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Twitch Within The Amazon Ecosystem

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1 Platform Ecosystems

Twitch, as most of the contemporaries digital platforms on the internet today, can and must be analysed taking in consideration its double-sided nature: the platform itself and its "puzzle piece" role in an ecosystem. But what are exactly platform ecosystems and what makes their connections different from any place in the cyberspace?

An ecosystem is a network of affiliated organizations linked together by several resource or product/service dependencies that confer to ecosystem participants distinct advantages that would have otherwise not emerged (Tiwana, 2013)

The word "ecosystem" comes from biology and refers to a system in which entities have some degree of mutual dependence. In platform ecosystems the value creation model aims to a symbiosis between the members; each actor/platform is both a beneficiary and an active influence in the value creation of the system and has constant impact on the others. The concept of ecosystem is actually very wide and comprehends many different structures, the robustness of an ecosystem is always more attractive to new users, either the complements cooperate within the system or compete against each other in it.

Ecosystems can be built around very different concepts: just one brand or artifact, one specific market or many sectors of it; One's scheme could be easier to analyse and describe because of its well-defined boundaries, having its components dedicated fully to one "central" platform or brand.

On the contrary an ecosystem can be amorphous and tending to constant change, with members entering and exiting freely, and taking part in multiple platforms and markets contemporarily. Examples of “defined” ecosystems can be the gaming consoles ones (Play-Station, X-Box, Nintendo) in which the entire network is built around one physical infrastructure for which the other members produce software and services; The different approach is very clear when comparing some of the most popular television/movie streaming services: on one hand you have, for example, Disney+, a platform born to host only Disney original form the company’s classical catalogue, produced for the cinema, or straight to home-video on the platform itself.- Each and every show is meant to be on Disney+, thought with an exact target audience in mind and tightly controlled. On the other hand services such as Amazon Prime Video are way more open, any producer can with lesser control sign a contract to have its products available on the platform which is at the same time just a collateral sub-ecosystem of the colossal Amazon’s one.

Platform ecosystems do present common unique characteristics that are fundamental to classify them and to determine what is and what is not an ecosystem, being some sort of digital platforms conglomerate is not enough. However, the number of digital networks that can today be included in the ecosystem definition is hugely high and the specificities incredibly various.

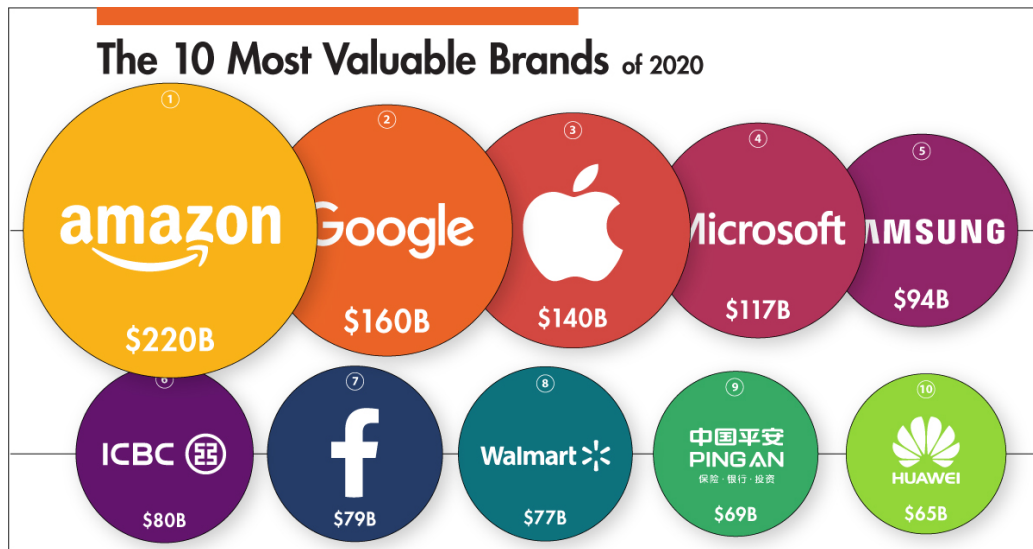
When competing Ecosystems aim to be, as the Play-Station slogan said, “the best place to play” (or be in): the idea is to create a new fundamental need in customers shaping a new (often cheaper) way to cultivate one’s interests or to simply facilitate and enhance daily activities and tasks (Streaming services for videos and videogames, e-commerce, online gaming subscriptions. . .)

Members of the ecosystem are often bound to the net through exclusivity contracts, big services/products packages are offered for a lower price than the one of the single platform model making it almost compulsory for smaller realities to take part in ecosystems and generating user loyalty as well.

Therefore, platform ecosystem inner relationships are not independent as arms-length market contracts, nor dependent as in hierarchical organization. They represent a new “hybrid” form of organization, in between of the loose coupling of a purely modular system, and the tight coupling of a traditional integrated product (Schilling, 2000). In ecosystems mutual support and legitimacy gains a greater importance and leads us back to the biology-term, the very concept of a natural ecosystem is in fact based on the idea that every organism is interdependent on other organisms within the system and gaining acceptance from powerful actors is therefore crucial.

The idea of platform ecosystem is not as new as one could think; many ecosystems and proto-ecosystems were active in the market throughout the last decades of 20th century, however it is with the rise of digital economy and, by consequence, of digital platforms that the idea spread exponentially. Earlier models of ecosystem were mostly artifact-based with firms producing products compatible with one central device, internet allowed ecosystems to start providing services and to completely evolve and multiply the possible business models. Improvements in communication and connectedness were key to the birth of online market platforms such as Craigslist and eBay were launched in the 1990s. The second boost to the digital economy came along with modern social media and online collaboration platforms and the launches of the contemporary giants of the industry (Facebook, Amazon, Google etc.) and their ecosystems (Alaimo, Kallinikos, & Valderrama, 2020).

Even if ecosystems are not the only model and instrument of modern digital companies, it is impossible not to underline the immense power of these structures; all of the internet/tech top 5 giants have their own ecosystem.



1.1 Towards a world ruled by ecosystems?

We are entering in a new age of the internet and possibly of the entire society thanks to the development of ecosystems; people start perceiving the presence of giant modular companies in their everyday lives and, as it often happens, re-see in our reality the traits of the fictional worlds portrayed in cyberpunk novels and movies. Amazon could potentially be the first multinational to succeed in something unprecedented, at least on this scale, genuinely generating a new "virtual" prime necessity good (layered and subdivided in the various services offered). This is not necessarily a bad thing, but the very strange and somehow scary phenomenon we soon might incur in is to see people, even ourselves, living "single-firm-based-lives". Purchasing everything they need from one single place, occupying their free-time with services offered by the same company, going to work for that same ecosystem that provides them the vehicles and public transportation they move with.

This paper will specifically analyse one piece (Twitch) of an ecosystem and its relationship with the other "gears" that compose the Amazon machine. So, I chose to introduce this specific ecosystem as an example of what I described until this point, for this reason and for an even greater one; No ecosystem is

as complex and forward looking as the Amazon's one. This single platform network has all of the characteristics discussed in the previous paragraphs and could be easily defined as the biggest and most stratified platform ecosystem in today's world and cyberworld.

2 Amazon History

Amazon's interpretation of the concept of digital business ecosystem is fascinating one to study for its incredible outcomes and its tendency to pave the way for how we conceive (digital) economy year by year, Amazon's worldwide network is both paradigmatic and pioneering of this phenomenon.

In order to analyze and understand Amazon as a platform ecosystem we have to look at its two natures: its e-retailer activities and services, and its ASP (Application Service Provider) ones. I will briefly outline its evolution and try to identify some of the key factors that lead the company to its unprecedented success.

Amazon was founded in 1995 by Jeff Bezos and started off as an on-line book seller. At this stage, it could be considered as a simple database from which consumers could buy a specific item when in need. At the time people still looked in different places for their different needs and, it was only a little bit later that the digital economy took off completely. Jeff Bezos thought of being late to the party of the internet business boom, and Amazon was actually his "regret minimization framework" in trying to join its competitors in the "gold rush" of this digital age. Nevertheless the digital bookstore had great success and soon Amazon expanded beyond it becoming a digital store capable of providing more and more to its customers. In order to provide a great deal of products Amazon ensured to independent sellers a platform and tools able to provide an easy transaction, great customer service, shipping etc. Small independent sellers and bigger ones were shown next to each other and could gather lots of new customers by being on the platform. Still, Amazon wasn't for long just a digital store. As others

companies of success did, Amazon was starting to buy smaller companies too; but on top of that, and most importantly, it did develop and launched information and communication technology infrastructures and, since it was in need of computational power, it created and specialized in server that now offers to anyone as storage capacity (Amazon S3) and computing power (Amazon EC2). Amazon offers web services to anyone willing to open a store online. It is in this diversification that Amazon, like other business ecosystems, finds its strength. Innovation is constantly brought about in different sectors of the market, spanning from e-commerce to home entertainment to digital services. Considering this the production side we can see how swiftly coordinated investments have been moved in order to enhance the building of an ecosystem that gives higher and higher returns(Ward, 2019). Amazon has expanded its offer to the consumer and also to the actors willing to partner up in order to be able to embrace most needs.

Nowadays the Amazon ecosystem is so vast that it can most probably go way beyond our perception of it, Amazon is behind many of our daily internet engagements and even more; but even if looking just at the Amazon ecosystem that is on the surface and that every one of us can identify we would be left mesmerized. Amazon is a digital store with an outstanding offer, it can be your grocery store, is probably your home assistant device, it's the Kindle you read on to everyday, it's your streaming service for film and series, it could be your service for music download and it is the Twitch platform on which you follow people's live streaming and on which I will mostly focus. Now, in order to have full access to most of these services you will just need a "prime" membership to Amazon (at the start of the year over 150 million people did) (Aversa, Haeffliger, Hueller, & Reza, 2020). This monthly/yearly subscription model was one of the major intuition that Amazon brought along and the real game changer for its ascension to the Olympus of digital companies. The company move was to include each and every service and each premium functions in one single subscription, so that even if the offered services could be found elsewhere and be even better

maybe, most customers are probably going to end up choosing what the Amazon package already offers them for free or for just a little more.

The multi-sector approach of the company is perfectly mirrored in the “Prime” subscription; it is characterized by one core service, the fast delivery/free shipping for Amazon.com but comes along with services in all of the other sectors covered by the ecosystem.

Many tried to imitate the Amazon digital business model or any of its associate services, but its “all in one package” and fluidity in having their platforms cooperating and in constantly adding new needs adds up is what renders Amazon unbeatable. The edgework (or super-modular complementarity) enhanced by Amazon services adds up rapidly before our eyes and, if we consider an ecosystem as something that entails a complex network of affiliated organizations whose resources, activities and outputs are linked in multilateral ways that cannot be reduced to the sum of bilateral connections between ecosystem participants (Adner 2017) we can surely see Amazon as one of the best and leading ecosystem of our age, the added value created both on the production and the consumption side is tangible.

Talking about the links between components, actors and organizations we must underline the path of dependencies in the Amazon platform; selling on this platform is not like selling on eBay or Facebook market place, it is not a mere shopping window, when you sell on Amazon you sell “for Amazon”. On the platform competition is controlled but surely remains steep, rivalry between platform participants is surely high, more complex is the control exerted by the platform owner since we are sometimes deceived in not perceiving the intervention of the platform but it is indeed quite high considering standards in sharing economy models. The high control exerted



by the platform could be probably due to the customer-centric policy applied by Amazon.

With its strategy Amazon is one of the few digital entities that granted itself a fixed place in the Olympus of digital companies, more precisely being part of the so called ‘Big Five’ together with Apple, Google, Microsoft and Facebook. Even though its origins are different Amazon could probably be one of the largest slices of the internet we today use. The company now competes on level we never thought it could compete on, such as cloud computing as an adversary to Google and Microsoft or with new platforms such as Twitch one that now frightens with its numbers the long established YouTube on the streaming side. Few are the areas not touched by the Amazon ecosystem, and some are trying to put a foot towards investing in those branches. As an example Facebook, with its market place is trying to monopolize peer to peer transaction, leveraging its network. We cannot be sure that Amazon will soon or later come out with its version of a direct retailer store from private to private, and in so doing opening a direct competition with a new challenger such as Facebook.

The pioneer/colonizing force of Amazon led the company to its contemporary position of hegemony, but could soon mark its first (relative) recession. The American antitrust has in fact just held its first interview to Amazon’s founder Jeff Bezos and his “colleagues” at the tech industry apexes.

House Judiciary Antitrust, Commercial and Administrative Law Subcommittee Chair David Cicilline expressed the necessity of national government (specifically the American one) to look more into these Platform Ecosystems and at least understand their power and try to regulate it: “...these companies are so central to our modern life, their business practices and decisions have an outsized effect on our economy and our democracy. Any single action by any one of these companies can affect hundreds of millions of us in profound and lasting ways”.

On the other hand the court, in the figure of ranking member James

Sensenbrenner recognized the creation of these companies as something that western society and its progress favored very much, and affirming that it would be obviously unfair to charge companies with the whole responsibility for what the digital economy has today become without taking into account governments; “Being big is not inherently bad, quite the opposite. In America you should be rewarded for success,” he said. “We’re here to better understand the role these companies have in the digital marketplace and importantly the effect they have on consumers and the public at large” (Robertson, 2020).

3 What is Twitch?

3.1 Twitch History

In 2007 Justin Kan and Emmett Shear launched Justin.tv, a website through which users could turn their lives into some sort of home-made reality show and live stream their daily activities, the site divided user content in categories. The gaming category grew so fast that in June 2011, the company decided to dedicate gaming streams their own platform: Twitch.tv.

Twitch’s public beta was dropped on June 6, 2011 and immediately started attracting public; 40 million unique users per month were already achieved in the first two years of activity. The company had already 100 employees by the end of 2013, all based in San Francisco.

Twitch has become the most popular gaming and e-sports streaming service and achieved that while being still a pioneer of the sector, this provided the platform with a market slice big enough to exercise a near-monopoly on the market. 2014 first quarter marked a new important record for Twitch that places itself fourth in the top five largest source of Internet traffic during peak times in the US, behind Netflix, Google, and Apple (Popper, 2013).

On February 10, 2014, Twitch definitively took over its former parent company (Justin.tv, Inc.) that was renamed Twitch Interactive. Tech giants

began to take interest in the platform and its success and Google reached in 2014 a preliminary deal to acquire Twitch through for approximately US\$1 billion.

It was a surprise for many analysts when Twitch was finally acquired on August 25, 2014, not by Google, but by Amazon for US\$970 million. Forbes reported that Google had backed out due to potential antitrust concerns around the company having in its hands both Twitch and Youtube. The purchase of Twitch marked once again Amazon's interest in the gaming sector as well as the one for entertainment. This interest became more concrete later with the official opening of Amazon Games Studios and the acquisitions of many game developer studios (most importantly CryTech, and consequently their Cry-Engine).

On September 30, 2016, Twitch definitively entered the Amazon ecosystem through the "Twitch Prime" appendix, a service included in the Amazon Prime subscription that enhances the user experience providing new premium features. Subscribed people got access to an advertising-free version of the streamings, to "Game Loot" (in game downloadable content), game discounts and ultimately one free subscription each month to any streamer's channel.

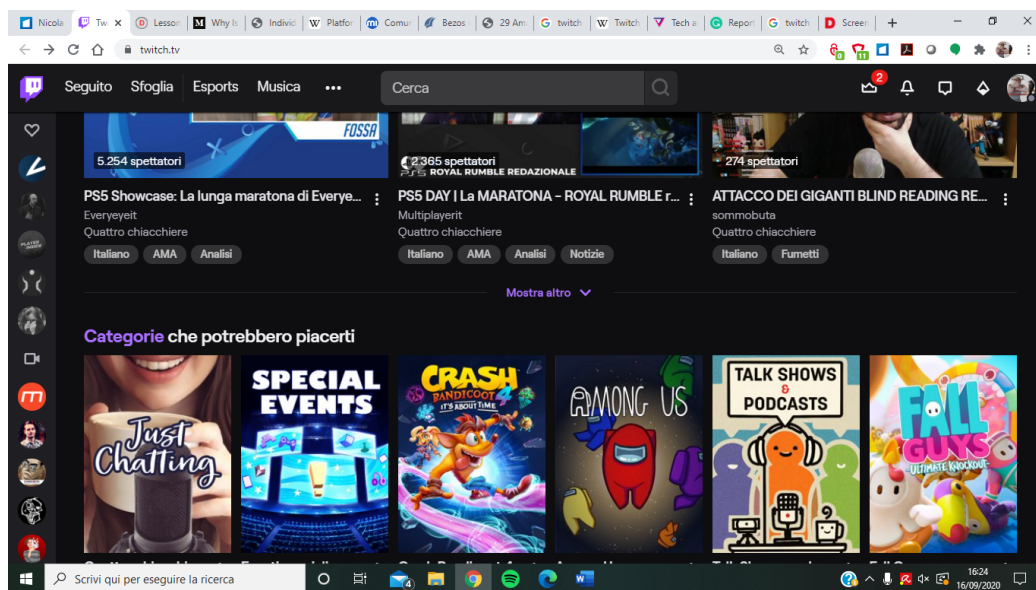
In order to reinforce its hegemony over the e-sports market and fruition Twitch started signing contracts with major tournaments and software houses such as Blizzard Entertainment. This granted Twitch the exclusivity in streaming and broadcasting world's biggest e-sports events. Next step into the Amazon ecosystem for Twitch was marked by the acquisition of the Internet Games Database (IGDB), Amazon decided to combine this service with Twitch after acquiring the Internet Movie Database (IMDb). The platform catalogues details of video games and Twitch uses the database service to improve its own internal search features and help users find games they are interested in and, of course, new Streamers to follow.

In 2019, Twitch unveiled a new logo and updated website design. The company launched along with this re-design a new advertising campaign, "You're already one of us", which aim to broadening Twitch's public way

over gaming.

The platform has in fact benefited hugely by the popular diffusion of the podcast-type content and hosts now talk shows, live reading, live dancing, live commentary of third party content and any other type of show that imaginable within law limits.

In 2020, while I am writing Twitch keeps growing and growing taking over always bigger slices of the entertainment market; One could think that Twitch's adversaries are similar services as Mixer, Smashcast, InstaGib ecc. But the resistance generated by these "Twitch-like" platforms is almost irrelevant if compared with the numbers of the purple streaming service. Today the challenge is for people's time and attention and Twitch already got in the major league and we can dare to say that its competitors are YouTube, Netflix, Tv, even books.



3.2 Interface

Let us look at Twitch (literally) more closely starting from what is the immediate contact for the user and that completely shapes his experience: the interface. On Twitch, contents are embedded in a streaming window, which

is part of the layout of the platform itself. Streamers can share their Camera(s) frame or their screen and broadcast their gameplay or live show to a potentially global audience in real time with very few seconds of latency.

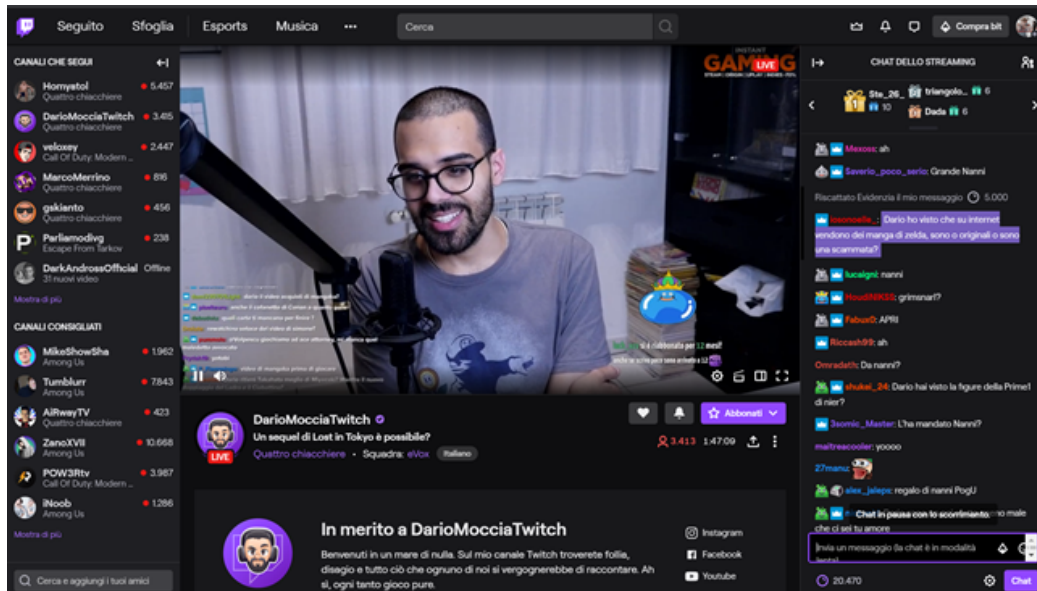
All the “active parts” of the community – streamers, eventual co-players and viewers – can communicate and interact with each other in multiple ways; first of all the “chat”, always present on the right side of the screen in which the viewers can interact with each other and the streamer in written form and through emojis, here are shown also the “achievements” of each user (their donations, the length of their subscription to the streamer, and the gifts they made to other community members). Anybody can watch any stream, however it is up to streamer to set the requirements for interacting in the chat; anybody, only followers, only or only subscribers.

Twitch’s chat is not comparable to the comment section of other broadcasting platforms or social networks, it is in fact part of the content itself, the content creator has constant access to it and can continuously interact with his viewers and let them, for example, democratically decide on what to do “together” during the livestream or answer questions ecc.

On the left side of the screen and in the superior part users see a menu bar through which they can navigate through channels and categories. Here they find also buttons for accessing their Twitch profiles, check for messages from other platform users and other notifications. Underneath the streaming window there is the title of the stream along with the specific category, tags and the buttons to subscribe to the streamer or donate subscriptions; beside the buttons users find the number of viewers in the moment and statistic about the streamers average monthly viewers. Streamers can have their streaming window invaded by customised alerts, pop-up notifications often marked by a sound effect (customisable to) that signal some actions operated by community member (donations, subscriptions, following ecc)

Finally, “the information area”, located below the streaming window and the chat, users will need to scroll down here to receive any sort of info left in this area by the streamer in dedicated text and images boxes; Most

streaming channels use this section for communicating their streaming schedule, the gaming computer setup, the links to their social medias, the chat rules and how to donate money ecc.



Twitch has pioneered a new hybrid form of interaction through its interface setup, since the end product that a viewer sees on Twitch is essentially a combination of pre-set spaces and interactions built identical for each channel, but that can at the same time be completely personalised by the streamer along with his/her community, like a sort of real time blog evolving and updating each time that a broadcast is streamed and archived.

Diversely from any other video streaming platform, the Host of the channel assumes through Twitch interface a “directing role” for the viewer’s eye: he/she is not only acting as the host of the transmission and/or the player of the videogame on screen, but he/she is also acting as the navigator between the spatial layers of the website, constantly verbally and non-verbally indicating which spatial frame of reference is relevant at a specific point in time (the game, the chat, himself) and channelling viewers’ attention towards different elements and improving the flow of the stream as a whole (Jucker et al., 2018).

This “environmental” interface model was particularly successful in

creating a sense of community both between the viewers of a specific channel and, more interestingly, Twitch users in general. These kinds of live streaming broadcasts provide in fact a complex setting where every participant has to be aware of the different spatial layers and how they are navigated and made relevant (how space is done), we could say that they have to learn a new form of social communications with various modalities and a specific hierarchy.

Twitch interface was not inherently revolutionary but set a standard and merged a lot of very good ideas that are now adopted by many live streaming platforms. The connection and constant interaction between the host of the stream and his/her followers is the true power of the service and the real element of novelty that led to Twitch's success. I will later go deeper into this topic.

3.3 Content, Audiences and Creators

Reading through the platform's history it would seem very easy to individuate its target and to speculate over the typical characteristics of the average Twitch user and taking in consideration only the first years of activity of the service that guess would have been right. But in the last couple years the situation started complicating and Twitch, perhaps involuntarily at first, broadened its public a lot.

Let us look at some numbers: Twitch has in 2020 140 milion monthly unique users, 15 milion active every day in watching the content created by 3 milion streamers, half of the users are connected to the platform for more than 20 hours a week with an average watch-time per day of 95 minutes. It is undeniable that Twitch still is a gaming based platform, it holds in fact the 72.2% of the entire gaming streaming market and 85% of its users are male, a statistic perfectly in line with the gaming industry in general(Smith, 2020).

People first logged in to see people play, to share one specific interest and this sector based content strongly contributed in shaping the platform

identity. Twitch initially fulfilled a double-sided demand, pro-gamers needed a way to earn money outside of tournaments and viewers wanted to spectate more often hardcore gameplay and take part in a previously non existing community outside of the game itself.

Gaming was enough to bring Twitch to the 30th position of the most visited websites in the world, making it one of the most important spaces of the platformized web both for business and for academical studies on the gaming and entertainment industry. The importance of Twitch may be a surprise to many, the platform is in fact far from even the knowledge of a very large part of the general internet population; this data can be easily explained trough a look at the website demographics: Twitch is very young, having 73% of its users aged between 16 and 34, 41% only between 16 and 24.

But things are changing. Twitch reached thanks to the pandemic 24% new users just this year and the advertisement crisis known as “Adpocalypse” that YouTube faced in the last three years led to a phenomenon of “mass migration” of the content creators from Google’s platform to Amazon’s one. This happened, luckily for Twitch, contemporarily to a slow but consistent revolution in the world of web entertainment.

Live streaming and podcasting platforms recently demonstrated that people are not only ready for long contents, but they are starting to prefer them. Now that the infrastructures are sufficiently cheap to provide everyone with almost infinite internet traffic many more people each day are choosing to watch and/or listen to long format types. Interviews, “long plays” and podcasts (in the widest possible definition of the term) are becoming the hegemonic form of web entertainment. Amazon had this intuition and managed to penetrate this new (or reborn) market through two branches of the ecosystem: Twitch, targeting mostly young people and gamers, and Audible that caught a more adult slice of public impressively widened thanks, once again, to the advantages granted by the ecosystem and the Prime subscription.

The Coronavirus pandemic gave Twitch the final boost towards a more “universal” kind of entertainment, and the demonstration is out to be seen by anyone: Twitch lists each month the most popular categories and games on the website and each and every month of 2020 has seen “Just Chatting” taking over the list with “Talk-shows and Podcasts” always present in the top ten and categories such as “Art”, “Music”, “ASMR”, “Food and Drinks”, “Science and Technology”, “Makers and Crafting” solidly present in the top thirty.

Twitch’s Just Chatting can easily be described as the live streaming version of YouTube vlogger channels; it has been the most-watched category in the second quarter of this year with 498 million hours streamed. We could tell that this rise is significant even without looking at numbers, as the category managed to beat out games and gaming channels of immense popularity such as Fortnite and League of Legends.

Interviewed about this shift in public taste Sean Horvath, chief revenue officer at StreamElements said this: “We are starting to see a rise of streaming stars who don’t game at all. . . if you don’t understand the appeal of streamers just chatting with their audiences, think of it like any talk show you watch on TV, but the difference is viewers can also interact directly, and real time, to the hosts.”

Horvath says the COVID-19 pandemic played and keeps playing an important role in “Just Chatting’s” growth: “A year ago, Twitch was averaging around 900 million hours watched a month, now, it’s hitting more than 1.5 billion, with that momentum really kicking in when the shelter-in-place mandates were announced earlier this year.”

Just Chatting’s viewership growth is incredibly significant because it is most likely “here to stay”; while videogames, as any product, will always tend to rise and fall and have a necessarily limited lifetime, Just Chatting, Talk-shows and Podcast have now managed to grow consistently and will most likely be at or near the top in the years to come while new videogames will keep coming and going.

3.4 Business Model

The business model of Twitch is based on a variety of income streams. The platform makes money in multiple ways, mainly charging users a voluntary monthly subscription fee both to the site itself through Amazon Prime (Prime Gaming, formerly known as Twitch Prime) and to the single channel/content creator, with an internal digital currency system similar to the “gems” of freemium mobile games, running video ads during the streams, as well as selling merchandise and signing contracts with videogame publishers and e-sports tournaments and events organizers. Portions of that revenue are then shared with the platform’s content creators, proportionally to the subscriptions and watch time they reach month by month.

The access to the Twitch platform is free-of-charge to both who wants to stream and who wants to spectate and take part in an existing live stream. However, many advanced features can be unlocked by paying a premium. This qualifies Twitch’s business model as freemium one.

Freemium model is known for attracting and retaining users at a very rapid pace, once they are in it for free and they appreciate the service they are willing to pay to enhance their experience and, in Twitch’s specific case, to re-pay streamers for the hours of entertainment and to get in closer contact with them. Having a user base demographically very young (mostly teenager and young adults) with an averagely low disposable income, Twitch needs to provide a not immediately expensive service that costs the users small transactions distributed in longer amounts of time.

This has not stopped Twitch from getting projected annual revenues of about \$500 million, there are plenty of income streams that Twitch managed to create and consolidate over the past few years. Being within the Amazon ecosystem helps a lot the platform value creation offering additional opportunities for sales and advertising other parts of the system such as the videogame marketplace of Amazon.com or Amazon Prime Video(Folks, 2020).

In the following chapter I will take in analysis every specific form of

operation that Twitch performs to make money nowadays:

1. **Subscriptions (Subs):** Viewers on Twitch can subscribe to a channel to support the content creator. The subscription model is divided into three tiers, which come in at \$4.99, \$9.99, and \$24.99 per month.

Subscribing to a channel does not only provide financial support to the streamer, but provides a series of standard benefits. These entail things such as:

- (a) Ad-free content
- (b) Access to streamer-specific original emojis only available for subscribers of that channel and usable in any channel's chat
- (c) Subscriber badges, which are customisable icons which show alongside a subscriber's username within the respective channel's chat room
- (d) Exclusive chatrooms only available to subscribers
- (e) Access to subscriber-only competitions hosted by the streamer
- (f) Access to subscriber-only additional content
- (g) Access to subscriber only voice chats
- (h) Access to discounts or free products from the streamer's marketplace

Twitch makes money through a revenue-share agreement with the content creator. Not any creator can receive subscription though, first they need to enter in the Twitch affiliate program (in the second quarter of 2020 the program counted around 200.000 affiliates). More precisely, Twitch takes a 50 percent cut of every subscription it can sell through its platform(Perez, 2018).

Twitch has been known to decrease the cut it takes for the more popular streamers on the platform (partners). Some of them managed to keep percentages between 60 to even 100 percent of the subscription revenue,

which in turn encourages them to stay on the platform, attract more public and generate value for Twitch.

There is one special kind of subscription: the “Prime” one. Every Amazon Prime account is entitled to support a channel per month for free with a subscription that gives him access to all of the premium features obtainable through normal subs. In this case Twitch directly pays the streamer but with a lesser percentage.

2. **Bits:** Bits (also called Cheer Bits) are the platform’s internal currency which viewers can use to “cheer” donating them to the streamer. When users cheer, their message in the chat will be shown as an animated emote — the more Bits you utilize, the more noticeable the emote becomes. Many streamers also activate an alert for cheering, so that the message pops up in the streaming window along with an animation and, of course, the name of the follower cheering. Bits can be bought on the Twitch platform. Different price packages are available, ranging from 100 (\$1.40) to 25,000 bits (\$308).

Similarly to the previously discussed subscription model, the creator will receive a part of the revenue for every bit that he receives as donation. The creator takes around 60 to 80 percent of the Bits revenue. The actual percentage depends not only on the number of Bits received, but once again by the creator’s popularity, and sometimes geography; Twitch applies different rules to different national markets.

3. **Advertising:** According to Statista, the average Twitch user is 21 years of age. As we already mentioned, this age group has naturally a smaller disposable income compared to older population outside of the platform target. Consequently, many users prefer to not even use any of the premium features available on Twitch(Gough, 2020).

Twitch has then enabled video ads, just like the ones users see on YouTube, on their pre-recorded videos and live streams to compensate the lack of monetization it has with its free users. Many ads come from

Amazon itself that promotes other parts of its ecosystem to users only familiar with Twitch and/or the e-commerce, Twitch was an important selling place for the Amazon Prime Video original shows.

Streamers are paid based on their CPM (Cost Per Mile) performance, which is the amount an advertiser pays a content creator per one thousand visitors who see his/her advertisements. However, it is up to Twitch to negotiate deals with the advertisers for these kind of ads (e.g. Redbull, Ubisoft, or any other company willing to advertise). Content creators have virtually no contracting power over this platform selected ads and receive just then a small percentage of the advertising pool depending on their CPM performance.

Twitch affiliation program consists among other things in the designing of a personalized contract with each streamer specifying their personal rates and incentives. It furthermore contains a confidentiality clause, for each and every one of the content creators, none of them can declare how much money he/she makes out of his/her work on the platform and the exact percentages perceived are to be kept secret too; this makes it tricky for us to determine the exact volumes that streamers make from advertising.

Content creators can determine when exactly they want to play the video ads, this seemed a logical solution in order to not damage the quality of the live-streams. In this way the host can synchronize his/her breaks with ads and prevent the ads from spoiling particularly important moment of their shows/gameplay. The most common ad spaces are “pre-roll” (before the video/stream starts), “mid-roll” (in the middle of the video/stream) ads and end-roll (before the very end of the video/stream when greeting and thanking the viewers).

CPM prices are highly seasonal, and the pay-out can vary significantly depending on the time of the year (ranging anywhere from \$2 to \$10 per 10000 views). Traditionally, June, October, November, and December

tend to be the months when advertisers pay the most for the ad spots.

4. **Merchandise:** The merchandise section is another product of the within-Amazon nature of Twitch; launched in October 2017, fans of the platform can buy Twitch-branded merchandise via a direct link to the Amazon store.

This merchandise is, of course, an Amazon-exclusive, meaning it can only be found on Amazon. Because of the sense of belonging that Twitch was able to create in all its years of activity, especially after the 2014 Amazon's acquisition, the fandom is really consolidated and many of the platform's users are willing to buy merchandise sold at quite higher margins. Furthermore, an Amazon Prime subscription, or in this case any Amazon account makes the purchase almost immediate, users are in fact already logged in through Twitch and can grab their merch with just a couple clicks.

Twitch's merch includes much more than a clothing line, but customers can also buy gift cards, gaming accessories, pillows, mugs and so on. Twitch merch is available in any country that Amazon operates in and sells to, basically worldwide.

5. **Twitch Funding, Valuation and Revenue:** According to Crunchbase, Twitch has raised a total of \$35 million in three rounds of venture capital funding during its first years of activity. Investors into the company included the likes of Thrive Capital, Bessemer Venture Partners, Y Combinator, Draper Associates, and many more.

Twitch's valuation has never been public since the company's entrance in Amazon's ownership in 2014 (\$970 million in an all-cash deal). Wall Street analysts have estimated that the company's valuation rose to about \$3.8 billion five years after its acquisition.

Twitch's growth has continued steadily over the years, but the company struggled to hit its goal for mid-2019 (between \$500 million-\$600

million), with the perspective to finally reach \$1 billion in 2020. Nevertheless, the platform still holds 73% of its market share and still remains the undisputed leader in the game streaming segment. Ironically, 2020, an year constellated of difficulties and even downfalls for many industries and areas of the market may have been Twitch most profitable year to date. Almost a quarter of its users are people who have known of the platform only since (and somehow because of) the pandemic and this year can represent the base for a new “revolution” on the platform(*business*, n.d.).

3.5 Elements of Novelty

When Twitch predecessor “Justin.tv” came out the idea behind it was somewhat revolutionary, at least for web entertainment; the question the two founders were trying to answer was “What if someone had the possibility to live broadcast his/her entire life? What if instead of uploading pre-registered videos people could real-time interact with their viewers and create the first web reality show?”. Time has proven that Kan’s and Shear’s idea was great and that the market, especially in some already interactive sectors such as gaming, was destined to proceed in that direction.

Interaction has always been the key word for a good videogame, a necessary condition to make it a valuable “gameplay” experience for the user, otherwise he/she would have just watched a movie. What Twitch did was basically add more layers to these interactions generating something new in the gaming industry. “New enough” to be successful even without a videogame. Interactions were already implemented in all social networks, even video broadcasting ones (YouTube, Vimeo etc.), however nobody managed to combine them with live streaming in a successful way.

When people are spectating a live stream, they know that they are witnessing something imperfect and not rehearsed, that would simply be impossible, and this is exactly what makes Twitch special. Viewers love streamers who can “keep it real”. They want to see something unique and

to “get to know” authentic personalities.

“Twitch provides the most authentic preview of a game you’ll find on the internet. That’s because it replicates the experience of watching your friend play from their couch. Is the hype real? Do you kind of want the controller? Should you buy this game right now? Contrast that with watching a two-minutes trailer loaded up with cut scenes. That’s my intuition for how Twitch helps viewers make purchasing decisions.” said Danny Hernandez, Twitch Data Scientist, in an article he authored.

Twitch understood that people rely more easily on live streamers who can show them their real experience, this inherent “reality” makes them want to be part of the experience itself being the experience either a videogame or some sort of categorised talk show, even for “Just Chatting”. Twitch does not recreate the experience of being around one’s own friends in real life but generates something new and similar, a digital space in which one host interacts friendly with all of the people writing in the chat that are not only spectating him, but also interacting one another, getting to know both the streamer and each other and creating a community at an unprecedented pace for more “classic” social networks(Danao, 2020).

Real time interaction is capable of completely change the content on screen and the roles played by the parts involved: the chat is an active character in the content creation process, they create inside jokes and contribute in the generation of a constantly evolving “language” and “narrative” known only by whom is part of a given chat and channel community, this phenomenon plays an important part in the astonishing user loyalty of Twitch; People come back every week for averagely 20.1 hours (95 daily minutes) because they do not want to miss out on what is happening in this place, they start feeling the need to hang out with this very particular group of friends.(Johnson & Woodcock, 2019)

Moreover, Twitch model allows the streamers to play as “puppets” in the hands of the chat letting people decide what the host is going to do during the livestream and accepting challenges through cheering and donations. A

very common practice on the platform is the so called “marathon” which consists in trying to keep the show going for as long as possible: for example a streamer can stipulate a form of “contract” with his/her chat that says that each unit (euro, dollar etc.) of donation will correspond to 1 more minute of live stream, and each new subscription to 3 more minutes and try, with the necessary help of the chat, to keep streaming for hours and hours (some streaming marathons went on for days, even weeks).

As I mentioned in the segment of this paper dedicated to the platform’s interface, Twitch has had the ability to create a strong sense of community also at a quite general level, this was both cause and effect of another particularity of the site: the annual TwitchCon, a convention that celebrates Twitch’s community.

Chase Newell, former head of Twitch’s Public Relations Department, in an interview at TwitchCon 2017 said: “TwitchCon is a celebration of the Twitch community with a focus on the creators, the publishers, moderators and developers, there is a broad community of all the fans who watch what they do and support their content.”

The events feature live gaming, panels, cosplay and conferences. The exhibit hall had arcades, board games, invitation tournaments, old school games, food trucks and free merchandise. Fans also had the opportunity to meet their favourite streamers. Around 30.000 people attended the last convention, held in 2019.

One more important key to the success of Twitch was its symbiotic growth with the world of e-sports. These disciplines and their fruition benefited hugely from the advent of Twitch that used them to show its potential and continues year by year to attract more people into it. The platform brought thousands of spectators to tournaments and similar events and helped in making e-sports more and more similar to standard real-life sports, with “top athletes”, highly supported and famous teams, leagues, sponsors and so on.

4 Was It Worth It? Twitch Weight in the whole Ecosystem

In order to answer this question we have to take a big step back to Twitch's acquisition in 2014; Amazon decided, to the surprise of many observers, to buy the rising platform for \$970 million dollar. To the surprised observers and analysts this move was hardly justifiable, even taking in consideration the company previous acquisitions. Amazon used in fact to adopt a very content centric strategy, the market place used to be the "main course" and the ecosystem (although already present) was only built to get as much people possible from as many niches as possible to start using the Amazon.com through other platforms (IMDB, Preview, LexCycle ecc.). However, it is quite the jump from having a gaming-streams broadcasting platform to selling more videogames or gaming accessories or Twitch's branded merchandise, and most importantly this possibility alone does not justify a close to 1 billion deal.

Apparently Amazon bet was for the long term and was based on a very clear reality: the huge growth of the gaming market which was worth \$26.4 billion dollars just in the U.S (2017). Bezos' company intuition was to buy itself the link between producers and loyal customers, the website were most products of the sector where showcased by content creators and where all videogame producers needed to advertise their titles. So it made perfect sense for amazon to enter the market by both advertising within his own ecosystem the products of the gaming industry and acquiring a strategical advantage in selling them then on Amazon.com.

The plan seemed to work out quite well and Amazon signed through Twitch many partnership contracts with some of the biggest software houses (Blizzard, Electronic Arts, Ubisoft) and managed to have more than 5 million games pre-ordered via Twitch Prime in 2016(Laubscher, 2019).

Because of its multiple acquisition in the sector Amazon was rumoured to be trying to create its own true gaming division, with its original

videogames and maybe even an Amazon branded console or cloud gaming service. But as I write in 2020, beside from some little projects, Amazon's does not seem to have done much in this direction.

Amazon's projected its interests into an even longer term and it took nearly 4 years for the world to discover the main reason for which Amazon purchased Twitch. Surprisingly simply broadcasting content was the real reason for the acquisition.

Broadcasting streamers that are rapidly becoming the web's top "stars", broadcasting e-sports, and possibly even real-life sports (NBA is recently trying to use the platform). Twitch is not only being profitable in itself, but it is also proving to be the greatest menace to YouTube, in other words a really powerful weapon for Amazon to use.

5 Twitch Versus YouTube

While the dichotomy between Amazon's streaming platform and Google's video broadcasting one is clear and very discussed between users and content creators, academic literature about it is almost non-existent and also specialized websites do not focus on it to much.

The challenge launched by Twitch to YouTube is however pretty evident, the purple platform is in fact proposing nowadays, along with an enhanced environment for real-time created content, its own archive of pre-recorded videos and past broadcasts, making its offer way more similar to YouTube. Moreover, the possibility of revenue for content creators on the Amazon's platform has become more solid and abundant since the "Adpocalypse" started hitting YouTube monetization back in 2017.

On the other hand, it would be an oversimplification to think at the market of entertainment as divided between this two platforms for multiple reasons. First of all, even with the recent explosion of non-gaming contents on Twitch, the site remains very polarized on that specific sector, while YouTube holds still its title of "universal" video platform. Secondly these two services

are competing against “everything else” before than each other; the true currency at stake here is in fact people’s attention, probably the most valuable good in the digitalized world. Because this attention is measurable with the entire human species most important currency, time, it comes natural that literally every business is fighting to get its own slice of it. If a person goes to the gym, then he/she is watching neither YouTube or Twitch, and the same goes for reading books, listening to music, playing a videogame, watching movies on Netflix or TV.

Mixing all of these things together makes it impossible to lucidly analyze the more specific markets of the two platforms taken in analysis; the only way to understand if there is an ongoing war and to try to determine who is winning or losing is to compare the two services and evaluate each one’s strengths and weaknesses.

YouTube has on its side a consolidated hegemony over online videos, along with the benefits brought by the Google ecosystem: for example the possibility to rent movies from Google Play and watch them through the platform, or the Spotify-like music service included in the YouTube premium subscription.

One more point of solidity of the website is its search engine combine with its already mentioned “universality”, YouTube hosts almost anything one could think about from tutorials, to reviews, from comedy videos to old documentaries. The possibility for the user to find exactly what he/she is looking for makes YouTube more welcoming for creators too giving them the possibility to develop their channels as open organized portfolios of their work, a showcase easy to browse and quality controlled by the creator himself. By contrast it is getting more and more difficult to get noticed on YouTube due to its saturation, and even if one manages to collect public it will be very hard for him/her to make a living out of it.

YouTube implements a quite classic interaction model based on the “comment section” below each video. This area can become really difficult to handle for the creators that find themselves struggling with all of the

most common social media issues of “hating”, inopportune comments, and the impossibility to create an effective discussion due to the delay between the video recording and the comments written after its publishing. The management of the comment section can also represent a massive loss of time for the YouTuber that has to “clean” as it will be forever part of its “virtual showroom”, like an additional piece to the opera originally posted by the creator that can sometimes impact negatively (with no justification) on the channel.

When looking closer Twitch appears as a radically different platform. The first strength of the service is its undisputed nature of “best place for gamers”, the website was created for this specific purpose and succeeded in obtaining and keeping almost three quarters of videogame streaming. Moreover Twitch offers, as YouTube, ecosystem advantages, but they are very different from the one presented by Google’s offer; having a Prime subscription enhances the user experience on the platform itself while allowing the user to take benefit from the entire Amazon’s roster of services, from original contents on Prime Video, to discounts in the main marketplace.

Differently from YouTube it is very difficult here to find a precise video and in so it is also harder for streamers to develop programmatically their own image, they have to rely on word-of-mouth and Twitch’s inner recommendation algorithm. The website compensates this aspect with the much more interesting and layered possibility of interaction, community sense is built in a faster and easier way on Amazon’s platform and usually with stronger results.

The particular real-time nature of the service completely changes the nature of the interactions giving them a sort of time limit: content creators interact directly with their audience and can discuss with them while in live, this allows the communication to be multisided and to create more value for both the user and the streamer that contemporarily receives feedback. Once that the transmission ends, the interaction ends as well, there will be no comments to check and clean as on YouTube.

A practical advantage that attracts creators to Twitch is the absence of editing in the production process, streamers need only their entertaining skills to start a prolific career on the platform. Live stream will never reach the “perfection” of the pre-written, pre-recorded videos, but viewers do not even expect that and are happy with having a more unfiltered and genuine contact with the creator behind the screen.

Twitch greatest point in subtracting both creators and public from YouTube is however money: it is in 2020 significantly easier to earn a living from Twitch than from YouTube; fewer loyal subscribers give more economic value to the streamer than sometimes thousands of views on a platform on which monetization has not only reduced its abundance over the years, but it is also become way more difficult to obtain for sure.

The fact that creators and public are shifting from one platform to the other (sometimes in both directions) has for sure to mean something and definitely marks an open conflict between the two giants of broadcasting.

With that being said, there is an alternative pattern of interpretation that can be easily made observing the two websites, that of complementarity. One of the solutions adopted by many creators is simply not to choose, but to implement both platforms in their online work. Very popular creators often sign contracts of exclusivity with the one or the other website, smaller YouTubers/Streamers can instead decide to use Google’s service to present themselves through a portfolio of videos that presents their project and professional work and keeps reaching new audience, while engaging more directly with their communities on Twitch and consolidating here a larger revenue stream.

6 Conclusions

Twitch plays an important role on many levels: it is a key gear in the Amazon Ecosystem, one of the biggest players in the gaming industry and the one everybody in the market has to deal with, as well as a rising power of web

entertainment.

In this paper I tried to give a description of the service, of its history, functioning, challenges and objectives; and I also tried to analyse its relationship with the Amazon Ecosystem and the market in which the platform operates. However, it is important to recognize the incredible level of complexity of this platform and of the digital economy in general, in order to better comprehend the theory of this world before to implement new practices and regulations.

Many different disciplines are producing academic literature around digital platforms and, on some of them, it is already possible to find in depth analysis of very specific aspects and comparisons between different services, business models, and effects on both the users and the market.

Twitch itself has become a topic of study for economists, sociologists, psychologists and many more. But I learnt that it is still very difficult to find a complete representation of the platform, at least an updated one. To study the internet it is somehow similar to quantum physics as the phenomena taken in consideration are changing at a pace too fast to clearly see them and frame their characteristics.

Each and every little aspect of Twitch could be the object of a paper of its own: why do people take pleasure in seeing someone else playing a video-game? Why are they willing to spend money on a content creator? Why is the moral policy of the platform identical in every country and is it a good idea? Can politics be possibly made on Twitch?

All of these questions deserve and will probably receive an answer. It is of crucial importance to define the cyberworld through its observation, these platforms are having in fact a huge impact on macro and micro mechanisms of our society. Scientific community and Public Opinion must start to know better and with a long term view the causes and effects of the digital economy and the values that this revolution is moving.

Amazon's approach to ecosystems is on its way to generate a new fundamental need for western society: being part of an ecosystem, both if

you are a business or a user; people will have to choose a contract to sign, one that includes more services every year at the price of completely relying on one company and to give up to it data about every aspect of one's life.

My research on Twitch has convinced me that this platform, especially for its unique interaction model, can be looked in search for future standards and directions; internet has not just revolutionised our world but has made revolutions something way more common, and Twitch is, in my opinion, one more turning point. People are already willing to come back to a virtual world everyday and to spend their evenings being part of a group chat and following one host or event, this already represents a big gap from watching a movie or tv, and a giant one from spending the night out with friends. Real life and Twitch (or similar services) are not necessarily in opposition, but it is important to understand how the rules of one are influencing the other.

The risk is that to underestimate digital platforms potential, to miss out on their effects and to be later force to take part in the cyberspace without having contributed in shaping it in this part of the future.

As I mentioned back in the introduction, at the beginning of this brief journey, ecosystems could partially or massively re-write our societies and daily lives. Once again, we are not necessarily headed full-speed towards a dystopia, but the rules of this "world of ecosystems" have to be discussed now and the social frame and knowledge left by this debate can be our generation's most important legacy. The digital revolution will not just "go wrong", the responsibility for the best outcome possible is tripartite between all of the involved parts in this crucial point in history: governments, companies, but most importantly users, us.

A happy coincidence

Tonight (24 September 2020), the day I will upload this thesis, Amazon made the surprise announcement of "Luna", a cloud gaming service that aims to compete with Google and Microsoft similar services, Stadia and X-Cloud. Luna, not by casualty, has a Twitch-purple interface and logo and will be

integrated in the Amazon ecosystem and feature premium functions for the prime members, the possibility to directly stream gameplay on Twitch and directly interact with it facilitating streamer-viewer interactions. This is the perfect news to receive while concluding this paper.

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Sintesi

Twitch, la piattaforma e il suo rapporto con l'ecosistema di Amazon

Ecosistemi di piattaforme

Twitch, come la maggior parte delle piattaforme digitali contemporanee, può e deve essere analizzata tenendo in considerazione la sua doppia natura. La piattaforma è infatti allo stesso tempo un servizio definito con funzionalità peculiari e elementi innovativi, ma gioca anche un importante ruolo come "ingranaggio" in un ecosistema, quello di Amazon. Ma cosa sono esattamente gli ecosistemi di piattaforme e cosa rende le loro connessioni diverse dal resto dell'internet? Un ecosistema è una rete di organizzazioni affiliate e collegate tra loro da diverse, e spesso mutuali, dipendenze da risorse che conferiscono ai partecipanti vantaggi specifici e quantificabili che non sarebbero potuti emergere altrimenti.

La parola "ecosistema" deriva dalla biologia e si riferisce a un sistema in cui le entità hanno un certo grado di dipendenza reciproca. Negli ecosistemi delle piattaforme il modello di creazione del valore mira ad una simbiosi tra i membri; ogni attore / piattaforma è sia un beneficiario che un fattore attivo nella creazione di valore per il sistema e ha un impatto costante sugli altri.

Il concetto di ecosistema è in realtà molto ampio e comprensivo di strutture differenti, la robustezza di un ecosistema è elemento attrattivo per nuovi utenti, o sia quando i complementi cooperano all'interno del sistema, sia quando questi competono l'uno contro l'altro all'interno dello stesso.

Gli ecosistemi di piattaforme possono basarsi su di un solo marchio o artefatto, su un mercato specifico (Play-Station, X-Box) o su molteplici settori contemporaneamente (Amazon, Google); queste entità modulari presentano caratteristiche comuni uniche che sono fondamentali per classificarle

e per determinare cosa è e cosa non è un ecosistema, non basta infatti conglomerare una pluralità di piattaforme digitali per rientrare nella categoria. Tuttavia il numero di reti digitali che possono oggi esservi incluse è già estremamente elevato e possiamo osservare svariate sottocategorie che propongono nuove interpretazioni del modello.

I membri di un ecosistema sono spesso legati alla rete attraverso contratti di esclusività, grandi pacchetti di servizi / prodotti vengono offerti a un prezzo inferiore a quello del modello a piattaforma unica, rendendo quasi obbligatorio per le realtà più piccole prender parte ad ecosistemi e aumentando contemporaneamente la fidelizzazione degli utenti al network.

Gli ecosistemi stanno traghettando internet in una sua nuova epoca e apportando cambiamenti percettibili alla società digitalizzata. Gigantesche aziende modulari hanno un impatto diretto sulla vita quotidiana delle persone e, come spesso accade, si possono rileggere nella nostra realtà i tratti dei mondi immaginari ritratti nei romanzi e nei film cyberpunk. Questa non è necessariamente una cosa negativa, ma dobbiamo chiederci se sia opportuno andare in questa direzione.

La mia tesi analizza in modo specifico un pezzo (Twitch) di un ecosistema e la sua relazione con gli altri "ingranaggi" che compongono la macchina di Amazon. Quello dell'azienda di Seattle è uno degli ecosistemi più ampi e sviluppati al mondo, ottimo al contempo come esempio del modello e come orizzonte a cui guardare per studiare il futuro dell'industria.

Amazon adotta infatti un approccio multi-settore perfettamente rappresentato nel suo servizio in abbonamento: Amazon Prime, un'unica sottoscrizione che garantisce l'accesso a funzioni premium del marketplace principale, insieme ad una pletora di ulteriori servizi e vantaggi.

Che cos'è Twitch? E quanto è importante oggi?

Twitch.tv è una piattaforma di livestreaming, lanciata il 6 giugno 2011 come spin-off della piattaforma di streaming generico Justin.tv. Il sito è progettato principalmente per lo streaming di videogiochi e gli e-sports, ma ha

recentemente visto crescere esponenzialmente anche altri tipi di trasmissioni, soprattutto talk show. I contenuti possono essere visualizzati sia in diretta sia on demand.

Il servizio detiene da solo il 75% percento del mercato del live streaming di videogiochi ed e-sports e conta, nel 2020, 140 milioni di utenti unici mensili, di cui 15 milioni attivi ogni giorno, 3 milioni di streamer (i creatori di contenuti della piattaforma) e un monte ore settimanale medio di 20 ore spese dagli utenti a guardare le trasmissioni in diretta.

Nel 2020, mentre scrivo, Twitch continua a crescere e crescere conquistando fette sempre più grandi del mercato dell'intrattenimento; Si potrebbe pensare che gli avversari di Twitch siano i servizi simili (Mixer, Smashcast, InstaGib ecc.). Ma la resistenza generata da queste piattaforme "Twitch-like" è quasi irrilevante se confrontata con i numeri del servizio di streaming viola. Twitch si contende sostanzialmente il tempo e l'attenzione delle persone e possiamo già azzardarci ad affermare che i suoi veri concorrenti siano YouTube, Netflix, la TV e persino i libri.

Gli utenti originali di Twitch si interessarono al servizio, per condividere un interesse specifico, il gaming, e questo contenuto di settore ha contribuito fortemente a plasmare l'identità della piattaforma.

Twitch inizialmente soddisfaceva una domanda bilaterale: i giocatori professionisti avevano bisogno di un modo per guadagnare denaro al di fuori dei tornei e gli spettatori volevano assistere a un gameplay di alto livello e prendere parte a una comunità precedentemente inesistente al di fuori dei giochi stessi.

Il gaming è bastato per portare Twitch al 30° posto tra i siti web più visitati al mondo, rendendolo uno degli spazi più importanti dell'internet delle piattaforme, sia per il business che per gli studi accademici sul settore del gaming e dell'intrattenimento.

Twitch ha accresciuto solo quest'anno, grazie alla pandemia, la sua base utenti del 24% e già precedentemente, soprattutto per via della crisi pubblicitaria nota come "Adpocalypse" che YouTube ha dovuto affrontare

negli ultimi tre anni ha portato ad un fenomeno di "migrazione di massa" dei creatori di contenuti dalla piattaforma di Google a quella di Amazon . Ciò è avvenuto, fortunatamente per Twitch, contemporaneamente a una lenta ma consistente rivoluzione nel mondo dell'intrattenimento web.

Le piattaforme di live streaming e podcasting hanno infatti recentemente dimostrato che le persone non solo sono pronte per contenuti lunghi, ma stanno iniziando a preferirli. Ora che le infrastrutture sono sufficientemente economiche da fornire a tutti un traffico Internet quasi infinito, molte più persone ogni giorno scelgono di guardare e / o ascoltare format prima inaccessibili ai più. Interviste, lunghe sessioni di gioco e podcast (nella più ampia definizione possibile del termine) stanno diventando la forma egemonica di intrattenimento sul web. Il modello di business di Twitch si basa su una varietà di flussi di reddito.

Modello di business

La piattaforma guadagna in più modi, principalmente addebitando agli utenti un canone di abbonamento mensile volontario sia al sito stesso tramite Amazon Prime (Prime Gaming, precedentemente noto come Twitch Prime), sia ad uno o più singoli canali, secondariamente con un sistema di valuta digitale interno simile alle "gemme" dei giochi freemium, pubblicando annunci video durante gli streaming, oltre a vendere merchandise e firmare contratti con editori di videogiochi e tornei di e-sport ed organizzatori di eventi. Parti di tali entrate vengono quindi condivise con i creatori di contenuti della piattaforma, proporzionalmente agli abbonamenti e al tempo di visualizzazione che questi ultimi raggiungono mese per mese.

Innovazioni

L'idea alla base di Twitch è in un certo senso rivoluzionaria, almeno per quanto riguarda il settore dell'intrattenimento sul web; "E se qualcuno avesse la possibilità di trasmettere in diretta tutta la sua vita? E se invece di caricare

video preregistrati i creatori potessero interagire in tempo reale con i loro spettatori e creare il primo reality show sul web? ”, questa era la domanda da cui scaturì l’idea dei due creatori di Justin.tv, la piattaforma che sarebbe poi divenuta Twitch. Il tempo ha dimostrato che l’idea era eccezionale e che il mercato, soprattutto in alcuni settori già interattivi come i giochi, era destinato a procedere in quella direzione.

“Interazione” è sempre stata la parola chiave per un buon videogioco, condizione necessaria per renderlo una preziosa esperienza di “gameplay” per l’utente. Ciò che Twitch ha fatto è stato fondamentalmente aggiungere più livelli a queste interazioni generando qualcosa di nuovo nel settore dei videogiochi. Le interazioni erano già implementate in tutti i social network, anche quelli di trasmissione video (YouTube, Vimeo ecc.), tuttavia nessuno era riuscito a combinarle con il live streaming in modo efficace.

Quando le persone assistono a un live streaming, sanno che stanno assistendo a qualcosa di imperfetto e non provato, sarebbe semplicemente impossibile il contrario, e questo è esattamente ciò che rende speciale Twitch.

Twitch non ricrea l’esperienza di stare con i propri amici nella vita reale ma genera qualcosa di nuovo e simile, uno spazio digitale in cui un host interagisce amichevolmente con tutte le persone che scrivono nella chat e che non solo lo stanno osservando, ma stanno anche interagendo tra loro, conoscendo sia lo streamer che gli altri utenti e creando una community molto più velocemente che nei social network più ”classici”. L’interazione in tempo reale è in grado di cambiare completamente il contenuto sullo schermo e il ruolo svolto dalle parti coinvolte: la chat è un personaggio attivo nel processo di creazione dei contenuti, gli utenti contribuiscono alla generazione di un “linguaggio” in continua evoluzione e di una ”narrativa” conosciuta solo da chi fa parte di una determinata comunità; questo fenomeno gioca un ruolo importante nella sorprendente fedeltà degli utenti di Twitch; Le persone tornano ogni settimana in media per 20,1 ore (95 minuti al giorno) perché non vogliono perdersi ciò che sta accadendo durante queste trasmissioni, iniziano a sentire il bisogno di passare del tempo con questo gruppo di amici molto

particolare.

Twitch ha inoltre avuto la capacità di creare un forte senso di comunità anche al livello generale della piattaforma, questo è stato sia causa che effetto di un'altra particolarità del sito: l'annuale TwitchCon , una convention che celebra la comunità di Twitch e a cui partecipano decine di migliaia di utenti.

Un'altra chiave importante per il successo di Twitch è stata la sua crescita simbiotica con il mondo degli e-sport. Queste discipline e la loro fruizione hanno beneficiato enormemente dell'avvento di Twitch che le ha utilizzate per mostrare il suo potenziale e continua anno dopo anno ad attirare più persone in questo mondo. La piattaforma ha portato migliaia di spettatori a tornei ed eventi simili e ha contribuito a rendere gli e-sport sempre più simili agli sport tradizionali, con top athletes, squadre famose e altamente supportate, campionati e sponsor.

Twitch nell'ecosistema Amazon

Molti analisti si sono inizialmente mostrati scettici sull'acquisizione di Twitch da parte di Amazon nel 2014. Inizialmente Amazon sembrava voler sfruttare Twitch come un mezzo per attirare una nuova nicchia di utenti, i gamer, sul suo marketplace, ma ciò non bastava a giustificare la spesa di quasi un miliardo di dollari per l'acquisto della piattaforma. Poi è stato sempre più chiaro che la compagnia stesse cercando di farsi largo in nuovi settori, tra cui quello dei videogiochi e quello dell'intrattenimento e che Twitch era solo la prima di una serie di acquisizioni mirate a lanciare servizi legati al gaming e forse persino dei videogiochi esclusivi o una propria console. Questa possibilità ha acquistato concretezza molto recentemente, più precisamente proprio oggi 24 settembre 2020, quando Amazon ha annunciato "Luna", una piattaforma proprietaria per il cloud gaming, direttamente inserita nell'ecosistema e fortemente connessa a Twitch.

Ma a quasi sei anni dall'acquisto è divenuto sempre più evidente che la motivazione principale per l'acquisto di una piattaforma di streaming da

parte di Amazon fosse lo streaming stesso. Il settore è cresciuto esponenzialmente divenendo non solo una fonte di reddito concreta per la compagnia, ma anche una delle attrattive principali dell’ecosistema e soprattutto un “intermediario” necessario per tutto il settore del gaming: chi produce e distribuisce videogiochi deve far sì che se ne parli qui, su Twitch, rendendo così il sito un’eccezionale piattaforma pubblicitaria.

Conclusioni

Molte discipline diverse stanno producendo letteratura accademica intorno alle piattaforme digitali e, su alcune di esse, è già possibile trovare analisi approfondite di aspetti molto specifici e confronti tra diversi servizi, modelli di business ed effetti sia sugli utenti che sul mercato.

Twitch medesima è diventata un argomento di studio per economisti, sociologi, psicologi e molti altri, tuttavia è ancora molto difficile trovare una rappresentazione completa della piattaforma, o almeno una aggiornata alle sue attuali caratteristiche. Lo studio di internet e delle piattaforme digitali è reso complesso proprio dai cambiamenti repentini che avvengono in questo settore.

Ogni piccolo aspetto di Twitch potrebbe essere oggetto di un’intera tesi: perché le persone si divertono nel vedere qualcun altro giocare a un videogioco? Perché sono disposte a spendere soldi per finanziare spontaneamente un creatore di contenuti? Perché la politica morale della piattaforma è identica in ogni paese? Si può usare Twitch per lanciare messaggi politici? Tutte queste domande meritano e probabilmente riceveranno una risposta.

È di fondamentale importanza definire il mondo cibernetico attraverso la sua osservazione, queste piattaforme stanno infatti avendo un enorme impatto sui macro e micro meccanismi della nostra società. La comunità scientifica e l’opinione pubblica devono iniziare a conoscere meglio e in un’ottica di lungo periodo le cause e gli effetti dell’economia digitale e i valori che questa rivoluzione sta muovendo.

L’approccio di Amazon agli ecosistemi sta per generare un nuovo

bisogno fondamentale per la società occidentale: far parte di un ecosistema, sia che si tratti di un'azienda che di un singolo utente; le persone dovranno scegliere un contratto da firmare, un pacchetto che includa nuovi servizi ogni anno, ma dovranno d'altra parte anche affidarsi completamente ad un'azienda e accettare di consegnargli dati su ogni aspetto della propria vita.

La mia ricerca su Twitch mi ha convinto che questa piattaforma, soprattutto per il suo modello di interazione unico, può essere analizzata alla ricerca di standard per il presente ed il futuro; Internet non ha solo rivoluzionato il nostro mondo, ma ha reso le rivoluzioni qualcosa di molto più comune, e Twitch è, secondo me, una svolta in più. Le persone sono già disposte a tornare ogni giorno in un mondo virtuale e a trascorrere le serate prendendo parte ad una chat di gruppo e seguendo uno streamer, questo rappresenta già un enorme differenza rispetto alla visione di un film o ad una serata in compagnia di amici o altre abitudini sociali più classiche e radicate. La vita reale e Twitch (o altri servizi simili) non sono necessariamente in opposizione, ma è importante capire come le regole dell'uno influenzano l'altro.

Il rischio è quello di sottovalutare le potenzialità delle piattaforme digitali, di perderne di vista gli effetti e di essere poi costretti a partecipare ad un futuro online senza aver contribuito a plasmarlo.