Privacy Issues and the Rise of Livestreaming

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I distinctly recall a time in my teens when people began to enjoy watching content creators on YouTube play video games. I was among these people. To the bewilderment of many parental figures, watching gamers, like Markiplier (Mark Fischbach), play break through games like *Amnesia: The Dark Descent* became immensely popular.[1] This form of entertainment was called "Let's Play" videos and Markiplier was among many other creators that created "Let's Play" content by playing trending or emerging games.[2] "Let's Play" content, while still prevalent on YouTube, has since evolved to include live streaming content. Today, online live streaming has experienced an exponential rise in popularity.[3] Spearheaded by the groundbreaking platform, Twitch, livestreaming now boasts a growing number of categories and streamers from controversial gamer, XQC to those who live stream craft making.[4] While this is form of entertainment is accessible, free, interactive, and engaging there are no shortage of drawbacks in the form of ethical and privacy issues that arise.

First things first, what is online live streaming? Live streaming is the "real-time broadcasting of audio and/or video content over the internet for an audience to watch as it happens."[5] In other words, you can watch various streamers play video games, chat about various topics, work on crafting projects, react to videos, play instruments, etc., in real time. In addition, you can also send comments to the streamer and, depending on the size of the audience, receive a response in real time. While Twitch is solely dedicated to providing a streaming platform, it is not the only one that allows for streaming.[6] Social media platforms like TikTok, Instagram, YouTube, and Facebook allow for streaming, but may be less lucrative for earnings.[7]

Streaming platforms despite its significant entertainment value, is a ripe platform for cybersecurity attacks.[8] Many streaming platforms require account creation in order to view live content and require payment information to send financial support to streamers.[9] As a result, these platforms store names, email addresses and payment information of millions of subscribers.[10] Without adequate cyber security measures in place, this information can be compromised.[11] It is not only viewers whose data may be at risk of being compromised, the streamer themselves can be at risk as well.[12]

With the advent of social media and online presences, the act of doxing has also gained prevalence. Doxing is "the act of revealing identifying information about someone online, such as their real name, home address, workplace, phone, financial, and other personal information."[13] This is not as

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[1] Benjamin Bullard, *Video Game Streamer Markiplier's Connection to Five Nights at Freddy's Explained*, POLITICO (Oct. 25, 2023), https://www.syfy.com/syfy-wire/markiplier-link-to-five-nights-at-freddys-explained.
[2] *Id*.
[3] *The Rise of Live Streaming: Why It's the Future of Digital Content?*, KALYZEE (Last Accessed: Feb. 28, 2024), https://www.kalyzee.com/en/resources/analyzis-and-trends/the-rise-of-live-streaming-why-its-the-future-of-digital-content.
[4] *Id*.
[5] Caroline Shalabi, *Livestreaming: What it is and How it Benefits Marketers and Advertisers*, INSIDER INTELLIGENCE (Oct. 19, 2023), https://www.insiderintelligence.com/insights/livestreaming-trends-stats/.
[6] *Id*.
[7] *Id*.
[8] *Privacy and Security in Live Streaming: Ensuring Your Audience's Safety,* JWP (Jan. 2, 2023), https://jwplayer.com/blog/privacy-and-security-in-live-streaming-ensuring-your-audiences-safety/.
[9] *Id*.
[10] *Id*.
[11] *Id*.
[12] *Id*
[13] *What is Doxing – Definition and Explanation,* KASPERSKY (Last Accessed: Feb. 28, 2024),

uncommon as one might think. Regardless of how unsettling it is, TikTokers like Trevor Rainbolt grew a massive following by identifying exactly where certain content creators are located by using basic mapping tools and analyzing the details in the background of the video.[14] For example, in a video posted in 2022, Trevor was able to determine the location of two women with only a black and white image of them standing in front of a body of water surrounded by mountains.[15] Image was sent to Trevor because the image contained the deceased mother of one of his followers.[16] By requesting the location, the follower was hoping to learn more about the mother they never knew.[17] While, Trevor may not have malevolent intent, there are many who do. This skill can be used to reveal the home address of creators if they regularly film in their homes.

There are other ways that doxers may obtain your information other than pictures and photos. These doxers can obtain IP addresses when someone interacts with or shares content online.[18] For example, doxers may also obtain sensitive information simply by stalking the streamers social media information and filling in the blanks.[19]

Despite so many privacy and security risks out there, streamers have options to protect themselves and their audience. In regard to keeping live streams secure, streamers can begin by selecting secure platforms.[20] There are multiple platform options for streaming, and it is imperative for streamers to check the level of security each platform has by checking the privacy policies in place.[21] While reading through pages of dense legal text may not be ideal for a content creator seeking to play Fortnite live, it is vital to understand the security measures in place and the ways in which the platform plans to use all personal data.[22] Streamers should also check the security of payment methods if they plan to allow subscriptions, gifts or paid content.[23] When a streamer goes live, there are various interactions a viewer can make. Outside of comments, they can subscribe, gift subscriptions (or gift subs), and they can purchase access to certain perks like stickers and name plates that allow them to stand out in the stream. Because of the seamless integration of these paid features into the viewing experience, it is imperative that safe payment systems are in place to protect audiences from data breaches. Finally, a streamer can protect their privacy by using VPNs to mitigate any attempts to access their IP addresses.[24]

There are many VPN services available, such as NordVPN, which, according to Cyber News, is one of the top five VPN's of 2024.[25] It boasts the ability to protect IP addresses while not compromising on speed and security.[26] On top of these features, it is also affordable for the new streamer seeking to

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https://usa.kaspersky.com/resource-center/definitions/what-is-doxing.

[14] Andrew Lloyd, *A Google Maps Expert Tracks Down Long-Lost Locations for His Followers and Posts the Results on TikTok. Millions Love His Videos, but There Are Risks*, BUSINESS INSIDER (Nov. 28, 2022), https://www.businessinsider.com/trevor-rainbolt-geoguessr-tiktoker-location-tracking-interview-2022-11#:~:text=Trevor%20Rainbolt%20is%20a%20Google,judgment%20to%20get%20it%20right.

[15] *Id*.

[16] *Id*.

[17] *Id*.

[18] *How Someone Can Find Your IP Address and What They Can Do With it,* WHAT IS MY IP ADDRESS (Last Accessed: Feb. 28, 2024), https://whatismyipaddress.com/how-someone-can-find-your-ip-address-and-what-they-can-do-with-it.

[19] *Supra* note 13.

[20] *Supra* note 8.

[21] *Id*.

[22] *Id*.

[23] *Id*.

[24] *Id*.

[25] Sarunas Karbauskas, *The Best Streaming VPNs in 2024*, CYBERNEWS (Dec. 12, 2023), https://cybernews.com/best-vpn/vpn-for-streaming/.

[26] *Id*.

make a name for themselves at only $3.39 a month.[27] Some may be familiar with them from their incredibly frequent features in YouTube videos that they have sponsored.

Live streaming is an excellent form of real-time entertainment that allows for accessibility and audience interaction. However, there are many ways in which hackers and doxers can compromise the safety of both streamer and audiences. With adequate safeguards on platforms, diligent streamers checking privacy policies, using VPNs and checking for payment security, streamers can mitigate serious cybersecurity issues. Platforms like Twitch must also remain diligent in their enforcement of privacy policies and remain consistent in updating their infrastructure to keep up with the methods of cyber criminals.

[27] *Id*.