gifts and unpack them on stream with their viewers.”

“The most obvious is financial but you could also just be a very funny chat member which add to the flair of the whole stream, or you could be a mod which does his job great [...].”

Overall, viewers who participate in gift-giving reported feeling the need to give something back to the streamer, whether it is being active in the chat, donating, or contributing positively to the streams. Often, viewers are appreciated for their support, and gift-giving can help them get some attention from the streamer and become more familiar with them at some point. Other viewers (community) may also notice and appreciate gift-giving.

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Try Before You Buy

The most frequently mentioned reasons for gift-giving among this group of viewers were showing appreciation, ensuring future content, expressing feelings towards streamers, and giving something in return. However, looking at a more individual level, it became clear that expressing emotions, showing appreciation, and reciprocating were the primary motivations for this viewer. This viewer type seems to use gift-giving as a way to express their feelings towards the streamer, to show appreciation for the content, as well as wanting to give the streamer something in return for their effort, time, and entertainment.

"I like to support streamers that I see regularly because I appreciate the content and can understand they put a lot of work into it. I often do not support streamers that I watch sporadically because I do not like everything about their content."

This viewer type is the only one who seems to use gift-giving as a way to show how they feel towards the streamer. Participants explained that:

"Gift giving is a way to show support/love/care to your favourite streamer by giving them some revenue, show off your support via exclusive emotes and a fancy badge in chat. It can show loyalty and commitment due to being a monthly subscription."

This viewer type is also the only type that scored mainly positive on using gift-giving as a way to build a connection with streamers, as well as expecting or hoping for a reaction from the streamer after donating (see Appendix E, Diagram 1). All participants of this viewer type reported to expect appreciation from the streamer.

Interestingly, even though they seem to be the only viewer type using gift-giving to express their feelings towards the streamer, they reported feeling neither comfortable nor uncomfortable with how close others feel with streamers they watch (see Appendix E, Diagram 3). This viewer type mostly performed as expected, donating to appreciate the content and ensure future content. Against expectations and the findings of Speed et al. (2023), this viewer type is interested in the streamer and uses gift-giving to show their feelings towards the streamer.

Antisocial Viewer

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Out of the two viewers who displayed antisocial behaviour, only one reported giving gifts. However, this person expressed discomfort with seeing others donate a larger amount of money. Although this viewer type seems to feel uncomfortable with donating to streamers, they might show an understanding towards others for gifting to show appreciation for the content with a small amount of money.

“I can understand if people donate a couple of Euros to say thank you, but I do not understand higher value donations.”

They might also participate in gift-giving to pay for the work of the streamer. However, they distance themselves from gift-giving to show personal affection or appreciation towards the streamer or community or distance themselves from gift-giving in any form.

“I don't get why you would donate money to a streamer. They (often) have enough anyways. Would rather donate to people in need.”

“If I were to go to the theatre or the cinema now, I would pay money for it.”

The responses from this viewer type align with the expectations based on previous literature. However, as one of the two participants also scored high on the viewer-type loyal lurker, that participant showed more understanding of people donating. However, he still reported to mainly donate to pay for the content like he would for other streaming services and to be able to watch without ads.

Loyal Lurker

The most frequently mentioned reasons for gift-giving in this viewer type were 1) to show appreciation, 2) to ensure future content, and 3) to pay for work. Looking at gift-giving motivations on an individual level, it becomes apparent that paying for work and ensuring future content were the primary motivations for gift-giving. Participants explained that they participate in gift-giving to:

“Show appreciation and hope that the streamer is able to continue streaming and may be able to reach a higher level”, “so that they can do this for a living.”

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Gift-giving for this viewer type is a way to *“pay for their work, which is free but should be compensated in a way”* and argue that they also pay for the cinema, Netflix, and more, so they do not see a reason not to support the streamer. Only one person of this viewer type reported to hope for an appreciative reaction of the streamer after gift-giving. Furthermore, three participants reported to sometimes engage in the chat but usually prefer a smaller stream. They reported being more open towards parasocial relationships compared to other viewer types. Participants reported feeling a connection with the streamer.

“If you watch a streamer for a long time, you feel like you know this person very well, same as in podcasts, just like a friend.”

Social Viewer

Many people choose to subscribe, donate, or gift subscriptions to smaller streamers in smaller communities. They feel a closer connection to the community and the streamer and get a sense of satisfaction from supporting them. In contrast, often, supporting bigger streamers feels more like paying for a service, as they have other sources of income, such as sponsorships. Although donating to bigger streamers can be exciting, it may not feel as personal as supporting smaller streamers, who are often more grateful. Supporting smaller streamers was reported to feel more genuine and honest.

“My main mood is always more in the direction of the smaller streamers, who are just not so well known yet, just to support them a bit.”

The main motivations for gift-giving were contributing positively to the chat and being entertaining, as well as doing something good.

“So, I like to think my actions cause a bit of happiness for someone else.”

“[I am] hoping to make the streamer a bit happier and giving everyone who is watching the stream a good laugh with the text-to-speech messages.”

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Overall, in streams with smaller communities, participants reported having the feeling that viewers and the streamer have a closer connection. In smaller communities, viewers reported to be more likely to participate in gift-giving. This is often done to draw attention to their messages or to use the text-to-speech function when donating to contribute positively to the chat and tease the streamer in a friendly way.

This viewer type mainly behaved as expected. However, viewers were not as interested in the streamer as in the overall stream and community. Social viewers were expected to chat and participate in gift-giving to win the streamer's attention, as well as to build a connection to the streamer. This did not show to be the case. They were likelier to make the stream a pleasant experience for everyone watching.

Trigger

Across VT1, VT3, and VT4, gift-giving triggers were summarised by participants as an innate, impulsive feeling. Usually, they observe this feeling in streams they perceive as entertaining and authentic or like the streamer's personality. However, they were not able to identify the trigger, which made them donate at this specific moment. Three participants (ID6, ID13, & ID15) reported more readily joining a hype train when being close to a certain goal or when others had already triggered a certain, entertaining alert.

Even though most participants of this study reported being aware of the parasocial phenomena that can take place in mass and masspersonal media, that is not always the case. Many individuals express discomfort with parasocial phenomena. Some individuals can understand why others may feel close to a streamer and may even identify with them due to shared interests. However, they still feel uncomfortable with the idea of people feeling too close to them. Others have shared experiences, such as seeing streamers as close friends because of their welcoming attitude. Some individuals view parasocial relationships as a natural occurrence.

Despite this sample's overall realistic perception of parasocial phenomena and their rational awareness of it, many people feel close to their favourite streamers, which potentially can end up in a toxic parasocial relationship. One participant shared an experience in which their friend spent a significant amount of money on a parasocial relationship with a streamer after personal circumstances during the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. Said friend quickly fell into a depression, trying to find an anchor in parasocial relationships. After the friend had spent a substantial amount of money, the family noticed, intervened, and was able to help.

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Stories like this highlight the importance of spreading more awareness of parasocial relationships, especially when people have the opportunity to easily interact with their favourite streamers or influencers through mass or masspersonal media. It is essential to get a better understanding of why people might fall into this pit and how they can use the parasocial relationships that might develop in a healthy and safe way.

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Table 3

Overview: Frequency of Gift-Giving motivation mentioned by each participant

		Show appreciation	Ensure future content	Contribute pos.	Doing smth. good	Paying for work	Express feelings	Give smth. back	Ad-free	Being mentioned	Connection
VT1	ID 1	1	2	2			3	1			
	ID3	3			1		1	1			
	ID5	2			1		1	1	1		
	ID10	1	4				2	1	1		1
VT2	ID9										
	ID13	4			1	1			1		
VT3	ID7	2	3		1	1					
	ID8	3	1			1					
	ID11		2			2					
	ID15	3	1	2		2				1	
VT4	ID2	2			3	2			2		1
	ID4			3	1						
	ID6		6	1	1						
	ID12	2		3	3	2					4
	ID14	3		1	1	1			1	1	
Sum		25	15	11	10	11	8	6	5	2	6
N of VTs		11	7	6	9	8	5	5	6	3	4

Discussion

The findings of this exploratory study will be presented in this chapter, shedding light on the dynamics of gift-giving behaviour in different viewer types. It will analyse and provide further insight into the complex relationship between gift-giving, viewer type, and streamer size, as well as provide a deeper understanding of gift-giving intentions and motivations.

Masspersonal media like live streams offer a unique platform for viewer engagement that sets them apart from other mass media platforms like Twitter. Viewers have the opportunity to interact with the streamer and other viewers in real-time through the live chat function, as well as through using functions like text-to-speech, highlighting messages, or engaging in other forms of gift-giving.

Stream Size Differences and Gift-Giving

Parasocial relationships have been characterised as being of one-sided nature, with people forming emotional connections to media personas, whereas the media persona usually does not form such connections (Horton & Wohl, 1956). Live streaming introduces unique dynamics to PSRs, as streamers are more accessible to viewers and reciprocal interactions are more likely (Kowert & Daniel, 2021). However, the nature of parasocial relationships in the context of live streaming may differ based on the size of streamers' communities and viewership.

Stream size differences were shown to have a considerable impact on viewers' behaviour. Participants repeatedly mentioned the size of the streamer and, therefore, their community size playing a vital role in their gift-giving and chatting behaviour. According to participants' observations, smaller streamers seem to foster a more personal and engaging atmosphere, which leads people to be more active in the chat and participate in gift-giving more readily. Reasons mentioned for why participants reported being more active in the chat as well as in their gift-giving behaviour were that their messages and donations do not go unnoticed as easily. The chat is not as overwhelming and distracting, allowing for more natural and personal interactions. Furthermore, participants reported smaller streamers to be more thankful when receiving gifts. Compared to bigger streamers, participants reported perceiving gift-giving in smaller streams to contribute to the streamer's growth, ensuring future content and increasing the quality of the stream more noticeably. It allows smaller streamers to invest in games and better equipment.

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Especially in social viewers (VT4), the importance of community and familiarity in online streaming were key indicators for gift-giving behaviour.

Often, gift-giving does not happen in silence. Even though subscriptions and donations do not need to be shared and can be kept in silence, most people choose to share them. Usually, they want to show their support, appreciate the content, and thank the streamer. However, people who say that they want to pay the perceived debt could do it in silence but also often choose not to. One participant reasoned that they want to show that they are also a person, thereby raising it to a social, interactive level between people and not just being a number or an anonymous name in the chat. People can share their support more easily, compared to Netflix or movie theatres, which makes them share their subscriptions and donations more readily.

Viewer Type Differences in Gift-Giving

The primary motivations for gift-giving, based on the number of participants mentioning it, were showing appreciation for the streamer's content, doing something good, paying for work, and ensuring future content. Overall, the reasons for gift-giving found in this study were in line with the findings of Wohn et al. (2018) and also showed to represent findings of other studies like Huang et al. (2019) and Zhu et al. (2017). The findings lead to the impression of gift-giving being more than the act of financially supporting someone but extending to viewers' wish to enhance the overall streaming experience for multiple reasons, as well as paying off a perceived debt. This suggests that gift-giving has both practical and emotional benefits, including ensuring future content and streams and fostering a sense of connection and appreciation. Overall, VT 2, VT3, and VT4 showed no interest in improving or fostering a relationship with the streamer through gift-giving. Only VT1 showed to participate in gift-giving to do so, separating gift-giving behaviour from parasocial relationships a little further. Even though most participants reported not forming a connection with the streamer through gift-giving, feelings of familiarity and liking the streamer and their content were still essential factors for gift-giving.

Each viewer type showed different motivations for gift-giving. Try before you buy viewers have shown to use gift-giving to express their emotions towards the streamer and appreciation for the content created, as well as paying a perceived debt. It might further be used to build a personal connection with the streamer and hope for a reaction of the streamer after gifting. VT1 was described by Speed et al. (2023) as highly valuing the content of the stream,

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therefore watching specific content of streams, not being too interested in the streamer. They were reported to enjoy the exchange with the community. In this study, this viewer type was the only one showing high interest in building and improving the relationship with the streamer. Due to previous research, these results turned out to be unexpected. Due to the heavy overlap in viewer types, especially between viewer types one and four, one might assume this to be an explanation for this viewer type's desire to foster the relationship with the streamer. However, VT4 showed no interest in building a relationship with the streamer and was more interested in building a connection to the community, as well as participating in gift-giving to contribute positively to everyone's stream experience. As this viewer type is heavily invested in the content the streamer creates, this type might want to feel closer to the streamer as VT4. While the streamer and their content might remain the focal point for VT1, VT4 seems to be more invested in the community as a whole, engaging with multiple individuals and talking about different topics outside of the streaming content. Even. If VT1 socially interacts with the community, it might be mostly about the streamer, which might in turn, be the reason why the streamer is the central point and why they want to build a connection.

In line with previous findings of Speed et al. (2023) and expectations, antisocial viewers appeared hesitant about gift-giving in any form. They seem to view gift-giving more like a deed or transaction rather than an expression of feelings compared to other viewer types. However, participants who showed to participate in gift-giving to pay for streamers' work also showed to have a mixed viewer type, which might explain possible tendencies towards gift-giving.

Loyal lurkers were primarily motivated to participate in gift-giving behaviours by the desire to pay for the streamer's work, ensure future content, and show appreciation for the content created. In the study of Speed et al. (2023), loyal lurkers were described as being viewers who enjoy the content created and build an emotional connection to the streamer but like to stay out of the chat. Unexpectedly, gift-giving motivations were solely based on the content created, and participants showed no interest in building a relationship with the streamer using gift-giving options. Interestingly, even though VT3 reported valuing a personal connection with their favourite streamers, therefore, most likely having a parasocial relationship, they did not mention using gift-giving options to do so and disagreed with the statement "I donate to be recognised by and build a connection with the streamer". These mixed results might point to people

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appreciating the one-sided connection to the streamer, simply enjoying their company but not diving deeper into the parasocial relationship and rather staying at a distance.

Social viewers emphasised the importance of community and personal connection in gift-giving behaviour. They preferred supporting smaller streamers as it felt more genuine, as well as contributing positively to the chat and enhancing the overall experience for both the streamer and the viewers through funny messages or triggering certain alerts. In line with previous research, this viewer type reports actively participating in gift-giving as they value social interactions and community engagement. However, due to their social nature, building a personal connection to the streamer could be a goal for this viewer type. Even though they appreciate personal interaction and familiarity to a certain degree, they do not participate in gift-giving to build a closer connection to the streamer but rather concentrate on the community. Motivations for gift-giving include contributing positively to the chat, being entertaining, and doing something good (for the community).

In the study of Speed et al. (2023), four different viewer types were categorised, which were implemented in this study. Due to the categorisation of participants into different viewer types, the diversity of gift-giving behaviour and motivations becomes apparent. It is important to note that participants showed elevated scores across multiple viewer types, suggesting that viewer types may not be fixed categories but rather exist on a spectrum influenced by multiple variables. This might lead to an overlap and more similarity in viewer types in this study due to the small number of participants. Nonetheless, some patterns that are observable might be interesting for further investigation. Despite previous findings on gift-giving, which suggest gifting to be a way to build a connection to streamers, viewers do not necessarily feel comfortable with others forming close connections with streamers and not necessarily use gifts to get closer to the streamer.

Participants were also asked to categorise their viewer behaviour. They often mentioned to be between viewer types, depending on the streamer. However, less active chatters often described themselves as lurking instead of categorising their behaviour as antisocial or try before you buy. Most of the participants mentioned categorise themselves between social viewers and loyal lurkers. Try before you buy sounds like a category which is really fixed, including only people who actually use Twitch streams to see how a game is performing before buying, which many people probably do not identify with and identify more with the loyal lurker category

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instead. The same goes for the antisocial category. Rephrasing them to, for example, "content fixated" and "introverted watchers" might be more welcoming to choose for people.

The study findings highlight the complexity of viewer behaviour within masspersonal media. The different viewer types provided a better insight into and understanding of the diversity of gift-giving motivations, shedding light on the complex dynamics of gift-giving and parasocial relationships. Understanding these findings and investing in future research might help streamers and content creators to understand their viewership better, as well as foster stronger connections to their viewers, encouraging gift-giving behaviour while also building a stronger and more engaging community. Streaming platform providers can use this information to enhance their streaming platform further, introducing features tailored to viewer types and personal preferences. Further, these findings can be used as a basis and inspiration for future research to investigate the dynamics of gift-giving behaviour and motivations in different viewer types.

Limitations and Future Research

Even though the study was of exploratory nature and was able to detect patterns and further insights regarding gift-giving dynamics, the study shows some limitations. Participants were contacted through various platforms such as WhatsApp, Reddit, Twitch, and the SONA system. Although this approach might result in a diverse sample, it may lead to sampling bias. People who are already socially active on social media platforms may have different characteristics than the general Twitch user population, therefore biasing viewer types and possible overlaps.

While qualitative research usually has smaller samples, it is crucial to consider that small sample size can impact the ability to generalise findings. Especially because of integrating four viewer types, future research should aim for a larger sample size, introducing around ten to fifteen participants for each viewer type. This limitation prevents the study from making broad claims based on the limited sample.

Further, the study used a combination of semi-structured interviews and online surveys. While this approach can provide a rich dataset, it is important to acknowledge that responses in interviews and surveys may differ due to factors like the social desirability bias or differences in response mode. Further, due to the qualitative nature of the study, the possibility of a confirmation bias cannot be left unnoticed. To avoid this bias, transcriptions were coded without knowing the participants' viewer type, as well as going through the transcript multiple times. One finding that stood out and was not further addressed in this study was the trigger of donations and gift-giving. People described it as an innate feeling of wanting to donate at this specific point in time. People address streamer characteristics and the current stream content as the reason they subscribed but could not explain why they donated at a certain moment outside of hype trains or other people donating. Future studies could investigate in more detail the triggers behind gift-giving, as participants reported these triggers as feelings or impulses. It is worth exploring whether these impulses are universal or differ depending on culture and upbringing. Future research could further investigate which societal impulses/pressure lie beyond this phenomenon.

Another study might focus on how viewer types might develop over time, depending on how long people are active Twitch users, as well as how it might change with age, allowing for an investigation of possible type transitions based on individual experiences, interactions, and changing preferences.

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Appendices

Appendix A

https://utwentebbs.eu.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_38luvZSWFvLoPAO

Informed Consent Online Study

Goal

This study aims to collect information about gift-giving behaviour in different viewer types on Twitch. Further, this study wants to examine the individual intentions for gift-giving, as well as the feelings and hopes different viewer types might have towards the streamer and others when participating in this social interaction.

Procedure

First, you will be asked to fill out a questionnaire in “Qualtrics” to indicate your viewer type, followed by follow-up questions related to gift-giving or feelings towards streamers. The questionnaire consists of 36 statements that you will need to answer on an 11-point Likert scale ranging from “least like me” (-5) to “most like me” (+5). Afterwards, you will be asked additional questions about your gift-giving behaviour, perception, hopes, and feelings. Followed by nine statements regarding gift-giving intentions and behaviour. The questionnaire will likely take around 30 minutes, depending on how much you are willing to share.

You can withdraw from the study at any time. You can ask questions at any moment.

Recording

Your data will only be used for the purpose of this study. The data will only be seen by the researcher and their supervisor and will not be shared outside the research team.

Participation is not expected to have any risks or consequences for you.

- Your answers and details will be processed anonymously.
- We are just interested in the possible correlations of variables and dynamics, not your performance or any possible social standards.

GIFT-GIVING BEHAVIOUR IN DIFFERENT VIEWER TYPES

Please fill in the following questions to continue with the study.

If you do not consent, your data will be excluded and deleted from the study.

If you have any questions before or after the study, please contact the researcher via email:

v.sasse@student.utwente.nl

Informed consent

I have read and understood the study. I have been able to ask questions about the study, and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

- Yes, I consent.
- No, I do not consent.

I consent voluntarily to participate in this study and understand that I can refuse to answer questions and withdraw from the study at any time without having to explain.

- Yes, I consent.
- No, I do not consent.

I understand that taking part in this study involves the recording of my information. I understand that I need to fill in a questionnaire provided to me, as well as answer questions asked to me regarding gift-giving on Twitch.

- Yes, I consent.
- No, I do not consent.

I understand that the information collected about me will be processed anonymously and will not be shared beyond the study team.

- Yes, I consent.
- No, I do not consent.

GIFT-GIVING BEHAVIOUR IN DIFFERENT VIEWER TYPES

Informed Consent Interviews

Goal

The goal of this study is to collect information about gift-giving behaviour in different viewer types on Twitch. Further, this study wants to examine the individual intentions for gift-giving, as well as the feelings and hopes different viewer types might have towards the streamer and others when participating in this social interaction.

Procedure

First, you will be asked to verbally fill out a questionnaire to indicate your viewer type, followed by follow-up questions regarding your viewer type. The questionnaire consists of 36 statements that you will need to answer on an 11-point Likert scale ranging from “least like me” (-5) to “most like me” (+5). Afterwards, you will be asked questions about your gift-giving behaviour, perception, hopes, and feelings. The interview will likely take around 40 minutes, depending on how much you are willing to share.

You can withdraw from the study at any time. You can ask questions at any moment.

Recording

The interview will be audio recorded and transcribed afterwards.

Your data will only be used for the purpose of this study. The data will only be seen by the researcher and their supervisor and will not be shared outside the research team.

Participation is not expected to have any risks or consequences for you

- Your answers and details will be processed anonymously.
- We are just interested in the possible correlations of variables and dynamics, not your performance or any possible social standards.

Informed consent

I have read, or the study has been read to me and understood the study. I have been able to ask questions about the study, and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

GIFT-GIVING BEHAVIOUR IN DIFFERENT VIEWER TYPES

- Yes, I consent.
- No, I do not consent.

I consent voluntarily to be a participant in this study and understand that I can refuse to answer questions and can withdraw from the study at any time without having to give an explanation.

- Yes, I consent.
- No, I do not consent.

I understand that taking part in this study involves the recording of audio information. I understand that I need to fill in a questionnaire provided to me, as well as answer questions asked to me regarding gift-giving on Twitch.

- Yes, I consent.
- No, I do not consent.

I understand that the information collected about me will be processed anonymously and will not be shared beyond the study team.

- Yes, I consent.
- No, I do not consent.

Appendix B

Statements to identify viewer type (Speed et al., 2023)

1. I like to use Twitch because streamers make me feel better.
2. I like to go to the same streamer, see how they are, and participate in the chat.
3. I want to support the streamer that I watch.
4. I love to interact with my favourite streamer.
5. I don't care about the games; I just want to watch the streamer I like.
6. I feel really close with the streamer I watch, even though I haven't met them.
7. I only watch specific streamers because they are funny or have exciting personalities.
8. To me, streamers are like celebrities.
9. I don't care about what streamers have to say about their lives.
10. I am uncomfortable with how close people feel with streamers who are complete strangers to them in real life.
11. I feel uncomfortable with giving streamers money just for playing games.
12. I like that streams are live because I can react and interact with the streamer in real-time.
13. Twitch helps me feel like I'm part of an international community.
14. I enjoy meeting new people with a common interest in video games.
15. I don't like to participate in the chat, but I like watching.
16. The chat is too distracting.
17. I feel like the people I chat with on Twitch are my real friends.
18. The Twitch community feels very fake to me because everyone chats anonymously.
19. I really hate the random drama that happens in chat.
20. Using Twitch makes me feel lonelier.
21. I like to watch my real-life friends stream on Twitch.
22. I watch Twitch when I want to relax and unwind.
23. It feels good listening to streamers play games. I like having it on in the background.
24. I hate tournaments and watching people compete.
25. I often get bored while watching Twitch.
26. While I am on Twitch, I can forget about my family, school, work, and other things.
27. Twitch is a gaming site and should only focus on gaming.

GIFT-GIVING BEHAVIOUR IN DIFFERENT VIEWER TYPES

- 28.** I get really frustrated watching streamers who really suck at the game.
- 29.** I watch Twitch to get my game fix when I can't play.
- 30.** I don't like when streamers do collaborations because it feels fake.
- 31.** Twitch helps me better decide which video game I want to play.
- 32.** Using Twitch has helped me find games I wouldn't have otherwise found.
- 33.** Twitch never helps me learn about new game strategies, tricks, and tactics.
- 34.** I watch Twitch because I want to become a streamer.
- 35.** I actually don't play video games, but I like watching other people play.
- 36.** I watch Twitch because of the nostalgia I feel about the games.

GIFT-GIVING BEHAVIOUR IN DIFFERENT VIEWER TYPES

Appendix C

Online Survey

Demographics:

Please enter your age:

Please enter your sex:

- Male
- Female
- Non-binary/third gender
- Prefer not to say

How would you define your viewing behaviour on Twitch and how often do you watch (e.g., socially active, just watching, only watching certain categories of streams, etc.)?

Hello!

Thank you for participating in this study!

You will be asked some general questions about your viewer type on Twitch, as well as your gift-giving behaviour and correlation variables. Please stick through the survey and answer the questions honestly.

Have fun!

In the next pages, you will be presented with a set of statements and questions. Please indicate how much you can relate to the statements. Don't take too long over your replies. Your immediate is best.

Viewer Type Statements were included here

Open questions regarding statements:

- Please elaborate why streamers might or might not make you feel better.

GIFT-GIVING BEHAVIOUR IN DIFFERENT VIEWER TYPES

- Please elaborate why you want or do not want to support streamers and how.
- How do you usually interact with streamer? (E.g., do you use bits to highlight messages, include messages in donations, just write in the chat, etc.)
- Please elaborate on why you might feel uncomfortable or comfortable with people feeling close to streamers.
- Please elaborate on why you might feel uncomfortable or comfortable with giving money to streamers.
- If you want to share any experiences or came up with something you want to share while reading the statements, please feel free to share here.

Almost Done!

Keep up the good work.

Definition gift-giving

In many studies online gift-giving is seen as the act of donating. However, the act of gift-giving can be seen as much more than solely financially supporting someone. Generally, gift-giving can be summarised as: giving someone something without being asked and not expecting anything in return; to validate a person or event; to support someone; the act of giving.

How would you define or summarise gift-giving on Twitch? What does gift-giving include for you?

Why and in which form do you participate in gift-giving on Twitch?

Which kind of streamers do you prefer watching? (e.g. gaming, just chatting, smaller streamers, bigger streamers, etc.)

What are your intentions for donating, subscribing, or sharing sub anniversaries?

What triggers your gift-giving behaviour and why?

GIFT-GIVING BEHAVIOUR IN DIFFERENT VIEWER TYPES

How does your gift-giving behaviour differ depending on the kind or size of the streamer and why?

How does gift-giving make you feel?

What are long-term/short-term expectations and hopes when participating in gift-giving? (e.g., regarding the streamer, content, community, etc.)

I participate in gift-giving to win everyone's attention.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

I participate in gift-giving to promote feelings of superior social status.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

I hope to get the attention of the streamer through gift-giving.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

I donate (subs) and or subscribe to support the streamer and the receiver.

GIFT-GIVING BEHAVIOUR IN DIFFERENT VIEWER TYPES

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

Through donations I express my feelings towards the streamer.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

After gift-giving, I hope for a reaction of the streamer.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

I feel the need to give something back to the streamer.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

I donate to be recognised by and build a connection with the streamer

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree

GIFT-GIVING BEHAVIOUR IN DIFFERENT VIEWER TYPES

- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

I donate to ensure (good quality) entertainment in the future.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

If you have any gift-giving experiences, feelings, etc. you can think of and want to share, please do so here.

Thank you for your participation!

If you have any questions or if anything is unclear, please contact the researcher via email.

v.sasse@student.utwente.nl

GIFT-GIVING BEHAVIOUR IN DIFFERENT VIEWER TYPES

Appendix D

Codebook

	Categories	Description
1.	Gift-Giving: ensure future content	People reported to participate in gift-giving to support the streamer financially, allowing the streamer to stream regularly and increase the quality and content of the stream.
2.	Gift-giving: increase interaction	
3.	Gift-Giving: ad-free	People reported to subscribe to streamer to enjoy the content ad-free
4.	Gift-Giving: express feelings	Gift-Giving is used to express (positive) feelings towards the streamer and show support; highlighting or including messages.
5.	Gift-Giving: contribute pos. to stream	Gift-Giving is used to contribute positively to the stream by including positive or entertaining messages
6.	Gift-Giving: doing something good	People participate in gift-giving because they like the feeling of doing something good and helping someone.
7.	Gift-Giving: appreciation	People participate in gift-giving because they want to show appreciation for the content created
8.	Gift-Giving: discomfort with high value gifts	Seeing people donating high value gifts makes them feel uncomfortable
9.	Gift-Giving: Paying for work	Donating as people are also paying for others' work and other streaming services
10.	Gift-Giving: give something back	Like gift-giving as they feel the need to give something back to the streamer; so that the streamer feels better
11.	Gift-Giving expectations: Appreciation	People expect to be acknowledged/appreciated in any way (reacting on donation, saying thank you, etc.)
12.	Gift-Giving expectations: being mentioned	Expecting streamers to acknowledge donation (and message) by mentioning user's name
13.	Gift-Giving: definition	What do people consider gift-giving to be in the streaming context; what does it include
14.	Gift-Giving: Trigger	What can be certain triggers for people to donate
15.	Gift-Giving: Trigger: help grow	Gift-Giving to help grow community and become more visible
16.	Gift-Giving: Personal Connection	Gift-giving because of personal connection (through e.g. shared interests and hobbies)
17.	PSR: understanding	People are aware of parasocial relationships and can understand that others might feel close to streamer

GIFT-GIVING BEHAVIOUR IN DIFFERENT VIEWER TYPES

18.	PSR: does not care	Does not care if people develop a PSR with the streamer
19.	PSR: negative attitude	People are aware of parasocial relationships and see it from an objective/realistic point of view; they do not feel close to streamers.
20.	Reasons for watching streams: entertainment	Watching streams to feel entertained
21.	Reasons for watching streams: socialise	Watching streams to socialise with others
22.	Stream size benefits: bigger streamer	People expressing the benefits of watching bigger streamers
23.	Stream size benefits: smaller streamer	People expressing benefits for smaller streamer
24.	Streamer Size: Differences	People talking about the differences in their behaviour depending on streamer size
25.	Streamer-Viewer Relationship: Personal Connection	People reporting in which situations they felt a personal connection to the streamer
26.	Streamer-Viewer Relationship: Shared experiences	Streamer-viewer relationship increases through shared experiences
27.	Streamer-Viewer Relationship: Interaction	How and when people interact with the streamer: The streamer-viewer relationship increases through this.
28.	Others	All other citations are interesting but were only mentioned by one or two people from different viewer types.
29.	Chatting: active	Active chatters to interact with the community

Streamer Size differences	1	2		2	4			1		2		9	5	4	4
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15

GIFT-GIVING BEHAVIOUR IN DIFFERENT VIEWER TYPES

Appendix E

Diagrams and Tables

Diagram 1

Median for gift-giving statements based on viewer type

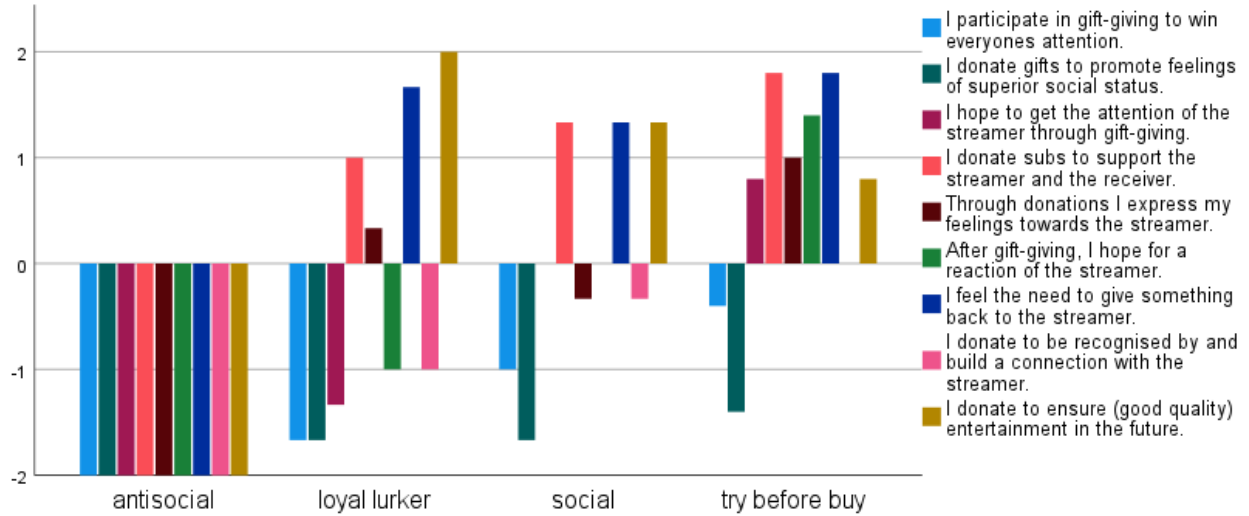
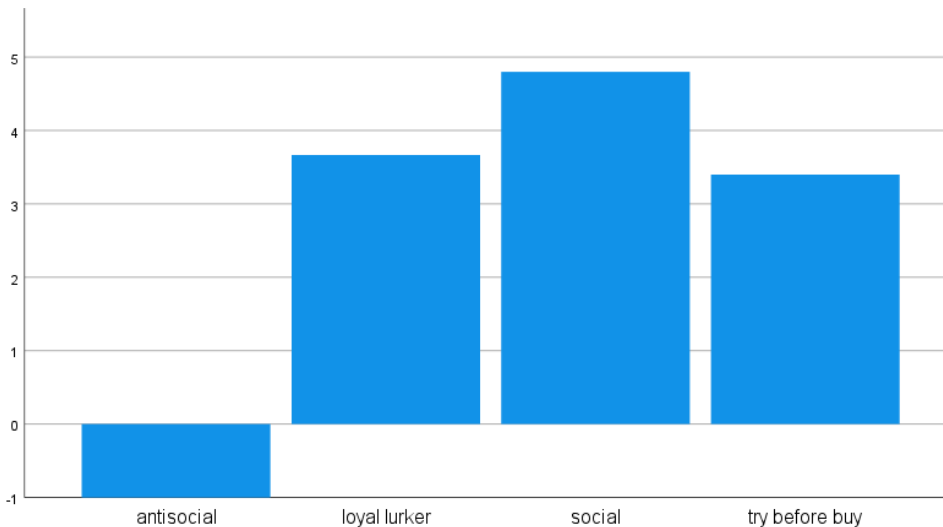


Diagram 2

Median: I want to support the streamer that I watch. Based on Viewer Type



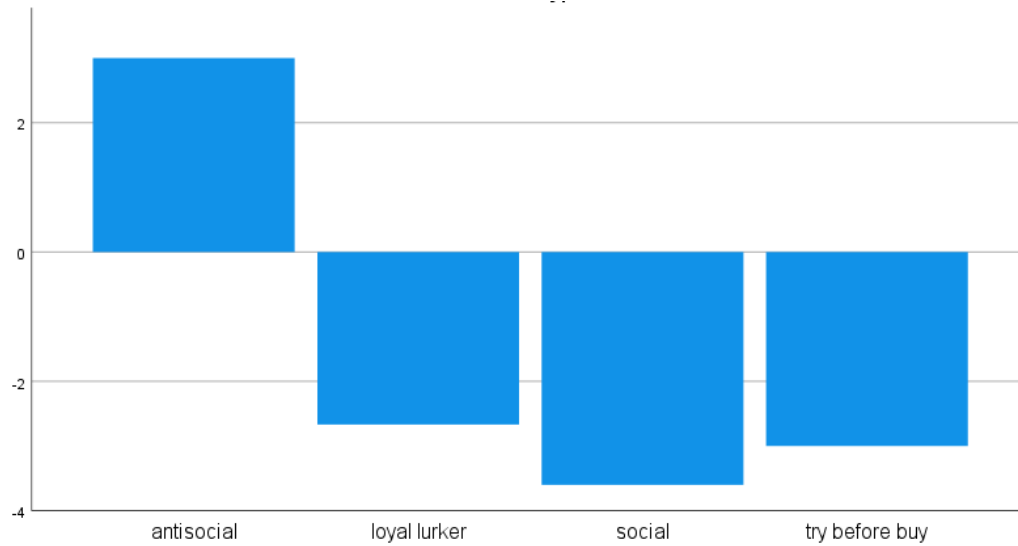
x-axis = Viewer Type

y-axis = Median: I want to support the streamer that I watch

GIFT-GIVING BEHAVIOUR IN DIFFERENT VIEWER TYPES

Diagram 2

Median: I feel uncomfortable with giving streamers money just for playing games. Based on Viewer Type



x-axis = Viewer Type

y-axis = Median: I want to support the streamer that I watch

Diagram 3

Median: I am uncomfortable with how close people feel with streamers who are complete strangers to them in real life. Based on Viewer Type

