

Who are the booktubers? Characteristics of Spanish-language literary video bloggers

¿Quiénes son los *booktubers*? Características de los video-blogueros literarios en lengua española

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Abstract

This article offers a statistical description of the key characteristics of Spanish-speaking booktubers, young people who use YouTube and other digital platforms to share content about books. To establish their demographics, the distribution of their popularity, the evolution of their production, two complementary methods were used: on the one hand, digital methods, to obtain data from 464 channels and 51,322 videos through YouTube's API v.3; on the other hand, an online survey (n=71) that describes some aspects of their cultural consumption. The results show that vast majority of the YouTube users are women, in their twenties, and have higher education. The dominant countries are Mexico, Spain and Colombia. The rise of BookTube channels happened between 2013 and 2015; afterwards, their production has stabilized. Despite the diversity of channels, more than 90 percent of the viewers are concentrated in the Top 20% most popular channels. These results allow us to recognize basic cultural patterns from booktubers and set the foundations for further observations of their evolution.

Resumen

Este artículo ofrece una descripción estadística de los *booktubers* en lengua española—jóvenes que usan YouTube y otras plataformas digitales para hablar de libros—. Para saber sus características demográficas, la distribución de su popularidad y la evolución de su producción articulamos dos métodos complementarios: en primer lugar, usamos métodos digitales para obtener información de 464 canales y 51.322 videos a través de la API v.3 de YouTube; en segundo lugar, lanzamos una encuesta online (n=71) que describe aspectos de su consumo cultural. Los resultados muestran que la mayoría de las *booktubers* son mujeres, de entre veinte y veintinueve años y con estudios universitarios. Los países con más presencia en la comunidad de *booktubers* son México, España y Colombia. El auge de estos canales de BookTube se dio entre 2013 y 2015; su producción después se ha estabilizado. A pesar de la gran variedad de canales, más del 90% de las vistas se concentran en el 20% de canales más populares. Estos resultados nos permiten reconocer algunos rasgos generalizados de los *booktubers* y sentar las bases para futuras observaciones de su evolución.

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Introduction

Among the multiple media practices readers can develop in the digital media ecosystem, booktubers have become well-known and gained influence as an emerging phenomenon of reading socialisation and reading promotion, especially among young people (Lluch, 2017; Tomasena, 2016, 2019). They are boys and girls - some of them very young - who share videos related to books and reading on YouTube, although their activity is also deployed on other social platforms such as Instagram, Twitter, Facebook or Goodreads, among others.

Booktubers' videos replicate the dominant audiovisual style of other YouTubers (Scolari & Fraticelli, 2017): they often use private spaces to record, explicitly address their audience using the I-you formula, look directly into the camera and encourage interaction in the comments section of the channel or on other social platforms.

The booktuber phenomenon must be framed in a broader perspective that encompasses how the internet and digitalisation are producing what Cavallo and Chartier (1998) call "the third reading revolution since the Middle Ages" (p. 42) and which has an impact on books themselves as an object (Logan, 2008), publishers (Bhaskar, 2014; Thompson, 2013) and readers, of course (Cassany, 2012; García-Canclini et al., 2015; Šesek & Pušnik, 2014).

A number of academic works have studied how the internet and digital technologies are transforming our ways of reading, writing, producing and interacting in both formal and informal educational contexts. (Aliagas, 2008; Cassany, 2012, 2015; Gee, 2003, 2014; Hernández-Zamora, 2019; Hernández & Hernández, 2013; Jones et al., 2015; Lankshear & Knobel, 2011; Lluch, 2014, 2017; Martin-Barbero & Lluch, 2011).

According to Cassany (2015), much of this work draws on two theoretical currents: the New Literacy Studies (NLS) (Ames et al., 2004; Gee, 1996; Street, 1993) and the social theory of learning (Gee & Hayes, 2012; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 2001). Both

consider reading and writing as social practices and not just individual cognitive processes.

Hernández-Zamora (2019, pp. 4-5) summarises the main theses of the NELs in the following points: a) there is a continuum between oral and written skills; b) reading and writing are social practices that take place in specific situations and are mediated by power relations (social, institutional, cultural), c) literate practices are inseparable from discourses. Literary bloggers' reading and writing can be seen as cultural practices.

Another important current in studies of user practices in the media ecosystem, is the concept of "participatory culture", and particularly in the case of YouTube (Burgess & Green, 2009, 2018; Jenkins et al., 2015; Jenkins et al., 2009). In the opinion of Jenkins et al. (2009, p. xi), a participatory culture a) has low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement, b) encourages people to share what they create, c) develops informal forms of mentoring and learning, d) generates social ties with others.

In line with Jenkins et al. (2009) they made one of the first endeavours to describe user practices on YouTube as an emblematic site of participatory culture. Their work has been republished in a second edition (Burgess & Green, 2018) which already takes into account many of the changes YouTube has undergone over the last ten years, such as the change in its business model, the redesigns of its interface (van Dijck, 2013, Chapter 6), the role of search engines and recommendation algorithms (Rieder et al., 2018) and the status of YouTubers as microcelebrities (Jerslev, 2016; Marwick, 2013).

Studies on booktubers

Sorensen and Mara's work (2013) was one of the pioneers in studying people who used YouTube to produce videos about their readings. The authors defined BookTube as a "networked knowledge community" where members learn through socialisation with shared rules, hierarchies, values and genres.

In Spanish, Lluch (2014, 2017) studied how YouTube represents a change in the traditional

mediations of reading promotion, such as schools or libraries, and also studied how the precedents of these practices were present in forums, blogs and social networks of fans of children's and young adult literature (LIJ). Rovira-Collado (2016, 2017) uses the "LIJ 2.0" concept to deal with these new forms of reading mediation through the Internet and their educational potential. From this same perspective, other studies have analysed the pedagogical uses of videoblogs in formal education contexts to develop different competences (Torralba-Miralles, 2018; Tusa et al., 2017).

Jeffman's work (2015, 2017) was one of the first to analyse the booktuber phenomenon from the perspective of participatory cultures, in line with previous work by Jenkins (2006, 2009) and Jenkins et al. (2015). Nevertheless, this optimistic view has been challenged to the extent that some booktubers have become prescribers who exchange the social capital accumulated on YouTube with other institutions in the literary field, such as publishers, authors and book fairs (Tomasena, 2016, 2019).

In recent years, literature on booktubers has become very diverse, linked to wider debates such as the relationship between technological affordances and uses by user communities (Sued, 2017), audience relations with booktubers via the comments section (González & Lomelí, 2018), the folksonomy of literary genres of the *bookshelf tours* (Santos-Sundstrom & de Moraes, 2019), community pressures within the group to favour certain practices (Ehret et al., 2018), the transmedia skills that they develop from their practices (Vizcaíno-Verdú et al., 2019) and typologies of booktubers' reading practices based on the classification they make in their lists and channels (Paladines-Paredes & Margallo, 2020).

However, there is a need for a study that describes who booktubers are as media subjects as broadly as possible. With this study, which is part of an ethnographic research on the media practices of Spanish-language booktubers, we intend to provide the basis for this endeavour with two objectives: a) to describe the basic socio-demographic characteristics of Spanish-language booktubers (gender,

age, education, country), the evolution and distribution of their popularity and b) to analyse the most popular types of videos, according to the audiovisual genres already documented in the academic literature on booktubers.

Method

In order to study the BookTube community, we turn to what Sued (2017, p. 98) called YouTube's "depth browsing". Inspired by the paradigm of distant reading (Moretti, 2016), depth browsing seeks to identify patterns and recurrences from a large amount of data and metadata from as many videos as possible without going into the particular analysis of the texts or the interaction between the interface and the users.

This approach to data has been present since the earliest studies of YouTube, such as Wesch's anthropological work (2008) on the first users of this social network. Kavoori (2011) studied the recurring forms of viral videos and in their pioneering study on YouTube Burgess and Green (2009) quantitatively analysed a corpus of 4,320 videos collected over three months in 2007 to find "the youtubeness of YouTube".

In order to make get this picture, we use descriptive statistics, which aims at "reducing large data sets in order to achieve a simpler data interpretation" (Igartua, 2006, p. 372). To that end, we use two data collection instruments, which allow us to work at different scales and levels of analysis: firstly, an online survey designed in Google Drive aimed at booktubers; secondly, we use digital methods (Rieder, 2015; Rogers, 2013) to extract quantitative data obtained from the YouTube API v.3 through automated computer scripts.

Each method is described in the following sections.

Online survey

We designed an online survey on Google Drive to obtain data on the cultural production and consumption habits of booktubers. We divided the questionnaire into two sections: a first section

aimed at obtaining socio-demographic data (gender, age, education); and a second section asking about their practices (time on the platform, frequency of uploading videos, topics covered in the channel, type of books, extra-literary topics they talk about and use of social platforms).

The online survey for booktubers was distributed between January and December 2017 through emails, social media and comments on some pre-identified channels. We obtained 80 responses, which were filtered to eliminate duplicate channels or those that did not meet the inclusion criteria (that they were channels that published content about books and that they were in Spanish), making a total of 71 valid responses.

Digital methods

Following the momentum of the software studies (Manovich, 2013, 2020; Rogers, 2013) that propose digital techniques for the study of digital communication, we used several tools from the YouTube Data Tools package (Rieder, 2015), to select, process and systematise information from 51,322 videos from 464 Spanish-language booktubers' channels.

Prior to the analysis, we followed the following procedure to select the videos: first, from 20 previously identified YouTube channels, we used the channel network module to track the hyperlinks to featured channels that the booktubers set up on their channels. Thus, we identified 482 channels with the following variables: number of subscribers, number of videos uploaded, number of total views and, in some cases, country.

In a second step of the selection procedure, we refined the sample in order to meet two inclusion criteria: that they were Spanish-language channels and that they talked about books, and to determine the gender of the people appearing in the videos. a box. The sample was reduced to 464 channels.

Thirdly, a manual review was carried out, both on YouTube channels and on the social platforms linked to each channel (Twitter, YouTube, Goodreads, Instagram) to complete the country

data, as well as gender¹ of the person responsible for each channel.

Finally, the Video List module of YouTube Data Tools was used to obtain a list of all the videos of each channel and the following variables: Video URL, channel ID, title, description, date of publication, duration, number of views, number of Likes, number of Dislikes and number of comments. Repeating this procedure for each channel yielded data from 51,322 videos.

Based on the computer procedures described above, data were extracted between 28th January and 7th February 2019. They were then analysed with Tableau Prep and Tableau Desktop, both for statistical processing and to prepare the geographical and temporal visualisations presented in this paper. Table 1 summarises the most important aspects of these methods.

Socio-demographic characteristics of the booktubers

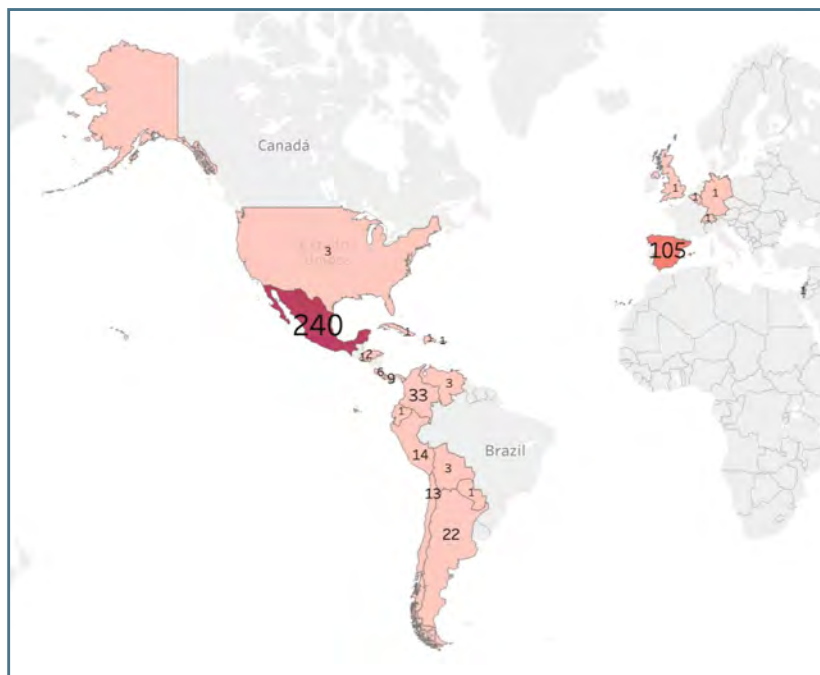
The analysis of the data obtained by digital methods through YouTube's API v.3 allows us to have a macroscopic look at the BookTube phenomenon in the different territories of the Spanish language. The results, summarised in figure 1, show that the countries where the most YouTube channels have been opened are Mexico and Spain, with 240 (51.71%) and 105 channels (22.63%), respectively. Countries such as Colombia (33), Argentina (22), Peru (14) and Chile (13), which also have an active local scene, rank second. And finally, there are other countries that have a more discrete presence in the sample (table 2).

It is curious that these data reflect migration processes, particularly in countries such as the United States (3), Germany (1), the United Kingdom (1) or Israel (1). These are channels of young people who have migrated to these countries where YouTube's automated system classifies according to the territory in which the content was uploaded to the platform, even if their media circuit is displaced. The geography of audiences transcends the geography

Table 1
 Summary table of methods, level of analysis, number of cases and variables used

Method	Level of analysis	Number of cases (n)	Variables
Online survey	Channel	71	Gender
			Age
			Education
			Topics covered in the channel
			Social platforms used
Digital methods	Channel	464	Number of subscribers
			Number of videos uploaded
			Number of total views
			Country
			Gender
	Videos	51,322	Channel ID
			Title
			Description
			Date of Publication
			Duration
			Number of Views
			Number of Reviews
			Number of Likes
			Number of Dislikes

Figure 1
 Countries with the most BookTube channels (n=464)



Prepared by the authors.

Table 2
 Countries with the most YouTube channels (n=464)

Country	Count	Percentage
Mexico	240	51.72%
Spain	105	22.63%
Colombia	33	7.11%
Argentina	22	4.74%
Peru	14	3.02%
Chile	13	2.80%
Panama	9	1.94%
Costa Rica	6	1.29%
Venezuela	3	0.65%
United States	3	0.65%
Bolivia	3	0.65%
Honduras	2	0.43%
Switzerland	1	0.22%
Dominican Republic	1	0.22%
United Kingdom	1	0.22%
Puerto Rico	1	0.22%
Paraguay	1	0.22%
Israel	1	0.22%
El Salvador	1	0.22%
Ecuador	1	0.22%
Cuba	1	0.22%
Belgium	1	0.22%
Germany	1	0.22%

Prepared by the authors.

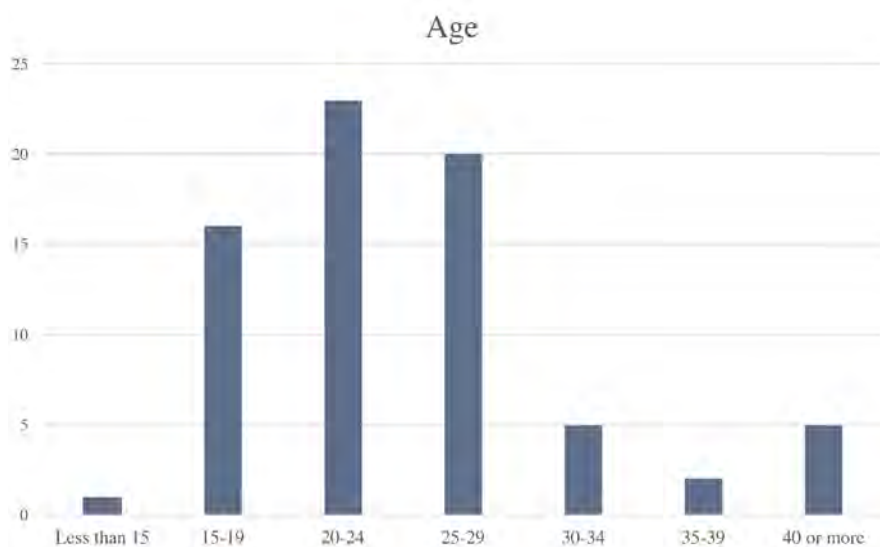
of infrastructures, a key issue for a transnational phenomenon such as booktubers.

As for the gender of the participants, 62.93% are women (292) and 33.19% are men (154). A minority of cases - around 4% - cannot be classified according to the gender variable, either because they are couples' channels (10) or collectives, such as schools, libraries, houses of culture or other organisations that have made institutional channels (8).

The survey provides complementary information to these macroscopic data, although it operates on a smaller scale (n=71). In terms of age (figure 2), most surveyed booktubers are distributed in three age ranges, in order of prevalence: 32% were between 20 and 24 years old at the time of the survey; 28% were between 25 and 29 years old; and 22% were between 15 and 19 years old. The survey also shows that there is a small percentage of booktubers over the age of thirty.

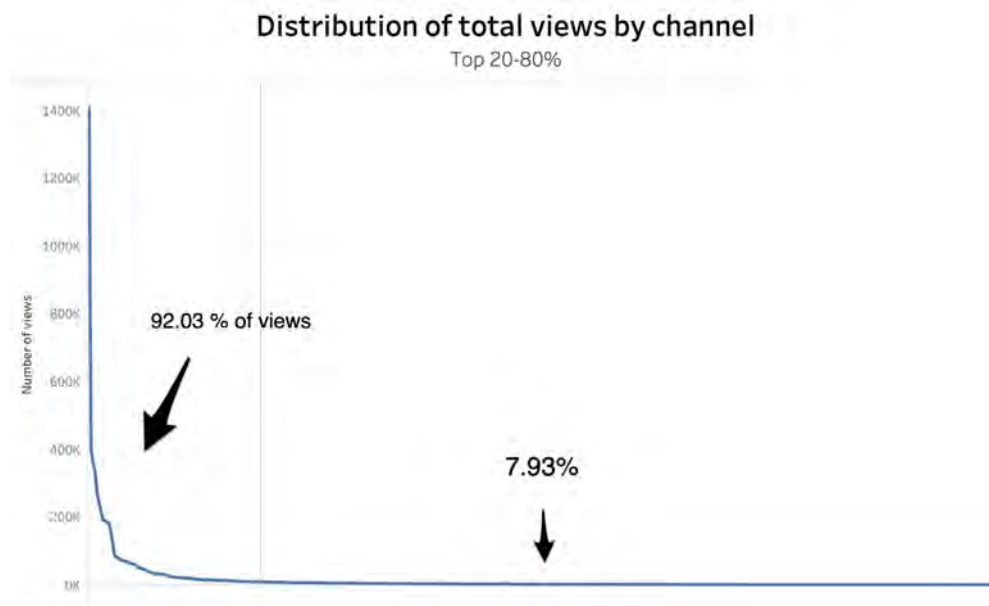
Regarding their education, the results of the online survey show that the booktubers have a high level of education. Only 4 out of the 71 respondents have secondary education or primary education; on the other hand, the vast majority (48) went or

Figure 2
 Distribution of booktubers by age (n=72), January-March 2017



Prepared by the authors

Figure 3
Distribution of total views by channel. Top 20-80% (n=464)



go to college; 14 of them had or had a their GCE and 6 of them had postgraduate studies.

Polarising popularity

The analysis of the 51,322 videos also provides an interesting insight into the attention audiences pay to the various channels. By designing the distribution of these channels, according to their number of total views and subscribers, we find that it has the shape of a long tail. This structure was described by Anderson (2010) as characteristic of many phenomena of cultural and commercial offerings on the internet. While a handful of channels concentrate much of the attention of audiences, the vast majority of channels have far fewer subscribers and therefore get far fewer views (figure 3).

The most popular 20% account for 92.03% of the views (338,155,685 views), while the remaining 80% barely account for 7.93% of the views. This polarisation is in line with van Dijck's comments (2013) on the evolution of YouTube from a horizontal, participatory distribution platform to a complex, increasingly TV-like ecosystem, where a minority of users become producers for a majority of users who take on the role of consumers.

Within that 20% are the channels that appear indexed in the first places when searching for booktube in Spanish in search engines, those most favoured by YouTube's relationship algorithms, those that appear in the media and are invited to book fairs, and recently, those that have started to become authors of children's and young adult literature (table 3).

The connectivity of the most popular booktubers, reflected in the number of subscribers and views of their videos (see table 3), becomes interchangeable merchandise with other institutional agents in the publishing field, such as authors, book fairs, publishers or bookshops (Tomasena, 2019); in contrast, the vast majority of BookTube channels that barely get the media attention and fame of the biggest ones, live in a more hidden logic, of small contacts, small networks of contacts; they organise meetings, presentations, book clubs. A cultural world far removed from the fame of the internet, more diverse, and operating more in the logic of the participatory culture that preceded YouTube (Jenkins, 2009).

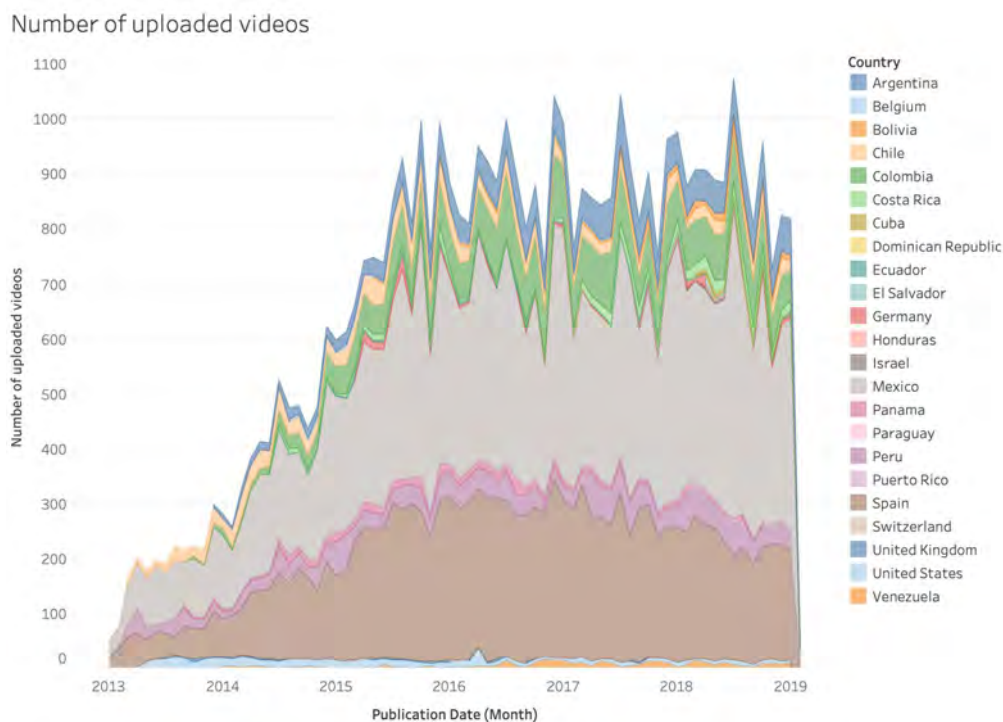
Table 3
 List of booktubers who have published books for the youth sector

Channel	Subscribers	Total views	Author	Book	Year	Publisher
raizarevelles99	1,407,072	73,060,600	Raiza Revelles (feat. Sebastián Arango)	Zelic	2015	Destino (Planeta)
Clau Reads Books	399,440	27,063,100	Claudia Ramírez Lomelí	El príncipe del Sol	2018	Planeta
Laspalabrasdefa	358,601	23,747,300	Fa Orozco (feat. Benito Taibo, Javier Ruescas and others)	No te calles	2018	Nube de tinta (Random House)
JavierRuescas	274,495	20,851,900	Javier Ruescas	Play	2012	Penguin Random House
				Show	2013	Penguin Random House
				Live	2014	Penguin Random House
				Prohibido creer en historias de amor	2018	Penguin Random House
				(Feat. Benito Taibo and Laura Gallego)	Por una rosa	2017
AbriendoLibros	219,636	6,781,100	Alberto Villareal	Ocho lugares que me recuerdan a ti	2016	Planeta
				Todo lo que fuimos	2017	Planeta
				Anoche en las trincheras	2018	Planeta
Fly like a butterfly	185,130	9,886,400	Esmeralda Verdú	Besos entre líneas	2016	Planeta
Mayrayamonte	121,240	9,434,600	May R. Ayamonte			
Josu Diamond	182,556	12,151,600	Josu Lorenzo Grilli	Bajo nuestra piel	2018	Cross Books (Planeta)
Andreo Rowling	160.677	10,867,900	Andrea Izquierdo	Otoño en Londres	2016	Nocturna
				Invierno en Las Vegas	2017	Nocturna
				Primavera en Tokio	2018	Nocturna
				Escape: las siete pociones	2018	Nocturna
				Mi otra mitad	2019	Cross Books (Planeta)
Nube de Palabras	85,677	4,054,600	Sara Cantador	La Playa	2018	Alfaguara Juvenil (Random House)
MartitaraBookVlogs	80,044	4,985,100	Marta Álvarez (illustrated by Laia López)	Mystical 1. El despertar de la magia	2017	La Galera
				Mystical 2. La guardiana perdida	2017	La Galera
				Mystical 3. El reflejo oscuro	2018	La Galera
				Mystical 4. El dominio del caos	2018	La Galera
				El arte de Mystical	2018	La Galera
			(co-written in collaboration with Iguazel Serón)	Héroes de Cobre	2019	Nocturna
LittleRedRead	50,197	3,095,800	Patricia García Ferrer	La cúpula de hielo	2018	Hidra

Note: Data retrieved from YouTube on 22nd February 2019.

Figure 4

Number of BookTube videos uploaded to the platform between 2012 and 2018 (n=50,136)



Prepared by the authors.

Evolution of booktubers' production

The diachronic analysis of the BookTube phenomenon in Spanish through these data has allowed us to explain how the production and consumption of videos has evolved.

As figure 4 shows, BookTube's boom took place in 2013, with the emergence of many channels, especially Mexican and Spanish. The number of videos uploaded to the platform experienced an accelerated growth until the second half of 2015, when the number of videos uploaded to the platform has stabilised. Production peaks in the graph are also noteworthy, as which point to certain time cycles when video production moves. These peaks coincide with holiday periods, especially July and December, when booktubers have more free time and many "best of the year" videos are produced. This fact also shows the large presence of dominant countries - Mexico, Spain, Colombia, Peru, Argentina - but due to its scale, it prevents us from appreciating the evolution of countries with a smaller

presence. Figure 5 provides a more detailed view of the same period, showing how production has grown in countries such as Venezuela, Costa Rica and Panama.

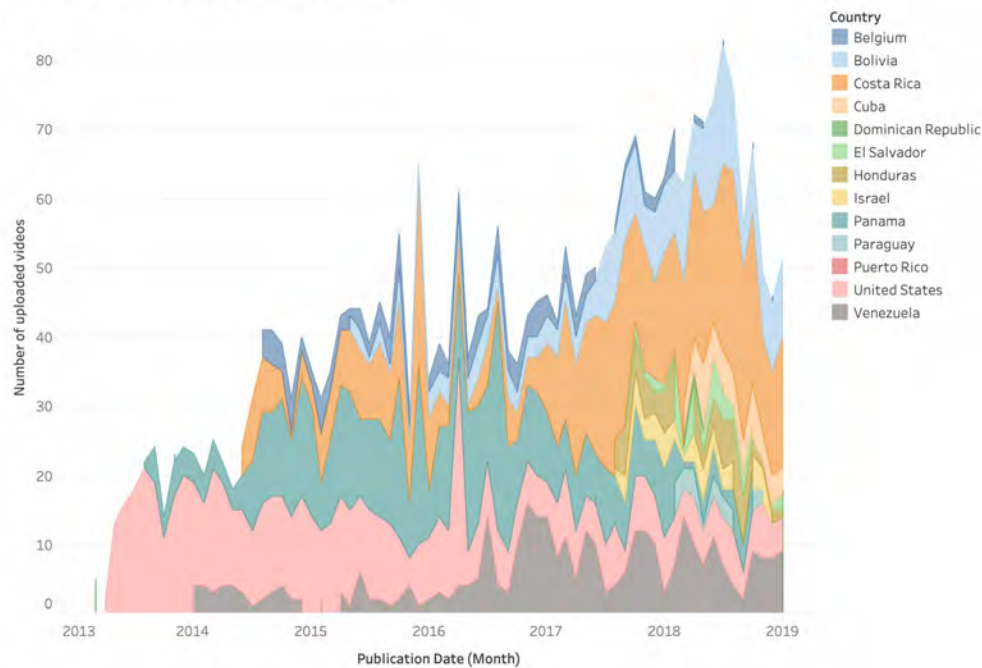
Conclusions

The results of this distant look at the phenomenon allow us to outline the common features BookTube channels have in the Spanish language. Through digital methods we have identified 464 channels, which produced 51,233 videos between 2012 and 2019. From these data we can describe some of the basic socio-demographic characteristics of these content creators.

The data show that most bookTubers are Mexican and Spanish, with a strong presence in other Latin American countries, such as Peru, Colombia and Argentina; however, there is also evidence that the production of book videos on YouTube has grown over time and diversified to other countries.

Figura 5
Number of BookTube videos in “small” countries

Number of uploaded (small countries)



Prepared by the authors.

BookTube channels are often a space for personal expression. As suggested by Carlón (2013), this is related to the de-institutionalised nature of this medium. Other authors such as Craig and Cunningham (2017) have theorised how this is linked to concepts like *authenticity* and *community*. The fact that 446 (96.1 percent) of the channels identify with a person reinforces the hypothesis that the value of BookTubers is constructed as a personal approach to reading, around which spaces of affinity are built (Gee & Hayes, 2012).

In terms of gender distribution, 62% of the channels are owned by women and 32.9% by men; and there is a minority of channels that are either run by couples or belong to institutions such as libraries, schools or collectives. Most BookTubers are between 20 and 29 years old and have a high level of education: 67% have a university education.

The polarised distribution of popularity of BookTube channels - in terms of total views and subscribers - has strong implications for understanding the cultural worlds that coexist within

the same platform. The channels in the top 20 per cent of popularity account for 92.03% of the views, while the remaining 80% get only 7.9% of the views. Concentration of visits turns some booktubers into allies of large publishers to promote their publishing novelties (Tomasena, 2019), whereby personal communication spaces coexist with economic interests and the accumulation of publishing power, as happens with other types of youtubers (Arthurs, 2018; Raun, 2018).

This concentration of attention means that the phenomenon of BookTube is going through by situations of structural inequality based on what Van Dijck (2013, p. 13) calls the “popularity principle”: “the more contacts you have and make, the more valuable you become, because more people think you are popular and hence want to connect with you”.

These data force us to qualify the dominant media rhetoric about booktubers as promoters of reading or new prescribers (Ruiz-Carzón, 2014; Schavelzon, 2016). Firstly, because the influence

of these creators among young readers is relative; only those at the top of the chart have achieved such power. They have become important allies of publishers, book fairs and booksellers, as they have become prescribers (Tomasena, 2019). Other channels operate on smaller networks, outside the media spotlight and the earnings of other YouTubers, and should be conceptualised much closer to the values of the fan world (Guerrero-Pico, 2019).

After a period of strong growth between 2013 and the first half of 2015, the data also show that the number of videos uploaded to these channels has stagnated. These data should be further measured to monitor their evolution and to study the extent to which young people are able to sustain their practice as they enter the academic and professional demands of adult life, but these demands are beyond the design and scope of this academic paper. Secondly, we think that future work would have to monitor the emergence of new channels; that is, whether there is a relay among these creators with a new generation of booktubers who, inspired by the work of their predecessors, decide to open their own spaces on YouTube or whether there is a migration to other platforms, as suggested by the “virtual transhumance” documented by Lluch (2014).

This work is a contribution to measure the scale and penetration of the phenomenon throughout the Spanish-speaking world and to characterise some features of booktubers. We hope that this first descriptive step is sufficiently solid to guide future research - both qualitative and quantitative - on the production of booktubers, their forms of socialisation, their relationship with the digital media sphere, and the development of competencies at the crossroads of oral, written and digital.

Notes

1. The “Gender” label is used to designate the identification of booktubers as “male”, “female” or “other”, and to distinguish it from the variable “Genre”, which is used to refer to the “audio-visual genre” of their videos. This is not to ignore the distinction between sex and gender that gender studies has brought to the social sciences.

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