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SHORT-PAPER

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Precarious Digital Labour and Emerging Challenges for Streamers on Twitch: A Case Study

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Abstract

Live streaming has shifted from a niche hobby to a form of digital labour, yet creators often work without formal protections. Recent cases, including coordinated harassment campaigns and contested bans, illustrate the escalating risks streamers face and reveal how Twitch's design and governance choices can heighten these vulnerabilities. This paper examines Twitch as an interactive system to analyse structural barriers to safety and the misaligned interests between viewers, streamers, platforms, and governments. Drawing on literature in digital labour and platform governance, and using illustrative case studies, we identify four interlocking dynamics: platform-streamer power imbalances, regulatory and institutional gaps, dependence on viewer patronage, and the structural invisibility of streaming within labour law. The findings show that Twitch exercises employer-like control over monetisation, visibility, and conduct while avoiding the obligations of formal employment. We propose governance models, regulatory reforms, and design interventions to address the systemic imbalance of power in live streaming.

CCS Concepts

• **Human-centered computing** → **Social media; Social content sharing**; • **Social and professional topics** → **Internet governance / domain names**.

Keywords

live streaming, digital labour, platform governance, precarious work, online safety

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1 Introduction

In late 2021, thousands of Twitch streamers were targeted in a wave of coordinated “hate raids” that flooded livestream chats with slurs, targeted abuse, and bot-generated spam, often aimed at marginalised creators [14]. These incidents exposed the absence

of proactive safety measures on the platform and forced creators to rely on improvised, community-led defences. In this paper, we examine a persistent gap between the labour streamers perform and the protections they receive. Streamers produce content, cultivate communities, and generate economic value, yet remain outside the scope of formal employment, legal safeguards, and platform accountability. Twitch retains control over moderation systems, monetisation channels, and visibility algorithms, while disclaiming responsibility for creator welfare [35].

Live streaming has rapidly evolved from a niche hobby into a major form of interactive digital labour. In 2024, Twitch averaged over 2.5 million concurrent daily viewers and 7.3 million monthly streamers [32], generating USD 1.8 billion in revenue [8]. Despite this scale, creators operate in precarious conditions, with minimal structural support and policy changes that are often reactive [28]. Although streamers may appear independent, their livelihoods are embedded in opaque algorithms, moderation systems, and monetisation frameworks controlled by the platform [33].

This paper addresses two research questions:

- (1) What structural barriers within Twitch prevent streamers from accessing adequate protection and support?
- (2) How do viewers, streamers, the platform, and regulators interact, and in what ways do misaligned interests sustain the current imbalance of power?

Drawing on literature in digital labour and platform governance alongside recent illustrative case studies, we analyse the asymmetrical control Twitch exercises over discoverability, monetisation, and moderation; examine regulatory gaps and institutional delays in protecting creators; and highlight opportunities for stakeholder cooperation to create safer and more equitable streaming environments. By linking the lived realities of streamers to structural analysis, this paper situates Twitch as an interactive system whose design choices have direct consequences for creator safety, wellbeing, and sustainability.

The scope of this paper is to examine Twitch as an interactive system of digital labour through the lens of platform governance and creator wellbeing. Using illustrative case studies and existing literature, we make the following contributions:

- (1) Provide a critical analysis of how Twitch's design and governance affordances shape discoverability, monetisation, and moderation, producing asymmetrical power relations between the platform and streamers.
- (2) Identify regulatory and institutional gaps that leave creators without adequate safety mechanisms or formal labour protections, with attention to the Australian context.



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- (3) Outline opportunities for HCI researchers, policymakers, platforms, and creator communities to collaborate on interventions that promote safer, more sustainable, and more equitable streaming environments.

2 Background on Twitch Live Streaming and Streamers

2.1 Streaming as Platform Labour: From Hobbyist to Professionalised Creator

Live streaming has transformed gaming from a private pastime into a public, performative, and community-driven activity. Improvements in internet infrastructure, the growth of participatory digital culture, and accessible broadcasting tools have reshaped how games are played and consumed. Twitch, launched in 2011 and acquired by Amazon in 2014, is now the leading platform for live game streaming [21]. Its expansion from a niche community hub into a major commercial enterprise reflects a broader shift in gaming culture, where gameplay has become a form of performance shaped by algorithmic visibility, data-driven incentives, and audience participation [29].

Twitch began as a space for amateur creators seeking self-expression and connection, but has become a highly professionalised and competitive environment. Success on the platform involves entrepreneurial labour, including building a personal brand, engaging audiences across multiple platforms, and adapting to the demands of opaque algorithms [23]. While a small number of streamers earn substantial income, most work in conditions of economic insecurity and long hours [18]. Although Twitch promotes the idea that anyone can succeed through effort, its discovery systems amplify inequality. A small number of highly visible creators dominate attention, while the majority attract fewer than ten viewers [35].

2.2 Monetisation and Platform Dependency

Twitch earns revenue through subscriptions, Bits, advertising, and integrations with Amazon Prime. These monetisation tools allow some creators to generate income but also deepen their dependence on the platform's infrastructure. Subscriptions, split evenly between Twitch and the creator, and Bits, which function as virtual tips, rely on maintaining consistent audience engagement. Prime subscriptions, offered through Amazon, further tie creator earnings to Amazon's wider ecosystem [26].

Eligibility for monetisation is restricted to the Affiliate and Partner programs, which require creators to meet minimum performance metrics that demand significant time investment. Neither status guarantees income, and Partner agreements impose stricter exclusivity clauses and contain opaque contract terms [35]. While a few high-profile streamers earn well, most receive limited returns, while Twitch collects platform-wide revenue from attention and transaction fees.

2.3 Streaming in Context: Comparing Creative Industries

Live streaming differs from traditional creative industries in its maturity, labour protections, and institutional support. Film, television, and music sectors have long-established unions, such as

SAG-AFTRA, the Writers Guild, and the American Federation of Musicians. These organisations provide legal protection, collective bargaining, and structured career development. Streaming lacks comparable infrastructure [15].

It is a hybrid profession that blends performance, production, marketing, and entrepreneurship. This convergence of roles makes formal recognition as a labour category more complex and limits the development of standardised contracts, mentorship programs, or training pathways [13]. Instead, careers are shaped by volatile platform policies, changes to algorithms, and the constant need to maintain visibility and audience engagement [29].

Unlike traditional performers, streamers have no institutional safeguards against burnout or sudden income loss. They often manage their schedules, content, and public image independently. Platforms such as Twitch enable new forms of creative expression and interaction but do so without replicating the safeguards that have evolved in other creative fields [10]. Without enforceable labour standards or collective representation, most streamers remain vulnerable to exploitation, exhaustion, and the instability created by platform governance.

3 Method

3.1 Overview and Visualising the Streaming Ecosystem

Figure 1 summarises the relationships and dependencies between the four key stakeholder groups in the Twitch ecosystem: viewers, the platform, streamers, and governments. It illustrates how each group contributes to and is affected by the operation of the platform, highlighting the structural imbalances that underpin streamer precarity.

Viewers provide the traffic, subscription revenue, and behavioural data that sustain Twitch's business model. Through direct financial support such as subscriptions, donations, and sponsorship engagement, viewers also exert significant social and behavioural influence over streamers. While viewers may mobilise around high-profile incidents, such as harassment scandals, their influence tends to be reactive and short-lived.

Twitch occupies a central position, shaping the viewing experience through platform design, moderation policies, and recommendation algorithms. It uses its platform status to limit liability while maintaining broad discretionary control over monetisation, discoverability, and policy enforcement. This employer-like control is exercised without corresponding legal obligations to creators.

Streamers supply the core content and audience engagement but have limited bargaining power due to their classification as independent contractors. They perform both entertainment and emotional labour, often cultivating parasocial relationships to sustain engagement and income. This dependency leaves them vulnerable to shifts in platform policy and viewer behaviour.

Governments provide limited consumer protection in digital streaming contexts and impose minimal workplace protections due to contractor status. Regulation is fragmented and often hindered by jurisdictional boundaries, with streaming rarely addressed directly in coordinated policy initiatives. As a result, gaps in health, safety, and employment rights persist, reinforcing the precarity of platform-based creative work.

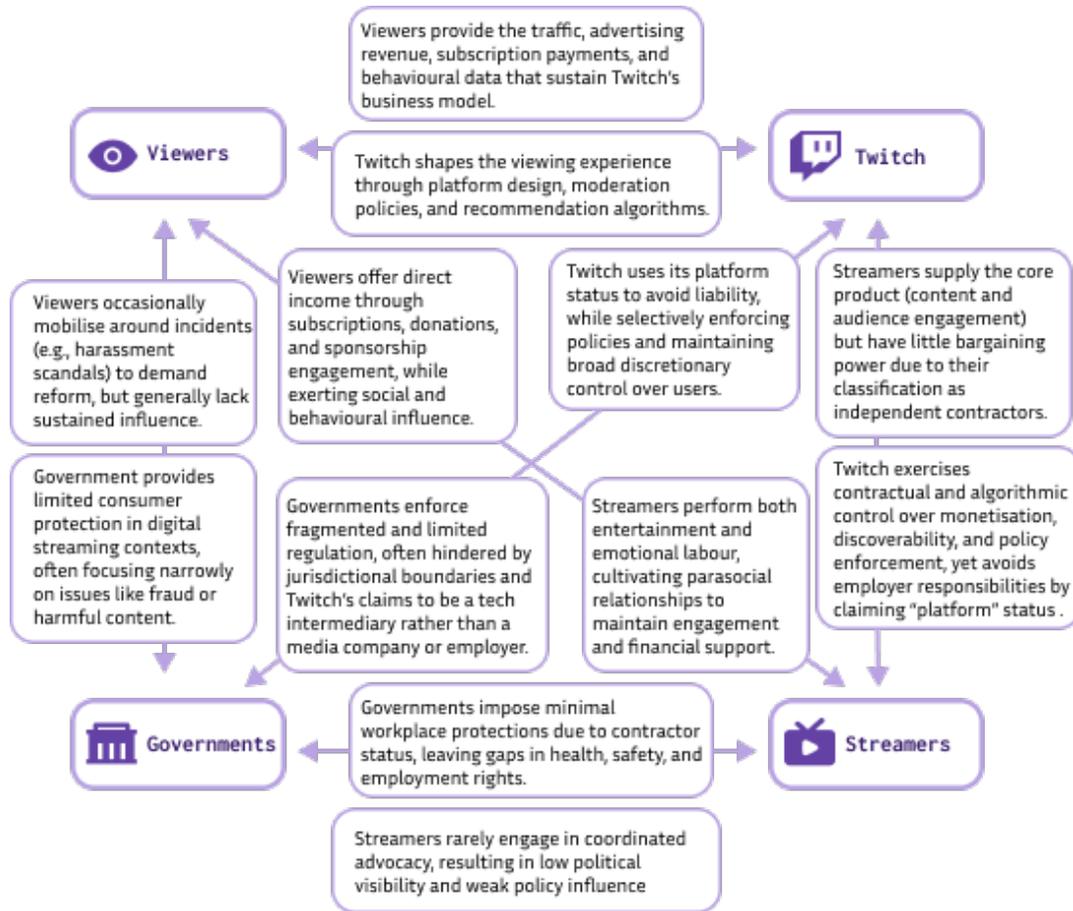


Figure 1: Stakeholder relationships within Twitch, showing dependencies between streamers, viewers, platform governance, and government regulation.

This configuration of dependencies demonstrates how value flows toward the platform while risk and responsibility are distributed unevenly across stakeholders. Twitch benefits from the creative and emotional labour of streamers, the financial and behavioural contributions of viewers, and the absence of comprehensive regulation. At the same time, the mechanisms available to challenge unfair treatment, ensure safety, or achieve equitable revenue distribution are limited. These structural imbalances directly inform the research questions in this paper, which examine how Twitch’s governance practices, stakeholder interactions, and regulatory gaps sustain conditions of precarity for streamers, and how more equitable and sustainable arrangements might be designed.

3.2 Selection of the Case Studies

This paper employs a structural analysis framework to examine how systemic forces shape streamer precarity on Twitch, drawing on structural analysis as a lens for mapping relations between power and vulnerability [4]. Four case studies were selected for their relevance, timeliness (2020–2024), and ability to illustrate key structural dynamics identified in Section 3.1. The “hate raids” of 2021 highlight how platform features designed for connection can

be exploited for large-scale identity-based harassment, exemplifying streamer vulnerability. The ban on Dr Disrespect in 2020 demonstrates Twitch’s unilateral authority over streamer careers, reflecting the platform’s employer-like power. Sweet_Anita’s 2022 hiatus is an example of the fragility of streamer–viewer relations under parasocial and economic pressures. Finally, the 2024 collapse of Self-Employed Australia illustrates the structural invisibility of digital creative labour within existing legal and advocacy frameworks. Together, these cases map onto the broader dynamics of streamer safety, platform governance, relational precarity, and regulatory neglect, offering a cross section of how systemic imbalances are sustained in the streaming economy.

4 Dynamic 1: Streamer Vulnerabilities and Professional Collective Organisation

Streamers on Twitch face multiple forms of vulnerability—economic, emotional, and physical safety—that arise from the way the platform structures its systems and responsibilities. This section examines how these vulnerabilities manifest in everyday streaming, using case studies to illustrate key challenges.

4.1 Case Study: Identity-Based Harassment in Twitch "Hate Raids"

Success on Twitch often depends on a streamer's ability to present a relatable persona and build a loyal audience. This approach blurs the line between public and private life, as many creators share personal details to foster connection. While this openness can strengthen communities, it also increases exposure to identity-based harassment and privacy risks.

In 2021, a wave of "hate raids" targeted Black, LGBTQ+, and other marginalised creators [14]. Coordinated groups used bot accounts to flood chats with abuse, slurs, and spam, disrupting broadcasts and in some cases forcing streamers offline. Many creators built their own protective tools, forming informal networks to track attacks, share defensive scripts, and raise awareness. Twitch, which profited from their content and visibility, offered only limited and reactive support. There was no legal action against perpetrators and no comprehensive platform-wide protections introduced. Creators were left to defend themselves in a workplace they did not own, but on which their livelihoods depended.

To manage risk, some streamers deliberately curate partial or misleading personal information. As documented in an interview by Wu et al. [36], one streamer explained:

"They would ask me a lot of questions about my relationships... I usually make up the answers. I won't tell them the truth... They want to know me better and get close... But I'm concerned that some of them might get too close... ask for my phone number and maybe, you know, stalk me."

This case reflects a wider pattern in which streamers must continually balance authenticity with self-protection. Building a sense of personal connection is often essential for maintaining audience engagement, yet it can also increase exposure to harassment and other risks, particularly for marginalised creators. In response, many use selective disclosure—concealing or altering aspects of their personal lives—to preserve safety while meeting the platform's implicit expectations for openness. This ongoing negotiation between visibility and vulnerability is shaped by platform design and monetisation systems that reward intimacy without providing adequate safeguards.

4.2 Precarious Careers in a Platform Economy

Twitch promotes the idea that "if you put in the work, you can get paid to play video games on-stream," but this narrative masks significant career precarity [22]. Success is tied to discoverability algorithms and hierarchies of visibility that are largely opaque to creators [21]. Twitch is dependent on a constant supply of live content to maintain viewer engagement and platform revenue, yet it bears little responsibility for the sustainability of the careers that produce it.

Earnings depend directly on fluctuating viewership, with no baseline salaries or job security. Streamers are incentivised to maximise metrics, often adopting an entrepreneurial mindset despite the low likelihood of substantial returns. This design fosters what Bingham [5] describes as an "almost compulsive fixation on viewership metrics," which demands affective and immaterial labour—being consistently friendly, engaging, and emotionally available [23]. As a

result, many streamers work under conditions that resemble other forms of gig labour, where individual workers absorb the financial and emotional risks while the platform captures a disproportionate share of the value they generate.

4.3 Limits of Platform Support and Accountability

When harassment occurs, Twitch's institutional response is often limited. Streamers are expected to moderate their own channels and manage abuse. In *Varga v. Twitch* (2022), a streamer sued the platform after enduring long-term harassment and stalking. Despite repeated reports, Twitch took no substantive action. The court ruled that Twitch had "no general legal duty to monitor or prevent harassment directed at individual streamers," reinforcing the platform's limited liability [37].

The case of Clara Sorrenti (known online as "Keffals") illustrates how online harassment can escalate into offline harm. Following a series of threats, harassers used details from livestream broadcasts to identify a hotel location, which led to a swatting incident and subsequent arrest [30]. Twitch did not provide visible intervention in response. Incidents such as this demonstrate how unaddressed online harassment can extend beyond digital spaces, creating severe consequences in physical settings and highlighting the limited capacity—or willingness—of platforms to intervene effectively.

Some streamers have tried collective action. The #ADayOffTwitch protest in 2021 called for stronger moderation tools in response to hate raids [30]. While it gained publicity, Twitch's changes were minimal. Harassers often returned with new accounts, and many creators still relied on third-party tools and informal networks. The platform's safety approach remains reactive rather than preventive.

4.4 Collective Organising Efforts and Their Challenges

Attempts to organise streamers have struggled to gain traction. The Internet Creators Guild (ICG), launched in 2016 to advocate for digital creators, dissolved in 2019 due to low membership and limited funding [23]. Streamers are classified as independent contractors, work in geographic isolation, and operate within fragmented communities centred on individual channels. These conditions discourage solidarity and make coordinated action difficult.

A more recent initiative, Twitch Unity Guilds, was introduced in late 2022 as a pilot program aimed at supporting underserved communities—including Black, women, and Latinx/Hispanic streamers—by providing funding, branding, and dedicated networking spaces such as Discord channels, plus workshops and visibility opportunities [31]. While this program offers tangible benefits, it is ultimately platform-sponsored, raising questions about potential conflicts of interest and their ability to act as independent advocates for streamer rights or pressure the platform on safety and labour issues remains inherently limited.

Organising also carries personal risks. Strikes or protests can lead to income loss, reduced visibility, and potential damage to audience relationships. Twitch's control over discoverability and monetisation further weakens incentives for collective action. These are structural conditions rather than incidental challenges—they

help maintain the current imbalance of power between streamers and platforms.

5 Dynamic 2: Platform Power - Employer, Facilitator, and Governance

Twitch occupies a structurally ambiguous position, exerting employer-like authority over streamers while claiming the legal protections of a neutral hosting platform. This dual framing allows Twitch to profit from creator labour, set behavioural standards, and control monetisation, without accepting the responsibilities that typically accompany either role. Streamers face limited recourse, precarious income, and asymmetric contractual terms. This section examines how Twitch uses both positions to consolidate power while externalising the risks of platform labour.

5.1 The Value Proposition of Twitch

Twitch presents itself not merely as a broadcasting service but as a career platform, offering infrastructure, global reach, and monetisation tools as pathways to professionalisation. Central to this promise are the Affiliate and Partner programs, which structure access to income. The Affiliate Program serves as the entry point, requiring streamers to meet modest thresholds, such as a minimum number of followers, average viewers, and broadcast hours, before they can earn from subscriptions, Bits, and advertising. The Partner Program, by contrast, is more exclusive, typically reserved for higher-visibility creators who demonstrate sustained growth. Partners gain access to enhanced monetisation options, promotional support, and in some cases improved revenue shares, though often under stricter contractual obligations such as exclusivity clauses. Together, these programs create a tiered pathway that formalises career progression while simultaneously reinforcing dependency on Twitch's rules, metrics, and discretionary enforcement [16].

This value is embedded within a governance structure that gives the platform significant control over a creator's livelihood. Few streamers can challenge this arrangement, making it a central source of dependency.

5.2 Case Study: The Banning of Dr Disrespect

In 2020, Twitch abruptly banned a popular streamer, Dr Disrespect [1], shortly after signing the streamer to a lucrative contract extension. At the time, the official explanation was a statement on an undisclosed violation as the reason for the ban. The incident revealed Twitch's ability to end commercial relationships without accountable justification, creating uncertainty for other creators. The platform has the capacity to exercise employer-like control—deciding who can remain visible and earn income—while avoiding the obligations of a formal employment relationship.

5.3 Employer-Like Control Without Obligations

While Twitch avoids recognising streamers as employees, its governance practices resemble those of an employer. The platform controls monetisation through Affiliate and Partner agreements, enforces behavioural norms via moderation policies, and sets implicit performance expectations for streaming regularity, content, and audience engagement.

Affiliate contracts set a fixed 50/50 revenue share, but Twitch reserves the right to terminate agreements at any time, with or without cause. One clause states:

“Either you or we may terminate this Agreement at any time, with or without cause, by giving the other party written notice of termination.”

This arrangement prevents streamers from negotiating terms or appealing decisions, reinforcing a top-down dynamic similar to other gig economy platforms [20]. Streamers remain subject to platform discretion without access to grievance procedures, union protections, or formal labour rights.

As outlined in Section 4.1, the monetisation model also contributes to financial instability. Income from subscriptions, Bits, and donations stops when a stream ends, pressuring creators to remain online and increasing burnout risk. Discoverability is shaped by opaque algorithms that prioritise certain behaviours or formats without clear explanation, making it difficult for streamers to improve their visibility or plan content strategies.

5.4 Platform Legal Framing and Liability Avoidance

Despite actively managing content, Twitch relies on Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act to present itself as a neutral intermediary [7]. This shields the company from liability for user-generated harms, including harassment, doxxing, and hate raids. While Twitch enforces community standards and bans, this intervention does not translate into a formal duty of care.

This dual positioning benefits Twitch on both fronts. It exercises significant operational control yet avoids the legal and financial responsibilities that might follow. As Baker [3] notes, this results in “selective enforcement and opaque moderation” that limits creator autonomy while protecting the platform from legal exposure.

For streamers, this creates a grey zone where expectations are high but protections are minimal. Their work is central to Twitch's profitability, but they remain outside established legal categories. This limits their ability to contest unfair treatment, appeal bans, or demand support.

5.5 Limits of Current Solutions and Ongoing Challenges

Twitch has occasionally introduced features intended to improve transparency and safety, such as moderation tools and appeal processes, but these changes remain limited in scope. Core conditions have not shifted: streamers still lack negotiating power, contractual protections, and independent governance mechanisms. Enforcement remains inconsistent, and procedural clarity is often missing.

Challenging platform decisions is difficult without legal recognition as workers, and community organising efforts are hampered by fragmentation and competition. As with grassroots actions like #ADayOffTwitch, awareness can be raised but systemic change is rare. This reflects a broader platform logic that centralises control while shifting risks onto creators. Addressing these imbalances will require more than incremental reforms—external oversight, professional advocacy bodies, and new labour frameworks are necessary to recognise and protect digital creative work.

6 Dynamic 3: Streamer and Viewer Relations under Platform-Engineered Precarity

6.1 Case Study: Hiatus, Backlash, and the Fragility of Streamer–Viewer Bonds

In 2022, the streamer Sweet_Anita took a break from broadcasting to manage serious health issues. Although the condition had been discussed openly, the hiatus drew mixed reactions. Some fans expressed frustration or accused the channel of neglecting its community, while others withdrew financial support or unfollowed. The hiatus was described as “being punished for being human,” with income falling sharply and reputation suffering simply because wellbeing was prioritised. This case illustrates how quickly audience support can shift when availability changes, underscoring the tension between the illusion of personal connection and the economic realities of parasocial entertainment.

6.2 Platform-Engineered Patronage and Emotional Dependency

Twitch’s monetisation model positions viewers as active participants in a creator’s success. Revenue largely comes from voluntary support such as subscriptions, Bits, and donations. This creates a *patronage logic* in which creators must cultivate ongoing emotional bonds to secure financial contributions. Success is not determined solely by content quality, but also by relational labour, sustained visibility, and likeability [17].

This structure shifts financial risk onto streamers while reinforcing dependence on viewer goodwill. With no baseline protections or guaranteed income, creators internalise performance expectations and face sustained pressure to be available. The result is a work environment that can contribute to exhaustion, stress, and burnout, particularly for those without an established audience. While Twitch profits from these interactions, it does not provide protections for the emotional labour on which they rely.

6.3 Parasociality and Platform-Designed Emotional Labour

Twitch’s interactive features—live chat, subscription alerts, custom emotes, and badges—are not just community tools; they are mechanisms designed to encourage parasocial intimacy. Twitch’s features have been associated with fostering a sense of shared experience, while its interface has also been interpreted as cultivating *platform-engineered parasociality*, simulating intimacy within a one-sided dynamic [25, 34].

Streamers are expected to respond to viewers with enthusiasm, vulnerability, and immediacy. Public recognition of financial contributions in real time has become an informal norm, reinforcing a culture where generosity is made visible and socially rewarded [34]. This practice embeds emotional labour into platform culture, with expectations often heightened for marginalised creators, who may also face tokenisation or harassment.

Although viewers have tools to initiate contact, streamers have few mechanisms to enforce boundaries without risking alienating their audience. Platform design amplifies this imbalance, enabling affective extraction without providing equivalent safeguards.

6.4 Viewer Power and Informal Governance

Viewers do not have formal authority within Twitch’s governance system, but their influence can be significant. Financial leverage allows them to shape content, encourage certain behaviours, and exert reputational pressure.

For streamers, the main tools for managing problematic viewer behaviour—such as bans or timeouts—are limited. Banned viewers can return with new accounts, and reporting systems offer little transparency or follow-up. Without robust moderation support, creators must self-police or depend on unpaid volunteer moderators, making the process inconsistent and exhausting.

6.5 Limits of Current Solutions and Ongoing Challenges

While Twitch has added safety features like ban-evader detection and improved moderation dashboards, these measures are reactive and do not address the structural causes of relational fatigue, parasocial abuse, or income loss during breaks. Platform design continues to prioritise viewer experience, often making creator vulnerability invisible.

Streamers have no formal channel to negotiate healthier engagement norms. Emotional labour remains uncompensated, and setting boundaries can result in financial or reputational costs. These pressures are particularly acute for marginalised streamers, whose visibility is both a source of opportunity and heightened risk.

Open questions remain about whether creators can establish clearer professional boundaries without damaging audience relationships, and what responsibilities platforms should assume in moderating affective labour. Addressing these issues will require changes not only in platform design but in broader cultural expectations within the streaming ecosystem.

7 Dynamic 4: Government Regulation and Structural Invisibility

7.1 Case Study: The Collapse of Self-Employed Australia

In 2024, Self-Employed Australia (SEA)—a national advocacy body for freelancers and independent contractors—closed after more than a decade of operation. In its final statement, SEA cited a political climate “aggressively against self-employed people” and legislative shifts that reduced support for contractor rights [2]. Although SEA did not focus specifically on digital creators or streamers, its closure is indicative of the limited and fragile infrastructure available to represent non-traditional workers in Australia. For platform-dependent creators such as Twitch streamers, who occupy an ambiguous position between employee and independent contractor, the loss of even adjacent advocacy bodies further reduces the likelihood of coordinated lobbying, access to legal expertise, or sustained policy attention. This absence of independent representation reinforces the broader pattern in which streaming labour remains structurally invisible within both labour law and mainstream worker advocacy.

7.2 Gig Work Without Employment Protections

Twitch streamers function as digital gig workers: independent contractors reliant on the platform for income, yet excluded from employment law safeguards. The entrepreneurial framing of their work masks the reality of precarity, in which creators bear all the risks without access to minimum wage, paid leave, or workers' compensation. Stewart and Stanford [27] note that gig work often operates outside the reach of traditional labour laws, eroding worker protections.

This precarity is intensified by the emotional and psychological demands unique to live-streaming work. For example, Gjestang [12] highlights how intense audience interaction can affect streamers' psycho-social work environment, while Chen et al. [9] document widespread burnout among Chinese livestreamers. Johnson [19] further emphasises how disability and mental health intersect with these risks, underscoring how some creators face overlapping vulnerabilities without institutional support.

Although creators operate under sustained visibility and pressure, existing work health and safety (WHS) frameworks often do not extend to digital platforms. This legal omission leaves streamers—despite being highly visible and economically productive—largely unprotected in the event of harassment, injury, or burnout.

7.3 Legal Gaps and Comparative Models

The legal ambiguity surrounding streamers is echoed in other jurisdictions. In Australia, labour law remains tied to a binary classification of employee versus independent contractor—a model poorly suited to platform-based work. Johnson and Woodcock [22] describe platform workers as occupying a “liminal zone,” absorbing the risks of self-employment while operating under rules dictated by the platform.

International approaches vary. The European Union's Platform Work Directive introduces a rebuttable presumption of employment for gig workers and requires transparency in algorithmic decision-making. In contrast, California's Proposition 22, heavily lobbied for by gig firms, entrenched contractor status while offering limited benefits. Both examples highlight the difficulty of applying conventional regulatory categories to platform labour.

7.4 Policy Proposals and Remaining Gaps

Emerging reform options include:

- (1) **Dependent Contractor Status:** Creating an intermediate category to grant partial rights without full employment classification [27].
- (2) **Deactivation Protections:** Introducing safeguards such as notice, justification, and appeal rights for account suspensions and demonetisation events [6].
- (3) **Portable Benefits:** Linking health, leave, and retirement benefits to worker activity across multiple platforms.

Despite these developments, most jurisdictions prioritise more visible gig roles, such as rideshare and delivery work, over digital creators. Yet streaming involves similar dependencies: creators are economically productive, governed by platform rules, and structurally precarious.

7.5 Implications for Platform Creators

Without regulatory recognition, streamers remain exposed to platform discretion. Monetisation can be revoked, accounts suspended, or visibility reduced—often without meaningful recourse. Contracts rarely include due process provisions, and platforms benefit from legal immunity as intermediaries. As Woodcock and Johnson [34] observe, streamers operate under “affective managerialism,” governed by metrics, audience sentiment, and opaque policies rather than fixed terms.

Addressing these vulnerabilities requires labour frameworks that move beyond binary classifications and account for the specific risks of digital creative work. Like other gig workers, streamers need policy mechanisms that recognise their unique dependencies and provide enforceable protections, both in Australia and internationally.

8 Discussion: Open Challenges and Future Directions

8.1 Transparency and Awareness of the Industry

The governance of streaming platforms such as Twitch raises unresolved questions that existing legal, institutional, and community frameworks have yet to answer. The interests of platforms, streamers, viewers, and governments remain misaligned, and it is unclear who holds the authority—or the incentive—to initiate reform. Without clear jurisdiction, accountability is easily deferred and responsibility can be shifted between stakeholders.

This uncertainty invites broader reflection on what a sustainable governance model for streaming might look like. Should accountability be embedded directly into platform design through enforceable transparency and safety standards? Could independent, cross-platform bodies set and monitor industry-wide codes of conduct? Might governments develop sector-specific regulation that recognises the unique blend of creative and gig labour in streaming, rather than forcing it into existing categories? Addressing these questions will require not only legal reform but also the active participation of platforms, creators, and civil society in defining the rules of the industry.

8.2 Emerging Archetypes and Pathways in Streaming Careers

As streaming matures, clearer career archetypes are beginning to emerge, echoing the role specialization evident in traditional media. Empirical research by Sjöblom et al. demonstrates that viewers derive different gratifications depending on the type of streamed content, and that the “archetypal structure” of a stream (e.g., interaction-heavy chatting vs. gameplay-focused broadcasts) matters more than game genre alone [24]. Based on the observable patterns on Twitch, we can tentatively identify several emerging archetypes:

- **Conversational Hosts** – centred around “Just Chatting” or equivalent formats, prioritising social engagement and offering intimate, community-driven content.
- **Skill Educators** – focused on gameplay mastery and tutorial-style content to satisfy viewers' learning and informational needs.

- **Personality Performers** – variety-oriented creators whose appeal lies in charisma and entertainment rather than gameplay.
- **Community Specialists** – niche streamers building strong identity or interest-based communities, fostering loyalty through shared culture.
- **Event Curators** – streamers who design live events such as charity drives or marathons to deliver social integrative experiences at scale.
- **Scale-Oriented Streamers** – large-scale performers tracking with typologies like “Spotlight” or “Professional” who balance broad audience reach with a sense of inclusion [11].

As streaming continues to industrialise, these patterns may formalise into structured career pathways accompanied by training, mentorship, and diversified income strategies. However, formalisation could also constrain the flexible creativity and individuality that currently define streaming culture. Whether the field evolves towards structured roles or remains individual-centric will hinge on industry norms, platform policy shifts, and creator agency.

8.3 Future Research and Intervention Opportunities

If current conditions persist, burnout, precarity, and exploitative visibility dynamics are likely to intensify. However, more creators are speaking openly about the need for fairer conditions and sustainable careers. Potential areas for further research and policy experimentation include:

- Developing retirement, insurance, and portable benefits schemes for streamers.
- Designing community-run safety and welfare infrastructures.
- Conducting longitudinal studies on career trajectories and exit points in streaming.

Across these areas, the core issue remains the same: streamers absorb most of the risk, while platforms retain control. Addressing this imbalance will require coordinated change at the policy, platform, and community levels.

Conclusion

This paper has examined the systemic factors that create and sustain vulnerability for streamers within the Twitch ecosystem. While streaming is often framed as a form of creative autonomy or entrepreneurial freedom, creators are deeply dependent on opaque platform infrastructures and excluded from the protections afforded to more traditional forms of labour.

The analysis identified four interconnected dynamics: (1) structural barriers to safety and support; (2) Twitch’s reactive and discretionary governance; (3) misaligned interests between viewers, platforms, governments, and streamers; and (4) the reinforcement of these conditions by platform capitalism and fragmented regulation. These patterns reflect a wider digital economy in which profitability is prioritised over worker welfare.

Streamers are expected to navigate harassment, burnout, and financial instability with minimal institutional support, while Twitch

sets the conditions of participation without democratic oversight or labour accountability.

By situating Twitch within the broader context of digital labour and platform governance, this study highlights the urgency of rethinking creator rights, platform responsibility, and the structures needed to ensure safety in the platform economy. As the streaming industry grows, the absence of systemic protections will deepen existing inequalities unless legal reforms, platform-level changes, and collective advocacy are pursued.

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