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Gamers, writers and social media influencers: professionalisation processes among teenagers

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Abstract

Introduction. The evolution of the media industry has prompted profound changes in the way teenagers develop their skills and access transmedia products. To be precise, the article focuses on the emergence of a grey area where media hobbies become professionalisation opportunities for young people, and profit opportunities for the industries. **Methods.** The study has been carried out from a mixed qualitative and quantitative methods approach. Ethnographic, statistical and textual data collection and analysis techniques have been implemented. **Results.** Three areas of professionalisation are detected: video games, creative writing and social networks, each with its own dynamics with respect to teenagers' gender and the resources and platforms used. **Discussion and conclusions.** Teenagers who undertake professionalisation processes constitute a minority and, within this group, it is essential to strengthen the skills that allow them to understand to what extent media companies profit from their work.

Keywords

Transmedia literacy; eSports; influencers, teenagers, collaborative writing.

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1. Introduction

Access to new platforms and media in the digital environment is enabling quick and easy communication among teenagers. Every day teens discover new applications and networks that change their consumption and production habits. However, while this digital environment is in principle free to access, we cannot ignore that access to content comes with some considerations, such as the collection of users' personal and location data. Sometimes, both young and adult people are not aware that using digital services comes with a price. That is why it is important to continue researching and reflecting on what transmedia literacy is in order to know what teens are doing with the media and how they can learn to manage them.

In this context, there are two areas that can in principle be opposed: the participatory cultures and the cultural industries. The former involves such practices as remixing, collective intelligence and a culture of collaboration between prosumers and fans, while the latter is characterised by the homogenisation of production processes, profit-making and corporate concentration. Between these two areas there is a grey area (Scolari, 2014) where some people, many of them fans of certain cultural products, transition from the amateur field of the participatory cultures to the professional field of the cultural industries, which characterises the phenomenon of cultural convergence (Jenkins, 2006). It is in this area where some young people with outstanding skills in the digital field are trying to open a gap in the cultural industries, specifically in video games (eSports, videogame development, etc.), publishing (Wattpad, booktubers, etc.) and product and service review (Instagram, YouTube channels, etc.). Although having very specific skills to excel in these areas is fundamental for teens to be able to work at a professional level, we cannot forget that these new environments are still developing in many aspects at the legislative and labour levels. And this is where many teens are sometimes immersed doing an activity that they love but is far from being their dream: transitioning from an amateur to a professional with a stable income.

This article is motivated by the reflections on this new media ecosystem and the role that teens are playing in it, as well as by the challenges and problems that arise in the relationships between prosumers and the new cultural industries.

2. State of the art review

2.1. Transmedia literacy and skills

In the current media ecosystem, young people are immersed in the consumption and production of digital content, through socio-technological practices that have been enabled by advances in internet technologies. Media competition (Ferrés-Prats and Piscitelli, 2012, Ferrés-Prats, Aguaded-Gómez and García-Matilla, 2012) is considered as a necessary tool to understand this new context. Likewise, the quick and easy access to new digital media has also increased the concern of different agents, such as teachers, educational institutions and parents, over their safe use (Livingstone et al., 2011; Masanet and Establés, 2018) and the formation of citizens who are critical of media consumption and production (Alvermann et al., 2018, Funk et al., 2016, García-Ruiz, Ramírez-García and Rodríguez-Rosell, 2014, Herrero-Diz, Ramos-Serrano and Nó, 2016).

Following this line, adults are required to better understand what digital media and tools teens are using and how they are exploiting their transmedia skills in the classroom (Lacasa, 2011, Scolari, 2018). In this sense, we consider it essential to continue working on transmedia literacy, which Scolari (2018, p.17) defines as “a series of skills, practices, priorities, sensitivities, learning strategies and ways of sharing that are developed and applied in the context of new participatory cultures”. In this way, the key to transmedia literacy would be to place social networks and practices with new media at the centre of teens’ practical and analytical skills. Thus, we have identified a series of transmedia skills that make up the basic pillars of this literacy, according to the latest studies in this area (Scolari, 2018): production skills; management skills; performative skills; media and technology skills; narrative and aesthetic skills; risk prevention and privacy skills and ideology and ethic skills.

In this flexible and changing media context in which labour, aspirational and ludic issues are intertwined, teens should possess a series of skills that empower to face the new media and professional opportunities that may arise. In this sense, we consider that the key skills teens need to foster their critical spirit would be media and technology skills, ideology and ethic skills, and management skills, which enable teens to understand how the media industries work, how they are managed and what are their implicit or explicit ideologies.

Specifically, we define the media and technology skills as those related to knowledge and decision-making with respect to the media in matters related to the socio-political economy, characteristics and digital languages of the media. On the other hand, the ideology and ethic skills refer to the detection, analysis and decision making when it comes to stereotyped media representations as well as ethical issues related to copyright and practices such as hacking and cheating. Finally, management skills refer to competencies in three main areas: social management, individual management and content management. Social management skills refer to the different degrees of dexterity to communicate, coordinate, organise, lead and teach while playing or producing content collectively. Content management skills refer to the ability to manage different multimedia content through a variety of platforms and media, through their selection, downloading, organisation and dissemination, while individual management skills refer to peoples’ ability to self-manage time and resources, their own identity, feelings and emotions.

Below, we will show how these transmedia skills are evident in the consumption and production of the different digital environments in which teens navigate in their daily lives.

2.2. Co-option of the audience: opportunities and risks

The “grey area” (Scolari, 2014) between the cultural and participatory cultures can bring with it both job opportunities and risks. The magnetism that generates simple, collective and free access (Jenkins, 2006) to digital tools is the greatest attraction of these new digital professions for young audiences. However, co-option of the audience can also exist in these digital environments, either through the exploitation of digital work from a Marxist perspective (Fuchs, 2017) or through the attraction of users who aspire to achieve a paid creative digital work (Duffy, 2016; Zafra, 2017).

Teens have at their disposal a wide variety of social networks and digital platforms to achieve their professional goals. The inexperience and lack of knowledge of teens about economic and power relations can lead them to generate great expectations when it comes to dedicating themselves to these new professions. However, in most cases, they will be frustrated by their failure to reach their initial goals. For this reason, it is necessary to build bridges between the tensions that emerge from this co-option of the audience, which requires the redefinition of laws, norms and roles between cultural industries and participative cultures (Stehling *et al.*, 2018).

Below, we break down the three main areas that we have identified as the aspirational pseudo-professionalisation areas of Spanish teens: video games, digital writing and social networks.

2.2.a. Competitive and professional gaming

The first author to approach systematically the definition of video games was Chris Crawford (1982), who identified and described its four main characteristics: representation, interaction, conflict and security. Video games are an extension of imaginary interactive worlds, but their most important feature is simulation (Wolf & Perron, 2014). People play video games because they are fun and because of the experiences they provide. That is, video games allow us to act and react to our actions and choices (Rigby and Ryan, 2011). An example of this is *League of Legends*, the most played online multiplayer game, with an average monthly player base of 100 million people (Guinness World Records, 2017), and one of the most used games in *eSports*.

The term *eSports* is an abbreviation for electronic sports. Also known as professional gaming (or pro-gaming) and cyber-athletics, it refers to competitive and professional video games (Brenda, 2017). Electronic sports or competitive gaming refer to organised video game competitions, mainly between professional gamers (CGC Europe, 2015). Gamers are people who participate in the organised competitions. Currently, the number of Spanish high-level gamers competing nationally and internationally has increased and as well as the number of Spanish competitions that attract foreign gamers, mainly from Europe (AEVI, 2018). The teams are companies that hire gamers with the purpose of participating in competitions on their behalf. In Spain, and internationally, the outstanding teams are Fnatic, G2, Team Solo Mid and SK Telecom (AEVI, 2018).

It can be argued that *eSports* were born out of modernity. That is, they are a product of globalisation, neoliberalism, affective social changes and the ubiquitous proliferation of ICT. As such, they appeared recently thanks to the existence of the necessary technological and sociological conditions (Carter and Gibbs, 2013). This niche market is based on the competitive aspect of videogames. The core of *eSports* is like that of traditional sports. People train to improve their skills, clubs are created, tournaments are organised, and fans enjoy watching their favourite high-performance game play (Ströh, 2017).

Broadcasters are operators with platforms to distribute audiovisual content in live, on-demand and online modalities. The industry's leading platform is Twitch, although YouTube, Mixer and even Facebook also stand out. In Spain, Movistar has a channel on its television platform: *Movistar Esports* (AEVI, 2018).

Teams are the essence of eSports. Some of the most popular teams, such as SK-Gaming, have themselves become companies, hire gamers from around the world, control casinos (composed of houses and training facilities) and earn large sums of money from cash prizes and sponsors. The wide range of media generated by these simple training sessions is also a valuable asset (CGC Europe, 2015). Professional gamers can spend several hours a day training to perfect their skills. Some eSports titles may require more than 300 actions per minute, so multitasking is a must and games often receive updates that can alter their dynamics (Shabir, 2017). Most eSports clubs run several squads, each specialising in different video games (The Esports Observer, 2018).

Live attendance to an *eSports* tournament or match is similar to that of any other classic sport. However, in this case, people get together to watch a videogame competition (CGC Europe, 2015). *eSports* have a certain setup of an arena: professional gamers sit and play a game at the central stage. As CGC Europe (2015) describes, each player has a monitor, a gaming PC, input devices, headphones and sophisticated seating. While it is common for professional gamers to bring their own peripheral equipment, computers are present to avoid unfair hardware configurations. As with regular sports, professional gamers wear shirts with logos. It is important to keep in mind that although the various *eSports* organisations (e.g., ESL, MLG and KeSPA) work differently, they all require teams to qualify for specific leagues and world tournaments (CGC Europe, 2015).

The vast majority of the income received by all sectors of the *eSports* industry comes from sponsors. Because of this, professional gamers use brand logos on their shirts, use brand products and create content on social networks around the brand that sponsors them. Broadcast platforms allocate screen space to the sponsor or even dedicate full channels to the brand. Event producers can display and showcase the name of the sponsor during games and, in the case of video game hardware companies, they can create full events around their latest product lines (The Esports Observer, 2018). In exchange for this, the sponsors get several rewards, such as an improved image, exposure to a large audience (Shabir, 2017), while other sponsors have specialised *eSports* marketing teams (Ströh, 2017). Sponsors are usually brands that pay publishers, event organisers and teams in exchange for displaying their products and logos or naming a competition after them (SuperData, 2015).

2.2.b. Collaborative writing and professional publishing

The exponential development of software in the second half of the 20th century has led to a profound change in the way we consume and produce cultural content in the 21st century (Manovich, 2013). These technological transformations have crystallised in a process that Jenkins (2006) calls media convergence, where the limits between production and consumption, between industry and customers, between issuers and receivers, are blurred. This process gives way to a panorama in which the social and cultural capital (and, to a lesser extent, the economic one) appear potentially redistributed and, therefore, the rules that govern the different sectors of the media industry are redefined. In recent years, this industry has had to manage, on the one hand, the emergence of hybrid consumers, or prosumers, whose access to production and distribution tools has been facilitated by software development, and on the other, the alternative forms of consumption that also operate without intermediaries.

In the case of the publishing sector, the rise of self-publishing (Furtado, 2012; Laquintano, 2010) is a visible symptom of these mutations. Agents and publishers, as Romarshan Bold (2018) points out, still hold much of the cultural capital of the literary industry, establishing the lists of relevant authors and books, but their social capital has been diminished by the expansion of platforms for collaborative writing and self-publishing, such as Wattpad. Founded in 2006 by Allen Lau and Ivan Yuen in Toronto (Canada), Wattpad is currently the world's largest collaborative writing platform, with more than 65 million users and 400 million uploaded stories (Lunden, 2018). Readers can join various subcommunities of literary genres and contribute to compiling recommendations and rankings of the platform, based on reading, sharing, commenting and voting on their favourite stories; which becomes data that are later interpreted by an algorithm. On the other hand, the young amateur authors of Wattpad propose genres and themes that are far removed from the preferences of the general public (Tirocchi, 2018) (which are often reflected in the popularity rankings), and adapt literature classics, such as *Jane Austen*, to the new generations (Mirmohamadi, 2014).

Wattpad's themes and structure are organised around reading and writing subcommunities following the legacy of the fan fiction communities, a phenomenon of collaborative literacy that emerged in the late 1960s in which fans rewrite the stories and characters of mass culture (Jenkins, 1992) and, like so many other manifestations of fan culture, has flourished thanks to digitalisation (Hellekson and Busse, 2014). It is not surprising that the works of fan fiction have their own section in Wattpad and have the largest number of users on the platform, with 93,115 (in March 2018). In fact, *After*, a romance fanfic based on Harry Styles, the former leader of boyband *One Direction*, was responsible for putting Wattpad in the sight of publishing houses, for whom the platform has become a breeding ground of literary talents. Since the first chapter of *After* was published in 2013, Anna Todd (aka *imagination1D*) has become the great success story of Wattpad. Just a year later, her work was already available in bookstores prior modification of the protagonists' names. In fact, *After* is a phenomenon that has ended up the institutionalising editorial crowdsourcing practices (Ezaleila Mustafa and Mohd Adnan, 2017) that we could already observe in other much talked-about *fanfiction*-professional publication transitions, such as the *Shadowhunter* saga (Cassandra Clare) and *Fifty Shades of Grey* (E.L. James), which originated on the *Fanfiction.net* website.

While these are movements that benefit the authors themselves and the publishing houses, it is interesting to note that these practices still arouse the scepticism of fan fiction communities, for whom this activity has never been carried out for profit. In line with the predicaments of the "gift economy" (Hellekson, 2009; Coppa, 2017), the production of fanfics is conceived as a gift to the community that aims to strengthen ties among participants, who gathered around their passion towards a common fandom object. Fanfics, therefore, possess an intangible value that is deeply rooted in the context and dynamics of the communities that produce them. Therefore, according to Jones (2014), fans consider the removal of fanfics from their original distribution platforms as a form of labour exploitation, taking into account that, in most cases, the authors of these works feed on the suggestions of readers during the writing process.

2.2.c. Social media influencers

The rise of unknown amateur writers to microcelebrity status cannot be considered an isolated phenomenon of similar trends in advertising, another sector of the media industry that has been seduced by the social capital that prosumers generate around them. Thus, the communication plans of brands and manufacturers, regardless of the size of their business, have been redesigned to take full advantage

of the persuasive capacity of people in social networks, whose reputation and ability to influence their respective communities of followers, on occasions, has catapulted them to the category of “influencers” (Segarra-Saavedra and Hidalgo-Martí, 2017, Ramos-Serrano and Herrero-Diz, 2016).

In Spain, 85% of social network users between the ages of 16 and 65 follow influencers (IAB, 2016). Some of these opinion leaders of the new millennium began their journey as consumers who shared their experiences and gave advice about a variety of media and non-media products, such as video games, television series, books, clothing, cosmetics and food. By means of a direct and close style, and exploiting a DIY aesthetic, influencers gained ground in that particular “attention economy” (Marwick, 2013) represented by blogs, first, and YouTube, Twitter and Instagram and YouTube. The scope of influencers has increased in parallel to the growth of their content in the different social networks and, with it, their attractiveness for brands. Traditional digital advertising does not work (Díaz cited in Elorriaga-Illera and Monge Benito, 2018, Riboni, 2017), hence brands focused on the vernacular prescriptive genres of the influencer, such as unboxing, review and, above all, the tutorial.

In her study of the phenomenon of beauty gurus on YouTube, García-Rapp (2016) analyses the mechanisms that influencers put in place to develop and maintain their online popularity. His results illuminated two distinct areas of activity linked to different contents and objectives that work in parallel. On the one hand, there is a “commercial sphere” based on the production of tutorials, in which the protagonists are the products and experience of gurus. These tutorials serve to boost the market value of these influencers before brands. On the other hand, the “sphere of the community” is built around vlogs, or videos with more personal content, where the gurus show pieces of their daily life. In this way, they reinforce their social value within the system of norms and hierarchies of the community in which they participate, and legitimise their position as influencer before followers, who reward their authenticity and willingness to share their private life (Burgess & Green, 2009, Lange, 2014, Martínez-Navarro and De Garcillán López Rúa, 2016, Elorriaga Illera and Monge Benito, 2018).

It can be argued that the multiplatform self-branding strategy (Marwick, 2013) carried out by influencers in all social networks is based on these two spheres. Both areas interact in a fragile balance that is determined by the degree of identification of followers with influencers, whose narrative of ‘ordinary kids’ is the main attraction for the audience, who sees them as reliable advisers (Pérez Curiel and Luque Ortíz, 2018) or role models (Pérez-Torres, Pastor-Ruiz and Abarrou-Ben-Boubaker, 2018). Hence, preserving authenticity becomes a key mission for influencers in a context of deep contradictions. In this sense, and in relation to youtubers, Ardèvol and Márquez (2017) argue that, on the one hand, the advertising and media industry appropriates the image of these influencers to sell their products, and on the other, the most popular influencers increasingly depend on the industry to maintain their professional activity at the cost of seeing the complicity with their audience diminished.

3. Research design

3.1. Research objectives

This work derives from the innovation, development and research project titled “Transliteracies. The transmedia skills and informal learning strategies of teenagers” (CSO2014-56250-R), whose general objective is to identify the transmedia skills and informal learning strategies developed by teenagers in their media practices. Specifically, in this study we will focus on those skills pertaining to the areas

referred to as *management skills*, *media and technology skills* and *ideology and ethic skills*. The specific objective is to explore emerging professionalisation processes among teenagers. We are interested in answering the following research questions related to professional practices that, in turn, give an account of the degree of acquisition of transmedia skills in the aforementioned three areas:

1. What areas of professionalisation can be distinguished in teenagers' media practices?
2. What kind of professionalisation strategies do teenagers execute when they consume and produce content?
3. To what extent are teenagers aware of the operation and political economy of the media and cultural industries?

3.2. Sample

This research project had a total of 237 young participants, between the ages of 12 and 16, from five Spanish autonomous communities (Andalusia, Catalonia, Community of Madrid, Valencian Community and Galicia). Field work was carried out between March and September 2016. Specifically, two secondary education centres were chosen per region, taking into account the educational specificities of each autonomous community, with special emphasis on the centre's funding type (public and/or state-subsidised) and location (provincial capital and/or secondary populations). Students participating in this research were enrolled in one of the three courses that correspond to the first cycle of Compulsory Secondary Education (ESO).

3.3. Methods

This study has been carried out from a mixed qualitative and quantitative methods approach. Ethnographic, statistical and textual techniques have been used for data collection and analysis [1]. It should be noted that this study has not been designed to be representative of the media consumption of Spanish teenagers. Its object of analysis are the most productive and creative teens in the informal environment, who allow us to detect transmedia skills and informal learning strategies to create didactic activities in the field of formal education. Therefore, for this article we have focused on the qualitative data of the research in order to infer the consumption trends and main media practices of Spanish teens. In this sense, we are aware that media practices at the pseudo-professional level do not constitute majorities, neither for young prosumers nor for adults, although we believe that it is pertinent to delve into the type of productive practices these users carry out within the current transmedia ecosystem.

Once the schools had been selected by each research team, a series of questionnaires were applied to teens to explore their interests in terms of media consumption and production and identify whether these interests belonged to the ludic-video field or to participatory culture (social networks, fan fiction, etc.).

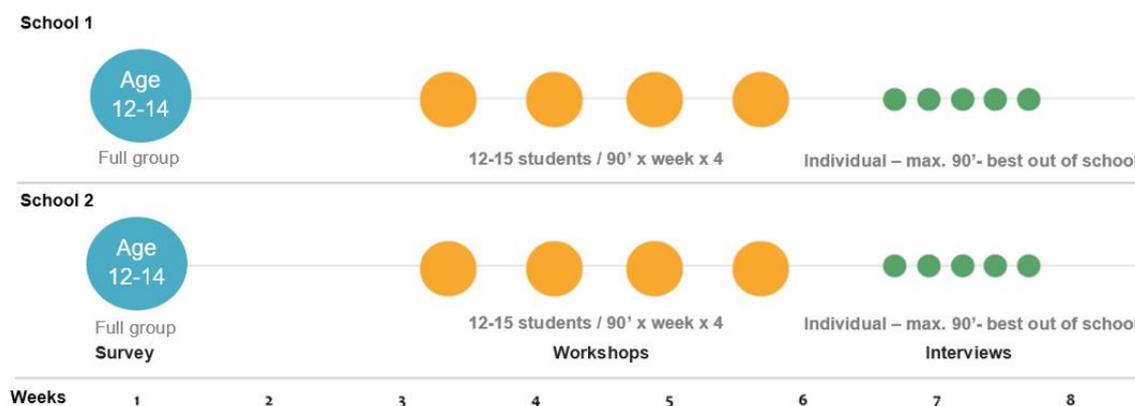
At this point, the researchers selected teens based on their interests in two workshops: one on video games and the other one on participatory culture. Both workshops lasted two sessions of two hours each and were recorded on video. In total, two workshops were held per school, that is, four workshops per autonomous community (eight sessions per region). During the workshops, researchers detected

those teens that were the most participatory and expressed a greater knowledge of aspects related to media production and consumption.

These teens were invited to participate in the last phase of the fieldwork, which consisted of in-depth interviews that delved into the topics addressed during the workshops. Figure 1 shows the participant selection process, from the general class group to the individual interview.

In addition, as an extraordinary and voluntary activity, prospective interviewees were given a media diary to write down their media diet for a week. The distribution of collected diaries is as follows: 15 from Andalusia, 17 from Catalonia, 16 from the Community of Madrid and 16 from the Valencian Community. In relation to the interviews, a total of 99 people were interviewed: 18 from Andalusia, 22 from Catalonia, 20 from the Valencian Community, 19 from the Community of Madrid and 20 from Galicia.

Figure 1: Fieldwork organisation for the selection of interviewees.



Source: Authors' own creation.

The last part of the analysis focused on the creation of table to carry out the textual analysis of the products made during the workshops to detect the transmedia skills present in such texts.

Once the data of the workshops and the in-depth interviews were collected, audios were transcribed, and their categories were analysed with the help of the qualitative data analysis software *Nvivo Pro 11 for Teams*. The first round of coding focused on descriptive issues while the second round was based on the detection and analysis of transmedia skills and informal learning strategies. Finally, the third round of coding was devoted to the integration of data from the five autonomous communities, thus creating a global tree map of transmedia skills and informal learning strategies.

Figure 2: Global tree map with results on transmedia skills and informal learning strategies in the Spanish context.

Name	Sources	References
7. Transmedia skills	197	10115
1. Production skills	107	1035
2. Management skills	173	3891
3. Performative skills	122	1187
4. Media and technology skills	65	642
5. Narrative and aesthetic skills	98	585
6. Ideology and ethic skills	82	387
7. Risk prevention and privacy	34	91
8. Other	152	2297
8. Informal learning strategies	119	1470
8.1. Learning by doing	113	841
8.2. Problem solving	49	113
8.3. Imitating / Simulating	63	207
8.4. Playing	17	36
8.5. Evaluating	5	5
8.6. Teaching	11	18
8.7. Directed learning	22	29
8.8. Other	24	221

Source: Authors' own creation.

4. Results

Throughout this study, three major areas of professionalisation were detected among the set of media practices carried out by the teens in the sample: video games, creative reading and writing, and social networks. Moreover, the qualitative analysis identified two fundamental aspects that had not been raised initially in the research questions. The first refers to teens' consumption and production issues with respect to gender, and the second to the use of platforms such as YouTube for the production of audiovisual content across the three areas of professionalisation of teens.

4.1. Consumption and production differentiated by gender

Each area is characterised by exhibiting a clear tendency with respect to the gender of teens who claimed to carry out activities related to this area. First, we distinguished the area of video games with a greater presence of men than women, which reinforces recent positions in this line. According to a survey conducted in 2015 by the International Game Developers Association, only 21% of the video game developers are women. Therefore, we still cannot say that there is gender equality in this area. There continues to be a gap in favour of men in terms of employment rate, occupation, positions of responsibility, etc. This disparity also occurs in the Spanish case. The sector increased its workforce from 2015 to 2016 by 22%, reaching 5,440 professionals. In 2015, the Spanish industry had a workforce of 4,460 professionals, of which only 17% were women, which contrasts with the high representation of women (45%) in the overall number of Spanish gamers (DEV, 2016).

Secondly, we detected an area of creative reading and writing with a focus of activity centred on Wattpad. In contrast, the analysis reveals that this activity is linked to the female sphere in line with previous studies on writing within fandom communities (Hellekson, 2009). Third, there is the area related to social networks, where we find a greater trend of female profiles whose activity revolves around Instagram and YouTube.

Table 1: Interviewed teens who know and/or are in a process of professionalisation.

Professionalisation area in digital environments	Number of interviewees	Girls	Boys
Video game - eSports	18	5 (27.78%)	13 (72.22%)
Creative reading and writing - Wattpad	15	14 (93.33%)	1 (6.66%)
Social networks	40	25 (62.5%)	15 (37.5%)

Source: Authors' own creation.

The results presented in the previous table have been obtained through the analysis of the 99 interviews conducted in the five autonomous communities, although the overall number of interviews (73) does not correspond to that number. The reason for this mismatch has been the detection of the selection criteria in relation to the research questions posed at the beginning of this article, focused exclusively on the professionalisation processes of teens in digital environments.

4.2. Audiovisual content as the core of professionalisation

In parallel to these areas, it is interesting to note that there is a common tendency in all of them that is related to the articulated consumption and production of video, again, around YouTube, which involves several sub-areas according to content (gameplays and live game broadcasts; books and tutorials, mostly). Thus, it can be said that, thanks to this thematic variety, YouTube appears as a transversal tool to the practices assigned to the three areas of professionalisation, although its presence varies across them. The presence of audiovisual content is clearly remarkable in the field of video games and in the area of tutorials as a showcase of the knowledge, skills and personal branding of teens, while in the written content in Wattpad, videos are essentially limited to presenting booktrailers.

Figure 3: 100 most cited words among interviewees in relation to their digital media practices on writing, photography, video and videogames.

earned money from the extensions that we created to download videogames. We offer services to users and maintain the website through a small investment that we obtain from the website itself”. In fact, Juan adds that he makes this type of content thinking about his future career in the computer sector.

With regards to the second area of professionalisation related to video games, *eSports*, we have detected four types of teenagers according to their connection with audiovisual platforms such as YouTube and Twitch:

- 1) Teenagers who do not know what this cultural industry is like.
- 2) Teenagers who know what eSports are because they consume them through tournaments and/or live broadcasts.
- 3) Teenagers who know what the eSports industry is like because they have friends or colleagues who are aspiring professional gamers and therefore receive inputs about the business from secondary sources.
- 4) Participants in the study who know what the eSports industry is like because they are participate in it as aspiring professional gamers.

In relation to the first group, many teens in the study mentioned that they play online video games, mainly with friends or colleagues, but that they do not know what eSports are as a cultural industry. The situation is different in the case of the second group of teens detected. For example, Luis (13 years old, Galicia) says he likes to watch videos of gameplays and characters from the *Clash Royale* and *Clash of Clans* videogames: “I find these videos entertaining, I have always liked them. And they also make tournaments that give cash prizes to the winners”.

In the case of groups three and four, the knowledge of the cultural industry of eSports is greater. Therefore, the capacity of these teens to analyse sociocultural industries is more developed, as pointed out in section 2.1 in relation to the greater development of media and technology skills. However, this knowledge is usually limited to economic issues and not labour and/or legislative matters, so many of them are not aware of the co-option of the audience by the media industries. In this sense, we highlight the example of Solomon (14 years old, Catalonia), who has a YouTube channel where he presents his professional gameplays of *Call of Duty*. “He still does not make money from his videos, but many professionals earn 4,000 euros a month because they have more than a million views on their YouTube channels [...]. This benefits YouTube because without channels of this type, it would get much fewer users on the platform”. Therefore, this teenager emphasises that the economic benefits that professional gamers can obtain from their videos also have an impact on other companies that are closely linked to *eSports*, as is the case with YouTube.

A similar case is that of Damián (14 years old, Catalonia), who has a classmate with 600 followers on his YouTube channel and receives money from both the platform and through the sponsors he has obtained thanks to his skills as a *Smite* player. In fact, Damián is trying to imitate his mate but by playing *Smite*, *Agar.io* and *Call of Duty* and by creating similar videos with the aim of becoming a professional in this field. On the other hand, there are cases like that of Nayim (15 years old, Catalonia), who makes videos of his gameplays in *Minecraft* for YouTube and wants to be a *youtuber*, but believes that if he is not the best, he will not be able to receive enough income and work professionally.

These practices contradict the messages teens receive at school about working professionally in the new digital environments. In this sense, Macarena (14 years old, Catalonia) criticises that her teachers underestimate the value of these new professions and consider them a “waste of time”. “Teachers say you’re not going to make a lot of money out of this. [...] That this would be something secondary, that you should not focus on it but rather on something better and that you should do this only for fun or entertaining”, says this young woman.

Only few teens reach the highest level of professionalism in the field of *eSports*. During this study we have detected that only one of the participants has managed to gain access to the circuit of competitions and tournaments. This is Rafael (14 years old, Catalonia), who usually plays *League of Legends*, and claims that reaching this level is very complicated because it requires many hours of practice. “When you reach the top of the individual ranking you start playing professionally [...]. This is like soccer. There are teams that sign up these gamers, and these teams begin to compete with each other, and the most important thing is that they compete against teams from different countries [...] Then, tournaments are broadcast live, and I like to watch the Koreans to learn because they are the best”, explains Rafael.

Therefore, we can point out that despite the easy and cheap access to videogame and YouTube platforms, the professionalisation of teens in this field is a minority practice, although it is widely accepted by them.

4.4. Writing on Wattpad: from a social to an individual profession

As mentioned in section 2.2.1, the reading and writing practices of the teens in the sample indicated a common denominator that, in view of the analysis, we can qualify as hegemonic. Wattpad is not only the basic vehicle that structures reading habits, literary experiments and socialisation among peers around common interests, but emerges as a probable springboard to enter the competitive publishing world. For example, Nerea, a 15-year-old student from the Community of Madrid, has written four chapters of a mystery ‘book’ (as stories are popularly known in Wattpad) that accumulated 1,200 readings by March 2016. She does not hesitate to relate her initiation as a writer in Wattpad after a friend recommended her to read “a very famous book”. Of course, it was *After*. “It is a novel made up of six books and each book is very large, and the novel’s author began writing in Wattpad and then became famous; She already had millions of readings and some publishers decided to publish it, talked to her and published it [...] And now it is published in all languages and in all countries”, Nerea explains. Her constant references to “fame” make a clear association between Wattpad and promotion channels for young amateur authors who want to make the leap to the professional arena.

Although Nerea, like Lorena (15 years old, Valencian Community), seem to be aware of the opportunities Wattpad offers for amateur writers, they do not plan to turn their hobby into a way of life. The central motivation for writing is entertainment and, above all, the social recognition of the community of readers. We observe a similar attitude in Esther (15 years old, Catalonia), the author of a story that combines romance and school bullying, a recurring theme among some of the teens in the sample. Faced with the dilemma of completing some of her unfinished stories, she always ends up choosing the most popular one, which had around 6,400 readings by March 2016: “I have people who say to me ‘keep on going’ or ‘I like it a lot’. Since they encourage me... I focus more on it because I know there are people who read it, and they comment and vote and since I don’t have anyone yet in

the others... I like it when people make comments because I can be aware of the criticism”. The feedback of readers emerges, therefore, as a key issue in our group of writers. If they reach a certain level of popularity, they can see their books translated into different languages. According to Abraham (15 years old), who is son of a philologist and took his first steps in Wattpad thanks to Esther, readers themselves are responsible for translating the stories. This task is added to the editing work that some readers traditionally develop (beta-reading) with some authors and this reinforces a collaborative work atmosphere within the platform.

To attract readers and encourage interaction with them, young users implement a series of promotional strategies. Besides worrying about spelling, avoiding excessively long paragraphs, and introducing changes at the request of beta-readers and readers, female teenage writers resort to paratextual strategies such as the creation of book covers, as if they were physical books in a shop window. Isabel, a 14-year-old reader from Catalonia, points out her preference for stories that have colourful covers because they seem more attractive at first sight. She also mentions that there a micro-structure within Wattpad dedicated to the offer and supply of covers that operates in parallel to *Covers*, the official application to create Wattpad covers [2].

In this way, there are user accounts that, instead of sharing books, offer these services to writers: “You go there, you explain your story, you request your cover and they do it for you. Then, all you have to do is add the legend ‘cover made by’ such a user... You have to give him some publicity in return”. And from talking about covers we went to talking about trailers, a promotion element in vogue in the publishing industry as a tool to face the transformations in the consumption of books caused by the irruption and development of digital technology (Tabernero Sala, 2013). “If this book were turned into a film, well, who would I like to play each person, right? Then she [Esther] assigns each character in the story an actor and she also makes the trailer, which is on YouTube”, says Abraham. Thus, the trailers, made from images taken from movies and television series, seem to have an intimate relationship with another promotion mechanism within Wattpad: the *cast*, which often appears detailed in all the chapters of a story and serves as an anchor with the media references of readers and writers. In this case, the cast of the story written by Isabel was formed mostly by actors from the teen series *Teen Wolf* and *Pretty Little Liars*. As in the case of covers, trailers also have their own market in the context of Wattpad and reflect the basic and transversal role played by YouTube in the media activities of teens.

As a counterpoint to this celebration of social, fluid and interactive writing, it is important to highlight the interesting positions of a minority of female writers who are closer to professional publishing paradigms. For example, Natalia (15 years old, Catalonia) is skeptical of Wattpad’s community of writers and readers, although she admits that she started a story on the platform because her friends convinced her and, fundamentally, because she wants to make herself known. Unlike her peers, her dream is “to be able to publish a real book” and to see it adapted into a film. A movie lover and avid writer since she was 11, and raised by parents who love reading, she claims to have written a total of 30 unpublished works with Microsoft Word. Much of her scepticism is based on what she considers the pretentiousness and trends of users, which in her view is what really attracts teens to Wattpad, and “not good writing, or the desire to improve their writing”.

Natalia fears the disappearance of the physical book and extols the figure of the individual author, as responsible for the original work and ultimate source of authority for the reader. All this invokes an ideology centred on the author on whom the publishing business has rested since the end of the 18th

century (Ezell, 2003). Seeking to differentiate herself from the rest of her peers, she opposes events organised within the platform, such as the Wattys Awards, and the concept of collaborative writing that gives Wattpad meaning: “Writing a story is a personal, lonely activity, and although people do not like to be alone when writing and doing things, you will never focus on writing if you do it with your partner or someone else [...] You are sharing the same application with thousands and thousands of people who may not write well at all”. Writing is conceived as an individual activity, reserved for a select few, linked to the culture of effort and the myth of authorial originality (“I want everything to be 100%, everything, characters, contexts...”). This practice would be at the opposite of the ludic-democratic positions exhibited by the female Wattpad readers and writers in the sample.

It is also worth highlighting as a contrast that, except for Natalia’s critical opinion against the model of social literacy proposed by Wattpad, practically none of the readers and writers in the sample made a critical reflection on the implications that the platform’s business model could have on their rights as users. However, some show certain concern with regards to the protection of the intellectual property of the content they share to avoid cases of plagiarism, especially when it comes to popular stories.

4.5. Aspiring influencers on Instagram and YouTube

As mentioned, social networks have emerged as the third major area of professionalisation. In particular, Instagram and YouTube have emerged as the dominant platforms. Teens in the sample carry out practices focused on increasing popularity and, above all, self-branding. However, it should be noted that not all teens develop their strategy consciously and taking into account the socio-economic context of each social network, so, again, we emphasise the exceptional nature of the examples analysed.

One of the teens who has internalised the attention economy on Instagram is Marisa (12 years old, Valencian Community), who relies on her group of friends “to gain popularity”: “When someone uploads a photo to social networks, they send a link to our WhatsApp group and ask for likes or comments”. The importance of likes and comments is precisely what leads a classmate, Ariadna (13 years old), to resort to a widespread self-branding strategy: address followers directly to, in this case, promote participation in your account. “For example, I take a picture of clothes that I bought and upload it with the question ‘Do you like what I bought?’. I also like the comments. Since people cannot always see me in person, they can see me on their mobile phone”. Ariadna conceives her identity on Instagram as a mediated extension of her offline identity that allows her to be visible to her closest circle but also to a network of unknown followers. In parallel to her personal account, she manages another one with her best friend in which she shares their own videos and tutorials as well as the contents of their followers, which is another strategy used by influencers to strengthen their personal brand.

Youtubers are not strangers to the self-branding tactics that lead them to share content beyond their initial platform. While Instagram is the network that beauty gurus generally use, Twitter is more employed by gamers. Vicent (14, Valencian Community) usually notifies followers on Twitter whenever he uploads a *Call of Duty* gameplay or a challenge to his YouTube channel, which has 300 subscribers. Regarding its rate of publication, this teenager indicates that he uploads videos “whenever he feels like it, every two days, one a week, every day”. In this sense, Vicent’s production would be explained by the flexibility with which he approaches his facet as *youtuber* and the content he uploads

to his channel. In contrast, Romina (12 years old, Valencian Community) wants to have a YouTube channel in the future, but currently “focuses on studies”. It could be inferred that the opposing attitudes of Vicent and Romina exemplify two different conceptions of being or becoming *youtuber*. One is far from traditional education expectations and the other conceives being *youtuber* as a clear work option, although subject to the achievement of some curricular objectives.

The concern for building a personal brand is also evident in the effort teens put into producing content that they upload to social networks. Adele, a 14-year-old teenager from Galicia, uses Instagram to spread the music videos she creates with the Video Star app. She started as a follower of accounts specialised in these videos until she decided to contact some collective accounts to upload her ‘videostars’. But there was a problem: “I did not like them [...] There was a girl younger than me, who uploaded them, but incorrectly. I want “quality”. Her idea of a quality ‘videostar’ is directly linked to the number of effects used in the videos and the purchasing power of those who produce it: “There are videos that do not have any paid [effects] and look shabby”.

Adele is an aspiring influencer whose videostars account on Instagram reached 100 followers on the first day after being announced among the followers of famous accounts: “I told people to start following me and they did”. Her expectations are to go from 554 followers (April 2016) to at least 10 thousand to be able to create a YouTube channel and direct their Instagram followers there. However, she recognises that YouTube is not part of the preferred channels to share content for videostars creators. “YouTube is for another type of video”, she says. Adele thus demonstrates a knowledge of the rules her own community of practice, but also of YouTube as a basic window to promote the content of influencers, although its relevance varies from community to community.

Once again, we observe that aspiring influencers in the sample have not expanded their knowledge beyond the strategies to position their image and content in the attention economy and beyond superficial knowledge about the business model of social networks, as mentioned in section 4.3, in relation to gamers and YouTube.

5. Discussion and conclusions

As we have analysed throughout the article, many Spanish teens are aware of the new opportunities that are emerging thanks to the rise of new digital cultural industries. However, few people have the necessary skills needed to successfully develop a professional career in the field of video games (game development or through *eSports*), creative writing or in social networks as influencers. In relation to these skills, we refer mainly to the critical analysis at the socio-economic level of the companies that are part of this media ecosystem. Although many are aware that there are interests, for example, in companies such as YouTube in the ludic-video industry, the tendency observed in the qualitative analysis points to a minority who know that companies profit from their digital work. It is in this area where we consider that a greater understanding of business interests is necessary and where transmedia literacy must play a crucial role. This literacy should also be extended to parents and teachers, since equipping them with tools to analyse these new digital environments will bring them closer to the practices that teens perform every day.

In this sense, it is important to note that many teens do not think about their future work when doing their digital activities but do them for mere entertainment or for self-branding. We do not believe that this aspect is negative, since thanks to their media practices teens can acquire a new type of skills and knowledge that formal and regulated education often do not provide. Like Elorriaga Illera and Monge

Benito (2018), we believe that the aesthetic quality of the content is not a determinant for the professionalisation of prosumers, but we do consider it is necessary to develop, both inside and outside the regulated environments, other type of non-production skills that prepare prosumers in their transition from anonymous amateurs to micro celebrities that generate business and attention. In this sense, the critical analysis of the industry and the development of personal tools to navigate these new scenarios should be the basis for training, especially in view of the case of YouTube stars who have suffered emotional and image crises as a result of their media exposure.

Another fundamental aspect that has emerged from the digital work of teens is the collaboration between peers. Beta-reading and the creation of products taking into account the best skills of each young person are some of the most used practices. Online real-time and free access to new platforms and social networks allows this type of work, which a few years ago was a slow and tedious process.

In this media environment we have detected three areas in which some teens are becoming professionals: videogames (game development and *eSports* competitions), creative writing (platforms like Wattpad) and social networks through the creation of *microcelebrities* and content and product reviewers. In all of them, audiovisual content, through platforms such as YouTube, converge with these three areas as hegemonic productions at the levels of consumption and creation by teens.

Finally, we have detected that traditional gender roles continue to be perpetuated when consuming and creating content. Thus, we find that in the field of video games, the presence of females is still far from being equal, although it is increasing. On the contrary, in the field of creative writing, masculine presence is minimal. However, the results on social networks show a tendency towards gender equality in relation to consumption, although at the level of production and self-branding girls have a greater participation.

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6. Notes

[1] The research team carried out an exhaustive protocol to protect the data and anonymity of the minors participating in the study. This protocol was approved by the Institutional Commission for the Ethical Review of Projects of the Pompeu Fabra University of Barcelona.

[2] Retrieved on 17 May, 2018.

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