

Departamento de Sociologia

**YouTube and YouTube Gamers:
Converting Gameplay into Social Recognition, on an Ever-Changing
Platform**

Beatriz Sanches Salvada

Dissertação submetida como requisito parcial para obtenção do grau de
Mestre em Comunicação, Cultura e Tecnologias de Informação

Orientador(a):

**Doutor Tiago José da Silva Lapa, Professor Auxiliar Convidado
ISCTE-Instituto Universitário de Lisboa**

Coorientador(a):

**Mestre Ana Pinto Martinho, Professora Externa Convidada
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Outubro de 2018



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This dissertation has been by far the most challenging project I have ever tackled. There have been many occasions in which I thought it would be easier to quit than continue onwards, but I could not quite pinpoint exactly why I wanted to stop writing. At first, I blamed my lack of motivation to a phenomena all academics are familiar with: procrastination. Ironically enough, most of it was done on YouTube, which I justified to myself as further research on the topic.

But as I rethink back on those times, I have come up to realise that I was frightened to not achieve the goals I had mapped out on a subconscious level. The fear to not cross the finish line, was crippling my train of thought.

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Abstract

Besides standardising the daily use of ICTs, computer games have developed and transformed the current global economy. Furthermore, the gaming industry has instilled new working practices, which have completely transformed the processes of consumption and production, yet blurred the lines between work and play.

YouTube embodies this new economy. On the one hand, it is a site where users actively participate and collaborate, creating relevant and sharable content. On the other hand, it is a mainstream media company that handles ongoing tensions between professional and amateur users, who wish to attain recognition, as the level of competition increases.

Since YouTube's business model is based on the circulation of user-generated content, the remaining question is whether the user's approach changes, as the platform evolves and institutionalises.

An online inquiry was applied to a sample of 10 YouTube Gamers from four different nationalities (Portuguese, American, Brazilian and Austrian) aged between 25 and 42, with the intention to analyse a YouTube Gamer's identity, the creative and technical process of creating content, the YouTube Gaming Community, and finally, the perception each respondent had over the platform.

The results of this study show that as the level of recognition increases, so does a YouTube Gamer's need to perform better online, not just in terms of content, but also on how they present themselves.

In addition, a YouTube Gamer's perception of Youtube as a disseminator of viral content, negatively effects their user experience, which might lead them into searching for new online platforms.

Keywords: YouTube; YouTubers; Gamers; Gameplay; User-Generated Content; Professional Generated Content

Resumo

Para além de terem normalizado o uso das TIC, os jogos de computador tiveram um grande impacto na economia global atual, nomeadamente na introdução de novas práticas laborais e na alteração dos processos de produção e consumo, o que dificultou a distinção entre trabalho e lazer.

O YouTube expressa esta nova economia. Por um lado, permite aos seus utilizadores participarem e colaborarem na criação de conteúdo relevante. Por outro lado, é uma corporação que lida com tensões entre profissionais e amadores, que tentam atingir reconhecimento, à medida que o nível de competição aumenta.

Dado que o modelo de negócio do YouTube é baseado na circulação de conteúdo gerado pelo utilizador, questionou-se a abordagem dos utilizadores face à institucionalização da plataforma.

Um inquérito online foi realizado a uma amostra de 10 YouTube Gamers de quatro diferentes nacionalidades (portuguesa, americana, brasileira e austríaca) com as idades compreendidas entre os 25 e os 42 anos, com o objetivo de analisar a identidade de um YouTube Gamer, o processo técnico e criativo na criação de conteúdo, a comunidade gaming, e a percepção que cada inquirido têm acerca da plataforma.

Os resultados demonstram que à medida que o nível de reconhecimento de um YouTube Gamer aumenta, também aumenta a sua necessidade de ter um melhor desempenho, não só em termos de conteúdo, como também na sua forma de apresentação.

Ademais, a percepção de que o YouTube dissemina conteúdo viral, afecta negativamente a experiência do YouTube Gamer, o que o fará procurar por outras plataformas.

Palavras-Chave: YouTube; YouTubers; Gamers; Gameplay; Conteúdo Gerado pelo Utilizador; Conteúdo Profissional

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1. Introduction

In *The Information Age*, Castells states the inherent human need to seek out information has been heightened by the introduction of technology in one's daily life, marked with the arrival of "a new society": the network society (Webster, 2006). The network society is made up of several "information networks", which are linked through constant flows of information and are mainly powered by the Internet and social media, which have shaped some societal sectors, such as politics and economy.

Furthermore, the network society's adaptability and flexibility to rapid changes in a global technology-led market, has decentralised power from big corporations to individuals and smaller organisations, which resulted in a transition towards a horizontal type of communication (Castells, 2001). This new mode of Internet use is related to the emergence of Web 2.0 technologies, where "(...) content and applications are no longer created and published by individuals, but instead are continuously modified by all users in a participatory and collaborative fashion." (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010: 61).

As a result, a new economy has flourished based on the creation of individual value: consumers are no longer bystanders, but active participants, both in consumption and production of content, which had an effect over the economy and how businesses work and surround themselves around their consumers.

One could illustrate the emergence of this "people-driven economy", also known as *socialnomics* (Qualman, 2009), to how YouTube has created economical value. Unlike traditional media, new digital media sites like YouTube profit from the circulation of content created by their users, also known as user-generated content (Jenkins, Ford and Green, 2013). YouTube's economical force is therefore driven by the consumer co-creation (Potts et al., 2008), which is the extension of the production and innovation processes to the consumer and the interactions established with others.

Besides YouTube's disruptive media business model, one should also point out the emergence of new jobs for their content creators, also known as YouTubers. According to Holland, "Since its development, YouTube has transformed from a video-sharing site into a job opportunity for content creators in both new and mainstream media." (Holland, 2016: 52).

While some scholars reinforce the idea of YouTube as a site of participation and collaboration, where anyone can voice their opinion, the opposite view is held by others. McChesney's book *Digital Disconnect: How Capitalism is Turning the Internet Against Democracy* (2014), "(...) addresses that media conglomerates have dominated the Internet, once an "anti-commercial" space. In terms of who is seen or heard on the Internet, there's no contest: companies dominate every network, and have been able to maintain and strengthen their stranglehold thanks to lax regulatory policy." (Maher, 2017: 12).

McChesney's cyber dystopian approach could also be compared to YouTube's institutionalisation: as professional creators and advertisers infiltrated the amateurs' realm, the platform's public sphere transformed from a place where one could freely participate, to a competitive site where the amateur's voice is challenged. Moreover, since YouTube's worth is based on the

circulation of user-generated content, Fuchs (2017) points out that the platform has taken advantage of the creative work developed by users as commodities, hence not caring for the “unpaid labourer”.

Although, Fuch’s “capital accumulation model” is associated to corporate social media, such as YouTube, this is not a recent practice. In fact, Kirkpatrick (2013) pointed out that the emergence of computer games and the gaming industry, though transforming the current global economy and how society is socially and culturally organised, also took a toll in the work sphere.

Increasingly work is creative but it is also economically insecure. Individuals in developed economies face competition for most jobs, not just from local markets but from around the world as increasingly production is located in the ‘virtual’ space of electronic networks. The labour process is more of an ‘adventure’ but it also places demands on inner resources of each individual that were previously withheld from the economic sphere. This situation calls forth a new kind of economic subject, namely the ‘streamlined worker’ who is less concerned with developing a careers than she is with palling the game well from day to day. (Kirkpatrick, 2013: 9)

It is therefore relevant to understand wether YouTube’s institutionalisation has converted amateurs into professionals, and in particular, gamers into YouTube Gamers. As a result, the following research questions were developed:

- *What kind of strategies do YouTube Gamers adopt and develop, in order to remain relevant on YouTube?*
- *How has YouTube’s institutionalisation affected a YouTube Gamer’s approach?*

The purpose of this dissertation then, is to understand how YouTube Gamers succeed on YouTube, based on their communicational strategy, as well as how well they respond to some of the platform ’s issues, thus adapting and evolving as creators.

Although YouTube is made up of several niches, YouTube Gamers were the selected ones for two reasons. On the one hand, as computer games have introduced people to ICTs and normalised the daily use of them, knowing why one plays video games is just as important as to why people use Social Media (Kirkpatrick, 2013). Furthermore, “(...) the fact that people associate digital devices with play has implications for the way they relate to their working tools.” (Kirkpatrick, 2013: 17.). In other words, the concept of work and play has been blurred by creatives such as YouTube Gamers, who broadcast themselves playing video games, with either the intention to achieve recognition, or profit.

On the other hand, most of the existing studies have conceptualised YouTube according to its own timeline. The first one would be before Google, which faces questions related to the presence of a participatory culture, as well as YouTube’s patronage over content, particularly amateur. The second one would be about YouTube’s institutionalisation, whose approach tends to explore the infiltration of

big media corporations and advertisers into YouTube's mediascape, resulting in ongoing tensions between user-generated content and professional-generated content, as well as undergone changes in the platform. However, the lack studies about a YouTuber's perception of these occurring changes, has yet to be further explored and therefore, it remains important to debate these issues.

This dissertation will attempt to answer the previous questions and is divided into five parts. The first part, *Theoretical Framework*, is divided into two subchapters: *YouTube* and *Gamers and the Gaming Culture*. The first one, will discuss YouTube as a media platform which enables participatory culture, while counterpointing with the effects of the platform's *googlization*, namely the user's experience, for viewers and creators alike. The second one, will briefly explain the evolution of the gaming industry, as well as the gamer's identity, and relate to the introduction of YouTube as a game changing event for the industry, as well as for the gamer's identity.

The second part, *Research Framework*, will propose a model of analysis based on seven hypotheses, which were created out of theoretical and empirical data, in order to facilitate the process of analysing the obtained results.

The third part, *Methodology*, is divided into two subchapters: *Investigation Method* and *Process*. While the first subchapter will explain the reason for choosing the method of analysis, the second subchapter will focus on describing the process of obtaining the results: from the selection of the YouTube Gamer's sample, to the creation of an online inquiry.

The fourth part, *Data Analysis and Results*, is divided into 4 subchapters. The first one, *Characterisation of the Sample*, will describe the socio demographic data from the studied sample, as well as other important elements, such as the Type of Gaming channel, based on the produced content, and the presence of merchandise, agents and sponsors. The final three subchapters, *Participatory Culture*, *Level of popularity* and *Identity of a YouTube Gamer* will test out the seventh created hypotheses from the retrieved data.

Lastly, the fifth part, *Conclusion*, will give out some general remarks about the developed study, and in what way this dissertation has paved out way for future research.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. YouTube

2.1.1. “Broadcast Yourself” - Participatory Culture Evidence on YouTube and YouTube’s Role as a Patron

Founded in 2005 by former PayPal employees, Chad Hurley, Steve Chen and Jawed Karim, YouTube is the most popular video sharing website in the world. A 2018 report done by *Hootsuite* and *We are Social* showed that in 2017, YouTube was the second most visited website in the world, based on average daily visitors and page views. In addition, out of the top ten most visited websites, YouTube was the only video site present in this category.

Like many of its video services’ competitors, YouTube’s primary intent was to remove any technological barriers, in order to facilitate the widespread sharing of amateur video content (Burgess and Green, 2009).

YouTube proclaimed itself as “Your Digital Video Repository”, where users could easily storage their videos and share them, with an already existing social network. One could compare YouTube to a cultural archive, destined for users to search old media content uploaded by other users, such as music videos and television series, as a way to reminisce about the past (Burgess and Green, 2009).

However, the platform suffered a shift, “(...) from the idea of the website as a personal storage facility for video content to a platform for public self-expression” (Burgess and Green, 2009: 4). Thus, a new era for YouTube had begun, easily recognised by its iconic slogan “Broadcast Yourself”, which according to Jarrett (2008) meant two things. Firstly, YouTube offered a positive user experience, by giving to its user the needed technical tools to produce, edit and share video content. Secondly, it was a call for action, directly inciting one to record a video and upload it in the site.

In other words, besides providing a free media outlet where anyone could upload low resolution video content effortlessly, YouTube also gave a voice to the individual, once constrained by powerful traditional media, as a means of self-expression and identity construction, through an open, accessible, compelling, unconstrained and unmediated type of communication (Miliken and O’Donnel, 2008).

The emergence of video-sharing websites adds yet another dimension to personalized program packages selected by viewers: we can now produce our own audiovisual contents and distribute them from our homes to a potentially worldwide audience. The “you” in YouTube signifies a new type of collaborative co-producer of media content whom we have come to refer to as a “user” of audiovisual content. Rather than simply offering a new technological environment for video-sharing, YouTube and similar sites are well underway to engender a new social practice that is distinct from the conventional agencies of viewers, audiences, or consumers. (Djick, 2014: 3)

Even though YouTube gives an opportunity for amateurs to perform and show themselves online, the company's wellbeing comes first. As previously stated, YouTube's business thrives from the creative content produced by its users, not from the actual platform. Since the site relies heavily on user generated content, YouTube's role lies solely on providing a free platform for its users.

As a result, YouTube's role is compared to one of a patron, for both corporative and non-corporative parts, since it supports collective creativity during the production of amateur videos, yet it controls some aspects of how it should be produced, ordered and re-presented for the audiences' perception (Potts et al., 2008). For instance, the website's design for video placement is according to the audience's interests and choices, which is clearly shown by particular metrics of 'popularity': Most Viewed and Most Discussed (Burgess and Green, 2009).

YouTube's agency towards UGC only got tighter in 2006, when Google purchased YouTube for 1.65 billion dollars (Holland, 2016), marking YouTube's official institutionalisation. The media company started gaining popularity with professional creators and big media corporations, who saw YouTube as an opportunity to remain relevant and attract some eyeballs. Consequently, YouTube added some policies, such as property rights, copyright ownership and commercial interests, which surprisingly enough, were already mentioned in the slogan's trademark element (Broadcast Yourself™).

Although potentially a site for resistant identity practices and for challenging established media power relations, its sale to Google indicates that YouTube is nevertheless a valuable piece of commercial real estate. Indeed, it is *because* of the non-commercial relations of consumers that the site has traditional economic value. (...) By marking its relationship to intellectual property conventions in its slogan, YouTube indicates its prime location within the conventional political/economic regime. (Jarrett, 2008: 135-136)

In addition, some scholars, such as Jenkins, point out that YouTube's business embodies the spreadable media model: the majority of the UGC is the result of repurposing and transforming already existing media content, usually produced by big media corporations, and turning them into something new, relevant and sharable. Although it brought value to the media company, the fact that the creation of new media content based of on already existing ones, only strained the relationships between amateur and professional users, as it constituted a breach of copyright media ownership. This issue will be further discussed in the following chapter.

In spite of YouTube's attempt to control the production of video amateur content, "(...) the purposes and meanings of YouTube as a cultural system are also collectively co-created by users. Through their many activities – uploading, viewing, discussing, and collaborating – the YouTube community forms a network of creative practice." (Burgess and Green, 2009: 61).

That is, while most YouTube users have followed the site's values, some users have appropriated the site in different ways, breaking the cultural and social norm. Burgess and Green (2008) defined this as "a user-led revolution", where some innovator users, also known as YouTubers, have changed the platform's meaning, based on their user experience.

Rather than solely using YouTube as “broadcast-yourself” video platform, YouTubers saw the potential of using the site as a place of discussion and exchange of opinions between individuals who shared similar interests, and social and cultural backgrounds. In other words, YouTube changed from a media platform solely moved by individual interest, to a social network of participation and collaboration.

Jenkins’s concept of participatory culture, denotes what was previously mentioned. On the one hand, YouTube has given space for individual creation, in which fans and media consumers create and circulate new content based on existing one. On the other hand, YouTube’s social affordance created out of the user’s experience, has given an opportunity to contribute one’s creative work in a social sphere, which can later on be collectively discussed and readjusted.

Despite YouTube’s best intention to offer a positive user experience, its users still had to solve some technical issues, in order to participate in a collaborative fashion. For instance, the site’s architecture did not offer any built-in method to participate in a collaborative fashion, so YouTube users had to come up with creative yet effective solutions, in order to achieve those same intended results. Burgess and Green (2009) defined this as a user-led innovation, which could be defined as finding ways to overcome technical barriers.

However, according to Burgess and Green (2008), YouTube has developed new features as a means to propagate itself as a social network, rather than simply inciting broadcasting. For example, the homepage has been redesigned so that whenever the user logs in, the user encounters content related to their social network, which in this case is subscribed channels and friends (Burgess and Green, 2008). These small yet effective changes are done in order to retain as many visitors as possible, by strengthening their relationship with the site and implementing ways to better communicate with their social network.

Although scholars such as Jenkins have praised online platforms for enabling the growth of participatory cultures, there are some scholars who point out this view as deterministic and unreal.

From a cultural perspective, the creation of amateur content is killing contemporary’s culture (Keen, 2007). That is, as individuals broadcast themselves, and are given a platform to voice their opinion, the quality, or veracity of content no longer matters. Consequently, the distinction between professional and amateur content is more diluted than ever, which could have an effect on the overall public opinion (Keen, 2007).

The tagline for YouTube is "Broadcast Yourself." And broadcast ourselves we do, with all the shameless self-admiration of the mythical Narcissus. As traditional mainstream media is replaced by a personalized one, the Internet has become a mirror to ourselves. Rather than using it to seek news, information, or culture, we use it to actually BE the news, the information, the culture. (Keen, 2007: 7)

From an economical standpoint, not every creator has the same visibility on YouTube. In fact, the majority of the views goes to big media corporations. According to Fuchs, “(...) transnational media corporations, the organised exploiters of artists and consumers' surplus value-generating labour, control YouTube's political attention economy.” (Fuchs, 2017: 123). In addition, as corporations

infiltrated YouTube's mediascape, so did their capitalistic logic. Consequently, YouTube's business model is the result of the accumulation of capital, by exploiting the unpaid labour, as well as the commodification of content generated by users, which is finally sold to advertisers (Fuchs, 2017).

YouTube's institutionalisation and the arrival of advertisers and big media partners to YouTube's social sphere, has strained the relationship between amateurs and the media company. The question is whether or not there is enough space in YouTube for amateur and professional content, and if YouTube can handle the tensions between user generated content and professional generated content.

2.1.2. YouTube's Institutionalisation and its Controversies

According to Kim (2012), ever since Google purchased YouTube, the media company has evolved from an amateur user-generated content medium to a professional broadcasting channel. With the "googlization" of YouTube (Djick, 2014), the media company became more advertiser-friendly, which spiked advertisers' interest towards online streaming video services like YouTube.

One of the reasons for this shift, from an ad-free to an ad-friendly environment, was the introduction of stricter copyright laws. By the end of 2007, YouTube introduced ad-effective tools, such as Video ID and Audio ID, that could inform copyright holders of any copyright infringements from source materials and claim their rights, by blocking, promoting, or even partnering up with YouTube and sharing the generated revenue (Kim, 2012).

Furthermore, YouTube's newest e-commerce model was based on the placement of two types of banner ads. The first one, Featured Videos, consisted on the user buying a space on YouTube's homepage, in order to advertise their ads. The second one, Promoted Videos, worked similar to Google Adwords: the user would buy search terms, also known as keywords, and associate them with the uploaded videos. This way, the user could assure that next time a viewer sought out a video of the same topic, the viewer would wound up in the channel.

As a result, the once disordered amateur-led platform soon became an ad-friendly one, where media companies could profit from online advertisement revenue, promote their content in a free manner, as well as interact closely with their audiences, that had moved towards new forms of media consumption.

In a 2009 study, Haridakis and Hanson further demonstrated this point, by suggesting that YouTube viewing is similar to television, except for the social aspect, reflected by some of its social networking characteristics. Firstly, YouTube viewers have the control to choose the type of content they intend to view and there is no viewing schedule. Secondly, YouTube viewers can share and discuss the viewed content with their social networks, allowing them to "(...) move seamlessly between traditional mass communication activity of watching mediated content, and interpersonal or social connection activity of sharing it with others" (Haridakis and Hanson, 2009: 317-318).

This doesn't mean that traditional media is no longer a significant focus, since they remain a crucial and prominent amplifier in a spreadable media environment. However, suddenly, the importance of recommendations from "the average person" have become a renewed priority, and word of mouth, the original form of marketing, is treated as a new phenomenon due to the major distinction: online communication creates a textual trail of the conversations audiences have about a brand or media property which may be archived indefinitely for all to see" (Jenkins, Henry, Sam Ford and Joshua Green 2013: 75)

Besides YouTube's social networking characteristics, YouTube users get the opportunity to create low-video quality content and upload it with no costs to an even wider audience than television (Maher, 2017). From a viewer's perspective, the fact that YouTubers create content from scratch, from writing the script and acting, to editing and post-production, makes the content appear to be more realistic, authentic and relatable than professional generated content (Holland, 2016).

In *Watching YouTube*, Strangelove further explores this, by claiming that YouTube offers something that television or film does not, and that online video streaming services such as YouTube defy the traditional media business model, stating that "(...) video diaries are the punk version of television." (Strangelove, 2010, *apud* Maher, 2017: 12).

In spite of YouTube's efficiency to draw more viewers, traditional media is not going anywhere anytime soon. That is to say, although user-generated content has become a serious rival to professional generated content, big media corporations will not disappear. In fact their adaptation to these new mediascapes is happening, not because they want to, but because they see the value user-generated content has over audiences, and advertisers in particular (Djick, 2014).

While Haridakis and Hanson's findings suggest that YouTube has revolutionised the media sphere, Kim (2012) states the opposite: YouTube was the result of an evolution, from television to digital. The reason for this could be explained by YouTube's adoption of old media rules, such as legally managed distribution of broadcasting content and smoothing links between amateur and commercial content (Kim, 2012). In other words, "YouTube represents not so much the collision as the co-evolution and uneasy co-existence of 'old' and 'new' media industries, forms, and practices." (Burgess and Green, 2009: 14).

Moreover, instead of competing with each other, YouTube and television work together and influence one another, with the single purpose of attracting eyeballs and advertisers (Kim, 2012).

Although this symbiotic relationship has proven to be beneficial for both of them, for YouTube's "core users" it has been the complete opposite. The infiltration of big media corporations has marginalised user-generated content, thus straining the relationship amateurs have developed with YouTube.

That is to say, from the user's perspective, YouTube's negligence towards amateur content has been perceived as a cultural shock on YouTube, whose values no longer stand by creative low-quality content, but rather focus on providing a safe place for professional looking content to thrive, often times skimming into sensationalistic, as means to generate ad revenue and improve the platform's popularity rank.

Paperlilies, a lead user of YouTube, agreed to this controversial change to the platform by stating the following:

You've got the corporate thing now, you've got it down pat. Everyone wants to be on YouTube and that's great. But now you've got to go back to those people who made YouTube what it is, and promote them. Because a lot of people are feeling neglected by YouTube. And the site that they grew to love last summer is no more. Now we have just another TV channel that happens to be on the Internet. And I don't like that. (Burgess and Green, 2009: 93)

In order to demonstrate their disapproval, YouTubers protested through the art of video making, such as vlogging, much like punk rock defied hippie genre in the 1970s (Burgess and Green, 2009). Appropriating Thornton's (1995) subcultural capital concept, a YouTubers' resistance against the platform's institutionalisation is but the result of detaching themselves from mainstream content and protecting their old ways of self-expression and self-fulfilment.

While some YouTubers were able to fight back YouTube's institutionalisation and the infiltration of professional-generated content into the platform, others have fully embraced it. In a post-network era where technology has become more sophisticated, audiences have become more selective and where overflow of information is a common denominator, it comes to no surprise that amateur videos on YouTube face a bigger competition than ever before. (Lotz, 2007 apud Kim, 2012). Furthermore, the high level of online competitiveness has affected the level of quality and veracity of information, becoming more manipulated, unrealistic and sensationalistic (Marwick and Lewis, 2017).

Consequently, YouTube's newest user generation no longer wishes to create something amateur. With the right technical tools and authenticity by their side, YouTubers can create professional looking content as any other present media corporative present on YouTube, claiming once again their rightful place in the platform and who knows, even achieving stardom.

This need of popularity and relevance on YouTube is constructed by the attention economy approach, which is the capacity to capture the audience's attention to the uploaded content, subsequently translated by their level of engagement:

Social media - and largely, the internet as a whole - is an attention economy where the most valued content is that which is most likely to attract attention. The overload of information enabled by the internet makes attention an extremely valuable resource. (...) Thus, in a media-saturated world, both traditional and new media seek to cover whatever can attract 'eyeballs' (Marwick and Lewis, 2017: 42).

However the fact that YouTubers perceive YouTube as a place to watch viral content, that no longer cares for authenticity, has weakened their established relationship. As a result, some YouTubers felt the need to rethink their communicational strategy towards their audiences, in order to stand a chance while facing an ever bigger competition.

For instance, some YouTubers have been criticised by the YouTube community for resorting to misleading techniques, namely eye-catching thumbnails and intriguing yet provocative headlines, in

order to attract more views and clicks to their videos (see Annex A.). Zannettou *et. al* (2018) defined these sort of techniques as clickbaits.

What Zannettou *et. al*'s study (2018) also proved was that although clickbait practices are effective for increasing a video's performance, YouTube recommendation engine does not distinguish between clickbait and non-clickbait content, thus not considering a user's experience as important as the well-being of the media company.

As a result, the entire YouTube community has been negatively affected. On the one hand, YouTube audiences have become victims of these techniques, compared to television viewers who "(...) are no longer active thinkers that creators seek to engage, but passive consumers to be roped in by catchy titles and intriguing thumbnails, and held by entertaining yet benign content." (Maher, 2017: 9). On the other hand, YouTubers have been increasingly ostracised both from its community and mainstream media for being amateurs who desire to become famous through vlogging.

The remaining question is whether or not user-generated content will survive in a platform that is becoming ever more professionalized and suffocated by traditional media and advertisers. However, one should not forget that YouTube's value and popularity is based on user-generated content. As a media company, YouTube should have the ability to respond to its users wants, needs and expectations. Without user-generated content, YouTube would not have had the same cultural impact over the online media industry.

2.2 Gamers and the Gaming Culture

2.2.1 Gaming and Gameplay as socially accepted cultural practices

While some scholars have defended the popularity rise of video games as the result of the rapid development of technology and transition of playing machines from arcades into households, Kirkpatrick (2013) also pointed out the importance computer games and the act of playing them had and still do over shaping society, on and off screen. These matters should be therefore seen as interdependent.

The act of playing computer games is closely knitted to society's perception shift of the use of computers, from government and corporate administrative tools, to user-friendly, playful devices. The main reason for this shift happened in the beginning of the 1970s, with the invention of computer games. Consequently, computers and its games became cultural commodities, not just for tech people, but for the ordinary man as well (Kirkpatrick, 2013).

However, according to Kirkpatrick (2013), the emergence of these cultural practices still arose a certain level of anxiety and suspicion from mainstream media and society alike, who still perceived gameplay as a child's plaything and a serious addiction to machines, that would soon cease to exist. 1980s Atari's failure further confirmed the mainstream's prediction that video games were "a simple fad", and consumers would soon go back to their old media consumption habits (Williams and Kahn, 2013).

By 1983, adults were effectively banned from arcades by social forces, and the simultaneously collapse of Atari and the home game industry made it appear that grown-ups were never again to be interested. Similar effects could be found among women, who were generally socialized away from technology already. The rise of Nintendo and its squarely child-centric marketing only reinforced these trends. (Williams and Kahn, 2013: 267)

In spite of the decrease of video games' sales in the 1980s, the gaming culture was slowly being formed. Besides the appearance of innovative gaming companies, such as Nintendo, magazines also had an important role towards socially recognising gameplay as a valuable cultural artifact. "It was through the production and dissemination of words, texts and images that people's ideas about computer games were formed, making it possible for the practice of playing the games to become widespread." (Kirkpatrick, 2013: 72).

One could compare the role of 1980s magazines to contemporary's gaming phenomenon in YouTube. Like the 1980s gaming magazines, YouTube Gamers and its community could be considered the greatest disseminators of video games, whom empower consumers into exploring parts of themselves (Chen, 2013), as shall be explored in the next chapter. The catch is whether a YouTube Gamers' performance is authentic or simply the creation of an online persona.

2.2.2 A Gamer Before a YouTuber? Identity Construction and Personal Branding on YouTube

Throughout time, as technology became more sophisticated and computer games evolved, so has its players. The once amateur enthusiast player, from a “white male computing fraternity” (Kirkpatrick, 2013), soon turned out to be a gamer, and a difficult one to define. Indeed, the level of complexity of a gamer’s identity increased over time, mainly due to the presence of a wide range of video game genres, as well as an equal increase on the level of gameplay difficulty.

Additionally, with the appearance of the Internet and social network sites, the social aspect of playing video games became more present and relevant, which turned out to be an even more important contributor for constructing a gamer’s identity.

For instance, Role-Playing Games (RPGs) such as World of Warcraft (WoW), have allowed gamers to not only establish online relationships with their peers, which are as important as the ones they create in real life, but also develop an online identity, through the choice of an avatar (Kirkpatrick, 2013). In other words, not only does a gamer’s identity is based on how one plays, but also on how the community recognises one’s gaming accomplishments.

However, Kirkpatrick reminds one that “The choice of avatar affects how we are perceived by others in the game, but it also limits the kind of role or function a player's character can take on in the course of particular game sequences.” (Kirkpatrick, 2013: 129). Taking into consideration Goffman’s concept of self-presentation (Goffman,1990), it is therefore extremely important for gamers to show their best selves online, which might not correspond to the reality, but to the creation of a second identity, whose performance goes accordingly to the community’s expectations (Kirkpatrick, 2013).

Avatars are then subject to transformed social interaction [24]. This phenomenon means that, with the advent of avatars, users have been able to emphasize and minimize certain aspects of self, such as appearance or behaviour. This has become possible because users are now editors and creators – designing and creating their self-representations, choosing what to bring to the foreground or hide in the background... (Bullingham and Vasconcelos, 2013: 103)

The creation of the online-self could also be applied to YouTube Gamers’ reality, especially to those that focus on Let’s Play (LP) videos, “(...) a method by which video game players record themselves commenting on gameplay for an online audience.” (Hale, n.d: 3).

By demonstrating their gameplay from start to finish, LP players are simultaneously presenting their online self to the gaming community, handing out valuable guidelines on how to beat the video game and giving feedback to audiences and gaming companies alike, on the quality of the experienced video game. That is to say, a YouTube Gamer’s value is created out of self-branding, which is the consumer’s ability to market as an object of interest for media consumption, much like brands and big corporations have done before (Chen, 2013).

But in spite of achieving self-discovery and self-fulfilment through the act of gameplay and social recognition from the YouTube Gaming Community respectively, a YouTube Gamer’s still

suffers, from Boltanski and Chiapello's "new spirit of capitalism", demanding "(...) streamlined individuals who are prepared to pay money and work in return for an increasingly thin return in terms of resources of self-construction and identity maintenance. In this context, recognition from others of one's play and of its value becomes more important than ever. Gaming culture is a recuperative resource in this sense." (Kirkpatrick, 2013: 121).

3. Research Framework

Prior to observing and analysing the object of study, which in this case dwells on YouTube Gamers' adopted and developed strategies as means to remain relevant on YouTube, a research method was conceptualised into three dimensions: *Participatory Culture*, *Level of Popularity* and *Identity of a YouTube Gamer* (see Fig.1.3).

As a result, the following hypotheses were created, as an attempt to respond to the research questions, and hopefully draw some conclusions from the acquired results.

H1: Social Media is the main vehicle used by YouTube Gamers to promote their channels, as well as spread and circulate content

Jenkins, Ford and Green (2013) explain spreadability as the rapid circulation of content through different platforms, in an easy sharable way: "Spreadability emphasises producing content in easy-to-share formats, such as the embed codes that YouTube provides, which make it easier to spread videos across the Internet, and encouraging access points to that content in a variety of places" (Jenkins, Ford and Green, 2013: 6).

As YouTube provides to its users an easy built-in-tool to share videos with others, it is therefore, extremely important for YouTube Gamers to know the whereabouts of their audiences, and be present in the platforms they are, which might delve into Social Media.

The reason for this assumption goes accordingly to Ramdurai's study (2014) in which he states that gaming content has been expanding throughout different platforms and reaching an ever wider and younger audience, that uses Social Media on a daily basis.

The first hypothesis (H1) will therefore test out whether or not Social Media plays an important role in creating opportunities for YouTube Gamers to circulate content from their channels to potential audiences.

H2: YouTube does not provide the necessary technical tools for a YouTube Gamer to interact with its audience

While some scholars have compared YouTube to a social media platform (Burgess and Green, 2009), others have pointed out YouTube's inability to provide a great user-experience to producers and viewers alike, who wish to participate in a collaborative fashion. (Postigo, 2014).

As result, YouTube users have to continuously overcome these obstacles, in hopes of enhancing communication between users.

The second hypothesis (H2) will evaluate how YouTube Gamers face these issues, when attempting to communicate with their audiences on YouTube.

H3: Viewers influence a YouTube Gamer's creative process

Chau (2010) points out that any level of participation, from viewing a video to creating content, contributes greatly to the YouTube gaming community.

Moreover, by registering every action taken by each visitor, YouTube is handing out valuable information for its creators, which could be used for their channel's benefit. For instance, the evaluation of metrics such as the number of views, likes, comments and subscribers, allow the creator to understand the type of content the consumer prefers to watch and from that, tweak and readjust the created content to the audience's liking.

In turn, these metrics shape the character of the most popular content; users can either deliberately attempt to produce content that will achieve mass attention according to the preset criteria, or they can ignore them altogether (and receive attention from dramatically smaller audiences). (Burgess and Green, 2009: 41)

The third hypothesis (H3) will question the creative process of YouTube Gamers, and whether or not the level of engagement registered by YouTube's metrics have any sort of influence on the type of produced content.

H4: YouTube's institutionalisation has led some YouTube Gamers to resort to clickbait as means to fight back competition and remain relevant in the platform

Although YouTube's participatory culture allows any user to create content and share it with others, the fact that the number of uploaded videos by amateurs and professionals alike is so great, makes one question the quality of content present on YouTube.

According to Zanettou et al. (2018), a YouTuber's main intent is to increase their ad revenue and profit from it. One of the ways in which YouTubers achieve this is through the use of clickbait, which is the use of deceitful images and texts, in order for viewers to click on the content and view it, as means to raise the level of engagement to that video.

In spite of increasing the chances for a clickbait video to be viewed, clickbait practices negatively affect a user's experience, since the actual content of the video does not equate to the expectations of the viewer before clicking on the video. This is a major concern for YouTube, since their main goal is to provide a great user experience:

It's great to see that people are watching more, but that doesn't necessarily mean the experience has improved. Look at website clickbait, for example. It might get you to look at more content, but it's not a great experience. My challenge is to answer the question, "how do we really know the experience is good across the board?" Answering that question involves looking at a few things: Can users discover YouTube's features and experiences? Do they know how to use those features? And do those features improve their experience? We're really starting to focus on user satisfaction as a measure of success for product development, ads, and even our algorithms. If what we're doing makes users happier, we're on the right track. And directly asking users "What's your biggest frustration today?" and "What's your favorite thing about YouTube?" provides more insights than we could gather from watch time alone. (Avery, 2018: 4)

According to Bartl (2018), YouTube's *googlization* and the exponential increase of professional productions, kept user-generated content from attracting views. In addition, most of the YouTube channels do not make enough profit from advertisement. In fact, only 3% of the YouTubers gain enough profits to make a living as a Full-Time YouTuber, leaving the rest 97% to never have as much success on the platform (Bartl, 2018). The reason for their inability to achieve stardom is due to an increase on the level of competition and productivity in the platform: as the number of channels increase, so does the level of competition.

It is therefore deduced that clickbait practices might be a way for user-generated content to survive in this platform.

The forth hypothesis (H4) will evaluate whether the strategic use of clickbait by YouTube Gamers, is correlated to YouTube's institutionalisation, as well as the perception each YouTube Gamer has over the platform's evolution.

H5: A YouTube Gamer's perception of YouTube as a platform that prefers viral content has made some gamers search for new platforms

Although YouTube users blame the media company for privileging dissemination of viral content, a 2016 study undergone by Google proved otherwise, relating to how and why people spend their time on YouTube¹. The top two reasons viewers watched YouTube were "to relax" and "to feel entertained" (see annex B.). In addition, the four main categories watched by YouTube users were: comedy, music, entertainment/pop culture, and "how to" (see annex C.).

¹ For more information, check Think with Google's article at the hyperlink: <https://www.thinkwithgoogle.com/data-collections/youtube-stats-video-consumption-trends/>

In spite of these results clearly showing that YouTube does not have a preference over viral content, YouTubers still perceive the platform as detrimental for the user-experience. Furthermore, the constant algorithm changes, took a toll on some channels' performance, in terms of number of views and subscribers, which have led some YouTube Gamers to consider moving to other platforms, such as Twitch and Dispatch, in order to survive online².

The fifth hypothesis (H5) will compare a YouTube Gamer's user-evaluation of the platform, with the possibility of moving to different platforms, in order to remain relevant.

H6: The cultural notion of a gamer has not changed over time and female counterparts are still not taken seriously by the YouTube Gaming Community

According to Ramurai (2014), video games are no longer appreciated by a selected group of people but has achieved mainstream popularity. This societal change of gaming content also took a toll on the gamer's identity, once characterised by the young white male tech figure.

Ramdurai's retrieved data (2014) further confirms this shift, by stating that although gaming content still targets young males best, women over the age of 25 have been identified as the fastest growing demographic for viewing gaming content on YouTube. Furthermore, millennial females are actively engaging more on YouTube gaming videos than on any other type of content (see Annex D.).

As consumption of gaming content is more inclusive towards female viewers, one might question whether female creators have started being accepted by the gaming community. YouTube Gamer PewDiePie begs to differ, when he criticised a female gamer from using her body, in order to get more views on her Twitch channel. In 2016 alone, only 35% of Twitch streamers were female, which signals a great disparity in number of female creators (Cole, 2018).

Although Twitch differs from YouTube, it is important to understand whether YouTube Gamers have the same understanding of female gamers across different platforms. The sixth hypothesis (H6), will evaluate whether the YouTube Gaming community, in particular its creators, still hold any prejudice against female gamers.

H7: Since the work of a YouTuber is still not socially recognised as a sustainable profession by outsiders, YouTube Gamers create online personas, in order to attract recognition

As YouTube becomes more mainstream, a YouTuber's wish to become more popular and capitalize on their content increases. However, according to Bartl's study (2018), "(...) the sheer volume of already existing competition must make it difficult for both professionals and amateurs to deliver their content

² See YouTube Video from Jacksepticeye's Channel: "Youtube's Making Some Questionable Changes." *YouTube*, YouTube, 30 Nov. 2016, www.youtube.com/watch?v=j5WxVBNpImE.

to any larger audience (Cunningham et al., 2016).” (Bartl, 2018: 17). Consequently, if a YouTuber intends to turn a hobby into a full-time profession, then the creator might have to learn to adapt and evolve as the platform changes.

Besides tweaking their content, in order to appease the audience’s interest, a YouTuber could also create a persona, with a specific set of characteristics and traits, appearing to be more approachable and relatable to the audience’s reality. For instance, YouTube vloggers record in their own bedrooms and discuss personal experiences and issues on camera, which might help them develop a closer relationship with their viewers, one thing that television has never been able to recreate (Burgess and Green, 2009).

This also happens with YouTube Gamers: while recording a video, they demonstrate their level of skill and mode of gameplay, which either defines them as authentic or fake gamers, leaving the identity of a YouTuber as secondary.

The seventh hypothesis (H7) will explore whether YouTube Gamers create personas, in order to feel accepted by the community and achieve a certain level of recognition.

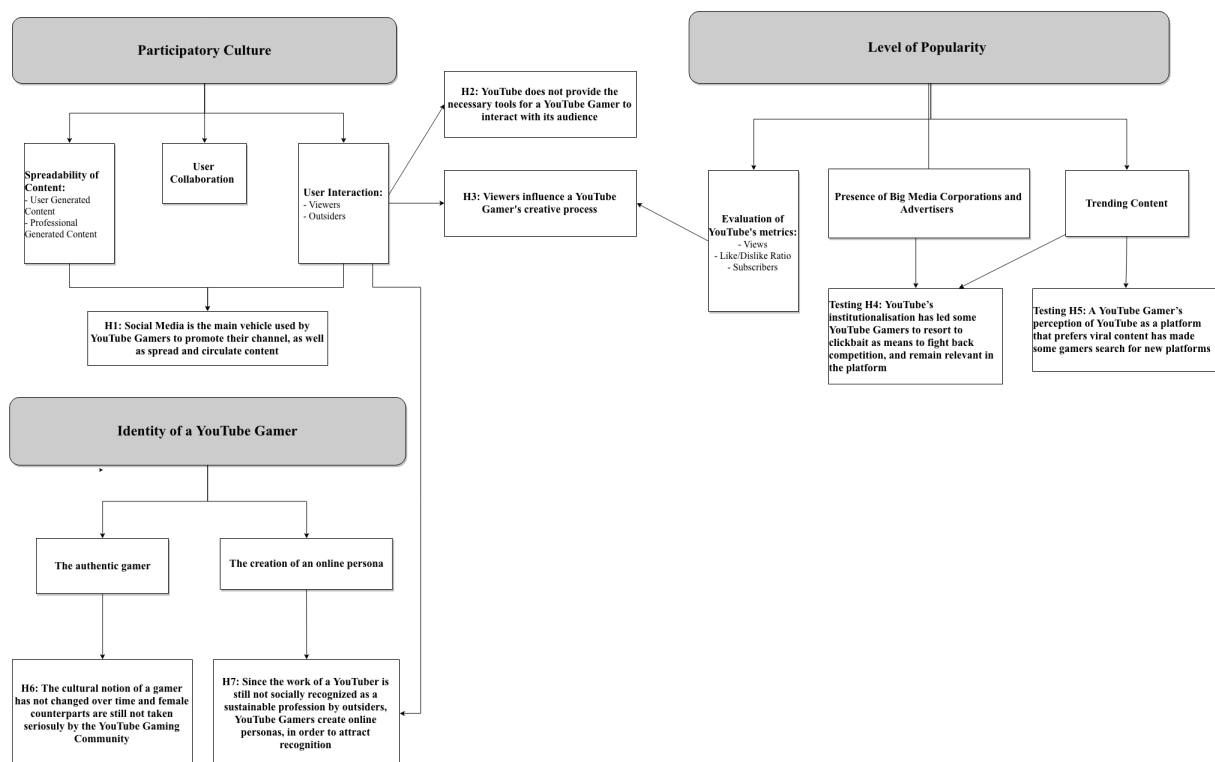


Fig 1.3. Research Framework

4. Methodology

4.1 Investigation Method

The two main goals for this study were to understand how YouTube Gamers succeed on YouTube, based on their communicational strategy, as well as how well they respond to some of the platform 's issues, thus adapting and evolving as creators.

In order to retrieve relevant data, it was important to directly get in touch with individuals from the studied niche, which in this case were YouTube Gamers. As a result, this dissertation used the qualitative method, through the creation of an online inquiry, which was later on shared with the selected sample and carefully analysed.

Furthermore, this study also used the Hypothetical-Deductive method (Quivy and Campenhout, 1998): the elaboration of a research framework was supported by a series of hypotheses, each based on previous work done by scholars, as well as retrieved data from online sources, including YouTube. However, in some cases, the lack of data allowed the selected method to also lean towards the inductive side.

4.2 Process

4.2.1 Creation of an Online Inquiry

The online inquiry was structured into six topics (see Annex E.), which questioned the YouTube Gamer's identity, the creative and technical process of creating content, the YouTube Gaming Community, and finally, the perception each respondent had over the platform.

Initially, the online inquiry was a script for a directive interview, but since the sample for this study was broadened to a global scale, the retrieval of the results would turn out to be different for each respondent. For instance, while YouTube Gamers with Portuguese nationality would be easier to carry out a directive interview, due to the close geographical location, international YouTube Gamers would be harder to track down, hence there would be no direct contact between interviewer and interviewee.

As a consequence, the script changed to an online inquiry with open-ended questions, similar to a semi-direct interview, giving freedom of choice for the respondent to answer or not, to the proposed questions.

Since the communication between respondents was done via e-mail, a Google Docs document was created with all of the questions and sent for each respondent via e-mail through an editable hyperlink. This way, the interviewer ensured that the communication with the respondent would be as transparent as possible, and that it would also be possible to monitor the progress of each responded inquiry, as it could be accessed from both parts (see Annex F.).

In addition, the online inquiry was also translated into Portuguese, since more than half of the respondents did not speak English.

4.2.2 Selection of YouTube Gamers

The following theoretical and empirical reasons justify why YouTube Gamers were the studied sample for this dissertation.

Firstly, although some scholars have already dealt with a YouTuber's qualities and their effects on amping up a popularity's channel (Holland, 2016), there is still a lack of studies concerning the YouTube Gamers' reality.

Secondly, there have been many registered cases in which YouTube Gamers had to deal with harsh criticism from the mainstream media, towards creating sensationalist content, in order to raise their online popularity rank. For instance, PewDiePie, the most subscribed channel on YouTube, payed two young men to record a video where they show a sign with the sentence, "*Kill All Jews*". What was considered as a joke by the creator and its community, was described by the media, as a video that disseminates Nazi and anti-semitic values, which did affect PewDiePie's channel performance (Marwick and Lewis, 2017).

Thirdly, although YouTube does not give preference to viral content, YouTube Gamers still assume that the media company plays an important role in deciding which video content is relevant and sharable, from the immense content flowing through the platform. YouTube's patronage has also been issued in 2016, with the algorithm controversy, which according to YouTube Gamer Jacksepticeye, immensely affected the activity of some channels, especially smaller ones, who had to leave the platform since their content could no longer sustain the algorithm changes³.

While selecting the YouTube Gamers that would make up the final sample for analysis, there were no limitations in terms of age, gender or number of subscribers. The only considerable variable was that the respondent had to have an active gaming channel.

The selection of the gaming channels was based on available data on Social Blade, a statistics website with the top online channels from different social media outlets⁴.

More than three hundred gaming channels were contacted from all over the world, but only a small percentage responded. The majority of the available contacts on the About Page of a YouTube Gamer's channel were for business inquiries only, meaning that people who usually handle these situations are the agents or managers of the YouTube Gamers, making the process to directly contact the actual respondents more challenging. The final sample was reduced to ten participants from four different nationalities: five Portuguese, two Brazilians, one Austrian and two Americans.

³ See YouTube Vide from Jacksepticeye's Channel: "Youtube's Making Some Questionable Changes." *YouTube*, YouTube, 30 Nov. 2016, www.youtube.com/watch?v=j5WxVBNpImE.

⁴ See more at: <https://socialblade.com/youtube/top/category/games>

4.2.3 Data Collection Procedure

Although the niche for this dissertation had already been, there was still the question as to how the interviewer would reach out the YouTube Gamers and ask for their permission to participate in the online inquiry.

There were two choices mapped out: either trying to contact them via social media, by sending a private message, or reaching out by e-mail through their “business inquiries only” e-mail box. It was later on decided to send an e-mail, since there were some gaming channels who did not have a link for their social media accounts on their YouTube channel, and also the chances for the respondent to check on their e-mail box and respond were greater than a comment on social media.

A Microsoft Excel document was created, and in order to keep a record of the e-mail correspondences with the YouTube Gamers it was used three different colours: green when the respondent accepted to participate in the online inquiry and has responded to it, yellow when it was a pending situation, meaning that the respondent had accepted, but had not yet responded to the online inquiry, and red for not responding to the e-mail, nor to the online inquiry.

Most of the e-mails were in the red zone. As previously mentioned, most of the collected e-mails were for business related issues only, which did limit the communication between YouTube Gamers. That is, there was no direct link with the YouTube Gamers because their agents or managers handled that communication.

After the respondent agreed to participate in the online inquiry, the YouTube Gamers would fill out the form sent by email, through a Google Docs. Each e-mail sent was personalised to the YouTube Gamer. For instance, if the YouTube Gamer did not speak English, a translation had to be made for the document.

When the form was filled, the YouTube Gamer would resend it back to the interviewer, and the final question to ask would be if the respondent would wish to remain anonymous. While some did prefer to remain anonymous, since they spoke out of some issues related to YouTube itself, others did not mind putting out their names. This could be a relevant data, indicating not only the need to publicise their own channel on this study, but to also be careful as to what they mention about the actual platform they work with.

5. Data Analysis and Results

5.1 Characterisation of the Sample

For this study, there were ten YouTube Gaming Channels participating in the online inquiry, as seen on Table 1.

YouTube Gamers	Age	Nationality	Gender
AUSGAMER1	25	Austrian	Male
USAGAMER1	28	American	Male
USAGAMER2	25	American	Male
BRGAMER1	26	Brazillian	Male
BRGAMER2	33	Brazillian	Female
PTGAMER1	34	Portuguese	Male
PTGAMER2	35	Portuguese	Male
PTGAMER3	42	Portuguese	Male
PTGAMER4	N.A	Portuguese	Male
PTGAMER5	39	Portuguese	Male

Table 1.5. Socio demographic of the sample by age, nationality and gender

In order to have an overall understanding of the gaming niche, the selection of the sample was broadened to a global scale, resulting in five Portuguese channels, one Austrian channel, two Brazilian channels and two American channels.

The distribution of the sample by age ranged between the ages of 25 and 42. However, one of the respondents, PTGAMER4, did not give out his real age, preferring for it to remain a mystery:

“To this day, no one has been able to get it right.” (PTGAMER4, Male)

Although the majority of the inquired respondents were male, there were two channels who had female gamers: BRGAMER1 and BRGAMER2. The respondents to both of these channels were respectively male (BRGAMER1) and female (BRGAMER2).

The majority of the YouTube channels from the sample were created after the “googlization” of YouTube. However two YouTube Gaming channels, USAGAMER1 and PTGAMER4, were created on the same year as YouTube’s institutionalization. (see annex H.).

In terms as the motivations for starting a YouTube channel, the answers were various. The oldest YouTube Gamers from the sample, USAGAMER1 and PTGAMER4, perceived YouTube as an online video repository, where they could reminisce about their childhood through making gameplay.

The youngest channels from the sample however, had a different outlook. While some YouTube Gamers started a YouTube gaming channel for fun, others saw the potential to learn technical skills, such as video-editing. Furthermore, some creators found that the available content on the

platform was not relevant, so they decided to do it themselves, as a way to share their video gaming skills with individuals that have the same interests.

In order to differentiate between YouTubers who have professionalized their channels, to those that still create content for fun, it was deemed important to retrieve their number of subscribers (see Fig.1.5). Furthermore, the collection of the number of subscribers from each gaming channel allowed to understand how YouTube recognises them as creators⁵. Half of the respondents have already achieved more than 1 million subscribers, which automatically meant that they have already been prized with a Gold Creator Award. However, all of the Portuguese channels have not yet achieved any level of recognition from YouTube.

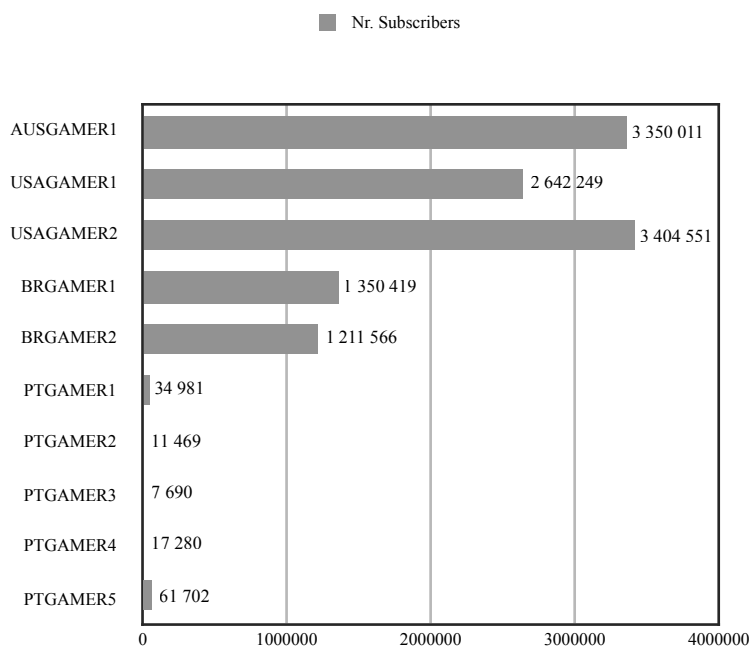


Fig 1.5. Number of Subscribers from each YouTube Gaming Channel. The number of subscribers from each respondent was last seen in 29th of September, 2018

Based on the YouTube Gamers’ responses to the question “Being a YouTuber is a hobby, or a full-time profession to you?”, the YouTubers from the sample were categorised into three groups: Full-Time YouTubers, Part-Time YouTubers and Hobbyist YouTubers (see annex G.).

A Full-Time YouTuber was considered to be an individual that solely gains money from creating content on YouTube, thus turning into a full-time profession.

⁵ YouTube recognises creators whenever they achieve a certain level of subscribers. “Silver Creator Award: Reach 100,000 subscribers, and you’ll receive a Silver Creator Award that you can proudly show off to family, friends and fans.”; “Gold Creator Award: Land 1 million subscribers and you’ll soon be hanging a shiny Gold Creator Award on your wall.”; “Diamond Creator Award: Once your subscriber count has soared past the population of most major cities, a Diamond Creator Award will recognise you as one of the biggest creators on YouTube”. See more at: <https://www.youtube.com/intl/en-GB/creators/awards/>

A Part-Time YouTuber was considered to be a creator that wishes to profit from YouTube content and turn it into a full-time profession, but has not been able to achieve it yet, due to several reasons, including insufficient channel visibility on the platform.

A Hobbyist YouTuber was considered to be an individual that does not gain money from creating content on YouTube, only seeing the use of the platform as a hobby and a great way to share video gaming commentary with followers that have the same interests.

Besides characterising the YouTube Gamers, it was also important to characterise their YouTube channels (see annex H.). The description from each YouTube Gaming channel was retrieved in the About Page section. Some of the collected descriptions had to be slightly readjusted, in order to retain the anonymity of the respondents.

Each YouTube Gamer' channel description allowed to better evaluate a YouTube Gamer's ability to multiply identities, as gamers and entertainers. That is, a YouTube Gamer's channel description is a public statement of who they are, and how the intended to be perceived as, based on the created content, the type of video genre played, as well as the software and hardware systems they use.

By analysing the description from each channel, the following diagram was created:

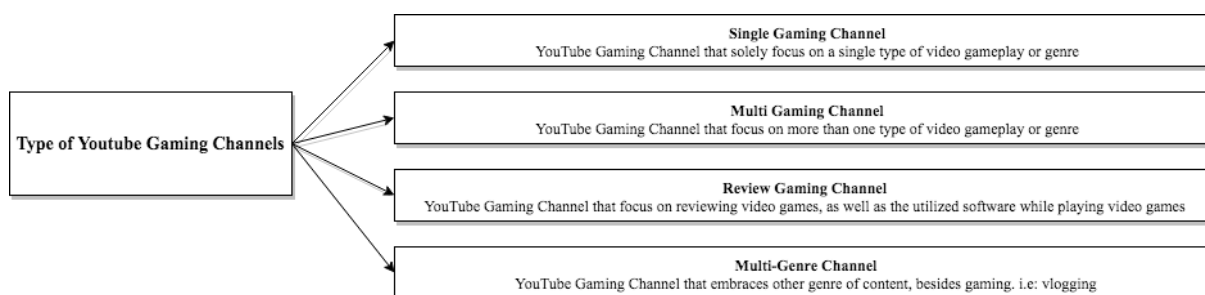


Fig 2.5. Type of YouTube Gaming Channels

The classification of the type of YouTube Gaming Channels allowed to confirm that the majority of gaming channels do not solely focus on a single type of content. Only two gaming channels from the sample produce a single type of video gameplay or genre, while the rest of the respondents are Multi Gaming Channels. In fact, some of the YouTube Gamers already produce content outside of the gaming realm, such as PTGAMER4, a channel dedicated to retro games and music production created by the YouTube Gamer himself.

Moreover, a channel's description also describes at what stage the channel is, in terms of profitability, which could be related to the presence or absence of e-mail contacts for business inquiries, merchandise and other possible partnerships with sponsors from the gaming industry (see Annex I.).

Most of the work tools are purchased by the YouTube Gamers themselves, even those that have already made it into a sustainable profession. In fact, some of them even build themselves. In turn, the attainment of video games by companies is deemed to be easier, since there is a bigger need for their content to be played out by influencers such as them.

In addition, only three of the ten studied channels sell merchandise, two of them already being Full-Time YouTubers (AUSGAMER1 and BRGAMER2).

Lastly, the majority of the studied gaming channels did not have an agent or manager, which might also indicate how the communication with the respondents was much more direct than with the rest of the larger sample to select at the stage of selecting the YouTube Gamers.

5.2 Participatory Culture

5.2.1 Testing H1: Social Media is the main vehicle used by YouTube Gamers to promote their channels, as well as spread and circulate content

Before answering to the proposed hypothesis (H1), it is relevant to understand if the YouTube Gamers from the studied sample are present on Social Media, and if so, which one do they find to be the most important one.

All of the respondents are present on at least one social media, and pointed out three main platforms based on their frequency use: Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. The majority of the respondents said that Twitter was their preferred social media platform, followed by Instagram and Facebook.

YouTube Gamers	Twitter	Facebook	Instagram
AUSGAMER1		X	X
USAGAMER1	X		
USAGAMER2	X		
BRGAMER1	X	X	X
BRGAMER2			X
PTGAMER1	X		
PTGAMER2	X		
PTGAMER3	X	X	X
PTGAMER4	X	X	
PTGAMER5			X

Table 2.5 - Presence of YouTube Gamers on Social Media Platforms

Out of the ten respondents, only two had presence on all three social media (BRGAMER1, PTGAMER3), which indicates that the studied sample does not use social media as a way to interact with its viewers. In fact, YouTube is already perceived as a social media by the gaming community, so there is no need to use other types of online platforms that provide the same effects:

“Yes, especially Twitter, although YouTube already functions as a social media. So technically, YouTube.” (PTGAMER2, Male)

In spite of the YouTube Gamers' overall presence on social media, most of them do not think it plays a huge part in a video's success. The collected answers to this issue were mixed, due to a series of variables, such as the size of the community, age of the YouTube Gamer, and type of gaming channel.

YouTube Gaming channels with over 1 million subscribers, do not take into account Social Media as the main reason for a video's success, because they already perform so well on YouTube.

“Not at all. My YouTube channel dwarfs the traffic of all of my social media pages combined.” (USAGAMER1, Nr. Subscribers: 2,642,249)

In fact, if it were not for their video's performance on YouTube, YouTube Gamers would not have the same notoriety on Social Media:

“No, social media success came through video success” (AUSGAMER1, Nr. Subscribers: 3,350,011)

As the number of subscribers decreases, so does a YouTube Gamer's influence and popularity on Youtube, which is reflected on their social media followers. From this, one can assert that social media is only important to YouTube Gamers once they achieve a certain level of recognition and popularity on YouTube.

“It is extremely important if a YouTuber has many followers. There is always a large percentage that click on social media content, which brings a lot of people. In my case, my community is small and insignificant.” (PTGAMER3, Nr. Subscribers: 7,690)

An interesting result that should also be pointed out is the evident aversion of social media, especially from PTGAMER2 and PTGAMER4, , which might be related to their age and type of gaming content they enjoy to play.

“Unfortunately, it is becoming less significant, due to the algorithms when posting or sharing something. Facebook and other platforms expect for us to pay more for our posts to be seen. So, I do consider that they are losing their importance when promoting new content on YouTube” (PTGAMER4, Age: N.A)

Besides not enjoying nor having the time to spend on Social Media, PTGAMER2 lacks patience to learn how to use social media to his advantage, focusing on the drastic algorithm changes these platforms face, which in his opinion, do not privilege his YouTube videos.

“It depends immensely on two things: content and social media presence. In my cas, it minimally impacts my channel, since I do not spend enough time on social media (to be honest, I do not like social media, I have little time to produce videos, let alone learn how to use social media - it is frustrating). In addition, social media uses algorithms that limit the a YouTube video’s level of reach, preferring to spread videos embedded in the platform. Basically, all of them want to keep their users, for as long as they are able to, such as Facebook and Twitter, who do not have any incentive for a user to share a YouTube video as a social media post.” (PTGAMER2, Age: 35)

In conclusion, social media’s use as a communicational tool to promote a YouTube channel, might not be the best option for some YouTube Gamers, mainly due to their level of activity on Youtube and the size of their community.

While YouTube Gamers with a considerable number of subscribers, will ease into social media, those with smaller numbers, will not have the same impact on social media. The reason for this might be related to their low level of notoriety on YouTube, for they have yet to achieve the role of influencers, someone that everybody follows.

“Honestly, I do not think social media influence that much. We see them as brand propellers and a cool way to get in touch with our audience. To use social media as a way to spread YouTube content has proven to not be effective, over time.” (BRGAMER1, Nr. Subscribers: 1,350,419)

Instead, YouTube Gamers perceive social media as a place of enhancing their public image, while searching for the best way to redirect more attention to their channels, which might pass by linking their newest videos into their social media profiles.

5.2.2 Testing H2: YouTube does not provide the necessary technical tools for a YouTube Gamer to interact with its audience

From the collected answers, YouTube Gamers interact with their audiences at three different stages. The first one is related to the actual activity of creating videos. USAGAMER1 stated that he communicates with his audience,

“By making videos.” (USAGAMER1, Male)

The second one happens when a YouTube Gamer uploads and shares videos with their subscribers. When facing the question as to how they inform their communities of newly released content, six of the respondents said through YouTube’s bell notifications and subscription box. However, there seems to be an overall discontent towards these tools, and especially towards YouTube:

“I hope that the YouTube subscription box and phone notifications do their job.” (USAGAMER1, Male)

“Posts on Twitter and Facebook and I pray that YouTube’s algorithm is in a good mood.” (PTGAMER2, Male)

“I publish the video and pray for YouTube to send notifications, which it doesn’t. It should not happen. If people subscribe to a channel, it is because they want to keep receiving content notifications. It does not even go with a bell...” (PTGAMER3, Male)

“We inform through social media, but YouTube has a notification system, though it is a shame that it does not properly function.” (BRGAMER1, Male)

As patron of their content, YouTube’s users have high expectations. If by any chance, these expectations are not fulfilled, YouTube users appear to blame the media company, not technology. In fact, YouTube’s inability to respond to these consistent technical malfunctions, is assumed by the respondents to negatively affect their channels’ level of reach and engagement to their subscribers, since they are not properly notified. These results also show that YouTube’s technical malfunctions affect both smaller (PTGAMER2 and PTGAMER3) and bigger channels (USAGAMER1 and BRGAMER1), translated by a tense relationship between the media company and the creators.

Lastly, the third one is responding to the received feedback from their viewers. The majority of the respondents said they interact with their viewers by responding to the comments of the uploaded video, or on Social Media.

For PTGAMER4, responding to comments on his videos is a way to get closer to a community, especially to younger viewers, who might tend to misplace his type of gameplay as old school or outdated:

“I read and respond, if necessary, to all my video comments, even though it is still a very morose work. I really enjoy to see youngsters asking me things about retro games, to which I respond to my best abilities and knowledge.” (PTGAMER4, Male)

In spite of their attempt to respond to as many comments as possible, the number of comments is far too big to try and respond to all of them. For instance, PTGAMER5 has to self-filter comments based on the level of relevance:

“I try as hard as I can to respond to all comments. To an extent, it becomes impossible to respond to all of them, so I only respond to those that I find that are more relevant, leaving a like to the rest of them.” (PTGAMER5, Male)

Besides responding to comments, it should also be pointed out that some YouTube Gamers, such as PTGAMER2 and PTGAMER3, create other opportunities for interaction outside of YouTube, such as using Discord Servers⁶ and recording Live Streams.

⁶ Discord is a free voice and text chat app for gamers. See more at: <https://discordapp.com/>

In conclusion, although YouTube has developed technical tools which allow YouTube Gamers to communicate with their audiences, the interaction is still limited by technical and design issues.

It was expected for the sample to have solutions to these issues, but it appears that the YouTube Gamers from this sample do not know how to handle these changes, and rather than overcoming the communicational issues, they either complain about it, or move to different platforms.

However, one must not forget that YouTube was never created to be a social network. YouTube became a social network due to the uses and affordances of the community.

5.2.3 Testing H3: Viewers influence a YouTube Gamer's creative process

When faced with the question whether or not their viewers influence the type of content they produce as YouTubers, their answers were mixed.

For some YouTube Gamers, it is more important to create content that people will most likely engage with, than produce content to their liking.

“Absolutely! I always want to create content that people want to watch and enjoy.” (USAGAMER2, Male)

Although USAGAMER2's wish is to create enjoyable content for his audience, there might be another issue underlined, concerning the wish to monetise attention, based on metrics such as number of likes, views and comments. In other words, by putting first the viewer's engagement rate, measured by metrics, YouTube Gamers are saying that they care more about what the audience's likes, or better yet, what YouTube likes.

“Yes, of course, if we want them to see, we have to please them.”(PTGAMER1, Male)

For this study, the evaluation of a video's success was based on two parameters: Metrics and Social Media. As the second hypothesis (H2) demonstrated, the studied sample does not require Social Media to evaluate their success, since Social Media has a minimum effect over their channel's performance. Instead the evaluation of metrics such as, number of views, likes, comments and time spent viewing the video are better indicators.

“I mention it on social media, and take feedback from there, but all-in-all, i don't feel social media is SUPER necessary to the success of a video of mine.” (USAGAMER1, Male)

Many YouTube Gamers, have pointed out that the like/dislike ratio is the most important metric, in order to understand whether or not the content was well received by the viewers:

“Like/dislike ratio is the number one thing I worry about, then probably number of views followed by overall engagement (comments, etc)” (USAGAMER2, Full-Time YouTuber)

As a result, while views and likes are the greatest indicators of a video's success, comments allow the YouTube Gamer to have an overall picture of the level of engagement and interaction with the video:

“The comments. Views and likes are generated by level of interest, but with comments I can understand whether they have enjoyed the content or not.” (PTGAMER3, Hobbyist YouTuber)

By comparing USAGAMER2 and PTGAMER3, one might conclude that Full-Time YouTubers with bigger communities, prefer to evaluate likes and views, since they profit from advertising as they get more views. Instead, Hobbyist YouTubers prefer to rely on comments, since it is their only reliable source, as their communities are smaller.

In spite of winning the seal of approval from the viewers, some YouTube Gamers from the sample have pointed out that they cannot help but feel obligated towards acting this way, in order to survive in a platform deemed to prefer viral content, to authentic creative one.

For instance, BRGAMER1 stated that some of their viewers suggest games they should try out next, which strongly indicates that their creative process is influenced by their viewers right before they actually record a video:

“Yes, our subscribers like to indicate us games to play, for instance.” (BRGAMER1, Male)

This need of survival might be related to a YouTube Gamer's wish to professionalize a hobby into a full-time profession, but also to the fact that YouTube does not respond to any of the ongoing user-experiences controversies, which do influence their level of popularity on the platform.

“Always. After last year's YouTube boycott towards games, we can no longer produce content we enjoy to make or play. We have to produce content that is trending or that the audience will enjoy to watch, in order to survive.” (BRGAMER2, Female)

Even though some YouTube Gamers from the sample follow the masses, others have refused to do so. USAGAMER1, PTGAMER3, PTGAMER4 and PTGAMER5 prefer to create content that they enjoy making, instead of recreating a trending topic:

“They used to, but they don't anymore. For the longest time, all I tried to do was please my audience, without thinking about what I wanted to do personally. That changed in late 2016 with the beginning of scripted content, and I'm really happy I did that.” (USAGAMER1, Nr. Subscribers: 2,642,249)

“On the contrary, I run away from the trends, so my channels does not grow to the same rhythm as others. I focus on indie or AAA games, but I also do vlogs about the gaming industry. Their feedback to my videos gives me an idea of what they want, but it has never influenced me. I only do it, if I enjoy what I am playing.” (PTGAMER3, Nr. Subscribers: 7,690)

“No, never. I only play what I like, and not what is trending. Check out the music I produce.” (PTGAMER4, Nr. Subscribers: 17,280)

“No, never. To be successful is to do what you enjoy to make and to do it passionately, and people feel that.” (PTGAMER5, Nr. Subscribers: 61,702)

Even though these four YouTube channels have a similar outlook on the creative process, their communicational strategies differ, mainly due to their uses of YouTube. While USAGAMER1 is a full-time YouTuber, the Portuguese channels see YouTube as a hobby, so their experience passes by having as much fun as possible, and sharing their experiences with others. The level of popularity and experience from USAGAMER1 gives him enough room to experiment new ways to create content he enjoys to make, and still monetise from it.

Viewers will only influence a YouTube Gamer’s creative process as long as the YouTube Gamer deems to be necessary. In fact, YouTube plays a greater role in influencing a creator’s strategy, since it is YouTube that evaluates all content and sizes them, in terms of metrics.

As a result, while YouTube Gamers who wish to professionalize their gaming channel will feel the need to respond to the audience’s suggestions, YouTube Gamers who think of YouTube as a hobby, will only respond to their better judgment as creators of content, leaning towards the amateur spectrum.

5.3 Level of Popularity

5.3.1 Testing H4: YouTube’s institutionalisation has led some YouTube Gamers to resort to clickbait as means to fight back competition and remain relevant in the platform.

Although Zanettou et al.’s study (2018) involved many cases of clickbait practices, this particular study will solely focus in the creation of deceitful video thumbnails and titles. It was therefore relevant to firstly understand whether the respondents consider the production of these communicational elements as important as the production of the actual content.

Out of the ten respondents, nine stated that both the creation of a video title and thumbnail are extremely important, if not more than the actual content.

“To an extent, yes. Clickbait is king, especially right now. Good content has become secondary- it’s now all about an abrasive title and thumbnail.” (USAGAMER2, Male)

In fact, the actual time spent for titling a video could take up to an hour, or even more, which indicates that titling video is just as important as actually recording it. In some cases, titling a video is thought out before actually recording the video (PTGAMER2, Male).

“Hours. Sometimes the good title never comes. As for the thumbnail, it takes me between 1 to 2 hours to create.”(BRGAMER2, Female)

PTGAMER2 justifies that the level of time and effort put out in creating the ideal title and thumbnail is not done in vain, because if it is not attractive enough, no one will click on it.

“Nowadays since the level of competition is getting bigger, the title is thought out BEFORE the video production (especially since I produce videos in English), but I would say that the creation of title+thumbnail takes more or less one hour. And to my great disappointment, the title and the thumbnail are MORE IJMPORTANT than the actual content of the video.” (PTGAMER2, Male)

This concern is associated with an increase on the level of competition on YouTube, resulting in an overflow of information. As the consumer faces more information, he has more power of choice, yet becomes more selective. It is therefore important for YouTubers to create appealing content for the consumer that might not recognise at first the creator, but is immediately drawn to the video aspect, which might lead the viewer to click on it.

In spite of the majority of the respondents stating that tilting and creating an eye-catching thumbnail to the video as important steps to turn a video into a success, PTGAMER4 prefers to be succinct and as close to reality as possible. This choice should still be seen as a strategy by the YouTube Gamer, for a video title and thumbnail is the first thing a new consumer faces on YouTube.

“Is it that important to associate a good title and thumbnail to the video? My video titles are as clear as possible, with the platform’s description, name and section of the game I am playing. In case it is a game series, I include the number after #. The majority of my videos have thumbnails dedicated to the game cover and my logo, all in all very discrete.” (PTGAMER4, Nr. Subscribers: 17,280)

Although it is important to produce content of interest to the viewers, clickbait practices do not consider a user’s experience as relevant, with the single purpose of raising the number of views, and the level of popularity.

According to USAGAMER1, PTGAMER1, PTGAMER2 and PTGAMER3, the definition of clickbait is still very misunderstood by the community. One thing is to purposely mislead the viewer into clicking a video that does not uphold the expected information, only in the end to feel frustrated or disappointed; another is to create visually enticing content that attracts the viewer’s attention enough to act upon it, through the act of clicking:

“What is clickbait? How do you define clickbait? If clickbait is just the act of trying to have the most eye-catching relevant image / text that you can, then yes, I do that with every single video. If you mean do I “mislead” with my title or thumbnail? Never. At least I try to never do that.” (USAGAMER1, Nr. Subscribers: 2,642,249)

“It depends on the definition given to the word: colour manipulation, image composition, words in the title. In its essence, these are all ways to make users to click on the video, and

in some aspects yes, I do utilize it. I always try to make a video as desirable as possible. However, If you are talking about shocking images or titles that do not necessarily reflect the content of the video, then no. (PTGAMER2, Nr. Subscribers: 11,4649)

By comparing the number of subscribers each channel has accumulated so far, with the decision to resort to any type of clickbait, there have been some revealing results. Out of the five biggest channels from the sample, three have stated they have used at least once, some sort of clickbait (AUGAMER1, USAGAMER2 and BRGAMER2). As for the five least popular channels from the sample (PTGAMER1, PTGAMER2, PTGAMER3, PTGAMER4 and PTGAMER5), all of them stated that they have never deliberately used clickbait as a misleading practice, and if they have, it was unconsciously done. From these findings one can conclude that as the number of subscribers rises, so does the need to become popular, which might pass through adapting clickbait techniques.

When faced with the question as to why they think YouTubers resort to clickbait, the answers were condensed into two reasons. Firstly, some YouTubers create misleading content as means to compensate their lack of creativity, thus recreating what they might think YouTube will enjoy recommending users to watch. In other words, those who do not know how to bring up relevant content, resort to clickbait:

“I think many YouTubers lack creativity with their content, and they try to make up for it with clickbait. This might work in the short-term, but it doesn’t work in the long term. I try to mix eye-catching thumbnails and titles with really REALLY solid video content.” (USAGAMER1, Nr. Subscribers: 2,642,249)

“Those who do not know how to be relevant, try to succeed through the use of clickbait. I think it is sad for the people who do this, to not understand how this affects us all, especially the cultural legacy contained in YouTube, which is being jeopardised for their 15 minute of fame. There needs to be stricter regulations and they need to be applied, though I suspect they are not, since it is bad for Youtube’s business.” (PTGAMER4, Nr. Subscribers: 17,280)

Secondly the use of clickbait by some YouTubers might be their way to become popular on the platform and keep their number of views and subscribers high. Consequently, this could mean that while approaching new viewers, authenticity is not a YouTuber’s main concern.

“It is normal that they do it. YouTube’s goal is to get views...and there is a lot of competition, which is normal why some try to stand out.” (PTGAMER5, Nr. Subscribers: 61,702)

“Yes. Unfortunately, YouTube already boycotts its content producers: it does not notify, not does it deliver copyright ownership to the videos; it does not recommend nor does it project gaming content at the top of the list. As a result, we are forced to create resources to go against this and try and get some attention. (BRGAMER2, Nr. Subscribers: 1,211,566)

In addition, since YouTube is a platform that monetises on content created by others, which is measured by number of views, YouTubers are forced to act this way, in order to survive. PTGAMER2 further explains this by pointing out that YouTube only cares for the capacity of videos retaining users on the platform, not so much on the quality or type of content. As a consequence, those videos are the ones that have an advantage on the algorithm and becoming trending.

“In this moment I believe that the type of produced content does not matter. What matters is the capacity to keep users in the platform, that is, for YouTube/Google, the only thing that counts is a video’s ability to retain users in the platform. And these are the videos that are prioritised by the algorithm. YouTube is not interested whether YouTubers use clickbait. In fact were it not for some advertisers threaten to leave the platform, then YouTube would not have had any problem with videos exploring children, in order to get more views.” (PTGAMER2, 11,469)

5.3.2 Testing H5: A YouTube Gamer’s perception of YouTube as a platform that prefers viral content has made some gamers search for new platforms

In attempt to understand why some YouTube Gamers would consider moving to different platforms besides YouTube, it was important to evaluate their user experience on the platform, from the time they created their channel, up to their current situation.

All of the YouTube Gamers from the sample have stated that their perspective of YouTube has changed over time. Both USAGAMER1 and PTGAMER4, who have created their channels back in 2006, argued that a lot of YouTube’s changes have been for the worse. For instance, USAGAMER1 stated that YouTube used to have a much more honest and open communication with YouTubers, though he remains hopeful that YouTube is trying to make amends towards its creators:

“YouTube has changed a lot over the years. There used to be a much better connection between YouTube and it’s creators. For a while, there was no connection between them. I feel YouTube is genuinely trying to fix that though. Time will tell if it’s genuine or not.” (USAGAMER1, Male)

While USAGAMER1 is hopeful that YouTube will listen to its users, PTGAMER4 remains pessimistic, comparing YouTube to an uncontrollable monster.

“Yes, it started out as small, useful and nice and today, it is a difficult monster to tackle.” (PTGAMER4, Male)

“Yes. YouTube used to be a good platform. Nowadays, it is our biggest nightmare.” (BRGAMER2, Female)

The rest of the respondents, which have created their channels well after YouTube’s institutionalisation, have two very distinct visions.

On the one hand YouTube is perceived as this platform that ignores its creators, while making profit out of their creativity. Consequently, there is an overall sense that the media company does not protect their creators from anything, even though they create content for the platform, which keeps it from stop running.

“Yes. Over the years, YouTube has grown a lot, and like any other company, its main goal is to increase the revenue rate, which sometimes leave the creators behind and out of focus. Right now, the majority of YouTube’s creators do not have a very good relationship with the platform, due to what it has become.” (PTGAMER1, Male)

“Very much. I have come to realise that this platform is unfair to its creators, it cheats and their communicational tools do not function as it is advertised.” (PTGAMER3, Male)

On the other hand, some respondents argued the opposite, that YouTubers were the ones that changed the most, as a way to respond to their viewers’ interest.

“Yes and no. The community and content has definitely changed over time, but I still approach it relatively the same. Yes it’s a job, but I love what I do and I’m passionate about it.” (USAGAMER2, Male)

“In my opinion, it was the creators that changed YouTube. We are constantly changing in order to entertain people.” (PTGAMER5, Male)

One of the reasons that could explain a YouTuber’s need to change one’s approach to its audience, is related to the constant algorithm changes happening in the platform, which does affect a user’s viewing experience and recommendation video section, thus affecting a YouTube channel’s performance.

Although the respondents from the studied sample do try to pay more attention to YouTube’s algorithm changes, most of them feel as if they are left in the dark by the media company, thus not knowing how to handle the situation, in order to succeed online. This could be justified by the overall dissatisfaction towards the level of transparency from the media company to the creators:

“To be transparent in the way it applies its tools. Many claim that YouTube’s algorithm should be transparent, though I disagree because that would worsen the user experience, since some would try to overcome it. Now, if the YouTube bell notification button exists, then why doesn’t YouTube send out the notifications of newly uploaded content to its subscribers? It only sends out to 1% of the subscribers, and that is just one example. Another example is people that watch my content on a daily basis and are mysteriously unsubscribed from my channel...” (PTGAMER3, Male)

“Yes, absolutely. It is odd to know that if we need to speak to someone, there is no one to address, which is why it is so important for a network to exist: it closes the gap between creator and YouTube.” (PTGAMER5, Male)

“Definitely yes, but let’s not be naive. From the moment Google bought YouTube, the platform just became another multi American financial corporation, ruled by the American culture and laws. When faced with profit, transparency is not YouTube’s main priority. (PTGAMER4, Male)

Additionally, algorithm changes do have an effect on how well a YouTube channel performs, and consequently, how the YouTube Gamer tries to approach the viewers. PTGAMER1 stated that YouTube prefers channels that create content in abundance rather than creative content. In other words, it does not matter whether it is good or bad content, what matters is whether the content is relevant, watchable and sharable.

“Yes of course, nowadays YouTube values those that create content in abundance, not so much for the creation of content. It does not matter if the content is good or bad, what matters is the capacity to bring more views to YouTube; those are the ones that are benefited and keep growing in the platform. Sadly, a polemic or dramatic video has more value than an informative one.” (PTGAMER1, Male)

PTGAMER3 further illustrates YouTube’s algorithm change with Logan Paul’s controversial video, uploaded in the beginning of 2018⁷. Controversies such as these affect smaller channels like PTGAMER3’s channel, who stand no chance against bigger channels, that get to reach a wider audience:

“A lot. Since January and that controversy with the YouTuber that filmed a hanged person, that YouTube’s algorithm transformed into a channel hunt. The smaller channels were jeopardised, impelled to reach a wider audience, since their videos are never showcased. YouTube’s lives became empty because subscribers are never warned and the videos never reach their addressee. Right now we literally work for nothing. Just for you to understand, in the past three years my channel’s performance has dropped about 70%. In comparison to last year, I am having lesser views. Did the people stop caring about my content, channel or YouTuber? Or better yet, is the platform making people “forget” that there is such a channel, by not delivering the news of newly uploaded content? It gives one to think.” (PTGAMER3, Male)

Since the YouTube Gamers from this sample perceive YouTube as this platform that no longer acknowledges creative content, giving space for viral, clickbait content to spread, the expected result would be related to moving to other platforms.

Most of the YouTube Gamers have disagreed with the affirmation that YouTube is a dying platform, since it still thrives with circulation of content. However, the YouTube Gamers from sample who do profit from YouTube, also rely on other platforms, such as Twitch. In fact, some of them are

⁷ Logan Paul and a group of his friends went to Aokigora, a Japanese suicide forest, and recorded their adventure. While they were inside the forest, the group of friends came face to face with a dead man’s body and uploaded the video on YouTube. It took 10 days for the media company to reply to this event, after the video had already accumulated millions of views. See more at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-42644321>

considering moving in the future to other platforms, in case YouTube does not change how content is viewed and circulated.

“I don’t think it is dying, but since it is running up against any big competitor, we feel as if YouTube accommodated it, without listening to its creators. Most of the changes done in the past few years were to please advertisers, not so much the creators. We are actually starting a Twitch channel as an attempt to not just bring other type of gaming content, but also to not solely depend on YouTube as our main income.” (BRGAMER1, Male)

“As for creative content then perhaps yes, but I don’t see that is is going to die. I have considered moving to other platforms, but I do not want to start from scratch. Besides YouTube I do some side jobs, in order to not solely depend on it.” (BRGAMER2, Female)

In other words, although YouTube is growing and becoming more mainstream, its creators are not having the same level of visibility, which might make them decide to move to different platforms. The future for the gaming community, though, is still unsure: while the Portuguese YouTube Gamers have a rather pessimistic view, stating that the gaming industry will never have the same impact as it used to, International YouTube Gamers are very positive, arguing that as long YouTube holds the attention of the masses, the platform will keep growing.

“There will always be gamers, new and old games, communities. YouTube has and will always have a saying on these matters, so probably as the years go by, YouTube will still be relevant name to millions of people around the globe, gamers included. But the platform needs to be careful with the chaotic and rampant growth, for it does not always bode well for its own wellbeing. There needs to be respect towards the audience and the artists.” (PTGAMER4, Part-Time YouTuber)

“I think it will continue to grow for the foreseeable future. No other platform monetizes as well as YouTube does, therefore no other platform has as many creators as YouTube does. As long as they hold that position, the viewers will stay.” (USAGAMER2, Full-Time YouTuber)

5.4 Identity of a YouTube Gamer

5.4.1 Testing H6: The cultural notion of a gamer has not changed over time and female counterparts are still not taken seriously by the YouTube Gaming Community

As previously mentioned, the studied sample is made up of ten YouTube Gaming channels, two of them have female gamers: BRGAMER1 and BRGAMER2. Both BRGAMER1 and BRGAMER2 have a positive outlook on the future for female gamers, especially in the YouTube Gaming

Community. As female viewers take more interest in gaming content, so do YouTube female gamers achieve a certain level of respect and recognition in the platform.

As a result, the presence of female gamers on YouTube, creators and viewers alike, has completely shattered the cultural notion of a gamer, the white male young tech player, to an individual who enjoys playing video games, regardless of gender.

“Since girls are becoming more present, not just as YouTube Gamers, but also as audience members, we see that the respect towards them has grown. The social stigma that a woman does not know how to play games is getting lower.” (BRGAMER1, Male)

“I can see that female YouTubers have been getting the sign of approval. The female audience only grows and is extremely accepted by the gaming community.” (BRGAMER2, Female)

While BRGAMER1 and BRGAMER2 are quite optimistic with the inclusion of female gamers on YouTube, male gamers had a different perspective. In fact, most of the male gamers from the sample did not have an opinion on this matter, since they are not acquainted with many female YouTube Gamers, which is also a reflection of the uneven gender ratio, between male and female channels, in the studied sample, (8:2).

What is also interesting to point out is how some YouTube Gamers have avoided this question by distancing themselves from the gaming community, thus not holding any responsibility for what might be wrongly interpreted.

“I cannot speak for the entire community but in my opinion, female gamers have the same level of respect and recognition as male gamers. In Portugal there are not many female gamers in the gaming community, mainly formed by men. I personally know a few female gamers which I have hung out with and they are treated inside the group as any other person. As long as there is respect, there is equality between genders.” (PTGAMER1, Male)

“Honestly, I don't think this is a question I can answer personally. I'm not a female gamer, and I don't follow more than a few of them to really know what the overall communities perception of female gamers are. All I can really say, is that I feel the perception of them has been, thankfully, improving over time.” (USAGAMER1, Male)

Although there is an overall sense that female gamers are respected in the YouTube Gaming community, USAGAMER2 argued that there are viewers who do not take seriously female gamers, because some of them pretend to be gamers and use their bodies, as a way to make money and receive views.

“Depends on what age range you're asking! I think for the most part female gamers are well respected and treated more or less the same. Younger viewers (especially males) sometimes sexualize girl gamers (and some girl gamers take advantage of it).” (USAGAMER2, Male)

Even though the sexualization of the female body is not a recent practice, since it already happens with female video game characters (Kirkpatrick, 2013), some YouTubers have adopted this strategy, in order to attract the viewer's attention. PTGAMER4 for instance, states that the use of the female body on video thumbnails is a type of clickbait practice, one he does not perform.

In spite of the overall distrust from the YouTube Gaming community towards female gamers, for PTGAMER2 it all comes down to how well the individual plays video games, regardless of their gender, which is the concept of the authentic gamer: someone that plays well and only cares about playing video games, and nothing else.

“That question is somewhat hard to answer, because the YouTube community is quite divided, when it comes to gender and race issues. There is not a single answer that comprises the overall opinion of the community. There are YouTubers who do not respect nor take seriously girls as real gamers. But there is also the other side of the coin on Twitch, in which many girls basically sell their bodies and pretend to be famers, in order to receive donations. It is a topic without a correct answer. However, in my opinion, when it comes to gaming, no gender has an advantage over the other. The way I see it, female gamer should be treated the same way as male gamers (as long as they do not see their bodies, like it happens in Twitch.). For instance, if you look up for Kiyeberreries, who is a friend of mine that produces content, she is good as any other male YouTuber, when it comes to games such as Heroes of the Storm, Anne Muniton or Overwatch. I don't know if this helps, but for me a “gamer” is genderless: as long as the person enjoys to play games and is willing practice and learn to play even better.” (PTGAMER2, Male)

H7: Since the work of a YouTuber is still not socially recognised as a sustainable profession by outsiders, YouTube Gamers create online personas, in order to attract recognition

In spite of half of the respondents from the sample being Full-Time YouTubers, all of the YouTube Gamers have agreed that there is a social stigma behind the work of a YouTuber as a sustainable profession, though some have pointed out that the situation has been improving over time (USAGAMER1 and PTGAMER1).

The reason why outsiders might not acknowledge the work of a YouTube Gamer as an actual profession, is due to the overall perception of YouTube as a video online platform where amateurs can easily achieve stardom and profit from creating videos. Furthermore, there is clear misjudgment over the great amount of time, effort and technical skill, a YouTuber needs to invest, where most of the return is minimum.

“Yes, until this day there are few who get and recognise this as a profession. Many think that it is only to sit down and created content, but it goes beyond that...search content, test what will be done, edit videos, promote and deal with the highs and lows of this profession can be psychologically draining. About being a gamer it is something that has been

accepted over time with eSport's success! Nowadays many are no longer viewed as people that do nothing." (BRGAMER1, Part-Time YouTubers)

"Yes, absolutely. Most people have no clue how much work goes into being an "overnight success". I love what I do, and consider myself very lucky, but I've also worked harder than most people ever would to get here." (USAGAMER2, Full-Time YouTuber)

In turn, this is related to how YouTube's business model functions, which appropriates user-generated content as means to add value to the media company. However, creators such as PTGAMER1 and PTGAMER2 argue that this business model in the end, only benefits YouTube:

"No, not everything that is free always bring value." (PTGAMER1, Hobbyist YouTuber)

"No. YouTube compensates consistency over creativity." (PTGAMER2, Part-Time YouTuber)

"In general, it is socially accepted by the people that follow gaming content, specifically from the side of the industry. It is not recognised by YouTube, which is always changing its algorithm, damaging smaller channels." (PTGAMER3, Hobbyist YouTuber)

As a result, the level of recognition of a YouTube Gaming channel not only does it takes into consideration the creation of relevant content, but also the development of an alter-personification of themselves, also known as a persona. As previously mentioned, authenticity is the number one trait viewers look for in YouTubers, which is something that the majority of the inquired respondents have considered, while developing their online personas.

On the one hand, YouTube Gamers who cannot profit from YouTube, or have no interest in doing so, agree that their online persona has changed through the course of time, though it has always remained as authentic and as close to reality as possible:

"We all create characters in the beginning, but little by little we become authentic ones. In the end, we wish to reach to a point that they both fuse as one." (PTGAMER1, Hobbyist YouTuber)

"It has changed. We do have a persona while we recording videos, but for it to be sustainable, it needs to based on real life traces of our personalities. We record daily videos, but always with the same sense of humour :) Although while we record" (BRGAMER1, Part-Time YouTuber)

On the other hand, YouTube Gamers who heavily rely on the profits gotten from YouTube, have to adopt an online persona according to the trends and audience's liking, that sometimes completely dominate the real person.

"How it has changed! I started out as myself, but today I think I am this character that adapts according to the level of demand." (BRGAMER2, Full-Time YouTuber)

In other words, if the level of competition and demand from YouTube is too much for the YouTube Gamer to handle, and that particular channel relies on profit to survive, the YouTube Gamer has the obligation to change themselves and the type of content they produce. USAGAMER2, for instance, shifted his focus from Call of Duty, to LP Games and is considering moving into real life content, such as vlogging.

This argument shows that Full-Time YouTubers with gaming channels are no longer solely focusing on gaming content, but are exploring more popular genres, such as People & Blog, indicating their need to remain relevant in the platform.

“My focus has shifted from a Call of Duty focus to a let’s play focus in recent years. I’ve also started to upload vlogs and focus on real-life content, which I think is my next transition.” (USAGAMER2, Full-Time YouTuber)

“It used to be just about games but it has changed. Today we post everything that we feel that is relevant and sharable.” (BRGAMER2, Full-Time YouTuber)

In conclusion, the creation of an online persona is based on traces from the personality of the person behind the YouTuber. As the person in real life grows and takes into more responsibility as a public figure and of relative importance to the gaming community, the online persona becomes more authentic and close to reality as possible. Although the creation of an online persona is based on a YouTube Gamer’s real self, the creator might have a need to adapt to what the community wants or expects to view on YouTube, in order to remain relevant on the platform.

6. Conclusion

The introduction of technology into one's daily life has affected the concept of consumer and consumerism. Consumers are no longer passively obtaining information from media outsources, but are proactively looking for it. Furthermore, the availability of free online platforms, such as YouTube, have enabled one to widespread their knowledge, thoughts and feelings to the rest of the world, transferring power from the masses to the individual.

In spite of YouTube's attempt to brand itself as a platform where one could broadcast one-self to the rest of the world, the reality is far from perfect. That is to say, while YouTube is a site of participatory culture, the platform also confronts some technical issues, which undermine the user experience. Furthermore, the ongoing tensions between professional and amateur creators and YouTube's role as patron amidst these tensions, have completely shifted YouTube's public sphere.

As advertisers and big media corporations infiltrated YouTube, so have their business models. YouTube's currency has changed from participation and collaboration, to number of views and number of subscribers. As a consequence, those who do not keep up with the competition, do not survive on the platform.

The main goal of this dissertation was to understand how YouTube Gamers attempt to achieve recognition on YouTube, and if their perception of the platform, from an online video amateur repository into a mainstream media, had an impact on their approach.

The results of this study show that as the level of popularity increases, so does a YouTube Gamer's need to perform better online, not just in terms of content, but also on how they present themselves, which might translate into creating an online persona. In other words, Full-Time YouTubers have a tendency to create content that the YouTube's algorithm likes, while Hobbyist YouTubers prefer to attain recognition from the gaming community.

Furthermore, the perception that YouTube has a preference over viral content might lead some YouTube Gamers in the future, to move into different platforms, such as Twitch, in order to remain relevant. One thing to consider is the fact that each YouTube Gamer has their own goals to achieve, which might either be to transform gameplay into a profession, or just develop a hobby and share with their peers. The future of the YouTube Gaming Community is still uncertain, but as long as YouTube is transparent with its users, the platform will continue on thriving.

Due to the extension of the online inquiry, some results had to be omitted. As a result, the following suggestions should be considered as guidelines for future works.

Although this dissertation only focused in specific moments of content planning, namely titling a video and creating a video thumbnail, there were other aspects to analyse, such as how long it takes to record and edit a video, and if the user has an uploading schedule. These factors should also be considered while defining a YouTube Gamer, in terms of how the channel performs on YouTube.

Even though YouTube does not have a lot of social networking features, its users' want to stay connected with the community, overruled the network's technical capacity. Consequently, one might

deduce that channels get more recognition, by collaborating with other YouTubers from the same niche community, which should be something to take into consideration in the future.

Since many YouTube users criticise the platform's patron over user-generated content, future works should also focus on the level of transparency between the media company and its users, and whether the company takes action upon reoccurring technical issues. In turn, YouTube's advertising policies and constant algorithm changes, should also be evaluated from the audience's experience, who might be turning from an active thinker, into a passive consumer.

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- Official Website for Discord App: <https://discordapp.com/>

8. Annex

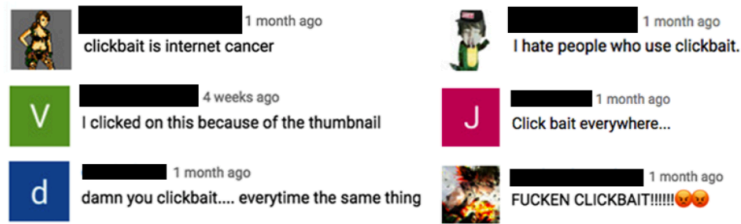
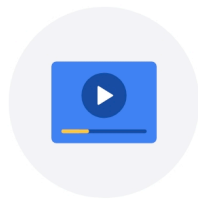


Fig. 1: Comments that were found in clickbait videos. The users' frustration is apparent (we omit users' names for ethical reasons).

annex A. Example of comments retrieved from clickbait videos. (Zannettou et.al, 2018)



The top two reasons viewers watch YouTube are "to relax" and "to feel entertained"

Think with Google

Google/Ipsos Connect, U.S., YouTube Cross Screen Survey (n=1,186 U.S. consumers 18–54 who watch YouTube at least once a month), Jul. 2016.

annex B. Top reasons for watching YouTube. Available online at: <https://www.thinkwithgoogle.com/data-collections/youtube-stats-video-consumption-trends/>



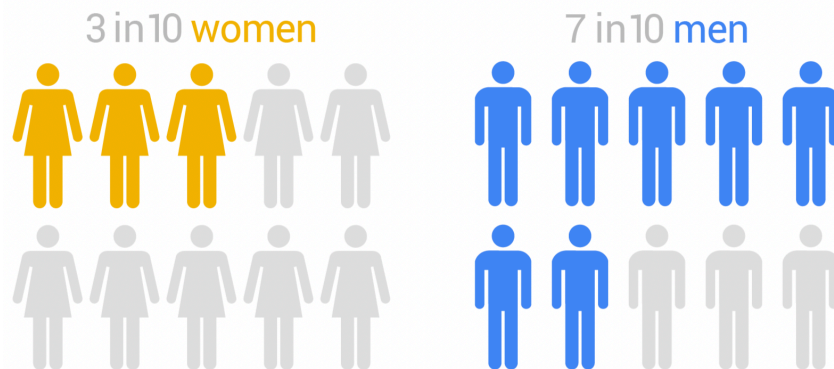
The top four content categories watched by YouTube users are comedy, music, entertainment/pop culture, and "how to"

Think with Google

Google/Ipsos Connect, U.S., YouTube Cross Screen Survey (n=1,621 YouTube users), Jul. 2016.

annex C. Top categories of content on YouTube. Available at: <https://www.thinkwithgoogle.com/data-collections/youtube-stats-video-consumption-trends/>

18–34-year-olds who engage with gaming content on YouTube



Note: Engagement is defined as commenting on, liking, favoriting, or playlisting a video on YouTube within a certain topic or channel.

annex D. Engagement rate of gaming content, based on gender. (Ramdurai, 2014)

ABOUT THE YOUTUBER

Age:

Gender:

Type of Channel:

Number of subscribers:

1. When did you first start your YouTube channel?
2. Why did you start a YouTube channel?
3. Are you on Social Media? If so, which one do you use the most?
4. Were you a Gamer before you became a YouTuber?
5. Do you sell merchandising?

ABOUT MAKING VIDEOS (RECORDING AND POST PRODUCTION)

1. How do you plan the content of a video?
 1. Do you write a script beforehand?
 2. Do you try out and practice the game before you actually record it?
2. Have you ever collaborated with other YouTubers?
3. How long does it take to record and edit a video?
4. How much time do you spend on planning a good thumbnail and title? Is it important to you
 1. Have you ever resorted to textual or visual clickbait?
 2. Do you believe that some Youtubers do this, in order to stay relevant
5. Do you buy your hardware and software systems, or do you have sponsors that give you the opportunity to try them out?

ABOUT VIDEO RELEASE

1. Do you have a publishing schedule?
2. How do you give a notice to your community that you have released new content?
3. Do you think Social Media plays a huge part in your video's success?
4. How do you evaluate if your video was well received?
 1. Metrics? (likes, number of views, number of subscribers, thumbs up and down...)
 2. Comments?
 3. Social media?

ABOUT THE YOUTUBE GAMING COMMUNITY

1. Do you watch other YouTubers? Have you ever been inspired by other YouTube channel's content?
2. How do you interact with your audience?
3. Do you think a YouTuber should establish order and rules in its community?
 1. To what extent do you control what your audience says or do?
 2. Haters and anonymous comments. How do you manage all that?
4. Does your audience ever influence the type of content you want to create and share?
5. In your opinion, what is the YouTube community's perception of female gamers?

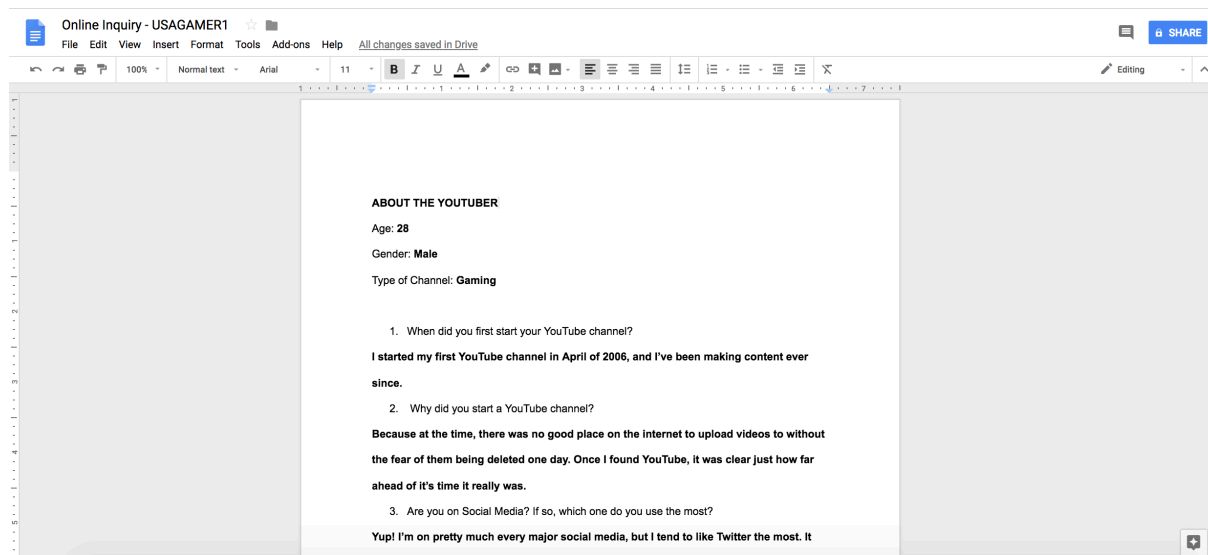
ABOUT YOUTUBER AS A REAL FULL-TIME PROFESSION, OR JUST A HOBBY

1. Being a YouTuber is a hobby, or a full-time profession to you?
2. Do you have an agent or manager that works with you?
3. Do you believe your creative work is fairly recognized?
4. Is there a social stigma behind the work of a YouTuber as a real, sustainable job?
5. Do you feel like your identity as a YouTuber has changed over time?
6. Is your channel still solely focused on Gaming commentary, or has it moved to a different genre?

ABOUT YOUTUBE AND ITS CONTROVERSIES

1. Has your perspective of YouTube changed over time?
2. Do you think that YouTube should be more transparent with its community?
3. Are you aware whenever the YouTube algorithm changes?
 1. Has it ever affected your channel performance?
 2. Has it ever influenced your creative process, or the way you approach your audience?
4. Do you feel like YouTube has become this attention seeking platform, where in order to stay relevant and up on the search list you must resort to clickbait?
5. Do you think YouTube is dying? Are you considering moving to another platform, like Twitch?
6. In your opinion, what is the future of the gaming community?

annex E. Online Inquiry Script



Annex F. Process of sharing a Google Document with YouTube Gamers (USAGAMER1)

YouTube Gamers	Being a YouTuber is a hobby, or a full-time profession to you?	Type of YouTuber
AUSGAMER1	“Full-Time.”	Full-Time YouTuber
USAGAMER1	“Absolutely full time.”	Full-Time YouTuber
USAGAMER2	“Full time profession.”	Full-Time YouTuber
BRGAMER1	“We are currently working part-time with the creation of content.”	Part-Time YouTuber
BRGAMER2	“I work full-time”	Full-Time YouTuber
PTGAMER1	“Hobby”	Hobbyist YouTuber
PTGAMER2	“I work part-time.”	Part-Time YouTuber
PTGAMER3	“Hobby. It is very difficult to live off YouTube in this time with such a small channel. I would like to make more, but until the channel explodes, there is nothing to be done.”	Hobbyist YouTuber
PTGAMER4	“It has always been a hobby, something I would like to do in my spare time. A few years from now it became a part-time profession thanks to the money I gain from publicity. It happened by chance, but I would love to it full-time, especially the music part.”	Part-Time YouTuber
PTGAMER5	“I also call it a Jobby. It started out as a hobby, but today, even though it is not a full-time profession (since it does not cover my monthly expenses), it is something that takes a lot of my free time.”	Part-Time YouTuber

annex G. Characterisation of the Type of YouTuber

YouTube Gamers	Year the Channel was Created	Description of the YouTube Gaming Channel	Type of YouTube Gaming Channel
AUSGAMER1	2013	This is my airsoft sniper channel. Check out my Shop. play fair, safe and have fun!	Single Gaming Channel
USAGAMER1	2006	<p>Hey Guys, USAGAMER1 here! Welcome to my YouTube Channel! I make gaming videos, mostly Minecraft, but other games from time to time as well!</p> <p>If you like my stuff, consider subscribing!</p> <p>Here's a list of some stuff you can expect from me!</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Minecraft Experiments - Minecraft Facts - Minecraft "Top Lists" - Minecraft Console / Pocket Edition Overviews - And much more! <p>Hope you enjoy!</p>	Single Gaming Channel
USAGAMER2	2010	<p>I upload let's plays, walkthrough, and game play from all kinds of video games! From the most recent popular titles, as well as old classics, I love to play all sorts of video games and share that fun with my viewers!</p> <p>I upload EVERY SINGLE DAY at 2pm, 4pm, 6pm, 8pm, and 10pm EST.</p> <p>If you have any business inquiries, you can contact me at:</p>	Multi Gaming Channel
BRGAMER1	2014	<p>Welcome to BRGAMER1 channel! We are a couple that started making videos for YouTube in 2011 with the channel GamerXbe! In here, you will find Minecraft, Roblox, many LEGO games, LEGO Worlds, console games (Until Dawn, Tearaway Unfolded, Mortal Kombat, Rayman, Castle Crashers etc), mobile games Android IOS (Angry Birds, Rodeo Stampede etc)</p>	Multi Gaming Channel
BRGAMER2	2012	<p>VIDEOS EVERYDAY! 12h30, 15h30 e 18h... and sometimes at 10h30 too :P</p> <p>CURRENT GAMES:</p> <p>The Sims 4, Minecraft, Roblox, House Flipper</p> <p>E-mail for business enquiries: brgamer2@gmail.com</p>	Multi Gaming Channel
PTGAMER1	2012	<p>How are you? My name is PTGAMER1 and this is the channel where I share gameplay content: Fifa 2017, Forza, Dirt 4, Clash Royal, GTA 5, Overwatch, and many other new upcoming games.</p> <p>Who am I?</p> <p>YouTube content producer, video gamer amateur, troller by nature, aspiring entertainer, smile collector, handsome and humble.</p>	Multi Gaming Channel
PTGAMER2	2010	<p>I'm a YouTube Content Creator who focuses on long-format unscripted gaming videos. Podcasts, Playthroughs, First Impressions, Vlogs, Gameplays, News, etc.</p> <p>I have a wide variety of content on my channel because I enjoy challenging myself, both in terms of gameplay and commentary.</p> <p>Also I might be addicted to Dark Souls. Praise the Sun!</p>	Multi Gaming and Review Channel

YouTube Gamers	Year the Channel was Created	Description of the YouTube Gaming Channel	Type of YouTube Gaming Channel
PTGAMER3	2015	Hey everyone, my name is PTGAMER3, and i do Let's Play Games, like Destiny 2, FIFA 18, PES 2018, or Crash Royale, and all gameplay walkthrough new content for almost videogames release. I cover indie games and do live streamings. I also enjoy VR or Virtual Reality Games in PS4, but also play on Xbox One, Switch, PC, and 3DS. As gaming journalist, I love to inform, and also work on family friend titles to play with my daughter. I upload videos everyday focus on gameplay, tips and tricks, gaming news, reviews, tutorials, and more. If you like, please subscribe and share this channel with others.	Multi Gaming and Review Channel
PTGAMER4	2006	Video Games & Music! My videos for everyone in the world to enjoy! Preserving my knowledge and passion for video games both old and new. Pure gameplay with regular (almost daily) updates, including new game releases and new retro game translations and enhancements. Retro home systems include Nintendo (NES/Famicom, Game Boy, Game Boy Color, Game Boy Advance, Super Nintendo/Super Famicom, Nintendo 64) Sega (Master System, Game Gear, Megadrive/Genesis, Mega CD/ Sega CD) NEC (PC Engine/TurboGrafx-16, Super CD), Sony Playstation and the almighty Commodore Amiga. Arcade systems include Neo Geo AES/MVS, Capcom CPS (all board versions) and Jamma. More recent systems include PC, Playstation 3, Nintendo GameCube, Nintendo Wii, Nintendo Wii U and Nintendo Switch. I also produce music! PTGAMER4 Music video clips for my original tracks and video game remix/covers plus full album audio streams.	Multi-Genre Channel
PTGAMER5	2015	Hi everyone, PTGAMER5 here and welcome to my Youtube Channel. Here you can expect Live Streams, Gameplays, Tips & Tricks, Unboxing's, Reviews or setup tours. Gameplay's ranging from racing games like iRacing, Need For Speed to MMO's and survivals such as H1Z1, Fallout 4, Star Wars Battlefield etc. Hope you guys enjoy the content feel free to subscribe :) Have fun :)	Multi Gaming and Review Channel

annex H. Description of each YouTube Gaming channel from the sample. Each description was withdrawn from the About page Section of each YouTube channel in the 28th of September, 2018

YouTube Gamers	Do you buy your hardware and software systems, or do you have sponsors that give you the opportunity to try them out?	Merchandise?	Agent?
AUSGAMER1	"I buy them."	X	
USAGAMER1	"I pretty much build everything myself when it comes to the equipment in my office. I also buy all the software I use if it's paid software. I could probably get a sponsor for the hardware, but I don't feel the need to. I like what I use."		
USAGAMER2	"It's about half - I do have sponsors provide some equipment, but a lot of it I purchase myself as well."		X
BRGAMER1	"We buy the majority of it, though some companies have already given us some merch that we still use to this day. The large part is acquired by what we earn from YouTube."		
BRGAMER2	"Os dois."	X	X
PTGAMER1	"Compro."		
PTGAMER2	"Work tools I buy everything. For videogames I contact the companies, it is pretty rare for me to buy them to produce videos because I have spent a large amount of time building up relations with editors as well as creating a respectable YouTube channel."		
PTGAMER3	"I usually receive videogames and systems. It is now known as partnerships, but I receive from editors and manufacturing companies to do my work. As a videogame journalist in the past, and currently a technology journalist, I keep receiving games to create content."		
PTGAMER4	"I have no sponsors. Every once in a while Nintendo sends me some games to try out before it's released, which gives me enough time to prepare content. But I do consider that 99% of my channel's content is not sponsored."		
PTGAMER5	"It depends. Nowadays I don't need to practically buy anything. I have a few sponsors but if I really to buy something, I buy it."		X

annex I. Evaluation of the presence or absence of sponsors, merchandise and agents of the YouTube Gamers