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THE EVOLUTION OF COMMUNICATION WITHIN THE WORLD OF FOOTBALL ON TWITCH. ANALYSIS OF THE MOST INFLUENTIAL CASE STUDIES IN SPAIN

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Communication and information have evolved over time. The emergence of the internet and the web has brought about a transformation in the communication paradigm, to the point where traditional media, such as radio, print, and television, have been surpassed by the rise of new social networks. Among these are those known as streaming platforms, which have become one of the main modern hubs. These platforms are chosen by prominent communicators to disseminate information and build a large public community, allowing them to reach a broader global audience. This research analyzes the development of sports communication within the world of football, selecting one of the most influential social networks in the digital realm, Twitch, and the most influential channels in Spain: "Gerard Romero", "RubenMartinweb", and "El ChiringuitoTV". **Methodology:** For the proper development of this research, a mixed-methods approach has been employed,

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combining both quantitative and qualitative elements to capture various perspectives and fully understand the collected data to obtain truthful and enriching results. Therefore, the study is divided into three parts: An exploration of the origin and influence of the selected case studies, the transformation and development of the platform in relation to the channels, and the most relevant and important moments for the audience. **Results:** The results demonstrate the transformation that sports communication within football has undergone over the years. Furthermore, the rise of social networks and streaming platforms in this phenomenon is observed, alongside the influence of new communicative figures responsible for conveying the events. **Discussion and Conclusions:** The growth of sports communication in football is considered, and reflections are made on the reasons for its expansion, as well as its near future.

Keywords: Communication, Football, Streaming, Twitch, Sport, Gerard Romero, El ChiringuitoTV, RubenMartinweb, Internet.

1. INTRODUCTION

For years, the world of sports communication has undergone a significant transformation. New technologies have created a new sphere in which the audience is much larger, rendering traditional media such as radio and television outdated. This phenomenon, in turn, has changed the way communication is transmitted (Boehmer & Rojas Torrijos, 2017). The digital universe is the one chosen by the main sports figures to create content. At this point, social networks have gained influence being understood as integrated services on the Internet, where users can create their own communities, with the idea of reaching the user and sharing the content (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). However, in order to correctly analyze the growth of communication and the emergence of social networks, it is important to understand their origins.

The nature of the Internet has changed significantly over time. This evolution began with the advent of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT). Its beginnings date back to 1960. This transformation led to a major achievement: the convergence of networks, communications, and information, a new way of disseminating the most relevant news as quickly as possible (Chen, 2019).

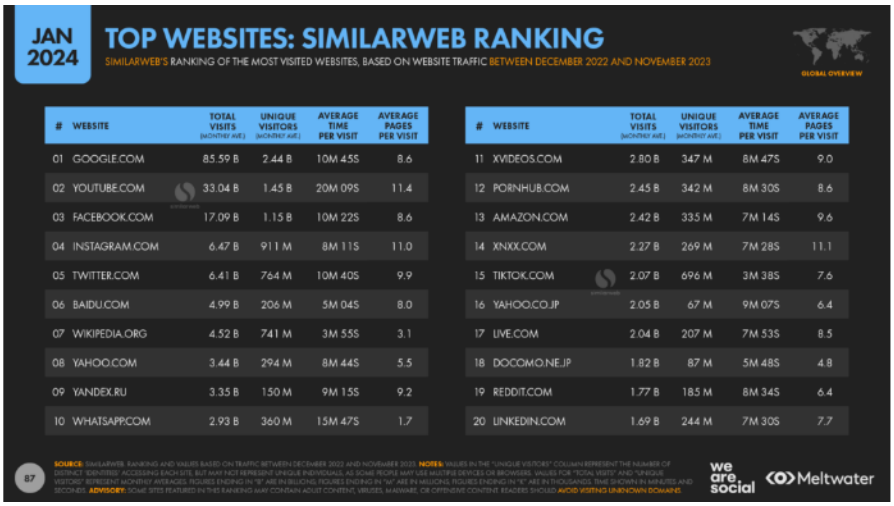
Over the years, this union has grown stronger. The advent of social media and live streaming platforms has given rise to a similar phenomenon in the 21st century. Both platforms are responsible for most of the content on the Internet and significantly influence audiences (García de León, 2022). They have created a new form of communication in society and in the world of sports (Rojas Torrijos, 2014). Interpersonal relationships are not treated in the same way, and communication circulates at high speed, generating closeness between parties. To the point that major events, not only in sports, have decided to embrace these types of platforms because of the freedom and young audience they offer (Muñoz Vázquez, 2013).

Streaming platforms can be understood in various ways. In this case, we focus on Paiva's definition of this phenomenon. Streaming is a method of transmitting data in real time that allows multimedia content, such as video, audio, or images, to be

distributed over the web. This technology operates by sequentially transferring data that is reproduced in real time as long as there is an Internet connection (Paiva, 2024). According to the Digital 2024 report by the analytics company We Are Social (Figure 1), these websites are commonplace and the most consumed by the online world.

Figure 1.

Most viewed websites



#	WEBSITE	TOTAL VISITS (MONTHLY AVE)	UNIQUE VISITORS (MONTHLY AVE)	AVERAGE TIME PER VISIT	AVERAGE PAGES PER VISIT
01	GOOGLE.COM	85.59 B	2.44 B	10M 45S	8.6
02	YOUTUBE.COM	33.04 B	1.45 B	20M 09S	11.4
03	FACEBOOK.COM	17.09 B	1.15 B	10M 22S	8.6
04	INSTAGRAM.COM	6.47 B	911 M	8M 11S	11.0
05	TWITTER.COM	6.41 B	764 M	10M 40S	9.9
06	BAIDU.COM	4.99 B	206 M	5M 04S	8.0
07	WIKIPEDIA.ORG	4.52 B	741 M	3M 55S	3.1
08	YAHOO.COM	3.44 B	294 M	8M 44S	5.5
09	YANDEX.RU	3.35 B	150 M	9M 15S	9.2
10	WHATSAPP.COM	2.93 B	360 M	15M 47S	1.7
11	XVIDEOS.COM	2.80 B	347 M	8M 47S	9.0
12	PORNHUB.COM	2.45 B	342 M	8M 30S	8.6
13	AMAZON.COM	2.42 B	335 M	7M 14S	9.6
14	XNXX.COM	2.27 B	269 M	7M 28S	11.1
15	TIKTOK.COM	2.07 B	696 M	3M 38S	7.6
16	YAHOO.CO.JP	2.05 B	67 M	9M 07S	6.4
17	LIVE.COM	2.04 B	207 M	7M 53S	8.5
18	DOCOMO.NE.JP	1.82 B	87 M	5M 48S	4.8
19	REDDIT.COM	1.77 B	185 M	8M 34S	6.4
20	LINKEDIN.COM	1.69 B	244 M	7M 30S	7.7

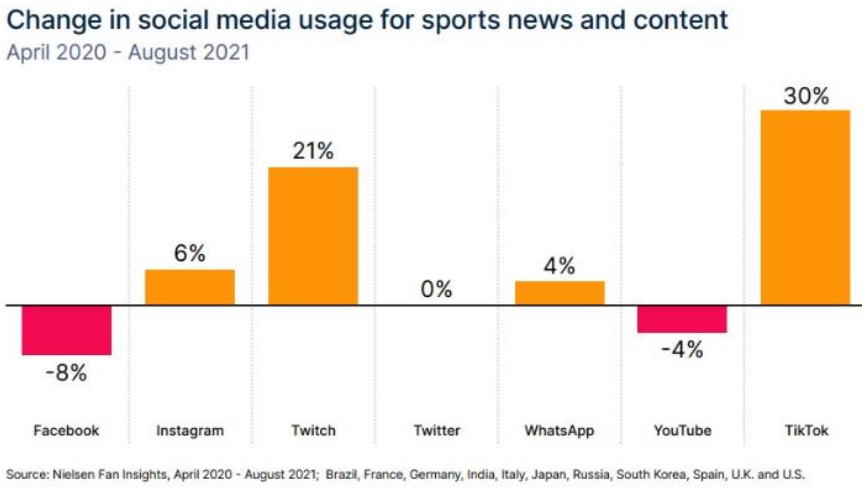
Source: Audiences of the most viewed websites in January 2024 (We are social, 2024, as cited in Thompson, 2024).

This report shows that Google, the search engine responsible for directing users to these types of pages, is the only website capable of unseating the major live streaming platforms and the most popular social networks. YouTube continues to stand out as the most-viewed website. However, there is one website that has been gaining significant influence in the world of communication since 2020. That is Twitch (Gutiérrez Lozano & Cuartero, 2020). It is the world's largest live content platform. According to its data, it receives more than 35 million visits per day and has a regular audience of over 2.5 million viewers. However, this was not always the case (Muñiz, 2024).

Its origins date back to March 19, 2007, founded under the name *Justin.TV*. It evolved steadily and acquired its current name in 2011. In 2014, Amazon acquired its rights for $970 million, a significant investment in the future of communication. Its major transformation occurred in 2019. The pandemic encouraged users to join the social network (Figure 2). In 2020, viewers watched 18.41 billion hours on Twitch. This is 67.36% more than in 2019 (Ebalé, 2023).

Figure 2.

The transformation of the sports audience on social networks



Source: Nielsen Fan Insights (2021), as cited in Rojas (2022).

Since its inception, sports have played a major role on this platform. There has been tremendous growth among users. In recent years, this evolution has been so significant that the platform has established itself as one of the most trusted for sports communication. Initially, traditional media viewed this growth as detrimental to the development of information. In response, many prestigious journalists joined these platforms (Herrero-Gutiérrez & Ye, 2024). Rubén Martín, a journalist at DAZN and one of the case studies selected for this research, stated in an interview that "journalism has come to treat platforms as enemies, when in reality they are allies" (Rojas, 2022, para. 7). These are clear examples of the transformation in sports communication. In turn, some experts point out that "interacting with the viewing community is key. Viewers share personalized consumption experiences based on humor, opinion, emotions, and authenticity" (Marín-Sanchiz et al., 2022).

Twitch's influence lies in broadcasting content that transcends journalism by combining information and entertainment to reach a much larger audience (Olivares-García & Méndez-Majuelos, 2022). However, this does not mean that communication loses its veracity in the process; both can coexist at the same point. The combination of clear communication and social media is becoming increasingly common. This phenomenon has led to the global expansion of the platform and has broken records worldwide (Branco, 2020). Leading football commentators have entered the world of live streaming platforms to reach a larger audience of different ages (Romeo-Ochoa, 2022). There are many channels with well-known figures of great communicative prestige, including the three channels selected as case studies in this research, with a high number of followers, as shown in Table 1. Where the color red represents channels born directly on the platform and the color blue represents those that began through traditional media.

Table 1.

The most watched Twitch channels in the world of football in Spain in 2024

Canal periodista	Seguidores
El Chiringuito TV	986.971
Gerard Romero	723.068
Siro López	309.113
Rubén Martín	177.784
Miguel Ángel Román	101.425
Mister Chip	97.828
La Media Inglesa	95.625
Tiempo de Juego	53.203
Rodrigo Fáez	51.050
Rafael Escrig	43.011
DAZN	40.796
Relevo	39.298
Marca	37.169
Diario AS	14.636
Diario Sport	9.811
Carrusel Deportivo	6.811

Source: Own elaboration (2024).

Currently, a clear reflection of the union between the sports world and Twitch is the entry of television programs into live streaming platforms. "El ChiringuitoTV" (https://twitchtracker.com/elchiringuitotv/streams), the Twitch channel belonging to the television program "El Chiringuito de Jugones", is a case study in this research and has 986,971 followers. It is one of the most important Spanish-language channels. It has a long history and treats information from an entertainment perspective. Second place goes to the channel "Gerard Romero" (https://twitchtracker.com/gerardromero/streams), created by Romero himself. He is a journalist who transitioned from traditional media to the Internet. He uses entertainment-based communication and the search for news, something characteristics of traditional media, with live connections and movement, encouraging user participation. The final case study in this research is the channel "RubenMartinweb" (https://twitchtracker.com/rubenmartinweb/streams), belonging to journalist Rubén Martín. On this channel, the journalist creates a discussion group on current football news accompanied by other fellow journalists. It is followed by around 180,000 people.

The importance of Twitch in the world of sports is evident in one of the most challenging periods in the Spanish soccer history. The traditional newspaper *El Confidencial* published private audio recordings between Luis Rubiales, the former president of the Spanish Football Federation, and Gerard Piqué, the former FC Barcelona player and current president of Kosmos Studios. These recordings addressed a highly controversial issue: relocating the Spanish Super Cup to Saudi Arabia (Álvarez, 2024).

In light of the commotion caused by this leaked conversation, the player sought to explain what had happened and neutralize the criticism he had received. To do so, he decided to hold an unconventional press conference on Twitch and invited numerous journalists. An average of 120,000 viewers tuned in to hear Romero's words. In response to this event, some experts claimed that it was "an example of the success

that sports journalism is having on Twitch, which can be seen in a rather controversial issue" (Montesdeoca, 2023, para. 4).

Therefore, this research focuses on understanding the evolution of some of the most-viewed channels so as to analyze how the world of sports communication has evolved in soccer. The analysis focuses on the growth of the selected channels, the communication time required to reach such a wide audience, and studying the main communication strategies followed as examples of successful situations.

The three case studies: "Gerard Romero", "El ChiringuitoTV", and "RubenMartinweb" stand out for their communicative variety, meaning that, although they are in the same market niche, their audiences differ very much depending on the topics covered.

2. OBJECTIVES

The objective of this research is to study the communication strategies used by the selected channels, such as "Gerard Romero", "RubenMartinweb", and "El ChiringuitoTV", within the context of sports communication on Twitch. To this end, the inception and development of the selected channels are examined, as well as their importance and usefulness on the platform.

Traditional media outlets have fallen behind, losing audience share and resorting to seek solutions on live streaming platforms like "El ChiringuitoTV". Only other live streaming platforms have been able to compete when it comes to developing direct sports communication. YouTube is Twitch's main rival in this area, but it has grown more gradually due to its wide variety of content from the outset. The purple platform is quite the opposite, having only entered the world of sports communication in recent years, which is why its evolution is an unprecedented phenomenon (Marín-Sanchiz et al., 2022). This platform was chosen to discuss its growth in the soccer world due to its influence acquired over the years. Its development dates back to the COVID-19 pandemic. Its influence was so significant that leading sports and soccer communicators decided to create a new communication paradigm based on social media.

Once the general objective has been explained, the following specific research objectives are proposed:

- **S. O.1: Analyze the evolution of each selected case study from its inception**: Understand both the transformation experienced over time and their evolution and analyzing their current situation.
- **S.O.2: Study communication strategies:** Evaluate the communication strategies used by the selected channels ("Gerard Romero," "El ChiringuitoTV," and "RubenMartinweb") and their influence on two-way communication with the audience.
- **S.O.3: Analyze the impact of Twitch**: Determine how the platform influences content presentation and communication by creators and their audience.

The world of soccer generates a large audience for the platform. This is why these case studies were selected. An attempt to understand how, despite the controversy, the communication of particularly influential events has a place and is viewed by the audience. To this end, three channels have been chosen. Their exhaustive study over the years, since their inception to the present day, seeks to help understand the transformation experienced by sports communication in Spain. In doing so, the different stages experienced by the channels and the evolution of their followers over time are analyzed individually. Additionally, the importance of Twitch in the process is discussed, highlighting the platform's most significant characteristics, which are responsible for its growth and the role to attract prominent soccer figures from the world of soccer to the network.

In this case, three Twitch channels were selected for data analysis. Each channel stands out for its influence on soccer-related information on the network. They have different communication characteristics, thus expressing the variety of content. Gerard Romero is known for his channel, which receives the pseudonym Jijantes, a curious way of representing the channel's consumer community. His audience is more focused on F.C. Barcelona and its players. However, during special events, he provides full coverage of the show, commenting and communicating about what happened. His communication style is casual and approachable. On the other hand, the El ChiringuitoTV community is very broad. Its journalists are very varied and use a relaxed tone and are responsible for communicating the most influential sports and soccer news. The last channel is RubenMartinweb. Its founder is a well-known and refuted journalist. Although his fame precedes him, he uses a dynamic based on entertainment. His analysis is very in-depth and covers major events. These three channels represent three different communication structures, creating variety and helping to understand the communicative transformation.

In this area, the opinion of Rafael Escrig, an expert journalist on the subject, stands out. This journalist assured that:

> These types of platforms offer something they have never had before: naturalness. Journalists have always taken their role very seriously. Soccer players should not be treated so seriously. I think these platforms, as well as social networks, have benefited us all. (Campos García, 2021, p. 39)

Soccer players and journalists have found social media to be a way to escape the sports bubble they are subjected to in order to reach the audience more easily. More and more players and coaches are predisposed to granting interviews to these media outlets, which are very important for the growth of sports communication. The selected sample is an example of journalists' closeness to their community. Together with the players, they have become leading figures in the sphere, helping in the process of their arrival on streaming platforms (Campos García, 2021).

3. METHODOLOGY

For the development of this study, a mixed methodology has been selected on the live platform and social network, Twitch. The objective is not only to quantitatively study the channels selected for their audience figures or followers, nor to qualitatively analyze their main contents and strategies, but to cover as much as possible in order to concisely explain the main weaknesses and strengths of the platform within the communication and information in the soccer sphere. Thus, a more complete study is generated where, "quantitative and qualitative variables converge with each other, adapting to the steps to follow. The purpose of using this mixed method is not to replace one or the other, but rather to identify the strengths and weaknesses of both approaches" (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004, p. 14-15).

The mixed methodology is broken down into two parts. First, quantitative variables are considered, focusing on data and figures representative of the channel's economic evolution and exponential growth. Conversely, qualitative variables and categories give rise to a less empirical and more subjective study, focusing on direct observation of the subject matter as well as the communication and information structures addressed at each moment (Hernández-Sampieri & Mendoza, 2018). Through these two types of methodologies, a series of data are studied that require an in-depth understanding. This results in experimental research and the deduction of figures to be interpreted in order to verify the different premises. Meanwhile, the research is longitudinal and takes place over a set period of time on a contemporary event.

Based on the three Spanish-speaking channels with the greatest impact in terms of communication within the platform, it is possible to observe the influence of content on the target audience; their figures are key to understanding the following generated in the audience. In turn, the use of Twitch and its formats reflects a clear example of success in the new sports communication. These three cases are a way to try to understand and compare how events of special importance are treated, from different points of view and with varied information and data treatment. All this, representing the growth of the page itself and reasoning about the evolution of the network in the sports world beyond the traditional media.

On the other hand, the channels are explored from their beginnings to the present day. It is a way to understand the evolution and gradual growth. It is a descriptive analysis of a peculiar phenomenon such as the beginning of Twitch in the world of sports information, along with the influence of traditional media and the figures of journalists. At the same time, but in another aspect of analysis, the different improvements, changes of sections and topics to be addressed within the content are taken into account. This creates a sort of nexus between the first and the second section to discern about the different changes of structure and internal actions taken by the creators to reach a larger audience, making a comparison of the figures, using the complete history. Finally, the transformation of the platform around the three selected channels is analyzed, trying to understand the influence and the evolution generated on it. To this end, a series of key dates has been identified as crucial for understanding the evolution.

The division into sections allows to accurately encompass the different stages experienced by the channels in order to reach the highest point at a communicative level. In this area, the use of the mixed methodology helps to integrate, on the one hand, the capacity of the case studies to innovate depending on the circumstances, centralizing the content on that with the greatest general impact and capable of attracting the target audience. The qualitative part of the methodology is in charge of outlining the themes used, the importance of language and the influence of these channels over time. On the other hand, the quantitative part of the methodology is in charge of breaking down and analyzing the figures over time. In other words, it explains the growth and evolution of the channels, comparing their figures and reaching conclusions about the different paths selected by each one. It is in the last section, where the mixed methodology has a joint influence on the research, the use of a specific time frame helps in the understanding of the actions generated by each channel, with the treatment of their figures and the different ideas used to achieve this profit.

These three success stories, seen from different perspectives, help to understand the development of sports communication. "El ChiringuitoTV" comes from the program "El Chiringuito de Jugones" of Atresmedia. It originates from a traditional medium such as television, thus transferring its audience to another medium to reach a wider scope. Additionally, they are most-watched programs in both media. In the case of "RubenMartinweb", his influence comes from traditional media, but he has created a Twitch channel to grow alone and has succeeded. Finally, the clearest case of success in sports communication through the live platform itself. Gerard Romero and his channel started from scratch on Twitch, leaving traditional communication behind. Since then, he has become a prominent figure and has amassed a loyal community. These three cases are linked to different analyses. A way to get and deal with results about the sports world and social media.

Therefore, the analysis period was selected from 2018 to 2024. For this purpose, key dates relevant to the analysis channels and the soccer field have been designated. Primarily, the creation of the first channel, "El ChiringuitoTV" on November 5th, 2018, is taken as a reference point. However, its activity and official data can be observed from November 1st, 2018, to June 26 th, 2019, when the season ends, and it continues to the present day. In turns, "RubenMartinweb" originated on January 8th, 2021, and "Gerard Romero" started his channel on December 10th, 2020; in both cases, the soccer season had already begun. From that point, the beginning (January 6th) and end (July 26th) of the soccer season from 2020 to 2024 have been selected as relevant dates, although the season ends on June 13th, 2024, in the latter.

In the second section of the analysis, a more specific study is carried out of each of the topics covered by the channels, in an attempt to understand the influence of the selected structure over time. Finally, the most significant moment in each of the channels is analyzed, with specific dates in each case and different moments. We exhaustively study the followers achieved, the live hours, the average number of viewers and the total number of viewers of each live broadcast. These variables are differential to understand the communicative management of the case studies and to address their incipient success.

4. RESULTS

The results of this research are organized into three aspects. First, a representation of data from each channel is shown, focusing on their beginnings. To this end, a series of representative dates in the worlds of sports, Twitch, and the selected samples were researched. The main guideline chosen was the number of followers gained by these channels throughout the selected dates, in order to understand their origin, growth, and current influence.

Secondly, the analysis focuses on understanding how the platform and selected channels have developed over time in terms of themes, structures, ideas, and communication. To this end, multiple live broadcasts from each year have been viewed and analyzed for their content structure based on the channel's selected theme.

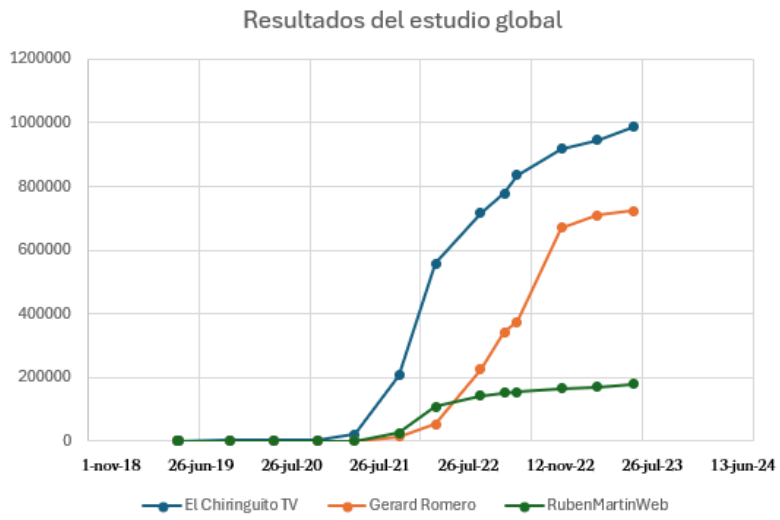
The third and final section discusses the most significant moments of each channels in the sample, explaining the growth of the relevant figure in the information and understanding the importance of each moment within the rise of the channel in question.

4.1. Origin and influence

Next, a research process is carried out on the case studies to understand their evolution on the platform, selecting some key moments representative of the phenomenon, from which specific statistics were generated for the proper development of the study. For this purpose, two influential moments in the world of sports between 2019 and 2022 were chosen. In all cases, January 6th, the first day of the soccer season, has been selected. Meanwhile, in the summer, July 26th was chosen because the main competitions take a break at this time so as to observe any changes in content during this period, when there is a decline in soccer content associated with sporting events. In turn, several representative dates have also been selected for "El ChiringuitoTV", the channel that was first launched. Finally, there are two key moments of analysis in the study. First, November 12th, 2022, which is days before the start of the World Cup. The second is June 13th, 2024, descriptive at the end of the soccer season. These results are shown in Figure 3 below:

Figure 3.

The followers of the case studies chosen since their inception (2018-2024)



Source: Own elaboration (2024), from Twitch Tracker (https://twitchtracker.com/).

From the beginning of the study, it is evident how the channels "El ChiringuitoTV" and "Gerard Romero" have experienced exponential growth, where the selected important moments have undoubtedly been relevant in the growth of followers. Meanwhile, the "RubenMartinweb" channel has maintained a gradual but steady upward trend. To understand why the channels have grown since joining the platform, we will take a closer look at each of the three channels under study.

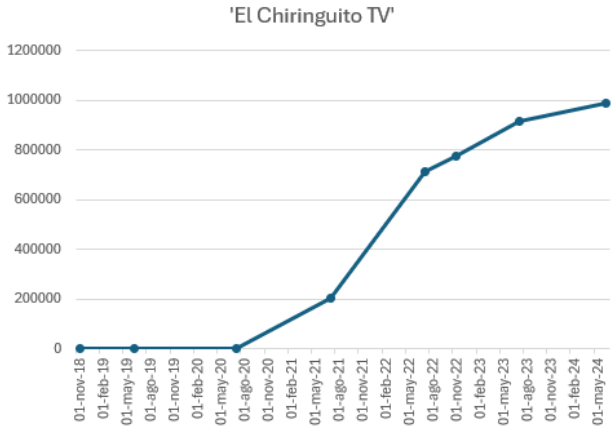
4.1.1. The ChiringuitoTV

The project's uniqueness lies in its professional structure. It originated from a successful television program with a global reach. Its figures demonstrate consistent and effective growth through quality communication. Before its broadcast on November 5th, 2018, the first official program had 225 followers, a figure supported by the above explanation. Its growth has been steady. By June 26th, 2019, it had 1,279 members, before the pandemic. This was a period of consolidation for the project, which occurred shortly thereafter. With the start of the soccer season on January 6th, 2020, the audience rose to 1,715 followers. By the end of the season on July 26th, 2020, the number of followers had reached 2,905. Once the pandemic began, the transformation was complete. The year 2021 marks a change in terms of both content and views. Due to the especial situation experienced, people are beginning to appreciate the significance of streaming platforms and are consuming much more content on a daily basis. On January 6th, 2021, "El Chiringuito TV" had 19,609 followers. This represents a growth of 10,000 users in just six months. The surprise came on July 26th, 2021, when the number of followers surged to 205,198, establishing it as one of the leading sports news channels in Spain.

The channel's growth continues as it reaches half a million people on January 6th, 2022. In just six months, the channel's growth demonstrates the influence of its communication among people. Time goes on, by November 12th, 2022, a week before the start of the World Cup, 777,418 users were already consuming live content. Right after the event, this number has grown to 835,674 by January 2023. Finally, by June 13th, 2024, the number had grown by over 100,000 to reach 987,486 followers. It is the most-followed sports communications channel in Spain on the purple platform. Figure 4 below illustrates its growth.

Figure 4.

The followers of "El ChiringuitoTV" chosen since its inception (2018-2024)



Source: Own elaboration (2024), from Twitch Tracker (https://twitchtracker.com/).

This evolution has been exponential. While it is true that the various aforementioned events have had a major influence on growth, the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic was a turning point in the world of social media and its channels. Before the pandemic, the content had few views, but after the event, the numbers began to skyrocket to the point where "El ChiringuitoTV" is now the most-followed soccer channel in Spain.

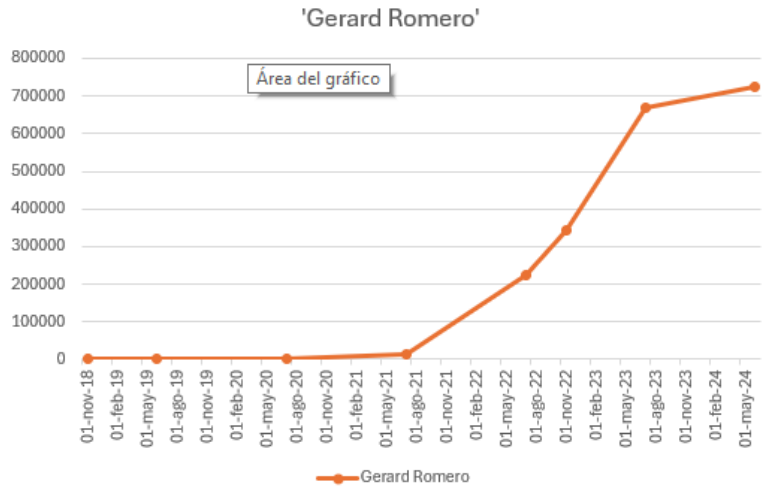
4.1.2. Gerard Romero

Gerard Romero is the most representative case of exclusive success on Twitch. He has gained fame through the content he has created on the platform. Therefore, it is important to explain how his growth has developed since his beginnings. He first went live on December 10th, 2020. On that date, his channel had 64 followers. Just a few days later, on January 6th, 2021, that number rose to 440 followers. The pandemic continued to wreak havoc, and users consumed content through these platforms. As in the previous case, the impact on the journalist's channel is evident. It began to experience a meteoric rise and reached 13,000 users by the end of the soccer season on July 26th, 2021. However, 2022 is the year that represents the channel's development (see Figure 5). On January 6th of that year, the number of followers reached 53,000. Even so, just a few months later, on July 26th, that number had increased fivefold to 225,021 followers. This increase is reflected in the figures, which reveal the communicator's closeness to his audience and the richness of the content. The communicator's role begins to take

on importance to users, which is characteristic of the new form of communication derived from social media. The communicative paradigm does not use the communicator as just another link in the chain, but rather as crucial to its future development, as can be seen in the figures.

Figure 5.

The followers of "Gerard Romero" chosen since its inception (2018-2024)



Source: Own elaboration (2024), from Twitch Tracker (https://twitchtracker.com/).

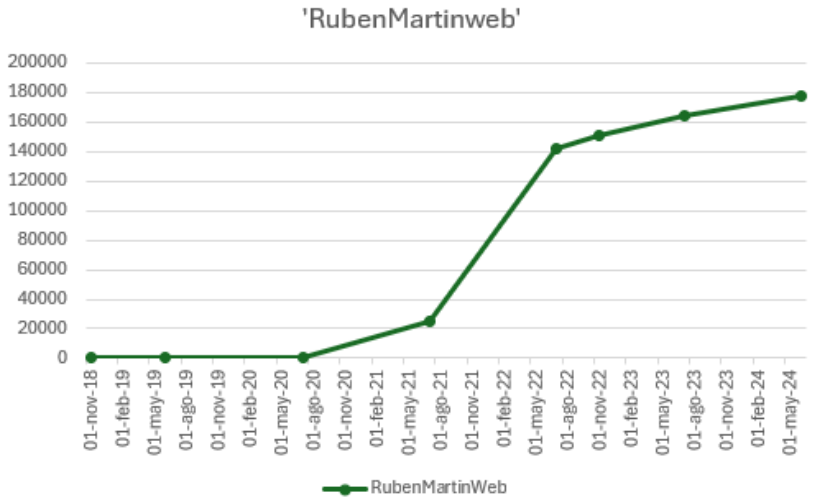
In this case, the World Cup increases those numbers. In 2023, Gerard developed new projects. The most important moment dates back to July 26th, 2023. His audience exceeds 670,000, tripling the numbers established a year earlier. His fame begins to be influential, all thanks to the platform. Currently, on June 13th, 2024, 723,087 people follow this channel daily and consume the journalist's content from different perspectives.

4.1.3. RubenMartinweb

Rubén Martín's channel depicts a phenomenon that contrasts with that experienced on Gerard Romero's channel. The influence of the journalist figure has a place in the relevance of the content. It is the fourth most-followed football communication channel in Spain. Its content ranges from news to debates between prominent sports communicators. The channel's origins date back to a time when the pandemic was already in full swing. On January 8th, 2021, representing the return of soccer after Christmas, he made his first live broadcast and gained 31 followers. By July, that number had grown to 24,520 followers, consumers who constantly watched his live broadcasts. Figure 6 shows that the year 2022 was key to his rise. On January 6th, 2022, the journalist registered 107,000 followers at the start of the soccer season and 141,000 at the end of that season in the summer on July 26th, 2022.

Figure 6.

The followers of "RubenMartinweb" chosen since its inception (2018-2024)



Source: Own elaboration (2024), from Twitch Tracker (https://twitchtracker.com/).

Momentary increase, however, these figures began to stagnate. Before the 2022 World Cup, the number of users only grew by 10,000, and after the event, audience growth stagnated. Although the most influential moment had already passed, people continued to watch the live broadcasts. Its development became gradual and cautious. Currently, there are 177,839 users who follow this channel. In this case, the journalist's figure is representative but does not significantly changes the communication process.

4.2. Transformation and development on Twitch

Since streaming platforms entered the sports communication sphere, it has undergone constant transformation. Depending on the type of content produced, the structures, themes or the way of developing the live broadcasts began to be managed differently. At this point, considering the selected case studies, each of the chosen paths will be explained by analyzing the topics covered, along with the ideas and templates used.

"El ChiringuitoTV", "Gerard Romero", and "Rubén Martínweb" are channels that share a similar approach to communication, but with certain key differences in how they understand the metamorphosis of Twitch. In this case, "El ChiringuitoTV", for example, has transformed its vision over time. Its origins date back to 2018, when it evolved from being just a soccer TV show to creating a gaming team to broadcast its FIFA 19 matches live on its channel. This trend continued throughout 2019 and into 2020. Twitch was characterized as a social network mainly for video games. However, the program's producer saw an opportunity to build an audience through the streaming platform by taking advantage of its television influence in the world of soccer communication. At that time, the channel was not looking to grow in terms of numbers, but rather to reach users unfamiliar with its usual content. By the end of 2020, however, video games began to take a back seat. This program has a large team of communicators and journalists led by Josep Pedrerol, one of the industry's most

influential figures. Its transformation lies in the fact that, from mid-2020 to the present, the formats began to focus more on soccer. News, information, debates, talks, reactions, and its special "Sportplus" have been the most frequently used topics. This, combined with the change in schedule and the possibility of attracting content about prominent soccer figures, led to a transformation of the format as it is known today.

Figure 7.

Live example of the channel "El ChiringuitoTV" (dated November 1st, 2022)

Source: Own elaboration (2024), from Twitch Tracker (https://twitchtracker.com/elchiringuitotv/clips#20221031-20221102).

Figure 7 illustrates the reality of quality content in terms of camera viewing and distribution, with a structure very similar to that of a television program. News is presented similarly, though in this case, the presenter is a staff member rather than Josep Pedrerol. The biggest change compared to television is the layout. There is a roundtable discussion around a table with streamers' own microphones and a heated football debate. This differs greatly from what we have seen in other cases, where staff skills help generate distinctive content. This is one of many cases and formats used to entertain and reach the audience. It is about the professionalization of the platform from the television sphere, excluding the traditional part.

"Gerard Romero" maintains a different model of sports communication from that typically seen on the platform's various channels. While the former was entertainment-based and news-oriented, the latter focuses on the journalist as the key element of the content. In 2020, together with some collaborators, he entered the world of video games, a strategy also followed by "El ChiringuitoTV", but he gradually shifted towards sports news, in an objective manner, and towards video materials featuring interviews with prominent figures in the world of soccer, starting in 2021 and onwards. This gave rise to freer, unstructured formats, where Romero himself took to the streets with his camera and created content in real life. He got closer to his followers and created events for his group, in which they were part of the program's recordings.

Figure 8.

Live example of the channel "Gerard Romero" (dated December 15th, 2022)

Source: Own elaboration (2024), from Twitch Tracker (https://twitchtracker.com/gerardromero/clips#20221214-20221216).

In this case, Gerard Romero's role as a journalist has been crucial to understanding the channel's growth. His closeness to the audience has led to the creation of a large community known as "Jijantes", comprising loyal followers of the channel. Figure 8 exemplifies this union between the journalist and his channel with his audience, bringing them closer and making them direct participants in the content, without neglecting the field of soccer. However, this has also transformed the channel's perception to the present day. Subjectivity has gained influence, revealing his love for Catalan soccer and F.C. Barcelona through special sections.

His latest big idea comes from the Kings League, a professional 7-a-side soccer league featuring big names from the worlds of media and soccer. Even so, his topics remain noteworthy and innovative within sports communication. Both channels stand out because they are always available, creating content every day throughout the year and generating more audiovisual traffic.

The last case is that of "RubenMartinweb". As in the previous cases, the content goes beyond sports. Video games are part of the channel's lineup, though to a lesser extent than in the other two cases. Its live broadcasts focus heavily on soccer from an entertaining perspective, following a television-oriented, objective approach. Its formats are traditional without losing the richness of the image. They use split screens, cameras, and content that focuses on the guests invited to the program. Special programs are also part of its schedule. In these, the content varies, but it usually follows the soccer theme. Additionally, they tend to have higher user traffic than the rest, but they are carried out at very specific times.

Figure 9.

Live example of the channel "RubenMartinweb" (dated October 20th, 2023)

Source: Own elaboration (2024), from Twitch Tracker (https://twitchtracker.com/rubenmartinweb/clips#20231019-20231021).

Despite being a Twitch channel, its content is very traditional, very similar to what is shown on television or radio. As you can see, it is a soccer discussion between several journalists who are important figures in the media. This structure is similar to that used on radio, but with one difference: each of them is in a different location when they connect, a trend very similar to current television programs.

This channel broadcasts live streams divided into different themes. However, it stands out for its lack of consistency. Starting a little later than the rest, in 2021, it took some ideas from other channels and combined them in its own. However, growth is slower, and the format has gone through a period of stagnation.

4.3. Relevant moments for the audience

The selected channels have grown gradually. Over time, they have grown and created a larger community of users who can consume their live streams at any time of day, regardless of the topic covered. However, in each case study, there are crucial moments for the audience, marked by an increase in average views and the subsequent overall project growth.

First, "El ChiringuitoTV" has undergone a very organized evolution since its inception. Its creation extends beyond Twitch, focusing on the influence generated by the television program. Nevertheless, a turning point in terms of content occurred when the channel experienced a global transformation in its statistics. That point was August 31, 2021. Its structure differed from that of other live broadcasts. The broadcast lasted almost 12 hours, attracting more than 600,000 views. It reached a maximum of 69,281 viewers at one time, with an average of 40,806 viewers. A very important figure to take into account was the number of followers gained. Although the channel has a large social following, on that day 26,827 joined by following the content. The main

reason was the topic. The program was called "Mbappé: The Definitive Tic Tac" which dealt with the whole issue of the French player's possible transfer to Real Madrid. The news was current and was able to reach a large audience. From that moment on, "El ChiringuitoTV" began to experience a significant boom. Mbappé's signing dominated the daily programs and marked the turning point for the channel in its quest for growth. In fact, the structure of the live broadcasts changed completely, and the same idea has been followed to this day.

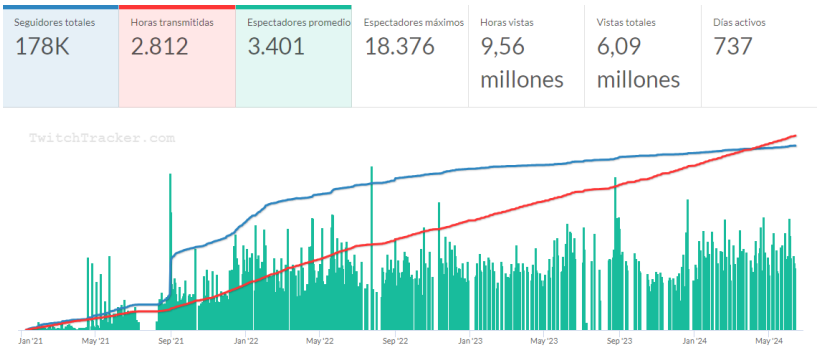
Gerard Romero's channel stands out for its specific sports and soccer content, focusing on all the information about F.C. Barcelona and teams from Catalonia. However, its audience reaches beyond that. Many users connect daily to consume the channel's content. From the beginning, the audience was very loyal, but there was a key moment in the channel's identity transformation. On September 1st, 2022, the Catalan broadcaster did a live stream that lasted about 14 hours, gaining 49,475 new followers. Even so, that's not the most impressive number: around 146,000 people watched the live stream, with an average audience of 62,083. These figures surpassed all previous views of the channel, and his influence was evident in his coverage of F.C. Barcelona's transfer window and the club's possible options on the last day of the market. Since then, his growth over the last two years has been reflected in figures reaching some 733,000 followers, up from 335,000 at that time.

Finally, among the selected case studies, "RubenMartinweb" stands out as the least active channel. This is reflected in its followers, with 180,000 accounts affiliated with the channel. These figures fall short when compared to the other case studies. However, it has a loyal community that regularly consumes its live streams and content. Its live streams are not as long as the rest, and its discussion topics are daily. Nevertheless, the channel's most influential content is not related to the discussions, but rather the live broadcast of a soccer match, commented on by the narrator himself. This is a rare occurrence, capable of representing the influence of sports communication within new media. Even so, this event describes the novelty, as the functionality of live image broadcasting has not yet reached the platform due to the increased rights cost. The match between Villareal and Stade de Reims received over 12,000 views in two and a half hours, gained 500 new followers, and had an average of 9,917 accounts watching the match simultaneously. This is an important change, though not as significant as in other cases. Rubén Martín's channel follows clear and very similar guidelines for each live broadcast. In this case, consistency lies not in the day-to-day but in content representative of the community, which takes center stage in the project.

The following figure illustrates the channel's growth over time. "RubenMartinweb" has received over 6 million total visits and over 9 million hours of viewing time.

Figure 10.

The most important statistics of the Twitch channel "RubenMartinweb" (2021-2024)



Source: Own elaboration (2024), from Twitch Tracker (https://twitchtracker.com/rubenmartinweb/statistics)

Despite being the three channels with the greatest impact in the sphere of soccer communication on Twitch, each of them has undergone a different growth process. After analyzing the obtained data, it can be seen that the largest channel is "El ChiringuitoTV". This channel is structured on a solid television base, with a representative audience. It was the first channel to start on the platform. However, unlike "Gerard Romero", it does not have a large number of subscribers to the channel. The Catalan journalist has created a community focused on Catalan football, helping him generate a very important focused communication bubble. On the other hand, Rubén Martín focuses on entertainment, but his base is discussion and informative debate through various figures. His growth was slower and less explosive. Even so, the most important content dates back to the live broadcast of an international soccer match, a representative event of where sports communication in the soccer world may be headed.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The overall objective of this study was to analyze the communication strategies employed by the selected case studies. In this regard, the analysis of "El ChiringuitoTV", "Gerard Romero", and "RubenMartinweb" has helped to shed light on a number of ideas that have been little discussed in the world of research on sports communication in soccer, but which are crucial to understanding the transformation and evolution process that has occurred in recent years. The Twitch's growth as a live streaming platform led to a constant transformation in the particular communicators' vision. From that moment on, these channels found a way to move away from traditional communication and enter a new world, where they would impose their own way of dealing with the flow of communication.

The primary objective of the study was to analyze the evolution of the channels to understand their complete evolution. Their beginnings represent a change, although they were not easy, each with its own characteristics, they were able to overcome various stages to become the most-watched channels in Spain (Table 1). In the case of "El ChiringuitoTV", it came from a television program with very strong foundations

and a clear communication strategy to attract the viewers. Even so, it has managed to adapt to the medium and become the most-followed soccer channel in Spain. To do so, as observed in the study, it has been able to evolve on the platform by leaving video games aside and inserting soccer information. On the other side are "Gerard Romero" and "RubenMartinweb", who have a significant advantage because of their status in the world of sports communication. However, their influence is not as great as that of the television program. Even so, they have managed to position themselves just behind it, with a large and loyal following. Their content has become representative of all audiovisual media. Even traditional media outlets are now sharing news stories from streaming platforms to develop their content. This is thanks to their communication skills, along with the importance acquired by the communicator figure, generating an increase in figures and exponential growth in profits, as reflected in the results.

The communication strategies used describe the difference between traditional media and new digital media, as can be seen in the section on "Transformation and Development on Twitch." In this case, the second objective was to study the communication strategies followed by the channels, explaining the communication structures and the different phases experienced. The analysis identifies that, in media such as television, each program undergoes a very comprehensive preparation in the form of a preliminary schedule, with a clear timetable similar to that used in radio programs. Meanwhile, live platforms establish a series of ideas with a varied schedule, depending on the communicator's style, where different topics can be addressed with momentary changes (Pires & Simon, 2015). "El ChiringuitoTV" is the only channel structured around a script. However, the other two channels are less marked by improvisation in their preparation. This generates close communication, where users are part of the process, using their opinions to improve content.

However, the universe continues to grow, and changes are constant. This fact reflects the transformation in the communication process (Martín-Muñoz & Pedrero, 2021). The most representative themes are those that deal with current issues of the moment, such as "Sportplus" and the "Kings League". In the past, the audience consisted of a single spectator, but proximity has fostered this type of communication. This happens with special sporting events. In this case, the study has reflected a change in content structures since the arrival of this type of show (Hutchins & Rowe, 2009). The possibilities of network communication generate a greater capacity for movement and ideas, as reflected in the study's results.

In this context, Twitch has had a significant impact, with more and more channels using the purple platform as a means to disseminate their information and reach a specific audience. Its figures have increased in recent years, and steady growth is expected in the future. The sample results have been representative of the phenomenon. "El ChiringuitoTV" is the most-viewed program. However, this does not mean that it is the most successful in terms of brand identity. "Gerard Romero" stands out in this area. Meanwhile, "RubenMartinweb" represents mixed communication, with touches of both sides, but less influential figures.

In this case, the third objective sought to understand how the influence of the purple platform has permeated sports communication by reflecting on its growth. Twitch's impact on the communication phenomenon has generated new ideas in journalism and content presentation, prompting an imminent reaction from traditional media outlets that need to establish themselves in the new niche. According to the results of the research, it should be noted that its principle of use stems from the COVID-19 pandemic. This fact drove the need to use this type of platform. Some, such as "El ChiringuitoTV", took advantage of this to grow their audience. Meanwhile, others were founded later, taking advantage of the market opportunity (Terán, 2021). Afterwards, however, the channels learned how to select the necessary strategies, along with the platform's influence, to grow, as the study shows. Therefore, they will continue to grow by treating information in the best way possible to satisfy their target audience and grow their audience while assimilating new strategies.

The results of this research allow us to conclude with a general idea about the growth of communication on new streaming platforms within the soccer world. The imminent consequences have been an understanding of the transformation in the sports communication paradigm. The selected communication strategies represent the introduction of new communication ideas, combined with certain structures typical of traditional media, such as camera changes and scenes on set, but developed through the immediacy provided by social media and its ability to broadcast from anywhere without the need for a wide variety of media.

The exhaustive research has met its objectives, helping to understand the growth of sports communication within the world of soccer in Spain. The chosen case studies have been a way to illustrate the communication phenomenon in order to understand it and how the public follows its content. Therefore, it would be important to continue analyzing the growth and transformation of this phenomenon in future seasons. As it is a constantly changing universe, its growth is representative of social evolution.

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