

How do *Youtubers* Reach a Large Audience?

The Zekiel79 case

¿Cómo los *youtubers* alcanzan una gran difusión?

El caso Zekiel79

Como os *youtubers* atingem um grande público?

O caso Zekiel79

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ABSTRACT

This article investigates and reflects on the process

that makes youtubers achieve great diffusion, which leads us to focus on their media and significant dimension. With this purpose in mind, we analyse Zekiel79's production following the model of hypermedia circulation developed by Carlón (2020), which allows us to understand that the growth of youtubers is not enough to study the poetics of their videos, but at least three levels of circulation of meaning must be addressed: 1) the circulation that occurs in the system that shapes the interactions between the youtuber and the hypermedia communication collective that he or she makes up; 2) the circulation that occurs in the interpenetration relations between this system and its environment; and 3) the circulation that occurs in the intersystemic relations between the mass media and the media supported by the Internet and telephony.

KEYWORDS: *youtuber, YouTube, hypermediatisation, humor, mediatisation.*

RESUMEN

El artículo indaga y reflexiona acerca del proceso que hace que los *youtubers* logren gran difusión, cuestión que lleva a concentrarnos en su dimensión mediática y significativa. A partir de dicho propósito, analizamos la producción de Zekiel79 siguiendo el modelo de la circulación hipermediática elaborado por Carlón (2020), el cual permite comprender que el crecimiento de los *youtubers* no alcanza con estudiar las poéticas de sus videos, sino que deben atenderse al menos a tres niveles de circulación de sentido: 1) la circulación que se da en el sistema que conforma las interacciones entre el *youtuber* y el colectivo de comunicación hipermediática que conforma; 2) la circulación que se da en las relaciones de interpenetración entre dicho sistema y su entorno; y 3) la circulación que se da en las relaciones intersistémicas entre los medios de comunicación masiva y los medios soportados por Internet y la telefonía.

PALABRAS CLAVE: *youtuber*, *YouTube*, *hipermediatización*, *humor*, *mediatización*.

RESUMO

O artigo indaga e reflete sobre o processo que faz com que os *youtubers* consigam uma grande divulgação, questão que nos leva a focar na sua dimensão comunicativa e significativa. Com base nesse propósito, analisamos a produção de Zekiel79 seguindo o modelo de circulação hipermediática desenvolvido por Carlón (2020), para compreender que o crescimento dos *youtubers* não basta com estudar as poéticas de seus vídeos, mas sim entender pelo menos três níveis de circulação de sentido: 1) a circulação que ocorre no sistema que compõe as interações entre o *youtuber* e o coletivo de comunicação hipermediática que integra; 2) a circulação que ocorre nas relações de interpenetração entre esse sistema e seu ambiente; e 3) a circulação que ocorre nas relações intersistêmicas entre os meios de comunicação de massa e os meios de comunicação apoiados na Internet e na telefonia.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: *youtuber*, *YouTube*, *hipermediatização*, *humor*, *mediatização*.

1. YOUTUBERS: THE CONSOLIDATION OF THEIR RELEVANCE ON THE INTERNET

Despite the competition that TikTok has meant, YouTube remains the social media network with the highest engagement. During 2023, it was the second most visited website in the world¹, after Google. Among the most viewed *youtuber* channels are PewPiePie and MrBeast with 111 and 91.9 million subscribers, respectively. There are also many *youtubers* in Latin America, who reach more than 30 million subscriptions, such as Fernanfloo or SoyGermán. With such success, it is understandable that their appearance has caught the attention of the media, the entertainment industry (marketing, for example) and the social sciences. The latter tend to consider that *youtubers* produce moral and sociocultural values that are especially appropriated by children, adolescents and young people, and, consequently, their advent influences the constitution of identity models (Aznar Díaz et al., 2017; Montes-Vozmediano, García-Jiménez & Menor-Sendra, 2018; Pérez Torres, Pastor-Ruiz & Abarrou-Ben-Boubaker, 2018).

How do social sciences define *youtubers*? They are usually defined as young people who regularly upload videos to YouTube and obtain monetary compensation for the views and the number of followers with whom they interact and, in time, form a community over which they have influence (Berzosa, 2017; Hidalgo Marí & Segarra Saavedra, 2017; Hott Corrêa et al., 2019; Rego & Romero Rodríguez, 2016; Regueira, Alonso-Ferreiro & Da-Vila, 2020; Vizcaíno-Verdú, De Casas-Moreno & Aguaded, 2019). Following the user classification proposed by Marsé (2012), *youtubers* would be differentiated from amateur users who do not generate content or aim it at family and friends, and from non-professional users who make tutorials or record particular events. They can also be distinguished from celebrities outside of YouTube who use the network to be in contact with their followers (Ardevol & Márquez, 2017; Díaz, 2017).

Whether explicitly stated or not, most studies start from this notion and analyze the *youtubers* who have the largest number of followers and views. A wide variety of topics are studied regarding them: genres and discursive styles (Chen, Li & Sun, 2018; Montes-Vozmediano, García-Jiménez & Menor-Sendra, 2022), business models (López, 2016; Sánchez Labella-Martín, 2020), influence on different population segments (Aznar Díaz et al. 2019; Conde, Forteza-Martínez & Andrade-Martínez, 2020; Korres-Alonso & Elexpuru-Albizuri, 2022; Gómez Pereda, 2014), roles in education and scientific outreach (Del Pilar, Baptista & Nicolas-Gavilán, 2020; Welbourne & Grant 2015). However, there is a question that has not yet been addressed enough: how does an amateur become a *youtuber*? That is, how does their channel reach a number of followers and views that can surpass that of the mass media?

¹ According to the Alexa ranking, a global positioning system. To learn how it works, see: <https://kinsta.com/es/blog/ranking-alexa/#what-is-alexa-rank>

Our work aims to contribute to the knowledge of this issue from a perspective that addresses the semiotic dimension of *hypermediatization*². To do so, in the following section we will summarize the results of the research studies referring to the issue we intend to address. Then we will present the theoretical framework from which we will conduct our study. In the following sections, we will analyze the case of Zekiel79, the channel of an Argentine *youtuber* who, being an amateur, became professional and achieved international acknowledgement. From this analysis we will be able to generate hypotheses about the dynamics of meaning that occur in the configuration of *youtubers* and how their groups of followers, news portals and mass media operate as they grow on the network.

2. FROM AMATEUR TO PROFESSIONAL YOUTUBER: WHAT IS KNOWN ABOUT THIS TRANSITION?

Studies on the configuration of *youtubers* recognize two fundamental processes: the passage from amateur to *youtuber* and the growth of followers and views that end up making them relevant media actors. We will begin with the second, as it is the most researched. Welbourne and Grant (2015) distinguish three factors in the popularity of YouTube videos that serve to order the reasons which explain the increase of views and followers of *youtubers*. These factors are: the content of the videos, the recommendation system and the elements independent from the first two.

One of the assumptions on which the studies are based is that the fundamental reason why a *youtuber* grows on the network is because their videos are liked. Therefore, the discursive qualities of the videos become a privileged object of study. For example, Chen, Li, and Sun (2018) analyze the speech acts of marketing videos that have the most views and recommend that *youtubers* use directive speech acts, share personal experiences, and encourage the participation of followers in order to be successful. Along these lines, discursive procedures, genres, and styles are analyzed (Wellbourne & Grant, 2015).

The logic of YouTube's recommendation system is another condition for the growth of *youtubers*. The system operates by machine learning, gaining knowledge from the user's choices and, in turn, offering them what has the most views (Zelcer, 2023). As with other platforms, it is a system that rewards the winners (Van Dijk, 2016) and is susceptible to manipulation. There are websites that sell fake views, comments, likes, and subscriptions (Pfiffenberger, 2014). Although YouTube constantly seeks to detect the artificial inflation of popularity metrics, its system remains fallible.

² By *hypermediatization* we understand the last stage of mediatisation. In it, mediatisation results from the constant interaction between the mass media system and the media systems supported by the Internet and telephony (Carlón, 2020).

The third popularity reason actually groups together different factors that contribute to growth, such as frequency and times of publication, country of residence, gender, language, etc. Among them, two are the most prominent: the establishment of a community of followers and the deployment of a media network. For a *youtuber* to grow, it is not enough to increase the number of followers: they have to build a community that shares tastes, interests and values, and its members have to engage in the exchange in the comment spaces provided by the network (Enke & Borchers, 2018; Welbourne, 2015).

In turn, this growth will be inhibited or encouraged depending on the media networks established by the *youtuber*, which are developed both inside and outside of YouTube. On the one hand, the platform's interface allows channels to recommend other channels under the name "featured channels." On the other hand, *youtubers* are usually transmedia in nature. They expand from YouTube to different networks where they have other accounts and also to traditional media (Redmond, 2014; Galán-Montesdeoca & Hinojosa-Becerra, 2020). Regarding the latter, the link between *youtubers* and mass media is often considered virtuous (Bonete Vizcano, 2015). Both benefit from the growing relationship between audience and followers, something that our research will show is not a general rule.

However, despite the acknowledgement of these conditions, the attention given to them has been very disparate. The analysis of the content of the videos is what prevails in the research. In recent years, studies on followers have gained ground, trying to measure the degrees of influence that *youtubers* have on them, but content remains the privileged subject. For its part, the investigation of the media network is outside the scope of the research we have analyzed due to the methodologies they use, a limit that we intend to overcome with our analytical proposal.

Let us now focus on the other process that the studies recognize as fundamental in the configuration of *youtubers*: the passage from amateur to professional *youtuber*. Elorriaga Illera and Monge Benito (2018) studied how Verdeliss, a mother of six children, began making confessional videos until she became a *youtuber* sponsored by important brands. Their analysis identifies four phases in this transformation, determined by the changes that occur in the videos and the number of views. The authors observe that in the first phase the videos are records of memories directed to their relatives. In the second, a confessional style is established and the videos are directed to a community of followers that goes beyond the family. In the third, meetings with followers appear, with live broadcast. And in the fourth, the incorporation of paid brands in the videos is consolidated, a situation which until then had been occasional and without proper economic agreements.

Beyond the interesting results provided by the study by Elorriaga Illera and Monge Benito (2018), we can see again that the content of the videos is what

prevails in the analysis. Is this approach enough to describe the configuration of *youtubers*? What happens with *youtubers* who maintain a similar content throughout their growth, as occurs with many gamers? How can we capture the media network to which we referred before, if it is a relevant factor in growth? In what follows, we will propose an analytical perspective that may address these issues.

3. A PERSPECTIVE FOCUSED ON THE HYPERMEDIA CIRCULATION OF MEANING

Our work will focus on the significant dimension of the topic we are dealing with, that is, the dimension through which the meaning that enables, for example, the acknowledgement of a phenomenon such as a *youtuber* is generated. Unlike the dominant conception in the studies to which we referred, for us, *youtubers* are not people who produce videos on a YouTube channel, but rather systems of discursive exchanges³ between the *youtuber* hypermedia enunciator and their hypermedia communication collective. Systems which are not isolated, but that, in turn, exchange discourses with their environment.

What do we mean by a hypermedia enunciator? We take here the definition of Carlón (2020), who defines it in the articulation of three epistemic levels – and allows us to account for the first pole or end of the aforementioned system –:

- An *enunciative level* corresponding to the traditional analysis of the enunciation in which the enunciator emerges as an effect of meaning of the communication scenes constructed in the exchanged discourses. In our case, the *youtuber* will be the effect of the tensions that occur between the enunciative regularities and diversities of his publications⁴.
- A *socio-semiotic level* that allows us to consider the enunciator as a specific type of “social actor”: a media, an institution, an individual, a collective, always conceptualized as a situated Peircean sign⁵, that is to say, occupying each time a specific place in the hypermediated semiotic network. In the case of *youtubers*, it is the social actor/individual sign. Although its growth as a hypermedia enunciator may give it institutional characteristics (economic resources, rules, participation of other individuals in the production of videos, etc.), the enunciation of the *youtuber* is anchored in the character of the individual.
- A *non-anthropocentric level* in which the enunciator is approached as a

3 Verón has been one of the founders of the conception of media phenomena as systems of discursive exchange (1987). Fernández (2023) proposes them as “the connecting unit of analysis (...) for all studies on mediatization” (p. 48). In Fraticelli (2019 and 2023) we have described the qualities of the exchange systems of the accounts of media social networks.

4 In Fraticelli (2021 and 2023) we develop an analytical model to study the different layers that make up the enunciation of social media accounts.

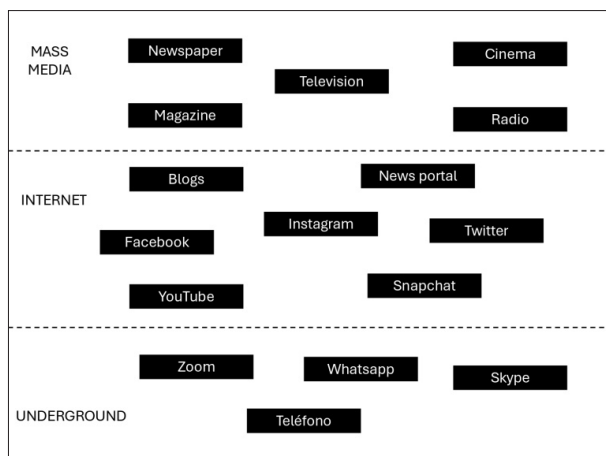
5 Carlón follows here Peirce’s (1974) definition of a sign, which he understands as something that is in place of something else for someone according to a principle, with “someone” being a new sign.

“being” with certain living (or not) attributes. Thus, a distinction can be made between organic, biological enunciators, such as socio-individual enunciators, and non-organic enunciators, such as institutions and the media. This level not only allows the introduction of the YouTube algorithm as a constitutive condition of *youtubers*, but also the so-called *virtual youtubers* or *Vtubers* who often use motion capture devices and artificial intelligence (AI) to animate avatars that assume the enunciation of the channel.

The other pole or end that constitutes the system is the hypermedia communication collective made up of hypermedia enunciators who are, in the first instance, in a position of acknowledgement, although both they and the *youtuber* hypermedia enunciator exchange positions of production and acknowledgement because YouTube enables feedback. These exchanges always generate meaning circulations (Verón, 1987)⁶.

At this level of observation of the *youtuber's* account system, we add another level, which is that of hypermedia circulation. That is, the circulation that occurs in the exchanges between media systems. In order to study it, we will use Carlón's Hypermedia Circulation Analysis Model (2020). In it, the author distinguishes three main media systems: the mass media system, the Internet and telephone-based media system, and the underground media system, whose main characteristic is that its meaning circulation is not public (Diagram 1).

Diagram 1. The three media systems



Source: Carlón (2020).

⁶ Throughout the article, we will understand the instances of production, acknowledgement and circulation as defined by Verón in his theory of social discourses (1987 and 2013). The instances include the conditions and grammars that make up the production and acknowledgement of discourses, while circulation is the discrepancies that occur between them.

Among these systems is where the flow of hypermedia circulation takes place. Its study will allow us to establish shifts in the meaning and transformations in the status of the *youtuber*, as well as to reconstruct the media network that operated in its growth, something that, as we pointed out, the aforementioned research has not managed to analyze.

To summarize, our investigation articulated three levels of observation: that of the enunciative regularities that occur in the production of the videos, that of the exchanges of the *youtuber's* account system, and that of hypermedia circulation. Combining these levels, we analyzed the 200 videos that Zekiel79 uploaded to YouTube between May 13, 2013, and July 12, 2015, the contemporary publications he made on Facebook and Twitter, and the comments that said production generated in his community. In addition, we also studied the impact of the account on mass media and news portals, and conducted an interview with the account owner.

4. ZEKIEL 79: THE CASE OF ANALYSIS

Zekiel79's videos are parodies of football match broadcasts. Through editing, collage and pastiche, these sporting events are filled with hilarious incongruities. For example, a missed ball kick goes around the world like a comet and a goalkeeper protects the goal area while riding a *Jurassic Park* tyrannosaurus (Image 1)⁷.

Image 1. Possibilities for Orión to avoid Lucas Gamba's goal



Fig. 1 Impresión de pantalla de *Posibilidades para que Orión evite el gol de Lucas Gamba*

Source: Zekiel79.

For some time now, it has been common to find appropriations of mass media texts on the Internet, as Zekiel79 does. What distinguishes him is his

7 Retrieved from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=03rhFNNhFYI>

thematic focus on football matches. Among *youtubers*, Zekiel79 belongs to one of the less frequent types: that of the scarce or non-existent presence of the enunciator in the videos. Despite its low occurrence, this type of *youtuber* is the one that best allows us to observe the conflicts and alliances that are established with the media institutions.

The qualities that we have detailed regarding Zekiel79's videos were present throughout the studied period, except for some modifications –especially the changes made in the opening and closing title cards that we will point out as we describe their hypermedia circulation–. The way to present their hypermedia circulation will be to distinguish its different phases. Each of them will be delimited by the hypermedia leaps that occur in circulation, that is, by the changes in media systems that occur in its flow.

4.1. First Phase: The Installation of the Parody

The first phase of Zekiel79's circulation extends from May 13, 2013, the date on which the first parody of a football match broadcast is published, until November 14, 2014, when one of his videos begins to be shared on WhatsApp. Previously, the channel, set up at the end of 2006, did not publish football parodies but recordings of the creator's private life and some other comic videos that he shared with family and friends⁸. Seven years later, the video *Penal errado por Silva contra San Lorenzo*⁹ (Silva's Missed Penalty Against San Lorenzo) was published. The video exaggerates the penalty missed by Boca Juniors player Santiago Silva against San Lorenzo de Almagro, both football clubs from Argentina, transforming the deflected ball into a meteorite that flies around the Earth. The next day, a new video refers to the same missed penalty, but making Boca players celebrate it as a goal. There were no new videos for a year, until March and June 2014, when two videos¹⁰ were uploaded in which the enunciator explicitly declared himself a fan of River Plate, another Argentine club, and placed Boca as the privileged target of his mockery. At the end of the videos, he showed a title card with the phrase: "River el más grande" (River, the greatest) and, in the description, "Bostero, te querés matar! LTA"¹¹ (Bostero, you want to off yourself! You got roasted). Thus, his statement was part of a long-standing rivalry in the folklore of both Argentine teams.

Until then, the circulation of the videos did not go beyond the small group of friends and family. But on November 14, the video *Atajada de Barovero a Gigliotti Sudamericana 2014*¹² (Barovero's Save Against Gigliotti, Copa

⁸ Among others, see: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SYg07hsOLIE>

⁹ Retrieved from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x9hV7hLasEM>

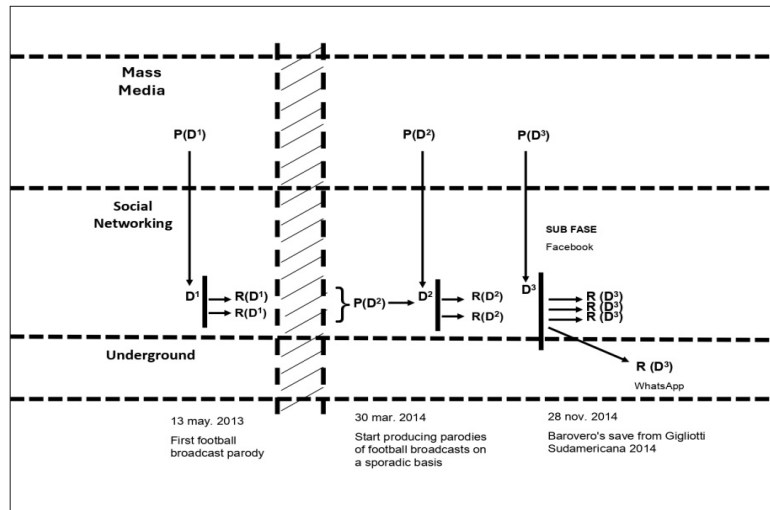
¹⁰ Retrieved from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9OstXRcn14s&t=1s> and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dSho9meRqJ0&t=58s>

¹¹ The word "bostero" is a nickname given to Boca fans and "LTA" is an abbreviation of "La Tenés Adentro", a homophobic insult that refers to having a penis in the anus.

¹² Retrieved from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8KhdptEiXBE>

Sudamericana 2014) spread through Facebook and WhatsApp, which implies a hypermedia leap, because it went from social networks to the underground media system. This first phase of Zekiel79's circulation can be represented as follows (Diagram 2)¹³:

Diagram 2. First phase of Zekiel79's circulation



Source: Own elaboration.

Speech D^1 is the first parody of a football broadcast uploaded on May 13, 2013, $P(D^1)$ are its production conditions and $R(D^1)$ its acknowledgements. There is then a temporary hiatus of about a year in which football parodies appear very sporadically, which are represented as D^2 , with its production $P(D^2)$ and acknowledgement $R(D^2)$ conditions. D^3 is the video *Atajada de Barovero a Gigliotti Sudamericana 2014* which causes an increase in the distribution scale because it ascends to another platform (Facebook) and produces its first hypermedia leap by appearing on WhatsApp.

4.2. Second Phase: The Expansion of the Collective

The second phase begins on November 14, 2014 with the video shared on Facebook and WhatsApp and lasts until May 7, 2015, when another video makes a hypermedia leap to the mass media.

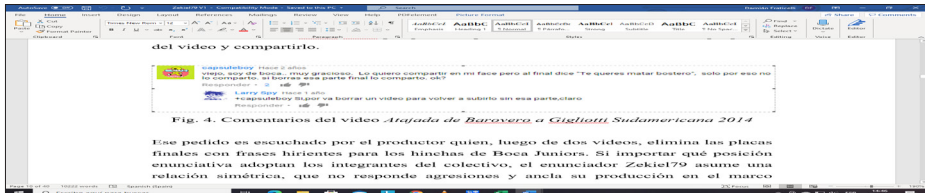
The spread of *Atajada de Barovero a Gigliotti Sudamericana 2014* from YouTube to Facebook and WhatsApp produced an increase in subscribers and

¹³ In the graphs, we follow the representation proposal put forward by Carlón in *Modelo de análisis de la circulación hipermediática* (2020).

views that involved the entry of new members to the hypermedia communication collective of Zekiel79. This collective became fully media-based, in the sense that it no longer assumed any type of relationship with the enunciator Zekiel79 outside the media, as had previously occurred when it was mainly composed of friends and family.

The statements in the comments of this new collective can be summarized in two positions. The first, focused on the referent, recognizes the video as a mockery of Boca. In it, the genre of conversation between football fans is displayed, where the River fan celebrates the comical aspect and the Boca fan is offended, insults and attacks Zekiel79. The second position focuses on the poetics of the video, positively valuing the production work. The enunciators who adopt it and identify themselves as Boca fans are not offended, but rather develop the affective distance of humor that enables them to gain pleasure, even if their own team is being ridiculed. They are the first to establish a demanding relationship with Zekiel79 according to their tastes and needs. In this case, they ask him to erase the marks that anchor the enunciation of the video to the River fan, because it prevents them from appropriating and sharing it (Image 2). A demand that is met: after two videos, there are no more offensive title cards aimed at Boca fans.

Image 2. Comments on the video *Atajada de Barovero a Gigliotti Sudamericana 2014*



Source: Zekiel79.

Atajada de Barovero a Gigliotti Sudamericana 2014 is a significant video in Zekiel79's circulation because it inaugurates enunciative positions that will last in the period studied and announces the conflict of interests that will develop between the *youtuber* and the media institutions in relation to the ownership of copyrights. Although the video reached a high number of views¹⁴, it could not be monetized because it uses footage from *Shaolin Soccer (Siu lam juk kau)*, a film whose copyright is protected by YouTube's automatic system. On the other hand, from this video onwards, a watermark with the channel's web address is attached to the following videos uploaded. This addition generates a change in the status of the enunciator by operating as an "author's signature", which enables him to be identified when the product is shared outside of YouTube.

¹⁴ At the time of the corpus collection, February 26, 2016, it had 276,810 views.

After *Atajada de Baravero a Gigliotti Sudamericana 2014*, three more videos were uploaded sporadically without much impact on the social networks until May 2015, the date of publication of the video that caused the jump to the mass media, a topic that we will discuss in the following section.

4.3. Third Phase: The Jump to National Media

The third phase of Zekiel79's circulation begins on May 8, 2015: that day the video *Entrenamiento de River previo al superclásico cope*¹⁵ (River's Training Before the Superclásico Cope) appears on TyC Sports, an Argentine sports channel. The parody turns River's training into a martial arts practice. Unlike the previous ones, the video that inaugurates the third phase meets the demands of Boca fans: the closing title cards that anchor the statement to the River fan no longer appear, nor is the mockery exclusively aimed at Boca, but at both teams. These characteristics make it possible for anyone to share it without contradicting their identity as a fan. During the day, the video spreads on different social networks and becomes the first to ascend to the mass media system¹⁶. The program *Tocala* on TyC Sports shows it, presenting it as a recording made by a user, without naming Zekiel79, but showing the watermark with the channel's address. A few days later, on May 17, TyC Sports showed another video by Zekiel79, this time a parody that mocks Boca for the sanction received because its hooligans used pepper spray on River players¹⁷, causing the suspension of a match. With both appearances on the TyC Sports sports program, the video quickly reaches a million views. From then on, Zekiel79's videos appear on news portals and national television programs. From this appropriation, Zekiel79's creator does not receive any compensation nor is he acknowledged as the author of the videos, but is generically called a "fan" and "user." However, the appearances in the media feed Zekiel79 with new subscribers and more views thanks to the watermark with the name of his channel.

Between May and July 2015, Zekiel79 acquires the enunciative status of "professional" *youtuber*. He increases the frequency with which he uploads videos to the channel, inscribing his logo on them and adding a title card at the end with links to the rest of his work. On the other hand, he becomes transmedia by setting up accounts on Facebook and Twitter. On both of these, he uploads YouTube videos and increases interaction with his followers on a daily basis. However, the type of communication that prevails on each of them is different. On Twitter, the referential takes center stage: in brief statements he presents the videos uploaded to the channel and retweets memes and gifs from other creators. On Facebook, however, the longer statements expose the enunciator's

¹⁵ Retrieved from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uM4SdjFygwk>

¹⁶ The chronology we present on Zekiel79's scale jumps was developed from the collected corpus, which implies that there may be adjustments in future works if new data appears.

¹⁷ Retrieved from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rZdnmMsXOB0>

emotionality and a greater interaction with the collective. An example of the latter is the enunciator's invitation to send him ideas for making new videos. Although on YouTube the collective always demanded changes in the grammars of production, it is with this type of invitation that Zekiel79 explicitly adopts them as determining factors of his production¹⁸.

Regarding emotion, its appearance incorporates a trait shared by most *youtubers*: the enunciation focused on the individual. As we have explained, on YouTube Zekiel79 does not appear in his videos, but his parodies imitate the enunciation of football television broadcasts. On Facebook, for his part, he makes his main theme his work as a *youtuber* and individual creator. In these first months of opening his new accounts, he tells his followers how hard it is to produce videos in his scarce free time, the problems he has in monetizing them due to YouTube's copyright restrictions, and the mistreatment he receives from mass media and news portals that use his material without acknowledging him as the author. The collective responds by asserting him as a content creator and hoping a television channel would hire him. Over time, Zekiel79 enriches his figure as a creator with socio-stylistic features by showing his private life (home, family, purchases). Thus, a new enunciative scene is inaugurated with a focus on self-portrait and autobiography.

During May and June 2015, Zekiel79 parodies the Copa América football matches played in Chile, which expands his group following by introducing new Latin American enunciators. The video *Escándalo en la final de Brasil vs. Colombia*¹⁹ (Scandal in the Brazil vs. Colombia Final), for example, includes members of both nationalities, which causes a rise in the creator's following by sharing the video on social networks in different countries. On June 23, Zekiel79 makes a new leap within the social network with *El nuevo refuerzo de Boca Carlos Amarilla*²⁰ (Boca's New Reinforcement Carlos Amarilla), a video that comically deals with the scandal starred by the Paraguayan referee, accused of favoring Boca. The Spanish portal *Mundo Deportivo*²¹ uploads the video, which demonstrates the international reach that Zekiel79 is beginning to acquire. The channel continues to gain subscribers: at the beginning of July it reaches seven thousand, a number that will increase shortly after with the video that begins the next stage.

In summary, this third phase can be represented as follows (Diagram 3):

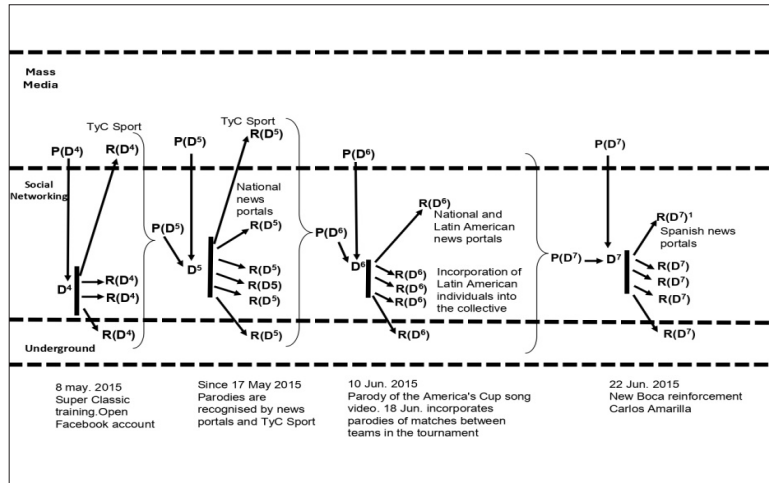
18 Due to concision reasons, we will not dwell here on the different ways in which the enunciator Zekiel79 is constructed in each account, but it should be considered that although they may appear under the same name, the enunciative constructions are different given that the qualities of the technical devices, the interfaces and the exchanges are also different. Therefore, in transmedia enunciators, enunciative constructions could be postulated on two levels: one that arises as an enunciative effect of the set of exchanges that occur in each account and another that is a result of the combined effects of the accounts.

19 Retrieved from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kdj5wMUBo6o>

20 Retrieved from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GFUzhU5pd7w>

21 Retrieved from: <http://www.mundodeportivo.com/videos/20150623/20578487479/en-una-falsa-presentacion-grondona-ficha-al-arbitro-carlos-amarilla-nuevo-jugador.html>

Diagram 3. Diagram of the third phase of Zekiel79's circulation



Source: Own elaboration.

D^4 is the video *Entrenamiento de River previo al superclásico cope* with its production conditions $P(D^4)$ and its acknowledgements $R(D^4)$. In them, three types of communication directions are distinguished: the horizontal one with the comments of the Internet users on YouTube, the descending one with the spread in WhatsApp and the ascending one in the acknowledgement of *Tocala* by TyC Sport. D^5 is the set of videos that are produced later, where the enunciator Zekiel79 acquires an asymmetric position with respect to the rest of the Internet users by having acknowledgements from news portals and television. D^6 is the set of videos that parody the transmissions of the Copa América matches. His acknowledgements $R(D^6)$ are an expansion and diversification of nationalities in the collective and a rise of the enunciator due to his reach on social networks and news portals in other Latin American countries. D^7 is the video *El nuevo refuerzo de Boca Carlos Amarilla* with its acknowledgement on European news portals $R(D^7)^1$, which involves a new growth on the network.

4.4. Fourth Phase: International Rise

The fourth and final phase of Zekiel79's circulation involves a leap into the mass media system. On July 6, 2015, Zekiel79 uploads a video that exaggerates the penalty missed by Argentine player Gonzalo Higuaín in the match that Argentina lost to Chile in the Copa América²². That same day it reaches national, Latin American and European portals. It reaches the

²² Retrieved from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jOJwJEN-VFg>

Argentine primetime newscasts and crosses borders appearing on various Latin American channels. The video adds thirty thousand views per hour during that day, quickly reaching one million views. The next day, one year after Brazil's resounding 7-1 defeat by Germany in the 2014 World Cup, Zekiel79 uploads a video where he reverses the result²³. The video spreads again during the same day on the Internet: the video is shared in national and foreign portals and television channels, not only European but also American, Asian and African. The views are multiplied in each of these media, reaching a million on the YouTube channel.

After these videos, Zekiel79 gains three thousand subscribers, surpassing ten thousand in total. With this success, a new enunciation of the media institutions appears with respect to Zekiel79. Until then, two positions are predominant. In one, he is generically called "user" and "fan", but the watermark with the name of the channel is maintained on the videos. In the other, this mark is erased and any type of link to its source is eliminated. The *youtuber* and his following complain about and reject this situation. The new enunciative position that is now incorporated is the one that acknowledges the creator Zekiel79 as the *author*. This figure appears in some news portals such as *Infobae*²⁴, which names him as the producer of the videos, and *La Gaceta*²⁵, which publishes an article about his entire production.

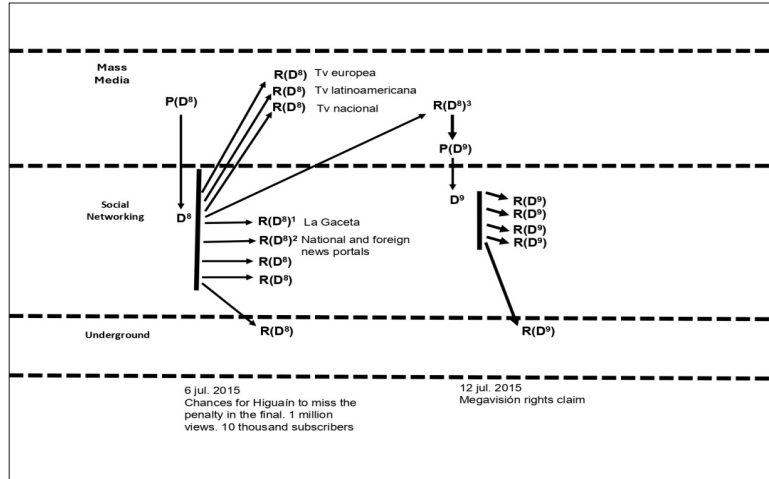
But this acknowledgement, motivated by the leap in international scale, brings the counterpart of new media institutions joining the copyright claims. *Megavisión* of Chile, for example, claims the copyright of the video about the Higuain penalty with its subsequent monetization. Faced with these conflicts of interest, a group within the collective operates in a similar way to how Jenkins (2009) describes the generation of knowledge by fans and Pierre Lévy (2004) speaks of *collective intelligence*. Its members warn the creator and the community about the mass media and websites that appropriate the videos and under what conditions. And in the face of copyright claims, they give advice on how to avoid them. Together, they generate knowledge about video distribution, software usage, and YouTube engagement strategies that no individual member, not even the creator, possesses. The circulation of this fourth phase can be graphed as we propose in Diagram 4.

²³ The video is titled *Brasil le gana a Alemania y pasa a la final de la Copa del Mundo 2014 (PARODIA)*. Retrieved from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FKImB3r8xsQ>

²⁴ See: <http://www.infobae.com/playfutbol/seleccion/2016/06/29/el-sueno-de-un-pais-en-un-video-editado-higuain-marco-el-gol-contra-chile-en-la-final/>

²⁵ See: <http://www.lagaceta.com.ar/nota/645000/deportes/canal-youtube-se-dedica-cambiar-historia-futbol.html>

Diagram 4. Fourth phase of Zekiel79's circulation



Source: Own elaboration.

D^8 is the parody video of the penalty that Higuaín missed, with the television broadcast of the match as a condition of production $P(D^8)$. Its acknowledgements $R(D^8)$ are those of the collective on YouTube, Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp propagations, located in a lower asymmetry due to the enunciative status that Zekiel79 had already achieved by having risen to the national mass media. On the other hand, we can observe the acknowledgements $R(D^8)^2$ of the news portals, the acknowledgements $R(D^8)$ of national and foreign television channels, and the acknowledgement $R(D^8)^1$ of *La Gaceta*, which wrote an article about Zekiel79 as author. In turn, one of the acknowledgements of Higuaín's video is the copyright claim by *Megavisión*, $R(D^8)^3$, which constitutes the condition of production $P(D^9)$ of Zekiel79's complaint on Facebook, D^9 , and the acknowledgement of the collective $R(D^9)$ proposing ways to avoid the accusation.

4.5. Institutional Acknowledgement

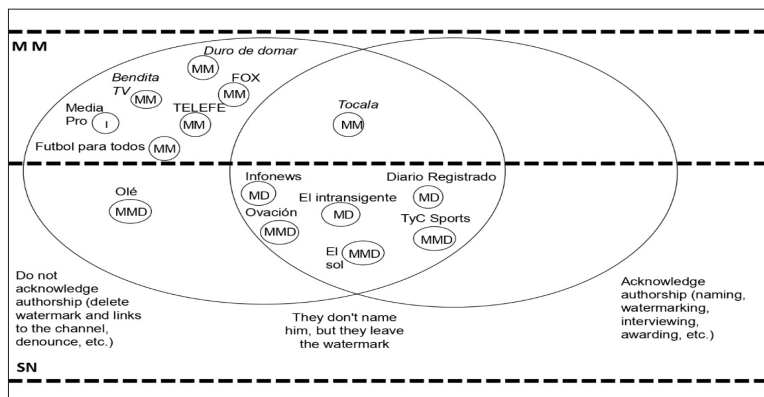
As a final stage in the analysis of the case, we will focus on a conflict between Zekiel79 and the media institutions that worsened as the *youtuber* grew as a means of communication: his acknowledgement as an author.

Since the beginning of his production of parodies, Zekiel79 assumed the authorship of the videos and his hypermedia communication collective not only did the same, but collaborated with him to avoid the censorship and claims that YouTube imposed on him. The media institutions, on the other hand, acted with other logics that varied over time. To describe them, we will use the spatial analysis model proposed by Carlón (2017 and 2020). Through its

analysis, we can make visible the changes in the enunciative positions that are adopted regarding a topic. Here we will make an appropriation according to the nature of the case. Instead of representing positive and negative evaluations as the model does, we will distinguish three fields of enunciative placements: institutions that do not acknowledge his authorship (they delete watermarks and links to the channel, denounce it, etc.); those that do not name him, but leave the watermark; and those that acknowledge his authorship (they name him, leave the watermark, interview him, award him).

During phase 2, initiated by Zekiel79's first appearance on television, the media institutions did not acknowledge his authorship and referred to him generically as "user" and "fan." However, there were two nuances in this position. One was to delete the watermark on the videos preventing any type of link to Zekiel79's channel on YouTube. The other was to leave the watermark with the channel address, thus encouraging an increase in its views and subscriptions. Diagram 5 shows the news portals –digital media (MD) and digital mass media (MMD)–, television channels and programs (MM), where the *youtuber's* videos appeared most frequently, and football leagues and federations (I)²⁶.

Diagram 5. Distribution of institutions according to their position on copyright in the second phase of Zekiel79's circulation



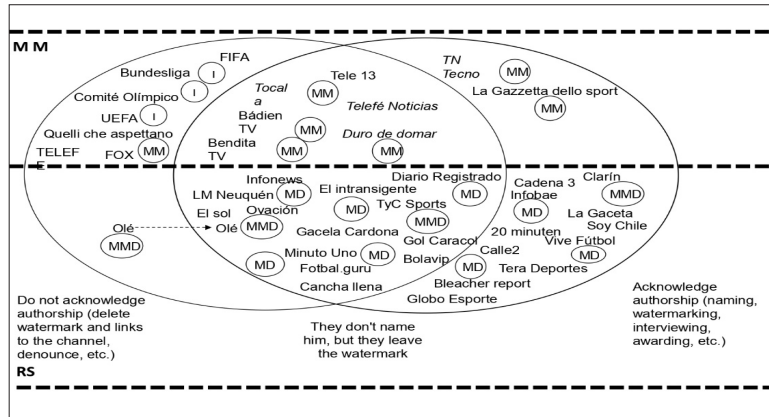
Source: Own elaboration.

As can be seen, mass media and institutions differed from most news and sports portals in their position. While television channels refused to allow their audience to contact Zekiel79, MD and MMD did so by leaving a watermark –except for the Argentine sports news portal *Olé*, which acted as a mass media. During the third and fourth phases, the scale of distribution of Zekiel79's videos

²⁶ The texts written in italics are the television programs, and the football leagues and federations (I) are located with the mass media because they are linked to them by their exclusive broadcast agreements.

grows and with it the reaction of media and non-media institutions changes (Diagram 6).

Diagram 6. Distribution of institutions according to their position on copyright in the third phase of Zekiel79's circulation



Source: Own elaboration.

If we compare this chart with the previous one, we can see that with the growth of Zekiel79, the number of institutions that did not acknowledge his authorship and made claims to YouTube to block the videos or grant them the proper monetization increased. In contrast, we see the emergence of media institutions that named him as the author and an increase in those that left links to his channel, even without naming him. Even the news portal *Olé*, resistant to this claim, stopped erasing the watermark on the videos towards the end of the period studied. However, it should be noted that such acknowledgements did not imply a change in the asymmetrical nature of the copyright conflicts. Institutions held the power to claim rights over the *youtuber*. The program *Bendita TV*, for example, frequently used Zekiel79's videos in its reports, hiding its watermark, but when Zekiel79 uploaded a fragment of the program, the video was blocked by YouTube due to a claim made by the TV channel.

5. SOME CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE KNOWLEDGE REGARDING THE CONFORMATION AND GROWTH OF YOUTUBERS

To conclude, we will summarize the contributions and discussions that result from our study regarding the knowledge collected on the conformation of *youtubers* and their rise in the media.

First, we must highlight the importance of articulating the three levels of observation presented in section 3 to study the phenomenon. As other studies have shown, paying attention to the content is essential to knowing the nature

of the *youtuber* (their style, genre, etc.), but it is not enough to understand their conformation or growth. In the period studied there were no major changes in Zekiel79's videos. If we had only analyzed this aspect, we would not have distinguished the videos prior to the scale jumps from those after these leaps, because parody always prevailed in them. Instead, when applying the proposed analytical model, we are able to see that the synergy produced between the instance of production and acknowledgement, and between the media systems, was responsible for the scale jumps. It acted as its condition of possibility.

We can therefore say that we agree with the studies that postulate the media network as a primary factor in the growth of *youtubers*. But while these studies limit themselves to pointing it out without managing to analyze its dynamics, the hypermedia circulation model allows us to understand it in a systematic way. With its implementation, we were able to observe that the hypermediatization of Zekiel79 involved constant ascending-descending circulation cycles. Rises that go from the YouTube channel and the Twitter and Facebook accounts to the news portals and television. And descents that occur when Zekiel79 and his collective resume the acknowledgement of the media institutions by incorporating them back into the social network. In each of these cycles, Zekiel79 grows by gaining subscribers and views.

However, the analysis of the phases shows that these hypermedia leaps do not only cause quantitative changes, but also involve qualitative transformations. The enunciative status of Zekiel79, for example, changed as his growth arose. In turn, his collective began to acknowledge him as a relevant enunciator, to which Zekiel79 responded by reinforcing his symmetry with it and calling for greater collaboration.

Finally, the research also allowed us to corroborate the fundamental role that other studies grant to the collective and to be able to discuss with them the postulate that media institutions encourage the growth of *youtubers*.

Regarding the collective, we were able to observe how it determined the production of Zekiel79's videos with its comments and how it propagated them on the network, which confirms our starting proposition: *youtubers* are systems of media exchanges. Within them, the members of the collective do not operate under a single logic, as is usually thought when they are conceived as fans. The enunciators who challenged the *youtuber*, for example, consolidated the group of followers and their criticisms contributed to the design of the videos.

We also noticed that media institutions do not operate with a single logic, but rather act in opposing movements and their acknowledgement varies according to the status of the enunciator. While news portals, in general, acted in favor of Zekiel79 by spreading the links to his videos to a larger scale, which increased the number of views and subscribers to the channel, television mostly appropriated his work without generating greater benefit for him, restricting the monetization of his videos and trying to block their distribution on the network.

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* The dataset that supports the results of this study is not available for public use. The research data will be made available to reviewers, if required.



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