



ANIME STREAMING PLATFORM WARS

A PLATFORM LAB REPORT



edited by Aurélie Petit





ANIME STREAMING PLATFORM WARS: A PLATFORM LAB REPORT

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A WORD FROM THE PLATFORM LAB DIRECTOR

Marc Steinberg

This report is the first of several planned public-facing reports that will interrogate aspects of platformization and its cultural impacts. This first report tackles streaming platforms from the angle of anime, one of the prime *contents* used to gather viewers and subscribers, and their dollars and data. A second will examine so-called “super apps” – apps that do everything from chatting with friends to digital payments to taxi services to news – to track their impact on cultural production, economic power, and everyday life. These are part of The Platform Lab mandate to examine platformization’s impact on Asia and Asian cultural production in particular. This mandate also means looking at how these mediators called platforms make cultural forms circulate outside of Asia. The year 2021 was marked by the phenomenon of *Squid Game*, the South Korean TV series that was Netflix’s most popular release to date. Before *Squid Game* (and indeed after it as well), Netflix and others focused their strategies around the anime market and the global demand for anime. It’s this circulation of anime by transnational platforms that is the focus here, in a report edited by Aurélie Petit.

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Aurélie Petit and Marc Steinberg

Japanese animation, or anime, is crucial to video streaming. Over the past decade, anime has become one of the prime axes around which competition over viewers has been fought; from Netflix to Amazon Prime Video to Crunchyroll and Funimation, providing anime offerings has become a major selling point for streaming platforms. This report offers an overview of the current state of streaming, with a focus on the business practices and marketing strategies of anime streaming platforms, anime-focused or not, in North America, and more specifically in the U.S. Over the past year, the Platform Lab members have researched anime as part of the Media and Animation Platforms initiative. What follows is one outcome of this research initiative.

This Platform Lab Report explores six brands that are streaming anime: Crunchyroll, Funimation, Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, HIDive, and RetroCrush, in order to deliver a comprehensive, if not exhaustive, analysis of anime's curation and distribution on streaming platforms in North America. The purpose of this study is to address the rush, over the past decade, for streaming platforms to invest in anime and its audience, up to the point where anime has become a necessary market to take into account when discussing the global streaming ecology.

Indeed, due to anime's rise in popularity, its dedicated and engaged fan bases, and the way in which subbed and dubbed anime content "travels well" internationally, anime as both an aesthetic form and a market—valued at US\$24 billion worldwide, half of which from outside Japan—has increasingly come to be seen as a strategic component of the 'streaming wars' with the power to attract and retain these sizeable transnational audiences, their data, their revenue, and the word-of-mouth promotion and increased brand recognition that is a product of passionate fandom discourse production.

By understanding anime distribution in the U.S. beyond fan practices, this project allowed us to not only size this multi-billion dollar industry and its actors, but also to rethink who actually benefits from the unpaid labor that has traditionally intertwined with anime distribution outside of Japan: while anime is such a lucrative medium, why does the discourse of anime dissemination continue to be one centering DIY practices, such as fansubbing and fan-led projects? Of course, such a question can and has to be answered at different levels. Among the companies we studied here, some were started as unbranded platforms by fans, such as anime giant Crunchyroll; its transition to a for-profit company has to be understood as part of this history and cannot be strictly separated from its early beginnings.

The first section of this paper examines three platforms that use anime-related media as part of an "anime economic zone," as Nakayama Atsuo terms it.¹ The anime economic zone or media mix franchising strategy situates anime as always part of a larger media ecology.² From figures to social messaging stickers to novelizations,

anime is dependent on a complexly intertwined milieu, ecology, or zone. This legacy impacts how streaming firms approach anime. Crunchyroll, Funimation, and HiDive all address anime as part of a larger media ecology. Crunchyroll and Funimation especially are also some of the earliest dedicated anime streamers, emerging out of the practice of torrenting prevalent during the first decade of 2000s. Although not discussed here, the impact of pirate streaming giant KissAnime, closed in August 2020 after copyright claims, must be noted while discussing anime successes on branded streaming platforms.

The second section looks at anime as a stand-alone commodity. Here we turn to the two largest global streaming giants, Netflix and Amazon Prime Video, both of which have committed significant funds to securing exclusive licensing rights outside Japan. These platforms tend to treat anime as a stand-alone entity. Similarly, RetroCrush, the anime streaming market's latest addition, can be thought of as itself an anime stand-alone: the platform is part of a bigger platform conglomerate owned by Digital Media Rights. Digital Media Rights sustains its distribution model by acquiring licensing rights, disseminated across its platforms.

The rise of streaming is part of a longer reconfiguration of anime from a broadcasting era (1960s), to the video and DVD era (1980s~), to the current streaming era (2010s~). Streaming anime has been crucial for battles over subscriber numbers, eyeballs, and capital. It has also had an impact on the anime industry itself. While not addressed directly here, the milieu of anime production in Japan has similarly been in flux, with the streamers courting rights holders for distribution rights outside of Japan. This attention has shifted the economics of anime production away from video software (DVD and Blu-Ray) and franchising or media mix practices towards being fully reliant on licensing fees to recoup production costs. Like the story told here, anime has also been essential for attracting subscribers in Japan. One study notes that "Japanese anime is a defining feature of online video streaming in Japan, driving over 40% of consumption on both Prime Video and Netflix."¹³ The story of streaming's impact on anime production and the state of streaming in Japan and the Asia Pacific will have to be addressed on another occasion.

As a mostly anglophone research group based in a North American university, the choice of studying North American anime consumption presented itself organically, although we still wish to bring light on two other geographical contexts that were accessible to us by our members: Brazil and France. We hope that this brief incursion into Crunchyroll's Brazilian and French strategies will contribute to the delocalization of anime studies from North America, while understanding how the American company had to work around regional specificities.

We hope readers find this overview helpful. Streaming is a complex field, increasingly determining cultural consumption and production. This is a first foray into anime's place in this complex field, with more to come.

THE ANIME ECONOMIC ZONE

CRUNCHYROLL

Jacqueline Ristola

This section examines the anime streaming platform Crunchyroll and its place in global streaming platforms economies. It focuses on the recent purchase of Crunchyroll by Sony Pictures Entertainment, as it helps demonstrate the current contours of the anime streaming market, its history, and its fierce competition.



Tower of Druaga: The Aegis of Uruk (2008)

HISTORY

Founded in 2006 by graduates of University of California Berkeley, Crunchyroll.com is a for-profit streaming site based in the United States that specializes in streaming anime, animated television series and films from Japan. The site has an unusual history compared to most streaming platforms as it started as a piracy site hosting fan-uploaded videos. Such content also included Anime Music Videos (AMVs), fan-made edits of anime set to music or other audio; fan-subtitled anime (fansubs); and other fan recirculated ephemera such as

game trailers and Japanese music videos.

In 2007, Crunchyroll began its transition as a professional streaming platform, receiving venture capital in December 2007. By April 2008, Crunchyroll was streaming their first legally licensed series, *The Tower of Druaga: The Aegis of Uruk* and *Blassreiter*, from Studio Gonzo. By January 2009, after announcing a new deal with TV Tokyo, the site committed to removing all pirated content. Since then, Crunchyroll has grown internationally as the largest legal streaming anime site. Crunchyroll's unique assets at the time were simulcasts, offering subtitled releases of recently aired anime episodes within a day of their broadcast in Japan. Crunchyroll now co-produces a large number of anime, which guarantees them streaming rights, and the company announced their own slate of "Crunchyroll Originals" (similar to the Netflix Originals production) in 2020, produced "in house" by Crunchyroll Studios. Many of the dozen anime titles announced have been released exclusively to Crunchyroll, with more set to debut within the next year or two.

As the platform received more company investments from such corporations as The Chernin Group and TV Tokyo, and later total acquisition by AT&T, Crunchyroll's profile has only increased. The site's expansive growth since 2006 includes up to over 70 million registered users, 3 million paid subscribers, translations of anime into a dozen languages, and services in over 200 countries and territories.⁴

SONY ACQUISITION

Sony began talks to purchase Crunchyroll from WarnerMedia beginning in August 2020. WarnerMedia's parent company, AT&T, seeking to reduce its significant debts accrued from recent spectrum auctions and its merger with WarnerMedia in 2018, reportedly asked for US\$1.5 billion.⁵ By December 2020, a deal was reached, with WarnerMedia selling Crunchyroll to Sony for US\$1.175 billion.⁶

This is part of a longer play by Sony to consolidate the global anime streaming market. Sony bought US-based anime dubbing and distribution company Funimation in 2017 (see the Funimation section for more info). In 2019, Sony combined their multiple streaming services—France's Wakanim, Australia's Madman Anime Group, and Funimation—under the joint ownership of Aniplex and Sony Pictures Television, and the leadership of Funimation's General Manager, Colin Decker.⁷

This is not the first time Funimation and Crunchyroll will be working together. Before the Sony acquisition of Funimation in 2017, Crunchyroll and Funimation had a cross-licensing deal from 2016-2018. This brief partnership entailed sharing anime streaming titles across the platforms, Funimation offering dubs of Crunchyroll shows, and Crunchyroll offering subtitled versions of Funimation licensed series.

DOJ INQUIRY

In late March 2021, news broke that the United States Department of Justice had launched an antitrust probe into the Crunchyroll deal.⁸ Reportedly, the DOJ concerns are around consolidation, and whether “overseas anime studios will be at a disadvantage with fewer distinct platforms to choose from for distribution.” Variety media analyst Kevin Tran expresses doubts whether the DOJ's concerns are warranted, given Netflix and Amazon Prime Video's investments in anime streaming.⁹ Netflix, for example, announced in late March 2021 that it will be releasing a whopping 40 new anime series on its platform this year.¹⁰ That big streaming players like Netflix and Amazon Prime Video (which experimented with its own anime-focused streaming add-on channel in 2017—see our Amazon Prime Video section for more info) continue to invest significantly into anime content—including platform exclusive series—lends credence to the argument that this DOJ inquiry is overblown.

While the attention to the larger streaming platforms and their investments into the anime streaming market is warranted, it's also important to note the smaller, anime-centric streaming sites such as HiDive and RetroCrush. These too have some platform exclusive titles, and illustrate a wider variety of anime streaming options available to the general public.

Crunchyroll is a North American streaming anime platform with a diversified portfolio and a global reach in Europe, South America, South East Asia and more, with branches focused on mobile games, manga, and live events. The company also recently became majority owner of Viz Media Europe Group in 2019, the top anime and manga distributor in Europe.¹¹ Therefore, Sony's acquisition is not just a play into the US market (this was already done through their Funimation acquisition), but

rather, a global play, in particular securing streaming in Europe and dominating the global streaming anime market. On August 9, 2021, Sony completed its acquisition of Crunchyroll for US\$1.175 billion through its consolidated Funimation group.¹²

DELIVERY AND CURATION

While a lot of attention on Crunchyroll has been focused on content, not much is done on its delivery or curation. In terms of delivery, the platform not only has substantial content libraries of anime, but standardized anime streaming industry practices to deliver it quickly to eager consumers with simulcasts and simuldubs. This standard is similarly followed by Funimation. These practices are attentive to contemporary fan practices of weekly watercooler discussions on forums and social media. This quick delivery is also in part a necessity to get ahead of fan-subtitled and circulated torrents of anime. This delivery model is also distinct from Netflix's model of releasing episodes all at once, which has infamously frustrated anime fans in their delayed release, often driving them to pirate currently airing anime instead.¹³

In terms of curation, Crunchyroll understands anime's niche and its fan practices. Anime conventions, for example, are a key space where anime fans express their fandom and consume merchandise, and both Crunchyroll and Funimation have had their footprint in these spaces for a while. Funimation, for instance, is usually present at anime conventions with panels and merch tables, while Crunchyroll began hosting their own annual Expo starting in 2017.

It remains to be seen how Funimation and Crunchyroll's expertise in the anime fandom will play out post-acquisition. It is this author's opinion that continuing to embrace these fan practices, rather than flattening them out with a corporate veneer, will be a boon to continuing to connect with these consumers, of which fans make up a large part.

CONCLUSION

The purchase of Crunchyroll illustrates that it is much more than just one streaming platform changing hands. Rather, it is about the strategic consolidation of the global anime streaming market by Sony, and the understanding of anime distribution as a driving force in terms of revenue.

Aurélie Petit

As mentioned before, for the last few years, Crunchyroll has expanded its reach well beyond the North American realm. By looking at the company's implementation and distribution strategies in two foreign, non-Anglophone territories, Brazil and France, we wish to paint a broader portrait of its activities in markets that are often overlooked in analysis of the platform. Moreover, this focus allows us to understand the global strategy developed by Crunchyroll to become an international brand, whether it means adapting to a country specific viewing practices (Brazil) or acquiring local companies under the Crunchyroll and Funimation umbrella (France).

Before Crunchyroll announced its arrival in France in October 2013, the French anime streaming market already had important players, strengthened by the country's historical relationship with anime and manga culture since the 1980s. This section will explore Crunchyroll implementation in France and its collaboration with local streaming platforms before and after its arrival.

FRENCH ANIME STREAMING MARKET

In 2009, French manga and video publishing company Kazé announced its own streaming platform KZplay,¹⁴ which offered anime dubbed and/or subbed in French such as *Cobra the Animation*, as well as simulcast anime series like *The Book of Bantorra*, *Kobato* and *Sound of the Sky*, for €6.99 per month. Anime episodes could also be purchased individually for €0.99 per episode. KZplay was the streaming platform of cable channel KZTV, which was owned by Japanese group VizMedia Europe since the company bought Kazé in 2010, closely following Kazé's announcement in 2009 that the company was being bought by Japanese companies Shōgakukan and Shūeisha (VizMedia Europe owners).¹⁵ The cable channel opened in July 2009 and ended in March 2017.



Tatoku Shicho:
*The Book of
Bantorra* (2009)

From 2009 to 2013, Belgium company Dybex streamed an episode of *Time of Eve* subtitled in French on its website for free, in collaboration with Crunchyroll. Soon after, Dybex started to offer simulcast subtitled episodes of *Fullmetal Alchemist: Brotherhood* on its Dailymotion channel to counteract pirating practices.¹⁶

In July 2012, French publishing company Kana Home Video (owned by Franco-Belgium company Media Participations through Citel) started a partnership with Crunchyroll to fund the Genzai streaming platform. For €5.99 per month, subscribers had access to popular anime from the Kana Home Video catalogue such as *Naruto Shippuden*, *Fairy Tail* and *Hunter x Hunter*.¹⁷ However, in September 2013 Kana

announced the fusion of Genzai and KZplay to start together a new platform under the name Anime Digital Network (ADN).¹⁸ For €6.99 per month or €59.99 per year, ADN subscribers had access to anime in simulcast, and subbed and/or dubbed versions in French. Thanks to Kana and Kaza's catalogue, ADN hosted popular anime such as the ones aforementioned, and also *Boruto*, *One Piece*, *Bleach*, *My Hero Academia*, *Food Wars*, and *Kuroko's Basket*.



Kobato (2009)

CRUNCHYROLL ARRIVAL

The fusion of Genzai and KZplay was not surprising as Crunchyroll announced its arrival in France in October 2013,¹⁹ as part of the platform's European implementation strategy (Crunchyroll Spain and Portugal were started earlier in May), therefore ending its previous partnership with Genzai to use Crunchyroll French streaming rights to anime into its own branded platform. In its press release, Crunchyroll announced that users with a previous Genzai account just needed to

sign up with their existing account on the platform.²⁰

In September 2019, Crunchyroll became the major investor of Viz Media Europe, and the intertwined relationships between France's main anime streaming platforms became more apparent than ever. In April 2020, Viz Media Europe SAS announced it will be renamed Crunchyroll SAS, meaning all brands previously owned by Viz Media Europe (including Kazé and AND) are now Crunchyroll brands.²¹

In a similar fashion to Crunchyroll, Funimation has also become an active actor in the French anime streaming landscape. French entertainment company Wakanim streamed for free its first anime in 2010, *The World God Only Knows*.²² Once Japanese company Aniplex became the main shareholder of Wakanim in 2015, the streaming platform started to propose monthly subscriptions offering an enhanced viewing experience for €5 per month. In 2017, they announced that the subscription offer will be reinforced, limiting free users with ads and slow definition video. In September 2019, Aniplex announced it will start a collaboration with Sony Pictures Television and therefore Funimation.²³

CONCLUSION

These collaborations under the umbrella of American companies raise the question of the possibility for French anime streaming platforms to not only exist but to remain independent. However, the arrival of dominant platforms like Netflix and Amazon render essential collaboration between independent and big companies to acquire licencing rights.

Elena Altheman

This section will explore Crunchyroll's operation in Brazil,²⁴ which officially started in 2012. It will mostly focus on issues of translation (dubbing and subbing) and the platform's diverse strategies to consolidate a particular national market with an extensive tradition of TV broadcasting and media piracy.

HISTORY

Crunchyroll started its Brazilian operations in 2012, offering 30 of its series (including new simulcasts) with Brazilian-Portuguese language support.²⁵ It is important to underscore that the service was not offered with European-Portuguese subtitles, thus marking Crunchyroll's efforts to localize its products within the specific market it was aiming for from the start. The announcement on Crunchyroll's blog emphasized not only the extent of Brazil's online presence, arguing it was the "5th largest internet market in the world"²⁶ at the time, but also the size of the Japanese-Brazilian population and the amount of "otaku running around" in the country.



Yamada-kun to
7-nin no Majo
(2015)

Indeed, Brazil houses the largest community of Japanese descendants outside of Japan in the world²⁷ and routinely holds anime and pop culture conventions with vast numbers of attendees.²⁸ Anime has always been present in the Brazilian cultural landscape, with the practice of fansubbing being one of the main resources for watching anime in the late 1980s and early 1990s with the circulation of pirate VHS tapes, which remained in practice with digital formats. Brazilian TV soon caught hold of the animated format's popularity, and in 1994 the now-extinct Rede Manchete started to broadcast *Saint Seiya* (1986), which is considered one of anime's first big hits in Brazil. Other networks such as the powerful TV Globo also had programming blocks dedicated to anime, mainly oriented towards a child audience. Bracketed with children, anime was then primarily dubbed at the time, which led the few voice actors in the country towards a type of "stardom."²⁹ However, by the mid 2000s, anime programming started to wane, and by 2010 there were barely a handful of shows broadcasted on TV.³⁰ It is within this context that Crunchyroll entered the country.



Rokka no Yuusha
(2015)

STRATEGIES

“Cover yourselves in festive carnival beads and feathers and start dancing the samba!” is the opening sentence for the official announcement of Crunchyroll’s Brazilian division in its blog.³¹ Initially drawing from tired stereotypes regarding Brazilian culture³², the platform’s strategy of catering to local audiences can be seen

in several of its business strategies in the country. Crunchyroll Brazil’s Portuguese Region Lead, the person responsible for the entirety of the Portuguese-language market is Yuri Petnys, who was involved as a teen with fansubbing anime.³³ The strategic placement of someone with a personal involvement with anime and knowledge of its diverse circulatory practices proved a vital decision for the platform.

Under Petnys, Crunchyroll was influential in reviving the practice of dubbing anime in Brazil in 2017, with three shows: *Rokka no Yuusha*, *Yamada-kun to 7-nin no Majo* and *Schwarzes Marken*.³⁴ According to Petnys, dubbing’s comeback followed the platform’s “international strategy” since dubbed shows are highly requested, and after a positive response of the Brazilian public, they felt “safe to continue the endeavor”.

Another important—and the first of its kind—strategy employed in Brazil to secure a wider market share was Crunchyroll’s partnership with national TV networks, which further helped to consolidate its approach to Brazilian-Portuguese dubbing.³⁵ First with weekend hour-blocks on Rede Brasil (RBTv) in 2018,³⁶ followed by the 2020 deal with Loading TV, which will broadcast more than 50 shows spread throughout its programming, this particular procedure seems pivotal in a country in which the overwhelming majority of the population own TV sets.³⁷

CONCLUSION

Crunchyroll’s approach for entering the Brazilian anime market is based on the platform’s “international strategy,” which focuses on local culture and customs in order to better localize its products and find wider audiences, encountering in translation and localization practices a good recourse to engage its target audience, the Brazilian anime viewers.

Santino Ciarma

This section situates the anime streaming platform Funimation as a dominant player in the global streaming platform economy. It focuses on the company's recent acquisition by Sony Pictures Television, and how Funimation's history as a distribution and licensing company has continued to inform its approach to global expansion. Furthermore, it highlights Sony strategies in becoming a major player in the anime streaming market.

HISTORY

Funimation's role in the history of anime's North American expansion is critical as the company is principally responsible for bringing some of the most renowned anime titles to America after its founding in 1994. Its initial success came from the relationships formed with anime production studios and committees in Japan, and the professional dubbing and localizing that allowed the licensing of these acquisitions to American broadcasting companies who then centered entire TV blocks dedicated to anime content. Following the overwhelming success of *Dragon Ball Z* on the newly launched Cartoon Network in 1998, Funimation expanded its revenue to home video sales, figurines, and toys, partnering with Bandai and Pioneer. Within a few years, Funimation had amassed US\$65 million from its initial licenses and acquired more such as *Yu Yu Hakusho* and *Fullmetal Alchemist*, providing continual content for both Cartoon Network's "Toonami" block, and its "Adult Swim" 18+ block, among others.



Yu Yu Hakusho
(1992–94)

MULTIPLATFORM DIGITAL DISTRIBUTION

Funimation's adoption of a digital streaming platform was a much slower one than Crunchyroll. While Funimation streamed select videos on its own website and YouTube channel, its focus remained on securing partnerships and distributing their licensed series to established platforms such as Hulu in 2008,³⁸ Veoh in 2009,³⁹ and Crackle in 2012,⁴⁰ rather than the creation of an independent streaming service. A short-lived joint venture between Funimation and Japanese streaming platform Nico Nico Video resulted in Funico, a streaming platform developed in 2011. This partnership allowed Funimation to acquire more license purchasing power as their joint

venture ensured that licensed titles would be streamed by the established streaming service Niconico and home video releases would be handled by Funimation, a strategy that has proven to be successful.⁴¹

In 2016, Funimation officially launched its own streaming service “Funimation-Now” and announced a partnership with the leading simulcast anime streaming service Crunchyroll to share content through streaming, home video, and acquisitions. This partnership allowed each company to operate its own streaming business with a shared interest in marketing a cohesive “fan experience” and to “grow the brand and monetization capabilities for our licensors,” according to Crunchyroll co-founder Kun Gao.⁴²

SONY ACQUISITION

Sony Pictures Television Networks acquired Funimation in 2017 for US\$143 million, to which Funimation CEO Gen Fukunaga said that Sony’s intentions were to leverage Funimation’s production of subs and dubs and make it a “global sub and dub anime brand.”⁴³ The acquisition effectively strained the partnership with Crunchyroll, due to regional restrictions for streaming rights under the previous deal. At the advice of Sony, Funimation terminated the partnership on November 9th, 2018 in order to expand its global operations, which Fukunaga said Sony had the technology and infrastructure to provide.⁴⁴

Initially under Sony, Funimation’s concerns still did not reflect a desire to consolidate its viewership to a singular subscription based streaming platform, but rather to acquire and distribute licenses, participating within the larger media mix of IP’s. Following the announcement of Hulu’s first-look deal to stream some of Funimation’s simulcasts and simulcasts, Sony Pictures Television’s Chief Digital Officer, Eric Berger, argued that Hulu acted as a “larger footprint” to reach broader audiences with different titles, in different markets and geographies.⁴⁵ Similarly, Funimation established a partnership with China’s largest streaming platform of Japanese anime, bilibili in March 2019 to jointly acquire licenses and share IP rights for broadcast, streaming, home entertainment, games, and merchandise in the US and China.⁴⁶ Following this, Funimation acquired Manga Entertainment Limited, the leading anime distributor in the UK and Ireland in May 2019,⁴⁷ thereby consolidating its licenses into Funimation’s UK business and situating themselves as the UK’s largest distributor of physical anime media, and adding this content to their FunimationNow streaming service (rebranded as Funimation UK in April 2021).⁴⁸

In September 2019, Sony announced that US based Sony Pictures Television, and Japan based Aniplex (another subsidiary of Sony) will unite its businesses under the banner of Funimation Global Group, growing to include France’s Wakanim (see section Crunchyroll France for more info), and Australia’s Madman.⁴⁹ Further global expansion was announced in October 2020, as Funimation will be expanding its streaming service to Brazil and Mexico, and further, would be developing subs and dubs in Spanish and Portuguese.⁵⁰

“ONE SONY” MODEL

Sony and Funimation recognize that their streaming platform is dedicated to an established audience of anime fans willing to pay a subscription fee for an expansive library of simulcast and simulsub content. The December 2020 announcement that Sony is purchasing Crunchyroll from AT&T for US\$1.175 billion⁵¹ shook up the industry, as it would consolidate for the first time the two major players in the digital landscape of anime streaming, raising red flags for the DOJ and initiating an anti-trust inquiry into the deal.⁵² Nevertheless, as of August 9th 2021, the acquisition of Crunchyroll by Sony has been finalized. While the DOJ inquiry did not prevent the merger from going forward, it started a discussion amongst viewers and industry critics on the risks associated with platform conglomeration: monopoly of services, uniformed content, erasure of smaller actors.⁵³

Sony has been amassing a competitive portfolio of international anime streaming platforms through global acquisitions and expansions in order to dominate the global anime streaming market. Anime industry analyst Sudo Tadashi has reported that Sony views anime as an embodiment of their “One Sony” initiative to break down departmental barriers and produce content that benefits the corporation’s music, gaming, film, and television sectors.⁵⁴ Following Sony’s acquisition of Funimation, then Sony CEO Kaz Hirai was particularly “taking stock of all the IP in the group and the PS4 will be at the center.”⁵⁵ Funimation’s founder Gen Fukunaga expressed a similar optimism towards Sony’s acquisition saying that Funimation’s leadership position in anime had been historically established, and that Sony had “direct access to the creative pipeline in Japan...to take Funimation to the next level.”⁵⁶ As but one example, Funimation as a Sony owned entity, has a greater chance of securing the streaming licensing rights to anime of which Sony Music is also a member of the production committee, a joint venture subsidiary company created by various entities with the goal of producing a form of entertainment.⁵⁷

CONCLUSION

It remains to be seen how the recent shake up will play out, though one thing is certain: Sony is positioning themselves as a dominant figure in the global anime streaming market in order to combat the recent resurgence of Netflix and Amazon Prime. Following the completed acquisition of Crunchyroll, Chairman and CEO of Sony Pictures Entertainment Group, Tony Vinciguerra has stated that the goal is to “create a unified anime subscription experience as soon as possible,”⁵⁸ presumably integrating Crunchyroll’s catalog and its over 4 million paying users. Regardless of this unified streaming service’s nomenclature, Sony’s focus remains on curating a large library of simulcast and simulsub content for global anime fans, presenting but one revenue model within Sony’s larger “One Sony” initiative, and an extended branch in Sony’s growing global network.



ANIME AS STAND-ALONE COMMODITIES

Colin Crawford and Elena Altheman

HISTORY & CONTEXT

As a dominant force in international streaming markets and film and television industries, Netflix has come to play an important role in the transnational rise of anime consumption, production, and circulation. Formally and strategically, Netflix's prioritization of dubbing and subtitling anime content increases its ability to circulate transnationally, thus enhancing the potential value and "efficiency" of the same anime content to travel across regional and linguistic markets. While 'efficient content' has been defined as "maximum happiness per dollar spent" according to a former Netflix VP of Product Engineering, it is more accurate to translate "happiness" as user engagement, Netflix's prized metric of user value.⁵⁹ Importantly, the efficiency of the "dollar spent" in this formulation cannot be divorced from the exploitative labour conditions of the anime industry both within Japan and its transnational outsourcing, as anime content is almost always "cheaper" to produce than live-action series.⁶⁰

NETFLIX'S ANIME LICENSING STRATEGY

With the shift to streaming, the entrance of various transnational platforms—Netflix, Hulu, Crunchyroll, Funimation, Amazon—into the Japanese anime industry has become an important revenue source for domestic Japanese production houses and IP rights holders.⁶¹ Netflix in particular has aggressively situated itself within Japan's anime industry, jockeying for distribution rights for "all other markets" outside Japan for many anime titles, and often marketing many of these titles as originals due to these exclusive distribution rights. Netflix has also sought to secure the rights to distribute some of the most well-known titles in anime, such as *Neon Genesis Evangelion*, *Naruto*, and *One Piece*, as well as the films of auteur Miyazaki Hayao's Studio Ghibli films outside of Japan, Canada, and the US—with HBO Max securing American distribution rights as a part of WarnerMedia's own anime strategy.⁶² Alongside acquiring the rights to distribute these classic titles, Netflix is also altering the Japanese anime production and distribution industries through the sheer scale of its investments, creating more demand and pushing anime beyond the aesthetic limits of Japanese broadcast law.⁶³ That said, major production companies in Japan view Netflix as a minor player in the distribution landscape inside Japan, with television broadcasters (which often have their own streaming platforms), ad agencies, and the media mix-inspired production committee system model still being the backbone of the anime industry. With IP-based product development being one of the main income sources for mainstream anime, a streaming-only Netflix model is seen to limit revenue possibilities and impact due to reduced viewership in Japan, which many studios still regard as their primary audience. As industry analyst Sudo Takashi notes, Netflix and Amazon will have to content themselves with licensing major anime works from production committees into the near future.⁶⁴

THE “NETFLIX ORIGINAL ANIME” PRODUCTION STRATEGY

As industry reporter Gavin Blair notes, in recent years Netflix is also directly funding Japanese anime projects more and more through its gargantuan content budget which is estimated to reach US\$17 Billion in 2021. This model bypasses the production committee system in the Japanese anime industry, where traditionally anywhere from five to fifteen companies negotiate projects for television broadcast in Japan, sharing their risks and costs. Netflix’s provision of budgets “up-front” increasingly eliminates this committee process by taking on many of those costs and risks in efforts to channel and accelerate anime production and transnational circulation through streaming on Netflix. This also transforms the habitual reliance of anime on the production and circulation of ancillary goods, reducing the importance of the “media mix” system for some Netflix-produced anime. By contrast, many traditional mainstream animation production companies decline to adopt Netflix’s model of financing, seeing it as producing animation for a very limited international audience, with little domestic viewing (Netflix is estimated to have 5 million subscribers in Japan).⁶⁵ Companies such as Toei Animation prefer instead to continue producing animation aimed at mainstream television audiences in Japan, coupled with licensing agreements with streaming platforms such as Hulu Japan or AbemaTV which are owned wholly or partly by traditional broadcasting giants.

Due to Netflix’s position as a tech company and not a TV broadcaster, the company is also not beholden to broadcast regulations for more mature and violent content, which the company has framed within its broader brand discourse of ‘total creative freedom’ as an opportunity for the expansion of what anime can be, boldly stretching the very definitions of the form beyond its Japanese origins into other languages and regions of origin.⁶⁶ Tech writer Cecelia D’anastasio argues however that Netflix’s increasing focus on more mature and violent anime is indicative of algorithmically informed American audience bias which caters predominantly to young white men. This replays a longstanding distribution pattern of showcasing the most visually violent programs for international audiences, such as the distribution of hentai anime as documented by Aurélie Petit,⁶⁷ for instance. When discussing the increasing variety of Netflix anime in terms of genre, setting, and “edginess,” the company’s chief anime producer Taiki Sakurai elaborates: “We don’t always have to talk about Japanese people.... Global, international storytelling—I think they want to prove they can do that kind of stuff.”⁶⁸ This discourse lies firmly within Netflix’s self-fashioned cosmopolitan brand of championing “global storytellers” by providing them “total creative freedom.”

To give a sense of the scale of this expansion, the company is set to launch 40 original anime series in 2021 alone, with a small but significant number of these titles coming from non-Japanese creators, some of whom are collaborating with Japanese anime creators and studios, such as the much hyped series *Yasuke* featuring the work of the Japanese anime studio MAPPA and director/ animator Takeshi Koike, alongside American director/graphic novelist LeSean Thomas, star Lakeith Stanfield, and musical artist Flying Lotus.⁶⁹ Broadly, Netflix’s original anime strategy aligns the

brand power of Netflix itself with the potential brand power of each of its original titles and the company's exclusive 'global' rights to distribute such IP in perpetuity—another nod toward the potential efficiency of this content, as the company bolsters its anime library through sheer scale.

CONCLUSION

True to Netflix's tech origins and its insatiable appetite for scaled expansion wherever possible, the company has aggressively situated itself within the global anime industry as a significant source of funding, production, and distribution. Catering to anime fan cultures outside Japan, while simultaneously pushing the limits of the definition of anime, these Netflix anime strategies hedge risk against one another while



Naruto (2002–2007)

the company rapidly deepens its catalogue of anime titles. Netflix's shotgun blast of 40 original anime titles to be released throughout 2021, alongside hopes of longtail economies for such titles (the slow discovery, engagement, value of this content over the long-term) are indicative of the company's broader content strategy, made all the more legible by the popularity, efficiency, and tentative success of this strategy as transnational desires for anime increase.

N-KO

Victoria Berndt

Expanding their transnational marketing strategy, Netflix introduced N-ko (e-nu-ko) Mei Kurono, a digital ambassador for their anime content on April 26, 2021.⁷⁰ N-ko is a VTuber, or virtual YouTuber, an online media personality with a design reminiscent of anime characters. VTubers arguably started with UK virtual vlogger Ami Yamato in 2011 and later Barbie Vlogs in 2015.⁷¹ However the rise of VTubers in recent years has become most associated with the Japanese anime aesthetics of notable creators such as Kizuna AI in 2016, and more recently, the VTubing agency Hololive in 2020.⁷² VTubers function as variety content entertainers, answering fan questions, playing video games, or completing challenges. VTubers do not only stream their content on YouTube, but also have a strong presence on Twitch, Discord, and Twitter, making their cross-platform media strategy appealing to businesses such as Netflix.



Kurono N-ko
Mei, virtual
YouTuber
(2021)

N-ko is played by a Netflix employee and introduces herself as a “sheep-human life form born in California”⁷³ and thereby speaking both English and Japanese. N-ko’s target demographic is primarily the Japanese Netflix audience, with the majority of her videos delivered in Japanese and delighting in anime’s popularity abroad.⁷⁴ Early in her introduction, she expresses a desire to collaborate with other VTubers

and release game commentary, akin to other VTuber content on the platform.⁷⁵ N-ko uploads videos onto the Netflix Anime YouTube channel amid anime press events, popular anime clips, new release trailers, and interviews with anime industry professionals. Her content has rotated between highlight videos where she focuses on an anime offered on Netflix (N-ko Presents), and The N-ko Show, where she discusses several anime at a time, answers fan questions, and delivers anime quizzes. Additionally, N-ko has uploaded several YouTube Shorts where she reminds viewers to enjoy anime on Netflix. Importantly, N-ko’s purpose is often remarked upon in her videos, and she transparently informs viewers that she exists to bolster Netflix’s anime presence online and to promote the series they release on their platform. Although N-ko encourages fans to interact with her on YouTube and Twitter, she has no personal social media pages. Instead, her interactions are all facilitated through the Netflix Anime YouTube channel or the Netflix Japan Anime Twitter page. N-ko’s variety content and her presence in Netflix Anime’s marketing highlights the growing cross-platform strategies that encourage anime as a cultural phenomenon,⁷⁶ not simply for revenue but for proliferated discussions across spaces and nations.

Aur lie Petit

This section looks at the Amazon streaming service, Amazon Prime Video, and more specifically focuses on the year-long anime focused channel launched by Amazon in 2017, Anime Strike. By exploring the ups and downs faced by the platform's anime service during this single year, which ultimately resulted in Anime Strike's discontinuation in January 2018, this section will provide a more comprehensive understanding of Amazon's relationship with anime streaming distribution today.

ANIME BEFORE

Launched in February 2005 for a US\$79 yearly price point, Amazon Prime was first described as a membership program aimed to speed up and reduce shipping costs on almost every product on the website (2-day delivery). By 2011, Amazon added Prime Video as part of the Prime subscription. It extended on Amazon Unbox, the service for purchasing online video launched in 2006. The 2011 version advertised ad-free instant streaming of more than 5,000 movies. By 2014, the service's price went up to US\$99 a year; by 2018, it went up again to US\$119 a year.



Battery the Animation
(2016)

While Prime Video has distributed anime before the launch of its anime-exclusive service in 2017, its anime programming consisted mostly of classic titles and not of simultaneous broadcast, with the exception of *Kabaneri of the Iron Fortress* in spring 2016 and *Battery the Animation* in summer 2016. In 2015, Amazon launched the Streaming Partners Program (Amazon Channels), a subscription-based platform that featured content-focus streaming services from third-party channels (AMC, Showtime, Lifetime Movie Club, HBO, etc.). Amazon Channels were separate from Amazon Video in that they had to be purchased separately. Channels were an added cost of US\$60 to the Amazon Prime subscription. In 2015, it meant a US\$160 annual expense.

ANIME STRIKE LAUNCH

In January 2017, Amazon announced the launch of Anime Strike, the platform's first branded on-demand service as part of Amazon Channels. At the time of its launch, Anime Strike offered more than 1,000 anime series episodes and movies, including recent shows and classic titles. The service also obtained exclusive streaming distribution deals in the US for *Scum's Wish*, *ONEHEI*, *The Great Passage*, *Vivid Strike!*,

Crayon-Shin Chan Gaiden: Alien vs. Shinnosuke, and *Chi's Sweet Adventure*. Following the announcement of Anime Strike, Amazon announced in March 2017 a partnership with Sentai Filmworks, an American anime licence company founded in 2008. As part of the deal, every new licence acquired by Sentai Filmworks were streaming exclusively on Anime Strike.



Crayon-Shin Chan Gaiden: Alien vs. Shinnosuke (2016)

company's understanding of the anime streaming war in the US, and of the importance of appealing to an already-established audience driven by fandom. Being a major (if not the biggest) player in online service in the US, it is not surprising that Amazon expected to reproduce this domination in its anime streaming service. In 2016, Amazon Prime Video was already ranked 2nd for streaming services with most subscribers, right below Netflix and far above anime-centered services such as Crunchyroll.⁷⁸

But in January 2018, a year after its launch, Anime Strike quietly disappeared from the Amazon Channels, after shutting its social media accounts by July 2017. On January 5th, 2018, Anime Strike subscribers received an email informing them their subscription was now cancelled and that they would be refunded the monthly payment beyond January 5th, 2018. They were also informed that all Anime Strike's shows would be added to Amazon Prime Video for no additional charge. In an interview with Forbes, a spokesperson for Amazon explained that they had "decided to move the curated catalogs of Anime Strike and Heera (another Amazon channel, focused on Bollywood content] into Prime Video so that more customers can enjoy this content as part of their Prime membership."⁷⁹

CANCELLATION

The cancellation of Anime Strike demonstrates that Amazon's traditional insular model of monopoly could not be applied to an anime streaming service. First, a major critic Anime Strike met was its price point.⁸⁰ At the time of its launch, an Amazon Prime Video plus an Anime Strike (double paywall) subscription costed a total of US\$15.98, while Netflix pricing was around US\$9.99 for a standard subscription, Crunchyroll US\$6.95, Funimation US\$5.99 and The Anime Network US\$6.95.

Anime Strike's pricing was higher (up to double) than other subscription services at the time; the platform received criticisms from anime fans because of it.⁸¹

Second, Amazon did not see the power of collaboration that has driven anime streaming platforms until now. By focusing on exclusive content to attract consumers—once anime were acquired by Amazon, they were streamed exclusively on Anime Strike and nowhere else—Amazon did not understand the ecology of the anime streaming distribution scene in the US, where platforms remain not despite each other, but because of each other. Already in 2016, Amazon had an international deal with Fuji TV's NoitaminA programming block to stream its series in exclusivity, including *Kabaneri of the Iron Fortress*.⁸² It demonstrated the early intention of Amazon to attract consumers based on an exclusive curation.

Additionally, fans regularly complained that the company was not prepared for simulcast streaming, and often missed subtitles, adding to the bad reputation of Anime Strike.

CURRENT ANIME STRATEGY

Following Anime Strike's cancellation, all shows that were previously available only on the channel are now part of the Amazon Prime Video catalogue. The company is now collaborating with other players of the industry. In November 2018, after the announcement of the end of the partnership between Crunchyroll and Funimation-Now, Amazon announced that the latter will be available as a channel for Amazon UK subscribers.



Kabaneri of the Iron Fortress
(2016)

During 2018, HIDIVE anime streaming service added some of Anime Strike's former exclusive titles, such as *Armed Girl's Machiavellism*, *Hitorijime My Hero*, *Kabukibu!*, *Anonymous Noise*, and *Grimoire of Zero*, marking the end of Amazon's exclusivity strategy.⁸³ Former Anime Strike collaborator, Sentai Filmworks also announced in 2018 that *Mitsuboshi Colors*, *Takunomi.*, *Hakumei and Mikochi*, *The Seven Heavenly Virtues*, *Pop Team Epic*, and *Dame×Prince Anime Caravan* will be streamed on HIDIVE.⁸⁴ The partnership between Sentai Filmworks and HIDIVE is still ongoing as of today.

CONCLUSION

Since the closure of Anime Strike, Amazon Prime Video has managed to stay a steady player in the US anime streaming industry. However, the platform has not particularly stood out by its distribution strategy, as opposed to other anime platforms in the US. Without going to the extent of creating another dedicated channel, fan interest in Amazon anime branding could surely be revived by starting collaborative projects with anime studios or platforms.

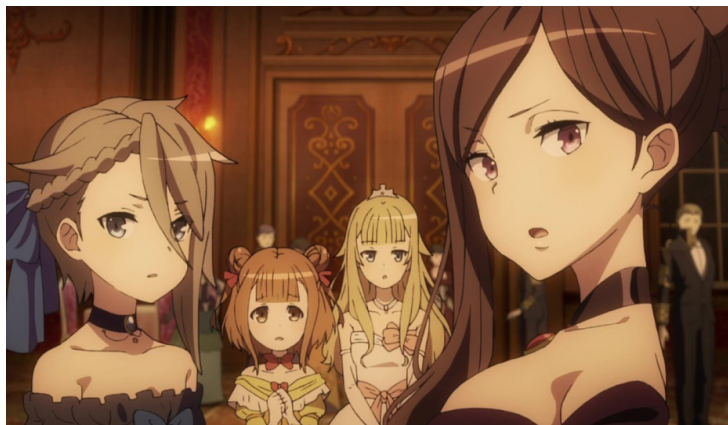
HIDIVE

Aur lie Petit

This section examines the anime streaming platform HIDIVE, and how its collaboration with Sentai Filmworks throughout the years has been essential in the conversation opposing streaming to video distribution.

THE ANIME NETWORK ONLINE

The arrival of HIDIVE on the anime streaming platform market is directly linked to the discontinuation of Anime Network Online (ANO) in 2017, a North American (Canada and U.S.) anime broadcaster owned by Anime Network, Inc. Started in 2002, ANO was first providing anime viewers with digital television subchannels and Video on Demand (VOD).⁸⁵ On January 1st, 2008, Anime Network announced the closure of its 24/7 channel, while continuing VOD and online streaming. In September 2009, its parent company, A.D. Vision (ADV) sold off the platform to Valkyrie Media Partners LLC. Beforehand on August 31, 2009, the Anime Network’s team published a web post reassuring their viewers that “AN has always been a separate entity from ADV, and as such business around here will continue as usual” and that “the Online Player isn’t [sic] going anywhere, neither are the forums or the Community section.”⁸⁶ After the closure of ADV, its owner, John Ledford, started Section23 Films, which also worked as the distributor for Sentai Filmworks, his anime licensing studio.



Princess Principal
(2017)

HIDIVE BEGINNING

In June 2017, ANO announced that it will close off its streaming service to focus on cable television and SVOD. At the same time, a streaming service called HIDIVE launched and started to stream anime that were until now exclusive to ANO, causing confusion among anime consumers. Indeed, no official statement on the relationship between the two platforms had been

previously published. Soon after, on June 21, 2017, HIDIVE LLC released a press statement informing that it had acquired the assets of ANO and that the “acquisition will enable HIDIVE to immediately increase its paid subscriber base as well as expand its outreach to addressable users. Following a limited transition period for subscriber migration to the HIDIVE™ online streaming service, AN Online will cease operations.”⁸⁷

Unlike other streaming platforms such as Crunchyroll and Funimation, HIDIVE does not offer a free, ad-supported service. Indeed, the platform focused instead on enhanced user experience and user interface. For US\$4.99 per month, HIDIVE

proposes to its subscribers' base unique features, such as the possibility to switch between censored and uncensored version of an anime, changing the colors of subtitles, in-episode live chats, as well as simulcast dubbing (dubcast) since 2018 with the premiere of *Devils' Line*, in addition to the more common simulcast subbing.⁸⁸

COLLABORATION WITH SENTAI FILMWORKS

It is essential to consider HIDIVE as the ongoing collaborator of Sentai Filmworks, meaning it serves ultimately as the streaming platform of Sentai Holdings LLC. In 2019, the Houston-based company received US\$30 million from the Cool Japan Fund initiative,⁸⁹ as



Granbelm
(2019)

well as an additional US\$3.6 million in 2020,⁹⁰ consolidating its role as a major player in the anime distribution market. Although Sentai Filmworks had established an exclusivity deal with Anime Strike, Amazon Prime Video's anime streaming service, during its duration from January 2017 to January 2018, the slow implementation of Anime's Strike licenced anime on HIDIVE throughout 2018 demonstrates that the partnership was never fully endangered. Similarly, while Sentai Filmworks announced in July 2017 that *Vatican Miracle Examiner*, *Hitorijime My Hero*, and *Princess Principal* will stream exclusively on Anime Strike in the US, the three series were available on HIDIVE for outside territories.⁹¹ The cancellation of Anime Strike in January 2018 affirmed HIDIVE's position as Sentai Filmworks' streaming platform. However, Sentai Filmworks does not work exclusively with HIDIVE, as it might have had in the past with Anime Strike. In September 2020, Sentai Filmworks announced a partnership with Crunchyroll to distribute home video, including *Granbelm*, *Food Wars! Shokugeki no Soma: The Fourth Plate*, *Ascendance of a Bookworm*, and *World Trigger*.⁹²

Today, this collaboration is visually present on both HIDIVE website (the "Shop" tab redirect users to Sentai Filmworks) and Sentai Filmworks website. In the Sentai Filmworks's catalogue section, three icons are present on each title: shop the DVD/Blu-ray, stream on HIDIVE (redirection on the platform) and news about the anime.

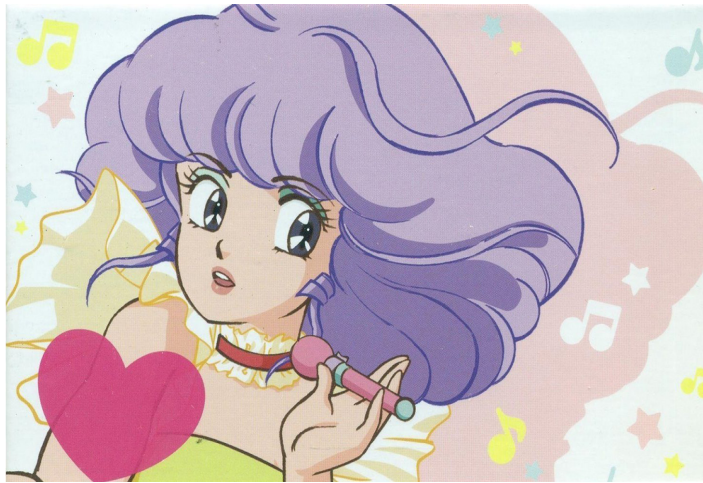
CONCLUSION

The case of HIDIVE is interesting as it is a collaboration between a video distributor and a streaming platform, therefore demonstrating that streaming does not necessarily signify or aim to be the end of the video object. The anime video market in the US is offering an independent experience to the streaming one, relying on fan capital and exclusive features for a higher single payment, where streaming reaches more viewership at a lesser price. Therefore, opposing these two models erases their specificity and what makes them successful among fans and viewers.

RETROCRUSH

Aur lie Petit

The third section focuses on the anime streaming service RetroCrush launched in 2020 by company Digital Media Rights (DMR) and the space it is occupying in the current anime streaming North American landscape economy. By examining RetroCrush's marketing strategy since its beginning in March 2020, as well as its distribution model, it states the streaming service as a singular player in both the platform and the anime distribution circuit.



*Mahou no Tenshi
Creamy Mami
(1983–84)*

by David Chu and Michael Hong. In January 2020, DMR announced that the company will launch five content-driven, free advertising-supported television (FAST) channels: AsianCrush, Cocoro, KMTV, Midnight Pulp and YuyuTV,⁹³ each specialized in a particular genre (respectively PanAsian cinema, kids' entertainment, Korean content, and thriller), with the exception of YuyuTV that offers more general content. David Chu, DMR co-founder and President, explained that FAST channels are often overlooked players in the "streaming war" that has been dominated by SVOD giants such as Netflix and Amazon Prime.

On March 30, 2020, DMR announced its new streaming service: RetroCrush, a new OTT channel specialized in the classic anime genre,⁹⁴ first available for desktop streaming.

PLATFORM CONGLOMERATE

With the exception of KMTV, a streaming app that specialized in Korean content, all of DMR channels are available for desktop streaming and as apps on iTunes, Google Play, Apple TV, Android TV, Roku, Amazon Fire TV, and smart TVs. All streaming services have a similar interface and offer cross-platforms content, for example the anime *Creamy Mami*, *the Magical Angel* and *Great Teacher Onizuka (GTO)* are available

HISTORY

RetroCrush is a streaming service curated by Will Chao and Mary Gibson (who also operates as head of acquisition) available in the United States and Canada. Since its beginning in March 2020, the platform has distributed anime from the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s, as well as a few newer shows. The streaming service operates under its parent company Digital Media Rights, a US-based multi-platform distributor and content aggregator started in 2010

on RetroCrush, Midnight Pulp and AsianCrush, reinforcing the idea of a platform conglomerate operating under a single parent company, DMR.

In July 2020, DMR announced that RetroCrush will now also be available in a FAST version available on STIRR,⁹⁵ an ad-supported live and on-demand streaming service launched in 2019. Midnight Pulp and Cinehouse will also be available on STIRR, as part of its agreement with DMR. The same month, streaming media service Plex announced that a live TV feature with 80+ channels will be added for free, including RetroCrush, AsianCrush and Midnight Pulp. And in March 2021, DMR added three of its streaming platforms—RetroCrush, Midnight Pulp and Cocoro—on Vizio SmartCast TVs. As these examples demonstrate, RetroCrush's channel distribution must be understood as part of a global strategy by DMR in which its streaming platforms are sustained by their belonging to a single conglomerate.

However, it must be noted that since its beginning in the Spring 2020, RetroCrush has managed to establish a brand identity outside of the DMR umbrella and is covered by anime news media as a serious player in the anime platform economy. As of April 2021, RetroCrush has 209 titles available for streaming, making the platform a notable player of the anime streaming economy. But where platforms like Netflix are offering not only an interface and in-home titles, but also services (subtitles, dubbing, information on the content), RetroCrush seems to have focused on curatorial practices above it all.

CONCLUSION

While RetroCrush offers a uniformed aesthetic common to all platforms under the DMR's umbrella, its appeal is found in its curation of anime from the "golden age" era, a marketing term used in DMR communications and on the platform website. By targeting this specific niche of retro anime fans, RetroCrush demonstrates its understanding of the North American anime fandom, and the importance this community has given to cult media. It offers a curation that might have previously only been accessible through piracy or as unbranded media. Although the arrival of RetroCrush might be synonymous with cultural fracking for the anime fan community,⁹⁶ as its distribution could mean a rise in copyright strikes for content that fans have previously distributed for free, it must be acknowledged that in the current age of anime overproduction,⁹⁷ RetroCrush's focus on older anime, ready to be distributed, might make it not only an awaited but also a necessary actor in the anime distribution ecology.

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