

## From Broadcast to Conversation: How Live Streaming Redefines Audience Engagement in the Creator Economy

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Received: 18 Jan 2026 | Received Revised Version: 19 Feb 2026 | Accepted: 28 Mar 2026 | Published: 16 Apr 2026

Volume 08 Issue 04 2026 | 10.37547/tajir/Volume08Issue04-04

### Abstract

*The proliferation of live streaming platforms has fundamentally altered the architecture of interaction between content creators and their audiences. Where traditional media operated on a one-way transfer of information from producer to passive consumer, live streaming establishes a qualitatively different communicative environment — synchronous, dialogic, and structurally dependent on audience participation. This paper examines the mechanisms of this transformation within the context of the creator economy, analyzing how the interactivity of the live format redefines metrics of engagement, monetization, and the long-term sustainability of digital brands.*

*The methodology combines a systematic review of academic literature on parasocial interaction theory, platform economics, and digital community loyalty with observational analysis grounded in more than fifteen years of the author's continuous practice in the live streaming industry. The empirical dataset draws on Twitch and Kick platform data spanning 2009 to 2026: 699 million total minutes watched, a peak concurrent audience of 236,284 viewers, and an average live audience of 12,272.*

*The findings indicate that the live format functions as a trust layer within a creator's digital brand — one that recorded content cannot replicate. Long-term audience loyalty patterns demonstrate that community depth is a structurally more reliable indicator of sustained creator presence than reach in a saturated media environment. The paper also identifies three key trends defining the current state of the industry: algorithm-driven discovery through short-form video, the role of AI-assisted tools in managing multi-platform presence, and a shift from mass reach toward niche authority as the defining strategic asset for independent creators.*

**Keywords:** live streaming, creator economy, audience engagement, parasocial interaction, niche authority, platform loyalty.

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**Cite This Article:** Davydov, I. (2026). From Broadcast to Conversation: How Live Streaming Redefines Audience Engagement in the Creator Economy. *The American Journal of Interdisciplinary Innovations and Research*, 8(4), 17–21. <https://doi.org/10.37547/tajir/Volume08Issue04-04>

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## 1. Introduction

Over the past decade, live streaming has evolved from a niche gaming phenomenon into one of the fastest-growing segments of the global media market. According to SNS Insider, the live streaming market reached \$113 billion in 2024 and is projected to exceed \$600 billion by 2032, growing at a compound annual rate of approximately 23% (SNS Insider, 2025). In the second quarter of 2024 alone, viewers collectively watched 8.5 billion hours of live content, and the average viewing session of over 25 minutes consistently exceeds comparable figures for recorded video (Astute Analytica, 2025). This expansion runs parallel to a broader structural shift in the content economy: according to Grand View Research, the global creator economy was valued at approximately \$205 billion in 2024, with the number of active content creators surpassing 200 million worldwide (Grand View Research, 2025).

Behind these figures, however, lies a more significant qualitative shift that market statistics capture only indirectly. Media consumption has historically followed the broadcast model: a producer forms a message, a platform delivers it, an audience receives it. This model, inherited from radio and television, shaped not only the technological architecture of distribution but also the professional logic of creators prioritizing reach over interaction, output over presence. Live streaming disrupts this logic. Chat, donations, polls, shared real-time reactions these are not additions to content but constitutive elements of a new kind of media space, one in which the audience is a co-author of what takes place.

This shift has direct consequences for how audience engagement is understood as a category. In the broadcast paradigm, engagement is measured through reach view counts, subscriber numbers, unique visitors. In the conversation model, the relevant indicators are fundamentally different: the number of unique chatters, the duration of uninterrupted viewer presence, the depth of the parasocial bond between creator and community.

This paper approaches the question from a position that combines theoretical analysis with extended firsthand observation. The author an active partner on both Twitch and Kick, with more than fifteen years of continuous presence in the live streaming industry on the Russian-language market has unique longitudinal access to data spanning several technological cycles of platform development. This makes it possible to examine the

transformation of the engagement model not as an abstract theoretical construct, but as an observable and measurable process that has unfolded over a decade and a half.

The aim of this paper is to identify the key mechanisms underlying the shift from broadcast to conversation model, to determine the factors driving long-term audience loyalty in conditions of high content turnover, and to articulate the structural trends that define the current and near-future state of the creator economy in the context of live streaming.

## 2. Materials and Methods

The methodology of this study rests on two complementary components: a systematic review of academic literature and an observational analysis based on empirical data accumulated by the author over the course of professional practice in the live streaming industry.

The first component comprises a review of theoretical and empirical work across several related areas: parasocial interaction theory, beginning with the foundational work of Horton and Wohl (1956) and its subsequent development in the context of digital media; research on audience engagement on streaming platforms, with particular attention to Twitch and YouTube Gaming; academic literature on the creator economy, including Cunningham and Craig's work on the professionalization of content production; and industry reports documenting the dynamics of platform ecosystems specifically data from Stream Hatchet, Goldman Sachs, and Linktree. Sources were selected on the basis of relevance to the research question, data verifiability, and temporal coverage sufficient to capture shifts in media consumption over at least one decade.

The second component is an observational analysis drawing on the author's platform data from February 2023 to March 2026 on Twitch and from the most recent 30-day activity period on Kick, supplemented by professional observations spanning a broader time horizon from 2009 to the present. The Twitch dataset includes 948 hours and 14 minutes of total streaming time over the tracked period, 699 million minutes watched, an average concurrent audience of 12,272 viewers, and a peak of 236,284 concurrent viewers across 34 million total live views. On Kick, the most recent 30-day period recorded an average of 11,716

concurrent viewers, 7,931 unique chatters, and 92,046 channel followers. This dataset constitutes a measurable empirical foundation that is unavailable within the constraints of standard academic research with limited observational time horizons.

The longitudinal character of the observations is of particular significance to this study. Fifteen years of continuous presence in the live streaming market spans several technological and platform cycles: the emergence of Twitch as the dominant gaming streaming platform, the wave of content production professionalization in the mid-2010s, the expansion of multi-platform presence as a strategy for reducing dependence on a single distributor, and the emergence of alternative ecosystems like Kick among them as a structural response to shifting monetization conditions for independent creators. Observing the transformation of audience behavior in real time across all of these phases allows for conclusions grounded not in cross-sectional snapshots but in the dynamics of change.

The limitations of this methodology stem primarily from its observational design. Data from a single creator operating within a specific cultural and linguistic context like the Russian-speaking CIS market does not support unconditional generalization to the global live streaming landscape. The absence of a control group and the impossibility of isolating individual variables within a real platform environment also constrain causal interpretation. At the same time, the specificity of this context building and sustaining a large, active community over a decade and a half in a market defined by intense competition for attention and low switching costs between creators — makes it analytically valuable for examining the mechanisms of long-term audience loyalty.

### 3. Results

#### *3.1 From Broadcast to Dialogue: How the Nature of Interaction Changes*

In the broadcast model, content is produced and consumed asynchronously: feedback arrives late and has no effect on material that is already fixed. Live streaming works differently. The viewer is present at the moment of production, their reactions shape what unfolds, and the stream itself loses much of its meaning without chat participation.

This distinction is legible in the data. With an average concurrent audience of around 12,000 viewers, the number of unique chatters over a 30-day period reached 7,931 more than 66% of those present actively participated in textual interaction. In recorded video content, the share of commenting users rarely exceeds 0.5–2% of total views (Kaytoue et al., 2012). This is not a quantitative difference it is a difference in how the audience understands its own participation: not as consumption of a finished product, but as co-presence in something as it happens.

Academic literature accounts for this phenomenon through the development of Horton and Wohl's (1956) concept of parasocial interaction. In the live context, the parasocial bond ceases to be one-directional: viewers do not merely observe the creator but regularly receive direct responses and real-time reactions (Wohn et al., 2018; Hilvert-Bruce et al., 2018). This produces what researchers call "perceived reciprocity" a sense of mutual relationship that strengthens audience attachment to the creator and reduces churn.

#### *3.2 Loyalty vs. Reach: The Paradox of Long-Term Presence*

Audience size and audience loyalty are not the same thing. A creator with a million followers may lose the majority of their viewers between streams, while a creator with a smaller but historically established base will sustain comparable concurrent viewership year after year. A median streamer with a comparable follower count but a shorter platform tenure shows significantly higher between-stream churn than long-term creators with equivalent metrics (Stream Hatchet, 2024).

The difference lies in the nature of the connection, not the size of the audience. Viewers who arrive through algorithmic recommendation respond to topical relevance and leave when it fades. Viewers with years of accumulated interaction come for a specific person regardless of what that person happens to be doing on stream. This is the practical substance of parasocial relationships in the live format: no interest in content, but attachment to a creator.

The figure of 7,931 unique chatters against an average concurrent audience of 12,000 over 30 days reflects exactly this: for most of those present, participation in the stream is a recurring practice embedded in their routine, not incidental media consumption. Recognition in the

form of the Streamer of the Decade award from GoodGame and induction into the Russian Video Game Industry Hall of Fame are external indicators of the same phenomenon sustained presence that shapes audience culture rather than simply accumulating views.

### **3.3 Trust Through Live: From Audience to Buyers**

Live streaming leaves no room for editing. The creator responds to events in real time, makes mistakes, changes position and the audience sees all of it. This is what distinguishes the live format from produced content, where the final version is always the result of selection and editing. The trust that a long-term streamer's audience develops is grounded not in a carefully constructed image but in years of observing how a person actually behaves.

That trust transfers to adjacent projects. The games from MehSoft studio *The Underground Man* series and *CHERNOBYL: The Untold Story*, distributed through Steam found their audience primarily through the live community rather than through standard indie game promotion channels. People bought a product made by someone they trusted a fundamentally different mechanic than targeted advertising or press releases.

The same logic explains simultaneous presence on Twitch and Kick with comparable average concurrent viewership 12,272 and 11,716 respectively. Multi-platform presence here is not about reach it is about independence. After Twitch revised its partner terms in 2023, many prominent creators found that their audience contact effectively belonged to the platform. Distributing presence across two platforms reduces that risk.

## **4. Discussion**

### **4.1 Three Structural Trends in the Industry**

Observations accumulated from 2009 to 2026 allow for the identification of three trends that define the current state of the industry.

Algorithm-driven discovery through short-form video has changed how live creators attract new audiences. Clips from streams distributed via TikTok and YouTube Shorts have become the primary channel through which viewers first encounter a creator, while the live stream itself converts that initial interest into a durable audience relationship. Creators who attempt to use the live format

for reach-oriented goals find themselves competing against algorithmically optimized short-form content on structurally unfavorable terms.

The proliferation of AI tools reduces the operational costs of maintaining multi-platform presence automated clip creation, subtitles, format adaptation. At the same time, audiences with high parasocial capital are particularly sensitive to signs of unscripted creator presence precisely what AI-assisted production cannot replicate by its nature.

The shift from mass reach to niche authority is the most fundamental trend of all. As the number of active creators globally surpasses 200 million (Grand View Research, 2025), broad reach strategies become structurally disadvantageous for independent creators without institutional backing. Those who endure are the ones who have built dense communities with high affective investment and it is precisely there that the live format, with its dialogic nature, holds its greatest advantage over algorithmic content.

## **5. Conclusion**

The shift from the broadcast to the conversation model is a structural change in what audiences expect from their relationship with a creator. Live streaming has made possible a type of presence in which creator and community exist in the same moment and act on each other in real time. This has changed both the format of content consumption and the economics of trust on which long-term sustainability in the creator economy is built.

The data examined in this paper indicate that the depth of audience connection is a more reliable predictor of creator sustainability than reach. 699 million minutes watched, a stable average concurrent audience across two platforms, and a high share of active chatters are all the result of years of consistent audience interaction in a format that demands authenticity and functions precisely because of it.

The three trends identified in this paper algorithm-driven discovery through short-form video, AI tools in content production, and the shift toward niche authority outline the contours of the industry for the years ahead. Their collective logic points in one direction: long-term advantage remains with creators who have built communities with high affective investment.

The observational nature of this study and its reliance on the experience of a single creator within a specific linguistic context define the boundaries of its conclusions. At the same time, it is precisely the longitudinal horizon of observation — more than fifteen years of continuous industry presence spanning several platform cycles — that represents an analytical value unavailable within the constraints of standard academic research. Future work may expand this foundation through comparative analysis of creators across other markets and quantitative measurement of long-term loyalty patterns at the platform level.

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