Text, metatext, hypertext and subtext YouTube in the culture of re-mediation and remix: a new media study

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Abstract: *This paper aims to discuss new media culture and the influences which new media objects exert on social acts, media and popular culture in their traditional sense. Following the theoretical works such as those of Lev Manovich, Manuel Castells and Albert Barabasi regarding virtual spaces, cultural interfaces, the network society and complex networks, but also those in the traditional media critical apparatus, essential and significant aspects of popular new media objects can be analyzed given their major importance in the emerging new media society.*

The paper describes an analysis model for complex new media systems and objects hosted by the World Wide Web conceived on four levels: text, metatext, hypertext and subtext. The case study aims to analyze the YouTube video-sharing portal as a new media object, according to the latest theories in the field, using traditional sociological methods as well as automated data collection and analysis methods specific to the new media.

Managing to outline several characteristics of this object we could better understand the phenomenon generated around it, the penetration of materials from YouTube towards television, and the status of a veritable anthropologic document the site has.

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I. Introduction

At the beginning of the 21st century we find ourselves in a world conquered by the digital revolution. The PC, a luxury just 15 years ago, has become a commodity, used from a young age. It has become as theoretician Lev Manovich put it, referring to the modern protocomputer – the Universal Turing Machine – a "universal media machine" (Manovich n.d.). By this name we should understand the PC as a support for the re-mediation of old media, the re-mediation that greatly influences what we have come to call the new media.

Connecting to the Internet and accessing the World Wide Web have revolutionized the way in which we communicate, taking our acts of communication towards new paradigms. According to McLuhan, the revolutions of communication technologies bring changes for the whole society, changes noticed only after a considerable period of time, the new media themselves being the generators of these transformations.

To understand more clearly this phenomenon, these changes and the new media objects, we must approach their study at the confluence of cultural and sociological studies whose analysis apparatuses were used for discussing the old media and the study of software systems and complex networks. Moreover, there is a need for new tools of collecting data on such objects, for new analysis paradigms adapted to this field, adapted to these media we make contact with every day without understanding their internal mechanics, their specific dynamics, the way popularity and success are achieved or their real impact on society in a given context as well as over a long period of time.

When a phenomenon as the advent and rapid development of the new media produces such an impact one cannot still discuss it by using intuition alone, using disparate data, irrelevant for it as a whole. Unfortunately, from this point of view there is almost no literature on the field in Romania, the only published book (*New Media* by Dorina Guţu published in 2007) only managing to emphasize the shallowness with which Romanian specialists treat this greatly discussed but seldom understood topic.

Contemporary journalism redirects its specific formats towards the new media as it did in the case of radio or television. Still, in order to create a successful journalistic product in the context of the World Wide Web one need thorough knowledge and understanding of the mechanisms that regulate the presence of new media objects in this virtual network and the dynamics of consumption closely related to this link structure.

New media culture is profoundly different from the old media culture. It is amalgamated, heterogeneous and adhocratic, similar to what Alvin Toffler predicted as being the third wave society. (Toffler, *Al treilea val* 1983)

I.1. The Web and Developing New Media Objects

The evolution of digital technologies and digital culture towards what we now call new media started with the first analog-to-digital conversions. The lower production

costs specific to the digital technology, miniaturization, the unexpected transformation of the computer in a commodity, the vision of people like Tim Berners-Lee, often dubbed "the man who spun the Web", have all concentrated in last decades of the 20th century to produce new media as a result of these circumstances, a result we don't know if it is just another branch of the media or if it predicts a digital reconceptualization of the whole world.

Although as the new media develop, they affect our lives more and more, there are still few initiatives meant to facilitate the understanding of the phenomenon and its implications.

The video and computer game market was closely approaching 7 billion dollars in 2006 (Carr, et al. 2006) and in the same year Europe opened its first clinic for treating video and computer game addiction. Computer games in the role-playing genre or action-adventure genre use virtual realities, virtual personas, avatars, thus immersing the user in a hyperbolized alternate reality. The study of computer games, of cyber-realities and cyber-selves implies using the theory of narratives, psychological theories on creating one's self through symbolic interaction (the theories of Cooley or Mead) applied to the process of creating and developing an avatar in a MMORPG for example (Robinson 2007). Clearly such initiatives must take into consideration software design, network theory etc.

According to a paper by Antonio Giulli and Alessio Signorini, the size of the Web was over 11.5 billion pages at the beginning of 2005 (Giulli and Signorini n.d.) (about the time YouTube was launched). Considering that only YouTube now has over 72 million videos (and implicitly automatically generated pages), we can only imagine the current size of the Web. More important than the size of the Web is its structure. Being the new media support with the fastest development rate (and a media object itself), predicting the structure of the World Wide Web is of utmost importance when trying to study its content, its effects, the languages that develop inside it etc. It was thought that it can be described by the model of random networks until Albert Barabasi proved that it follows the same complex network model that communication networks (like the Internet) or social networks follow.

The inherent implications of this discovery are numerous (especially when designing a system or when trying to discover the cause of success for certain websites), but more importantly, it proves how little we know the field of new media, the way in which new media systems develop and the way they change our perception of reality.

II. Text, metatext, hypertext and subtext

This seemingly pretentious phrase ("text, metatext, hypertext and subtext") finds its justification in describing an analysis model for new media objects part of the World Wide Web together with the socio-cultural phenomena associated with their popularity and use. Each of the four terms refers to a different level of analysis, together defining a wholesome analysis model. In what follows, each of the four terms defining levels of analysis will be explained in greater detail.

II.1. Text

The first level is one that is not characteristic to the new media object, one corresponding to the traditional media studies approach. At this level, text analysis, using of course the concepts related with new media theory, is the main tool used in studying web objects. Starting from semiotic analysis to psycho-analysis and the study of ideology in the text or text system of the analyzed object, the critical apparatus consists of a plethora of tools theorized in critical theory with respect to cultural and media studies.

We will not go into further details with regard to this aspect because it is a well-known one and it bears little novelty in the context of this paper. One cannot help notice the strength of the remix culture in the case o new media culture, this maybe determining success by forwarding a participative paradigm and at the same time a new way of conceiving the media process from the perspective of disassembling the producer-consumer relation with the advent of culture-specific tools in the Web 2.0 paradigm. A series of examples of new media objects belonging to this remix culture are YouTube and Wikipedia as exponents of participative remix, un-automated, creative on the one hand and categories such as feed aggregators, mash-ups which define automated or semi-automated remix on the other hand.

The shortcomings of textual analysis coincide with the fervent criticism brought to the field of media studies in general that is the subjectivity and the speculative nature of textual analysis. the results of such analyses tend to become texts of their own subjected to personal influence.

II.2. Metatext

In the case of this specific differentiation, we will use the term metatext with its meaning related to the World Wide Web that of a series of data grouped under specific tags (title, description, link, category, views, keywords etc.) corresponding to each web page in particular. The primary role of metatext (or metadata) is that of making it easier for search engines to index, to identify as specific as possible each page in a machine-readable format.

The relevance of metatext for the analysis of a new media object is in the fact that these data, being machine-readable can be automatically extracted (data mining) and introduced in a statistical system in order to obtain a mathematical model of the objects in the analyzed new media system. This level is very useful in analyzing big systems to map their structure based on descriptive statistics or to verify some hypotheses using inferential statistics. Also, based on the tags that characterize each object in a system, one can build conceptual hierarchies using the conceptual clustering methods provided by mathematical models like formal concept analysis. Starting from these, one can emphasize internal structures characteristic to user communities (in the case of social networking systems' virtual communities like Hi5 or Facebook) or groups and subgroups of objects. This type of data description can prove to be very useful in social studies.

II.3. Hypertext

By hypertext we refer to a fragment of the text of a new media object (let's say a web page) that links (hyperlinks) to another object (another page). As an analysis level, this aspect corresponds to mapping the context in which the analyzed object is found inside a bigger system (World Wide Web for example) and its internal substructures. Starting from this mapping, one can identify popular pages, describe the way in which an object becomes successful and to what extent the success of an object determines the success of objects linked to it. At this level, the most important theory which also offers the best mathematical models is that of Albert Barabasi. In his best-seller *Linked* he proves that complex networks that are self-organized (from social networks to communication networks like the Internet and virtual networks like the World Wide Web) follow the same laws (power laws, Pareto distributions – "the 80/20 rule") all belonging to the category of scale-free networks. This fact explains the way in which success is not equally distributed, a small part of the objects in such systems accumulating most of the users' attention. Also, at this hypertextual level we can decide through comparing the number of visits of an object, a web page, and the number of other pages that have permalinks to it whether the respective object has the characteristics of a viral development (i.e. the so-called viral promotion or viral marketing or objects of any type –mostly videos- that have a viral circulation through communication technologies such as e-mail or instant messaging systems).

II.4. Subtext/Context

The analysis of subtext can be seen as a final level that sums up and implies extracting some meaning out of the observations made at the previous levels. In the case of big popular systems that are phenomena themselves (Wikipedia, YouTube) or those that are part of a phenomenon (Hi5, Facebook, MySpace) the subtext should hold considerations on social representations, characteristic features of consumption, the identification and self-identification of consumers/users as members of a community, often as members of a subculture hosted in a virtual space. Also, one can discuss the socio-psychological features such a group manifests in the virtual space, producing, consuming and relating to each other via new media objects, and also in real life, in the absence of these new media objects, by reference. A special place at this level is held by the self-definition of the individual in virtual space (depending on the possibilities the community in question offers). This phenomenon is called cyber-selfing and it is most casual in online games like the highly successful MMORPGs, but also online communities (Hi5, Facebook, Shelfari, MySpace) that try to each bring some novelty with regard to the customization options. As a result we can state that at this analysis level, having completed the other levels, we can enter the subtext of the new media object observing the changes it brings with respect to behavior, identity, the feeling of belonging to a group, the degree of inhibition of the individual, of the user. Of course such diagnostics can be considered to be no more than mere speculation, but they can sufficiently isolate behavioral groups or individuals in the context of finding their position as related to a certain new media system or object.

III. Case study: YouTube in the culture of re-mediation and remix

III.1. Video-sharing and the interest for YouTube

Video-sharing is a segment of new media that has developed rapidly over the past two years by means of the global access to larger bandwidth and faster Internet connection through fiber optics. As opposed to traditional television, video-sharing doesn't imply a unidirectional flow from the producer to the consumer but rather a network of interwoven flows between the members of a community who exchange roles, being at times consumers and producers. Making an analogy with the term of self-journalism, one could say these sites could be called self-television. Still, one must not oversee the fact that specialized producers still grab the lion's share, trying to align their marketing strategies, their production tactics and their target in order to make some profit on this uncertain, rapidly developing market.

Probably the most accessed and certainly the best-known such media system is YouTube, launched at the beginning of 2005, hosting at the present over 72 million videos. At the end of 2006 YouTube recorded almost 100 000 unique visitors each day making it into the top 15 websites (source: comScore World Metrix – www.comscore.com), in July 2007 YouTube was among the 10 best-known brands in the U.S. (source: the Nielsen//Netratings Report for July 2007). The success of this immense video repository triggered the birth of many video-sharing sites or similar initiatives. Most of these copy the structure, policies and "way of life" of YouTube, so many of the conclusions of the study of this site as a new media object will be relevant for a large share of the market.

In what follows we will approach the study of this new media object in two ways. Firstly, we will use the analysis apparatus of critical theory adapted to the study of new media objects – close to what Manovich dubbed software studies (Manovich, The Language of New Media 2001)-, employing qualitative methods to describe in detail the internal mechanics, the software system, the user interface, the human-system interaction models and the intra-community social interaction, the possibilities the system offers and the meaning of all these.

In the second part of our case study, we will use descriptive statistics to draw conclusions on the most popular types of videos, on the hierarchy and structure of the over 70 million videos. The data collection methods used will also be specific to new media studies.

III.2. Qualitative approach

III.2.1. Objectives

The analysis below tries to answer the following questions related to the YouTube new media object:

1. What is the model of the user interface and why is it structured in this way?
2. How and why do YouTube users interact with each other?
3. What is the role of administrators in content control?
4. Is YouTube a marketing area for the music and cinema industries?
5. What is the ideological model behind the producer-consumer relation?

III.2.2. Methodology

We use content analysis (of course this also means the analysis of the interface and the whole system design as we actually consider the source code to be the text not only the videos), integrating as we already mentioned the critical apparatus of cultural and media studies with elements of interface and software design analysis.

III.2.3. Analysis

We start with the standard page of a YouTube video. The central element of this is of course the area in which the respective video is visualized. The content itself bears little importance, this being mainly a traditional video sequence. One cannot help notice that we can only access the content through a software application, the web player, emphasizing the role of computerized media, that of re-mediating (Manovich, Alan Kay's Universal Media Machine n.d.) through a software tool that runs on a computer (universal media machine). The interface of this application can be divided into elements belonging to the two strata of the conceptualization of a cultural interface forwarded by Lev Manovich: the cultural layer and the software layer. As an element of the cultural layer, an element which imitates previous generation media machines, we recognize the Play/Pause button characteristic to VCRs or audio cassette players. As an element of the software layer we can consider the slider which allows the user to access the content in any point, digital media being (seemingly) non-sequential as were audio or video cassettes, magnetic tape in general. The Fast Forward and Rewind buttons were elegantly replaced by this much more comfortable slider.

The pages of each video follow the same template varying only through specific information (the number of visits, the title, the uploader's ID, the number of comments, the date the video was added, the category, certain tags etc.) – being actually generated automatically as a result of a query on a database. On the right side of the screen we can see a list of videos considered to be related to the current one. This is one of the key elements that facilitate and encourage navigating from a link to another on Youtube. It is interesting to observe that the system allows a maximum of 30 related videos, an egalitarian policy (normally, some videos would accumulate hundreds even thousands of links) that is a consequence of some software considerations related to the size of the results returned by a query on the system database and loaded on an automatically generated page – a page containing more data will be created and will load slower. It is not in the system's interest that the most viewed pages load the slowest, on the contrary. We can draw an analogy, approaching the cultural layer/software layer paradigm again, with the lists of recommended films on the interior of a video cassette case, containing images and little information. The advantage YouTube has is that success is quantifiable by the number of views, information that determines most of the users to choose a video over another. The software layer consists of the scroll bar that as in any other computer application replaces flipping a page, being already a well-known metaphor for text processors.

Another important area is that of comments which is certainly very suitable for analysis in many sub fields of social and cultural studies. The number of these comments is also a measure of the success of a video, but often the most commented objects are those which start the most controversies in a community.

Despite the fact that the Internet allows us to communicate with anyone anywhere, we often find ourselves communicating locally and not globally through the new technologies. These lists of comments are not actually dialogs over cultural spaces, means of global communication, global topics being generally really hard to find. Following this thought, in fact one of the things that one can accuse YouTube of is localizing consumer specific activities, some videos or comments being really prohibitive, localized because they are not in a widely spread language. In this way, YouTube manages to be a global commodity, consumed in local portions. The cultural and linguistic segregation of the site is a well-known fact for the observers of the phenomenon but less apparent for the common users and also a topic on which the owners refuse to comment. We must mention that given the success of some videos, the menace of spam that can overwhelm the comments becomes imminent.

This is where we can observe the intervention of the YouTube administrators to deactivate comments for certain videos that prove to be veritable magnets for violent language or spam. Being a site where anyone can upload videos (not longer than 10 minutes – an important feature of the system policy that encourages a certain type of ad-hoc productions), the administrators review the videos retroactively in order to ban those that contain explicit nudity, pornography not being one of the owner's (Google) objectives – we can mention that there are similar pornography-oriented sites: PornTube, RedTube, YouPorn, names that are living proof of the strength of the 3-year-old YouTube brand.

Still, the existence of these administrators, these supreme instances that exert the owner's rights, make the YouTube community look less idyllically left-wing, egalitarian, but we'll come back to the ideology behind the YouTube system. Dedicated producers of videos that personalize a channel form a special category and to the interface of their videos a supplementary section is added, similar to the related videos section, the videos by the same author section. The YouTube system thus sustains the emergence of authors that can escape the producer/consumer duality and distinguish themselves by creating successful videos.

But YouTube is also a business and more and more music or cinema producers promote their videos using such channels. A good example of this practice is the most viewed video in the YouTube top, the official Girlfriend video of the American singer Avril Lavigne (approximately 98 million views), uploaded by the production company itself (RCARecords), probably as a part of the marketing strategy for the album of this singer best known for her success with a target audience very similar to that of YouTube (teenagers/youths under 25 years old coming from the urban environments

of western Anglo-American culture, belonging to the techno-urban-grunge-alternative subcultures). So is YouTube a space for ad-hoc productions, or is it being invaded by professional videos, marketing or political campaigns (CNN had a partnership with YouTube to present the presidential debates)?

We haven't discussed one of the most important aspects characteristic to YouTube: the remix culture (for example the already famous Anime Music Videos – AMV- i.e. creating a video for a well-known song using scenes from popular Japanese cartoons, one such video is ranked second with over 97 million views). The beta interface which YouTube will launch soon will allow users to edit online already existing videos in order to create new ones. Again, we are talking about an application that runs on the "universal media machine" that doesn't mimic a cassette player or a VCR but a whole video-editing console. The site celebrates this important direction of remix culture (which was born in the 80s and 90s and may reach it apogee by the ability to customize, remix videos on a site). This is the way in which production becomes easier, more ad-hoc, encouraging the amateur author to compete with the great professional content producers, each time hoping to get those 5 minutes of fame.

Whether or not the promise in the title (YouTube – Broadcast Yourself) that of being a means of expression that YOU, the person usually at the end of the TUBE can use, the promise of offering the consumers the means of media production and diffusion, the promise of being a voice of the oppressed, of those who are not often heard is kept is still a difficult question. Usually home-made video producers are also the biggest YouTube consumers (prosumers), but a considerable number of the most viewed videos are those loaded by record companies or professional producers to promote a new album, a new movie, or a new artist. Seduced by the mirage of success stories (simple videos, not even extraordinarily special that paradoxically hit the top through viral phenomena – for example once the most viewed video with 96 million views is an unprofessional recording of a piece of a standup show), amateur producers turn into avid consumers trying to find the formula for guaranteed success. The socio-psychological profile of those that actually get addicted to YouTube contains of course elements of revolt, counter-cultural buds cultivated in a greenhouse of aspirants to the powerful status of successful media producer with minimal effort and investment, but condemned to be perpetual dilettantes, always part of the hungry consumer group for professionally made videos, well-targeted, well-marketed on YouTube. So a view on ideology, based on French Marxist thought entitles us to believe that the egalitarianism advertised by the new participative media is in fact a great illusion and that spaces for free expression like YouTube do not belong to us but to the hegemony of professional video production and online marketing and that few home-made productions really get to live their success story, most of them lengthening the tail of a Pareto distribution by virtue of the "80/20 rule".

III.3. Quantitative approach

III.3.1. Objectives

This part of the paper is meant to verify some observations, discuss on some descriptive statistics using a data set of about 1000 YouTube videos – the most viewed ones.

A) Data description. We are interested in descriptive statistics and the distribution of data with respect to the number of views (according to the theoretical results of Albert Barabasi on the structure of complex scale-free networks like the Web, the distribution should follow a power law, so a Pareto distribution – the 80/20 rule: 20% of the videos accumulate 80% of the views).

B) Graphic description and classification. We are interested in the percentages of views per category (Music, Entertainment, Comedy, Politics, People and Blogs etc.), the percentages of views per video duration.

III.3.2. Methodology

III.3.2.1. Collecting and managing the data

Because any query on the YouTube database returns a maximum of 1000 results, the sample had to be limited to this size. Because it is almost impossible to generate a query with a maximal number of results that describes a random sample, we chose to use a query for the most viewed videos, thus ensuring the numerical data are sufficiently consistent to test correlations and at the same time the descriptive statistics present a maximum level of interest because they will tell us something about the successful videos on YouTube. Also, we took into consideration the theoretical presupposition that the results follow a power law, as part of a scale-free network, a fact that actually means the data will be sufficient to identify the distribution of the population for any sample size.

To collect the data we used corresponding software tools, namely in the initial phase a web scraper (Screen Scraper) to define a series of rules that were used to automatically extract the data from the HTML source of the query result list for the most viewed videos and from the HTML of a regular YouTube video page. The data gathered was written to a XML file in order to be processed (the dates and numbers had to be reformatted, the video duration had to be computed in seconds) using a short program written in C# and then written to a table in a TXT file. The TXT file was loaded in the statistical software (SPSS).

These are the variable extracted for each video.

YouTube id: the unique identifier of each video in the YouTube database – primary key

User: the name of the user who uploaded the video

Runtime: the duration in second

Views: the number of views

Added: the date the video was uploaded

Comments: the number of comments

Category: the category the video belongs to

III.3.2.2. Data analysis

To analyze the data we will use descriptive statistics to describe the gathered data and visualize them. We will also identify the distribution of the data with respect to the number of views. The data distribution on the YouTube predefined categories, the ratio of comments to views and the distribution of views over video runtime should also prove interesting.

III.3.3. Results evaluation

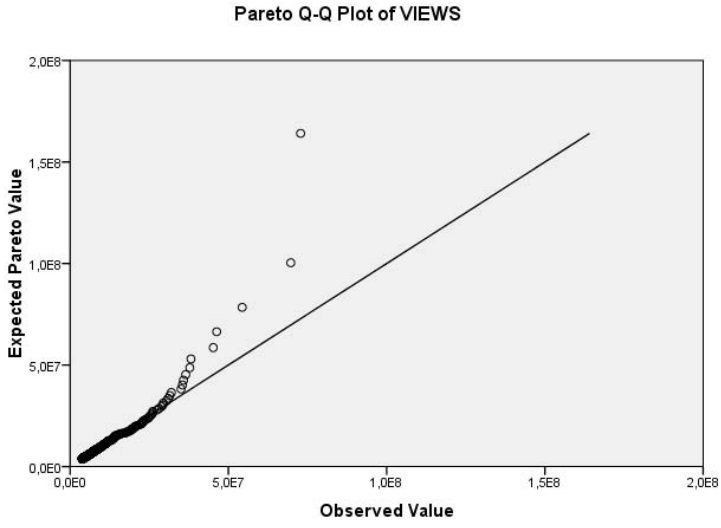
Firstly, we tried to use descriptive statistics to obtain supplementary information on the data set.

A). We tried to find out what the distribution of the Views variable is on the data set.

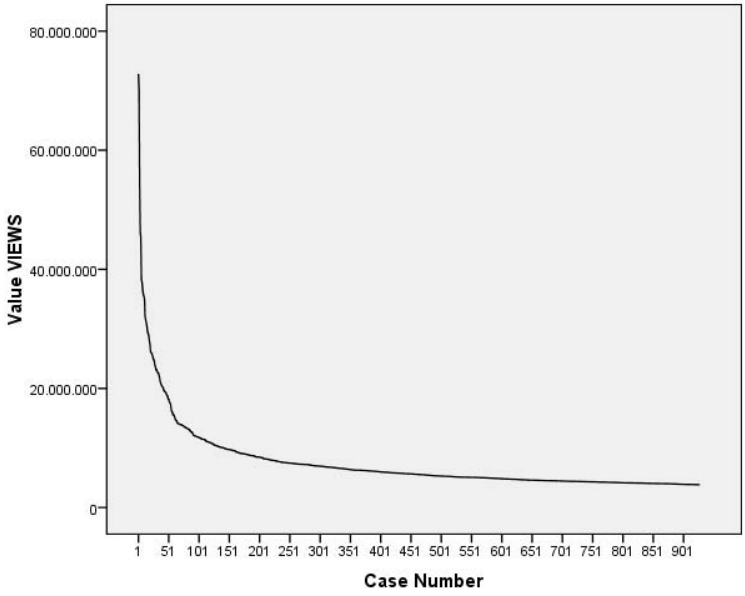
Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
VIEWS	928	3,828,247	72,813,265	7,526,829.92	6,286,777.335
COMMENTS	928	3	225105	10272,95	15222,433
COMPUTED_AGE	928	18	959	429,30	192,930
RUNTIMEs	928	5	1468	219,52	121,123
Valid N (listwise)	928				

We noticed that as we assumed drawing from the theoretical works of Barabasi on complex networks, the distribution of views follows a power law, so a Pareto distribution. We used the Q-Q plot to observe to that extent the gathered data respect the theoretical distribution.



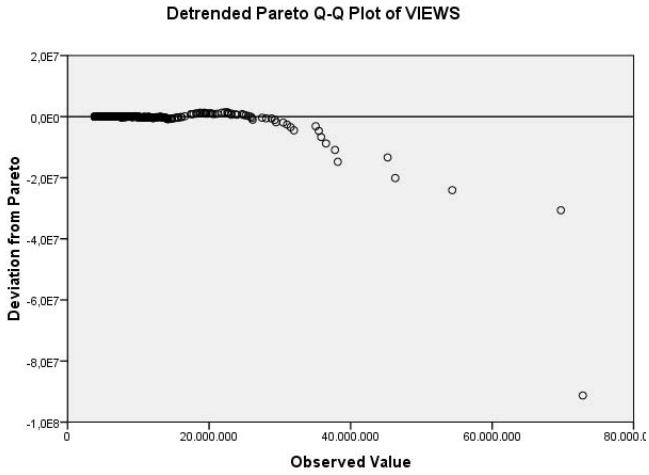
Next, we tried to find out what the distribution of the Views variable is on the data set.



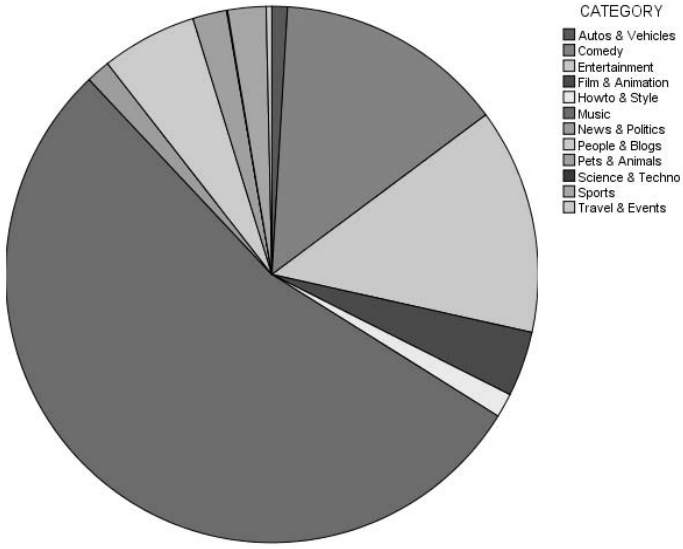
Estimated Distribution Parameters

		VIEWS
Pareto Distribution	Threshold	3,828,247
	Shape	1,943

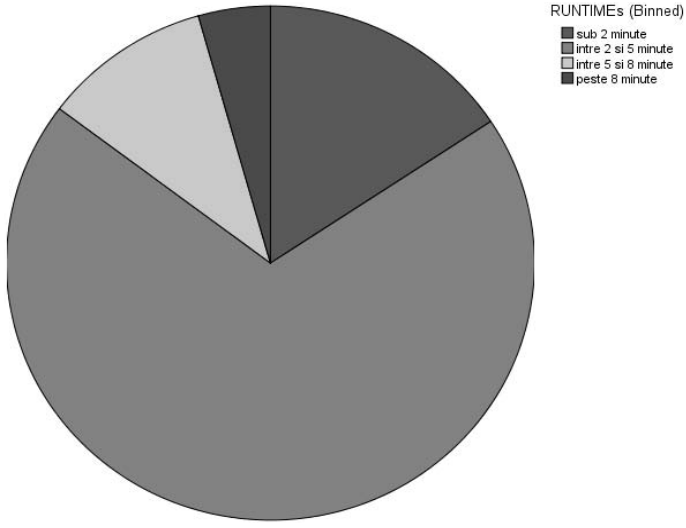
The cases are unweighted.

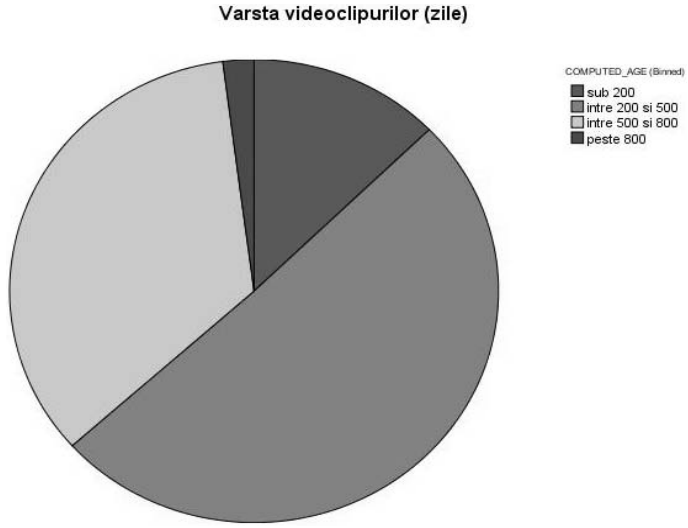


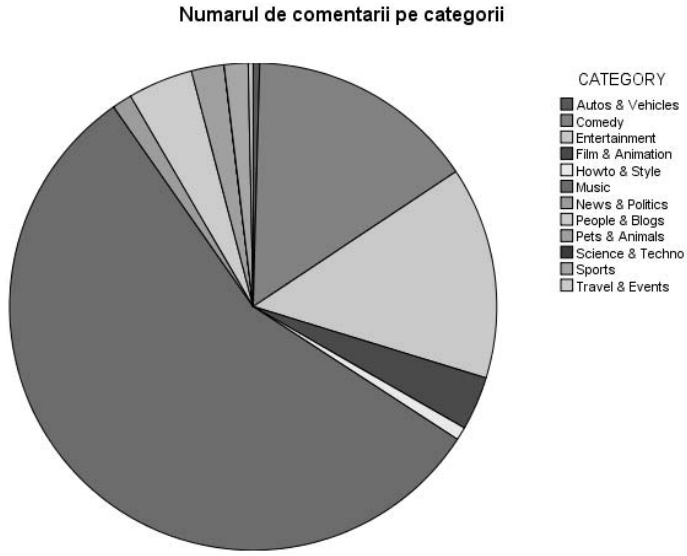
B). Here are next some interesting charts. The one below describes the distribution of views per category.



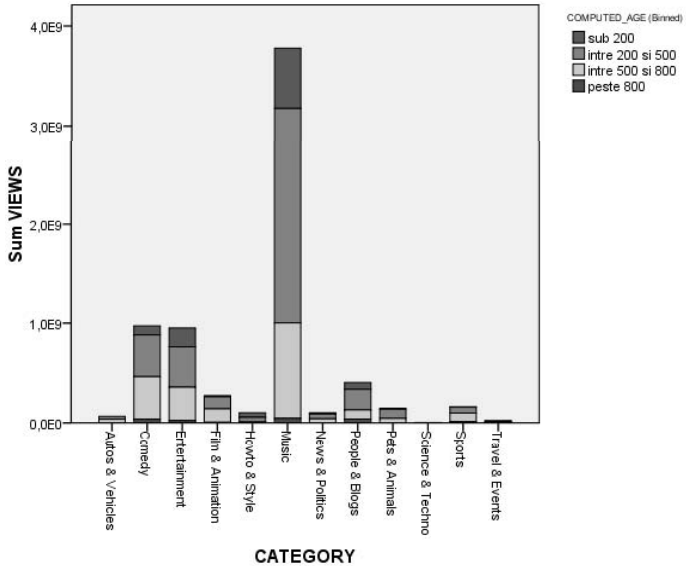
And this one describes the distribution of the total number of views per classes of video runtime. As one could have guessed from the previous chart, most of them have between 2 and 5 minutes.



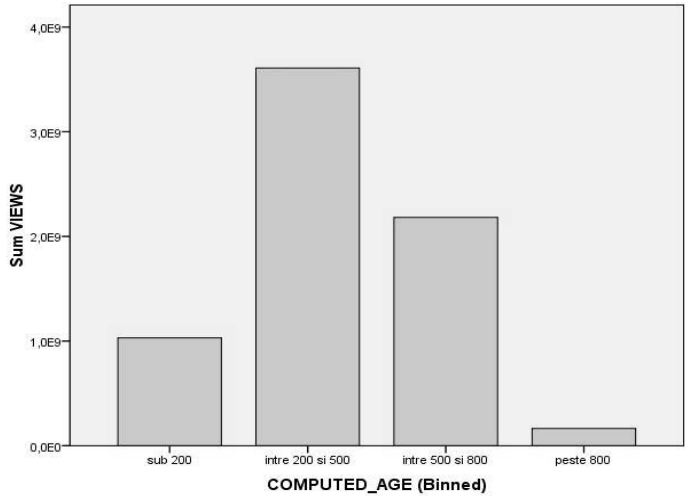


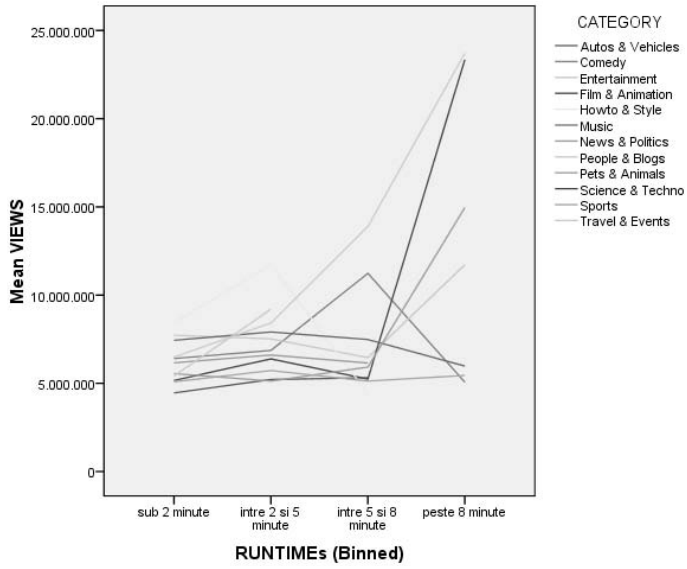


One can easily notice that the distribution of comments is approximately the same as that of the views, so there is evidently a correlation there (which we also tested for).

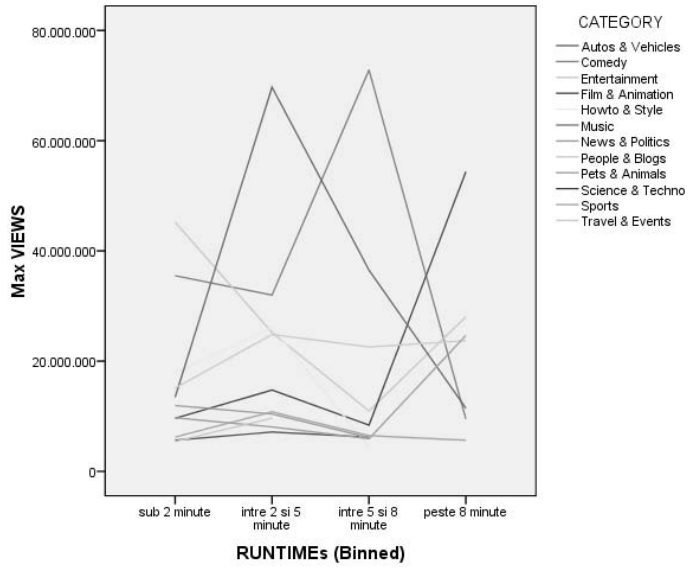


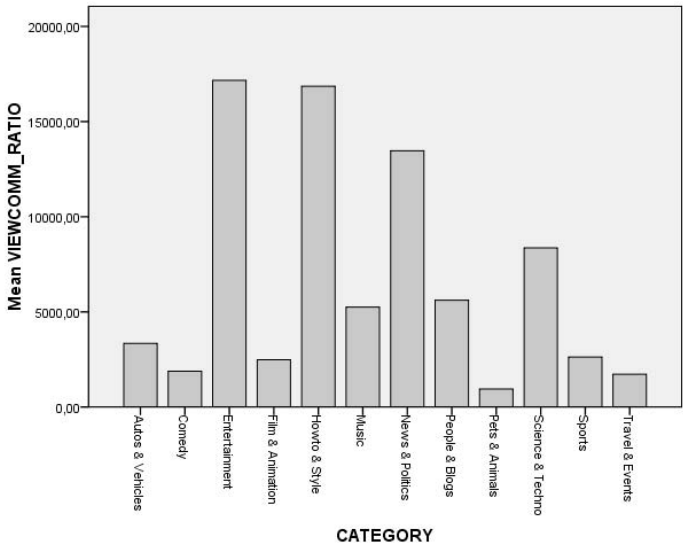
An interesting result is the above chart where one can see that a considerable segment of the most viewed category (Music) is made of videos added in the last year and a half. Such a description will become more interesting in a couple of years when YouTube will be more than 3 years old.



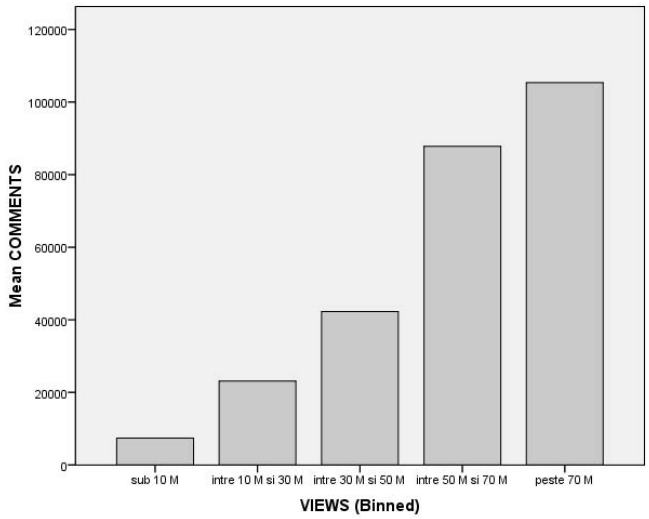


In the above chart we can notice that for categories such as Film & Animation and People & Blogs, users prefer longer videos, observing a rise of the mean of views on the duration segment of over 5 minutes where the most viewed category (Music) decreases. Also let's see the duration segments where the YouTube categories peak.





The ratio views/comments offers a picture of the categories where most of those who watch the video are interested in discussing it with others. As expected, the popular categories (Entertainment) do not generate a lot of talk in proportion with the number of views, given the superficial consumption. But we find that not even News & Politics incites users to communicate with each other. The most commented categories are Pets & Animals, Film & Animation and Comedy. Still the Music category has a relatively good positioning for this ratio given that it is the most popular.



IV. Conclusions

The conclusions to be drawn from this case study range widely. Firstly, having in view the relation of the site with the normal user, one can state that there is very much support for a culture of re-mediation (shows, movie fragments, old cinema, videos form TV, digitally captured and then uploaded on YouTube either because of their entertainment value or because of a symbolic value) and remix (as we explained earlier, users are encouraged to remix already existing videos through new tools the site has available due to the observed general tendencies). If re-mediation is an expression of the Web's libertarianism often confronted with copyright issues, remix is a creative trend encouraged by the site's owners exactly because it promotes consumption.

Having in view the difference between professional producers and amateurs, we can conclude that although the video-sharing space ensured by YouTube is an egalitarian one, the individual video pages respecting the same template, the record companies and professional producers win most of the audience, the exceptions only encouraging amateur producers to look forward to their 5 minutes of fame (**the system being one that follows the 80/20 rule – 20% of videos accumulate 80% of views, true to the phrase "the rich get richer"**).

From the statistical analysis of approximately 1000 videos (the most viewed 1000) one can clearly observe the dominance of the Music category (over 50%) and a dominance of the videos with runtimes between 2 and 5 minutes (75%). The two facts are obviously closely connected, YouTube proving a great taste for the music video culture launched by TV channels such as MTV. This fact offers also some information on the subculture most of the users belong to (youths from the urban environment with rich audio-visual media consumption experience). The Pareto distribution of views confirms the suppositions about the fact that it follows a power law, a pretty common thing for a new media system in the World Wide Web (the unusual part is that the number of links of each page to other pages is limited, thus not allowing for hubs to form and accumulate a gigantic number of links; still there are hubs that accumulate a gigantic number of views, a phenomenon that takes us to the conclusion that YouTube is a site that attracts a lot of links from the rest of the Web, most of the links on the site being internal, we can say that it is built like a "trap").

As a component of everyday life, accessing video-sharing websites and especially accessing YouTube has become as casual (or even more casual in the case of certain age groups) as listening to the radio or watching TV. There are a series of factor that set apart video-sharing sites from televisions (there is also an emergent subcategory of online video-sharing that target the objective of becoming online televisions, but the most successful are those following the YouTube, Metacafe or Trilulilu model

[1] Umwelt, (pl. umwelten) – significant environment (coined by semioticians Jcob von UexKull and Thomas Sebeok)

in contrast with Veoh or LiberTV). The whole existence of YouTube in the network society is a communicational one and it brings with it a series of new mechanisms of creating meaning. The act of transmitting a link to a video is as meaningful to the consumers as is the message of the video itself. The existence of a video, of a message launched in the communicational channels of the network society is characterized by the accumulation of new signification every time it is transmitted from a node to another, integrating into the remix and re-mediation culture from a semiotic point of view. The entertainment consumption in the network, flowing rapidly, always re-mediated and remixed has created very quickly around the individuals around the individuals a series of strongly intersected umwelten[1] because in the end these individuals achieve acts of communication, transmitting significations when sharing a video most often through instant messaging systems. The music video culture penetrates popular culture even more than before, engaging us in offline conversations also. About this dichotomy, we must remark that it has evolved to such extent that more and more TV stations broadcast news about events on the Web in the same way that they do with external news.

By cultivating curiosities (not necessarily the sensational) the video-sharing sites such as YouTube slowly weave a web of hyperreality to which we refer more and more in our daily conversations (especially the age groups that represent the heavy consumers), thus penetrating our everyday life. Our conversations come to be about a video watched the day before as a curiosity, but a video that is already known to the people we interact with (as a result of network communication) thus becoming a good subject for conversation at the group level. Of course this culture which manifests itself at many levels through re-mediation, remix and the creation of hyperealities and virtual realities can be circumscribed by postmodernism, but its existence is profoundly influenced by its development in a network society, close to the meaning of the phrase as coined by Castells.

V. Closing Remarks

In 1979 MTV broadcasted a music video for the first time. The choice made by the now famous TV station was not subtle at all. It was the song *Video Killed the Radio Star* by The Buggles. The effect of broadcasting music videos on this exclusively musical TV station was the exact opposite of what they had anticipated: people kept listening to the radio and the popularity of some songs even grew as people had watched their music videos on MTV.

We keep hearing all kinds of predictions saying that we are rapidly approaching the end of television. It is obvious that as more people have access to greater bandwidth, TV as we know it will change, but it would be risky to predict its death.

Video-sharing sites are part of what the new media theories call the re-mediation phenomenon. If we refer to YouTube as a central node in a new culture of re-mediation and remix, we must consider that remix is a trend started by MTV culture and also only now we begin to experience the reverse loop of re-mediation.

As radio finally had to gain from the popularity of music videos broadcasted by MTV and other TV stations, it is not likely to witness the death of television in our lifetime. The successful videos on YouTube often enter this reversed re-mediation and get on the screens in our living-rooms. Of course, the fact that the TV set will soon be connected to the Internet will change a series of the features of consumption, but the culture of sequential consumption of audio-video products will persist as an essential feature of television as a cultural practice. The option to introduce channels and podcast/vodcast subscriptions reflects consumption habitudes created by traditional television.

Whether the really universal media machine is one of collective consumption (as the TV was in its golden age) or one of private consumption (as the PC has become in our time) is still unknown. Regarding this matter we can surely remember that until recently and even now maybe the PC was thought to cause alienation. If we think that the TV set has now come to be a part of almost every room in our houses, facilitating individual consumption, one can definitely state that this unidirectional flow medium could more likely cause alienation, than the interactive, intensely communicational PC connected to the Internet.

Either way, the penetration of television in the seemingly egalitarian universe of the Internet can only cause us joy in a context where our social discourse is now more than ever based on media references whether we enjoy consumption sequentially, possibly collectively or we take greater pleasure in hypertextual, private consumption.

The study of popular new media systems can reveal the directions taken by certain cultures or subcultures. A study of virtual social networking systems such as Hi5 (which reached 2.5 million users in Romania) can have meaningful results from a sociological point of view. Also, following the growth of articles on Wikipedia on different topics or the success of certain categories, we can try to explain the dynamics of a system that still seems impenetrable by the traditional media analysts.

The strongpoint of the proposed analysis model is its adaptability at each level. For example, at the metatextual level, instead of statistical methods for describing the data set one can use formal concept analysis for a more complete and intuitive hierarchical description of the system. Also, we would like to highlight the introduction of the study of the links networks between the new media objects that make up complex new media systems (the hypertext level).

The subtext (/context) level deals with complex socio-cultural phenomena that take place inside virtual communities, the way in which new media consumption in a specific context leads to specific communication, thought and perception of society. This characteristic is a latent, subtle one, an on-going process, but one that has major effects on the long term as Marshall McLuhan theorized.

The qualitative approach uses two keywords that are specific to new media objects in the Web 2.0 paradigm, re-mediation (as conceptualized by Lev Manovich) and remix, a characteristic of postmodern media culture.

Using quantitative methods for Web research (automatic data collection of large samples), one can identify objects that present certain particularities of success (viral videos for example).

The results concerning successful categories in the online environment describe the turn to entertainment. Still, one has to notice that this entertainment can be formative with respect to our cultural and political life. This case study has considered important to identify the success factor that generates popularity in the YouTube new media system because in this context we can easily track the new directions of media consumption, directions that hold much importance for journalism and communication studies, given the relation they have with popular trends.

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