
Miscellaneous

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From gamer niche to mainstream media: Twitch's most popular media figures and content

Abstract

This article presents the main features of the Spanish streamers with the most followers on Twitch, as well as their content. The aim of the research is to identify the streamers who hold the most appeal for young people on one of the social networks that has experienced the highest growth in recent years. To this end, based on the selection of the main profiles in terms of number of followers, along with other indicators that help to categorise the content, a portion of the platform's most influential offering has been analysed. The results show that young people have created a personal space on this platform with features that belong exclusively to their age group, which are part of their youth culture. The streamers act as figureheads by offering spontaneous content to which young people can relate, and the interaction enriches the experience and reinforces a sense of community. Moreover, the latter aspect is essential to the success of the platform, as it occurs at a crucial moment when identity and relationships with peers take on special importance. Our analysis reveals a gender bias consistent with other international research. This is evidenced by the scarce presence of women as content creators, which is an unbalanced distribution that occurs on a national and global scale.

Keywords

Young people, Twitch, digital culture, content, streamers.

1. Introduction

Access to digital devices and screens is occurring at increasingly younger ages (Garmendia *et al.*, 2016, 2018; Livingstone *et al.*, 2011, Smahel *et al.*, 2020), with a plethora of options to choose from in the current media landscape (Aran-Ramspott, Fedele & Tarragó, 2018). One of the groups that uses and consumes technology the most are adolescents, who create spaces in which different activities take place, with “their own elements of behaviour and differentiation of meaning” (García-Jiménez, López & Montes-Vozmediano, 2020, p. 281).

One of these spaces is Twitch, which is among the world's most popular streaming platforms among 16–34 years-old (Olejniczak, 2015; Kavanagh, 2019; Sjöblom *et al.*, 2019). Youth is a key stage in life and in the development of individuality, when a person's character is being developed (Aran-Ramspott, Fedele & Tarragó, 2018). Moreover, in this stage the media play an important role in the socialisation process (Arnett, Larson & Offer, 1995), as well as in shaping imaginaries (Delgado, Calderón & Nieto, 2022). Due to the importance and vulnerability at this vital stage, when young people are in the midst of constructing their “self”

(Bernete, 2009), it is important to understand how they interact in the current digital scenario (Blomfield & Barber, 2014).

The study of such content, and of the leading figures involved (transmedia influencers) (Ruiz, 2020), helps to understand global consumption patterns and the shaping of the imaginaries and identity of young people. This aim of this study is to address the content on Twitch by analysing the figures who broadcast on the platform, or the so-called streamers, in order to identify those who are the most successful, and to outline their main characteristics.

1.1. *New actors and habits in young people's audio-visual consumption*

Spanish youth have changed their audio-visual consumption patterns in the last decade, migrating from traditional channels to new digital platforms (Gutiérrez & Cuartero, 2020). Several studies on the consumption habits of young people (Medrano, Palacios & Aierbe, 2007; Gutiérrez & Cuartero 2020) affirm that this age group is increasingly moving away from traditional media. According to research by Gutiérrez and Cuartero (2020), 22% of 19–21 years-old stated that they never watch traditional television during their viewing time.

Digital media offer dynamics that are far removed from linear television, and traditional media can hardly compete (Gutiérrez & Cuartero, 2020). Today's audiences choose what, when, and how many times they view the content, with more extensive communicative options. According to Velasco and Manjón (2022), streaming platforms are nowadays an essential part of young people's daily audio-visual consumption habits, and their increasing popularity is especially significant.

Twitch has established a new paradigm in interactive audio-visual consumption and has created an online community (Hamilton, Garretson & Kerne, 2014). It offers a large-scale, fast-paced mass chat (Ford *et al.*, 2017; Johnson, 2018), which encourages user immersion (Gray, 2017), and its infrastructure is designed to encourage communication between users, and between the audience and the streamer (Sjöblom *et al.*, 2019). Young audiences see broadcasts as an opportunity to interact with like-minded peers and become part of a community. Along these lines, Hamilton, Garretson and Kerne (2014) and Hilvert-Bruce, Neill and Sjöblom (2018) state that what drives young people to consume content on platforms such as Twitch is the emotional need and social motivation they feel at this stage of life. Research by Lessel, Altmeyer and Krüger (2018) and Wulf, Schneider and Beckert (2018) also provides data on the importance that users place on the interactivity of this medium, which is the main reason why they subscribe or make donations (Gros *et al.*, 2017).

1.2. *Twitch*

Twitch is a streaming platform where those who deliver the message, or the streamers, broadcast live videos, make comments, and share their computer screen while playing video games or viewing a variety of content, so that those who watch them, or the viewers, can see them and interact with the streamer or with the community through real-time chats. All of this generates an interactive experience between the protagonist and the audience that is different from other broadcast media, combining two communication channels simultaneously: video broadcasting, and text communication through chats (Hamilton, Garretson & Kerne, 2014).

Although YouTube is still the largest video repository and consumption platform in numerical terms, since its inception in 2011, Twitch has managed to gain a foothold where Google's platform was not present: in the live broadcasting of video game matches (Gutiérrez & Cuartero, 2020). Live broadcasts and interactivity are two of the pillars of this medium. It was launched under the name Justin.TV as an experiment among four friends, who carried out live broadcasts of their own television programme online. The venture was so successful that they decided to open the service to the community in order to enable them to broadcast live as well, and they renamed the platform Twitch (Calderón, 2021).

Initially it was especially popular among the gamer community, but today it has become one of the most successful platforms among the youth audience (Chávez & de Oliveira, 2021; Sjöblom *et al.*, 2019; Hu, Zhang & Wang, 2017). The quality and stability of the broadcasts, and the growth in users within the first two years, reaching 200,000 in 2013 (TwitchTracker, 2020), led to Amazon buying the platform for \$970 million a year later, in August of 2014 (Todd & Melancon, 2018). In 2015, Twitch opened the door to other types of content (Gutiérrez & Cuartero, 2020), and since 2017 the platform has received more views and users than other channels, including Netflix and HBO (Gómez, 2017)¹.

The circumstances brought about by Covid-19 benefited Twitch (García, 2021; Calderón, 2021; IAB Spain, 2021), which attained record-breaking numbers and saw its audience figures and number of creators and followers grow during that year, reaching 5.5 million users who broadcast on 76,000 live channels. In 2020, a total of 4 million people consumed content on the platform simultaneously (Twitchtracker, 2020), and in one day alone it reached 34 million hours of viewing (Gutiérrez and Cuartero, 2020). By 2021, more than 30 million people were connecting every day, and more than 7 million streamers were broadcasting every month (Calderón, 2021), reaching more than 6.5 billion hours watched (Twitchmetrics, 2021), with a growth of 27%.

One of the main reasons why Twitch has grown exponentially is due to its having evolved from very specific and attractive content for Generation Z and Millennials, in the form of video games, to a universal offering (Calderón, 2021). As pointed out by Rey (2021) and Sjöblom *et al.* (2019), Twitch is becoming increasingly mainstream and has positioned itself as one of the main sources of information and entertainment (IAB, 2021; Suárez-Álvarez & García-Jiménez, 2021; Navarro & Tapiador, 2023). The Ikusiker report (2022) asked university students which Twitch categories they liked most, and the findings indicate that varied content is gaining ground over initial niche topics: 43.4% of young people choose “video games,” closely followed by 39.7% who prefer “just chatting,” which is a category where they talk about different topics. This “conversational quality” has grown the most since 2018 (Espinosa, 2020) and is currently the most viewed (Rey, 2021). Today, a variety of popular content is broadcast among the community, such as interviews, sports, music, art, and cooking. Moreover, Twitch is becoming “an entertainment platform where you can find creators and live content from any field” (Calderón, 2021).

Several studies have analysed the Twitch phenomenon from various perspectives, including the following: from a technical viewpoint (Khan *et al.*, 2022; Kokinda and Rodeghero, 2023); from a media perspective (Criado, 2022; Marín, Valero & Rojas-Torrijos, 2022; García Rivero, Martínez & Bonales, 2022); from a social standpoint (Ringland *et al.*, 2016; Johnson, 2018; Navarro & Tapiador, 2023); and from the vantage point of communicative issues (Vosmeer *et al.*, 2016; Gros *et al.*, 2017; Hilvert-Bruce, Neill & Sjöblom, 2018; Wulf, Schneider & Beckert, 2018; Kohls, Hiler & Cook, 2023; Speed, Burnett & Robinson, 2023). However, in spite of these efforts, we are still in the early stages of academic research on this phenomenon (Hu, Zhang & Wang, 2017; Hilvert-Bruce, Neill & Sjöblom, 2018). According to Navarro and Tapiador (2023), the scarcity of studies regarding Twitch in comparison to other social media may be due to the following factors: its fairly recent popularity; the fact that it is still seen as a video game platform; and the complexity of analysing large amounts of video. However, a review of the most recent literature addressing this area of knowledge shows increased

¹ Due to these figures, Twitch became a threat for big companies such as Facebook, Microsoft, and Twitter, which launched different platforms to compete with Amazon's new network, such as the following: Facebook Gaming, YouTube Gaming and Microsoft's Mixer (Gutiérrez & Cuartero, 2020). The emergence of these new players had an impact on Twitch in 2019, which lost users due to the move of two of its star streamers, Ninja and Shroud, to Mixer (González, 2019a; Garro, 2019; and Webb, 2019). Just one year later, in 2020, Microsoft closed Mixer and ended the contracts of both streamers, announcing its alliance with “Facebook Gaming” (D'Anastasio, 2020).

academic interest in this platform, as well as theoretical and conceptual advances that are far more complex than the basic foundations and concepts of just a few years ago.

The early research on Twitch focused on e-sports and other video games. Moreover, even today this gaming area still represents the majority of research regarding this platform (Chae & Lee, 2022; Gasparetto & Safronov, 2023; Kohls, Hiler & Cook, 2023), as many video game academics rely on Twitch for their observations (Alvarado & Arbaiza, 2022; Condis, 2023; Ashley *et al.*, 2023; Yildiz, Haktanir & Saritepeci, 2023). Despite this situation, the ways in which streamers and the community interacted soon drew the attention of academia (Hamilton, Garretson & Kerne, 2014; Olejniczak, 2015; Ford *et al.*, 2017; Nakandala *et al.*, 2017; Scheibe *et al.*, 2022; Dutt & Graham, 2023). Later, some studies focused on the social aspect by comparing this platform to other services (Hamilton, Garretson & Kerne, 2014; Vandenberg, 2022; Lorgeoux & Divakaran, 2023), while others focused on the audience (Gandolfi, 2016; Hu, Zhang & Wang, 2017; Lessel, Altmeyer & Krüger, 2018; Kneisel & Sternadori, 2023).

In addition, the study of this platform has been approached from other perspectives as well. For example, the factors that induce audiences to participate in these live broadcasts have been addressed by several authors, including Hilvert-Bruce, Neill and Sjöblom (2018), Gros *et al.* (2017), Wulf, Schneider and Beckert (2018), Vosmeer *et al.* (2016), Kohls, Hiler and Cook (2023) and Speed, Burnett and Robinson (2023). Studies by Gros *et al.* (2017) highlighted entertainment, while the desire to socialise and feel that one belongs to a community have been addressed by Hilvert-Bruce, Neill and Sjöblom (2018), Wulf, Schneider and Beckert (2018) and Speed, Burnett and Robinson (2023). Apart from these two aspects, learning to become a better gamer, especially in gaming environments, has also been explored by Vosmeer *et al.* (2016) and Speed, Burnett and Robinson (2023). This last idea has also been examined by Kohls, Hiler and Cook (2023), who have shown that passive consumption achieves the same results as active consumption in terms of behaviour, enjoyment, and a community feeling, among other factors. Gandolfi (2016) and Kneisel and Sternadori (2023) highlight the presence of the streamer and his or her interaction as one of the main reasons for consumption.

Twitch is no longer just an entertainment medium but is now “a means of socialisation” (García Rivero, Martínez & Bonales, 2022, p. 2). Along these lines, Gros *et al.* (2017) have found that the socialisation aspect is the main reason for monetary investment through donations and subscriptions. Thus, Hilvert-Bruce, Neill and Sjöblom (2018) have discovered there is more emotional connection on smaller channels, users stay longer in the broadcast, and they contribute more economically. However, Yu and Jia (2022) have recently warned that although the platform does not have an algorithmic system that would benefit major streamers, the overwhelming number of channels means that users tend to go to the most popular figures and donate to them as a result. Delving deeper into the emotional connection, Lessel, Altmeyer and Krüger (2018) and Kneisel and Sternadori (2023) noted the importance of involving the audience in the broadcast, which brings new meaning to the experience (Vosmeer *et al.*, 2016). This integration, according to Hu, Zhang and Wang (2017), allows the audience to identify with the streamer, thereby increasing their engagement and consumption time.

On the other hand, Sjöblom *et al.* (2019), who studied the figure of the streamer and the way in which they create their content to attract audiences and generate revenue, highlight the business potential of the platform. Johnson and Woodcock (2017) also support this idea and point out the precariousness of the lives of some streamers, as opposed to the large figures managed by the platform and the e-sport industry. In this regard, Cai *et al.* (2018) highlight the platform's ability to sell products, as they explain how the public prefers to be guided by streaming rather than traditional online commerce when it comes to making purchases. The findings of García Rivero, Martínez and Bonales (2022) also support this idea and confirm the effectiveness of Twitch in brand communication, although they point out the need for the advertising industry to transform the communicative strategies targeted at Generation Z.

For his part, Olejniczak (2015) focuses on the language of the Twitch community, which occurs through simultaneous chats. This is something that is characteristic of the platform, which does not happen with other communication models previously analysed (Ford *et al.*, 2017). This unique aspect has an impact on the nature and structure of the messages, which only remain on the screen for a short time. In large communities, short, repetitive, emoticon-heavy messages are common. These allow users to show how they are feeling at any given moment, which the authors Ford *et al.* (2017) refer to as *crowdspeak*. Contrary to the way it might appear, according to Ford *et al.* (2017), this form of communication is engaging for users and appeals to online communities. If the size of the audience is smaller, messages are longer and there is less presence of emoticons. According to Nakandala *et al.* (2017), the use of the second person singular is more common in less popular channels, which encourage more intimacy, while in more popular channels users generally rely on the third person singular to talk about the streamer. Another interesting feature pointed out by Olejniczak (2015) is that the language specific to this platform often carries over outside the platform.

From a more social point of view, Johnson (2018) and Ringland *et al.* (2016) studied the platform and the gamer community from the viewpoint of inclusion. Johnson (2018) analysed the experiences of people with chronic illnesses such as disabilities, as well as mental or physical health problems, and concluded that based on the streamers' own experiences, the positive aspects outweigh those that are negative.

Along the same lines, Ringland *et al.* (2016) analysed a gamer community similar to the ones found on Twitch, whose target audience is people with autism. They revealed how these people socialise in this type of environment and the positive impact it had on them. In this regard, Johnson (2018) also points out that the platform is beneficial for inclusion and community-building for vulnerable people.

As seen above, most Twitch studies to date have focused on the platform, gaming, interaction, the community, monetisation of activity, advertising, and mental health. However, over the years the scientific community has started answering more diverse questions about the platform, including societal issues such as climate change (Navarro & Tapiador, 2023), and politics (Ruiz-Bravo, Selander & Roshan, 2022; Iranzo-Cabrera & Casero-Ripollés, 2023), among others. These authors concur in pointing out the diversity and heterogeneity of the space that is created on Twitch, which is far removed from the polarised discourses found on other social networks such as X or Facebook. As asserted by Iranzo-Cabrera and Casero-Ripollés (2023, p. 11), Twitch encourages more open participation, without time restrictions and without intermediaries, and therefore “contributes to strengthening democracy.” However, in this sense Navarro and Tapiador (2023) are cautious, as they believe the platform may offer a new, only slightly explored avenue for public manipulation, propaganda, and the dissemination of fake news.

In terms of gender, Nakandala *et al.* (2017) and Ruvalcaba *et al.* (2018) have examined the unequal treatment of female gamers through the feedback they receive in the primarily male-dominated e-sports realm. Their studies show that women receive more comments that objectify them, while men receive more interactions regarding the game, and the situation is exacerbated in the case of important figures. Kneisel and Sternadori (2023, p. 335) agree with this idea and describe the Twitch consumer as primarily male, and they have identified situations in which “women are objectified.” Finally, these same authors conclude that the gaming environment and these streaming communities “are not very accommodating to women” (Kneisel & Sternadori, 2023, p. 335). This idea is also defended by Cullen (2023), who adds that the situation faced by women in these communities is not perceived as an injustice by users. The findings of Cullen (2023, p. 542) confirmed that Twitch users believe feminist ideology is “incompatible with video games and streaming,” even going so far as to say that “it harms these communities.”

In line with the foregoing analyses, Hamilton, Harretson and Kerne (2014) underlined the importance and potential of this social media in the current interactive paradigm, which was also highlighted by Wulf, Schneider and Beckert (2018). In terms of its future, Johnson and Woodcock (2017) believe that the potential of streaming is not likely to decrease in the coming years, yet it faces challenges.

1.3. Streamers as content creators

Twitch streamers are gaining importance, becoming figures of interest (Gutiérrez & Cuartero, 2020; Galdolfi, 2016), and are part of the platform's success. As confirmed by Aran-Ramspott, Fedele and Tarragó (2018, p. 74), young people see YouTubers "as public figures and micro-celebrities," and as "an integral part of adolescent culture," as these teenagers obtain their initial exposure to content directed at their age group through these figures. Moreover, personality influences the popularity of streamers (Törhönen, Sjöblom & Hamari, 2018) and is the factor that differentiates them and determines whether they succeed or not (Pellicone & Ahn, 2017). According to research by Hamilton, Garretson and Kerne (2014), streamers project their personality through their live performances, and this fosters the creation of a strong community, which have the need to share the values transmitted in order to feel identified with the group and be comfortable when interacting with others.

Young people consume this content because it entertains them (Gros *et al.*, 2017), and also because they like what they do and how they do it (Lara, 2020). Pre-adolescents value the humour of these figures most of all, and secondly the fact that they deal with topics of interest to them (Aran-Ramspott, Fedele & Tarragó, 2018). Viewing this type of content makes them feel like part of the digital youth culture (Lara, 2020; Hilvert-Bruce, Neill & Sjöblom, 2018) and this is an important factor in the platform's success among Generation Z. The perception of the streamer as someone close, imperfect, and genuine, in whom the line between the personal and the public is blurred, is a key factor in the success of these figures and the platform (Telo, 2021). The channel's big personalities know this and base their strategies on "displaying accessibility, presence, and intimacy online" (Jerslev, 2016, p. 1246). With the advent of Twitch, the relationship with the traditional TV anchor, which is seen as depersonalised (Telo, 2021) and distant, has clearly changed.

The identification and empathy with the streamers (Hu, Zhang & Wang, 2017), as well as the social relationship that the community creates (Hamilton, Harretson & Kerne, 2014; Hilvert-Bruce, Neill & Sjöblom, 2018; Wulf, Schneider & Beckert, 2018), are media practices that have been discussed for years and are important factors inherent to this social network. This identification role may be less prevalent among women, due to the lower number of female streamers. This uneven impact of male and female YouTubers in the number of followers and views also occurs on YouTube (Aran-Ramspott, Fedele & Tarragó, 2018), which influences young women's perceptions of gender roles (Todd & Melancon, 2018). Research by Ruvalcaba *et al.* (2018) reveals the presence of sexist attitudes and the perpetuation of gender roles in e-sports, and they point to this animosity as a factor driving young women away from e-sports. Similarly, another study by Delgado, Calderón and Nieto (2022) regarding the discursive construction of gender in one of the most popular video games featured in the analysis, namely *GTA V*, concludes that "in the culture of heavy consumption by adolescents, gender violence is evident, which generates, transmits and reproduces a type of hegemonic and discriminatory thinking."

2. Material and methods

The main objective of this study is to analyse the figures who broadcast on Twitch in order to identify the most successful content, and to outline their main characteristics, the purpose of which is to reveal the consumption patterns of young people and the types of content that achieve success on the platform.

To this end, a number of secondary objectives have been established to provide a detailed description of the object of study: the first is to identify the figures with the most followers in Spain and their characteristics; the second is to reveal the most relevant topics in detail; and the third is to describe and analyse the dynamics of broadcasting.

To achieve these objectives, the study is based on content analysis, as it allows us to “quantify data and provide objective conclusions, supported by numbers that represent real phenomena” (Ramos *et al.*, 2014, p. 48). This technique is very common in the social sciences, which allows us to use data to develop theories that can be applied to their context (Krippendorff, 1990; Ramos *et al.*, 2014).

The technique was used to delve deeper into the analysis, which enabled us to address different aspects that were aggregated in order to draw conclusions. These aspects were measured on the basis of variables, or items, which were counted as units of analysis (Ramos *et al.*, 2014). Moreover, this study is structured around a sheet containing the following relevant items to address the main and secondary objectives: average age, country of residence, initial platform, male and female followers, content, average number of views, broadcast frequency, average broadcast time, shots, and editing.

The sample was obtained by selecting the channels of Spanish-speaking streamers with the highest number of followers in February of 2022. From this group, the individuals with the most followers worldwide were selected, to obtain more precise information regarding the content that Spanish youth create and consume, as they are one of the most active communities in the world, and among those who generate the most content (Calderón, 2021). In total, 29 streamers were selected. Of these, 3 could not be analysed (FolagorLives, Wismichu, and MarkiLokurasY), as they had deleted their content or did not broadcast during the month of February. This left a total of 26 streamers who were analysed in detail.

Table 1. Profiles analysed.

State rankings	Overall ranking	Channel	Number of followers
1	1	auronplay	10,682,612
2	2	Rubius	10,349,045
3	3	TheGrefg	8,467,223
4	4	Ibai	8,347,109
5	9	Alexby11	2,777,007
6	12	IamCristinini	2,594,174
7	15	LOLITOFDEZ	2,336,949
8	19	Biyin	2,105,197
9	21	Perxitaa	1,985,779
10	23	Ampeterby7	1,843,822
11	27	Luzu	1,714,726
12	29	Reborn_Live	1,666,479
13	31	Vicens	1,603,615
14	32	bysTaXx	1,547,634
15	33	Aroyitt	1,534,340
16	34	MarkiLokurasY	1,471,801
17	35	Llobeti4	1,423,072
18	37	Gemita	1,377,142
19	38	Folagorlives	1,327,468
20	41	aXoZer	1,319,814
21	42	elxokas	1,295,613
22	44	Wismichu	1,287,947
23	48	Mayichi	1,182,389
24	49	thedanirep	1,127,971

25	50	ElRichMC	1,095,382
26	53	IlloJuan	1,083,967
27	54	JaggerPrincesa	1,052,656
28	55	LakshartNia	1,051,235
29	56	xXxTheFocusxXx	1,032,238

Source: Own elaboration from data extracted on 12 February 2022 from Twitchmetrics - Streamers and Games [https://www.twitchmetrics.net].

To analyse the channels, three main groups of variables were established based on the secondary objectives: streamer characteristics, channel content, and broadcasting dynamics.

- O1. Categorisation of the profiles: To this end, we collected the average age of the streamers, their country of residence, their initial platform on the digital landscape, and the number of followers.
- O2. Channel content: The type of content was analysed (0=gaming only, 1=variety only, 2=combination of gaming and variety) of the first broadcast of each channel in February of 2022, and the average number of views of each streamer during the month of February 2022 was examined as well.
- O3. Broadcasting dynamics: we identified the frequency of transmission, and the broadcast duration that streamers disseminated on their channels during the month of February 2022. We also observed the diverse shots displayed during the first broadcast in February 2022 (0=one shot, 1=several shots and/or effects placed in the image), and the editing they carried out during the streaming (0=adds external features, 1=does not add external features).

Table 2. Items analysed.

Characteristic identified	Description	How the information was obtained
Average age	The average age of the streamers is based on the average age of all the streamers.	The age of each streamer was recorded in order to obtain the average age of all the streamers. Dates of birth were obtained from sources on the Internet.
Country of residence	The country of residence is considered the place where each streamer currently lives.	The country of residence was obtained through internet searches.
Initial platform	The channel on which they started broadcasting content: YouTube or Twitch.	Several websites were consulted to obtain this information,
<i>Followers</i>	These are the number of people who follow the different streamers. To follow a channel, the user simply clicks on the "Follow" button. Those who take this step receive free alerts about the content of this channel in their profile.	Data regarding followers was extracted from the Twitchmetrics - Streamers and Games website on 12 February 2022.
Content	Content refers to the topics covered in the video of the first broadcast in February.	To obtain this data, each content item was viewed and classified into gaming only, variety only, or a combination of both.
Average number of views in February	The average number of views is the average number of plays each streamer received in this particular month.	This figure was obtained by recording the number of views of all the February broadcasts of each streamer, and then making an average of all of the numbers.

The frequency of broadcasting	Broadcast frequency is the regularity with which streamers published content during the month of February 2022.	The frequency of broadcasting was calculated by counting the number of days each streamer broadcast during the month of February. The days without content were divided by the four full weeks of the month to obtain a rough idea of how many days per week they are not working.
Airtime	Average airtime is defined as the average amount of time per day that each streamer is active when performing live, during the month of February.	To achieve this figure, the duration of all the February broadcasts of each streamer was taken into account, and then an average was calculated from that figure.
Shots and editing	Shots are the different images that the audience records during live performances, and editing involves the incorporation of elements into the audio-visual piece.	Data on the shots and editing were collected by viewing the videos and sorting the items. The criteria of the shots were based on whether there are picture changes, or whether the picture is the same throughout the broadcast, as well as the use of image effects. In editing, the incorporation of external elements that enhance the consumption of the content was also taken into account.

Source: Own elaboration.

A total of 131 hours and 43 minutes of video were analysed for this work, which aggregated a total audience of 3,560,313 users.

3. Results

3.1. *Categorisation of the streamers*

3.1.1 Average age

Although the age of the streamers helps to distinguish these figures (Aran-Ramspott, Fedele & Tarragó, 2018), and the growth of Twitch is mainly due to Generation Z, or in other words, young people from 16 to 25 years-old (Calderón, 2021), the average age of the streamers is 27.5 years of age. As they are just slightly older than the maximum age of the target audience, they manage to connect with them, often imitating behaviours and expressions typical of the younger generation.

3.1.2 Country of residence

Despite the fact that all the streamers were born or grew up in Spain, it is striking that among those who have disclosed their residence (n=26), only half of them (n=13) reside in this country. One of them lives in the United States for personal reasons, and the others (n=12) moved to Andorra for tax reasons.

3.1.3 Initial platform

Of the streamers analysed (n=24), 82.75% had previously appeared on YouTube, which clearly shows they are able to connect with young audiences on different social media channels. Many of these streamers use a transmedia strategy, and they try to optimise their resources by reusing the content they create for Twitch on other social platforms, such as YouTube, in order to generate a greater financial return from the same piece (Gutiérrez & Cuartero, 2020).

3.1.4 Followers²

The four Spanish streamers with the largest number of worldwide followers are also the top four Spanish-speaking streamers on a global scale, and among the top eight in the world.

The top female streamer from Spain, IamCristinini, is ranked number 6 in Spain and number 12 in the Spanish-speaking world. Gender bias regarding the number of followers also occurs at the worldwide level, which influences young women's perception (Todd & Melancon, 2018).

The top Spanish-speaking streamer, AriGamePlays, is in 11th place in the global rankings, with 24.43% of the followers of both genders, and the most followed male streamer.

3.2. Contents

3.2.1. Content

An increasing number of content producers are combining gaming with a variety of content. Nearly 53.84% of the streamers (n=14) combine varied content with gaming; a total of 26.9% (n=7) focus solely on gaming; and 19.2% (n=5) deal exclusively with varied content.

Games are replayed by different streamers, such as The Grefg, Ampeterby7, Vicens and Gemita, who all play *Valorant*; LolitoFdez and Reborn_Live play *Rust*; and Perxिताa, the danirep, and xXxTheFocusxXx play *GTA V*. Many of these players are taking advantage of the February releases, such as Rubius, elxokas, and IlloJuan, who play *Dying Light 2*, or Vicens and Llobeti4, who have tested the new updated *Fortnite*.

Other streamers play against each other, such as Alexby11 and Aroyitt playing *Gang Beasts*, Alexby11 and bysTaXx playing *Counter Strike*, and LakshartNia and xXxTheFocusxXx participating in the *Minecraft* challenge.

3.2.2 Average number of views

The average number of views for the month of February was 269,865 plays, and the highest average for February, at 970,358 views, was for Ibai, who is 4th in number of followers.

The results show that the achievement of success in February views does not necessarily correspond to the number of followers. For example, streamers elxokas and IlloJuan rank third and fifth in average number of views, yet they are 21st and 26th in number of followers, respectively.

Table 3. Average number of views.

<i>Streamer</i>	Average number of views	Ranking among Spanish streamers in number of followers
Ibai	970,358	4 th
Auronplay	889,124	1 st
elxokas	873,859	21 st
Rubius	809,111	2 nd
IlloJuan	788,814	26 th

Source: Own elaboration.

The content with the most views was that of Ibai, which coincided with the broadcast of a special event, *Disaster Chefs*. Although Ibai organised the show, other streamers participated as well. The success of this programme, along with the rest of the month's content, ensured that Ibai achieved the highest average number of views for the month. The *Disaster Chefs* event, which is similar to the TV show *Master Chef*, was broadcast from a catering school. In the programme, pairs of streamers contended in a timed competition to make different dishes, and the winner was selected by a panel of judges. With Ibai leading the way, these

² See Table 1, Streamers analysed (p. 7).

types of programmes are well received on the platform. Moreover, they show how these people are able to transcend our usual concept of streamers, as they become personalities with broader objectives.

In addition to the views Ibai has obtained, the high viewing figures for Rubius, Auronplay, and IlloJuan show that variety and comedy in content are the most popular categories for the Twitch audience. Ibai and Auronplay did not include any games in their broadcasts, and although Rubius, elxokas, and IlloJuan did play games, the relaxed and varied content was also present in their broadcasts.

Table 4. Number of views.

<i>Streamers</i>	<i>Content Title</i>	<i>Content category</i>	<i>Views</i>
Ibai	<i>DISASTER CHEFS #1 HA LLEGADO EL DÍA</i>	Special Events	4,1M
Rubius	<i>LA RATA IS BACK - NOCHE DE VR CON ZILVERK - VARIETY KINGGGGGGGGGGGGGGGGGGG</i>	Just Chatting	1,9 M
Auronplay	<i>Hablamos y vemos vídeos de coreano El Terrazas</i>	Just Chatting	1,4M
elxokas	<i>DISASTER CHEFS Y LUEGO UN VARIETY TIMIDÍN PUEDE QUE DYING LIGHT? ME FUMO 40 (LOST ARK 5 DÍAS POGGERS) !REDES</i>	Just Chatting	1,4M
IlloJuan	<i>Disaster Chefs, juego de un franquista y Dying Light 2. La típica tarde de jueves</i>	Just Chatting	1,2M

Source: Own elaboration.

3.3. Broadcasting dynamics

3.3.1. Frequency of broadcasting

The frequency of broadcasting is not directly related to the number of followers. For example, the streamers who broadcast the most days, and who only had one day off per week in February, were ranked 4th and 29th in terms of number of followers. More than half of the streamers, namely 53.84%, have between one and three days off per week.

The streaming pair Grefg and Gemita went on holiday for a week during the month under study, so we considered February as an extraordinary period for the couple. On the other hand, MarkiLokurasY did not have a single broadcast on any day in February by choice, and FologorLives and Wismichu removed all of the month's content from their accounts.

3.3.2. Airtime

The average broadcasting time was 5 hours and 24 minutes during February, with Rubius having the longest broadcasts of the month, with an average of 12 hours and 59 minutes. February coincided with his strategy known as "expandable live," in which each subscription or donation adds 20 seconds to a counter, and until it reaches 0, the streamer cannot stop the broadcast. During this event, Rubius was live for 9 consecutive days and more than 215 uninterrupted hours of broadcasting between the end of February and the beginning of March.

Xokas was the second longest video broadcaster, with an average of 11 hours and 25 minutes, followed by IlloJuan, with an average of 9 hours and 11 minutes.

However, the streamer who spent the most time live during February was elxokas, with a total broadcast time of 217 hours and 3 minutes. This streamer was relentless in his broadcasts, and his live transmissions were longer than usual (the second in average time), which he claimed was one of the reasons for his poor mental health (TresB, 2022).

The majority of the streamers (n=14) opted for shorter than average broadcasts, and only half (n=7) wanted to be live for more than 5 hours a day.

As for the relationship between broadcasting time and success in terms of the number of followers, the results are somewhat inconclusive. The 1st and 4th streamers, based on the number of followers, broadcast for less than the average time in February, and the second and third streamers exceeded the average time, with the second, Rubius, having the longest broadcasts.

3.3.3. Shots and editing

The immediacy of streaming makes shooting and editing simple compared to traditional media. A microphone and camera are all that is needed to broadcast live. More than half of the channels (53.84%) (n=14), use only one shot during the entire broadcast.

A total of 30.7% (n=8) use a variety of shots and resources, examples of which include the zoom in the case of Rubius and The Grefg, and the mirror effect by JaggerPrincesa.

Although the camera helps to identify and connect with the audience, some streamers (n=4) decide not to use it, in order to conceal their identity.

Most streamers use simple editing techniques, yet some spend more time on editing by incorporating external elements into the video: for example, Rubius introduces gifs and memes live during his broadcast; Luzu produces and broadcasts sketches to promote the channel; and Ibai produces entire shows, similar to that of a traditional media outlet, in his *Disaster Chefs* event.

4. Conclusions

The success attained by Twitch is based on three foundations: the streamers, or celebrities, who act as a catalyst for the platform; the content, with topics and features which, together with the streamers, shape digital youth culture; and the interactive experience, which enhances consumption and strengthens the bond between the streamer and the audience. Young people find this platform a place to relax, laugh, and be part of a community, as noted by Hamilton, Garretson and Kerne (2014); Hilvert-Bruce, Neill and Sjöblom (2018); and Wulf, Schneider and Beckert (2018). As such, in line with our results, the keys to the success of this platform are the figure of the streamer (Kneisel & Sternadori, 2023), entertainment (Gros *et al.*, 2017), and the desire to interact and become part of the community (Hilvert-Bruce, Neill & Sjöblom, 2018; Wulf, Schneider & Beckert, 2018; Speed, Burnett & Robinson, 2023).

Regarding the most viewed content, and the streamers with the highest average number of views, the findings of this study support the affirmations of Hilvert-Bruce *et al.* (2018), Suárez-Álvarez and García-Jiménez (2021) and Navarro and Tapiador (2023), who have pointed out that Twitch is now a mainstream medium that has moved away from being a space that only caters to gamers.

Twitch has broken away from the trend toward fast, on-demand consumption of content (Gutiérrez & Cuartero, 2020; Espinosa, 2020). Content is improvised and spontaneous, and although each broadcast varies in length (Gandolfi, 2016), broadcasts are generally long, averaging 5 hours and 24 minutes in February, possibly due to some users listening to the programme in the background (Espinosa, 2020). To a certain extent, the success of the *live* aspect can be explained by “decision fatigue” (Neira, 2021), in which the boundless audio-visual offering overwhelms and prevents the user from making a choice. In this way, the live content of streamers is similar to turning on the radio, which is often listened to in the background as well (Espinosa, 2020). The long broadcasts and passive consumption reinforce the ideas of Kohls, Hiler and Cook (2023), who assert that consuming in a passive way is beneficial in terms of enhancing behaviour, enjoyment, and a feeling of community, as occurs with active consumption.

The majority of Twitch's most successful content creators come from channels such as YouTube. Furthermore, as part of their overall transmedia strategy (Aran-Ramspott, Fedele & Tarragó, 2018), they are present on diverse social networks, which indicates that they are able to connect with young audiences on different platforms, regardless of the characteristics of those spaces. This is evidenced by the fact that streamers have stopped being gamers and have become celebrities and multifaceted characters of interest *per se*, as shown by the *Disaster Chefs* programme broadcast by Ibai, which was the most watched broadcast in February.

These individuals are key to the success of the medium (Gandolfi, 2016), as young people search for the feeling of being part of the digital youth culture, so that they can share their

experiences with their peers (Hilvert-Bruce, Neill & Sjöblom, 2018). The figure of the streamer is perceived as accessible, imperfect, and genuine, which helps young people to identify with these popular characters. According to previous studies (Livingstone, 1988), and regarding its similarity to YouTube (Morales, Aran-Ramspott & Fedele, 2020), Twitch shares media uses that have been previously studied, such as identification and empathy with the personalities (Hamilton, Harretson & Kerne, 2014).

Young people have found not only a role model in these streamers, but a peer as well. This openness is achieved by speaking the language of the young listeners (Olejniczak, 2015) and sharing personal issues, which strengthens the bond with the streamers at a time in their lives when social media and their own culture are highly important.

Our results are consistent with the analyses of Gros *et al.* (2017), who note that entertainment is still one of the main incentives for using Twitch. The average number of views, as well as the most viewed content in February, indicate that variety and humour are the topics that are most interesting for the audience. The editing of the most elaborate videos was focused on this humorous purpose, with features such as memes, sketches involving parody, and image effects being added to the live broadcasts.

The features on Twitch are simple, and this simplicity helps the users to connect with both the streamer who is broadcasting and the content, thereby fostering a sense of intimacy between the audience and these personalities (Aran-Ramspott, Fedele & Tarragó, 2018). For example, the use of a live camera helps to promote a sense of community, which creates an interactive ecosystem (Hamilton, Garretson & Kerne, 2014). Nevertheless, as mentioned earlier in our study, four of the twenty-nine figures analysed chose not to show their image on camera.

The success of both the platform and the personalities has made video streaming a profession, as noted by Sjöblom *et al.* (2019) and Johnson and Woodcock (2017). The result of this transformation from a hobby to a professional activity has been the relocation of nearly half of the Spanish streamers analysed to Andorra in order to avoid taxation in Spain. Moreover, the association of content generators opposes the new audio-visual law proposed by la Comisión Nacional de los Mercados y la Competencia [the national commission for markets and competition] (CNMC), which aims to regulate their advertising activity. During this research, at least two streamers who were living in Spain threatened to move to the neighbouring country if this measure is enacted.

Due to the professionalisation of these celebrities, streamers now set their own guidelines for frequency of broadcasts and the approximate broadcasting duration of their content (Sjöblom *et al.*, 2019). Twitch does not encourage daily streaming, nor 24 or 48-hour live streams, yet maintaining a regular and lengthy schedule of broadcasts helps to achieve success on this platform (Johnson, 2018). More than half of the streamers take between one and three days off. Nevertheless, some of these personalities are well above average, and the 217 hours that xokas broadcast during February clearly indicates an obsession with work (TresB, 2022), along with the anxiety arising from the need to be everpresent, as the streamer later admitted.

The community of Spanish streamers is one of the most active and prolific creators of content in the world (Calderón, 2021). The four Spanish streamers with the largest number of followers are among the top eight in the world. However, despite their dominance, there are still very few female role models, as confirmed in the study by Ruvalcaba *et al.* (2018). The difference in the number of followers is incredibly high, and this gender gap is a national and global problem. A more balanced distribution is important in order for future generations to have role models in this sector.

In line with Cai *et al.* (2018), the success of this platform has created an opportunity for big brands to target young audiences, a segment that is not currently present in traditional media (Sjöblom *et al.*, 2019). Nevertheless, this group is open to mainstream messages (Lacalle, 2012), and to the streamers they admire, who act as prescribers (Cai *et al.*, 2018).

This article is part of a larger research effort aimed at this platform and its content, which in turn is part of a broader framework of platform analysis aimed at young people. For future lines of research, the authors recommend the study of content reception and its influence on the construction of young people's identity from a gender perspective. Apart from the scant presence of female streamers reported in this article and confirmed by other studies as well (Gros *et al.*, 2017), several authors have pointed out the gender stereotypes that are often displayed in the live broadcasts (Hamilton, Harretson & Kerne, 2014; Ruvalcaba *et al.*, 2018), and in video game transmissions as well (Delgado, Calderón & Nieto, 2022). Therefore, a more in-depth analysis of the presence of women on this platform would help to examine and possibly promote a more egalitarian social network, which could be influential in shaping the personalities of young men and women.

The language used on these platforms, which the audience knows and imitates even outside of Twitch (Olejniczak, 2015), is a key source of information about youth culture which, in this regard, opens the door to further research on the new forms of expression that arise from new patterns of behaviour.

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