Between *broadcast yourself* and *broadcast whatever*: *YouTube*'s homepage as a synthesis of its business strategy

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Abstract

YouTube is a company representative of its original context, *Web* 2.0, that originally positioned itself as an open and collaborative platform to broadcast videos created by all kinds of users; their slogan was, and remains, *Broadcast yourself*. The acquisition of *YouTube* by *Google* introduced it in the search for profit in the framework of OTT (over the top) communication. The *YouTube* homepage reveals the successive business policies followed by the platform. In this work we analyze the evolution of the unlogged homepage of *YouTube Spain* between 2009 and 2018. We observe the gradual disappearance of the videos produced by private users and its replacement by those made by professional users (youtubers) and cultural industries. There is a remarkable parallelism between the implementation of business models and the greater or lesser recommendation of video from one kind of user or another.

Keywords

YouTube; Audiovisual content; Video; Online video; Algorithms; Youtubers; User generated content; Pro-am; Creative and cultural industries; Business models.

1. Approach

YouTube was created in 2005, initially as a website dedicated to sharing, free of charge, videos deposited there by users. In the context of technological and sociocultural changes, that of *Web 2.0*, interpretations of an optimistic nature were encouraged, stimulated by the recurrent association of certain emerging technologies with imaginary elements related to progress and innovation (**Silver**, 2008). *YouTube* appeared as the most genuine expression of that new sociocultural tendency towards self-expression and participation.

The disruptive nature of this new platform and its brilliant success soon made it the largest repository of popular culture, which caused a wave of studies largely enthusiastic about the circulation of videos produced by users **(Arthurs**; **Drokopoulou**; **Gandini**, 2018).

In 2006, *Google* bought *YouTube* for a multimillion-dollar amount, seeking to convert it into the reference platform in online video and make that investment profitable. Consequently, *YouTube* began to maintain a unique place in the competitive –and increasingly concentrated- online OTT (*over the top*) scenario. Following a philosophy based on the success of *Google*, *YouTube* developed some lines of action and business models aimed at obtaining the expected return.

Although *YouTube*'s social success is unquestionable, its profitability remains a challenge

The extraordinary amount of data generated by *YouTub*e includes unique users, the frequency of its use, and the number of videos uploaded, all of which confirm that *YouTube* is a global success. *YouTube* has become the main online video platform. In parallel with the development of this platform, the research on *YouTube* has multiplied and matured, orienting both its observation as a unique scenario where social life manifests itself as well as the appropriate methods for its study (**Arthurs**; **Drokopoulou**; **Gandini**, 2018). But it also includes the observation of the mechanisms on which its economic orientation rests.

As early as 2009 Gehl pointed out that *YouTube* was a repository, based on the –free of charge- work of users, who would not only assume the cost of producing videos and the traditional risk of success or failure, but also the tasks of depositing in that repository their productions, classifying them, and describing them (tags, titles, descriptions) (**Gehl**, 2009). It made it easier for other users to access these videos and maintain certain interactions with them, which would provide *YouTube* with other forms of benefit based on the users' actions (in their number of views, likes, and comments).

YouTube stores an exorbitant number of videos that, potentially, have the same diffusion capacity among millions of global audiences. That is why the technology on which *YouTube* rests is of special importance, because it has the ability to obtain and process data about user behaviors –with the aim, among others, of guiding the production of content (**Poell** *et al.*, 2017) for a better construction of audiences and to facilitate their profiles to advertisers- as well as in the establishment of a mechanized system of recommendations.

Algorithms are at the heart of the technology behind the successful functioning of *YouTube*. This platform proposes, on its homepage, content recommendations that are linked to previous behaviors, for which registration (logging in) is necessary. If the user does not login, the section "Trends" gives some options for viewing videos linked, among other issues, to the social consumption dynamics of the platform treated algorithmically. Within this algorithm the number of reproductions of the content plays an important role, adding the interaction, the currency of the video, the number of subscriptions and the oscillation between the change and the novelty (**Rieder**; **Matamoros-Fernández**; **Coromina**, 2018).

Algorithms –that mathematical sequence of defined steps to solve questions and problems- play a leading role in our society, which has come to be defined as "civilization of algorithms" (**Elías**, 2015). And in the cultural field this prominence reaches singular relevance. We have delegated tasks in the algorithms (classify, filter, prioritize, and recommend) traditionally developed by qualified professionals in that field (gatekeeping and curation). We are used to their active presence in the conditioning of our cultural use, they go unnoticed, as a "technological subconscious" (**Thrift**, 2006). The digital basis of our daily life is also enigmatic because the entities that establish and exploit it do not reveal the totality of its technology or its algorithmic "heart". Although algorithms are coated with certain rationality (**Kitchin**, 2018), these are the center of a technology that, in turn, responds to a business logic that includes objectives and ways of framing human actions.

That is why the scientific works that deal with algorithms and their social power abound; and, more specifically, their impact on the choice of videos among the millions deposited in the gigantic repository that constitutes *YouTube*. One of the most important uses of the algorithm includes the recommendations of videos that *YouTube* makes based on social consumption and the previous behavior of the identified users or in response to the questions they ask the platform.

The *YouTube* algorithm automatically filters and recommends, a function traditionally managed by qualified professionals

But the algorithm is not the only element with outstanding involvement in the selection and recommendation of videos deposited on *YouTube.* Other actors also play a role, such as certain bloggers and some channels that feed their video content from the platform, or as the same publishers of the initial pages of *YouTube* –which guide their performances, among other criteria, set by their company. *Google* and *YouTube* are the ones who, above all, exercise the task of recommending what goes on the *YouTube* homepage (**Gehl**, 2009).

> The *YouTube* homepage represents the universe of content with which the company identifies itself

The continuing dominance of *YouTube* as the most visited platform for free consumption of online video is a result of its content offerings. For example, the initial page *YouTube* offers without prior registration or the "Trends" section, both of which represent an expression of the brand identity and, therefore, the business perspective –even if *YouTube* claims not to have an editorial line. In this paper we start with the assumption that *YouTube's* homepage and the "Trends" section constitute a significant synthesis of the policies followed by the company. The homepage –in general, the platform- is following advanced principles of web design, usability, and navigability; and highlights content that affects its purpose of building audiences –based on data on cultures of use- as well as other content that results from their business policies, which include agreements with cultural and creative industries.

In its few years of existence, *YouTube* has explored several business models and lines of action in search of economic profitability. These lines include the creation and distribution of content produced by varied social actors, among which we could distinguish, for typological purposes, amateur-users from youtubers and other content creators who have found in this communication platform an area of professionalization as well as the cultural, traditional, or digital native industries.

In this work we also start from the assumption that viral memes, remixes, and mash-ups show a line of high interest for the business purposes of *YouTube*: the relationship of broad audiences with certain content and communicators born in the *YouTube* universe, which allow monetizing certain content generated by users. This is how *YouTube* contributes to its own professionalization, which has more than one million affiliates to its partner program, many of whom have millions of followers.

YouTube has followed an evolution that has moved from the content generated by amateur users to those professionally generated (**Kim**, 2012). Thus, without giving up its first philosophy linked to user videos, *YouTube* establishes its position in the market by associating these participatory cultural practices with the "*YouTube* brand". *Broadcast yourself* is still their main slogan. But the business logic of *YouTube* has gradually marginalized the videos produced by those amateur users, so difficult to make profitable, and has granted greater interest to other producers, such as creators of increasingly professionalized content or the cultural and creative industries themselves.

The objective of this work is to analyze our main assumptions: that the unlogged *YouTube* homepage shows its business policy and its variations over time in the gradual displacement of content generated by amateur users through other content, generated in this case by professional producers. This work then seeks to investigate the relationship between the business strategy of *YouTube*, with its various bets for different business models, and the content to which *YouTube* gives greater visibility.

We believe that the changes observed on the *YouTube* homepage are in line with its business policy: the *YouTube* home does not respond to the *Broadcast yourself* slogan or to an alleged editorial impartiality. The variations that the homepage follows run parallel to the changes in the commercial strategies of the platform, from which an editorial decision is derived, motivated by business issues. To that end, we examine the evolution followed by the *YouTube Spain* homepage and the videos presented there, which have been produced by different types of users. We use on the Spanish page for the purpose of focusing our universe of study and obtaining a full and coherent sample, since the consumption of videos in different countries varies, conditioned by the cultural values of each country (**Park** *et al.*, 2017). Specifically, we examine the evolution of the presence, on the *YouTube* homepage in Spain, of videos produced by amateur users, professionalized users, and cultural and creative industries. We also observe the changes introduced by *YouTube* in the selection criteria of the videos –reflected in the categories used to group them- that will obtain greater visibility through their presentation on the initial page.

2. In search of profit: *YouTube* and its business models

YouTube has been part of the services and products offered by *Google* since 2006, as part of *Alphabet Inc.*, a multinational corporation. At its origin, *YouTube* could have been defined as an online video platform created to share audiovisual content for free by users, without restrictions in terms of copyright. **Burgess** and **Green** (2009) described *YouTube* according to its various forms: a large volume website, a broadcast distribution platform, a media archive, and a social network, while representing a disruption in the media business model, such as a new space of media power.

The disruptive nature of the platform concluded with the purchase by *Google*, with clear objectives:

- to convert it into the video reference platform on the internet;
- to integrate it within the structure of the creative industries in a legal manner;
- to achieve profitability on the investment made.

The first objectives were achieved by consolidating the second most visited website in the world (**Alexa**, 2018) and positioning its brand as a cross-platform audiovisual reference for the content of creative users and cultural industries. However, in terms of commercial profitability, some sources believe it is impossible (**Winkler**, 2015; **Patel**, 2017), while others are more optimistic and emphasize the advantages of positioning the platform between cultural industries and the professionalized user (**Cunningham**; **Craig**; **Silver**, 2016).

Participatory culture can be considered the core of the *YouTube* business (**Burgess**; **Green**, 2018). It has ceased to be a website for sharing video and is instead a platform for the creation and dissemination of content with a goal of economic profitability (**Holland**, 2016). This has meant that successful creators are now understood as brands (*brand culture*) with multiplatform production strategies that include traditional media (**Holland**, 2016; **Cunningham**; **Craig**, 2017). **Cunningham** and **Craig** (2017) call such proto-industry *social media entertainment* based on the former amateur creators, adding other online communities and marking the differences with respect to the strategies of production, content and marketing of traditional media companies. The debate about participatory culture moves towards the "platformization" of culture, an issue that implies both the mention of business models and the "datafication" of cultural consumption (**Prey**, 2016).

Throughout its evolution, each *surface* of *YouTube* has been opened to the market (**Lobato**, 2016). *YouTube* is committed to a wide and simultaneous range of complementary business models that reinforce each other. Its main business model is based on the AVOD (*ad-supported video on demand*) modality within the VOD (*video on demand*) (**Prado**, 2017), offering access to a catalog in an unlimited and free-way, financed through the advertising.

Unlike other OTT companies with business models based on subscription and pay-per-view, *YouTube* bases its commercial success on user activity and advertising. This hinders its profitability. Its strong positioning is linked to the consumption of free video financed with advertising and the content created by the user conditions the achievement of profits. The content of cultural industries is a safe value for advertisers (**Lobato**, 2016), compared to the content generated by users, which is less predictable and dependent on the associations created by *YouTube* algorithms.

The evolution in the strategic decisions of *YouTube* shows a search for the professionalization of content and a greater commerciality. Since 2007, after the purchase by *Google*, *YouTube* has introduced advertising videos as a form of financing and in 2009 founded *Vevo,* together with the main record labels, as a subsidiary platform dedicated to music.

Since 2011, the *YouTube Partner Program* (*YPP*) has made it possible for users to receive part of the revenue generated by their content, which in practice means an investment in the production of their users with better results in terms of visualizations. The monetization of the content, according to **Postigo** (2014), creates a narrative of accumulation that is contrary to the disinterested previous values of the community of users. It also leads to the creation of *MCN*s (*Multi Channel Networks*) or channel networks, as intermediaries that help to professionalize production and management in order to provide creators with better commercial results.

The conditions of entry in the *YouTube Partner Program* hardened in January 2018, supposedly to help the most valued creators to obtain more income. In practice it means a bet to limit the investment to the most attractive content. This action is consistent with user demand: 85% of the viewings are concentrated in 3% of the channels, which leads to the phenomenon *rich-get-richer* (**Bärtl**, 2018).

> "The categories of the *YouTube* homepage are in a state of permanent transformation"

YouTube initiated various formulas to monetize content in 2013 and 2014. Between May 2013 and the end of 2017, it offered subscription packages to the payment channels in the United States. The cancellation of the initiative reveals its failure and prepares the transition to *YouTube Premium*. In 2014, the *Fan Funding* program established a voluntary financing model for creators, a *crowdfunding* model, in other words. Not very popular, it would be replaced in 2017 by *Super Chat* to finance live streamings.

Other initiatives were the introduction of *YouTube Music* in October 2015 (music content app) and *YouTube Red* in four countries (access with payment without advertising), with hardly any success (**Singleton**, 2016).

The *YouTube Movies* and *YouTube TV Show* products, integrated into the *YouTube* portal since 2015, would correspond to a TVOD business model (*transactional video on demand*, limited-time rental, or permanent purchase with micro-payments).

Since 2015, the *YouTube Gaming* subscription platform deals with videogames, offering an app with various services and access to live gameplays broadcasts.

In 2017 *YouTube TV* starts its operations as *Linear* OTT (subscription to linear television channels through the internet for a base price of $40 per month), beginning with just the US market, in direct competition with cable television.

The *YouTube* ecosystem changed again in 2018 with the conversion of *YouTube Red* into *YouTube Premium* (with an SVOD model, *subscription video on demand*) and what seems like a determined investment for the own production in the so-called *YouTube Originals*, following the steps *of Netflix*, *Hulu*, or *Ama*zon. In parallel, *YouTube Music* is recast as *YouTube Music Premium*, with a subscription business model.

YouTube is thus betting on multiple simultaneous business models with different services and content that aim to be additional. In any case, it moves away from its foundational claim of a participatory culture (**Lobato**, 2016). The actions of *YouTube* are therefore directed towards an economic model of the "platformization", in which different communities, media, and supports coexist with a broader and more ambitious business concept behind the brands/channels of success.

In the current model of *YouTube* converge the dual logics of community and commerce, broadcast distribution, and social media (**Burgess**; **Green**, 2018), as commercial hybrid space (**Arthurs**; **Drakopoulou**; **Gandini**, 2018). The monetization of the platform reproduces the dependence on traditional media advertising and its inefficiency, but adds the possibilities and effectiveness of online analysis (**Cunningham**; **Craig**; **Silver**, 2016), that is, the advantages of "datification".

Despite the platform's obvious marketing strategies towards profitable subscription-based business models, *YouTube* maintains the *Broadcast yourself* slogan and its web 2.0 brand identity created by and for the user: it is presented as a neutral web service to see and share content and not as a content producer itself (**Burgess**; **Green**, 2018). The contradiction of its commercial objectives with the alleged brand identity is a consequence of *YouTube's* moment of transition between who it was and who it wants to be and the situation of the online audiovisual industry, an enormous rivalry. The logic of "pivot or die" (**Cunningham**; **Craig**; **Silver** 2016) is imposed on their strategic decisions.

3. Material and methods

The proposed methodological approach is very close to the approach of the digital methods of **Rogers** (2015), because we also seek to address the medium to study the cultural and social phenomena of the Web, that is, to observe the methods of the medium, integrated into the heart of these online instruments. Thus, it is possible to focus on the internal logic that *YouTube* follows, in the very categories and processes that this platform adopts within its algorithmic technology to organize and present information.

Among the wide and varied range of social actors that upload videos to *YouTube*, with the aim of typological simplification -and being aware of the inherent limitations of any taxonomy that reduces the complex reality to simple types- we have defined three categories of users/content producers:

-amateur users: do not pursue economic purposes, but entertainment or communication, and are not communication professionals. In contrast to other more worn-out terms, such as *prosumer*, we chose to recover that of *emerec* (*emetteur-récepteur*), used in 1973 by Cloutier (**De-Aguilera-Gamoned**; **De-Aguilera-Moyano**, 1989), which reflects more genuinely that social actor that receives messages but also elaborates and spreads its own with technological means;

-pro-am (**Leadbeater**; **Miller**, 2004): those users who, being initially amateur, have professionalized their activity outside the industry -as well as other content generators born in any case in the *YouTube* universe-. They possess advanced communicational knowledge, handling of digital technologies and specialized knowledge that has allowed them an appreciable degree of visibility. For our analysis, in this category we include users with more than 1,000 followers, one of the requirements to participate in the *YouTube Partner Program*.

- cultural and creative industries (CCI): both traditional and digital natives.
- we added a fourth section called "others", with those videos not included in the previous categories, such as those produced by government actors, companies from other sectors, or videos not available or eliminated by the platform due to non-compliance with copyright, broken links, etc.

We use a quantitative research methodology with an exploratory and descriptive scope, based on the content analysis of the *YouTube Spain* homepage without registering (logging in). The tool used to access the primary sources is the *Wayback Machine* website (*Internet Archive*, 2018) that allows access to the different records or screenshots made by the self-described *Internet Archive* on the website object of study.
https://archive.org/web
https://www.youtube.com/es

The universe of the research is made up of all *YouTube Spain* homepages between June 2007 and July 2018.

The population of the research consists of the records documented by *Internet Archive* through *Wayback Machine*, adding a total of 656 screenshots collected between 7 February 2009 and 11 July 2018, there are no captures prior to this first date in the *Internet Archive*. From this population we extract a representative sample of 20 captures, 1 per semester, chosen randomly, ascending to a total of 674 videos contained and analyzed in these homepages[1].

Of the possible variables that we can find we are interested in the presence of social actors producing/creating content -*emerec*, pro-am and CCI-, as well as the sections, which sometimes coincide with the categories proposed by the platform (*YouTube* currently distinguishes 15 categories of different "Genre" –for example: Entertainment, Music, News and politics...- to catalog the channels and videos that are uploaded to the platform) and in the remainder of the occasions these are created *adhoc* by the platform for its *Logged-Out Home Page* (we will call these latter categories "functional" because these are sections whose objective it is to group videos based on a common theme, for example: Recommended channels, Videos of the day, or Recommendations) that have shaped the design of the homepages analyzed.

> There is a direct relationship between changes in *YouTube's* business models and the evolution of its homepage

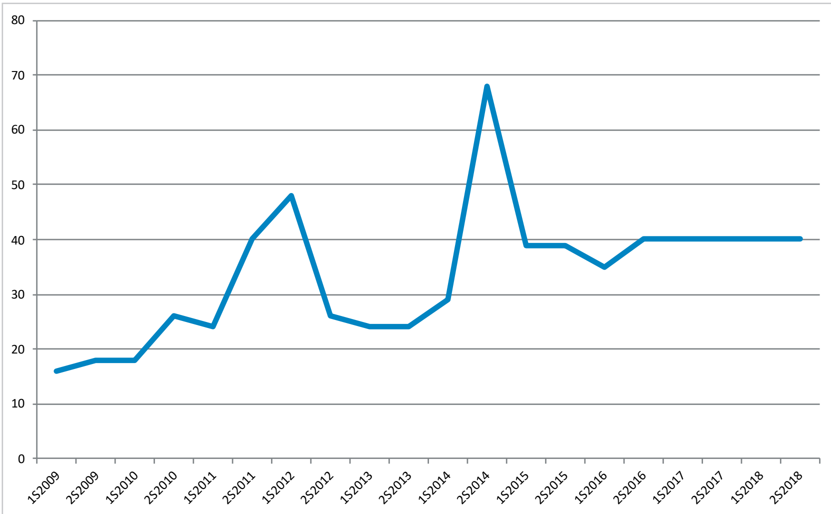
The technique of quantitative content analysis applied to the study consists of a first observation phase in which the referred data to the type of uploader or user that uploads videos and are coded, by viewing them, according to the second variable: the section or category of the homepage on which they are included.

This first part ends with the corresponding statistical analysis and exploitation of the results. In a second phase the focus is on the evolution of the sections or categories regardless of the type of producer, identifying the periods in which they have been active on the homepage. In summary, in the analysis performed, in order to observe the changes in the business strategy of *YouTube*, we look for relationships between the evolution of the categories and users/producers throughout the period analyzed.

4. Analysis and results

The analysis carried out and the results obtained point to a relationship between the evolution of the creators of videos located on *YouTube Spain*'s homepage and the changes in the company's business strategy.

In a field closer to web design, usability, and navigability than to the content itself, we first highlight the growth in the number of videos present on the homepage (graph 1), from its beginnings until the end of 2014, in which the number reaches its maximum (68), after which it drops and stabilizes around 40 videos. The platform has been incorporating designs and structures for quick access to other videos related to the initial page, such as side menus, which appear in the first half of 2012, subsequently reduce their categories, and finally disappear at the end of 2014. After the side menu disappeared a horizontal slide was added to access other videos, but it disappeared in 2017. For the present analysis we have limited the videos to those that are visible on the homepage by vertical scroll, ignoring other submenus. The total number, reflected in graph 1, remains stable over the last four years.



Graph 1. Evolution of the number of videos on the *YouTube* homepage

Pro-am users are the largest contributors of audiovisual content in the total of the period analyzed (280 videos) followed closely by the CCI (238 videos) and the *emerec*, with a minimum weight on the home pages (73 videos) but with a very significant evolution (Annex 1).

We propose three time segments based on key moments in the evolution of the *YouTube* homepage with respect to users/producers and categories.

4.1. First stage: Emergence of the UGC (user generated content) (2009 - first semester 2012)

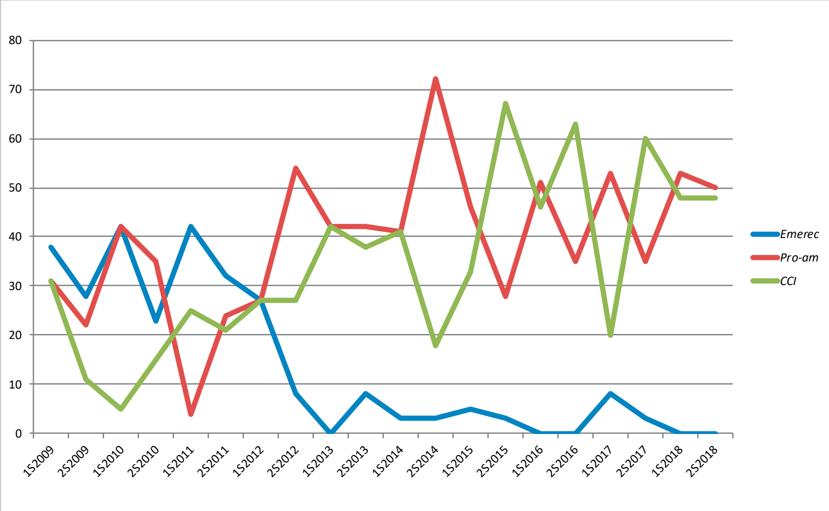
If we focus on its temporal evolution (graph 2), we observe a first stage that coincides with the beginning of the platform characterized by an exponential growth of users. In this context it is the *emerec* and pro-am users who account for most of the homepages. The cultural and creative industries or CCI are practically absent, except for the record industry.

In this first emergent stage, from its beginning until the first semester of 2012, the videos are grouped into categories of genre along with others that we call functional, suggesting the viewing of videos under concepts such as "Featured Videos" or "Trends".

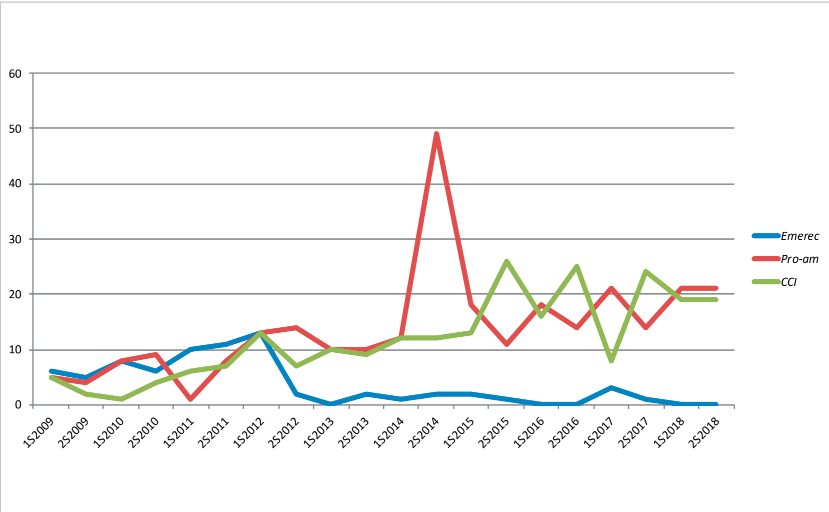
The following graph shows the same evolution of the number of videos –now expressed as a percentage- included according to the three main types of actors on the platform, with which we can observe the importance of each one of them regardless of the total number of videos.

4.2. Second stage: Professional communication: *Youtubers* and CCI (second semester 2012 - first semester 2015)

This initial stage of *YouTube Spain* gives way to a period characterized by the decline of the *emerec* and the rise of the pro-am, and to a greater extent, of the CCI. The milestone that marks the beginning of this second stage is the confluence of the three types of producers in the second half of 2012, placing the end of this stage in 2015, when the growth of the CCI stabilized. The changes produced in the algorithm coincide with new business model strategies, specifically with the birth of the *YouTube Partner Program*, which transforms and professionalizes pro-ams with the appearance of *youtuber* and MCNs (*Multi Channel Networks*). This indicates that the growth of the visibility of videos created by pro-am users in 2014 could be derived from *YouTube's* strategy of linking its identity to these pro-ams, and to the growing industry around the pro-ams, such as the MCNs, in a context of acquisitions of those by companies such as *Disney* or *Boomerang TV*.



Graph 2. Evolution of the number of videos on the *YouTube* main page according to type of user/producer



Graph 3. Evolution of the percentage of videos on the *YouTube*´s home page according to the type of user-producer

We can see (Annex 1) the near disappearance of the *amateur* user from the *YouTube* homepage, previously circumscribed to the categories of content and popularity (table 1). In 2014 the appearance of the category "Recommended channels" was integrated within the context of pro-am promotion that transcends the mere visibility of isolated videos, in order to favor fidelity to very active channels and youtubers, belonging to MCNs and supported by the *YouTube Partners Program*. Although the core of the business is still the participative culture, it coexists with the commercial logic (**Burgess**; **Green**, 2018; **Arturs**; **Drakopoulou**; **Gandini**, 2018).

In this second stage, the pro-ams dominate the homepage, highlighted in the "Recommended" categories related to popularity and trends. This phenomenon had its peak in this second stage, which coincided with the appearance of a new product, the channels, which was an ideal container for the activity of *emerecs* but, above all, for pro-am and CCI. Since its appearance in the second half of 2014, the recommended channels are the most used functional category on the homepage (figure 4). In the case of the most common genres, video games are the top content category of the pro-am.

Since 2015, *YouTube* has opted for greater visibility of the cultural and pro-am industries, marginalizing the amateur user

4.3. Third stage: The consolidation of the CCI (first semester 2015 - present)

Starting in 2012 the presence of CCIs increased (figures 2 and 3), but from 2015 until the present it has held more relative weight. Since its inception, music has been the main sector of the CCI, even after the birth of *Vevo* in 2009. Since 2014, the appearance of *Vevo* content in the form of channels has been significant.

Other sectors of the CCI have been integrated into the platform as content producers (media, film, or videogame industry). The most common format with which they are presented on the homepage are recommended channels, themes,

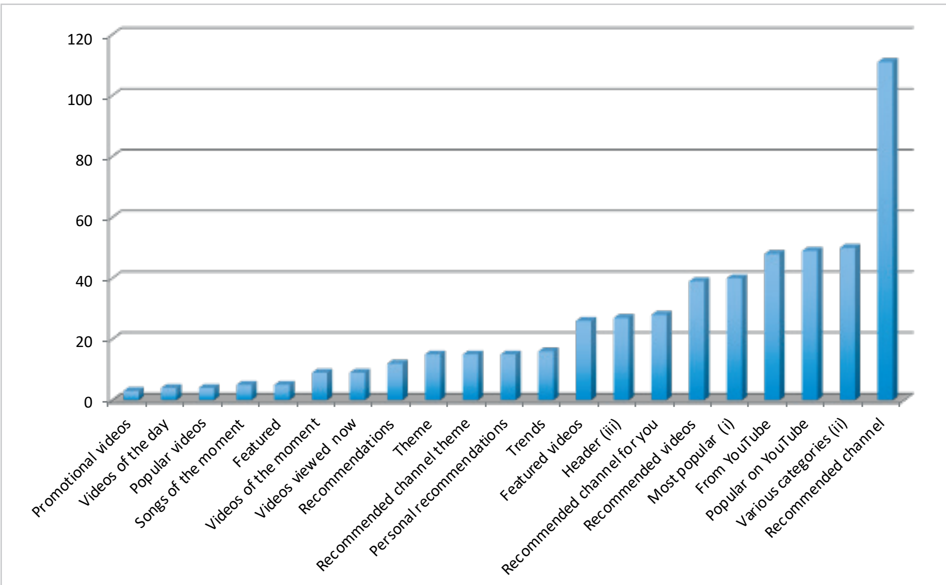
Table 1. Categories that appear on *YouTube* homepages in chronological order

CATEGORIES	1S2009	2S2009	1S2010	2S2010	1S2011	2S2011	1S2012	2S2012	1S2013	2S2013	1S2014	2S2014	1S2015	2S2015	1S2016	2S2016	1S2017	2S2017	1S2018	2S2018
Promoted videos	■																			
Featured videos	■	■	■	■	■															
Trending videos now		■	■	■																
Most popular (i)		■	■	■	■				■	■										
Personal recommendations				■	■															
Videos that are being watched now																				
Trends					■	■											■	■	■	■
Various categories (ii)						■			■	■	■	■						■	■	
Most seen						■														
Superfavorites						■														
Featured						■	■	■												
From *YouTube*							■	■												
Recommended							■													
Videos of the day								■												
Header (iii)									■	■	■	■	■	■	■					
Popular on *YouTube*											■	■	■	■	■		■	■		
Channel recommended for you												■								
Recommended channel													■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Popular videos															■					
Videos of the moment						■										■				
Songs of the moment																■				
Themes																■		■		■
Recommended videos																	■		■	■
Recommended channel theme																			■	■

(i) By similarity in the sections/categories, these have been grouped: Most popular, Popular on *YouTube*, Popular on *YouTube* and Popular now.
(ii) The item Various categories groups the sections whose titles match a *YouTube* gender category, for example, Music, Science, and technology or Sports.
(iii) The Header category refers to the videos that appear at the top of the homepage without any section title.

and highlights. In terms of content or gender categories, it should be noted that CCIs have become the main producer in the music category.

The CCIs went from occupying about 10% of videos in the first years to more than 50% in the most recent samples analyzed. If these data from the homepages are extrapolated to the *YouTube* set, they could reflect the progressive integration of the CCI in the digital sphere, especially in audiovisual platforms.



Graph 4. Number of videos by categories

Topics: the automatic generation channels

In 2018 the "Theme" or "Recommended theme channel" arises, a result of the evolution of the different algorithms that converge on the *YouTube* homepage in the category configuration. The "Theme" groups videos and thematic channels generated automatically by the algorithm "when a topic is detected that has a considerable presence on the website" (*YouTube*, 2018). This qualitative advance in the design of the algorithm shows the tendency of the platform to full automation by providing the most appropriate content according to its criteria. It also shows the progressive use of user information extracted from its digital uses.

5. Discussion and conclusions

> *YouTube*'s algorithm is another marketing resource

YouTube appeared as a platform that represented participatory culture. However, the results of this research corroborate the idea that *YouTube* soon left behind the dream of a philanthropic and collaborative web –which so influenced the first studies about this platform (**Arthurs**; **Drokopoulou**; **Gandini**, 2018)-, in order to orient itself towards the creation and diffusion of audiovisual content following commercially profitable objectives (**Holland**, 2016). Imposing the application of business models that took advantage of its positioning as a key brand of the online audiovisual, to successfully migrate from the *Broadcast yourself* to a *Broadcast whatever* in which profitability is avidly pursued. At its core is model that has given fabulous results to *Google*: filter, sort, select, prioritize, and recommend selected content over others.

The already abundant literature about *YouTube* accounts for the different facets that authors like **Burgess** and **Green** (2009) have rightly attributed to this platform. Bearing in mind several of these authors we have focused on their business models in relation to the content offered by *YouTube* to its users, classifying that content according to who their producers were. The method we develop responds to the specific aims of our research and to a precise object of study –the content offered by *YouTube* on its unregistered homepage, concentrating on the visible videos through vertical scrolling, ignoring other submenus- allowing us to reach certain conclusions. But it also helps us to think and propose new questions, among other issues, relating to the incidence of this platform in the production, dissemination, and consumption of cultural products, thus emphasizing our attention to issues of considerable importance in social research.

The content offered by *YouTube* on its unregistered homepage represents the symbolic universe of content with which the company identifies itself, in addition to using an editing model that confronts with *YouTube*'s communication policy, which still highlights the communicative centrality of the user. The variations in the content offered by *YouTube* on its initial page show an open intention to link the identity of the platform with certain products and creators, over others. The objective is to give greater visibility to more attractive content for consumers, thus moving forward in the construction of their audiences.

The results of the analysis show an evolution of the sections and categories that classify and filter the content of the homepage. Therefore, we found there is ongoing experimentation, with a mutant platform model in several aspects.

At the same time, we discovered a direct relationship between the changes in their business models and the evolution of the number of videos on the homepage according to the type of producer and the categories –in line with the institutionalization process of this platform that **Kim** pointed out (2012)-. Consequently, we conclude *that the YouTube* homepage is a significant synthesis of the company's policy.

We identify different stages in *YouTube*'s commercial and communication strategies:

- foundational stage between 2005 and 2006 that responds to the principles and values of collaborative production in the web 2.0;
- between 2007 and 2010 *Google* tries to make the platform profitable through agreements with the CCI and increases the presence of advertising, without losing the production of the *emerec* as the main identity;
- between 2011 and 2014 *YouTube* is strongly committed to the pro-am in its business models and in the number of videos and categories of its initial page;
- between 2015 and 2018 it is perceived -as **Cunningham**, **Craig,** and **Silver** (2016) mentioned- that there was a greater commitment to the visibility of the CCI, in parallel with the prominence of the pro-am content. Since 2015, the platform has been promoting channels with different payment models linked to professional content and more professional pro-am;
- 2017 and 2018 the content of *emerec* users was practically banished from the *YouTube* homepage while a balanced promotion of the content of ICC and pro-am users took place. Previous proposals for various payment products converge on *YouTube Premium* and lead to the commitment to own production (*YouTube Originals*), like other OTT platforms.

We venture that *YouTube* will continue to delve into a search for profits through the production and dissemination of audiovisual content. Among them, the content generated by non-professional users will remain almost without any protagonism, while those generated by the proto-industry (**Cunningham**; **Craig**, 2017) built around the pro-am will maintain some prominence. Although possibly decreasing, *YouTube Premium* has the highest potential to attract profits, and the *YouTube* algorithm and its home page would adapt to this possiblity.

6. Note

1. All the primary information is available for consultation on *The Internet Archive* website and the captures in video format, tables, and graphics are in the *Figshare* repository.
https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.7116710

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8. Annex

Videos of the *YouTube* homepage according to category and user-producer. Years 2009-2018.

Date	Section type	*Emerecs*	Pro-ams	CCI	Others	Nº videos
07/02/2009	Promoted videos			4		4
	Featured videos	6	5	1		12
	Total	6	5	5		16
	Percentage	38	31	31	0	
02/08/2009	Videos that are being watched now	**1**			**3**	4
	Featured videos		**3**	**1**		4
	Most popular	4	1	1	4	10
	Total	5	4	2	7	18
	Percentage	28	22	11	39	
05/02/2010	Videos that are being watched now	3	1		1	5
	Featured videos		4			4
	Most popular	5	3	1	1	10
	Total	8	8	1	2	19
	Percentage	42	42	5	11	

02/08/2010	Custom recommendations	2	6			8
	Videos that are being watched now	1		1	2	4
	Featured videos		1	1	2	4
	Most popular	3	2	2	3	10
	Total	6	9	4	7	26
	Percentage	23	35	15	27	
15/01/2011	Custom recommendations	3		3	2	8
	Most popular	4		3	3	10
	Trends	2			1	3
	Featured videos	1	1		1	3
	Total	10	1	6	7	24
	Percentage	42	4	25	29	
19/07/2011	Various categories	10	4	4	6	24
	Most watched				3	3
	Superfavorites		3			3
	Videos of the moment				4	4
	Trends	1	1	1		3
	Featured			2	1	3
	Total	11	8	7	14	40
	Percentage	32	24	21	41	
01/02/2012	From *YouTube*	5	13	6	6	30
	Recommendations	7		5	3	15
	Featured	1		2		3
	Total	13	13	13	9	48
	Percentage	27	27	27	19	
01/07/2012	From *YouTube*	2	13	2	2	19
	Videos of the day			4		4
	Featured		1	1	1	3
	Total	2	14	7	3	26
	Percentage	8	54	27	12	
27/01/2013	Header		1	2	1	4
	Various categories		6	8	2	16
	Most popular		3		1	4
	Total	0	10	10	4	24
	Percentage	0	42	42	17	
19/07/2013	Header		1	1	2	4
	Various categories	2	8	6		16
	Most popular		1	2	1	4
	Total	2	10	9	3	24
	Percentage	8	42	38	13	
02/01/2014	Header		1	2	1	4
	Popular on *YouTube*		2	3		5
	Various categories	1	9	7	3	20
	Total	1	12	12	4	29
	Percentage	3	41	41	14	
03/08/2014	Header		2	2		4
	Recommended channel for you		35	5		40
	Popular on *YouTube*		4		1	5
	Various categories	2	8	5	4	19
	Total	2	49	12	5	68
	Percentage	3	72	18	7	

28/01/2015	Header		2	1	1	4
	Recommended channel		10	10	5	25
	Popular on *YouTube*	2	6	2		10
	Total	2	18	13	6	39
	Percentage	5	46	33	15	
17/07/2015	Header	1	2	1		4
	Recommended channel		5	25		30
	Popular on *YouTube*		4		1	5
	Total	1	11	26	1	39
	Percentage	3	28	67	3	
09/01/2016	Header		4			4
	Popular on *YouTube*		8	1	1	10
	Recommended channel		6	15		21
	Total	0	18	16	1	35
	Percentage	0	51	46	3	
07/07/2016	Videos of the moment		5			5
	Trailers Theme		4		1	5
	Recommended channel		5	20		25
	Songs of the moment			5		5
	Total	0	14	25	1	40
	Percentage	0	35	63	3	
09/02/2017	Trends		4	1		5
	Recommended videos	2	12	4	2	20
	Recommended channel		5		5	10
	Popular on *YouTube*	1		3	1	5
	Total	3	21	8	8	40
	Percentage	8	53	20	20	
15/07/2017	Trends		3	2		5
	Popular on *YouTube*		4	1		5
	Various categories	1	3	15	1	20
	Recommended channel		4	6		10
	Total	1	14	24	1	40
	Percentage	3	35	60	3	
25/01/2018	Trends		5			5
	Recommended channel		10			10
	Recommended channel theme		3	7		10
	Various categories			10		10
	Recommended videos		3	2		5
	Total	0	21	19	0	40
	Percentage	0	53	48	0	
11/07/2018	Trends		3	1	1	5
	Recommended videos		8	7		15
	Recommended channel		5	5		10
	Recommended channel theme			5		5
	Various categories theme		4	1		5
	Total	0	20	19	1	40
	Percentage	0	50	48	3	
TOTAL		73	280	238	84	675
TOTAL PERCENTAGE		11	42	36	13	