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Risk-taking performances in Chinese video streaming: A study on streamer-viewer interactions

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STATEMENT OF AUTHENTICATION

The work presented in this thesis is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original except as acknowledged in the text. I hereby declare that I have not submitted this material, either in full or in part, for a degree at this or any other institution.

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ABSTRACT

This project focuses on viewer-streamer interactions in the rapidly growing live video-streaming industry in China, more specifically for risk-taking content. This researcher investigated the users' motivations and engagement relating to risk-taking performances. Compared to traditional mass media, interactions between viewers and streamers in live streaming appear to have strong social connection and community base.

This study is a qualitative study where multiple methods were applied to collect original data; based on two different Chinese live-streaming platforms. It discusses streamers' motivations for conducting risk-taking performance, caused by economic reasons and shaped by business models. This study determines the live-streaming experience of both streamers and viewers in three themes: motivation, interactions and experiences.

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

This study is about the interaction between streamers and viewers in risk-taking live streaming performance in China. In this thesis, I focus on three main themes mediated by live-streaming platforms and apps: (1) streamers' motivation on conducting risk-taking performance, (2) the model of interaction between users and (3) viewers' experiences. The thesis is a qualitative study that contains interviews with five participants in total, as well as participant observation of two live-streaming performances in combination with two live streaming apps on mobile device: Bilibili and Douyu. The data provides information on individual users, including streamers and viewers on live-streaming platforms who are generally underrepresented in the wider literature. This study explores the unique relationship between streamers and viewers and also among users themselves in China's highly commercialised live-streaming system.

This research draws on the theory of participatory culture, which has been applied to media studies and internet studies globally. Unlike many other live-streaming studies whose focus is on investigating negative effects on youngsters or social problems, this work aims to build a more nuanced understanding of the ways that streamers and viewers interact with each other, and what it means for the markets, cultures, and communities at large. The study also provides some detailed insights into the context-specific and monetising – specific aspects of a contemporary Chinese live-streaming circumstances.

This project aims to fill the gap in understanding Chinese live streaming, particularly view-streamer interactions in risk-taking content. It is important to understand how risk-taking live streaming content reflects and influences Chinese digital/ internet culture, given the scale of users and the attention it attracts. There are two research objectives:

- To develop in-depth understandings of the interaction between streamers and viewers.
- To understand the key feature of risk-taking behavior in Chinese live streaming, as a cultural phenomenon and as part of the emergent social media entertainment industry.

The following research questions will be explored:

1) What is the nature of users' interaction and the motivation for watching and conducting risk-taking performances in Chinese live streaming?
2) What are the social, economic and cultural reasons for the popularity of live streaming in China?

As these questions indicate above, I am more concerned in understanding users' experiences of conducting/ watching behaviour, than simply critiquing the possibly harmful and controversial content. I am interested in seeing how the interaction between users is played out in those performances, as well as how the monetary factory between users and platforms. This study is a specific and local one with part of my own presence within a target community – Chinese younger generations who watch/ conduct risk-taking live-streaming performance.

1.1 Background

In 2017, Wu Yongning, a video live streamer, lost his grip and plunged from a 62-storey building to his death while he was conducting his "cash for clips" live streaming. This so-called "roof topper" had posted more than 500 short and live-streamed videos on platforms, attracting more than a million fans and earning at least 550,000 Yuan (A$110,000). According to numerous media reports (Wong, 2017; Zuo, 2019; Shen, 2019), Wu's performance was part of a competition with rewards of 100,000 Yuan (A$20,000) as a prize, and the question arose as to whether Wu's viewers or the platform have to carry some responsibility for his death.

Two years later in May 2019, The Beijing Internet Court ruled that the platform should bear only "minor responsibility" and had a "causal relationship" as Wu himself was mainly responsible for the accident. The court ordered payment of 30,000 Yuan (A$6,000) compensation to his family. In China's streaming industry, the lines of responsibility can be unclear. Regulators and streaming industry practitioners often play the game "catch me if you can". From 2014 to 2019, regulations about live streaming contain various rules covering content, technology and the operating model (Sun, 2017; Cunningham, Craig & Lv, 2019; Chadha, 2016). In theory, all streaming

platforms are subjected to regulation, yet content and technology is always evolving, which makes it difficult for regulation enforcement to keep up with. In addition to government pressure and platform regulation, there is also the conversation about why participants conduct/watch risk-taking performances is raised from general public.

It is important to acknowledge that the term "risk-taking live-streaming performance" in this paper is not a clearly defined as singular term; rather it is a mixed-genre term incorporating outdoor activities, game, music, dance, food and more which are involved with risk. In this work, "risk-taking" is loosely identified as the act or performance that involves danger or some level of risk in order to draw attention from viewers, which might or might not necessarily have immediately harmful consequences. As a result of expanding restricted regulations, streamers have to find new ways to get out in order to attract more viewers and internet traffic. Some of the more recent popular genres include overeating/inedible food consumption such as eating live fish and chugging down raw eggs, challenges related to uninhabited islands, wilderness survival, and playing horror games. For example, the "eating broadcasting" genre is simply innocuous entertainment; the streamer often eats unconventional dishes while talking to their viewers. This "eating broadcasting" has become "binge eating" recently. An example shows a skinny girl eating excessive amounts of food and depicts unhealthy eating habits and unrealistic limits. In addition, many "binge-eating" streamers have a habit of purging and vomiting in order to consume large amounts of food, which may cause eating disorders or organ failure. Over the past few years, risk-taking live streaming has become the nucleus of controversial debates taken up by the media and by internet regulation/policy on contemporary culture regarding the question, "what kind of content can be put up on the Internet?" or "how to prevent tragedy from happening?"

Live streaming as a new media technology and phenomenon has been growing tremendously. In 2016, there were over 200 different live-streaming sites in Mainland China alone. However, apart from its commercial success, there are also lots of difficulties. The "Wu yongning" news story cited above displays some recurrent myths about Chinese live streaming, for example, why some streamers love to engage in risk-taking performances on live streaming, or how viewers like to watch this kind of video content. Because of the popularity of live-streaming videos and their power to drive sales, live-streaming platforms and sites are heavily driven by their community of streamers and viewers who watch and follow. Moreover, live-streaming's system and

its communication and ratings generate interaction that is rich in subtext and full of meaning.

Live streaming captures attention from media and communication researchers. Some literature and research on live streaming has emerged and explores live-streaming consumption motivation, yet the interaction between audiences and streamers in risk-taking live streaming within the context of Chinese media has not been explored sufficiently in this research field. This paper mainly focuses on the interaction between streamer and viewers themselves rather than on the content. Looking into the structure of live-streaming platforms, as well as users' practices, this paper suggests that live streaming in China manifests as an emerging trend of hyper-commercial industry, which has implications for users' interaction.

The rise of user-generated-video-content in online platforms like YouTube and Twitch is important as a global context for this project. YouTube started as a platform for video sharing and user-generated-content (UGC), with participatory culture as a defining feature (Burgess, 2009). There are more than three million YouTube creators globally and some level of allowances from their uploaded content in 2018. In 2019, there were more than 2000 YouTube professional and amateur channels with at least a million subscribers (Cunningham, Craig& Lv, 2019). Another sample is Twitch[1], an Amazon-owned live-streaming gameplay platform, which is followed by 140 million monthly viewers, and 2.2 million monthly broadcasters (Smith, 2019). The success of Twitch has not just been due to the playing of or watching of games; it is also because of its video production, marketing and reviewing. In the last few years, its visibility and influence has rapidly grown to the point where it has become an important force in the live-streaming industry, especially gaming genres, and increasingly, in the global media ecosystem as whole (Johnson& Woodcock, 2018).

As Cunningham, Craig and Lv (2019) argue, "Live streaming in China is quite different from Western platform live streaming". As stated in iiMedia (2019) and iResearch (2018) reports, the live streaming market in China is estimated at 501 million live streaming users in China in 2019 and the economic scale of the industry will be as large as A$27 billion in 2022. The idea of social media entertainment (SME) or internet celebrity sees an interesting counterpart in China's parallel internet

1 Twitch is a video live streaming service operated by Twitch Interactive, a subsidiary of Amazon. Introduced in June 2011, the site primarily focuses on video game live streaming

universe, known as *Wang Hong, or Wang Hong economy*. Wang Hong suggests different features and evolutionary trajectories. In China's live-streaming platforms, users have generated different types of content ranging from game play to cooking, talent shows and karaoke. Live streamers skilfully convert their onscreen performances and popularity into revenues, with various online and offline interactions, including famous streamers' fan meetings, advertising sponsors and even public performances. Since 2017, there have been dramatic changes in the practices and regulation of live streaming. Chinese live-streaming sites are already under increasing pressure from policy changes by China's State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television (SAPPRFT) "cleaning up the air in cyberspace" prohibition; the genre of live-streaming content has become less diverse and platform regulation more restrictive (Sun, 2017; Soo, 2018). A more recent policy updates from the Cyberspace Administration of China (CAC) (2019) in October 2019 is "youth mode". CAC continued to push forward the work of preventing young people's Internet addiction, up to now, 53 different live streaming platforms in total have been launched "youth mode", including huajiao, liujianfang and some other major domestic video platforms. As a result, streamers, platforms and agencies are competing for demand of the live-streaming industry while they face more social responsibilities from regulations.

1.2 The scope and methodology of the study

The project uses a qualitative study to explore issues of importance and discover streamer-viewer interactions in Chinese risk-taking live streaming. This research is narrowly focused on documenting the experience of a small group of live-streaming users. There are five adult participants (aged over 18) involved in live-streaming experiences who were interviewed. Three are viewers and two are live streamers. These participants were selected on the basisi on their social and cultural diversity. Data was collected mainly via interviews over a period of two months on the Chinese social media site WeChat. The participation-observation method is also adopted in this research to provide more descriptive explanation for interactive behaviour between streamers and viewers based on two recordings of live-streaming performance. In

addition, this work also looks at live-streaming apps that mediated the interaction process. For the purpose of analysis, interview transcripts and live-streaming performance recordings notes are analysed under three themes: motivation, interaction and experiences.

This research attempts to understand what is happening in live streaming between viewers and streamers in the current internet context. This Master of Research thesis project explores users' interaction on live streaming over a one-year period. The use of interview and participatory-observation methods is to capture the nature of the current live-streaming industry. These methods include regular conversations with participants, observation of live streams in real-time, archived replays and readings of live-streaming commentary.

In order to explore users' interaction, I have conducted semi-structured interviews not only with streamers but also with viewers, to highlight the intertwined relationship between live-streaming platforms and users. From July 2019 to September 2019, there were five participants interviewed, including two streamers and three viewers. Along with interviews two live-streaming performances were analysed from two streamers on two live-streaming apps – Bilibili and Douyu between September and October 2019. In addition, "app-go-through"[2] methods were conducted. The responses to the open-ended question interview and online participation observation were analysed using thematic analysis explained by Braun and Clarke (2006 & 2013). The thematic analysis of this qualitative data includes interviews, notes, and transcripts of live performances. This is a method for identifying, analysing and reporting multiple themes, which provide detailed analysis of experiences, meanings and the reality of participants.

The participants in this study are a particular group that can most reasonably be described as of the younger generation, as well as middle or low-class Chinese in that they are neither extremely rich nor poor. Further, this group is characterised by a high degree of mobility and workforce participation.

A further limitation is the inherent contradiction of any study that attempts to track participants on what they watch, what they experience and what they think about during a period. Yet, their viewing behaviours and experiences do not cease while

[2] App-go-through refers to an approach to the study of apps. It will be explained in more detail in Chapter 3.

research is being undertaken. As well as, live streaming policy and regulations will also continue to change.

1.3 Significance of the study

The purpose of this research is to rethink what risk-taking performances mean for both streamers and viewers. Most previous academic research focuses on the consequences or negative influences of risk-taking live streaming, rather than why or how. The results of the study help to understand the users' interaction and motivation, as well as social, economic and cultural reasons behind risk-taking performances in the Chinese context. This area has not been well understood or represented in the existing literature, and the study seeks to reveal in-depth information in the context of the Chinese digital landscape. With the development of live streaming over the past several years, it is imperative that research be carried out to analyse not just the video content, but also the users behind the video content. This research provides a full description of users' live-streaming experiences, and would fill a comprehension gap in the current industry. A contribution to this knowledge may help inform the general public regarding risk-taking performances, as well as help in the advancement of live-streaming platform management.

1.4 Chapter outline

The following four chapters build on this introductory chapter. Chapter 2 reviews the literature, which presents basic theoretical concepts such as participatory culture, and social media entertainment that have driven the current live-streaming industry. The first section explores the philosophical, as well as practical aspects of participatory culture. In chapter 2's second section the focus is on the current research of live streaming, and provides an example of the Western live-streaming industry. The last section of Chapter 2 provides a rich overview on Chinese Internet environment, more specifically on live streaming landscape. Chapter 3 outlines the research design and

shows the methodology that was used as well as the details and the methods underpinning the research project. Further, it introduces the rationale for the methods employed for this study, for decisions about how to observe participants and recruit them, and the use of interviews for data gathering, observation for performance, ethical considerations and how to analyse and interpret the data. Chapter 4 is the chapter in which data is introduced and examined. Streamers and viewers are presemted separately as they engage in live streaming with each other, especially in regard to their interactions within this commercialised industry.

CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The first section of this chapter situates video streaming as a global phenomenon, and discusses how live streaming works around the world. In order to develop a theoretically informed understanding, this section explains the theoretical development in relation to "participatory culture" in the evolving digital media landscape, which underpins this research project. It is followed by a review of existing studies on live streaming from the perspectives of cultural consumption and users' belonging, and a context review of the Chinese Internet environment, particularly live-streaming platforms and internet policy. The purpose of this literature review chapter is to document existing understandings of live video streaming globally and locally as in Chinese context.

2.1 Theoretical development of participatory culture

2.1.1 Participatory culture and media convergence

The term 'convergence' has become firmly identified in recent years with the work of Henry Jenkins in his 2006 book, *Convergence culture: where old and new media collide*. He introduces the term as "in the world of media convergence, every important story gets told, every brand gets sold, and every consumer gets courted across multiple media platforms". For him, convergence can be defined as:

> "The flow of content across multiple media platforms, the cooperation between multiple media industries, and the migratory behaviour of media audiences who will go almost anywhere in search of the kinds of entertainment experiences they want".

In the context of media convergence, Jenkins further conceptualises convergence culture, which largely focuses on interaction between fans and their favourite media. Convergence culture represents a shift in the ways we think about our relationship to media.

The Web 2.0 concepts are most often applied to online participatory culture, and to the rise of blogging, sharing and collaborating in the contemporary society. The term "participatory culture" is commonly believed to have been coined by Henry Jenkins as well, referring to the involvement of Internet users in the creation of culture and content. The idea of participatory culture can be traced back to some theoretical works on active viewers and popular culture and everyday life in cultural studies even before the introduction of the Web 2.0 era. Fuchs (2014) explains the distinctions between web 1.0 and web 2.0, "Web 1.0 is a computer-based networked system of human cognition, Web 2.0 a computer-based networked system of human communication". Hinton and Hjorth (2013) believe that the Web 2.0 model adopted and encouraged an environment where there are no technical barriers and an increasing number of social networking sites. Due to the low barriers, more viewers can participate in this kind of environment. Take live streaming here as an example, there are almost no technical requirements to start and almost no cost. Fuchs (2014) further explains that Web 3.0 evolved from Web 2.0: "Web 3.0 a computer-based networked system of human co-operation". Similarly, Shirky (2008) interprets Web 3.0: "Social media and social software are tools that increase our ability to share, to co-operate, with one another, and to take collective action, all outside the framework of traditional institutional institutions and organisations". Yet, Jenkins (2010) has some criticism of Web 2.0; he states that there are distinctions between participatory culture and Web 2.0. Participatory culture is a culture while Web 2.0 is more like the blurred line between producers and consumers of content.

Participatory culture provides a fundamental basis for many recent concepts in internet studies. Specifically, these types of cultures are not just about media consumers, but also contributors and creators in this internet space. In Jenkins's book (2006), media users are primarily understood as active and creative participant, with "...greater roles to play, in the key decision making institutions of their time", rather than passive consumers and vulnerable viewers. Participatory culture provides an important perspective to understand live streaming from users' perspectives. It is not the form of technology that matters for participatory culture, but rather how people are engaging and interacting with that media. Jenkins' 2009 book "*Confronting the challenges of participatory culture*", summarises five characteristics of participatory culture:

> "A participatory culture is a culture with relatively low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement, strong support for creating and sharing one's creations, and some type of informal mentorship whereby what is known by the most experienced is passed along to novices. A participatory culture is also one in which members believe their contributions matter, and feel some degree of social connection with one another (at the least they care what other people think about what they have created)".

Live streaming provides an economic and cultural rearrangement of "participatory culture" as participants are not only able to create and consume video content, but are also able to comprehend ways live-streaming platforms work. Participation in live-streaming platforms takes many different forms. Users in live-streaming platforms like to spend time on the platforms to contribute video content, making connections and collaborating with others. Some leading users like to make innovation on live-streaming platforms through their own collective practices.

This new refinement of "participatory culture" reflects the rise and clash of new versus old technologies within contemporary media convergence. Jenkins (2016) states that participatory culture embraces the values of diversity and democracy: "different configurations of culture invite or enable degrees of participation". A critical shift in the media recently associated with convergence is the rise of user-generated content (UGC) and user-created content (UCC), the shift from media users to media participants. As earlier mentioned, there is a low barrier in terms of access to technology; people have various forms of agency to participate in the social media. The word "UGC" and "UCC" seems to be similar. Hinton and Hjorth (2013) explain: "An active part of the media discourse involves forwarding content to other users". Yet in her book on YouTube (2009), Burgess holds the argument that UCC is "vernacular creativity". Digital media have lowered the cost of media creations, opening up the process to anyone with access to the technology and the Internet. In recent years, the proliferation of mobile devices equipped with high definition cameras and high-speed internet has led to a surge of individuals making live streams. The streaming service allows users to experience mediated content without the need to download it, as users interact with each other in real time. Live-streaming users are no longer understood as viewers and streamers; they have transformed into participants, who are actively producing and interacting with content. Live streaming provides

equal opportunities for every individual to interact. The strict boundaries between each party's roles no longer exist, as audiences and producers are intertwined together. Features of this new participatory culture assist viewers to become involved in the streamer's content, even as co-creators (Hamilton et al., 2014).

The current live-streaming system is undergoing a deep shift in several aspects that shape its functionality and structure, for example, the distribution of platforms, the number of channels, the business model in the industry, as well as the relationship between the sender and receiver. The Internet has brought interactive technologies that transform the means of communication and increase the opportunities of engagement. Live streaming as a form of participatory culture, and the culture surrounding, is a unique one, particularly in the contemporary digital age. Jenkins' theory (2006) about participatory culture in convergence media is important for live streaming because he details the structure of convergence as both a top-down, corporate-driven process and a bottom-up, consumer-driven process. Consumers change the way in which they create, experience and consume media, and media/ technology companies provide infrastructure and software. The idea of "co-creation" is used to describe the process by which consumers use the tools and social environment of digital platforms to take an active role in the content production and media distribution (Deuze & Banks, 2009). Economic, cultural and social values from live streaming have been collectively co-created by its users, including audiences, producers, content creators etc., and Jenkins states, "Sometimes, corporate and grassroots convergence reinforce each other, creating closer, more rewarding relations between media producer and consumers". Convergence media requires media companies to rethink their old operations and develop new assumptions that shape both programming and marketing decisions. Brun (2008) uses the term "produsage" to define the process: "the collaborative and continuous building and extending of existing content in pursuit of further improvement". Jenkins (2016) has written about power structures in participation, "more and more, media producers embrace our participation as a means of increasing engagement in a highly competitive media system". It is the change in people's understanding of consumers: while the consumers were once passive, they are now active; while consumers were once isolated, they are now socially connected.

2.1.2 Social media entertainment

Unlike traditional media, important aspects of streaming provide an entertaining media experience with streamers and real-time interacting experience with other viewers to a considerable extent. The rise of content creators from live streaming is similar to how YouTubers have evolved – some people like to contribute to the community; they become media professionals and they publish content across different platforms. They are incubating their own media brand, building fan communities around the globe and enhancing their public profile among young people. This is what Cunningham and Craig (2017) call "social media entertainment". Successful content creators are not traditional television celebrities. Rather, they are influencers among ordinary people with a high level of expertise in engaging their viewers through the "specific affordances of the platforms" (Burgess and Green, 2018). In a contemporary context, all a person needs to do to become a streamer or a viewer is to have an Internet connection and a laptop or smart phone.

In the analysis of live streaming, economy and culture are always intertwined together. Content creation can be a profitable profession: the larger the audience, the more money is to be made. According to a report in 2016, in the United States alone, content creators earned more than $US5.9 billion across nine digital and social media platforms (Shapiro& Aneja, 2016). Witkowski et al. (2016) state that streaming in participatory culture exists at an unprecedented level. These content creators are embedded in the cultural economy of digital media and their fan communities are passionate enough to interact with them in various ways in real time, including complimenting them or confronting them. Even though the growth in both video and user base has continued at a high rate, content creators have to learn how to manage risk by diversifying their income from different platforms, including live appearances, fan meetings, and brand sponsors. Successful creators of social media entertainment can engage in entrepreneurial practice: building and maintaining their fan community. An example of what is meant by 'social media entertainment' is the case of PewDiePie[3], who is a famous YouTuber. PewDiePie is arguably the most visible producer on YouTube, as a creative entrepreneur. He created more than three thousand different videos over six years on YouTube. His career success is demonstrated by his

[3] PewDiePie: real name Felix Arvid Ulf Kjellberg, known as online name PewDiePie. He is a YouTuber from Sweden, known for his comedic video content and 'Let's play' game video series.

appearance on *South Park*[4] in 2014 (PewdDiePie, 2014). According to the report published by YouTube in 2017, his channel attracted 53 million subscribers and four million dollars income in 2013 (YouTube, 2017). Another example is the beauty blogger Michelle Phan, who was named in the 2015 *Forbes*' 30 under 30 lists (Adams, 2016). All these examples can be seen as evidence that social media entertainment can be a glamorous career.

On the other hand, digital capitalism is much criticised. Schiller (1999) traces the transformation and development of the Internet, a network originally created to serve government agencies, military contractors and education institutions. However, over the past generation or so, a growing number of networks began to serve as corporation users: "As it comes under the sway of an expansionary market logic, the Internet is catalysing an epochal political-economic transition toward what I call digital capitalism" (Schiller, 1999, xvii). The exchange of digital information over data networks has become the centre of economic and social activity, and information has become commodified. Later, Schiller (2001) concluded in his analysis of China's communication hardware, content and services that while these are significant developments, it seems he only focused on this "big theme".

In the book "*Platform capitalism*" by Nick Srnicek (2017a), Srnicek explains the rise of the business model capitalising on big data, and how media companies rely on it. The question is: who owns the data? According to Srnicek, Google and Facebook are dangerously expanding and "appropriating data as raw material". He argues that "data is the basic resource that drives these firms, and it is data that gives them their advantage over competition" (2017, p.254). The more users a platform accumulates; the more benefits it will obtain. This explains why most platforms enjoy rapid and exponential growth. The example of YouTube is "paradigmatic of the valorisation process" (Srinicek, 2017, p.22-23) underlying platform capitalism and big data manipulation. The algorithm is able to upgrade the system through personalised recommendations. Also, the increasing accuracy of the service is one of the possible reasons for the leadership of YouTube in the web space. Similarly, the strategic use of the recommendation via 'related video' is a key way for users to discover more videos (Burgess & Green, 2018). An effective algorithm in these video-streaming apps allows normal users to gain equal opportunities to become instant celebrities (*China Tech*

[4] South Park is an American adult animated sitcom for the Comedy Central television network.

Insights, 2017). This algorithm directly connects with recommended videos, and viewers do not even have to press a single button to continue watching; it directly jumps to the next video.

Ritzer and Jurgenson (2010) argue that 'prosumption' has been a feature of capitalism for as long as production and consumption have co-existed, and that it is becoming the dominant model in the digital economy and a regular part of everyday life. Everything online can be seen as a product on the shelf with a price tag. As with the various organisational structures and models of production in Web 2.0, many people have discussed the exploitative potential in a system employing paid and unpaid digital labour over the Internet. In the system of co-creation, websites such as YouTube benefit from the voluntary time and energy provided by their online community. More and more users from those websites become aware of the value of the work and the data they produce voluntarily. Online entertainment video star Hank Green, a vlogger on YouTube, simply wants YouTubers and production companies to aim for higher CPM (cost per impression): "Just every viewer paying an average of $1 per piece of content" (cited in Dredge, 2015).

2.1.3 Digital optimism?

The generalisability of the much-published research on Jenkins' participatory culture is problematic. Previous studies of Jenkins have been optimistic about emerging cultural power in media landscape where grassroots media users can participate in the larger context. In the beginning of the book titled "R-inventing the media", Turner (2016) calls for a careful and critical approach to 'digital optimism', aiming to rethink media and cultural studies in the context of social media. As he points out, a new media studies approach is needed as communication systems evolve:

> "Given this volatility and its varied outcomes, the traditional paradigms for the analysis of the mass media require reassessment if media and cultural studies are to better understand the altered states of the media today, and to find ways of mapping their coordinates". (2016, p.20)

Turner (2016) reconsiders theories built around the concept of media convergence and argues that media convergence is not enhancing the power of audiences, but rather increasing commercialisation and market concentration. He

suggests that media studies should pay more attention to analysing the aspect of commercialisation and digital capitalism:

> "The core weakness of the literature on convergence culture, and it is in my view a weakness that seriously limits its usefulness for the broad project of rethink media theory right now, is that it is more or less blind to the role played by the commercial interests that are implicated in – indeed, that drive – these developments." (2016, p.27).

As discussed earlier about data and algorithms, rather than power being generated through all participatory users with shared interests, it is located within media corporations' search algorithms, which are highly commercialised in the contemporary digital age. The histories of live-streaming platforms provide a clear example of this: the power hierarchy on live-streaming platforms was initially offered to the individual users, yet, it is now being transferred back to the media corporations to make it commercialised. Van Dijck (2018) presents different perspectives about platforms, that is, "platform-driven change of society". According to her book, there are three different aspects that define a platform: datafication, commodification and selection. So that, live streaming can take account for "the platform" van Dijck implies. Live-streaming platforms have the ability to do things such as "like", "share", "follow" and so on, this interactive behaviour represents a prime resource for the platform. Also there is the commercial part of live-streaming generated products, for example, donation and gift sending. What's more, the live-streaming platform algorithm allows users to have influences on the subject they watch.

The Internet allows users in this space to create materials by using previously made content remixing and rewriting the originals. Lievrouw (2011) discusses the conflicts and thinks that there is "no guarantee of quality" for the videos from people who have no expertise in this area. The changes usually associated with UGC have resulted in new modes of production, distribution and consumption that have been developed and operated in "contingent ways".

In relation to the area discussed above, contemporary media is more thoroughly focused on commercial interests. I want to conclude these sections here by asking: how is participatory culture being shaped by the commercialised and capitalised digital media platform? Is it still applicable under digital capitalism?

2.2 Existing studies on live streaming

This second section in the literature review highlights the connections between streamers and viewers in relation to participatory culture. This part of the literature looks at viewer's engagement, information seeking and motivation across different platforms. In this section, I work to progress the conceptual understanding of live streaming by discussing what live streaming is, as well as the understanding of the interaction between streamers and viewers in live streaming.

2.2.1 Cultural consumption about live streaming

Live video-streaming services enable synchronous communication between a streamer and viewers, and between different viewers around the world. Live streaming has become a cultural phenomenon in the Internet age. Unlike previous streaming services, such as YouTube or television, live streaming offers a platform for audiences and streamers to interact in real time. Streamers broadcast themselves in front of public viewers, playing video games, eating food, and dancing. Viewers watch and listen to the streamers, and directly interact with the streamers in real time, facilitating their ability to interact with each other, as well as other viewers on the same platform in the real time (Hilvert-Bruce et al. 2018; Yu et al. 2018; Lim et al. 2012). This two-way communication makes streamers directly acknowledge and respond to viewers, and viewers can directly participate in this live-streaming environment.

In the first section, I have shown how the industry takes advantage of digital labour within digital capitalism. In addition to this, this section will more specifically focus on video-streaming context. Jenkins has studied mainstream examples of participatory culture, exploring how audiences interact with popular culture and create meaning out of this relationship:

> "Totally autonomous from or totally vulnerable to the culture industries. It would be naïve to assume that powerful conglomerates will not protect their own interests as they enter this new media marketplace, but at the same time, audiences are gaining greater power and autonomy as they enter in the new knowledge culture" (2006, p.136).

Jenkins' definition of participatory culture goes through different processes of development. With the rise of Web 2.0 companies and business models, he distinguishes two different types of companies; companies that try to monetise fan fictions, and companies that attempt to extract free labour from fans. A continuation of this idea of mainstream participation can be seen in the live-streaming studies. To extend from Jenkins' fans theory, Witkowski et al. (2016) focus on how viewers' attention and social interactions are "commodified". On Twitch, this form of gift-giving behaviour has been called "donation", and some other platforms call it "reward" or "send gift". Yu et al. (2018) and Chen and Lin (2018) argue that the reason for this type of engagement is the need for social interaction. Viewers can purchase a gift item on the live-streaming platform and send it to the streamer they like. The streamer will receive monetary or non-monetary benefit from the streaming platform, as the streamer receives the gift item during live streaming. Hilvert-Bruce, Neill, Sjoblom and Hamari (2018) indicate four different factors for live-stream engagement, and donation is one of them: "The donor is usually thanked personally by the streamer, celebrated in the chat room, and may have their name displayed on the stream as the 'Top fans' or a 'Recent fans'". In some cases, viewers even compete over how much they have donated to this streamer.

2.2.2 Identification, belonging and participation in live-streaming performance

On Twitch, YouTube Live, AfreecaTV[5], Douyu, and other live-streaming platforms, viewers interact with streamers who put up content, and with other anonymous viewers who simultaneously watch the content via live chat in the commentary area. In particular, some of the newest live-streaming platforms enable viewers not only to participate with other users in the commentary area, but also participate in the streamer's ranking system, and make donations. Whenever viewers recommend the content of this streamer or make some donation, the streamer checks their online IDs, reacts and thanks them by calling their name or doing other gestures. This type of viewer engagement is different from the "leave a comment in the video commentary section", and has more real-time interactions.

[5] AfreecaTV: a video streaming serice based in South Korean

Hamilton. Garretson and Kerne (2014) have explored the motivation of this interaction between streamers and viewers, as they can identify themselves online. Due to the social connection and participatory nature of streaming environment, users form some sort of stream communities. Live streaming serves as a virtual space where communities form and grow, with viewers using chat features to communicate about the content they are watching. For example, a platform such as Twitch serves as a "virtual third place […] where informal communities emerge, socialise, and participate" (Hamilton et al. 2014). Those professional game streamers and audiences form together as "communities of practice". Churchill and Xu (2016, cited in Johnson and Woodcock, 2018, p.4) argue that streaming has become "more than just an entertainment medium; it is the home of the largest gaming community in history". In terms of the theory of UGC, Sjoblom and Hamari (2017, p.933) investigated why people watch others play video games. This was based on four distinct types of usages, "hours watched, streamers followed, streamers watched, and streamers subscribed to". "The results show that feeling a sense of community in the watching experience not only increases how much people watch streams, but also perhaps more importantly, was also the strongest determinant of following streamers and subscribing" (p.933).

This discussion so far has been about certain existing literature about live streaming. To move into a more specific and clear mode, it might help if some questions are outlined here – if Western live-streaming platform can be understood as above, can Chinese live streaming still be understood in the same way? What are the differences?

2.3 The uniqueness of the Chinese live-streaming industry

The first two sections have drawn heavily from participatory culture and social media entertainment and the theorising around it. This section reviews the literature on the Chinese internet context, more specifically on live streaming, in order to provide a rich background for the analysis and discussion of findings in this project. This third section of this literature review focuses on censorship and commercialisation aspects within the Chinese internet.

2.3.1 Value chain of Chinese live streaming

China has famously built an alternative online ecosystem that is larger than that of the rest of the world. These initiatives have included banning YouTube, Facebook, Twitter and Instagram while growing its own platforms in a parallel online universe. The government's digital economic strategy has incubated some massive tech giants in China, known as the BAT (Baidu, Alibaba and Tencent), and which have lead to a more highly competitive online system than the Western world, as well as inside of the parallel system. Live streaming has flourished in China – in 2016, there were over 200 different live streaming platforms (Chadha, 2016). Not only BAT, but also some other big technology companies such as Weibo, or YD in China – managed to launch their own live-streaming platforms over the past few years. Every technology/ media company wants a piece of this unparalleled live-streaming market. However, with this competitive environment, platforms can still make millions from live streaming every year. Comparing annual reports from iiMedia research[6], we find that the number of online live-streaming users in China reached 398 million in 2017. Later in 2018, the live-streaming industry development tended to become more stable and rational, with the number of users expected to reach over 500 million by 2019 (iiMedia research, 2018; iiMedia research, 2019).

Live-streaming platforms have contributed to the growth of the Chinese digital creative economy to some extent. In 2015, live-streaming revenues in China reached USD$2.25 billion (around A$3.3 billion) (Fannin, 2017). According to a report from Online Live Performance Branch – China Association of Performing Arts (2017) – the total market revenue was 30.45 billion RMB (around A$6.09 billion) in 2016. YY, one of the earliest live-streaming platforms (Geron, 2012), provides large group video streaming for a wide range of users and it can support more than 100,000 users simultaneously on one of its channels from the platform. It had 3.2 million paying users in 2013 and increased to 7.2 million in 2015 (Liu, 2016). According to the newest book '*Live streaming: participatory culture and experiential economic in new media landscape*' from the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences on Chinese live streaming, currently, there are three different content production methods in live-streaming platforms- UGC, PGC (professional generated content) and PUGC (professiona user generated content).

[6] iiMedia research: A China data-sharing website, focuses on third-party data mining and analysis for new economic industries.

PGC has great commercial values in live streaming, yet at the same time, initial investment is large with only a relatively small number of successful cases.

PUGC is the combination of the popular UGC with top-level professional production content.

However, Liu (2014) describes a slightly different Chinese social media entertainment industry. These are UGC, PGC (as known as PPC, professionally-produced content) and OGC (occupationally-generated content) in the content of creation. These three are closely related and clearly different. In Liu's point of view, the difference between UGC and PGC is that users from PGC have certain professional backgrounds, for example, *Da V* (opinion leaders on Weibo). And the difference between PGC and PGC is that whether the platform pays for the content or not, like professional online journalists.

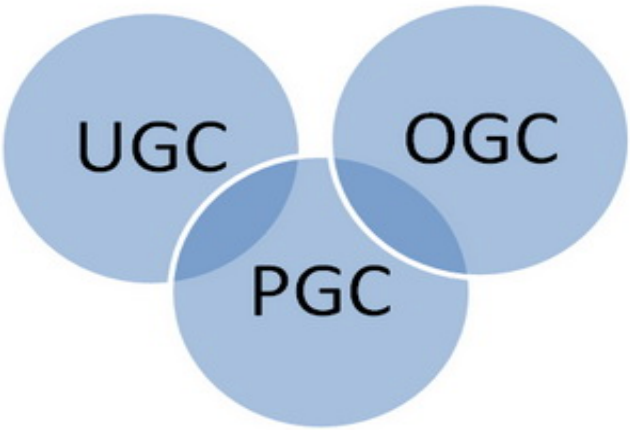

Figure 1. Representation of UGC, PGC and OGC (Liu, 2014)

Wang Hong has also grown inside the Chinese Internet's "parallel universe". Also known as 'internet celebrities', *Wang Hong* translates as 'internet famous'. Cunningham and Craig (2019) define that live streamers are one type of Wang Hong, and Wang Hong can be seen as the SME creator, "Chinese SME – *wang hong* – operates entrepreneurially and interdependently within this media ecology across multiple platforms and stakeholders, whether fan communities or general users, sponsors or advertisers, regulators and policy makers". Live streaming has become

one of the most cost-effective tools for commercials in China. Just as in many other industries, the development of live streaming has divided into different labour divisions:

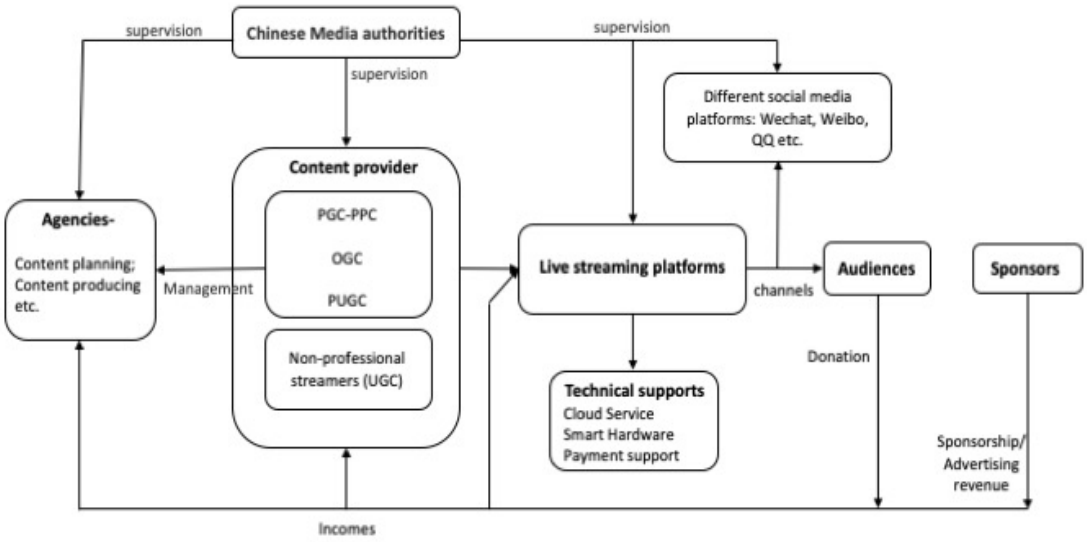

Figure 2. Chinese video streaming industry map

Just as in many other industries, there is a value chain in the Chinese video-streaming industry. According to Figure 2 shown above, content providers use live-streaming platforms to publish their content to public viewers. Sometimes they use social media channels to promote their content. Agencies such as content planning teams, content producing teams, and copyright management teams, manage the content of professional streamers (including professional streamers and celebrity streamers). Different types of live-streaming platforms have to rely on third-party technical companies support to run their system, for example, Cloud service and online payment support. The key to the fast growth of live-streaming business in China is twofold: viewers' donation (gift-selling) and sponsors' sponsorship (advertising). Furthermore, Chinese media authorities have a right to supervise live streaming agencies, content providers and live-streaming platforms.

There are two different types of content providers in live streaming – grass-roots streamers, and professional crews in Chinese live-streaming platforms (Liu, 2016), specifically professional streamers and celebrity streamers. Grass-roots streamers, also called non- professional streamers, need to rely on their viewers, and

are usually regular people with some performing experience. However, professional streamers have support from different resources, for example, a content planning team, content producing time, talent agencies and other third parties that can take care of the content. Due to the popularity of live streaming in China, "streamer" has become a new profession. Live streaming companies such as YY or Inke that rely on streamers to generate revenue, they are actively seeking talented people who have potential to become popular, and they provide the platform and facility to support and train them (Weller, 2017).

Service platforms in China have to rely on technical support from third parties for service maintenance (iResearch[7], 2017). Unlike YouTube or Twitch, for service platforms in China, there is a considerable operational cost. In terms of revenue, live-streaming platforms cut a portion from viewers' donations and sponsors' advertising revenues. In the Western World, many web celebrities gain fame on social media. The most successful kinds to have monetised their huge fan bases are fashion icons. They publish Instagram photos or YouTube videos about make-up or styles, becoming a YouTuber or Instagrammer earning large sums from brand sponsorships.

In this Chinese live streaming value chain, agencies and content planning play a similar role on YouTube. They help content providers to build communities and moderate their streams. At the same time, agencies also recruit new grass-roots streamers and train them for live performance in more professional ways. This training process is the switch from UGC to PGC.

The live-streaming environment in China is unique compared with other countries, not only because of the parallel universe, but also because of the unique culture phenomenon. Fannin (2017) explained that there are two reasons why live streaming is so popular in China; the loneliness of youth and the well-developed IT infrastructure in China. As discussed in section two, live-streaming users tend to look for a sense of community. Youth tend to seek belonging on the Internet, particularly in live streaming where they can talk with one another in real time (Chen & Lin, 2018). A study by Haimson and Tang (2017) about social media states that immersion, immediacy, interaction and sociality were four important factors in the live-streaming engagement. The use of the mobile internet has contributed to the public's high acceptance of live streaming as a new format of social participation. According to a

[7] iResearch: a market research and consulting company, supplying online business service in China.

report released by China Internet Network Information Center (cited in Liu, 2016), there were 656 million users who use the phone to access the internet in 2016, which is 92.5% of all netizens. The use of smart phones has lowered the barrier to live streaming, particularly for streamers (Fannin, 2017 & Liu, 2016).

One phenomenon is live streaming '*Chi bo*', refers to 'binge eating' or 'eat broadcasting'. Originally from Korean as '*Mukbang*'— it is live broadcasting in which a streamer eats large amounts of foods or certain strange food while interacting with viewers. On Chinese live-streaming platforms, it is typical to see a streamer introduce certain food to viewers from different geographical locations. Local and traditional food feasts travel from one community to another in this contemporary media landscape. Mizijun[8] was the first person to introduce 'binge eating' to wider viewers in China and she is the most famous one; she had 2.2 million Weibo fans within three months since the first live broadcast video (Xinhua, 2017). From there, more and more streamers joined the 'chi bo' team. This 'chi bo' practice is tied to the concept of participatory culture. Becoming a mukbang eater seems like a nice choice if you can get that much food in your belly, after all, getting paid to eat sounds like a dream. This may have been the case two years ago, but it is not now. Mukbang is not simply just eating a large quanitity of food, rather it has developed into different forms, including consuming weird food, the eating stinky food challenge or even swallowing inedible items. Many spin-off news stories have reported on streamers wanting to be famous, for example, "live streamers attacked by octopus as she tries to eat it", "a girl poised after ear aloe plant on live", "a video blogger died after live streaming himself eating poisonous bugs". This type of live streaming can be found everywhere since there are no regulations on what a person can or cannot eat.

2.3.2 Business model: flow of money on live-streaming platforms

"It is all about traffic", this is the slogan everybody believes in the live-streaming business. As mentioned earlier, the growth of the live-streaming business in China has been rapid. Yet, how exactly does this business work? Figure 3 depicts two major

[8] Mizijun: Chinese wang hong, and online name is 密子君. She is known for binge eating and eating challenges, and became famous because of finishing 10 cups of really spicy noodle within 16 minutes 20 seconds.

types of income for platforms: virtual gift (or donation) from viewers, and advertising revenue from sponsors.

Different live-streaming platforms or agencies have different shares with the content provider. According to Liu and Li (2016, p.16) from Tencent, "the conversion rate for virtual gifts to cash is normally 50-60% of the initial price paid in real currency". In this business model, streamers act like salespersons; the more gift they receive, the more money they will get, and the total amount of gift or the number of followers has become one of the most important criteria for attracting advertisement sponsors. A full-time streamer, whether as a professional streamer or a non-professional streamer, can earn around A$800 every month (Liu, 2016).

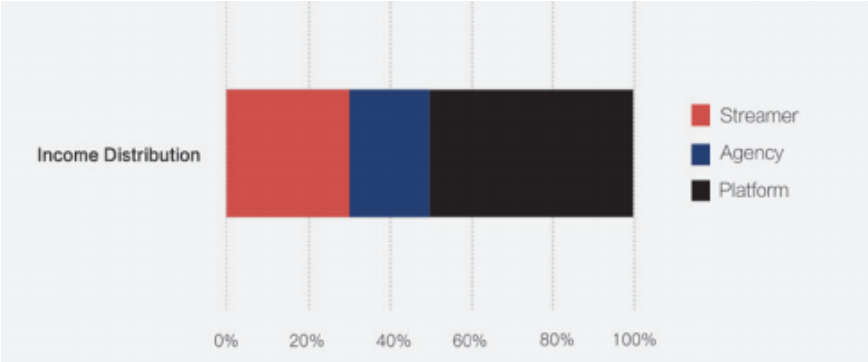

Figure 3. Platform income distribution (Liu & Li, 2016)

Another major income revenue is from the advertising sponsors. Live video streaming offers the perfect advantage for interactive advertising – real-time interaction and communication between streamers and viewers. Dayi Zhang[9] is one example. She made $46 million from selling clothes alone, and the income increased to $60 million in 2016. This income is even more than that of Kim Kardashian who made only $45.5 million in the same year (Daily, 2017 & Pan, 2017).

2.3.3 Censorship in Chinese live streaming

Cunningham, Craig and Lv (2019, p.11) use the phrase "borderline acceptable online expression" to describe the Chinese live-streaming environment. Chinese media

[9] Day Zhang (or Zhang Dayi), born in 1988. She is a fashion entrepreneur/ designer who is very popular and a successful internet celebrity (Wang hong) in China.

regulations allow authorities rights to crack down on news or other harmful content online (Xu & Albert, 2017). Therefore, we can say that internet content tests the limits of media control.

The censorship of live-streaming content existed back in 2014 and some live streaming apps disappeared due to SAPPRFT requirements, banning the: "spreading of illegal content, dressing in military or police uniforms or dressing scantily and acting flirtatiously" (Liu, 2014& Bandurski, 2017a). In June 2017, SAPPRFT issued an edict, which aimed at "cleaning up the air in cyberspace", shuttering 73 platforms and 1870 streamers (Xinhua, 2017). AcFun, Ifeng and Weibo (aka. Yizhibo) were the most affected video-streaming platforms in this "clean-up" operation. This edict focused on content censorship, especially in the comment section, and was designed to limit the invasion of new media platforms into social and political commentary for general Chinese netizens. To cope with the endless workload of supervising live-streaming platforms, a variety of strategies were developed that combine with human and computer intervention. In Yi live, there are 2000 employees and half of them are involved in online supervision, but YY does not have many staff, using software to monitor live streaming content (Cunningham, Craig & Lv, 2019)

In January 2017, an article in the *People's Tribune* noted that "streaming platforms made it difficult to control 'guidance of speech', a reference to the overarching goal of social and political control through the media" (cited in Bandurski, 2017b). Likewise, Sun (2017) thinks that Chinese authorities have difficulty keeping up with the technology, similar to regulators elsewhere. In April 2018, Kuaishou, Tiktok and other popular video apps underwent investigation from SAPPRFT, which issued an order for them to clean up any crude and facetious content (Soo, 2018).

This is the last section of the literature review. By canvassing the literature on the Chinese live-streaming industry in section three, a detailed context for the present study and its focus on the value chain and censorship is provided. However, there are some questions arising here, which will be discussed in later chapters. Questions include: Can Jenkin's idea about participatory culture be applied to the contemporary Chinese live-streaming context? How?

The next chapter outlines the methodological perspectives that underpin this study, as well as detailing key aspects of the methods employed.

CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

Chapter 2 reviews the literature on the theoretical developments of "participatory culture" in the evolving digital media landscape, as well as the contemporary context in the Chinese media environment. These are the key theoretical and practical contexts of this research. This chapter outlines the methodological framework for the research project that explores the interaction between streamers and viewers in Chinese risk-taking live streaming. This research utilises a qualitative study and draws upon interview and participant observation methods to explore the main research questions noted in earlier chapters.

Internet studies have become an emergent interdisciplinary research field where a variety of new approaches and frameworks are being experimented. The Internet provides new potential for researchers in both academic and practical ways, with huge opportunities to gather data that would otherwise take much time and resources to acquire. It is often far faster and cheaper than other forms of analysis and data is available in or close to real time. While the Internet has opened new possibilities for qualitative researchers, there are challenges involved. Contemporary researchers attempt to understand the broader context surrounding the media landscape, as well as how people engage with media itself (Brennen, 2013).

Live streaming is a combination of media technology and culture. It challenges traditional unidirectional models of sender and receiver through its shifting of power. In 1947, Shannon and Weaver placed a model of communication between sender and receiver in a mathematical way. This model of communication was designed to mainly evaluate communications through telephone and radio and breaks down into five different categories: sender, encoder, decoder, receiver and noise. This is very much a simplified and effective person-to-person communication, rather than mass communication. A couple of decades later, the growth of industry became much more complex from when Shannon and Weaver created this model. In his theory of communication and cultural studies, Stuart Hall (1973) introduces, "the encoding/decoding model of communication" in television discourse, which is that the message travels from sender to receiver, and the receiver decodes a message in a way that make sense to them. From Hall's understanding, the process of encoding and

decoding is the translation of a message and how the message can be interpreted via different receivers depending on the individual's cultural background, economic standing and personal experiences. His model claims that a viewer member can play a major role in the decoding process as they can actively change the message's meaning. Decoding has both verbal and non-verbal communication, for example, body language and facial expression. In this research project context, live streaming potentially challenges the encoding and decoding system from Hall, by the participation of users who might shape cultural production.

However, the communicative model of stremer-viewer interation is relevant to, but more complex than the encoding and edcoding system. The streamer is the sender and viewers are the receiver; the streamer sends out the message through verbal and non-verbal ways, and the message can be interpreted differently from viewer to viewer. Another way to understand this is that viewers can send the message back to the streamer, to influence the streamer's behaviour. Also, many viewers might follow the streamer's practices, which link with participatory culture.

To reflect this methodologically, I chose to use qualitative methods with interviews and participant observation. Brennen (2013, p.4) notes in her book *Qualitative Research Methods for Media Studies*, "qualitative research is interdisciplinary, interpretive, political and theoretical in nature. Using language to understand concepts based on people's experience, it attempts to create a sense of the large realm of human relationships". As a qualitative researcher in this research project, I have looked at and considered the diversity of meanings and values created in live-streaming platforms. Rather than focusing on media effects and impacts, I want to understand the relationships, the connections and the power structures that exist within the live-streaming media environment. Unlike quantitative research, which is often considered and used on scientific research, qualitative research attempts to use language to analyse people's experiences (Brennen, 2013). Employing a qualitative approach was therefore deemed appropriate to gain new in-depth insights from real live-streaming cases. Qualitative approaches allow me to discover the meaning behind live-streaming performances through the eyes of my participants. In this study, the semi-structured interviews that were conducted; it provided rich and detailed information about risk-taking performance streamers' experiences and perceptions, as well as viewers' perspectives toward risk-taking live streaming, and enabled me to consider the meanings of the respondents' replies. In addition,

participation observation methods were conducted in order to understand people's interests, practices and experience.

3.1 Interviews

Interview is the most common method in the qualitative research of data collection (Braun & Clarke, 2013). In general, there are three different interview methods: structured, semi-structured and unstructured open-ended interviews. In the qualitative methods, the semi-structured interview is the dominant form, as it requires researchers to prepare an interview guide before they conduct the interview. For the nature of this research project, semi-structured interviews were chosen, as it was desired to go more deeply into users' experiences and some of the topics. Braun and Clarke (2013) make a comparison of standardised face-to-face interviews and qualitative interviews. Qualitative interview is unlike traditional standardised face-to-face interviews, where the interviewer is a 'robot' asking questions in the same way and exactly in the same order. In qualitative interviews, ideally, the researcher will ask a series of questions prepared in advance and participants will respond using their own words. Open-ended questions are preferred so as to encourage participants to provide in-depth and detailed responses. Employing qualitative methods is therefore appropriate to research that is, "less concerned with data collection and instead strives to understand the meaning of information" (Brennen, 2013, p.28). Gubrium and Holstrin (cited in Brennen, 2013) note that, through face-to-face and in-depth guided conversation, semi-structured interview questions could explore respondents' feelings, emotions, experiences and values within their "deep nuanced inner world". A well-conducted face-to-face qualitative interview can provide rich and detailed data about individual experience and perspective. Some researchers consider virtual interviews, including telephone interviews and email interviews, as poor substitutes compared to face-to-face interview. However, increasingly, virtual interviews have shown their particular strength to make up the limitation of traditional face-to-face methods, and virtual interviews are no longer regarded as poor substitutes for face-to-face interviews but more as a different type of interview method with its own advantages and disadvantages.

Given the rise of social media, and its intergration into contemporary everyday life. Chen and Hinton (199, p.29) explain the idea of online interviewing: "Online

interviewing requires the researcher to have access to frame-capable browser software and space on an internet web server that supports PHP server-side scripting and an interviewee with a similar browser with access to the World Wide Web". In virtual interviews, two people or a group of people communicate with each other through the agency of the Internet by following a certain interview structure. When researching online communities and online experiences, the use of virtual interviews is appealing and serves to increase the credibility of the project, because interview participants are integrally engaged with the environment in which they are located (Evans, Elford & Wiggins, 2008).

Virtual interviews are useful tools for this research project because of their special capacity to use a variety of ways to conduct the interview, such as video virtual interviews or text-based interviews. In this research project, I employed text-based virtual interview, simply sending text messages through a WeChat app and participants could reply to me in the same way. WeChat is a communication social media app that allows people to communicate quickly and easily regardless of geographic location. There is an increasing number of studies, which have directly featured WeChat as a medium for research. The design and function of written Chinese, symbols and visual cues afforded by WeChat have allowed users new methods for creating messages and online interactions (Sandel et al., 2018). Although text messages via social media app can take a few minutes' time for both an interviewer and interviewee, interviewees can have time to think about what to answer and give a clear explanation. In this way, both the interviewer and interviewee can construct their language more carefully. What's more, text-based virtual interviews protect their anonymity.

There are advantages in using online (virtual) interview methods, but there are undoubtedly disadvantages. One of the main weakness of virtual interviews is probably that internet communication is limited to carrying information, where face-to-face interviews are enhanced by many visual and body movements to explain the use of words. In online/ virtual interviews, the use of acronyms or abbreviations (e.g. LOL, ROFL) and emoticons (☺) in the communication act as substitutes for non-verbal cues (Braun and Clarke, 2013). It is to be noted, "the use of language takes on added significance in text-based interviews and becomes particularly pertinent where understanding of terminology may not be shared" (Evans, Elford & Wiggins, 2008. P.321).

3.1.1 Interview participants

There were two different interview participant groups – two streamer participants and three viewer participants. The research participants were two live-streaming performers who were selected using purposive sampling. This entails establishing relevant selection criteria and searching for suitable respondents who meet these criteria (Bernard, 2002).

For inclusion in this research sample, the streamer interview participant group have to possess two characteristics: (1) they are doing or have conducted risk-taking live streaming performances; (2) this participant group's gender will be different from another streamer. This helps me gain insight into what the motivations are for conducting risk-taking performances, and to explain whether streamers' gender difference will create different perspectives in terms of performance. The live streamers who took part in this research methodology were active across two different live-streaming platforms, and they are based in China. Multiple strategies were used to maximise the recruitment range. The primary recruitment method for streamer interviewees were through the distribution of messages to their platform inbox about my research, such as,

> "Hey, I have watched your live-streaming performances and I really liked it.
> I am currently conducting a research about live-streaming performances.
> Please friend me on WeChat if you are interested".

In order to reach my target streamers, I looked at eight different live-streaming platforms, including Inke, Huajiao, Yi Live, Now, YY, Huya, Bilibili, Douyu from 09/07/2019 to 30/07/2019, and sent around 80 copies of the message in that period of time. All top-ranking lists were examined to see which of the streamers conducted risk-taking performances. In addition to sending the message, I also distributed my recruiting message through my different social media platforms such as Weibo post, Douban status, WeChat moments, as well as WeChat group chat. It was hard to find a right streamer participant because most top streamers are managed by either an agency or the platforms, and they do not normally take non-commercial interviews.

Beside streamer participants, three different viewer participants were also included. They possess two characteristics relevant to the aim of the project: (1) they watch risk-taking live streaming performances; (2) they made donation to streamers.

This helps me to understand their intention in watching risk-taking performances, and understand why viewers make donations to streamers. In the process of viewers' interview recruitment, I took a very similar approach to that of streamer interview recruitment but one that was much easier. I examined the streamer's donation ranking list and sent out a message to their inbox:

> "Hey, I saw your contribution to the streamers on the list and I am currently conducting a research about live-streaming performances. Please friend me on WeChat if you are interested".

In the two days between 08/07/2019 and 10/07/2019, more than 50 messages were sent out, and there were seven people who friended me on WeChat. One of these four did not meet the criterion, so I interviewed three in the end.

In order to ensure confidentiality and anonymity, each of the five interview participants (streamers and viewers) is referred to by a respondent code such as Streamer 1 and Viewer 3.

Table 1. *Streamers: research interview participants*

Respondent code	Streamer 1	Streamer 2
Live streaming apps	Bilibili, Yi	Douyu
Live streaming types	Binge eating, food challenge	Gaming: horror game
No. of followers	20000+	70000+
Frequents of streaming	2 times / week	3 times / week (various)

Table 2. *Viewers: research interview participants*

Respondent Code	Most frequently used apps	Most frequently watched streaming type
Viewer 1	Douyu, Bilibili, Meipai	Makeup, Food
Viewer 2	Yinke, Bilibili	Food, Gaming, Talent show
Viewer 3	Bilibili, Douyu	Gaming, Cat

3.1.2 Data collection

Prior to conducting the interviews, a list of pre-defined questions (see Appendix C) was formulated, in order to ensure that interviews followed a similar structure and to facilitate the comparison of data gathered from different interviewees. Although this pre-defined list was used in each interview to guide the interview process, there was still room to digress in case any unforeseen relevant topics should emerge during an interview. In the beginning of the interviews, "ice-breaker" questions and introductory questions were asked, in order to establish rapport between researcher and interviewees (Brennen, 2013). After this, interview questions were asked directly concerning the topic and research questions. This part started with a non-leading and semi-structured interview question, asking the respondents for their opinion and attitude toward live streaming, as well as risk-taking content. This allowed the respondents to express what they personally think.

The length of the interviews was approximately 30 minutes to one hour. All interviews were text recorded with the written consent of the participants and later transcribed and analysed using thematic analysis.

3.2 Participation observation

Gobo sees "Western cultures as being fixated on observation, and maintains that being observed and observing others are central aspects of our contemporary lives" (cited in Brennen, 2013, p.160). Observation is useful for collecting data, and in qualitative methods, observation is concerned more with description and explanation. In general, qualitative research observation is often seen as ethnographic, which "was the process in which researchers spent long periods of time living with and observing other cultures in a natural setting" (Wimmer & Dominisk, 2014, p.148). Brennen (2013, p.163) explains, "Participant observation is integral to ethnography". Researchers use this method to explain language, practices and activities of one or many specific group(s) of people and make sense of their everyday life. Although observation does have its unique advantage that helps the researcher define basic background information, it does suffer from its problem of reactivity, "the very process of being observed may influence the behaviour under study" (Wimmer & Dominisk, 2014, p.129), Also observational fieldwork usually takes a long time, perhaps several years or decades.

Virtual (or online) ethnography is a relatively new development in qualitative research, which extends its notion into cyberspace, while traditional ethnography involves the researcher entering into the physical location to understand their research participants. In the online world, observation takes a different meaning because those being observed are not people, but rather their representation or self-reflection in virtual form. Sometimes, the process of conducting observation online with special interest groups, professional organisations and virtual communities is referred to as 'netnography' (DeWalt & DeWalt, cited in Brennen, 2013,). The word 'netnography' is linked together with "computer-mediated communication" (Kozinets, cited in Wimmer & Dominisk, 2014, p.151) and it depends on the Internet as a source of data. Netnography is a strong emerging field of methods, which developed from ethnography. Netnography recognises the social interaction in virtual space, and it believes that internet users form an online community that becomes a part of their daily life. One benefit of web observation is that everything happened in every life can be stored, no matter whether it is an email message, blog, or online chat history. Researchers can record things that happens and interpret what they see or hear. While this method can be useful in the qualitative approach, researchers need to understand its disadvantages. Since online posts are anonymous, online participants may "feel free to post inflammatory, mischievous or off-topic messages that distort the data" (Wimmer& Dominisk, 2014, p.151), and the researcher has to spend a lot of unnecessary time to analyse non-useful information. Furthermore, "not everybody posts comments at the same rate; a few people may account for the majority of messages and skew the results" (Wimmer & Dominisk, 2014, p.151).

3.2.1 Recording and archiving live streaming performances

Normally, there are four different observation types: complete observer, observer as participant, participant as observer, and complete observer. As a complete observer, it is difficult to envision a researcher on-site who does not interact with any of the participants. However, as Brennen (2013) states, "more recently, some researchers choose to record activities and events on video cameras that are strategically placed around the site. These non-participant observers watch and analyse the recording off-site at later date". Through these "recording and archiving live-streaming performances" activities, there is an aim to understand the streamer-viewers'

interaction in risk-taking live streaming, such as the gift-giving process, the communication topic, or even the amount of donation.

3.2.2 Research participants

There were two different live-streaming performances in this research approach. For inclusion in this research sample, these two performances were from the same two streamers interviewed. These live-streaming performances are based on the following characteristics: (1) popularity on the platforms, (2) video content, (3) number of viewer, and (4) inclusion of sponsored, affiliate/ free product video, and non-sponsored video.

In order to achieve a clear analysis, each of the video performances is referred to by a code in the following text.

Table 3. *Analyses of performances*

Performance number	Performance 1	Performance 2
Streamer number	Streamer 1	Streamer 2
Video content	Food	Gaming
Number of viewers	<1886	<3876
Date of the performance	23.09.2019	12.09.2019
Sponsored/ non sponsored?	No	No

To further refine the channels for inclusion in this study, two live-streaming performances were analysed according to video content, number of viewers and sponsorship and non-sponsorship. To better understand the interaction between streamer and viewer, it was necessary to define the nature of sponsored, affiliate/free product, and non-sponsored video.

3.2.3 Data collection

Data collection of video posts began from July 2019 and ran until August 2019. For each of the live-streaming performances, the focus was on the interaction between

streamers and viewers. The transcripts and the recording of each live streaming were read and watched repeatedly in order for the researcher to become acquainted with the data.

Along with video recording, field notes were also taken. These focused on the activities of viewers during a live-streaming performance event, such as comments, donation, likes/ dislikes and the conversation among viewers, as well as the streamers' responses to all these. Special attention was given to the acts/activities that led to some challenging performances or behaviour by the streamers.

Field notes are one of the primary methods for observation of live-streaming performances. Research field notes in this study can be described as thick description, although much research data can be downloaded as screenshots and videotapes. My field notes often took the screenshots as additional supplemental information for traditional hand-written notes, as well as digital notes. Screenshots and video recordings could be seen as a type of field notes alongside with traditional field notes, as they can capture information such as a user's name, the number of followers, time, dates, comments, as well as gifting behaviours. The visual nature of screenshots alone can be used as a starting point for written notes, which provide more fully experienced and richer views. The digital nature of this research project with traditional field notes demonstrates that digital material can be used as a supplement for traditional ethnographic practices.

3.2.4 App-go-through method

Following the increased prominence of apps since the introduction of Apple's iPhone around 2008, technologies and their functions are driving forces in our complex, dynamic everyday lives, and this challenges media use research. Traditional methods are no longer adequate for digital media researchers to describe and understand current media use appropriately. Accordingly, there is an increasing need for methodological innovation to ensure researchers can face challenges in a changing world. The app-go-through method is a way of engaging an app's interface directly and examines the relation between technology and cultural reference through a user's experiences. Light, Burgess and Duguay (2018, p.882) write, "the core of this method involves the step-by-step observation and documentation of an app's screens, features and flows of app use in order to make them salient and therefore available for critical analysis". It

offers new ways to research today's mobility, and connect with everyday life. The authors also describe the prior use of walkthroughs: "Walkthroughs are an established genre of vernacular cultural practice, particularly in the consumption and evaluation of cultural good (Grimes, 2015; Singh et al., 2000)" (cited in Light, Burgess & Duguay 2018, p.885-6).

The app-go-through's close engagement with app technology has been developed in cultural studies. In Du Gay et al.'s (2013) *Doing Cultural Studies: The Story of the Sony Walkman*, the author examined the environment of the Sony Walkman as a material artefact and site of cultural struggle, examining "how [a technology] is represented, what social identities are associated with it, how it is produced and consumed, and what mechanisms regulated its distribution and use". While it is important to understand the cultural influences within communication technologies, the app-go-through method is customised to mobile apps. It is simply involved with examining what the app contributes to a user's interaction with it, as well as examining the app's function and features, and discovering the relationship between app and user interaction.

Figure 4. Douyu screenshot

This research employs the walkthrough method of Light, Burgess and Duguay (2018), and revolves around research questions, "How does the app makes people addicted and how does the app serve as a bridge for interaction?" and "How does that function facilitate certain interactions between streamer and viewers?" This method asks researchers to engage directly with an app's interface, examining its technological mechanisms and embedded cultural references to understand how it guides users and shapes experiences.

Following this method, I recorded the registration process by opening a new account on two different Chinese live-streaming apps – Bilibili and Douyu – to capture the steps of everyday use. These two different live-streaming apps were chosen as representative of Chinese live-streaming apps.

Table 4. *Live streaming apps version*

Name of the app	App's version on IOS system
Douyu	Version 6.000
Bilibili	Version 5.48.2

In the method from Light, Burgess and Duguay (2018), it is further explicated that the key to this method is to observe step-by-step and to document an app's screens, features and flows of activity. In particular, the walkthrough method consists of three stages: 'registration and entry', 'everyday use', and 'app suspension, closure and leaving' (2018, p.892-899). In everyday use, I consciously applied "an analytical eye" (Light, Burgess& Duguay, 2018) as a research practice from 1st July to 10th July to distinguish the use of these two apps from my previous personal use. During this time period, I browsed live streaming randomly on the first page of these two live-streaming apps. Data was collected by making screenshots of profiles and live streams.

3.3 Thematic analysis

I conducted thematic analysis (TA) in this research. Just as its name implies, Braun and Clarke (2013, p.337) explain "[thematic analysis is] a form of analysis which has

the *Theme* as its unit of analysis, and which looks across data from many different sources to identify themes". Gerald Holton developed TA as a named approach in 1970s, but it was not popularly recognised as a method for research until recently (Braun and Clarke, 2013, p.178). TA is relatively unique among qualitative analytic methods because "it really is 'just a method'" as "it does not prescribe methods of data collection, theoretical positions, epistemological or ontological frameworks" (Braun and Clarke, 2013, p.178). Some suggest that thematic analysis is grounded theory (Kellehear, cited in Tuckett, 2005, p.76), however, the research cannot claim to be 'pure' grounded theory because of the theoretical sampling limitations. TA mostly focuses on human experiences subjectively. This approach emphasises participants' perception, feelings and experiences. One of the main strengths of TA is its flexibility, as it can be applied to almost any types of research. Braun and Clarke (2006) identified that there are two primary ways –inductively or deductively – in which the process of data analysis occurs in thematic analysis. In an inductive approach, the themes are strongly linked with data because it is data-driven. On the other hand, deductive approaches are theory-driven. This method can offer a rich description of a data set and is very useful for summarising large bodies of data. There are six stages from Braun and Clarke (2006): "Phase 1: familiarising yourself with your data", "Phase 2: generating initial codes", "Phase 3: searching for themes", "Phase 4: reviewing themes", "Phase 5: defining and naming themes", and "Phase 6: producing the report".

The initial generated codes were connected to the recognised themes, and constructed and identified in relation to the research questions, particularly, what motivates streamers to conduct challenging performances and what attracts viewers to watch them. A refinement of these themes was conducted, before the themes were finally determined and named concretely.

In the first stage of the thematic analysis, all scripts were read through numerous times to gain familiarity with the data and then the main themes were searched for from the transcripts. The sentences containing responses or the interaction between streamers or viewers in transcripts were re-read with particular attention being paid to themes arising from the first stage of data analysis. The sentences (or interactions) were then collated under the emerging theme headings and were given provisional labels and definitions detailed in discussion chapyer. The sentences (or interactions) were again re-read to see if they contained any further relevant

information to the provisional themes. The themes were given their final analytical form and definition and were refined further through systematic examination.

3.4 Ethical considerations and limitations

The key ethical imperatives guiding the research were confidentiality, anonymity and informed consent (National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research, 2007). These factors are important because interview participants' online profiles were public available on the Internet. For the participants, there was some risk involved in candidly sharing their experiences and interaction around numbers of sensitive issues such as the relationship with their agencies/live-streaming platforms or their viewers' online, and commercial issues. Therefore, the responsibility to guard the participants' anonymity was a primary responsibility and concern throughout the research. Recognising the possibility that participation in the research could trigger unsettling consequences, participants were provided with details of support services from Western Sydney University, so they could have access at any time during and after the research project. A participant's code, such as Streamer 1 or Viewer 1, were used for each interviewee to safeguard their anonymity, well-being and privacy. Participants in the study were assured of confidentiality via oral and written assurance from the researcher. The data was collected via multiple in-depth interviews and participant observation. Transcription notes, research notes and other material were stored on a university provided secured Cloud Drive, which could only can be accessed by the researcher and the researcher's supervisors. Additionally, all interviews were conducted over a one-to-one connection via WeChat, and video recording materials were conducted over Bilibili and Douyu live-streaming platforms.

The researcher met all requirements set by the Human Research Ethics Committees (HREC) from Western Sydney University. The approval letter is located in Appendix A.

One of the interesting aspects of using WeChat as the communication tool and live-streaming apps as observation platforms is the fact that they operate synchronously. A benefit in using the inbuilt function such as "post" or "moment" to carry out interviews and observation is that ease of access is offered for users to interact without really talking to one another. It also enables the same freedom for researchers, in that they can directly copy and paste from WeChat for the purpose of

accuracy in transcribing the interview. In comparison with traditional methods, there is a high degree of errors that would be made during the process of note-taking and transcriptions. However, the model of research methods is not without its limitations. With fully online methods, participants would have more self-censorship in mind, as they may not able to freely express their feelings.

CHAPTER 4. DISCUSSION

This chapter analyses and discusses the themes arising from the data gathered in interviews and supplemented by participatory observation and "app-go-through" examination in the light of relevant literature. The aim of this chapter is to construct a picture of the streamer-viewer interaction and the participants' everyday experience as they engage in live streaming and to find a way of interpreting those experiences against the literature at the point of "interactive" in a commercialised industry.

A central challenge is how to disentangle the complexity of these interactive activities between streamers and viewers in order to analyse what might be going on, and to present their experiences in a way that is comprehensible. Therefore, this following section should be read, as if it were only a reflection of the time when this paper was constructed, while the context is not static.

The following sections are sequential in the way that they follow the process of experience on live-streaming platforms: streamers are motivated to provide content, streamer and viewer have interaction on the platform, and viewers have certain experiences about live streaming. Additionally, each of the sections explicitly takes up a theoretical orientation for the analysis of data. This chapter draws from media, culture and communication studies to analyse how users think about and respond to risk-taking performances in a commercialised live-streaming landscape, by incorporating the concepts like "internet celebrity", "entrepreneurial solutionism", and "co-experience".

4.1 Motivation

This section, as indicated by the data, responds to the primary theme – that is, "motivation" – as articulated by the streamers in the commodified live-streaming industry. Section 4.1.1 explains the commercial and business models that are the site of this investigation through establishing the framing and basic context of data. Section 4.1.2 offers a detailed account of the attitudes of streamers towards risk-taking live streaming performance in this context.

4.1.1 Economic motivation and business models

The evolution of China's live-streaming platform shares a similar trajectory to that of the West only in the early years. However, in recent years, the live-streaming environment in China has been fuelled by the rapid transformation of technology and the internet industry. A large population in China embraces the commercialisation of an online media industry that is also highly competitive compared to the West (Cunningham, Craig& Lv, 2019). From PC-based video streaming to more recent mobile streaming, live streaming has been dependent upon and keeps up with technological advances. Further, this commercial success is also attracting more live-streaming viewers to convert into streamers because of the potentially lucrative income on offer. However, these grassroots individuals are not yet developed enough to produce high-quality content, as most only want to make quick money rather than contribute to quality live-streaming content. Moreover, risk-taking performance is an easy way to catch attention without any professional expertise.

When asked "why do you conduct risk-taking live streaming performance?" the interviewees (streamers) responded: "sometimes, they will pay me a lot, I just play it" or "I will do it if I can, but I just ignore it if I think it's too dangerous". This suggests that, streamers are fully aware of the consequences of risk-taking behaviours, such as vomiting after binge eating, or having a nightmare after the horror games. This was indicated as a significant consideration of the live streamers' experiences; profits are the driving element in this commercialised industry. From Jenkins' (2006) participatory cultural perspective, users produce content in their own right while they are not necessarily passive, platforms offer a place where users can make creative work and are appreciated by other users online. The more time a streamer spends on the platform, the more viewers they can attract, as well as generate more commercial transactions. In other words, a streamer can become an "internet celebrity" by driving more clicks that platforms are benefiting from. As such, producing live-streaming content is a kind of digital labour. While platforms offer a space for streamers to explore cultural and commercial opportunities, the platform companies also exploit their creativity, time and labour sometimes in an unfair and debatable way.

The Chinese live-streaming industry is financially much more sustainable than in the West due to multiple revenue sources (Cunningham, Craig& Lv, 2019); Accordingly, the motivation of streamers is much more complex as well. For streamers, aside from casual interaction with their viewers, their "influence" or "traffic

driving" is of much consideration, and refers to the ability to increase the sales of certain products. Streamer 1 explained how the business works in live streaming as follows:

> "The advertising sponsor will give me a code or link that I can link in my video, my viewers can place the order through this link. My sponsor can track how many people place the order through the link, if they have good sales, they may sponsor more videos." (Streamer1).

Due to the integration of live-streaming platforms, social media platforms and e-commerce platforms – which I will discuss in more detail in section 4.2.1 – streamers typically receive not only a basic salary and percentage of gifts income, but also a bonus from the platform, as well as advertising sponsors. "There were allowances from the club. Gaming streamers make money from signing clubs or platforms. For the girls' showroom, they rely on gifting." (Streamer 2). One streamer may conduct streaming performances because he or she wants to have more income, while another streamer does it because the live-streaming platform recognises a streamer's importance and influence in the ecosystem. Though streamers expressed different motivations, they cannot proceed without financial factors because the overall Chinese live-streaming environment has been highly commercialised.

Keane and Chen (2017) define such a social and cultural motivation as "entrepreneurial solutionism" that is, suggesting and encouraging the young generation to participate in this large social media framework in China with the policy agenda of "Internet+" and "Mass Entrepreneurship and Innovation". Under this policy agenda, "the state's aspiration of economic restructuring drives but also shapes the platformisation of Chinese cultural production" (Lin& Kloet, 2019). Yet, this "Chinese dream" of the internet environment is very much problematic in the face of "how to incorporate the rhetoric of creative disruption into a Chinese political system underpinned by a view of social harmony and collectivism" (Keane& Chen, 2017). The Chinese live-streaming environment is perhaps paradoxical in some ways: on the one hand, the Chinese live-streaming industry was incubated by BAT, which has been investing massive funding and technology support. On the other hand, live-streaming platforms have been relatively inhibited by government regulations, which reshape how streamers and agencies can work.

The current Chinese political circumstances do not overly influence the practices and motivations of streamers. By comparison, the platforms where they are based in have a stronger impact. From the interview, Streamer 2 commented that "some live-streaming platforms have collapsed due to regulations, and also because of the money chain of the streamer's fee was too high to make profit. My club was disbanded due to the financial issue as well. The big boss won't invest money anymore".

In order to attract more viewers, platforms have to make an overdraft cost to sign famous streamers to perform on that platform, yet sometimes that cost far exceeds the revenue. Thus, Chinese platforms are located within a very competitive landscape where they also compete for good streamers.

4.1.2 Streamers' attitudes towards risk-taking

In the interviews, streamers were asked about their attitudes towards risk-taking performance and other streamers who conduct risk-taking performances. Two streamer interviewees expressed similar attitudes towards extremely risky performances such as roof jumping. They have close related concerns with regard to their impact on the general public: Both streamers state that that such a performance is very "stupid" if the content evokes significant discomfort in viewers. "I think they are stupid. It might be useful for a streamer to be famous within a clip, but it is going to be a joke later on" (Streamer 1). "I think it is pretty scary and I don't like that" (Streamer 2). Although not all streamers articulated this risk-taking performance's metaphor so explicitly, all streamers expressed similar attitudes. However, said they would still enact such performances within their ability if viewer (s) made a certain monetary donation. This is a notable discovery in the data indicating the streamers' role of content creation. Jenkins' definition of participatory culture goes through an evolution. The idea of "participatory culture" was that people voluntarily contribute to the Web and their "contributions do matter", which allows a "degree of social connection with one another" (Jenkins, 2009). Live streaming can be seen as the newest extension of the relationship between streamers and viewers on platforms, which, however, are not entirely voluntary.

The controversial aspect of these risk-taking performances has left millions of members of the public with a bad impression based on misrepresentative stereotypes,

and this is especially true amongst older generations living in rural areas. Interestingly, in general, streamers say they would not tell their families that their career was in live streaming unless the content was so popular that they could not hide anymore. Unlike other social media platforms (e.g. WeChat and Weibo), where users can select, which group of friends they want to share with, live- streaming platforms allow users to visually share and discover new content with the general public. Streamer 1 said she definitely would not let her parents discover that she conducts live-streaming performances with controversial content, stating: "Because I know they would not let me do this. I come from a small place where people are very much traditional generation; they usually have a stereotype for the word "streamer" or "Nvzhubo" (in Chinese term "femal streamers"). People in my home town, they are the Kuaishou and Huoshan video type (other two streaming apps), so I did not sign up on those two platforms because I did not want my parents to know". Cunningham, Craig and Lv (2019) explained the situation that called as "feminized service sector", indicates the gender imbalance live streaming environment. Female streamers move to first-tier cities to pursue professional training and performances, while men stay at home to maintain their family and connect outside world through their phone. Streamer 2 voiced the same concerns but for different reasons in terms of reaction from his parents: "My parents felt like I joined some kind of pyramid scheme organisation in the beginning, but I explained to them that I can make a lot of money from this, so they just let me do this".

Interestingly, although Chinese parents might understand and support a streamer's career, they do not like to see their children becoming too deeply involved in the streaming business because "it is not a proper career" or "it is not going to last forever". As Streamer 1 explained, she is not going to conduct risk-taking performances forever; instead, she will slowly transform her content in different ways once she has a sufficient fan base. All these concerns may change, as live streaming becomes a mature industry.

4.2 Interactions

4.2.1. Tips/ gifting/ donation

Commercialisation greatly affects live streaming in China. It influences a streamer's performances, streamer-viewer interactions, and both participants' attitudes and

experiences. Tips, gifting and donations are the most important forms of commercial interaction on live-streaming platforms. When interviewed, the three viewers were most frequently asked the question, "how much do you normally donate". All responded that they did not donate too much, "just like you have to pay the ticket to watch the movie in the cinema" (Viewer 1). During the period of observation of two live-streaming performances, nearly 10% of the viewers had made different amount of purchases of gifts and each of the gifts was worth around A$5 average. When a viewer sends a virtual gift, especially one that is worth a large sum of money, a message is displayed to all viewers of the streaming cohort, which is a public announcement of someone's admiration and appreciation. According to observation notes, there was a difference in gifting behaviour according to gender. Two streaming performances were observed and interactions were compared. It was found that, male gaming streaming does feature a slightly higher amount of donation than the female binge-eating streamer, however, with less content engagement. Female streamers have three times more engagement than male gaming streamers. Observation of two risk-taking live-streaming performances revealed that Streamer 1, the female streamer, would interact with viewers more frequently in order to attract more audiences by asking questions or performing in different ways. Sentences such as "please donate some tips if you like my performances" or "thank ***(viewer's online name) for your donation" in Streamer 1's performance occurred three times more frequently than Streamer 2's performance over a 60-minute period. Previous research has documented that men do have higher purchase amounts than women with less purchasing behaviour (Yu et al. 2018). However, these differences can be understood in terms of platform factors, fan base or other factors that influence donation behaviour due to my size of research.

Interestingly and importantly, the streamers do not generate much proportion of income from donations. Rather, their major revenues come from advertising sponsors, agencies or platform allowances. Streamer 1 did not sign up with any other parties and her primary income is from advertising and a platform allowance. Another streamer, Streamer 2, signed with a platform agency, and his income was from advertising and the agency. For both streamers, commercial advertising is the largest income source, rather than donations from viewers. Their intention is to attract more followers on their channel in order to gain more advertisements, rather than making money directly from their viewers. Furthermore, Streamer 2 even told his viewers not

to donate too much, "When I was broadcasting in summer or winter holiday, there are a lot of students, I would tell them to not to send big gifts or donate too much. Only a few small tips would do if you really like my content" (Streamer 2). This is in sharp contrast to those e-commerce platforms with live-streaming functions, such as Taobao Live or Red[10], where the streamers' priority is to drive more sales on the platform while their viewers watch performances only because they want to buy products.

Gifting is not only one-way, at lease not only from viewers to streamers. Streamer 1 told me that sometimes streamers reward their fans as well, but through other channels. She had rewarded her fans through other external channels, such as in the QQ or WeChat group chat with red packets, or transferred money through Alipay[11] sometimes. She believes that rewarding fans like this would encourage more people to follow her and participate actively in her live-streaming activities. In my observation of two performances, loyal viewers on the top ranking were not reluctant to make donations, especially after the streamer says, "Please tip me if you like my performance". Some streamers even treat gift-senders differently compared with those who do not make donations. Streamer 2 categorises those who do not send gift as "Baipiao" （白嫖）, referring to those who only watch but do not spend any money.

One striking problem of gifting within the platform environment is fake donation. Streamer 2, who had a contract with the live-streaming platform, disclosed that platforms would fake the number of viewers' donations to make it look better, as this is directly connected with sales and advertising revenue. Streamer 2 said, "People buy the fake traffic and donations. Sometimes the platform buys them; sometimes the streamer. They want to make these numbers as big as possible, such as the number of followers and the number of viewers during streaming". This is very much an open secret in China, where users often sceptical about the figures and traffic appear on the website, as "the number is too good to be true". A recent news (Lee, 2019) story has shone a spotlight on a fake data scandal happened on Weibo. Zhang Yuhan, a Chinese Weibo based Wang Hong, posted a video featured commercial brand and generated more than 3.5 million viewers, 3000 likes, 943 forwards and 1261 comments, but in fact, not a single order was made after this vlog commercial. Seems like this is not a single case, but in live streaming business too. Buying fake traffic can attract more

[10] Red, also known as RED or Xiaohongshu, is a social media and e-commerce platform.

[11] Alipay is similar to Paypal. It is a third-party mobile and online payment platform.

advertising; more sponsors enable platforms (streamers/ agencies) to make more money and thus buy more fake traffic. This seems to be a “vicious circle”.

Live streaming apps can mediate interaction and offer an interface between streamers, viewers and content. Their functions and design also influence the gifting and donation activities significantly. I examined two representative apps which streamers participants use, discovering the relationship between app and users’ interactions. The function of virtual gifts here is similar to the tipping system on Twitch. The virtual gift system normally starts with viewers in a live-streaming context. They purchase gold coins (or points and tickets) on the platform and the virtual money can then be converted into virtual gifts, such as a heart, flowers, fireworks etc. (Figures 5). Viewers who donate large amounts can achieve certain higher privileges than normal viewers in-stream, such as a higher position in the ranking list or a golden medal on the public profile (Figures 6). The income generated by selling virtual gifts is distributed between content provider, platforms, and agencies.

Figure 5. Bilibili – virtual gift example

Figure 6. Douyu VIP viewers ranking system

These apps try to simplify the gifting processes to make it as easy as possible for viewers to purchase and send virtual gifts. Taking Douyu as an example, the registration of the app only requires three steps: downloading, signing up, and connecting with WeChat/ Weibo account. Further, there are only three steps for gifting/donation as well: selecting the gift, selecting the amount of money, and confirming the payment. App users can use their WeChat or Alipay as a payment option, which is very convenient, taking advantage of China's advanced e-payment ecosystem.

4.2.2. Audience participation

Paid virtual gifts allow streamers to pay attention to gift-sender comments more easily through a large number of message or comments. From observation, some viewers make donations with different intentions in terms of gaining a streamers' attention, especially when it comes to asking a specific question or sending a certain request to the streamer. Streamer 1 noted, "I normally appreciate their donation by calling their ID, only for those who actually spend money, not for those free gifts". Indeed, from her performance observation, she would call the viewer's name to show her appreciation every time there was an actual donation. In this way, viewers are no long passively watching, but active participants or perhaps can be called as "participatory audiences" as Livingstone (2013, p.24) defines "[…] participatory audience is more

social than that of the active audience […]". Viewers who send gifts can also develop a further connection with streamers they like, ranging from a chance to add a streamer's private contact to being appointed as moderator for the fan chatroom. As such, it is social participation through the use of digital media, and live-streaming platforms also offer increasing, though heavily qualified and contingent, opportunities for participation.

Besides donating and commenting in the live-streaming session, inviting other streamers was an important way of interaction for viewers and attracting more viewers. Although the practice is not frequently used, one streamer reported that they like to collaborate with other streamers in order to make performances easier and less stressful. "It is about what time you play, or who you play with." Streamer 2 shared this when he described his horror gaming, "sometimes they like you to hang out with other streamers, sometimes they like you play games with girls. Most of the time they watch it for excitement". This is a win-win situation where both streamers in the same live streaming session can attract different audiences, but with same interests, and audiences can find more interesting content they like to watch and follow.

Consideration of Chinese state action or policy changes around live streaming must again emphasise differentiation from the West, as content creation and viewers' engagement is largely influenced by regulation from platforms or political frameworks. Streamer 2 talked about his experience with regulation, saying, "Some live-streaming platforms collapsed due to regulation. Companies too. A lot of streamers lost their income for a long period of time due to concerns they were 'harming social morality'. Sometimes, I feel shame for them, even though I know they are playing the edge ball. There is nothing we can do here. If anyone plays the edge ball in my streaming room, I would ask my gatekeeper to kick them out and put them in the blacklist 'cause I don't want to take the risk". As such, streamers are aware of this change in the streaming system and they try very hard to not to push the boundary even for their viewers.

However, as noted above, some streamers would be inclined to carry out risky performances for commercial reasons. This has given rise to some concerns. These performances may result in more popularity among fans, though they may also incite more people to perform dangerous challenges without any safety considerations. However, a viewer's advice may affect decision-making during the live-streaming performance. For example, during the observation of the binge-eating challenge

performance, the streamer may take their viewers' advice about what food should they eat next, or how many bowls of food they should consume. This kind of involvement enhances the relationship between viewers and their streamers (Hu, Zhang& Wang, 2017).

In the live-streaming room, the streamer usually leads the topic while performing the show, and viewers who often adore the streamer, join the discussion while watching the performance. All three viewer participants expressed their adoration of the streamers' personal glamorous style. The connections formed between the streamer and their viewers appear like the relationship between a celebrity and their fans to some extent, "It is gradually becoming like the fans and the star, and they are really funny". However, in contrast to viewers' attitudes, streamers have a different point of view. When I asked about "what kind of relationship you have with your viewers" to streamers, both streamers felt differently, one saying that it is, "similar to the relationship between prostitutes and their customers" (Streamer1) and the other saying it was, "just like friendship" (Streamer 2). This is probably beucase of they have different intention to start with. Consequently, viewers watch live streaming because they like the streamer and gradually become their fans. On the other hand, some streamers only view their fandom as a way of making money, yet sometimes there are streamers who consider this relationship in a more equal way.

The built-in communication functions on live-streaming platforms such as inbox, comment or barrage cannot meet streamer-viewer interaction demands. Thus, they use general social media outlets such as WeChat or Weibo to enhance interactions. Self-identified as an independent grassroots streamer, Streamer 1 does not believe that only eye-catching live-streaming content is worthy of securing commercial success. Rather, she aims to promote herself on various social media platforms so as to reach more viewers, as well as developing relationships with advertising sponsors. During my observation of her performances, she introduced her Weibo account to her viewers constantly. Comparatively, as a professional (contracted) content creator, Streamer 2 is supported by the live-streaming platform behind him. This allows him to focus on the live-streaming content, and removes the need for worry about promotions and relation building.

4.3 Experiences

Imagine a scene where a viewer is watching live streaming in their everyday life: After a long and exhausting work day, a viewer returns home, sometimes to a small room in a shared apartment he/she rents. He/she picks up their mobile phone or tablet, and watches the performances of one of their favourite streamers. This scenario is a typical element in their spare-time entertainment. Why do viewers watch live streaming? What is their experience? Is it for the appreciation of the "risks"? Are there some deep and complex social and cultural reasons?

4.3.1 Pleasure and everyday life

Battarbee (2003) coins the concept of "co-experience". When people experience themselves together in social interaction online, "experiences can be seen as an individual's reaction, but also as something constructed in social interaction". There are four dimensions to defined co-experiences according to Battarbee (2003): "co-experience is social", "co-experience is multi-modal", "co-experience is creative", and "co-experience is for fun". This research focuses more on the aspect of the viewers' pleasure of "having fun together".

To understand the concept of "co-experience" in live streaming, specifically in risk-taking performance, it can be inferred that these viewers are often fans or supporters of particular genres performed by streamers. Risk-taking performances, more specifically in this case horror games and binge eating, viewers generally share more common interests to the live-streaming genres, compared to a talent show or a singing/ dancing show. A sense of pleasure is a sub-theme that trended throughout my conversations with viewer interviews, as well as in the performance observation, especially in the binge-eating performance or challenging performance. While responding to the question of why this kind of content is attractive, they listed the following reasons:

1. Not normal. "Their behaviour does not accord with the public common sense." (Viewer 1): "I think these people are amazing. Their body structure is not like normal people" (viewer 2).
2. Feeling of pleasure. "There is a general feeling of pleasure when watching." (Viewer 1); "it is really cool to watch, watch a person eat so much stuff, it is

good to go along with meals." (Viewer 2); "We are in a lot of pressure every day, those live streaming is pressure relieving" (viewer 3).

3. Curiosity. "Because of my curiosity." (Viewer 1); "I really want to know what is going to happen after finish the challenge" (viewer 3);

Likewise, from my observation of Streamer 1's binge-eating performance, there were nearly 2000 different comments from viewers in total within the first hour, yet 70% of the comments were meaningless comments, such as "I like you", "feeling good", "that's amazing", "so cool", so on and so forth. The rest of the comments were indicative of more interactive behaviour with the streamer, such as making donations or answering the streamer's questions.

The three in-depth interviews with viewer participants all revealed similar concerns with risk-taking performances, in particular, the well-being and safety of streamers. One of the viewers' interviewees commented, "I think it is just chaos right now. Some people just take the challenge without any knowledge and preparation. For example, the 'Wilderness Survival' challenge. Often, unexpected things will happen and people just get hurt or die." (Viewer1). Meanwhile, although all viewer participants emphasised that though they are concerned with risk-taking performances, they would still watch risk-taking content streaming and donate to those streamers since streamers can do things they cannot do.

Although viewers might feel pleasure, streamers might feel differently, particularly in terms of foodie content streaming. Streamer 1 described how live streaming impacts her: "It will affect my diet, and sometimes I have to go to the toilet to vomit after the camera is off". In the meantime, Streamer 2 also expressed he sometimes has nightmares after the stream finishes or fears he might have a heart attack, yet he has to continue his performances because of "[I have to perform] 80~120 hours per month". The longer the period they stream online, the more viewers they will attract, as well as more users for platforms.

4.3.2 Lonely economy and imagined community

Viewer participants were asked a number of questions related to why they chose to watch/ conduct risk-taking live streaming and what are the reasons that other viewers watch such content. In answering these questions, terms such as "loneliness" and "a

sense of belonging" were frequently used to express their reasons. In other words, they participated in such sessions for social connections because they preferred to be connected with people online rather than in reality. As such, live streaming is creating interesting types of "imagined communities" (Anderson, 1983) where people do not know each other (at least their real identities), but only gather together while the streaming event occurs each time. A live-streaming event connects millions of viewers across the world nowadays. The anonymity of the Internet is a comfort for live-streaming viewers. As they do not know other people, they do not have to take on social responsibilities as in the real world, but simply enjoy the sense of belonging in such an imagined community.

Viewer 1 points out, "the performance is really going well with meals". She is not alone. Viewer 2 also states, "[those performances] are good go along with meals". This point of "going well with meals" is a theme, which emerged in my conversation with viewers, as a significantly important part of their everyday life. Not only with "going well with meals", Viewer 3 also describes the situation that "basically everyday if I feel tired, sometimes I even turn on the streaming while I take a nap, on the side of my pillow". The data from this project indicate users' needs for live streaming, as well as their living conditions in their everyday life, because most of the users cannot afford, or do not prefer, to make a social connection in reality. Live streaming offers a place where they can avoid social pressures and enjoy entertainment without spending any money or at minimal expense.

This, however, reflects a social problem for young working-class generations, and an emergent cultural and economic phenomenon in today's Chinese internet – "lonely economy". Viewers of live streaming are mostly young rural immigrants who live in first-tier cities in China such as Beijing or Shanghai, without family or close friends. According to iiMedia Research report (2019), people under 24 years form the majority of internet users whose income is less than 3000rmb (A$600) per month (the number may vary according to different live-streaming platforms). This is not enough to live in a big city so they have to save on everything. They rely on their smart phones for communication, entertainment, and human interaction largely in virtual worlds, as it is more affordable than other costly "real" social activities. However, they are lonely because their overall lifestyle and economic conditions make it difficult for these young people to enjoy social life and cultural engagement in the offline world with friends and families.

Parents may understand a streamer's reason for conducting live streaming because streamers can make money from it, however, it would be difficult for them to understand a viewer's donation behaviours, as all of my viewer interviewees pointed out. "My mom is going to break my leg if she knows [I made donation to streamers]" (Viewer 1) and "My parents think that I have problem and I should not make donations to streamers". The generation gap in attitude towards live streaming is very evident, as viewers indicate that their friends would not care so much about donation behaviour, as "people around me, my friends, they all watch live streaming" (Viewer 2).

Viewers of live streaming rely on it for "looking for a sense of belonging", which is typical of young people's internet activities including live streaming. In the interviews, a streamer participant confirmed the existence of "loneliness" among Chinese internet users by explaining why she started live-streaming performances in the first place: "I just graduated and came to Beijing at that time, did not have many friends. I just go home, like the apartment for singles, eat my takeaway while watching other streamers' videos. I feel not that lonely if someone is eating with me." (Streamer 1). These participants were suffering from loneliness and often felt awkward talking about it with their family or friends. Building and maintaining friendship in real life is not easy; it takes emotion and can be expensive. According to Du (2019), "[…] single adults prefer not to spend time with other single friends, but would rather spend their spare time alone", which means users on live streaming are not "FOMO" (fear of missing out) anymore. Rather, since there is no social pressure they enjoy the moment spending time alone or with others who they do not know online. Previous studies also present similar phenomenon where users want to escape from close-tie relationships in reality and enjoy different social lives (Lu et al., 2018).

Interestingly, on the one hand, viewers are lonely people as discussed above; on the other hand, viewers' attitudes towards others who also watch risk-taking live streaming are not that friendly. According to the interviews with three viewer participants, they do not have a mutual appreciation of other viewers on the live-streaming session. These tensions are exemplified in Viewer 3's interview. Viewer 3 acknowledged that she did not interact with other viewers during streaming performances. She explained, "NO! I don't like them and I think most of them are morons, and they always sending comments like 'aaaa!' (low quality comments) or they like to lead off the topic". Her response reflects the nature of viewer-to-viewer

interaction: watching live streaming can satisfy personal needs but does not help build communications and interactions with one other. The analysis of the comments in the two performances I observed suggests that, most comments were made about streamers while only a small number were about other viewers. The comments about other viewers were generally negative, for example, "you can close the window if you don't like xxx", "don't lead off the topic", and "no one begged you to donate anyway". This is in some ways is similar to streamers' attitudes towards their peers. In short, they do not like each other, yet they are in the same imagined community.

China's one-child policy (now modified to some degree) has contributed to this condition. As the number shows above, people under 24 years form the majority of internet users. They are termed "one-person families" or "empty-nest youth", and "they are mostly well-educated, young and willing to spend money on themselves" (Li, 2018). This group of people has grown used to being alone and their consumption habits have become more personalised and more private whether in real life or online. This is similar with the idea of "Do it Yourself" in participatory culture. Jenkins (2010) states that "Do it yourself rarely means Do it alone". This is very much the situation in live streaming; viewers sit in front of the screen alone and watch the streamer's performance, yet he/ she is actually surrounded by a group of people who are in the same space with the same interests but without interaction. Different viewers have their own stories and understand streamers' performances through their own interpretation.

CHAPTER 5. CONCLUSION

This research sets out to explore the interaction between streamers and viewers in risk-taking performance within the emerging commercialised Chinese live-streaming platform, including their motivation and experiences, the model of interaction, and how the broad socio-cultural and economic contexts shape live-streaming practices.

It first examines streamers' motivation for conducting risk-taking performances, usually as a result of economic reasons and shaped by business models. Even though streamers are conscious of the consequences of risk-taking activities, they would still conduct such performances due to economic rewards. While the live-streaming industry helps to encourage grassroots creators to play a leading role in cultural production and maximise their creative potential, the platformisation of live streaming raises significant issues such as digital labour and precarious creativity. Risk-taking live streaming in China constitutes an intriguing example of the commercialisation of cultures and creativity in a digital form. It also illustrates how commercial factors have an impact on the process of interaction between streamers and viewers, and between creators, platforms and agencies. It is clear that live streaming in China sustains a commercial ecosystem characterised by influencers, internet traffic, and user gifting. Mediated by powerful apps with built-in functions of virtual gifting and ranking, users become the currency in the live streaming system, and this can be translated into revenue for the platform and streamers.

In this research, I have investigated the communicative nature of streamer-viewer interaction in live streaming. When compared with the classic Shannon and Weaver communication model, the interactive communications in live-streaming platforms have changed or extended significantly. It is not a linear model anymore, in which, feedback and interaction are crucial. Culturally, this study finds that the interaction between streamers and viewers in risk-taking live streaming is also beyond the traditional understanding of "participatory culture". Though participatory culture helps explain some participatory activities, it is not the only fundamental perspective to critically understand live-streaming practices as the motivations and experiences of viewers and streamers are complex and multidimensional. As such, this research

contributes to rethinking what risk-taking means for both streamers and viewers in the perspective of interaction.

Despite the tight regulations of the Chinese internet, viewers are still looking for sensational live-streaming content for entertainment and fun, and as part of the emergent "lonely economy". Their experience of watching and engaging with live streaming also creates a form of "imagined communities". However, it is perhaps unique and paradoxical that although Chinese live-streaming users create "imagined communities" on live-streaming platforms, they do not interact with one another. This is especially true in the case of viewers. Unlike in situations where streamers may interact with each other for business collaboration, there is often conflict between viewers as they hold a variety of opinions.

Due to the limited scale and scope of this study, several limitations exist. First, it is recognised that the research data collection process may provide generalisability of results. I conducted two live-streaming platforms in Mainland China and with five participants. Future studies are suggested to extend the current research scope to include more live-streaming platforms, as well as short-video apps. An increase in the number of interview participants would also broaden the analysis of the live-streaming phenomenon in future research.

Secondly, I collected data from only two genres of risk-taking live streaming performance. There are other types of risk-taking performances available to audiences, for example, outdoor activities. A user's behaviour may vary due to live streaming genres. Therefore, future studies should include and incorporate other streaming categories with more detailed research focusing on content differences. Beyond risk-taking, there are many other types of live-streaming videos on different platforms and each has its own communicative, cultural, and economic models, as well as communities and regulations. It is would be meaningful to look at other genres and develop comparative studies. In addition, this study has not yet analysed and explained the Chinese media landscape in detail. Chinese media/internet regulation is always changing and how it interacts with live streaming would be an important topic for further research. Last but not least, live streaming is constantly evolving, making it a potential cornucopia for new research projects in media studies, Internet studies and cultural studies.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A APPROVAL LETTER FROM HREC

WESTERN SYDNEY
UNIVERSITY

HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

1 July 2019
Associate Professor Anne Rutherford
School of Humanities and Communication Arts

Dear Anne,

Project Title: "Risk taking performances in Chinese video streaming: A study on streamer viewer interactions"

HREC Approval Number: H13234
Risk Rating: HREC - Moderate
I am pleased to advise the above research project meets the requirements of the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research 2007 (Updated 2018).
Ethical approval for this project has been granted by the Western Sydney University Human Research Ethics Committee. This HREC is constituted and operates in accordance with the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research 2007 (Updated 2018).
Approval of this project is valid from 1 July 2019 until 15 January 2020.
This protocol covers the following researchers:
Anne Rutherford, Rui Zhang, Tony Ren

Summary of Conditions of Approval

1. A progress report will be due annually on the anniversary of the approval date.

2. A final report will be due at the expiration of the approval period.

3. Any amendments to the project must be approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee prior to being implemented. Amendments must be requested using the HREC Amendment Request Form.

4. Any serious or unexpected adverse events on participants must be reported to the Human Research Ethics Committee via the Human Ethics Officer as a matter of priority.

5. Any unforeseen events that might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project should also be reported to the Committee as a matter of priority.

6. Consent forms are to be retained within the archives of the School or Research Institute and made available to the Committee upon request.

7. **Project specific conditions:**
There are no specific conditions applicable.

Please quote the registration number and title as indicated above in the subject line on all future correspondence related to this project. All correspondence should be sent to humanethics@westernsydney.edu.au as this email address is closely monitored.

Yours sincerely

[redacted]

Professor Elizabeth Deane
Presiding Member,
Western Sydney University Human Research Ethics Committee

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APPENDIX B RECRUITMENT ADVERTISING

Figure 7. Recruitment advertising

APPENDIX C SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Interview Questions – Audiences

- Please confirm that you are over 18 years old
- How long you have been watching live streaming?
- How much time do you normally spend on watching live streaming every day/ every week?
- How did you start to watch live streaming, and risk taking content particularly?
- List three key attractive features of risk-taking live streaming please!
- What are the influences of live streaming/ risk-taking on you?
- Why do you donate to streamers?
    - How much do you normally donate to streamers?
    - Do you donate because of the live streaming content? Or do you donate only because of you like the streamer?
    - Under what circumstances do you donate to them?
    - What are the attitudes of your family members and friends towards donation? Support or against?
- Do you think live streaming and risk-taking content have any social or cultural values? What are they?
- How do you interact with streamers and other viewers?
- Do you think risk-taking live streaming will continue to be a viable business in social media industries? For how long?
- Is there any other content you usually watch on live streaming?

Interview Questions – Streamers

- Please ensure that you are over 18 years old.

- How long have you been doing live streaming?
    - How long you have been performing/streaming risk-taking content?
    - Is this your part time or full time job?
    - If live streaming is your full time job, what are the benefits and disadvantages?
- For what purpose, did you start live streaming?
    - Tell us about your first live streaming experience of risk taking activities please!
    - Why did you keep doing this?
- What is your motivation/aspiration as a live streamer, becoming self-made star, activism, or others?
- What do you know about other streamers and their motivations?
- How do you do to attract more viewers?
    - Are you using other social media platforms to help you maintain your fans?
- How do you interact with viewers in live streaming performance? For example, do you call their name or appreciate their donation?
    - Which interaction type do you think have the best result?
- What are the attitudes of your family members and friends towards risk-taking content?
- Have you considered safety issues while doing risk-taking performances?
- Is it possible to talk about your income?
    - What is your average income per month from live streaming?
    - What are the major sources of your revenue?
    - What percentage of your income would be shared by the live streaming platform?
    - Do you think your income is enough for you to live?
- How does the regulation on live streaming platform affect your risk-taking performance?
    - How does the regulation work on the platform?

- How long will you stay in the live streaming industry?
    - Are you going to try other types of content, such as gaming and sports?
    - What kind of content do you think audiences would like? Why?