COMPETING ONLINE: A NETNOGRAPHIC STUDY ON TWITCH INFLUENCERS
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Thesis presented to Escola de Administração de Empresas de São Paulo of Fundação Getulio Vargas, as a requirement to obtain the title of Master in International Management (MPGI).

Knowledge Field: Gestão e Competitividade em Empresas Globais

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To my Family, who has always supported me,

To QDL, primary drive to my personal growth,

To my Professors, who fed me with curiosity and knowledge,

To whom has been by my side, and will always be.
ABSTRACT

The research, through the analysis of four influencers and the interviews of their staff members aimed to outline the most successful strategies used in building strong personal brands and the related communities. After having highlighted the baseline strategy, namely the practice of sharing specific values and experience to bond the community together, the research distinguished four different ideal profiles to inspire the neophytes, based on real effective cases.

**KEY WORDS:** influencer; esport; Twitch; virtual community
RESUMO

A pesquisa, através da análise de quatro influenciadores e as entrevistas de seus funcionários, teve como objetivo delinear as estratégias mais bem sucedidas usadas na construção de marcas pessoais fortes e comunidades relacionadas. Depois de ter destacado a estratégia de referência, ou seja, a prática de compartilhar valores e experiências específicas para unir a comunidade, a pesquisa distinguiu quatro diferentes perfis ideais para inspirar os neófitos, com base em casos reais e efetivos.

PALAVRAS CHAVE: influenciador; esport; Twitch; Comunidade virtual
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Introduction

On April 2018, Tyler “Ninja” Blevins has been ranked as the most popular professional athlete on social media, considering the followers interaction (Dotesports, 2018). More popular than Cristiano Ronaldo, Neymar and McGregor. Ninja is a previous Esport player, meaning a professional video-gamer, who has decided to leave his esport employment to become a full-time streamer. He now plays video-games live on a co-creation platform, named Twitch, entertaining hundreds of thousands of spectators, earning 6 million dollars just thanks to donation and subscriptions (CNBC, 2018). LolTyler1, a different Twitch broadcaster (analyzed in the research) hit the record of live audience ever on 4 January 2018, with roughly 380 thousand live spectators, earning 36 thousand dollars per hour (The Esport Observer, 2018).

The increasing interest into gaming, the raise of video-game professional sports (esports), with an expected growth in revenues of 36% in the period 2015-2020 (Newzoo, 2017), created new public figures and new communities, with the origination of new influencers-follower logic and the establishment of traditional ones to be studied. These logics include strategies and practices often undetectable to the average spectator, but functional to community building and personal branding.

Indeed, in investigating personal-branding, social media influencers, and influencer marketing from an academic point of view, it is clear the presence of strategic directions (Marwick, 2010; Khamis, 2017). Moreover, with the increasing presence of ordinary people and amateurs among the opinion leaders after the demotic turn (Turner, 2006) the roles that were once reserved to celebrities and are now open to SMI (social media influencers). The conjunction between this new and evolving industry and the emergence of new, amatorial, public figures complicates creates new opportunities for the research.
In studying influencers online and the reasons behind their success, namely their strategies and practices, the researches centered their attention on the spectatorship side, often using analytics and quantitative methods to analyze this new and interesting digital world (Gandhi & Muruganantham, 2015; Kim & Han, 2009; Trammell & Keshelashvili, 2005). This academic direction is even more actual when talking about digital niches, due to the secretiveness, the peculiarities and the closeness of those community, as for the case of the context of this research, the online gaming communities (Hamari & Sjöblom, 2017; Kaytoue-Uberall, 2012; Sjöblom et al., 2017). On the other hand, when the researches used qualitative methods, those were not entographic or netnographic, lacking the immersion in the community (Kozinets, 1999; Kietzmann et al., 2011; Uzunoğlu & Kip, 2014).

Therefore, the thesis aims to study the increasingly important but rarely explored online gaming communities’ influencers with a qualitative, netnographic, method, in order to have the most internal perspective possible, submerging into the communities as one of their members and researching influencers strategies by analyzing their personalities. Therefore, the research aims to understand the strategies used by new micro-celebrities (a term coined in research by T.M. Senft in 2001, later published in 2008) in creating public identities, feeding, maintain and expanding their aggregate fan base for sociologic and economic benefits.

To this end, Twitch was chosen as a relatively new live mixed media (Hamilton et al., 2014) for being the digital locus of this netnographic research. Twitch, bought by Amazon in 2014 for 1 billion dollars, is a video-games streaming platform with more than 100 million unique viewers month, reaching half of the American millennials, comprehending more than half of them (58%) spending more than 20 hours weekly on it (Twitch, 2013). The streaming phenomenon, besides the Electronic Sports (Esports) appearance, becomes of interest for marketers (Seo, 2013) and researchers with attractive implication concerning the co-creation platform market, the online
community building process in a niche and the influencer marketing. The Twitch broadcasters are now real professionals, transforming what was initially a hobby in their full-time employment, competing among them in the attention economy (Goldhaber, 1997; Pope, 2007). Building the best practices from the experience of professional streamers is a valuable insight, both for companies and new influencers, interested in entering, competing and succeeding in this new market.

Starting with a literature review which will cover the influencer (social media influencer) phenomenon and its raise, personal branding techniques and practices, the methodology of the thesis is explained, comprehending the reasons behind the choice of specific communities and influencers. Once the methodology and the data collection and analysis are presented, the research continues with the results, reaching the conclusion of the study. The outcome of the research is represented by the outline of four different influencer types, representing different strategies and practices used by successful influencers. The effort of drawing these final personalities is useful to answer the research question:

“What are the practices of successful influencers and how functional are them to feed, maintain and expand their fan-bases, building community and strengthening the influencer’s brand?”

In particular, the research aims to analyze the approach the influencers use with their fan bases to create sense of belonging and to transform a viewership in a community with shared values. Moreover, the objective is to assess if and how these practices are recurrent and coherent during time, combined with the analysis of the different positions, in terms of perceived brand, of the influencers. Therefore, it can be determined the consequences of the particular approaches. The discussion will lead to the determination of four personalities built on the engagement of the literature review and the analysis (observation and interviews). These different profile formulations can be used by both companies and aspiring influencers. For the formers, the market direction
realized in the companies’ entrance and interest in the esport industry and in its closest circles makes important an outlook of the influencers’ successful approaches, reflected by practical steps to be followed and suggestions to be inspired by.

Similarly, for the aspiring influencers, the research aims to convey the message of the primal importance of setting a strategy and choosing a direction in terms of building a character with specific qualities, attributes and traits.

1. Literature Review

1.1. The Emergence of Social Media Influencer

Researches supported empirically the importance of using a personal brand in advertising and in marketing efforts. Already in 1955, the “Influencer-Influencee pair” has been studied in the renowned article “Personal influence: The part played by people in the flow of mass communications” by Katz and Lazarsfeld, in which the importance of the two-step communication has been found: a person who first receives a message and then in turn passes the message to one of his associates, becoming a "relay point in the network of mass communications". The marketers firstly evolved their understanding and use of the “relay points” the two authors described using celebrities and traditional marketing. Afterwards, however, the strategic choice taken by the companies was based on the endorsement and the creation of spokespersons, instead of the exploitation of celebrities’ fame (Troester, 1991). The creation of spokespersons was useful on two sides: the first one was to have greater control over the persona created by the brand over the years, power that companies did not have over independent influencers. Secondly, the association between a product, a brand and a public persona is, indeed, much stronger if the individual is just
linked to one brand and no others (Tom et al., 1992).

Moreover, it has been demonstrated how people, lately, view celebrities with skepticism, turning around the classic way to advertise a product (Erdogan, 1999). Why should I trust Cristiano Ronaldo about toothpastes? If companies and marketers understood the importance to overcome the use of celebrities for marketing purposes, Katz and Lazarsfeld pushed even further, realizing, more than 60 years ago, that the turning point of their research was sociological and that the creation of a new, different, “system” with an interactive approach would have been the future of the influencers and influencees relationship. Indeed, the traditional influencer marketing, rise as a part of the conventional marketing communication advertising, thanks to the cinema and music’s idols, has been put into challenge due to the spread of social media platforms and the dismantling of the barriers between a person and a vast audience. Before the digital revolution in fact, being famous or becoming a celebrity was just limited to someone that achieved something special in a popular area of interest, might this be music, cinema, business or being born with some kind of unique benefit or privilege (heritage or royalty) (Khamis, 2017).

Influencers on social media are often academically called SMIs or Social Media Influencers, defined as people who possess more considerable than the average potential to influence others due to such attributes as frequency of communication, personal persuasiveness or size of (and centrality to) a social network, according to Audrezet, Moulard and Kerviler’s definition (2017). Starting as amatorial contributors on social networks, who share their daily life, respond to comments and create ties with their communities, they develop followers’ perception of having a parasocial interaction (PSI) with them. They are perceived as friends with almost a face-to-face relationship. The authenticity of the new influencers’ opinions, a views or a believes, is excellent and seen as reliable (Colliander & Erlandsson, 2015); they can be trusted on endorse a product without being
questioned by the potential buyers and, therefore, the SMI became the further step in the evolution of the influencer figure: companies do not have to invest time and money on a single spokesperson, whom, inter alia, would face the competition in the virtual space, represented lately by an unprecedented number of communicators who “compete across more screen for increasingly distracted dispersed and privatized audiences” (Khamis, 2017). A mixed and flexible public persona was born, helped by the rise of SNSs (Social Network Services), which can be called micro-celebrities (term coined in a research by T.M. Senft in 2001, later published in 2008), individuals who have an audience that they can strategically reach and maintain through ongoing communication and interaction (Marwick, 2010), famous enough to endorse a product, but fairly independent and bonded to their audience to be trusted.

1.2. The promotional culture in the attention economy

To achieve the status of micro-celebrities, without being helped by companies or great achievements, as described by Khamis (2017), but just riding the opportunity the social networks offer to ordinary people, strategic self-branding is fundamental. To the end of attracting people, more and more social identities became a brand and the self-branding turned indeed into an essential “attention-getting device,” helping individuals to gain visibility and to achieve competitive advantage in the crowded marketplace of the attention economy.

In the new “promotional culture” (Wernick, 1992) people have incorporated strategies and ideas initially designed for the marketing of commodities and used by public persona to increase the awareness of their personal brand. In the attention economy, represented by a surplus on the side of the offer (information and influencers), the distinctiveness became mandatory, and the narrative becomes strategic. The branded persona, being designed for public consumption, plays a
postmodern notion of identity, emphasized on construction, style and fluidity (Berger, 2011). The “creative self-enterprise” (Duffy & Hund, 2015) revolution was, indeed, not just supported by innovation and openness of virtual spaces but also by a revolution in the way people live and interact with each other. The rise of self-branding is part of a new form of neoliberal governance by empowering people to consider themselves entrepreneurial subject, accountable for their own success (Bandinelli and Arvidsson, 2012).

Social media opened for amateurs the opportunity to shoot a photo, record a video, write a book or express themselves, welcoming them into one of biggest market of people’s attention ever, characterized by a crumble of technological barriers and an increasing ubiquity, becoming the best place for personal branding. The therefore created public figures are targeted and strategic, helped by the social media’s ground which makes available the use of consistent, distinct and valuable trans-media narratives to sustain the newly personal brands for then starting a process of consolidation, when the audiences embed the brands within their own individualized media flow - through like, shares and comments - (Khamis, 2017).

According to Mashable (2017) there are 65 years of new videos uploaded every day. Without any concepts of rivalry and excludability, every video and every minute of them can be seen and it is accessible to every user willing to use its time and its attention to enjoy that particular content, in a situation of which every user’s minute has to be allocated choosing between 24’000 different minutes uploaded. However, the attention a potential customer might pay to some ads or a video on a social media platform is limited. The market is therefore characterized by an excess of information and a shortage of attention: in using a SNS (social network service) the user who seeks for information uses its attention as a currency while for the influencer the information represents utility, increasing the influence of the information provider. To reach the information or content
seeker, the influencer has different ways; he can either exploits the “subscription” model (Yu & Kak, 2014, p. 237) that characterizes the attention economy or he can increase its audience and visibility, creating a snow ball effect due to the platforms’ algorithms. The first way, made possible by some platforms, consists in locking the users into the influencer’s content providing service: once the influencer manages to attract and convert the follower, making him subscribing the channel or the page, then the information seeker would not need to look for information or content because they are automatically proposed by the platform due to the subscription, and they only belong to the subscribed channel. The second way is related to the internal mechanism of some platforms. Twitch, for instance, rank on the higher side of the page, the channels with most current viewers and not the one with most followers. These platforms’ strategic choices, indeed, change the way the influencers compete.

2. Methodology

2.1. Overall Methodology

The peculiarities of this research which based its results on the observation and on interviews of members of particular communities have brought to the use of ethnography. The locus of the study, however, required a more specific set of practices in order to approach the distinctive communities of gamers online. Social networks and social media embed different logic from the physical loci, as well as digital communities have characteristics, attributes, and way of communicating which differ from real societies and communities. Thus, in order to answer the research question, the use of netnography came handy, resulting tailored on the research nature and objectives. The netnographic methodology does not substitute virtual ethnography and might be defined as an
effort to adapt the latter for the study of evolving networks. Indeed, as written by its creator, Robert Kozinets, in the book “Netnography:Redefined” (2015), netnography is “rooted to core ethnographic principles of participant-observation while also seeking to selectively and systematically incorporate digital approaches such as social network analysis, data science and analytics, visualization methods, social media research presence and videography”. Using Netnography means firstly diving into the studied culture, understanding its logic, taking field notes, interviewing participants, using hermeneutic interpretation, ensuring consent and providing human, humane and resonant representation (Kozinets, 2015). Due to the delicacy of the research question and the reluctance of the influencers to be interviewed and studied, joined with the pre-existing knowledge of the author in the field, defined by Kozinets (2015) as being “an elderly participant in the ‘fun-culture’ ”, a particular kind of netnography has been chosen: the Symbolic Netnography. The Symbolic Netnography aims to explore cultures and communities that emerged through computer-mediated communication (Kozinets, 2002) and focused on the experience of the researcher in observing and therefore representing the results of belonging to the specific culture or community hermetically. Moreover, The Symbolic Netnography allows the author to interpret the data depending more on the self-interpretation and the self-experience, than the interaction with participants (Figure 1).
Thus, the use of this particular set of practices, part of the Netnographic methodology, allowed the author to overcome the reluctance and the closeness of the community in being studied, exploiting the already existing knowledge of the author, who has been part of the studied community for more than two years. Studying and researching from the literature the field, being already a member of the community, gave the research a mixed perspective, powerful enough thanks to the extensive literature research but emotional and experiential as well thanks to the first hand and in-loco participation.
2.2. **Context**

Netnography requires certain requirements and condition for a context to become a creditable locus for a research. Kozinets (2015) detailing described these characteristics in: relevancy, active, interactive, substantial, heterogeneity, rich in data, experiential. All these requirements has been matched by Twitch, an online video platform in which gamers stream while they play video games.

2.2.1. **How it works**

While approaching Twitch.tv, on the top of the page it will appear a series of channel streaming, the one the algorithms are sponsoring, followed (below) by the channels the viewer might like and followed by the different categories (Appendix 1). Once clicking on “Browse”, all the categories will appear and the viewer can choose among different games streamed and streaming typologies (cooking shows, always-on-stream, talk shows & podcasts, just chatting), even though the major part of the spectators watch gaming channels (Appendix 2). Every user of the platform has a personal channel, with a nickname, and can decide in every minute to turn the streaming on, competing on the main page for attracting viewers. With the same nickname and user, he can join a live streaming, watching the streamer and chatting with other users in the channel’s chat-box (Appendix 3). The user can also decide to add user as friend and chat separately with him.

Even though everyone can stream, it is quite difficult to attract viewers, due to the algorithm and the platform’s modus operandi. Every channel (every user), in fact, can follow or subscribe other channels; with the follow, the user will receive a mail when the followed user is online streaming. Moreover, the followed user will appear on the right side of the main page while online (Appendix 1 and 2). The subscription is a further step in the channel engagement because, instead of just following, the user will donate money to the channel (from 5 to 25 dollars), to access personalized emoticons for every channel (to be used in the chat box) and a personal badge that will appear next
to the user nickname, showing from how many months in a row the user is a subscriber.

2.2.2. **Relevancy**

Twitch is relevant for and related to the research question in the way the streamers have become influencers with hundred thousand followers (if not even millions) across different social networks. Moreover, on Twitch there is a combination of both broadcasting and open IRC chat channels (Hamilton et al, 2014). The latest change in the Twitch policy and the growing importance of the platform are the main reasons behind platform choice. First of all, Twitch launched what it is called “Always on Stream” which allows the Streamers to be live not just while playing but also for a Talk Show or for broadcasting the process of preparing dinner (Bowman B, 2017). This is a clear step of Twitch into an “Influencer Platform” in which the users have direct contacts with their favorite stars. The difference from the old one is that, before this change, streamers were not allowed to move the webcam that had to be on the computer, just to record the face of the streamers while playing. Moreover, before the latest changes in Twitch policy, a streamer could start earning money thanks to subscription or ads just after having obtained the partnership with the platform, which had heavy requisites: thousands of followers and tens of thousands of views on the channel. On 24 April 2017, Twitch started giving the opportunity to almost every user to start earning money with a low complexity process and with almost zero entry barriers (just 500 minutes streamed and at least three current viewers) (Statt, 2017).

2.2.3. **Active and Interactive**

Twitch presents highly interactive spaces: loltyle1, one of the analyzed streamer has 3453 hours streamed on his channel (Twitchstats.net, 2018), with the incredible number of 49'231’961 messages sent on the chat (stats.streamingeelement, 2018), meaning an average of 238 messages sent every minute.
2.2.4. **Substantial**

Amazon keeps growing years by years, achieving in 2017, 355 billion minutes watched, 2 million broadcaster and 15 million unique daily visitors (Twitchtracker.com, 2018). Twitch would result among the most watched US cable-channel with an average current viewership of 962k users, surpassing the CNN which counted 783k viewers.

2.2.5. **Heterogeneity**

This requisite is related to either the “variety of difference or a consistency of similar types of participants, proving a strong and required social sense” (Kozinets, 2015). In the case of Twitch, the requirement is met in the similarity and specificity of the community, namely the Twitch spectators who are firstly gamers. According to Twitch survey (2014), the average gamer, uses the smartphone, the tablet and watch tv in streaming more than a non-gamer. Moreover, is more educated, optimistic, family oriented and successful than the average. Among the users, more than a half are between 18 and 34 years old and 81,5% of them are male (Twitch, 2014).

2.2.6. **Rich in data**

According to Twitch (2014), with 2,2 million creators, Twitch is the 4th, among companies’ networks, for the percentage of U.S. peak internet traffic produced, following Google, Netflix and Apple.

2.2.7. **Experiential**

Twitch is based on delivering an experience to the user, thanks to the incredible amount of interaction possible between the user in the chat-box and the effort of the streamers in engaging the users during the streaming. Twitch slogan is, indeed, “Don’t just watch, join it” (Twitch, 2018)

2.3. **Data Collection**
The data collected by the Netnographer in order to answer the research question, aligned with the chosen methodology has been of three different types: archival, elicited and produced, according to the shared natnographic practice (Kozinets, 2015).

These data are based on four main streamers channels, represented in the Table 1.

**Table 1. Streamers main statistics (Twitch.tv, 2018)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Streamer’s Channel</th>
<th>Views</th>
<th>Followers</th>
<th>Stored Video</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Loltyler1</td>
<td>83,860,767</td>
<td>1,88 million</td>
<td>333</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paoloidolo</td>
<td>10,011,325</td>
<td>94,6 thousands</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pow3rTV</td>
<td>6’365’301</td>
<td>237 thousands</td>
<td>225</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ThijsHS</td>
<td>53,410,135</td>
<td>566 thousands</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The streamers have been chosen for different reasons and thanks to the previous knowledge of the author in the field, namely being part of the gaming community and having watched Twitch for more than two years.

In order to choose the streamers to analyze, therefore the communities to join, some factors have been considered. First of all, the language requisite: when the streamer speaks in English he has a worldwide potential, while when he speaks in his language the community is restricted to the
country. In order to analyze hermetically the vocabulary and the interaction in the channel, it has been considered necessary to choose two Italian channels, speaking the language of the Author. At the same time, in order to compare those channels with a global and with wider perspective channels, two global streamers speaking in English has been chosen. The two most famous and most active Italian streamers are, indeed, Paoloidolo and Pow3r.

Besides, the streamers have been chosen for their peculiar situation, either growing or in a stational or maturity contingency. One of the requirements in order to choose the streamers has been the different growing pace of the fan-base and the different ratio between hours watched and average number of viewers. Moreover, as can be seen by the graphs that support the above differences (Figure 2, 3, 4, 5), it can also be found a difference in the stability of the streaming: if some streamers rely more on a stable viewership, other relies on subsequent peaks of traffic. These differences make possible to compare the attributes and strategies of a growing channel like Pow3rTV’s (#83 fastest growing channel worldwide) with a channel with double the fan-base (ThijsHS’s) which has a negative average viewers’ rate (Twitchmetrics, 2018). Paoloidolo, in particular, has been chosen, instead, for its activities besides the streaming, namely being owner of a chain of video-game related clubs and pubs and for being the founder of the most active community for League of Legends in Italy. Loltyle1, on the other side, is famous for his videos which are shared on the net and for the fact that he has been banned by the game that made him famous, League of Legends, for his “toxic” behavior, coming back after roughly two years and braking the record of current viewers on Twitch.
Figure 2. Paoloidolo current viewers and total time spent watching by month (Twitchtraker.com, 2018)

Figure 3. Pow3rTV current viewers and total time spent watching by month (Twitchtraker.com, 2018)

Figure 4. ThijsHS current viewers and total time spent watching by month (Twitchtraker.com, 2018)
2.3.1. Archival Data

The archival data are based on content already existing on the locus, in this case on Twitch. The platform allows every streamer, indeed, to save the previous streamer in the section “Video” of their channel. The most famous Streamer often choose to store and maintain previous streaming, indifferently from their importance. The stored videos are also accompanied by the chat “live”, namely the chat which had place during the streaming. This allowed the netnographer to stop the video, rewind and analyze more deeply them, as well as overpassing the copyrights and laws which did not allow to record and store privately Twitch videos. The archival data has been the one used for the observation and comprehended roughly 15 hours of observation for every streamer.

2.3.2. Elicited Data

The elicited, or co-produced data, are the one coming out from the interaction between the netnographer and the participants. In the case of this research, these are the data created by the interviews. The choice of the participants for the co-creation process has been quite delicate. The selected participants had to match two restrictive requirements. First of all, they needed to follow the streamer for at least two years. Moreover, they had to be active member of the community with
a certain degree of authority, from moderators of the Twitch channels to the streamers’ managers. This choice allowed the netnographer to have a mixed perspective, interviewing a fan of the streamer, who is part of the community and engaged spectator who, at the same time, has an overall knowledge of the strategies used by the streamer. The members of the community have been quite reluctant in accepting of being approached and, out of tens contacted, no one showed willingness of being recorded, having a face-to-face (on Skype) interview. This has been caused by two reasons; the first one is the reluctance of the average participant in mixing the virtual life with the real one. The gaming community is a niche in which people are considered for their role in the community and their gaming rank, not for their physical aspect or job. Their “user” created a comfort-zone, in which they have an authority that would disappear one they exit it. Second of all, they all considered the streamers as influencer and, therefore, as brand with a value. For this reason, they were afraid of saying something they could not say. After having approached unsuccessfully moderator on Twitch chat, @Christian, one of ThijsHS’s chat moderator, advised me to join Discord, a proprietary freeware VoIP application designed for video gaming communities. Apparently, all Twitch most famous channels have a private Discord channel, in which participants get to know each other and communicate. Here, the access to moderator, community leaders and manager was much greater. In fact, once one of the joined channels has been chosen (left part of the screen, Appendix 4), on the right part of the screen (Appendix 4), will appear the community leaders, divided for each role; there is also the possibility to message them privately once joined the discord channel. Even though most of the approached members declined the interview: “Well, I will have to politely decline”, “I would prefer not to, sorry” or did not answer, eight of them accepted. However, they did not accept of having a proper interview but only to answer the question on discord, written.
The interviews came after the observation and therefore the question were related to the particular streamer to understand deeper his strategies and validate some of the peculiarities observed in collecting archival data. In regards of the interview conduction, the general rules for a netnographic interview have been followed (Kozinets, 2010), namely:

- Specify the scope of the research;
- Ask open-ended question;
- Relate the central question to the specific qualitative strategy of inquiry;
- Ask one or two central questions followed by no more than seven related sub-questions.

The interviewed members are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Interview participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>User</th>
<th>Community Role</th>
<th>Associate Streamer/Community</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>@OnlyxDivision</td>
<td>Twitch Moderator</td>
<td>Loltyler1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>@mcadams</td>
<td>Chat Moderator</td>
<td>Loltyler1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>@dajoe</td>
<td>Manager and Agent</td>
<td>Thijs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>@nicomar93</td>
<td>Twitch Moderator</td>
<td>Paoloidolo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>@Moto</td>
<td>Twitch Moderator</td>
<td>Paoloidolo</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This has only one participant to the interview because, as part of a professional team, the only one authorized to release interview is the manager and agent.

2.3.3. Produced Data

The produced data are the one directly produced by the netnographer; in the case of the symbolic netnography are produced either by reflective analysis subsequent the observation or field-note contemporary to the observation. The field-note relies on the self-experience of the author in the social field (Kozinets, 2015). In the case of this research, the field-note has been taken physically, pen and paper.

2.4. Data Analysis

For the analysis and interpretation of the collected data, the netnographic common practice has been followed, as explained by Robert Kozinets in the ninth chapter of his last book (2015).

The common practice follows seven steps. The first three of them have been used for interpreting the data and the analysis. The fourth step is the crossing point between the analysis and the discussion, part of which is the attempt to create four ideal influencer personalities, which would
be the final objective of the research and the representation of the research’s results. The remaining three steps have been therefore functional for the results representation, the discussion and the ideal profiles creation.

These steps are:

- **Imagining**: Using the previous knowledge of the social media’s functioning, joint with an early observation of the Twitch platform, the author built the first impressions, outlining what to analyze and the potential focus of the research, which was, initially, related to digital leadership. Then, the first field-notes have been taken with the focus of finding interesting cases and events related to the focus.

- **Re-Imagining**: with the time passing and the self-experience in the platform growing, the focuses changed, because the author found a focus which was not discussed in the literature and for which there was a greater amount of data. The shift lead to the community building and the strategies used by the influencers to attract and maintain their fan-base.

- **Abduction**: in this phase the literature research has been finished and there was the need to relate the concepts from the literature and the aim of the research to the data. This has been the phase of field research and interviews. The influencers to be observed have been chosen (as already described) and the greater number of field-notes has been taken at this stage. Moreover, as previously outlined the influencers’ staff members have been interviewed.

- **Visual Abstraction**: after the data has been collected, the author needed to create categories and general attributes to relate the specific to the general phenomenon. According to the self-experience, the observation and the interviews, the categories outlined in the results have been chosen and related to the single cases.
- Artifying: the netnographer needed to address one of the objective of the research, namely the creation of four general personalities, which could collect under their umbrella different influencers, being of inspiration for new ones. At this stage there has been the need to be creative and to transform individual practices and strategies into general direction.

- Cultural Decoding: in the cultural decoding the author reviewed the work and related together different data, trying to transform feeling into data and descriptions into analysis. The aim of this step is to give the work academic power and global comprehensibility.

- Tournament Play: this has been the phase of reviewing and making the research substantial, deleting what was superficial and choosing the best cases among the ones collected. This has been the final revision of the research.

3. Results

3.1. Analysis

The influencers’ job on the Twitch platform is recurrent in many ways and every influencer’s streaming became a similar product to the other, competing in the same market. Analyzing the finished product and listening to the experts’ opinions, some attributes were recurrent and have been chosen for the analysis of the streamers: accountability, variety, streaming focus, approach and language. Those are, moreover, the ones which distinguish every influencer from each other and are useful to create an understanding which can be useful to outline the different, four, personalities in the discussion part of the research. The attributes are described deeper in Table 3.

In order to give an initial idea of the position of every influencer for these metrics, Figure 6, 7 and
Table 3. Metrics' description used for the streamers’ analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Metric</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accountability</td>
<td>This is the metric to assess the seriousness with which the influencers take their jobs, concerning punctuality, hours streamed and respect for their staffs and viewers. Does the streamer want to be considered as a professional?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variety</td>
<td>The variety of the streaming measures the content of the created and finished product. Does the influencer present the same game for long periods? Has the influencer created different streaming formats?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Streaming focus</td>
<td>Here the difference between the different influencer’s aim are outlined. Which is the experience the influencer wants to give to the audience? With this metric the netnographer distinguishes between the objective of the streamers: do they want to be more serious or funny?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Different influencers have different approaches: while some prefers to be more distant from their audience, creating a strong, individual, brand, others prefer to be close to them by associating themselves with their communities. It is also interesting to understand how much the influencers are opened in sharing their personal life with the community.

Which vocabulary do the influencers follow and use? Do they use bad or dirty words? Do they use soft and lovely words? This metrics distinguish to the heavy and concise vocabulary of some influencers to the soft and inclusive one of some others.

Figure 6: Accountability and Variety dimensions of the streamers
Figure 7: Approach and Streaming Focus of the streamers
3.1.1. ThijsHS

Thijs is a personal brand strongly linked to Hearthstone, the game he usually plays and which helped him becoming famous. The intense focus that relies on the game in this channel, makes to assume that the results Thijs obtains in the game attracts and maintain the audience and the fan base. This is partly confirmed by his manager, who declared that Thijs, contrary to other competitors, is more committed to stay on the top of the game instead of focusing too much on the content creation. The focus on the game is also confirmed from the titles he gives to his streams, like “Thijs playing HearthStone rank 20” or “Thijs – Hearthstone top 10 NA”.

Contrary to other streamers, he does not want to offer an adventure (most of the streamer would write “Road to rank 1”) but a stable, reliable personality of good repute, directly linked and focused
to that particular game – the channel is indeed called ThijsHS which stands for Thijs HeartStone. Every fan knows what to expect when opening his channel, namely a Hearthstone game, making the variety of the content quite low. He does not pronounce bad or dirty words, he does not insult anyone and he avoid being ironic. Thijs maintains the viewership focused on the game, putting himself on the back, with his voice just used as a surrounding audio of the streaming. The entertainment is firstly related to the game he is playing, and then to his persona. His vocabulary, made by words such as “amazing”, “love”, “lovely”, “great” is soft and friendly and does not catch people attention directly. However, it makes the digital space nice to attend from anyone. As Joseph Chang, his manager, explained, he has a positive outlook not just for gaming but for life in general and “his continual optimistic charisma easily resonates with people”. Although Thijs is firstly a gamer and then an entertainer, he still needs to address the community engagement, and he does it using two parallel strategies. First of all, he is one of the most active streamers, with regards to hours streamed (he streams even for eight hours straight) and secondly, he tries to make the streaming the most pleasant possible. Unlike the three other streamers analyzed, his objective is not to be entertaining and to keep viewers’ attention but to make the streaming relaxing, matching the escaping need described in the literature review. He does not try to be funny but polite, not ironic but nice. He is hearty and aims to make all problems and the daily complexity disappeared thanks to its kindness, unique in the digital video-games environment.

As declared from his manager, Thijs tries to meet the largest number of fans possible, aware of the importance of being, as defined by J. Chang, a “down-to-heart” person. From the observation matured, however, it is clear the creation of a certain distance, almost formality, that the streamer wants to maintain between his figure and the fan-base. Compared to the other streamers analyzed, he does not talk much about his life, his friend and his personal sphere. He tries to maintain almost
a professional relationship, based on the exchange of hours viewed by the fans and his entertaining service and game expertise. Professionalism that he maintains even while playing; he does not accept any comments or advices from the chat and he does not endorse any fan if, in hindsight, he was right about a particular play. However, although he does not accept advices if anyone give them to him without being asked, he ask for them in order to engage his community.

Thijs always use the word “we” instead of “I” when talking about achievements: the difficulty in using this approach is to balance the need of creating engagement with the fan, making them feeling part of the streamer’s achievements while maintaining a certain distance in order to retain, from the streamer’s perspective, the reputation of “best player”. A further important point that characterizes Thijs is that he treats himself like a product, aware of the economic exchange that happens on his channel: he streams for money. This is the reason why he often thanks the fans that subscribe or donate, however without much gratitude, aware that those donations are the results of a precise effort, the professionalism and the entertaining service he is offering.

Finally, the distance of his approach makes him avoiding any insult or silly controversial, just facing and responds to constructive criticism.

3.1.2. Loltyler1

Loltyler1 is hardly associable with a personal strategic brand due to his apparent authenticity, which leads the observer to think that the simplicity of his approach goes along with a lack of a planned and strategic approach. However, this would be reductive in studying one of the most famous entertainers of Twitch. After having interviewed two moderators and veterans of his stream (one of them from the day one, more than three years ago) and having observed the influencer for fifteen hours, what comes out is a lack of premeditation in the daily content but the presence of an overall plan and strategic directions. In observing the streaming what comes out is an extrovert,
confusing and emotive subject, who would not go along with the idea of planning the daily activities. He is genuine and straightforward; citing OnlyxDivision, a friend of him and collaborator: “He does not have any overlays or flashy transition […]. He turns on stream, plays league (League of Legends) and that is it”. Mr. McAdams also confirmed what said: “He is definitely genuine with his mood […]. I do not think that any of his outbursts or rants or whatever are premeditated.”. Being authentic and genuine, however, is part of the overall strategy above cited. Even though according to his staff the content is not planned, the general approach is, and brought him to the success. His rage, insults and overreactions helped him creating word of mouth and shares among the web, helping the influencer to achieve a famous public persona even outside his fan-base. This character, built to be extreme, fostered potential viewer curiosity, which had then the opportunity to see him live on Twitch, being potentially part of those moments. In considering this approach, the auto-irony played a key role. His first of all jokes about himself (his height, behavior, mental attitude and what happens in his life) and then he jokes about his fans. As declared by @Mcadams:” He has some distinct traits that separate him from other streamers and it makes easily accessible for people to get into the community and get up to speed with the jokes for then laughing with the rest of us”. The storytelling is a pillar of his success: “People who have watched him for a bit know his girlfriend, his pets, his hobbies outside of streaming” (@Mcadams). He tells about his life and his problems, creating a transparent public figure people can be friend with or laugh about. Tyler is also far from being “politically correct” both toward his fans and inside the gaming environment. He is often rude, he largely makes use of bad words and does not care about the formal exchange relationship with his fans, he does not often respect his schedule and stream less than his competitors. Tyler’s extreme brand is funny but does not want to be friendly. Although he decided to maintain a certain openness in regard to his personal life, he tries at the same time to balance it with a celebrity-fan distance,
beneficial to strengthen his personal brand. Tyler does not want to create the idea of equality inside a shared community; he underlines both the difference between his celebrity-figure and the fans and between the payers and non-payers among his fan-base. In a digital space in which “every influencer wears a mask” (quoting @moto), his being straightforward and honest has always been appreciated, both by the veteran who have been interviewed and also by the fans who wrote in the chat during the observation.

Interesting indeed is, moreover, his “lone” image; first of all, he does not have a crew, meaning that he usually plays alone, which is tougher from an entertainment perspective. However, influencers with an adequate level of self-confidence and attitude to entertain usually tend to concentrate the streaming on their personas, avoiding having other people in the streaming. What is unique, both compared to the influencers analyzed in this research and from an overall perspective, is the lack of a management team and sponsors – “He is not held by any contracts, sponsors or any management” (@OnlyXDivision) - which is even more surprising thinking that he is one of the most famous influencers on Twitch. Simultaneously, the “lone” figure is part of Tyler storytelling, vital for the construction of his personal brand. Not just quoting OnlyXDivision: “[…] as well as he does not rely on anyone for his success, he was self-made […]” but also following the chat, it may be deduced that fans and viewers respect and admire Tyler for his being a fighter. He achieved the success alone, he goes against Twitch, which banned him, and he does not treat politely anyone who he does not respect. People like him because he flies over social, formal and behavior rules, giving to every spectator a sense of freedom. Variety-wise, although he has a clear focus on League of Legends (in loltyle1, lol stands for League of Legends), he also tries to create different contents and play different games: one of the most seen videos is, indeed, a streaming in which he played an horror game. The format of the streaming is, however, mostly the same with him playing a videogame and commenting aiming to create a funny and entertaining
environment. The streaming focus is, in fact, pure entertaining; this is interesting considering that he has been a great League of Legends player.

3.1.3. **PaoloIdolo**

PaoloIdolo attention to brand building focuses more on his community than on his figure. The sense of belonging of his fan-base in the greatest among the analyzed influencers and PaoloIdolo’s community claims to have his own attributes and personality. The choice of focus, undoubtedly strategic, is part of a streaming direction which clearly tends toward the entertaining instead of the game. The inclination was part of a development of the last years, with the aim of protecting the streamer to the openness of the Twitch platform, which increased the competition and the average gaming skills. @Enkk, a member of his staff, pointed out indeed how one of the reasons of his success was the lack of competition when PaoloIdolo started streaming and how, by then, the combination of gaming ability and charisma were sufficient condition for the success. If, at the beginning of his career, his main focus was to be a great player, associated to a particular League of Legend’s character, the nowadays effort to maintain his audience and fan-base need to include a greater entertaining section, which lately overpassed the gaming one. @Moto, a friend of PaoloIdolo and veteran of the streaming, pointed out how the gaming ability took the second place to the content creation and the ability to entertain the old and new fans with various methods. The streamer is indeed close to his fan-base, firstly communicating a friendly figure, open with his personal life, and open to talk about fans’ problems and life. In doing so, however, it might be noticed a hint of planning and acting: “Paolo is not our friend, we are friends of his mask […]. He does not want that his personal life really affects his job. He has innated entertaining characteristic that he exaggerated, and we love it. […] even if they know (that they are following a mask) they do not care.” -@Moto. The effort towards
the content creation goes along with the variety of the product offered which is sometimes related to the game, sometimes just pure entertainment. The variety of his content is the greatest among the analyzed influencers: he often has talk shows alone, with guest or with fans, and also uses different formats for his streaming (1vs1, games with fans, games with different profiles at different levels, 24 hours marathon and lives with guests). The strategy, in the case of Paoloidolo, penetrates the daily decision and influence not just the overall brand and the influencers attributes but even the single streaming. @Enkk called this approach “quality stream”, a common objective shared among the staff to implement solutions that gives the spectator a various and exciting entertaining product. Paoloidolo, a gamer who became a showman, invested not just on his community brand but also on the overall industry, promoting friends who now became influencers as well and, finally, founding with them a competitive gaming team, with the same name (MOBA) of the two gaming clubs he opened up with his partners and his managers. In this way, he did not just widen the focus of his brand but he also invested the public interest he achieved with a cross-selling strategy.

In his way of communicating, he is never formal with the fan-base and he is always ironic, except for a small portion of the streaming in which he faces social, personal or political topics. In this way, he held an easy streaming still passing the idea of a leader, interested in people issues and ready to raise solutions. As @nicomar93, a moderator and veteran of his channel pointed out:” He uses a simple strategy: he tries to be authentic while not showing his weaknesses”; in this way he can be a genuine personality, passing the idea of being “the friend of everyone” (@nicomar93) while maintaining a leadership image. He often starts the streaming with a short talk show, in which sometimes he asks to the chat what they want to do: if playing in high rank, having fun and playing with fans or even just talking. Thus, every streaming is potentially different, and his fan-
base associates his personality to a flexible and diverse influencer instead of a great player.

Consequently, the risk of a too strong correlation between the channel success and the game’s attraction decline, due to a loyalty built around the influencer instead of the content created, as @Moto highlighted. Finally, the effort in making the personal life entering in the professional one is the greatest seen in hours of observation among many streamers. In almost two years, he is the only influencers which streamed from a park during a night with some friends. His girlfriend, friends and pets are a critical part of the relationship between PaoloIdolo and his community.

3.1.4. Pow3rTV

Pow3r analysis requires more caution than in the previous cases due to the freshness of his success, which leads to the frontier of the new Twitch influencers’ logic. From the observation what comes clear is a charismatic leader who excels in everything he does. His final objective is not to be funny but to be admired, to build a celebrity personality which starts from the streaming and continues outside on a various social media profiles’ portfolio. Pow3r understands the underlying exchange which happens in his channel: an entertaining product for money and views, and therefore he acts consequently. However, this does not lead him to be servile; on the contrary, he considers the connection with his fan-base as a two-way relation. Interesting is, indeed, his openness in talking about his current career position and his strategies to grow. He publicly declares his objectives and missions for the short and long period, strategies aiming to maintain and grow the base of people who he is actually talking to. Although he does not publicly consider himself as a professional (he declared that he has another job) he treats Twitch and the Influencer job with the greatest seriousness among the analyzed streamers. It is also of interest how he tries to hook his audience with continuous challenges, sometimes related to his hard skills, sometimes
associated with personal achievements which fall outside the channel’s focus but are related to his career as a public persona. The accountability for Pow3r is critical, as well as the seriousness with which he treats his fans and the promises he makes.

He understands the need to detach his channel from the game that made him famous, not to risk a potential decrease of fans when the game will start decrease in popularity; he also understands and talks freely about the Twitch (as a platform) and its influencers. He can do every of these precisely because, as he explained, there is a rise of awareness from the spectators’ perspective in considering the influencer as a job and in understanding the importance and the effort (even the monetary one) in offering a high standard entertaining product. Even though the channel is pretty much focused on a particular game (Fortnite) and although Pow3r’s fans are rarely open to vary the product -when he takes a pull on Instagram, on average three-quarters of his fans want to have him playing Fortnite – Powe3r is trying to create a more flexible personality, by offering different games, talk shows, interviews and friendly but professional streaming experience. He does use bad words, but in small quantity; he cares about the chat, thanks every subscriber and donators but never while he is playing. He often tries to create new challenges and embrace them, not just to engage his public but also to strengthen his “star” public image. Both @MrValerio94 and @Tork/, part of his staff and in charge of his communication and marketing strategies were quite secretive and did not address any strategy or practice. It was however of a great interest the fact that both of them, when broadly asked, highlighted that the most important thing to know about Pow3r is his great attention to every detail, mixed to his genuineness; the second attribute, however, collides with the observation and with the vital attention to details, brand construction and marketing effort, not just noticed during the observation but also confirmed by @Tork/. From the observation it comes clear that his approach is interestingly strategic and honest at the same times. He explains
his strategies to his target advising, for instance, the fans to subscribe the channel or to support it in particular way instead of others.

Even when he seems caring, being apparently lovely he is strategic. Although he streams in Italian and his fan-base is mostly Italian, he started trying to play with international people so that he can offer an English (and so worldwide accessible) streaming while playing and then talking in Italian between the games. This is functional to maximize the potential of his abilities as a gamer, opening them up to the whole market, while maintaining himself in the safe-zone concerning the entertaining part of the stream.

3.2. Discussion

After hours of observation and considering almost two years spent watching Twitch and various streamers as a part of the spectatorship, some concepts and strategies used by Twitch streamers appeared clearly to a keen observation. Many practices used by the influencers could be definable as essential while many other just recurrent. Details and strategies, on the other hands, distinguish different personalities and create groups of micro-celebrities or influencers who act and compete in a similar way. With the aim of simplifying the conclusion of this dissertation, the empirical proof found through the observation, joined with the insights of experts and passionate who work in this sector, will be here analyzed and gathered according to their similarities and differences, in order to create ideal profiles and define different influencers personalities and approaches.

In watching streamers playing video-games, building relationships, facing controversial and greeting fans, something came very clear: in every aspect of their daily working life, they always respect the public persona they created. The coherence of the streamers’ personal brands is essential for both the streamer and the fan-base, to give guidance to the former and to hook the latter. The coherence is, moreover, related to the position of the streamer in what might be called
Once the streamer analyzed and decided which kind of content he wants to create and in which way he wants to address his audience, then he needs to evaluate his position on the life-cycle curve to address potential growth or a maturity period with an ad hoc strategy (Figure 6, 7 and 8). Besides, the influencer always needs to build a community, in order to maintain the success achieved and secure his fans loyalty. The most used practice to do so, the baseline strategy, is to create and promote particular values, experience or concept who can be shared among the community and that can bond the member of the community together and link it to the influencer in a distinctive way compared to others.

With the aim of building a comprehensive conclusion, and to point out the differences in strategies and practices among the influencers, the four analyzed streamers will be used as a case for building a practical profile, as a representation of a greater influencers group similar to him, to become a guide for neophytes and a case for students and researchers.

3.2.1. The Professional

For the characteristic of this particular influencers’ strategies and personality, the personality suits the best influencers in maturity status, either because of the particular phase faced in the influencer life-cycle or because, although at the beginning of the influencer experience, the person is already famous - in the case of Twitch, an example might be a neophyte streamer but pro-player and member of a worldwide famous sport team.

The maturity status and, consequently, the already favorite position of the influencer, is the reason why “The Professional” personality is the one requiring the highest entry level, either concerning the stardom or the gaming skills. Both the requirements, if met, make possible for the influencer to attract viewers and fans just thanks to their status and reputation (“Thijs playing HS
Without the necessity to attract, the aim of “The Professional” is just to lock-in the viewer in the subscription process, specific of the social media platforms, through the entertainment, the content creation, and the community building. Contrary to the other influencers analyzed, the marketing strategies of “The Professional” do not go after particular segments of the attention economy, but are directed to the larger audience possible. The final aim is, indeed, to be neutral and not to create any haters. “The Professional” tries not to take any strong personal positions and not to share any personal value that might compromise his neutral personality who does not need to attract to maintain a variegated and mixed audience, which needs to be the biggest possible with no segmentation or focused target. Thus, the influencer types do not require the influencer any effort to be interesting but just the need to be friendly. In other words, the influencer does not act like a genuine amateur who started sharing content on social media but as a reliable authoritative professional. In the case of “The Professional”, the final objective should be to upgrade his figure from being a famous personality to be a micro-celebrity, focused on boosting his recognizable reputation. The professional bases indeed his success on the expertise and knowledge in the field, which gave him authority over particular information (Yale & Gilly, 1995), strategic in the case of this celebrity due to the focus of the streaming, which is not firstly related to his persona but to the content created. The viewers need to trust just the information the influencer is providing, and not directly the influencer himself. The idea is to create an opinion leader, who therefore needs to put the perception of knowledge as one of his major objectives (Solomon, 1992), as it often happens in the political field (Froehlich & Rudiger, 2005). On the practical side, the profiles impose to prioritize the goals achievements in the particular area of expertise of the influencers, focusing on quantity (hours streamed in Twitch terms) and confining on the entertainment side just the goals sharing experience (the “we” instead of the “I”). Finally, “The Professional” needs to decrease the potential fluctuation in the audience
based on his results, therefore to the reliability of his information. If, on the one hand, the reputation of the personality makes possible to achieve considerable audiences without defined strategies and marketing efforts, on the other hands the community has not strong foundation and, just like it has born thanks to the reputation, so it can disappear due to it, in the huge Twitch influencers’ “market”. Indeed, for this personality, the expectation are higher, quality-wise, than compared to others; these high standard increase the risk of disconfirmation, which can affect exponentially the “customer” satisfaction and reverse the influencer popularity. Therefore, in order to reduce this risk, this personality, already strong in authority toward the single individual, needs to focus on the construction of a community structure. In doing so, the baseline strategy might come in handy, namely creating an experience, concept or value shared inside the community and between the community and its leader. In the case of this profile, it is preferable for it to be something raising from the community and not something shared by the influencer. Thus, the role of the influencers should be just to kick-start, giving, strategically, a spark to the audience to be transformed into a shared experience like making superficial errors the audience can laugh about, streaming with a particular pet or inviting a particular guest. In the case of Thijs, for instance, sometimes it happens that he goes in the kitchen and, in the streaming, it appears the empty chair; Thijs however keeps playing remote and, with time, the meme created is that the chair plays better than Thijs. Every time it happens, all the fans laugh about it.

3.2.2. The Jester

“The Jester” personality is based on auto-irony as the guiding principle of the overall strategy. The creation of a funny figure, who makes people laugh together and laugh about him, become the shared something needed to transform the audience into a community and to lower the community boarders embracing new spectators. Becoming a Jester needs a proper level of authenticity,
functional to be seen by the viewers as a real spoof instead of an actor. It has been proved that authenticity is, moreover, a major trait in the creation of a leadership figures (Schultz, 2015), who, in the case of the Jester, is fundamental for the creation of a community made by members willing to share his contents and endorse him. A fine line, however, divides being a comedian and being a funny figure, and one of the differences is the genuineness, namely the credibility of the personal brand created which needs to be “real” in the new and evolving social media platforms. Increasing the credibility of the personal brand requires the annulment of the distance between the influencer and the audience, raising the belief among the fans that the influencer is nothing too far from them, neither concerning the soft skills neither the “hard” ones (the gaming skills in the case of Twitch”). Consequently, the influencer still represents a respected figure for his achievement and he became even more appreciated because fans can impersonate him and ideally dream his success. The Jester represents the pursuit of the entrepreneurial subject of the neoliberal government of the social media (Bandinelli and Arvidsson, 2012), the personal-brand which became self-enterprise. On a practical side, the storytelling is critical: the influencers should firstly explain his story and his past, telling his journey and talking about the present as an achievement, result not just of effort but also about luck (enhancing the possibility for impersonating). Besides, “The Jester”, as the name proposes, is an extravagant, funny and sometimes excessive figure, who maximize the effectiveness of a WOM marketing campaign which relates all the possible social media platforms. The extravagant creates buzz effect thanks to the word of mouth – or mouse - and attracts potential fans who want to be part live of the extreme they have seen shared on social media. Once they have the first touch point, they easily become part of a community without particular values, “relay point in the network of mass communications” (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955, p. 1) related to a genuine and authentic figure. The focus of the profile is neither to the game (i.e. the formal objective of the
online channel) and nor to the reputation, but to the entertainment. The variety of the content proposed is indeed quite important, allowing the influencer larger opportunities for “meme” creation (a humorous concept which can be easily shared, becoming viral) as well as the openness of his personal sphere with the fan-base.

Although formally influencers with millions of fans, these personalities need to downgrade themselves to a “normal” status and the problematic task requires the need to share the highest number of things in common with their audience, essentially meaning talking about daily problems and dreams, friends, pets and hobbies, always trying to be ironic and never too intense. The result is the idea of an amatorial influencer, similar to his fan-base, creating a sense of demographic semblance to the audience, often used by managers to create high-potential leadership and stronger networks (Ibarra, 1995). Finally, the integration of the community is fundamental, namely the intensity of strengths of the structure of relations (Coleman, 1988) which needs to be apparently weak from the outside, allowing potential fans to join the network without hesitation but strong enough to lock them in and feel part of a community of similar fellows (the demographic attribute). In more specific terms, the network can be described as little dense, high connected and low hierarchized (Granovetter, 1973).

3.2.3. The Leader

Differently from other influencers’ objectives, the final goal of “The Leader” is to build a strong personal brand associated with specific attributes and values, a strong personality with a tied fan-base and a community close enough to give to the participants the highest sense of belonging possible. The leader shares opinions, and he is never politically correct, neither while talking about fans not in talking about other influencers. He does not impose his vision but, on the other hand,
he does not give any space for discussion, avoiding the creation of digital space for arguing, in which his personality might be challenged and undermined, getting out of the influencer’s control. The aim of the “Leader”, for the specific aim of this research, is to create a Machiavellianism system (Wiedman et al., 2010), with the self-centration over the influencer’s persona, convincing their fan-base about his idea and strengthening the community to the highest level. This might be obtained only after the reach of a high intimacy with the fan-base which might be related to an enormous group of friends of which the influencer is the leader. The approach, confident but familiar, is maintained on all sides of the public brand, from the name to the content creation passing through the marketing strategies. Practically, the name should be the real name of the influencer and the content creation should be focused on the interaction with the community - in the case of Twitch a co-creation strategy inside a co-creation-based platform - and on an interactive and Omni-platform based influencing effect. It is critical for the Influencer to share as much as possible about his life and his ideas, implying that there is no acting in the way the influencer is shown in front of his fan-base. In the case of Paoloidolo, every fan knows about the problematic in the streamer’s love story, knows the streamer’s parent and part of his family, his friends and his pets.

It is advisable also to widen the borders of the community, including and promoting smaller and less famous influencers, empowering them and having a return in term of community size and leadership. One of the objectives of “The Leader” should be the creation of gregariousness: a strengthen of the network ties based on a high trust toward the streamer and an incredible commitment in respect of the community (Gwinner et. al., 1998). Indeed, it is strategic for the influencer to also criticize and challenge other influencers and community, in order to promote a confident personality and to use the turmoil created by his words as a marketing tool for his
personal brand, reaching potential audience from other communities, challenging their leaders. The interaction is a vital part of the ideal influencer, in order to strengthen the community and to bond inextricably the leader with his fans. The key point is to achieve an equilibrium between genuineness and celebrity-status in order so that the average fans fell tied up to the influencer but, at the same time, fell privileged to interact with him. In the case of Twitch, the influencer can play a game with a group of fans, chatting with them, having them on the call during a live or even hanging out with them sharing the moment on social media. The criticality of this profile is, at the same time, one of his strengths: the profile just applies to quantitatively limited fan-base and it is often not scalable due to the impairment of the influencer’s values and opinions, as for the case of Paolidolo who maintain a sizeable enough but not massive fan-base, but yet stable and strongly connected. On the other hand, the ties created with the community make possible for the influencer to have as the only entry requirement the charisma, putting aside all the gaming skills (or different hard skills in other digital sectors) which might be a plus but are not necessary. Finally, it is vital for “The Leader” to vary his product, as shown in the case of Paoloidolo, offering diverse experiences and the idea of a flexibility and adaptability, following the new trend of leadership in the digital era (E-Leadership) in which those are the most vital attributes of the leader (Goethals et al., 2018).

3.2.4. The Star

The influencers group definable as “Stars” are interesting for the logic behind their figures, attributable to more traditional ways of influencing and personal branding strategies. Moreover, this last personality is critical to highlight the difference between traditional celebrities and the most similar SMI to them.
Similarly to “The Professional” influencer, “The Star” status is related to the achievement of something special in a certain area of interest. Thus, the attraction of the audience is related to an undoubted authority in a certain field or an unparalleled ability; in the case of Pow3rTv, for instance, the achievement is the position of one of the best players worldwide in the game he plays.

What is different in comparison with the above-cited personality is the retention and the development of the fan-base. If, in the case of “The Professional”, the objective was the achievement of professional results in the area of interest (i.e. the rank 1 in a particular game in the case of Twitch), for “The Star” a further step is required, which is the centralization of the results under the influencer’s personal brand. For “The Star”, contrary to “The Professional”, there is no “we” but just “I”, as for the case of Pow3rTv opposed to ThijsHS’s one. There is no community bondage between the fans if not the shared admiration of the star. Although the starting point between the star on social media and the traditional celebrity might seem similar (they reached the fame because of particular achievements) the difference lies in the way they maintain and develop their popularity. Despite maintaining a certain distance between his fans, functional to the creation of an elusive figure, the star needs to maintain a continuous interaction and to always respect his fans. Unlike for traditional celebrities, SMIs recognize that their success always came from the viewers, thanks to the achievements, and not from the achievements that eventually led to their fan-bases (Nouri, 2007).

The final objective of this kind of influencer is the use of particular hard skills for the final objective of developing of a public persona which goes beyond the interest of the particular field in which he had started. In fact, the “cross-selling” attention is not between different games but between different platforms and fields. Indeed, in the storytelling strategy of the influencer, there is no interest in focusing on his personal sphere but the focus stays linked to the personal
achievements related to the influencer’s career. Critical for the ideal profile is, therefore, a certain degree of proactivity with the precise use of the personal brand and fan-base, in order to re-invent his professional figure, becoming a talk-show host or guest, a radio speaker, an event organizer or an entrepreneur. Optimistic about the evolution of his field, “The Star” is an innovator, a pioneer who wants to develop his figure, leading it to new challenges and subverting the rules of the competition. Besides, the degree of an SMI innovativeness influences the WOM propension of the viewership (Wiedmann et al., 2010).

As for the case of Pow3rTv, the influencers belonging to this groups are often peculiar in the way of dressing and communicating and have the final objective of being unique and indistinguishable, to be intriguing. They frequently have specifics sayings and habits, strategically used for the community building commitment. Having a strong focus on their personal status and their personal reputation, “The Star” needs to feed continuously their fans with challenges which, contrary to “The Professional” type, point out not a shared achievement but the superiority of the influencer, empathizing a certain distance between him and the audience.
4. Conclusion

The research, through the analysis of four influencers and the interviews of their staff members aimed to outline the most successful strategies used in building strong personal brands and the related communities. After having highlighted the baseline strategy from which every influencer should start from, namely the practice of sharing specific values and experience to bond the community together, the research distinguished four different ideal profiles to inspire the neophytes, based on real effective cases. All the profiles always follow a coherence in the way they speak, interact and communicate, gaining a clear positioning in their viewers’ minds.

The real cases have been analyzed using five categories: accountability, variety, streaming focus, approach and language. The differences of the real cases in the intensity and the use of those attributes created four macro-profiles, which, adjusted with the best practices and the advices retrieved from the literature, built the four ideal profiles to be followed: The Professional, The Jester, The Leader and The Star. The research furtherly outlined that, while the personal brand practices are fundamental to attract potential viewers in the attention economy, the storytelling is critical to retain them and to target particular and specific market segments.

4.1. Implications

With the increasing marketing investment of various companies on Twitch and streamers’ channels (Cmswire, 2018) and aware of the stable trend of companies and celebrities opening their own profiles (Ranker, 2018), the research can be useful to understand which are the best practices to be used in order to both be successful and to deliver and communicate the right attributes to their fans or customers.
Future research might analyze the differences in the influencers approach in streaming under the name of a well-know brands and the responses of the audience. Moreover, it might be of interest understanding the effectiveness in transferring particular brand values to the audience. Finally, a similar work of building ideal profiles could be created basing the analysis on companies or celebrities not associated with the video-game industry.

4.2. Limitations

The Twitch platform is evolving rapidly and the entrance of companies and celebrities is changing the standard rules of the competition. The newest successful streamers have different behaviors and transmit different attributes than the previous ones and the importance of the streamers’ knowledge into video-games is decreasing. The ideal profiles outlined in this research might be soon updated due to the velocity of this industry and the rapid changes in the way influencers compete. Moreover, although the streamers to be analyzed has been chosen according to restrictive criteria and after an accurate research, a more comprehensive study which analyzed a greater number of influencers with a netnographic method would probably outline more and different ideal profiles.
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6. Appendix

Appendix 1: Twitch Homepage (Twitch.tv)

Appendix 2: Twitch Browse (Twitch.tv)
Appendix 3: Stream View (Twitch.tv)

Appendix 4: Discord loltyle’s page (discordapp.com)