Title

The Stories Told in Professional Video Game Live Streaming: What Does It Mean To Be a Professional Video Game Streamer? A Case Study of the Most Popular Twitch-Streamer Ninja

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1. Introduction

The video game industry is thriving according to a wide variety of metrics. For example, the number of active video gamers worldwide is constantly growing and so is the revenue of the global video game industry (*Video Gaming Industry*, 2018). It's estimated that the global esports audience will grow to 600 million by 2023 – giving it a far larger audience than most traditional sports. In the U.S. esports are predicted to overtake everything except the *NFL* in terms of audience numbers by 2021 (Iqbal, 2019). Video gaming, video game culture and the video game industry are becoming more and more societal relevant as they increasingly shape society. As an important submarket, video game live streaming (VGLS) is also constantly growing. For example, the average total number of *Twitch*, one of the major platforms for VGLS, hours viewed has been steadily on the rise since its founding in 2011 (Iqbal, 2019).

However, VGLS not only gathers increasing attention from layperson but also more recently from researchers. As VGLS is increasingly influencing society, researchers have been investigating a range of topics from affordances of VGLS (Sjöblom et al., 2019), the lives and careers of professional video game live streamers (PVGLS; Johnson & Woodcock, 2019), digital labor, gender and VGLS (Guarriello, 2019; Jenson & de Castell, 2018; Witkowski, 2011) ethical implication of VGLS (Jung et al., 2018), impact of VGLS on the video game industry (Johnson & Woodcock, 2018), learning effects of VGLS instructions (Payne et al., 2017) to the motivations, and attitudes of the viewers of VGLS (Barbieri et al., 2017; Chen & Lin, 2018; Gandolfi, 2016; Hilvert-Bruce et al., 2018; Hu et al., 2017; Sjöblom & Hamari, 2017).

Building on the work of Johnson and Woodcock (2019), this study is going to investigate the lives and careers of PVGLS. While Johnson and Woodcock (2019) derived their insights from in-depth interviews of 39 'partnered' streamers, this study is going to use the case study approach based on an extreme case sampling of the currently most prominent streamer Ninja, alias Tyler Blevins, and data obtained from published digital news interviews. The study aims to use this type of data to investigate the common themes media organization are interested in when they report about lives and careers of PVGLS and the view on both topics from the most prominent example.

2. Methodology

2.1 Case Selection

This study takes a naturalistic approach to knowledge development, adding an in-depth qualitative case study on how PVGLS think about themselves and the community of PVGLS. The overall research approach was guided by the case study method which is especially useful for detailed analysis of how and why questions (Yin, 2009). Ninja was selected based on metric based extreme case sampling as he is the most famous PVGLS on Twitch. This metric based extreme case sampling was chosen because the most successful cases usually are also the most influential opinion leaders in terms of culture and practices within one community. In accordance with cultural and psychological theory, aspiring professional or already PVGLS tend to look at Ninja as a role model and heuristic for mindsets and best practices to adopt. Consequently, his thoughts about himself as a PVGLS, the community of PVGLS and the community of VGLS are especially relevant. Ultimately, he represents also the whole PVGLS community as a whole when he gives interviews on big shows on traditional media channels (Cash, 2018).

2.2 Case Subject

According to Duwe's (2018) estimates, in April 2018, Ninja ranked higher than the most popular professional athletes, such as Ronaldo, LeBron, and Shaq, on social media interactions. At the beginning of his career, Ninja was a professional video game player, earning his living by performing in competitions. At a certain point, he decided to leave eSports and become a full-time streamer. Today, he plays daily video-games live on a co-creation platform, named Twitch, entertaining hundreds of thousands of viewers, earning him 6 million dollars from donation and subscriptions alone (Kim, 2018).

2.3 Data Collection

The sampling method was ongoing sampling in which the sampling decisions are made after or in response to data collection. The data sample was based on collecting subcases until theoretical saturation. The following search procedures were employed to optimize efficiency and relevancy: the search phrase 'Ninja Tyler Blevins Interview' was typed into Google after an initial screen 15 written news article interviews from different news outlets to enable triangulation were collected to NVivo 12 (QSR International, 2018) for further analysis.

2.4. Data Analysis

Qualitative content analysis was applied to the two data sources. According to Drisko and Maschi (2016), content analysis is a structured approach for making replicable and valid inferences from the material. These inferences may address the material, the creator, the recipients, or the impact of the material. The analysis followed the inductive thematic coding procedure proposed by Saldaña (2013). In the first stage of analysis, the findings of Johnson & Woodcock (2019) were only passively activated, while at the second stage the findings were actively read and useful opportunities for integration were sought out.

3. Findings

In this section, a thematic reconstruction of the past, present and future life from Mr. Blevins is presented. To sustain the personal voice of Mr. and Mrs. Blevins in the reconstruction as authentic and unbiased as possible, many direct quotes from the interviews with Mr. and Mrs. Blevins were integrated. In addition, instead of the typical cutting or paraphrasing, the length of quotes is preserved to capture the thought process and simulate the reading experience of the audience of these articles.

3.1 The past professional and personal life of Mr. Blevins

In their various interviews with PVGLS Johnson & Woodcock (2019) identified two common paths towards PVGLS: (i) Competitive gaming industry and (ii) digital gaming culture and content production. Aspiring PVGLS coming from the competitive gaming industry, saw VGLS as an extension of existing eSports behaviors into a more personalized and individual form and application of existing digital skills into a new potentially profitable context. In contrast, the second group got into streaming via other online platforms that are not necessarily themselves ‘gaming’ platforms such as YouTube but had communities that integrate closely with wider gaming culture.

Journalists often asked about the narrative of “how Ninja got into streaming?” However, his explanations vary in detail. Because he is the face of the community, it is useful to reconstruct his narrative fully in order to understand how this might influence the public, especially fans, people interested in video game industry, and people involved in the video game industry. Ninja accredits his own interest and that of his two older brothers to their father’s passion for video games:

“My dad actually was the main influence. (...). He loved video games when they started to come out and he would purchase them ‘for us,’ but really we would go to bed around as early as you can imagine when we were little, 6 p.m., 7 p.m., 8 p.m. He would play on the consoles until 2 or 3 a.m. in the morning.” (Montag, 2018)

Consequently, the family-owned early gaming consoles and when Halo was launched on Xbox in November 2001 they bought it (Montag, 2018). Blevins’s brothers recall that when Mr.

Blevins was around 10 years old, he wanted to play Halo with his older brothers and they thought he was too young to play, but

“he just destroyed us. (...). He would stay up past the wee hours and just keep working.”

(Montag, 2018)

Both brothers already touch on two attributes that are found across future personal brand narratives of Blevins: his exceptional work ethic and talent at video games. In contrast to only highlighting talent, both the exceptional work ethic and talent create a relatable personal brand narrative.

According to Teng's interview (2018), Blevins's mother established strict rules: they had to keep their grades up, get a job once they were old enough and spend an hour outside for every hour they gamed. By doing this, she indicates openness for gaming and the awareness of the need for balance. At the age of 17, he persuaded his parents to let him go to his first gaming tournament of Halo 3. During the preparation, he and a rotating cast of teammates played and lived out of his parents' basement. Attending the tournament, he

“started realizing, ‘Oh my god, you can actually go to these events, I can actually make a team and I can compete against them. (...) That was when stuff got real.” (Montag, 2018)

However, he took a cautious approach to become a professional gamer. In 2009 to 2010, in his first year of college, he says that “I maintained my job that I was working at Noodles & Company and I stayed in college while (...) I was doing well in school, putting in the time and effort there, and soccer as well, that I would be rewarded to play as many games as I want” (Montag, 2018). In 2011, around the age of 18, he became a professional Halo player and started streaming (Cook, 2018). During that time, he

“continue[d] to be in school, taking fewer hours in college is fine because you're still going to school, but I was working 40 hours a week and taking two to three college courses, and still streaming somehow” (Cook, 2018).

To be able to achieve this, he cut his sleeping and social time with friends and family: “I wasn't hanging out with friends unless they were coming over to my house to watch me play. I didn't have a social life, I was the last person to a family gettogether, arriving at 10 o'clock at night because I'd finished streaming for 12 hours. I would come home at 6 pm and stream instead of

hanging out with my family” (Cook, 2018). Only when he started making a "comfortable living" from streaming, a self-estimated \$80,000 to \$90,000 a year, he quit his job at Noodles & Company and dropped out of the community college (Teng, 2018).

In 2012, his team won the Halo 4 2012 MGL Fall Championships, with Blevins achieving the highest score in the final game. Since then, he competed with major e-sports teams. However, for Blevin’s family, the growing success was a surprise (Montag, 2018). In 2015, Mr. Blevins moved together with his soon to be manager and wife that was also a streamer and highly supportive of his career ambitions (Huddleston, 2018).

In 2016, before Blevins transition to Fortnite, he was playing Halo and a battle-royale game called H1Z1 (Smith, 2018). In September 2017, while all the big streamers were still playing PlayerUnknown's Battlegrounds, Blevins noticed opportunity with Fortnite and he switched to it (Teng, 2018). Blevins was doing so well that last year he announced he would not be competing in Halo championship events, instead of focusing on streaming “Fortnite” on Twitch (Montag, 2018).

The narrative of the most known PVGLS reveals various interesting factors. While Johnson & Woodcock (2019) focus on more immediate activity before becoming a PVGLS, Blevins’s narrative shows that many other previous factors important to illuminate when studying the narratives of PVGLS. When studying PVGLS, one should aim to get full biographies starting with childhood to explore various social relationships. In Blevins’s case, there was an overall family structure of encouraging influence from his father and brother and of boundaries set by his mother. Especially, the parental gender associated with the roles in encouraging and setting reasonable limits is an interesting pattern to explore with cross-case-analysis. Early on, Blevins would see his same-gender parent and older brothers gaming and when he was old enough start it too. Later, Blevins also had friends interested in playing with him and participating together in competitions together. In addition to this favorable social environment, his competitive mindsets combined with continues high self-management (i.e., achieving good grades, playing soccer and video games) and analysis of his gameplay likely fostered a sharp learning curve from a young age.

Based on this favorable social environment and amount of deliberate gaming practice, his success in eSports and the transition to becoming a professional eSports player are almost logical.

While he did not address the motivation for starting streaming, considering his situation in college and probably the goal of turning his passion for video gaming as quickly as possible into a full-time career, streaming was likely a move to add another revenue stream besides prize money by monetizing something he already did, practicing the game, with entertainment. Blevins's later success in streaming can be seen as the accumulation of the vast amount of important PVGLS career capital based on him starting streaming early and, since then, consistently putting time into honing his streaming-entertainment skill and gaming skill. Blevins says that

"I've been doing it for a very long time. Even before Twitch, I was streaming on Justin.tv. So I think it's a matter of experience. Also, I think that I have two most important features of a good streamer: I am very good at the game I play and I am entertaining. If I'm not on the top of my game" (Breczko, 2019).

Doing this, he was able to develop the skillset combination crucial for a highly successful PVGLS. In his overall narrative, the focus is more on his superior gaming skill. However, his ability to entertain while gaming is of similar importance. For example, Hernandez (2018) frames him as "Twitch's most famous entertainer" and Mrs. Blevins highlights that "he entertains millions on his gaming stream every day" (Huddleston, 2018). According to Teng (2018),

"streaming is as much about entertainment as it is about victory. Streamers like Ninja transform their lives into content, broadcasting their thoughts and doings in real time. Watch a streamer long enough and he feels like your friend. During one recent stream, Ninja coos at one of his dogs in a highpitched baby voice in between games: "Oh hi, my little ladybug. I love that you can come see me anytime because we don't have doors in the basement!"

Blevins's ability to perform and provide a high-level gaming and entertainment experience consistently is rooted his favorable social environment (i.e., parents, siblings, friends, wife), the personal inclination for both things, high drive for learning and a vast amount of practice. While Blevins took the path described by Johnson & Woodcock (2019) from eSports to VGLS, future narrative analysis based on interview data should look into the previously outlined factors to enable more illuminating cross-comparison influencing the career of PVGLS.

3.2 The current professional and personal life of Mr. Blevins

Blevins's past and present narratives echo the finding of Johnson & Woodcock (2019) that PVGLS's amount of working time devoted to streaming was significant, often far more than the 35 average job hours. For example, Johnson & Woodcock (2019) interviewed PVGLS said that streaming 'fifteen hours a day to launch things [...] I mean my first three months of Twitch was nearly every waking moment', "over 70 hours a week" and "not take a single day off aside from those main critical days, emergency so on so forth", and "one streamer worked eight hours as a registered nurse, would 'come home and stream eight hours, sleep like four [laughter]'".

Life of a PVGLS. Almost every interview includes and emphasizes Blevins's past and current daily routine of streaming indicating a two-sided interest in this topic. Considering the unfamiliarity and newness of this career, the interests of journalists and the general public in what it entails having a career as a PVGLS makes sense. Whether being a doctor, professional athlete or professional gamer, representatives of career professions have a personal interest in framing their career profession positively. In this light, the emphasis on borderline work ethic for becoming and staying successful as a PVGLS whether true or not seems coherent. Usually, the narrative of the daily life includes Mr. and Mrs. Blevins because his wife is also his manager. She oversees the 15 employees of Team Ninja that includes public relations specialists, a YouTube editor, a social media manager and personal assistants (Huddleston, 2018).

In the beginning, Mr. and Mrs. Blevins lacked a daily routine and consequently

"something had to change, because he'd just wake up and stream all day until he went to bed. (...) And it's like: This isn't a relationship — we don't really have time together. He just didn't have a schedule. So the best thing he ever did was set a schedule" (Smith, 2018).

According to Mrs. Blevins, nowadays she wakes up around 6 am to return phone calls and answer emails from fans, members of the media and representatives from Team Ninja's sponsor companies, as well as anyone else interested in the Ninja brand (Huddleston, 2018). At 9 am, Mr. Blevins wakes up and they share a half hour together. During this time, they have coffee, discuss business, or just talk about how their nights were (Smith, 2018). Typically, Mr. Blevins will stream on Twitch for more than six hours from 9:30 am to 4 pm. Meanwhile, Mrs. Blevins handles errands, taking care of their dogs, and handling more phone calls and emails. Both have

the four-hour break from 4 pm to 8 pm. However, “even though we do have four-hour breaks, we don’t usually get that with one another” (Hernandez, 2018). Mrs. Blevins says that “our breaks are just talking about business and, unfortunately, I need to do that, because there are people that need answers and we don’t have enough time as it is. (...) but, if it wasn’t me he would have to be having those talks with somebody else” (Huddleston, 2018). Afterward, Mr. Blevins streams usually another six hours, roughly until 2 am, and Mrs. Blevins answers even more emails (Smith, 2018). Overall, Mr. Blevins states that he “play[s] Fortnite at least 10 hours a day” (Cook, 2018). However, he would like to sleep more hours but, “but, you know, got that schedule, dude. If I am five minutes late, I look at that chat and it’s like, “Is Ninja late? Is he streaming today? Why isn’t he on?” (Draper & Bromwich, 2018). Overall, Mr. Blevins says that gaming and streaming are still fun for him: “it’s almost always a pleasure for me and I never play off stream, that’s why I was able to do it for so long. But the first 30 minutes of the day is definitely the most difficult for me, because I’m still tired after the night.” (Breczko, 2019)

On a more broader time priorities level, they attempted to go offline one day a week, which they call a “date day”, though recently they have been skipping it (Teng, 2018). Since their honeymoon in 2017, they didn’t take any vacation and are not planning on doing that for “maybe another year” (Hernandez, 2018). Further, Mr. Blevins says that he does not have any hobbies (Breczko, 2019).

Challenges and potentials of a PVGLS. Mrs. Blevins frames his work ethic as a commitment to the family and is grateful for it. She says that

"I look at it as: He's not playing video games all day; he's working all day. (...). And I have so much more respect for him, and I'm so proud of him, because I get to say my husband works all day, he works so hard, and he really does so much for our family. So it's not hard for me at all. I giggle. I laugh every day. He's funny, and I get to hear his streams first-hand at the house. He keeps things so fun, and without the stream and how hard he's worked, we wouldn't be blessed with the life we've had." (Smith, 2018)

Both frames align when Mr. Blevins frames this daily routine as something challenging but not something that would cause him to burn out because he overall enjoys what he is doing (Smith, 2018) and he wants to monetize the current momentum for future financial security,

"I'd be an idiot to do that [take a break] now. (...) until my family is taken care of. Say this ends tomorrow, we don't have enough for the rest of our lives. I tell Jess, 'Honey, we're not going to have that much quality time this year, or even next year. But if we do this right and I continue to grind for a couple more years, we can set ourselves up, and our family and our family's family, for the rest of our lives.'" (Teng, 2018).

Other reinforcements for this intense schedule come from the immediate loss of subscribers when he is not streaming, the fear of somebody taking his place, and the fear of not capturing the current momentum and letting it die (Teng, 2018). Mr. Blevins sees himself as the owner of a small business, and the only product is Ninja (Teng, 2018). Consequently, he weighs every decision to leave his computer to travel to celebrity or family events against the financial repercussions (Teng, 2018).

"When we decide whether I'm going to an event, the pay has to be there," he says. "If it's not paid, how much clout are you going to get? Are you going to be networking? Is that networking worth \$70,000?" At the same time, there's the constant threat of fading popularity. "The more breaks [streamers] take," he says, "the less they stream, the less they're relevant."
(Teng, 2018)

Mr. Blevins says losing subscribers is stressful,” even my subscribers and my viewers, they’re like, “Ninja, man, you lost 5,000 subscribers.” I lost 100,000 when I went to E3. I went for four days, I won the tournament there with Marshmello, but I didn’t win money, it was for charity. So it was \$500,000 — it was worth it, 100 percent, but I lost 100,000 subscribers.”

In conjunction with his work ethics, all interviews investigate his income. Since Mr. Blevins is earning more than \$1 million US dollar a month from various revenue streams, he also has a personal interest in showing that the exceptional amount money is earned based on exceptional hard work and world-class skill characterizing any world-class athlete (Huddleston, 2018). He is very open about his earning because he wants to establish realistic expectations,

“I kind of want everyone to know: This is how much the top guys can make. It’s important that parents can see. All the contracts for professional athletes — all their salaries are public: This is how much the best quarterback makes, this is how much LeBron makes a year. That’s a huge driving factor in bringing things to, “Hey this is how much Ninja might make this year

or next year.” That is now a bar that parents and kids can look up to.” (Draper & Bromwich, 2018)

He estimates 70% of his income comes from the Twitch and YouTube and 30% from brand sponsorships with Samsung, Uber Eats and Red Bull, music and his own merchandise (Briggs, 2018).

PVGLS as a career path. In the context income, most journalists inquire about his views on professional gaming as a viable career path as he has a large base of young fans. However, Blevins does not regard professional gaming as a viable career path for everyone and feels responsible to objectively inform his younger fans about the odds as they might want to follow his footsteps (Breczko, 2019; Montag, 2018; Tassi, 2018). Based on his autobiography, he recommends young ambitious people to diversify their interests and skills.

“All the kids out there, you can’t just drop everything and focus on playing video games for a living. (...). It’s also becoming a very competitive career choice right now, and you want to make sure that you’re securing your future.” (Montag, 2018)

And

“Everyone must hear the brutal truth. If you are really, really, really bad at the game maybe stick with it as a hobby. But if you have talent, then put yourself out there. Take part in tournaments and make the world hear about you” (Breczko, 2019).

Blevins emphasizes the increasing competitiveness of the digital space on Twitch and YouTube. However, he generally encourages every person to follow their dreams and believe that they can do anything, but at the same time have enough self-awareness to stop and acknowledge the harsh reality (Tassi, 2018). If entertaining and content creating is something that does not come naturally and is really difficult, they should find pursue other passions (Tassi, 2018). Overall, Blevins acknowledges that his success is based on luck and a lot of work and in this sense he recommends his fans not to

“(...) tak[e] a year off to do full-time streaming, quitting jobs or school, and I’m like, ‘No,’ that’s the exact opposite of what you do. (...) when you start this it’s not like you have a minimum salary, you make no money: you need ad revenue, you need people to subscribe and do-

nate to your stream, especially if you have no following on any social media platform whatsoever, which most people don't when they're thinking about quitting their desk jobs.“ (Cook, 2018)

In conclusion, the journalists use Blevins narrative to explore what it means to be a PVGLS. The focus is on his life as a PVGLS, his challenges, and potentials as a PVGLS, PVGLS as a career path. Blevins narrative clearly outlines the importance of various factors to become and stay one of the most popular and successful PVGLS. There is a large overlap in the factors mentioned in the past narrative, namely intense work ethic, sacrifice of social and personal goals, supportive social relationships – especially his Mrs. Blevins in her double role, the motivation for this intense work ethic of achieve a certain level of financial security and the pressure to perform and compete at a high level to secure these financial outcomes. Compared to the PVGLS interviews by Johnson and Woodcock (2019), Mr. Blevins seems also to exhibit a more entrepreneurial and optimizing mindset.

3.3 The professional and personal future of Mr. Blevins

In general, Mr. Blevins seems to dislike talking about five-year plans or what the future holds, according to his Mrs. Blevins (Teng, 2018). However, some ideas can still be found across the interviews. As previously mentioned, Mr. Blevins's drive for the present comes from his future ambition of taking care of his family by achieving a certain level of financial security: "[I'm] definitely investing and saving it as much as possible. I don't plan on doing anything crazy with it" (Montag, 2018). Unlike most people, for whom his current net worth in millions of US dollars would probably be satisfying, his norm of financial security is different.

In one of his earliest interviews, Mr. Blevins goes beyond the family motivation by highlighted his motivation "to use my influence for good things" and consequently he did a "suicide prevention/awareness charity I did was because I had recently lost a longtime friend and moderator in my channel to suicide. I felt confused and helpless about the entire situation, and just needed to do something about it" (Tassi, 2018). For the future, he says that he plans "on doing plenty more fundraisers and charities" (Tassi, 2018). For his personal windfall, he plans to make it last:

Based on various statements, the type of work focused lifestyle in combination with motivation by financial security is only a short-term future plan. Overall, he sees no end to his streaming and gaming career because he enjoys gaming and streaming his gameplay is nothing that adds much extra effort. In the interview with Breczko (2019), he says, "I hope I will stream for another 20, 30, maybe 40 years. I will definitely never stop playing games, so if I do it anyway, why shouldn't I stream it?". When asked what he thinks about "the physical degradation of your skills?", he answered that "I am definitely still in my prime. I am still fantastic at the game, and I will not be good at video games in my opinion" (Draper & Bromwich, 2018). Based on his previous experience, he is confident he can master whatever game comes next. "I can 100 percent compete at the top level in every game that I play," he says (Teng, 2018). However, Blevins says he thinks Fortnite nowhere near peaking (Briggs, 2018). Generally, Mr. Blevins's outlook on the future is optimistic as he sees him both mentally and physically stable and healthy and skillset wise highly capable.

However, there are some challenges as he continues to grow. According to him, one of his biggest challenge of the year is

“continuing to stay positive. (...). Once you’re kind of in the limelight, there are a lot of people. You just get these random haters who, in my opinion, probably don’t even enjoy your content or watch it. They just hear about your stuff, and they’re just very rude. A lot of comments on Instagram and Twitter and sometimes subscribers on my chat, they can be very rude. It’s like they’re just trying to bring me down no matter what it is. They’re just in a not happy place. They’re trying to make someone else feel that way.” (Hernandez, 2018).

The business strategy to achieve this, according to his wife and manager, is to establish him as a mainstream celebrity known globally across demographics by placing him in Hollywood movies and more collaborations with traditional celebrities such as musician or athletes (Huddleston, 2018). Blevins says, “the goal was just to be bigger than gaming. That is something everyone strives for, right? Michael Jordan, LeBron James, all those people” (Draper & Bromwich, 2018).

In many areas, there is an overlap between the attitudes and topics found by Johnson and Woodcock (2019) in their interviews. Both Mr. Blevins and the interviewed PVGLS share (1) the enjoy of their work and want it to continue indefinitely, despite the substantial amounts of time and effort investment and the emotional and background labor (2) feelings of precariousness in their streaming activities, having a backup plan (3) the common belief that Twitch and streaming would only continue to grow. It is surprising that even with Mr. Blevins’s level of financial success, being the biggest streamer in the world, he shares the sentiment of precariousness indicating a more cultural subjective than objective opinion. Further, Mr. Blevins seems more confident and optimistic about his future overall compared to the interviews PVGLS as Johnson and Woodcock (2019) point out in their conclusion, “we have demonstrated here a clear emphasis upon feelings of precariousness expressed by our respondents about their long-term Twitch careers. When considering the future of Twitch as a company, however, the opposite was the case, where comments ranged from the generally optimistic to the borderline technoutopian.” (p. 13). Compared to Mr. Blevins’s clear vision for the future of his brand, Johnson and Woodcock (2019) do not mention any considerations of PVGLS for brand strategy and further expansion plans indicating a lack of strategizing and vision.

4. Conclusion

The gaming industry is now one of the largest entertainment industries and one of the rising sub-industry is video game live streaming (*Video Gaming Industry*, 2018). Building on the work of Johnson and Woodcock (2019), who interviewed PVGLS to construct life and career narratives based on commonalities and differences, this paper reconstructed how journalists are representing the lives and careers of PVGLS. In addition to representational analysis, a single case study design was chosen to focus on the reconstruction of one original in-depth narrative. As the case subject, the most popular video game live streamer, Mr. Blevins was elected because he represents the most successful case of a PVGLS and usually this status also makes him the most influential opinion leaders in terms of culture and practices within one community. Thus, aspiring professional or already PVGLS tend to look at Ninja as a role model and heuristic for mindsets and best practices to adopt. Consequently, his thoughts about himself as a PVGLS, the community of PVGLS and the community of VGLS are especially relevant. Ultimately, he represents also the whole PVGLS community as a whole when he gives interviews on big shows on traditional media channels (Cash, 2018). To enable triangulation 15 written news article interviews were collected from different news outlets.

Compared to Johnson & Woodcock (2019) analysis of past narratives that focused on the question how PVGLS moved to streaming, this study goes more in-depth in the past narrative of PVGLS by starting with Blevins childhood and identifying subsequent the crucial events and factors influencing his current mindset, behavior and successful position. His superior ability to perform and provide a high-level gaming and entertainment experience is influenced by his early on favorable social environment (i.e., parents, siblings, friends, wife), the personal inclination for competitive gaming and entertainment, high drive for learning and a vast amount of practice.

After understanding the factors that got him to his current position, we reconstruct his current daily life with the potentials, challenges and his motivation. Mr. Blevins's past and present narratives echo the finding of Johnson & Woodcock (2019) that PVGLS's amount of working time devoted to streaming was significant, often far more than the 35 average job hours. However, compared to the PVGLS interviews by Johnson and Woodcock (2019), Mr. Blevins seems also to exhibit a more entrepreneurial and profit-optimizing mindset. Overall, the reconstructed narrative, based on the journalists' interests, explores more in-depth what it means to be a PVGLS. In fact, the focus is on his life as a PVGLS, his challenges and potentials as a PVGLS,

PVGLS as a career path. Blevins narrative clearly outlines the importance of various factors to become and stay one of the most popular and successful PVGLS. There is a large overlap in the factors mentioned in the past narrative, namely intense work ethic, sacrifice of social and personal goals, supportive social relationships, the motivation for this intense work ethic of achieve a certain level of financial security and the pressure to perform and compete at a high level to secure these financial outcomes.

Ultimately, we investigated his perceptions and ambitions about his future. In many areas, there is an overlap between the attitudes and topics found by Johnson and Woodcock (2019) in their interviews. Both Mr. Blevins and the interviewed PVGLS share (1) the enjoy of their work and want it to continue indefinitely, despite the substantial amounts of time and effort investment and the emotional and background labor (2) feelings of precariousness in their streaming activities, having a backup plan (3) the common belief that Twitch and streaming would only continue to grow. It is surprising that even with Mr. Blevins's level of financial success, being the biggest streamer in the world, he shares the sentiment of precariousness indicating a more cultural subjective than objective opinion. Further, Mr. Blevins seems more confident and optimistic about his future overall compared to the interviews PVGLS as Johnson and Woodcock (2019). Compared to Mr. Blevins's clear vision for the future of his brand, Johnson and Woodcock (2019) do not mention any considerations of PVGLS for brand strategy and further expansion plans indicating a lack of strategizing and vision.

In conclusion, *"what does it mean to be a professional video game streamer?"* Generally speaking, to be a PVGLS means being able to combine one's personal passion with making a comfortable living, sacrificing relationships and other personal areas to be able to work intensely to make it in this competitive job market, being under constant pressure to perform, being constantly evaluated by the audience, sharing all the challenges of classical jobs in the entertainment industry, such as actor or comedian, and to be one's own CEO and consequently needing elaborate self-management and learning skills. It seems that the social media celebrity and PVGLS job market is not fundamentally different from the old classical job market in the entertainment industry and sports industry that also fueled by the ambition of people wanting to combine their passion with a viable career path.

The VGLS community is lucky to have Blevins as the role model because he openly shares his narrative based on rational decision making and ups and downs.

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