

THE DISNEY+ PLATFORM: THE WALT DISNEY COMPANY'S DIGITAL BUSINESS TRANSFORMATION

PLATFORMA DISNEY+: DIGITALNA POSLOVNA TRANSFORMACIJA TVRTKE WALT DISNEY

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SAŽETAK

Nova medijska industrija temelji svoj razvoj na tehnologiji streaminga i modelu ekonomije platformi. Digitalizacija proizvodnih sustava te digitalna transformacija modela proizvodnje i distribucije medijskih sadržaja izravno su utjecali na promjenu načina distribucije i konzumacije medijskih sadržaja. The Walt Disney Company, kao jedna od tri najveće multimedijske korporacije na svijetu, razvio je streaming platformu Disney+ kako bi se natjecao u industriji streaming platformi medijskih sadržaja. U radu se analizira poslovni model razvoja The Walt Disney Company u kontekstu digitalne transformacije i pokretanja poslovnih aktivnosti u novom poslovnom segmentu. Poslovanje Disney+ analizira se u kontekstu ostvarenih prihoda te trenda broja korisnika koji su postali pretplatnici platforme. Rezultati istraživanja su dokazali snažan rast prihoda, dok je istovremeno broj pretplatnika počeo padati nakon završetka globalne pandemije Covid-19.

Ključne riječi: digitalna transformacija, Disney+, streaming, video-on-demand, Walt Disney Company

ABSTRACT

The new media industry bases its development on streaming technology and the platform economy model. The digitization of production systems and the digital transformation of media content production and distribution models have directly influenced the change in the way media content is distributed and consumed.

The Walt Disney Company, as one of the three largest multimedia corporations in the world, developed the Disney+ streaming platform to compete in the media content streaming platform industry. The paper analyses the business model of development of The Walt Disney Company in the context of digital transformation and the initiation of business activities in a new business segment. The business of Disney+ is analysed in the context of realized revenues and the trend of the number of users who have become subscribers to the platform. The results of the research proved a strong growth in revenue, while at the same time the number of subscribers began to fall after the end of the global Covid-19 pandemic.

Keywords: digital transformation, Disney+, streaming, video-on-demand, Walt Disney Company

1. UVOD

1. INTRODUCTION

The Walt Disney Company, together with its subsidiaries, is a diversified worldwide entertainment company with operations in two segments: Disney Media and Entertainment Distribution (DMED) and Disney Parks, Experiences and Products (DPEP) [1]. Disney+ is the dedicated streaming home for movies and shows from Disney, Pixar, Marvel, Star Wars, and National Geographic, along with The Simpsons and much more [2]. The Walt Disney Company is one of the three largest global media corporations, and has developed business activities in almost

all media industries. Although according to the age of the corporation, which was founded in 1923, i.e. it is 101 years old, it could be concluded that it has already passed its most successful phase, The Walt Disney Company proves that the management and governance of the corporation is the most important factor in the stability and long-term survival of modern corporations.

The corporation has based its successful business development on innovation and new product development and has continuously been one of the leaders in the media industry. In 1928, the corporation developed the popular Mickey Mouse character and became the leader in the animation industry. Ten years later, the segment of feature films was developed, and the film *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* was the first full-length film of its kind [1]. The year 1950 was the beginning of expansion into the segment of television and theme parks. In each of the individual media industries in which it would compete, The Walt Disney Company would eventually become the leader.

With the development of digitization of the business process and the convergence of media content, Disney began to develop in this direction in 2005 and began to take over corporations from that business segment. In the first wave, the corporations Marvel, Lucas Film and 20th Century were taken over, and after that Disney took over ABC, Hulu, Hotstar, ESPN and others. The turning point towards the development of the streaming business segment begins in 2015 when Disney develops BAMTech, which will be the carrier of streaming development, and in 2017 takes over the majority package. All of this enabled the development of the Disney+ segment, which uses streaming technology and is very strongly entering the global streaming industry. The Disney+ platform began broadcasting in 2019, and a year later it expanded to Europe, India and Latin America. In 2021, the platform expanded operations in Asia, making it globally available. Regardless of the global expansion of business and the digitization and convergence of business processes, Disney has always remained synonymous with princess films [3]. The paper will analyse the business results of the platform, which records continuous growth in revenue and

the number of users in the four-year period of operation. The financial results of operations are presented in The Walt Disney Company Annual Report and cannot be analysed separately from the overall business result. No papers were found in the databases that research and analyse financial and business activity of the Disney+ platform, which makes this paper unique. The corporation uses the effects of economies of scale and other benefits brought by doing business in the corporation's ecosystem.

2. POSLOVNI MODEL WALT DISNEY

2. THE WALT DISNEY BUSINESS MODEL

The Walt Disney Company became globally famous for its animated films, primarily the animation of still popular Mickey Mouse, but what characterized the corporation were films about princesses. In 1937, the full-length film *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves* [4] was shown for the first time, and today it holds the tenth place among the films of all time [5]. In 1946, the famous Salvador Dali collaborated with The Walt Disney Company on the short film *Destino*, which he called the "First Surrealist Cartoon" [6].

The Disney Company uses different models of value co-creation, combining classic models of revenue generation using already existing amusement parks and similar services, with modern forms of content monetization on platforms. The revenue building model in the form of a digital platform ecosystem has proven to be the best option for various corporations that have used these management strategies [7]. Successful platforms support the development of various forms of externalities in the platform environment, which enables them to create a successful environment, and at the same time the platform is the centre of that successful ecosystem [8]. The Walt Disney Company consists of ownership of a number of different multimedia corporations including Pixar, The Muppets, Marvel, and Twentieth Century Studio, all of which contribute to the diversity of the corporation's offerings [5]. Disney owns a 50% stake in A&E, The History Channel and LifeTime

(1). In March 2024, the Hulu platform became a part of Disney+, which is why Disney+ partially changed the logo. Subscriptions are now offered on the bundling platform Disney+, HULU and ESPN [9].

The corporation was also the leader in the development of nature documentary films, and in 1948 the first documentary Seal Island was broadcast, which would win an Oscar. In the next twelve years, Disney will broadcast twelve more films from the True-Life Adventure series, which will bring them seven more Oscars [10]. This strategy enabled the corporation to develop and maintain a leading position within the entertainment industry. The corporation also went through difficult financial periods, but after the feature film Cinderella from 1950, it can be said that the financial situation stabilized and that the corporation began to develop unstoppably [11].

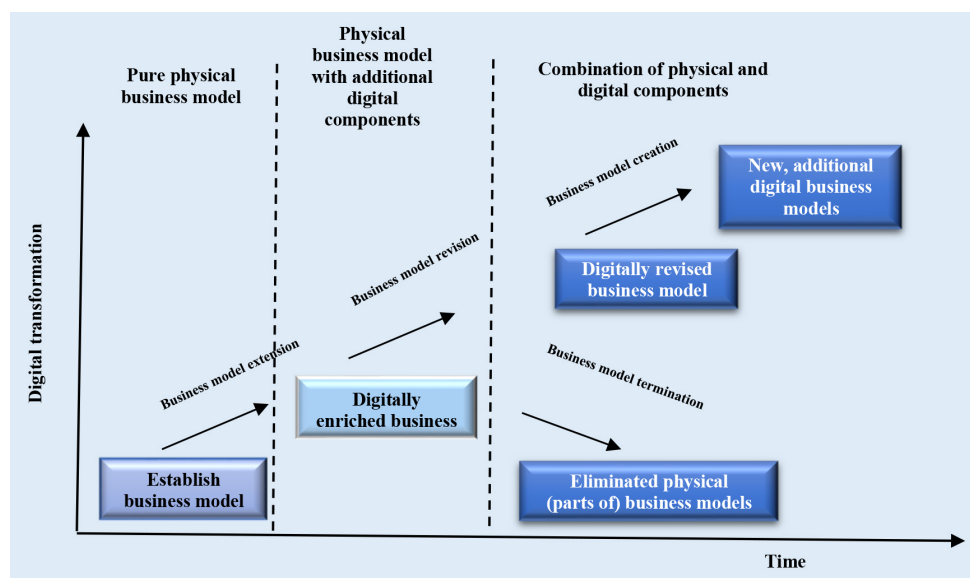
3. DISNEY+ STREAMING PLATFORMA

3. *DISNEY+ STREAMING PLATFORM*

The Walt Disney Company followed the development of technology and adopted new technological solutions within the media industry. The digitization of production systems and the convergence of media content consumption models were the fundamental drivers of the development of the streaming model within The Walt Disney Company. The streaming business

model is based on the platform economy model [12], that is, on the two-sided market model [13]. Business development in the platform economy model implies the use of the zero marginal cost production model [14] which significantly affects the reduction of production and content distribution costs. The development of the Disney+ platform took place in parallel with the increasing criticism of films about princesses and the analysis of the position of women in the corporation's films [5].

Even today, the popular Mouse was developed as an analogue animation, so that Disney would develop streaming technology as the most developed segment of the media industry. This was the classic development path from the digitization of content to the digital transformation of the organization [15]. The corporation developed classic terrestrial television channels, Disney stores, Disney radio stations, and Disney parks (1). In addition, the film industry was developed, which became famous for Disney princesses. Disney parks are still the biggest cash generators, or cash cows for the corporation. The model of digital transformation of the industry and diversification of income, i.e. creating the largest part of income from the streaming model, has already affected the global music industry [16]. The development model of digital transformation followed three fundamental development phases as recognized by Hanelt et al.: 1) Pure physical; 2) Physical with additional digital components; 3) Combination of



Slika 1 Razvoji put poslovnih promjena; Izvor: Lozić, Fotova Čiković, Lozić (2024). [18]

Figure 1 Developing path of business model changes; Source: Lozić, Fotova Čiković, Lozić (2024). [18]

physical and digital components [17]. The digital transformation process is shown in figure 1 [18].

The Walt Disney Company has developed a special form of branding known as "branded house". The strategy is based on the development of brands (Disneyland, Pixar), franchises (Beauty and the Beast, Toy Story, Pirates of the Caribbean) and movie characters (Mickey Mouse, Winnie the Pooh, Jack Sparrow). All factors of the branded house are digitized and contribute to the development of Disney's digital transformation [19]. The development of the model called the digital economy is based precisely on the development of the platform economy, that is, the technological platform that connects different forms of business activities, that is, the platform enables the connection of several different markets and the development of stagnant production and service activities [20]. The corporation has developed an ecosystem within which the Disney+ platform is the most technologically advanced business segment. The platform consists of several different organizations that have different forms of content monetization. The most technologically developed segment is content broadcasting in the platform economy model, and for such a business model it is called a profitable centre of gravity [21].

4. METODOLOGIJA I ISTRAŽIVAČA PITANJA

4. *METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS*

The research and analysis in the paper is focused on the analysis of income and the trend of the number of users of the Disney+ platform. Business in the streaming platform model is still in development, and the first results of business activities need to be analysed. The data for the analysis was taken from The Walt Disney Annual Report, but also from other sources specialized in analysing the business of streaming platforms and video-on-demand platforms. The research is based on two research questions:

1. What is the platform's revenue trend in the development period?

Revenues from the Disney+ platform do not follow the trend of revenues from the streaming business segment at The Walt Disney Corporation [22]; How was the increase in the subscription price in the last quarter of 2023 reflected on the company's income [23]?

2. What is the trend in the number of users who have become subscribers to the platform?

How did Disney+ platform subscribers react in the post-Covid time [24]; how was the decline in the number of subscribers outside the USA reflected on the business results of the platform [25].

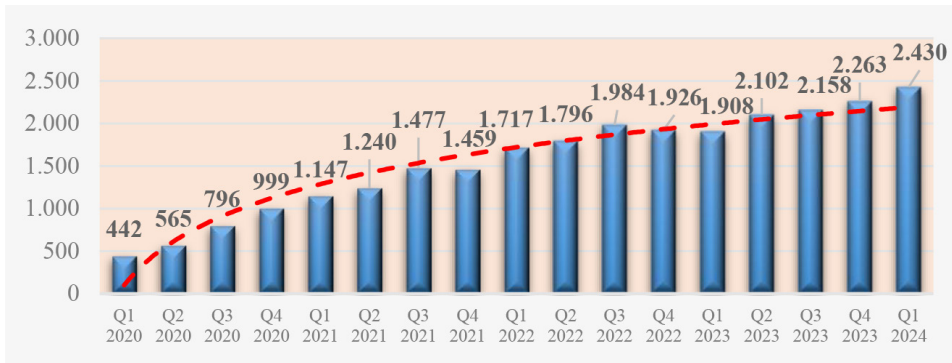
The corporation does not yet publish official data from the platform's profit and loss statement, that is, only data from consolidated balance sheets is published. The platform still has to complete a five-year development cycle in order to be able to analyse the final data.

4.1. FINANCIJSKA ANALIZA

4.1. *FINANCIAL ANALYSIS*

In the analysed period from 2020 to 2024, the platform's revenues grew from \$2.4 billion to \$8.4 billion, i.e. earnings tripled. Despite strong revenue growth, it was only in the first quarter of 2024 that the platform made a profit for the first time. Platforms Disney+ and Hulu in the first quarter of 2024 made a profit of 47 million dollars, which is a big turnaround compared to losses of 587 million dollars from last year [22]. Incomes increased continuously, but this growth was digressive. The platform achieved the highest percentage of revenue growth in the second year, i.e. revenue growth compared to the first year of operation was 86%. After that, the income grew digressively from year to year. The total revenues of the platform in the analysed period are shown in Figure 2 [26].

The platform's revenues grew at an average rate of 7.6% quarterly, interpreted by the linear regression equation of the trend $y = 117.48x + 613.67$, with a coefficient of determination of 96.33% ($R^2 = 0.9633$), that is, the platform's revenues grew at an average rate of 31.93% per year interpreted by the linear regression equation of the trend $y = 1.9x + 3.1$, with a coefficient



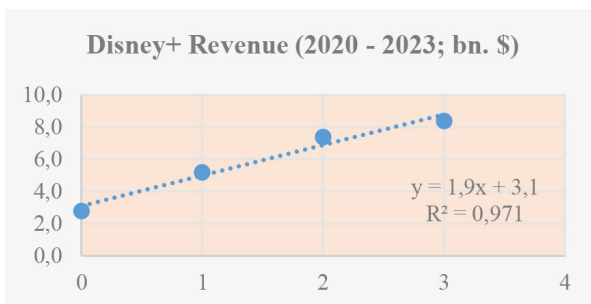
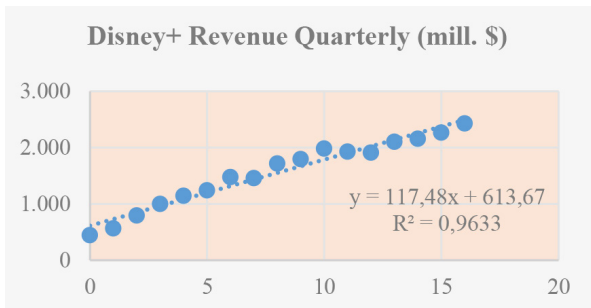
Slika 2 Kvartalni prihodi Disney+ (2020.-2024.; milijuni \$); Izvor: Iqbal, 2024. [26]; izrada autora

Figure 2 Disney+ Revenue Quarterly (mill. \$; 2020-2024); Source: Iqbal, 2024. [26]; own illustration

of determination of 97.1% ($R^2 = 0.971$). In the last analysed period, the inflection points are below the average trend curve, which indicates a drop in income below the average growth for the analysed period. After the end of the global Covid-19 pandemic, revenues fell below average growth, indicating a strong connection between user behaviour and the impact of the pandemic on platform revenues.

Tablica 1 Regresijska analiza prihoda Disney+ (2020-2023); Source: Own Illustration

Table 1. Disney+ Revenue regression analysis (2020-2023); Izvor: osobna izrada



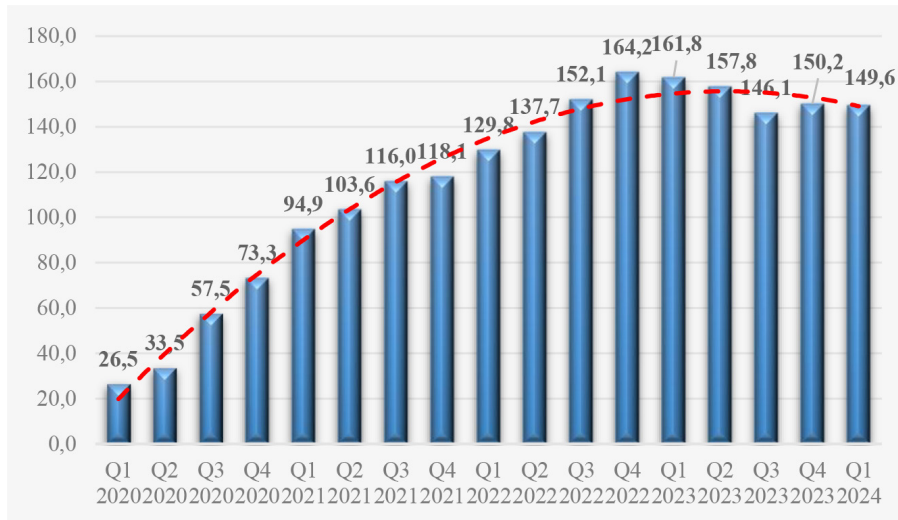
Unlike the streaming platform Disney+, which is slowly starting to make a profit, the ESPN platform made a loss of 65 million dollars in the same period [22]. The increase in subscription fees in the last quarter of 2023 did not significantly affect the revenue trend, i.e. revenues continued to grow continuously

as before the subscription price increase. The corporation continues to invest in the development of the streaming segment after the encouraging results of the new platform and hopes that revenues will continue to increase in the future.

4.2. SUBSCRIBERS ANALYSIS

In contrast to revenues that grew continuously in the entire analysed period, the number of users grew during the pandemic, only to start to decrease afterwards. The impact of the pandemic on the number of subscribers was much stronger than on the platform's revenues. The number of subscribers increases with the development of the pandemic, and with the end of the pandemic, the number of subscribers begins to fall. Revenues are growing digressively, despite the decline in the number of users, which indicates the construction of other revenue models of the platform besides subscription revenue. The results of the analysis of the number of subscribers are shown in Figure 3 [26].

The number of subscribers grew at an average rate of 6.69% quarterly, interpreted by the linear trend equation $y = 8.0809x + 51.394$, with a coefficient of determination of 83.25% ($R^2 = 0.8325$), that is, the number of subscribers grew at an average rate of 37.63% interpreted by the linear trend equation $y = 40.7x + 47.1$, with a coefficient of determination of 92.73% ($R^2 = 0.9273$). The value of the coefficient of determination in the linear trend equation for the quarterly period is close to the threshold value of 0.8 and indicates a strong influence of the change in the trend of the number of platform users. The results of the analysis are shown in table 2.

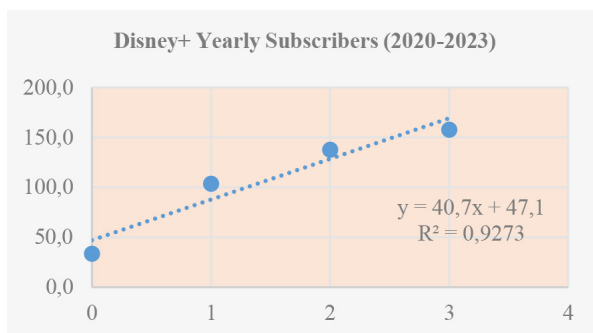
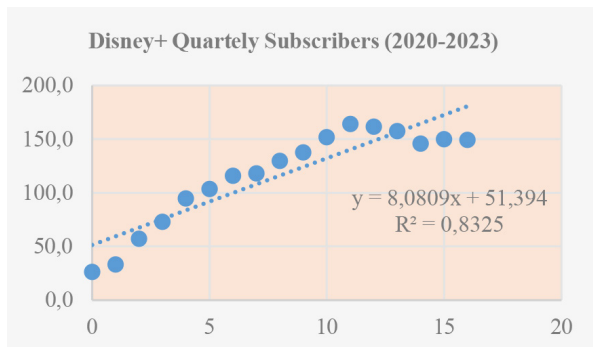


Slika 3 Kvartalni pretplatnici Disney+ (milijuni); Izvor: Iqubal, 2024. [26]; izrada autora

Figure 3 Disney+ Subscribers Quarterly (mill.); Source: Iqubal, 2024. [26]; own illustration

Tablica 2 Pretplatnici Disney+ (2020-2023); Izvor: osobna izrada

Table 2 Disney+ Subscribers (2020-2023); Source: Own Illustration

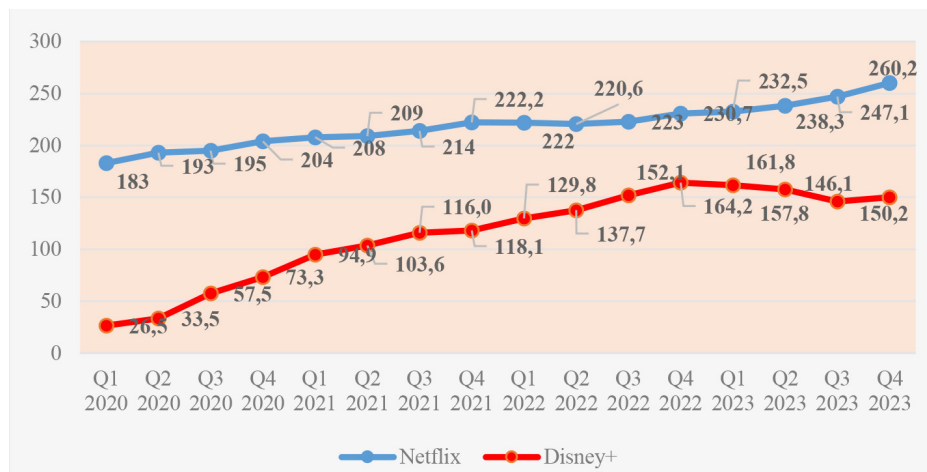


In the first quarter of 2024, the number of subscribers from the USA and Canada increased by 7.9 million. At the same time, the corporation started selling a viewing package that includes Disney+ and Hulu, and by the end of the year it will try to integrate the ESPN platform into the same subscription package [22]. Such a strategy will undoubtedly strengthen the corporation's competitive advantage in the video streaming platform industry. Disney owned an archive of

more than 8,000 hours of content. The global Covid-19 pandemic closed most of the activities from which the Corporation generated income, so turning to streaming seemed like a completely logical move. However, the end of the pandemic led to a decline in the number of users [24]. The decline in the number of users in the fourth quarter of 2023 was also significantly influenced by the decline in the number of users in India after Disney lost the rights to the Cricket league in India [25]. The end of 2023 was marked by a strike by a part of the actors as well as a drop in subscriptions to cable television, which further affected the drop in income.

Co-creation of value in digital platform ecosystems has proven to be a key success factor for major players in various industries [27]. Digital platforms strive to develop a frictionless market entry model, which will enable them to monopolize the market in the long term and greatly narrow the choice, habits and movement of users. On the one hand, the platforms try to remove obstacles built by other platforms, and at the same time they try to raise new obstacles that will protect their business interests. This way of doing business in which different ecosystems are driven to individual adaptations and the establishment of alternative organizations is called the creation of "walled gardens" [28].

The trend of income, but also of the movement of the number of users, does not indicate a possible monopolization of the market by the Disney+ platform. Moreover, comparing the business



Slika 4 Disney+ vs. Netflix pretplatnici (2020.-2023.; milijuni); Izvor: Iqbal, 2024. [26]; izrada autora

Figure 4 Disney+ vs. Netflix Subscribers (2020-2023; mill.); Source: Iqbal, 2024. [26]; own illustration

results with the main competitor Netflix platform, a continuous growth in the number of users on the Netflix platform is noticed, in contrast to the trend on the Disney+ platform. Digital platforms are organized as intermediaries in the interaction of two or more groups of users. The growth of the number of users stabilizes the operation of the platform, which facilitates monetization on the platform as well as locking users on the platform. The constant search for new users, or the increase in the number of users, leads to situations called "platform wars" [29]. The analysis indicates a sharp increase in the number of users of the Disney+ platform, but this was not reflected in the trend of users on the Netflix platform. The results of the analysis are shown in Figure 4.

5. ZAKLJUČAK

5. CONCLUSION

Compared to its two biggest competitors on the media market, The Walt Disney Company was the last to start building a streaming platform for the distribution of media content. Starting a business in the platform model, it pulled all media content from the Netflix platform, but this did not affect the trends in the number of users on both platforms. In the context of the first research question, the results of the research proved the continuous growth of income. Incomes grow digressively, and the analysis proved below-average growth in the last analysed period. In the context of the second research question, the results of the analysis indicate a decline in the number of subscribers after the

end of the Covid-19 pandemic. The growth of income despite the stagnation of the number of subscribers points to the analysis of other types of income generated by the platform. First of all, these are revenues from marketing and from the sale of data on the market. The trend in revenue and number of users proves the strong competition in the industry of streaming platforms. The industry is moving towards a mature stage and the time of consolidation is coming, as happened in other segments of the industry. Disney has already moved to a bundling model and has subscriptions for multiple different platforms to ensure the stability of the platforms it owns.

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