

Converging Experiences, Converging Audiences. An Analysis of Doctor Who on Twitch

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Abstract

While primarily considered to be a platform for livestreaming of video games, Twitch has recently diversified into streaming archival television content. In 2018 and 2019, episodes of the television show *Doctor Who*, originally aired between 1963 and 1989, were shown on the service, which also provides a synchronous chat function for viewers to communicate with each other as they watch.

This article examines this phenomenon through conducting qualitative and quantitative surveys with a segment of the viewership of these streams in order to uncover a diversity of age and experience with the content that exposes a convergence of viewership. Results indicate that the convergence of audiences and novel affordances of the service provide opportunities for new experiences and forms of interaction, both with the media content and with other viewers. The live, synchronous nature of the broadcast is a key feature, and while some viewers found having less control over their viewing experience disconcerting, it resulted in different watching and production practices. This included the creation of memetic content which was shared with the wider community of fans beyond those watching the stream. We argue that new forms of communal watching are enabled by digital convergence and emerging technology platforms and services. These lead to new shared media experiences and outcomes.

Keywords

Television, streaming, Doctor Who, Twitch, participation, social media

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Introduction

The modern television landscape is increasingly populated by streaming and on-demand services, serving up content at a time convenient to the viewer (C. Johnson, 2019). It has been suggested that this is causing disruption in the nature of television viewing (Horvath et al., 2017). While such services facilitate a greater variety of content and scheduling options, they also have features with the potential to fundamentally change the nature of the viewer and community's experience with the media (Morris, 2019): for example, binging content by oneself can reduce opportunities for discursive interaction between or during installments, altering the process of interacting with other fans (Seitz, 2019).

In summer 2018, fans of the television series *Doctor Who* had an opportunity to watch the series in a manner with which many younger viewers may not have been accustomed: presented as live, with no chance to rewind to catch dialogue, pause to grab another snack, or jump to a favorite scene. Harkening back to the early days of *Doctor Who*, when episodes were largely shown on television once with nary even a repeat, this programme was not some deliberate throwback to older technology, but rather the appearance of a relatively new one. 'Doctor Who on Twitch', a streaming experience wherein classic *Doctor Who* episodes from 1963–1989 were broadcast on the online video platform Twitch, saw a coming-together of different fan groups, different types of viewers, and different levels of technical skill and knowledge. With *Doctor Who*'s 55-year history, many newer fans may never have seen early seasons prior to this opportunity to view them in the online company of more experienced fans, some of whom might have seen the episodes many times before.

'Doctor Who on Twitch' offered a novel opportunity for shared viewing in the age of on-demand content. While liveness of content has not gone away entirely (see Reason and Lindeloff, 2016), it is becoming less common to watch scripted television live as more and more viewers have shifted to personalised streaming services like Netflix and Hulu. And yet, as our research demonstrates, a great

many people not only found value in the ‘*Doctor Who* on Twitch’ service, but also found new ways of interacting with the program.

This paper reports results of a study examining these *Doctor Who* marathons hosted on Twitch, wherein large portions of the 20th century back catalogue of episodes were streamed as-live over relatively short periods of time. We discuss the generational sharing of fan experience enabled by this new platform, the unique affordances of an online platform delivering content that must be watched at a specific point in time, and similarities and differences to the traditional linear viewing experience. Ultimately, we argue that the type of *technological* convergence that ‘*Doctor Who* on Twitch’ represents – where traditional viewing practices meet contemporary participatory practices – demonstrates a meaningful *intergenerational* convergence as well, where old and new fans’ *engagement* converges, reinforcing traditional sociality. As we will show, the *Doctor Who* on Twitch livestreams functioned to cohere a disparate group of people through the convergence of technology, the liveness of the event, and the creation of memetic content as emblematic of this.

Background: Models of Streaming Television

Until recently, a television viewer required a set and a receiver in order to pick up broadcast content. Before the widespread adoption of home recording technologies such as the VCR, they also needed to be present at the correct time. If a viewer in the 1960s wished to watch an episode of the BBC television programme *Doctor Who*, they had only one opportunity. While some episodes might have repeat showings at a future date, this was not guaranteed (particularly given that the original masters of some episodes were not retained by the BBC, having no perceived future use) and also required the viewer to be available for said repeat where they were not for the original viewing. There was no ability for the home viewer to time-shift the viewing to a more convenient time.¹

¹ Some fans did audio record episodes as they aired for later playback.

The modern television landscape looks very different. Not only did VHS recorders and DVRs introduce the ability to retain programmes for timeshifting and repeat viewing, digital broadcasting and on-demand streaming services such as Netflix and BritBox are becoming a major component of the television landscape (Herbert et al., 2019) and mean that there is now, for some programmes, no ‘initial showing’ at a particular time and date. In 2017, a Pew Research Centre study found that streaming services were the primary means of television watching for 61% of 18–29 year olds in the USA (Pew, 2017). On these services, episodes are often released in batches and immediately made available to be watched at the viewer’s leisure, whether that be in a ‘binge’ all at once, or on a more spread out schedule of availability. Many traditional broadcasters like the BBC also provide so-called catch-up services, such as iPlayer, which make episodes that were traditionally broadcast at a specific time and date available afterwards for viewers who missed or wish to rewatch them. Indeed, as Sørensen (2016: 382) has demonstrated, the BBC has used these catch-up services to harness elements of live TV as a core aspect of its multiplatform marketing strategy to combat the rise of streaming services. The prevalence of such services has normalised bingeing behaviour and introduced fundamental changes to the nature of the television landscape and viewing experience (Herbert et al., 2019).

There is also an increased democratisation of streamed multimedia content with the advent of new technologies associated with ‘Web 2.0’ allowing individuals to create and upload their own content. Live streaming is an increasingly common aspect of online platforms, popularised by services such as Periscope (launched in 2015) which upon its acquisition by Twitter was integrated directly with the platform and grew rapidly due to its ability to leverage existing social networking (Tang et al., 2016). Facebook Live had an initial launch in 2015 for use by celebrities, before being made available to all US users in 2016 (Haimson and Tang, 2017). In August 2019, Reddit launched a trial of its own livestreaming service, the Reddit Public Access Network (PAN) (Pardes, 2019). Platforms scatter and commoditize viewership (see van Dijck, Poell, and de Waal: 2018), Such services provide immediacy and immersion (Haimson and Tang, 2017) and often incorporate interaction as a key feature, allowing commentary to be passed back to the streamer constituting communal discussion by viewers.

Despite this, there is still a significant amount of television for which the temporal nature of the viewing experience is important. This is certainly the case for live coverage of events such as sporting activities or music events, in which the viewer feels a part of the live experience and audience even though they are viewing remotely (White, 2004). Equally, there can be important liveness attributes given to scripted dramas because of attitudes towards spoilers – a trend towards watching new content as quickly as possible, or specifically on initial broadcast, in order to be able to take part in discussions without coming across key plot details that might impact the naive viewing experience (see Levine, 2008). This urge towards a shared temporal space in which to discuss particular ‘event TV’, the ‘watercooler effect’, may be a factor in recent tentative moves back towards a weekly broadcast schedule rather than the release of series all in one block, which encourages ‘binge-watching’, as popularised by Netflix. For example, Disney announced in August 2019 that their streaming service Disney+ would include a weekly schedule for its releases rather than whole series blocks (Alexander, 2019). Shared viewing experiences and associated discussion are heightened when the majority of viewers are watching a simultaneous broadcast, not least because of real-time commentary on social media. This means that even repeat showings of archive television can have a feeling of liveness if they are broadcast to a shared viewing audience.

Twitch and Streaming *Doctor Who*

Predating the rise in mainstream popularity of the social media streaming services mentioned above, Twitch launched in 2011 on the back of an earlier service called Justin.tv which was originally presented as a means of streaming everyday activities (Burroughs, 2019). However, Twitch specialised in streaming video games (Cook, 2014). In 2014, the service was one of the largest live streaming platforms (Gros et al., 2018), was around the 100th most viewed website, and was bought by Amazon for almost a billion dollars (Johnson and Woodcock, 2019). Pires and Simon (2015: 255) described its emergence as representing a media phenomenon through which ‘anyone can become a TV provider’. To stream on Twitch, one need only have a webcam and an account (Taylor, 2018: 6).

Twitch is known primarily for its use in esports and gaming to provide live streaming coverage of game play combined with linked group chat space: that is, while one is watching whatever is being streamed, the simultaneous live text chat on the same screen allows group interaction, and sometimes live feedback to the streamer. This ‘private play turned into public entertainment’ (Taylor, 2018: 6) provides a space for viewers to log on and follow a stream of a video game player, all while chatting with other people watching the same stream. Turning their hobby into their labor (see Chia, 2020), some Twitch streamers have become celebrities in their own right, and have garnered a strong following on the site; they can make money as ‘influencers’ on the site through paid subscriptions, donations, and influencer marketing. According to ‘Twitch Tracker’, Twitch as per 2019 routinely has 4.4 million monthly streamers, 53,000 concurrent channels, and over 260 billion minutes of content watched annually.² Simultaneously, the chat stream becomes a way of harnessing and broadcasting fan activity, a type of ‘platform fandom’ wherein fan work is redirected ‘into the workings of the platform’ (Morris, 2019: 358). The chat, thus, is both incentive for viewing and an incentivized commodification of viewer activity.

In order to combat the perception that Twitch was only about video gaming, in 2015 Twitch launched a new non-gaming category, Creative, intended to showcase a wider variety of creative works. This diversification includes ‘marathon’ events showing television archive content, including *The Joy of Painting with Bob Ross*, *Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood* and *Pokémon*. During a stream, content cannot be paused, rewound, or started over; it is for all intents and purposes, broadcast as live and turned into an event. Because these broadcasts cannot be paused and are scheduled à la traditional models, they recreate the linear broadcast model. Alongside this, the simultaneous chat space enables a shared experience space for discussion between viewers, thus harnessing contemporary interactive technologies as well. There are often so many people interacting on a chat that the conversation can flow by at incredible, almost unreadable speeds.

² <https://twitchtracker.com/statistics>

In her book *Watch Me Play*, TL Taylor (2018: 2) describes watching content on Twitch as a ‘media event’, an experience that cannot be replicated because of its inherent sense of liveness. Media events are an increasingly common type of content in today’s ‘experience economy’ (Pine III and Gilmore, 2019) as consumers pay for unique experiences rather than any individual good. Traditionally, the experience economy has been used to discuss in-person events like tourist attractions (Oh, Fiore, and Jeoung, 2007) or escape rooms (see Booth, 2020). But in today’s increasingly converged media environment, media texts take on experiential qualities. For example, Matt Hills (2015) has shown that anniversaries of media texts often take on event-like status: he discusses the 50th anniversary of *Doctor Who* as a multi-modal media ‘event’, taking place on television, in cinemas, and at convention centres, rather than merely as a text. Continuing this trend of turning livestreaming into an event, Twitch collaborated with the BBC in 2018 and 2019 to include so-called classic *Doctor Who* the original run of *Doctor Who* in their television marathons.

Doctor Who can be separated into two eras, generally classified as classic and new. The former was televised serially between 1963 and 1989, consisting of 25-minute episodes grouped in varying numbers to create linked episode sets or ‘stories’³. The 21st century revival of the series sometimes known as new *Doctor Who* began in 2005, and has 45 minute episodes. Twitch ran three different streams of ‘*Doctor Who* on Twitch’. The first started on 29 May 2018 and ran for seven weeks. The marathon event on Twitch included almost the entire extant run of classic *Doctor Who*, in original broadcast order. The exception was that due to licensing issues, five of the stories (featuring the Daleks) were excluded. A second stream, for the most part a repetition of the content in the first, started on 05 Jan 2019. A third stream, from 17 February 2019, showed the small selection of Dalek stories not included in the original streams. While the first two streams had similar content in terms of the content being shown, there were format differences; for instance, the first stream repeated episodes three times while the second showed each episode only twice, on a duplicating twelve-hour cycle. The first stream included newly produced

³ Equivalent to, for example, the way a modern show may have a two-part episode which states ‘to be continued’ at the end of the first part. These stories ranged from 2 to 12 episodes each.

trailers (for each section of the show, defined by the seven actors who in turn played the title role) which were shown in between every episode, while the second included the trailers only between each ‘story’ (group of linked episodes). From these trailers, especially those from the first stream, fans on Twitch grabbed catchphrases to turn into memes. *Doctor Who* on Twitch replicated a sense of liveness as it urged its viewers to tune in to watch the episodes at particular times; once they were shown, they did not come back on the service.

Research Methodology

In undertaking this research, our aim was to interrogate the phenomenon and investigate the community and practice surrounding viewers who watched ‘*Doctor Who* on Twitch’. In particular, we were interested in ways in which the format, situation, and nature of the technology platform contributed to this being an event different to that which might occur in other contexts. To conduct our analysis, we used a variety of methods to collect data. First, in order to understand the context, we observed and collected the text chat during the second stream of the episodes in January/February 2019.⁴ Based on these observations we then used a survey designed in qualtrics to collect both quantitative and qualitative data about fan viewers of the streams and their responses to it. When reporting the numbers and percentages of responses below, it is important to note that not all questions were mandatory, and some were dependent on branched selections, therefore we have included the number of respondents completing each individual question. We targeted our questionnaire to self-proclaimed *Doctor Who* fans using a variety of social media networks and by sharing it on Twitter with the ‘*Doctor Who* on Twitch’ hashtag used by fans to discuss the event.

All work reported in this paper went through a formal ethical review process, which examined both the questions and the method of participant selection. The surveys were conducted anonymously and

⁴ The Twitch chat client Chatty (<https://chatty.github.io/>) was used to create logs of conversation during the stream.

obtained informed consent from participants. While we have also used observations from the public live text chat and from Twitter discussion accompanying the episodes to direct our research and inform our findings, no direct quotes gathered through this observation are included in this paper, in order to respect privacy.

Who Watched *Who* on Twitch

Media coverage of the *Doctor Who* on Twitch events reported viewing numbers in the millions (Moore, 2019). These figures appear to originate from those indicated within the Twitch channel itself. However, this number is cumulative (thus including all viewers who ever watched the channel), and it is important to note that this channel not only screened the *Doctor Who* marathons, but previously also showed other programmes such as *Pokémon*. Despite this, it is true that viewing figures during the stream were considerable. During the *Doctor Who* streams, viewer figures fluctuated depending on the time of day and particular episode being shown. However, there were routinely 5000 people watching at the same time, and viewing figures for the first stream at the start of the popular 'Fourth Doctor' era exceeded 20,000 (Kendrick, 2019).

Our survey asked 34 questions, although many of these were branching questions and so different questions had unequal answer rates. In total, we had 188 responses to the survey. 30 of these did not progress beyond the initial page of questions and were thus excluded from the analysis, leaving 158 respondents. Although the survey respondents were, in the majority, those who had watched one of the two Twitch streams of *Doctor Who*, a proportion of those who completed the survey (around 20%) had not watched either stream. In order to understand the population of those who responded -- while not necessarily taking it to be representative of the total fan or viewer population due to the recruitment methods -- we asked a number of questions relating both to demographics, and the relationship the respondents had with *Doctor Who*. With the exception of one individual, who did not answer any of the free entry text questions, all respondents self-identified as considering themselves a fan of *Doctor Who*. Although not all of the respondents chose to indicate their country of residence, those who did indicated a

wide range of geographic locations including Australia, Hungary, New Zealand and the Czech Republic. The largest cohorts were from the UK and USA. Just over half the respondents were male (56.3%) with a third (32.3%) female respondents and a smaller proportion who identified as non-binary/third gender (1.9%), entered an alternative description (2.5%) or chose not to respond to the question (7%).

Historically, there has been a perception within the fandom that prior to the 2005 series, the stereotypical *Doctor Who* fan was male. Post 2005, this has shifted and fans of the new series are often considered in terms of transformative fandom, which tends to be skewed towards female fans. We have not found clear evidence for or against this division, therefore gender is not discussed in detail in the analysis presented below. However, future work could look more closely into generational gender split in Doctor Who fans.

[Figure 1]

Figure 1. Gender of Respondents

With regards ethnicity, of the 129 who gave a response to this question, the overwhelming majority (94.5%) identified themselves as white. Several authors have explored the complex relationship *Doctor Who* has with race both in terms of the series itself (e.g. Gupta, 2013, Orthia, 2010) and fan responses (Charles, 2020). Despite often nominally exploring themes such as colonialism or social justice, and an increased diversity of casting and foregrounding of anti-racism in the recent seasons of the show,⁵ there remain issues in both the show and fandom, and these demographics are not thus particularly surprising for this structurally white, western-centric fandom that as with others has historically excluded or erased POC contributions (see Pande, 2018), particularly given the context of the Twitch stream focussing on classic episodes.

The respondents varied in age, showing a distribution among those who responded to this question which included respondents in each of the available age categories. The largest group were those

⁵ For example the episode ‘Rosa’ which centres Rosa Parks

in the 35–44 age category, with a drop off in the older age categories. We also asked the age at which respondents first watched *Doctor Who*, giving an indication of their childhood familiarity with watching the programme.

[Figure 2]

Figure 2. Age vs. Age First Viewed

Several questions were intended to obtain more information about respondents' experiences with *Doctor Who*. These included their favourite Doctor,⁶ and the first episode that they remembered watching. As might be anticipated given the broadcast dates (*Doctor Who* was not on air between 1989 and 2005), there are differences between the age groups and their experiences with the programme; for example, the most common age at which 25–34 year olds began watching the programme is 15–20, while for the 35–44 category it was most common to start watching at age 5–10, and a larger proportion of those in the 45–54 category began watching under the age of 5. From the responses regarding the first episode watched we were able to segment between those who first watched the 'classic' (20th Century) series, and those who watched the 'new' (21st Century) revival from 2005 onwards. Of the 158 respondents to this question, 100 out of 155 (64.5%) indicated their first experience was with the classic series.

Again, as might be anticipated, there appears to be a relationship between the age of respondents and the nature of their first experience with the show (see Hills, 2019a). Younger participants were more likely to have first watched the new series, and of those in the older age groups, those who started watching at younger ages were more likely to have initially seen the classic series. Almost no respondents over 45 years indicated the new series as their first introduction. It seems plausible that many of the older fans viewing the stream would have had a longer experience with the episodes being shown.

⁶ These results did not show any obvious trends but all the Doctors were represented with the exception of the third Doctor, Jon Pertwee.

[Figure 3]

Figure 3 Age and First Episode

Despite this, of those 106 who gave an answer to the question ‘Were there episodes you watched on Twitch which you had not seen before?’ almost half of respondents (48%) indicated that this was the case, and that there were some episodes that they viewed for the first time on the stream. This is possible because of the large number of extant episodes, the difficulty in obtaining some sections of the show to watch and the fact that a small number of the episodes shown have only recently been recovered and could not be viewed for a long period of the show’s history.

Convergence of Technology; Convergence of Audience

The Twitch stream of *Doctor Who* manifests a number of characteristics that illustrate a shift in the modality of viewership. Our survey data illustrated how the fans made sense of these shifts. Most significantly, we found that generationally distinct categories of *Doctor Who* Twitch viewers were each experiencing the text in a new way. For fans that grew up watching the classic series of *Doctor Who* on television, Twitch’s broadcast format emulated a style they were used to, but the binge-like marathon and opportunities for simultaneous chat were new components. For younger viewers who have grown up with new *Doctor Who*, seeing the classic episodes while chatting with older fans made the experience more meaningful.

Doctor Who on Twitch demonstrated a convergence of classic modalities of viewership and newer modalities of participation. When we asked viewers how watching the stream differed from how they’d usually watch *Doctor Who*, the most common response overall was that respondents traditionally watched *Doctor Who* on their own or with one or two others. The stream itself – simply knowing that one was watching with thousands of others – allowed a ‘sense of community’ or ‘communal feeling’ which also allowed interaction with other viewers in real-time. This fact connects with previous research on the

sense of community that emerges through live television (see White, 2004; White, 2006). That the interface of Twitch even displays how many viewers are currently logged on emphasizes this feeling of community, as Stewart (2020) notes of second screen viewing generally. Several referred to this as a shared experience, or like watching with friends. One respondent noted ‘The collective banter way to share the experience was not that different from watching a marathon in person with friends’. Some specifically referred to the fact that the chat allowed them to know how others responded to episodes they had previously only watched alone, and the mass viewership could change their opinion of the quality of some episodes.

Many respondents noted that Twitch highlighted generational differences in the audience(s) that were watching. One quote from a respondent highlights this:

The chosen platform was so unconventional from the traditional ways of watching classic *Doctor Who*, which primarily is on DVD. Choosing Twitch was inviting a specific audience and generation who may only have seen the most recent series or never even have heard of '*Doctor Who*'. It was an event that was inclusive and free to access providing you had an internet connection and a lot of time on your hands. Put bluntly it said to a demographic, 'Here is your Dad's '*Doctor Who*' if you want to give it a go. You don't have to pay for it and nobody is going to judge you'. It was inclusive and an open forum.

The majority of respondents commented on this intergenerational aspect; that watching a television show from the mid-20th century on a new 21st century platform both brought the show to new audiences and also gave both newer and older audiences dramatically different ways of watching than they were used to. One respondent noted: ‘I thought it was very successful in getting a whole new generation of Doctor Who fans who have never seen classic Who to watch classic Who on a medium that was familiar to them already’ while another directly commented on their interaction with younger fans, noting ‘It was great to see younger fans who'd never seen the show or the classic series become so

engaged with it'. It's important to recognize how difficult it can be in the United States in particular to watch classic *Doctor Who*. There are only two (legal) ways to watch classic *Doctor Who*: on DVD or through a subscription to the online streaming service BritBox. However, neither of these methods are particularly straightforward. Many of the DVDs are hard to find or out of print, and some can be quite expensive to buy. BritBox is easier to access but it has yet to fully penetrate the market – according to Mitchell, the service only recently hit 500,000 subscribers.⁷ It is unlikely that younger viewers, more used to services like Netflix or Hulu, would be purchasing DVDs or subscribing to obscure sites. In short, *Doctor Who* on Twitch may have been one of the first places many new fans of *Doctor Who* encountered the series, as one parent noted: 'My son went nuts for the [First Doctor] Hartnell one in particular. Packaging up television from forty odd years before he was born like that helps engage him in something he might not otherwise watch'.

Thus, the convergence of technologies on Twitch also heralded a convergence of audiences. Watching digitally in a social space enabled new forms of interactions that spanned fan generations. This disrupts some traditional thinking, especially regarding *Doctor Who* fandom, which has tended to organize generationally. For example, Matt Hills (2019a: 105) has shown that *Doctor Who* fans will form emotional attachments to the era of *Doctor Who* they watched when they were growing up, leading to 'affective tensions between different generations of fans coming to *Doctor Who* at different times.' Of course, *Doctor Who* has always been a show shared by generations – parents introducing their children to it, or families watching together – so it's no surprise that different generations generally like to watch it together (much media is shared generationally; see D. Johnson, 2019). What is new here is the way that different generations of fans are sharing their own generationally-specific viewership with each other; the Twitch stream explicitly targeted different generations of fans, instigating generationality to intersect with fandom. As Booth and Kelly (2013) have described of *Doctor Who* fans at conventions, each generation has something new to teach the others.

⁷ <https://variety.com/2019/tv/news/britbox-hits-half-million-subscribers-1203110468/>

Another common response was that watching *Doctor Who* in this way enabled new perspectives on the episodes, either via observing the reactions of new viewers or simply as a product of the medium they were shown in. The chat often enabled older and newer fans to share information. Older fans could appreciate and re-evaluate the episodes they may have not seen in a while, and offer contextual information to the younger fans via the chat. For example, one survey respondent described the way classic fans could help new fans understand how classic *Doctor Who* viewership occurred: ‘it wasn’t repeated, so you had to “be there” (a bit like television in the 1970s!)’. Newer fans shared their participatory habits (e.g., making memes) with older fans who may not have been familiar with such practices.

The chat opened up new opportunities for viewers of the series that no fan had particularly had before. The use of a backchannel for communication led to new types of information sharing; as one fan noted, ‘With the text based chat on twitch there is a much more social aspect, even people who are really into the episodes can participate and not feel like they are “upstaging” the content’. Despite this, when asked to note particularly successful aspects of the stream, very few specifically mentioned the text chat; it seems to have been an incidental pleasure rather than a focus. Certainly not all of those watching the stream interacted with the chat; even during the busiest discussion times the number of people typing comments into the chat stream was a tiny fraction of the numbers viewing. How many viewers were reading the chat but not contributing is unclear, but several of our survey respondents said that they did not read the chat at all.⁸

⁸ As we discuss in the conclusion, the absence of responses here may have stemmed from our targeting *Doctor Who* fans for our research, rather than specifically Twitch viewers who watched *Doctor Who*.

Convergence of Time and Space: Liveness and Participation

The convergence of technologies also led to a convergence of a sense of ‘liveness’ within the audience of the streams. The sense of televisual ‘liveness’ (the inability to control the schedule of television content) meshed with social media ‘liveness’, or a ‘compulsory continuous connectedness’ that defines ‘the possibilities of interacting immediately with those who matter most’ (Lupinacci, 2020: 3). Karin Van Es (2016, 2017: 1249) argues that there are ‘constellations of liveness’ surrounding the discourse of ‘being live’, meaning that the sense of ‘liveness’ on social media is constructed and articulated differently than that of, say, live television. Mark Stewart (2020: 354) found in terms of Twitter use that ‘the “liveness” of broadcast television complements the live affect presented by many social media platforms’. The concept of ‘liveness’, as van Es (2016) shows, is a construction, made by the media and by the participants, that makes any particular event meaningful: just as liveness helped structure the discursive qualities of television itself (see Levine, 2008), so too does liveness help cohere the audience of Twitch. The concept of ‘liveness’ vis-à-vis *Doctor Who* on Twitch emphasised the audience’s role in co-constructing the feeling of ‘being-there’ as it happened (see van Es: 2017: 1253). What *Doctor Who* on Twitch demonstrated, through the convergence of technologies mentioned earlier, is a simultaneous convergence of space and time, as the *feeling* of ‘liveness’ by viewers of Classic *Doctor Who* when it was aired was harnessed by Twitch as an *experience* of ‘liveness’ by participants of the live stream. The liveness of *Doctor Who* on Twitch connected how viewers were *seeing* the episode to how they were *experiencing* it with others.

Twitch’s attempts to echo that sense of television’s liveness can be seen as a throwback to an earlier era. Live television has, from the earliest days of the medium, been seen ‘as a source of distinction’, both between types of television programmes and also between television and other media (Levine, 2008: 395). Liveness is considered one of the defining qualities of the medium. Levine (2008) offers examples where television content has been broadcast as live as a way of cementing that connection to more ‘authentic’ experiences: live productions of docudramas or sitcoms become like

theatrical productions writ large. Here, liveness is not inherent to television, but rather *channelled through* television via its connection to theatre.

Liveness also bonds the television audience: as White (2004) considers, watching catastrophes unfold live on television creates an audience as much as it showcases a moment in time. In some ways, Twitch streaming appears to replicate this appeal to the in-the-moment nature of live broadcasts: if you weren't watching the stream at the particular time an episode was on, you missed that moment (and its requisite chat), and thus missed becoming that audience. Missing the episode wasn't really the issue: in reality, if one missed the episode of *Doctor Who* on Twitch, they could easily download it and pull it up on screen in a matter of seconds. What was at stake was missing *the moment that creates an audience*, which occurred during these live streams through the 'thrill' of connectedness generated by the chat (see Lupinacci, 2020: 12).

Relinquishing Control

Twitch presented *access* to episodes that many fans (especially those from the United States) may not have seen before; but it also demonstrated a *loss of control* over the broadcast of those episodes. When asked how watching the Twitch stream differed from their traditional experiences of watching the show, respondents specifically referred to changes in viewing habits or practices, and many of these were linked to the proscribed nature of the way the episodes were delivered. For example, one noted: 'I don't usually watch Doctor Who in order, rather I pick an episode randomly, also I don't usually watch that many episodes in such a short period of time'. Several respondents similarly noted that they would normally pick a small number of individual episodes to watch rather than watching a larger number all at once, though others also suggested that they watched the stream more opportunistically and did not necessarily stay for complete stories. Several respondents directly mentioned lack of control, often framed as unwelcome negative impact. 'Usually watch whenever I like, but with Twitch was like appointment TV, couldn't catch every episode, made it stressful sometimes'; 'It was tough because I couldn't watch episodes on my own time or pause them for later'. However, other responses suggested loss of control

had potential positive outcomes; 'Twitch reminded me of the days of watching it on PBS – no control over schedule, often up very late to watch. These days I usually stream on demand or watch DVDs so I have nearly complete control over what I watch and when. Until Twitch, I hadn't watched much classic who since the 80s'. That some viewers felt compelled to watch multiple episodes in a manner which they would not normally, despite having access to them in other formats such as on DVD, suggests they saw value in the live nature of the broadcast. A number of respondents similarly indicated that, since they would have been unlikely to watch certain episodes without the prompting of the stream, there was value in revisiting what might have otherwise been neglected content or experiencing it in a different form. This point was made in some of the responses to the question asking whether there were respondents had watched episodes new to them via Twitch, as seen in this longer response:

I have all the existing stories on DVD anyway, but it was good to see stories I haven't watched that many times or wouldn't instinctively choose to watch as all were treated equally. It gave me a chance to reappraise them just because they happened to be on. Mainly the Hartnell stories and the Davison era. 'Arc of Infinity' for example I wouldn't necessarily choose to watch but it being on was actually pretty fun.

This loss of control is in opposition to the increased accessibility inherent in streaming episodes which would not necessarily be otherwise available at all, and the positive impact of the shared nature of the experience enforced by the liveness of the stream. However, we also have some evidence that the balance between these must be carefully managed, which comes from responses regarding the differences between the two streams from those who had experience of both. The most common type of response to this question was in reference to the negative impact caused by changes to the scheduling. Respondents commented on, and did not like, the fact that the episodes were shown across a shorter timescale with no breaks at the weekends and fewer repeats of episodes. Several commented that there was therefore less opportunity to 'catch up' if the timing was not suitable, giving a lower level of control and access.

Additionally, more time had to be invested in order to stay ‘up to date’ because of the continuous format. ‘I watched much less of the second stream because my schedule was different, I also missed most of Troughton because he played for even less time’.

It appears that the more compressed nature of the broadcast during the second run was less conducive to continued engagement. The restriction to two 12 hour blocks meant that it was potentially less available to those in a range of timezones, and several respondents highlighted that they thought the scheduling was inconvenient: ‘It was perhaps unsuccessful in the way the scheduling prevent[ed] people from watching all stories in a single day (due to sleep and work commitments), depending on their time zone, even factoring in the double repeats’. These factors, combined with less promotion of the event, and the reduction in ‘novelty value’ because so many people had already watched the first stream, meant that viewership and engagement was more limited. This was noted by respondents: ‘I suspect that the first stream built momentum in viewership in a way that the second didn’t have time to’. Some of the other changes that might have contributed to this feeling of ‘less investment’ were the removal of the pre-shows and trivia and reduction of memes, the aforementioned compressed scheduling, and a much more limited promotion of the event before it took place.

When asked about what they might change about the stream, the most common category of response was in relation to scheduling, for example indicating that the stream should include fewer episodes per day, be shown at different times, or include more repeats. It appears there needs to be a balance between the shared space of an enforced live viewing time, and making that time one that is acceptable for the audience to be able to attend regularly. It should be noted that including more repeats would have necessarily split the audience, as was already to some extent the case between the existing repeats which were suited to different timezones. There must also be efficient communication and promotion of the times at which live content is available, which is something several respondents indicated they felt was lacking for the stream and might change. ‘Make the schedule easier to access and understand what episode and part is currently playing’.

Memes and Production

[Figure 4]

Figure 4. London 1965!

A final element that helped create a sense of community on the *Doctor Who* on Twitch streams came from the plethora of memes created by the groups, most specifically the ‘London 1965’ meme. The meme’s creation highlights and actualizes the organic transitions of memes from the realm of the subcultural to the professional. That is, the memes coming out of Twitch, which were often Twitch-specific (insofar as they referenced something inherent to the Twitch stream itself) demonstrated a similar type of convergence as the viewership itself: both the bottom-up approach to cultural creation discussed by Jenkins (2006), but also the rapid spread of the meme outside of the Twitch community. We’ll follow the ‘London 1965’ meme specifically to demonstrate.

As Shifman (2014: 169) describes, memes are more than just sites of humorous intent: they are artifacts that ‘signal membership in a larger community’. Memes are participatory and social (Milner, 2016). Audiences and fans use memes both to signal their connection and to raise (or sometimes lower) their social capital within that community (Literat and van den Berg, 2019). By sharing memes, audiences can generate a tangible connection to their communities. As an outcome of participatory practices within a media event, then, the memes that emerged from the *Doctor Who* on Twitch streams made manifest the convergence of technologies and the cohesiveness of the audience.

Born from one of the interstitials shown between episodes in the first Twitch stream, ‘London 1965’ became the first and most famous meme from the *Doctor Who* on Twitch marathons. The interstitial showed clips of forthcoming episodes as a teaser to keep people watching. The line ‘London 1965’ comes from ‘The Chase’, an episode where original companions Barbara and Ian finally make it back home to Earth just a few years after their departure. Upon arriving back in the city they left, Ian exclaims ‘Barbara, we made it! London, 1965!’

If the interstitial ad had only played once, it is unlikely that it would have garnered as much enthusiasm as it did. However, Twitch played the ad in between *every episode of the stream* – meaning, fans that were participating as live in the stream saw it once every half hour. Fans picked up on the line and started to anticipate it, putting ‘London 1965’ in the chat as the famous line approached until almost nothing else was visible in the chat.

News of ‘London 1965’ soon spread. Fans who were using a second screen to chat about the experience of Twitch started to post the ‘London 1965’ on Twitter, and fan art and gifs of the line began to be tweeted and retweeted. ‘London 1965’ became a badge of remembrance – by Tweeting it, one fan could demonstrate to others that they were part of a circle of knowledge. They knew what was happening on the Twitch stream. It also served as a way of generating interest in the Twitch stream. As the meme spread and became popular, it also moved from the subcultural realm of Twitch to the realm of what Matt Hills (2019b) has termed ‘professionalized fandom’, wherein big name fans are able to ‘self-brand’ their own subcultural capital and ‘parlay...’ their ‘franchise-legitimated and professionalised fandom’ by selling merchandise featuring the meme on sites like Redbubble and Etsy. Hills describes such a Redbubble site selling merchandise, where former *Doctor Who Magazine* editor Clayton Hickman has created a ‘London 1965’ shirt.

This anticipatory and memetic sharing of key lines highlighted by the interstitials, including ‘London 1965’, carried over into the second instance of the stream, even though in this case the interstitials in question were reduced in frequency, appearing only between each story. By this time, however, the line had taken on a transformed meaning, representing the knowledge and excitement carried over by those who had participated the first time round, and sharing the playful interactions with those who were newly experiencing the stream.

What the ‘London 1965’ meme demonstrates is how the discursive nature of memes (Wiggins, 2019) helps to cohere the converged audience. The London 1965 meme became a tangible way for this community of Twitch stream viewers to identify with each other. What started as a line of dialogue became a means of advertising the stream; taken by the community, it then became an organic sign of

being part of the Twitch stream group, which may have encouraged more people to join. As noted above, 20% of our respondents did not watch either of the streams. Many of these stated that this was because they did not understand what Twitch was, or thought it was primarily a gaming platform. However, some were aware of the event even though they did not watch it, which may be attributable to the widespread sharing of the memes on social media outside of Twitch. The ‘London 1965’ meme demonstrates how memetics doesn’t just produce an outcome; it produces a process of always-becoming, where the meme exists as a multifaceted emblem of a community.

Conclusion

In early 2020, the Coronavirus/COVID-19 pandemic locked down millions of people around the world in their homes. Separated from friends and loved ones for more than 10 weeks, many media viewers turned to digital entertainment for social experiences. Whether it was Jackbox games, digital board games, or simultaneous Netflix parties, the social world collided with the digital world in unprecedented numbers. Interestingly, the *Doctor Who* on Twitch phenomenon that we observed happening in 2019 made a revised appearance through the fan campaign #DoctorWhoLockdown. Organized by fan and *Doctor Who Magazine* writer Emily Cook, the #DoctorWhoLockdown coordinated online experiences, where fans who were physically distant could become socially close through simultaneously watching and live-tweeting episodes of *Doctor Who*, often with the creators and stars of the show, each with its own hashtag. As Webb et al. (2016: 1) explain, ‘The goal of distributed performance is to join performers and audiences in a shared sensory experience through bi-directional connections’. Indeed, for many fans during #DoctorWhoLockdown, the convergence of media included having to sync multiple devices -- starting televisions or BBC iPlayers or Netflix accounts with Twitter streams. What the #DoctorWhoLockdown of 2020 demonstrates -- similarly to what the *Doctor Who* on Twitch of 2018 demonstrates -- is that even repeat showings of older episodes of television can have a feeling of liveness if they are shared between members of an audience: ‘While broadcast media have value themselves, there is a marked difference between a one-way channel of communication and the shared experience enabled

by live streaming technologies' (Jacobs 2018). As we have demonstrated in this paper, these simultaneous 'as-live' viewings represent a convergence not just of media, but of people. Bridging generations and technologies, these live events emphasize the communal nature of media through a shared love of a text.

As we write this, other live streaming events are under development, and are taking a lesson from Twitch. For example, the technology development arm of the BBC, BBC R&D, are currently trialling 'BBC Together', a technology that allows simultaneous viewing of synced programming (Hentschel et al., 2020). The impact of communal watching hasn't been lost in the age of digital convergence; it has simply moved to new channels. As new technologies enable new forms of shared experiences, we see new outcomes emerge. Constraints form an inherent part of these live or as-live experiences; giving up individual control over the time and situation in which the viewing experience takes place is a necessary consequence of creating a shared community experience. However, as we have seen, there needs to be a balance between pragmatic accessibility and the additional effort which makes taking part feel special.

As we have discussed in this paper, digital convergences are being used to simulate traditional live practices. Because of new affordances, new types of interactions (e.g., memetic production) have become possible, but at their core these technological convergences represent meaningful social convergences as well. As Burroughs (2019: 160) writes, 'streaming allows audiences to participate in the ripple of mediated information. This immediacy can serve as a counterstream to mass or traditional media's own programming of content and information'. Although we've focused on one particular mode of social convergence in this paper, there are many avenues left to explore: for example, we specifically reached out to *Doctor Who* fans who were interested in Twitch, but we didn't reach Twitch viewers who may have stumbled upon the *Doctor Who* stream, and thus been introduced to new content. In addition, as Burroughs (2019: 160) points out, 'Live-streaming apps and websites such as Periscope and Twitch.tv increasingly straddle the line between sanctioned and unsanctioned content'. We would encourage future scholars to examine some of the unsanctioned ways that Twitch viewers make use of convergent sociality.

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