

# AN ANALYSIS OF COMMUNICATION TRENDS ON TWITCH.TV<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

As with any other community that appeared at the climax of the internet, the streaming world is booming with every passing year, generating and reaching new revenue levels and being seen now as one of the most important and valuable forms of entertainment. This study will discuss the language used by certain streamers and their community. The main objective of this paper is to understand phenomena such as speech, dialogue, and overall interactions between the streamers, their community, and their viewers. This paper will also discuss the power behind the words used by streamers, which can very well determine how someone will be viewed on streaming platforms. This study will offer information about banned comments and provide semantic and pragmatic analyses of some of the most popular terms used on Twitch.tv.

To make this research possible, chats and live broadcasts from various popular streamers were monitored, trying to see specific patterns to understand how their language works and concluding if there is an already new language or system of speech that goes around in the streaming community. Discourse analysis was the primary theory for this study, understanding and interpreting what the streamers and the viewers say during the live streams. The semantic analysis of some of the words helped obtain a good understanding of the terms and their meaning, making it easier to interpret the language constructs coined by the streamers and their communities; with this, two different types of meanings were analysed to follow the line of meaning, both from a contextual and conceptual point of view. I also conducted a pragmatic analysis to see the correlation between words and contexts, determining if there is any importance in the context of the language of streaming.

At the endpoint of this study, I was able to offer a clear understanding of the language used on Twitch.tv, draw a clear picture of what certain expressions and combinations of words mean in this environment, and, if possible, see if these expressions or words can reach more than the online world of live broadcasting.

**Keywords:** Communication; Slang; Political correctness; Live streaming; F, L, W.

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## **1 Introduction**

Language has gone through multiple stages, changing and evolving systematically. Communication and, with it, languages always had various instances to be used, whether talking directly to a person, verbalising what they have to say, and adding to the act of information sharing, whether through letters or using other tools of communication such as phones, there has always been a need for maintaining contact. Language use has been changing constantly. During the late 90s and the beginning of the 21st century, a new, revolutionary way for people to be connected appeared: online communication. With online communication, people could connect more efficiently, interacting verbally or writing more straightforwardly. This new way of expression brought a language change to the table.

Since those expressions and language structures already have an entire history on the internet, as this research shows, I could see how those changes appeared and have evolved over the years, somehow growing up closest to the phenomenon as a teenager on the internet. Not only was I able to see the evolution, but I was also fascinated by it, by this new way of communicating via online platforms, using language differently, a way of expression open to interpretation, being seen as an easy way to communicate by some, or as cryptic by others, something which offers a broader range of interpretation. The main point is that the use of language has gained a new perspective, with these new expressions slowly making it into the vocabulary of people, especially those who grew or are growing up in the internet age.

The main aim of this paper is to analyse how the communication process takes place in specific online communities found on Twitch.tv, seeing if there are new methods of communication and whether the language adapts to new possible trends set up by those communities.

The second main focus of this paper is to see how language is, as is everywhere in the world, moderated on this platform, seeing if there are limits to the act of one expressing oneself through language, focusing here on the role political correctness has on the process of communication on Twitch.tv. There is a need for specific rules and regulations for the community to work and develop properly; with this, AutoMod was added on Twitch.tv, a program that helps creators moderate their chats.

This paper will offer some information about the context in which those constructs took shape and gained popularity, as it is vital to clearly understand the context in which those expressions and language structures appeared and have been used during the last two decades.

## **2 Literature Review**

This part of the paper offers a brief analysis of the relevant sources of information on the topic of this study. As the online community known as Twitch.tv grew in

popularity, the same effect happened to the number of relevant studies about this matter. Considering how fast these linguistic constructs were evolving, I found several relevant studies about the language of Twitch.tv.

Chae and Lee (2022) talked in their paper *Sharing emotion while spectating video game play: Exploring Twitch users' emotional change after the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic* about how the COVID-19 pandemic effect can be very well seen in the emotes on Twitch.tv. What caught my interest in this study was the use of natural language processing, which BMI defines as something that “refers to the branch of computer science—and more specifically, the branch of artificial intelligence or AI—concerned with giving computers the ability to understand the text and spoken words in much the same way human beings” (Chae, & Lee 2022: 2) as a research method, linking up how emotes and emotions can coexist on Twitch and share meaning, stating the importance of emotes when it comes to expressing feelings and emotions.

Another relevant article was written by Enrico Gandolfi from Kent State University; the article is entitled *To watch or to play, it is in the game: The game culture on Twitch.tv among performers, plays and audiences* and discusses in depth the relationship a stream has with their audience. The study obtains clear-cut information and uses relevant research methods and instruments, applying a multidimensional framework that “was applied towards consumption, identity and production dimensions of Twitch.tv” (Gandolfi 2016: 1). The article states that multiple streamers base their content on their general audience, leading to unique communication patterns.

In the study *Emote-Controlled: Obtaining Implicit Viewer Feedback Through Emote-Based Sentiment Analysis on Comments of Popular Twitch.tv Channels* Kobs et al. (2020) analyse the sentiment of live text made by the viewers in some of the biggest streaming channels on the internet. An exciting idea that fascinated me was, “Automatic sentiment analysis on these comments is a challenging task, as one can compare the language used in Twitch.tv with that used by an audience in a stadium, shouting as loud as possible in sometimes nonorganized ways.” (Kobs et al. 2020: 1), stating how the language of Twitch can slowly but surely build a community from the ground through shared interest and entertainment. The study also points out how the language used in Twitch.tv live chats is different from standard English “This language is very different from common English, mixing Internet slang and gaming-related language with abbreviations, intentional and unintentional grammatical and orthographic mistakes, and emoji-like images called emote”. (Kobs et al.2020: 1), something that is vital when analysing how language works and which criteria are considered for something to be chat-related.

Olejniczak (2015) makes a corpus-based analysis of the language used on Twitch.tv, placing the viewers at the centre of the communication process. This study provides an exciting approach to the language used on the website, presenting how people worldwide can coexist in the same chat and communicate adequately, which is fascinating. This study presents the streaming platform as open for interculturality, affirming that the language used has multiple neologisms and emotes with

impressive contextual meanings. The last part of the study states the importance of context dependency when it comes to the language structures that are used on the platform. “The conditions under which language is used on Twitch.tv do not resemble those of other internet communities; the messages are not permanent and are characterized by a low uptime on the screen, while the potentially huge number of participants imposes certain constraints on message length and content.” (Olejniczak 2015: 333)

In the article *Toxic Communication on Twitch.tv. Effect of a Streamers*, Poyane (2019) talks about how viewers communicate in Twitch.tv chats. The paper’s main point is understanding how social-demographic characteristics affect communication. This study focuses on how toxic communication appears in chats, stating the importance of data interpretation and obtaining relevant information about the types of communicative exchanges seen on Twitch.tv. (Poyane 2019)

In the article *A beginner’s guide to the most-used Twitch emotes*. Jay Hathaway presents a brief history of emotes and some of the most used emotes on Twitch.tv. In the article, he states the importance of emotes in the streaming community, saying that depending on their popularity, some may be used millions of times daily. Essential knowledge about the topic was also offered in the last part of the study, Jay Hathaway states that people cannot learn about all the emotes because the streamers and moderators are updating the packs constantly to keep the community entertained and further develop the exchange of ideas. “You can never really master all the emotes on Twitch because streamers create new ones for their channels all the time, but you can learn the handful that is near-universal on the site.” (Hathaway 2017)

In his article *The Discourse of Online Live Streaming on Twitch: Communication between conversation and Commentary* Recktenwald (2017) describes in detail how discourse on Twitch.tv is organised between the streamers and their communities, making a valuable study about how people interact on the platform. The study discusses how communication occurs on the platform, analysing who initiates it and how it is taken forward in the stream context. There is also information about discourse instances in which the streamer addresses the community based on multiple contextual types, making this study extremely valuable as it provides relevant knowledge about the communication process on Twitch.tv.

### **3 Research Methodology**

The primary research method used to develop this study is discourse analysis. With the help of this method, I will analyse and try to figure out exactly how some of the most well-known expressions from Twitch.tv work. As language needs to be examined from the standpoint of discourse, I highly value the evaluation from a discourse analysis perspective, demonstrating that depending on how the text is

shaped from a vocabulary and pragmatic perspective, a relevant interpretation of the text can be made.

Pragmatic analysis – As suggested in the previous paragraph, I will conduct a pragmatic analysis of these word constructs, trying to show the correlation between meaning and context, concluding how those expressions or language structures can be seen and interpreted.

Semantic analysis – As meaning is an essential element when discussing communication and language, a semantic analysis will be conducted to obtain a better level of understanding regarding the terms used on the streaming platform.

### **3.1 Research instruments**

Online dictionaries – In developing this study, online dictionaries are a great asset not only in understanding how these expressions and language constructs work but also in obtaining particular meanings and definitions, some aspects which can be very well compared to one another for the overall interpretation of the subject to get a more valuable result. For this study, relevant and trustworthy dictionaries such as Cambridge or Oxford Dictionary have proven useful.

## **4 Data analysis and Interpretation**

Language and communication are vital parts of our lives; whether through spoken, written, or any other method people have been conveying messages since the beginning of time. With technological progress, people have been more in touch with one another and are talking more on the internet. This paper analyses only a particular instance of online communication, which gained traction during the last two decades. These constructs are now perceived as online communities' most common language structures.

Twitch.tv is an online streaming platform that first appeared in 2011 (Geeter 2019), with two main components: the streamers and the viewers. The streamers provide live content, something I will offer more details about later in this section of the paper. The viewers actively watch the streamers, meaning they interact with them or other viewers via chat or donate money to support the streamer and their community. When it comes to content, Twitch.tv offers a variety of possibilities, the main focus being on video games; there are streamers for all genres of games, and a vast complexity when it comes to how video games are viewed as the central theme of the platform from the beginning until now. Nevertheless, there are not only games on this platform, as specified on the Twitch.tv 'about us' page; there are streamers for multiple fields, music, food, sports, traveling, and the list can go on. One of the most significant categories of streams on Twitch.tv is Just Chatting.

As the name suggests, in Just Chatting, the live stream focuses on the streamer talking with their audience or other persons invited on their live stream. The streamer does that by reading the live chat, answering questions, or conversing

with the chat. Just Chatting is often seen as the most-watched category on the streaming platform, having a very organic feeling and a very high level of entertainment and connection through communication from both the streamer and the viewer. The category changed from IRL to Just Chatting in late 2018.

#### **4.1 Ways of communication on the platform**

In order for the live broadcast to be entertaining, communication between streamers and chatters plays an important role. As there are more than 140 million active users monthly on the platform (Rohit 2024), the platform developed multiple ways of communication. Of course, even if text messages in the chat remain the primary and most used form in which chatters communicate with one another and with the streamer, there are more ways to communicate on the platform.

#### **4.2 Communication through donations**

As Twitch.tv is a free-to-use platform, people, and more importantly in this context, chatters, can follow streamers and interact with them freely. On Twitch.tv, donations are a way to support content creators. Although communicating through chat remains the regular option, when a streamer has a big audience, it becomes unlikely that the streamer will read chat messages due to the huge number of people writing. With all this considered, donations are a viable way for a chatter to communicate with a streamer, as only a few chatters engage in donating money. Donations are seen by most as a viable communication channel, as the streamers have different sound alerts for donations and are prompted to read a donation if it includes a message; a chatter can ask a question or send a message to the streamer.

#### **4.3 Channel points**

Channel points are a relatively new, innovative way chatters can interact with the streamer and play an active role during the live broadcast. Channel points are earned in different ways; the system created by the platform encourages people to be active in the chat, participate in raids, and follow and watch the stream. “Channel Points are unique to each enrolled channel and can be earned through actions such as Watching, Following, and Participating in Raids. Doing these actions on an eligible channel will reward you with Channel Points for that channel.” (Channel Points Guide, n.d)

With channel points, chatters can perform various actions in the chat, such as starting polls, asking the streamer to do certain things to entertain the audience etc. With these points, chatters can feel included in the progression of the stream, making it seem like they are part of the streaming process. A downside is that channel points are separated by the streamer, meaning that points are accumulated separately for each streamer, favouring chatters to often stay in one community and not explore the content of other streamers.

#### **4.4 Whispers**

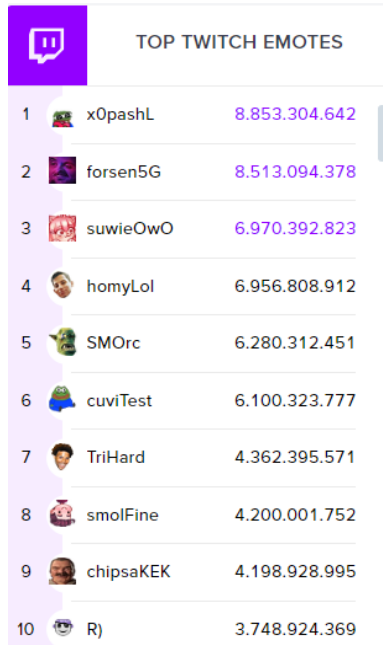
Twitch.tv also allows direct communication between chatters, as this is a way people can privately communicate on the platform without the streamer or any other chatter seeing their conversation.

#### **4.5 Emotes on Twitch.tv**

Emotes are what most people typically consider to be emojis, a graphic representation of a face, an emotion, or anything that can take form into a small detail. There is a specific difference between emoticons and emotes. Emoticons or emotes are created by using a particular sequence of keyboard characters. Emojis are small images directly used after text.

Despite their similarity in form and meaning, the words are not etymologically related: emoticon comes from a combination of the words emotion and icon, while emoji comes from a Japanese term meaning “pictograph”, from e, “picture, drawing”, and moji, “(written) character, letter.” (“emoticon vs. emoji”, n.d.)

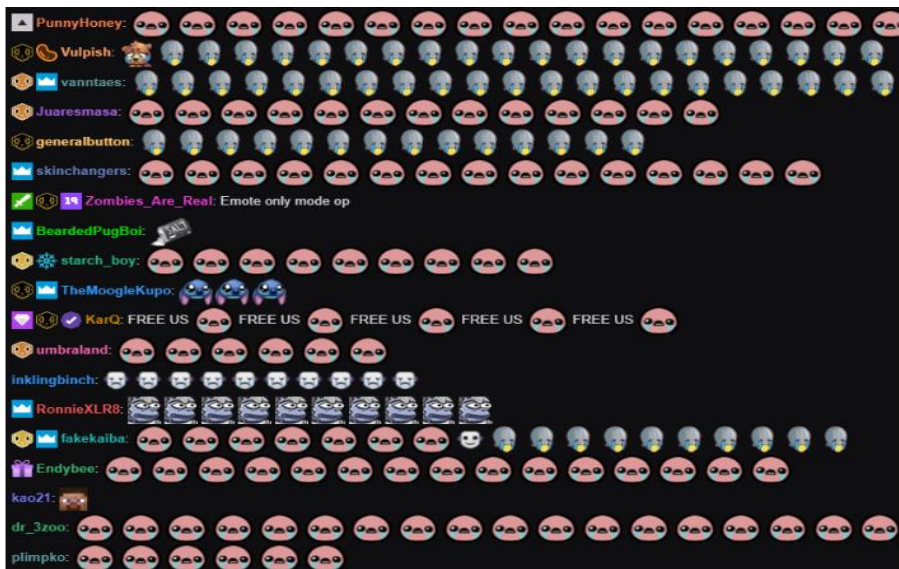
Emotes also have a huge role in video games, showcasing action or sounds a character can perform; the Urban Dictionary contextually defines this as a term used in video games that describes an action the virtual character can perform, usually accompanied by sound and some animation. (Selfie 2006). Emotes have multiple connotations and meanings; depending on the context, the meaning of the emote can change. Regarding communication on the platform, emotes are used the most. A visible trend in chats over the past few years involves emotes overtaking words as a means of communication.



Rank	Emote	Usage Count
1	x0pashL	8.853.304.642
2	forsen5G	8.513.094.378
3	suwieOwO	6.970.392.823
4	homyLol	6.956.808.912
5	SMOrc	6.280.312.451
6	cuviTest	6.100.323.777
7	TriHard	4.362.395.571
8	smolFine	4.200.001.752
9	chipsaKEK	4.198.928.995
10	Rj	3.748.924.369

Picture 1. Top Twitch emotes

As in the example below, twitch chats are frequently seen as full or almost full of emotes.



Picture 2. Twitch emotes in the live chat

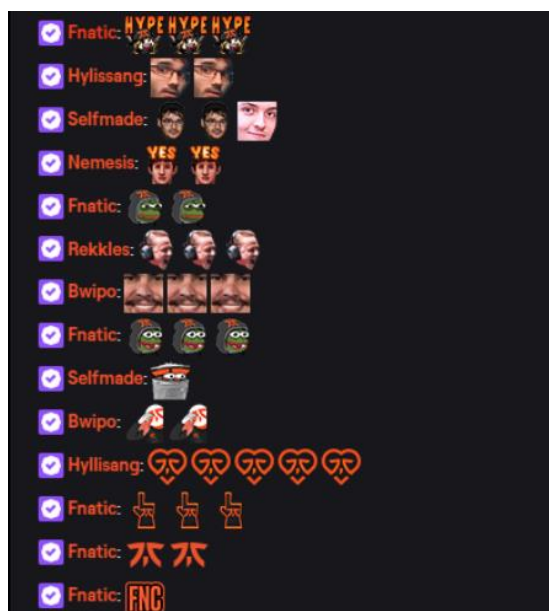
Picture 2 shows what a Twitch.tv chat can look like. The emotes are used to show the chat's frustration because the Emote mode has been turned on by the streamer or one of the chat moderators.

The example below showcases one of Twitch's most widely used emotes, which, along with other emotes explicitly used for specific channels, help spam the chat, one of the forms of chat interaction with the streamer. This example shows how context is essential when it comes to emotes, as there is a high chance that if you use one of the emotes specifically related to a particular channel on some other streamer's chat, viewers from the second streamer might not understand.



Picture 3. Spamming emotes in different contexts

The last example I wanted to showcase is seen in Picture 4, an example which shows how, in an online tournament, a team can be supported by the chat via emotes; by this, the viewers who are following the broadcast can help their team and create a pleasant atmosphere not only for them but for the other viewers.



Picture 4. Emotes used to support a team

As seen in the three examples above, emotes are a viable option in online chats, a good solution for expressing oneself without using words. These emotes are very useful in bringing online communities together, as multiple emotes are known all over the internet. Concluding the description of emotes on Twitch, I do believe emotes are helpful in online communication, bringing in a new dimension and creating a more colourful and lively atmosphere for both the viewer and the streamer. Emotes can also make a streaming community feel more united, as certain emotes are special, referring to certain streamers or communities, bringing this originality and uniqueness to the streaming environment.

#### 4.6 The use of slang on Twitch.tv

Slang is an essential element in online communication; the language, as we all know, adapts depending on the community and environment. For more than ten years, the platform has seen various trends that have altered the language used on the platform, with some words or expressions appearing and developing into trademarks for different communities or the platform in general.

#### 4.7 W and L

As with emotes, using the letters W and L has gained much traction online and can be very meaningful, depending on the context. The L and W are known to be slang in the online environment. The early use of L appeared at the dawn of the last millennium, as there were multiple connotations in which American rappers used

expressions such as “It’ll be a cold day in hell the day I take an L.” (Joseph 1998). With this example, the artist states that he cannot lose, whether in a deal, fight, or any other competition. (Bilbo 2021)

In 2003, Urban Dictionary introduced a definition for L, the term being defined by the expression *take the loss*, is frequently used to describe flunking a test, being dumped, being stood up, being beaten up or robbed, or losing one’s money in the stock market, gambling, or through exploitative business schemes. (EZ\$nipr 2016)

The letter W on Twitch.tv is slang for *win, won, or winning*. It can also be used to celebrate something good that happens on stream. For example, if a streamer wins a match, the streamer may say W while their chat may also spam the letter W to celebrate with the streamer. The W can also be used as a counter indicator of the L. For example, if a streamer or a content creator has an opinion or does something that is considered to be suitable by the chat, utterances such as *W streamer W community* are written in the chat, which means that both the streamer and their community are seen as ok on the platform based on their activity and interaction.

As both W and L are used frequently on Twitch.tv I will briefly contextualise how both language structures are used and the possible meanings attached to those terms. The letter L on Twitch is slang for the words *lose, lost, or losing*. It can also be used when something terrible happens on stream. For example, if a streamer gets wrecked in a game, the streamer may say L while their chat may also spam the letter L in chat. It is again a way of expressing oneself in the videogame community while keeping the chat entertained as they also use the expressions and can interact with the streamer and one another. L can also be used when the viewers do not share the opinion of the streamer, the construct L turning into an adjective, forming the expression L streamer, which describes a streamer in a negative light, the opposite of a W streamer.

#### **4.8 F**

As with W and L, another letter has gained popularity and is now used in multiple Twitch.tv chats and outside of the platform, being a standalone on the internet and a reference that is widely known as an online meme.

The term was first introduced in 2014 when a particular sentence, *Press F to Pay Respects* appeared in the middle of a cutscene after the death of Private Will Irons, a playable character beloved by the fans of Call of Duty, Modern Warfare. By pressing F, the players could advance during the cutscene, something necessary to continue the playing experience.

On Twitch.tv, the term has multiple connotations. For example, when a streamer engages in playing a videogame and gets killed in the game, there is a change or a perfect moment for the chat to spam the letter F, whether this will be as a form of satire, which is the case most of the time, or as an actual showing of respect. The letter F is also spammed by the chat when the streamer announces to viewers that the stream is going to end. The latter F can also hold some bad connotations in

the online community, as the trend with W and L, the F can very well turn into an adjective, taking the connotation of death in an expression such as *F stream*, which means that a streamers audience is decreasing or gone to a point which is close to nonexistence.

#### 4.9 Copium

The term copium dates back to 2003, when Charles Kente Williams, known by his stage name as Keak Da Snake, used this word for his music album. In 2016, the term gained traction on various online platforms such as Reddit and 4chan due to political reasons, and it appeared on Twitch.tv in 2018. (Copium Meaning Explored, n.d)

The term is a combination of the words cope and opium, and it is used satirical on the platform to describe a fictional drug that people need to use when losing games or when facts do not match reality. For example, when a steamer plays a game and constantly loses due to their lack of skill, the chat might use the emote attached below or simply write *copium* in the chat, while the streamer will come up with fake excuses that can be unchecked.



Picture 5. Visual representation of the visual meme Copium

#### 4.10 Chad and Beta

The term Chad is used to refer to a stereotypical alpha male, someone who is young, athletic, and gets a lot of attention from women. (“chad”, 2020). The term is often associated with the incel community. People referred to as incels are men who feel as though they are unable to attract women and who tend to have misogynistic tendencies. (“incel” n.d)

On Twitch.tv, the term is mainly satirical to describe a good-looking streamer who can communicate well with a woman. The toxicity of the term is seen when the counterpart of the term Chad is used. The term beta, an antonym for Chad, describes a man seen as passive, subservient, weak, and effeminate. (“beta” 2020)

#### **4.11 Mالدing**

Mالدing is a slang term used in online communities, it appeared first in 2004 and has been trending on Twitch.tv since 2019. The term's exact meaning originates from the words mad and balding, which refers to someone who gets mad enough to start balding. On Twitch.tv, the word is typically used to refer to streamers who are losing games and getting mad while also going bald. "Mالدing in Twitch chat means that you are mad and balding simultaneously. The word is jokingly used to refer to people who seem that they are so mad, they start going bald." (Abhimannu 2021)

#### **4.12 Political correctness and the language of Twitch.tv**

As the internet progressed from the last millennium into the current days, specific regulations appeared on online platforms in order to make them eligible for sponsorship and suitable for pushing forward human rights, activism, and an overall acceptable language on the platform. This entire process took place systematically by adding rules and regulations since the first appearance of the platform, getting now to a point where both the streamers and the vast majority of their community know about these specific rules. Twitch streamers can be banned for discriminatory speech, threats to harm themselves or others, and general harassment. They can also find themselves in trouble if they share another member's personal information, impersonate Twitch staff, or make any speech intending to take advantage; they also can find themselves banned from the platform for using offensive speech about subjects such as religious beliefs, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation or inciting to violence in any way through speech. (Community Guidelines, n.d) Twitch.tv has an app that ensures that certain expressions are not used in the chats, keeping the platform as clean as possible. For example, as of December 16, 2020, Twitch has outlawed the usage of the words "virgin", "simp", and "incel" on their platform – both in chat and by the streamer (Amos 2020), considering that the words are too offensive and can be used for bullying other people. Any streamer has access to multiple moderation tools to keep the language in their chat clean; streamers with a big audience will have moderators, people who moderate the chats and make sure to keep them as friendly and nonconflictual as possible. Also, any streamer can make a list of banned words and expressions in their chat; with the list made and introduced into the system, the viewers cannot send messages if those include banned words or expressions.

#### **4 Conclusions**

Concluding this paper, I want to mention that a growing language system is taking shape on Twitch.tv; whether it appeared there or just migrated from other places on the internet, the language used by streamers and viewers has evolved since the beginning of the platform.

With this paper, I wanted to point out some of the most fascinating phenomena happening to the communication process of Twitch.tv. In the first section of the data collection and interpretation section, I described how chatters and streamers communicate online, which is, as I mentioned throughout this paper, a vital element for the well-being of the platform. As it was seen, there are multiple ways to communicate on Twitch.tv, the potential to keep the audience entertained while also communicating seems to create a bond between streamer and viewer, a vital element going forward for the platform and communities.

I then talked about emotes, presenting examples of how they are used, and offered information about their uniqueness and use on the platform. The fact that emotes are created by the community and can be used to express a wide range of emotions and have a satirical element that can improve both the streamer and viewer experience.

Last, I briefly touched on political correctness on Twitch.tv, focusing on the rules and regulations, especially regarding this paper's main topic of interest, language. The platform introduced some valuable tools for creators to moderate their chats and offer a better viewing experience for their community, giving them a sense of control over what may be said and reducing offensive language or anything inappropriate.

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