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# The booktuber channels as a space of socialization of youth reading practices

# Los canales booktuber como espacio de socialización de prácticas lectoras juveniles

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#### Abstract

This work approaches the reading practices of booktubers, young people who use YouTube to talk about books. In order to identify the transformations that the platform introduces in the cultural practices around literary readings, the content of the videos of the 6 booktubers' channels is classified according to the functions they perform in the forms of the readings' socialization. The resulting functions are: analyzing the readings, showing the personal literary collections and selecting literary information through challenges or games that they share with other booktubers. The analysis of the distribution of the types of socialization practices in these channels shows how booktubers organize and shape these categories, specializing in a function, according to their own interest, age or reading experience, or the consolidation of a virtual community that generates and produces content of interest. This way, they establish themselves as mediators of an evolving reading process, taking advantage of technological tools to transform the reading practice.

## Resumen

Este trabajo realiza una aproximación a las prácticas lectoras de jóvenes booktubers que utilizan YouTube para hablar sobre libros. A fin de identificar las transformaciones que la plataforma introduce en las prácticas culturales en torno a las lecturas literarias, se clasifica el contenido de los videos de los canales de 6 booktubers de acuerdo a las funciones que desempeñan en las formas de socialización de las lecturas. Las funciones resultantes son las de analizar las lecturas, mostrar las colecciones literarias personales y seleccionar información literaria a través de retos o juegos que comparten con otros booktubers. El análisis de la distribución de los tipos de prácticas de socialización en estos canales muestra cómo los booktubers organizan y moldean estas categorías, especializándose en una función, de acuerdo a su propio interés, a la edad o la experiencia lectora, o a la facilidad de consolidar una comunidad virtual que genera y produce contenido de interés, consolidándose como mediadores de un proceso lector que evoluciona, aprovechando las herramientas tecnológicas para transformar la práctica lectora.

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#### Introduction

Social concern about the decline in reading habits among children and young people as they proceed through their education fuels many debates about literary reading in the media. Studies on the reading habits of children and young people (González, 2017; Valdés & Mariscal, 2018) show that students read less in their private sphere as they proceed through academic years. The negative influence of audiovisual stimuli (Gutiérrez, 2009) is usually put forward among other reasons to explain this progressive lack of interest by readers.

This dualistic vision, which places reading and screens as opposing poles in the preferences of children and adolescents, ignores the emergence of youth socialisation practices around reading in virtual contexts. As found in some studies (García-Canclini, 2015; Travancas, 2014), the use of web 2.0 platforms is transforming the way young people share what they read. The possibilities offered by the Internet and the social media to connect readers create a space for virtual interaction that consolidates a community of practice and learning. The fuzzy nature of exchanges in these networks strengthens the social dimension of literary reading and is limited to the field of vernacular practices, as it expresses interests and needs that operate outside the formal education systems (Barton, 2010).

The transformations in reading practices introduced by the Internet and the social media contradict the view that blames technology for the decline in interest in reading among adolescents. They also open up a new space for research by making the reading behaviours of the new generations outside school visible (Leverato & Leontsini, 2008). It would be very interesting to know the impact of the virtual environment on the reading practices of young people who use the tools provided by the Internet to generate and share content on their literary books for the teaching of literature. Indeed, school cannot live with its back turned to the impact of the social media in the configuration of the "empirical reader" (Bombini, 2006). It is essential to know the characteristics of this reader to adjust the school education of literary readers to this new reality, both to incorporate the forms of socialisation of those books that may be of interest for the school, and to take into account the training needs that arise from their actions in the virtual environment (Manresa & Margallo, 2016). The objective of this article is to analyse the online reading practices of booktubers, young readers who post videos on YouTube to talk about books, which will allow the identification of forms of socialisation around literary reading that are being consolidated in the social media that can be valuable models of reading dynamics for schools.

#### New reading practices in virtual spaces

If we focus on the type of exchange that is inherent to literary reading, i.e. recommending favourite books, we will see that the Internet has expanded the forms of reading recommendations. According to Lluch's (2014) study on bloggers and booktubers, the use of technological resources to create one's own content around reading produces an empowering effect that transforms the reading experience and enriches it.

Other research has deepened the analysis of digital spaces managed by young people and adolescents around the discussion and generation of content related to books (Manresa & Margallo, 2016; Torrego, Acebes-de-Pablo & Dornaleteche, 2016). These studies highlight that the vitality of literary practices in the virtual world is reinforcing the social dimension of reading, which is increasingly moving away from the exclusive sphere of intimacy. The increase of discursive genres to invigorate book-related exchange is manifested in the coexistence of genres transplanted from the analogical world, such as the review, with other formats typical of the digital environment such as literary challenges, contests and recreational activities that are reading-related. The constant renewal of the ways bloggers and booktubers talk about books shows the creative use of technological tools for the promotion of reading. This configures an active reader, who does not only consume, but also creates content from each individual reading. The analysis by Manresa & Margallo (2016) of five blogs by teenagers with literary themes shows how these spaces lead to "a reconversion of amateur readers into readers who promote and invigorate reading, implementing a wide range of strategies and contents related to the world of literary fiction" (Manresa & Margallo, 2016, p. 68). The reading profile of the bloggers under study is characterised by the strengthening of their social projection, with a strong awareness of belonging to a community, and by their creativity when using the resources available in the digital to consolidate their presence on the net.

## The Booktuber phenomenon

The emergence of the booktuber phenomenon brings together adolescents who are attracted by the visual potential offered by YouTube and the ease of creating channels with their own content and free-of-charge distribution, and create new virtual communities that discuss and analyse books using video to share their reading experience. Ravettino (2015) defines booktubers as young book lovers who present and review video titles in a virtual community of practice that includes many young people.

Rovira-Collado (2016) states that video reviews by booktubers are an evolution of traditional blogs, given the growing popularity of the audiovisual format. Sorensen & Mara (2014) define booktubers as a knowledge community network, because they share contents, intentions and knowledge socialisation processes. They also distinguish between videos in which booktubers comment on books (reviews) and videos in which they talk about books without details of their content, simply showing them to the camera with a brief comment (wrap-ups, bookshelf tours). The study of these categories of content is essential to understand these practices.

YouTube's educational potential includes both the creative aspect that makes it possible to create booktrailers (video advances on the theme of a book) and to generate booktuber content (videos about books that are modelled on those used by booktubers), as shown by Rovira-Collado (2017). According to this author, the use of these commercial and vernacular practices in the classroom allows to generate new reading socialisation practices that contribute to the promotion of reading. In a similar vein, Bergé's study (2018) reports that booktubers' practices are increasingly known and followed by teachers and students. This fact validates the interest in studying and deepening knowledge of this universe and its practices.

## **Study methodology**

In order to learn about the reading practices that young people implement through specialised channels, a documentary analysis (Bardin, 1991) of the channels of six booktubers was carried out. It presents the results of an exploratory research on how YouTube channels dedicated to books organise their content and what reading socialisation practices are these forms of organisation related to. Data analysis was performed with inductively created categories (Taylor & Bogdan, 1989). The objective of the research was to analyse the content of the selected channels to answer the questions: How is the content of the booktuber channels organised according to their function as networked reading practices? Does the content distribution of each channel configure specialisations that distinguish the booktubers from the sample?

In order for the sample of the six selected channels to be representative of the profiles of booktubers with a presence in social networks, the following criteria were taken into consideration:

Age: our interest focuses on young readers linked to formal education (secondary or university education), so we selected booktubers aged between 16 and 23 years. In order to determine the age of the participants, we used the information that booktubers provide in their public social media profiles -Facebook, Twitter, Goodreads or others- or in some of the videos where they explain this information.

The trajectory and consolidation of the channels under study was established from a minimum number of 2,000 subscribers, of 50 uploaded videos with a periodicity of at least one video every 15 days.

Degree of specialisation in books. In order for the channels to fit the booktuber profile, a minimum percentage of 60% of content related to literary books was established, including reviews, literary challenges and other spaces devoted to books. In order to determine these proportions, the videos uploaded from the creation of the channel until the 29<sup>th</sup> of April 2016 were reviewed.

Source: only Spanish-speaking channels were searched. In order to determine the origin of the booktubers, data was extracted from the information provided by the channels and the language used in each of the videos, narrowing the search to channels from Spain, Central or South America.

The application of these criteria to an initial corpus of 30 book-related channels resulted in

a sample made up of six booktuber channels of young readers-, including teenagers and adults-, from countries with different reading traditions --Spain, South America and Central America-- who upload videos on a regular basis -at least twice a month- and who have a significant audience -of between 3,500 and 24,000 followers-.

In order to analyse the content of the channels in this sample, three categories are proposed, defined by viewing a selection of approximately 200 videos from the 30 book-related channels in the initial corpus and comparing them to the characteristics identified in blogs and book channels identified in the reference studies. The three categories are defined on the basis of the functions that the videos serve in the socialising practices of the booktubers:

a) Analysis. This category shows the reflective and analytical aspect of the booktuber. It gathers videos that review literary works or that delve into a particular literary theme. These videos are aimed at discussing, analysing and explaining topics about books and literature. The category of analysis also appears in studies of literary blogs (Gómez Soto, 2011; Rovira-Collado, 2016) that identify a predominance of the analysis function in these virtual spaces.

Table 1Study sample and link to the selection criteria

Channel name	Number of subscribers	Age	Number of videos uploaded	Upload frequency	Date created	Country of origin	Proportion of Booktuber content
Libros de María Antonieta	3,500	23	94	1 video per week	15/08/2011	Spain	100%
Lewis Rimá	13,991	18	136	1 video every 15 days	21/05/2012	Mexico	90%
Tormenta Literaria	9,912	16	194	1 video per week	23/01/2013	Argentina	85%
Letras Infinitas	24,326	16	76	1 video every 15 days	10/12/2013	Mexico	100%
Óscar Leal	9,011	20	109	1 video per week	15/09/2013	Mexico	80%
Matías G.B.	7668	21	91	1 video per week	20/01/2012	Argentina	100%

- b) Collection. It includes videos showing the booktuber's personal libraries, either under the form of monthly compilations of the books purchased, books read in a given time or visual tours of their shelves. The collector's function is present in literary blog studies such as those of Manresa & Margallo (2016) and Sánchez-García, Lluch & Del-Río (2016), which show how young readers have an exhibitionist side that leads them to show their inventories of covers, quotes or favourite readings.
- c) Selection. It includes videos in which the booktuber organises and selects literary information to respond to a series of challenges such as organising a series of questions on topics such as favourite books, characters or specific literary genres that other booktubers present to "challenge" others and make videos answering these questions and talk about literature. While these videos have a playful dimension (Manresa & Margallo, 2016), their primary function is to organise and select literary information to share on video and challenge other booktubers to do so.

The analysis of the selected channels comprises two phases:

- The first one, presented in the section "How is content organised in the booktubers' channel", classifies the videos that the booktuber community groups in playlists and includes a wide range of video types: reviews, Wrap-Ups, Book Hauls, etc. This paper proposes an organisation of these types of videos into more general categories that describe their content according to the type of reading practice they are related to.
- In the second phase, presented in the section "Characterisation of reading socialisation practices", the six channels of the sample are analysed based to the presence of the type of contents generated in the first phase of the analysis. Showing how the previously defined content categories are distributed across the six channels provides an initial

characterisation of the type of reading socialisation practice used by booktubers.

This analysis identifies first approach to the ways in which booktubers organise their channels' content present it to their audience, who answers to the research questions posed.

## How is content organised in the booktubers' channels

Booktubers organise the content of their channels into playlists already established by the community itself, which takes the names of the videos they contain and which come either from their Anglo-Saxon counterparts (Book Hauls, Wrap-Ups, Bookshelf Tours) or from terms adopted by the Spanish-speaking community (reviews, reading guides, tops, challenges). These videos are shown and modified in a dynamic and creative way, which makes necessary a classification on the basis more general categories that refer to the type of reading socialisation they are related to.

#### Table 2

How is content organised in the booktubers' channels

Analysis	Collection	Selection	
Reviews	Book Hauls	Book Tags	
Reading guides	Bookshelftours	Tops	
Studies	Wrap-Ups		

- a. Analysis The following videos can be found here:
- Reviews: they analyse elements of a book such as the plot, the characters, the action, the conflict and the ending. These videos usually have a specific format: general summary of the argument and overall assessment of the reading. Reviews do not give very specific details of the book so as

not to undermine the reading experience of those who have not read it yet. The making of these videos involves the complete reading of the work and a previous preparation of its content that varies depending on the style and involvement of each booktuber in the process.

- Reading guides: videos in which the booktuber organises a series of books by author or topic, aimed at facilitating or improving the reading experience of others. The presence of advice, explanations or analysis of different books shows their informative nature and the willingness to share knowledge with the virtual community. Making this type of video involves the preparation and synthesis of the books; it thus takes much more time and dedication than other videos. Some videos such as Leer a los clásicos from the Libros de María Antonieta channel, or Guía de lectura de Stephen King, from the Matías G.B. channel are examples of reading guides, in which the booktuber makes an overview of the literary work of one or several authors and analyses them as a whole, aiming at motivating and starting to read a set of works.
- Studies: these are analyses of a subject related to books or literature, for example, videos in which booktubers compare the film adaptation to the book it is based on. There are also unique topics per channel, such as La medicina en la literatura, from the Libros de María Antonieta channel, which analyses contents such as books about medicine, writers and diseases, tuberculosis in literature, or Virginia Woolf's bipolar disorder. This category differs from the previous one because, while Reading Guides always try to explain how to read a book, a genre or an author, the Studies compare literature to other disciplines or deal with topics that go beyond literary fiction, such as films or popular culture.
- b. Collection. The following videos can be found under this category:

- Book Hauls: would literally translate as "book tour." In this category, the booktuber shows his/her audience the collection of books that have just arrived to his/her library and that he/she has yet to read. These videos always specify the origin of the book, whether he/ she bought it on his/her own, received it for free at an event, or are gifts from its publishers. They serve the function of showing the book physically, the quality of its edition and the booktuber's opinion prior to reading it. They work as an announcement of the readings that will soon be reported in the channel.
- Bookshelf Tours: In these videos, the booktuber shows the audience his/her book shelves and how their own books are organised. Unlike Book Hauls, which show the most recent acquisitions, these videos tour the booktubers' personal library. Unless there has been a massive reorganisation or update of your their books, each channel is limited to a Bookshelf Tour.
- Wrap-Ups: The booktuber summarises the books read in a specific period. They consist of a short summary and a personal view of the book. Wrap-Ups generally group monthly readings of between 6 and 12 books, although this depends on the booktuber's reading pace booktuber and the periodicity with which he/she uploads his/her videos. In the video, the books are shown one by one with comments on the edition and a synthetic opinion on whether to recommend it or not.
- c. Selection. This category consists of the following videos:
- Book Tags: videos that circulate among the community that pose a series of questions about preferences and reading habits to which each booktuber is invited to respond through another video. Book Tags deal with specific themes, as shown in these examples of the most popular ones: Book Tag of colours, Book Tag of classics, Book Tag of unpopular opinions or Book Tag



Graph 1. Distribution of categories on all channels.

of genres. In each one, a list of questions about these topics is generated so that each booktuber makes the tag with his/her own information.

Tops: videos to select books in order of preference or popularity. For example, the Óscar Leal channel makes videos of the Top 10 mystery books, the Top 10 horror books or the Top 10 zombie books. Tormenta Literaria creates Top rankings with The 10 most popular books I have read, o All the books I read in 2015. Libros de María Antonieta organises the best books in 2014 and 2015, and Matías G.B. makes a Top ranking of the Books I have to read in 2016.

## Characterisation of reading socialisation practices

In this section of the analysis, the distribution of the categories in each of the sample channels is presented by means of graphs, and then the particularities of the content of each channel are explained and related to the results of previous studies.

As the distribution of videos by category in Figure 1 shows, each channel has a category that prevails over the others, which could be related

to a certain degree of specialisation in booktubers' profiles. Total content in analysis videos in the Libros de María Antonieta channel represents 83%, and Matías G.B. has 43% of this same category in relation to 32% of collection and 25% of selection, which means that both use their channel mainly to discuss, give opinions and reflect on books. The function of its channels, mainly based on review and analysis, is oriented towards recommendation, a socialising practice that is approached from deeper reading here.

On the other hand, there is a group of channels in which the selection category prevails over other content, such as Literary Storm, which has 39% of this type of videos, or Lewis Rimá, which has 67%. Both include a predominant series of videos about challenges, lists that organise information according to original criteria and videos that replicate content generated by other channels, such as Book Tags. These channels are mainly aimed at generating entertainment related to literary information that leverages the audiovisual and interactive potential of the platform. Booktubers thus become reading promoters through videos that challenge followers, encouraging them to join the challenge of selecting readings. The concern for attracting and retaining followers has a bearing on the use



Graph 2. Number of videos in the analysis category by channel.

of creative forms of reading promotion that give reading socialisation practices a dynamic and participatory nature. Finally, there are channels more oriented to the collection category such as Letras Infinitas (56%) and Óscar Leal, with an equitable distribution between the collection (48%) and analysis (46%) categories. The Collector category takes advantage of YouTube options to display books from personal libraries in real time. Among the effects that this category has on social practices related to books is the use of self-image as a booktuber reader as a cover letter to the community. Along with this exhibitionist dimension, collecting is also related to consumerism, a feature that publishers try to make profitable.

In order to deepen the analysis of how the profiles of the booktubers in the sample are configured, the video distribution graphs by categories are shown below.

As the distribution of analysis videos in the sample channels shown in Figure 2, the list of Reviews is common to all channels. This is reasonable as they represent the core purpose of these practices: to analyse books and comment on video books. These video reviews on the sample channels last between 5 and 10 minutes, and generally focus on the description of the plot of the work and its subsequent analysis.

Age and experience on YouTube may have an impact on the type of content present on the channel. In the Libros de María Antonieta and Matías G.B. channels, the most experienced booktubers in the sample, the analysis videos prevail (more than 80% in Libros de María Antonieta and 43% in Matías G.B.) Although the link between maturity to in-depth videos about books that emerge from these results (Libros de María Antonieta, 23 years old, and Matías G.B. 21 years old) should be verified in a more extensive sample, it is noted that the age variable determines the type of content of the channel in our case. Therefore, in the channels of younger booktubers, Lewis Rimá (18), Letras Infinitas (16) and Tormenta Literaria (16), collection or selection contents prevail, which may indicate an orientation towards more dynamic and interactive videos.

With regard to the specialisation by content type, it is also significant the number of subscribers variable, which reinforces the division that marks age: the channels of the younger booktubers specialised in selection and collection contents are also those with a greater number of subscribers (24,326 in the case of Letras Infinitas, 13,996 in the case of Lewis Rimá and 9,912 in the case of Tormenta Literaria). In contrast, channels with fewer subscribers (Libros de María Antonieta, with 3,500



Graph 3. Number of videos in the collection category by channel.

subscribers, and Matías G.B., with 7,668) tend to generate content that is more oriented towards analysis and discussion. It is understood that the function of socialising and sharing content under the form of lists, challenges or games allows for a more significant progression in terms of achieving a massive audience. It is also understood that younger booktubers tend to diversify content by adopting new strategies that allow them to stand out from the crowd.

The analytical function, also present in literary blogs (Manresa & Margallo, 2016; Rovira-Collado, 2016; Sánchez, Lluch & Del-Río, 2013), is embodied in the genres that booktubers develop (video reviews, studies and reading guides). This fact is a sign of continuity of the analytical trend in the audiovisual media. Booktubers have an instructive vocation and in their videos, as they include the genres from the blogs devoted to deepen the literary work.

With regard to the distribution of video collectors, graph 3 shows that Book Hauls and Wrap-Ups are the most common ones. Almost all the booktubers in this exhibition make both types of videos, it being understood that showing the personal library is essential for any booktuber as it identifies them as members of the community.

It is interesting that some of these videos, such as Wrap-ups, which show the books read in a given period, show a reading frequency ranging from 5 or 6 books per month in the sample under study, which in turn refers to a consolidated reading habit. In general, videos in the collection category encourage users to read by means of a fun approach to reading, which tries to arouse each readers' curiosity. They use strategies that generate surprise and expectations, such as highlighting intriguing details of the books or attractive aspects of their format.

Figure 4 shows the distribution of selection videos in the sample channels. The ability to tag or label another booktuber to share personal information, interests or fun facts about books makes the dissemination of these videos easier. The selection and organisation of literary information by way of challenges consolidates this vision of a reader who is a reference for his followers, interested in knowing the personal preferences of the booktuber



Graph 4. Number of videos in the selection category by channel.

Book Tags, the most popular videos in this category, allow to make content viral, while challenges launched to the booktuber community are shared through tags that allow to spread this practice. The use of literary information as a recreational tool that promotes reading among community members is one of the distinctive reading socialisation practices of booktubers.

These data show that the experience of literary reading on the web is expanding, strengthening its social dimension through the creation of original and attractive content aimed at promoting reading. As pointed out by Cassany (2012), Lluch & Acosta (2012), or Martos Núñez (2006), discursive practices mediated by technology shape the emergence of new genres, with their own characteristics and inherent to the platforms that incorporate technological resources they provide and adapt to the interests and needs of the new generations. On the other hand, the nomenclature of the videos is consolidated in the practices generated from the community itself, which self-regulates the content organisation process. The use of this nomenclature (Book Tags, Wrap-Ups, Book Hauls, etc.)

allows the generation of booktuber content to be replicated and expanded within the framework set by the community itself.

The distribution of the content categories in the exhibition's channels confirms the configuration of a consolidated reader, who leverages the functionalities of the technological tools at hand to make the reading process more dynamic, both from an analytical point of view, in which YouTube is used as a platform to share knowledge and studies on books, and through the selection of literary information and the display of book collections. All these functionalities involve ways of socialising reading that are useful to consolidate an audience.

#### Conclusions

Research on booktuber channels allows us to identify the characteristics of the reading practices of young people who post videos about books on YouTube. The wide range of videos and channels dealing with reading on YouTube reflects the creativity and dynamism of booktubers generating content on this platform. Far beyond being just a descriptive exercise, they become young critics who use their books to infect others with their love for reading.

Booktubers approach the diffusion of the books they read by exploring the various possibilities provided by the audiovisual format and the YouTube social network. The impact of both on the renewal of reading-related socialising practices can be summarised in the following aspects:

- Customisation. Although the booktuber content regulated by the community has several similarities, what thousands of followers find interesting in these channels is the opportunity of knowing the booktuber's opinion about a particular book, knowing their personal literary collections or their favourite reading lists, which varies in each channel available in the virtual community so it diversifies the flow of content on YouTube.
- Interaction. As YouTube is a social network, with functionalities that promote permanent exchange of content and creation of new formats, it allows booktubers to generate and circulate videos about games and challenges that motivate them to seek and show information and opinions about literary reading. The community is strengthened by staying in constant touch, and it grows in terms of followers and content creators, expanding this practice over wide territories.
- Knowledge. It is also important to develop knowledge about the book, either by deepening their analysis or by offering literary information. The ways in which these young readers talk about books in a passionate and convinced way are new, generating a reading promotion momentum that can be very useful to create awareness in the new generations and allow them to approach reading from a fun vision mediated by technology.

Booktuber channels represent an evolution in the way young people conceive and perform

the reading process mediated by technology, as they move from blogs, where texts and pictures prevail, to the use of video and the social features of YouTube, which have a greater potential for disseminating content to new audiences, and consolidate the idea that technology permanently modifies and shapes these types of expression. Booktubers choose to share, either from the position of an expert reader, or from a more playful and social perspective, which allows the scope of these practices to be broader and respond to the wide range of interests of a growing audience.

Beyond a description of these booktuber channels' content, this study helped to identify links, for example, between the age and number of followers of the booktubers and the type of content they specialise in. The fact that older booktubers with fewer followers specialise in analysis while younger ones with fewer followers specialise in lists that do not require so much in-depth reading shows an evolution in socialisation practices towards those that involve greater participation and are oriented towards motivation rather than reflection on books.

Although this work presents a descriptive approach to the reading practices of booktubers, the analysis of the channels' content is limited to the identification of the functions performed by the videos in the configuration of reading socialisation practices. Nevertheless, it does not analyse the content of the videos, which opens the way to future research into the characteristic discourse of booktubers or the type of interaction with their audience.

It also opens up avenues for participatory research through interviews or focus groups that take into account the booktuber's position vis-à-vis the creation of his/her content as well as the possibility of projecting this and similar practices in the field of didactics and formal education. As we have worked with a limited and reduced sample, these conclusions cannot be generalised to the whole universe of booktuber reading practices, as the dynamism of activities mediated by technology constantly moves on and changes. Nevertheless, this study is an advance in the process of knowledge and research on how adolescents' vernacular practices are shaped under spaces generated, organised and promoted by them, with rules and situations regulated by the community of practice itself.

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