

## Narrowcasting Desire: Streaming, Modding, and the Cybernetic Shift in Digital Communication

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### ABSTRACT

*This study examines how digital communication in participatory cultures has shifted from linear broadcasting to adaptive, feedback-driven systems. Using a qualitative netnographic approach, it analyzes the Skyrim modding ecosystem, particularly the Immersive and Adult mod collection on NexusMods and its circulation across YouTube and Twitch. Drawing from the frameworks of cybernetics, narrowcasting, and platform capitalism, the research explores how creators, audiences, and platforms form self-regulating loops of information, affect, and governance. The findings reveal that communication within these communities functions as a cybernetic network, where feedback structures participation and adaptation; as narrowcasting, where content circulates among niche publics defined by shared taste and identity; and within platform capitalism, where visibility and engagement are quantified and monetized. Together, these dynamics illustrate how digital creativity operates as both collaborative and regulated, sustained by user interaction yet constrained by infrastructural control. The Skyrim modding community thus represents a microcosm of contemporary media convergence: an ecosystem that is recursive, affective, and increasingly shaped by algorithmic feedback and platform governance.*

**Keywords:** *cybernetic communication, modding community, narrowcasting, niche audience, platform capitalism.*

### Introduction

Waves of technological updates during the Web 2.0 Era has brought changes to the way mass media and audiences interact. Mass media has to change their way of disseminating their media product to a highly fragmented markets and segmented audiences. Furthermore, the emergence of various digital platforms on the internet empowered and enabled people in terms of technology usage. The Web 2.0 phenomenon allowed user interaction and led to the rise of participatory culture. Social media platforms such as YouTube, Facebook, and Reddit became spaces where users could share and communicate freely. In this environment, users created, remixed, and circulated content that reflected their desire to participate in culture. This process established the foundations of a circular communication model that would later characterize digital

ecosystems (Jenkins, 2006. Kozinets, 2015).

This phenomena of technological advancement represent one of the most significant paradigm shifts in media history. From traditional broadcasting that relied on “one to many” model where mass media hold the centralized power of content production and audience reception, to the rise of narrowcasting where audiences can also become the producer of content, often referred to as “Prosumer”. Narrowcasting differs from broadcasting by engaging specific audiences through feedback-driven, affective, and social mechanisms rather than generalized mass appeal. This transition redefines communication not merely as transmission, but as an adaptive, recursive, and participatory system (Scholz et al, 2019).

The system that was born through this transition could also be understood as an ecosystem. In this case, a digital ecosystem where audiences are no longer addressed as a faceless homogeneous public, but as fragmented communities that have preferences, interests, affections, and identity. The dynamic of digital ecosystem could be understood through the theoretical framework of cybernetics. Even though the framework was proposed more than half a century ago, the core of the theory resonates within the digital ecosystem. Cybernetics emphasizes feedback, self-regulation, and adaptation, elements that could be observed in the logic of various digital platforms (Wiener, 1961). In this digital era, the interaction between audiences or user and the digital platforms produce data that could be analyzed and forms feedback loops between audiences, creators, platforms, and algorithm. Those loops of feedback could be explained by cybernetics theory, that were regarded as a universal framework capable of explaining how digital processes evolve through continuous adaptation (Alvarez and Correa, 2023).

Building on this systemic understanding, Hatipoglu (2022) extends cybernetic thought into new media aesthetics, emphasizing performative and interactivity as intrinsic attributes of digital systems. In such systems, communication becomes an ongoing performance, where feedback and response generate both information and experience. In digital environments, performance becomes the act of communication itself, an ongoing cycle of input, processing, and output that continually reshapes both user experience and system behavior. This performative logic underscores how cybernetic systems generate new forms of media aesthetics, where information, technology, and audience participation are inseparably entwined.

This forms of media aesthetics could be found in the video game industry where the gaming communities interact within their digital ecosystem, especially the video game modding

communities. The modding communities embodies the participatory ethos of audiences in the digital ecosystem, their practice of expanding or altering the video game content embodies the creative potential of the digital platforms. Their modification product would become the consumption of players, a source of content for streamers, and even endorsed by video game developers and publishers. They are repeatedly going through the feedback loops of interaction with fellow members of the gaming world. At the cultural level, this process resonates with the notion of convergence culture which describe the merging of corporate and grassroots media and the rise of participatory culture (Jenkins, 2006).

On one hand, the creative aspects of modding embodies the positive side of the convergence culture. On the other hand, it raises questions about the ethical dilemmas of convergence, particularly in the case of ownership, intellectual property, and labor exploitation (Reisinho et al, 2024). These problems could be observed through the rise of platform capitalism that describe the economic system in which digital platforms act as intermediaries that extract and monetize data from user interactions (Srniczek, 2017). Srniczek argues that data has become the new material of capitalism, and digital platforms serves as its factories. Sites where user behavior is recorded, and analyzed like Youtube, Twitch, Google, and many more, operate as cybernetic infrastructures and transforms participation into profit through continuous feedback. This economic model situates narrowcasting as not only a communication phenomenon, but also a form of digital economy problems (Srniczek, 2017:47).

The shift from ownership to access in digital economies also contributes to the problems of creative labor dilemma. Access-based consumption model were argued to have reinforced continuous engagement, turning audiences or users into nodes in the network of data circulation. The disappearance of ownership parallels the cybernetic principle of openness and adaptability where users are kept in a state of constant participation (Zhu and Cho, 2021). Within this cybernetic economy, modding communities emerges as one of the prime example of circular loops of digital capital that sustain engagement and participation. Modding communities are very adaptive in reaching niche markets, they could accommodate contents and features in which the original game could not. They could also become the sources of contents for streamers playing games for their niche audiences. The modding communities could also become the lifeline of video games that were considered out of date, thus, giving more revenue to the owner of video game copyrights.

This study aims to establish how digital narrowcasting, cybernetic feedback, and niche

economies converge within platform capitalism. The example of niche economy in this study would be the sexual modification of video games in the modding communities, one that could be regarded as the “niche of niche”, where desire become one of the main economic drive. The modding communities that are going to be the subject of this are The Elder Scroll V : Skyrim (mentioned as Skyrim) Modding Communities that have a high number of active audiences in its ecosystem, and have a quite high number of sexual modification available across the modding platforms.

## **Literature Review**

Narrowcasting could be interpreted as a technological advancement from the broadcasting model of mass communication. Narrowcasting emphasize targeted dissemination and audience segmentation in digital media contexts. To put it simply, Scholz define narrowcasting as “sharing with few, well-defined others”. This definition distinguished narrowcasting from broadcasting that targeted loosely defined masses (Scholz et al, 2019). Scholz’s research also demonstrates that narrowcasting engages both self-related and social cognition processes more intensively than broadcasting, reflecting deeper emotional and interpersonal investment (Scholz et al, 2019). These two motivaitonal drivers are fundamental to participatory communication online.

From a media theory perspective, narrowcasting aligns with what Jenkins (2006:2) calls the era of convergence culture, where “the flow of content across multiple media platforms” coincides with active audience participation. Jenkins (2006:3) explains that convergence allows audiences to become producers (“prosumers”) who select, remix, and circulate information within specific communities. These networked publics exemplify narrowcasting logic: personalized, interactive, and organized around shared affective or cultural interests. In this way, narrowcasting is both a technological process (algorithmic personalization) and a cultural one (community formation through shared meaning).

Moreover, the shift from broadcasting to narrowcasting signals a transformation in communicative agency. According to Krivý (2023), digital communication systems now function as ecosystems, where adaptation and responsiveness define communication dynamics. Algorithms perform as “ecological filters” that shape information environments and organize niche publics. Hence, narrowcasting can be interpreted as a cybernetic process within these ecosystems—a

feedback-driven communication pattern that continuously adjusts content according to audience data and engagement responses (Krivý, 2023).

The second theoretical foundation of this study is cybernetics, a framework that has the ability to explain systems of communication and control through feedback loops. Wiener defines cybernetics as “the science of control and communication in the animal and the machine”, emphasizing self-regulation and adaptive behavior as the essential principles of organized systems. In this model, information functions as both signal and control mechanism, enabling a system to maintain equilibrium through feedback (Wiener, 1961). This foundational theory has profoundly influenced how we understand communication technologies as responsive, circular, and dynamic rather than linear.

As elaborated by Alvarez and Correa (2023), cybernetics extends from mechanistic control to social complexity, providing “a multidisciplinary approach capable of analyzing systems through their structure, dynamics, and relations with the environment.” They identify second-order cybernetics—introduced by Heinz von Foerster—as the phase in which the observer becomes part of the system, making observation reflexive and communication self-referential (Alvarez & Correa, 2023). This theoretical development is crucial for understanding digital communication platforms, where users’ actions both influence and are influenced by algorithmic processes, forming recursive human–machine interactions.

Hatipoglu (2022) deepens the philosophical dimension of cybernetics by linking it to new media aesthetics, arguing that digital systems perform through “recursive loops of performance and feedback.” Cybernetic performativity captures how interaction and iteration themselves produce meaning and aesthetic experience (Hatipoglu, 2022). Digital communication thus becomes performative, continuously producing and adjusting its own structures through engagement. This philosophical turn aligns with the cybernetic view of media as autopoietic—self-organizing and self-sustaining through user interaction and system feedback (Wiener, 1961; Hatipoglu, 2022).

From this perspective, digital platforms and online communities are cybernetic systems: they process information (user activity), generate feedback (algorithmic recommendations), and regulate communication behavior (visibility, metrics, moderation). Feedback loops are not mere technical mechanisms but cultural circuits that sustain participatory desire, engagement, and identity formation online.

The third theoretical foundation of this study is Platform Capitalism, which connects cybernetic communication systems with the political economy of digital media. Srnicek (2017) defines platform capitalism as a new business model that rests on the extraction and control of data, where digital infrastructures mediate social and economic interactions. Platforms like Twitch, Patreon, and YouTube exemplify this model by transforming user participation into sources of value, harnessing feedback loops to sustain user engagement and data generation (Srnicek, 2017). In this context, communication is both a social process and an economic one—feedback, interaction, and visibility become measurable, monetizable units of exchange.

Srnicek (2017) argues that platforms embody a rentier logic: they do not merely provide digital services but act as intermediaries that control access and collect value from every interaction within their ecosystem. Data serves as the new raw material of capital, while algorithms function as instruments of extraction and prediction. This logic resonates with Wiener’s (1961) cybernetic principle of feedback control, now operating within capitalist structures that convert informational flows into profit circuits. Feedback, once a mechanism for balance, becomes a tool for economic optimization.

The ideological underpinning of platform capitalism is further illuminated by Krivý (2023), who critiques the metaphor of the “digital ecosystem.” He argues that this metaphor masks capitalist asymmetries by framing economic systems as natural and adaptive rather than constructed and exploitative. Within these ecosystems, users are portrayed as agents of creative participation, even as their labor and data are extracted through algorithmic control (Krivý, 2023). Similarly, Jenkins’ (2006) concept of convergence culture shows how corporate media and participatory audiences intersect, producing a participatory economy that celebrates user creativity while embedding it in profit-oriented structures.

This dynamic is vividly seen in modding communities, where user-generated creativity and pleasure serve corporate value creation. Reinho et al, (2024) describe modding as an “ethical dilemma,” balancing participatory empowerment with exploitation. Modders contribute cultural innovation that enhances game ecosystems, yet their labor is unpaid and regulated by proprietary systems (Reinho et al, 2024). This duality epitomizes the economic and affective logic of platform capitalism: the fusion of self-expression, community, and capital within cybernetic systems of participation.

Furthermore, Zhu and Cho (2021) note that the rise of access-based consumption—

streaming, renting, and subscribing—intensifies user dependency on platforms. This model aligns perfectly with cybernetic capitalism: users are perpetually connected, their engagement continuously feeding back into the system. The constant generation of data ensures the platform's ability to adapt, predict, and monetize behavior (Zhu & Cho, 2021). In this sense, platform capitalism transforms communication into a self-reinforcing cybernetic economy driven by attention and affect.

Synthesizing these frameworks, this study conceptualizes digital modding communities as cybernetic communication systems embedded within platform capitalism, where narrowcasting organizes affective micro-publics and feedback mechanisms sustain economic and cultural circulation.

## **Methodology**

This study employs a qualitative netnographic approach to examine how narrowcasting, cybernetic communication, and platform capitalism operate within digital modding communities. Netnography is a digital research method that adapts ethnographic methods to online spaces. Allowing researchers to analyze the meanings, social structures, and communicative practices that emerge in the digital culture (Kozinets, 2015). In this study, the digital culture mentioned is the modding culture of Skyrim, which the communities interact through forums, comment threads, and content-sharing platforms. Netnography could provide an interpretive framework for understanding the cultural, affective, and economic dynamics of these digital ecosystems. Netnography's strength lies in its ability to capture the naturally occurring interactions of online communities (Kozinets, 2015). Making it ideal in this study to observe and explore how the participatory culture, in this case participant of video game communities, especially modding communities, embedded within platform capitalism.

The most dominant modding site of Skyrim would be NexusMods, one of the biggest video game modification platforms that give free access to audiences. The communities also spread across other platforms such as Loverslab, Youtube, Twitch, Reddit, and other fan sites. The website chosen as the main source of data on this study is NexusMods. NexusMods functions as the largest mainstream repository for mods, emphasizing technical performance, accessibility, and user reputation systems. NexusMods hosts varied specific sub-audiences defined by aesthetic, moral, or

affective preferences. This division also reflects how platform capitalism regulates visibility and desire through moderation policies, monetization structures, and community governance (Srniczek, 2017).

Netnographic research in this study follows Kozinets's six step model, that summarized as follows: first step, entry and community selection, this stage involves identifying and selecting relevant communities that align with the research goals. Skyrim modding communities was chosen for its participatory culture and very active communities. The second step, data collection and archival, in this stage data is gathered from user generated content such as forum discussions, comment threads, mod descriptions, and metadata. Screenshots and field notes are systematically archived for later coding and analysis. Third step, Observation, in this stage researcher conducted a non-participatory observation to adhere with the ethical guidance for studying communities where sensitive or explicit content circulates. This kind of observation ensure minimal disruption and maintain ethical distance from potentially private or adult oriented exchanges.

The fourth step of the Netnographic research is data coding and thematic analysis. In this study, coding categories are based on the three core theoretical lenses that were used. Coding categories include feedback loops, affective participation, and platform regulation. Step 5) Ethical consideration emphasizes informed consent, transparency, and the protection of community privacy. Ensuring anonymity and omitting direct quotations would be applied when conducting research because NexusMods includes adult or identity-sensitive materials. Step 6) Interpretation and cultural analysis, connected observed communicative behaviors to the cybernetic model of feedback, the affective logic of narrowcasting, and the economic structures of platform capitalism (Weiner, 1961. Scholz, 2019. Srniczek, 2017). The goal is to articulate how communication within these modding communities exemplifies recursive cultural systems— where user interaction, desire, and data circulation form self-sustaining loops of meaning and value.

The analytical focus of this study revolved around three interrelated dynamics of the core theoretical framework. First, the feedback and adaptation dynamics where mod creators respond to community feedback in cybernetic fashion, adjusting their work to maintain engagement. Second, the segmentation and desire where narrowcasting organizes audiences into micro-publics, such as mainstream mod users and adult oriented mod users. The third dynamics are platform governance and value extraction where platforms like NexusMods embody different manifestation of platform capitalism. Each of these dynamics provide triangulated lens to interpret social,

technological, and economic feedback systems sustaining digital modding culture.

## **Results and Discussion**

Skyrim, a game that was released on 2011, is actually one of a few unique case of single-player game in which it doesn't seem to be losing its player-base any time soon. Many media articles online would mention about how Skyrim is the game that never ends (Medium, 2024. Gamingbible, 2025. PCGamer, 2025). Skyrim would be 15 years old next year and it's player-base is still going strong, around an average of 20-thousands players are playing Skyrim daily according to SteamDB's Player Charts (SteamDB, 2025). This seemingly never-ending Skyrim journey that those daily players are on, were largely thanks the modding communities of Skyrim. Until this day, those modding communities are supplying Skyrim with endless contents and updates, making every play-through feels different for every player that are willing to modified their Skyrim.

Those very active communities not only bring joy to player, but also to content creators and streamers for new kind of contents to be covered during their stream on platforms like Youtube or Twitch. This is evidenced by many content regarding Skyrim's mods on Youtube and many streamers that are actively streaming Skyrim on Twitch and YouTube with thousands of viewers cumulatively. Ultimately, Bethesda Studio the developer of Skyrim is one of the parties who benefits from the Skyrim modding communities. Bethesda has released Skyrim multiple times in different edition along the year, from 2011 to 2022 and they have sold over 60 million copies as of 2023 (IGN, 2025). Upon observation on parties that received benefit from the modding communities, researcher found a pattern in which every party are connected in cybernetic loops and a narrowcasting ecosystem.

To learn more about this ecosystem, researcher employ a netnography approach upon Skyrim modding communities. Through this approach the data found were numerous, ranging from the website's stats, gaming and modification lists, forum's threads and comments, guidelines and policy of each websites. From those wide array of data, researcher found a unique case that is relevant to the goal of this study. The case mentioned was the recent relaunch of a dormant mod collection named "Immersive and Adult" mod collection, curated by a member of the community with username Canliberk. Username is not censored as Canliberk chose to appear on a public

Youtube mentioning the username. This relaunch became an interesting case to be studied for several reasons. First, this relaunch attract a lot of member of the community, there have been around 1350s comments (each could have their own reply or discussion) in the mod collection comment section since its relaunch on 12 September 2025. Second, NexusMods as the platform actively advertised and announced the relaunch through community announcement and Youtube Channel. Thrid reason, the relaunch has become a topic of discussion about platform management.

The relaunch of Canliberk's Immersive and Adult mod collection offers a focused case through which to observe the dynamics central to this study. Its circulation across NexusMods, YouTube, and related forums encapsulates the recursive communication, affective exchange, and governance tensions that define participatory digital ecosystems. The event's mixed reception—ranging from enthusiasm to controversy—reveals how user feedback, niche audience targeting, and platform visibility intersect. As such, this case exemplifies the convergence of cybernetic adaptation, narrowcast participation, and platform mediation, serving as an ideal entry point for the following discussion on cybernetic feedback within digital communities.

The dynamic of Wiener' cybernetics could be seen through the case of Canliberk's Immersive and Adult mod collection relaunch. Wiener's explanation about cybernetics as communication and control through feedback reflected in the mixed reception in the relaunch case as an ongoing loops of receiving input, internal processes of feedback and regulation, producing output, and adjusting future behavior (Weiner, 1961). NexusMods' announcement of the relaunch can be seen as the input element of cybernetics, the relaunch was announced by NexusMods through its front-page feature and official YouTube channel, generating widespread engagement and a surge of cross-platform discussions.

On YouTube, content creators and viewers responded positively to the relaunch, celebrating the curator's return and the project's continuity. The affective tone was one of excitement and communal recognition. The mod's revival signified stability and shared enthusiasm within the broader Skyrim fan culture, especially people that found the news from YouTube video. On NexusMods website, the response from the communities varied. The surge in downloads and user activity after the news on NexusMods web would trigger mixed response from the members of communities. On the collection comment section, members asked about the bug or technical issues that they encounter when trying to install the mod, for example:

Hey guys, back again. My game keeps crashing in the same spot on my way to Rorikstead from Whiterun about half way (MasterK\*\*\*\*\*).

Should i update the mods or will that mess with the game? (BreadAmb\*\*\*\*\*).

Those questions and reports would go through comment sections, forum threads, and bug reports system which will then trigger the element of control and adaptation. The prime example of this element is when mod authors and curator of updated the mod, fixes issues, or clarifies installation steps, in which Canliberk's collection has gone through nineteen updates after relaunch. After that the updated mod is re-downloaded, shared, and potentially featured in new announcement or videos. This is an example of a closed-loop system where communication serves as both signal and control. The system self-regulates through the flow of information where no central authority dictates it, but stability (working mods, community trust) emerges from distributed feedback (Wiener, 1961).

The case of broken mods and newbie questions are not the only feedback loops that were happening in this complex digital ecosystem. When the larger scope of digital ecosystem were observed, researcher found a more complex cybernetic loop. This loops includes not only a problem of broken mod, but also about clashing interest between member of communities with Nexus platform. As mentioned above, Nexus decision to make an announcement on the front page of the web, and notification for all member of communities have been met with mixed review. The platform's decision to front-page the announcement translate to broadcasting an adult-oriented collection to all users. This announcement sparked controversy among members who had opted to hide adult content. Several users criticized the decision as "advertising" and argued that it disregarded their personalized preferences, revealing a tension between community segmentation and platform-wide visibility. Example of the comments are:

they don't even give an option to turn off collections. so many of us will never touch a collection, yet they push it into our face like they are commissioned to (ArcWar\*\*\*\*\*).

my 15 year old daughter uses mods from here, this is poor judgement. Inappropriate, cringe, embarrassing (Tcb\*\*\*\*\*).

100% agree the" hide adult content" should cover site news. Gives the site admins more freedom to post what they want with less people offended

(Cyk\*\*\*\*\*).

The response on Nexus news page are diverse compared to the joy on Nexus YouTube comment section. This divergence between YouTube and Nexus responses represents a complex instance of cybernetic regulation within a distributed communication network. The information signal which in relaunch news, circulated through multiple communication nodes, in this case, YouTube and Nexus, but it does not mean that other nodes are not receiving signal. Members of the communities might bring the news to other platform like Steam, Reddit, and Discord. Each node produced feedback: celebration, critique, and debate. These responses, in turn, prompted the system, which are the platform and the mod author, to adapt.

After the responses from platform, curator, mod author, or even experienced members of the communities, The cycle thus closed upon itself, input (announcement) produced feedback (user reactions), which generated output (policy clarification and adaptive moderation). This cycle establishes a recursive circuit of control through communication. In this sense, the Immersive and Adult case enacts the cybernetic principles of self-correction and adaptation as the modding ecosystem collectively regulates itself through communicative exchange.

The multi-platform feedback process also aligns with what described as second-order cybernetics, in which the observer becomes part of the system. Users, creators, and moderators simultaneously act as participants and observers—each interpreting and adjusting behavior in response to others' actions (Alvarez & Correa, 2023). The interaction between modders, players, content creators, and platform governance produces an emergent, self-sustaining ecology of communication, what Krivý (2023:3) terms a digital ecosystem, characterized by constant adaptation and self-regulation.

The cybernetic perspective has shown how communication within the Immersive and Adult collection operates through recursive feedback loops between users, the curator, and the NexusMods platform, forming a self-regulating system of adaptation. Yet, these feedback mechanisms occur within a communicative environment that is not uniform but segmented. Defined by audience preferences, affective investments, and varying degrees of visibility. To understand how meaning and participation circulate in this ecosystem, it is necessary to examine how NexusMods structures communication through selective exposure and targeted audiences. The following discussion turns to the concept of narrowcasting, focusing on Skyrim's digital

ecosystem of streamers, content creators, mod authors, and various platform infrastructures that addresses specific sub-audiences within the Skyrim community.

Skyrim has various sub-groups of audiences, reflecting on the NexusMods news incident explained above, there are two sub-groups that could be identified already. One group that do not want to use nor see adult mod content, and the other group that celebrates the return of Canliberk and his adult mod collections. Upon observing NexusMods gallery of mods and community threads, researcher found that the word “immersive” are one of the most used or mentioned. One of the evidence is the usage of the word immersive on 1800s mods titles. This signify that there are sub-groups, be it modders or players, that has interest in immersive-themed mods, although not all of them would want the adult part of Canliberk’s collection. There would surely be many other niche groups out there in Skyrim communities, but, the focus of this study is on the group that preferred adult content modifications on their Skyrim.

By observing Skyrim’s niche group that preferred adult mod, researcher could learn about the “many to small” logic of narrowcasting orientation. Although this niche market is small compared to the general audiences, there are still many members of the ecosystem that participate in the exchange of information such as streamers on Twitch, content Creator on Youtube, and Modders on NexusMods and even LoversLab. This reflect the concept of narrowcasting as the micro-segmentation of communication flows within participatory media systems (Barasch & Berger, 2014; Onyebuchi & Nze, 2020). The example could be started from one of the nodes of ecosystem, Streamer. The circulation of Skyrim gameplay across Twitch and YouTube illustrates how narrowcasting structures communication and cultural belonging through selective exposure and shared affective codes.

The observation of two Twitch streamers, Black\*\*\*\*\* and Zv\*\*\*\*\*, whose broadcasts integrate adult or sexually suggestive modifications, demonstrates how audience segmentation operates not only through technical filters but also through cultural signaling. Both streamers’ content is flagged by Twitch as “intended for certain audiences,” effectively limiting viewership. The explicit titling of Black\*\*\*\*\*’s stream as “Boobarim”, a playful yet provocative rebranding of Skyrim. This indicates an invite toward audiences that are familiar with it, and receptive to, eroticized modding cultures. On the streamer’s concluding performance, modified non-player characters dance while viewers cheer in the live chat, transforms gameplay into an affective performance of shared sexual humor and desire. This selective presentation resonates with what

Barasch and Berger (2014) describe narrowcasting as communication aimed at “well-defined, sympathetic others,” where the pleasure of participation lies in being part of an exclusive, self-aware public.

The streamers practices above show how narrowcasting in modded game streaming functions as identity work. Audiences and streamers construct micro-publics of recognition through shared familiarity with modification culture, sexual aesthetics, and subcultural humor. As Postigo (2007:302) notes, modding communities are “productive knowledge cultures” that articulate creativity and identity simultaneously. Within this framework, adult or erotic mod use becomes a communicative marker of insider status, signaling a shared disposition toward transgressive or niche play. These spaces, while publicly visible, are culturally coded, accessible primarily to those who understand the modding lexicon, mod managers, and the blurred boundary between play and erotic performance. This dynamic described as the moral ambivalence of the modder, where creative innovation and cultural deviance coexist as expressions of participation. The Twitch streams observed here transform that ambivalence into entertainment, situating erotic modding as both taboo and community bonding ritual (Curtis et al, 2021).

On YouTube, similar affective and cultural mechanisms are visible in the case of \*\*\*\*\*GamesVT, a VTuber who three year ago, actively streamed Skyrim. Later, during the hiatus, she announce through a community post, that she is still playing Skyrim and finally able to install “SexLab” (an adult mod framework) and still “gooning”. The post’s informal tone and shared slang (“goon together again”) reveal how narrowcasting extends beyond platform algorithms into affective discourse that consolidates audience identity. As Opitek and Kohlmeyer (2021) observe, the convergence of prosumer and community practices allows users to blur the line between consumption and production, turning gameplay and modding into collective acts of identity performance. In this case, modding is both a technical and social practice through which the creator and followers co-produce meaning and intimacy.

These examples also reveal gendered and cultural implications of narrowcast identity formation. As emphasize, video game spaces reproduce and reconfigure cultural scripts of gender and sexuality through both representation and participation. The eroticization of female bodies in Skyrim mods and their celebratory presentation in streams, can be read as both an act of performative pleasure and a reinforcement of fantasy (Lynch et al, 2016). Narrowcasting thus becomes a cultural filter, it not only separates audiences by preference but also creates spaces

where gendered fantasies and sexual humor are normalized and collectively affirmed. From a broader perspective, these streaming cases illustrate how digital narrowcasting transforms participatory media into affective micro-publics.

While these narrowcasted performances foster affective intimacy and identity coherence within micro-publics, they also operate within the economic and infrastructural logic of digital platforms. On Twitch and YouTube, visibility and audience engagement are not neutral. They are quantified into metrics that translate directly to algorithmic promotion, monetization opportunities, and community standing. The streamers' cultivation of erotic or niche modded content can thus be understood as part of a platform-mediated economy of attention, where affect and desire are converted into watch time, donations, and algorithmic amplification. As Srnicek (2017) argues, platforms function as extractive intermediaries that transform participation itself into data-driven value, blurring the distinction between cultural expression and economic labor.

The governance of digital creative labor on platforms such as NexusMods and Twitch reflects a complex negotiation between participation, ownership, and economic regulation. On NexusMods, mod authors are explicitly prohibited from selling their creations or accepting paid commissions, as stated in the platform's Terms of Service and Donation Guidelines. This restriction came from the legal status of mods as derivative works built upon copyrighted game assets owned by Bethesda Softworks. As a result, modding remains situated within a "moral economy" of sharing, where creative effort is rewarded symbolically through endorsements, kudos, and the donation points system, a Nexus-managed fund that distributes modest financial rewards based on popularity metrics rather than direct transactions. This framework transforms user participation into a feedback-based reputation system, aligning with the cybernetic logic of regulation and adaptation: creators and users continuously recalibrate their behavior according to the communicative signals of downloads, endorsements, and community approval. Economic control thus operates not through direct monetary exchange but through systemic feedback loops that shape visibility and legitimacy within the modding ecosystem.

In contrast, Twitch exemplifies a fully monetized model of platform capitalism, where participation is explicitly structured through metrics of engagement and attention. Streamers monetize their activity via subscriptions, Bits, advertisements, and donations, yet these mechanisms remain under Twitch's centralized governance, as the platform retains control over both monetization rights and algorithmic visibility. Even in cases of adult or modded Skyrim

content, “flagged for mature audiences”, the communication remains shaped by the same cybernetic infrastructure, algorithms register viewer interaction, categorize content, and reward engagement through amplification. This attention economy transforms community intimacy and affective participation into measurable commodities, rendering even narrowcasted, niche publics economically productive.

As Srnicek (2017) argues, platforms extract value by transforming participation itself into data-driven labor, erasing the boundary between social interaction and monetization. When viewed through the intertwined lenses of narrowcasting and cybernetics, these systems illustrate how digital creativity is governed by recursive loops of feedback and segmentation: Nexus sustains moral participation through symbolic exchange, while Twitch converts the same participatory logic into quantifiable capital. Both models exemplify how digital communication evolves under platform capitalism—adaptive, self-regulating, and continuously optimized for visibility and control.

The analysis of the Immersive and Adult mod collection and its circulation across NexusMods, YouTube, and Twitch demonstrates that digital communication in participatory cultures operates through an integrated system of feedback, segmentation, and economic governance. From a cybernetic perspective, the modding community functions as a self-regulating network, where information and affect flow through recursive loops of adaptation between users, creators, and platforms. The same communicative circuits become increasingly differentiated through narrowcasting, as content is tailored toward distinct micro-publics that share aesthetic preferences, technical expertise, or affective investment. Yet, these adaptive and segmented dynamics unfold within the broader architecture of platform capitalism, which translates participation and visibility into quantifiable metrics and potential revenue streams. Across these frameworks, communication is revealed not as a neutral exchange of messages but as a form of systemic behavior, which are adaptive, affective, and economically mediated. The Skyrim modding ecosystem thus embodies the contemporary condition of digital media, a cybernetic, narrowcast, and commodified space where community creativity persists within structures of algorithmic regulation and corporate governance.

## Conclusion

This study reveals that digital communication within the Skyrim modding ecosystem operates as an adaptive system shaped by feedback, segmentation, and platform governance. The analysis of the Immersive and Adult collection and its circulation across NexusMods and streaming platforms demonstrates how creative participation has evolved into a cybernetic process of continuous interaction and adjustment. Within this system, narrowcasting organizes communication into niche publics defined by shared knowledge, taste, and affect, while platform capitalism structures the economic and algorithmic conditions under which such participation occurs. These frameworks altogether show that digital creativity today is both collaborative and regulated, sustained by user agency yet constrained by infrastructural control. The Skyrim modding community thus exemplifies the broader logic of contemporary participatory media, which is recursive, affective, and increasingly shaped by the feedback architectures of the platforms that host it.

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