Reading and informal learning trends on YouTube: The booktuber

Lectura y aprendizaje informal en YouTube: El booktuber

**ABSTRACT**

The digital era has perpetuated new pedagogies of collective participation in networks that requires reflection in the conventional education area, because of YouTube, as audiovisual platform of outstanding international recognition, concentrates an extensive repertoire of informal learning practices among young people. In this case, the research focuses on a form of literary expression driven by the new Booktube community, which is dedicated to the recommendation of books and the promotion of reading by focusing their messages through the videoblog format. This aspect, closely popularized in the platform, allow us to deepen new youth practices outside classroom that refer to the promotion of books and critical and judicious expression on aspects related to content, formats, genres and authors in a context supported by the media ecology. In order to deepen the reasons why youth reads currently, we developed a literature review starting with the transmedia literacy concept evaluating narrative and aesthetic competences and applying a content analysis and a case study that collects channels of two Spanish booktubers with high impact and community: Javier Ruescas and Fly like a Butterfly. Results discern an affinity space linked to the opinion of peers that promotes reading and writing, and the ability to interpret, describe, compare and reflect about the literary context.

**KEYWORDS | PALABRAS CLAVE**

Transmedia literacy, YouTube, informal learning, media literacy, social networks, books, participative culture, young people.

Transliteracidad, YouTube, aprendizaje informal, competencias mediáticas, redes sociales, libros, cultura participativa, jóvenes.
1. Introduction and state of the art

Cyberspace and the digital age have perpetuated new collective pedagogies constructed on the reorganization of social habits and customs in a collaborative economic context starred by the Internet, the connection between networks and resources, the interaction, openness and social inclusion. This environment has entailed globalization of user participation involving users who modify their condition to become coauthors and prosumers (producers and consumers) of new media and education products (Benassini-Felix, 2014; Scolari, 2016).

Delving into this reflection, the development of the Internet and digital communications enables the circulation of a wide diversity of contents through different media, which allows for the establishment of a hybrid pattern of vertical traffic (top-down and bottom-up), which works in a participatory and disorganized manner stemming from individual and common decisions (Islas, 2009; Jenkins, Ford & Green, 2015). These procedures reflect the visibility of new identities devoted to the creation, modification and cyclical redistribution of content that expand across participatory culture as a new scenario of media convergence (Jenkins, 2008).

This framework also relies on amateur and self-taught practices that unveil new communicational, social, and educational insights (Skripčová, 2017), breaking barriers in a civic, artistic, and creative expression: informal mentorship exercises based on the transmission of knowledge between peers. Thus, YouTube’s celebrated reputation generates a countless number of communities based on unlimited types of interests in which infinite forms of social relations develop” (Bautista-Sancho, 2012: 124). These are relationships and content that the Web 2.0 has amplified alongside people’s skills, gradually incorporating these systems into everyday life.

Online communities have active agents (young people) that provide information and promote new channels of empowered and democratic communication (Arriga, Marcellán-Barago, & González-Vilella, 2016; García-Galera, Fernández-Muñoz, & Del-Hoyo-Huerto, 2017), these links evidence appropriation as a resource for collaborative learning and identity configuration (Ito & al., 2008; Livingstone, 2008). On these bases, the study aims to deepen the Booktube phenomenon on YouTube: a grouping of literary channels in which the self-proclaimed youtubers (booktubers) share tastes and interest for reading with their followers (Monacciano, 2015). The final goal is, therefore, to inquire as to the motives for these relationships taking as starting point two celebrities from the Spanish-speaking community: the readers and writers Javier Ruescas and Fly like a Butterfly.

Media convergence, in its globalizing process, has become reinforced by a constant evolution of the roles people play with and for the media, as well as for the cultural industry. In virtue of this scenario, the primitive conception assigned under the halo of passivity has transformed individuals into “active participants in the creation of new versions of history” (Miranda-Galbe & Figuero-Espadas, 2016: 121) that search for information, transmit concerns and produce stories. They configure an audience model that responds, according to García-Orosa (2018), to new traits including the explicit reception, the client-participant conversion, the inclusion of a cybermedia environment, and the integration and dissolution of the user in communities. In other words, “people make several active decisions when they share content” (Jenkins, 2008: 41) through digital media that manage the contemporary self with a breadth of informational, communicational and entertainment options. (Fernández-Rodríguez & Gutiérrez-Pequeño, 2017).

Active broadcasting audiences alter their participation and progress as creative audiences by going “beyond traditional consumption” (Scolari, 2013: 49), and unleashing a series of economic-cultural productions throughout history. These create new generations adapted to and associated with technology: the digital natives, the millennial generation, the gamer generation or the new millennium apprentices, who highlight the generational gaps in terms of technological and personal skills (Matamala-Riquelme, 2016), and who direct their interests towards innovative forms of creative and digital expression: blogging, microblogging or videoblogging.

This epitome of youth production and progression is accentuated with the arrival of YouTube in 2005 and its subsequent acquisition by the North American giant Google in 2006, placing the platform as the second website with the highest traffic worldwide (Alexa Traffic Statistics, 2018). A success that is not only reflected in the financial motivation of its users, youtubers (Lange, 2007) but also in the breadth of media content uploaded year after year and its mediation as a platform for personal expression (Scolari, 2018).

On YouTube young people disseminate ideas, beliefs, and customs through cultural hybridization and the struggle against homogeneity, in an affinity space that, as noted by Gee (2012), corresponds to that place or set of informal places where some people affiliate with others without sharing the same cultural, racial, ethnic characteristics. In
other words, they base their relationships on common activities, interests, and objectives. Several authors argue that the platform has become a stimulating resource that provides adequate safety for these users to promote opinions and encourage creativity from different perspectives, as well as to establish a parasocial interaction that reveals the inherent influence between them (Lee & Watkins, 2016). Here, youtubers, as trustworthy authorities (Pastor-Ruiz & Abarrou-Ben-Boubaker, 2018), pose relations of attraction with their followers on a physical, psychic, and homophilic level (attraction between homonyms in terms of their beliefs, tastes, etc.) (Rubin, Perse, & Powel, 1985; Eval & Rubin, 2003).

It is, therefore, a bargaining chip that links comments between peers; enhances social, emotional and cognitive skills (Tan & Pearce, 2011); and enables expression, informal learning and identity building. In a different realm, YouTube established itself as a source of entertainment and discussion, but also as a scenario of “archival capacities and social dynamics” that “have provoked the emergence of more proactive exercises” (Scolari, 2018: 95). This presents a vital starting point for video blogs (vlogs), network communication models that respond to a unique format: the asynchronous, multimodal monologue recorded in front of a camera that adapts and publishes on the web to a limited audience (Frobenius, 2014).

1.2. Informal learning and transmedia literacy on Booktube

On the basis of this context, Jenkins (2006) conducted a study on new literacies (Area & Pessoa, 2012) more than a decade ago, involving both social and collaborative competencies, based on participatory culture and traditional and academic literacy. A notion that started from classical literacy: illiterate, literate, formal and linguistic; going through recognized media literacy: multimodal, consumer, critical and formal (Caldeiro-Pedreira & Aguaded-Gómez, 2017; Gutiérrez-Martín & Tyner, 2012); towards transmedia literacy: digital, multimodal, prosumer, critical and informal (Scolari, 2010). Namely, in this last point, transmedia literacy as a set of practices, relationships between media and youth, and informal learning strategies blurred by the online age (Gómez-Galán, 2017; González-Martínez, Serrat-Sellabona, Estebanell-Minguell, Rostan-Sánchez, & Esteban-Guitart, 2018). A concept based on daily activity and on unconsciously acquired, disorderly and casual instruction of knowledge, goes beyond media skills (Ferrés & Piscitelli, 2012), and displays a set of transmedia skills such as 1) learning by doing what you like; 2) learning by solving problems; 3) learning by imitation or simulation; 4) learning by examination or improvement of one’s own or others’ work; 5) and learning by means of teaching with the young person transmitting and receiving knowledge. Subsequently, Scolari (2018) defined YouTube as “a platform where transmedia competencies are being developed outside formal learning environments” (Scolari, 2018, p. 98). In fact, videos have become an educational resource for young people in terms of formal training and apprenticeship aimed at hobbies, as “eight out of ten use video for training purposes, a figure that reaches 96% and 94.6% in young people aged 14 to 19 and 20 to 24 respectively” (Fundación Telefónica, 2017: 152).

At this point, the report of the Spanish Reading and Book Observatory (2018), reveals reading as one of the favorite cultural practices in the country, growing to 3.5 points over the last four years. It represents a growing practice that shows the highest percentage of readers between the ages of 15 and 19 (90.1%). At the same time, the report on
Reading Habits and Book Purchase in Spain (Gremios de Editores de España, 2017), confirms the range of between 25 and 34 years (100%) followed by those between 14 and 24 (99.3%), indicating online sources as the main triggers.

Weeks, Ardévol-Abreu and De-Zúñiga (2017) evidence, in this sense, that people increasingly depend on the influence of other individuals on social networks for recommendations, knowledge or opinions that affect their behavior and social dynamics. In other words, Lianaki-Dedouli and Plouin (2017) define it as learning to be and learning to live together. This is how opinion leaders can become sources of immeasurable influence within a mechanism of dependency and/or affinity (Gee, 2012), such that young people “demand reference points that enable them to find and select the most interesting titles” finding out “the opinions of their peers” (García-Rodríguez, 2013), this generates communities such as Booktube on YouTube. It is a “network comprised by users producing original content” who “use their own channels to celebrate or discuss books, generally fiction, dedicated to the adolescent public” (Sued, 2016).

The development of a reading habit is therefore closely linked to this literary event that surpasses the crossroads between traditional and digital reading. Some authors point to this community as a reading promotion phenomenon, of alliance with the publishing industry, and as a clear example of best practices for the development of a reading habit in the classroom (Rovira-Collado, Llorens-García, Fernández-Tari, & Mendiola-Oriate, 2016; Rovira-Collado, 2016, 2017; Cortes-Vargas, 2018). Thus, a new informal learning strategy emerges, increasing transmedia competencies directly related to the literary universe and the growth of a critical and communicative spirit (Ballester & Ibarra, 2016).

2. Material and methods

Based on the literature review, the aim of this study is to investigate the factors that motivate young people to read through booktubers. That is, to initiate an exploration into the reasons why young people and young adults can read today. Similarly, we try to analyze those transmedia competencies derived from the narrative aspect of booktubers.

The population selected using non-probability sampling includes the two channels belonging to eminent figures recognized in Spain, Javier Ruescas (250,988 followers), and Fly like a Butterfly (183,943 followers), a choice based on gender equity, the representativeness of two of the leading figures as reported by El País newspaper on August 13, 2017 (Filippi, 2017). Also, Spanish nationality and the number of subscribers were considered (YouTube Statistics, 2017). This decision was reinforced by the use of qualitative and quantitative techniques: literary review, content analysis, and case study.

The analysis of contents, in this case, is established as a valid procedure for our study, recognized in the scientific-academic field as enabling documentary observation and, consequently, the manifestation of social events (Sierra-Bravo, 1994). Likewise, the technique uncovers a record of systematic and objective data, which, alongside the case study, namely research that involves a unit of analysis sample, is considered a replicable methodology for future research (Andréu-Abela, 2010; Hernández-Sampieri, Fernández-Collado, & Baptista-Lucio, 2007).

On this foundation, we designed the first evaluation instrument following Knappendorf’s (1997) guidelines, including sampling units (observable portions of reality) and recording units (delimitation and definition of units subject to the objectives of the study). With this approach, we proposed the categories (sampling units) and variables (recording units) in Table 1. These were extracted from reports on reading habits, and analyses on physical, psychic and homophilic attraction previously pointed out by Rubin, Perse, and Powell (1985), Turnet (1993) and Evan and Rubin (2003).

Next, we selected a reduced sample from both channels, which totaled 200 comments (100 comments from each of the videos sharing the same subject matter). This choice is justified, again, in the exploratory analysis and the first 100 comments that algorithmically in YouTube, are more relevant and display more interactions from the community (the platform gives priority to those with more comments, likes, etc.). The content selected for the study, the Book Haul, is one of the most representative in the community, which deals with the recommendation of books purchased by booktubers. Therefore, with this first phase, we intend to explore some of the interests that promote reading and acquisition of books by young people based on the arguments and content shared by booktubers.

The next step, focused on the development of transmedia competencies through these practices, was to transcribe the statements of two booktubers applying as a second research instrument Scolari’s (2018) narrative and aesthetic evaluation system, since it enables the interpretation of narratives: 1) appreciating aesthetic values; 2) recognizing genres, reconstructing narrative worlds and comparing stories; 3) expressing identities and visions of the world through narrative.
In order to do so, we used another sample consisting of the random (probabilistic) selection of videos visualized (374 from Javier Ruescas and 273 from Fly like a Butterfly), in order to unravel the degree of informal dexterity relative to the booktubers’ abilities to interpret, recognize, describe, compare, evaluate, reflect and apply knowledge relating to narrative and literary aesthetics.

3. Analysis and results

The questions raised in the methodological section were then approached by means of a content analysis that yielded the most important variables regarding the relationship between booktubers and followers. After applying the first research instrument, which gathered those recording units related to reading promotion, the acquisition of copies, and physical, psychic and homophilic attraction to the booktuber, a total of 200 comments were collected in an exclusive videoblog format, the Book Haul. In the case of the 100, Javier Ruescas’ comments analyzed and specifically on the video “Book Haul: Laura Gallego, Blue Jeans, Josu Diamond, Andreata, Rowling and more!” One can see that physical or psychological attraction are not priorities for the community of followers, as only 18% of them mention positive aspects linked to character or appearance. Along the same lines, on the video “Book Haul: Book Haul December 2016 and January 2017” by Fly like a Butterfly, only 6% of this physical-psychic interest is displayed. In other words, out of 200 comments, only 14% of subscribers refer to these particular traits. In contrast to the homophilia attraction by which users find a reason for spatial affinity with the booktuber (Gee, 2012), Javier Ruescas’ channel contains a total of 80% of annotations linked to a shared passion for reading, authors, literary genres, etc. In Fly like a Butterfly, this trend is also preferential, as 68% refers to the same emotional, sentimental and personal relationship with the booktuber. The space is thus a mirror that reflects the personal and emotional universe of the individual who has or has not been exposed to reading. The homophilia attraction is a reason for spatial affinity with the booktuber, which is expressed quantitatively, out of the entire sample, 148 comments (74%) share some degree of affinity with youtuber4, which represents an initial baseline to be delved.

Following the same design and taking into account purchase intention, acquisition, or book recommendations by followers on both channels, evidence suggests that, in the case of Javier Ruescas, this behavior is more prevalent than with Fly like a Butterfly. This matter represents a new investigative path for the evaluation of those characters that most influence the community of followers of each booktuber. In this case, Javier Ruescas’ video focuses on the display of new additions to his bookshelf, arguing his choice, motivation, and interest in each book, yielding a total of 48% purchase intentions.
In the case of Fly like a Butterfly, however, the booktuber focuses the script on soliciting the opinion of its subscribers, eliciting the intention of purchase in only 28% of them. Overall, 76 comments (38%) focused on the will to buy or read, and 63 (31.5%) on the recommendation of new titles to peers or booktubers themselves. Given that Book Haul represents exclusive content to present acquired books, it would be interesting to broaden the spectrum to other audiovisual products, to find out the degree of interest within the community to acquire the books in a comparison that includes: book tags (sets of questions about books), wrap up (comments about books read), bookshelf tour (presentation of the personal library), unboxing (live opening of packages with books), etc.

Applying the second research instrument, adapted to Scolari's (2018) evaluation of narrative-aesthetic competencies, the aim was to explain the capacities and, consequently, transmedia skills unconsciously acquired by booktubers in informal learning environments. So, 1) the recognition of genres, formats, and reconstruction of narrative worlds; 2) the comparison of stories, genres, and formats; 3) and the expression of identities and worldviews through storytelling, awaken great skills and narrative mastery of this YouTube community. These cases are contemplated from the literal transcription of booktubers in a random selection of videos collected

<table>
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<th>Competencies</th>
<th>Specific competencies</th>
<th>Examples from Javier Ruacesas</th>
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<tr>
<td>Interpret</td>
<td>Reconstruct transmedia narrative worlds.</td>
<td>[Ruacesas] The first series I am going to tell you about is Sky's original and it is called Gomorrah, and is based on the novel by Roberto Saviano. [...] Another series that makes me mad and that I follow since it was released is The Strange, based on the book by Guillermo del Toro and Chuck Hogan... (<a href="https://bit.ly/2eH31rq">https://bit.ly/2eH31rq</a>)</td>
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<td>Recognize and describe</td>
<td>Genres in different media and platforms.</td>
<td>[Ruacesas] This is science fiction, adventure and the characters each have their own personality, each has their own story... (<a href="https://bit.ly/2QJ3IIf">https://bit.ly/2QJ3IIf</a>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compare</td>
<td>To highlight the differences and similarities between different narrative worlds.</td>
<td>It had a plot very similar to the one we know from Cinderella. Moreover, since then many versions of this story have emerged in other cultures. Even our friend Jean Baptiste Basile [...] had his Cinderella story where the stepsisters, the little shoe, the transformations appeared... (<a href="https://bit.ly/2G6hM0z">https://bit.ly/2G6hM0z</a>)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Evaluate and reflect</td>
<td>About a specific narrative world.</td>
<td>[González] I love the metaphors he uses, I love this book because... (<a href="https://bit.ly/2Bv3Vmd">https://bit.ly/2Bv3Vmd</a>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apply</td>
<td>Choose and consume/leave content based on aesthetic or narrative values.</td>
<td>[Ruacesas] In my case, what weighs more right now than the cover itself is the name of the gentleman or the lady on it. That is who the author. For better or worse, the fact that one has read a book by that person can be decisive... (<a href="https://bit.ly/2RR2BPZ">https://bit.ly/2RR2BPZ</a>)</td>
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<th>Competencies</th>
<th>Specific competencies</th>
<th>Examples from Fly like a Butterfly</th>
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<tr>
<td>Interpret</td>
<td>Understand the story, narration, etc.</td>
<td>[Esmeralda] For starters, there is the protagonist, who is a Colombian girl, who for her young age seems quite mature. One normal day he goes to her school, and suddenly they discover that there is a boy who has committed suicide... (<a href="https://bit.ly/2LeOVID">https://bit.ly/2LeOVID</a>)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Recognize and describe</td>
<td>Genres in different media and platforms.</td>
<td>[Esmeralda] There are from young children's to more adults, some classics, some totally juvenile and... because that is what I like, the variety... (<a href="https://bit.ly/2SEzC0">https://bit.ly/2SEzC0</a>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compare</td>
<td>Highlight the differences and similarities between the different formats.</td>
<td>[Esmeralda] I have not followed her because it became too long and I started watching the TV series. [...] I like that in the television series they did not cut a hair like the author in the books... (<a href="https://bit.ly/2UESU5g">https://bit.ly/2UESU5g</a>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluate and reflect</td>
<td>Our own creations.</td>
<td>[Emerald] I had never written a book and much less proofread. The truth is that it is a process in which you have to remember everything you have done and then many parts that you have removed and then you do not remember, and you have to go back. The truth is that it was quite difficult, but also, when we read the final version we said: better, it is better this way... (<a href="https://bit.ly/2C7GZG7">https://bit.ly/2C7GZG7</a>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apply</td>
<td>Choose and consume/leave content based on aesthetic or narrative values.</td>
<td>[Esmeralda] I am going to show you a couple that I have not read, but they have caught my attention, and I love the covers... (<a href="https://bit.ly/2RNvVGJe">https://bit.ly/2RNvVGJe</a>)</td>
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in the form of an example in Table 2\textsuperscript{5}. Interpreting, recognizing and describing, comparing, evaluating and reflecting, and applying narrative and aesthetic knowledge related to literature become latent informal transmedia competencies within the booktuber phenomenon, where the development of skills directly related to reading comprehension, evaluation, reflection, and communication are observed. Elements that, together with the figures presented, contribute to the achievement of the goal discussed below.

4. Discussion and conclusions

The Booktube community emerges as a manifestation of new informal online learning practices involving parasocial factors that determine the eminent development of transmedia skills outside the classroom (Lin & Farnham, 2013; Scolari, 2018). This is not only reflected in studies related to the educational community in its intervention for the promotion of literature and reading (Rovira-Collado \& al., 2016; Rovira-Collado, 2016; 2017; Cortes-Vargas, 2018), but also in the link between booktuber and follower. In this study, we have been able to glimpse some of the reasons that invite young people’s reading in a presumption environment such as YouTube.

In this way, the Booktube community displays glimpses of spatial affinity considerably related to the intercultural sharing of interest in books, authors and literary genres (Gee, 2012). Homophilia, then, seems to become one of the reasons for the growth of the Booktube community on knowledge, tastes, and literary preferences. A fact sustained prematurely on arguments, expositions and diverse contents that, in the same way, promote the automatic acquisition of abilities for the interpretation, reflection, evaluation, comparison, and reading-writing application.

In addition, it has been proven that both Javier Ruescas and Fly like a Butterfly are not only dedicated to the expression of opinions about literary products, but also to the production and promotion of their own copies. This note highlights the need to reassess, from a widely expanded study population, whether the pattern of authorship is reiterated in order to delve into the community’s level of narrative and aesthetic competences, as well as the writing aspiration of its followers.

It should be emphasized that, unlike other studies on the identity and autobiographical fame of youtubers (Pérez-Torres \& al., 2018), booktubing has created a synergy of collaboration, recommendation, and participation among equals in which the physical or psychic aspects are not as important as tastes and reflections. This inference invokes the replication of the study in a larger community and a subsequent geographical comparison of tastes and reading aspirations, differences that may or may not have been premised by pre-established or homophilic attraction records, as well as the purchase intention and recommendations. This event of increasing significance for the educational field which, from transmedia literacy and new youth practices in social networks, finds new literary development tactics in environments that are beyond academic control, but which, similarly, are positive and relevant for in-class analysis.

The cases analyzed, although limited, show sufficient capacities in the interpretative, descriptive, comparative, reflexive and exploitable transmedia, where the last word is not only held by booktubers, but also by their followers. Thus, we begin the first contact in order to discover where the interest in books, reading, and youth writing arises from, which, first of all, seems to be associated with spatial affinity, and linked to a shared opinion between peers, public and social, crossing the borders of what is monomediatically pre-established (Frobenius, 2014; Scolari, 2018). Although this research may reflect a sample limitation confined to the success of two Spanish-speaking case studies, we insist on exhaustively deepening the relationships that motivate youthful reading through the booktubing phenomenon. To this end, we invite the development of a more comprehensive, comparative and conclusive examination. Thus, this study offers the methodological bases and unveils the need to address the influence exerted by different booktubers on young people through their contents and reasoning. Along the same lines, it facilitates confirmation and reflection on the factor of peer affinity as an eminent motivational force for reading in quotidian and informal environments.

Notes

3 See appendix and Scolari’s (2018) instrument to record narrative and aesthetic competencies and its methodological application (https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.6225044).
4 See the complete appendix on the physical/psychic and homophilic attraction records, as well as the purchase intention and recommendations (https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.6225602).
5 See Table 1 in full (https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.6225608).
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