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CONTENT – SOMMAIRE – INHALT – CUPRINS

NARRATIVE COMPLEXITY IN 30-MINUTE DIGITALLY DISTRIBUTED TV SERIES

IONUȚ PAUL BOCA[1]

ABSTRACT. The rise of VoD services on the media market has produced key mutations in the television series industry at all levels. The dynamics of the tripartite relation between production, distribution and consumption gains new ground when a series of digital media distribution portals break the traditional linearity of television and adopt the aesthetics of media catalogs that users can access whenever and wherever they want. This new form of distribution allows the development of complex narrative structures, which were difficult to put into practice in traditional television, a medium whose evolution was defined by its own time constraints.

This paper explores the main narrative features of 30-minute series distributed by Video-on-Demand (VoD) portals over the past five years and explores the narrative differences between linear and digital shows, with a special focus on Netflix original productions.

Keywords: Netflix, TV series, comedy series, sitcom, narrrative structures, narrative complexity, streaming, media serialization

Context

The digital distribution of TV series has led to discussions (Lotz 2014; Tryon 2015; Newman și Levine 2012; Romano 2013; Brojakowski 2015; Mittell 2015a; Pedersen 2016; Diez 2014; Mittell 2015b; Jenner 2015; Innocenti and Pescatore 2015) about a new "golden age"

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(Newman and Levine 2012) of the television industry, or the transition to its fourth evolutionary stage, TVIV (Jenner 2015), in which complex multidimensional stories reconfigure the media market and encourage new ways of media consumption. Jason Mittell (2015b) points out that, in order to understand the structural changes in recent series, we must look at the broader image of the television industry. According to him, one of the main factors that led to the emergence of narratively complex series was the change of the business model that used to define TV industry.

Audience fragmentation, a process that took place during the 1980s and 1990s, made narrative experiments possible, thus sparking off the creation of series that would satisfy the specific tastes of niche audiences. From this perspective, original HBO productions such as *The Sopranos* or *The Wire* played a catalysing role on the entire industry through atypical narrative mechanisms, complex characters and difficult topics. Taking HBO's example, other TV stations, such as FX or AMC, began to produce their own series based on the premise of a greater narrative complexity. Through their quality and association with an active and young audience, these productions have become a source of legitimacy for those TV stations.

The public discourse on a new type of television – as opposed to the traditional one - involving quality, complex, revolutionary productions, was then taken over by streaming services when they started producing their own content (Tryon 2015). In this way, digital television has become a place for the democratization of consumption, expanding user access opportunities and bringing "new opportunities for aesthetic progress, such as more 'complex' stories or Netflix's strategy of releasing all thirteen episodes of a TV season at once for 'non-linear' consumption" (Newman 2014, 134). In fact, according to Jason Mittel (2015b), the way stories are told are in close connection with the way they are consumed. Users' ability to control digital content (through pause, playback, skipping and fast-forwarding, or accessing any episode of the production) frees show creators from the need for narrative redundancy, which is one of the core features of linearly distributed

shows. While much of the traditional series dialogue was used to remind viewers of the events that have taken place in the past, new stories can get rid of most of these redundancies, without fear of confusion in consumers' minds, and develop extensive story arcs. Thus, digital distribution merges episodes into a new kind of whole, with a structure and a way of access that rather resembles a novel than a serialized narrative created for linear distribution (Mittell 2015b).

In this sense, Jason Mittell (2015a) discusses the experience of accumulating information as the modus operandi of recent series: from the episodic structure, it goes to a serial one, in which story arcs extend over several episodes of the text. Thus, the need to restore the story to an equillibrium at the beginning of each episode disappears in favor of larger structures, where action progresses from one segment to another. The trend is observable in comedies such as *Master of None* (Netflix, 2015 - present) or *Grace and Frankie* (Netflix, 2015 - present), which rely heavily on major story arcs. The same narrative pattern is also observed in adult animation sitcoms: *Bojack Horseman* (Netflix, 2014 - present) or *Big Mouth* (Netflix, 2017 - present) tend to put much greater emphasis on major narrative conflicts than classical series such as *Family Guy* or *The Simpsons*.

Thus, an important part of the cultural discourse on TV series has been focusing on the fact that recent shows, no matter their genre, tend to adopt more complex narrative structures in order to meet the needs of an audience that is actively involved in the viewing process.

At the same time, authors emphasize the huge influence that the emergence and popularization of VoD services - especially Netflix – had over the production and distribution of TV shows.

While most authors focus their studies on TV series' narrative complexity on prime-time dramas, this paper tries to track the clues of the same phenomenon in 30-minute shows. Thus, the present study explores the narrative features of linearly distributed and digitally published 30-minute series with at least one new season released between 2013 and 2018. Its ultimate goal is to delineate recurrent narrative patterns in original Netflix productions whose episodes are identifiable with

the 30-minute traditional broadcasting interval, and to point out the main structural differences between Netflix original productions and linearly distributed series.

Methodology

This study is based on content analysis. The quantitative dimension of the analysis is matched by the qualitative research applied on the content of the series itself. Both are supported by individual examples in the data set. The study also combines automatic data processing techniques with the manual coding of individual productions.

The analyzed data set is comprised of information about 111 series whose episodes are identifiable with the traditional 30-minute broadcasting interval[2]. Out of these, 57 shows were distributed by traditional television channels, and 54 were published by VoD portals: Netflix (36 series), Amazon (11 series) and Hulu (7 series). All the identified series with an average episode lenght of 35 minutes or less were analyzed.

A first step in developing the data set was to identify the IMDb.com page of each series. The collected page IDs were used to automatically extract data about each item in the set. Data extraction was performed through API queries of The Open Movie Database (OMDb). In this way, data on the title of the production, the release year and its cancellation year (where applicable), the release date of the first episode, the average length of an episode (or exact length, in the case of linearly distributed shows), the genre (s) of the production, the one-paragraph synopsis, the spoken languages, the country of origin, the number of seasons, the users' rating and the total number of their votes were extracted. Information regarding the original distributor has been added manually.

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[2] With very few exceptions, all the analyzed series are comedies.

The second step was to manually frame each of the productions in the Series - Serial continuum, in order to identify the degree of narrative closure at the level of individual episodes. Due to the large number of productions, the variation of the serialization degree was reduced to three categories: Series, Mixed and Serial. In cases where the actual production was not consulted - for reasons of lack of access - the analysis was based on the individual episodes' synopses on IMDb.com.

Another important step in collecting information was the manual association of each production with a set of setting, conflict, and characters conventions. Due to the large number of series in the data set, conventions were identified based on the first season of each production. The study used inductive coding (Stuckey 2015; Thomas 2006), but also the TV Tropes community database for identifying conventional recurrent elements in the analyzed media texts. TV Tropes is a website that collects examples of tropes related to narrative conflict, characters and other narrative devices used in movies, series, comics, books and other media. The reason for choosing this source is that although it is based on user-generated content, the TV Tropes Wiki is the most comprehensive collection of such narrative devices and patterns currently available. At the same time, the community self-regulates and eliminates the tropes that prove to be irrelevant or redundant. The TV Tropes website has also been previously used in researching latent personality types of the characters in feature films (Bamman, O'Connor and Smith 2014).

Regarding the setting of the stories, the identified conventions refer to the spatial and temporal coordinates of the plot (eg house, hospital), but also to the tone of the story (eg noir, horror) or to a series of mise-en-scène elements which denote a certain genre (eg: forensics, science fiction).

In order to identify the types of conflict, Nancy Lamb's theoretical classification (2011) was used: man versus man, man versus nature[3], man versus society, man versus self (inner conflict). The study also added man vs. technology (Price 2016), and man vs. supernatural conflicts

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[3] This study overlaps man-versus-fate conflicts with the man-vs-nature ones.

(Kallas 2010) as distinct categories. Also, three specific types of narrative conflict have been added: family comedies, work comedies, and friends comedies. The reason for describing these narrative features as conflict types was the need to individualize these story categories in the data set. In addition to the presence of these narrative mechanisms, the present study also distinctly marks the genre of the production in order to differentiate the story arcs of these narratives from the recurrent types of conflict in dramas. The reason for dividing the productions into three distinct categories is closely related to the observation of different narrative structures in the data set, but also to the need to relate certain productions to specific target audiences. Also, the research distinctly marks the plots or subplots which revolve around love stories between protagonists and other characters.

In order to identify the recurrent types of carracters present in the considered media texts, the study used several narrative tropes which were manually identified on the TV Tropes website.

The next step in the manual coding process was identifying the types of narrative structures present in each series. For this purpose, the study used the classifications theorized by Ronald Tobias in *20 Master Plots (And How To Build Them)* (1993) and Christopher Booker in *The Seven Basic Plots: Why We Tell Stories* (2005). The two theories are similar in view of the fact that both assert the existence of a relatively small number of structural patterns of stories, to which any narrative can be reduced. Such research follows, on the one hand, the theoretical framework developed by Vladimir Propp (1968) in *The Morphology of the Folk Tale*, originally published in 1928, and, on the other hand, the ideas presented by Joseph Campbell in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (2004), first published in 1949. The identification of the series considered with certain structural categories took into account the first season of each production.

The theories developed by Ronald Tobias and Christopher Booker can be a key point in identifying recurring narrative patterns that transcend the medium - book or film - and the specific genre of the cultural product under consideration. From this perspective, they are an important step in exploring the dominant structural categories

in the production of television series. Although these narrative categories were conceived by the two authors in view of closed narratives such as feature films or novels, they can be successfully applied to series, where the main narrative arc of each season has a certain degree of closure at the end of the last episode. It should also be noted that complex narratives contain elements belonging to several types of stories. For this reason many of the series have been associated with several narrative models and not a singular one.

The final stage of the manual coding process consisted in identifying series with female protagonists, and those with a hero character of a race other than Caucasian. At the same time, the series that have at least one main character with a LGBTQ sexual orientation were identified. Through this process, the present study aimed to explore, in a general context, gender, race, and sexual representations in 30-minute television narratives released in recent years, and thus to identify potential niche target audiences for certain media texts.

Information about the identified narrative conventions and features was processed using KH Coder - a free software for natural language processing and data mining. The calculation of the co-occurrence matrix was performed automatically based on the Jaccard similarity coefficient. In the visual representation based on this matrix, a minimum Jaccard distance of 0.1 was considered. The charts presented in the following section were obtained using KH Coder and Tableau Public. This paper continues by presenting and discussing the results of the study.

Results and discussions

Episode lenght

The results show that series created for digital distribution are 3 minute longer on average than those produced for weekly broadcasting. While an individual episode of a digitally published show is 29 minutes long on average, an average linear episode is only 26 minutes long (Figure 1).
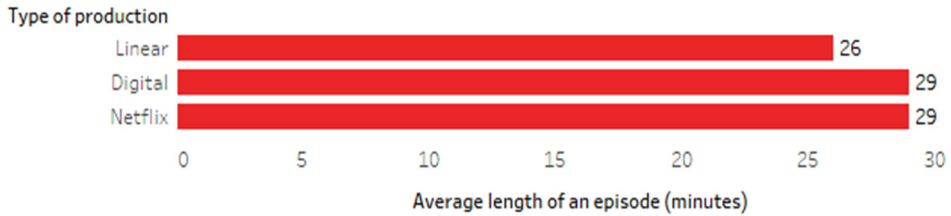
Figure 1. Average lenght of an episode across different types of content

On the one hand, this result shows a shift in the temporal format of the shows, closely related to the lack of advertising breaks on VoD portals. On the other hand, we can also observe important differences between linear and digital shows when we take a look at the frequency of certain length categories (Figure 2).
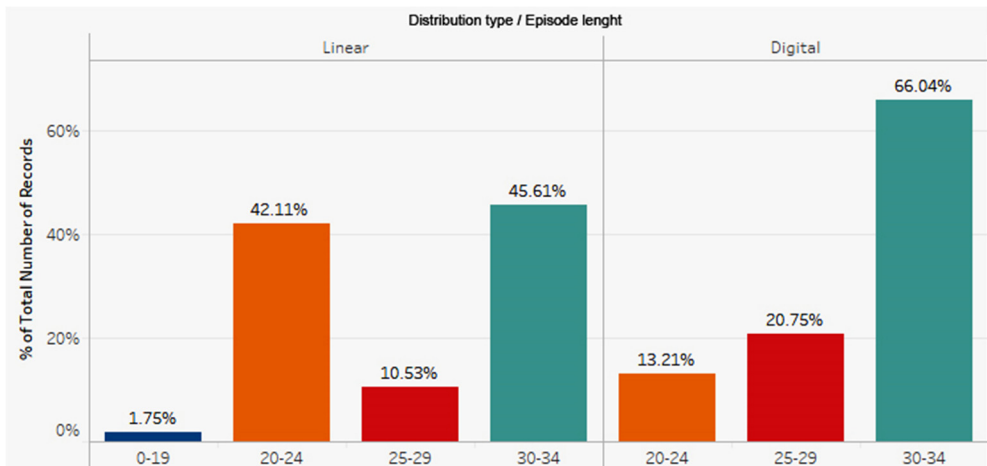
Figure 2. Frequency of episode length categories in relation to type of distribution

66.04% of the digitally distributed shows have an average episode lenght of 30 to 34 minutes, whereas only 45.61% of the linear productions share the same feature. At the same time, only 13.21% of the digitally distributed series fall within the range of 20-24 minutes, the traditional length of a sitcom, whereas 42.11% of the linear series

remain dependent on the traditional sitcom temporal formula. This is a sign of the fact that the development of VoD portals produces genre mutations, and comedies take the form of media products based on longer segments. The presence of the 30-34 minutes category among linear productions can be explained by the inclusion in the data set of several series produced by subscription-based TV channels such as HBO or Showtime. In the absence of commercial breaks, these services also give up on the traditional 22 or 23-minute per episode formula, and adopt the half an hour comedy model.

Another important feature of digitally published series is the fact that the length of individual episodes varies depending on the narrative needs of that specific segment, and is not subject to a predetermined duration. Figure 3 shows the episode lenght variation in the first season of *Grace and Frankie* (Netflix, 2015-present).
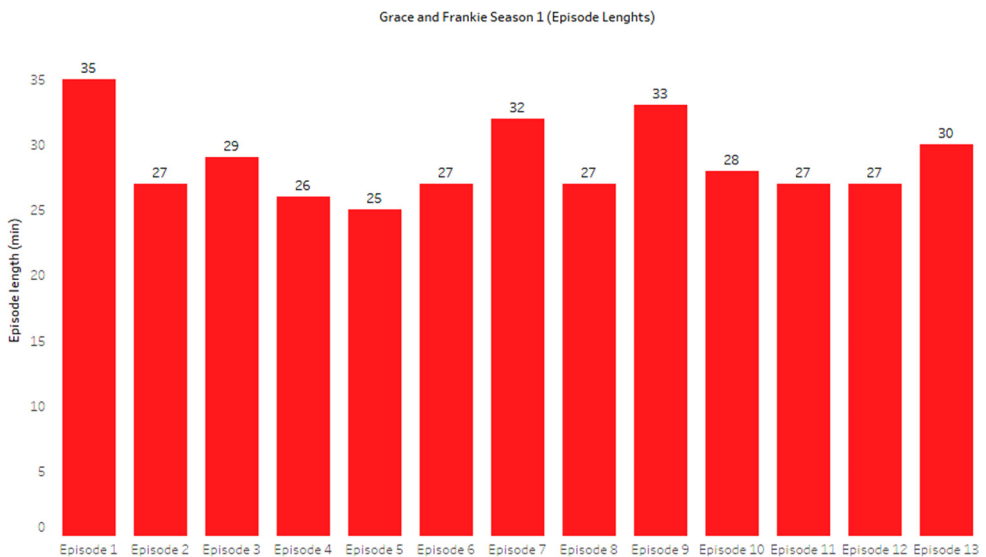

Figure 3. Episode length in the first season of *Grace and Frankie*

The episodes last between 25 and 35 minutes, which is certainly made possible by the distribution mechanisms implied by VoD portals. This type of creative freedom is closely linked to the disappearance of

the external constraints of a fixed broadcasting schedule. The digital distribution of series also causes extreme cases of episode length fluidity: in *Mindhunter* (Netflix, 2017-present), episodes vary between 34 and 60 minutes, while in *Godless* (Netflix, 2018-present), individual segments of the show last between 40 and 81 minutes. The phenomenon speaks of an increased creative freedom of the production team. Screenwriters and directors create episodes according to the narrative needs of the production, and do not subdue to a set of external rules.

Series and serials

An important distinction made by scholars (Kozloff 1992; R. Nelson, quoted in Allrath, Gymnich, and Surkamp 2005) is the one between episodic shows (series) and those based on major story arcs (serials). Also, Jason Mittell (2015a) notes that the growing narrative complexity of TV series is closely related to the development of stories based on continuity between episodes and between seasons, while other authors (Brojakowski 2015; Romano 2013) talk about the emergence of "hyperserialized" productions. The present section of the study analyzes the productions included in the dataset from the standpoint of the series-serial continuum theorized by R. Nelson Nelson (quoted Allrath, Gymnich, şi Surkamp 2005). Figure 4 shows the differences between the productions published by VoD portals and those distributed by traditional television channels from this perspective.

An interesting phenomenon revealed by the results of the present study is the massive serialization of digitally distributed comedies and other 30-minute shows. 68.52% of the productions are mixed, while 29.63% of them can be categorized as serials based on story arcs that spread over several episodes, a season or even several seasons. On the other hand, 28.07% of the linear media products that fall into this category follow episodic formulas, 63.16% are mixed and 8.77% are serial. Differences between the two types of content considered show that while traditional television remains partially dependent on classical structures, digitally distributed comedies follow formulas that rely

heavily on narrative progression and accumulation. The results reveal narrative mutations produced in genres such as the sitcom, which, when it comes to Netflix shows, takes the form of serialized comedies that rely heavily on major story arcs. At the same time, the phenomenon leads to the emergence of mixed comedies, such as *Master of None* (2015-present) or *Unbreakable Kimmy Schmidt* (2015-present), as well as serial comedies that follow continuity-based structures such as *Everything Sucks!* (2018), *On My Block* (2018) or *American Vandal* (2017-present).
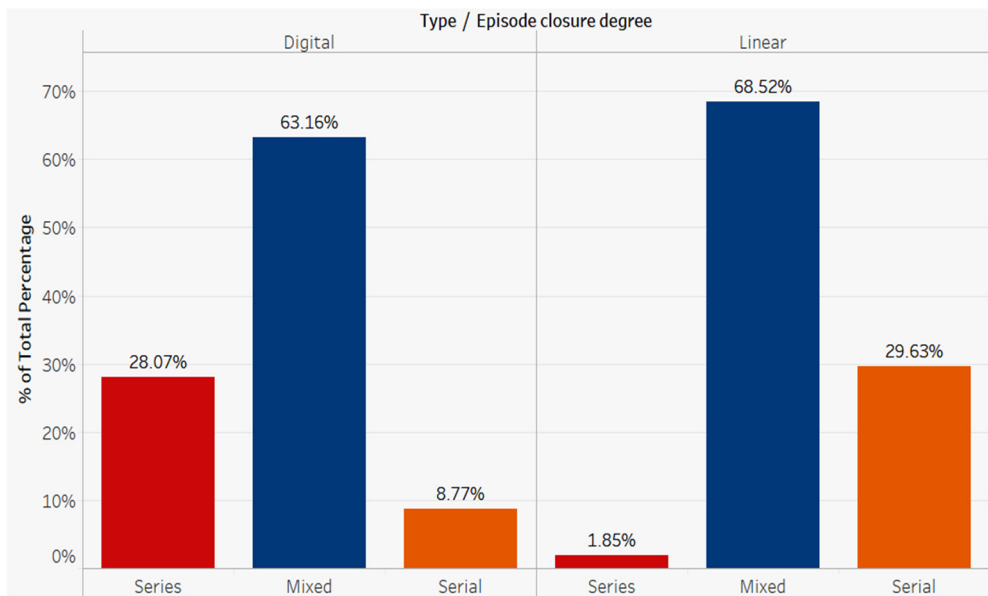
Figure 4. The relation between distribution type and serialization degree

The emphasis placed by digital shows' creators on serialization formulas based on narrative progression is closely related to the increasing complexity of TV series highlighted by scholars. The results of this study show that VoD services mostly put their bets on continuity-based series and that this production strategy leads to a reduction in the number of shows based on episodic story arcs. The phenomenon reveals the emergence of new narrative formulas, through mutations in traditional genres.

Narrative tropes and conventions

This section of the study aims to present the recurrent narrative features of the series considered in relation to their type of distribution. For this purpose, Figure 5 shows the most common setting conventions in linear, digital, and Netflix original productions.
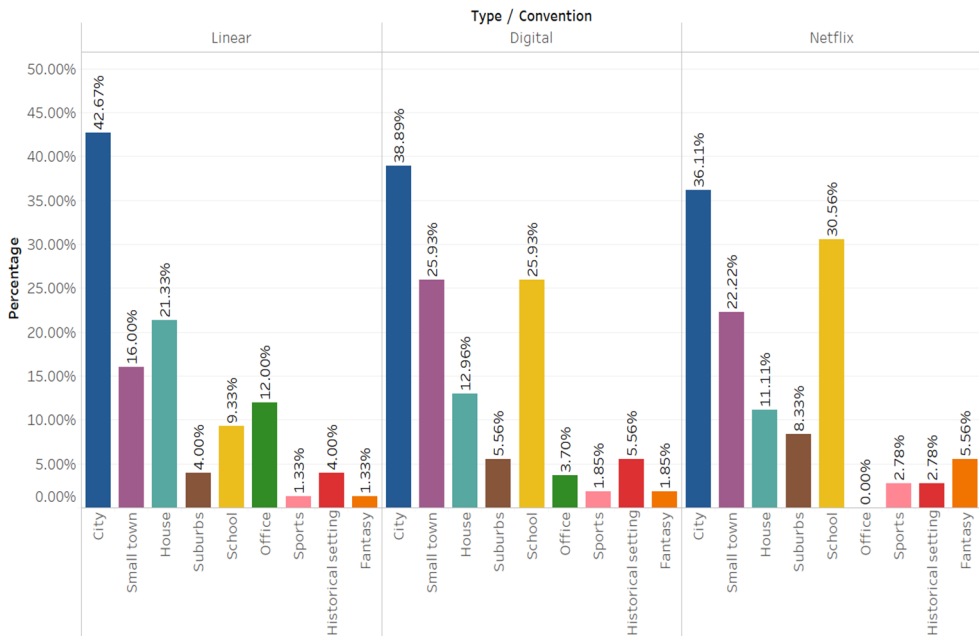
Figure 5. Setting conventions frequency in the analyzed productions

A first major observation is related to the percentages of serialized narratives that take place in a house or in a limited number of indoor spaces that appear recurrently. Thus, if 21.33% of the linear series comply with this convention, the percentage is only 12.96% in the case of digitally distributed series. In the case of original Netflix productions, it drops to 11.11%. The phenomenon speaks about the mutations going on in contemporary sitcoms. Whereas traditional sitcoms tend to use a small number of (studio-built) indoor spaces as a setting, newer comedy series tend to be filmed in real and more diversified settings. This is also related

to the modern use of a single-camera setup, which gives a more cinematic feel to comedies, as opposed to the multiple-camera setup used in traditional sitcoms. Thus, Netflix relies heavily on serialized comedies, which redefine the classical sitcom formula, while a high percentage of the comedies distributed by television channels remain dependent on traditional conventions. There is also a decrease in the number of serialized stories that take place in offices: 12% of the linear productions, 3.7% of the digital ones. Another interesting phenomenon is the strong emphasis that Netflix producers place on developing series about teenagers, whose stories take place mostly in educational institutions (in most cases, a high school). The fact that 30.56% of the 30-minute series produced by the American company start from this premise can indicate the fact that Netflix relies in many cases on media texts capable of meeting the narrative expectations of a young audience.

Figure 6 shows that the distinctions between series created for different types of distribution extend beyond setting conventions.
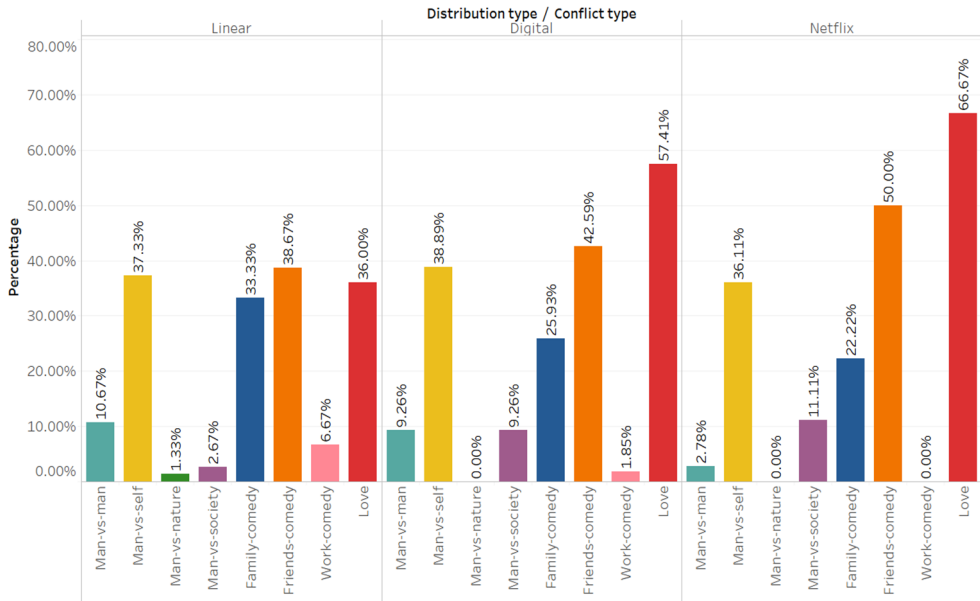
Figure 6. Conflict types frequency in the analyzed productions

When it comes to conflict types, a first observation can be related to the strong presence of love stories and love subplots in digitally distributed series (66.67% of the cases, compared to 36% of the linear shows). At the same time, many Netflix narratives are built around groups of friends (50%), which could be a new indication of a production strategy that oftenly relies on attracting a young audience. In addition to this, the percentage of family comedies is lower when it comes to Netflix productions (22.22%) than for linear series (33.33%). This phenomenon is directly related to the previously mentioned emphasis that the Netflix production strategy puts on narratives which revolve around friend groups. The results of the study also show that many 30-minute series (37.33% of the linear productions, 36.11% of the digital ones) are built around man-vs-self story arcs, which follow the inner evolution of a main character.
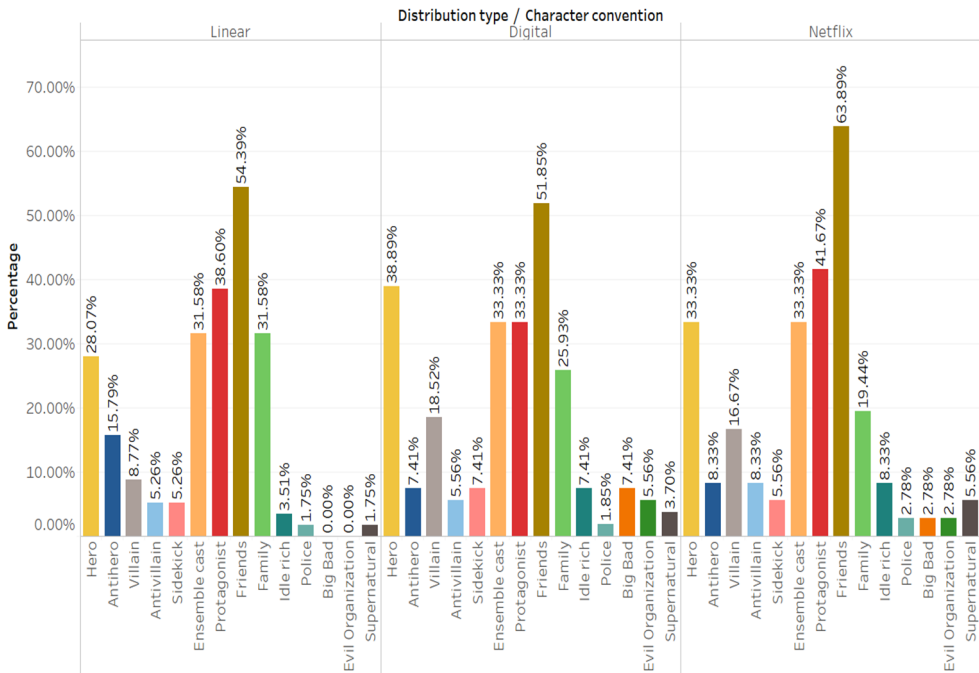
Figure 7. Character conventions frequency in the analyzed productions

The high percentage of narratives developed around a protagonist in the content categories considered (41.67% for Netflix productions, 38.6% for linear series) confirms the increased popularity of productions whose story unfolds around a social group, but use the convention of a central character (Figure 7). This phenomenon was previously discussed by Innocenti and Pescatore (2015). Most often, such protagonists function as an audience's point of view character, and all the events taking place in the narrative universe are the result of their actions (eg, *Master of None* - Netflix, 2015-present, *Brooklyn Nine-Nine* - FOX, 2013-present). Another interesting aspect is the relation between the presence of friends and family members as central characters. In linear series, families are present in 31.58% of cases, while friends have an important role in the narrative in 54.39% of them. When it comes to Netflix productions, the difference between percentages is much higher: families play a central role in 19.44% of productions, while 69.89% of narratives revolve around friend groups. This result once again highlights the importance of targeting a young audience in Netflix's production strategy.

At the same time, 28.07% of the linear series and 33.33% of the Netflix productions revolve around a hero. An interesting phenomenon observed in the analyzed content is the high proportion of antiheroes and antivillains present in the productions. 15.79% of the linear shows and 8.33% of the Netflix productions use an antihero as the main character. The results of the study are in line with the observation of the authors Romano (2013) and VanDerWerff (2017), who also observed a growing appetite of show creators for antiheroes. The high proportion of antivillains is related to the same phenomenon. Writing such characters can be a sign of the narrative complexity of recent series. Many of them no longer revolve around a world where the morality of characters is a clearly dichotomized one: black or white, bad or good. Developing morally complex characters is a sign of the narrative complexity scholars have been talking about in recent years.

Figure 8 shows co-occurences between certain setting conventions, types of conflict, character typologies, and serialization degree of the analyzed productions.
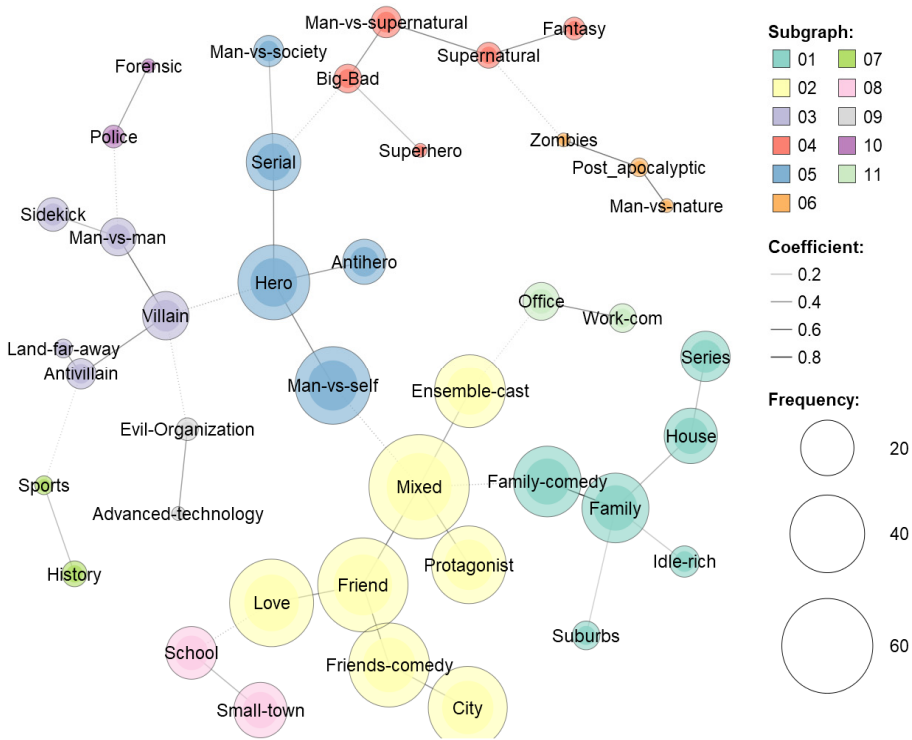
Figure 8. Co-occurrence network of narrative tropes,
conventions and serialization degree

Cluster 1 shows a strong correlation between several features which are specific to traditional sitcoms. The episodic structure, the narrative revolving around a family (in many cases an "idle rich" family who lives in the suburbs), a house or a limited number of closed spaces that appear recurrently in the series are all features that, as the results of this study have pointed out, can mostly be met in linear series.

Cluster 2 reveals the narrative patterns of comedies which revolve around friend groups. Usually, these productions are mixed, meaning they are based both on episodic story arcs and on narrative progression from one segment of the show to the next. These comedies either use the convention of a main character or revolve around an ensemble cast

comprised of characters who sometimes play a formulaic role in the narrative. These stories usually take place in big cities and use love subplots in order to move the narrative forward.

Clusters 3 and 5 reveal the fact that highly serialized productions usually revolve around a hero (in many cases, an antihero) who gets opposed by an antagonist. In these narratives, the main story arc is represented either by the inner transformation of the protagonist (made possible by the forces that oppose him or her), of by the opposition between the hero and the villain (in this cases, the inner evolution of the main character works as a subplot). The co-occurrence network also brings forward the fact that the presence of a man-vs-man conflict oftenly involves the use of a sidekick in the story.

Clusters 4, 6 reveal a smaller set of serialized narratives that revolve around the fight between a hero and an opposing force, in which certain genre conventions play an important role in the development of the production. These narrative formulas are much less represented in the data set than comedies and are mostly used in 60-minute productions.

Cluster 10 shows the existence of a small number of shows that borrow narrative conventions from police procedurals, but apply them in a shorter, 30-minute format.

Clusters 7 and 11 reveal other narrative formulas based on specific settings: high school series and work coms.

The co-occurrence network unfolds three main narrative models: episodic series which usually revolve around families, mixed narratives which tell the story of a friend group (either through an ensemble cast or by using a protagonist) and highly serialized man-vs-man productions. As the results of this paper have already showed through tropes and conventions' frequency, the latter category is less common when it comes to 30-minute series.

Plot types

Another way to identify the most commonly used narrative models in the series considered is by exploring how these narratives

reflect certain archetipal story structures. From this perspective, Figure 9 shows the occurrence frequency for each of the 20 master plots theorized by Ronald Tobias (1993) in the corpus.
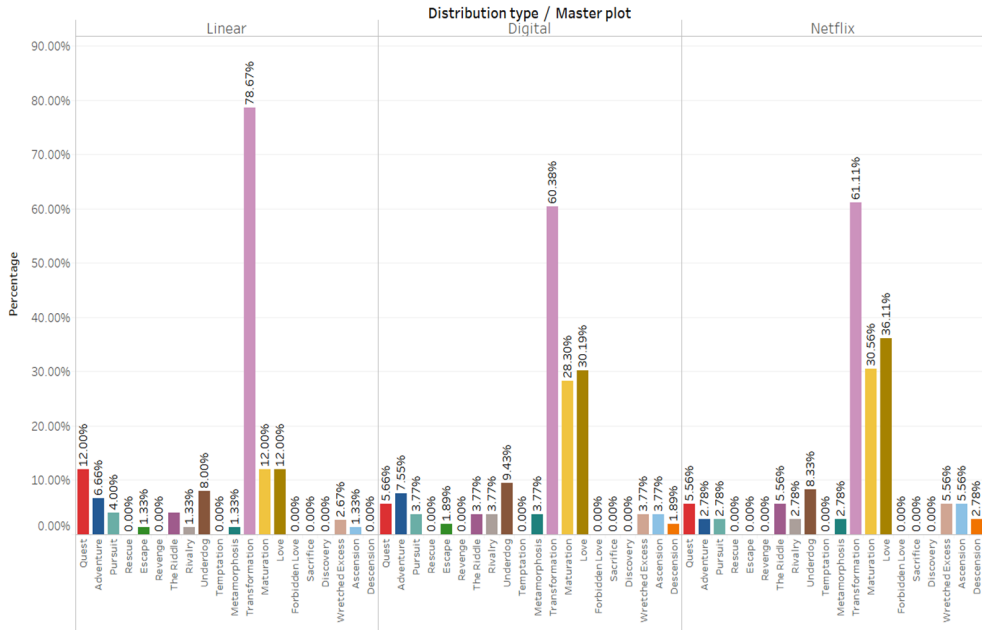
Figure 9. Plot types frequency (Tobias 1993)

As the figure shows, linear series tend to put a stronger emphasis on stories that follow the inner transformation of the main character than Netflix productions (78.67% versus 61.11%). Although this could be the case, we cannot ignore the fact that 30.56% of the Netflix series tell stories about maturation, another plot type that involves the inner development of the protagonist. The high percentage of productions that tell such stories indicates once again that targeting a young audience is a core point of Netflix's production strategy. Another interesting observation refers to the fact that many Netflix productions revolve around love plots (36.11% versus 12% in the case of linear shows), a phenomenon that was already emphasised by the previous findings of the present study.

Regarding the narrative categories defined by Christopher Brooker in *The Seven Basic Plots* (2005), most of the stories considered fall under the comedy typology (Figure 10). At the same time, there are much more digital series that revolve around a character's journey from rags to riches compared to linear shows. This structure was identified in 25% of the original Netflix productions and in 2.67% of the traditional, weekly-distributed shows. As a confirmation of the high percentage of maturation stories already observed, these narratives could once again be an indication of the fact that attracting a young audience is an important part of Netflix's global strategy.
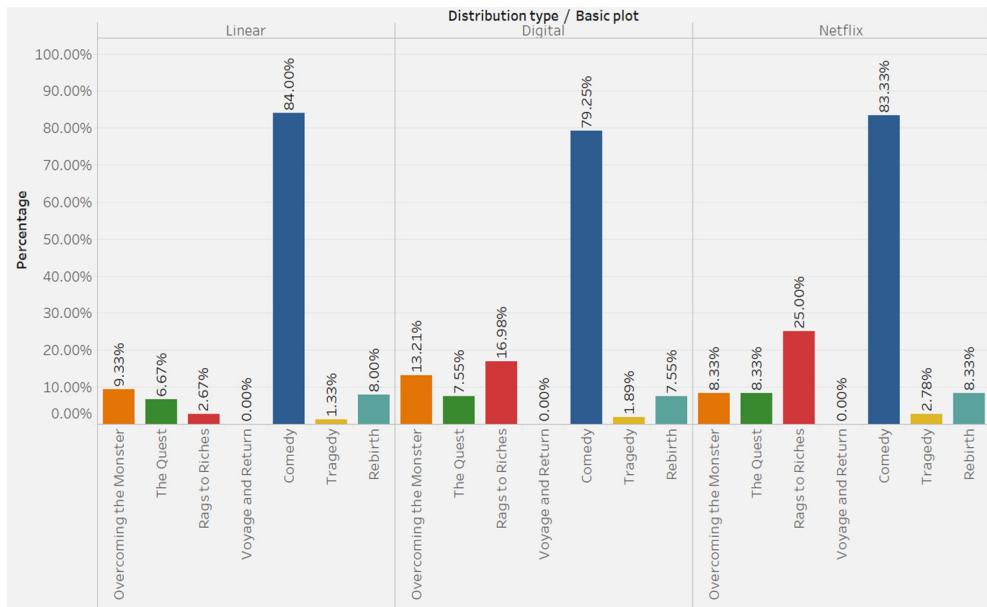
Figure 10. Plot types frequency (Booker 2005)

Gender, sexual and racial representations

One third of the Netflix original shows considered have a female protagonist, while in the case of linear productions the percentage drops to 28% (Figure 11). The result is consistent with the conclusions

of other studies. A research by San Diego State University (Buckley 2018) showed that 24% of the highest-earning American films in 2017 had female protagonists. Also, another study found that women are better represented in television series than in feature films: while the proportion of women in the total number of characters having lines was 32% in 2016 for feature films, it goes up to 42% when it comes to series (Lauzen 2017).

At the same time, the same researcher shows that in 2016 47% of the major characters in streaming series were women, while the percentage was only 42% for traditional television channels (Lauzen 2017). It should be noted that the study also considered TV genres such as reality-shows, and not just fictional series. Also, the present study only took into account the series protagonists, as opposed to all major characters. The results show a higher degree of women representation in Netflix original series, but not in all digital shows.

As far as the representation of sexual minorities is concerned, the highest percentage of series with at least one LGBTQ protagonist was recorded for Netflix original shows, with 19.44% of the productions. The observation is consistent with the results of a GLAAD Media Institute study (2018), which shows that the streaming portal is the most inclusive major media channel in the US when it comes to representing LGBTQ people. The phenomenon can be linked to the business strategy of the company, which focuses on attracting and retaining a number of niche audiences, and does not target a single, homogeneous audience (Lotz 2017).

11.11% of the Netflix series have African American protagonists, while the percentage for linear shows stands at 13.33%. A UCLA study (Mohdin 2018) shows that in the 2015-2016 season, 20% of the important roles in cable television productions were played by African Americans, while the percentage was only 12.9% for VoD portals. The differences could be explained by the fact that the present study only took into account protagonists, and not all the main characters
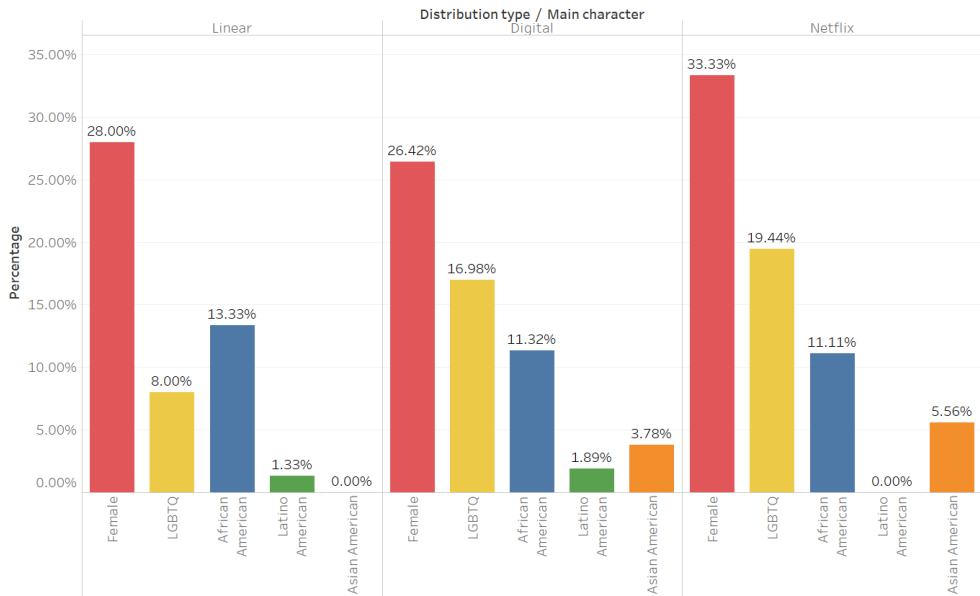
Figure 11. Gender, sexual and racial representation in the analyzed series

On the one hand, Netflix proves to be the most inclusive media channel when it comes to women, sexual minorities, and Asian Americans. On the other, the results show that African American actors get more important roles in cable television shows than they do in Netflix original series.

However, the fact that Netflix has significantly increased its original content production since 2015, as well as the company's increased attention to the representation of the African-American community in the media - as shown by the recent "New Day In Hollywood" campaign (Britni 2018) - could indicate an effort of the streaming company to catch up with the traditional industry.

Towards a narrative model of 30-minute digital series

Exploring the structural features of 30-minute shows allows the identification of recurring narrative patterns in the analyzed series. This section of the paper aims to summarize the results obtained by compiling

the identified narrative patterns. To this end, the study will explore the functioning mechanisms of linear series, respectively the ones of original Netflix productions, as a standard for digital series.

	Linear shows	Netflix shows
Episode lenght	Average length: 26 minutes 46% of productions have episodes ranging from 30 to 34 minutes 43% have episodes ranging from 20 to 24 minutes Episode lengths are generally stable	Average length: 29 minutes 66% of productions have episodes ranging from 30 to 34 minutes Variable episode lengths
Serialization degree	63% - mixed story arcs 28% - episodic story arcs 9% - major story arcs Although the majority of the series rely on mixed story arcs, many productions follow the traditional episodic structure.	68% - mixed story arcs 2% - episodic story arcs 30% - major story arcs The traditional pattern of episodic story arcs disappears almost entirely. Many comedies are based on narrative progression from one episode to another.
Setting	The most common setting is a large city (43%). There are also many series whose action takes place mostly in a house or in a limited number of recurrent indoor spaces (21%). The phenomenon speaks about the frequent use of a sitcom-specific convention.	The most common setting is a big city (36%). There are fewer series whose action takes place in a house or in a limited number of indoor spaces that appear recurrently (11%). There is a high percentage of narratives that take place in small communities (22%) and in schools (31%). This last observation can be interpreted as part of Netflix's strategy of attracting a young audience.
Narrative conflict	Most stories follows the comedic formula of sitcoms revolving around friend groups (39%) or families (33%). The most common type of conflict is man vs. self (37%). Also, love stories play an important role in fictional universes (36%).	Half of the productions rely on a comedy-specific conflict which revolves around a group of friends. There are fewer family comedies than in linear productions (22%). Love stories are extremely important: 67% of the productions are based on such a story arc.

	Linear shows	Netflix shows
Characters	In the case of 54% of the series, friends have an important role in the narrative. Members of one or more families have a central role in 32% of stories. 32% of the series rely on ensemble casts, while 39% revolve around a protagonist.	Many of the series revolve around a protagonist (42%). Friend groups play a major role in 64% of productions. 33% of the series rely on ensemble casts. The strong focus on exploring the actions of friend groups may indicate that attracting a young audience plays an important role in Netflix's production strategy.
Plot types (Tobias 1993)	Most productions follow the inner transformation of one or more characters (79%).	Although the most common type of plot is the one that explores the inner transformation of a character (61%), there is a significant percentage of maturation stories (31% vs. 12% in the case of linear series). Also, 36% of the productions follow the narrative pattern of a love story.
Plot types (Booker 2005)	84% of the productions can be identified as comedies (as an aesthetic category).	83% of the productions follow the narrative mechanisms of comedy. There are a number of stories that follow the path of a protagonist from rags to riches (25%).
Gender, sexual, and racial representations	28% of the series have female protagonists. At the same time, 13% of the productions have at least one African-American protagonist and 8% have one with a declared minority sexual orientation.	There is a higher percentage of female protagonists: 33%. The results also show a high percentage of productions that have a LGBTQ protagonist: 19%. African-Americans are present as protagonists in 11% of the productions.

Conclusions

The present study highlighted the main narrative coordinates of serialized shows distributed by the big players in the market over the last five years, and also highlighted the differences between TV series produced for weekly distribution and the ones created for digital publishing on VoD platforms. At the same time, the present research confirms the narrative differences between Netflix productions and

cable television formats. The results show that digital productions deviate from TV-specific time conventions: to begin with, the length of individual episodes increases in the case of digitally published shows. Also, in the absence of precise time constraints for the creators of a show, episode lengths tend to vary when it comes to content created for digital distribution. Thus, the episode length becomes rather dependent on the narrative needs of the specific segments of the production. It is a first major contribution to increasing the production team's creative freedom.

Another important observation of the paper refers to the industry's strong emphasis on major story arcs. Although this can be seen in both production categories, it is much more evident in series created for digital distribution. While some weekly distributed TV series still use the episodic conflict pattern - as with traditional sitcoms -, such a narrative approach is almost entirely absent from the digital production landscape. Ample story arcs suggest a high level of narrative complexity (Mittell 2015a) for the media products considered.

This study also led to the identification of a set of features of what Jason Mittell (2015a) would call "complex television series": highly serialized comedies that revolve around a protagonist (Innocenti and Pescatore 2015), the strong emphasis that show creators put on following the inner transformation of a main character, the taste for antiheroes and antivillains (Romano 2013; VanDerWerff 2017) are all signs of a new stage in the production of television series. At the same time, this study revealed one of the core mechanisms that Netflix uses in its production strategy: attracting niche audiences such as the LGBTQ community or targetting a young audience play an important role in the global design of the streaming company. In addition to this, the results of this research showed the main genre mutations in comedy series. From this perspective, is crucial to observe that although it has gained most of its cultural capital through its original dramas, Netflix also works on developing new narrative models for 30-minute series. Only by stories based on narrative progression and complex characters can these shows satisfy the needs of a young and active audience, who has full control over what, when, where and how much of the productions they watch in each viewing session.

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LACK OF FACT CHECKING IN MASS MEDIA
IN THE DIGITAL AGE

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ABSTRACT. The main purpose of this paper is to investigate the situation with fact checking, the way the journalists follow the principles of ethical codes while providing information to the mass, whether they choose to be led by information published in online platforms by ordinary people, or, on the contrary, to be the frontrunner source of information to the mass, by providing correct information not fake news. For this we analyze the general role of the media in society, the challenges the journalism faces in the digital age, the role of social networks as source of information, situation with breaking news, ethical challenges journalism is facing in the digital age, cases of fake news with harmful impact, the role of journalists in the digital age. And as a result of analyzed we came to the opinion that these days it is very important for the society to see the quality news written by professional journalists with true fact.

Keywords: Digital age, digital media, fake news, disinformation, fact checking, journalist ethic, news

1. Introduction

Mass media is the powerful system of institutions which could be provided to the mass by telling the word with a positive or negative impact. That is why journalists are carrying a lot of responsibilities by providing the information to the society and have to be careful with the facts, with the words in order not to provide harmful effect

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to the mass, to the one person individually, to the communities, to the countries and to the world as a whole. These responsibilities mostly are reflected in the journalistic codes of ethical principles, such as - fact-checking, objectivity, truthfulness, accuracy, impartiality, etc. It has always been hard to follow all the principles, mostly to check the fact before publishing, and now in the digital age in the period of social networks, blogging and citizen journalism it has become harder for mainstream journalists to provide hot news with a checked fact. In the last years journalists have faced problems with lack of fact checking and not following the ethical professional normative in the process of providing information to the public. This phenomenon had taken place before and caused harmful reactions with in the society. But now with the technology development, with appearing online platforms, social networks., when information from different countries all over the world is available for every person who has access to the internet via smartphone or notebook, this problem starts to be large and uncontrolled. For fact checking organizations it is so difficult to identify fake news within thewide range news. This problem started to be a global one after the presidential elections in the USA and is now, like a new way of disinformation and black PR, spreading all over the world. A lot of fact checking companies started their activities in the last years, but even with them it is so difficult for journalists to select. And the main problem of a lot of mistakes made by the journalists is the willing to publish hot breaking news. But in these times when every minute users of social networks are publishing millions of news through Facebook, Twitter etc. it is so difficult for journalist to be the first source of information

Moreover, now Facebook and Instagram provide Live Video content, that increase the possibility of ordinary people to spread information nonstop.

The purpose of this paper is to understand what role journalists have to play in order to provide correct information to the public, what is more important for journalists - immediacy or truth, what role play the breaking news in the lives of journalists and should they

still focus on it in the professional process. Another point will be the ethical codes of journalists face reality in the digital age. Based on examples we will look at the impact fake news had on people's lives, how the lack of fact checking and lack of ethics in mainstream news cause the tragedy. This analysis could provide us with a better understanding of the image of today's journalists and the kind of journalist the audience is expecting to see in the future.

2. The role of the media in society

What is journalism? Who is a journalist? What is news? Is all news we are reading all true, written based on real fact, not false? In this period of time in digital age answers to these questions are not so clear. By answering these questions we are trying to understand the main functions and performances of a journalist and then proceeding from this knowledge to continue analyzing what kind of challenges a journalist faces and how it impacts his professional activities.

Journalism in traditional theories is considered as the way of providing factual, correct information of the event happened in society by using different forms – written, audio, visual. The model of communication with audience used by traditional media is liner, that means by using monologue, journalists provide a message to the society, which is influenced by the minds and work as guideline for the people in their lives. (Robinson, S. (2012) page 60)

By providing the society with information, mass media have duties towards the public which they have to implement by following ethical principles. Between these duties we could mention to be watchdog, provide images of civil real life, be respectful to society and individually to each person and their rights, meet informational and cultural requirements of the public. (Jakubowicz, K. (2009) page 10)

Journalist perform as watchdogs working for the society in the interest of the audience, audience who are paying journalists and media for assistance in receiving correct and accurate information. (Deuze, M. (2005) page 7)

A lot of common and abundant functions mass media carry, between them we could mention information, interpretation, instruction, bonding, and diversion. Moreover journalists have a gatekeeper function, in other words they regulate the information that addresses the public. The gatekeeping function includes the following elements - transmission, confining, broaden and provide new interpretation. (https://courses.lumenlearning.com/suny-realworldcomm/chapter/15-2-functions-and-theories-of-mass-communication/)

In their gatekeeping role journalists choose confident images and words in order to provide and preserve specific remembrance of the society. The journalist is laying stress on reliability of the recap of information by using their skillfulness by being viewer of the occurrence and by reporting. (Robinson, S. (2009) page 167)

Every news consists of some aspects, that is why a journalist providing information has to think not just about the events but also has to try to present it as a story. The main purpose is to put the events in consequent order so that the public would be able to easily read and understand the event that occurred. For the journalist it has to be significant in a huge information flow to stress more valuable actual facts and then build the news around it. (Phillips, A. (2014) page 6)

Balance of opinions in providing the news is an important part of mainstream journalist work, they have to get two or more views on the event, in order to let the public see the situation from all angles. (Lule, J. (2014) page 514-515)

With ongoing globalization, the way of producing the news changes. Journalists nowadays cover more the events that occur globally but have also to deal with a culturally more diverse society in their immediate environment. (Deuze, M. (2009) page 23)

Moreover, globalization and web technology evaluation, mostly the internet features as multimedia and interactivity, impact the journalistic role and function. In the digital age when the public takes part in news providing, journalists in the opinion of some theories start to be "gate watchers". (Robinson, S. (2012) page 59)

3. The challenges the journalism faces in the digital age

Journalism starts to be more difficult because of digitalization. The amount of information has increased, and the spread of production has risen which is why the journalist working time starts to be longer and has caused the necessity of new skills. In online networks journalists have to not just write an article, but also take videos and images, and, the main thing in my opinion, to manage information that is spreading through social media by ordinary people. (Dragomir, M., & Thompson, M. (2014) page 109)

The modifications of journalist practice have taken place not only in daily work process but also have an impact on the way of communication with the audience, mostly with the blogs users. At the same time starts to be more significant than ever the question of accurate work of journalists based on ethical codes in order to ensure the society receives clear faithful information and not to undermine the confidence of the public. One example of incorrect ethical work could be the incident with ex Washington Post journalist Janet Cook, who provided a fake story, resulting in the loss of her Pulitzer prize and eventuallyher job. (Bailey, O. G., & Marques, F. P. J. (2012) page 404)

The digital age provides opportunity for collaboration and active involvement to each person in the journalistic sphere, everyone who has access to the internet could be a journalist by spreading information. Blogs, social networks such as Facebook, Myspace, Twitter, different types of sites are providing information, even information that has local value. (Fenton, N. (2012) page129-130)

Nowadays we could see that readers and users and the citizen journalist, bloggers have potential due to interactivity provided by online platforms to correct weaknesses of mainstream journalism and spread information which is more convenient to life realities and illustrate events that concern the society. (O'Sullivan, J. (2012) page 47)

Internet with its variety of platforms has developed the democratic culture in a new way, has transformed the role of gatekeepers, has increased pluralism of opinions and views, has provided information

from all parts of the world, has changed the role of citizens by involving them in the collaboration. At the same time, it has provided wide control of the online communication process of different organizations with different political, cultural and religious perspectives that could cause a bad impact on the public. (Giannakoulopoulos, A., Varlamis, I., &Kouloglou, S. (2012) page 294)

3.1 Social networks become source of information

Online platforms have become a source of information for the journalist. Mass media consider the public as an extra news source, from which they could receive audio visual information directly from the scene. BBC's user-generated content tells that one hour before they get information from their recourses, they already will have access to the information from the public who are witnesses of the event, and such kind of source could consider the fasters one. (Hermida, A. (2012) page 313)

Online platforms, mostly social networks, allow the public, to be more independent from the news provided by elite that in itself is changing the way of creating, interpreting and distributing the information. The communication and collaboration provided by social networks and online platforms allows to think that mass media are starting to be more social. Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, Myspace are the social networks that make it easier to socialize, through Flickr, YouTube, Uncut Video, and Jumpcut users can share multimedia content. (Meraz, S. (2009) page 123-124)

The appearance of Facebook social network changed the way the public gets information. Based on PEW research held in 2016 in USA and Australia we can conclude that social networks and blogs have a good reach of audience interested in news. 62% of Americans adults are reading news in online platforms, mostly from Facebook (62% from this 64%)(?). In Australia this percentage is low, however it is still more than the half (52, 2%). One interesting fact is that the users not searching for a news in social networks, they are receiving it through posts published by their friends. (Pangrazio, L. (2018) page 10)

3.2 Breaking News

Timeliness 'right here, right now' this is one of the qualities of journalists that is challenged by multimedia and a multicultural approach to journalistic work. (Deuze, M. (2005) page 457)

The evolution of the online platforms has a significant impact on how the media obtain information –given the open and short-term availability ofthe news. All traditional media (Radio, Newspaper, TV) were forced to familiarize and modify the way of production and reporting in order to be competitive and get the reach and share of the media market. Now when the online newspaper has tools provided by the Internet, it could compete with broadcasters by providing audio video content on an equal basis with articles by doing it operative. Internet provides changes to the audience too, to the means how they are receiving information. New consumers of the media products want information on time and from different sources. Yahoo! News and Google News have become the platform where users could immediately get a list of information with connection to the different media websites. (Lule, J. (2014) page 626)

Reporting the news is the duty of journalist, here with the immediate action is very important with regard to the events in order not to lose newness of news. Due to this fact decision making, quality and timeliness, rushing, real time effort are necessary qualities of the journalist profession. Surveys show that journalists in USA and other countries are suffering from the lack of sufficient time, for them it is so valuable to provide information as fast as possible. If before the question was about the speed of providing information now it is about providing news nonstop. From the point of view of journalists, speed can be considered as a primary one and similarly complicated by-effect of news work. (Deuze, M. (2005) page 449)

The completion by delivering information to the public as quickly as possible to be faster than other news platforms causes a situation in which immediacy leads to the worst impact on accuracy. The journalistic practice changed due to speed delivery and as the result came along the

problem of lack of fact checking and to the forefront came the tendency to produce news without checking, just providing in the format of press releases. (Dragomir, M., & Thompson, M. (2014) page 109)

Presently, the substance of journalism is "feeling of the rate". Online journalist studies mention "promptness" as the basic requirement of professionalism. Journalists describe their job as "real time news delivery". Based on surveys from Europe, USA and Latin America"24/7 always on news culture" is the result of technology development. Technology and the transformation of news work: Are labor conditions in online journalism changing. (Paulussen, S. (2012) page 201-202)

4. Ethical challenges journalism is facing in the digital age

Based on ethical principles for a democratic society the main element of news reporting is providing accurate information that will be valuable for a well-functioning society. Journalists have to check the fact before spreading to the public. The Committee of Concerned Journalists mention that accuracy is the core element of news around which everything is constructed - "context, interpretation, comment, criticism, analysis and debate". That is why it is so important for the public to have a credible information source. The journalists have to understand and be accurate with this that the main for them being the society, not the advertisers and shareholders, journalist responsible facing the audience. In other words journalists have to provide clear information based on facts, and not to think about profit. (Lule, J. (2014) page 628)

Journalists in their job follow strong standards and ethical codes and have the ability to evaluate the more important aspects of the events, that is why professional journalists enjoy great respect and credibility therefore have to be more accurate in his reporting. (Siapera, E., & Spyridou, L. P. (2012) page 80)

In the digital age when every person could provide information through online platforms it is so important for both professional journalists and ordinary users to remember ethical principles, such as:

- Thoroughness
- Accuracy
- Fairness
- Independence
- Transparency

Before the existence of the internet with its different instruments journalists haven't had the opportunities and tools to clarify information that fast and without problems, but at the same time journalists never faced the problem of necessarily fighting for following the principals of accuracy and credibility. (Paulussen, S. (2012) page 202)

In the time when social networks and online platforms acting as resource of breaking news and when information spreading faster than ever the role of journalists as fact checkers is being questioned. (Hermida, A. (2012) page 320)

It is important for a journalist even after publishing to check the fact, whether it is true or not, for example news website The Huffington Post is the biggest online platform linked with blogs (over 2000 bloggers) put the requirement on the authors to check the fact within 24 hours after it was published, otherwise the writer would lose the position on the blog. Besides providing the truth, ethical codes mention another very important principle as loyalty to the public. Loyalty means that journalists have to understand that they work for the society, not for financial benefit. Journalist have to always remember that "media products are not just economic», they have to be responsible in the face of the public, because they are carrying out the society's interest while providing news, in order not to cause harmful impact. (Lule, J. (2014) page 631)

Research provided in "Journalism, Media, and Technology Trends and Predictions 2019" by Reuters institute gives information about Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and the situation with "bad actors" on these platforms in 2018 "the banning of Info-Wars, first by Apple and then by other platforms marked a major shift in approach. But the scale and complexity of the task ahead is immense. Every week

new problems emerge – a bit like a game of 'whack-a-mole'. By July the crisis spread to WhatsApp with false rumors about child abduction in India leading to a series of lynching's. In Brazil, a coordinated disinformation campaign on WhatsApp played a part in the rise to power of far-right leader, Jair Bolsonaro. And by the end of the year attention had switched back to Facebook, where hundreds of self-organizing 'anger groups' laid out their demands and organized destructive 'Gilets Jaune' protests across France". All these online platforms have started to work on resolving the problems with "bad actors" and objectionable content. (Newman, N. (2019))

Based on the information provided in Reuters institute survey 31% of news is fake news in the USA, in Romania it is 38%, in Hungary even higher at 42%, in Greece 44%, in Turkey 49%. The percentage is lower in the UK (15%), Germany (9%), Denmark (9%), and the Netherlands (10%). (Nic, N., Fletcher, R., Kalogeropoulos, A., Levy, D. A., & Nielsen, R. K. (2018) page 39)

The reasons of providing and type of disinformation to the mass could be different. Some of them are provided by European Association for Viewers Interests (EAVI). Based on their opinion the main misleading news are - propaganda, clickbait, sponsored content, satire and hoax, error, partisan, conspiracy theory, pseudoscience, misinformation, bogus. European Association for Viewers Interests classified partisan, conspiracy theory, pseudoscience, misinformation, bogus as the ones with high impact to the mass audience. They are considering money, politics/power, humor/fan, passion, mis(inform) as the main motivation for the publication of incorrect information. (Steinberg L. (2017))

As the result of the boom of spreading misinformation and fake news appeared a lot of facts checking projects, base Duke Reporters' Lab survey made in 2017, in 51 countries around the world operated 137 fact checking projects.(Ireton, C., & Posetti, J. (2018)) And at the same time a lot of actions started to operate, among them is the "ethical standard setting mechanism" action which is a part of the program Journalism Trust Initiative that will start in June of 2019

organized by the EJN's leader Aidan White in cooperation with Reporters Without Borders with assistance of over 100 media organizations among which press councils in Europe has the purpose to counteract against disinformation as "media self-regulatory initiative" and as the comparison for analyzing the quality journalism, that could be a prototype for future models. (EJN Annual Report 2018/19).

How could we see a journalist firstly faced with the problem of fact checking, more than ever it started to be a big problem? Every second different types of news are publishing spreading through online platforms, and as we understand these online platforms start to be the source of information for journalist news. In this fuss it is very difficult to check fast the accuracy of the fact, of course journalists are using links to the source of information, but this does not reduce his accountability, because most people after reading the news on social networks and blogs, in order to be sure are looking forward to see the real situation through the news published by mainstream media, but as we could see in next passage journalists start to be more irresponsible.

And again a lot of organizations doing researches and providing recommendations, and as mentioned above media organization are working to strengthen the media self regulation process. If media self regulation is still good for journalist professional work to these question we could find answer in OSCE publication - The Online Media Self-Regulation Guidebook. According to the opinion of authors "Self-regulation is a way to prevent governments from interfering extensively with media content offline, as well as online" and as a reply to the critics of media self-regulation who "blame this system for being a kind of a "self-service" where the media industry protects its own interests instead of those of the public" they suggest to straight the transparency and efficiency. (Stone, M. (2013))

4.1 Cases of fake news with harmful impact

But the worst thing that happened with the appearance of online platforms and mostly the social networks, mainstream media start to do more and more mistakes. We could see a lot of lack of fact checking and lack of ethical principles that caused problem for businesses, the

political situation, and maybe most harmfully to the life of ordinary citizens. Now we are going take a look at some of them and what they led to.

In 2008 the iReport site by CNN reported that Steve Jobs, CEO of Apple «was rushed to the ER just a few hours ago after suffering a major heart attack». Within 10 minutes the Apple stock lost 10% of its value. (Hargreaves, S. (2008))

Boston Marathon Bomber was labeled Sunil Tripathi by Facebook and Twitter users, and even worse by journalists who have a lot of followers on Twitter. Journalist without checking information by breaking ethical standards did from the ordinary boy a guilty. Then only when NBC spread information that he is not the person responsible for the bombing, media stopped publishing information about his connection to this story. But harmful impact had been caused already as people started to attack his family. Even the company that was responsible for his finding rejects to help his parents because it could damage the image of their company. Several days later, on 23 of April Sunil was "found dead in the Providence River. The details surrounding his death remain unknown". (ethicaljournalismnetwork.org)

Pizzagate is another story that had a bad impact on the life of a person. The story starts when with the support of far-right platforms like Breitbart and Info-Wars, the information that Hillary Clinton was a pedophile and is kidnapping, molesting and trafficking children in the restaurant Comet Ping Pong, was distributed through social networks like Facebook and Twitter, and then went viral. Firstly this fake news provide bad impact to Hillary Clinton personally, then to the restaurant owner and employers (they were receiving a lot of messages from social networks with content blaming them). The peak of the story was when the 29-year-old Edgar Maddison Welch come to the restaurant with 3 guns and started to shoot. (Fisher, M., Cox, J. W., & Hermann, P. (2016))

These stories show how important it is for journalists to follow ethical professional standards and to check the fact before publishing in order not to harm innocent people.

5. The role of journalists in the digital age

What could be the role of journalists in the digital age in order to improve the situation with lack of fact checking.

Blogger Tim Malbon of "Made by Many" described how his positive impression of the coverage on Twitter soon gave way to alarm: I was awestruck by the live feeds provided at #Mumbai and others (such as Twitter Grid). Having looked around elsewhere, my initial reaction was that the main old-school news agencies like Reuters, CNN, and the BBC just weren't providing the coverage, in contrast to the truly MASSIVE volume of tweeting going on. But as the evening continued my feelings changed about this, and I started to see an ugly side to Twitter, far from being a crowd-sourced version of the news it was actually an incoherent, rumor-fueled mob operating in a mad echo chamber of tweets, re-tweets and re-re-tweets. During the hour or so I followed on Twitter there were wildly differing estimates of the numbers killed and injured – ranging up to 1,000. Made by Many, November 27, 2008 (Allan, S. (2012) page 335)

Journalists have to understand that providing breaking news in the period of the digital age, when online platforms like social networks with their wide spectrum of tools give opportunity to the users to public all soft information immediately from the event and allow to them to be first in providing first information even earlier than in media, is not their main function. Nowadays, the role of journalists could be described as a filter which will check the news provided by online platforms for accuracy of the fact, is it real or not, true or not, contains disinformation or not, could have bad impact to the society or not, in order to provide to the audience credible, checked information. (Price, G. (2015) page 8)

Professional journalists are supposed to provide quality information transparent, accurate, that reflects the interests of the society, but nowadays not just do the informing function, at the same time journalists have to be open for conversation with the audience, allow the audience to participate in news content, in order to understand what the real need of the society is, and start to be competitive in the media market. (Van der Wurff, R. (2012) page 247)

6. Conclusion

The problem with fact checking is the huge problem which needs time and journalist professionalism to reduce it. For example Sambrook R. thinking that three principals could solve the problem – evidence, diversity, transparency and plus to them media literacy "can help us navigate in the new digital world of information abundance and deliver journalism that is trustworthy and fulfils its public purpose". (Sambrook, R. (2012) page 40)

In conclusion it can be said that as the result of this paper in my opinion for journalists now it is so important to find a place between social networks and the public. Journalists don't need to chase after breaking news, most of the news are being published firstly in online platforms by bloggers and ordinary users anyway. That is why mainstream journalism has to find a different scope of work and at the same time should find the balance between business, ethics and accuracy.

Another point is to start to communicate with the audience in order to investigate what is necessary for them, in order to publish information that will be actual, and will reflect the interest and needs of audience and to improve media self regulation that will help to journalist force for good democratic society.

The main thing to be the filter of fake news, to provide information with accurate fact, try not to publish hot news where the fact is important, but come back to analytic and investigates genres, not just to information one.

By using analytics and investigative type of approach to the news, they provide to public accurate information with different opinions and the same time will increase the value of could journalist between the public.

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JOURNALISTIC ETHICS DURING THE 2019 ROMANIAN PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN. A METHODOLOGY PROPOSAL

SINZIANA-MARIA JURAU[1]

ABSTRACT. The article presents a methodological proposal for the study of journalistic ethics during the 2019 Romanian presidential campaign. In order to do so, the article discusses the most relevant ethical provisions, enshrined in the Ethical Code, that were adopted in 2009 by the majority of the Romanian media outlets. The methodological challenges are presented and assessed, along with potential solutions that could mitigate the risks of errors of the assessment.

Keywords: financial independence, truth telling, public interest, presumption of innocence, Romanian Journalists' Ethical Code

I. Context: 2019 – Presidential election year

Klaus Iohannis won the second round of the 2014 presidential elections with a share of 54,43% of the cast ballots. His campaign slogan "Romania of the things well done" reflected the presidential program that included the goals of allocating 6% of GDP for health an equal percentage for education, restructuring of the management system of EU funds, development of the capital market, keeping the flat tax, return of VAT to 19%. As a true candidate of the Liberal Party, mr. Iohannis advocated during his campaign for a liberal economy based on competitiveness and prosperity, encouragement of a highly

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developed agriculture and continuous investments in infrastructure. Although aiming for a "clean" campaign, mr. Iohannis, a Protestant and a Transylvanian Saxon, part of the country's German minority, had the predictable surprise of having to respond to the comments made by opposing candidate Victor Ponta that a candidate for Presidency shouldn't face any problems to get elected if he is Orthodox and Romanian.

In 2014 there were no public debates between the fourteen candidates prior to the first election round. After extensive negotiations and implicitly or explicitly rejected invitations from candidates' teams, a university and even the President at that time Basescu, only two televised debates took place, on 11th and 12th of November, at two privately owned television stations. Media researcher Patrut[2] identified on the electoral agenda the fight against corruption, the independence of justice and the enforcement of the rule of law, the law of amnesty and pardon, parliamentary immunity, Romania's relationship with international partners, the exploitation of gold at Roşia Montană, the vote of the Romanians in the diaspora, the electronic vote or correspondence and the plagiarism of Prime Minister's Victor Ponta doctoral thesis.

According to article 83 of the Romanian Constitution, the term of the President of Romania is five years, exercised from the date the oath was taken. Klaus Iohannis, the president currently in office, was sworn in for his first term on 21 December 2014 and was endorsed by the National Council of the Liberal Party in June 2018, as its candidate for a second term. Since the maximum number of mandates is two under the provisions of the current constitution, this would be mr. Iohannis' last term. Three different opinion polls, belonging to IMAS and CURS, on a similar sample size, performed through 2018, indicated mr. Iohannis as the winner of future elections, in 2019, predicting over 34% of the total of expressed votes. Both sources polled for a

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[2] Patrut Monica, *Framing the Presidential Debate. Case Study*, in Polis. Revista de Stiinte Politice, vol. III, nr. 3(9), 2015, available in Romanian at http://revistapolis.ro/documente/revista/2015/Numarul_3(9)2015/Numarul_3(9)2015.pdf, accessed 10th December 2018.

number of candidates that wouldn't qualify for the second round of the elections, including the Social Democrats party leader mr. Dragnea, former prime-ministers Dacian Ciolos and Victor Ponta, and Hungarian minority party leader Kelemen Hunor.

II. Relevant Romanian Ethical Standards

The Romanian Journalist's Ethical Code was initially adopted in 2004, during the Media Organizations Convention. The provisions of the Code were debated and agreed upon by journalists, members of the editorial staff, media owners and journalists' unions signatory of "The Journalist's Statute". The Code was further developed and adopted in a revised form in 2009 by 20 organizations (Sindicatul Roman al Jurnalistilor MediaSind), making it the widest endorsed Code to date.

For the purpose of our future research, we will direct our attention to the 2009 version of the Code, which, most likely, will continue to be the applicable version for next year's elections. We intend to identify the ethical standards on reporting about politicians, political parties and political agendas. Initial investigation performed of the research material available from previous election campaigns (news articles reporting on political parties and candidates during the campaign) led us to believe that the relevant provisions of the Ethical Code may be the ones regarding Gifts, sponsorship and other benefits (Article 4), Correctness (Article 5), Verifying the information (Article 6), Separating facts from opinions (Article 8), Private life (Article 9), Benefit of doubt / presumption of innocence (Article 14) and Special techniques of acquiring information (Article 16).

The following paragraphs are dedicated to introducing the content of these ethical provisions, as they are stipulated by the ethical code, followed by a brief overview of their limitations and points of criticism. We will conclude with a proposal for the research methodology, namely introducing the research questions and a proposal for transforming these ethical provisions into indicators.

1. Financial independence – a key to independent media reporting

The Center for Media Pluralism and Media Freedom (CMPF) designed the Media Pluralism monitor as a research tool to identify potential risks to media pluralism in the Member States of the European Union. The 2017 country report on Romania presented the outcome of the assessment of risks to media pluralism as they were examined in four main thematic areas, which were considered by the researchers to capture the main areas of risk for media pluralism and media freedom: Basic Protection, Market Plurality, Political Independence and Social Inclusiveness. We have considered of particular importance the assessment of the Media Plurality and Political Independence areas, that were measured using the indicators of transparency of media ownership, media ownership concentration, cross-media concentration of ownership and competition enforcement, commercial and owner influence over editorial content and media viability, for assessing Media Plurality, and political control over media outlets, editorial autonomy, media and democratic electoral process, state regulation of resources and support to media sector, independence of PSM governance and funding as indicators for assessing Political Independence[3]. The outcome of the evaluation presented Market plurality as the area most challenging, with a 75% high risk level. Romanian media was presented as entirely dependent on the revenues from advertising, that were unevenly distributed across platforms, with print journalism grossing on less than 3% of the total advertising allocations[4], online journalism 18% and television 65%. The situation according to the authors of the report, "leaves the media market vulnerable to outside influences and dependent on financial backers who may have a political or commercial agenda. This translates into high risks of Commercial and owner influence over editorial content (79%), a low Transparency of

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[3] Marincea Adina, Bodea Roxana, Monitoring Media Pluralism in Europe: Application of the Media Pluralism Monitor 2017 in the European Union, FYROM, Serbia & Turkey, Country Report: Romania, p. 1, available at http://cadmus.eui.eu/bitstream/handle/1814/61153/2018_Romania_EN.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y, consulted 05.11.2018.

[4] Idem, p. 6.

media ownership (75%), and a high Media and cross-media ownership concentration (72% and 67% risk)"[5]. The results were concerning especially because they correlated with a medium risk (63%)[6] of the Political Independence indicators that assessed the existence and effectiveness of regulatory safeguards against political bias and political control over the media outlets, news agencies and distribution network as well as the effectiveness of self-regulation in ensuring editorial independence. Political independence of the media and editorial autonomy both scored an alarming 81% score.

This year, the country report by Reporters without Borders was signaling the "sharp decline in press freedom" caused by "excessive politicization, corrupt funding mechanisms, the subjection of editorial decision-making to media owner interests and deliberate disinformation"[7]. The same analysis underlined the fact that ownership concentration is affecting editorial independence. It became thus clear to us that an important dimension to measure is the respect afforded to the fourth article of the Ethical code regarding Gifts, sponsorships and other benefits.

Article 4 of the Ethical code includes a series of provisions aimed at ensuring journalists' independence from external financial influence or similar influences that might affect his impartiality or independence. Under art. 4.1 it is thus prohibited for the journalist to use his status as a journalist or the information obtained while practicing, in order to receive benefits, for himself or a third party. Furthermore, under 4.2 the journalist is prohibited from accepting monetary gifts, goods or any other advantages that are offered in exchange for altering the content of the journalistic act, and has to be transparent regarding the financing of the events he attends. According to the provisions enlisted under 4.3 "When practicing and entertaining work relationships developed with public authorities and various private entities (companies, foundations, associations, parties, etc.) the journalist is prohibited

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[5] Idem, p.7.

[6] Idem p.8.

[7] RSF, *Romania's press freedom in free fall as its takes over EU presidency*, https://rsf.org/en/news/romanias-press-freedom-free-fall-its-takes-over-eu-presidency, consulted 27th of December 2018.

from developing agreements that might affect his impartiality or independence.".

McBride and Rosenstiel[8] underlined the fact that "true transparency" "requires producing the news in ways that can be explained and even defended", thus becoming "the key to a method".

We intend to measure the respect afforded to these provisions by analyzing, on one hand, the transparency of the ownership of the media outlet, the transparency of the funding of the outlet, as well as any indicators or disclaimers that the media product had the content or the production sponsored, and by whom.

2. Truth telling versus presenting the public with distorted information

Article five of the Ethical code, titled "Fairness", classifies as "professional transgressions of maximum gravity", attempts to "deliberately distort a piece of information, make ill-grounded accusations, or plagiarizing, use photographs or audio-video recordings without copyright or committing slander"[9] and recommends journalists to "quote in an accurate manner. Quoting must be precise, and in the case of partial quoting, the journalist takes it upon himself to preserve the message of the quoted person."[10].

The article gathers under its provisions recommendations aimed at avoiding two different types of transgressions: the ones involving copyright and authors' rights issues in general and the ones of inaccuracy of the information provided by the coverage. Since one of the basic roles of media in society is to provide with the necessary information for forming decisions and base conduct in daily lives of those affected, objective reporting, based on accurate and reliable information is extremely important.

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[8] McBride Kelly, Rosenstiel Tom, *The new ethics of journalism*, Sage Publications, USA, 2014, p.90.

[9] 2009 Code of Press Ethics, http://www.mediasind.ro/comunicate-1/coddeontologicunic, accessed on 2nd of November 2016.

[10] Ibidem.

In transforming this provision into indicators that could be monitored, however, we have encountered difficulties caused by the condition of intent that is stated throughout it. As we can observe, in order to deem a specific behavior or journalistic product as an ethical or deontological "transgressions" a journalist must be "deliberate" and know the fact that the accusations are "ill-grounded", thus the journalist should know the truth but choose to hide or distort it. Studying the choice of language in reporting, in order to verify the respect afforded to this provision, is an imperfect research method, as it cannot independently prove the intent of the author, nor the actual knowledge the author had on the reported matter. The valid research method(s) that could prove the unethical behavior are the interview and perhaps the focus-group. However, we believe that it is highly unlikely that the journalists will openly admit ethical or deontological transgressions, due to the potential consequence of losing their credibility. Due to these methodological challenges, we intend to correlate potential highly subjective and offensive reporting, observed independently in the choice of words and choice of subject, with a second indicator that could verify the respect afforded to article 5 by the journalist. The second indicator provided by the ethical standard, that has a higher potential to be objectively verified, can be identified by verifying the photographs accompanying the article, as well as the choice of quotes and the accuracy of citation. Common examples of previous inaccurate reporting in the Romania media include associating the news of an arrested politician being released with the picture of the politician wearing handcuffs and associating the news of his arrest with the statement of the prosecutor's office detailing the accusations, but without respecting the presumption of innocence. Therefore, we will observe indicators independently, but give them "value" only if they correlate.

The last two paragraphs of article five deserve separate attention. Paragraph 5.3 states the norm of clarifying the status of authors that are not professional journalists. 5.4 stipulates that "It is compulsory to clearly separate journalistic products from products created for

advertising purposes. The latter shall be distinctly marked and shall be presented so as not to be mistaken for the journalistic products.". Respecting these last two provisions of article 5 during election campaign is extremely important, as both of them aim at warning the public regarding the source of the material and of the information that it is provided, as well as regarding the standards respected by the author / writer. Whereas the public will naturally expect from a professional journalist to present verified facts, to compare and contrast information from multiple sources, in an attempt to provide the objective truth, or at least as many facets as possible of a situation, the very same public has different expectations upon reading either advertorials, full press-releases and opinions written by specialists that are members of a specific political party, opinions of lobbyist, representatives of entities sponsored or contracted by the State etc.

Thus, in our research, we intend to survey both the situations in which the newspapers respected these provisions, eliminating those items from further analysis and investigation regarding the respect afforded to press ethical norms, and the situations in which the newspapers provided with a copy of a press-release or other campaign materials in full, without any contribution from the journalists and without properly marking its source.

Complementing article five regarding "Fairness", the text of article six of the Ethical Code provides the standard the verification of information, by stating that "The journalist shall pursue reasonable courses of action in order to verify the accuracy of the information before publishing it." and decide not to publish "false information or pieces of information thought to be false based on sound reasoning"[11].

A similar methodological problem as with article five arises in a potential independent monitoring of the respect afforded by the journalists to article six. The formula "reasonable course of action" used to condition the verification of the accuracy of information introduces both journalist and researcher to the question "What is "reasonable"

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[11] 2009 Code of Press Ethics, http://www.mediasind.ro/comunicate-1/coddeontologicunic, accessed on 2nd of November 2016

and how can this be objectively assessed?". From the journalistic "corner" of the issue, a statement of a source that, even biased, has proved its validity over time, can be perceived as "reasonable" in the context of limited time and financial resources. For the researcher however, the lack of verification of that one statement from one source is completely "unreasonable" and the verification itself is difficult to monitor without using the focus-group of interview as a research method. Thus, in order to monitor the respect afforded to this provision we intend to verify if the published information has clearly identified and relevant sources, as well as whether there was a published denial or rebuttal of the information during the campaign. The results obtained should be discussed in correlation with the results obtained as a result of the media monitoring of article five, since the two ethical provisions, complemented by the provisions of article seven, aim at protecting the same value of providing the public with verified and accurate information.

As a remedy for providing the public with inaccurate information, ill-grounded accusations of defamatory information, article seven of the Ethical Code provides the journalistic standards for the duty to rectify errors, specified under art. 7.1 of the ethical code is stipulated in a manner equally vulnerable to interpretations, journalists having the duty to "promptly correct" any "significant error". The appreciation of what can be considered a significant error, as well as what "promptly" means are left upon the best judgment of the editors in charge. In practice these corrections are often avoided, due to a generalized belief that these might harm the credibility of the journalist or would present the newsroom as one that is vulnerable to external pressure.

According to paragraph two of the same article "The right to reply is granted when the request is deemed to be righteous and reasonable. The right of reply is to be published as soon as possible under similar conditions to the journalistic piece in question. The right of reply may be requested within 30 calendar days of the date when the journalistic piece was published.". However, due to the fact that the exercise of the right to reply, published and thus visible

to the public, can be censored by the journalists, as well as due to the fact that the monitored period is of 30 days, we are not expecting to observe it.

We conclude the brief analysis of the provisions regarding the conditions to rectify errors, as well as that of the conditions to publish a reply to misleading or defamatory content, by suggesting that the media monitoring should correlate any situations in which this article has been observed by the journalists with the observance of articles five and six of the Ethical Code.

3. The right to privacy and private life. Exercise and limits with regards to candidates and their families

Article nine of the Ethical Code stipulates journalists' obligation to "respect the right to privacy and persons' dignity (including any family, address and email information)". Although the relevant exception of the information of public interest is provided for by the Code, unfortunately the exception lacks the definition of what the notion of "public interest" actually represents. The 2004 version of the Ethical Code, adopted in a similar setting as the 2009 one, included in its Preamble a definition of the notion that stipulated the fact that it is of "public interest" "any matter affecting the existence of the community"[12]. According to the Preamble, it can be a matter of public interest the functioning of the government and of public authorities in the administration of power and of public service. We discern in the Preamble the same criteria of administration of power and of public service with regards to dignitaries, politicians as well as public officials.

With regards to the limits of intrusion into privacy and private life of the politicians by using the public interest as a justification, the same Preamble states that a politicians' private life can be considered of major public interest "only when it is relevant to the fulfillment of

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[12] Code of Press Ethics, established by the member organizations of the Media Organizations Convention and adopted in 2004, http://www.mediawise.org.uk/romania-2/, accessed on 2nd of November 2016

their duties"[13]. Both these above-mentioned clarifications strengthen the idea that the essential criteria in deciding whether an information represents an intrusion into a candidate's private or family life or a valid matter of public interest is the direct link between the exercise of public function or of power entrusted by the public and the private matter.

We intend to analyze the respect afforded to this standard by observing the written articles as well as the attached photographs independently because, in this particular case, our previous research has shown the fact that the situation in which journalists intrude into persons' privacy by publishing photographs unrelated those persons' public life and with no clear link to the text are numerous.

It is our belief that article sixteen of the Ethical Code, regarding the usage of special techniques of acquiring information, should also be taken into consideration during the analysis of the respect afforded to the provisions regarding privacy and private life. The article stipulates the journalists' obligation to acquire information in an open and transparent manner and states the fact that „The use of special investigative techniques is justified when there is a matter of public interest and when that information cannot be obtained through other means". In these circumstances, when special investigative techniques have been used, the fact must be explicitly stated at the moment of publication.

4. Presumption of innocence

Lastly, we have decided to observe in our media monitoring the respect afforded to one of the provisions of the Ethical Code that might be less frequently encountered, namely presumption of innocence. Article fourteen of the Code establishes journalists' duty to respect the principle of presumption of innocence, so that "no person shall be presented guilty prior to a final sentence of a court of law". The same article advises journalists to seek the accused persons' point of view, as well as, in case of divergent opinions, the points of view of all parties involved.

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[13] Ibidem.

Valid indicators for monitoring this provision include the accurate usage of the words "accused", "investigated", "offender", "convicted" and similar, words that embody specific criminal procedure phases and that cannot be dissociated from an objectively verifiable reality. Serving the same scope of monitoring the respect afforded by the journalists to this provision regarding presumption of innocence, we intend to monitor not only the published text but also the photography associated with text. Previous research has shown us the fact that transgressions happen more often in the supporting visuals, with pictures of politicians during trial or even arrested being associated with articles regarding unrelated accounts of their endeavors.

III. A methodological proposal for the study of journalistic ethics during the 2019 presidential campaign

Taking into account the situation of the 2014 election campaign during which the candidates preferred to avoid direct clash in televised debates, it is our belief that a media monitoring of the printed and online daily newspapers, both national and local, could be relevant in indicating the main topics of the campaign as well as the respect afforded to the ethical standards by the journalists. Due to the fact that, prior to the election campaign, there will be a period dedicated to raising signatures to support the candidates, we will take into consideration the manner in which the journalists respect the provisions of the Ethical Code during this "pre-campaign" period as well. Monitoring this period should provide with a comparison base between officially regulated campaigning period and potential "grey areas" during which journalists might feel that the standards could be applied or interpreted differently or less strictly.

With the aim of discovering the answer to the research question "Do Romanian journalists respect the provisions of the Ethical Code during the 2019 election campaign?" we intend to assess, subsequently, what is the respect afforded to the provisions of articles five, six, seven, nine, fourteen and sixteen of the Ethical Code.

We intend to use the content analysis of the published written media as a research method, in order to survey if the above-mentioned provisions of the Ethical Code have been respected during the election campaign. We find that the following are relevant indicators of the respect afforded to the ethical provisions as previously discussed in this article:

Article	Five Fairness	Six Verification of information	Seven Right to rectification and reply	Nine Right to privacy	Fourteen Presumption of innocence	Sixteen Special techniques for acquiring information
Indicator	Accurate quotes (compared with other media outlets for the same quotes) Quotes identify the source Accusations are based on verifiable facts Accusations identify the source The choice of words doesn't emphasize bias The visuals associated with the text reflect the text accurately Non-journalist content creators (specialists, lobbyist, party members) are identified as such. Advertorials are clearly recognizable	The information has a clear identifiable and verifiable source Multiple sources confirm the information and are mentioned No rectification or reply has been published in relationship with the article	A rectification has been published A reply has been published No allegations of an unpublished reply can be found online or upon consulting other media outlets	There is a clear and direct link between the intrusion into privacy and the exercise of public function or of power entrused by the public	The correct and accurate word is used to describe the verifiable criminal procedure status The visuals that illustrate the article are respecting the ethical provision and accurately portray the criminal procedure trial status	Are clearly indicated as such in the article Were necessary, and the necessity is clearly indicated, explained or logically follows the situation depicted in the article

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I HAVE, I POST, THEREFORE I AM! HEDONIC CONSUMPTION AS A TOOL FOR SELF-PROMOTING BEHAVIOR ON SOCIAL NETWORKING PLATFORMS

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ABSTRACT. Research shows that people often associate themselves with material objects or places and use them to gain a certain validating status from others. (Millan and Mittal, 2017:2, Thompson and Hirschman 1995:151, Schau and Gilly, 2003:1-5). Individuals often find themselves engaged in social comparison and self-presentation behaviors in order to fit in and gain recognition. The present paper takes a closer look at the ways the rise of social media is affecting these behaviors. The main aim of our research is to find out whether there is a link between hedonic acquisitions and self-promoting on SNS. Our hypothesis, that individuals who practice self-promotion on social networking platforms are more likely to make hedonic acquisitions than those who use social media for other gratifications, has been confirmed to a certain extent.

Keywords: Social Networking Sites, self-promotion, self-representation, hedonic acquisitions, social comparison.

Introduction

Human self-presentation behavior is driven by self-esteem and belonging needs. Status aspirations influences individual's behavior, and consumption objects may satisfy certain needs. Even in tribal

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times, people used material goods to show their social status to other individuals. This consumption behavior is specific for the current modern times and is often referred to as status consumption. Specialized literature on marketing defines it as „acquisition and use of consumer goods symbolizing status, both to the individual and to relevant others, motivated by a desire to maintain, protect, and/or enhance one's social status" (Millan and Mittal, 2017:2). Concerts, gourmet food, art, flowers, designer clothes, sports cars, luxury items are hedonic goods. They are characterized by an emotional and sensory experience such as fun or pleasure. Social Network Sites provide the individual with the necessary tools to display and promote the self to a large audience: friends, followers and other users in the network. Images of the self, feelings, actions, associations with brands or celebrities, places, possessions and many other types of information can be made publicly available in the online environment.

In this paper we examine the relationship between self-promoting behavior on social network sites and hedonic consumption. First we reviewed the literature regarding the classification of human needs and how people cope with the means they have to satisfy them. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs has been analyzed. Needs of belonging and self-esteem drive individuals to engage in social comparison and self-presentation behaviors in order to fit in and gain recognition. We looked at how the rise of social media is affecting these behaviors and drives the desire of fame.

Specialized literature indicates that possessions and places are often used to create an identity and that brand, celebrity and location affiliations can increase engagement among the audience and increase the number of reactions of the shared content (Veblen, 1953 and Campbell, 1987 in Richins and Dawson, 1992:2, Thompson and Hirschman 1995:151, Schau and Gilly, 2003:1-5, Dhar and Wertenbroch, 2000:2; Khan et al, 2004:6; Oesch, 2015:4-5). A survey has been conducted in order to collect information from users and non-users of social media, in order to identify a link between their online behavior and hedonic consumption.

The present study provides valuable information for the fields of marketing and psychology. Influencers, and those who want to become influencers, can improve their strategies in order to increase their number of followers, to become more popular in their community and beyond it. Patterns found on demographic data can be valuable for companies when segmenting the target audience by showing how various categories of people react to different content they are exposed to. For the field of psychology, this research offers information about how individuals are gratifying their needs through social media use and how self-presentation is influencing their buying decisions. The framework can be easily replicated and personalized based on certain marketing or psychology goals.

Literature review

Impression management

Ed Diener, a researcher in positive psychology, argued that people are happy as long as they think they are happy and that subjective well-being (SWB) can be empirically measured. Diener's research shows that SWB consists of positive feelings (positive affect), negative feelings (negative affect) and life satisfaction. Life satisfaction is measured by assessment of balance between positive and negative affect in an individual's life and how well that life measures up to his aspirations.[3] Individuals have needs that psychologist Maslow (1954) classified in a 5 level pyramid. Beside physiological and security needs, people need to be loved, to be part of a group, they need to feel appreciated and capable of success. (Cao et al, 2012:3, Noltemeyer et al, 2012:1, Wahba and Bridgell, 1976:3; Heylighen, 1992:3). Research shows that individuals use media to satisfy certain needs. SNS provide opportunities for users to gratify their needs of connection and belonging but also to increase self-esteem. Recent studies indicate that relationship

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[3] http://www.pursuit-of-happiness.org/history-of-happiness/ed-diener/, accessed on 16.01.2018

maintenance, entertainment, social sharing, relaxation, social surveillance, expressing appreciation, offering or seeking help, are some of the reasons why people use social media. (Quan-Haase, 2012:2).

According to Krämer (2008:2) and Chen (2010:3-4), Maslow (1954), Schlenker (1980), Steel (1988) and later on Leary (1995) identified the human need for self-esteem, therefore it is expected that people want to be perceived by others in a certain way. Impression management (self-presentation) is generally considered to be persuaded by the desire to make a favorable impression (one's ideals) on others, because the impressions people have about others, affect how others perceive, evaluate, and treat them, and also how they view themselves. Specialized literature indicates a variety of variables that motivate people to control how others perceive them. The larger the audience and the more public a person's behavior is, the more likely he/she is concerned with how it appears to others. To construct the image of the audience, people rely on the number of friends or followers they have (Choi and Bazarova, 2014:1-3, Marwick and Boyd, 2010:1-3, Marwick, 2015:1). Walther and colleagues (2008) found that comments made by one's Facebook friends impacted the profile owner's rating of social attractiveness and credibility (Walther et al, 2008:1-27). Another study by Tong and colleagues (2008:1-24) found that the more Facebook friends a profile owner had, the more socially attractive he or she was perceived to be. The impression motivation should increase with the value of the outcomes one hopes to attain. If one can achieve material and social outcomes, self-esteem maintenance or identity development, he/she will feel more motivated to manage the impressions generated. Target characteristics can also influence the importance of creating an impression. When an individual interacts with targets that are of high power or status position, the impression management motivation will increase as such targets are able to confer these types of outcomes. People have boundaries in regard to the images they find acceptable to project and become motivated to manage their image when they believe the impression others have about them falls outside these boundaries (Leary & Kowalski, 1990:1-6, Krämer and Winter, 2008:2;

Chen, 2010:3-4). Individuals evaluate themselves also by comparison with others (Social Comparison). If they perceive they are superior, their psychological well-being will be boosted. If they believe they are inferior, self-esteem will be affected and the psychological well-being is threatened. Vogel's experiments indicate that the use of social media is directly related to high social comparison due to the opportunities provided by SNS (Vogel et al, 2015:2). Many other studies showed the relation between the use of SNS and social comparison behaviors. Mehdizadeh's (2010:1-8) research on Facebook users indicated that low self-esteem is tied to the amount of time spent on Facebook. Angie Zuo's (2014:4-17) research on 417 undergraduate students showed that the more time an individual spends on Facebook, the more likely he is to be engaged in social comparison. Haferkamp et al (2011) surveys and experiments concluded that woman who looked at beautiful users experienced a more negative body image than those who were exposed to less-attractive users and that men exposed to profiles of successful others presented higher discrepancy between the actual and the desired career status, than those confronted with less-successful males.[4]

Users receive public feedback from other users on profile features. Thus, they evaluate the impression they make online in terms of reactions others have to the content they post (likes, comments, shares). A study conducted by AliAlassiri and his colleagues (2014:3) reviewed the dominant types of self-presentation, showing that self-promotion (enhancing and promoting one's positive traits) and ingratiation (imitation, addressing compliments in order to get others to like the individual) are the most frequent forms of self-presentation in the online environment. When self-promoting, the individual enhances its own positive traits and promotes its qualities to others. The individual seeks to be viewed as competent (AliAlassiri et al, 2014:3, Zuo, 2014:4-17, Mehdizadeh, 2010:1-8, Krämer and Winter, 2008:2). Using biased information, social comparison made on the online environment

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[4] http://online.liebertpub.com/doi/abs/10.1089/cyber.2010.0120, accessed on 12.01.2018

differs from in-person social comparison and predominantly concerns upward comparison. There is vast research showing that in SNS profiles, the self is presented in a favorable light. Rosenberg (2009:1-95) found that individuals who used Facebook to self-promote, as a means of self-presentation, emphasized their qualities and achievements. A research conducted by Lo and McKercher (2015:8-9) shows that tourists did not take photos of themselves if they believed the photo will not benefit them (eg no makeup, shabby clothes). Lola Chen's research (2009:7) on YouTube amateur performers indicated the use of self-promotion tactics in order to achieve a larger audience who can recognize and admire their competences.

Materialism and the desire of fame

Media and celebrity have always been related. Two major changes in celebrity appeared with the rise of social networking sites: pop stars, actors and other traditional celebrities welcomed social media and the opportunities to create direct relationships with fans and the creation of micro-celebrity was enabled. Following the example of celebrities, self-promotion has become a phenomenon even in ordinary peoples' lives. Dr. Michael Brustein, a clinical psychologist, has noted that society's beauty ideals are influenced mostly by celebrities and that people often mimic them in order to comply with these ideals. One way to "fit in" is to model the self after social media's most popular figures[5] (Chen, 2009:7; Marwick, 2015:2-3; Djick, 2013:5). Popularity is "the state or condition of being liked, admired, or supported by many people".[6] In the online environment users can compare themselves with others in terms of audience size (friends, followers) and amount of reactions (likes, shares, comments) (Choi and Bazarova, 2014:1-3, Boyd and Marwick, 2010:1-3, Marwick, 2015:1).

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[5] https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/instagram-influencers-beauty_us_5aa13616e4b002df 2c6163bc, accessed on 13.03.2018

[6] https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/popularity, accessed on 12.01.2018

The consumption of utilitarian goods is cognitively driven and attains a functional task: food, clothing, detergents, fridge, and so on. Hedonic goods are characterized by an emotional and sensory experience, fun, pleasure (such as gourmet food), concerts, art, designer clothes, sport car, luxury items. Many theories have been elaborated to describe materialism such as "the importance a consumer attaches to worldly possessions". Materialists consider acquisitions, symbols of identity and see them as essential for their well-being. The value of possessions comes from their potential to confer status and also from their capacity to display a desired self in an imagined perfect life". (Veblen,1953 and Campbell, 1987 in Richins and Dawson, 1992:2). Several theories and empirical studies show that people invest meaning in things, they acquire and display them and that human-object relationships functions three-way (person-thing-person). (Thompson and Hirschman 1995:151, Schau and Gilly, 2003:1-5, Dhar and Wertenbroch, 2000:2; Khan et al, 2004:6; Oesch, 2015:4-5).

There is a lack in scientific research regarding the tools and strategies people use to self-promote, the types of behavior which aim at gaining popularity and whether possessions or places can increase fame in the online environment. In an interview for the New York Post, Instagram influencer Lissette Calveiro (32.2k followers) confessed that in order to make her social media life look glamorous she sank $10,000 into debt by dining out, going on shopping sprees and traveling, all for the attempt of displaying a fascinating life.[7] The editorial team of a famous campaign and brand analysis platform, Social Samosa, published an article with confessions of influencers that admitted that they often bought unnecessary and fancy thing just to blog about them and that they were often taking hundreds of pictures before selecting the final one[8].

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[7] https://nypost.com/2018/03/03/my-quest-for-instagram-stardom-left-me-in-financial-ruin/, accessed on 13.03.2018

[8] https://www.socialsamosa.com/2017/11/influencer-confessions-surprise/, accessed on 13.03.2018

At this stage, an intermediate conclusion would be that individuals behave in such ways to satisfy their needs and to achieve a state of well-being. It is in the human nature for people to evaluate themselves by comparison to others and present themselves in ways they want to be perceived. They use various tools in order to achieve recognition and to fit in. Association with material things and places is often used in order to shape an image. Through their features, social media platforms allow users to present a desired self to a large audience and provide opportunities for social comparison. Users can find much information about other users and compare themselves in terms of physical aspect, marital, professional and financial status and also lifestyle: hobbies, dining and travel preferences. Individuals can engage in various behaviors aiming to find equilibrium of (subjective) well-being. Frequently, they practice self-promoting in order to gain popularity and achieve the desired level of recognition. They analyze the number of likes, comments and shares they receive, as well as the numbers attained by others, in order to compare themselves to them. SNS provide users with tools for quantifying the results of their self-presentation actions, in order to shape their image and future behavior based on the number of reactions they receive.

The main aim of the present paper is to find out whether there is a link between hedonic consumption and self-promoting on SNS. Our hypothesis is that individuals that practice self-promotion on SNS are more likely to make hedonic acquisitions than those who use social media for other gratifications. This study aims to answer the research question: Is self-promotion behavior on SNS a predictor of an increase in consumer needs for hedonic acquisitions?

Methodology and research design

We conducted an online survey among Romanian residents, users and non-users of social media platforms. The questionnaires' structure was designed in such a way that it enabled the researchers to make correlations between the shopping behavior and the frequency/

nature of social media use of the respondents. It consisted of three main parts: the first five questions concerning the demographic data: gender, age, income, occupational status and the area they live in (rural or urban). The next 13 questions concerning the shopping behavior for clothing and electronic devices, travel and events. The last 17 questions analyzed the use of social media platforms. Our focus is on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. Gemius data from 2017 reveals that Facebook is the most used social media platform in Romania, with 79.8% of internet users in the country. Following Facebook, in descending order, is Pinterest, Instagram, LinkedIn and Twitter.[9] We were not interested in Pinterest, as it is mostly used to search for specific content, products, tips or inspiration, nor in LinkedIn, due to its business and employment-orientation.

The age classification of the participants was made according to Rose M. Kundanis in her book "Children, teens, families and mass media The Millennial Generation" (Kundanis, 2003:37-43), based on the data provided by The Center for Generational Kinetics.[10]

Table 1. Generation classification

Generation	Generation Z teenagers	Generation Z young adults	Generation Y (millennials)	Generation X	Baby Boomers
Age range	14-18	19-25	26-35	36-56	57 or older

Based on their income, respondents were divided in three major categories: low-class, middle-class and upper class. In order to establish the range of income for each class we have considered the minimum (1162 lei) and medium (2434 lei) disposable income in Romania, in 2018. Low class is represented by those that have a

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[9] https://www.gemius.com/agencies-news/romania-top5-social-networks.html, accessed on 08.03.2018

[10] http://genhq.com/igen/, accessed on 09.02.2018

disposable income up to 1162 lei. For the middle class, the income range is between 1162 lei and 2433 lei. In the upper class, the income is 2434 lei and above.[11]

Respondents were classified according to their occupational status in eight categories: employers/entrepreneurs, employees, self-employees in non-agricultural activities, self-employed in agriculture (farmers), pensioners, non-employees and students/pupils, according to Romania's National Institute of Statistics (INS) classification[12]. Since statistics regarding the amount of money Romanians spend yearly for traveling were not publicly available, we used as guidelines the results of a study conducted by MKOR, a research company, regarding Romanians' preferences and the budget allocated for traveling in the summer of 2017[13]. The following categories with regard to the expenses generated annually by traveling for tourism purposes have been taken into account: those who spend yearly 4500 lei or less, those who spend between 4501-9000 lei and those who spent 9001 lei or more. After analyzing the Eurostat statistic data[14], we created the ranges of expenditure for clothing, per year: 500 lei or less, between 501 lei and 1000 lei and 1001 lei or more. Using Quickmobile statistics on how much Romanians spend on smartphones, the following categories of expenditure were created: 1000 lei or less, between 1001 and 2000 lei and more than 2000 lei.[15]

The questions revolved around aspects regarding the affinity for luxury and towards following trends, the frequency of traveling for more than three days for tourism purposes, for buying clothing items and new gadgets, for attending certain events and eating out.

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[11] http://www.calculator-salarii.ro/, accessed on 06.03.2018

[12] http://www.insse.ro/cms/en/content/coordinates-living-standard-romania-population-income-and-consumption-2016-romanian, accessed on 28.02.2018

[13] https://mkor.ro/blog/studiu-turism-vacanta-vara-2017/, accessed on 07.03.2018

[14] http://adevarul.ro/economie/stiri-economice/romanii-cheltuie-putin-haine-incaltaminte-comparativ-ceilalti-cetateni-europeni-5a4cefe5d7af743f8d0119a1/index.html, accessed on 07.03.2018

[15] https://observator.tv/economic/studiu-cat-cheltuie-romanii-pe-smartphoneuri-178241.html, accessed on 08.03.2018

In terms of expenses, the focus lays in the yearly amount of money spent for traveling and for clothing. Other data is considering the possession of certain gadgets, such as computers, smartphones, smart watches, game consoles and so on, the willingness to buy one or more of the newest smartphones introduced on the market in the past year and the type of events and festivals respondents are usually attending. Also, we searched for the most in-trend smartphones and created a list of items people might be interested in. As for the SNS behavior, we asked about the frequency and nature of use for each platform: Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. Since not all three networks have the same features, we framed the questions adapted to each of the platforms and some general questions that apply to all of them. Other information needed is regarding the frequency and the type of content shared: self-generated or other shared content and the frequency of posting on each of the four categories of topics: news, educational, personal and entertaining. Personal posts consist in self-generated content that discloses personal information. It can be pictures, gifs, videos of the user, event attendance, check-ins, product review and other status updates that directly expose a trait of the individual. Self-praising (self-promoting) posts are defined as "deliberate updates (pictures or writings), which published and shared on social media, are heavily conveyed with the positive self-images or self-focusing messages." (Kik, 2017:1-8). Self-praising posts can consist in images, text, check-ins or other status updates that display positive characteristics of the user. It can be a check-in at a certain notorious event, an exotic destination they traveled, presents received, relationship status or professional achievements.

We used convenience sampling and distributed the questionnaire on Facebook Groups dedicated to survey participation, among students or on online groups for different types of users: mothers, students' research groups, clothing sales and others. The respondents were also asked to share the survey among their peers.

For reasons of efficiency, costs and ease of use, we decided to use SQL (Structured Query Language) to interrogate our database.

SQL language is a standard computer language for relational database management and data manipulation. We used PostgreSQL as our database management system (DBMS). It uses and extends the SQL language and offers a variety of features for data workloads storing and scaling. By using PgAdmin as a client application for PostgreSQL, we were able to run SQL queries to extract and manipulate data. We used the language to formulate our queries. It allowed us to select certain columns with specified attributes, counting the number of results and averaging them respectively or selecting records that have matching values. We were interested in correlating demographic characteristics of certain groups of respondents (gender, age, income, occupation, living area) with online behavior (frequency of posting, type of content shared and so on) and offline behavior (private event attendance). The open source tool is user-friendly and time-efficient. The results of the interrogations are retrieved within seconds. Multiple conditions can be applied, "AND conditions" and "OR conditions" can be combined.

Findings

A number of 203 participants filled out the questionnaire: 68 male and 135 female, most of them from urban areas (169 subjects). Most of the respondents are Millennials (44%) followed by generation Z teenagers (28%), generation Z young adults (12%), generation X (11%) and Baby Boomers (6%). With regard to the monthly income, the majority of subjects (42%) earn more than 2433 lei, 27% earn between 1162 and 2432 lei and 25% have less than 1162 lei at their disposal per month.

A vast majority of respondents use Facebook (93%), 61% use Instagram and only 12% use Twitter. 31% of them use only Facebook while 43% use both Facebook and Instagram. 54% of them use multiple social networks (Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and others). Only one respondent claimed to be using only the platform Twitter. Some of the reasons for not using the most common platform, Facebook, were data protection and the presence of fake news. Instagram non-users argued that the content they are exposed to on this network does not fit their needs and also the lack of time.

In order to identify a shopping behavior oriented towards hedonic acquisitions, we analyzed the social media behavior of individuals who often travel, buy clothing, shoes, accessories and gadgets and who take part in multiple events or who spend more money on each of the above. The main aim was to find whether there is a correlation between this behavior and self-praising posts. We have created four categories of individuals: those who travel for more than three days for tourism purposes, three or more times a year, those who buy clothing, shoes and accessories monthly or more often, those who possess more than three gadgets and those who attend/plan to attend more than two music festivals in the following year.

Only 31% of the respondents travel for more than three days for tourism purposes, three or more times a year. Almost half of them (49%) use both platforms: Facebook and Instagram and follow life-style and travel influencers. Only 30% of them claimed that they did not follow any celebrity/influencer. Regarding the amounts spent for traveling, 41% spend less than 4500 lei/year, 33% spend between 4501 lei and 9000 lei and 8% spend more than 9000 lei/year. The rest of the participants did not give details about how much they spend for traveling. Regarding the frequency of posting, there are groups of similar size that post weekly, monthly and yearly. No relation between travelling behavior and location/travelling disclosure on SNS or self-praising behavior was found, as displayed in Figure 1.
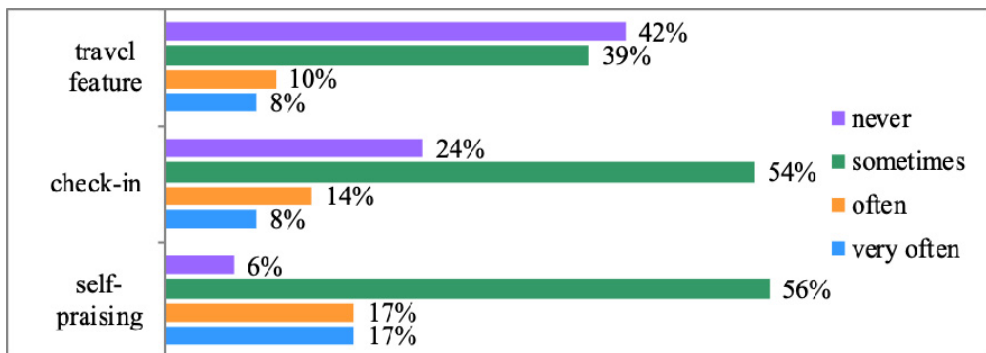

Fig. 1 Frequency and types of posts shared on different social networking platforms by respondents who travel three or more times a year

Most of the participants never disclose location or they do it only sometimes. The majority of people in this category claimed that they mostly share personal content, careless of the amount of travel expenses, as can be seen in Figure 2.
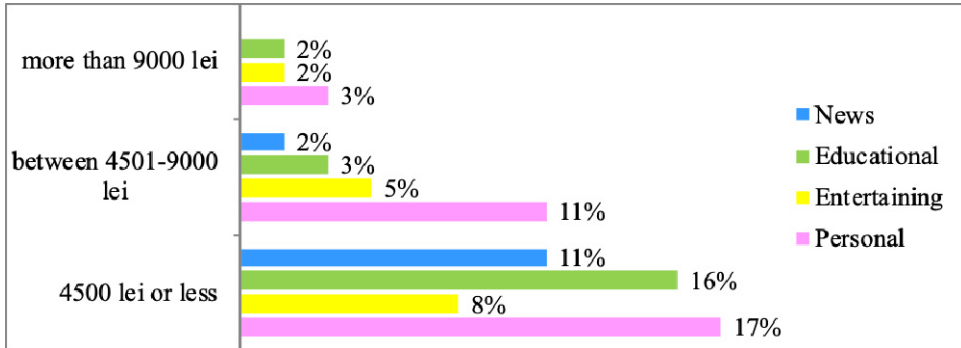

Fig. 2 Correlation between annually expenses on travel and
the type of content shared on SNS

35% of respondents buy clothing, shoes and accessories monthly or more often. Half of them follow fashion and life-style influencers while 20% are not interested in any celebrity/influencer. 56% of participants in this category are Instagram and Facebook users and 24% only Facebook users. When asked about the frequency of posting self-praising posts, 36% of the participants said they do it sometimes, 28% do it often and 26% do it very often. Only 8% of them said they never share content that enhances traits of the self, as displayed in Figure 3.
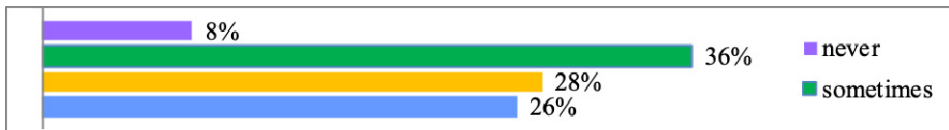

Fig. 3 Frequency of posting self-praising content on different social
networking platforms by individuals who buy clothing,
shoes and accessories monthly or more often

Results did not show any relation between the frequency of sharing self-praising post and buying luxury or designer items.

Based on the data collected from people who gave us information regarding the amount of expenses, the higher the amount of money spent on clothing, the higher the discrepancy between the number of individuals who share mostly personal content compared with other types of content, as can be seen in Figure 4.
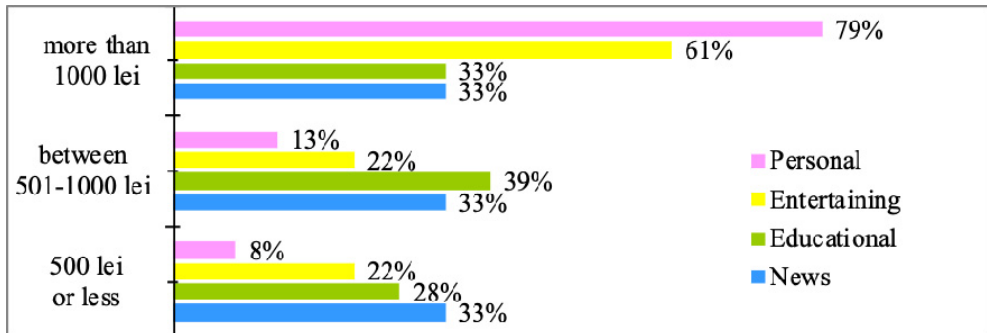

Fig. 4 Correlation between monthly expenditures for clothing, shoes and accessories and types of content shared on SNS

No relation has been found between buying behaviors and posting about acquisitions or gifts on social media. The majority of respondents said they never post about acquisitions (more than 50%) and gifts (more than 40%). The percent of respondents who publish such content often or very often is lower (below 20%) as displayed in Figure 5 and Figure 6.
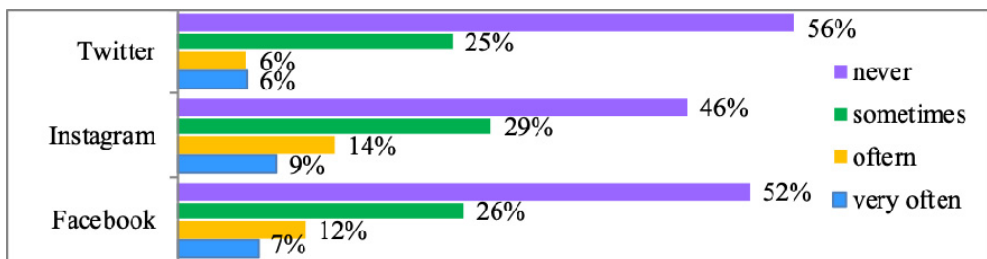

Fig. 5 Frequency of posting about acquisitions on different social networking platforms for respondents who buy clothing and accessories monthly or more often
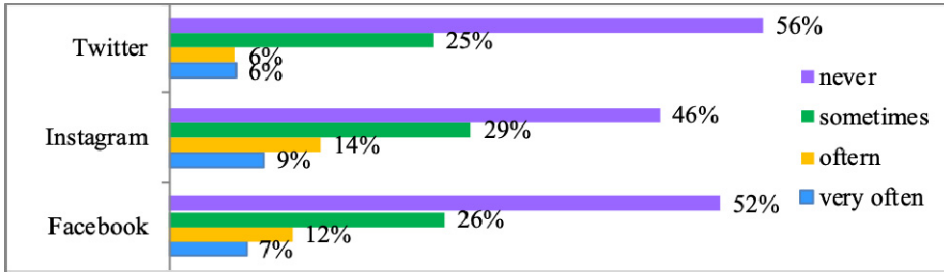
Fig. 6 Frequency of posting about gifts on different social networking platforms for respondents who buy clothing and accessories monthly or more often

We considered that people who own more than three gadgets are most likely to be hedonic consumers. Therefore, we analyzed their behavior on SNS. Almost half of the respondents (44%) own more than three gadgets. Also, more than half of them (57%) follow lifestyle, fashion and other influencers on social media, 20% don't follow any. 48% of them use both Facebook and Instagram and 30% use only Facebook. A similar percent of multiple SNS use (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter), has been found on this category compared with other categories analyzed. A large majority (83%) declared they buy a new phone once every two years or more rarely and 14% make such acquisitions annually, while 48% declared they own or desire to have one of the most in-trend smartphones. 48% spend more than 2000 lei on smartphones, 29% spent between 1000-2000 lei and 17% spend less than 1000 lei. No relation has been found between this buying behavior and posting about acquisitions or gifts on social media. More than 50% of respondents in these category claimed they never post about acquisitions and gifts as displayed in Figure 7 and Figure 8.
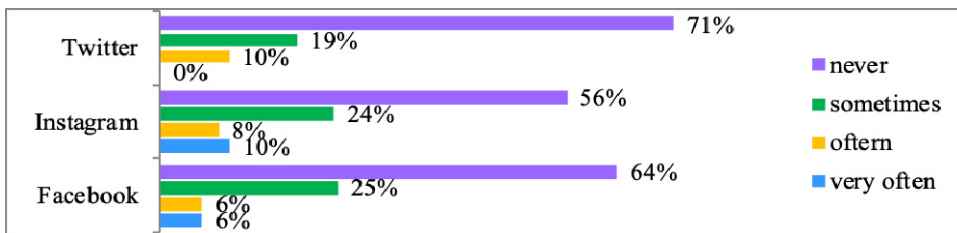

Fig. 7 Frequency of posting about acquisitions on different social networking platforms for respondents who own more than three gadgets
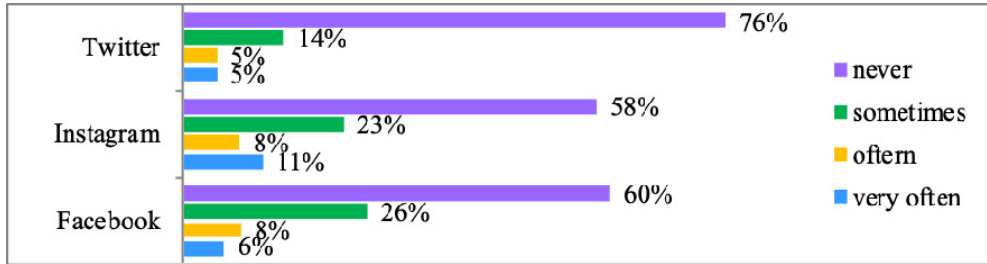
Fig. 8 Frequency of posting about gifts on different social networking platforms for respondents who own more than three gadgets

The results show no connection between the frequency of posting personal content and behavior patterns in buying technology items for individuals that buy a new smartphone annually or when a new model appears. Still, the higher the amount of money spent on a new phone, the higher the discrepancy between the number of people who share mostly personal content, as can be seen in Figure 9.
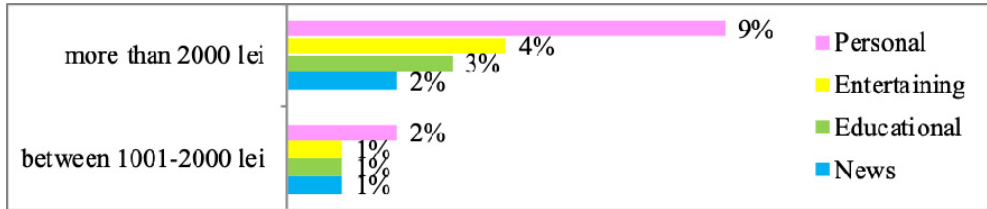

Fig. 9 Correlation between smartphone expenses and the type of content shared on SNS

In the events category, we have 31% of the respondents. They participated or plan to participate in more than two music festivals in the current year. They are mostly multiple SNS users (61%). Half of individuals in this category follow life-style influencers and 20% don't follow any celebrity. Contrary to the findings for the previous categories, the number of individuals that never post about themselves is significantly lower than those who post (careless of the frequency).

Most respondents that share self-praising content often and very often, participate in private events, while those who post only sometimes or never such content, are not interested or they would like to participate in private events, as displayed in Figure 10.
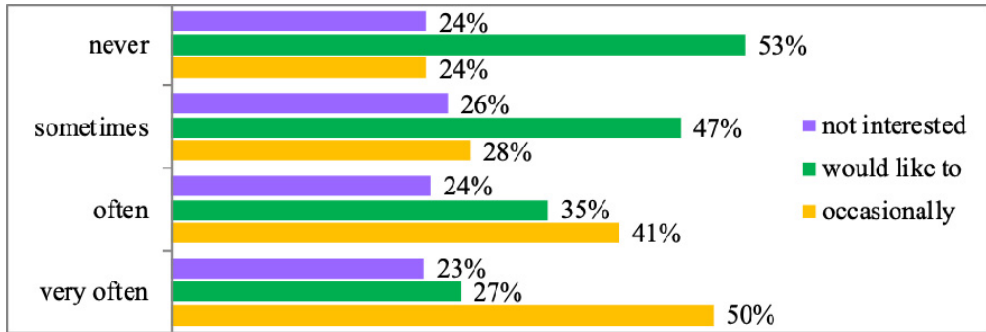
Fig. 10 Frequency of participating in private events correlated with the frequency of posting self-praising content on SNS

Regarding the type of content posted, there is a higher number of individuals who post mostly personal content than those who post news, educational or entertaining content as illustrated in Figure 11.
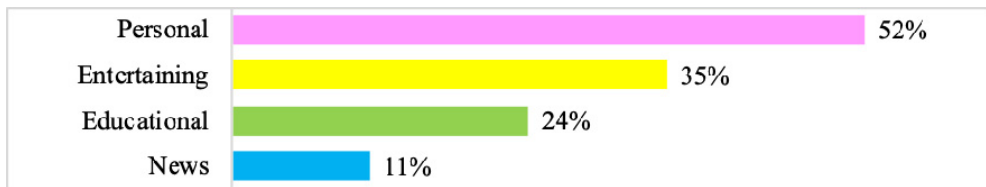
Fig. 11 Type of content shared on different social networking platforms by respondents who attend more than 2 festivals/ year

Regarding the frequency of posting self-praising posts, 51% of the participants responded they do it sometimes, 24% do it often, 16% very often and 9% never post such content. We tried to correlate this with a higher orientation for hedonic acquisitions. Therefore our focus was on those who travel more than 3 times a year, spend more than 9000 lei on travel and more than 1000 lei on clothing yearly, those who own more than three gadgets, who buy a smartphone yearly or more often or spend more than 2000 lei on such acquisitions and also on those who attend more than 2 music festivals in a year. As displayed in Figure 13, the results show a tendency towards hedonic acquisitions, such as fashion items and event attendance, for those who publish very often self-praising posts.

The majority (70%), of those who share very often self-praising posts attend more than two music festivals a year, compared to those who share such content often (24%), sometimes (24%) and never (17%). The same pattern has been found for fashion acquisition behavior: 77% of those who share self-promoting content buy clothing, shoes and accessories monthly or more often, while less than 50% of those who promote themselves often (43%), sometimes (27%) or never (33%) have this behavior. The frequency of buying a smartphone and the amount spent on such acquisitions showed similar trends. Most individuals with a higher frequency of self-promoting are spending more on smartphones and buy them more often. For other categories of buying behavior, the results are balanced.

Regarding the types of posts which generated the most reactions, our data indicated that personal content scored higher for Facebook and Instagram, compared to Twitter where the values were balanced, as displayed in Figure 12.

Fig. 12. Type of content that generated most reactions
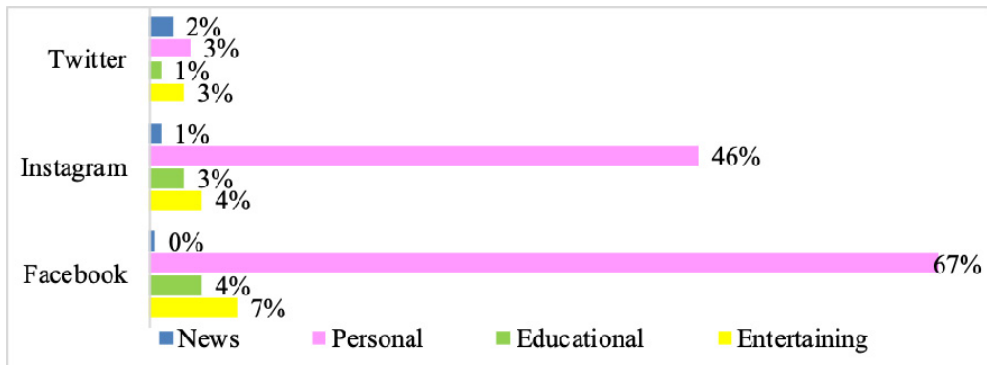on different social networking platforms

The findings show that each age group uses various social media platforms for different reasons. Differences in uses and gratifications between age generations can be observed. Generation Z teenagers use Facebook mostly for information seeking (67%) and Instagram for pastime (86%). The majority of other generations use Facebook for

relationship maintenance (Gen Z young adults 44%, Millennials 38%, Gen X 43% and Baby boomers 50%) and Instagram for entertaining (Gen Z young adults 36%, Gen X 40%) or information seeking (29% Millenials). Most Millenials use Twitter for information seeking (41%). All respondents from Gen X claimed they use Twitter for relationship initiation and all Baby boomers for professional development. No participant from Gen Z teenagers uses Twitter. Gen Z young adults use Twitter mostly for information seeking, professional development and relationship initiation in equal shares (25%).

Conclusions

We can conclude that individuals who travel often, spend a higher amount on traveling or own multiple gadgets, do not use social media platforms more often than others in order to make their way of living public. They do not post check-ins or photos about their acquisitions, gifts or travel destinations. More than 60% of respondents claimed they never or just sometimes use check-ins or travel action features. The same pattern was found regarding clothing, shoes, accessories and gadgets. People who buy such items more frequently, or spend more money on them, do not post more about their acquisitions or gifts on social media platforms.

The results were different for those who attend or plan to attend more than two music festivals in the following year, partially confirming our hypothesis. Individuals in this category use more often tools, such as check-ins and event attendance that allow them to publish their location and participation to certain events.

Regarding the frequency of sharing personal content, more than 50% of people who travel for more than 3 times a year for tourism purposes, make their travels public more often, regardless of the amount of money spent on traveling. As for clothing, shoes, accessories and smartphones shopping behavior, the higher the expenses, the higher the number of individuals who share personal content. Respondents oriented towards hedonic consumption share mostly self-praising posts.

The present research showed that self-promoting behavior on SNS is a predictor of an increase in consumer needs for hedonic acquisitions, partially confirming our hypothesis that individuals that practice self-promoting on SNS are more likely to make hedonic acquisitions than those who use social media for other gratifications.

The limits of our research reside in the low number of respondents. Another aspect is the fact that a very small number of respondents do not use any social media platform (2%) or use other platforms than the ones in our focus (3%), therefore future research could consider making comparisons concerning buying behaviors between users and non-users of social media and expanding the research on a larger sample.

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HOW-TO VIDEOS AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF AUTHENTICITY IN THE AMATEUR CULTURE

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ABSTRACT. As content created by amateurs continues to gain at least as much popularity as professional productions in the online medium, authenticity is key in this ongoing struggle. In this context, this paper discusses the ways in which authenticity is constructed in regard to a popular user-generated genre: the how-to video. It examines a set of eighteen such media texts uploaded on YouTube, that are covering various topics. The study finds that these how-to videos create an authenticity effect through a combination of both external and internal factors. Five main ingredients contribute to the construction of their authenticity: expertise, amateur status, mimesis, emotion and interactivity.

Keywords: YouTube, authenticity, how-to video, user-generated content, amateur culture

Introduction

The fact that how-to videos draw so much attention despite being produced by someone with no formal expertise might stir curiosity. Burgess and Green observed that popular amateur videos on YouTube generate more engagement than professionally produced ones (Burgess & Green, 2009). In other words, not only are these videos watched by a lot of people, but they also receive many comments and numerous other videos are added as responses to them.

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What makes such videos popular and engaging is their authenticity, a feature that is seen to be a core value of social media platforms (Tolson, 2010). Thus, everyone is struggling to be authentic on such websites in order to draw attention and keep their audience close.

As YouTube can be considered the birthplace of many user-generated genres, some of which became very popular Internet-wide, the platform also witnesses a continuous effort to create authentic content. The authenticity of several user-generated genres that have conquered the online medium, such as Internet memes (Shifman, 2018) or vlogs (Tolson, 2010; Werner, 2012), has been given scholarly attention in recent years, but many other popular ones have been neglected. Therefore, this paper focuses on the construction of authenticity of amateur-made how-to videos on YouTube.

Background

According to Merriam-Webster dictionary, if something is authentic it means that it is real, sincere, and not false or an imitation. On social media, it somehow means the same thing (Tolson, 2010). Therefore, for a YouTube video to be considered authentic, it is important that its creator is honest, and presents real information in an original way. Concerning how-to videos created by amateurs specifically, these aspects are critical for their success, given that their ultimate purpose is for ordinary people to learn something from them and to further put the knowledge gained into practice. Burgess and Green acknowledge "the ideology of authenticity associated with DIY culture" (Burgess & Green, 2009, p. 29) that is taken very seriously on YouTube.

On her study on a type of Internet memes known as testimonial rallies, Limor Shifman distinguishes two types of authenticity: external and internal (Shifman, 2018). Especially in the case of user-generated content, the two can often be combined.

External authenticity refers to the "objective truth" (Shifman, 2018). In this sense, it relates to objective depictions of the world that can be validated from the outside, by someone other than their producer, through scientific means for instance. Making references to terms such as "factual truth" or "truth as correspondence", the scholar points out that this approach is essential for telling the difference between what is authentic and what is inauthentic (Shifman, 2018). When it comes to media texts, it helps draw distinctions between reality (what is authentic, real, and true) and representations (what is inauthentic as opposed to real). This opposition is often used as a reference in discourses undermining the authority of traditional media, something that is characteristic to user-generated content. For how-to videos created by amateurs this is somehow crucial, as it usually helps confirm their applicability.

As to internal authenticity, the notion revolves around a correspondence between a statement and a sort of inner essence (Shifman, 2018). To explain the concept, Shifman appeals to terms such as "truth as coherence" or "truth in essence" (Shifman, 2018). According to the former, it is enough for a person to be coherent when creating the content for it to be perceived as authentic. As implied by the latter, the preferred message will always be the one that resonates with the audience's worldview, regardless of what is proven to be, based on actual facts, true.

Moreover, internal authenticity is strongly related to individualism. To be authentic thus rather means to stay true to yourself, choosing not to follow mass commercial trends (Shifman, 2018). Hence, while authenticity can be interpreted in many ways, when presenting themselves on social media, users are trying to stay away from the official and inauthentic ways associated with older media (Tolson, 2010). As their amateur nature is key to their success and their creators seem economically disinterested (Riboni, 2017), this is also critical for how-to videos and it often helps validate their unprofessional origin.

User-generated content and authenticity

There is no universal solution for creating authentic amateur content on social media, therefore everyone is striving in a variety of ways. What's more, since being authentic means staying away from what is mainstream, it is logical for every content creator to try obtain this authenticity through a variety of different means.

Furthermore, every user-generated genre has its own specificities, no matter how similar it is to another. Some aspects work for more genres, but some are only characteristic to one genre in particular and it all depends on the genre's features.

Shifman observed that testimonial rallies benefit of both internal and external authenticity (Shifman, 2018). For this genre specifically, authenticity is built through four basic ingredients as follows:

- Evidence: the people participating in the movement present proof of their involvement through detailed accounts of the events, either verbally or through audio recordings, photos, or material evidence;
- Self-orientation: the unique, personal experiences of the people participating are emphasized through the use of their own handwriting, photos, and voice recordings;
- Affective judgement: participants express their emotions and judgements through verbal or non-verbal cues, creating a sense of affinity with like-minded individuals;
- Mimesis: the creation of memes relies on formulas, thus participants follow a certain bottom-up model they developed themselves, as opposed to the approaches imposed by more traditional, commercial media (Shifman, 2018).

In his study on genres of the YouTube vlog, another successful user-generated phenomenon, Werner analyzed the construction of authenticity of reaction and witness videos (Werner, 2012). The scholar observed that emotions are suitable weapons frequently used by creators to make their content authentic. Such videos appear not to be staged and seem free of constraint. They allow for the display of

things that would not normally be shown in a material produced by mainstream media such as inappropriate emotion, flawed character and truth that would usually be concealed. The immediacy and intimacy of these videos render them authentic. In addition to these aspects that constitute internal authenticity, witness videos, through their nature, also benefit from one ingredient that is similar to Shifman's evidence for testimonial rallies: the person that proves that he or she truly participated in the events as a witness.

Comparing vlogs to older media, like radio or broadcast television, Tolson looked at the former's construction of authenticity based on three dimensions:

- Presentation: the videos are unedited, seem unscripted, and are shot in a domestic setting, while the content creators use colloquialisms and local dialects, and do not hide their clumsiness and lack of professionalism. In the cases examined by Tolson, the videos were not edited because the YouTubers did not even have the skills needed to do so.
- Interactivity: the participatory possibilities existent on YouTube allow the content creators to address the audience like in a real-life, face-to-face conversation, and the audience replies by adding comments or posting other videos;
- Expertise: although the videos are made by amateurs, these seem to know what they are doing, and the way they structure their talks resembles other speech genres such as lectures (Tolson, 2010).

How to create authentic how-to videos on YouTube

When it comes to the authenticity of how-to videos created and uploaded by amateurs on YouTube, it is also necessary to consider the existence of several subgenres, such as life-hack videos, which have their own characteristics and are popular in their own right. Likewise, the fact that they cover a variety of topics, from domains such as Beauty & Fashion, Cooking, Health, Home Improvement, Kids,

Sex & Relationships, or Technology, must not be neglected either. This research tries to identify and describe the ingredients that render amateur-made how-to videos authentic by answering the three research questions:

RQ1: How is authenticity constructed in the case of popular how-to videos uploaded by amateurs?

RQ2: What are the specificities of authenticity construction depending on the domains covered in popular amateur how-to videos?

RQ3: What are the specificities of authenticity construction depending on the subgenres of popular amateur how-to videos?

Method

Qualitative content analysis was performed on eighteen amateur-made how-to videos in English, uploaded in the How to & Style predefined category on YouTube channels that are influential according to the Social Blade ranking. With the aim of analyzing media texts that cover a diversity of topics, three frequently encountered domains were considered. The two most influential channels depending on the domain covered were selected as follows: *NikkieTutorials*, *SaraBeautyCorner - DIY, Comedy, Makeup, Nail Art* (Beauty & Fashion), *Rosanna Pansino*, *MosoGourmet 妄想グルメ* (Cooking), *DaveHax*, *Troom Troom* (Home Improvement). Being chosen based on their titles so that life-hack videos were also included, three videos pertaining to each of these content creators were examined. The language used by YouTubers was kept unchanged, as provided by the platform's automatically generated text transcript, to emphasize each creator's unique way of address.

Based on the aspects assessed by Shifman, Werner and Tolson in their aforementioned studies on the authenticity of several popular user-generated genres, a new formula was created in order to be applicable to how-to videos created by amateurs, considering their specificities. Hence, five main factors, both external and internal, that make such videos authentic were scrutinized: expertise, amateur status, mimesis, emotion and interactivity.

Findings

While the five main ingredients combine forms of both external and internal authenticity, the boundaries between these two can sometimes be blurry. Some aspects are more prominent than others from one video to another, but they are all essential in constructing the authenticity of how-to videos produced by amateurs.

i. Expertise

As the ultimate goal of watching a how-to video on YouTube is to learn something from an amateur or non-professional, it is important that these people provide proof of their expertise, otherwise nobody would pay that much attention to them. Given how diverse how-to videos are on the platform, this can come in many forms.

For starters, the fact that the videos eventually work stands as solid proof that the content creators know what they are doing. If the tips and tricks they offer in their media texts lead to an actual result that is functional or is attainable in the end, then their expertise is verified. The way in which they use the right products and tools in order to obtain specific results is also noteworthy. In addition to that, their competence is also validated by the fact that when they share their knowledge, they put everything in practice themselves. As the audience sees in detail what they do and how they do it, and sometimes also receives an answer to the whys, the YouTubers leave the impression that they are experts in their fields.

Furthermore, the language used by the channel owners also shows proof of their know-how. Sometimes, the wording they use resembles that of specialists:

> "I pat on the color as opposed to buffing the color in."
> (NikkieTutorials)
> "If you set the pressure too low it takes forever and if it's too high, you're in danger of blasting the soil out of the pot."
> (DaveHax)

Some of them make recommendations like true professionals for their viewers, despite their amateur status:

> "If you were looking to buy this to mattify or set your face I wouldn't really recommend it because it has a sheen." (NikkieTutorials)
> "White base works best if you are using bright colored sharpies like I do." (SaraBeautyCorner)
> "After a few minutes of heating and mixing this is how it should look like." (Rossana Pansino)
> "So what you can do is put your hose directly into the watering can so it's constantly filling it up." (DaveHax)

Every now and then, the language used by the content creators also reveals their confidence in their own skills and materials, that it becomes impossible not to perceive them as experts and follow their instructions:

> "You'll easily make it, I promise!" (SaraBeautyCorner)
> "I'm about to show you 12 amazing make-up and DIYs that will change your life!" (SaraBeautyCorner)

Body language is also playing a significant role, serving the same purpose. For instance, in one video, the channel owner of SaraBeautyCorner shows the color swatch of the lip glosses she created from scratch by applying all the tints she obtained on her hand, while talking about the existence of so many options. The YouTuber basically shows the audience how these colors look like in association with skin color, so that viewers would know what to expect from the entire palette. As to the videos which do not imply any talking, gestures are even more important. An example in this sense is a video added on the channel MosoGourmet, where the content creator makes a giant emoji ice cream cake. The channel only contains videos that depict hands performing the task and the actual person is not fully shown. When pouring the cake mix into the cooking mold, the YouTuber carefully removes the bubbles on the surface with a spoon, so that when it freezes it remains neat.

ii. Amateur status

Internet users choose to watch content produced by amateurs and non-professionals in order to learn something for a reason. Therefore, it is also imperative that creators maintain their amateur status in spite of their proven expertise, otherwise there would be nothing left to differentiate their content from that of professionals. This, as well, is done in many ways.

The setting is a crucial detail in the case of amateur how-to videos and is a factor that contributes to their authenticity. As their purpose is to be put into practice by anyone by themselves, at home, they are all shot in a domestic setting, regardless of their subgenre.

However, the setting depends on the type of content featured in the videos. Thus, cooking tutorials are all made in the kitchen. Even though in some of them, only a pair of hands doing the work is shown, kitchen appliances or other pieces of furniture specific to that type of room confirm the location. Furthermore, home improvement videos are set all around the household, depending on the space where "improvement" is needed. Hence, how-to videos offering gardening tips are shot in the garden, while those explaining how to clean tiles in the shower cabin are made in the bathroom. As to media texts covering beauty related topics, the action in these ones either occurs with the channel owner standing against a wall in front of the camera, usually holding a mirror in her hands, or in the bedroom.

Moreover, the language used by the YouTubers is an indicator of their amateur status as well. They often make use of informal speech, using contractions like "gonna", "cuz" (NikkieTutorials, Rossana Pansino, DaveHax). The channel owner of SaraBeautyCorner even uses double negatives, another marker of informal language: "didn't do nothing", and prefers the short form of some words such as "mani" (for "manicure") or "combo" (for "combination"). The YouTuber that owns NikkieTutorials makes use of colloquialisms and more vulgar idioms: "In today's video I'm gonna grab the color green by its balls".

Sometimes they even admit themselves that they are not perfect and make mistakes just like everyone else. Such examples include:

"[…] along the forehead or should I say eight head before the haters do." (NikkieTutorials)

"I'm kind of freaking out about this tutorial/ transformation because I have no idea where this is going […] but I'm here to learn and try" (NikkieTutorials)

"This is actually the first time I'm trying the sharpie nail art." (SaraBeautyCorner)

"Leaving room is really difficult, I have a hard time doing that." (Rossana Pansino)

In some situations, their gestures happen to be more expressive than words could ever possibly be. For instance, when applying lipstick in a video, the channel owner of NikkieTutorials also gets some on her teeth before she cleans it up. Another example is a video on the cooking channel called MosoGourmet, when the hands that are performing the action are shown while dropping some kitchen tools, and, while trying to arrange the resulting Oreo sandwich in order to take pictures of it, it falls down.

Regarding editing, overall, it is characteristic to how-to videos, but it is a necessity required by the features of the genre and is kept to a bare minimum. Very few how-to videos are filmed in a single shot, despite their amateur nature and this does not occur because the YouTubers are experts in using video editing software. Most probably, they are not, and they just have some basic skills. It is common for some life-hack videos to be filmed in that way, because they are shorter and the actual purpose of the videos in this subgenre is to make tasks faster to accomplish. Nevertheless, for life-hack videos that present a list of solutions, and not just a single one, it is necessary for the distinct parts to be filmed separately and put together through editing. For instance, in a life-hack video uploaded on the channel called DaveHax, that offers several tips for cleaning the shower and tiles, the channel owner prefers to film in a single shot one tip or trick, then the camera is moved when he is showing something else.

Moreover, as to cooking how-to videos, it would take too much time to shoot while the food is in the oven or in the fridge for instance. Channel owner Rosanna Pansino prefers to stop recording while leaving her cups in the freezer for hardening and then resumes filming her activity when they are ready. Thus, it would be ineffective to leave the camera on and filming as the time goes by and later obtain a video that is several hours long instead of a few minutes. That surely is not something that the audience expects from a how-to video.

By the same token, when the YouTubers start doing something shown in detail and then they continue with that specific action in the very same way, or repeat it, it would become dull for the audience to watch the same thing done all over again. Thus, the content creators make use of their editing abilities to avoid the monotony. One such technique employed is the use of fast-forward, like done by the channel owner of DaveHax, who uses this function to prevent the tedium while carving a pumpkin. He explains how he does it, shows it in detail in the beginning and the rest is fast-forwarded. Another example is a video uploaded on the NikkieTutorials channel, where the YouTuber applies make-up and creates a pattern on one eye and shows everything in detail, but prefers to repeat the same action for the other eye, off-camera. If she had not done that, the video would have been at least seven minutes longer, and while it already has a total length of thirteen minutes, it would have become dull.

As to scripting, where talking is involved, the channel owners seem to talk naturally. Markers of hesitation and insecurity can often be traced in their speech and are not hidden from the audience:

> "I'm going in with this Mac, uhm… Next to Nothing powder." (NikkieTutorials)
> "Some prayers to me please because I hope this eye will look a little bit, like 10% the same of this side." (NikkieTutorials)

In one video, the channel owner of NikkieTutorials also stutters and mumbles something when talking about the concealer she will use, calling it "Narciso 7", then immediately correcting herself by saying "Nara soft".

One aspect that could be debatable is the introductory greeting that is repeated in the same way at the beginning of every video. The materials uploaded on the channels NikkieTutorials and Rossana Pansino are two illustrative examples in this sense:

"Hello guys! It's me, Nikkie!" (NikkieTutorials)
"Hey guys, it's Ro!" (Rossana Pansino)

The channel owner of DaveHax also has a specific idiom, often asking the audience if something is "pretty cool, huh?". On the one hand, perhaps the YouTubers are trying to remember to use them every time, which would give out their scripted parts of the materials. On the other hand, maybe these phrases are so characteristic to them that they always come out naturally and they are markers of their authenticity.

Even regarding the videos where they use voice overs, one can argue that content creators follow a script. While performing the actual actions, they drop things and it is possible that not everything is always perfect. Thus, the performance was not scripted, while the voice over is done in a certain way only to fit the imagery, because otherwise it would be pointless.

However, the videos uploaded on the channels called SaraBeautyCorner and Troom Troom contain parts that follow a clear script without a doubt. The channel owners frequently incorporate mini-scenarios into their videos, so that the audience can understand how and when the life-hacks presented can be useful in real life situations. Regarding SaraBeautyCorner, the content creator plays all the characters involved, while the videos on Troom Troom feature more people that are recurring. The second character is usually a supportive friend that comes with the solution that is further presented step-by-step. In the videos uploaded on the Troom Troom channel, the characters switch roles so often that at some point it no longer makes sense who is the one in need of help and who is the other, and who narrates the story. As the script is visibly confusing and flawed, it reminds the audience that it still is an amateur production. Nonetheless, concerning both situations, the use of such

scripts can be perceived as a necessity, as they allow the audience to grasp the information with more ease.

iii. Mimesis

Although it is a user-generated genre that is predominantly found on a platform whose community has strong feelings of dislike for the mainstream (Werner, 2012), it does not mean that how-to video creators do not follow a similar recipe, just like professionally produced content does. As diverse as they are, they still have features in common. While the structure slightly resembles that of tutorials produced by formal educational institutions, YouTubers have developed it over time. Therefore, the recipe is also a creation of the everyday Internet user, which makes the videos more authentic.

All content creators constantly provide proof of both their expertise and amateur status. They all show what they do and how they do it without hiding their clumsiness. They share with the audience what products and tools they use, how these are applied and why they are needed, sometimes admitting they are not sure of the result. Every single video depicts someone performing the action from beginning to end, and the performance is not always without error.

YouTubers constantly imitate each other, but at the same time, each of them adds something genuine to it. Depending on the sub-genre and topic covered, more specific formulas can be observed.

Life-hack videos are designed as short materials, as due to their nature, they are supposed to be implemented easily, thus quickly. SarahBeautyCorner, DaveHax and Troom Troom channels contain media texts where one life-hack is presented in less than one minute. It is difficult to determine how content creators "agreed" to a set of rules and conformed to them, or if they did it independently, without being aware of one another's work. Nonetheless, they all do it in the same way.

Moreover, in cooking how-to videos, the ingredients and tools needed are usually shown at the beginning. An example in this sense is the channel owner of Rosanna Pansino, who enumerates everything

that she is about to use before starting to do any work. By comparison, in how-to videos on beauty and fashion, the most important product or tool is usually mentioned in the beginning, while the others are revealed during the action. For instance, in the introductory part of one video, Nikkie from NikkieTutorials recommends the Fenty Beauty Killawatt Highlighter, without which she would not be able to obtain the desired summer glam look. While working on the make-up transformation, she uses plenty other cosmetic products, but those could be replaced, so they are not given so much significance.

While all the channels considered are influential, the videos discussed were uploaded in different periods of time, from 2015 to 2018, so it is impossible to affirm who came up with the recipe. It is rather safer to say that they all built it and developed it in time.

iv. Emotion

As how-to videos are supposed to be instructional, the display of emotion is not so often encountered in these media texts. Anyhow, as they are made by amateurs, they do not completely hide their emotions from the public, and this aspect contributes to the authenticity of their media texts. Sometimes, content creators share their own enthusiasm in regard to their work and the quality of the results obtained, or talk about what they feel in regard with certain aspects related to their actions:

> "Oh my God! I am living a freckled fantasy." (NikkieTutorials)
> "The color green gives me anxiety, the color green makes me nervous, but most of all very unhappy." (NikkieTutorials)
> "Just thinking about how many colored glitter lips we can create makes me so excited about life! Pretty embarrassing… but I love it." (SaraBeautyCorner)

Even when they do not explicitly display their emotions through words, YouTubers do that through exclamations or gestures. In one video, Nikkie from NikkieTutorials channel sighs when she applies setting spray on her make-up and she finally obtains the desired look.

Similarly, while cooking one recipe, the channel owner of Rossana Pansino loudly smells the chocolate that she is about to add to her dish, emphasizing how good it smells, and then says "oooh yeah!" and "woo-hooo!", expressing enthusiasm when the dish seems to turn out as expected.

v. Interactivity

The fact that YouTube allows for interaction between the content creators and the viewers also contributes to the construction of authenticity of how-to videos. While the audience has the possibility to participate in the dialogue through comments or video responses, it is often the channel owners that initiate conversation. They usually talk to their audience as if they were present, addressing it in second-person plural or refer to themselves plus the audience as a group, using first-person plural:

> "Hello guys […] you see this? You're like what, but then you're like oh my gosh!" (NikkieTutorials)
> "Hey loves!" (SaraBeautyCorner)
> "We are gonna be making bonbons!" (Rossana Pansino)
> "Let's get started!" (Rossana Pansino)
> "There's our pumpkin message board really to use!" (DaveHax)
> "We want to completely soak the shower head." (DaveHax)

Moreover, content creators pose questions to their viewers or provoke them to react through their affirmations:

> "Have you heard that a lot of people are getting freckle tattoos?" (NikkieTutorials)
> "I want to know who of you watch the Eurovision and are big fans of it." (NikkieTutorials)
> "Maybe because they just look too good to be real, what do you think?" (SaraBeautyCorner)

These are then able to reply through the aforementioned means. The fact that audience contribution is actually relevant is confirmed by the fact that many channel owners admit that some of their

materials are made at viewers' request. In this way, YouTubers basically reply to the replies of the audience, engaging in conversation with it. A case in point is content creator Rossana Pansino, who affirms this in one video: "I got so many requests from you guys to make something Steven Universe themed". At the same time, snapshots of user comments from previous videos, certifying such requests, are displayed at the bottom of the video.

Some YouTubers see the viewers' comments as a challenge or inspiration for creating new content and they openly admit it:

> "I've been hyping up this challenge for a couple of months now." (NikkieTutorials)
> "You guys made fun of me in the comments of last video saying that I have an obsession with glitter!" (SaraBeautyCorner)

Channel owners also invite members of their audience to further contribute to the construction of knowledge products with their own opinions, ideas and interpretations, looking for some sort of feedback for their works:

> "I hope you'll try it out and if you do so, please send me photos." (SaraBeautyCorner)
> "Let me know in the comments which hack you think is the coolest." (SaraBeautyCorner)
> "If you guys make these treats please take a picture and send it to me." (Rossana Pansino)
> "If you have any other ideas […], please let me know." (Rossana Pansino)
> "Did you like our cleaning life hacks? Then write in the comments which of them you will use the next time you have a battle with dirt." (Troom Troom)

Conclusions

How-to videos created by amateurs or non-professionals are, in a genuine way, authentic. The genre combines forms of external and internal authenticity, which is constructed through five main ingredients:

expertise, amateur status, mimesis, emotion and interactivity. While the first two seem to be incompatible, above all, this paradox is the most significant. If the YouTubers did not know what they were doing, then nobody would be interested in watching their materials. Only the mere fact that content creators show both proof of their expertise and amateurism makes how-to videos authentic and sets them apart from other user-generated genres, no matter how similar they actually are to them.

Creators of how-to videos often rely on editing and, sometimes on scripts for the production of their materials, whereas these are not at all characteristic to vlogs. Moreover, as they are supposed to be instructional and somewhat reminiscent of formal, traditional learning environments, the channel owners display less emotions in their materials, in comparison to the aforementioned genre. Nonetheless, these individuals are still amateurs, so they do not completely hide them from the audience, adding up to their authenticity.

Furthermore, even though their authenticity relies on their genuineness, how-to videos are based on a user-generated formula that is adopted by every content creator, just like Internet memes do. These recipes vary depending on the subgenre of and topic covered in the how-to videos.

Due to the participatory possibilities implied by YouTube as a platform, more often than not, content creators initiate and engage in conversation with the viewers of their materials. This interactivity involves the exchange of ideas, opinions, and interpretations between YouTubers and their audience. Therefore, both parties contribute and are relevant to the construction of knowledge products, making this specific type of video authentic.

The study of other subgenres, or more how-to videos in general, might reveal other ways in which their authenticity is built. Given how diverse the media texts pertaining to this genre are, there might be other significant ingredients besides the five considered in this research, as well as other methods through which they are expressed.

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