

# **A Socio-Rhetorical Analysis of Sports-Tagged Content Produced by Youtubers**

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## **ABSTRACT**

*This research proposes a socio-rhetorical analysis of videos posted on YouTube under the tag “Sports”, specifically the regular content created by users, so-called Youtubers. The theoretical basis contemplates the concept of technology – based on the works by Viera Pinto (2005) – and participatory culture – mainly guided by ideas from Shirky (2008, 2011). The analytical device is derived from work by Swales (1990, 1998, 2004), Askehave & Swales (2001), and Miller (1998, 2012). A hybrid methodology was created, resulting from the sociological and linguistic concepts applied to the organizational reality of virtual massive communication. The analysis decomposes the video in rhetorical movements. We follow the hypothesis that the main purpose of such communicational practices is self-promotion of the individual who produces the YouTube channel, or the promotion of the brand of which constitutes the channel produced by multiple users. Furthermore, the self-promotion and widening of audience is pursued with financial purpose.*

**Keywords:** Technology. Sports. Socio-rhetorical analysis.

## **1. Introduction**

Human interaction in virtual spaces has been, more and more, object of study and investigation in various fields of science, that are looking for a deeper understanding of social behavior in such spaces. As new media are created, new communicative practices come along, adjusting to society, resolving necessities and creating new ones.

The association of the computer as a support for communication and the internet as data network allowed a completely new communicative scenario: massive production of massive content. Before this

technological conversion, the production of massive content, i.e. content aiming a large scale audience, was delimited to agencies, such as TV and radio stations. Now, technology allows any individual to broadcast content, possibly reaching a wide scope.

This is the context in which YouTube was created, reaching, to date, the position of second most accessed site of the world, and over one billion users, which represents a third of the whole connected population. The platform work in 88 countries, reproducing around 3.25 billion hours of video every month, and is, certainly, a very rich object of research.

Created by Char Hurley, Steve Chen and Jawed Karim in 2005, YouTube allows its users to share audiovisual content, with great possibility of wide range. The effort of its creators generated a tool with many possibilities of video publication, of any extent, in a simplified and fast way. The creation of homemade audiovisual content was already popular by the time YouTube was created, and the platform boosted, in a way, such practice.

Although it was not the first to promote video sharing on the internet, YouTube was a shooting success, and one year after its beginning, it was bought by Google, for an estimated valued of 1.6 billion dollars, which gave even more impulsion for the development of the platform. According to Burgess & Green (2013), in November 2007, the site was the most popular in England, and represented 37% of all audiovisual content consumed in the United States (BURGESS & GREEN, 2013, p. 3). By then, the site reproduced around 100 million videos every day. Nowadays, it is estimated that 5 billion videos are watched in a daily basis.

On YouTube, the channels may work as a mere way to access and manage content to be watched on it; as a personal record of videos; or as it may be organized as a TV channel, with regular content production, creating a public image. With the acquisition of the platform by Google, a huge widening of hosting servers came along, allowing users to post video in any amount.

Other than the storage widening, the new administration also brought a new way to deal with the users. In order to keep the website profitable, the videos may be watched freely, but the most popular ones come with advertisements, which generated a great flow of money, considering the number of videos reproduced daily. Thus, in 2007, Google implemented the *YouTube Partner Program*, and the most accessed channels in YouTube started receiving a share of the profit from advertisements placed on its videos. The program worked as an incentive for more content production, and more audience gathering. The website was, then, accessed not only by those looking for entertainment consumption, but also those who wanted to make profit of content production, other than becoming a new spot for brands to advertise.

The opening for videos monetization created territory for the emergence of *YouTubers*, i.e. those users that have YouTube content production as a job, either part-time or full-time. This practice aims to create an image of a channel with regular content publishing and loyal audience, and the highest statistics regarding numbers of views and subscribers, which are defining requisites in the profit generated by videos' monetization. Unlikely enterprises and organizations previously established that use this new market field to expand their advertising efforts, YouTubers take the platform as a start point to their self-divulcation.

The products of these new communicative practices are very diverse. For instance, the production of user-generated content is so numerous and multiple that it became oversaturated. Holmbom (2015)

presents a qualitative research regarding this phenomenon, by interviewing prominent YouTubers (i.e. channel owners with significant number of subscribers), in order to investigate their purposes and strategies. The research points out that on YouTube, especially when it comes to regular content posting channels, there are innumerable videos regarding the same theme and with very alike layouts. Thus, in order to find a prominent spot, YouTubers have to be aware of content production trends and comprehend the cultural aspects that guide the audience's search for entertainment and content (HOLMBOM, 2015, p. 23). This fight for relevancy moves users to create content that is more and more specific, making emerge subcategories within categories, in an attempt to incorporate "really original" elements and differentiate from their peers.

Such great amount of specialized and customized content generates a communicative scenario that looks chaotic, considering how recent these practices are and the great unexplored potential it presents. Simonsen (2011) corroborates, by saying:

Although YouTube provides categories for its users, it is also a melting pot of content where traditional genre conventions in many ways are inadequate. Fiction and non-fiction, television content, home-movies of pets and creative animations are placed in the same categories. This makes it difficult to make sense of YouTube and its content. (p. 51)

The works by Holmbom (2015) and Simonsen (2011) point out to the emergence of several new practices incentivized by the YouTube Partner Program. In face of so many different possibilities and realizations, one might ask: what is the centralizing factor, which groups all these productions in one universe? Or, in other words, what are common feature amongst YouTuber's videos? Taking language as start point, these are the leading questioning to this article.

Thus, this research has as main objective to analyze the constituent aspects of the text genre that result from the YouTubers' practices, aiming to contribute to the YouTubers' phenomenon comprehension, as well as expand the discussions regarding massive communication in virtual spaces. For that, this paper will analyze the discourse based on the categories proposed by Swales (1998), in order to decompose videos into rhetorical movements.

We believe that the recurrence of constituent elements in the analyzed material suggests enough stability to consider YouTubers' videos as representatives of a text genre, and that the structuration of rhetorical movements presented in popular videos reveal strategical features for public gathering and maintenance.

## **2. The social and technological nature of YouTube**

In face of the transmutations occurred in terms of communication possibilities, due to the development of digital technology, many fields of Human Sciences put effort on understanding this new configuration. Regarding the concept of technology, we follow the theoretical path offered by Vieira Pinto (2013), starting by the author's review on the idea of "technological era".

According to Vieira Pinto, it is erroneous to affirm that we live in "the most technological era" in history, or anything of the sort, such as we are living an "extraordinary" moment. He believes, in fact, that any part of history is technological, since all techniques applied in any moment are resultants of

technological knowledge developed in it, and all moments are articulated in one wholesome historical process of hominization. This process is based, according to the author, in humans' capacity to solve problems and take action over nature, which has happened in every moment of history, thus, any moment is "technological". In his words: "every phase of human history, in any culture, is characterized, descriptively, by the technical productions humanity was capable to elaborate in it" (VIEIRA PINTO, 2013, p. 63).

Although he considers that there is no "extraordinary era", given the continuous process of evolution of technology, Vieira Pinto (2013) does not deny that certain techniques represent a qualitative leap that boosts society to "an orbit before non-existent" (p. 67), for they uniqueness in the theoretical moment they first appear. In other words, it is important to keep attention to the impact of digital technology in our present society, but also to the previous exceptional moments of humanity. In the author's words:

Technological creation, in any give history phase, influences humans' behavior, but it does not make them the history motor. It just explain a state of astonishment and bewilderment, and the adjacent 'value crisis', for they bring profound modifications in social habits, in coexistence manners, in communication, and in ways of thinking. (VIEIRA PINTO, 2013, p. 69-70).

We assume, then, that we are living a historical moment in which the digital technology emergence represents a qualitative leap for its unique characteristics, but also that it results from an evolution associated in all previous qualitative leaps. This aspect is very revealing of Vieira Pinto's concept of technology, that all techniques and technological devices are based on a very long and complex process of knowledge construction.

Digital technology – and here said in a broad sense, which includes computers, internet, YouTube, etc. – is a result of a long historical process of improvement in humans' capacity of projecting and socializing, and relies on the previous technologies and on the effort of innumerable individuals and institutions. Thus, we may say that technology as a human faculty explains *how* we got here, but then another question emerges: *why* is it that digital technology became what it is, and not something else?

Vieira Pinto's works offer us some considerations that might clarify such questioning: in this line of thinking, it is important to understand that the development in the capacity of projecting and creating is as exclusive to human species as is its vulnerability. The non-human animals receive everything they need from nature, while humanity has to modify the world around it in order to survive. In a certain way, we may say we adapt nature to our needs, since we are not completely adapted to it. The struggle for survival, development, and, ultimately, comfort, is the fuel that runs technological creation.

In the current social arrangement, such concept is even more complex, once all human life now depends on not only its capacity to project, but also on the technological nature established around it. According to Vieira Pinto (2013):

[...] what is currently on production is the economic and political structures of society. Humanity does not create, invent or make anything other than the pure expression of its necessities, being in charge of solving the contradictions with reality (VIEIRA PINTO, 2013, p. 49)

Another important point to comprehend the results of human technological production is the dialectics of its development: humanity became capable of modifying nature around it, by understanding and

controlling its forces, but as it occurs, we create new antagonistic forces, for our state of technological development becomes our nature. Thus, humanity does not fight only against natural forces in a literal sense, such as physics principles and climatic events, but it also has to solve problems created by itself.

One of this “forces of technological nature” is the human work necessary to execute a project, which makes human faculty of socialization one of the mandatory resources to technological development, since we rely on our social capacity to organize individuals and act over the world. In this sense, the organizational model directly affects the technology’s evolution process, because the community members are the ones capable of organizing the production forces. As says Vieira Pinto (2013), “the ones who detain the most valuable goods of each historical moments are naturally presented as the voice of dominant ideology, for they are able to conveniently conduce it” (p. 39).

In other words, the owners of the means of production, i.e. the necessary workforce and knowledge, play a determinant role in the technological development, setting its path. Then, even though historically built knowledge and production efforts are collective, a technique or technological device effective emergence is conditioned by the personal intentions of the individuals or groups that control its means of production.

On the other hand, even though the means of production dictate the appearing of a new technological product, the scenario that follows its emergence is not possible to fully foresee or control. According to Vieira Pinto (2013), “If on the one hand the production process, as an expression of the current state of knowledge and objective forces, defines the technique in the only way it might manifest itself, on the other hand, the technique does not condition only the present production, but determines its implementation on the future” (p. 195).

Thus, technological creation is conditioned, but the effects of the use of its products will depend on how they are assimilated by their users. In the case of YouTube, that was created as platform for audiovisual content sharing, while the emergence of the YouTubers phenomenon was not planned, but a result of the appropriation of the platform’s communicative functionalities by its users.

To stipulate a conceptual-philosophical of technology development does not contemplate all aspects of the discursive community. It is also necessary to understand the application of the technological products in the communicative practices involved in the object of this study, as well as the forces that incentivize and move such activities.

Discursive communities constituted in a virtual environment, like YouTube, are resultants of the cosmogony generated by its features, which means the virtual space is intrinsically part of such communication nature. So far, we have considered the structural features of the YouTubers discursive community, and from now on we shall discuss its organizational aspects, in order to verify the assimilation of the platform attributes by YouTubers and identify the motor forces of this practice.

### **3. The power of participation**

We consider that the human workforce and social organization are determinant in technological creation. However, the process that results in new technology emergence does not command what happens before. It is possible to verify, through philosophical discussions regarding technique, the reasons why

computer and the Internet were created – e.g. by identifying the collective necessities and economic factors that incentivized the detainers of the means of production to execute a project –, or even point out multiple potentialities to these inventions and the possibilities they create, but, in order to understand the object of this research, the communicative practice of YouTubers, we need to search for the reasons why thousands of people are now dedicating their time and effort to produce massive content. The socio-rhetorical studies are an interesting tool for doing so, for one of its main criteria of analysis is the *communicative purpose*. To enter the search for the communicative purpose of the object here, it is important, firstly, to understand how technology were appropriated by the users.

One of the most fertile fields of development in virtual spaces was communication, for human faculties of language and socialization are main features in our society evolution. To try to understand how human creation, communication and social organization resulted in the phenomenon of YouTubers, we resort to Clay Shirky works (2008; 2011), dedicated to describe the “culture of participation”.

Alike Viera Pinto (2013), Shirky (2008) assumes that sociability is an innate characteristic of men and women, and plays a vital role in our development as species. To him:

Sociability is one of our core capabilities, and it shows up in almost every aspect of our lives as both cause and effect. Society is not just the product of its individual members; it is also the product of its constituent groups. The aggregate relations among individuals and groups, among individuals within groups, and among groups forms a network of astonishing complexity. (SHIRKY, 2008, p. 14)

In this line of thought, the author presents the concept of “group complexity”, a very significant aspect of our ways of social organization. The complexity to which he refers is the fact that every time a new individual joins a group, new relations are established between the new member and its peers. What happens is that the number of relations grows exponentially in an increasing group, which makes the number of relations completely unmanageable after a certain point. In other words, from a certain scale is simply impossible to keep track of relations in an organization.

Shirky (2008) points out, from such perspective, how our capacities of socialization and organization become antagonistic forces in certain contexts. For him, the most common model for entrepreneurial organization today only works when sectioned into hierarchies, and only reaches the size of the biggest companies known. It is clear, in his point of view, that such model has limited capacity, for the number of manageable relations is limited, as well as for the cost of implementing several layers of hierarchy. In his words, the current model,

In a way, every institution lives in a kind of contradiction: it exists to take advantage of group effort, but some of its resources are drained away by directing that effort. Call this the institutional dilemma – because an institution expends resources to manage resources, there is a gap between what those institutions are capable of in theory and in practice, and the larger the institution, the greater the costs. (SHIRKY, 2008, p. 47)

The author suggests that a counterpart of such model emerges along with digital tools and online communication. While the difficulties of organization in large scale groups in the traditional model reside in the cost of transaction among hierarchy layers – i.e. the expenses to create and maintain agreeable relations between members –, the use of new communication devices allows individuals to organize in non-

institutionalized groups:

New social tools are altering this equation by lowering the costs of coordinating group action. The easiest place to see this change is in activities that are too difficult to be pursued with traditional management but that have become possible with new forms of coordination. (SHIRKY, 2008, p. 51)

For instance, Shirky mentions the case of the photo sharing and storage platform Flickr. The website offers to its users the possibility to upload, view, share and search pictures, that come along with captions, titles, descriptions, tags and comments. Shirky (2008) points out how such tool facilitates participative and spontaneous co-venture for events of any scale, providing and cataloguing pictures of the same theme but from several different perspectives. This sort of work would not be possible without the technological features of the platform combined with collective effort (cf. SHIRKY, 2008, p. 31).

In the aforementioned scenario, there is no stipulated relation amongst member working on the coordinate action. The Flickr platform merely offered the possibility for it to happen, but it would not be able to manage the efforts that result in an event co-venture. It only happens due to spontaneous actions from individuals interested in the same event, as well as in taking pictures and publishing them. To Shirky (2008), the association between a social-digital technology and the phenomenon of spontaneous massive organization brings into society a new type of work, which he defines as “serious, complex work, taken on without institutional direction. Loosely coordinated groups can now achieve things that were previously out of reach for any other organizational structure [...]” (SHIRKY, 2008, p. 47).

The author links the emergence of what he calls *participatory culture* to the paradox of the complexity of groups, i.e. the necessary effort to organize actions that can only be taken by large-scale groups in opposition to the impossibility to manage such groups. The participatory culture arises from digital communication tools, and the effect is what Shirky refers to as “massive amateurization”. It consists in the fact that individuals without any specific professional skills start to execute jobs that were before restricted to professionals, such as photography and journalism, simply because the technological scenario allows them to. In his words, “our social tools remove older obstacles to public expression, and thus remove the bottlenecks that characterized mass media. The result is the mass amateurization of efforts previously reserved for media professionals” (SHIRKY, 2008, p. 55).

Assuming that a profession exists “to solve a complex problem, or one that requires some sort of specialization” and mass amateurization disrupts, in a way, this previous logic, Shirky points out that participatory culture on internet trespasses the barriers of traditional media. He does not intend to diminish the professional works of photographers and journalists, but to show how the possibility of non-specialized individuals producing massive-oriented content might be highly productive, even though the resultant products of amateur activities often present less quality. The value lays, in his theory, on the *cognitive surplus*, which would be the core element for spontaneous activities in huge scales.

This concept of cognitive surplus is defined in Shirky (2011) as the sum of time, energy and talent of individuals that are spent in social activities other than daily jobs. He considers that it generates the motor force for spontaneously coordinated actions, when properly oriented. The results of participatory activities, as well as the potentialities or cognitive surplus deploy, are innumerable, diverse and unpredictable. Shirky (2008) points out that, in such context,

various results look quite different from one another, and as we get good at using the new tools, those results will diverge still further. New ease of assembly is causing a proliferation of effects, rather than a convergence, and these effects differ by how tightly the individuals are bound to one another in the various groups.

The case of the YouTubers is also a resultant of this phenomenon, since massive production of entertainment content is moved by personal volition of each individual engaged to that.

Shirky (2011) also dedicates his work to analyze the behavior of the individuals grouped for cultural activities, in order to comprehend, more specifically, what inspires and incentivizes them to dedicate their free time for online gatherings. He identifies two primordial types of motivation working in these cases: intrinsic and extrinsic motivations. The first kind regards the individual sensation of satisfaction in concluding a task and the feeling of being, somehow, productive in society. The latter type of motivation, on the other hand, “are those whose reward for doing something is external to the activity, and not the activity itself” (SHIRKY, 2011, p. 68), and, according to the author, money is, by far, the most common example of this type of motivation.

Furthermore, Shirky (2011) asserts that the internet is the first media to present a “post-Gutenberg economy”, meaning that the infrastructure that support the flow of massive content in this case does not belong to the content’s producers, since the internet may be accessed by anyone who pays for it. Regarding the difference between content producers on digital and traditional media, the author suggests that the motivations behind each practice are fundamental factors to distinguish these jobs, because in a participatory community, the satisfaction of engagement and productiveness may be shared and increase the desire for human connection – and, consequently, increase its expressiveness.

Thus, the personal will for expanding the amplitude of communication, allied to the satisfaction of successfully acting over the world, is the motor of amateur massive content diffusion on the Internet, and the main rupture between the products of digital media and traditional media. In Shirky’s (2011) words:

If the only thing our new communication tools allowed was the release of pent-up desires, the effect would be like a cork popping; satisfaction of our latent needs for autonomy and competence would pour out quickly and then stabilize at some new level. But that’s not what’s happening. The flow of amateur production and organization, far from stabilizing, continues to increase, because the social media rewards our intrinsic desires for membership and sharing as well. (SHIRKY, 2011, p. 83)

The metamorphic scenarios presented by him reinforce the idea that the possibilities of technology appropriation are innumerable and unpredictable. In face of the current “period of intense experimentation of these tools” (SHIRKY, 2008, p. 49), the institutions that desire to get financial profit in virtual communities need to be aware of the power of mass participation culture, as well as of the motor motivations for internet users gathering.

Regarding the aforementioned example of the use of Flickr, Shirky (2008) affirms that the enterprise responsible for the platform manage to adapt itself to the mass culture movements, especially by not growing expectations of controlling the content on the website, and so leaving the content publications to be freely managed by the users. In such cases, he points out that online social tools make room for “[...]”



actions taken by loosely structured groups, operating without managerial direction and outside the profit motive” (p. 51).

On the other hand, YouTube’s administration found another way to integrate financial profit and spontaneous collective efforts – not only by monetizing it, but also direct it, in some levels. The overture for content producers to profit from posting videos offered by YouTube Partner Program, and making emerge the “YouTuber profession”, unites intrinsic and extrinsic motivations described by Shirky (2011), by offering a tool capable of fulfilling the users’ need for communication and productiveness, and also capable of generating money income, if well succeeded.

Even before the YouTube acquisition by Google, Tapscott & William (2006) were already discussing the future of open content production when inserted in market logic. In their point of view, it reformulates the way we establish communication, making it more agile and interactive – and less concerned with content quality. Their considerations show that open massive communication was not born on YouTube, just found a fertile space to develop itself on it. In their words: “[...] new business models for open content will not come from traditional media establishments, but from companies such as Google, Yahoo, and YouTube.” (TAPSCOTT E WILLIAMS, 2006, p. 271)

Thus, YouTube can be defined as a platform whose terms of use and interaction were established, intently, aiming a large-range spread of communicative activities, such as informative segments and entertainment content, which now can be largely produced by amateurs and dismissing the need to organize them in a traditional way. By disrupting the previous dominant organizational model, the new arrangement is capable of exploiting spontaneous collective efforts in a way that benefits both the enterprise and the content producer. Also, it overcomes the necessity to manage big groups of individuals, saving money and time in what concerns the content production sector management.

Ultimately, Google discovered how to use the communicative potential of YouTube, as well as articulate collective forces to execute such potential. Tapscott & Williams (2006, p. 272) point out that: This new generation of companies is not burdened by the legacies that inhibit the publishing incumbents, so they can be much more agile in responding to customer demands. More important, they understand that you don’t need to control the quantity and destiny of bits if the can provide compelling venues in which people build communities around sharing and remixing content. Free content is just the lure on which they layer revenue from advertising and premium services.

In the context we are here investigating, we observe two complementary motor forces in the practices that are going to be analyzed: a set of private interests within the company and the synthesis of intrinsic and extrinsic motivations amongst the content-producer users. It is necessary, then, to keep in mind the plurality of motivations working behind the content producing process, in order not to lose focus on the search for rhetorical unities on YouTubers’ videos.

Shirky (2008) points out that the “mass amateurization is a result of a proliferation of expressive capacities”, and – likely the emergence of the press printer that has exponentially increased the production of written texts – generates a content surplus that is much bigger than an individual’s capacity to consume information. By removing the production “bottleneck” of technology-centered information diffusion, the virtual environment allows YouTube, and other content-sharing websites, to produce gigantic amounts of

content, which works, according to Tapscott and Williams (2006), as a decoy to attract and keep more and more users.

The responsibility of attracting the biggest audience possible is transferred to YouTubers, since their work aims to profit from their content popularity and gain more and more followers – and this reflects on content production. They also follow a logic of “the more, the better”. Such phenomenon is described by Shirky (2008), pointing that the media is transformed, as long as the practices of “communication” and “publication” become the same, disrupting the filtering patterns of traditional/professional media. Thus, in massive media, the difference between quality and average content become more and more relative. According to the author, the main mindset changes: “The future presented by the internet is the mass amateurization of publishing and a switch from ‘Why publish this?’ to ‘Why not?’” (SHIRKY, 2008, p. 60).

On the other hand, the market field established by the popularization of means of massive communication generates a new paradigm: as the amateurization of popular communication processes occurs, more individuals start to put time and effort on it as a regular activity, and also as source of income, which may be interpreted as a new professionalization process. A very significant example of that is the “professionals” in YouTubing. Such process was described by several authors (BURGESS & GREEN, 2008; MORREALE, 2013; DORNELLES, 2015; and CORUJA, 2017; for instance). This stabilization of professions, as the YouTubers, and activities, as “vlogging” and other forms of self-exposure, suggest a standardization of communicative practices in virtual spaces.

## 4. Methodology

The methodology here applied involves the concepts from the theoretical-bibliographical research developed so far, along with the practical procedures regarding video selection and analysis within Youtube.

To our analysis, 10 videos were selected, among the most accessed sport-tagged channels, according to the socio-rhetorical theory’s concept of prominent members of a discursive community. The search was made through the “Browse channels” button, for we understand that the most accessed and most rated content represent prominence and effectiveness of communication when it comes to YouTubing practice.

After the selection, the data was analyzed, in order to put the main communicative purpose in evidence. Recurrent verbal and imagery elements working for the realization of such purposes were transcribed, so we could formulate generalizations regarding their effects in text architecture, as proposed by the socio-rhetorical model. We follow, as well, Zhang & Wildemuth’s (2009) recommendation, in case of unstable formations of genre, to “be flexible in adding categories along the process and work on the data more than once” (p. 29), since there are many details and patterns that could go unnoticed amongst the miscellaneous aspects of this practice.

## 5. The celebrity class of youtubers

Wikipedia defines “YouTuber” as a “class of internet celebrities who gained popularity through video

sharing on YouTube platform”<sup>1</sup>. This profile guided our selection, once we were looking for high-visibility channels in YouTube categories, in order to investigate if there is a structure regularity in the most consumed content on the site.

Amongst the most accessed producers who monetize videos through the YouTube Partner Program, we can separate them into ones with an individual person as main figure of the channel, and the ones produced by a group of people that dedicate their work to bring fame to the channel, not only to themselves individually. Both types, though, have characteristics related to selling people’s image, drawing attention the individual(s) involved, in a very personal way.

The videos suggestions offered by YouTube on the main page is based on navigation metadata, meaning each user get different suggestions, according to channels they follow and searches they make (not only on YouTube, but on several pages accesses through the browser). Thus, we opted to select videos figuring in a spotlight position in the “Browse Channels” tool, within the category “Sports”, because this section of the website classifies content according to their level of “virality” – i.e. how fast they gained popularity, measured by followers and views.

Because the content of the channels is very overwhelming in amount and very diverse, our analyses were focused on a theoretical description of the discursive community of the YouTubers, highlighting the patterns found. Having exposed our thoughts on the technological environment and the forces that move the practices on YouTube, we may trace the profile of this discursive community according to the categories proposed by Swales (1998)

The first category regards a core aspect of the YouTubing practice, which is the supporting technology. In this case, the “space” the community shares is very determinant, for it does not distinguish from the communicative mechanisms and functions listed as discursive category. In fact, space and communication fuse in this case.

Regarding the common objectives of the community, we have seen how the motivations behind these practices are based on human nature factor, as much as on money profit. The latter is an objective shared not only by the YouTubers, but also by the detainers of this mean of communication, so it reflects not only on the content production and text architecture, but also on the community’s environment infra-structure.

Two other categories for discursive community characterization are, respectively, the mechanisms between the community members and the information exchange functionalities. As aforementioned, because YouTube is inserted in a virtual space, the criteria of “place” disappears, and the tools for communication and information are profuse. The environment is organized in order to fulfill the necessities that move technological development – which is large-scale communication, in this case. Shirky (2008) offers a very interesting metaphor to clarify this symbiosis:

When we change the way we communicate, we change society. The tools that a society uses to create and maintain itself are as central to human life as a hive is to bee life. Though the hive is not part of any individual bee, it is part of the colony, both shaped by and shaping the lives of its inhabitants. The hive is a social device, a piece of bee information technology that provides a platform, literally, for the communication and coordination that keeps the colony viable. Individual bees can’t be understood

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<sup>1</sup> Available at <[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_YouTubers](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_YouTubers)>. Accessed on 18 fev 2018.

separately from the colony or from their shared, co-created environment. So it is with human networks; bees make hives, we make mobile phones.

On YouTube, users may establish communication through video and channel comments space, where they offer feedback regarding all kinds of content – in some cases, high popular channels' comments become alike to discussion forums. This characteristic, imbricated to the platform's structure, represents the fourth criteria in the socio-rhetorical analysis.

The fifth one regards the characteristic lexicon of the community, representing the language evolving in it. The term "YouTuber" itself emerges as a specific word to refer to the practices of this community. Moreover, a characteristic that is common among online tools is the development of metalanguage, so that their users can talk about its functionalities, creating and altering word, such as "followers", "to like", "thumbs up", "hit the bell", etc.

Finally, the sixth category, the prominent/experienced members of the community, concerns users who have a more developed knowledge of the discursive properties of the practices within the community, in opposition to the new members, with whom they share their knowledge. In the set of members contemplated in this research, we could verify that YouTubers whose channels accumulate a great number of followers seem to be very aware and conscious regarding how their communication works. It reflects in the fact that they grew to be famous, expanding their popularity across other media, such as television and online social networks.

The socio-rhetorical based analysis of the selected data resulted in three main rhetorical movements, as follow:

Movement 1: to capitate the watcher's attention – in this introductory movement, the YouTuber(s) employ a series of artifices to retain the spectator user in the video page, by greeting them, presenting an upcoming segment of what it going to be done throughout the video or some scene related to the topic.

Movement 2: narrative sequence – this movement if materialized either as an oral presentation of facts (personal or external), either as an audiovisual segment with talks, interviews, games, short scenes, amongst other generic structures. This sequence consists, specifically, in the entertainment part of the content.

Movement 3: to persuade the audience – this movement consists in segments that try to stimulate the spectator to raise statistics of the video and the channel, as in to press the "like" button, to subscribe to the channel, or to hit one of the links that take the user to the YouTuber's social network pages.

These movements were identified in all the analyzed videos, which points out to a rhetorical pattern within the communicative practice of the YouTubers. The videos were analyzed separately, but the conclusion drawn may be applied to the community as whole, as presented in the final section.

## 6. Conclusions

This research aimed to identify categories in the activities by the so-called YouTubers, individuals who produce mass communication content on YouTube. The analysis were based on the concepts developed on the socio-rhetorical theory for text genre analysis, in order to evince the rhetorical movements in the composition of the created content. The analysis partially corroborate the initial hypothesis: the YouTubing practice, as a whole, seems to be oriented towards the central purpose of self-image divulgation, in order

to get more and more users watching their content, and, consequently, raising channel's statistics and profit. Notwithstanding, the videos per se seem to have as major purpose the entertainment – to capitate and captivate the audience. The subjacent textual elements, such as video description and annotations, are the responsible tools for increasing statistics, views, likes etc.

Furthermore, some other conclusions may be drawn. Firstly, the themes approached in the videos, even in the Sports category, tend to be fused with topics regarding the YouTubers' personal/public lives, as well as the guest's or other individuals' figuring in the videos. Along the analyzed speeches, there is a great predominance of segments concerning private matters and the hosts practice as social communicators on the digital world. It represents an effort to increase audience. The progress in statistics of a channel is a recurrent theme in videos, which means there are no worries to hide the purpose of increasing popularity.

This characteristic seem to be a reverberation of the *vlogging* practices – audiovisual segments containing “personal journal” entries –, which became very popular by the time of the emergence of the platform. In general, many of the videos seem to converge to the same essence of vlogs. Furthermore, several YouTubers became famous because of such videos, and many others keep a parallel channel containing only vlogs.

Concerning the rhetorical actions found in the analyses, the results show that the process of attention capitation (movement 1) is always the initial segment of the video, followed by movement 2, which consists in entertaining the spectator. Likewise, movement 3 appears all over the selected data, aiming to persuade the audience to interact with feedback tools that surround the content. This movement is always present at the end of videos, however, we verified that this segment may take place more than once during a video, in short blocks in middle of movement 2. The duration of the videos is, majorly, determined by movement 2, since movements 1 and 3 always appear as short segments.

It is also interesting to notice that the user-generated content does not necessarily has to do with the category in which they are classified, since the main decoy of the videos is the insertion of personal topics in the videos. Sometimes, this trend overcomes the original thematic, deviating the content from the category.

Taking the communicative purpose as privileged criterion for analysis, the videos may be understood as an object of entertainment, capitation a captivation of audience, and of persuasion to click on the several links that surround the host page. The activity of YouTubers, as pointed by previous studies and hereby endorsed, present certain regularities in its productions, which become more and more professional, even though the practice originated from a process of mass amateurization.

Certainly, this paper does not contemplate the totality of the communicative aspects of YouTubers. Nonetheless, we hope the brief considerations here proposed figure as useful to enrich the discussions regarding online communication, and its reverberations in other scopes of society.

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