



Communication strategies in the video game ecosystem: a relational approach based on the analysis of channels and user profiles

Estrategias de comunicación en el ecosistema de los videojuegos: un enfoque relacional basado en el análisis de canales y perfiles de usuario

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Abstract:

The growing relevance of digital platforms has profoundly transformed communication and value creation strategies within the video game industry, fostering the emergence of participatory ecosystems in which developers, content creators, and gaming communities interact continuously. In this context, this study aims to analyse the communicative functions performed by different digital platforms in the generation of digital engagement and to propose a relational model explaining value creation within the video game communication ecosystem.

To this end, a qualitative comparative study was conducted based on a structured content analysis of 60 units of analysis from TikTok and Twitch, corresponding to three representative video games (Fortnite, League of Legends, and Genshin Impact). The study employed a purposive sampling strategy and a coding matrix specifically designed to identify communicative functions, interaction patterns, and relational configurations among platforms, content creators, and user communities.

The results show that the platforms analysed perform differentiated and complementary functions within the digital ecosystem. While TikTok primarily concentrates content aimed at discovery and the acquisition of new audiences, Twitch facilitates processes of evaluation, learning, and retention through more intensive and sustained forms of interaction. The comparative analysis identifies three relational configurations—discovery, evaluation, and retention—which underpin the proposed relational model explaining how interaction among platforms, content creators, and users contributes to digital engagement and value creation.

The main contribution of the study is a conceptual framework that extends platform-centred approaches by interpreting digital engagement as a relational and ecosystem-based process. This model offers new implications for research on digital communication and video game marketing, as well as for the design of multi-platform communication strategies aimed at strengthening participation and the sustainability of digital communities.

Keywords: digital communication; video games; digital engagement; digital platforms; value creation; video game marketing; digital ecosystems.

Resumen:

La creciente relevancia de las plataformas digitales ha transformado profundamente las estrategias de comunicación y creación de valor en la industria del videojuego, favoreciendo la aparición de ecosistemas participativos donde desarrolladores, creadores de contenido y comunidades de jugadores interactúan de forma continua. En este contexto, el presente estudio tiene como objetivo analizar las funciones comunicativas que desempeñan distintas plataformas digitales en la generación de

digital engagement y proponer un modelo relacional que explique la creación de valor dentro del ecosistema comunicativo del videojuego.

Para ello, se desarrolló una investigación cualitativa de carácter comparativo basada en un análisis de contenido estructurado de 60 unidades de análisis procedentes de *TikTok* y *Twitch*, correspondientes a tres videojuegos representativos (*Fortnite*, *League of Legends* y *Genshin Impact*). El estudio empleó una estrategia de muestreo intencional y una matriz de codificación diseñada específicamente para identificar funciones comunicativas, patrones de interacción y configuraciones relacionales entre plataformas, creadores de contenido y comunidades de usuarios.

Los resultados muestran que las plataformas analizadas desempeñan funciones diferenciadas y complementarias dentro del ecosistema digital. Mientras *TikTok* concentra principalmente contenidos orientados al descubrimiento y la captación de nuevas audiencias, *Twitch* favorece procesos de evaluación, aprendizaje y fidelización mediante formas de interacción más intensas y continuadas. A partir del análisis comparativo se identifican tres configuraciones relacionales: descubrimiento, evaluación y fidelización, que sustentan la propuesta de un modelo relacional capaz de explicar cómo la interacción entre plataformas, creadores de contenido y usuarios contribuye a la generación de *digital engagement* y a la creación de valor.

Como principal aportación, el estudio propone un marco conceptual que amplía los enfoques centrados en plataformas individuales al interpretar el *digital engagement* como un proceso relacional y ecosistémico. Este modelo ofrece nuevas implicaciones tanto para la investigación en comunicación digital y marketing de videojuegos como para el diseño de estrategias de comunicación multiplataforma orientadas a fortalecer la participación y la sostenibilidad de las comunidades digitales.

Palabras clave: comunicación digital; videojuegos; *digital engagement*; plataformas digitales; creación de valor; marketing de videojuegos; ecosistemas digitales.

1. INTRODUCTION

The video game industry has established itself as one of the leading sectors of the digital economy and of the cultural and creative industries. According to Newzoo (2025), the global market exceeds 3.4 billion players and generates annual revenues of approximately US\$190 billion, placing it ahead of other entertainment industries such as film and music. In Europe, the sector has more than 75 million players and generates an economic impact of over €25 billion, driven by an ecosystem comprising developers, distributors, digital platforms, and content creators (Video Games Europe, 2024). In Spain, video games constitute one of the leading cultural industries, with revenues exceeding €2.3 billion and more than 20 million players, consolidating the sector as a strategic market for digital innovation and the creative economy (AEVI, 2024). In this context, understanding how communicative relationships among the different actors in the digital ecosystem are articulated is increasingly relevant from both academic and business perspectives.

In this context, digital communication has acquired a strategic role in value creation. Content dissemination no longer depends exclusively on actions undertaken by companies; rather, it occurs through continuous interaction processes among multiple actors who actively participate in the creation, circulation, and reinterpretation of video game-related content. Platforms such as TikTok and Twitch, together with other social networks and spaces for digital participation, have fostered the emergence of highly active communities in which users not only consume information but also produce content, share experiences, recommend video games, and influence the decisions of other players.

The literature has extensively examined the influence of social networks in areas such as digital marketing, electronic word-of-mouth, influencer marketing, virtual communities, and customer engagement. Various studies have shown that digital platforms play an important role in video game dissemination, community strengthening, and the development of relationships between brands and consumers. Likewise, recent research has highlighted the importance of user participation,

collaborative content creation, and the dynamics of participatory cultures in consolidating increasingly complex digital ecosystems.

However, much of this research has addressed digital platforms in isolation, analysing their specific characteristics or assessing their individual impact on variables such as purchase intention, brand awareness, or engagement. Although these contributions have improved our understanding of how specific platforms operate, there is still limited knowledge of how different platforms interact with one another to generate value-creation processes within the video game communication ecosystem. Consequently, a gap remains in the literature concerning the functional relationships established among digital platforms, content creators, and user communities.

This limitation is particularly relevant given that current digital communication processes develop in environments characterised by complementarity among platforms and the simultaneous participation of multiple actors. From this perspective, interpreting each platform as an independent channel makes it difficult to understand the relational nature of digital engagement and the mechanisms through which value is generated within video game digital ecosystems.

To help address this gap, the present study comparatively analyses the communicative functions performed by TikTok and Twitch around three representative video games (Fortnite, League of Legends, and Genshin Impact). Through a structured content analysis of sixty units of analysis, the research examines how different platforms support processes of discovery, evaluation, and retention, as well as the interaction patterns generated among users, content creators, and video games.

The main contribution of the article is the development of a relational model that explains the generation of digital engagement from an ecosystem perspective. In contrast to approaches centred on individual platforms, the proposed model interprets engagement as the outcome of functional interaction among different actors and digital spaces, identifying three relational configurations—discovery, evaluation, and retention—that provide an integrated understanding of value-creation processes within the video game communication ecosystem. In this way, the research contributes both

to the literature on digital communication and video game marketing and to the design of multi-platform communication strategies for organisations and professionals in the sector.

The article is structured into six sections. Following this introduction, the second section presents the theoretical framework and reviews the literature on digital communication, participatory platforms, and digital engagement. The third section describes the methodology, including the research design, case selection, analytical procedure, and methodological rigour criteria. The fourth section then presents the results of the comparative analysis and the proposed relational model. Finally, the fifth and sixth sections develop the discussion, conclusions, implications of the study, and future research directions.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE VIDEO GAME COMMUNICATION ECOSYSTEM

Over the past two decades, the video game industry has undergone a profound transformation driven by the convergence of digitalisation, the development of social platforms, and growing user participation in communication processes. Traditionally, video game promotion was structured around relatively one-way marketing strategies based on advertising campaigns, specialised media, and actions carried out directly by publishers and distributors. However, the consolidation of digital platforms has substantially modified this model, giving rise to a more open, decentralised, and participatory communication ecosystem.

This transformation is taking place in a context of continued sector expansion. The video game industry is currently one of the main markets within the cultural and creative industries, with a global community of more than 3.4 billion players and annual revenues close to US\$190 billion, exceeding other entertainment industries such as film and music (Newzoo, 2025).

In Europe, the sector generates an economic impact of more than €25 billion and has over 75 million players, consolidating its position as one of the main drivers of the digital

economy (Video Games Europe, 2024). These trends form part of a broader growth process in the global entertainment and media market, driven by the expansion of digital distribution, platform-based models, and sustained growth in the consumption of interactive content (PwC, 2025). In Spain, the industry generated revenues of more than €2.3 billion and has over 20 million players, reflecting the sustained growth of video game consumption and the progressive digitalisation of leisure habits (AEVI, 2024). In this context, communication has shifted from an essentially promotional function to becoming a strategic element for value creation, the maintenance of stable relationships with gaming communities, and the articulation of increasingly complex digital ecosystems.

In Europe and Spain, the sustained growth of video game consumption and the progressive digitalisation of leisure habits have likewise reinforced the sector's economic and social importance (AEVI, 2024; Newzoo, 2024; Video Games Europe, 2024). In this context, communication has shifted from an essentially promotional function to becoming a strategic element for value creation and the maintenance of stable relationships with gaming communities.

The evolution of the communication ecosystem has been closely linked to the development of digital platforms that facilitate the production, distribution, and circulation of content generated both by companies themselves and by users. From the perspective of participatory culture (Jenkins, 2006), consumers have ceased to be passive recipients and have assumed an active role as producers, disseminators, and interpreters of content. This phenomenon has favoured the emergence of digital communities characterised by high levels of interaction, collaboration, and collective knowledge creation, where recommendations, live broadcasts, gameplay analyses, and audiovisual content significantly influence the perception and adoption of video games.

At the same time, the consolidation of content creators has modified traditional communication dynamics between companies and consumers. Streamers, influencers, and other specialised profiles currently perform functions that go beyond commercial promotion, acting as intermediaries capable of interpreting video games, generating trust, energising communities, and facilitating collective learning processes.

Consequently, digital communication no longer depends exclusively on messages issued by organisations but is configured as the result of multiple interactions among developers, platforms, content creators, and users.

Recent literature has analysed this phenomenon from different perspectives. Various studies highlight the role of social networks in brand awareness, electronic word-of-mouth, influencer marketing, and the construction of digital communities (Ashley & Tuten, 2015; Kannan & Li, 2017; Tafesse, 2016). Complementarily, research focused on video games has highlighted the importance of digital platforms in fostering player participation, content co-creation, and digital engagement (Sjöblom & Hamari, 2017; Johnson & Woodcock, 2019). Nevertheless, much of this research has focused on specific platforms or phenomena, paying less attention to the functional relationships established among the different actors in the communication ecosystem.

This evolution shows that communication in the video game industry can no longer be understood as a set of independent actions carried out through isolated channels. Rather, it constitutes a dynamic ecosystem in which multiple platforms, communities, and content creators interact continuously, generating processes of participation, information exchange, and value creation that transcend the boundaries of each individual platform. This transformation reflects the consolidation of platform models in which relationships among companies, digital infrastructures, and user communities become the main mechanism for value generation (Thorhauge, 2023). Understanding this transformation is essential for analysing how digital engagement is generated and why approaches capable of integrating the relationships among the different components of the communication ecosystem are needed.

2.2. DIGITAL PLATFORMS AND COMMUNICATIVE FUNCTIONS

The consolidation of digital platforms has profoundly transformed communication strategies in the video game industry. In contrast to traditional models based on predominantly one-way communication, current platforms configure interactive environments in which content dissemination, user participation, and community creation take place simultaneously. In this context, platforms cease to be mere

distribution channels and become communication infrastructures that articulate relationships among developers, content creators, and players (Van Dijck et al., 2018; Nieborg & Poell, 2018). More recent research extends this perspective by noting that platforms organise the production, circulation, and visibility of content as part of a platformisation process that affects the entire cultural and media ecosystem (Nieborg & Poell, 2023).

The literature on digital platforms has shown that they are not homogeneous spaces but environments with differentiated architectures, algorithms, and interaction logics that shape the production, circulation, and consumption of content (Poell et al., 2022). From this perspective, the technical characteristics of each platform influence both content visibility and forms of community participation, fostering different levels of interaction, collaboration, and value creation.

In the video game context, this functional specialisation is particularly evident. Platforms oriented towards the consumption of short-form audiovisual content, such as TikTok, favour discovery processes through viral dynamics driven by recommendation algorithms. The combination of short formats, high dissemination capacity, and low production costs facilitates the rapid circulation of video game-related content, contributing to increasing the visibility of titles, characters, or events and extending the reach of communities beyond regular players.

In contrast, live-streaming platforms such as Twitch offer a different communication environment. Synchronous interaction between content creators and audiences fosters learning, question resolution, exchange of experiences, and the development of more stable relationships among participants. The possibility of watching full gameplay sessions, interacting through chat, or participating in collaborative activities turns these platforms into spaces where content consumption is combined with community creation and the strengthening of user commitment (Hamilton et al., 2014; Johnson & Woodcock, 2019).

Other platforms, such as YouTube and Discord, likewise perform complementary functions within the video game communication ecosystem. While YouTube facilitates

access to persistent content such as analyses, tutorials, and reviews that extend the life cycle of information, Discord supports the consolidation of stable communities through persistent communication channels that allow players to coordinate activities, resolve questions, and maintain ongoing relationships. Although these platforms are not the empirical focus of the present study, considering them helps to show that digital communication takes place in a multi-platform environment in which different spaces fulfil specific and complementary functions.

This perspective is consistent with contributions from the literature on digital ecosystems, which interprets platforms as interdependent components of a broader network of social and technological relationships (Tiwana, 2014; Jacobides et al., 2018). From this perspective, the value generated by a platform depends not only on its individual characteristics but also on how it interacts with other platforms and with the different actors participating in the ecosystem.

Consequently, the analysis of digital platforms requires moving beyond approaches focused exclusively on the individual evaluation of each social network towards perspectives that consider the communicative functions they perform within the ecosystem. Rather than competing to perform the same task, platforms appear to specialise in different stages of users' communication experience, contributing complementarily to attracting new audiences, building shared knowledge, and strengthening digital communities.

This interpretation is particularly relevant for understanding communication in the video game industry, where user participation takes place simultaneously across multiple platforms. However, although the literature recognises the importance of these digital environments, there is still limited knowledge of how the different communicative functions performed by platforms are articulated to generate processes of digital engagement and value creation. This issue provides the starting point for the following section, which focuses on digital engagement as a relational process within digital ecosystems.

2.3. DIGITAL ENGAGEMENT AS A RELATIONAL PROCESS

The concept of engagement has acquired growing importance in the literature on marketing, digital communication, and consumer behaviour, becoming one of the main explanatory frameworks for understanding relationships between organisations and users in digital environments. Although it was initially associated with individual cognitive, emotional, and behavioural responses (Brodie et al., 2011; Hollebeek, 2011), the evolution of digital ecosystems has broadened this perspective by incorporating dimensions related to social interaction, collaborative participation, and value co-creation.

In this context, the concept of digital engagement emerges, understood as the set of processes through which users actively interact with brands, content, platforms, and other participants within digital environments (Dessart et al., 2015; Harrigan et al., 2018). From this perspective, engagement is no longer limited to quantitative indicators such as the number of views, likes, or comments, but is interpreted as a multidimensional phenomenon integrating processes of attention, participation, learning, recommendation, content creation, and the development of lasting relationships.

Recent literature agrees that digital engagement is a dynamic process that evolves as users increase their level of involvement with a community or brand (Calder et al., 2016; Vivek et al., 2014). In addition, recent research broadens this perspective by proposing a shift from approaches focused exclusively on the customer towards engagement models that incorporate interaction among multiple ecosystem actors, including organisations, platforms, and digital communities (Hollebeek et al., 2022).

Consequently, engagement intensity depends not only on exposure to particular content but also on the quality of the interactions established among the different actors participating in the digital ecosystem. From an integrative perspective, engagement can be understood as an evolutionary process combining cognitive, emotional, and behavioural dimensions and developing through continuous interactions among the different ecosystem participants (Lim et al., 2022). This interpretation is consistent with recent research on platform markets, which argues that engagement constitutes a strategic resource emerging from interaction among users, platforms, and organisations,

moving beyond traditional approaches focused exclusively on individual consumer behaviour (Van Crombrugge & Stremersch, 2025).

This relational dimension is particularly evident in the video game industry. Unlike other sectors, video games generate highly participatory communities in which developers, content creators, streamers, and players engage in continuous processes of communication, learning, and experience exchange. In these environments, engagement is not built solely through interaction between a user and a platform, but through a network of relationships connecting multiple actors and digital spaces. This interpretation is consistent with recent reviews of digital engagement, which highlight the need to analyse the phenomenon as a multidimensional process in which technological, social, and organisational factors characteristic of contemporary digital ecosystems converge (Rasul et al., 2024).

From the perspective of participatory culture (Jenkins, 2006) and virtual communities (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001), users play an active role in the production and circulation of content, contributing both to the dissemination of the video game and to the generation of collective knowledge and the strengthening of community identity. Content creators also act as mediators between companies and communities, facilitating processes of interpretation, learning, and recommendation that influence players' experiences and the consolidation of social ties.

This approach shows that digital engagement is neither a static state nor an individual response, but an emergent process derived from continuous interaction among digital platforms, content creators, developers, and user communities. Each of these actors performs specific functions that contribute, complementarily, to the generation of shared experiences and the construction of long-term relationships.

However, although the literature recognises the interactive nature of engagement, a substantial part of research continues to analyse it from perspectives centred on specific organisations or individual platforms. This approach makes it difficult to understand how different digital spaces jointly contribute to the generation of engagement within a single communication ecosystem.

Consequently, it is necessary to move towards approaches that interpret digital engagement as a relational phenomenon, in which value does not arise from isolated interactions but from coordination among multiple actors and platforms that participate simultaneously in the user's digital experience. This perspective makes it possible to connect the study of engagement with theories of value creation and digital ecosystems, providing a more appropriate conceptual framework for analysing contemporary communication in the video game industry.

2.4. VALUE CREATION IN DIGITAL ECOSYSTEMS

The transformation of digital environments has profoundly changed the way value is generated in the cultural and creative industries. In contrast to traditional conceptions centred on the production and distribution of goods by organisations, contemporary literature understands value creation as a dynamic and collaborative process involving multiple actors interacting within the same ecosystem (Vargo & Lusch, 2004, 2008, 2016).

Service-Dominant Logic (SDL) constitutes one of the main theoretical frameworks for explaining this evolution. From this perspective, value is not an inherent attribute of products or services, but the result of processes of exchange, resource integration, and interaction among organisations, consumers, and other actors involved. Consequently, the consumer ceases to play a passive role and becomes an active actor who participates in value co-creation through use, experience, and social interaction.

This approach has led to the development of the concept of value co-creation, understood as the process through which different actors jointly contribute to generating shared experiences, knowledge, and benefits (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004). In digital environments, this co-creation is manifested through collaborative content production, information exchange, collective problem solving, and community building that enrich the consumption experience beyond the original product.

Recent studies conducted on video game platforms show that co-creation processes depend on the interaction among platform functionalities, coordination actions

undertaken by organisations, and the active participation of gaming communities (Hung et al., 2025).

In the video game industry, value creation is particularly relational in nature. Contemporary video games generate value not only through their technical or narrative characteristics, but also through the interactions that develop around them. Live broadcasts, player recommendations, audiovisual content creation, streamer communities, user-created guides, and conversations held across different digital platforms expand the gaming experience and contribute to extending the life cycle of video games. In this context, value emerges from relationships established among developers, digital platforms, content creators, and gaming communities rather than from actions undertaken by a single actor.

This interpretation is consistent with the literature on platform ecosystems, which conceives digital platforms as infrastructures capable of facilitating interaction, coordination, and resource exchange among multiple participants (Tiwana, 2014; Jacobides et al., 2018). From this perspective, platforms do not generate value in isolation but act as connecting spaces where shared interests, knowledge, and experiences converge. Their capacity to facilitate these interactions largely explains the consolidation of digital communities and the strengthening of digital engagement.

Likewise, various studies have shown that value creation in digital ecosystems depends on the complementarity among the different actors that comprise them. Developers provide content and updates; content creators interpret, disseminate, and contextualise the gaming experience; platforms provide the technological infrastructure necessary for interaction; and communities generate collective knowledge, recommendations, and continuous participation processes. The combination of these contributions forms a system of interdependent relationships in which value is constructed in a distributed manner and evolves as interactions among participants increase.

From this perspective, value creation cannot be understood as the result of a linear sequence of marketing actions, but as an emergent property of the communication ecosystem itself. The greater the interaction among platforms, content creators, and

communities, the greater the opportunities to generate shared experiences, strengthen social ties, and consolidate sustainable processes of digital engagement. Consequently, analysing digital communication in the video game industry requires an ecosystem approach capable of explaining how these relationships jointly contribute to value generation.

In this regard, recent research suggests that the engagement of different actors and value creation evolve jointly within digital platforms, mutually reinforcing one another as interactions among ecosystem participants increase (Hendricks et al., 2025).

Although the literature has made significant progress in studying value co-creation, digital ecosystems, and participatory platforms, relatively few studies integrate these approaches to explain digital communication in the video game industry jointly. In particular, there is still limited understanding of how the different communicative functions performed by platforms are articulated with digital engagement processes to generate value within the ecosystem.

This gap justifies the need to develop a conceptual framework that allows video game communication to be interpreted from a relational perspective. In this sense, the following section proposes the theoretical foundations of an integrative model connecting the communicative functions of platforms, digital engagement, and value creation within a single digital ecosystem.

2.5. TOWARDS A RELATIONAL MODEL OF THE VIDEO GAME COMMUNICATION ECOSYSTEM

The literature review shows that research on digital communication in the video game industry has developed considerably over the past decade. Existing studies have extensively analysed the role of digital platforms in content dissemination, community consolidation, influencer marketing, electronic word-of-mouth, and digital engagement. In parallel, contributions from Service-Dominant Logic, value co-creation, and digital ecosystems have helped explain that value emerges from interaction among multiple actors rather than exclusively from actions undertaken by organisations.

However, these advances have evolved relatively independently. While the literature on digital platforms has focused mainly on the characteristics and effects of specific environments such as TikTok, Twitch, YouTube, or Discord, engagement research has tended to analyse user involvement from perspectives centred on brands, communities, or individual consumers. Similarly, studies of value creation have explored co-creation processes within digital ecosystems, but with limited attention to the communicative functions performed by different platforms in these processes.

As a consequence, there is still limited understanding of how different digital platforms articulate with one another to foster participation, interaction, and value creation within the video game communication ecosystem. Although recent literature has made significant progress in analysing the platformisation of cultural production (Nieborg & Poell, 2023), understanding remains limited regarding how the communicative functions of different platforms are integrated to generate continuous processes of digital engagement and value creation.

In other words, the literature explains in sufficient detail what happens on specific platforms, but offers a more limited understanding of how functional relationships among platforms, content creators, developers, and gaming communities jointly contribute to the generation of digital engagement. This constitutes the main research gap addressed by the present study.

From this perspective, it is insufficient to interpret digital platforms as independent channels whose performance can be analysed in isolation. Contemporary video game communication develops in an environment characterised by the coexistence of multiple digital spaces, where users participate simultaneously across different platforms and adopt diverse roles as consumers, content creators, community members, or advocates. Consequently, understanding value creation requires a perspective capable of integrating these relationships within a common analytical framework.

In response to this need, the present study proposes a relational model of the video game communication ecosystem. This model is based on the premise that digital

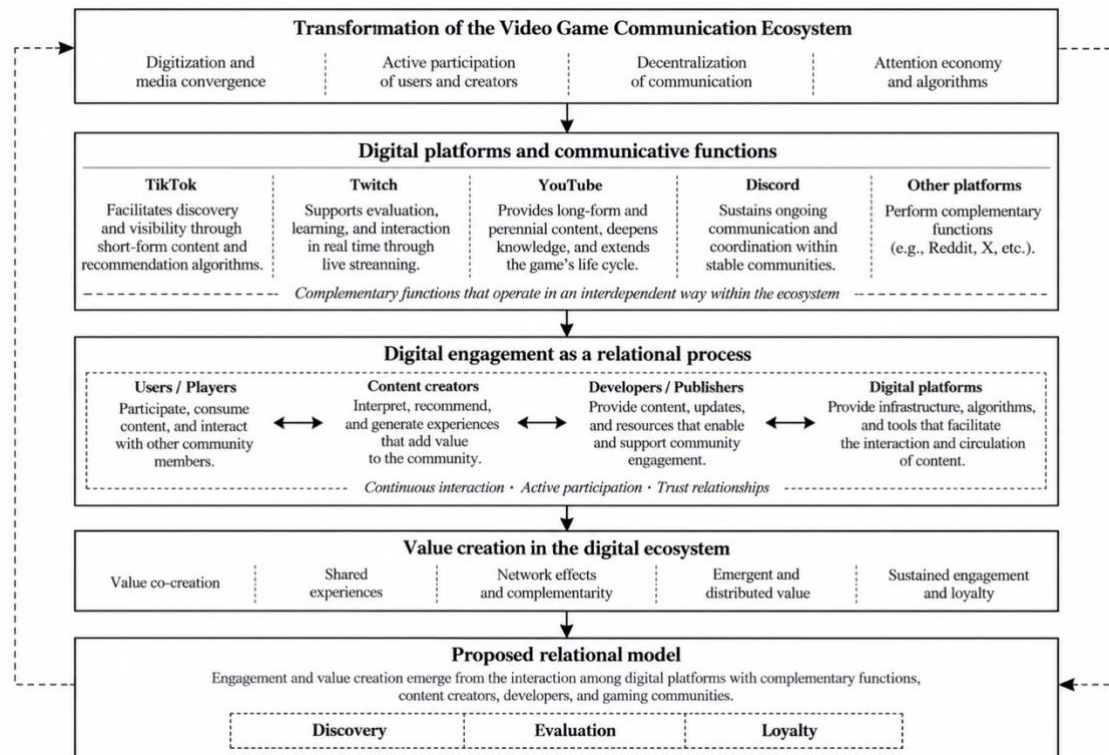
engagement is not merely an individual user response, but an emergent process constructed through continuous interaction among digital platforms, developers, content creators, and gaming communities. From this perspective, platforms cease to be understood as independent communication channels and are instead interpreted as interdependent components of an ecosystem in which each performs specific and complementary communicative functions.

The proposed model organises these functions around three relational configurations: discovery, evaluation, and retention, representing different interaction patterns observable within the communication ecosystem. These configurations should not be interpreted as linear or sequential stages of user behaviour, but as complementary dynamics that can coexist and reinforce one another depending on context, video game characteristics, and the degree of community participation.

From a theoretical perspective, this approach makes it possible to integrate three research streams that have so far evolved relatively independently: studies on digital platforms, the literature on digital engagement, and theories of value creation in digital ecosystems. The articulation of these approaches provides a conceptual framework capable of explaining not only the individual functions of each platform but also the relationships established among them and their joint contribution to value creation.

Based on this conceptual proposal, the research develops a comparative analysis of content published on TikTok and Twitch around Fortnite, League of Legends, and Genshin Impact. The objective is to empirically identify the communicative functions performed by these platforms, analyse the interaction patterns they generate, and examine how these relationships support the proposed relational model. Figure 1 synthesises the conceptual framework guiding this research and shows the relationship among digital platforms, digital engagement, relational configurations, and value creation within the video game communication ecosystem.

Figure 1. Conceptual framework of the relational model of the video game communication ecosystem.



Source: Authors' own elaboration.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. RESEARCH DESIGN

This study adopts an exploratory qualitative design based on the comparative analysis of digital content published on communication platforms linked to the video game ecosystem. This approach is appropriate when the objective is to understand complex phenomena, identify behavioural patterns, and generate interpretive frameworks for communication processes that, due to their dynamic and multidimensional nature, are difficult to address through exclusively quantitative approaches.

The study is based on the premise that communication in the video game industry constitutes a relational phenomenon in which the effectiveness of marketing strategies depends on interaction among different types of users, digital platforms, and communicative functions. From this perspective, the purpose of the research is not to measure the impact of isolated variables or establish statistical causal relationships, but

to analyse how the different communication channels are articulated within the digital ecosystem and how this articulation contributes to explaining processes of user discovery, evaluation, and retention.

For this purpose, a methodological strategy based on comparative case analysis was adopted, a widely used approach in qualitative research when the aim is to examine the same phenomenon in different contexts in order to identify regularities, differences, and common configurations. Rather than focusing on a single platform or video game, the study compares different communication environments and different types of video games with the aim of increasing the explanatory capacity of the analysis and avoiding dependence of the results on a specific case.

The research design therefore combines two complementary levels of analysis. At the first level, a systematic review of recent academic literature and industry reports is conducted in order to construct the conceptual framework underpinning the research and define the analytical categories subsequently used. At the second level, an exploratory study is conducted based on the analysis of content published on digital platforms, making it possible to assess the applicability of the proposed conceptual model through systematic observation of representative cases.

It should be noted that the purpose of this exploratory study is not to make statistical inferences about the video game industry as a whole, but to identify communication trends, interaction patterns, and functional relationships among platforms and user profiles that can enrich and substantiate the relational model proposed in this study. Consequently, the results obtained should be interpreted as analytical evidence aimed at generating theoretical knowledge and formulating future research directions rather than as results generalisable to the sector as a whole.

3.2. CASE SELECTION AND SAMPLING STRATEGY

The cases analysed were selected through purposive or theoretical sampling, widely used in qualitative research when the objective is to study complex phenomena through cases considered particularly informative. In such designs, statistical representativeness is not the primary selection criterion; instead, priority is given to the capacity of cases

to reflect different configurations of the phenomenon under study and facilitate comparison across diverse contexts.

First, two digital platforms representing clearly differentiated communication models within the video game ecosystem were selected: TikTok and Twitch. TikTok is currently one of the main spaces for video game discovery, characterised by algorithmic distribution of short-form content, high viral potential, and predominantly asynchronous consumption. Twitch, in turn, represents the sector's leading live-streaming environment, where real-time interaction between creators and audiences fosters learning, legitimisation, and community building. The selection of both platforms responds to their functional complementarity and their relevance within contemporary communication and marketing strategies in the video game industry.

Second, three video games representing differentiated business models, community dynamics, and forms of interaction were selected: Fortnite, League of Legends, and Genshin Impact. Fortnite represents a large-scale social ecosystem based on live events and shared experiences; League of Legends is one of the leading references in competitive gaming and esports, with a highly specialised community; while Genshin Impact exemplifies a hybrid model based on narrative, continuous content updates, and monetisation through free-to-play and gacha mechanics. The combination of these three cases introduces structural diversity into the analysis and reduces the risk that the results will be attributable exclusively to the characteristics of a single type of video game.

The final sample comprised a total of 60 units of analysis ($n = 60$), distributed evenly across platforms and video games, with ten pieces of content analysed for each platform–video game combination, as shown in Table 1. This distribution ensured comparability among the different cases and maintained balanced representation of each context analysed.

Table 1. Distribution of the sample by platform and video game analysed

Platform	Fortnite	League of Legends	Genshin Impact	Total
<i>TikTok</i>	10	10	10	30
<i>Twitch</i>	10	10	10	30
Total	20	20	20	60

Source: Authors' own elaboration.

The selection of the units of analysis was based on previously established criteria designed to ensure sampling homogeneity. Specifically, the content had to meet the following requirements: (1) have been published during the three months preceding the data-collection period, thus ensuring the currency of the analysis; (2) display a high level of visibility within each platform, considering public indicators such as views, number of likes, or level of interaction; (3) maintain a direct relationship with one of the three selected video games; and (4) allow communication behaviours to be observed through visible interaction elements, such as comments, chat participation, or public engagement metrics.

Applying these criteria made it possible to construct a heterogeneous but methodologically consistent sample suitable for identifying recurring communication patterns and comparing the different functions performed by each platform within the video game ecosystem. Consistent with the exploratory nature of the study, the purpose of sampling was not to obtain a statistical representation of all published content, but to select sufficiently relevant and diverse cases for analysing the relationship among platforms, communication practices, and user profiles.

3.3. UNIT OF ANALYSIS

The unit of analysis was defined as an individual piece of digital content published on one of the selected platforms (TikTok or Twitch) and explicitly linked to one of the three video games included in the study (Fortnite, League of Legends, and Genshin Impact). Each unit was treated as an independent analytical case that could be systematically examined using a common set of analytical categories.

For TikTok, the unit of analysis corresponded to an individual video published on the platform, including both the audiovisual content and associated textual elements (title,

description, and hashtags), as well as the main public interaction metrics available at the time of data collection. On Twitch, the unit of analysis was defined as a live broadcast or highlight focused on one of the selected video games, likewise considering the contextual information and public participation indicators associated with the broadcast.

For each unit of analysis, a homogeneous set of descriptive variables was recorded to facilitate subsequent comparison. These included the publication platform, the video game analysed, the type of content creator, the duration of the piece, the predominant communicative function, the type of interaction promoted, the observable level of user participation, and the main public engagement metrics (views, likes, comments, or other interaction indicators available on each platform).

The choice of the individual piece of content as the unit of analysis reflects the fact that it constitutes the most immediate observable manifestation of communication strategies developed within the video game ecosystem. These publications make it possible to identify both predominant communicative functions and interaction dynamics among content creators, platforms, and users, allowing a comparative analysis of how different digital environments support processes of discovery, evaluation, and retention.

The use of a homogeneous unit of analysis across all cases made it possible to apply the same observation and coding protocol, ensuring comparability across platforms and video games. This methodological criterion is particularly appropriate for exploratory comparative studies, as it facilitates the identification of recurring patterns and functional differences across the contexts analysed, strengthening the internal consistency of the research process.

3.4. ANALYTICAL INSTRUMENT AND CODING CATEGORIES

The empirical analysis was conducted using an analytical matrix specifically designed for this research, whose purpose was to systematise observation of the units analysed and ensure homogeneous application of coding criteria. The instrument was developed on the basis of a review of academic literature on digital marketing, interactive

communication, engagement, virtual communities, and participatory platforms, adapting the main theoretical constructs into a set of observable and comparable categories.

The matrix integrates two complementary types of variables. First, it incorporates descriptive variables intended to characterise each unit of analysis, such as platform, video game, type of content creator, and public interaction metrics. Second, it includes analytical categories aimed at identifying the communicative functions and relational dynamics present in the observed content. These categories were defined before the analysis began in order to ensure coding consistency and minimise subjectivity in data interpretation.

The analytical categories were operationalised through conceptual definitions and specific observation criteria, allowing each unit of analysis to be consistently assigned to a single predominant category in each dimension examined. The main dimensions included the communicative function performed by the content (discovery, evaluation, or retention), the type of interaction promoted, the role performed by the content creator, the level of audience participation, and public engagement indicators associated with each post. The operational definition of these categories, together with the criteria used for coding, is summarised in Table 2.

Table 2. Matrix of analytical categories and coding criteria

Recorded variable	Description
Platform	<i>TikTok / Twitch</i>
Video game	<i>Fortnite, League of Legends, Genshin Impact</i>
Content type	Video, live stream or highlight
Creator type	<i>Influencer, streamer, user, official account</i>
Duration	Content duration
Views	Public metric
Interactions	Likes, comments, chat
Communicative function	Discovery, evaluation or retention
Interaction type	Passive, reactive or active
Participation level	Low, medium or high

Source: Authors' own elaboration.

To reinforce methodological consistency, all units of analysis were examined following the same observation protocol and using a single coding matrix. This procedure made it possible to apply homogeneous criteria throughout the analytical process, facilitating comparability across platforms, video games, and content types. The use of predefined categories also helped reduce potential interpretive biases arising from the qualitative nature of the study.

Coding was systematically performed by the principal researcher through an iterative process of reviewing and cross-checking the units analysed. Following an initial descriptive recording phase, each piece of content was classified according to the categories established in the analytical matrix. Subsequently, a comparative review of the coding was conducted to check the internal consistency of the process and ensure uniform application of the analytical criteria across the sample.

Although the study adopts a predominantly qualitative approach, the use of a structured analytical matrix made it possible to organise the information systematically and identify recurring communication patterns across platforms and video games. This procedure facilitated both comparison among the cases analysed and subsequent interpretation of the results in light of the proposed relational model, strengthening research traceability and methodological transparency.

3.5. ANALYTICAL PROCEDURE

The analytical procedure followed a structured protocol comprising five consecutive phases, designed to ensure homogeneity in the collection, organisation, and analysis of information. Applying a systematic procedure ensured comparability among the different units of analysis and strengthened the traceability of the research process.

In the first phase, the platforms and video games forming the study sample were identified, applying the selection criteria described in the previous section. Subsequently, digital content suitable for analysis was located by reviewing publications related to the selected video games. From this process, the 60 units of analysis meeting the previously established inclusion criteria were selected.

In the second phase, each unit of analysis was systematically recorded using the methodological matrix designed for the research. For each piece of content, descriptive variables were documented, including platform, video game, type of creator, content format, and the main public interaction metrics available. This record provided a homogeneous information base before the coding process began.

The third phase consisted of qualitative coding of the units of analysis. Each piece of content was examined individually by applying the categories defined in the analytical matrix, identifying the predominant communicative function, the type of interaction promoted, the role performed by the content creator, and the observable level of audience participation. Coding followed the operational definitions established in advance in order to apply uniform criteria to all units analysed.

In the fourth phase, comparative analysis was conducted across platforms and video games. Once individual coding had been completed, the units of analysis were grouped according to the different dimensions considered in the study, making it possible to identify similarities, differences, and recurring communication patterns. This process facilitated comparison between TikTok and Twitch, as well as among the three selected video games, highlighting the different functions performed by each platform within the video game communication ecosystem.

Finally, in the fifth phase, the patterns identified were interpreted in light of the theoretical framework developed in the study. This stage made it possible to integrate the empirical evidence obtained with the main conceptual approaches to digital marketing, participatory platforms, and engagement, contributing to the substantiation of the proposed relational model. The interpretation of the results focused on identifying common communication configurations and functional relationships among platforms, content creators, and users, avoiding statistical inferences and maintaining the exploratory nature of the research design.

To reinforce the consistency of the analytical process, all phases of the procedure were carried out following the same methodological protocol and applying the predefined observation and coding criteria uniformly. This strategy ensured internal coherence of

the analysis and facilitated replication in future studies addressing other video games, digital platforms, or communication contexts.

3.6. METHODOLOGICAL RIGOUR AND QUALITY CRITERIA

To strengthen the methodological quality of the study, several criteria were adopted to ensure the credibility, consistency, and transparency of the research process. Given the qualitative and exploratory nature of the design, methodological rigour is not based on statistical representativeness of the sample, but on the systematic application of observation, recording, and analysis procedures that ensure the internal coherence of the results obtained.

First, analytical consistency was ensured through the use of a single observation protocol and a common analytical matrix for all units studied. All publications were examined using the same analytical categories and operational definitions, avoiding the application of different criteria across platforms or video games and facilitating comparability among the cases analysed.

Second, methodological transparency was reinforced through an explicit description of the decisions adopted during the research process. The definition of the unit of analysis, sample selection criteria, coding categories, and the different stages of the analytical procedure are described in detail in the preceding sections, making it possible to reconstruct the development of the research and facilitating replication in subsequent studies.

Likewise, to reduce potential interpretive biases, the coding of the units of analysis was based on predefined categories supported by the specialised literature, avoiding classifications emerging ad hoc during the analysis. Once the initial coding had been completed, the units underwent a systematic review to verify consistency in applying the established criteria and to check the consistency of the interpretations made.

Another element contributing to the rigour of the study is the case-comparison strategy. The inclusion of two platforms with differentiated communication logics and three video games belonging to different genres and business models made it possible to identify

recurring patterns beyond the particularities of a specific case. This comparative logic strengthens the analytical validity of the study by facilitating the identification of regularities and differences across diverse contexts.

Finally, the quality of the research is grounded in the integration of the empirical analysis with the conceptual framework developed. The categories used during coding derive from widely established constructs in the literature on digital marketing, engagement, interactive communication, and participatory platforms, which promotes coherence between the theoretical foundations and the empirical evidence obtained. In this sense, the study aims to provide an analytically grounded interpretation of the phenomenon investigated, offering a transparent methodological procedure that can be replicated and extended in future research.

3.7. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

As with any exploratory research, this study presents a number of limitations that should be considered when interpreting its results and assessing the scope of its contributions.

First, the research is based on purposive sampling comprising 60 units of analysis corresponding to two digital platforms and three video games. Although this strategy is suitable for identifying communication patterns and conducting comparative analysis, the results are not intended to provide a statistical representation of the video game industry as a whole. Consequently, the conclusions should be interpreted as analytical evidence limited to the cases examined.

Second, the study focuses exclusively on TikTok and Twitch, platforms that play a particularly relevant role in contemporary sector communication but do not exhaust the diversity of the digital ecosystem. Other spaces with equally significant functions, such as YouTube, Discord, Instagram, Reddit, or X, are excluded from the analysis; incorporating them could provide new perspectives on interaction dynamics among communities, content creators, and developers.

Likewise, the selection of Fortnite, League of Legends, and Genshin Impact was intended to represent different business models, genres, and forms of interaction. However, the

video game industry is highly heterogeneous, so future research could expand the sample by incorporating titles from other segments, such as narrative-driven AAA video games, independent productions, simulators, sports games, or virtual-reality offerings, in order to assess the transferability of the proposed relational model.

Another limitation derives from the nature of the material analysed. The research is based on systematic observation of digital content and its public interaction metrics, without incorporating information from interviews, questionnaires, or internal platform data. Consequently, the study makes it possible to analyse communication strategies and observable participation patterns, but not to explore users' individual motivations or the decision-making processes of developers or content creators.

Furthermore, the analysis is cross-sectional, considering content published during a specific period. Given the dynamism of digital platforms and the constant evolution of recommendation algorithms, communication strategies and community behaviours can change relatively quickly. Longitudinal research would therefore be particularly valuable for examining how these processes evolve over time and analysing the impact of technological changes, video game updates, or transformations in platform policies.

Finally, the proposed relational model should be understood as an exploratory analytical approach constructed through the integration of specialised literature and the empirical evidence obtained. Its main contribution lies in offering a conceptual framework for interpreting relationships among platforms, content creators, and users within the video game communication ecosystem. However, validating it in other contexts, platforms, and sectors constitutes a future research avenue that will make it possible to assess its explanatory capacity and broaden its theoretical scope.

4. RESULTS

4.1. CHARACTERISATION OF THE ANALYSED SAMPLE

The empirical analysis was conducted on a sample comprising 60 units of analysis, selected through purposive sampling according to the methodological criteria described in the previous chapter. The sample was evenly distributed across the two digital

platforms under study (TikTok and Twitch) and the three selected video games (Fortnite, League of Legends, and Genshin Impact), with the aim of facilitating systematic comparison across different communication contexts.

The sample distribution follows a logic of methodological balance, assigning the same number of units of analysis to each platform–video game combination. This strategy made it possible to minimise potential biases arising from unequal representation of the cases and to facilitate the identification of common communication patterns and functional differences across platforms and gaming communities.

The units analysed correspond to digital content published by different creator profiles, including official accounts, specialised creators, streamers, and influencers, as well as users with high visibility within the respective communities. Each unit was examined considering both its descriptive characteristics and the analytical variables defined in the coding matrix, incorporating information on the publication platform, reference video game, content format, public interaction metrics, and the main communicative functions observed.

Table 3 presents the general distribution of the sample, showing the number of units analysed by platform and video game.

Table 3. Distribution of the analysed sample by platform and video game

Classification criterion	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Platform	<i>TikTok</i>	30	50.0
	<i>Twitch</i>	30	50.0
Video game	<i>Fortnite</i>	20	33.3
	<i>League of Legends</i>	20	33.3
	<i>Genshin Impact</i>	20	33.3
Total units analysed		60	100.0

Source: Authors' own elaboration.

As can be observed, the balanced distribution of the sample facilitates comparison between platforms and video games, preventing the results from being conditioned by a greater presence of any one of the cases analysed. This methodological configuration provides the basis for the comparative analysis presented in the following sections, focused on identifying predominant communicative functions, interaction patterns, and

relational configurations characterising digital communication in the video game ecosystem.

4.2. PREDOMINANT COMMUNICATIVE FUNCTIONS OF DIGITAL PLATFORMS

The comparative analysis of the units studied identified significant differences in the communicative functions performed by the two platforms analysed. Although both TikTok and Twitch actively participate in constructing the video game communication ecosystem, the results show that each tends to specialise in different stages of the user's journey, performing complementary rather than substitutive functions.

Table 4 presents the distribution of the communicative functions observed across the 60 units of analysis, distinguishing between content oriented towards discovery, evaluation, and retention.

Table 4. Distribution of communicative functions by platform

Communicative function	<i>TikTok</i> (n)	<i>TikTok</i> (%)	<i>Twitch</i> (n)	<i>Twitch</i> (%)	Total
Discovery	21	70.0	8	26.7	29
Evaluation	6	20.0	10	33.3	16
Retention	3	10.0	12	40.0	15
Total	30	100.0	30	100.0	60

Source: Authors' own elaboration.

The results show that TikTok primarily concentrates content oriented towards video game discovery, characterised by short formats, high viral potential, and rapid dissemination among potential users. This orientation makes the platform particularly effective for increasing the visibility of the titles analysed and facilitating initial contact between users and the video game.

By contrast, Twitch has a greater presence of content associated with evaluation and retention processes. The synchronous nature of the platform, the duration of broadcasts, and continuous interaction between creators and audiences foster spaces for learning, exchange of experiences, and community building, which contribute to maintaining players' interest and strengthening engagement.

Overall, the results show that both platforms perform differentiated but complementary functions within the video game communication ecosystem. While TikTok primarily acts as a mechanism for acquisition and discovery, Twitch plays a more prominent role in consolidating communities and deepening the relationship between users and the video game. This functional complementarity is one of the main findings of the study and provides initial empirical evidence supporting the relational model developed in subsequent sections.

4.3. COMPARISON OF COMMUNICATIVE FUNCTIONS ACROSS THE VIDEO GAMES ANALYSED

In addition to the differences observed between platforms, the comparative analysis identified variations in predominant communicative functions according to the video game analysed. Although all three titles have a significant presence of discovery-oriented content, the distribution of evaluation and retention functions reflects differences associated with the characteristics of each community, the business model, and the interaction dynamics specific to each video game.

Table 5 presents the distribution of the communicative functions identified in the units of analysis corresponding to Fortnite, League of Legends, and Genshin Impact.

Table 5. Distribution of communicative functions by video game

Communicative function	<i>Fortnite</i> (n)	<i>Fortnite</i> (%)	<i>League of Legends</i> (n)	<i>League of Legends</i> (%)	<i>Genshin Impact</i> (n)	<i>Genshin Impact</i> (%)	Total
Discovery	11	55.0	8	40.0	10	50.0	29
Evaluation	4	20.0	8	40.0	4	20.0	16
Retention	5	25.0	4	20.0	6	30.0	15
Total	20	100.0	20	100.0	20	100.0	60

Source: Authors' own elaboration.

The results show that Fortnite has a higher number of discovery-oriented pieces of content, which is consistent with its strong presence on social networks and with a communication strategy based on temporary events, brand collaborations, and highly viral content. This type of publication facilitates the acquisition of new users and the rapid dissemination of news within the digital ecosystem.

In the case of League of Legends, a higher proportion of content related to evaluation is observed. Gameplay broadcasts, strategic analyses, game guides, and content related to professional competition create an environment in which the community seeks specialised information before making certain consumption decisions or improving its performance within the game.

Genshin Impact, in turn, has the highest presence of content oriented towards retention. The game's continuous updating, periodic introduction of new characters and events, and the importance of its narrative and follower community favour the production of content intended to maintain players' interest and strengthen their connection with the video game ecosystem.

Despite these differences, the comparative analysis shows that the three video games share a similar communication structure in which discovery, evaluation, and retention functions appear complementarily, albeit with different intensity. This result suggests that the observed differences are more closely related to community characteristics and the communication strategies developed by each title than to the existence of completely differentiated communication models.

Overall, the comparison among video games shows that the nature of the product conditions the distribution of communicative functions but does not alter the general logic of the digital ecosystem analysed. This finding reinforces the idea that platforms and video games maintain a relationship of functional complementarity, providing an empirical basis for developing the relational model presented in the following sections.

4.4. INTERACTION PATTERNS AND ENGAGEMENT

In addition to the differences observed in communicative functions, the analysis identified different patterns of interaction between users and the content published on the platforms analysed. These patterns are key to understanding how engagement develops within the video game digital ecosystem, as they reflect different levels of participation, involvement, and community building.

Table 6 presents the distribution of the predominant interaction types identified during the analysis of the 60 study units.

Table 6. Distribution of interaction types by platform

Interaction type	TikTok (n)	TikTok (%)	Twitch (n)	Twitch (%)	Total (n)	Total (%)
Passive	17	56.7	5	16.7	22	36.7
Reactive	9	30.0	10	33.3	19	31.6
Active	4	13.3	15	50.0	19	31.7
Total	30	100.0	30	100.0	60	100.0

Source: Authors' own elaboration.

The results show significant differences between the two platforms. On TikTok, passive interactions predominate, mainly associated with the rapid consumption of audiovisual content, where user participation is generally limited to viewing, reacting through likes, or replaying the content. Although this type of interaction favours high dissemination and reach, it generates relatively limited involvement with the video game community.

By contrast, Twitch has a higher proportion of active interactions, favoured by the synchronous nature of the platform. The possibility of participating in real-time conversations through chat, interacting with content creators, and sharing experiences with other users turns broadcasts into spaces of collective participation where engagement acquires a much more intense social dimension.

Reactive interactions occur with relatively similar frequency on both platforms, although they respond to different dynamics. On TikTok, they generally take the form of comments, shares, or responses to previously published content, whereas on Twitch these interactions are integrated into ongoing conversations between the audience and the creator, contributing to the maintenance of more stable and cohesive communities.

Overall, the results show that the level of engagement depends not only on the volume of interactions recorded but also on their nature. Platforms that facilitate two-way communication and sustained participation foster longer-lasting relationships between users and the video game, whereas those oriented towards rapid content dissemination stand out for their ability to expand reach and attract new audiences.

These interaction patterns reinforce the idea that digital platforms perform differentiated functions within the video game communication ecosystem. While TikTok primarily acts as a mechanism for attraction and discovery, Twitch fosters the consolidation of active communities and the strengthening of engagement, providing the empirical basis for identifying the relational configurations presented in the following section.

4.5. RELATIONAL CONFIGURATIONS IDENTIFIED

The comparative analysis of platforms, video games, and interaction patterns identified three relational configurations that synthesise the main communication dynamics observed in the video game digital ecosystem. These configurations do not represent rigid or mutually exclusive stages, but functional patterns describing how platforms, content creators, and user communities jointly contribute to value creation and the strengthening of engagement.

The first configuration corresponds to the discovery configuration, characterised by the predominance of content aimed at maximising video game visibility and attracting new users. In this configuration, TikTok plays a central role due to the high dissemination capacity of its short-form audiovisual content and the operation of its recommendation algorithms. The interaction observed is predominantly passive or reactive, prioritising reach, virality, and audience acquisition over the construction of lasting relationships.

The second configuration identified is the evaluation configuration, in which users engage in processes of comparison, learning, and information exchange before or during their gaming experience. The results show that Twitch is particularly relevant at this stage because it supports extended broadcasts, gameplay demonstrations, strategic analyses, and continuous interaction between creators and audiences. Consequently, engagement ceases to depend exclusively on content consumption and is instead sustained by processes of participation and collective knowledge construction.

Finally, the third configuration corresponds to the retention configuration, where the main objective is to maintain community interest and strengthen relationships among the different actors in the digital ecosystem. Active interactions, sustained participation,

and the development of stable ties among users, content creators, and the video game predominate in this configuration. The results suggest that these dynamics favour the consolidation of more cohesive digital communities and contribute to extending the communicative life cycle of the video game beyond the initial moment of acquisition or consumption.

Table 7 summarises the main characteristics of the relational configurations identified during the analysis.

Table 7. Relational configurations identified in the video game communication ecosystem

Relational configuration	Predominant communication objective	Predominant platform	Predominant interaction type	Content creator role	Value generated
Discovery	Attract the attention of new users and increase video game visibility	<i>TikTok</i>	Passive / Reactive	Disseminator and endorser	Reach, awareness, and attraction of new players
Evaluation	Provide information, learning, and comparison before or during the gaming experience	<i>Twitch</i>	Reactive / Active	Demonstrator and facilitator	Trust, learning, and strengthened engagement
Retention	Consolidate the community and maintain users' continued participation	<i>Twitch*</i>	Active	Community facilitator	Loyalty, sense of belonging, and community continuity

*Retention may be complemented by other platforms oriented towards community management (e.g., Discord), although these are not part of the analysed sample.

Source: Authors' own elaboration.

The configurations identified show that digital platforms do not act in isolation but as complementary elements within the same communication ecosystem. Each contributes differently to the user's relational journey, performing specific functions that range from initial acquisition to the consolidation of active communities. In this sense, the analysis suggests that the value generated depends not only on the individual characteristics of each platform but on the functional interaction established among them.

These results constitute the empirical basis for the relational model proposed in this research, developed in the following section. The model integrates the configurations identified into an explanatory structure that makes it possible to jointly understand the relationships among platforms, content creators, users, and video games, offering a broader interpretation of digital communication within the video game ecosystem.

4.6. THE PROPOSED RELATIONAL MODEL

The results obtained make it possible to propose a relational model that integrates the configurations identified during the comparative analysis and provides a joint interpretation of how the video game communication ecosystem operates. Unlike approaches centred on the isolated study of a platform or a single type of interaction, the model proposes that value creation occurs through the functional articulation of different digital spaces, each of which plays a specific role in the relationship among the video game, content creators, and the user community.

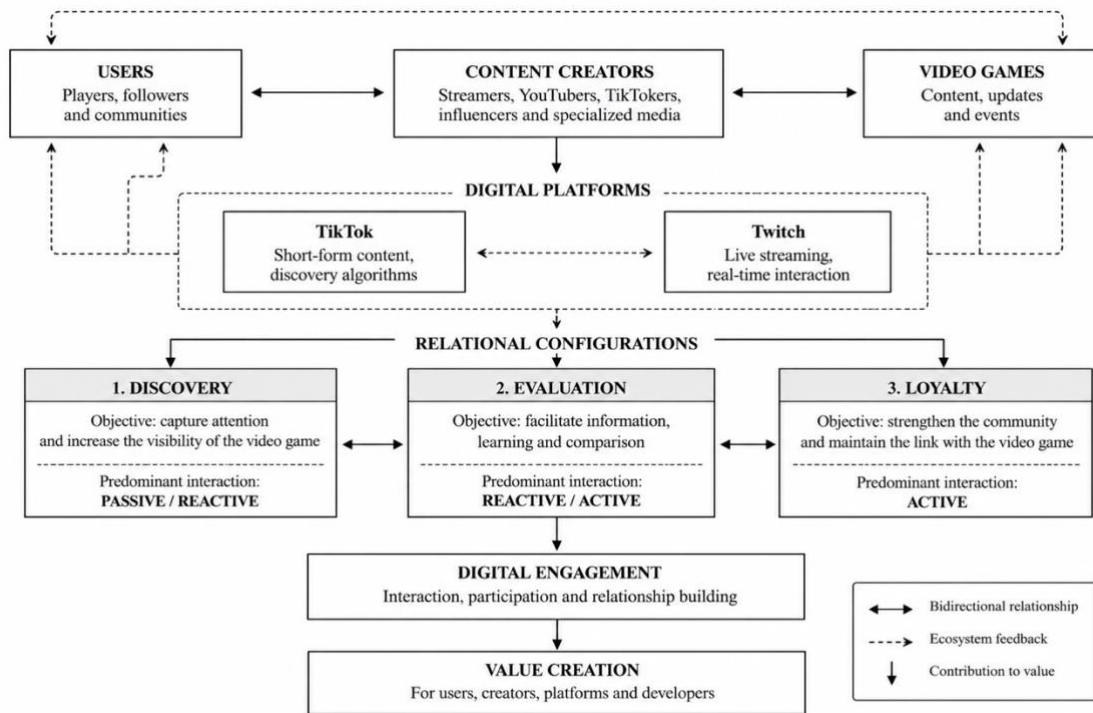
As shown in the preceding sections, the platforms analysed do not compete to perform the same communicative function but contribute complementarily to different moments in the user's relational journey. In this sense, TikTok primarily acts as a space for discovery and dissemination, facilitating the acquisition of new audiences through short, highly shareable content with strong viral potential. Twitch, in turn, assumes a predominant role in the evaluation and retention stages by facilitating learning processes, sustained interaction, and community building around the video game.

The proposed relational model is based on the premise that engagement should not be understood as the result of a single interaction but as a dynamic process constructed through multiple relationships among platforms, content creators, and users. From this perspective, the value generated lies not exclusively in the technical characteristics of each platform but in the ecosystem's capacity to connect differentiated communicative functions that jointly foster player attraction, participation, and retention.

Figure 2 graphically represents this conceptual proposal, showing the relationship among the discovery, evaluation, and retention configurations identified during the analysis. The model shows that these configurations are not necessarily linear or

mutually exclusive stages, but complementary processes that can develop simultaneously and reinforce one another depending on the dynamics of each community and the communication strategies implemented by the different ecosystem actors.

Figure 2. Proposed relational model for the video game communication ecosystem



Source: Authors' own elaboration.

From a theoretical perspective, the model extends traditional approaches to digital communication in video games by shifting the focus from individual platforms to the functional relationships established among them. This approach makes it possible to integrate contributions from digital marketing, virtual community studies, and the literature on participatory platforms within a common analytical framework, providing a broader interpretation of the processes through which engagement is constructed in digital environments.

From a practical perspective, the model provides a useful tool for designing communication strategies in the video game industry. Rather than conceiving each platform as an independent channel, developers and marketing managers can plan coordinated actions that leverage the specific strengths of each digital space,

articulating strategies aimed at acquiring new users, generating trust, and consolidating active communities. This integrated view is particularly relevant in a context characterised by increasing audience fragmentation and the coexistence of multiple platforms with differentiated communicative functions.

Overall, the relational model constitutes the main conceptual contribution of this research, offering an explanatory framework that integrates the empirical evidence obtained with the main theoretical approaches to digital communication and video game marketing. Its analytical nature facilitates understanding relationships among platforms, content creators, and user communities, while providing a basis for future research aimed at testing and extending its application to other video game genres, digital platforms, or creative-economy sectors.

4.7. SYNTHESIS OF THE MAIN FINDINGS

The comparative analysis conducted in this study identified a set of communication patterns that contribute to understanding the operation of the video game digital ecosystem from a relational perspective. Overall, the results show that digital platforms do not perform homogeneous functions but specialise in different communication processes that, complementarily, foster digital engagement and value creation for the different actors involved.

First, the results demonstrate the functional specialisation of platforms. While TikTok primarily concentrates content aimed at discovery and the acquisition of new users through highly viral dynamics, Twitch has a greater presence of content linked to evaluation, learning, and community retention. This differentiation confirms that both platforms perform complementary functions within the user's relational journey.

Second, the comparison among the video games analysed shows that, although the three communities share a similar communication structure, differences exist in the intensity with which the different communicative functions are manifested. These variations appear to be associated with the characteristics of each video game, its content-update model, and the type of community formed around each title.

Third, the analysis of interaction patterns shows that engagement depends not only on the quantity of interactions generated but also on their nature. Platforms that facilitate sustained participation and two-way communication foster deeper forms of involvement, whereas those oriented towards rapid content consumption stand out for their ability to increase visibility and attract new audiences.

Finally, integrating these results made it possible to identify three relational configurations—discovery, evaluation, and retention—which synthesise the main dynamics observed during the analysis. These configurations constitute functional patterns describing how platforms, content creators, and user communities interact in generating engagement and value creation within the video game communication ecosystem.

Overall, the findings provide a consistent empirical basis for the relational model proposed in this research and allow for a broader interpretation of the communication processes analysed. Based on these results, the following chapter explores their theoretical and practical implications, contrasting them with previous literature and discussing their contribution to the study of digital communication and video game marketing.

5. DISCUSSION

The results obtained make it possible to interpret the video game communication ecosystem from a relational perspective, moving beyond approaches focused exclusively on the isolated analysis of digital platforms. While much of the literature has studied the role of social networks such as TikTok, Twitch, or YouTube independently, the findings of this research suggest that value creation and digital engagement emerge from functional interaction among platforms, content creators, developers, and gaming communities.

5.1. INTERPRETATION OF THE RELATIONAL MODEL

One of the main findings of the study is the identification of a relational model explaining how different digital platforms perform complementary functions within the video

game ecosystem. The results show that platforms do not necessarily compete to fulfil the same communicative function but specialise in different dynamics that, jointly, foster user attraction, participation, and retention.

In this regard, TikTok stands out as a space oriented towards discovery and visibility, facilitating the acquisition of new audiences through short and highly viralisable content. In contrast, Twitch assumes a predominant role in evaluation and retention processes by facilitating live broadcasts, sustained interaction, and community building around the video game.

The three relational configurations identified—discovery, evaluation, and retention—should not be understood as rigid or sequential stages, but as functional patterns that can coexist and reinforce one another. Users may discover new content while maintaining high participation in already established communities or seek additional information before deepening their gaming experience. From this perspective, digital engagement is configured as a dynamic and continuous process resulting from interaction among multiple actors and platforms.

The proposed relational model therefore broadens understanding of the video game communication ecosystem by shifting the focus from individual platforms to the functional relationships established among them.

5.2. THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

This study makes several contributions to the study of digital communication and video game marketing.

First, it proposes an integrative conceptual framework connecting contributions from digital marketing, participatory culture, platform studies, and the engagement literature. Rather than addressing these approaches independently, the relational model shows how they converge to explain value generation within the video game communication ecosystem.

Second, it introduces the concept of relational configuration as an intermediate analytical unit that makes it possible to connect observable communication practices

with value-creation processes. This perspective facilitates understanding engagement not as the result of a single interaction but as an emergent phenomenon derived from coordination among platforms, content creators, and user communities.

Third, the results suggest that the effectiveness of digital communication depends not exclusively on the individual performance of each platform but on the functional complementarity among them. This represents a contribution relative to previous studies, which have tended to evaluate the impact of each social network independently.

Finally, although the study focuses on the video game sector, the relational model has potential for transfer to other areas of the cultural and creative industries characterised by the coexistence of multiple digital platforms and participatory communities.

5.3. IMPLICATIONS FOR THE VIDEO GAME INDUSTRY

The results obtained also have relevant implications for developers, publishers, and digital marketing professionals.

First, the research highlights the value of designing coordinated communication strategies across different platforms rather than planning isolated actions for each social network. Each platform provides specific value within the relationship-building process with players, and its effectiveness depends to a large extent on how it is integrated with the rest of the communication ecosystem.

Likewise, the results highlight the strategic importance of content creators as intermediaries between companies and gaming communities. Their role goes beyond video game promotion, contributing to the generation of trust, facilitating learning, stimulating participation, and strengthening ties between users and the brand.

From this perspective, the most effective communication strategies will be those capable of combining actions aimed at acquiring new players with initiatives designed to consolidate active communities and maintain stable long-term relationships.

5.4. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

As with any research, this study presents certain limitations that should be considered when interpreting the results.

First, the analysis was conducted on a purposive sample of sixty units corresponding to three video games and two digital platforms. Although this selection allowed for an in-depth comparative analysis, future research could expand the number of cases, incorporate other video game genres, and consider new digital platforms.

Second, the study adopts a qualitative methodology based on structured content analysis. The incorporation of quantitative methodologies, longitudinal designs, or mixed approaches would make it possible to empirically test the relationships identified and examine their evolution over time.

Finally, the research focuses on content published openly on digital platforms without incorporating real user behavioural data. Future studies could complement this approach through interviews, surveys, platform metrics, or digital analytics techniques that would allow deeper investigation of engagement-generation processes.

Despite these limitations, the study provides an analytical framework that contributes to understanding digital communication in video game ecosystems and offers a conceptual basis for future research interested in analysing value creation from a relational and multi-platform perspective.

6. CONCLUSIONS

The transformation of the digital ecosystem has profoundly changed the ways in which video games communicate with their audiences, shifting the focus from strategies centred on individual channels towards participatory environments in which digital platforms, content creators, and user communities interact continuously. In this context, the present study analysed the communicative functions performed by TikTok and Twitch around Fortnite, League of Legends, and Genshin Impact, with the aim of understanding how these interactions contribute to the generation of digital engagement and value creation within the video game communication ecosystem.

The results show that the platforms analysed perform differentiated but complementary functions. While TikTok stands out for its ability to foster discovery and expand content reach through viral dynamics, Twitch emerges as a particularly relevant space for evaluation, learning, and community retention through more intensive and sustained forms of interaction. These findings show that the effectiveness of digital communication depends not only on the performance of each platform in isolation but on how their functions are articulated within a single ecosystem.

The main contribution of this research lies in identifying three relational configurations—discovery, evaluation, and retention—and developing a relational model that integrates these configurations into a common explanatory framework. In contrast to approaches that analyse digital platforms as independent channels, the proposed model interprets digital engagement as a relational and dynamic process emerging from interaction among platforms, content creators, developers, and user communities. From this perspective, value creation is no longer understood as the result of isolated communication actions but as an emergent property of the digital ecosystem as a whole.

From a theoretical perspective, the study contributes to the literature on digital communication, video game marketing, and platform ecosystems by proposing an integrative perspective connecting concepts from digital marketing, participatory culture, and platform studies. It also introduces relational configurations as an analytical unit for understanding how different communicative functions combine to foster digital engagement and value creation. In this way, the research extends platform-centred approaches and offers a conceptual framework applicable to the analysis of other digital ecosystems characterised by interaction among multiple actors.

From a professional perspective, the results suggest that organisations in the sector should design coordinated communication strategies across platforms, leveraging the specific strengths of each rather than optimising them independently. Integrated planning of actions oriented towards discovery, evaluation, and retention may contribute to strengthening community participation, increasing user engagement, and fostering more sustainable relationships between brands and their audiences. The study

also highlights the strategic role of content creators as intermediaries capable of facilitating trust generation, information circulation, and the consolidation of digital communities.

Nevertheless, the results should be interpreted in light of the study's limitations. The research is based on a purposive sample of sixty units of analysis corresponding to three video games and two digital platforms, and its conclusions are therefore not intended to be statistically generalisable. In addition, the analysis focuses on public content and does not incorporate information on actual user behaviour or quantitative performance indicators. Consequently, future research could expand the number of platforms and video games analysed, incorporate longitudinal designs and mixed methodologies, and integrate digital analytics metrics, interviews, or surveys to test and extend the proposed relational model.

In conclusion, this study shows that value creation in video game communication ecosystems depends not only on presence across digital platforms but on the ability to articulate functional relationships among the different actors participating in them. By positioning digital engagement as a relational and ecosystem-based process, the research offers a new perspective for understanding digital communication in the video game industry and establishes a conceptual basis that can guide future research on participatory ecosystems and multi-platform communication strategies in the cultural and creative industries.

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8. CONTRIBUTION

	Author 1
Conceptualisation	X
Data curation	X
Formal analysis	X
Investigation	X
Methodology	X
Supervision	X
Validation	X
Visualisation	X
Writing (draft)	X
Writing (review and editing)	X

9. CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The undersigned author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

10. DECLARATION OF USE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

The author declares having used artificial intelligence as a support tool for reviewing, improving, and reformulating the manuscript's wording. The final content has been reviewed and validated by the author.

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