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The Popular Phenomenon of YouTube Reaction Videos: A Case Study on 'REACT'

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Abstract

A growing percentage of this content consists of reaction videos, a new type of user-generated content that has been on the rise within this social media platform, in which individuals record themselves reacting to any sort of content. This paper aims to explore the dynamics involved in this type of content, not only from the perspective of the creator but also from the angle of the viewer, to try and understand what leads to the popularity of these videos. The current thesis aims not only to dissect the topic but also to present the field of Media and Communication studies with relevant and unprecedented insight into the motivations that lead viewers to engage with this kind of content and contribute to debunk this contemporary audience phenomenon. To do so, a case study was conducted on a YouTube channel named 'REACT'. The study utilised Uses and Gratifications Theory as well as the concept of mediated voyeurism to help contextualise the reaction genre. Using content analysis, 4 of their videos were analysed qualitatively. Plus, a focus group was conducted in order to not only understand the overall sentiment towards the reaction video genre, but also identify the possible reasons for it to be a global success. Results show that reaction videos can be characterised as dynamic, highly engaging and extremely relatable videos. Furthermore, they can be of amateur nature – unscripted, spontaneous and organic, or more professionalised – scripted and edited. Additionally, while most of the needs these videos fulfil can be categorised as diversion needs, the remaining ones can be perceived as both personal identity and surveillance needs. The current research can be seen as a useful tool for society to interpret relevant patterns of content creation and consumption within the current digital age.

Keywords: YouTube, Reaction Video, Uses and Gratifications Theory, Voyeurism, Mediated Voyeurism

Table of Contents

List of Figures and Tables

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Introduction

According to YouTube, there are "500+ hours of content uploaded every minute" (YouTube, n.d.-b). A growing percentage of this content consists of 'reaction videos', a new type of user-generated content that has been on the rise within this social media platform, in which individuals record themselves reacting to any sort of content. The goal is to capture their spontaneous reactions to the content they are reacting to and sharing them with their audience. In doing so, they are engaging with viewers, increasing their channel's interaction levels and, eventually, capitalising on it. This paper aims to explore the dynamics involved in this type of content, not only from the perspective of the creator but also from the angle of the viewer, to try and understand what leads to the popularity of these videos. Accordingly, the following research questions were formulated:

RQ 1: What are the characteristics of a reaction video?

RQ 2: What factors contribute to the overall success of the reaction genre?

To limit the sample of the analysis and to help better answer these questions, a case study approach was decided upon. Hence, the YouTube channel 'REACT' was chosen to be examined, as it was not only one of the pioneers of the reaction genre, but it also contributed towards making this genre the global phenomenon it currently is. By studying this trend, this study aims to present the field of Media and Communication studies with relevant and unprecedented insight into the motivations that lead viewers to engage with this type of content, contributing to debunk this contemporary audience phenomenon. Additionally, by providing knowledge not only on the genre itself, but on the complex dynamics of YouTube, this study aims to serve as a compass for society to navigate this complicated digital environment.

Correspondingly, the current thesis will reflect the following structure. In the first chapter, the reaction genre will be contextualized. To do so, the platform where it takes place – YouTube, will be scrutinised and the concept of 'reaction video' will be explained. Plus, both the channel 'REACT' and the legal affordances of reaction videos will be introduced

to the reader. The second chapter will situate this research within the academic field by examining previous work done on the subject of analysis. Furthermore, the third chapter will critically engage with the theories and concepts that helped guide this study. In chapter four, methodology is presented and explained. Chapter five presents an overview of the ethical concerns and guidelines that shaped this study. The following chapter, number six, presents the results obtained and further analyses them. Finally, conclusions are drawn, limitations are examined and potential future studies proposed.

1. Contextualizing Reaction Videos

1.1 YouTube

Available in more than 100 countries, YouTube is "much more than a place to go and see viral videos" (Lange, 2014, p.9) and can actually be conceptualised in various ways. In fact, with "more than 5 billion videos watched per day" (Ogden, 2023, n.p.), YouTube is not only actively shaping viewing patterns worldwide but has reached a level comparable to that of traditional media outlets like television and radio. Hence, Cha et al. (2007) describe it as "the world's largest UGC [user generated content] VoD [video on demand] system" (p.1). The website also works as a 'media archive' (Burgess & Green, 2009, p.5) or a 'repository' (Strangelove, 2010, p.19), where content is uploaded, catalogued and then stored. This elaborate digital library allows users to search content with the use of keywords, simultaneously turning it into a search engine. And with 3 billion searches per month (Wagner, 2017, p.56), YouTube has become the world's second largest search engine (Wagner, 2017, p.56). Apart from enabling users to upload and watch content, the website also allows them to share, like, dislike and comment videos, which ultimately turns it into a social media platform. In fact, with more than 2 billion active users a month (Sheperd, 2023, n.p.), YouTube is currently the "world's second-most used social media platform" (Kemp, 2023, n.p.). By giving users a place to consume content but also produce it and discuss it, YouTube becomes a creative hub, where "users are 'co-producers of meaning'" (Burgess & Green, 2009, p.95) and where their "actions leave material traces" (García-Rapp, 2017, p.232), in what Burgess and Green (2009) call

"participatory culture" (p.10). Furthermore, YouTube can even be perceived as a creative enabler or a "patron of collective creativity" (Burgess & Green, 2008, p.1), since it gives the cultural and creative industries a platform and directly impacts the circumstances under which content is created. However, even as a creative patron, "YouTube is a platform for, and an aggregator of, content, but it is not a content producer itself" (Burgess & Green, 2009, p.4). With an incalculable amount of content uploaded every day, the once secondary website is now the biggest video sharing platform in the world (Ceci, 2022). For this reason, YouTube is seen as a powerful media company part of the entertainment industry and a disruptor of existing business models, able to build careers from scratch. Yet, in order to understand how this happened one needs to take a step back and look at the company's evolution. YouTube's journey started in 2005, when it was founded by three former PayPal employees. Originally created as a simples video sharing website, it quickly caught the attention of technology giants like Google, that ended up buying YouTube for an astounding 1.65 billion dollars in 2006. This purchase marked a big shift in YouTube's trajectory as it strongly contributed to the expansion of the company's business models. This shift was materialised with the creation, in 2007, of the 'YouTube Partner Program', that enabled creators to start monetising their videos through advertisement. This new way of generating revenue did not only transform the platform by also actively encouraged content creation. Following this trend, in 2008, a new feature that promoted the professionalization of content creation was introduced – 'YouTube Insight'. Presently known as 'YouTube Analytics', this new tool gave creators the chance to learn more about their audience, by providing them with metrics such as age, location and gender. The next few years, the website developed the already existing possibilities for advertisement, with the implementation of tools like Google's 'AdSense' and for overall revenue generation, with the establishment of the 'Creators Hub' – "offering assistance to creators regarding content planning and audience management" (García-Rapp, 2017, p.232). With these tools available to everyone who might want to use them, the difference between amateurs and professionals seems is becoming increasingly hard to distinguish as "user-generated content on social media platforms has also become a modern form of entertainment" (Geider, 2021, p.4). Hence, according to Burgess and Green (2009) YouTube is an "unstable object" (p.6), a representation of how old and new systems can coexist. Ultimately, the platform as a whole mainly consists of "remixed and intertextual videos" (Bliss & Nansen, 2022, p.3), as users not only create original content but also borrow content from other users as is the case of reaction videos.

1.2 Reaction Video

Nowadays, vlogging is the new video creation trend. Talukdar (2020) defines it as "a video log, which could include any kind of content" (p. 749). These videos usually adopt a conversational form – simple, informal and intimate to a degree – and have become "somewhat emblematic of YouTube's user-created content" (Burgess & Green, 2009, p.43). Within the vlogging category, a new genre seems to be on the rise – reaction videos.

Reaction videos are self-recorded videos showing one or more individuals reacting to an "outside stimulus" (Kiseki, 2020, n.p.), usually some sort of media content. The reaction, "a behaviour, a feeling or an action that is a direct result of something else" (*reaction*, n.d.) is usually said to be genuine and emotional and its intensity should vary according to the content being reacted to. Bliss (2022) perceives this genre as a direct evolution of the so-called 'reaction GIF', "a short, silent, looping and untitled moving image" (n.p.). However, the origins of the reaction video genre seem to date back to a more distant past.

Traditional media outlets like television and radio have been capitalising on people's reactions for long. In 1947, radio show 'Candid Microphone' started playing practical jokes on listeners and airing their reactions. Later, similar television formats like 'Candid Camera', 'Whose Line Is It Anyway?' and 'Kids Say the Darndest Things', started broadcasting people's reactions to bizarre situations and practical jokes which eventually "set the industry standard for capturing individuals in unguarded moments using an unobtrusive camera" (Clissold, 2004, p.33). This type of content would later be directly connected to the creation of the 'reality tv' genre, as it values genuine and relatable content. Later, in the early 80's, the element of reaction was also incorporated in Japan's variety show scene. This fusion began with the show 'Naruhodo! The World' where celebrities could be heard reacting to on-screen events. Given the success of the format, producers decided to transition this format to video reactions by including celebrities' live reactions to content in a small box usually positioned in the corner of the screen. However, the use of reactions would be taken to another level with the debut of the British television show 'Gogglebox' in 2013. By simply featuring anonymous people sitting in their own homes watching television, the show highlighted reactions as its focal point. At the same time, on internet's most famous video sharing platform, YouTube (Ceci, 2022), reaction videos were also gaining notoriety. In 2006, a video titled "Nintendo Sixty-

FOOOOOOOOOOUR" that showed two kids opening Christmas presents, went viral. Yet, it was the kids' over-the-top excitement for receiving a Nintendo console seemed to captivate the YouTube community's attention, starting an outpour of user-generated videos reacting to it. Later that same year, another video was responsible for generating a noteworthy number of videos of people reacting to it – "Scary Maze Game". The video consists of a mock-up computer game that at some point by the sudden appearance of a zombie aims to scare the viewer. In this case, a big percentage of the videos produced using the clip were of adults pranking children with the goal of obtaining an honest and exaggerated reaction from them. However, it would be in the following year, 2007, that "one of the best-known shock videos in history" (Diebelius, 2017, n.p.) would go viral. "2 Girls 1 Cup" is the trailer for an explicit pornographic movie. The clip's grotesque and extreme fetishist nature sent shock waves through YouTube's community, making it go viral and originating thousands of videos of people reacting to it, since "it was unwatchable, and yet it had to be watched" (Anderson, 2011, n.p.). This paradoxid situation emphasized the role that reaction videos started to play for their audience, allowing them to "experience a dangerous thrill without having to encounter it directly" (Anderson, 2011, n.p.). Thus, through the use of these videos, audiences behave as described in Tomkins' affects theory, "desiring to maximize their positive feelings and minimize their negative ones" (American Psychological Association, n.d.). Additionally, creators understood that by displaying extreme reactions they were most likely increasing the success metrics of their videos, as "spectacularity implies the capacity to generate attention" (Nielsen & Petersen, 2021, p.124). Besides the characteristics of the video chosen, deciding to pick an already viral video to react to has also proven to be favourable in increasing the success rate of a reaction video, as YouTube's algorithm will most likely promote it through the 'suggested' feature.

Generally speaking, reaction videos can be labelled as diverse, relatable and authentic as they aim to "establish communicative connections to people" (Lange, 2009, p.71) and, therefore, become "videos of affinity" (Lange, 2009). Ultimately, these videos are "meant for anybody and everybody, or possibly nobody—not addressed to anyone in particular—or perhaps only vaguely addressed to 'the YouTube community'" (Wesch, 2009, p.21).

1.3 REACT

The current thesis aims to thoroughly examine the genre of 'reaction videos' on YouTube. However, due to the vast nature of the platform, this would only be possible by narrowing the sample used. Hence, this research will be based on the analysis of YouTube channel 'REACT'.

In June 2007, American brothers Benny and Rafi Fine created a YouTube channel titled 'TheFineBros'. In the following years the brothers would change the name of the channel to 'Fine Brothers Entertainment' before eventually setting on the name 'FBE'. At first the channel mainly hosted humorous sketches and video series produced by the pair. However, after a while the brothers started producing and posting reaction videos. This type of content would eventually start to draw attention to the channel and quickly its success became notable. The favourable outcome of the reaction videos posted led the brothers to begin investing more time and effort into producing the content, ultimately resulting in the creation of the reaction video series 'Kids React' – where children were recording reacting to viral videos. The videos got so successful that the Fine brothers started producing other similar series such as 'Teens React', 'Elders React' and 'Adults React', in what would become known as the 'React' format. In doing so, they became a reference for the genre with some considering that they "pioneered the art form as we know it with their signature 'React' video series" (Rolli, 2017, n.p.). In fact, their channel is recognised as the "first react channel on YouTube" (Xu, 2022, n.p.).

Throughout the early 2010's the channel was the main reference for reaction videos on the platform with videos like "Kids React to Gay Marriage" and "TEENS REACT TO GANGNAM STYLE" reaching over 46 million and 35 million views respectively (NeoReach, 2022, n.p.). This success can be attributed to two key aspects. The first one refers to the type of content is being used as reaction material in these videos. 'FBE''s videos include a wide range of content such as viral videos, trending topics or sensitive/controversial subjects. By using content that is already extremely successful or topics that are known to attract a lot of attention, the channel intentionally feeds off of the existing momentum. The second one refers to the format established by the 'FBE' channel. The videos are professionally recorded, produced and edited which contrasts with the usually amateur nature of reaction videos. Furthermore, their 'React' series

maintains a similar structure throughout the different categories – an intro, the actual viewing of the content and a segment titled 'question time'. Even if having different characteristics one can easily view a 'Kids React' video and an 'Elders React' video, for example, and recognise they are both part of 'FBE''s 'React' series. Another key factor that contributes to the success of their videos is the fact that for the most part the channel works with a recurring cast, divided into the categories of each react series. In doing so, they allow fans to establish connections and develop affinity towards these cast members, ensuring 'brand' loyalty.

"Having established their dominance over the reaction video format" (Hern, 2016, n.p.), in 2015 the Fine brothers developed and presented an innovative project called 'React World' – "an opportunity for other people to license the "React" brand (…) in exchange for some percent of the revenue generated by content using the license" (Green, 2016, n.p.). However, what began as an avant-garde business plan, praised by YouTube's VP of content partnerships at the time (Spangler, 2021), quickly backfired. Together with the announcement of the project, the brothers filed for trademark protection on the term "React" with the U.S. Patent & Trademark Office. If approved, it would mean that all content posted under the genre 'React' would have to be licensed or would be taken down. The controversial news quickly spread through the YouTube community that immediately came together to disapprove of the move, as it alleges "that reaction videos long predate the React format" (Hern, 2016, n.p.). The backlash received was so damming for 'FBE', that the brothers were forced to withdrawal the request and issue a statement apologising, since they were losing "10,000 subscribers an hour" (Yin-Poole, 2016, n.p.). Witnessing the fall of their empire the brothers decided to leave their own media company, and subsequently their YouTube channel. Likewise, and in an attempt to dissociate the channel from the brothers, in 2020, a rebranding changed the company's name to 'REACT MEDIA' and the YouTube's channel name to 'REACT'. More recently, 'REACT MEDIA' was acquired by 'ELECTRIC MONSTER MEDIA', "a newly formed digital media roll-up company" (Spangler, 2021, n.p.). With this purchase, and with the help of the subsidiary agency 'LITTLE MONSTER MEDIA', whose goal is to combine "industry-leading best practices, deep analytics data mining, production support, creative strategy consultation and over a decade of experience" (Little Monster Media, n.d.), the company is expected to not only fully recover from the controversy but thrive in the media field.

Despite all these setbacks, 'REACT MEDIA' is doing remarkably well, with "44 million cross platform subscribers" (React Media, n.d.) and more than "1 billion minutes watched monthly" (React Media, n.d.) across channels. Similarly, the 'REACT' YouTube channel is still amongst the giants of YouTube, with a combined total of "13 billion views" (REACT, n.d.) and an astounding "20 million subscribers" (REACT, n.d.). Also present in TikTok, Snapchat, Twitter, Instagram and Facebook, the channel receives an approximate "22,000,000 monthly views" (Electric Monster Media, n.d.), showing that it is still a relevant actor in "giving context to culture" (Electric Monster Media, n.d.).

1.4 Legal Framework

Reaction videos can take many formats. For the most part, nowadays, videos will show not only the reactor but also the content being reacted to, either wholly or partially. In fact, a significant percentage of videos, like the format produced by 'REACT', features a split screen, where the work is shown on one side and the person's immediate response to it is shown on the other. Accordingly, because these videos include content belonging to other people, copyright infringement is an impending issue.

Copyright refers to "the legal right to control all use of an original work (...) for a particular period of time" (*copyright*, n.d.). In 1886, the Berne Convention was held in order to safeguard literary and artistic works. Later, in 1996, and because of the revolution in technology, under the same Convention, members signed the World Intellectual Property Organization Treaty (WIPO), an agreement aimed at providing the "legal protection and remedies that were appropriate for copyright issues in the digital age" (Vogele, 2017, p.607). Subsequently, in order to implement the treaty, and as one of its signatories, the United States of America ratified the Digital Millennium Copyright Act, commonly known as DMCA.

According to the DMCA, copyright protection is by definition ensured for all "original works of authorship" that are "independently created by the author" and "have at least some minimal degree of creativity" (Vogele, 2017, p.600). This minimum level of creativity means that "a work may be original even though it closely resembles other works so long as the similarity is fortuitous, not the result of copying", since "originality does not signify novelty" (Vogele, 2017, p.600). Accordingly, to allege a copyright

infringement an individual only has to prove the ownership of the work and its originality. Nevertheless, the law also foresees exceptions and because of that, another set of regulations named 'Fair Use' was created. Fair use is "perhaps the most significant limitation on a copyright owner's exclusive rights" (Stim, n.d.). The possibility for this limitation in the owners' rights is ultimately decided by a court under a case-to-case approach and is determined according to a multitude of factors. The aforementioned legislation, however, is only valid for the United States, as each region operates under different regulations. Notwithstanding, they are perhaps the most relevant rules for the entertainment industry, since a substantial number of technology giants operate in the country, like YouTube.

YouTube has been amidst controversy concerning copyright, as some authors argue the platform "prefers concord over conflict" (Clay, 2011, p.220) and has since developed various mechanisms to deal with this issue. One of these tools is 'Webform', an online form provided by YouTube that allows users to expose allege copyright infringement on their content (YouTube, n.d.-a). Furthermore, the platform also provides users with the 'Copyright Match Tool', a system that allows users with already existing copyright claims on their content to find reuploads of those same videos within the platform (YouTube, n.d.-a). For both of these tools, YouTube takes the video down and issues a strike on the creator who posted them. Furthermore, if a creator collects more than three strikes within 90 days, YouTube will terminate not only the account responsible for publishing the video, but also any associated channels (YouTube, n.d.-a). Besides allowing users to report content, YouTube has its own tool for identifying copyright infringements – 'Content ID'. The "digital fingerprinting system", allows copyright owners to upload their content and then "scans videos uploaded to YouTube for matches of that content" (YouTube, n.d.-a). If found, YouTube can "track, monetize, or block" content, depending on what the plaintiff decides, but a copyright strike will not be issued (YouTube, n.d.-a). Besides all these actions within the platform, content owners can also officially submit a request to DMCA, which will then notify YouTube and initiate the legal process. After receiving a DMCA takedown notice, the platform will not only remove the content but also issue a strike on the creator. However, "the DMCA does not require copyright strikes (…) they are part of YouTube's aggressive internal policy to prevent rampant copyright infringement" (Vogele, 2017, p.608-609). In fact, for many users and subscribers of the platform, YouTube's approach to the copyright case is part of a "heavily abused system

because it is extremely easy for copyright owners to take down allegedly infringing material from a website using DMCA notifications, even if that material is not actually infringing at all" (Vogele, 2017, p.609).

Whether covered by fair use or not, reaction videos have been receiving so much attention and generating so much profit that they have become a threat to the original content owners, including big corporates. As of now, YouTube represents "both a business (...) and a cultural resource co-created by its users" (Burgess & Green, 2009, p.35) and its future will ultimately depend on how well the platform is able to "manage and balance the tensions between advertising, content and copyright" (McDonald, 2009, p.403).

2. Literature Review

YouTube's relevance in today's society is undeniable. This influence stems not only from its immensity, but also from its ability to disrupt conventional social mechanisms, creating new ways to communicate and, therefore, actively shaping society. A lot has been written about YouTube as a platform in the academic community, however, upon some research one can easily identify a shortcoming – the lack of literature on its genres, particularly on some of the most recent ones. This is the case of reaction videos, a noteworthy genre of YouTube vlogging and one of the most successful types of user-generated content in the platform. One of the most relevant pieces of work on the topic is the 2011 New York Times article "Watching People Watching People Watching" by Sam Anderson, as it was one of the first articles ever on the topic and provided an exhaustive overview on the video genre, including its history. Anderson (2011) argued that "watching a reaction video is a way of vicariously recapturing primary experience" (n.p.) and that this played a crucial part in the success of the genre. Following Anderson's 2011 article, the genre started gaining more attention with multiple authors writing on it (Werner 2012; Kim 2016; Skelton 2018; Bliss and Nansen 2022). According to Kim (2016) "reaction videos are a vernacular form of visual production where people use a webcam to record themselves while watching certain media content" (p.333). This type of content can, however, also be perceived as "a form of inter-media", as it operates "in-between media text and media reception; in-between narrative and sensation; in-between authenticity and performativity; and in-between entertainment and resource" (Bliss &

Nansen, 2022, p.1). Nevertheless, despite how you perceive them and despite all the different formats within the genre, reaction videos have this "sameness" (Anderson, 2011, n.p.) that is unique to them and that has turned them into the phenomenon they are nowadays. Hence, it is no surprise that the internet is full of articles promoting the genre, giving creators tips to produce them and advertising the type of success and revenue the genre can create (Podcastle Team 2022; NeoReach 2022; Riverside.fm 2023). Whether of academic importance or not, the number of published articles speaks to the relevance of the genre itself.

However, reaction videos have also been at the centre stage of controversy, sparking a complex debate on the issue of copyright and eventually permeating the academic community. With opinions divided between the creators side and the copyright owners one, a lot has been written on this matter, both from the legal perspective and from the entertainment point of view. Vogele's 2017 article "Where's The Fair Use?", as the name indicates, questions the current application of fair use and challenges YouTube's policies, deeming the platform as "ill-equipped to handle this ever-expanding online media" (Vogele, 2017, p.631) and its practices as "aggressive" (Vogele, 2017, p.609). On the same note, Bailey (2016) recognises the current turning point for YouTube, as the platform "has gone from being sued by big media companies to being a big media company in its own right" (n.p.). As copyright has become a real and impending concern for creators of this genre, the author goes even further and provides suggestions for creators to avoid this issue, such as "get permission if possible", "attribute clearly", "use clips" and "focus on your reaction" (Bailey, 2016, n.p.).

Besides being discussed as a genre, reaction videos are also researched for their role in creating online 'celebrities' (Marshall 2014; Abidin 2020) and for their active contribution in fan practices, particularly within the K-Pop community (Oh 2017; Lorenzana 2022), as "reaction videos are like havens of exchanged knowledge and emotions among fans" (Magoncia, 2014, p.29). Similarly to these studies, academics have also been producing articles on the affordances of reaction videos within areas like porn (Bliss, 2022) and music (McDaniel, 2021).

Furthermore, a different type of studies have also been conducted concerning reaction videos – neurological studies. As the popularity of these videos has been on the rise, so

has the interest to find out why. Experts point the success of the videos to something called ‘mirror neurons’, a type of cells that “enable us to automatically simulate other people's experiences. Thus, when we see someone doing an action that is joyful, we might share the joy they experience because we know what it feels like to rock out to music ourselves” (Aziz-Zadeh, 2018, n.p.). Similarly, Palladino (2016) argues that the videos provide the viewer with “a two-fold experience: we feel satisfied because we know the emotions being conveyed in the video, and we bond with the reactor because we can share their emotions” (n.p.). Likewise, authors have also been connecting reaction videos to the study of human emotions (Werner 2012; Warren-Crow 2016; Schankweiler 2020). As a matter of fact, according to Peres and Musse (2021) who use reaction videos as tools to study emotional responses, this type of content “facilitates and approximates the process of exposure of the reaction actors in a potential real-world scenario, without ethical and behavioral restrictions” (n.p.), making it a great method for this type of studies.

Given their relevance and popularity, reaction videos have become an inseparable part of YouTube and have been featured in a multitude of studies concerning both the platform and user-generated content in general (Burgess and Green 2008, 2009; Susarla et al. 2012; Xu et al. 2016; Holland 2017). Besides, given their success, reaction videos are also seen as an “independent attention economy having its own circuits of production and consumption between reactors as providers and YouTube audiences as consumers” (Kim, 2016, p.335) which has placed them as central in studies regarding labour and attention economy theories (Kim 2016; García-Rapp 2017; McDaniel 2021; Lorenzana 2022).

Ultimately, because of their novelty, reaction videos still remain highly unexplored by the academic community. Aiming to fill this research gap, the current thesis aims to not only dissect the topic but also provide unprecedented account of the reasons for its success and the overall sentiment towards these videos.

3. Theoretical Framework

3.1 Uses and Gratifications Theory

It is not possible to analyse the phenomenon of reaction videos on YouTube without theorising on the reasons why individuals choose to watch them in the first place. Accordingly, the current paper will utilize the Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) to further examine this genre. UGT is a mass communications theory formulated in the 1970's by sociologist Elihu Katz and theorist Jay G. Blumler, who wanted to understand the power audiences had over the media. The theory is defined as a study of:

> (1) the social and psychological origins of (2) needs, which generate (3) expectations of (4) the mass media or other sources, which lead to (5) differential patterns of media exposure (or engagement in other activities), resulting in (6) need gratifications and (7) other consequences, perhaps mostly unintended ones. (Katz et al., 1973, p.510)

Up until then, the academic community believed that audiences were a passive and disengaged group of individuals that were influenced by the media. By proposing the UGT, Blumler and Katz defied this idea and suggested that the audience is instead "active, discerning, and motivated in their media use" (Felci, 2021). By stopping to think "in terms of what the media do to people and substitute it for the idea of what people do with the media" (Halloran, 1970, as cited in Hodkinson, 2017, p.116), researchers were able to not only identify why people choose a certain media but also what the results of that choice are. Amongst the main reasons for choosing a given media channel, McQuail et al. (1972) identified the following:

> 'Diversion': a short-term escape or emotional release, enabling suspension of everyday routines and problems. 'Personal relationships': a substitute for face-to-face social companionship, a facilitator of relationships or a source of community belonging. 'Personal identity': a resource for the development or reinforcement of personal values, meanings and a sense of one's place in the world. 'Surveillance': a source of knowledge, information and engagement with the world. (as cited in Hodkinson, 2017, p.116)

These same motivations can be applied to the genre of reaction videos, particularly those of YouTube channel 'REACT', as one can argue that as forms of entertainment, reaction videos fulfil needs of diversion. Moreover, users can also fulfil the need for personal relationships through the possibility to suggest videos for reaction, the opportunity to develop affinity towards 'REACT''s recurring cast, the capability to discuss with other users in the comment section and the ability to share the video with friends and family. Additionally, by watching people react to relevant, and sometimes controversial themes, individuals can situate themselves regarding the topic and either relate or dissociate from others, which fulfils their possible need for personal identity. And finally, individuals can keep track of current world events, such as politics or simply the latest music trends, which might meet their need for surveillance.

The aforementioned motives or needs, can also be referred to as '*gratifications sought',* that refer to the fulfilment that viewers expect to obtain from the use of a given media channel (Felci, 2021). Additionally, '*gratifications obtained'* concern the fulfilment viewers experience by the use of a particular media channel (Felci, 2021). Hence, when media use corresponds to or surpasses the gratifications sought, it leads to recurrent use of that same media (Felci, 2021). For example, a YouTube user's needs for diversion can be met through the consumption of a reaction video, as it provides an emotional release and a break from reality. If this was the case, chances are that in the future this same user will be returning to the platform searching for more reaction videos. Katz et al. (1973) argue that the fulfilment of an individual's needs can be met through: "media content", "exposure to the media *per se*" and "the social context that typifies the situation of exposure" (p.514). Likewise, the same example can be analysed through this model – the user was looking for a diversion from life (media content), they connected to the YouTube app to pass time (exposure to the media *per se*) and enjoyed some alone time while watching a reaction video on the platform (social context of exposure). Ultimately, because this individual's needs were met, they are most likely to actively make the decision to return to that same content in the future. It is using this particular angle of UGT that the current study will be developed, particularly during the application of methodology. More specifically, UGT will be used to guide the conduction of the focus group. To do so, participants will be asked about the types of needs that a content like reaction videos could possibly fulfil for them.

As the digital landscape is constantly evolving, the "cutting-edge theoretical approach" of Uses and Gratifications has had to adapt alongside (Ruggiero, 2000, p.27). Newhagen and Rafaeli (1996) argue that this approach is key to understand "Internet's chameleon-like character", as it "lays out a taxonomy of what goes on in cyberspace" (p.11). What's more, for Ruggiero (2000) UGT models must expand in order to accommodate the variables of "interactivity, demassification, hypertextuality and asynchroneity" (p.29) introduced by this new digital era we live in. In the particular case of YouTube, where users effortlessly alternate between disseminating content and being receivers of content themselves, the perception of the audience as an active participant seems to be more accurate than ever. For Davidson et al. (2010) users access YouTube for a variety of reasons such as "to watch a single video that they found elsewhere (direct navigation), to find specific videos around a topic (search and goal-oriented browse), or to just be entertained by content that they find interesting" (p.293). Simultaneously, besides fulfilling user's needs through its content, YouTube also gives users the ability to use the platform for social purposes, through the sharing and commenting features, which testifies to the complex nature of this media channel. Studies show that users choose YouTube to fulfil needs of "social interaction, escape, interpersonal utility, co-viewing, convenient information-seeking and convenient entertainment" (Haridakis & Hanson, 2009). Nevertheless, because YouTube is known for being a source of user-generated content, the platform can also be categorised as a part of reality entertainment. Plus, since reaction videos show unscripted human reactions and interactions, they too can be considered part of the reality genre. Therefore, it becomes important to also analyse the needs fulfilled by reality tv, which are: "social interaction, companionship, reality entertainment, voyeurism, habitual pass time and relaxation" (Papacharissi & Mendelson, 2007). By examining both YouTube and Reality Tv, it becomes clear that what they have in common are attributes of social nature, which match one of the main principles of UGT, the assumption that "social and psychological factors guide, filter, or mediate behavior" (Rubin, 2009, p.167). Besides these social factors, psychological traits like the aforementioned voyeurism, are also identified as gratifications obtained through the use of reality entertainment. In fact, "voyeurism used in media can be traced back to reality television" (Su, 2012, p.12). Moreover, according to Nabi et al. (2006), voyeurism seems to be an important factor when evaluating the gratification obtained from the consumption of both reality and fictional content. And because reaction videos are directly connected

to reality tv, voyeurism becomes of great importance to the current study and its relation to reaction videos will be further explored in the following section.

3.2 Mediated Voyeurism

The rapid and constant evolution of technology has created a world where glancing at other's lives has become an integral part of society, prompting the development of concepts like '*publicly private*' and '*privately public*' (Lange, 2008). This new era of what Marshall (2014) calls '*public intimacy*' is only possible due to the level of exposure that social media networks enable, as in this ecosystem information is '*public-by-default*' and '*private-through-effort*' (boyd, 2011). One of the great contributors to the wide spread of personal information in the form of user-generated videos is YouTube. Through the platform, users are invited to broadcast their lives and themselves, as its slogan 'Broadcast Yourself' indicates. In the case of reaction videos, users are publicly sharing their reactions, taking a moment that would otherwise be considered private and turning it into a public display. For this reason, reaction videos have been associated with some sort of '*cyber-voyeurism*' (Micalizzi, 2014). According to Rodgers (2020), this "type of voyeurism scratches an itch" (n.p.) because "we get to experience the dynamism of the human condition from the comfort of our office chair" (n.p.). Nevertheless, this eagerness to watch others may be seen as "a disturbing anxiety, an unhealthy and inauthentic relationship with others" (Hill, 2009, n.p.), especially when it can be classified as a voyeuristic desire.

Generally speaking, voyeurism is nothing but "a tendency, not necessarily of prurient nature, to observe something without the knowledge of others" (Micalizzi, 2014, p.196), however, the term is usually associated with 'voyeuristic disorder', a form of paraphilia that consists of "watching an unsuspecting person who is disrobing, naked, or engaged in sexual activity" (Brown, 2021, n.p.). Despite this negative connotation associated with the term 'voyeurism', when it comes to audience behaviour, according to Su (2012), it is simply "a behavior which is non-sexual, unaware, and personal in the world of multi-media" (p.8). To help distinguish this curiosity for others from the standard sexual deviance, author Clay Calvert created the concept of "mediated voyeurism":

> the consumption of revealing images of and information about others' apparently real and unguarded lives, often yet not always for purposes of entertainment but

> frequently at the expense of privacy and discourse, through the means of the mass media and Internet. (2000, p.2-3)

This concept, far from the sphere of mental disorders, aims to embody the "full range of our natural curiosities", that has become an "inescapable component of our society" (Blazer, 2006, p.391). Calvert (2000) also categorized voyeuristic media content, dividing it into: "(1) video verité voyeurism, (2) reconstruction voyeurism, (3) tell-all/show-all voyeurism, and (4) sexual voyeurism" (p.4). Despite the relevance of all of these categories for the media and communications field, the current paper will primarily focus on the concept of "video verité voyeurism" as it concerns "unrehearsed, unscripted moments of real life played out before, and captured by, a video camera" (Calvert, 2000, p.5), the exact same characteristics of a reaction video. Accordingly, the voyeurism associated to reaction videos shares the same attributes as 'video verité voyeurism' – "a relatively new form of mass-mediated, nonfiction voyeurism" (Calvert, 2000, p.6).

Nevertheless, in order for mediated voyeurism to exist, there needs to be people willing to put themselves out on display, in what de Laat (2008) labelled as "mediated exhibitionism" (p.62). In the case of YouTube channel 'REACT', one can argue that all the individuals appearing in the reaction videos posted by the channel are a willing part of this exhibitionism. Adding to the fact that these actors are voluntarily putting themselves out in the digital world, they are also keeping the interaction unequal, as only the audience has access to them and they don't have access to their audience. In doing so, they are enforcing the power relations present in voyeurism as they are "keeping the gaze one-sided" (Baruh, 2007, p.49) and, therefore, empowering their voyeur audience. These power relations are part of what Whitaker (1999) calls the '*participatory panopticon*' - a "form of consensual submission to surveillance" (Andrejevic, 2006, p.405) - where the spectator fulfils their sensation-seeking needs and the creators profit from attaining them. To further boost their audience's engagement, producers, namely the ones responsible for creating reaction videos, resort to a multitude of techniques to provide appealing content. These techniques involve, for example, the careful choice of content cast reacts to, and post-production editing, that enables producers to choose the reactions used in the final video and to emphasize those same reactions. All of this while maintaining a seemingly raw, unrehearsed and untouched content – the true appeal of the reaction genre.

Ultimately, by continuously feeding their audience this unscripted content that once was considered private, YouTube channels like 'REACT' are bringing "flâneur and voyeur" closer and simultaneously nurturing a "symbiotic relationship" between the two, one that is sustaining a "multibillion-dollar industry" (boyd, 2011, p.505).

4. Methodology

For every research there are a number of procedures carried out in order to obtain and analyse information on that topic. These procedures are what we formally recognise as methodology. However, "methodology is not a value in itself" (Krippendorff, 2004, p.21) but rather an instrument to help guide the research process. Methodology is in fact, a complex plan outlined by the researcher to answer the established research questions. For the current research, two questions were formulated: (RQ1) 'What are the characteristics of a reaction video?' and (RQ2) 'What factors contribute to the overall success of the reaction genre?'. When analysing these two questions one can easily perceive their qualitative nature, as both of them focus on exploring and explaining the phenomenon of reaction videos on YouTube rather than quantifying or validating it. For that reason, the current study will build on a qualitative methodological approach, particularly through the use of a qualitative content analysis and the conduction of a focus group.

Qualitative research is "an umbrella term used to describe ways of studying perceptions, experiences or behaviors through their verbal or visual expressions, actions or writings" (Salmons, 2016, p.3), and because of the subjective nature of this type of methodology, the results it produces are non-numerical (Pathak et al., 2013). By focusing on experiences and meaning-making, qualitative research is founded on the conviction that reality is based on the different perceptions each individual has (Wilson et al., 2021). This type of attitude is part of the "intellectual maps and models" (Brennen, 2017, p.8) that researchers use to guide them in the research process, also known as research paradigms.

According to Rehman and Alharthi (2016), a research paradigm is "a basic belief system and theoretical framework with assumptions about 1) ontology, 2) epistemology, 3) methodology and 4) methods" (p.51). Ontology concerns how the world is perceived by

the researcher. Epistemology concerns knowledge and its limits. And methodology and methods concern the ways through which knowledge is acquired (Brennen, 2017).

In terms of ontology, the current study follows the approach of relativism. According to this approach "standards of reasoning, and procedures of justification are products of differing conventions and frameworks of assessment" (Baghramian & Carter, 2020, n.p.). In other words, knowledge is dependent on context and cannot be perceived as absolute. Accordingly, rather than accepting a 'universal truth', the current paper aims to analyse and understand the sentiment towards the reaction video genre. Furthermore, because it aims to "understand social phenomena in their context" (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016, p.56), the current study follows an interpretivist epistemological approach. Interpretivism perceives reality as a social construction and views knowledge as subjective, deriving from meaning and influenced by context (Pizam & Mansfeld, 2000, p.337). In the case of reaction videos, their meaning is created by both the context in which they are produced but also by the individuals that consume them. Nevertheless, the choice of a qualitative methodological approach allows not only for meanings to be created but also for context to be considered when seeking knowledge. This approach will be further developed in the following sections.

4.1. Content Analysis

With the current paper focusing on a social phenomenon like the reaction video genre, it is crucial that the methods used are able to encompass both the complexity and the subjectiveness of such a topic. For this reason, and in order to answer the first research question – 'What are the characteristics of a reaction video?', the first method used will be a qualitative content analysis.

Qualitative content analysis is a methodological approach that was introduced in the 1960's and that can be defined as an "intellectual process of categorizing qualitative textual data into clusters of similar entities, or conceptual categories, to identify consistent patterns and relationships between variables or themes" (Given, 2008, p.120). What's more, Schreier (2012) characterises qualitative content analysis as "interpretive, naturalistic, situational, reflexive, (...), case-oriented and emphatic on validity" (p.21). By helping the researcher narrow down the amount of information gathered, this method allows for meanings to be derived and conclusions to be extracted. In fact, Mayring

(2000) argues that this approach maintains some of the attributes of a quantitative analysis while applying them to a qualitative sample of study. However, this method does more than "merely counting words or extracting objective content from texts to examine meanings", it allows for the researcher to "understand social reality in a subjective but scientific manner" (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009, p.308).

Nevertheless, despite helping the researcher reduce the data and quantify a qualitative sample, this method, like any other, would be insufficient to cover the vastness of the content available in the digital landscape, particularly on YouTube. For this reason and given the fact that this study aims to dissect a specific genre of videos, the current paper will use a case study approach. A case study allows the researcher to "explore and investigate contemporary real-life phenomenon through detailed contextual analysis of a limited number of events or conditions, and their relationships" (Zainal, 2007, p.1-2). By reducing the size of the sample collected, this approach allows for an in-depth comprehension of the topic, that can be seen as "empirical completeness and natural wholeness" (Given, 2008, p.69). In this particular case, and because of its "specific position within the larger population" (Given, 2008, p.69), the case being studied is that of YouTube channel 'REACT' – a giant in the reaction video genre within the platform.

To gather data for the content analysis, a sample of 4 videos from the channel was created. However, since conducting a focus group requires intensive planning, preparation and time-consuming analysis, the number of videos included in the sample was affected by the size and time limitations of this study. The videos chosen all belong to the video series 'React': 'Kids React', 'Teens React', 'Parents React' and 'Elders React'. The reason for the choice of these 4 particular segments, is that they represent the distinct generational extremities and, therefore, they add generational value to the analysis. By analysing videos featuring such a diverse group of people, the analysis is enriched. Despite being a relatively small sample, because the videos chosen all share an identifiable common structure and since reaction videos display a certain "sameness" to them (Anderson, 2011, n.p.), one can argue that it is a sufficient sample. Overall, by choosing a sample so diverse in terms of content and of line-up, the analysis carried out will provide an intersecting and more accurate scrutiny of the genre and, therefore, of its characteristics.

Furthermore, the choice of each video was based on the number of views it has. In this case, the videos chosen are the most viewed in their segment. One could argue that instead of using the number of views as a determining factor in the choice of the videos, the dates when the videos were posted would be a better criterion. However, when analysing the most viewed content of the channel one can definitely identify a pattern – the most watched videos are not the most recently posted ones, in fact they all go back to at least 5 years ago. Plus, it is only by analysing the most watched videos that it becomes possible to identify the common denominators for their unmistakable success.

The next step towards analysing the meaning of the qualitative sample was the establishment of a codebook, to not only help with the interpretation of the data but also to guide the process of the content analysis. Also known as a 'coding frame', the codebook "is a structure, a kind of filter through which you view your material" (Schreier, 2012, p.63). This structure consists of main categories, commonly known as codes, that incorporate the main elements that are relevant for the analysis. By defining these codes, the researcher is able to "reduce the variety of meanings in the material to the distinctions specified by these categories" (Schreier, 2012, p.63) which not only helps to narrow the information analysed but also enables the study to focus only on those key elements. Furthermore, the attributes of these codes can vary from specific to broader, depending on the goals of the study. Overall, this process known as 'coding', consists of "identifying potentially interesting events, features, phrases, behaviors, or stages of a process and distinguishing them with labels" (Given, 2008, p.85). For the current research the coding process followed an emergent approach, as categories were "established following some preliminary examination of the data" (Stemler, 2000, p.2). This decision was motivated by the fact that by arising from the data itself, these codes would not only adjust to fit the research and but would also not carry any pre-conceptions or expectations. Hence, the coding book established was the following:

Variable 01. Interactivity

Attributes – This variable concerns the interaction established between the 'REACT' team and their audience.

Variable 02. Profitability

Attributes – This variable concerns the efforts made by the 'REACT' team in order to engage with their audience.

Variable 03. Content

Attributes – This variable concerns the type of content being reacted to in the videos.

Variable 04. Structure

Attributes – This variable concerns the structure of the videos, namely attributes like duration of the video and thematic segments.

Variable 05. Manipulation

Attributes – This variable concerns the possible interference of the producers in the content, namely through their interaction with the cast members and through post-production.

4.2. Focus Group

"Qualitative research gives voice to the participants in the study" (Pathak et al., 2013, p.192). Accordingly, and in order to answer to the second research question – 'What factors contribute to the overall success of the reaction genre?', the second methodological approach that will be used in the current research is the focus group method.

Also called 'group interviewing', this method has been around since the late 1930's, as it was initially used by social scientists to study the social behaviours of individuals. By the 1950's it had become a widely popular marketing tool, used by companies across all industry sectors, but it was not until the 1980's that this method would start to be used in academia (Krueger & Casey, 2015). Nowadays it constitutes a valuable tool to conduct "exploratory research", as it uses "participants' discussion as a form of data collection" (Given, 2008, p.352). Generally speaking, a focus group consists of an "organised discussion with a group of individuals to understand their views and experiences of a project, activity or a topic" (*Focus Groups*, n.d.). Hence, because of the experimental nature of the discussions that focus groups encourage, this method produces qualitative

data. The choice to conduct a focus group derives from the researcher's needs to not only get insight on behaviour and the factors that influence it but also to explore perceptions about a specific topic, in this case reaction videos.

On that account, a focus group was held the 12th of May in Malmö University's Orkanen Library. For this purpose, a meeting room was previously arranged - a private, comfortable and neutral environment. In order to recruit participants, a standard message was conveyed into a local group for international students living in Malmö. In doing so, the researcher aimed to gather a homogeneous group of participants, as having similar participants can "make it easier for them to share their thoughts and feelings about the research topic" (Given, 2008, p.353), and therefore, increase the chances of having an active exchange. However, there was a restrictive element in the recruitment process – participants needed to be between 24 and 35 years of age. The reason for this is that according to statistical data on YouTube usage, in 2022, the demographic group 24 to 35 years old composed around 20% of the total amount of users, making them YouTube's biggest consumer (Madwar 2022; Global Media Insight 2023; Oberlo n.d.). Ultimately, the focus group counted with 6 participants, from 5 different countries of origin. From this group, 5 of them are students, one of them recently graduated and half of them hold part-time jobs. A more detailed view of this data can be found bellow, in figure 1.

Name (aliases)	Age (years)	Country of Origin	Student/Level	Working
Ibrahim	29	Azerbaijan	Yes/Masters	No
Fatima	25	Azerbaijan	No	Yes/Part-time
Emil	30	Ukraine	Yes/Masters	Yes/Part-time
Josh	25	United States of America	Yes/Masters	No
Max	26	Germany	Yes/Masters	Yes/Part-time
Sofia	25	Italy	Yes/Masters	No

Figure 1: Information on the participants

It is important to note that the aforementioned information is being disclosed with the full knowledge and consent from all the participants. Furthermore, as requested by some of them, all the names provided do not correspond to the participants' real names and are aliases randomly chosen to represent them and to facilitate identifying them during the analysis section. Consent was also requested to not only record the audio of the discussion

but also to reveal its content. Nevertheless, this issue will be further developed in the following section 'Ethics'.

5. Ethics

Like any other member of society, researchers are shaped and influenced both by their own moral compass and by cultural norms. Despite what set of beliefs guides an individual's life, these values must be set aside when conducting research, as researchers must thrive to uphold the highest ethical standards possible. The foundations of research ethics revolve around the basic assumption of 'do no harm'. By agreeing to this principle, researchers agree to "refrain from doing any harm first, before doing any good" (Sivaraman, 2019, p.423). Accordingly, research should be a positive contribution to society and not the cause of harm to any of the people involved in it. To help guide researchers, plenty has been written on research ethics, however, all these recommendations are now at risk of becoming obsolete, as research has never been more focused on the digital than now. In other words, because of its unique features, social research in the digital age raises a whole new set of ethical issues (Salganik, 2018).

Social media provides access to an unprecedent world of information. What's more, social media data can be seen as valuable, easily accessible and generated in real time. Because technology is everywhere and is now a part of daily life, social media has become the perfect place to gather information on the social domain, especially since they have become themselves a mirror for this realm. Plus, these platforms provide researchers with a "publicly available, low-cost and instantaneous technique for collecting substantial amounts of data" (Hookway, 2008, p.92). Therefore, researchers become forced to "rethink established ethical principles of informed consent, privacy and anonymity" (Sugiura et al., 2017, p.185), as new questions arise from the use of these platforms to collect data. Some of these obstacles can be summarised using the '*6 V's*' model: "volume, variety, velocity, veracity, virtue and value" (Williams et al., 2017, p.322) – as these attributes represent the challenges that researchers are faced with when using social media as a source for information gathering.

In the particular case of the current research, YouTube is not only the topic of the research being conducted, but also the singular source of data collection for the conduction of the qualitative content analysis. With using this social media platform, the main ethical concerns are connected to issues of privacy, since "it is problematic for researchers to justify their actions as ethical simply because the data are accessible… The process of evaluating the research ethics cannot be ignored simply because the data are seemingly public" (boyd & Crawford, 2012, p.672). However, nowadays social media platforms, like YouTube, explicitly ask for their user's consent when providing third parties with access to their information. This permission is a part of YouTube's policy and can be found under the section 'Licence to Other Users', an indispensable part of the consent users have to sign before they are able to create their accounts (YouTube, 2022). Correspondingly, Townsend and Wallace (2015) argue that "data accessed from open and public online locations (...) presents less ethical issues than data which are found in closed or private online spaces" (p.10). In the specific case of the YouTube channel used for data collection purposes in the current thesis – 'REACT', given that it is a high profile channel and that it purposefully attempts to reach as many users as possible, the issues of anonymity and privacy applicable are not the same as if we were dealing with any ordinary user of the platform. Nevertheless, because the information collected is considered public, other ethical standards still need to be met, namely those concerning intellectual property.

Another possible ethical issue concerning data collection using YouTube is that of consent. It has already been established that the reaction videos analysed are part of a public domain and, therefore, do not require formal consent. Still, the people that appear in these videos, also known as secondary participants, must also be considered. A secondary participant is "someone who was not initially designated as a primary participant in a study, but about whom information is gathered" (Given, 2008, p.804). However, even if not having given formal consent for the use of these videos, one can argue that by willingly agreeing to participate in them, these intervenients were aware of their public circulation and, therefore, of any possible ulterior uses.

Finally, with the conduction of a focus group another ethical issue arises, that of participant consent. When actively engaging a human subject – "a living individual about whom a researcher obtains (1) data through intervention or interaction with the individual

or (2) identifiable private information" (University of Washington, n.d.), compliance becomes a key element. Not only do researchers have to ask for a participant's consent, but this consent needs to be voluntary and informed. With this being said, before the start of the focus group, all participants were asked for their consent to not only record the audio of our conversation, but also to use all of the information provided (for academic purposes only). Additionally, the participants were informed of the nature of the study, as well as its purposes and implications. Since some of the participants did not feel comfortable with using their real names, it was agreed that aliases would be used to protect their identities. It is also important to mention that participants were informed that they could withdraw their consent at any time. Nevertheless, a copy of the current paper will be addressed to each one of the participants in order to ensure the veracity and integrity of the information provided.

6. Presentation and Analysis of Results

The current chapter will present an overview of the obtained results and a complete analysis of them.

6.1. Content Analysis

The first section of the analysis will concern the qualitative content analysis that was performed using the 4 most watched videos of the video series 'React' – a segment that belongs to the YouTube channel 'REACT'. By analysing different video series, the researcher aims to obtain a completer and more truthful sample of what a reaction video really is.

6.1.1. 'Kids React'

The first video analysed is "Kids React to Gay Marriage", referred to from now on as 'video 1'. The video, almost 16 minutes long, has been posted under the section 'Kids React' 9 years ago, and already counts more than 47 million views so far.

The video begins with a disclaimer about its content. In this message, signed by the Fine brothers, the viewers are not only warned about the "sensitive content" they are about to watch but are also informed about the intentions of the video, which are to promote "dialogue and conversation" (REACT, 2013, 0:01). The structure of the video is the following: in the first part the kids are shown a set of videos and then, in a segment called 'question time', they are asked about what they just saw.

In the first video shown, the kids can see a flash mob marriage proposal made by one man to another. As the video unfolds, younger kids aged 5,7 and 9, can be seen trying to make sense of what they are seeing, with some of them visibly confused. Whereas older kids aged 10 to 13 that quickly realised what the video was about, can be seen cheering the couple on. As the second video plays out – another marriage proposal between people of the same sex, younger kids can be seen asking more questions and trying to comprehend what is being displayed. Throughout this first part of the video, the so called 'reaction' part, kids can be heard expressing both their confusion, with questions like "how?" and expressions like "that's crazy", and their support, with words like "cute" and "adorable". Older kids quickly responded positively to the video by saying things like "ok, they are gay… but it's ok" (REACT, 2013, 1:14) or "that's what I want to see a lot! Gay and lesbian people shouldn't be hiding!" (REACT, 2013, 3:28). While younger kids had to go through an initial stage of confusion and even some repulse to be able to positively engage with the topic. In fact, only one child expressed negative feelings all throughout the video.

For the second part of the video, 'question time', producers began quizzing the children on the topic. While the discussion progresses, additional information on the topic is shown as a footnote. Producers started by asking "What did both those videos have happen in them?" (REACT, 2013, 3:37), to prompt the kids to describe what they just watched using their own words. Followed by the question "How did the videos make you feel?" (REACT, 2013, 3:58), to encourage the kids to express their feelings and thoughts on the videos. Then, producers asked the kids how they think other people would react to someone being gay, before adding that some people were "upset" by this. The following questions asked concerned the meaning of being gay, its reasons and the possibility, or not, to reverse someone's sexual orientation.

Soon after, the producers turn their attention on the topic of gay marriage, questioning the kids about their thoughts on this topic and providing them with an overview of the current state of gay marriage within their country, the United States. All the kids, except the youngest, showed disbelief and disapproved of the illegality of gay marriage in most states, some even comparing the topic to racism, slavery and gender inequality issues. Producers then move on to contextualise this issue worldwide, explaining that "in some places in the world you can even be put in jail if you're gay. And even worse, in some places you even could be sentenced to death" (REACT, 2013, 8:32), to what the kids expressed heightened feelings of anger, frustration, sadness and disbelief. Moreover, producers ask the kids to directly address the people that are against same-sex marriage by asking "what would you want to say to the people out there that believe gay marriage shouldn't be allowed?" (REACT, 2013, 13:10). This question can be seen as an explicit attempt by producers to get the kids to engage with their audience, particularly with the part of the audience that is against the LGBTQI+ community, especially since all the kids featured objectively position themselves against people that are 'anti-gay'. Moreover, by positioning themselves against homophobia, the channel is most likely to become popular amongst those who, alike them, are in favour of the LGBTI+ community.

Finally, producers ask the kids to speak directly to those that might be watching that are either openly gay and in a bad place because of that or that are too afraid to position themselves as gay. Once again, the children assertively position themselves in favour of the LGBTQI+ community, speaking words of encouragement, love and acceptance to those belonging to it. Thus, this question can be perceived as a clear effort to have the kids positively engage with the LGBTQI+ community, particularly those that are subscribed to the channel.

Regarding the youngest child, who openly spoke against same-sex marriage stating that "gay is bad for you" (REACT, 2013, 4:03), perhaps because of his young age and his inability to express his feelings towards this topic, his interventions throughout the video are scarce. With this being said, overall, the children reacted positively to same-sex marriage.

The video ends with a message saying “Links in description for more resources and information” (REACT, 2013, 15:54), before thanking the viewer for watching. These links lead viewers to educational content on concepts like ‘sexual orientation’, ‘marriage equality’ and ‘coming out’. Additionally, the links to the original videos shown to the kids are made available in the video description, crediting their creators and, therefore, possibly avoiding copyright issues.

When considering possible manipulation present in the video, for the most part, the children can be seen talking and looking straight into the camera which clearly indicates that they are aware that they are being recorded. Furthermore, throughout the video, whether because they are seen glancing at the producers or because they are being asked suggestive questions, the kids are undoubtedly being conditioned by the production team. Accordingly, on some occasions, kids even give indicators that they are aware of the controversy around the topic of gay marriage, like when one boy states “I feel like I know what kind of topic this is” (REACT, 2013, 2:36) or when one girl reacts to being asked about possible reasons to be ‘anti-gay’ by wearily replying “Oh God” (REACT, 2013, 10:47). Overall, the choice of the content shown to the kids can also be seen as strategic, as being a controversial topic it is more likely to generate more passionate reactions from the kids.

Figure 2: Thumbnail for video 1

Source: REACT (2013)

What’s more, the thumbnail used for the video (see figure 2) represents a clear attempt at ‘clickbait’, by using suggestive images of the kids’ dramatic reactions to the topic in order to incite viewers to click on the video and, therefore generate profit. Ultimately, by choosing content deemed as controversial, the channel is actively trying to increase its views and, eventually, its profit.

6.1.2. ‘Teens React’

The second video analysed, referred from now on as ‘video 2’, is “Teens React to Bullying (Amanda Todd)”. The video, posted 10 years ago on November 18th, 2012, is around 15 minutes long and already has more than 44 million views. Before proceeding to the video, the viewer is faced with a warning from YouTube (see figure 3) regarding the content of the video and the fact that it “may contain suicide or self-harm topics” (REACT, 2012). It is only after the viewer selects the option to proceed that the video starts.

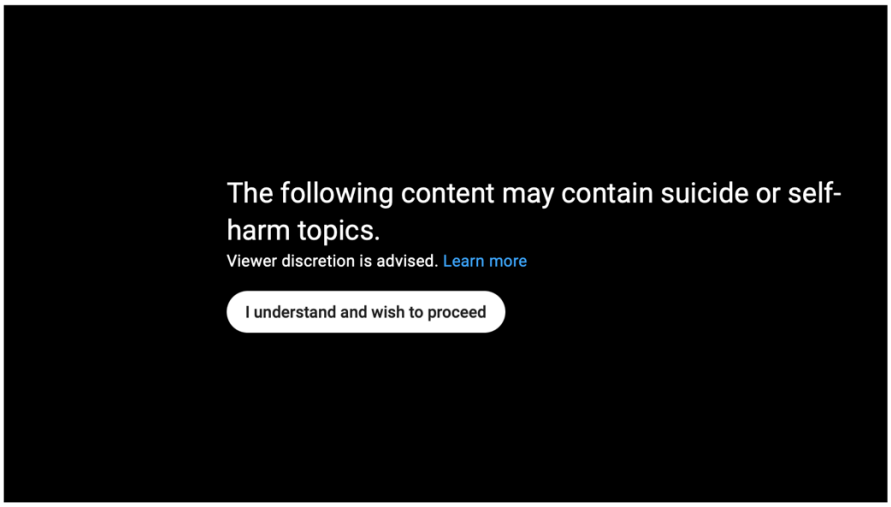

Figure 3: YouTube’s warning present before the video starts

Source: REACT (2012)

Similar to YouTube’s announcement regarding viewer discretion, the video begins with a message from producers addressing the topics of depression and suicide and offering information and help through the links provided in the video description.

The video shown to the teens, aged 15 to 18, is that of Amanda Todd, an American teenage girl that committed suicide after being bullied and harassed online and assaulted at school. In the video Amanda can be seen displaying a series of flashcards telling her story before showing graphic photos of her wrists as a result of self-harm. When shown

Amanda's video, some of the teens recognise her name and story and all of them show emotional responses, with one of the girls visibly upset and in tears.

Besides the audio for the original video being displayed, the video does not have any background music, unlike all the other videos usually posted not only under the 'Teens React' segment but also under the entire video series 'React'. This silence can be interpreted as setting the tone of the video as a serious one. Another change in the structure of the video is the absence of the division between the 'reaction' section and the 'question time' section. In this case, after the end of Amanda Todd's video the questions just naturally flow without the need to insert a particular segment for them. Producers starting by asking the teens if they knew what happened to Amanda and then providing them with information on the case. During the video, the questions asked mainly revolved around the teens views and thoughts on cyberbullying, bullying and possible causes and solutions to this issue. Furthermore, throughout the video, the teens are encouraged to speak directly to the viewers multiple times, with questions like "And if anyone was watching that was a bully and was someone that torments people online, what would you say to them?" (REACT, 2012, 13:00) and "And what would you say to someone who is being bullied or considering suicide and might be watching this?" (REACT, 2012, 13:24). By prompting the teens to directly speak to their audience, it can be argued that the producers are aiming to increase their engagement levels. Moreover, by asking questions like "Do you have any personal experience with being bullied or teased?" (REACT, 2012, 6:56), the producers are actively encouraging the teens to share their own experiences. In doing so, the teens are more likely to be seen as relatable by their audience, which appeals to the viewer's empathetic side and possibly contributes to the growth of viewer loyalty.

Since the video shown to the teens only occupied the first 2 minutes, the video ends up mainly being a discussion rather than a reaction. Nevertheless, the content chosen can be perceived as very engaging with teens, as the girl who appears in the video displayed was only a teenager herself. Plus, issues of bullying, cyberbullying, depression, self-harm and even suicide are commonly associated with teenagers. Ultimately, the choice of Amanda Todd's video can be seen as a strategic one. By choosing not only a very well-known case but also very sensitive topics, the producers are deliberately aiming to increase the popularity of their video, and therefore, its profitability. Plus, the choice of such an intense video can also be seen as a way to obtain more extreme reactions from the teens.

The video ends with an 'endscreen' or 'endslate' – "a YouTube feature that appears in the last 5-20 seconds of a video" and that can be used by creators to "promote videos, playlists, merchandise and external websites" (*End Screen*, n.d.). This can also be considered as a strategy to increase the channel views, the number of subscribers and, once again, the profitability of their business.

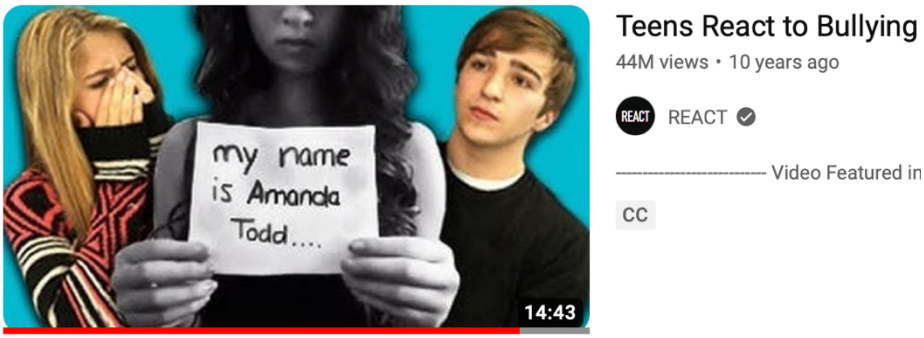

Figure 4: Thumbnail for video 2

Source: REACT (2012)

Finally, when taking a closer look at the thumbnail image used (see figure 4), one can see how producers are trying to manipulate their audience in order to increase views, as the image shows particularly striking reactions from the teens. This manipulation is also present in the questions asked during the video, as they seem to guide the teenagers to discuss controversial topic like cyber-security, to share personal stories and to directly approach their audience.

6.1.3. 'Parents React'

The third video analysed is the 10 minute long "PARENTS REACT TO XXXTENTACION (SAD!, changes, Jocelyn Flores)". Referred to from now on as video 3, the video was posted 5 years ago, on March 22nd, 2018, and already counts more than 30 million views so far. The video begins with a snippet of what some of the reactions throughout the video will be, almost a tease to viewers. After this, an intro plays out introducing the content and identifying the user that requested this particular content.

The video shows adults, categorised by the channel as parents, reacting to music by the rapper XXXTentacion. The adults are shown a total of 4 songs by the artist. While some of them clearly seem to be disliking the music, other can be seen grooving to it, with one of them even recognising the artist. While the first two songs divide the parents, the second set of songs seems to gather more of a positive consensus on the artist. The main attributes commented by the parents seem to be the overall content of the lyrics, the use of explicit language and the rhythm of the songs.

After asking the parents if they knew who the artist was, producers inform them that not only has he been one of the most requested artists to be covered by them, but they have actually already reacted to him in a previous episode. For the next part of the video, the parents are shown their reactions from that first video, generating an almost 'inception-like' moment. In fact, this can be perceived as a reaction video to a reaction video.

Following this moment, producers move on to 'question time', as they start by mentioning that they barely react to content twice on the channel but the demand had been so intense that they eventually decided to repeat it. After justifying their decision, producer then ask the parents why they think people had asked for parents to react to this artist again. The parents answers identify exactly what the reasons might be for the popularity of this video – the high expectations for the shock value and the clear manipulation of stereotypes in a strategic way. The video continues with producers questioning the parents on their views and thoughts regarding XXXTentacion and the controversies associated with the artist. Finally, as a last question the parents are asked if they would be ok with their kids listening to this artist, similarly to what had been done in that previous episode, to what this all parents replied 'yes'.

The video ends with a personalised message from some of the parents featured in the episode to the viewers, thanking them for watching the video, encouraging them to subscribe to the channel and personally greeting a pre-selected number of fans based on their comments on previous videos. This is inserted in an 'endslate', where viewers can find links to directly subscribe to the channel, subscribe to XXXTentacion's channel, and to access more videos from this and other series on the channel.

Overall, when analysing this video one can point out multiple aspects. The first one regards interactivity, as this concept seems to be present throughout the whole video, with multiple mentions to fans' requests. Plus, a message displayed as a footnote informs the viewers that staff members from the channel are replying to fans comments for the first 30 minutes after the release of every video and informs the fans of the schedule for video releases (see figure 5). By promising a personalised interaction with fans, the channels is able to promote their "almost daily" releases and, therefore, increase viewer loyalty and overall profit.

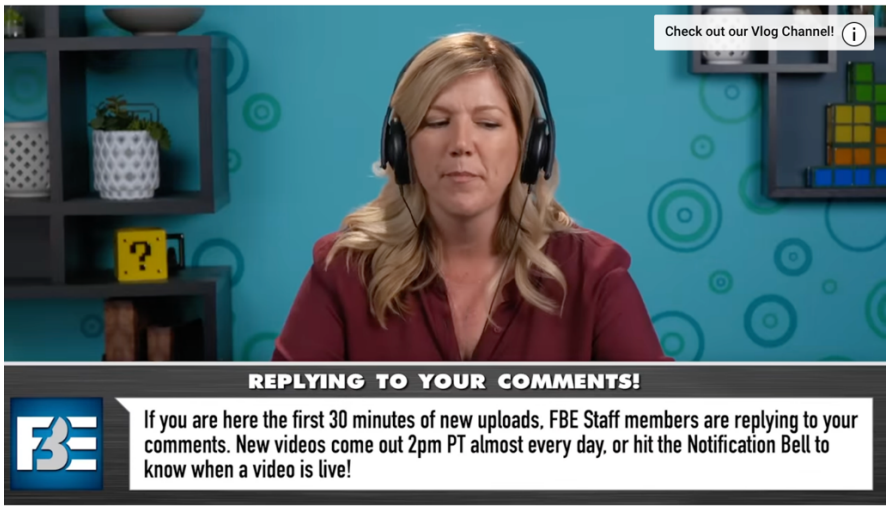

Figure 5: Footnote displayed during video

Source: REACT (2018, 1:00)

The second aspect is the structure of the video, that seems to be carefully planned and professionally executed. In terms of structure the video includes: a teaser, an intro and an 'endslate'. By keeping consistency in the use of this structure throughout the series, producers hope to imprint the brand 'REACT' on their viewers. Another aspect to be considered is that of manipulation, as once more, the thumbnail image for the video seems to be purposefully choosing expressive reactions from the parents in order to captivate users to click on the video. Lastly, by choosing such popular and controversial content, 'REACT' aims to introduce itself in XXXTentacion's momentum and benefit from all the attention generated by the artist.

6.1.4. ‘Elders React’

The last video to be analysed is “ELDERS REACT TO EMINEM”, referred to from now on as ‘video 4’. The 10 minute long video was posted 9 years ago on February 6, 2014, and already has more than 41 million views in total. The video begins with a small intro to the content, including a vintage themed song and mentions to the viewers that requested the content.

In total, the elders are presented with 4 songs from rapper Eminem. Overall, the elders seem to be divided between positive and negative feelings towards Eminem’s music. While factors like the explicit language used, the content of his lyrics and the fact that he is included in the rap genre seem to be the reason for some of the elders to dislike Eminem. Some of them seem to appreciate Eminem’s music, the speed he can rap to and his overall artistry.

As the video plays, producers move onto ‘question time’ and begin to quiz the elders on what they just watched. With some of the questions being about the controversy surrounding Eminem for “being white” or even the fact that some consider him to be the greatest lyricist ever, the producers seem to encourage the elders to take part in these disputed issues. The video ends with a customised ‘endslate’, where elders directly speak to the viewers, not only to thank them for watching but also to encourage them to subscribe to the channel. Additionally, REACT’s other social media platforms are linked and so are other videos from their YouTube channel. Finally, a follow-up video containing deleted scenes from this video is promoted.

The structure of the video seems to consist of an intro, the so called ‘reaction’ part, the segment ‘question time’ and the ‘endslate’. Plus, throughout the video, footnotes with additional information on Eminem are displayed. When analysing all of these elements, one can argue that not only are they enforcing the REACT brand but they are also aiming at portraying the content and more professional.

When analysing the choice of the content for the elders to react to, one can argue that is a strategic choice from producers in order to try and obtain noteworthy reactions from them and, therefore, increase the channel views. The reason for this is that producers are

basing their choice on stereotypes, particularly on the fact that the rap genre is usually associated with younger generations and not with older ones. When choosing Eminem, a rapper known for his controversial music, producers are trying to capitalise on the possible shock value of the reactions. Furthermore, by promoting a follow-up video containing deleted scenes from the current one, producers are trying to benefit from the popularity this first video could have and expand their profitability. This shows just how valuable reactions can truly be.

Another important aspect from this video is the fact that it actively engages with the channel's audience, not only by including the names of the viewers who requested this content but also by engaging the audience at the end of the video with a personalised message from the elders.

Additionally, during the video, a footnote asking viewer's to suggest content for the elders to react to can be seen on display. This is a clear statement from the channel saying that their audience has got full control of their content and that it can actually be influenced by them. In doing so, the channel is not only trying to establish a connection with their audience, but also trying to increase their loyalty towards the channel.

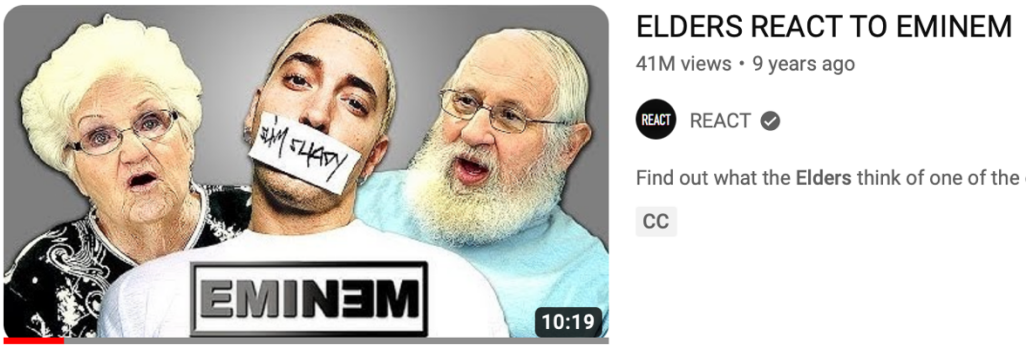

Figure 6: Thumbnail for video 4

Source: REACT (2014)

Finally, and similarly to what happens in the other videos, the thumbnail image used (see figure 6) can be perceived as sensationalistic, as it purposefully depicts dramatic reactions from the video.

6.1.5. Analysing the Four Videos

In order to conduct an overall analysis of the four videos, it is crucial to guide it through the five pre-established codes: interactivity, profitability, content, structure and manipulation. Concerning REACT's interactivity, when considering all four videos it becomes apparent that on multiple occasions cast members are prompted to directly address their audience, not only thought some of the questions asked by producers but also through pre-recorded messages played in the 'endslate'. Furthermore, by acknowledging the viewers that requested a given content and directly speaking to them, fans are encouraged to have an active and engaging attitude towards the channel.

Regarding profitability, one can argue that 'REACT' directs multiple efforts towards expanding their profit. At least on one occasion, video 3, a footnote can be seen promoting the channel's schedule for the release of new videos. Another key aspect of a business oriented approach adopted by the channel is the use of an 'endslate'. This structural element present in most videos, includes not only the links to REACT's other social media platforms but also to other content present in the channel, an easy and direct way to promote it. Furthermore, pre-recorded messages encouraging fans to subscribe to the channel can also, sometimes, be found in the 'endslate'. By using all of these strategies, the channel is working towards retaining its audience and, therefore, generate more profit.

Analysing the content chosen for the videos, it is possible to identify 3 main factors behind these choices. The first one is popularity. By choosing an already extremely popular artist, music or topic, the chances of the reaction video being successful are automatically increased, as it is possible that it can benefit from YouTube's algorithm and be suggested by the platform. The second one is controversy. By identifying controversial topics or discussions and reacting to them, producers are intentionally looking to benefit from the momentum created around these matters. And finally, the shock value. By using stereotypes to their advantage, producers are intentionally sparking curiosity and interest surrounding the videos, as the bigger the stereotypes, the bigger the potential for noteworthy reactions.

Regarding the structure of the videos, for the most part, it appears to be a consistent one: intro, reaction to the content, 'question time' and 'endslate'. With the exception of the

‘Teens React’ video, because of the type of content it was dealing with, all the other videos contained background music, which definitely adds another layer to the entertainment aspect the videos fulfil, as it keeps the video dynamic. Furthermore, another consistent element in the videos is the presence of footnotes containing additional information, which not only provide the viewers factual information but also serves, sometimes, as a promotional banner. Overall, by displaying a professional and consistent structure the channel aims to strengthen the REACT brand and, eventually, retain more viewers.

Finally, when considering the last code ‘manipulation, and how REACT interferes with the content it posts, one can identify at least 4 main types of interference. The first one concerns the content chosen, as it purposefully is aimed at obtaining the best possible reactions from the cast. The second one, concerns the questions asked by producers, as they are a clear attempt to agitate the video and possibly generate some controversial opinions and reactions from cast members. The third one refers to all the post-production work that is done on the videos. While watching the videos it becomes clear that they have been edited, not only to remove more dull moments but also to allow producers to directly shape the narrative they want the video to tell. In doing this, producers are manipulating the content they post, in an evident effort to increase the channel’s views and its profit. Ultimately, the thumbnails used can be seen as another clear manipulation, as they depict sensationalistic reactions in an attempt to attract more viewers to the videos.

Overall, and particularly in the ‘Parents React’ video, one can see that the cast featured in the videos is almost always the same, which helps to increase the engagement with their audience and to create some sort of familiarity between fans and cast members. Additionally, since all the videos are relatively old, one can argue that the channel has not been able to achieve that type of popularity in recent years and is probably seeing a decline.

6.2. Focus Group

The focus group was initiated by not only having participants introduce themselves to the room but also by the moderator explaining what a focus group consists of. Participants were explained that not only are there no right or wrong answers but they are welcome to

engage each other, as the focus group consists of an open and informal debate. After this brief introduction, participants were asked if they knew what a reaction video was, in order to make sure that all of them would entry the conversation from the same starting point. Since all of them said they were familiar with the concept, the focus group was ready to start.

To begin with, participants were shown an example of a reaction video, in this case, the video chosen to be displayed was "ELDERS REACT TO EMINEM". The choice of this video is based on multiple factors. The first one is that the video is included in the content analysis sample, aforementioned as 'video 4'. This means that the content analysed both by the researcher and the participants is coherent. The second reason for this choice is the length of the video. Since it was important to retain the participants' attention, it was crucial that the video showed was as small as possible – in this case the video is amongst the two smallest videos out of the four. Additionally, and since both videos were the same length, the choice was ultimately made according to which video had the highest number of views.

After showing the participants the video, the discussion began. Overall, a total of 6 open-ended questions were asked. After revealing to participants that the video already has more than 41 million views, the first question asked was 'Why do you think this is such a popular video?'. To this question, participants gave 5 possible reasons:

- The fact that the video is in English, which obviously helps it reach a broader audience
- The fact that the artist being reacted to is already an extremely famous one, which can attract a lot of attention to the video
- The fact that this artist is known to be controversial, which obviously increases the chances of people having a particular opinion formed about him and, therefore, wanting to hear other people either agree or disagree with it
- The generational divide that characterises this video – having older people react to music that is, generally, associated with a younger generation
- The overall entertaining aspect of the video, as it sparks curiosity and can be perceived as amusing or even "funny"

The second question asked was ‘Would you normally watch or be interested in watching reaction videos? Why? Or why not?’. To this question all participants, except one, replied they usually would be interested in watching a reaction video. As for the person that replied no, this answer was still not necessarily a negative one, as this person mentioned that although they would not actively look for this type of content, if shown that content, then chances are they would watch it. Amongst the other participants, while all of them mentioned they would be interested in watching a reaction video, only 2 of them stated that they would actively search for this type of video. In this case, both participants mentioned that this would only happen regarding reaction videos to music – videos where someone reacts to their favourite artist’s newest release. Overall, most participants agreed that although in the past, “back in the YouTube days”, they would be “obsessed” with reaction videos, nowadays they find it more convenient to watch smaller types of videos, like the ones featured in social media apps like TikTok or Instagram. However, all of them agreed that if shown a reaction video by a friend, they would be highly interested in watching it.

Inspired by a Uses and Gratifications Theory approach to the topic, the next question asked to participants was ‘What type of needs would you say this content fulfils for you as a viewer?’. The answers provided can be condensed into 7 different types of needs reaction videos are fulfilling for viewers:

- Comedy value
- Quality Content
- Entertainment
- Passing time
- Curiosity
- Cultural differences
- Generational differences

For the next part of the discussion, the questions were directly related to the video shown in the beginning of the session. Hence, the next question asked was ‘Are there any specific parts of the video that you think are relevant or of particular interest?’. Overall, the group

did not seem to find any parts of the video of particular relevance, with exception to one participant that highlighted a specific comment from one of the elders and praised their analogy.

Still regarding this particular video, and considering it is divided in two parts – the reaction part and a segment titled 'question time' – participants were asked 'Which part did you enjoy the most and the least, and why?'. Despite none of the participants actually choosing between the two parts, all of them seemed to agree that not only both of them are interesting but they are also necessary, as they complement each other. Regarding the 'reaction part' of the video, participants qualified it as more "funny", more "memorable" and more "relatable" than part two. As for this second part, 'question time', participants defined it as having more "content" as it works as some sort of "behind the scenes" for the actual reactions. Additionally, some of the participants mentioned that because it contains "provocative" questions, the second part can be seen as being more "profitable", as it is "what drives clicks, what drives comments, what drives ad sales".

Finally, regarding the 'bonus content' mentioned in the video, participants were asked the following question 'Would you be tempted to clink on it? Why?'. To this question, most participants agreed on the fact that although they would not typically choose to click on a 'bonus video', if the content on the first video was good enough or from a specific channel or creator they already like, then they would probably click on it. However, some of the participants seemed to disagree with the others, as according to them "the video has a specific length and they chose probably the most entertaining parts already. So why should I watch the not so entertaining parts?".

As there were no more questions to be asked, the rest of the conversation just flowed amongst the participants as "unlike one-to-one interviews people can build upon one another's responses and come up with ideas they may not have thought of one their own" (*Focus Groups*, n.d.). During this part of the conversation, multiple topics were brought into discussion, such as the preferred type of reaction video and the preferred style. Correspondingly, reactions to music and sports – football in particular, seemed to gather the group's consensus as their favourite types of reactions. As to the style of reaction, most of the participants seemed to prefer a more amateur style of reaction, as they bring an "element of relatability" that "something like super, super heavily produced, like the

React Channel or something similar" cannot bring. As the conversation came to a halt, the moderator concluded the focus group and thanked the participants for their collaboration.

6.3. Overall Analysis

After thoroughly analysing the data collected during both the content analysis and the focus group, it is crucial to combine them in order to adequately provide an overview of the reaction video genre on YouTube.

When watching REACT's videos on YouTube, it becomes evident that the channel is working like a well-oiled machine, actively capitalising on the potential that reaction videos seem to have. To do so, REACT is using cross-promotion techniques to promote not only other content available on the channel but also its presence on other social media platforms. Besides these types of techniques, the channel is also adopting a sensationalistic approach to its business model, by carefully using the post-production phase to select and boost the content chosen, by asking provocative questions to the cast and by choosing highly polarising content to react to. In addition to its controversial tone, not only is the content chosen by producers already extremely successful on its own, but also seems to intentionally engage with stereotypes, increasing the potential shock value of the reactions. As a matter of fact, these attributes, identified through the content analysis, are perfectly aligned with the motivations that focus group participants indicated as crucial to the success of the reaction video genre. Additionally, participants also mentioned the generational divide, the fact the videos are in English and the overall entertaining facet of the video; all attributes present in the content analysis results.

Another important aspect to consider is the relatability of the videos, mentioned multiple times by participants throughout the discussion. Taking REACT's case as an example, the channel is constantly trying to increase its engagement levels with their audience, by interacting with fans on the comment section, by meeting fans' requests and by having the cast directly engage with the audience. Besides all these strategies, by maintaining a permanent cast, the channel allows fans to create ties with its members. Plus, by seemingly creating unscripted videos, REACT aims to present itself as a channel producing relatable content. However, as some of the focus group participants mentioned,

all these attempts might be failing, as by presenting professionalised content, creating a well-established brand and editing its videos to maximise action, REACT is undermining its possibilities of being relatable to viewers. This transition from amateur to professional appears to be part of the cause for the apparent decline the channel seems to be facing, a tendency described by most participants and noticeable in the analysis of the videos. Nevertheless, the channel, as well as the overall reaction video genre, seem to still be a highly relevant and profitable part of YouTube.

In order to analyse the reasons for the success of reaction videos, adopting a Uses and Gratifications approach to the data seems to be the best method. When analysing the responses given by the participants to the question 'What type of needs would you say this content fulfils for you as a viewer?', a total of 7 motivations was registered. Using McQuail et al.'s classification of needs to analyse the answers collected, it is possible to theorise on the types of needs that reaction videos are fulfilling for their viewers.

The results show that while most needs can be categorised as diversion needs ('comedy value', 'quality content', 'entertainment', 'passing time'), the remaining ones can be perceived as both personal identity and surveillance needs ('curiosity', 'cultural differences', 'generational differences'). The reason for this, is the fact that not only are these needs are helping to make "sense of one's place in the world", but they are also "sources of (...) engagement with the world" (McQuail et al., 1972, as cited in Hodkinson, 2017, p.116). Plus, because they meet needs of surveillance, one can argue that reaction videos are simultaneously satisfying a universal and ingrained voyeuristic desire, as they enable viewers to satisfy their curiosity about others and their lives. Following Calvert's categorisations of 'mediated voyeurism', one can position reaction videos as part of the "video verité voyeurism", since they broadcast "apparently real and unguarded" moments of strangers' lives (Calvert, 2000). Additionally, by showing seemingly unscripted and otherwise private emotions, the channel seems to be capitalising on the voyeur's needs to witness '*public intimacy'* (Marshall, 2014). Nevertheless, because the content is created and shared by the ones being observed, one can argue that reaction videos are part of a 'voluntary panopticon', otherwise known as '*participatory panopticon*' (Whitaker, 1999), since they allow the audience to engage in a deliberate, prearranged and voluntary surveillance.

7. Concluding Discussion

After concluding the overall analysis of the data collected, one can use the knowledge acquired to return to the initially proposed research questions and answer them.

Through a critical and transverse analysis of multiple videos from the YouTube channel REACT, it becomes possible to answer the first question - 'what are the characteristics of a reaction video?'. Thus, reaction videos can be characterised as dynamic, highly engaging and extremely relatable videos. Furthermore, they can be of amateur nature – unscripted, spontaneous and organic, or more professionalised – scripted and edited. Overall, they are highly conditioned by the content they use as the basis for the reaction, as this will be key in determining not only the quality of the reactions obtained but also how these reactions will be received by the audience.

Additionally, the results obtained through the conduction of the focus group allow for the second question – 'What factors contribute to the overall success of the reaction genre?' to be answered. The focus group proved to be a key element, not just in understanding the overall sentiment towards the reaction video genre, but also in identifying the possible reasons for it to be a global success. Accordingly, one can argue that reaction videos not only fulfil needs of diversion, such as helping to pass time, providing comical content or simply entertaining the viewer, but they also help viewers engage with the world around them, as they allow for viewers to relate to others and they satisfy surveillance needs. Ultimately, by understanding the needs they are fulfilling, one can finally comprehend what is behind their success.

Overall, because of their significant level of engagement with viewers and their relatability, reaction videos are a highly successful phenomenon, creating careers online and building extremely successful brands like REACT.

As the current thesis explores such relevant and current phenomenon, it not only provides the field with an important overview on the genre of reaction videos, but it also contributes with unprecedented insight to the motivations and attitudes of viewers regarding this type of content. Besides important contributions to the academic field of

Media and Communication Studies, because reaction videos are deeply connected to YouTube and to the concept of user-generated content, the current research can be perceived as a useful tool for society to interpret relevant patterns of content creation and consumption within the current digital age.

Nevertheless, because of its case study approach, this research deals with a limited sample. Hence, future studies could benefit from analysing a larger and more diverse sample, particularly through the use of more than one YouTube channel. Another limitation of the study is the analysis of predominantly older videos due to their higher number of views. Accordingly, it would be of great interest for further studies to not only analyse more recent videos within the genre, but perhaps conduct a juxtaposing comparison between older and newer videos. Additionally, future studies could benefit from further research on the concept of mediated voyeurism, namely on the connection this matter has with concepts like user-generated content, surveillance and surveillance capitalism.

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