THE DREAM STREAM PODCAST

"Exploration of streaming and intersectional social issues within its community, media and users"

by Mattie Osborne

School of Media & Performing Arts

Faculty of of Arts & Humanities

Coventry University

ABSTRACT

This project focuses on exploring key, intersectionalist topics such as sexism, moderative censorship, and user engagement through interview discussions amongst participants in the form of a podcast. The podcast will be designed to be both informative as well as entertaining, drawing references and stylised by analysing other market competitors, audience demographics and numeral data to confirm the artefacts own potential audience. What was discovered from this project is that the development of podcasting as a sourceful medium has extensively reached newer audiences, many of them being younger and more active within streaming communities making it a youthful media when compared to its length of development from its formation.

The project's purpose is to highlight and to open up a helpful and friendly discussion on the impact streaming has had on content creation within platforms and has changed the way entertainment and information is absorbed by their demographics. It will help assess the current strengths and weaknesses of podcasting and furthermore, streaming media. It will also aim to give a detailed analysis of how the people who use the platform have maximized and delivered to the industry through market research in the dissertation stage.

Total Word Count: 3,284 exl. Acknowledgements, Appendices & References.
Listen:
https://open.spotify.com/show/66HKkowpxz0XHsr6gjzdaE?si=7kFifeX_Qw6sz2vEEul_mw

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Final thanks go to the amazing individuals who participated in the project, and made the podcast a reality. Thank you for being on the podcast, and for giving some really good interviews. It means the absolute best to the project.

CHAPTER ONE: PODCASTING AND ITS AUDIENCE?

Podcasting as a format has been a growing prominence within the media, and that was something throughout the course of this project I thoroughly wanted to investigate and research further into how podcasting came about, the importance of engaging with discussions through audio and how it was developed and apply that learning to my own podcast concerning the streaming community. Thus, the Dream Stream Podcast project began.

My original research into podcasting delved very much into how it began as a realised, modern form of audio media, leading my project research towards two individuals. In a Medium article by Team Sounder (2019), I learned a lot about the development of RSS or 'RDF Site Summary'; developed back in 2004 by Adam Curry and Dave Winer who were experienced media professionals and sought to create a way for media to be updated in a standardised cross-web compatible system. This led them to the development of what became the foundation for podcasting, and in 2005, Curry developed one of the first podcasts, Podshow. The RSS system was successful, and in the same year, podcasting was elevated due to its use by President George W. Bush as a form of presidential address. Podcasting over the coming decade developed with the times; Apple developing it's iPhone technology and bringing stronger audio systems on board helped increment and cement RSS as a vital, technological advantage for many media creators as well.

"As the name gained popularity, new media creators started to jump into the boat, and more podcast networks continued to emerge. The podcasts conveyed different types of content. While some of them were based upon topics, others were for entertainment purposes." (Team Sounder, 2020)
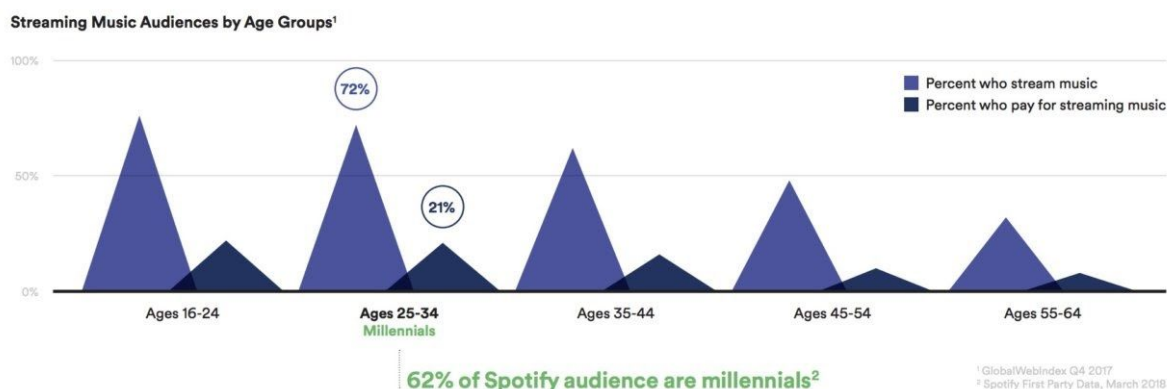
To this effect, podcasting began shifting in the early 2010's to become more for entertainment purposes, topical debates and so forth. One of the biggest changes seen was the development of software designed explicitly to host RSS feeds such as Spotify

and Soundcloud, both becoming staple competitors in the music & podcasting industries.

Learning this, I wanted my podcast to reflect what I had learnt about it as a form of media, and this research definitely helped me concretely construct the podcast around the platform, than the platform around the podcast because the audiences available from either Soundcloud, or Spotify would be vastly different in their technography - phone applications vs computerised software. My main choice was to go with Spotify; built with RSS uploading in mind like Soundcloud, it had a much more diverse audience demographic to tap into, especially given the topic of the streaming community which is primarily young adults who have as a technographic use more phone application software than computer-based.

When researching into this further, there were numerous studies that surveyed and collaborated with Spotify to induce an accurate reading into their audiences which was beneficial to this project in determining where to assume potential target demographics. In his analytical article for Music Business Worldwide, Tim Ingham discussed and evaluated data that MBW corroborated from Spotify. In the data, Ingham (2020) pointed out that:

"Spotify's own data in Q1 2018 showed that 62% of its audience were 'Millennials', defined as those aged between 25 and 34 – a stat which didn't even include those aged 24 or younger"

Streaming Music Audiences by Age Groups[1]

■ Percent who stream music
■ Percent who pay for streaming music

72% 21%

Ages 16-24   Ages 25-34 **Millennials**   Ages 35-44   Ages 45-54   Ages 55-64

62% of Spotify audience are millennials[2]

[1] GlobalWebindex Q4 2017
[2] Spotify First Party Data, March 2018

(Figure 1: Spotify Quarter 4 2018; Spotify First Party Data March 2018. Ingham, 2020)

Looking further at the chart though from the previous quarter, a clear pattern begins to emerge as you can see a descending curve from the initial 'Percent who stream music' that begins to drop as we reach the ages of 55-64. From data collected over the course of this project independently through our own surveys, it can be confirmed efficiently with Spotify's own Q4 2017 data that the collective user base is generally larger than those past the age of 45. However, from our roughly 400 survey participants, I discovered that the audience for podcasts differs slightly from Spotify's projections which lumps podcasts into their music streaming data; a failure not rectified until October 2018. In our post-survey data, it was demonstrated that there is a bigger percentage of audience engagement from people 18-24 making up roughly 31% (rounded up) of the total participant count, with 25-34 being the second largest majority at roughly 26% and 35-44 year old's being roughly 20%.

Age of Survey Participants

55+
4.7%

45-54
8.0%

35-44
19.5%

25-34
25.7%

Under 18
11.2%

18-24
30.9%
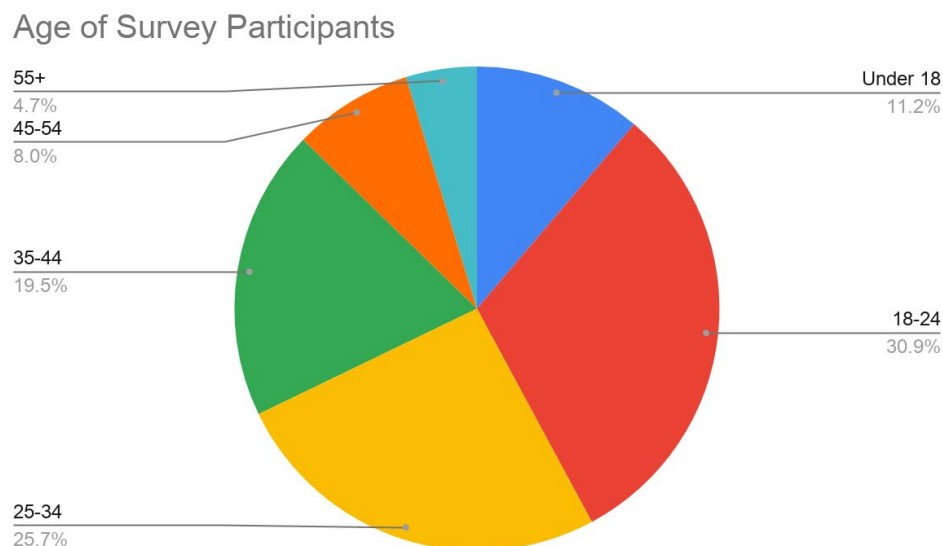
(Figure 2: TDSP Research Survey 'Age of Survey Participants')

This ultimately helped me to conclude and reinforce my decision to target audiences within these age ranges; streaming, just like podcasting is relatively a new form of media and so it makes sense to target it's biggest consumer group: Generation Z (those

now aged 18-24) with a secondary target demographic of those in the Millennial generation. With my audience demographics organised, it was time to focus on reinforcing my understanding and development of the podcast through more literature research.

LITERATURE REVIEW: WHAT HAS BEEN SAID SO FAR?

When further digging into what made podcasting such an intriguing media format, I began looking into different literature concerning the topic. Due to the industry being only a solid 16 years old currently, there was little in the way of academic theory as there were practical discussions and articles on developing a podcast from the ground up. A book that I found most helpful when working through this problem was one by Nuzum, E (2019). The book was very depth heavy. Elaborate and precise, it discussed a lot of the benefits and more structural importances of building a podcast; audience focus and retention, as well as improvement in future endeavours. While it does cover a large variety of different areas and offers greater insight into improving one's abilities in podcasting, Nuzum's work draws mostly from interpersonal experience than confirmed practices, though he swears by it in his writings in Chapter One of his book:

"Every successful podcast, ever, has delivered on each of these three tenets. Regardless of form, format, or style, I've spent years trying to find an exception to this, and never have. You should consider hitting these marks to be your gateway to success, too." (Nuzum, 2019)

As Nuzum stated, the exception has never been found, but a negative of this is that it doesn't deny it could exist either. That would be the negative drawback of Nuzum's work as a literary reference for this project is that it doesn't act a definitive practice, rather one on personalised experience with only personified evidence. However, a positive of that is it can make for great instruction because as a creator, it gives myself a sense of personability and connection to the experience and can help better my own understanding; outaking long, withholding or complex wording with independent stories can often help more neurodivergent academics like myself work on connecting

information since we rely so often on those social cues rather than on purely academic ones. He often used anecdotal stories to influence outcomes in his work. For instance in the same chapter, he discussed his friend Heather and her podcast about Whiskey, and only whiskey to emphase why it was important to focus solely within one topic area. Nuzum (2019) wrote further:

"Compelling stories and ideas can be about a lot of things. They can be about something that happens. They can be about a series of events. They can also be a question or suggestion. They can be about something that's at stake. Those stories and ideas can be expressed in narrative form or through conversation"
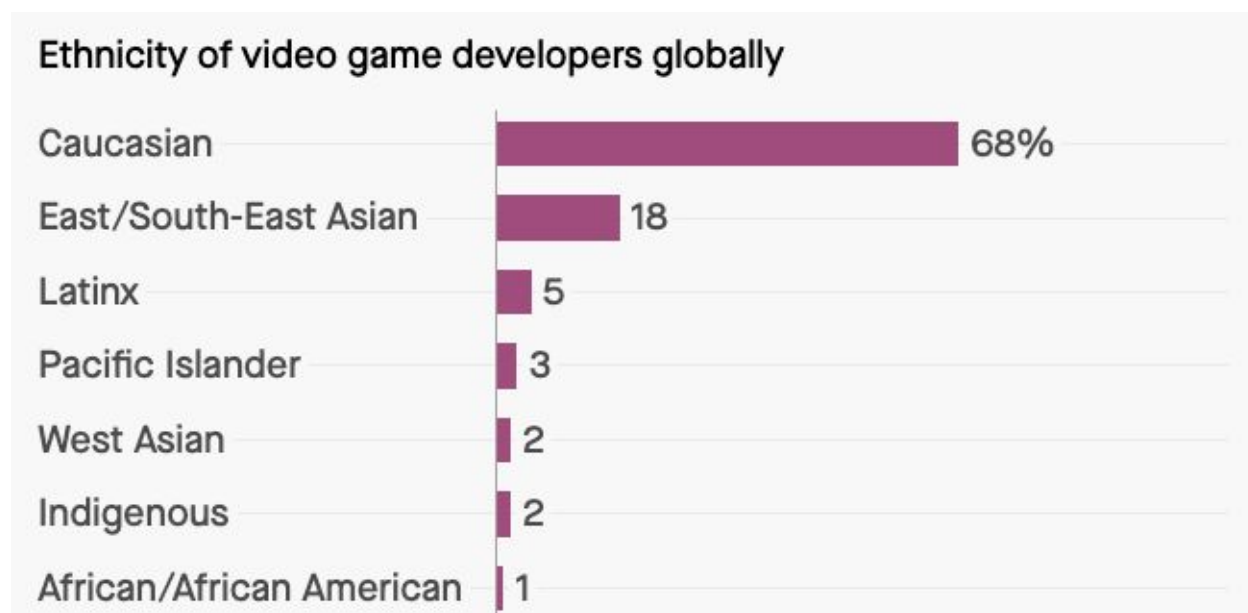
Nuzum clearly sees through his observation that the narrative is always important; as it is in similar media formats such as radio, but more so that podcasting is more conversant and dependent on a selected topic than a variety. A weakness to his work though is its reliance more on visual data than practical theory and leaves some questions. For instance, what is the proper way to conduct the conversation, or is that purely individual? Doesn't having open/end conversations leave room for misinformation since conversations are dependent on more opinionated vocalisation than factual?

 While satisfactory in its ability to teach core lessons on individual practices, as a piece of academic literature it doesn't hold a solid basis and rather a singular source of practical information than backed practical theories.

Another key literature resource I used that helped shape the research on this project was an article titled 'Why Intersectionality Matters When We Discuss Gaming's Equality, Equity and Justice' written by Talitha Baker in June, 2020 proving that the problems within gaming are still prevalent topics today. In their article, Baker (2020) discusses key intersectional issues in the gaming industry which streaming has helped grow and maintain, such as sexism, racism and more. Her article comes off the back of June, not only being Pride Month, but also off the back of the 2020 Black Lives Matter protests that have spread worldwide. This has helped, by analysing the article, to contextualise it

in comparison to recent events and placing it in a better position when discussing, specifically, racial disparity and stereotyping in the gaming industry.

"The world is becoming an ever-more diverse and globally connected place, but it's also become clear that not everyone's rights are equal. In recent weeks, civil rights and Pride-related activism have shown bright spotlights on unjust treatment for various minority groups." (Baker, 2020)

Ethnicity of video game developers globally

Caucasian	68%
East/South-East Asian	18
Latinx	5
Pacific Islander	3
West Asian	2
Indigenous	2
African/African American	1

(Figure 3 - Ethnicity of video game developers globally. Baker, 2020)

Her work, unlike Nuzum's, uses collected data to help formulate and accurately discuss concrete theories within a modernised lens, and explains coherently what her topic is about in proven practices rather than personalised ones. Despite not writing on transmitting these ideas into conversation points for podcasting, it is important as the lead on this project to draw information from numerable sources and Baker's article assisted in learning about key factors and events both in and out of the gaming/streaming industry such as #GamerGate. The biggest weakness of the article however, is that it doesn't provide a proper view of all these problems within an inter-contexted piece - simple and data-based explanations sure, but nothing the properly underpins why these issues truly matter within the context of intersectionality in the gaming/streaming industry.

CHAPTER TWO: MARKET RESEARCH & DEVELOPMENT

Understanding the market was critical to making the podcast stand out against other competitors. Since podcasting developed 16 years ago, the market for podcasts has increased significantly given the size of some of the most successful podcasts such as the Joe Rogan Experience which as of May 2020, earned him a $100 million dollar deal with Spotify and ranked second-largest podcast on Apple as stated in John Koetsier's article for Forbes.

"In addition to his podcast subscribers and YouTube viewers, Rogan has 9.4 million followers on Instagram, 2.4 million likes on his Facebook fan page, and six million followers on Twitter, so he's definitely a cultural force." (Koetsier, 2020).

The market in podcasting then, clearly has a bright future ahead of it, and lucky for me Rogan isn't one of my competitors. An original goal of the podcast was to do niche reporting on a variety of different subtopics underneath the umbrella of the streaming community, meaning the project aimed for a smaller audience market. To that end, I began looking into podcasts that I previously came into contact with. Not only did they make for great listening, but they also gave me a deeper and more practical way of gauging the editorial process, style and design concepts both for the podcast and marketing it.

A podcast that I listened to often, 'The Sci Guys' headed by Luke Cutforth was a big inspiration into the styling of the Dream Stream podcast in how they edited their structure. Despite discussing an entirely different topic to the project, the outline was fairly similar in which they would have a continuous conversation that was organised by subtopics and questions. While this would have been beneficial to my podcast, it wasn't what interested me as I was more interested in creating a podcast that was informative through specialist interviews than simply conversing with friends. Listening to Cutforth (2020)'s podcast with the other hosts, it was clear there was a specific, equal dynamic which I found useful in establishing a clear dialogue between hosts and guests. This

would ensure a flow between them, and thus streamlined the process, something I was keen to tweek and replicate for the Dream Stream Podcast. When creating the podcast, I wanted it to be visually soft in imagery - to ensure a positive and calm reaction for the viewers, while also maintaining the vocal freedoms of my participants. The best imagery to invoke that kind of response needed to be somewhat on theme; light, recognisable but with a small fragrance of colour. Exploring Unsplash, a site dedicated to creative common photography for projects, I stumbled across a photographer called Adam Valstar. Valstar (2019) had a varying selection of numerous gaming/streaming imagery that would be great for connoting the topic of the stream before the audience listened to it, but they were mostly dark and monochromatic colours, asides from this one.

(Illustration 1 - White Nintendo DS Valstar, 2019)

The image denoted the popularised and now somewhat retro Nintendo DS, a hand-held gaming console now niche compared to it's Wii U and Switch counterparts that dominate a lot of the streaming community, but held a special place in many gamers

hearts. Since the podcast would cover retro gaming, the imagery not only served a unique connotation of what the podcast represents, but also what listeners could tune into. It's brightened hues of pinks and shining whites made it appealing as a brand image for the show, detailing people's love for old-school, classic games of their youth. This held especially true, when taking into consideration the podcasts target audience were Millennials and Gen Z, who would've grown up with it as a grounding part of their childhood to late teen years. With the decision on imagery made, it was time to record.

ETHICAL PRACTICES

In journalism, whenever taking on a project, the ethics of the project need to be properly in line to ensure a steady and continued flow of active participants, rights to information and imagery and much more. As part of a university project, ethics that were necessary to the project's success such as following GDPR 2018 was taken into account when processing participant data. Participants were asked to consent to have their interviews stories shared online, with the procedure only going through with those who do not mind the content being shared online. Participants in the interviews were identified by their first name and twitch channel username which will be considered minor personal information (Name, Basic Location - e.g. UK etc.), in attempts to reduce risks of doxxing, and all participant data was destroyed/to be destroyed 30 days post-interviewing. Once consent was confirmed through a detailed Participants sheet, the participants were contacted via email directly, and any email information was only kept to ensure post-participation contact for important matters. This information was, per university guidelines kept secure behind an encrypted email account, as well as participant data from both the interviewee forms and surveys kept in an offline drive to be destroyed post-project. This would minimise the risk of any data breaches, and ensured that all anonymous information could not be traced outside of the project.

CHAPTER THREE: FINAL PRODUCT AND EVALUATION

Creating the podcast from scratch wasn't an easy feat. First, I had to organise a content calendar of when content would be organised and recorded, times for editing. I began recording episodes immediately, planning an episode structure to ensure every episode ahead of the next had some sort of connection to the next and the next and so on. This did mean that planning the episodes made them oftentimes take longer to record because of collaborating with the guests to properly set up a timeframe in which they'd be available - demonstrated best in the illustrations below.

(Illustration 2 - Google Calendar - Planning Phase)

Due to technical difficulties concerning internet connection, and the fact there was a pandemic still on-going, live recording was unfortunately not possible and neither was pre-recording in the studio. How I overcame this was through the use of a piece of chat-room software called Discord which allowed me to securely bring in as many participants as I needed for the interview into private, encrypted channels and converse

with them about the interviewing process. From there, recording was simple - through Adobe Audition, I was able to record and render the audio straight onto the editing software so that then it was ready for adjusting to how I wanted it - keeping in mind the half-an-hour time slot allotted for each episode. Following a few more technical difficulties, the process was streamlined much more efficiently once issues with Audition were resolved and recording began in early-July, aiming for an August release. I made the decision to ensure there was an ample bulk recording of episodes to help maintain a healthy work-life balance, making necessary breaks so as to not wear myself out mentally. The idea helped immeasurably, because it kept my focus on the project sharp and ready and provided ample opportunities to alter or edit the artefact to improve it, if it was necessary.

A flaw that I did find however, in my method to maintain the content calendar was that some of the subtopics to be covered had the potential of being timed pieces. This limited me profoundly when coming up with concepts and ideas as I either had to rely on generalised ideas or record with a specific time frame for uploading in mind. Overcoming this was hard. Given that the project was about a mixture of subtopics, it should of been easy, but the topics had a varied range of subtopics within subtopics; specified by events that fed into their narratives such as in the upcoming third episode discussing racism in gaming, which was filmed back in July meaning a lot of what was discussed then about BLM, donator causes etc. had the potential of fizzling out of current, external conversations, and would of wasted effort made on the episode. That example was one of the many reasons why I gave myself that additional breath room. There was no point running myself ragged for the project entirely, if that would demoralise me further.

As a piece of media, the podcast does it's job, though I do regret that it's not longer. If I could redo it, I would have properly planned a way to make it longer; more interactive and engaging through social media such as polling topics, who the audience would

want to see etc. Instagram and Twitter, being large social media platforms, would have been great places to market the podcast upon full release. Optimising them, and creating a solid social media presence would have brought in potentially double the numbers I saw upon releasing the first episode with only <200 listeners - which not bad for a first run, could have done better. For the next few episodes as well, I'd work on the technical issues the podcast had - such as the intro which when exported was raised in volume despite Audition as the editing software, having it sound on level with the remainder of the podcast from start to finish. Overall though, I am proud of the achievement and work I had put into this project within the amount of time provided. It has potential, to continue further beyond university, and be an informative, entertaining piece of media in the long run as podcasting isn't going anywhere, and neither are the issues I want to continue to discuss.

APPENDICES

The Dream Stream Podcast: Episode One - Everything in Moderating

"In the Dream Stream Podcast's voyage episode, we talk about the ins and outs of Twitch moderating, what to look out for and the pros and cons of taking up a moderator role with Colin & Cosmo"

Listen:

https://open.spotify.com/show/66HKkowpxz0XHsr6gjzdaE?si=7kFifeX_Qw6sz2vEEul_mw

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