

“Chopped” on Twitch: A New Type of Twitch Game

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May 2019

“Chopped” is a competitive game show aired on Food Network, a cable television channel, that blurs the lines between competition and reality television. In “Chopped,” four professional chefs are selected to compete against one another to see “whose cuisine reigns supreme,” as judged by a panel of four famous television chef personalities. The competing chefs cook for three rounds: appetizer, entree, and dessert, with one chef being eliminated in each round. The chefs must use “mystery ingredients,” which are often unusual, unique, obscure, or out-of-place ingredients. For example, a mystery ingredient basket might include beef tongue, a Scotch egg, rosewater, and durian. The winner claims a \$10,000 prize. The “Chopped” stage is a professionally managed soundstage, with commercial kitchens and kitchenware, a fully stocked refrigerator and pantry of ancillary ingredients, and assorted plateware. Because of the complexity of the challenges, most “Chopped” contestants are professional chefs.

The popularity of “Chopped” is well-known. A Google search for “how to play Chopped at home” yields thousands of results from food and lifestyle bloggers. And Food Network, the cable home of “Chopped,” hosts a hybrid online competition where entrants can submit recipes using mystery basket ingredients judged by celebrity chefs. Clearly, the franchise is valuable to Food Network.

To date, the only way to play “Chopped” is live, in the studio. I propose a new play-at-home version of “Chopped,” with Twitch as the broadcast platform, and Amazon Fresh the specialty marketer and delivery service for the mystery baskets. (Twitch and Amazon Fresh are owned by Amazon.) Here’s how it would work: Participants would subscribe to the “Chopped at Home” program and receive a monthly food subscription delivery with the mystery

ingredients. At a designated day and time, the participant would start up Twitch and be randomly coupled to another contestant, with whom they would compete in a split-screen broadcast. The contestants would be able to see and interact with each other, and both contestants would be visible to the general Twitch viewing public. Twitch users would vote on who won the round, with the winner proceeding on to the next competition. Participants would be ranked throughout the season, with the overall winners crowned “Chopped at Home” champions, and winning a \$10,000 purse (just like on the television show).

The idea of “Chopped at Home” incorporates the concept that creative television producers have championed, as T. L. Taylor restates television historian William Uricchio in her tome *Watch Me Play: Twitch and the Rise of Game Live Streaming*: “This interest in facilitating ‘live extension, interaction, virtual presence, and communication’ is woven throughout the history of television” (24). Taylor continually references the power of “simultaneity” with regard to television programming, with “second screen” experiences as a prime example (25).

Playing along at home is hardly a new concept in television, as Taylor relates, but never before has it been presented as it is in “Chopped at Home.” This concept provides both interaction and simultaneity to the participant, but with the added power of the Internet. And while broadcasting yourself isn’t a traditional “second screen” application--that term refers to people using their phones or other Internet-connected devices during television watching--it gives a new meaning to second screen. The contestant’s laptop or phone becomes the second screen, because it is used to *broadcast* the contestant.

Taylor continually references the puzzle of how to foster “engagement” with the brand--recognized as an important metric to marketers. How better to promote engagement with the “Chopped” franchise than “Chopped at Home?” Not only would people interact in a meaningful way with the “Chopped” franchise by playing “Chopped at Home,” those viewers

who are strictly there to spectate can experience the “Chopped” brand in a new and exciting way.

As Wendy Hui Kyong Chun states in her work, *Updating to Remain the Same: Habitual New Media*, “To be is to be updated” (2). Cable television is facing an industry sea change as consumers increasingly see cable television as non-essential. In November 2018, *Fortune* magazine reported that “cable operators lost nearly 1.1 million subscribers” in the first three quarters of the year, yielding the most dire losses in nine months since 2014. If cable channels aren’t appealing to consumers anymore, it’s time to think differently about cable channels--and their most valuable properties, the programs and personalities that draw engagement. Some cable channels are offering standalone app subscriptions; others provide their content without charge online, still supported by commercials. But to my knowledge, no other cable franchise has leveraged the power of user-generated content broadcasting, coupled with the sale of a specialty item necessary to create the user-generated content.

This notion--bringing a play-at-home game into television viewers’ homes, and then broadcasting that play-at-home game via Twitch--could be extended to other creative competition game shows. Contests like “Project Runway,” a fashion design competition, or “Face Off,” a prosthetic makeup game show, could also curate specialty subscription boxes sold and delivered by Amazon with competition against random contestants broadcast by Twitch. Again, the reimagination of the franchise in this manner divorces the show from the cable channel and adds a revenue stream of a subscription box. Another revenue stream would be the affiliate links in the Twitch feed, showing how viewers at home could get the very same ingredients or components used in play shipped directly to their home through Amazon.

In conclusion, this concept provides a new line of business for cable channels that continually need to develop new revenue streams in the face of declining cable subscribers.

Twitch will be an essential part of this new way to experience cable shows. No other online platform has the infrastructure or expertise to support the technology needed for this than Amazon, the global leader in Internet hosting and new technology application. And, no other specialty retailer has the skill or expertise in sourcing and shipping the types of materials needed for the subscription mystery baskets than Amazon Fresh. Finally, as fewer people have cable in their homes, but more come online everyday, the potential capture of new demographics--especially those who would otherwise never log on to Twitch--is immense. This concept would bring new users to Twitch, but also bring new fans--without cable subscriptions--to the cable show franchises. Either way, Amazon will be a clear winner in this game.

References

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