

:Chatting: Errors in Live Streamer Discord Servers

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This article examines the text chats' of live streamer Discord servers and traces the types of chatting errors, the response to those errors, and attempts to understand the motivation for responding to such errors. I focus on the response to chatting errors from regular chatters, those without institutionalized moderation power, in a server toward other regular chatters. Live streamer Discord servers offer a site where intimacy and power fuel competition between users, impacting the response to errors in text chats. Using my knowledge as a regular chatter and moderator across various live streamer Discord servers I seek to elucidate these chatting errors in the public and semiprivate space of a Discord community as sociotechnical error and highlight the importance of understanding these niche social communities.

Keywords: social media, Discord, sociotechnical error, content moderation, power, online communities

Discord is a social media platform that hybridizes video, voice, and text chat. It launched in 2015 and is composed of virtual communities called "servers" used by friends and fans alike as an all-in-one hub for community and communication. Fan communities for video games, live streamers, music artists, and the like use Discord to commune and engage with each other over shared interests. However, the social media platform was originally created as a way for friends to communicate using low-latency voice chat while playing video games (Takahashi, 2015). While the platform is still used for this purpose on smaller levels, Discord has grown into a giant communication center for a variety of user needs. The platform boasts over 150 million monthly users and 19 million active "servers," Discord's official name for enclosed community spaces (Discord, n.d.). Servers are either publicly or privately listed, the latter requiring an invite link, sent from the owner of the server distributed as privately or opening as desired, for users to gain access to the server. Discord also has formally partnered or verified servers with top video games like Genshin Impact or Minecraft, which have hundreds of thousands to millions of users alone. These act as official hubs for fans' connection with other fans and a centralized space for the newest information about the games themselves. In addition, Discord also has partnered servers for the communities of live streamers like iBai or pokimane, which host tens to hundreds of thousands of users. These live streamer communities typically operate on a semiprivate basis, where fans can find an invite link on the platforms that host their favorite streamers like their respective Twitch or YouTube channel. As a hybrid platform for all-in-one text-video-voice communication, Discord has situated itself as a central pillar in the live streamer space for building community between creators and their fans.

As Discord is a hub for fan communication, there is an inherent necessity to moderate these spaces, especially for larger communities like the aforementioned streamer servers. Although most live

streaming servers require a link to join and are not searchable through the app or desktop client, the barrier to join and gain access to chat in a live streamer Discord server is quite low. Given this, moderation becomes a necessity to uphold the specific communities' norms and rules. The invite link system, which most streamers use, means anyone who can access the link will gain entrance into the server. Discord, as a social media platform, has features which allow for moderation such as the roles system, the integration of bots to organize and regulate moderation, and abilities to ban and control entrance to the server with a private versus public designation. The roles system is a part of Discord as a platform that allows a server to create roles and assign them to users in the server. The size and history of the server and any unique aspects of a particular community will determine how and who moderate the community. Servers use bots as an essential element to streamline and regulate the moderation process (Jiang, Kiene, Middler, Brubaker, & Fielser, 2019), but much of the decisions around what errors constitute recourse are made by human actors. In the case of live streamer Discord servers, moderators are usually fans of the streamer and do the labor of moderation on a volunteer basis (Seering, Dym, Kaufman, & Bernstein, 2022). In some cases a head moderator or community manager may be employed by the streamer themselves to moderate and organize the server, especially if the community is large. However, a majority of the moderating labor that takes place on Discord is voluntary and done in part as an act of service to the live streamer they enjoy watching.

This article focuses on the sociotechnical errors that occur in the text chats of live streamer Discord servers. Given the relative size of some of the bigger streamers' servers, errors are inevitable due to the public and semiprivate nature of the servers themselves. Relatively easy access allows for both fans and anti-fans to join these niche community spaces of their favorite and most hated streamers. Errors in this case refers to messages or images posted in the text chats of a live streamer's community server that fall into at least one of three categories: 1) violating the platform's terms of service (TOS), 2) breaking the rules of the live streamer's Discord server itself, and 3) general Internet and chatting missteps. These three buckets of errors vary in their legibility, the final category being a bit difficult to discern. For the sake of this article, I will focus on the latter two errors as they are usually unique to the culture and environment of the specific Discord server itself and not readily identifiable across servers like a platform-wide TOS error.

The second type of error, breaking a particular Discord server's rules, is a common error. When joining a live streamer Discord server, a user is typically dropped into the rules channel of that server (Figure 1).

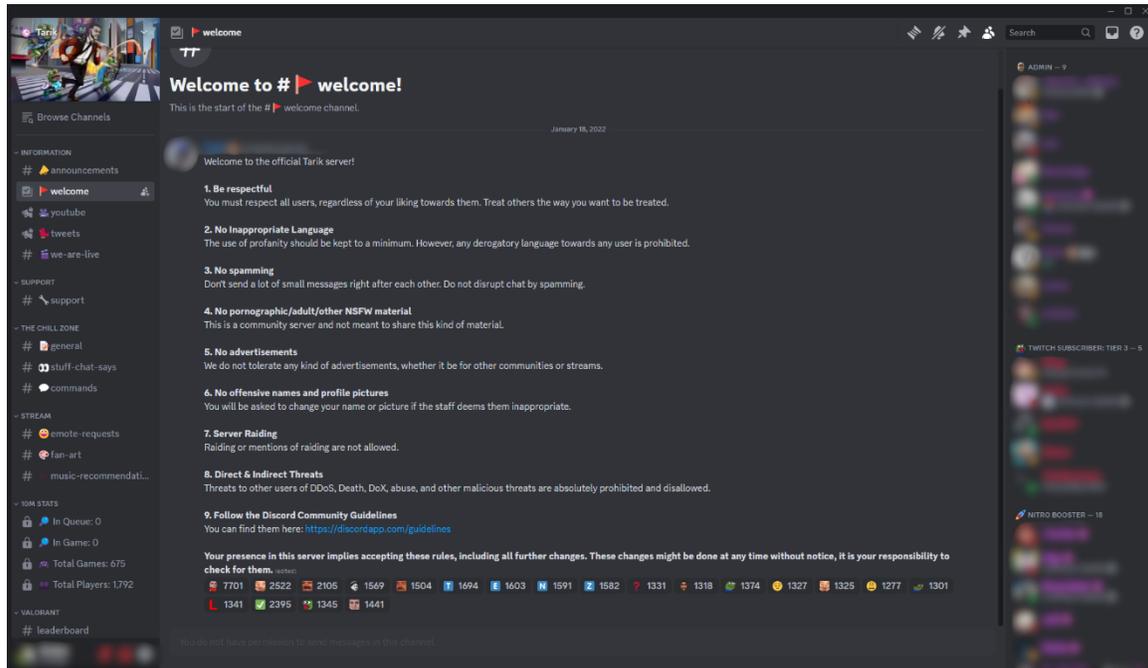


Figure 1. Screenshot of the Tarik Discord server rules. The profiles are blurred for privacy.

Figure 1 shows the rules channel of the official public server for popular live streamer, Tarik. After joining and landing on the rules channel, the user is typically asked to react to the message to “agree” to the rules and gain access to the rest of the channels in the server. The rules channel is usually a permanent feature of live streamer servers, where moderators and other chatters can reference to remind themselves and others of the rules. Examples of rules from live streamer Discord servers include: do not talk about other streamers’ Twitch/YouTube chats or Discord chats; no advertising or self-promotion; avoid controversial topics like religion or politics; be kind; no NSFW (not safe for work) content including usernames, profile photos, etc.; do not @/ping streamers (tag and notify any live streamer in a message); and moderators have the final say—if you are told to move on, do so. These examples come from various public and semiprivate live streamer Discord servers. Most of these rules appear across servers and are often organized and worded quite similarly, especially if the streamers are from a similar niche in the live streaming space. Depending on the size of the community and the type of content the streamer focuses on, there can be more specific rules, but these are generally some of the most common rules found across live streamer Discord servers. In addition to the categories of error identified above, the rules of the servers themselves also vary in their legibility, which makes deciding what an error is and how moderators and other chatters respond to errors a largely grey area. Because live streamer Discord servers are a place for fans of a streamer to gather and chat about their content, often in real time with a stream, or build community over time through regular chatting, the rule against controversial topics is especially common. In these fan spaces, it is generally expected that it is supposed to remain lighthearted and avoid sensitive and politically charged comments. However, how does one determine what is political or controversial? What happens when the streamer themselves is talking about

politics or a potentially controversial topic during their live stream? Is the chat supposed to ignore what is happening and chat about something else? Ultimately the moderation team within these servers make the decision on what is and is not acceptable in real time, as text chat is live, which directly leads to inconsistencies in discerning and responding to error.

The last type of error is general Internet and chatting mistakes. This type of error is the most ambiguous. Some examples of this type of error include: asking other chatters personal questions, posting sexual innuendos or borderline NSFW/lewd jokes, and oversharing about one's own life. While these examples do not go against the explicit rules I listed above, they are unwritten rules of using Discord or engaging in collective space on the Internet, especially with strangers. Because of the vague nature of this category of error, there can be a quite volatile response to these errors from teasing or joking to severe punishment in the server. I will explain more about the response and motivation for response to the various types of errors further in the article.

Errors in text chat range in their legibility by both other users and moderators. Given the potential for vagueness in both implicit and explicit rules in live streamer Discord servers, responses to said errors will ultimately vary. The reaction or moderation in response to errors is the most interesting part of tracing these errors. There has been significant research on content moderation across various social media platforms, and specifically moderation on Discord, but there has been little attention to the moderating potential of "regular" chatters to other chatters in Discord spaces (Gerrard, 2018; Jhaver, Ghoshal, Bruckman, & Gilbert, 2018; Seering, 2020). In mapping the types of errors, the response to error, and the motivations for response, this article attempts to elucidate the way that Discord's platform affordances, specifically the use of the roles system, impacts how chatters moderate and police each other in a horizontal way particularly through power and intimacy.

Discord's affordances construct hierarchies of power and intimacy through roles and channels by managing and ranking users, establishing exclusivity, and regulating engagement (Kocik, Berge, Butera, Oon, & Senters, 2024). The role system is a feature of Discord itself that allows servers to categorize users into moderate-able buckets. Roles are used for both cultivating community and for control. Depending on how the server is organized, roles can be either self-selected or given to a user by the moderation team or administrators of the server. In many cases servers use a mix of both methods, where cosmetic- and community-centric roles are self-selected and social status roles are given top-down. For example, cosmetic and community focused roles can include roles about specific community events that allow those to tag everyone with the role when events happen or they can just be other interests that can connect users in the server—like roles for interest in video games like Valorant, Minecraft, party games, or sports team affiliations across the NBA, NFL, or F1 racers. In addition, some servers use identity-based roles like gender-identity roles for women and nonbinary people to allow restricted access to channels just for those people. Lastly, most servers feature a pronoun selection role to facilitate respectful communication across chatting spaces between users. While I have dubbed these roles as cosmetic- and community-focused roles separate from social status roles, they are ultimately still used as a form of control in organizing the server by limiting access to certain channels based on roles. However, they are different than the social standing roles in that they are primarily elective. The social standing roles are a direct translation of a user's status within the community itself. For example, the roles

separate moderators from administrators, and sometimes even indicate whether a user is a subscriber, a paying member to the live streamer's Twitch channel. In some live streamer Discord servers, there are even attempts to mark users as newer chatters versus longtime chatters of the server. In my experience this facilitates top-down moderating of text chats within the Discord due to the native platform features of Discord allowing or limiting access to certain roles. Additionally, through the help of bots, some servers, both generally and live streamer servers, use a reward and levels systems for chatting frequently and over a long period of time (Kocik et al., 2024). This would indicate, in a similar way to a differentiated role between a newbie chatter and regular chatter, one's status within the space. Roles themselves are particularly interesting to think about as a tool for both community and control in that they are visible to everyone in the server. There is not a way to hide one's roles or for a moderator or administrator to hide someone or their own roles either. They are always visible within the space.

Returning to the chatting errors that happen in these spaces, roles deeply impact the way that others respond to an error. If an error occurs, users typically respond in one of three ways: either a reply message or separate message, reacting to the message through Discord's react function, or posting an image or emote as a separate message. This can look like linking to a channel within the server that has the rules of the server, spamming animated emotes, flagging the moderators to specific messages containing an error or generally to the whole chat, etc. One's social status within the server, primarily expressed through their roles, influences how chatters respond to "errors." For example, if a longtime or regular chatter of the live streamer Discord server, indicated through a designated role, chats about politics, they are less likely to be reprimanded with a warning or be muted than someone who is not a longtime or regular chatter. These various responses to errors take on different motivations but some include attempts to preserve the sanctity of the space, responding to gain social capital by helping moderators to police other users, building camaraderie by "dogpiling" errors in chat, and more.

Roles establish hierarchies of power and intimacy within live streamer Discord servers. This directly impacts how users respond to errors. The text channels themselves function as a panopticon-like space where regular chatters take up the role of an "official" moderator in an attempt to gain social capital, preserve the community space, and experience collective camaraderie. Before responses to an error even happen, one's roles and therefore their social standing determines what an error even is and how severely it is responded to, if at all.

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