

Case Study on Twitch

What Is It and How Does It Work?

Twitch is a live streaming platform in which users can watch live or archived videos based on their interests, while interacting with the broadcaster and other spectators. Although the most popular channels are about videogames, one can also find videos about cooking, music, travelling and Q&A. In February 2020, Twitch had 3.8 million broadcasters and on average 15 million active users visit this site daily (Yaden 2020) ¹. Twitch is available on many devices (computer, phone, PS4, Xbox, Chromecast and Apple Tv) and while the basic account is free, the platform offers different subscription options to serve the needs of various users.

At the heart of Twitch's success and popularity is the integration between content and community: Twitch broadcasts are constructed as co-productions between streamers and the audience as the real-time interaction between these two groups is an integral part of the social and interactive video experience that defines this platform. On one side, some people participate as content creators and entertainers and start their own channels, “[transforming] their private play into public entertainment” (Taylor 2018, p.6) ². This group is known as “live streamers” and their typical broadcast include a live feed of their screen and a webcam displaying their reactions to the in-game events and comments of the audience. On the other side, instead, others join the platform as viewers and they can decide their level of participation based on their personal preferences and wants: viewers can either simply watch the show, taking a “lean back” approach (Miller 2019, p. 75)³ or, through the live chat, they can actively participate in the Twitch broadcast by talking with other viewers and/or asking questions to the streamer, “leaning forward” and becoming co-producers of the live experience.

The chat box works as a powerful community building's tool and the conversations sparked in the chat rooms are what transforms Twitch into a collective and social watching experience, which is very different from simply watching videos of somebody playing a game, cooking a dish or playing a song on YouTube. So, referring back to Gensler's Experience Modes, connecting and interacting with a community of like-minded people is one of the main motives for the viewer (social mode) as, according to Wulf *et al*, “Twitch fulfills all aspects of social communities, namely, membership (by subscription to certain streamers), influence (via interaction with other viewers and the streamer), need fulfillment (they refer to rewards such as sociability, status, success, and gaining of both knowledge and skills), and emotional connection to others (through a common history and identification with others that is shaped via continuous participation)” (333)⁴. In addition to the social dimension, some viewers stream the videos to learn more

about a game's techniques and strategies or to see the game in action, increasing their overall knowledge and understanding of the game (educational motive). Finally, other members of the audience join the platform in order to be entertained and to escape from their everyday life (entertainment mode), so for these individuals two of the major attractors to the video experience is the personality of the broadcaster and the quality of the streaming show. The success of streamers is measured, in fact, not only by their gaming skills but also by their ability to match the taste and sense of humor of the audience and to provide a fun, engaging streaming experience. For the streamer, Twitch represents "an empowering tool for self-expression" (Partin 2019, p.155) ⁵ as well as it constitutes a way to make money through donations, ads, subscriptions, sponsorships while elevating their status within the Twitch community. A viewer can, for example, donate virtual currency, the Twitch "Bits", to support their favorite streamer, and this will allow him/her to amplify his/her voice and to stand out from the rest of the audience (ex. Melina is a streamer travelling around Europe who asks her fans to support her trip through donations, see images 1 and 2 in the Appendix)

Let's Try It!

When I first downloaded the Twitch app, I was skeptical about the level of interactivity and participation that could be achieved through this platform, but after streaming a couple of videos I was very impressed by the sense of community and the emotional connections that I started developing in this site. One of my favorite videogames is *The Sims*, so I joined the streaming of SarPlaysSims, a Canadian streamer with a bubbly personality and 5.8k followers (image 3), who was building a mansion in *The Sims 4*. I was very excited that the streamer was in building mode, as that is one of my favorite activities of the game, and, as soon as I entered the chat room, SarPlaysSims welcomed me and thanked me for following her and then kept talking with the other viewers about her obsession for bread. I immediately jumped in, expressing my love for garlic bread (image 4), and then I kept following the conversation, which shifted pretty quickly, moving from horror movies (image 5) to hair colors (image 6). The streamer kept decorating the house, while constantly interacting with the audience: she sang some famous songs while wearing a Stitch hat, made jokes, replied to the viewers' questions and talked about her everyday life (saying, for example, that she needed to do laundry and she just got off work).

The conversation was lively and entertaining, the topics were extremely relatable and I really felt like I was just sitting on a couch talking with my friends while playing my favorite game. I was a little bit frustrated by the intrusiveness of the ads as well as by the overwhelming amount of comments in the chat box which drowned some of my personal observations and made me feel ignored, but most of the time I was able to have a pleasant conversation with the other viewers and bond with them through our shared interest for *The Sims*. As I connected with some members of the audience, I also had two meaningful personal interactions with the streamer which made me feel valued and heard and deepened my bond with SarPlaysSims: in the first one, I commented how I loved the lamp that the streamer chose and she thanked me and asked me if I thought it was high enough (image 7); in the second interaction, instead, as we were talking about how luxurious the house created by SarPlaysSims was, I commented how rich people always seem to have a lot of abstract paintings (image 8), SarPlaysSims laughed and told me she was going to add one and then more people started posting comments about tendencies and habits of rich people. In this second instance, I felt important and visible as I turned from a generic

member of the audience to an *active* prosumer who sparked a new conversation, attracted the attention of the streamer and made a suggestion that contributed to the design of the house. While I was very involved for the first 30 minutes of the stream session, the rest of the time I tuned in and out, keeping the video as background noise and acting more as a distracted viewer (which shades light on the different types of involvement that the user can choose to have with this experience). Overall, I really enjoyed participating to this collective gaming experience as I learned new tricks about the game and useful information about the expansion packs, I virtually met some interesting people (such as snckrs9, a girl from Germany who was watching the stream to learn English) and I felt a sense of belonging to *The Sims* community.

Using Twitch for the Cooking Community

Thinking about the Tasters and Helpers of my research project, Twitch could be a great platform for this community as it could contribute to improve the situation of the unemployed cooks as well as it could strengthen the social connections, provide learning opportunities and foster a lively dialogue between the members. On Twitch cooks could live stream their cooking classes, asking the audience to support them through donations, and with the chat box they could reply to the viewer's questions in real time, while sharing tips and teaching culinary techniques to the audience. The Helpers could serve as moderators for the conversations and could also use this platform to show off their skills and to start building up their influence in the cooking community by posting videos about their recipes and hosting Q&A session during which they can give suggestions to the less experienced members of the community. The Tasters, instead, could stream videos to get inspiration and learn new recipes without having to necessarily actively participate in the conversation if they don't want to. In this way, Twitch could be used to solve one of the challenges brought by COVID-19 (cooks' unemployment) while also meeting the needs and wants of the cooking community.

Notes

1. Joseph Yaden. "What is Twitch?". *Digitaltrends*, September 6, 2020, <https://www.digitaltrends.com/gaming/what-is-twitch/>
2. Taylor T. *Watch me play: Twitch and the rise of game livestreaming*. (Princeton University Press,2018).
3. Carolyn Handler Miller. *Digital Storytelling 4e: A Creator's Guide to Interactive Entertainment* (Taylor and Francis Group,2019).
4. Tim Wulf *et al.* "Watching Players: An Exploration of Media Enjoyment on *Twitch*", *Games and Culture* 15 (2020) 328-346.
5. William Clyde Partin. "Watch Me Play:Twitch and the Cultural Economy of Surveillance", *Surveillance & Society* 17 (1/2):153-160

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DIGITAL MEDIA OFFERING MODEL for TWITCH'S VIEWER

FUNCTIONAL WANTS & NEEDS

- WANT TO INTERACT WITH FELLOW GAMERS AND EXPERTS
- WANT TO STREAM AND WATCH ENTERTAINING LIVE CONTENT
- SOME WANT TO ACTIVELY PARTICIPATE IN THE TWITCH BROADCAST AND GET INVOLVED
- WANT TO CONNECT WITH STREAMERS AND OTHER STREAMERS
- NEED FOR ESCAPE AND DIVERSION

PAINS

- FRUSTRATED THAT CHAT IS OVERLOADED WITH MESSAGES AND THEIR VOICE IS NOT HEARD
- INFORMATION OVERLOAD + CATAPHONY
- TROLLS DISTURB THE CONVERSATION

GAINS

- INCREASED KNOWLEDGE OF TECHNIQUES
- SOCIAL CONNECTIONS & SENSE OF BELONGING TO COMMUNITY OF
- EASE OF PARTICIPATION

MOTIVATION

- TO CONNECT WITH OTHERS AND SOCIALIZE
- TO BE ENTERTAINED WHILE BEING PART OF THE BROADCASTING EXPERIENCE
- TO LEARN MORE ABOUT A SPECIFIC TOPIC OR PRODUCT
- TO FEEL PART OF A COMMUNITY

PURPOSE

- OFFER A LIVE, INTERACTIVE EXPERIENCE THAT ENCOURAGES SOCIAL INTERACTION
- MONETIZE ON AUDIENCE'S DESIRE FOR FACILITATION AND INTERACTIVITY

CREATE A SOCIAL MEDIA THAT IMPROVES CONTENT AND COMMUNITY

- MODERATORS IN CHAT ROOM
- OPTIONS TO ADJUST CHAT ACCORDING TO MIBOS (HIDE COMMENTS OF A PARTICULAR USER)
- AUTOMATIC DETECTOR OF POSSIBLE INFO OVERLOAD BASED ON DENS OF MESSAGES

GAINS

- HAPPINESS IS CREATED BY OFFERING A MEET UP SPACE FOR PEOPLE WHO SHARE SIMILAR INTERESTS
- MAKE AUDIENCE AS CO-PRODUCERS OF THE SHOW
- INTERACTIVITY IS OPTIONAL (CUSTOMIZABLE EXPERIENCE)

PRODUCTS & SERVICES

- LIVE STREAMS AND ARCHIVED VIDEOS OF VARIOUS TOPICS (e.g. VIDEO GAMES, COOKING, TRAVELING)

- DIFFERENT MEMBERSHIP OPTIONS TO CATER DIFFERENT USERS

- MULTIPLE PLATFORMS TO ACCESS CONTENT

- INTERACTIVE AND REAL-TIME CHAT ROOM AS

- PLEASANT COMMUNITY BUILDING TOOL

- TWITCH BITS TO AMPLIFY USER'S VOICE AND SUPPORT STREAMERS

- BROADCASTERS AND AUDIENCE ARE CO-CREATOR OF THE STREAMING EXPERIENCE

VALUE CREATION PROFILE

VALUE OFFERING MAP

DIGITAL MEDIA OFFERING MODEL
for TWITCH'S STREAMER

FUNCTIONAL
WANTS &
NEEDS

- WANT TO SHOW OFF THEIR SKILLS
- WANT TO ENTERTAIN PEOPLE + WATCH OTHERS
- WANT TO CONNECT WITH LIKE-MINDED INDIVIDUALS
- WANT TO MAKE MONEY
- WANT TO INCREASE THEIR SELF-ESTEEM BY ESTABLISHING REPUTATION AND STATUS IN ONLINE COMMUNITY (DESIRE FOR SELF-REPRESENTATION)
- TO CREATE CONTENT AND TO OFFER AN ENGAGING BROADCASTING EXPERIENCE

PAINS

- ANNOYED WHEN VIEWERS ASK INAPPROPRIATE QUESTIONS
- FRUSTRATED WHEN THE SYSTEM HAS GLITCHES
- STRESSED BY SUBSCRIPTIONS

GAINS

- SOCIAL CONNECTIONS AND STATUS
- MONETARY COMPENSATION
- FUN AND SOCIAL GAMING EXPERIENCE

MOTIVATIONS

- TO CONNECT WITH PEOPLE WITH SHARED INTERESTS
- TO BELONG TO AND BE RECOGNIZED IN THE TWITCH COMMUNITY
- TO INFLUENCE AND INSPIRE OTHERS
- TO OBTAIN FINANCIAL POWER

VALUE CREATION PROFILE

PRODUCTS & SERVICES

- COLLECTIVE AND INTERACTIVE BROADCASTING EXPERIENCE
- CHAT ROOMS TO BUILD CONNECTIONS WITH THE AUDIENCE IN REAL-TIME
- SOCIAL PLATFORM WHERE GAMERS WHO CAN ACHIEVE INTER-OPERATION
- OPPORTUNITY FOR STRATEGIES TO MONETIZE CONTENT THROUGH ADS, SUBSCRIPTIONS, SPONSORSHIPS
- DONATION MANAGEMENT SYSTEM -> TWITCH BITS SUPPORT STREAMERS
- THE STREAMING SHOW IS CO-CREATED BY STREAMER AND AUDIENCE

PAIN RELIEF

- REGULATE THE CONTENT OF CHAT AND BLOCK TROLLS
- IMPROVE SYSTEM'S BUGS
- REDUX SUBSCRIPTIONS THRESHOLDS

GAINS

- HAPPINESS IS CREATED BY ALLOWING STREAMERS TO CREATE CONTENT MORE FREELY AND BY GIVING THEM OPPORTUNITIES TO MEET UP WITH OTHER GAMERS

PURPOSE

- TO OFFER A NATURAL WAY FOR PEOPLE CAN CREATE FORTUNE AND CONNECT WITH OTHERS
- TO MONETIZE ON PEOPLE'S DESIRE FOR SELF-EXPRESSION, MANIPULATION AND INTEREST

VALUE OFFERING MAP

-D-

Appendix

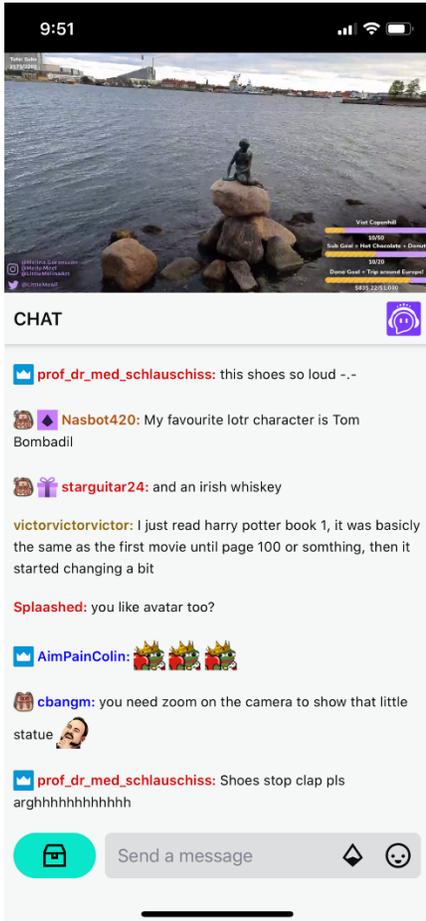


Image 1

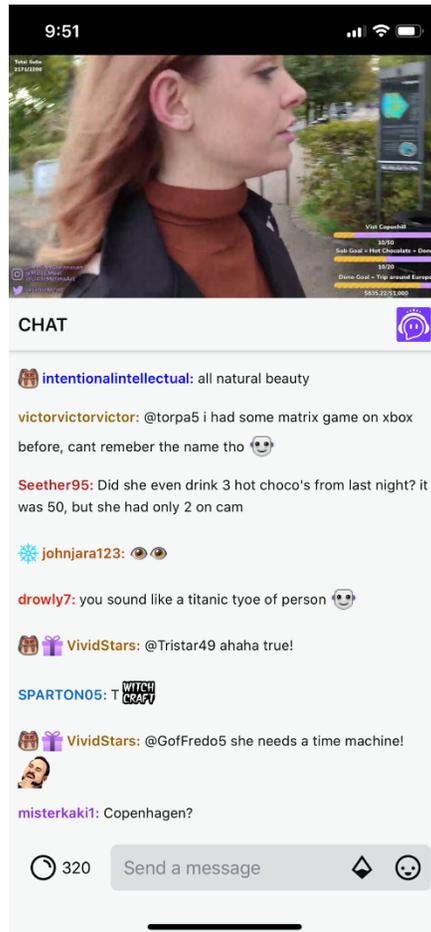


Image 2

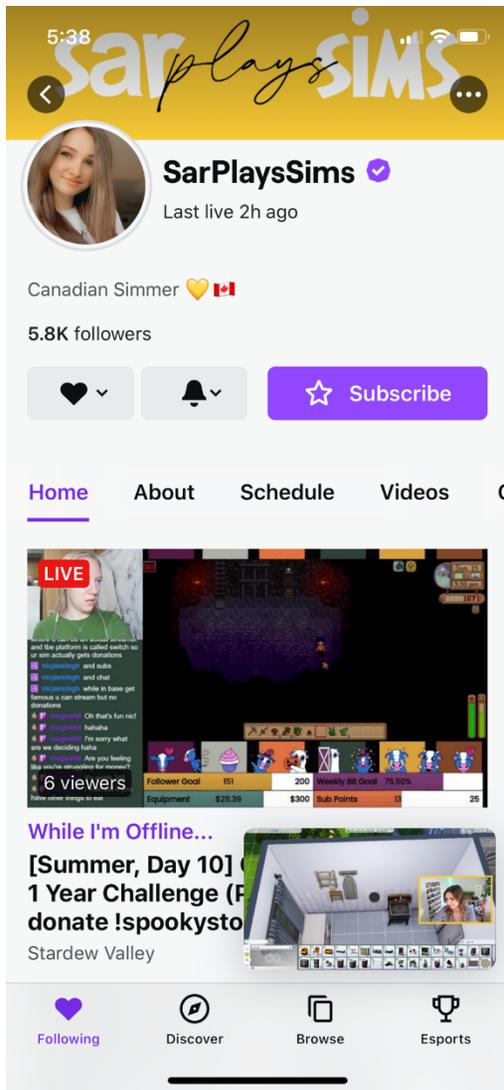


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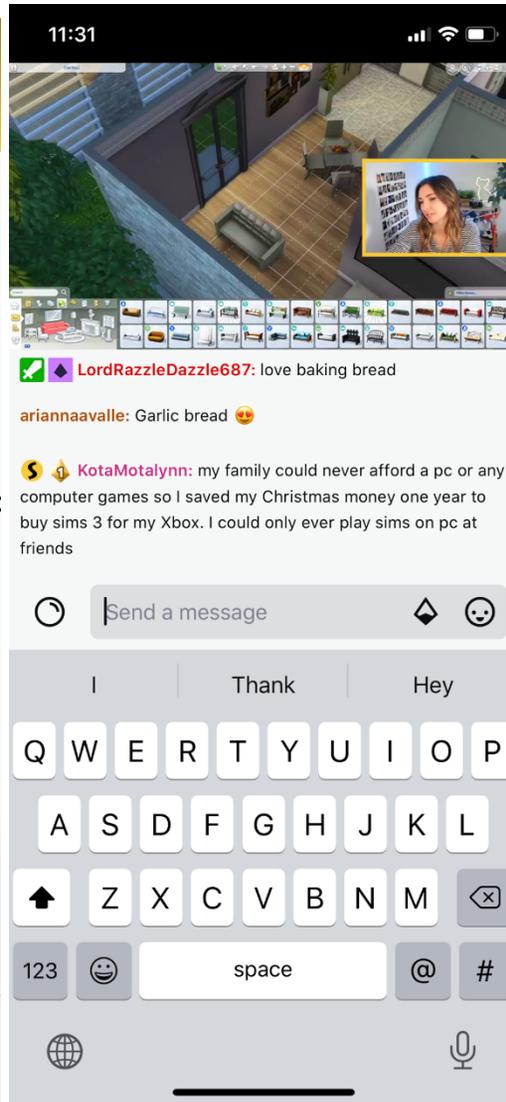


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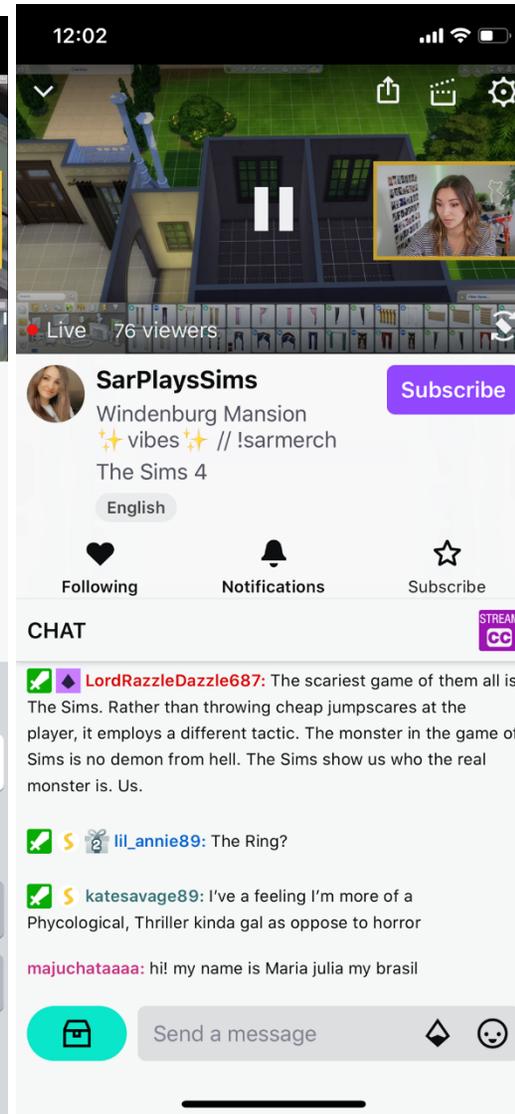


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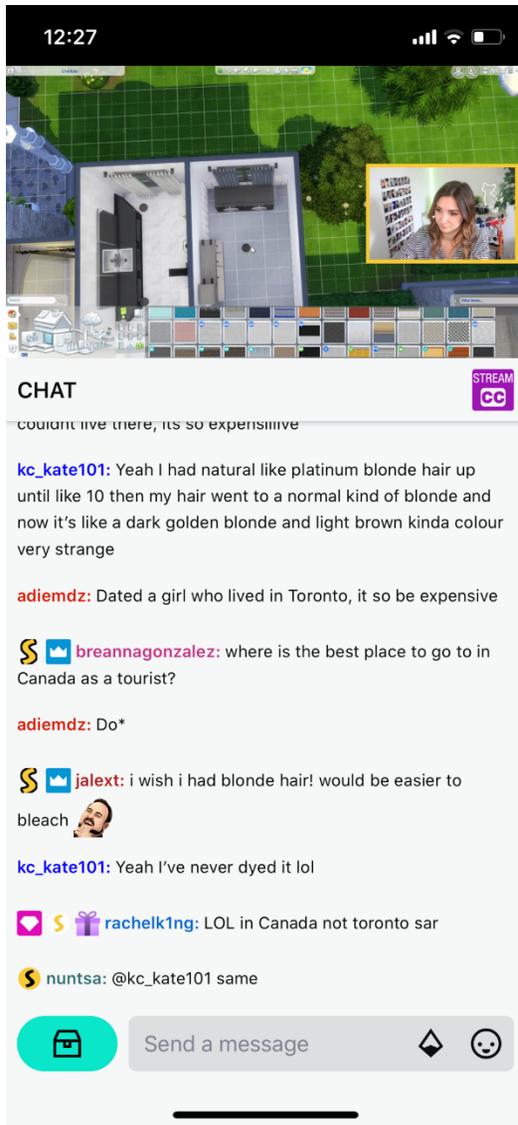


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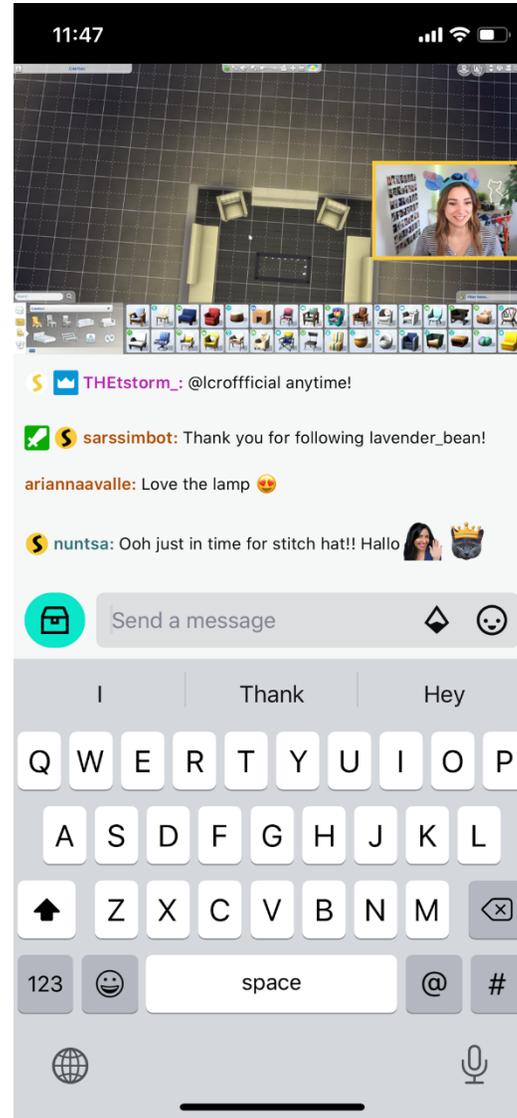


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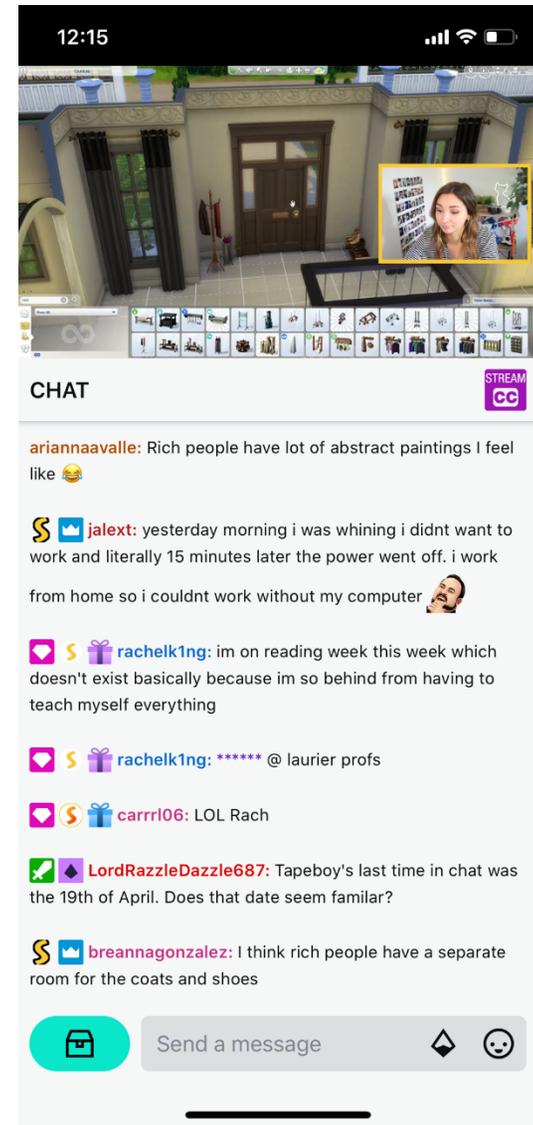


Image 8