Sakari Lauronen

Streamer relations in a Counter-Strike platform in Finland

KAMK • University of Applied Sciences

Abstract

Author(s): Martti Sakari Lauronen

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This thesis was conducted to investigate the relations between streamers and third-party Counter-Strike platforms, aiming to uncover the factors influencing the success of these collaborations. Over the past years, streaming has become an increasing method of marketing, especially within the gaming industry. Through qualitative research involving interviews with Finnish Counter-Strike streamers and a platform representative, insights into partnership strategies, challenges, and benefits were obtained.

The study highlights the importance of aligning brand values and assigning mutual objectives between streamers and platforms. Furthermore, the multifaceted nature of partnership evaluation and the intangible benefits of collaboration such as visibility and positive discourse are shown alongside user acquisition metrics. Effective communication emerged as a crucial factor in partnership management, with platforms deploying various methods to facilitate collaboration. Despite challenges, the research suggests that streamer-platform partnerships contribute to the overall well-being of the Counter-Strike ecosystem, fostering positive atmospheres and communities for players. This study provides insights for both streamers and platforms to maximize the impact of their partnerships and drive community engagement.

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CS:GO – Counter-Strike Global Offensive, a FPS video game developed by Valve.

FPS - First-person shooter, a shooting game genre where the camera is shown from the players perspective.

VAC – Valve Anti Cheat, the cheating prevention program that is used within Counter-Strike.

1 Introduction

The topic of this thesis is to **study streamer relations within Counter-Strike platforms.** In the video game industry, the game Counter-Strike is unique in the way that in addition to the games own matchmaking, there exists entire businesses and companies that provide third-party match-making solutions. These companies build their business model in providing a secondary level of anti-cheat, competitive matchmaking, and additional competitions such as tournaments and lad-ders players can compete in, which are not provided by the game developer. I chose this topic as my thesis, as I have personally played in these platforms and completed my practical training at Esportal, one of the platforms that operates in the Nordic region. Additionally, during my training I worked closely with streamers and collaborating with them captured my interest in exploring this method of marketing further in the context of Counter-Strike platforms.

1.1 Streaming industry and research

Streaming as an industry has grown intensively over the past few years. Especially in the video game industry, popular streamers are used as a powerful marketing tool that can bring thousands of viewers and directly promote the product or service the company provides. As such, for the research in this thesis 5 to 7 interviews will be conducted with streamers that have experience in working together with a Counter-Strike platform. Additionally, an interview with a Counter-Strike platform representative will be conducted to get their perspective on working with streamers. With the interviews the research will gain insight into their experience working together, what their expectations were going into the partnership, how they measure the success of such a part-nership, determine sufficient compensation, and value to their stream audiences. The main goal for the research will be to highlight potential pain points in the partnerships and how they can be improved, especially regarding communication between the parties. Furthermore, the research aims to help develop the relationships between streamers and Counter-Strike platforms to be-come long lasting and fruitful collaborations that help both grow.

1.2   Hypotheses

There is little research done in using streamers specifically in Counter-Strike platforms. Through the interviews and the answers from them, it will be interesting to see what the results will be. While this study does not presuppose specific hypotheses, it seeks to uncover potential pain points in the partnerships and opportunities for improvement, especially in communication and procedures with the parties involved. The goal is to help foster long-lasting and mutually beneficial collaborations between streamers and Counter-Strike platforms.

In conclusion, this thesis aims to explore streamer relations within Counter-Strike platforms, uncovering insights to enhance collaboration and relationships. Through interviews with streamers and platform representative, this study seeks to offer practical recommendations to both parties. The following chapters will delve into theory, methodology, and findings, contributing to a deeper understanding of this dynamic between streamers and Counter-Strike platforms.

2 Theoretical background

In the following chapters, we delve into the history of Counter-Strike, its associated third-party platforms, and the evolving landscape of streaming as an industry. This section provides a brief historical overview of each topic and explores the significance of streaming in contemporary marketing strategies as of 2024.

2.1 Counter-Strike

Counter-Strike is a game that was originally developed to be a mod for the game Half-Life in the late 1990s. Counter-Strike quickly gained popularity and as Mullane (2023) states, blended tactical gameplay and team-based action which set it apart from the FPS norm when it released in June 1999. Valve, the developer behind Half-Life quickly collaborated with the creators of the mod Minh "Gooseman" Le and Jess "Cliffe" Cliffe to develop the mod further to be its own standalone game. Soon after, Counter-Strike 1.0 was released in November 2000, which quickly became successful.

Even though the game was released over 20 years ago, the core gameplay has not changed. Players are divided into two teams, Terrorists whose goal is to explode a bomb by planting it and protecting it or Counter-Terrorists, whose goal in turn is to defuse the bomb. While the game has gotten multiple updates with different versions, this simple but capturing gameplay has kept gamers hooked for decades.

Figure 1. Title screen of Counter-Strike 1.6

History of Counter-Strike can be divided into roughly four different versions. Firstly, the original game after developed by Valve with its version 1.6, which is often referred to as the golden years of Counter-Strike. Secondly, in 2004, Valve released Counter-Strike: Source, that introduced a brand-new Source engine that significantly changed the physics and graphics of the game. Thirdly, in 2012, the games next major iteration Counter-Strike: Global Offensive got released that brought the game to the next generation of video games once again updating graphics, gameplay mechanics and introducing a matchmaking system. As Henningson (2020) wrote in his article, "CS:GO was true to its prequels but was made for a modern world."

Prior to the release of CS:GO, players had to play in privately created servers with varying skill level of players and rulesets. This version of Counter-Strike is where players first got to find opponents that were similar in skill level to theirs with regular rulesets and maps, and where first iterations of third-party platforms emerged. Last year in 2023, the game had its latest version update to Counter-Strike 2, which replaced CS:GO, overhauling the games physics and graphics and introducing new gameplay elements.

2.2 Third-party platforms of Counter-Strike

Uniquely to Counter-Strike, the game has a phenomenon where third-party platforms have emerged that provide matchmaking services to players outside of the main game's matchmaking system. Companies such as FACEIT, Esportal and ESEA host their own servers with improved anti-cheat, smoother experience, and their own ranking system. According to Morris (2024), "There are two big reasons that you should play CS2 FACEIT instead of normal matchmaking. To start, FACEIT uses a different anti-cheat to standard CS2 matchmaking. This is a kernel-level anti-cheat, meaning you avoid this issue with CS2 FACEIT. A complaint often leveled at CS2 is that VAC lets too many cheaters slip through the cracks. No longer though, as FACEIT's anti-cheat is much more in-depth for CS2. The next is the level of competition. Even in the lower ranks, you'll usually find there is more communication, and more competent teammates in general."

Some players go even as far to say as third-party platforms are a "necessary device to enjoy the game properly." (Miter, 2023). While third-party platforms offer distinct advantages such as improved anti-cheat systems and higher levels of competition, it's important to consider potential drawbacks. For instance, these platforms require additional steps for players to access, including downloading the platform client and installing their anti-cheat software. This extra effort may deter some players, particularly those who prefer the convenience of Valve's built-in matchmaking service. Moreover, the player pool on third-party platforms is typically smaller compared to Valve's matchmaking service, which can lead to longer queue times and less diverse matches. Additionally, the elevated skill level of players on these platforms may create a more challenging experience for new players.

These companies provide their services as free to use and offer a premium subscription that includes benefits such as advanced statistics, access to competitive leagues and ladders, premium only events and item drops you can gain by playing. However, the core experience that they offer is available without purchasing a subscription. Additionally, these companies offer competitions and communities that the player can participate while playing and win prizes. Streamers, esports organizations, brands and other companies are often included in collaborations with the platforms in hosting them. As an example, Finnish esports organization ENCE has partnered with multiple Counter-Strike platforms, hosting their own tournaments at Esportal and having their own clan in FACEIT where their fans can find other likeminded players and participate in organized activities hosted by ENCE.

2.3   Livestreaming industry

Livestreaming, which entails real-time transmission of information over the internet in a video format, first emerged as a technology in the early 1990s. Initially, only large-scale events such as music concerts or sports games were sporadically livestreamed over the internet until YouTube hosted its inaugural livestream event in 2008. Shortly after, in 2011, the American streaming service Twitch was founded, primarily focusing on video games. Twitch rapidly gained mainstream success and became immensely popular. Today, most social media platforms, including YouTube, Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram, offer livestreaming capabilities, making it more accessible than ever before (Rogers, 2022).

The largest streaming service, Twitch.tv, boasted over 7 million unique active streamers as of 2023. Despite its primary focus on video games, the platform hosts creators producing non-gaming-related content such as music performances, talk shows, or educational content (Martin, 2024). According to Slayton (2022), what distinguishes livestreaming is its engagement with the audience. Popular streamers can interact with their audiences through the chat, enabling viewers to send messages, tips, advice, or otherwise engage with them. This interactivity has been the key to success for Twitch, where the most prominent streamers amass millions of followers.
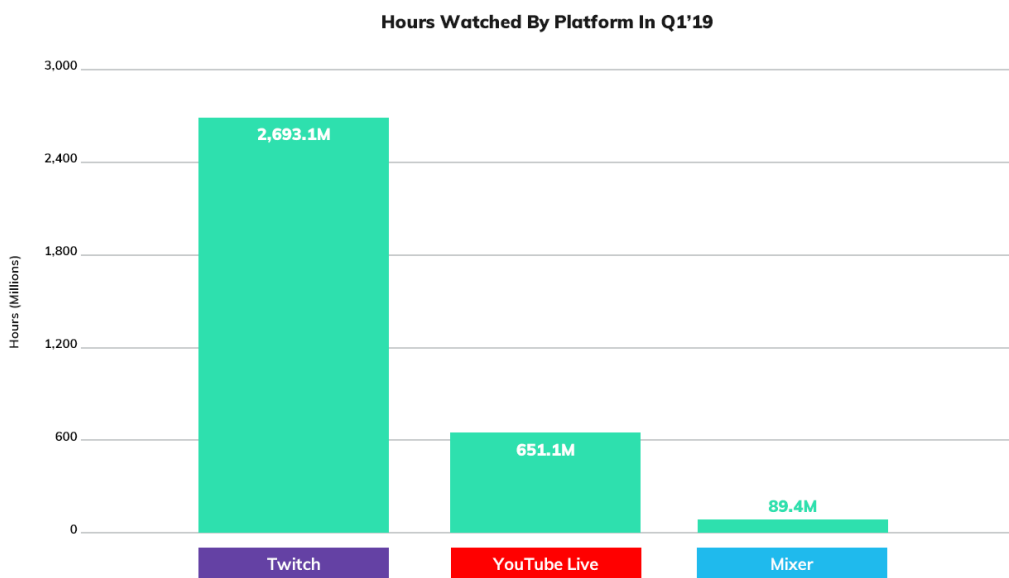

Figure 2. Hours watched by platform in Q1´19 (Gorenko, 2019).

2.4 Games industry and livestreaming

Streaming platforms are reshaping game promotions, providing developers with new opportunities to reach wider audiences through collaborations with popular creators. According to Dursun (2023), partnering with influencers has become a vital marketing strategy for many game developers, allowing them to attract target groups that may be difficult to reach through traditional marketing channels.

As emphasized by Sammis, Lincoln, and Pomponi (2015), influencer marketing's appeal lies in its ability to engage real people authentically. Streamers can effectively showcase games by sharing genuine reactions and enjoyment, as demonstrated by the partnership between Twitch streamer Lirik and Ubisoft. Lirik, with over 2 million followers, collaborated with Ubisoft to promote a game and during the promotion was asked how he likes the game, to which he stated "if you're asking sponsored Lirik, then the answer is yes, but if you're asking unsponsored Lirik, then the answer is yes also. I think I love this game's features" (Lou, 2021).

However, utilizing streamers for game promotions entails risks. Pierce (2022) notes that marketing efforts must appear authentic, as streamer communities value personal engagement and authenticity over direct marketing tactics. Moreover, the alignment of company values with streamers' personal brands is crucial for success. According to a 2019 article by Haryacha, professional Twitch streamer Scott 'Sco' McMillan emphasized the importance of partnering with companies that resonate with the community and contribute positively to it. McMillan stated that the companies must have a good reputation, provide quality to their fans, and align with the players' interests.

2.5 Partnership Relationship Management

"Partner Relationship Management (PRM) really is about relationships. It is about understanding the needs of one's business partners and satisfying those needs to the best of one's ability while building trust between the two parties. PRM, therefore, is much more complex than collecting data. An organization must learn to communicate with its partner, using self-disclosure skills to articulate its needs. It must know its personal trust strategies and then share those with the partner. The organization must build agreements that are mutually beneficial while working through the conflict that collaboration, by its very nature, causes." (Dent, 2006).

Effectively communicating in a partnership of any kind is essential for its success. Furthermore, having high quality communication is a key aspect for transferring information between two parties. Aspects such as accuracy, timeliness, adequacy, and credibility of information that is exchanged is vital to succeed (Mohr & Spekman, 1994, p. 138). This forms the basis for success on PRM, enabling effective collaboration and understanding between the parties.

With any kind of partnership, it is evident that challenges arrive at some point. Especially when partnering with streamers that create content as their main source of income, it is essential to have communication methods to manage grievances. "A grievance can commonly be understood in B2B context as a dispute between the parties involved and as a complaint made by any of the partner due to the differences in goals, perceived poor efficiency, and perceived unfairness. Companies must have formal as well as informal mechanisms to handle grievances" (Agarwal & Singh, 2014, p. 19-20). As such, managing upcoming issues and if possible preventing them beforehand by communicating well is extremely important for fostering a healthy partnership.

3   Methodology

The research focuses on examining practical examples of partnerships between streamers and Counter-Strike platforms, with an emphasis on identifying strategies to enhance their effectiveness. As mentioned before in the introduction, 5 to 7 interviews will be conducted to experienced streamers and an industry representative from a popular Counter-Strike platform. The interview questions focus on their individual experiences regarding collaborations and were set in a way that the results would help each other understand their stance on the partnerships. Additionally, the interview seeks to give suggestions and feedback for the streamers and platforms to further improve their relationship.

3.1   Data Collection Using Semi-Structured Interviews

According to Blaxter et al. (2006: 172), using interviews allows for gaining detailed information that might not be accessible through other methods, such as observation or questionnaires. Additionally, Dörnyei (2007: 143) argues that interviews facilitate participant understanding, with interviewers able to rephrase or simplify questions as needed for more accurate data collection.

As such, qualitative research in the form of multiple semi-structured interviews has been chosen as the most suitable approach for this research. Given that the interviews focus on the experiences of both streamers and platform representatives in their past collaborations, qualitative method provides flexibility to cover the interview questions in-depth that the research aims to capture.

The target group that will be interviewed are streamers that have varying amounts of experience in brand partnerships, be it with Counter-Strike platforms or other companies surrounding the streaming field. By capturing their firsthand experiences with these partnerships, the research can provide understanding to the factors that affect streamers decision to join the collaboration and understand the challenges they have faced. To ensure sufficient variability and sample size, a target of 5 to 7 streamers with relevant experience is preferred. Additionally, one representative from Counter-Strike platforms will be interviewed to gain their perspective on the topic. This way the study gains insight from industry professionals and aid understanding the platform's role in streamer to brand collaborations.

3.2   Data Analysis

After the interviews have concluded, a combination of thematic analysis and coding will be employed to analyze the data gathered from them. Thematic analysis will serve as the overarching framework for systematically identifying patterns, themes, and recurring topics from the interview responses. This process will involve reviewing the interview results, grouping the answers into similar categories and themes, and analyzing the relationships between these themes to gain a comprehensive understanding of the data gathered.

In addition to thematic analysis, coding will be utilized as a method to further refine the identification of patterns and themes within the data. Coding involves systematically assigning labels or codes to segments of the data that represent specific concepts or themes. These codes will help in organizing and categorizing the data, facilitating the identification of commonalities and variations across the responses.

By integrating both thematic analysis and coding, this approach ensures a rigorous and systematic examination of the interview data, enabling a thorough exploration of the collaborations between streamers and Counter-Strike platforms. Furthermore, differences with the interview results will be pointed out and evaluated for further analysis. The differences will be further studied in relation to the themes or topics to get a thorough interpretation of the data and consider alternative perspectives.

Once all the answers have been thoroughly reviewed, a discussion will be written to further point out insights gained from the analysis and suggest potential improvements for collaboration methods between streamers and Counter-Strike platforms in the future. The discussion will draw upon the identified themes and insights from the data analysis, providing a solid basis for recommendations.

The culmination of the research will be presented in the results section showcasing key insights from the data analysis. The success of the research depends largely on the quality and depth of the interviews conducted, especially the participation of streamers that have significant experience with brand collaborations. If enough streamers that are well versed with collaborating with companies are interviewed, the study should succeed well.

3.3   Reliability and Validity

This section evaluates the reliability and validity of the research methodology employed, particularly concerning the interviews conducted with Counter-Strike streamers and a platform representative. Originally, the research plan aimed to conduct 5 to 7 interviews with experienced streamers engaged in partnerships with Counter-Strike platforms. Ultimately, 5 interviews were completed with Finnish Counter-Strike streamers, alongside an interview with a platform representative responsible for marketing and operations. While pre-existing connections facilitated communication with some streamers, scheduling interviews encountered occasional challenges. Several instances of last-minute cancellations or rescheduling led to delays, and follow-up attempts with three initially planned interviewees resulted in no response.

Despite these challenges, 5 successful interviews were conducted with streamers, along with the platform representative's interview. Virtual calls via Discord facilitated the interviews, which were recorded and transcribed. The interviews were conducted in Finnish rather than English to facilitate for a comfortable environment for the participants, and the answers are translated to English. The interviews provided valuable insights into the streamers' experiences with partnerships, despite variations in their levels of experience with partnerships and streaming in general. While some interviewees had limited experience, their perspectives still contributed meaningfully to the research. This aligns with the understanding that platforms engage in campaigns with influencers of varying follower counts, as emphasized by the platform representative.

Overall, the results can be considered valid for the purposes of the thesis, as benefits of the interview method became clear when facilitating them. As Dörnyei (2007: 143) mentioned, the interviewees asked occasionally for further clarification on the questions which improved the quality of their answers as they understood the questions better. In summary, while the interview process faced logistical challenges, the methodology employed ensured the collection of reliable and valid data.

4   Results

This part of the thesis showcases the results of the interviews. Below, all the interviews are sum-marized before analyzing the results of the research and comparing the answers in a more thor-ough manner. The interviews started with general information regarding the interviewee, such as their name and how long they have been streaming or working with a Counter-Strike platform. Afterwards questions regarding topics such as what attracted them into entering a partnership, what their expectations were, how they measured success and compensation, how they feel com-munication was handled, what their role is within the community and what challenges they have faced.

4.1   Interview #1 Tommi "Tomppahh" Paakkunainen

The first interview was done with Tommi "Tomppahh" Paakkunainen, a Finnish streamer who started streaming originally in 2013 and began streaming more purposefully during 2018 to 2019. His first partnership was with CSKeisari, which he was attracted to due to the alignment of their brand with his own and the opportunities it presented, mainly regarding additional income and unique content creation.

Tommi emphasized the importance of visibility when entering partnerships with Counter-Strike platforms. He highlighted the value of being part of a stream team and participating in tourna-ments and events organized by the platforms for increased visibility. This is also how Tommi measured the success of the partnership, through increased viewership and visibility as evidenced by spikes in viewership during partnership-driven activities such as giveaways. He highlighted the importance of setting realistic goals and negotiating with the partners beforehand.

Tommi values direct and honest communication in partnerships, which stemmed from his past experiences in other fields such as DJ gigs. He stressed the need for clear agreements and defined expectations to avoid misunderstandings. Specifically, he mentioned for both parties to remain truthful in their promises and to say things as they are and avoid overpromising.

For compensation, Tommi evaluated it based on a combination of factors including monetary compensation, visibility, social media promotion, and product offerings. Tommi relies on previous

experiences and consultations with colleagues to assess fair compensation. He believes that platforms can enhance community engagement and content creation through activities like skin giveaways, tournaments, and events that encourage viewer participation and interaction. In his opinion streamers play a significant role in fostering positive experiences and communities within the Counter-Strike ecosystem. They provide a space for viewers to connect, have fun, and escape daily stresses.

Tommi has not faced significant challenges in his partnerships with Counter-Strike platforms, however he acknowledged the competitive landscape for partnerships, especially for smaller streamers. He suggested the creation of a common platform, like WeHype, where influencers and brands can easily find and connect with each other, streamlining the partnership process and potentially fostering collaborations between influencers.

4.2   Interview #2 with "eXtinctorTV"

The second interview was done with Twitch streamer "eXtinctorTV" who has a history of streaming Counter-Strike since 2017 and shared his experiences and perspectives on partnerships with the Counter-Strike community. He prioritizes viewer engagement and ensures that partnerships align with his values, benefiting his audience. Especially partnerships that can offer something tangible to his audience are valued by him.

With platforms eXtinctorTV chooses ones he personally enjoys and believes in, emphasizing the importance of honesty, reliability, and the ability to host viewer matches. His partnerships are driven by a desire for genuine engagement rather than promotion. He measures the success of partnerships by determining goals together with the entity he is partnering with and seeing if those goals are achieved and if his viewers benefit from the partnership. Honesty and positive experiences are key indicators of success that he evaluates.

eXtinctorTV stresses the importance of clear and timely communication through platforms like Discord. Having communication channels be open and responsive is crucial for maintaining a positive experience during the partnership. Timely resolution of any issues and fulfilling promises are crucial to maintain the trust with relationships for content creators. In addition to communication, the way eXtinctorTV evaluates compensation is based on the value that his viewers gain rather than sole monetary factors. For him, the ability to host viewer games and ensure viewer engagement are important considerations when assessing fair compensation, and the ability to

enhance his stream and develop it to become better. From the platform's perspective, they can further better the engagement in the community by promoting special events in collaboration with content creators and providing unique gameplay experiences.

Streamers play a significant role in fostering these communities within Counter-Strike platforms as they bring players and facilitate engagement through activities like viewer matches. However, whenever technical difficulties or unfulfilled promises occur, they should be resolved with high priority to maintain trust and positive relationships. He states that the communities regarding Counter-Strike can be small and word spreads fast, and content creators want to avoid platforms that they can expect to have problems with.

Lastly, he suggests that platforms align their values with content creators they wish to collaborate with. Tailor the activities they wish to host with the creator to align with their audience is important. Additionally, he focuses on streamlining the user experience, having timely support for technical issues, regular updates with new, exciting events and features for the target audience so that the platform can be successful.

4.3   Interview #3 with Teemu "Spamned" Rissanen

The third interview was with Teemu "Spamned" Rissanen, a professional streamer who has streamed Counter-Strike since 2012. The interview sheds light on his extensive experience with partnerships within the Counter-Strike community, where he provided his insights into the dynamics of collaborations with various companies in Finland.

Teemu emphasized the critical importance of prompt and cooperative communication in fostering successful partnerships. He underscored the need for platforms to designate accessible and involved contact persons, especially for time-sensitive matters such as organizing matches. Additionally, he highlighted being active in the collaboration process and if necessary, having calls with the partners to catch up and brainstorm how to develop the collaboration further. He provided examples of cases where he lacked the rights or status on the platform to host matches for multiple days which delayed his work. Teemu noted that unresponsive communication from platforms has been a significant challenge in his partnership experiences, that can significantly hinder the collaboration.

In addition to communication, Teemu discussed the necessity of setting concrete goals with part-nering creators and ensuring their achievement to maintain mutual satisfaction. He discussed his approach to determining fair compensation, considering factors such as the scope of the contract and the effort required, whether it involves hosting matches or other promotional activities. Teemu highlighted the importance of tailoring the scale of partnerships to the needs of collabo-rating companies, including the frequency and duration of activities on the platform.

Teemu also touched upon the vital role of platforms in community engagement, advocating for initiatives such as giveaways, special events, and active involvement in content creation with in-fluencers. In his opinion, being involved with the content creation process from platforms side is essential which in turn resonates to the viewers. He stated that streamers have a massive role with platforms, where they can bring in activities, visibility, and trust towards the platform.

He emphasized the influence of streamers in shaping player preferences and suggested that plat-forms avoid generalized partnerships with creators. Instead, Teemu recommended tailoring col-laborations to the individual needs and branding of each streamer for long-term success. He men-tioned that common ground rules can be set in place, but that more attention needs to be given to what is the right way for this specific content creator to advertise the company.

4.4   Interview with Jere "LeiskaGG" Leinonen

The fourth interview was conducted with Jere "LeiskaGG" Leinonen, a young streamer who started his online presence in 2019. He highlights the importance of keeping the collaborations with companies simple and easy with clear goals, emphasizing that the brand should fit with his own values. He mentions that earlier in his career he got offers from gambling platforms which he outright denied, as him being underage at the time and the values those platforms present not aligning with his values.

LeiskaGG mentions that when going into a partnership they define the goals together with the company and is hoping that his community likes the partnership and the possibilities it offers. This is also the way he measures if the partnership was successful or not, based on the positive feedback he receives from viewers during his streams. He briefly mentions visibility being an added benefit but points out that his community feedback is more important than viewer num-bers. In addition to positive feedback he receives, he points that communication should be smooth and preferably with an assigned person that is easy to reach if needed.

Regarding compensation, LeiskaGG evaluates his own brand value and workload to determine a fair amount. He had positive experiences interacting with past partnerships, such as with Esportal, where the staff actively participated in his stream and outlined being actively involved with his stream during the partnership as a positive experience. Despite having minimal challenges encountered with partnerships, LeiskaGG suggests that innovative partnership models should be developed beyond the conventional "play and bring presence" at the platform approach.

4.5   Interview with Sami "Myst1s" Partanen

The fifth interview was conducted with Sami "Myst1s" Partanen, a Finnish streamer who has been active on Twitch since 2017. For him, the importance with partnerships has been as means of enhancing participation and engagement with his stream community. The motivation with partnerships has come from the desire to offer tangible benefits and experiences for his viewers, especially through collaborative activities. He highlighted the significance of open communication with platform partners and advocated for active involvement from their side, rather than having passive sponsorship agreements with little to no involvement.

Myst1s measures the success of partnership through positive feedback rather than analyzing viewership numbers or other data. As his stream is focused on community interaction, his criterion for success is following if the content he is creating is interesting for the viewers and if they want to participate with him. Regarding compensation, Myst1s emphasized the need for fairness and transparency, and acknowledged that coming up with value definition is difficult, however he measured it by assessing the time, effort and planning required for the partnership.

Regarding community engagement and content creation, he highlighted the benefits of collaborative activities such as hosting a tournament or viewer matches that are facilitated by the platforms, this way the content is easier to organize rather than having to set the tools required himself. For challenges, he mentioned mainly maintaining interest with Counter-Strike the game itself, mentioning variance in motivation, rather than issues with platforms and noted that communication with them has generally been quick and efficient in his experience.

In terms of improvements, Myst1s recommended finding new innovative tools such as Streamcoi which could enhance marketing efforts and engagement with streams and their chats. He em-

phasized being able to adjust and be flexible with partnerships and to cater towards the uniqueness of each stream and its community. Additionally, he highlighted the value with direct interaction between sponsors and viewers, as it fosters greater engagement and credibility.

4.6   Interview with a Counter-Strike platform representative

The final interview was conducted with Felix Kaukiainen, Head of Marketing & Operations at Esportal where he gave several insights into a Counter-Strike platform's approach to streamer partnerships and the challenges they have faced. Kaukiainen emphasized the importance of aligning with streamers that have values which resonate with the platform and underlined brand safety standards whenever partnering up with an influencer. This indicates a strategic focus on maintaining a positive image and avoiding potential risk factors with influencers by ensuring compatibility with partners. Additionally, he highlighted the significance of campaigns in which influencers are brought onboard to expand the platform's reach and audience engagement across different regions.

Measurement of success was not solely based on user acquisition but also on factors such as visibility and positive discourse generated by streamers. This holistic evaluation and factoring of intangible benefits suggest a good understanding of partnership impact beyond numbers and user amounts. To achieve a successful partnership, effective communication using channels like email and Discord channels were utilized to communicate and engage with streamers. For larger streamers, direct contacts were provided that underscore the platform's commitment for personalized support while providing initiatives for community engagement such as events and tournaments aim to foster collaboration and content creation.

However, Kaukiainen acknowledged the challenges faced by the platform, particularly regarding streamer commitment and resource allocation. Instances of unfulfilled agreements or last-minute changes underscored the inherent complexities of coordinating multiple stakeholders in influencer campaigns. Moreover, the interview shed light on the platform's limited resources and the difficulty of effectively communicating with numerous streamers while managing other daily tasks. These insights underscore the practical challenges inherent in fostering and maintaining successful partnerships in the dynamic realm of influencer marketing.

To enhance partnerships, Kaukiainen emphasized the importance of clear communication and mutual commitment. He recommends streamers, even small and ones who are starting their

streaming career to approach collaborations seriously. Companies and platforms may be willing to engage with a diverse range of content creators even if their audience is small. Overall, the interview revealed a multifaceted approach to streamer partnerships characterized by strategic alignment, communication strategies and ongoing efforts to address and optimize them further.

4.7 Discussion

Based on the interviews with streamers and Counter-strike platform representative, several key themes emerged regarding partnerships within the two parties. This section analyzes and covers these themes. Firstly, regarding motivation and goals with the partnerships, the streamers show-cased diverse motivations for entering a partnership ranging from enhancing community engagement to generating additional income. For example, Tommi "Tomppahh" Paakkunainen high-lighted the importance of aligning brand values and goals with partners and noted that the goals set up for the partnership need to be realistic with the streamer. Furthermore, Teemu "Spamned" Rissanen, who does stream as his primary source of income, noted that partnerships for him are a significant part of his livelihood and emphasized going above and beyond to make the partner-ship successful for all parties. In addition, having platforms that have features and functionality that the streamers personally desire and wish to play in, even outside of their streams, was high-lighted as important factor when deciding whether to go into a partnership together.

The interviewees had various expectations from partnerships, depending on their individual goals, priorities, and past experiences with other companies. Most commonly, clear communica-tion and set expectations were noted as a key factor. They expected transparent communication channels and prompt responses, and sought for clarity on goals, responsibilities, and terms of the partnership to avoid misunderstandings. Both the streamers and platforms goals for the collabo-rations were to be mutually beneficial, offering value to each other enhancing their brands, en-gaging the community, and contributing to it.

The success of partnerships was evaluated based on various metrics, including viewer engage-ment, positive feedback, and brand visibility. Streamers such as "eXtinctorTV" and Sami "Myst1s" Partanen evaluated the success from community feedback and involvement in the stream and defined the partnership as beneficial through intangible methods rather than numerical value through viewership numbers for example. Increase in viewer interaction, specifically through par-ticipation events such as tournaments, giveaways or special streams which also boosted their

viewership numbers were seen as successful metrics to note. Additionally, Felix Kaukiainen from Esportal highlighted that the success needs to be evaluated holistically, and to consider factors such as positive discourse, brand perception and feedback through social media in addition to user acquisition. Having the predefined goals and objectives negotiated for the partnership and fulfilling those was seen as an important criterion for success.

Effective communication rose as a critical factor in successful partnerships. Streamers highlighted the importance of transparent and quick communication with partners and generally preferred direct contact persons. Furthermore, keeping the discussion honest was seen as pivotal to ensure a trusting relationship. Having accessible and involved staff to contact from the platforms side was highlighted as a key component for success specifically when problems arrived. In terms of communication channels, digital methods such as Discord or email were used for day-to-day interactions while some preferred to have regular calls and meetings, making the communication more personal and fluent to avoid misunderstandings. This was also noted from the platforms side as important, however limited resources may challenge the possibilities for having a dedicated contact person to facilitate communication.

In addition to resource allocation, several other challenges were identified such as competitive landscape with other streamers and unresponsive or late communication. Cases such as missing rights or restricted access to platform features were highlighted as examples of issues faced. Streamers and the platform representative highlighted the need for innovative, flexible solutions to partnerships. Each community and streamers are different, and when organizing a partnership, it must be considered to tailor the partnership to its needs. This can be achieved through negotiating thoroughly beforehand and setting goals for success together. The platform noted coordinating complex campaigns together with influencers as a significant challenge, as it is often done in addition to other daily tasks further contributing to resourcing difficulties.

In terms of compensation, the interviewees gave varying results for what they considered when determining sufficient compensation. Commonly, the streamers considered the effort and workload that was required for the partnership and evaluated that based on either their own past experiences or consultations through colleagues. Monetary compensation, visibility and brand exposure, product offerings or giveaways for their audience were among the factors contributing to evaluating the value of their services. From the platform's perspective, compensation can come from marketing budget for a separate campaign, but they highlighted that negotiating with the streamer ultimately determines the end amount, depending on scope of the agreement.

Streamers play a significant role in fostering positive experiences and communities within Counter-Strike platform ecosystems. They create engagement through activities such as viewer matches and tournaments and impact directly to consumer decision for playing on a platform. Streamers provide the platforms a community for the users to connect with, interact and share enjoyable gaming experiences together. From the streamer's perspective, the best partnership experiences they had were with companies that were actively involved, and the worst were passive ones with no further communication after beginning the partnership. Therefore, it is recommended to invest in proper resource allocation whenever considering using influencers as part of marketing campaign, as the benefits from successful collaborations affect more than user acquisition numbers towards the platform. Overall, both streamers and the platform representative advocated for having platforms and communities that help the entire Counter-Strike ecosystem. Streamers provide and create interaction and content, while the platforms provide the tools, support, and resources for collaboration so that the user experience thrives with surrounded by a positive atmosphere filled with likeminded communities.

5   Conclusion

In this thesis, the dynamics of streamer-platform partnerships within the Counter-Strike commu-
nity were investigated, aiming to shed light on the factors which affect the collaborations to be-
come successful. Through interviews with Finnish Counter-Strike streamers and a platform rep-
resentative, valuable insights were gained into strategies, challenges, and benefits of such part-
nerships.

The results reveal several key themes that underscore the complexities and opportunities in
streamer-platform relationships. Firstly, we observed the importance of aligning brand values and
objectives between streamers and platforms to ensure mutual benefit and brand safety. Plat-
forms, as highlighted by the representative, are selective in their partnerships, prioritizing influ-
encers whose values resonate with them and their partners. This strategic approach emphasizes
the significance of authenticity and credibility in fostering successful collaborations.

Moreover, the research highlighted the multifaceted nature of partnership evaluation. While user
acquisition metrics remain essential, the interviews emphasized value of intangible factors such
as visibility and positive discourse generated by streamers. Platforms not only seek to increase
user numbers but also aim to leverage influencers' ability to engage and create positive experi-
ences in their communities effectively.

Effective communication rose as a crucial factor with partnership management. Platforms employ
various channels such as Discord and email contacts to facilitate communication and support with
streamers through the partnership. However, as mentioned by some of the streamers, challenges
such as delays in communication or even complete radio silence were hindering their experience
which suggests a need for streamlined communication and resource allocation for communica-
tion. Having a dedicated staff member responsible for partnerships and managing them could
improve the relations in the future.

Despite the challenges, the research suggests having streamer-platform partnerships an increase
in the overall well-being inside Counter-Strike ecosystem. Streamers facilitate and create positive
atmosphere, communities and events for the players which can eventually turn further into tan-
gible benefit, users for the platform as well as intangible benefit, positive user association with
the platform. By fostering clear communication and mutual commitment, both streamers and

platforms can maximize the impact of their collaborations and drive the Counter-Strike community forward and create engaging experiences.

While the results were focused on Finnish streamers with a limited sample size, future research could explore additional factors relating to partnerships such as cultural differences with other regions and diverse communities, further technologies, or methods to use for partnerships. Conducting larger research with more streamers with increasing variance on experience, viewer amounts and expectations, the results could portray further areas for improvement. In conclusion, fully understanding streamer-platform partnerships can be a significant competitive advantage for platforms and leveraging them effectively is essential for growth and sustainability with Counter-Strike communities.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Interview questions for the streamers empty

1. What is your name and how long have you been streaming?

2. During your time streaming, have you been partnered with companies in any deals and if so, what initially attracted you to partnering with them?

   a. If you have not been partnered with any company, what would attract you to partnering with a business in your stream? (Answer only if no experience)

3. When going into a partnership with a Counter-Strike platform type of company, what are your expectations when entering it?

4. How would you feel the partnership was successful, how would you measure it?

5. How do you feel the communication within the partnership should be handled? In your experience, is there specific instances you feel there should be open communication channels in place if needed.

6. How would you determine what is fair compensation for your services in a Counter-Strike platform? Consider the scope of the contract and the value you bring as a streamer, and if you can provide examples of the factors, you consider when assessing the compensation.

7. How could a Counter-Strike platform help with your community engagement and content creation in your stream?

8. What role do you believe streamers have in the community around a Counter-Strike platform in Finland?

9. What challenges have you faced in partnerships with Counter-Strike platforms?

10. What suggestions would you give to improve the partnership between streamers and Counter-Strike platforms? Is there any specific features, tools or procedures that would benefit both parties?

Appendix B: Interview questions for the Counter-Strike platform representative empty

1. Could you introduce yourself and your role within the Counter-Strike platform? How long have you been involved with the platform?

2. Can you provide examples of past partnerships the platform has engaged in with streamers? What factors typically attract the platform to partner with streamers?

3. What are the platform's expectations when entering a partnership with streamers? What goals does the platform aim to achieve through these partnerships?

4. How does the platform measure the success of its partnerships with streamers? Can you describe any metrics or criteria used to evaluate the effectiveness of these collaborations?

5. How does the platform ensure effective communication with streamers throughout the partnership? Are there specific channels or processes in place to facilitate communication when needed?

6. How does the platform determine fair compensation for streamers participating in partnerships? What factors does the platform consider when assessing the compensation offered to streamers?

7. How does the Counter-Strike platform support streamers in their community engagement and content creation efforts? Are there any specific initiatives or tools provided to enhance streamer engagement with their audience?

8. From the platform's perspective, what role do streamers play in shaping the Counter-Strike community? How does the platform collaborate with streamers to foster a positive and engaging community environment?

9. What are some of the challenges you have encountered in partnerships with streamers? How does the platform address these challenges to improve future collaborations?

10. Based on your experiences, what suggestions would you offer streamers to improve partnerships between the platform and the streamers?

Appendix C: Interviews with the streamers

Questions are in cursive and **Answers in bold.**

Tommi "Tomppahh" Paakkunainen

1. *What is your name and how long have you been streaming?*

Tommi "Tomppahh" Paakkunainen. The first time I streamed was in 2013, on Twitch I started in 2016. From years 2018/2019 I started streaming more purposefully.

2. *During your time streaming, have you been partnered with companies in any deals and if so, what initially attracted you to partnering with them?*

   a. *If you have not been partnered with any company, what would attract you to partnering with a business in your stream? (Answer only if no experience)*

My first partnership was with CSKeisari which was called CSGOKeisari back then. I actually am the first partnered streamer with CSKeisari ever. What attracts me is of course some small extra income for myself and opportunities to do different things that I could not be able to do otherwise. Pyry, the owner of CSKeisari who asked me seemed like a good guy and their brand fitted. I have gotten lots of opportunities from casino companies for example, even if they would be quite financially good partnerships, I definitely would not accept those partnerships. How their brand fits with my brand and will the viewers like the partnership and would it fit me is what matters.

3. *When going into a partnership with a Counter-Strike platform type of company, what are your expectations when entering it?*

Visibility, that is the key. I started as a partnered streamer with Enhanced Esports in their stream team which had connections to Esportal. I was able to do tournaments with my name on it, stream for them and have my stream on the website and even cast some events which brought good visibility.

4. *How would you feel the partnership was successful, how would you measure it?*

I have never been a big streamer, often I had 30-50 viewers on average. During the best times when I was active and got high amounts of viewers by hosting giveaways with CSKeisari for

example, the viewer amounts peaked as high as 150 or more. This brought good visibility for both of us. Usually with partnerships we negotiate what the goals are and what the goals are and try to remain realistic with them.

5. *How do you feel the communication within the partnership should be handled? In your experience, is there specific instances you feel there should be open communication channels in place if needed.*

I like to be direct and agree things as they are and what we will do and make sure that they are as agreed. Unrelated to streaming I have done some DJ gigs where we have agreed to do something but not agreed on the specifics which has led to things not being as they should have been. This taught me to define the partnerships before starting. Sometimes I have started making a tournament to a platform, but we did not really go through with the details and the platform overpromised on lots of things such as participant numbers. Nowadays if a company wants to do a partnership, I want to speak honestly and directly about the partnership, and those who actually know what they are usually doing do so.

6. *How would you determine what is fair compensation for your services in a Counter-Strike platform? Consider the scope of the contract and the value you bring as a streamer, and if you can provide examples of the factors, you consider when assessing the compensation.*

Compensation needs to be defined depending on what we are after. Is it money, visibility, Twitter posts, giveaways or raffles that the stream gets. Sometimes companies give a bigger amount of compensation through products rather than cash. Personally, I evaluate the compensation based on previous experiences. If there is a situation where I have no experience on, I have many colleagues and friends who I can ask if they have done a similar job before and then reflect on my own situation, the brand and stream. Usually, the more services that are asked for the higher the compensation is.

7. *How could a Counter-Strike platform help with your community engagement and content creation in your stream?*

What I liked to do whenever possible is to have a skin giveaway. The giveaway does not necessarily have to be a direct giveaway, but through a tournament, event, or other funny content with the stream that at the end of the day has a reward for the viewers. For example, watch 5 minutes and you get a "coin" from the stream and after 12 hours we check who has the most

"coins" and do a raffle based on them. Or through with Esportal, we had an event called "Tompan Tiistai Cup", a tournament I hosted on Tuesdays which was liked in the community where players were able to play leisurely and have a laugh. To summarize, different ways to bring viewers to play together and spend time as a community. Often what I see is that we have a ladder for example with a pro player with his name on it and you have an opportunity to play with this player. Bringing content, giveaways, or a combination of them which helps my brand visibility as well.

8. *What role do you believe streamers have in the community around a Counter-Strike platform in Finland?*

Streamers have a massive role in my opinion. In Finland specifically, we have lots of CS streamers who are quite different from each other, and in many cases the streams have a different viewer and you do not see similar names between them. Lots of people who have their own small communities, which in turn create positive experiences. I had multiple private messages sent to me from viewers that they had a bad day but thanks to the stream they had a nice time and got to talk with people. The streams are important to people clearly, and to me my goal was that everyone gets to play and have a good time, when you come to the stream you can forget your troubles for a while and not be judged. Like I said earlier, we have lots of communities so everyone can find something that they like.

9. *What challenges have you faced in partnerships with Counter-Strike platforms?*

Personally, I have not had any challenges so hard to say. What I could say is that I'd want to do more of the partnerships, if you are a starting streamer or even with myself where I have 30 viewers and some streamer has 100+ viewers or even more, the competition can be tough. From my experience all the partnerships have gone smoothly.

10. *What suggestions would you give to improve the partnership between streamers and Counter-Strike platforms? Is there any specific features, tools or procedures that would benefit both parties?*

I'd like to see a common platform that could be utilized between brands and influencers. A company called WeHype is a good example of this, a platform where influencers can find offers and brand deals. A common place where influencers can register, tell a bit about themselves and their viewer amounts and through this platform companies can find and communicate to the influencers. Through this platform influencers could possibly collaborate with each other as well, to have a common platform where everyone has gathered.

eXtinctorTV

*1.	What is your name and how long have you been streaming?*

I am eXtinctorTV on Twitch, I have streamed Counter-Strike on/off from 2017 and in 2020/2021 after ending my competitive gaming career I streamed full time until the end of last year.

*2.	During your time streaming, have you been partnered with companies in any deals and if so, what initially attracted you to partnering with them?*

*a.	If you have not been partnered with any company, what would attract you to partnering with a business in your stream? (Answer only if no experience)*

I have done lots of viewer games in the past, and I look at partnerships in a way that if the viewers can get something from them and when I have been approached so that I can giveaway something in my stream. All partnerships must align with my values, and I have never gone into any partnership so that I would be the sole beneficiary but rather I think how my viewers can benefit from it.

*3.	When going into a partnership with a Counter-Strike platform type of company, what are your expectations when entering it?*

Before starting any partnership with any platform, it must be done in a way that I would play there myself and so that my viewers would also play there. Additionally, the platforms must be honest and reliable, if I can host viewer matches there that is usually enough. Depending on the platform, I have either played viewer games more casually, or looked at if I can play on an extremely high level and improve myself. Anyways, I must like the platform myself even outside of streaming, I do not want to pretend anything.

*4.	How would you feel the partnership was successful, how would you measure it?*

Often, we discuss beforehand why we are doing the partnership in the first place and what the criteria for success will be from both parties. If the goals that we set together are fulfilled and that we agree that viewers are getting something from the partnership, it must be made sure that they are actually getting it. If the experience on it is good and honest, for me and the viewers, is how I feel it was successful.

5.   How do you feel the communication within the partnership should be handled? In your experience, is there specific instances you feel there should be open communication channels in place if needed.

Using Discord has usually been enough with communication channels. However, everything that is wanted from the partnership needs to be clearly brought out. Generally, with communicating, it should be fast and effortless so that there would not be any delays. With partnerships, if you answer with a 2 day delay it might as well be that you never answered at all. I like that there would be a contact person and a backup for them in-case they are unavailable, if the communication with platforms is missing the experience can be difficult. With difficult cases if there are delays, it's important to communicate that we will reply to you by a certain date.

6.   How would you determine what is fair compensation for your services in a Counter-Strike platform? Consider the scope of the contract and the value you bring as a streamer, and if you can provide examples of the factors, you consider when assessing the compensation.

Depends on the type of partnership, with Counter-Strike platforms in my case it usually has gone to hosting viewer games, and I want that the viewers get something from it. For content creators some look at it how much time goes into the partnership and base their compensation based on that. I try to think that what develops and serves my stream the best so that the viewers also benefit, and that's how I determine that it is beneficial.

7.   How could a Counter-Strike platform help with your community engagement and content creation in your stream?

Advertise in their social media accounts that an event is done in collaboration with a content creator and if possible, make it a special event and giveaway skins or other rewards. Another way is that if the platform can make the games be different so that the platform players and viewers want to join, have it be something different than the usual. Sometimes there are technical difficulties with the matches, its important that we have someone to help with them when needed to avoid interruptions.

8.   What role do you believe streamers have in the community around a Counter-Strike platform in Finland?

Large role. Counter-Strike platforms want as many players as possible and players who are involved in communities. When there are streamers who bring in players and serve the purpose

of the platform, they act as good middlemen between the platforms and players which in turn creates communities, like viewer matches that foster engagement.

9.   What challenges have you faced in partnerships with Counter-Strike platforms?

Mainly technical difficulties with servers for example, if they can be fixed fast it would be nice. If viewers have been promised that they are getting something it should also be delivered so that they do not need to be asking about it afterwards. If a promise is made and it is not kept, the word spreads fast and these problems affect platforms fast. Content creators do not want to collaborate with platforms if they can expect lots of problems.

10.   What suggestions would you give to improve the partnership between streamers and Counter-Strike platforms? Is there any specific features, tools or procedures that would benefit both parties?

When content creators are brought onboard in a partnership, the platforms should think what their main purpose and target audience is so that everyone shares the same values. That's a good starting point to make it as smooth as possible. Speaking of smooth, playing in the platform should be easy, for example downloading the anti-cheat program or creating a profile should be simple, fast and easy. Whenever problems arise, getting a fast response is important.

The platforms should be improved based on their target audience, if there are tournaments with high skill levels, bring in good players to participate. As long as the platform has no problems and their staff keeps support messages in order, brings in new different events, features and game modes they can be successful.

Teemu "Spamned" Rissanen

1.   What is your name and how long have you been streaming?

Teemu "Spamned" Rissanen, I streamed the first time in 2012 and regularly from the year 2018.

2.   During your time streaming, have you been partnered with companies in any deals and if so, what initially attracted you to partnering with them?

a.   If you have not been partnered with any company, what would attract you to partnering with a business in your stream? (Answer only if no experience)

I must highlight myself a bit, I most likely am one of the Finnish streamers who has done most partnerships with many different companies. In 2019 when streaming became my full-time job, as an entrepreneur a large source of income is partnerships which is why I became interested in them.

3.   When going into a partnership with a Counter-Strike platform type of company, what are your expectations when entering it?

I have done collaborations with many platforms. As a streamer I value the ability to to cooperate, specifically receiving fast answers. I keep in high regard if I get answers with the same day, I do not mean that you have to be answering during Saturday night at 10 PM but in normal office hours if I ask something I expect to get a response within a few hours or during the same day. Also, so that the partnerships work both ways, I have experience with partnerships that after initial discussions I have not gotten any response to anything which is not enough. Often, I need help from their end and getting that fast is what I value the most.

4.   How would you feel the partnership was successful, how would you measure it?

With any partnership, we set certain goals with the company or platform that wishes to get more visibility or customers for example. Usually we determine concrete goal, for example that now we need to get 500 new users during a certain time period, or the goal can also be to create general activity in the platform by hosting matches or advertising. How I feel that I have succeeded is that if the goal is concrete, it must be reached, and I try to do a bit extra so that the company I'm partnering with is satisfied. That's how I measure it, I aim to work as long until the customer is satisfied.

5.   How do you feel the communication within the partnership should be handled? In your experience, is there specific instances you feel there should be open communication channels in place if needed.

In my opinion the way communication works best is that with the company that is purchasing services from a content creator, in this case me, there should be a contact person I can reach out to. Often the partnerships are agreed with someone who is a bit higher up in the hierarchy and they do not necessarily have the time to be answering to me when I am working and doing my stream. The best would be that the person is someone who I can reach fast, I have experience in the past where I have had to wait for days to get an answer to a problem. For example, I have tried to host matches and I need some status or rights in the platform to host them, and

I have had to wait long to get them. I feel that is the bare minimum, whenever we are doing partnerships where I host matches would be that I can actually create them. Additionally, I value if the platform has active admins, if someone is cheating, I could react to it and send a report forward to someone.

6.   *How would you determine what is fair compensation for your services in a Counter-Strike platform? Consider the scope of the contract and the value you bring as a streamer, and if you can provide examples of the factors, you consider when assessing the compensation.*

Depends on the goals we set. In my case, I am a full time Counter-Strike content creator and solely focused on that which brings additional value to Counter-Strike platforms and other companies that revolve around the game. How I measure it is depending on the contract we agree on, factors such as is it purely banner advertising, matches on the platform, content that I create or something else. For matches we can agree on for example that I host 20-100 games within 1-2 months, or anything in between, the amount of work I have to do defines the compensation. If I do a partnership that includes playing once a month with banners on, the compensation is smaller compared to hosting 30 matches in a month.

7.   *How could a Counter-Strike platform help with your community engagement and content creation in your stream?*

With community engagement the first thing that comes to mind is giveaways, if the platform can offer premium subscriptions, skins, or other rewards. If the platform has other partners, for example Red Bull, if products can be raffled through the platform its always good engagement if the product is good. It's important that the platform is involved in the content creation process, it could be minor things such as having a call with them how things are going, if they can help with anything, can we do something special together like a tournament or a competition. The key is to be actively involved.

8.   *What role do you believe streamers have in the community around a Counter-Strike platform in Finland?*

Very large role. Streamers can heavily influence how popular a platform is or will be, depending on how much the streamers play. People look at their favorite streamers daily and look at what they are playing, which platform are they playing on and what they are advertising. With that comes trust towards the platform, "my favorite streamer is playing here so I will play there as well", and he is hosting matches there, so I want to play with him, create an account there and

then maybe realize that this is a good place to be. Later on, if the streamer is not online stream-ing, and they want to play the game they can play there by themselves.

9.   What challenges have you faced in partnerships with Counter-Strike platforms?

Unresponsiveness to my messages. That has been the largest and most common problem I have faced, if I am not getting responses in many days or need a status update or certain rights in the platform and I can't get them, it creates frustration. I have faced a case where I have a tournament coming up today and still have not had the rights to host it, which has been diffi-cult.

10.   What suggestions would you give to improve the partnership between streamers and Counter-Strike platforms? Is there any specific features, tools or procedures that would benefit both parties?

Be involved in the process. Do not fall into thinking that what you want more everything in the platform and this streamer can bring it to us, of course you want more players playing and so on that is kind of given. Think that we have different kinds of content creators who focus on different things in their streams, for example I focus on more leisure content and hosting many viewer matches, the partnership needs to focus on what the streamer needs. Essentially create the partnerships with the streamer's rules, base the collaboration on that. Coming back to the viewer matches for me, focus the partnership on that for me and for someone else who focuses mainly only on competitive gaming, he does not like to host leisure viewer matches, then focus the collaboration with them on something competitive, for example a tournament or ranked matches that he plays. Consider what kind of person you are collaborating with rather than giving the same deal to everyone, it simply does not work. You can have some common ground rules that this needs to be present and this needs to be advertised but give more attention to what the right way for this content creator is to advertise our company.

Jere "LeiskaGG" Leinonen

1.   What is your name and how long have you been streaming?

My name is Jere "LeiskaGG" Leinonen, I started streaming in 2019 and have kept breaks some-times in between.

2.   During your time streaming, have you been partnered with companies in any deals and if so, what initially attracted you to partnering with them?

a.   If you have not been partnered with any company, what would attract you to partnering with a business in your stream? (Answer only if no experience)

Being open and making the partnership easy with clear goals. Simplified collaboration that fits my taste, I do not wish to do partnerships with any companies that do not align with my values, like gambling sites.

3.   When going into a partnership with a Counter-Strike platform type of company, what are your expectations when entering it?

I go in with the expectation to complete the partnership goals and so that my community would like it. I don't think about it specifically.

4.   How would you feel the partnership was successful, how would you measure it?

Positive feedback from my community. Whenever I was hosting community games and if I kept a break, I noticed that my community liked playing them and wanted more. And visibility.

5.   How do you feel the communication within the partnership should be handled? In your experience, is there specific instances you feel there should be open communication channels in place if needed.

Usually the communication has gone smoothly, I use Discord and not email. Low thresholds contact person who I can have a conversation quickly. Fast answers are good.

6.   How would you determine what is fair compensation for your services in a Counter-Strike platform? Consider the scope of the contract and the value you bring as a streamer, and if you can provide examples of the factors, you consider when assessing the compensation.

I evaluate my own brand value and how much work it would be, and then determine based on that how much the compensation could be.

7.   How could a Counter-Strike platform help with your community engagement and content creation in your stream?

For example, when I was partnering with Esportal, their staff sometimes visited my stream and matches when we had an active partnership. Being actively involved.

8.   What role do you believe streamers have in the community around a Counter-Strike platform in Finland?

Large role, the more people that stream the bigger hype comes up with time. If everyone collectively decide that they want to play with a specific streamer for example, it brings more players to the platform and influences it positively.

9.   What challenges have you faced in partnerships with Counter-Strike platforms?

Personally, I have not had challenges, however with one unrelated to Counter-Strike platforms I had a partnership that paid their fee very late. Their organization had changes and thus the process was slow.

10.   What suggestions would you give to improve the partnership between streamers and Counter-Strike platforms? Is there any specific features, tools or procedures that would benefit both parties?

I'd like that there would be something new and unique. Nowadays usually the partnerships go with a very basic model which mostly includes just playing on the platform. I can't tell you what that new thing would be but to have something refreshing would be nice.

Sami "Myst1s" Partanen

1.   What is your name and how long have you been streaming?

Sami "Myst1s" Partanen, I have streamed starting from early 2017, I may have had my first stream in late 2016, around that time I started originally.

2.   During your time streaming, have you been partnered with companies in any deals and if so, what initially attracted you to partnering with them?

a.   If you have not been partnered with any company, what would attract you to partnering with a business in your stream? (Answer only if no experience)

I would say that why I started doing partnerships is that when I started streaming, I hosted and still host games with my viewers, and they get to participate. Instead of me sponsoring giveaways, I can have something good to share alongside a partnership to my viewers. That has been a motivator for me, I have liked that I could have had companies to partner with that I could get something to share with the stream. Basically, I want to increase participation with the stream, join in the conversation and so on. So far streaming has not been a primary source of income for me, the main thing has been that I have gotten something nice to share.

3.   *When going into a partnership with a Counter-Strike platform type of company, what are your expectations when entering it?*

When I started streaming, I played only Counter-Strike at the start and for many years in a row which kind of burnt me out from the game. Then, often when partnering with platforms they want that you play on the platform regularly, and I have had times when I have not wanted to play the game at all which is also not beneficial for the company I'm partnering with, not to me or the stream and its content. I have always wanted to keep the communication channels open and said that I have this kind of situation going on, that I can do the minimum that we had agreed on, and then when I have lots of motivation to play, I have messaged that maybe we could do something together. When talking I have liked the best when the partnership is involved themselves and plans together with me what kind of content they wish to have, the worst cases have been where I've been said "do something and put our logos up". The best ones have been actively involved.

4.   *How would you feel the partnership was successful, how would you measure it?*

The way I measure it that if you think about a specific game, so that how many people participate and are involved with it. With my own stream I have also thought what we would do together, with a new game for example how they can get involved and if that is something that we should do. With Counter-Strike games I have followed that if the content is interesting, do the viewers want to play it and I closely follow the feedback and messages viewers send and then forward it to the platforms if possible. I do not look at pure statistics really, just eyeballing the numbers and seeing if the feedback is positive.

5.   *How do you feel the communication within the partnership should be handled? In your experience, is there specific instances you feel there should be open communication channels in place if needed.*

I always prefer to have an open communication channel. If possible, have a meeting and talk it out and face to face is the best even. When I'm reached out through email, and someone asks for a partnership I immediately ask if we can have a meeting about it and that way, I can understand the offer the best.

6.   How would you determine what is fair compensation for your services in a Counter-Strike platform? Consider the scope of the contract and the value you bring as a streamer, and if you can provide examples of the factors, you consider when assessing the compensation.

I have always thought this in a way that what the sponsor is getting. With Counter-Strike platforms they obviously want more users and pay for that to the streamer. Amounts to think has always been hard, I prefer to make contracts and sponsor deals with people I know, so that it is more than a sponsor deal so if I need help with something, and if I do a partnership with a price that I think is not that big, then the sponsor may quickly agree afterwards. Defining appropriate compensation today with streaming platforms, usually you put up an advert to a chat bot or use an affiliate link or something similar, then how many of the viewers use it? I would argue that not many, less than 10%, unless you get something tangible from it. I don't have a direct answer to this, I calculate how much time, effort and planning the partnership would take and then base it from there.

7.   How could a Counter-Strike platform help with your community engagement and content creation in your stream?

How I have benefitted myself, is that when we do partnerships, I have asked with help to set up a tournament for example, so that the platform gets players and they set it up on their platform and they have not asked for any fee from it. The benefit that me and the community has gotten that it's easy to set up activities and community matches, and I do not personally have to create a server and configure that.

8.   What role do you believe streamers have in the community around a Counter-Strike platform in Finland?

I see that streamers have an important role in community activation, and I see the community games as a good example since I look at it through video game and media education perspective, that those games are a lot safer to play compared to normal matchmaking. Even when thinking of educationally the stream games are very good, you get to play with other Finnish

people and can find new friends to play with. Some people have even created new friendships through streaming communities.

9.   What challenges have you faced in partnerships with Counter-Strike platforms?

Personally biggest challenge has been the game itself, when I have a good drive going on and the game is interesting and we have a partnership going on, and if for example a new game gets released that I want to play or something else happens, instead of playing that I have to use all the time that I am playing to a game that just right then is not that interesting for me. I have transformed into more of a variety and real-life streaming, so even the thought of playing one game daily for a month gets me a bit burnt out. That has been the biggest challenge with Counter-Strike partnership deals. I have not had any communication issues, usually I have been answered within 24 hours if I sent a message.

10.   What suggestions would you give to improve the partnership between streamers and Counter-Strike platforms? Is there any specific features, tools or procedures that would benefit both parties?

Some programs that have been with partnerships is one like Streamcoi, which automatically the partner sets a photo and that is integrated into the chat, where the photo with the effect comes to your chat. So, if you want to have a chat bot or photo advertisement, that is a lot more eye catching and that it is automated, if there is a longer partnership then this could work when thinking of marketing.

Otherwise speaking, being as active as possible when communicating with the streamer and ready to flex from your own marketing principles if they fit better to some other community. Every community is different, and the same thing does not work with everyone. The partnership should be able to be customized to your liking and adjusted to the community and the stream. I have also liked that when the sponsor has visited the stream, it has always been interesting, and viewers can ask questions from the sponsor directly which activates the users more compared to the company advertising through the streamer, its more impressive.

Counter-Strike platform representative interview.

1.   Could you introduce yourself and your role within the Counter-Strike platform? How long have you been involved with the platform?

I'm Felix Kaukiainen, I have worked at Esportal for 4 years and my current position is head of marketing & operations, and I am responsible for those areas in the company.

2.   Can you provide examples of past partnerships the platform has engaged in with streamers? What factors typically attract the platform to partner with streamers?

I'd say there are 2 different sides, purely marketing related influencer partnerships and other is related to campaigns that are done with clients, those are what we usually do. As an example, last year we had a new influencer campaign which was done internationally within Europe, where we contacted Counter-Strike 2 streamers from different countries where we wanted to bring them to our platform to try it out, give any suggestions for improvement and introduce it to their own communities. We had multiple streamers with varying amounts of followers. We categorize streamers into large, medium, and small size streamers roughly on how many viewers they usually have.

With campaigns, when talking about influencer collaboration we firstly think about brand safety, the values of the streamers have to align with ours. Some influencers have existing partnerships with online casinos and those are a no-go, and some brands that are involved in gaming industry have their own ambassadors, so we need to research if they are compatible.

3.   What are the platform's expectations when entering a partnership with streamers? What goals does the platform aim to achieve through these partnerships?

From a marketing perspective we often have a referral link, as in we give the influencer their own link through which we can follow their influence on the platform and its users that have registered through the link. This way we can measure the effectiveness of the partnerships.

4.   How does the platform measure the success of its partnerships with streamers? Can you describe any metrics or criteria used to evaluate the effectiveness of these collaborations?

More users through a referral link are not the only way we measure success; we want to take into account visibility and positive discussions we receive through social media or through the influencers Discord channels for example. User amounts is a very tangible way to measure success, but overall visibility on how the influencer succeeds to represent the platform and bring out its advantages and why they want to play on the platform due to its features for example. Some influencers do not talk at all about the platform or talk negatively even about it.

*5.	How does the platform ensure effective communication with streamers throughout the partnership? Are there specific channels or processes in place to facilitate communication when needed?*

Often when we approach streamers, we email them and represent the partnership proposal briefly and concretely. From that we often use Discord, where we create a channel or use private messages for communication, sometimes through email. We have a Discord community in which most of our influencers are part of, and from there we can give help and message each other.

Depending on how big of an influencer we a partnership with, a streamer with a larger following usually has a direct contact person such as me or my colleague, but if we have a smaller streamer, they are invited to join the Discord community in which we have admins that can help. Me and my colleagues are also in the channel so we can help out if needed.

*6.	How does the platform determine fair compensation for streamers participating in partnerships? What factors does the platform consider when assessing the compensation offered to streamers?*

We can divide the compensation in to 2 categories, marketing outputs and campaigns. If we have a partnership campaign, to which we want to get influencers involved, we have a set budget for them at that point. Most of the time the compensation is determined by the level of the influencers, how large of a channel they have and how professional they are about it. There is no set in stone amounts or formula on compensation, we always negotiate with the influencer on a case-by-case basis. For example, factors are how involved they are with the campaign, what kind of content and how much content, and through which channels they create.

Some influencers have large differences in with what channels they include in the campaign, they may stream to Twitch very agreeably, but if you want to include Instagram posts for the campaign, we have noticed that influencers charge more depending on that. So, we need to plan out the needs of the campaign, what are its needs and which channels we want to be visible and what the influencer thinks is the best for the campaign.

*7.	How does the Counter-Strike platform support streamers in their community engagement and content creation efforts? Are there any specific initiatives or tools provided to enhance streamer engagement with their audience?*

We'd like to believe that we help influencers with many ways, we have in our platform different events and game modes that are easy to play with their communities. With Esportal we have Gather matches with different levels, normal gathers that are open for everyone, for influencers we have a specific Verified status to the platform so they can host Verified Gathers in which have a higher chance for a reward to all Premium players. Lastly, we have Star Gathers that are rarer, Premium player only Gathers that always have a drop at the end of the match which are very popular. We can give influencers different rights and features to them so they can create content for their communities.

Additionally, we can give rights to host different raffles, be it through skins or Premium pass rewards that we can give to influencers so they can give away to their community and create a positive atmosphere. We also have community events, for example tournaments that the streamer can join and create content from that. We aim to have many events that the streamer can participate with their community and have a nice time. The largest influencer campaigns we have had are Super Days or Battle of the Streamers where we can sponsor a prize pool, we try to create concrete events whenever we have enough time and resources.

8.   From the platform's perspective, what role do streamers play in shaping the Counter-Strike community?

Counter-Strike is a game that is best played with a good atmosphere with players who are active. Streamers are important as they have managed to create their own communities, which consist of likeminded individuals who follow the streamer that is playing and hosting matches. I see that streamers are a key part of the Counter-Strike wellbeing, they are doing a great job, and we try to help them and give them a possibility to create these matches easily and grow their community.

9.   What are some of the challenges you have encountered in partnerships with streamers? How does the platform address these challenges to improve future collaborations?

The most concrete example that comes to mind is that we have had some events with influencers where we have agreed that they are involved with some event or a tournament and create content from it, and what we had agreed on never happened. It has either been forgotten or sometimes we haven't even gotten any explanation, or sometimes we have agreed that a partnership will begin but it had never started even if we had agreed on compensation, content amounts and so on. You can notice that the field is relatively young, and many are doing streaming as a side hustle or a hobby which can create challenges with the influencers. For example,

you have a campaign with 3 streamers involved then suddenly one of them can't make it, and you have budgeted a set amount of money for the campaign, it can be a significant part that is left out. These can also happen very last minute where getting a replacement is not possible.

I must admit myself as well that if we have a campaign with many influencers included simultaneously, especially if it is a larger campaign that has many smaller streamers included, I have noticed that focusing, helping, and ensuring that everyone understands what we are doing can get hard. It's difficult to bring the vision what we have for the campaign and help when needed at times, if there would be more time or resources included with the influencers then the results would be more effective.

10.   *Based on your experiences, what suggestions would you offer streamers to improve partnerships between the platform and the streamers?*

A successful partnership is often dependent on multiple factors aligning at the same time. I would say that clear communication and sticking to what we agree on is important. Take the collaborations seriously, the platform may want to partner even with a smaller streamer. Mostly we have positive experiences with streamers.