Youtuber and Community Management strategies

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Abstracts

[ES] Introducción: El objetivo planteado es identificar los indicadores que promueven la creación, el mantenimiento y el crecimiento de una comunidad de usuarios en torno a los canales de *Youtuber*. **Metodología:** Se plantea un análisis de contenido de carácter exploratorio sobre una muestra de 100 vídeos, 10 de cada uno de los 10 canales con más suscriptores del ranking Socialblade en el período comprendido entre el 14 de septiembre de 2018 al 22 de febrero de 2019. **Resultados:** El estudio permite identificar cuatro estrategias de gestión de comunidades desplegadas por los *youtuber*: fidelización de la audiencia, ampliación de comunidad, generación de expectación sobre futuros contenidos y la gestión particular de la pestaña Comunidad del canal. **Discusión y conclusiones:** Se revelan indicadores y prácticas válidas para comprender el fenómeno de las comunidades de *youtuber*, un fenómeno de masas con tan solo 15 años de existencia y un crecimiento imparable.

[EN] Introduction: The aim of this article is to identify the indicators that promote the creation, management and growth of a community of users around *Youtuber* channels. **Methodology:** An exploratory content analysis is used on a sample of 100 videos, 10 from each of the 10 channels with most subscribers based on the Socialblade ranking in the period ranging from 14 September 2018 to 22 February 2019. **Results:** The study identifies four strategies of community management deployed by the *youtuber*: audience loyalty, community expansion, generation of expectation about future contents and the particular management of the channel's Community tab. **Discussion and conclusions:** Valid indicators and practices are revealed to understand the phenomenon of *Youtuber* communities, a phenomenon of masses with only 15 years of existence and an unstoppable growth.

Keywords
[ES] *Youtuber*; comunidad; estrategia; fenómeno fan; videojuegos.
[EN] *Youtuber*; community; strategy; fan phenomenon; videogames.

Contents

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1. Introduction
1.1. Influential *youtubers*

To be an influencer on YouTube means to produce and distribute audiovisual contents in a channel of your own and along with it, to obtain a significant number of followers on which influence is exerted and with whom there is interaction on social networks (Enke & Borchers, 2018). But this definition is insufficient to fully describe the complexity of the phenomenon. Like Hidalgo-Marí and Segarra-Saavedra (2017) point out, to be a *youtuber* means to create a social movement around the channel, raising the interest of millions of users worldwide and achieve that the number of fans and followers does not stop growing, both in general as well as regarding the number of visits to videos produced. The creation of a community with common interests around the channel represents a valuable asset that the *youtuber*, besides being creator, must also know how to manage properly. This community works as a social network subrogated to the superior social network, YouTube in this case, with extensions to other social networks. The contents management used by the *youtuber* seems decisive in the configuration of a community of followers.

After an analysis of the YouTube content (hereinafter referred to as YT), the channels of influencer creators gather the best conditions of traffic and interaction to study this phenomenon. The phenomenon of renowned *Youtubers* potentiates conversation and social interaction. The contents published are a source of innovation of new audiovisual formats and generate a wide and growing community of followers around the channel. The management of social conversation by the *youtuber* also influences in the growth of followers. Therefore, our study about communities will focus on Spanish *youtubers* and their most watched videos.

In the field of cosmetics and fashion, users tend to formulate many questions and the *youtuber* answers have a good acceptance (Ben-Mimoun, Marion & Depledt, 2015). The *youtuber* tests products, examines them, facilitates his or her experience and provides opinion to an audience eager for novelties and who is offered assistance about the decision making process for consumption or use, hence increasing efficiency and avoiding losing any time nor money. The excess of existing information consumes human attention.

The hallmark that *youtubers* creators grant their contents, ease of use, accessibility to the platform and the sum of communicational actions deployed in the fans community nurturing the channel explain

why their practices follow the paradigm of the attention economy (Simon, 1971; Bessi, Scala, Rossi, Zhang & Quattrociocchi, 2014). The proliferation of media and the democratization of technology increases the possibilities of social conversation. In this panorama, human attention is revealed as a scarce resource disputed by a multitude of messages with magnetic properties. In the digital field, those messages appear independent, dissociated from their sender. This sender is evolving into author, transforming the generation of information into a creative process and the message into a production. Production-messages impregnated from the authors' hallmark waiting to be consumed by a user who decides to pay attention and re-activate them. Therefore, we affirm that communication is mediated by the message.

In essence, the *youtuber* is an influencing prescriber of products, services or ideas, authorized by the expertise in the topic, who generates experiences in his or her frequent massive audience, characterised by humour, the capacity to entertain and the presence of brands searching for credibility-coated spaces to communicate in a more efficacious and empathic manner.

The power resides in his or her capacity of influence. But what determines being an influencer? In the study Pillars of the New Influence (Armano, 2011), the 6 pillars of influence are suggested:

- Reach: the power of the influencer is not limited to a single communication channel, but instead he or she has different platforms and resources available to reach a greater number of people.

- Proximity: when addressing their public through platforms like YouTube, influencers achieve a greater proximity and closest interaction with their followers compared to the interaction that traditional media like the television might offer. There is a bidirectional relationship between the influencer and the public, who feel a role is played inside the communication process.

- Experience: influencers are considered experts that have gained experience in a specific area through participation and a value granted by a social system.

- Relevance: the relevance of a specific subject is proportional to the performance capacity of the influencer within a community or group.

- Credibility: this factor determines the level of influence, since activities and transparency of individuals help construct the dimension of their reputation.

- Trustworthiness: the reason why we trust an individual, even if there is scarce experience and credibility, is because we believe in him or her due to sharing the same interests or simply because we know him or her. In the case of the influencer there is created a sort of "intimate atmosphere" where a level of trust is stablished between the influencer and the follower, although there is no face-to-face contact.

Considering the aforesaid, the first research question is formulated. What are the aspects that characterise the *YouTuber* and what elements of the channels manifest so? The answer to this question will allow to identify recurrent patterns and compare between the different channels analysed.

1.2. Socialization communities

YouTubers create an authentic community around their channel. A community of practice is defined as a group of people who share concerns, problems or passions about the same subject in order to

deepen its knowledge and gain expertise through continuous interaction (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002, p. 4). The phenomenon generated around YouTube channels can be considered as a community of practices, as per Gannon & Prothero (2018, p. 594) who demonstrate its usefulness to explain the consumption based on these communities and the interest towards Marketing management in the field of beauty products.

Online communities show some peculiarities: they are generated around a domain (Preece, 2000; Porter, 2004) where contents and resources are shared (Wenger, 1998) and there exists an identifiable social interaction (Preece and Maloney-Krichmar, 2002; Kozinets, 2002) that is attributed a certain collective efficacy by some (Carroll, Rosson and Zhou, 2005).

These communities can be detected between the youtubers and their followers (vertical) or between creator *Youtubers* (horizontal) and involve a series of characteristics grouped into three dimensions according to Wenger *et al.* (2002): reciprocal involvement (social interaction, relationships, mutual assistance, joint activities), a shared repertoire (language, shared resources, styles and documents) and comprehensive vision of joint enterprise (negotiated enterprise, native and shared responsibility). All these elements motivate interactions between their members and their highest or lower presence grants value and relevance to interventions. In addition, the dimensions applicable to the content ratify the predominance of the scheme user-video-user focused on the content proposed by Wattenhofer, Wattenhofer & Zhu (2012). This entails further proof about mediated communication focused on the message, characteristic of the change of communicational paradigm and based on the necessary attention economy.

The indicators that ensure the presence of a community include: the presence of shared interests, participant's interactions, user generated content, existence of norms or limits that define the practices of the community and a characteristic and unique culture. Based on these indicators, Rotman & Preece [1] suggest defining a community as follows:

> "A group or various subgroups of people, brought together by a shared interest, using a virtual platform, to interact and create user-generated content that is accessible to all community members, while cultivating communal culture and adhering to specific norms" (2010, p. 320).

The sharing of interests, contents, virtual space, guidelines for behaviour and social conversation is the reason to be of a virtual community. The community exists thanks to what it shares and decides how and when to do so. It is an ecosystem where every element feedback the others and relationships are based in what it is shared: opinions, emotional judgements, proposals, new contents and ideas surrounded by an environment that enables large doses of humour-based entertainment.

The second research question is formulated as follows. What elements, characteristic from a community of users, can be found on *Youtuber* channels?

1.3. Community strategies implemented by *youtubers*

Aware about the relevance, not only about production but also contents management, YT openly fosters *youtubers* activity through its initiative called Creators Academy. In this space there is a quite uplifting guidance addressed to future *youtubers*: "Willing to share a video, that is emotional or that captivates, are qualities that tend to drive viewers to come back steadily to the platform" (*YT Creators Academy*, 2018). The educational strategy for creators is based on the feedback and the identification

of recommended practices in each category. These practices are the ones that users have confirmed that work both, regarding the daily activity, as well as using trial and error: "to evaluate the content of a specific category, it is convenient to know the best examples of that category" (*YT Creators Academy*, 2018). YT specially emphasizes on the relevance of identifying a category and tag its contents as a visualization strategy oriented to 4 objectives (some of the questions that YT suggests to creators are presented and summarised below):

– Identify the influencers of a category and analyse the value of the content for the audience: what practices are executed and work? Is the content focused on educating, inspiring or entertaining?

– Identify the audience of the category: the strategy of the channel is adjusted to the sociodemographic data of the audience and its interests? It is also interesting for the brands and advertisers?

– Identify content strategies that work in the category. Is the content published regularly and planed based on the preferences of viewers, programmed series or thematic groups? Is the steadily active content optimized according to the purpose and interests of viewers or is it generating awareness about large scale events or specific appointments? How does a programming calendar contribute to preserve the audience, increase the number of followers and gain new subscribers?

– Identify the common elements of the category: how is the content introduced in every category? Based on the type (for instance, music videos vs. fun sketches), viewers are used to watch videos with specific formats, with a specific duration and production. Look for those elements and discover how the improvement in the content of the channel helps new creators. The suggested elements include: a similar level of production, an approximate duration, similar formats, production qualities, most used production techniques, aesthetic elements of the channel's design among channels with similar outlook.

The purpose is to avoid the loss of time the "trial and error" represents and to orientate *youtubers* creators to better position the content so that it is more successful. The guidance that YT provides to creators follows a very common benchmarking strategy in the business sector:

A continuous and systematic assessment process, that constantly measures and compares the business processes of an organization versus the processes of the leaders in any place of the world (as long as there is a compatibility between companies conducting said study) to obtain information that helps the organization to develop actions aiming to improve their performance (American Productivity & Quality Center, APQC, 1997).

Learning and innovation capacity turn into strategical aspects (Drucker, 2000) in a business context marked by globalization and the use of information technologies and knowledge that characterize the so-called society of knowledge. Once the subject behind the content is decided, the *YouTuber* makes decisions about production and execution that succeed in making a video more or less interesting. Depending on them, the video will generate a specific level of engagement on the audience.

Regarding the engagement strategies in YouTube channels, McRoberts, Bonsignore, Peyton & Yarosh (2016) suggest an analysis model that includes five measurement indicators: 1. Indicators to promote and foster the participation of the viewer; 2. Indicators that analyse the type of interaction the

YouTuber stablishes with his or her audience; 3. Indicators about the speech style; 4. Indicators about complex editing that allow to classify contents into three levels of editing: low profile, very basic contents; and 5. Indicators for contents input and output, classified into three types: sophisticated; sporadic or non-existing. This proposal allows to identify relevant aspects that distinguish contents generating a greater engagement in the user. The engagement will explain the level of interaction. In our study, we will delve into the indicators related to interaction.

In previous publications, after analysing the strategic management of YouTube channels conducted by minors, there were confirmed many coincidences in the tactics used by *YouTubers* to communicate with their followers (Tur-Viñes, Núñez-Gómez and González-Río, 2018, p. 1226) like: the resource of using fixed video introduction and closure statements or the use of a hallmark design to promote the recognition of the channel. In this case, we target the focus of attention on adult video-creators. The decision about the subject behind the video, the final creativity and the transmedia management of every content by *YouTubers* can influence in the way the social conversation is developed.

The research question resulting from the ideas mentioned above: What strategies related to the creation and maintenance of social communities can be detected in the most watched channels? The main objective of our study is: To identify indicators that promote the creation, maintenance and growth of a community of users around the youtuber channels with more subscribers. We selected the indicators related to the community management analysis model of Mc. Roberts *et al.* (2016) as a reference and suggest some adaptations that will enrich the content analysis.

2. Methodology

An exploratory study was conducted using the content analysis technique, that allows to systematize, objectivise and quantify the analysis of the characteristics of a content (Berelson, 1952, Neuendorf, 2002).

The sample was composed of 100 videos, 10 videos of each one of the 10 channels with more subscribers in the ranking of 250 accounts with more subscribers in Spain facilitated by Socialblade on September 2018 (see table 1). The selection criteria for the channels included: *Youtuber* channels in Spanish with more subscribers and monetization. The study period ranged from 14 September 2018 to 22 February 2019. Some *Youtuber* with a high number of followers, like AuronPlay among some of them, could not be included because they did not publish 10 videos or did not achieve a high number of views during the fieldwork of the study.

The following research questions were formulated:

- What aspects characterize the *YouTuber* and what are the elements of the channel manifest them? (P1).
- What elements characteristic from a community of users are present in *YouTubers* channels? (P2).
- What strategies related to the creation and maintenance of social communities are identified in the most viewed channels? (P3).

We consider that the community management implemented by a *Youtuber* is configured by two dimensions: indicators promoting and fostering participation (1) and the types of *YouTuber*-audience

interaction (2) (see table 1). The aim is to identify, describe and compare community management styles in *Youtuber* channels.

Table 1. Dimensions and study variables

Indicators for promoting and fostering participation of the user in the community (Dimension 1)	Types of *Youtuber*-audience interaction (Dimension 2)
1. The *Youtuber* encourages his or her audience to interact with the channel	1. Use of introducing statement
2. The *Youtuber* encourages his or her audience to interact with the video	2. Use of fillers
3. Interaction formulas used	3. Characteristic jargon
4. Promotion of other *Youtubers* in the audio	4. Personal and differentiated style of the *Youtuber*
5. Recommendation of other *Youtubers* in the "recommended channels" section	5. Mention to the number of views or statistics of the channel
6. Advance about future contents (expectation)	6. Mention to specific users
7. Presence of contests and other strategies aimed to reward interaction	7. Mention to the increase of subscribers
	8. Direct request of comments or opinions
	9. Assigns nicknames to fan followers
	10. Calls to the viewer about parts or elements of the video

Source: Adaptation of indicators 1, 2 and 3 of the models suggested by McRoberts, Bonsignore, Peyton & Yarosh (2016). Variables 6 and 7 have been added by the authors.

There were used 3 identification variables of the channels: name of the channel, number of subscribers and theme.

Table 2. Sample of channels, subscribers and theme

#	Channel	Subscribers / Theme	#	Channel	Subscribers / Theme
1	ELRUBIUS OMG	33 million subscribers Videogames	6	TheGrefg	9.4 million subscribers Videogames
2	VEGETTA777	25 million subscribers Videogames	7	LuzuGames	8.6 million subscribers Videogames
3	WILLYREX	15 million subscribers Videogame	8	STAXX CRAFT	7.2 million subscribers Videogames
4	EXPCASEROS	10 million subscribers Entertainment	9	GYMVIR	5.9 million subscribers Personal care
5	MAKIMAN131	10 million subscribers Videogames	10	Vchurches	5.5 million subscribers Videogames

3. Results
3.1.Channels analysed

From the ten channels analysed, eight have been created by men. The only two exceptions are the channel *ExpCaseros* produced by the *Youtubers* Natalia and Mayden and *Gymvirtual* by Patry Jordan. Most of channels are dedicated to the upload of videogames contents. These are videos featured by gamers. These creators share their gameplays with their followers, using either live or pre-recorded broadcast, record their multi-gamer plays where the *Youtuber* confronts other players to battle, fight or collaborate through said game modality. They narrate while playing to promote videogames, show promote videogames, teach tricks and hints to other gamers. On the other hand, the channel *ExpCaseros* is dedicated to making home-made experiments, low cost experiments, cheats, handicrafts, optic illusions, myths unveiled, survival strategies, oddities, etc. all that explained in an entertained manner and with a humour twist. *Gymvirtual* is a channel dedicated to gymnastics exercises, health-related advice, diet and sport, healthy and easy recipes to prepare at home. The channel *makikamn131* is focused on entertainment. There is a mix of videogames, challenges and the follies of Internet, to generate humorous content. All channels are made by youths with creative capacity, who were able to gather millionaire audiences.

3.2. Indicators of promotion and user participation in the community (Dimension 1)

The content creators analysed, without exception, encourage followers to interact with the channel. The design of the YouTube interface promotes communication since it allows users to write opinions about the *Youtuber*, about the channel and about each one of the videos published in the channel. In the upper right section of YouTube there are the tools that enable users to join or subscribe to the channel. Right beside the last uploaded video, creators encourage visitors in written by using similar claims: "Click here to subscribe". "Subscribe, click a like and video inside" writes *elChurches* in one of his videos. *Makiman131* invites visitors of his channel to "join his craziness".

The direct requests for subscription to the channel are a recurrent and shared practice in all cases, although some do so, by using special strategies based on economic exchange. *elRubiusOMG* suggests his followers the possibility to join his channel for 4.99 € per month. In exchange, he facilitates exclusive access to contents, customized banners for some followers, *emojis,* direct private access and other exclusive contents. Also, *TheGrefg*, broadcasts live, but to participate in the game, it is necessary to subscribe and pay 5.99$. It is a means to maintain users captive and to stablish a certain hierarchy in the direct access to the YouTuber. *Veggeta777* offers different subscriptions levels to his channel: silver, gold and diamond level; the same benefit levels YouTube grants to monetized channels. Each level involves the participation of one, five and ten Euros respectively. Different benefits are obtained depending on the level. In the silver level, there are obtained banners and the possibility to participate in chats. In the gold level, access to surveys in live broadcasts and the possibility to have access to specific videos before the rest of subscribers. In the diamond level, subscribers obtain, in addition to the rewards mentioned earlier, the benefit of being greeted by the *Youtuber* live.

Although not all *Youtubers* demand payment to subscribe to the channel, all of them follow similar behaviour patterns, recognize their followers' loyalty by offering some sort of reward: download games for free, mention the names of new subscribers, reduce the price of a game by using the name of the *Youtuber* as a discount code, etc.

In general, contents creators verbally encourage their audience, at the end of the video to click a like if they liked it. The number of likes received is a key information to understand the preferences, expectations and increase their loyalty. They are also useful as an indicator of success and the reach of their work. *YouTubers* promise to upload more videos with the same content if many likes have been received.

Live broadcasts are a way to interact with the audience. When the video is broadcasted live, the viewer can share his experience by interacting with the *YouTuber* and the rest of viewers using the comments section on YouTube or social networks. *Vegetta777* broadcasts live videos (called *"noche íntima vegetil"* [vegis' intimate night]) through the Twitch platform, a platform similar to YouTube that gamers tend to use for live broadcast. These broadcasts are usually done at night when it is possible to create a more intimate atmosphere. He dedicates these videos to answering questions from his followers. *El rubiusOMG* also broadcasts two-hour live videos. Further examples: "On Monday, 4 february we will be broadcasting live here. We will taste military food: O" (*ExpCaseros*); "Do you want a live video this evening about victories in the Battle Royale of Battlefield V? Epic is coming ^^ I hope you love it! It is up to you to decide whether it is the last one or we keep rocking ^^" [sic] (*Vegetta777*).

Table 3. Channels, social networks of the channel, alternative channels and recommendations

YouTuber	Social Networks	YouTube Tag	Alternative channels	Recommend other YouTubers	Recommend merchandising
elrubiusOMG Since 19/12/2011	Facebook Twitch Facebook Twitter	Videogames	Rubius Z	Mangelrogel; EDDisplay; Chestoesenior;aLexBuy11; Maximus; iTowGamePlay; Willyrex; Different Heavy	
VEGGETA777 Since 2/3/2008	Twitter Instagram Facebook Twitch Google+	Videogames		TheWillyrex; TheGamerMaldito sTaXxCraft; xFaRgAnx YT byAbesL; Stratus; angelyxaras aLexBY11; DsiGamer iTownGamePlay ♥Terror&	
TheWillyrex Since 9/8/2009	Twitter Instagram Facebook	Videogames	TheWillyrex	VEGETTA777 sTaXxCraft	
ExpCaseros Since 18/9/2012	Twitter Instagram Facebook	Home-made experiments	http://www.youtube.com/expcaseroskids http://www.experimentoscaseros.info/ Mayden & Natalia Vlogs	Laury What	Men and Women T-shirts
Makiman131 Since 11/2/2013	Twitter Instagram Facebook	Entertainment	MakiGames	CamiloGames; FixFive CrocodualYT; NEW LEVEL UPENDI – Toys & Fun; patty dragona	
Luzugames Since 1/5/2013	Twitter Instagram Facebook	Videogames	LuzuVlogs LuzuyLana	TheWillyrex; sTaXxCraft byAbesL; aLexBY11 VEGETTA777	T-shirts Mugs
TheGrefg Since 30/1/2012	Twitter Instagram Facebook	Videogames	https://mixer.com/TheGrefg https://goo.gl/alqmWP	byRaFiTa; byViruZz; bytarifa; Nil Ojeda; iByre; Georgo; Ampeteeby7; Thetoretagg1 KenyaYT; NahueVIEW	Book "YouTube secrets"
sTaXxCraft Since 27/11/2011	Twitter Instagram Facebook	Videogames	sTaXx (Main channel) sTaXxRandom	Willyrex byAbesL Thetoretagg1 PokeR988TV DjMaRiiO	
gymvirtual Since 1/11/2010	Twitter Instagram Facebook Pinterest	Sports	Patry Jordan SecretosdechicasVIP Patry Jordan English Secretosvlog Gym Virtual English Mistim		Book "I can handle everything"
ElChurches Since 4/8/2012	Twitter Instagram Facebook Twitch	Videogames		Claudix NexxuzHD THE CORVUS CLAN Markos MicZ Rafyta18 ZunexSensations	

Authors' own creation.

The collaborations with other *YouTubers* are common in this platform. This promotes the exchange of followers between creators, increases interactions with the users and creates a characteristic communicational style. In one of his videos dedicated to the game Fortnite, he succeeded in gathering the 100 Top Spanish speaking YouTubers. *Luzugames* also mentions and plays in his videos with other YouTubers. The last video of *NexxuzHD* in the sample is created with another renowned *YouTuber*, *ElChurches*. However, it is more common that *YouTubers* recommend others in the section "channels of the platform" of their channel. All of them recommend some channel (a minimum of one *ExpCaseros* and a maximum of eleven, like the case of *Veggeta777*). There is often observed a reciprocal relationship in the recommendations based on friendship relationships and similar contents (see table 3). It is usual that *YouTubers* recommend their other alternative channels in this same section as well.

YouTubers create expectation and raise the interest of their followers by advancing the contents of their next videos. Following the preview model of television contents, they announce the contents of

future videos, days or hours in advance. This way, their fans will keep the programming in mind. The last announcement of *elrubiusOMG* in his Community channel: "World Release of Virtual Hero today at 22:00 on my channel :) (in 4 hours) GIT HYPE BOIS". Vegetta777 in his Community channel, refers to the latest content uploaded to the channel this way: "The variety continues in the channel! We do not stop rocking in all games! TODAY A LIVE VIDEO OF BATTLEFIELD V! The NEW Battle Royale has just been released! Will we achieve victories this evening?".

Another interaction formula is about sharing contents related to the personal experience of the *Youtuber*, aspects of the everyday life, travels or issues associated to their creative facet. *ExpCaseros* shows in the channel's community section, a picture of their dog, *TheWillyrex* shows a picture of him wearing the limited edition of his clothes. Sharing this story, as recommended by the YouTube channel can be a very powerful way for viewers to identify with the *YouTuber* and to develop a sounder connection than the one developed with other creators.

The contests and raffles of books written by the creators, as well as mugs, clothes, also represent a form of interaction to keep the community active; they are also useful to promote the channel and the *Youtuber* products (merchandising). *TheGref*, author of the book *Los secretos de YouTube* [The secrets of YouTube]*,* organized a contest that consisted of getting to the locations indicated previously in Google Maps. The first person arriving to each location would receive a free book signed by the author. The Youtuber acknowledges in his channel: "Thank you all for coming to the locations! I love you!! ALL of you". The creator of the channel *gymvirtual* also organizes raffles regularly among her followers. The reward that winners receive is content from another of her social networks. The *Youtuber* says that the most important thing is not the prize, but the recognition of doing things in a correct manner.

3.3. Types of *youtuber*-audience interaction (Dimension 2)

Youtubers stamp their particular style to their audiovisual contents. Although many have adopted strategies recommended by the YouTube Academy, such as appealing headlines, an introducing statement that repeats, good illumination, similar formats, each one has his or her own way for doing things and this is what makes them singular compared to the rest of creators.

The communicational and aesthetic style of each one of them, personal and non- transferrable, has allowed them to gather a community of followers that identify with their ways of doing and telling things. For a creator it is indispensable to outstand, do things differently from the rest. The initial greeting or the introduction statement is an identifier element that is part of the *Youtuber's* hallmark: "Dearest creatures of the Lord" (elrubiusOMG) "What's up smart guys, welcome to a new video" (ExpCaseros) "Hi, welcome you all to a new bacchanal" (NexxuzHD). "Hey, 'morning you all, handsome and vegettas" (Vegetta777) are some of the initial greetings from the creators analysed.

There is identified a characteristic jargon, understandable by the audience that use to watch their videos. This language is characterized by the use of fillers: "ok" "that is" "you know" are repeated by elrubiusOMG. Shorthand phrases like: "very nice, dude". Anglicisms: Epic fail, What the fuck, trolls, spammers, etc. Words that quickly cross the screens to incorporate into the everyday language of youths. The lack of norms is evident in some *Youtubers*, especially when they write. Thus, Nexxus introduces his channel: "Welcome to my channel! Originality, Fun and Video quality: D I love GTA 5, but every now and then I upload other kinds of games, anyways, if you want more! You may enter

my secondary channel! I wait for you there! :D". Using a different style, *elRubiusOMG* welcomes "I am proud of this community we have created together. Thank you for staying with me day after day, those who have been here for a long time and the new comers, I love you:')".

The gamers creators use terms characteristics of the videogame and players culture, difficult to understand for people who do not belong in this world. Words that define situations experienced in the gamer's life and that are essential to communicate with their followers. One of the specialties of *elrubiusOMG* are the one-minute videos about new videogames he promotes, for instance: "New video. Pokemon Lets Go in 1 minute. Every like is one less Caterpie in the world" (Caterpie is one of the creatures of the Pokemon Franchise). *Vegetta777* expresses himself this way: "My car bugged". "*Bugear"* [2] [Bugged in English] means to alter any element of a game through the introduction of codes like *bugs*, or taking advantage of them, to get a bonus over other players. "If you are really a numbskull, you are using cheats" says *ElChurches*. Referring to a player who is using cheats [3] to get advantage in the game.

Every significant increase in the number of subscribers to the channel is shared with the followers in an immediate manner. Setting audience goals and achieving challenges stablished is something usual in this world. *TheGrefg* announces, in the community section of his channel, a 10 million subscribers special "10 million Special Pre-recorded videos. Still it is too early to talk, but I think I will never upload a video as good as this one to my YouTube channel. When? How? Will there be a trailer? You will know all about it very soon...". Live broadcasts is one of the ways to reward followers for their loyalty. This is what the creators of *Expmaniacos* write "After working for 6 years, are now 10 million *expmaniacs*! 10 million thanks, we will never be grateful enough...". The tone is always colloquial, and only a minority of channels (n=2) use the inclusive gender language.

The *YouTuber* is aware that his or her channel depends on the number of followers, therefore the reason why every significant increase is communicated to the audience, celebrated and thanked by *YouTubers* using different rewards: organizing challenges, live broadcasts, special videos, etc. A good number of subscribers means succulent benefits for them and a name in the world of YT. "Signing chests since 1992. I have the best and also the craziest followers!" (*sTaXxCraft*). "We are already 15,000,000 subscribers! Thank you ALL very much! To bear me for so many years!! And for the newcomers…well… you don't know how much more there is left still... xD I achieved to log into the ARK server, so today we continue the series! Please remind that you can also vote every 24h here:" (*TheWillyrex*).

The acknowledgement and special consideration towards some fans is manifested through the mention of their name or profile in the statements of the *Youtuber*. Sometimes, as an answer to some direct question, or as reaction towards some comment either through the YT channel or through social networks. To answer to questions and comments is a way to take care of the members of the channel's community. Although, Youtubers do not tend to answer the comments of their followers in the section reserved for comments of the channel, however, they search and promote the feedback of their audience by mentioning some comments in their videos, memes, etc., not only through the channel but also through their social networks: Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. "Please write, when do you think we will reach six million subscribers in the channel?" says *elChurches*. "Guys, follow me on Instagram that I am quite active there :)" (*sTaXxCraft*).

At the beginning and the end of every video, *Youtubers* remind the viewer to click a like for the video and ask about the opinion and comments in the channel or through the networks. They try that their fans avoid becoming mere spectators to stablish a dialogue instead, a bidirectional communication that moves the content creator closest to his or her audience. *Gymvirtual* states the following requirement: "I am eager to read your opinions, I would like to see the themes you would like me to handle, you already know that I am always very attentive about what you are saying."

All *YouTubers* inform their followers about the contents they are preparing. They use statements like "We are gonna rock it", "This is gonna be big" "You will love it" are expressions that aim to engage fans with the channel. Another way to achieve that association is by assigning nicknames to followers. Creatures and creatures of the Lord (*ElrubiusOMG*); *TheWillyrex* tends to call his followers *batrachians*; expemaniacs (*ExpCaseros*); *DjMariio* refers to his video followers as guys, also *ElChurches* refers to his followers in the same way. *Veggetas* are the followers of *Veggeta777* and also *handsome* or *gorgeous*. By using this tactic, they achieve that their fans feel like belonging to the group.

The creators do not tend to grab the attention of the users over parts or elements of the video except when a new element in the scenario is added. The only exception is found in *ExpCaseros*. Natalia and Mayden invite to watch their videos called the *back room*, but they do not tend to grab attention on parts of the video.

4. Discussion and conclusions

The results allow to compare this study with the preceding findings mentioned earlier in the introduction. The data confirm the existence of many configurative elements about what is known as community of practice as understood by Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder (2002) and Gannon & Prothero (2018). These communities present the characteristics proposed by Preece (2000) and Porter (2004) since users gather around a domain. However, it is convenient to nuance that in the case of *youtuber* channels, the community has a transmedia character, since contents are disseminated through several media and formats with different domains and a broad scope of possibilities to contact the brand-channel: several YT channels in parallel, attached social networks, merchandising products for online shopping and other diverse connections. Although social interaction is identifiable and, therefore, there is coincidence with the studies of Preece and Maloney-Krichmar (2002) and Kozinets (2002), the study reveals that this *youtuber*-audience interaction is perceived best on live video spaces where there is interaction in real time and has a greater authenticity and realism.

All community properties suggested by Wenger et al. (2002) could be confirmed to a greater or lesser extent as indicated in the results section, especially the existence of a characteristic shared jargon. Communities orbit almost exclusively on the video content published, also confirming the user-video-user scheme focused on the content suggested by Wattenhofer et al. (2012). The presence of norms, in the sense suggested by Rotman & Preece (2010) is not explicit, but instead has the tacit or implicit character, it is difficult to identify and would deserve an additional future research.

Significant gender differences are evidenced in the sample selection studied (monetized channels in Spanish with more followers). In the selected sample, 80% of *youtubers* are men and only 20% are women. In all cases, the youtuber is predominantly a *solo* protagonist, except for the case of the channel *ExpCaseros*, conducted by a couple. It can be said that the world of *youtubers* is configured by

initiatives or individual projects where the personal brand stamps a clear difference although there is not an equal presence of both genres.

The most voluminous audiences appear in the themes related to videogames (7 for every 3 channels studied), even though there are other social networks different from the generalist YouTube, such as Twitch (owned by Amazon) exclusively targeted to live video streaming, playthroughs of games played by users, *eSports* and videogame events. In addition to the videogames, the other themes of greater success are related to accessible entertainment (experiments), body care and a healthy lifestyle. The narrations, in all cases, are revealing and inspiring for the user, in a way: cheats, surprising ideas, divergent perspectives, humour or exclusive information.

The objective presented in the study was to identify the indicators that promote the creation, maintenance and growth of a community of users around the youtuber channels with more subscribers. With all the restrictions derived from the exploratory character in the suggested approach, an aspect that hinders making excessive generalizations despite using a wide sample, we can say that practices were identified in each one of the three dimensions of the community concept.

The three research questions have been confirmed by the study since the practices that characterize each *Youtuber* have been identified and are manifested in the channel (question 1), there was confirmed the presence of distinctive elements that allow to conceptualize the followers of the channels as a community of practice (question 2) and 4 community management strategies were identified (question 3), detailed as follows.

The study allows to identify four community management strategies deployed by *Youtubers*: fidelization of the audience, community widening, generation of expectation on future contents and the particular management of the tab Community of the Channel.

The first one is based on the fidelization of the audience and includes actions that often entail an economic exchange, added value or access to exclusive contents. In all cases studied, the audience is directly and openly requested to interact by clicking "like". The monetization system and the variables considered to assess the capacity and influence of a channel force the *Youtuber* to request in a direct manner since the number of subscribers alone, is not a valid data, since a user can be subscribed, but not being active. The activity of the followers and their disseminating potential through sharing and other social actions, allows to increase the number of followers in an exponential manner. A certain conditionality in the management of interactions is perceived, namely, the *Youtuber* is more present, replies directly to followers and interacts more in exclusive spaces or those that involve prior payment. To compare the intensity of the interaction of the *Youtuber* with his or her audience, on free access social networks as well as paid spaces, could be an interesting future research line that could not be analysed with the approach in this study. The exclusive spaces with some access requirement (payment, previous invite…) reduce the number of members of the social conversation, ensure a more intimate and manageable conversation, *a priori* by the *Youtuber*, that is hindered by more massive spaces. To broadcast live with open chat is an alternative way to reward followers for their loyalty.

The action of users focused on fidelization are often complemented by actions targeted to the extension of the community (second strategy) in the search of audiences that share the same thematic interests. This occurs by performing actions of diverse nature in collaboration with other *Youtubers* with which interests and themes are shared. This way the audiences of different channels but similar themes are

extended and mixed, creating wider communities, appealing synergies and differentiated contents that can be watched on several channels at the same time, transcending the personnalism of the channel and increasing the interest of the audience based on the novelty and the event of a joint performance of two *Youtubers* who tend to work independently. This way the fan phenomenon is encouraged, an unavoidable element in every community of this type. Any significant increase in the number of subscribers or considerable visualization data are celebrated by the *Youtuber*, with explicit mention to festivities.

The third strategy is related to the generation of expectation about future contents, standing out by the diversity of formulas and their temporal planning in the previous period. The temporal planning includes the concentration of messages in the hours prior to generating the event. The formulation of questions is prominent in all of them. Even scheduling new contents in the calendar to orientate the audience and ensure their presence in the release of new contents.

The fourth strategy is the management style of the tab Community of the channel, specifically designed by YT to strengthen the relationship with the public and encourage them to come back to the channel more often. Each *Youtuber* uses it in a different way, which evidences his or her flexibility, but allows to extend the life of some videos or update them through thematic versions that group several videos published previously in a separated manner, upload videos in GIF format repeated key scenes, *making off* videos, contents related to the personal life of the *Youtuber*, perform crossed productions together with other channels, publish surveys, among others. The videos uploaded in the Community tab appear there, but also in the feeds of subscribers as well as the subscription tab of channel' subscribers. This way, the likelihood of watching videos increases in a significant manner. It is a suitable space to recognize followers, increase their noteworthiness by mentioning them or answer their most usual questions, tagging comments of users with a heart or reply using unprecedented images.

It is appealing to confirm two simultaneous lines of work by the *Youtuber*, apparently contradictory and opposed that coexist in the everyday life of their management: the group of actions aimed to increase the number of subscribers and the group of actions aimed to create less massive spaces where a more direct interaction with the followers is possible. We could say that the size of the community does not favour the direct and authentic interaction; to counteract this effect, the *Youtuber* is willing to direct interaction only in more reduced spaces, more minoritarian and that promote a more efficient conversation.

The management of a community of thousands or millions of followers is complex and demanding. The strategies onset to differentiate every channel are innovatively ephemeral. The indications provided by the YouTube Academy to creators induce to reproduce what works, extend formulas that surprise and boldly look for the attention of the followers. The practices identified confirm that we are living a phase where the attention economy determines the type of communication and its socialization. In this sense, the conclusions of this study confirm this theory. To know the evolution of these spaces for the future, in order to monitor the evolution of communities, how are they influenced by the passing of time and the generational change entail a research challenge of undoubtful interest. There is also research interest about studying the forms of management of the social conversation deployed by the *Youtuber* and that are facilitated by technology but hindered by the excessive volume of users of his or her community.

This exploratory study [**4**] reveals indicators, practices and strategies valid to comprehend the phenomenon of *Youtuber* communities, a phenomenon of masses that could not be studied 15 years ago because it did not exist.

5. Notes

[1] Original text: "*A group (or various subgroups) of people, brought together by a shared interest, using a virtual platform, to interact and create user-generated content that is accessible to all community members, while cultivating communal culture and adhering to specific norms*" (Rotman & Preece, 2010, p. 320).

[2] Definition of *Bugear* [online]. (28 May 2019). Retrieved:
http://www.gamerdic.es/termino/bugear

[3] Definition of *Chetado* [online]. (28 May 2019). Retrieved:
http://www.gamerdic.es/termino/chetado

[4] This text has been funded by Universidad de Alicante, a public research entity, under public and competitive convocation. Ref- VIGROB 021.

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