Issues of Nationality within Online Spaces: Online Live Streaming Platforms

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This ethnographic report offers insights into the understanding of online communities through the study of the concept of the nation, as discussed by Benedict Anderson (2006). Ethnographic research explores the narratives of nationality that are experienced within an online community that is associated with the practice of online live streaming. This paper also discusses anthropological and non-anthropological methodologies and their importance and usability online. Interaction with interviewees brought to light an understanding of online live streaming as a media product capable of influencing the processes of identity construction in terms of national values. This research thus proves that nations as 'imagined communities' are to be found and analyzed in online communities, where icons such as emotes and memes are used and disseminated as part of the everyday interactions that users undertake in their positions as spectators of live streaming. Nonetheless, this research also struggles with paradoxical understandings of online nationalism, which renders necessary an adaptation to the online setting of established knowledge on the matter.

KEY WORDS Nation, Nationalism, Imagined Communities, Live Streaming, Online Community

This ethnographic report sets out to discover the ways in which narratives and discourses around nationality, and therefore expressions of nationalism, may play out in online settings, particularly within online live streaming platforms. The themes surrounding the concept of the nation-state have been, and still are, central in the discipline of Anthropology, especially in regard to macro-themes such as the cultural construction of identity and the building of communities. I believe that the advent of digitalization, specifically the advent of Web 2.0, has changed, or even subverted, the boundaries of the traditional definitions of nationality, nationalism, and community. To explore these themes, I decided to conduct three-month-long fieldwork on online live streaming, a kind of digital instrument that has seen an incredible increase in its usage over the last decade, being easily accessible from everywhere in the world through the Internet. Throughout this fieldwork period, I drew from traditional literature the necessary definitions and modes of expressions of nationality to discuss how common use of live streaming platforms may potentially support and reinforce narratives of the nation-state and performances of national identity. In other words, my research is intended to explore if online expressions of nationhood can be found in the context of online live streaming and if the already

existing theory on nationalism can clearly explain those expressions.

While designing and conducting my research, the main issue I intended to explore varied greatly in its sub-questions. When I first planned out fieldwork, I originally intended to explore online communities as a whole, but I later restricted it to only live streaming platforms and their communities. The question that I set out to study included not only issues of nationality and expressions of nationalism but also other concepts, such as transnationalism. While researching, however, in discussions with informants and in reading more academic literature, I realized not only the vastness of the question that my research was trying to address but also the inherent complexity of the sub-questions being discussed. From first believing that expressions of nationalism and transnationalism in online contexts were two sides of the same coin, I was gradually brought to reconsider my beliefs and realize that these two constitute two different phenomena which must be centred within different frameworks. This piece will thus focus only on how national narratives may be reinforced through online live streaming, leaving the question of how live streaming may deconstruct these same narratives.

The question of fieldsite was also an element subject to change in the conception of my research. Depending on the conceptualization of online spaces, the field site may be considered single-sited and multi-sited. Nonetheless, considering the common features of live streaming platforms, I initially understood them as a single site and a broad site of study. While conducting research, however, I navigated through the different connections that support cyberspace: from Twitch.tv, arguably the most popular online live streaming service, to YouTube, the famous video-sharing platform, looking at VODs (Video on Demand recordings of previous live streams that users can rewatch) or compilations of highlights from famous streamers. I then read and researched public discussions about these forms of media, including Twitch, on the social media Reddit, a platform that enables users to post digital content in thematic groups or forums (subreddits) while other users engage with them by voting up or down, commenting, or reposting them. I conducted this research while discussing with my informants, members of a small multi-gaming community named "Vault" (the name is imaginary) and all consumers of Twitch, YouTube, and Reddit content. While doing my fieldwork, I realized that the platforms' sharing of features and contents was valuable to my research and that they were to be considered separate in their locality but interrelated in the wider perspective that my fieldwork held. In this sense, I reflected on "the translocal linkages, and the interconnections between those and whatever local bundles of relationships which are also part of the study" (Hannerz 2012, 402). Ulf Hannerz's reflections on multi-sited ethnography accompanied my thoughts on the nature of my fieldwork's site(s), and the considerations I made in conducting my fieldwork reflect his conclusion. Moreover, Hannerz (2012) argues that to do multi-sited ethnography, it is necessary to select some sites from the many that could be included, something that I also found myself doing, as I restricted my research to the platforms that I have already mentioned, while I could potentially have included a set of other online spaces.

Additionally, the main criteria of the informants for this research were their familiarity with Twitch.tv or related platforms and their availability to be interviewed. During the first month of fieldwork, I struggled to find interviewees, a desolation of data that was eventually interrupted by finding a Discord server. Discord is a platform that allows users to join groups, which are usually called servers, where they can talk, chat and share images and videos along with other minor features. This server was recommended to me by an acquaintance who suggested that this community may be interested in being interviewed. At the time of this research, the "Vault" server has a total of 103 members, out of which around twenty are everyday active users of live streaming platforms. Throughout my fieldwork, I was able to interview six members of the community. Being based in Italy, most of the users of "Vault" identified themselves as Italians; nonetheless, there was still a minority presence of members from various countries, such as Romania, the United Kingdom, Switzerland, the United States, and Canada.

Literature Review

When reflecting upon the concept of the nation-state, we must consider Benedict Anderson's definition as widely accepted within the social sciences. Anderson (2006) argues that the nation is constantly being imagined and reconfigured during everyday life; in particular, he states that "[the nation] is an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign" (Anderson 2006, 6). Anthony D. Smith (1998) similarly highlights the idea of the modern state as a force that can shape and define the attachment to a territory, and the self-identification with a territory, through the use of elements such as census and maps, as argued by Anderson (2006), but also through "symbols, images and concepts of nationalism, the ideology and language" (Smith 1998, 92). The construction of a national identity is thus described as a cultural construct forged through an ideology that promotes unique cultural values tied to a 'limited and sovereign' territory, mostly through semiotic processes. But does this apply when this cultural process happens online? In this sense, Danah Boyd's definition of 'networked publics' can be best applied. She states that "networked publics are publics that are restructured by networked technologies" (Boyd 2010, 39). In being so, they constitute both the space defined by those technologies and the "imagined collective that emerges as a result of the intersection of people, technology, and practice" (Boyd 2010, 39). This imagined collective that Boyd speaks of clearly resembles Anderson's notion of 'imagined community' (2006). This correlation between the two concepts is a basis on which my research makes novel inquiries about nationalism.

One piece of literature that has a crucial role in online nationalism is Daniel Miller and Don Slater's *The Internet* (2000). In this book, the authors explore the nuanced connections between offline and online presence, looking at multiple forms of media and touching upon the theme of nationalism. The authors recognize that in engaging with Internet media, people position themselves "within networks that transcend their immediate location, placing them in wider flows of cultural, political and economic resources" (Miller & Slater 2000, 18). In this 'dynamic of positioning,' the authors

recognize nationalism as the most strengthened aspect of identity. Nonetheless, according to the authors, this sense of nationalism and national identity is deeply affected by online processes and is, therefore, much different from nationalism as traditionally understood (Miller & Slater, 2000). On top of this, in Matthew F. Palmer's 2012 study of online nationalism, he recognizes the augmented effects that recent development in online communicative technologies create, especially when engaging with nationalist rhetoric. Palmer speaks to a sense of immediacy enabled by the online medium and works subtly to build emotional responses, even when the rhetoric expressed is simply "reproducing emblematic signifiers of the state" (Palmer 2012, 126).

Within the online setting, scholars have defined nationalism online as cyber-nationalism. Cyber-nationalism is imbued in the consumerism of digital media, for example, eSports broadcasting (the live streaming of professional videogame tournaments), and has been the focus of a number of authors. T. L. Taylor's Watch Me Play (2018) has often been seen as a central text in the discussion of online live streaming. In particular, she argues that the aspect of liveness of online broadcasting is a powerful affective device that pushes people to bond, share experiences and construct identities (2018). While she argues that the experience of online broadcasting may not constitute a pure expression of nationalism in itself, other scholars have identified the issue of eSports as a fundamental element of national identity building (Szablewicz, 2016, Turtiainen et al., 2020). Some have argued that nationalist narratives are interconnected with community usage of 'memes', usually an image, video, or text, generally of comical nature, that spread rapidly among community members (Ismangil, 2019).

On a broader note, the recently identified phenomenon of online media consumerism, as analyzed by Ying Jiang (2012) in China, has pushed for further understanding of new forms of nationalism, promoting concepts such as 'cyber nationalism,' first described by Xu Wu in 2007. Cyber-nationalism has been defined as a "non-government sponsored ideology and movement" (Xu Wu 2007, 155), to which Ying Jiang (2012) adds the idea of consumerism and self-management of communities that may reinforce national values in an inherently international context. We have thus come to understand how the traditional concept of the nation may face the need to be re-evaluated when confronted with newer understandings of cyberspace and online communities. Analyzing the theoretical context in which this research fits is, therefore, necessary to understand not only the methodology used for the fieldwork process but also to place the findings more clearly within the ongoing debate of online nationalism.

Methods

In her "Figuring Out Ethnography," Kim Fortun (2009) states that "research design is conceived as preparatory without being deterministic" (2009, 171), and in fact, despite the careful design of how fieldwork was to be conducted for this project, I found myself experimenting in many ways. As Malinowski (2012) states, participating in the daily life of the observed group is a crucial aspect of doing anthropology; reflecting upon the idea

of participant observation, I carefully approached the different techniques in which this method of research can be applied online, especially in the setting of live streaming. This is the reason why part of my methodology included participation in the process of live streaming both in terms of consuming and producing. I spent several hours partaking in the dynamics of spectatorship of different streamers, all the while gaining familiarity with the streaming tools to stream myself. Fortun's suggestion that research design is never deterministic becomes an example of the adaptation of participant observation that I carried out, a characteristic of the method (its adaptability) that renowned digital anthropologists such as Boellstorff (2012) or T.L. Taylor (2018) have already praised. Despite my attempts to participate in the live-streaming context, I believe I couldn't fully immerse myself in the process. On a reflective note, my participation in a spectatorial position during live streams was always limited by my search for insights. I limited my view and my self-inclusion in the online setting to the extent of gathering what would be of interest to my research, only partially and superficially grasping the 'powerful' feeling of the online spectatorial position discussed by Taylor (2018). Moreover, during my attempt to live stream, I found myself staring at the viewer counter of my stream, remaining 0 for hours, forcing myself to reflect on the implications of the phenomenon. I thus believe that using Julian M. Murchison's words, I wasn't fully able to "abandon [...] [my] practiced, objective stances" (2010, 85). The feeling of distance from the longed-embodied experience of spectatorship and streaming remained with me for the entirety of my fieldwork.

Part of the observational process that I undertook was also made of thread research in the official subreddit of Twitch. The process, which I have drawn from Ruberg et al.'s (2019) study of harassment in video game live-streaming settings, consisted of employing the search tool of the social platform Reddit to look for threads and discussion posts regarding the main topics of this research: nationalism, nationality, cyber-nationalism or otherwise online nationalism, eSports, tournament, and other keywords. I was thus able to gain a framework of how and if a general debate on the issue of national identity was carried forward. However, as Emma Louise Backe states, "lurking is a great practice for preparatory research, but it is a poor ethnographic methodology" (2020), and indeed I found that the discussions were useful to direct my general understanding of the topic but were nowhere near effective in addressing my research question.

The addition of participant observation in the online setting and thread research was not the only methodological approach that I considered. While reflecting upon the possible reasons why I couldn't find any participants in my research, I was led to believe that the offer of an in-depth interview could be seen as unappealing for a main reason: the inherent aspect of the interview is interacting with a stranger. Anonymity is a crucial aspect of Internet relations with strangers. Deciding to participate in an online interview may reveal itself as a more difficult choice than in a physical setting. The reassurance of an embodied presence is not an option when presenting oneself in an online discursive setting such as a forum. For this reason, I believe that potential participants see the exposure to a stranger as an obstruction to their possible desire to

take part not only in academic research but in a simple conversation as well (especially considering the prevalent population of younger individuals that use live streams and video games). This doesn't preclude the fact that some individuals online may be less susceptible to wariness than others. However, I still believe the online setting amplifies this sense of wariness towards strangers, particularly when such strangers want to discuss personal habits and opinions in one-on-one conversations.

Because of the issue with online anonymity, I decided to prepare a simple survey of ten questions, mixing multiple choice with more open-ended queries. The questions ranged from requiring simple answers, like "Do you consider online live streams as a media product?" to more complex questions, including, "Do you think that online live streaming may reinforce ideas like nationality? In what ways?". The preparation of the survey happened almost at the same time that I was brought to discover the Discord community "Vault," so that I was able to share it among the members of the community. Following Taylor's argument that "quantitative measures often don't fully capture varying contexts along with nuanced behaviours and attitudes" (Taylor 2018, 189), I opted to use only the more articulated answers as the source of information from the survey, mainly using it as an element that might arouse interest within the members of the community, kindling appeal in my project where there was little or none at all in the beginning. Through this stimulation, I was able to break barriers to participation, pushing two of my respondents to voluntarily ask about further involvement.

It is important to address the fact that the survey questions reflect the biases and constructs that are the result of the researcher's background. In my fieldwork, I recognize the deep emphasis that I put on the concept of nationality as a fundamental aspect of an individual's identity. In trying to discover how nationality and the concurrent expressions of nationalism play out while engaging in online live streaming, I assume that it has a role to play and word my questions in that direction. By wording the survey this way, I recognize that I present a topic that is already neatly defined and conceptualized to my participants without any initial discussion that may have redirected this research toward other ends.

The selection of interview participants from only one community of users fostered insights into the limitation of access to what Gerald D. Berreman (2012) calls 'backregions.' Berreman uses 'backregions' to refer to the way informants may manipulate information to give a favourable impression of themselves to others. The 'backregions' describe what is kept secret, or behind closed doors, from the eyes and questions of the researcher. Reflecting on his work in Sirkanda, a village in the lower Himalayas, he states that "more than one definition of the village situation is presented or may be presented to the outsider" (Berreman 2012, 174). This potential difference in how a community presents itself to an outsider, which is not as relevant to my research as much as to the caste system which Berreman was studying, was nonetheless crucial when thinking about the sheer amount of diversity that could have been included in the study of national expressions of identity. The lack of access to this diversity happened for various reasons. Among them, I spent limited time doing fieldwork, and I faced language barriers that impeded communication with others that didn't speak English or

Italian. These restricted the academic value of the outcomes of this research. This reflection is not intended to, as Boas describes it, "attempt to solve the fundamental problem of the general development of civilization" or, in my words, attempt to solve and describe the entire picture of the issues of expressions of nationalism online (Boas 2012, 66). It is worth noting that my interviews were restricted to a single online community, and thus, the outcome of this research is limited, especially in the face of the bigger dynamic processes that happen during online live streaming. The need to historicize the moment and highlight the limitations of doing fieldwork in a single community of one hundred individuals was kept in mind while undertaking the interviewing process. To summarize the main methodological approaches that I undertook during my fieldwork, I conducted participant observation of online live streaming settings, preparatory thread research of the Twitch main subreddit, the involvement of participants through an online survey and the traditional method of interviews.

Findings

During the interviews, the participants considered online live streaming a media product, and as a media product, it can have powerful implications in constructing the identity of who is watching. While there is no clear definition of what a media product is, it will be understood hereafter as any piece of media (or mean of communication, especially when it happens in mass) that can be clearly defined with boundaries or a beginning and an end, such as a TV episode, a magazine, a YouTube video, pictures, etc. Participants found that live streaming is most fitting among these examples. The reason why it possesses implications in identity building is to be found in the potentiality of meaning that it can transmit to its consumers. All interviewees also recognized the possibility of expressions of national values and narratives in the live-streaming setting, but there was a stark divide between respondents on the origin of these potential expressions of nationalism. During separate calls, two participants argued that, as media products, live streaming might support and reinforce the ideas and agendas of the institutions that promote and control advertisement on live streaming platforms or the ideas and agendas of the organizers of tournaments to which live streamers often participate. While this consideration is crystal clear, the place of nationalism within the mentioned agendas was much more confused and obscure. The majority of participants, however, believed that it was the community itself that reinforced concepts of national identity, for example, through the use of 'memes,' copy and paste text messages (so-called copy pasta), or emotes, in the same way, that Milan Ismangil (2019) had found in his research of grassroots nationalism within the videogame Dota 2. Despite these concerns, almost everyone expressed a sense of distance from these debates, meaning that the perceived importance of such discussions on the bottom-up reinforcement of national identity was not directly applicable to their experience of live streaming, especially within the Italian the Italian national context. LiZico (the nickname of one of the participants), who comes from a small town in a mountainous region in Italy, argued that his fellow countrymen often

lack the digital infrastructure to participate in live-streaming contexts where national identity might be of importance (referring to gaming tournaments). He argued that the lack of organizers, sponsors, and support of various sorts, especially for the live streamers coming from small towns such as his, is a crucial factor in deciding how and who can take part in the media production that is live streaming, thus also deciding how and where national values can be expressed.

While discussing digital communities in the interviews, Anderson's (2006) definition of the nation was central. Twitch channels were thus brought to be understood, in my conversations with participants, as 'imagined communities' that are 'limited' by the boundaries of the channel itself, the chat box or even the link of the channel. They are also 'sovereign' in that, as LiZico puts it, "the chat reigns." What this means is that the interactions happen through the chat box, where individuals can write any form of comment and thus influence the course of the live stream. Also, in this sense, other participants highlighted how badges (given to subscribers of the channels, often having different forms based on how long one is subscribed) or emotes may become nation-like imagery, like a badge of honour or a medal. This insight points out how generally speaking, the semiotic relationships of badges, emotes, memes, and so on are of fundamental importance in understanding the cultural dynamics of the digital spaces wherever they can be found, whether in live streaming or somewhere else on cyberspace. On this note, Ismangil (2019) describes how memes, both when they are and aren't understood, are fundamental in defining the boundaries of the community and acting as gatekeepers. In doing so, Haynes (2020) points out how they reinforce hegemonic ideas in intricate expressions of gender, race, and nationalism. These authors provide one framework to better understand how the Twitch users that I interviewed felt not only about memes but also badges and emotes: as gatekeepers of online imagined communities.

Thinking in terms of Ying Jiang's (2012) debate on consumerism, Ferguson (2015) states how directing attention towards national cultural products (in our case, online live streaming) may be considered an expression of nationalism. While discussing this possibility, one of the participants described its similarity with his perception of preference toward national products, especially in terms of food, he argued, and diffidence toward foreign products as a form of reaction to globalization. While trying to translate this into the online setting within which our conversation was taking place, he argued that the language barrier prevented him from spectating non-Italian live streams. Nonetheless, when the participant was questioned if he knew other languages and whether he would still consume mainly Italian live streams, he responded affirmatively, arguing that there is a certain sense of pride in watching members of the same nationality play games at pro levels, especially during tournaments. This latter statement prompted the question, which I directed toward other participants as well, of whether witnessing a hypothetical Italian team of live streamers competing in an international tournament would be a source of pride for them. The question was answered affirmatively by almost every participant, often accompanied by laughs and comparisons with other sports environments such as football or the Olympics.

Overall, the general belief was that live streaming in itself, despite being a media product, is not a platform for the expression of national values and narratives. Despite this belief, the idea of broadcasted tournaments, in which popular live streamers participate, was seen as contexts in which national identity was important, especially when associated with sports events. Szablewicz (2016) reinforces this idea of a connection between eSports tournaments and Olympic metaphors, through which live-streamed matches are constructed around concepts such as "'international understanding' and the cultivation of a 'peaceful world'" (2016, 259). This seemingly inconsistent perception of live streaming as both a national and non-national space of expression can be explained by the context in which a live stream is situated. A participant named Alessandro explained that small streamers and tournaments have a tendency to be ignored by sponsors or corporations. For this reason, he continued, "they don't have the importance and visibility that is needed when we talk about international confrontations." For Alessandro, therefore, the lack of visibility and importance, or in other words, the difference in scale, was a crucial aspect in defining whether live streams may be a source of national narratives, especially in consideration of the Olympic comparison and the idea of global diplomacy that can be developed from it.

Throughout my fieldwork, I noticed a significant difficulty in translating a static notion of nationalism that was already present in my informants' minds into a dynamic concept that can be applied to online contexts. The view of live streaming as a potential instrument in the reinforcing of national values was welcomed but was a foreign concept, as something that doesn't happen within their own national context, but that may happen in others. The example of China was often made in this regard, perceived as one of the few places where online live streaming actively works towards the construction of national identities and nationalistic values, and this clearly reflects the interest throughout the academic literature, with the main texts on cyber-nationalism focused on China, and the particular nuances of Chinese cyber nationalism (Xu Wu, 2007). Nonetheless, the possibility of this phenomenon being observed and presenting common characteristics, also in other national contexts, was not discarded, and, more importantly, the notions themselves of nation and nationalism were applied to other non-purely national contexts such as those of online communities and Twitch channels, or at least, an attempt was made.

This research is not intended to provide a clear and defined picture of the issue at hand. Nonetheless, the research presents itself as a report of insights from an online community of everyday Twitch users within a defined national context. This may reveal useful considerations on how national values can present themselves in non-explicit ways and influence the identity-construction processes that these users undertake when participating in online spectatorial positions. One of the main issues in my findings was the paradoxical situation in which the informants discarded the possibility of their favourite channels being a medium of expressions of national values but promptly argued in favour of feelings of pride when hypothesizing about Italian participation in a tournament, a feeling that might be enhanced if the participating streamer was one of their favourites. One of the factors that, I believe, made this

paradoxical situation possible was a fundamental misunderstanding of how nationalism plays out. My informants, when talking about nationalism, easily associated it with the fascist regime. The reason for this, as Alessandro explained, lies in the education that the Italian participants received. In history classes at school, it is common for students to discuss nationalism during the lessons on the fascist period, a very important milestone in the historical education of young Italians. This is an association that Anderson addresses, stating that "one tends unconsciously to hypostasize the existence of Nationalism-with-a-big-N […] and then to classify 'it' as an ideology" (Anderson 2006, 5); this classification process is comparable to the quick nationalism-fascism association that participants made. This classification and perception of nationalism as an ideology, and even a historical reality, pushed the informants to avoid recognizing forms of expression of national values within the context that they take part in every day. A lack of recognition is rendered even more important by Ismangil's statement that "it is through everyday usage that these normalizing discourses [large-scale narratives of nation-state framed by the media] become (re)articulated through the individual" (Ismangil 2019, 234). This statement is explicative of the ways in which a specific narrative about nationalism in the live-streaming context may be part of normalizing discourses that take nationalism up as something completely different and incompatible with the actual perception of everyday users.

According to Anderson, one of the crucial moments in the origin of nationalism was the introduction of the printed word into the lives of individuals (2006). It was the advent of print capitalism that made it possible for individuals "to think about themselves, and to relate themselves to others, in profoundly new ways" (Anderson 2006, 36). This argument brings us to a similar discussion Xu Wu makes about the medium. In particular, Wu (2007) articulates that the medium is effectively the message rather than being only the messenger. Now, it must be taken into consideration the fact that Xu Wu's work deals with online spaces in general, meaning that there is no specific discussion of particular ways of engaging online (as we are doing with live streaming), but nonetheless, these considerations about the importance of the medium are central in our analysis of live streaming as a medium. What are the implications of stating that the medium of live streaming is, in fact, the message of nationalism itself? I argue that through online live streaming, users interact in a context where normalizing discourses and behaviours sustain national values. This was proven on many occasions where participants expressed feelings of pride or had clear preferences in how they interacted with online live streams. The fact that these expressions tended to be overlooked when compared to how nationalism is imagined in its ideological and historical perceptions is not of decisive importance. The reality is that through a particular medium, users are enabled to feel and interact in particular ways that sustain preferences and unarticulated senses of interaction with each other, which are similar to how Anderson describes the significance of the printed word. This is even more credible when we apply Anderson's (2006) description of reading the newspaper as a 'mass ceremony' and the liveliness and ritualistic nature of live streaming.

Introducing the idea of the medium as the message is particularly important for my last argument. An understanding of online communities as potential semi-national entities was surprisingly recognized and articulated in the settings that the informants frequented every day. In particular, the participants all reflected the idea expressed by Arfini et al. (2019) that online communities are 'cognitive niches' in two main senses. The first sense is that online communities "implement networks of social connections that spur information-sharing activities among agents linked by similar interests" (Arfini et al. 2019, 394). Respondents critically analyzed online communities in the same sense; helped by my introduction of Anderson's definition of the nation, they identified the 'imagined' part of the community as a 'network of social connections' created by shared interests. Related to the second sense, respondents reflected on Arfini et al.'s idea that in online communities, "information-sharing activities are developed by epistemically defected mechanisms […] and exploit problematic fallacious reasoning" (2019, 394) in the form of reasoning that one of the respondents described as "the hive mind." Through this definition, the respondent was trying to describe the way in which online communities, such as live streaming communities, fallaciously reflect a mode of reasoning in which truthfulness or correctness didn't matter, as long as it respected the mechanics of social interactions that were put in place by the community itself. The same respondent connected the idea of "the hive mind" to the notion of a 'sovereign' state. Through this analysis, enhanced by the identification of emotes and memes with maps, flags or national songs, live-streaming communities (and transcending the specific, online communities) were associated with nation-like entities.

This report describes online live streaming as a media product capable of influencing the processes of identity building of its audience, and thus also capable of carrying and reinforcing national values according to the idea that the medium is the message (Wu, 2007). The fieldwork shed light on a particular paradoxical situation in which respondents didn't recognize the possibility of a nationalistic value of live streaming but still brought forward feelings associated with a national identity when thinking about it, especially at higher professional levels, such as broadcastings of eSports. In this sense, this research discusses live streaming as a medium through implications of stating that the medium of live streaming is, in fact, the message which nationalism can be expressed through normalizing discourses and practices in which users engage. During these engagements, criteria of truthfulness or correctness don't matter as long as the user respects what has been termed by an interviewee as 'the hive mind,' and makes use of all those elements considered to be gatekeepers, such as memes. This suggests that Benedict Anderson's definition of nations as imagined political communities, may reflect itself as a reality of online communities as well, where the medium of the printed word is seemingly reproduced in the live streaming process through its ritualistic consumption and intrinsic mass interaction. Nationalistic elements are sure to be found, but the definitions through which we explain them are inneed of a slight adaptation to the intricate and complex spaces and modes of interaction of the online world, where, as attested in the conversations with participants, nationalism is neither comprehended nor perceived.

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