


TwoSet Violin: collective musical experiences deriving from affinity and connectivity

TwoSet Violin: experiencias musicales colectivas desde la afinidad y la conectividad

TwoSet Violin: experiências musicais coletivas de afinidade e conectividade

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Abstract

Through their YouTube channel, the Australian duo *TwoSet Violin* are a benchmark in the dissemination of musical practice. Their many fans include professional musicians, amateurs, and the general public. This study aims to know audience connection with these violinists, as well as affinity among their followers. A qualitative methodology is therefore established, based on deep non-participatory netnography, drawing on selection of the most appropriate comments on videos in which followers send compositions to be interpreted by these Youtubers. Results show a clear link



between all who interact, recognizing the value of compositions by others and offering support and advice, despite diversity in training and musical interests. We provide a discussion and conclusion on the interaction model and generation of collective experiences arising from the connectivity environment involved in the *Fan Compositions* playlist, in relation to other studies based on similar environments.

Keywords: YouTube; content creation; followers; connectivity; netnography; music

Resumen

El dúo australiano *TwoSet Violin* es un referente en la divulgación de la práctica musical, especialmente a través de su canal de YouTube. Entre sus muchos seguidores se incluyen músicos profesionales, aficionados y público en general. A través de este estudio se pretende conocer los lazos de conexión de la audiencia con estos violinistas, así como las claves de afinidad entre sus propios seguidores. Para ello, se establece una metodología cualitativa, basada en la netnografía profunda no participativa, a partir de la selección por conveniencia de los comentarios más adecuados de los vídeos en los que los seguidores envían sus composiciones para ser interpretadas por los *youtubers*. Los resultados muestran que existe un vínculo evidente entre todos aquellos que interactúan, reconociendo la valía de las composiciones ajenas y ofreciéndose apoyo y consejo, a pesar de la diversidad en cuanto a formación e intereses musicales. Se discute y concluye acerca del modelo de interacción y generación de experiencias colectivas surgidas desde el entorno de conectividad que implica la lista de reproducción *Fan Compositions*, en relación con otros estudios fundamentados en entornos similares.

Palabras clave: YouTube; creación de contenido; seguidores; conectividad; netnografía; música

Resumo

A dupla australiana *TwoSet Violin* é referência na divulgação da prática musical, principalmente por meio de seu canal no YouTube. Seus muitos fãs incluem músicos profissionais, amadores e o público em geral. Através deste estudo pretende-se conhecer os laços de conectividade do público com estes violinistas, bem como as chaves de afinidade entre os seus próprios seguidores. Para isso, estabelece-se uma metodologia qualitativa, com base em netnografia profunda não participativa, da seleção por conveniência dos comentários mais adequados dos vídeos em que os seguidores enviam suas composições para serem interpretadas pelos *youtubers*. Os resultados mostram que existe uma ligação evidente entre todos os que interagem, reconhecendo o valor das composições dos outros e oferecendo apoio e aconselhamento, apesar da diversidade em termos de formação e interesses musicais. Discute-se e conclui-se sobre o modelo de interação e geração de experiências coletivas advindas do ambiente de conectividade implicado pela playlist *Fan Compositions*, em relação a outros estudos baseados em ambientes semelhantes.

Palavras-chave: YouTube; conteúdo de marca; seguidores; conectividade; netnografia; música

1. Introduction

1.1. Interactions on YouTube: a view from netnography

YouTube is an online media platform where offline communication habits are reproduced (Kapoor, 2022), with the peculiarity that they present particularly intense features when participants possess digital skills (Perifanou et al., 2021). Being able to cultivate conversations in this environment and favor their flourishing is a constant concern for the platform, especially when the number involved is very high (Tur-Viñes & González-Río, 2021) and comments can often tend toward radicalization (Maddox & Creech, 2021).

Both social science and communication studies are concerned by the need to take digital networks as a research reference (Omena & Granado, 2020). We are particularly interested in the area of YouTube, in the interpellation between the *youtuber* and the follower, dealt with in studies which narrate the collaboration of all involved in the transmedia story (Scolari, 2016) and the fact this is an essential element for consolidation of a channel as a reference (Korres Alonso & Elexpuru-Albizuri, 2022). An approach to netnography is required, understood as one of the best means to learn what occurs in virtual environments (Turpo Gebera, 2008), previously developed in the study of behavior of groups of followers (Yao, 2021)

Through this approach, the use of information stored on the network is possible, either through comments (Airoldi, 2021a), labels (Brett & Maslen, 2021) or any other registered element, for its qualitative treatment through analysis focused on research. Moreover, when the study requires, it is a very useful model to combine its possibilities with more traditional methods (Wu, 2022). Therefore, the fact that a content-based approach is needed, derives from the very nature of the object of study. In this regard, we face an enormous compendium of information that is also however, full of partial elements or ellipses, roughly tendentious or intentional contributions, hidden commercial aspects, etc. (Kozinets, 2015), which encourage qualitative approaches to be preferential.

1.2. The youtuber and music: *TwoSet Violin*

Within the musical field, social networks have become an insatiable focus of promotion, but also of labeling and connotation of artistic practices (Johnson & Ranzini, 2018), since incidence of comments and the way of presenting certain music induces how these are perceived (Shang et al., 2021). Besides the fact that the YouTube environment itself models musical (Airoldi, 2021b) and extra-musical (Tollon, 2021) tastes and trends from its own algorithmic criteria and recommendations (Alfano et al., 2021), young *youtubers* generate content by predicting audience, which in turn produces meanings that directly influence

those audiences (Multas & Hilvonen, 2021) and the dissemination of audiovisual products (Barredo Ibáñez et al., 2021).

In the musical field, we can differentiate the environment of musical dissemination with prestigious channels with a large following. One of the most paradigmatic cases in this section is Jaime Altozano, who has transcended the field of entertainment to access the formal context of education (Autor, 2021). The *youtuber* musician also stands out, focused on providing a space for recreation through practice. The latter includes a compendium of content generators with different degrees of competence (Vizcaíno-Verdú et al., 2021), a space where *TwoSet Violin* resides.

This Australian duo (Brett Yang and Eddy Chen) have managed to acquire over 3,540,000 YouTube followers (more than double if we add other social networks). Through their motto, the adynaton of practicing 40 hours a day, by the end of this study, 1,274 videos had been published. Their casual style and extensive command of the violin have made them a benchmark in the field of audiovisual communication and social networks, and their impact means they are taken seriously in the current musical sphere (Tan, 2021). Their powerful diffusion has led them to be used in formal educational settings (Lei et al., 2021) and to perform live worldwide. In addition to videos, they have collaborated with top-level instrumental musicians.

There is research on other pairs of *youtuber* violinists focused on dimensions such as the generation of successful trends (Vizcaíno-Verdú & Contreras-Pulido, 2020). Adding literature to this field, the case in point shows that one of the most notorious particularities in the development of the work of these young people is their skill in promoting close connections with their audience (Cayari, 2011). In this section, what stand out are videos compositions followers submit for interpretation. Highlighted in this research is that, through comments generated by publications based on selection and interpretation of scores provided by followers, a collective expression germinates around the practice of *youtubers* and thus a communicative link between commenters. This whole process is anchored in elective affinities understood as active confluences in the network (De la Pava, 2011).

Consequently, this present research proposes qualitative analysis of comments centered on videos that appeal directly to the audience, that is, those in which, after requesting original compositions from followers, are chosen to be interpreted in the channel. The essential aim is to find the key to existing connectivity between *youtubers* and fans, and also between individuals in the audience itself. The indicators that served this purpose were members perception´ of the purpose of the channel; reception of the series dedicated to musical works composed by the community of followers; type of contacts established between asymmetric profiles (in terms of musical knowledge) and value given to compositions by followers through their reactions.

2. Material and methods

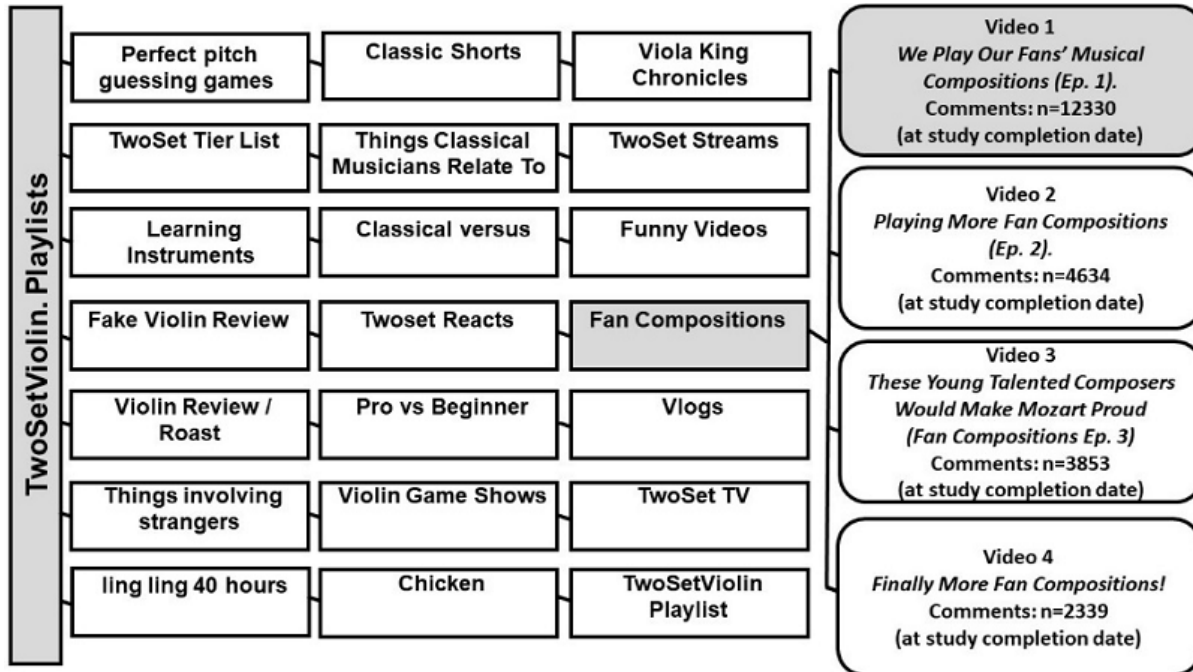
Comments on YouTube videos have been the subject of study in various fields, (Klausen, 2021; Thelwall, 2021) owing to their particular importance when interpreting interrelationships between anonymous and influential figures, often due to their own exposure, or to the extreme reactions they may cause (Sun & Shen, 2021). Following some of these methodological frameworks, a qualitative study in networks (Estalella and Ardévol, 2011) is proposed in its asynchronous *online* variant (Mann & Stewart, 2000) on textual documents (comments), which delve into dialogical mechanisms established in this logic of connectivity. In order to achieve this, it is based on theoretical foundations of non-participatory deep netnography (Delli Paoli & D'Aura, 2021), applied to music dissemination, taking into account analogous references developed for other platforms (Santana et al., 2016).

In short, the proposed methodology is based on the screening of videos towards those labeled as "*Fan Compositions*", towards observation of comments on the first of the experiences where fans works were interpreted. Given the qualitative nature, the most appropriate basic instrument for obtaining results is categorization, thus, organization of information is allowed in compartments of similar content. Considering this procedure suitable for performing this research meant exploring previous practices around non-participatory deep netnography. As planned in the research design, this enabled the researcher to obtain interpretable results to respond to set aims.

2.1. Sample

Obtaining the qualitative analysis sample was generally based on observation of the *TwoSet Violin* channel, so that, from the global framework with 21 playlists (at the end of this study), four videos were used by compositions by followers and selected and performed by the two protagonists. Once the enormous number of comments on each of these audiovisual products was verified, the sample was limited to those of the first contribution (n=12330) since, as well as being the most numerous and widely sufficient to meet aims, contained clues on the novelty of the interaction model, as it was the first of the series

Figure 1. Delimitation of sample: playlists



Source: own elaboration

Within the sample, “the answers to the answers” will be considered, since many structures on which we intend to draw conclusions are generated from these. It should also be noted that, in the results section, where we use specific examples to show how aims are achieved through comments, lexical errors typical of the casual language employed in social networks are maintained, as well as the use of uppercase or lowercase letters in the original, incompatible with the writing of a research report, but consistent with the source.

3. Results

As for aims, in accordance with the aforementioned indicators, four sections serve to pursue the naturalization of the relationship between members of the channel and the collective meaning given to generated contributions. These dimensions, which emerged operationally within the research design, are: perception of the purpose of the channel, assembly around the *Fan Compositions* series, the setting up of a meeting point based on personal symmetry between professional versus amateur musical profiles and reactions by the community toward audience contributions

3.1. Perceptions on purpose of channel

For fans, the two musicians in TwoSet Violin have enough charisma to be followed by a large number of people:

01: "Sometimes I forget that they are professionals..."

Their success stems from their enormous skill as instrumentalists, they are masters of the violin and amaze those who approach them either randomly or systematically:

02: "Casually sight reading dotted rhythms, syncopations and random arpeggios flying up into 6th position like it's nothing"

However, musical ability would be relegated to the background if it were not combined with communication skills. Undoubtedly this facet is what has provided substance and success to their contributions on the network, and it is shown insistently, as referred to in the example:

03: "I love the mix of meme-y, TwoSet specific stuff with other, more generally themed pieces! It feels like a representation of how Brett and Eddy bridge that space between classical music and internet culture"

In addition, opening the channel to audience contributions is considered a differentiating factor. In the following section this aspect allows us to discuss the connective networks that have generated close affinities

*04: "Mozart:*composes for his followers* TwoSetViolin:*Followers composes for TwoSetViolin*"*

Participants' perception of the purpose of the channel pivots between intentions (to encourage violin players to practice) and derivations to which it has led the audience (linked more to entertainment focused not only on performers, but also on the general public). Among the former, comments report that preliminary intention:

05: "twoset's fans are music students looking to procrastinate practicing"

Jokes are common, denoting the idea behind the slogan stressing the need for constant practice in order to improve which is widely used in the *YouTuber* duo's merchandising:

06a: "Hey, you know, you really should be practicing"

06b: "what about you, you are here writing replies go practice"

06a: "darn it, you caught me"

The first peculiarity is found regarding instrumental performance, not only do professionals (or students with a professional perspective) feel included, but a wide range of individuals with different abilities and musical interests:

07: *"I always wanted to play violin as a child unfortunately I never did. At 44 years old I watched one of your videos and became inspired by you both. My Husband perched a student's violin for me as an early Birthday gift. With the help of your videos to help me get over myself. I have been playing my violin for two months now. I wanted you both to know how much your videos mean to me. I'm hoping to be good enough in a year or so to play violin at our senior center next holiday season. Thanks so very much for the inspiration"*

Consequently, the issue of musical appreciation, over support for personal *performance*, emerges more often, broadening the spectrum of the channel's possibilities as a source of gestation of collective meanings:

08: *"Finally appreciated violin. Thanks to you bros"*

09: *"Thank you to Twoset Violin and their many skilled fans. I have come to appreciate violin like never before"*

10: *"Thanks for bringing classical music back to my life!"*

This leads to the fact that the purpose of the channel, in the eyes of followers (given contributions), is oriented towards an interaction model appreciated by audience:

11: *"This is easily the best community/creators interaction on youtube, ever"*

12: *"honestly the coolest vid ive seen with fan interaction!"*

3.2. Fan Compositions series

Within *TwoSet Violin's* performance philosophy, taking into account constant audience interaction, it was logical to open the dynamics of the channel to followers' contributions. According to the following selected reflections, the reception was positive and they were immediately asked to expand the idea and perpetuate it over time, as shown in these chained comments:

13a: *"Petition to make a series of playing Fans' Musical Compositions"*

13b: *BRETT AND EDDIE. PLS.*

13c: *"You are top comment so there is a large chance of doing it again"*

13d: *"Signed! That would be an incredibly fun idea! :D "*

13e: *"They did say that when the video hits 90,000 likes they'll do another one... Welp, it's around 93k now~ Our bois always keeps (reminded of haha) their promises so I'll look forward to Part 2!!"*

Within the aforementioned interaction framework, and following its initial appearance there was the freedom to feed the duo with ideas, encouraging them to make changes in this format,

14: *"They should make a competition"*

15: *"They should do a world cup, but instead of football, it's violin pieces"*

16: *"We should submit a change.org"*

3.3. Transversal meetings, professional and amateur musicians

To establish connectivity modalities between those who interact on the channel, their typologies must be approached from the viewpoint of their training and musical interest. This consideration will help delineate whether there really exist horizontal or symmetrical relationships between them or if, in contrast, disparate categories are established when interacting.

A large sector of followers –difficult to quantify– comprises musicians disappointed with their own training, something quite common among students with first-hand experience of the pyramidal structure of artistic musical education:

17: *"I'm so untalented but I'm a subscriber!"*

18: *"I always forgot how lots of Twoset's fans are probably professional musicians and music students, i just assumed ppl are like me who can't even sightread and only shed on the violin"*

A large group of subscribers can be found attracted by the *TwoSet Violin* videos, but who feel no need to play an instrument or, at least, do not, regardless of the reason:

19: *"welcome non musicians:-)"*

20: *"When your a musically inept subscriber and the only music knowledge you have is from watching twoset..."*

21: *"I don't even touch instruments. Any of them, they would explode. AND I don't even know classical musical enough to say that I really like it. Them both are so nice that made me keep watching the videos lol"*

Professional musicians (or tending towards professionalization, at higher study levels) are also an active part, regardless of their level (22), instrument (23) or style (24):

22: *"never expected really that this twoset community would be this talented. I clicked this video for some laughs but I ended up with goosebumps all over my skin. pieces were very beautiful, and i'm proud of this community, but also terrified how talented these composers are. It really showed me how's like to see/hear real prodigies' world. Just stunned in awe. Thank you twoset and linglings and linglingwannabes"*

23: *"I mainly play the Tenor Saxophone in Wind Ensemble and Marching Band at the highschool I go to and I started learning a bit of guitar and keyboard piano so I have no idea what I am doing here but I learned a lot about classical music from this channel and appreciate it even more than I did before I started learning how to play a musical instrument"*

24: *"Sometimes I think "why don't I compose something for Brett and Eddy as well?" then I remember I'm a punk musician and I don't even know how to read music lol"*

Among comments, aesthetic intentions are gathered on the value of works suggested for interpretation by *youtubers*, generally highlighting the artistic skill of the musicians in the community:

26: "Me realising my composition wasn't played: disappointed. Me after listening to the other compositions: disappointed in myself"

Therefore, having mentioned fan types, we delve into the relationships between these. *TwoSet Violin* encourages efforts to improve, so they have generated a group of people with a special interest in extracting results based on time and effort. This, together with feeling part of a community that can help improvement is evidenced in some comment threads:

27a: "How tfr they able to read music so easily...? I still need letters ffs...."

27b: "you need to try reading it without letters. putting the letters there is like leaving the training wheels on a bicycle. you'll never learn to ride without them if you don't try"

27a: "thks but it's tough"

27b: "You can do it, I believe in you :)"

These harangues are common, but often surreptitiously masked with practical advice from personal experience:

28a: "I played the violin for like 3 months but quit because I couldn't understand how to read sheets"

28b: "28a I have just started out with piano (self-learning) and I have absolutely no clue on how to get started with sheet reading. People who can do it seem to be from another world to me :D"

28c: "28b i only have a keyboard and i want to learn the piano, and i cant buy one since im still in middle school and have no money. Can i practice on the keyboard, till i have face to face piano classes?"

28b: "28c ofcourse you can. I should have mentioned correctly in my previous comment that i too have started learning on the keyboard. Once I get a little comfortable and save enough money I'll get a piano. I would definetely suggest you start too. Don't wait to learn until you get a piano. Something is always better than nothing"

Furthermore, when audience members witness the successful results of their work, they seek advice on improvement in instrumental or compositional practice, in the same way that current cybernetic communities interact to obtain information, with the difference being in this case otherness in musical terms is recognized as qualified:

29: "This is an awesome piece! I'm writing my first sonata, and all of my compositions rely on bluegrass-inspired music (what I grew up listing to). Do you have any advice for composers writing off of folk music? Awesome job"

Within the wide spectrum of followers, it is interesting to observe comments linking formal education with these informal practices, hinting at the usual difficulties in academic fields and gratitude for the flexibility and good harmony in this environment:

30: *"Or like me who attempted to learn but was promptly kicked out by my teacher because I couldn't hold the bow correctly"*

In summary, there is a general feeling, common in other channels of the video platform, which report on the feeling of well-being of forming part of such a heterogeneous community:

31: *"If you can screw it slowly, you can screw it quickly'. I´m so proud of this community"*

3.4. Reactions to fan contributions

Positive spirit and recognition of the value of compositions provided is constant. Selected comments are taken from two works performed by *TwoSet Violin*. As for the first, being a teacher serves to establish the link mentioned in the previous section, regarding formal and informal education:

32a: *"Thanks "Breddy" (that's short for Brett and Eddy) for choosing my piece. I am honoured to have my piece played and to be featured alongside such amazing composers. WOW!"*

32b: *"I loved your piece! Great humor, and the contrasting melodies were beautiful. It was so satisfying to listen to them come together at the end. I bet the student who introduced you to TwoSet is really proud of you. Congrats! You're officially the coolest music teacher in the world"*

32c: *"I came to the comments to say that your composition was my favorite! I am a music teacher as well and I love Bach. I loved the counterpoint and melodies. Well done!!!"*

Regarding the second follower – composer, due to this achievement their potential future on other platforms is highlighted, weighted by the maximum number of responses allowed by YouTube (500):

33a: *"I am so honored that you guys chose to perform my composition. You guys are the best! Thank you so much!!! 6:00 :)"*

33b: *"I like your piece so I hope I'll see your name somewhere someday"*

33c: *"It's such a beautiful piece I love it. Hope to hear more of your compositions in the future! On a more practical note, DON'T FORGET TO COPYRIGHT THIS PIECE!!"*

33d: *"Loved your composition! You have some serious talent. Can't wait to see and hear where you go from here!"*

33e: *"Everyone is loving your piece and obviously Eddy and Brett too... beautiful piece!! Well done <3<3"*

33f: *"Could you please upload your composition to your channel?? I really want to have it!! It's absolutely great!!"*

33g: *"Loved your composition! Could you write something for classical guitar? I would love to record it! Greetings from Paraguay"*

33h: *"Can you put that on Spotify? I want that on my playlist!!!!!!!!!!!!!"*

37i: "One day, 33a's piece will be performed world wide and will go down in history for sure. I cannot wait to hear and see this happening"
37j: "33a should definitely write film scores!"

In general, benefits of the reported composition increase and added value is generated to the context (constant allusions to the fact that *TwoSet Violin* chose this piece) to then foresee a great future outside the network (providing the ability to dedicate oneself to music with total solvency is recognized). The group assumes the authority to provide value and encourage future interventions from colleagues who have achieved the success of being interpreted by *youtubers*.

4. Discussion and conclusions

To understand the collective experiences that emerged in a context of connectivity, the parameters that produce links between *TwoSet Violin* and their audience were examined, as well as the type of relationship between followers themselves. Dimensions where results were organized in the previous section will here guide analysis and discussion.

Firstly, audience motivation in following the channel and interacting with such enthusiasm is a factor we try to decipher from comments. As regards perception of the purpose of the channel, from initial pretensions – the practice of 40 hours a day as the most widespread mantra – to final results –recognition of the musical value of *youtubers* and many audience members–evolution towards camaraderie and emotional support is observed, which, according to analogous approaches (Schau et al., 2009), strengthens links between the community.

Thus, achievements by followers in the social plane coincide with those in other online communities (Demin & Sorochan, 2020), although, in this case, some dimensions that often appear defined are increases: sense of group-belonging (regardless of musical skills), cohesion (confirmed by interventions that reinforce behaviors aimed at effort and perseverance in instrumental study), recognition by like-minded people (especially in extolling the aesthetic-musical value shown in videos) and models for increasing opportunities (clearly illustrated in the case of selected followers). Unlike in other research focused on successful content on the platform (González-Martínez & Chica-Freire, 2018), this relationship did not appear to imply rejection of objects or content promoted by *YouTubers*.

Delving into the *Fan Compositions* series confirms that possibilities for promoting musicians through YouTube do not have a single dimension, nor are they easily grasped under a single model of understanding, as observed by Cayari (2016). Therefore, the irruption of original compositions to be performed by *TwoSet Violin* corresponds to possible promising promotion models, serving as a stimulus to the audience. In addition, within the

framework of *Fan Compositions*, the inclusion of the three levels of communication typical of YouTube grammar (Dynel, 2014) is clearly witnessed, since all are present, modeling of relationships is richer and more robust: links through interaction of sheet music submissions, through the link with content itself, comments published and consequent establishment of dialogue among participants.

Another verified fact is cohabitation of professional musicians, *amateurs* and the general public, all participants in the merits of both protagonists, but also of those who in these specific videos collaborate in showing their talent. In this line, the approaches of Wang et al. (2021) are corroborated by stating that YouTube is effective for subjects with an interest in learning and who also hold positive attitudes and express satisfaction in viewing and subsequent practice. Therefore, the symbolic ties of belonging (Sabich & Steinberg, 2017) with which there is a tendency to establish links beyond the simple proposition of videos, through interaction, are one of the hallmarks of the medium. For this reason, it can be considered that the defining emblem of *TwoSet Violin* resides in combining informative intention –together with commercial interest (Jenkins, 2009) – with connectivity, by affinity between followers. Although there are studies on the difference between musical tastes depending on training received (López Herrera & Oropeza Tena, 2013), in light of our results, regardless of artistic competence, value given to musical achievements is similar.

This fact results in the transversality of content generated and its broad spectrum when it comes to reaching a heterogeneous public. Prior research has studied the degree to which extensively linking the channel to issues of general interest is an achievement as regards viewer growth (Thelwall & Foster, 2021) and, if diverse interactions are observed, this fact is verified in the field of musical dissemination of *TwoSet Violin*. The content and forms of relationship also support the idea that through these links, the three features (social, intellectual and cultural) that add value to a diverse online community are achieved, as identified in previous research. (Chung et al., 2020; Seraj, 2012)

The mood of relationships serves to verify other studies on interaction in networks in the musical context (Cavalcanti et al., 2021), according to which, integrated knowledge is articulated based on the use of parrhesia, understood as an expression devoid of fear and, therefore, a generator of collective expressiveness, which modifies the classic communication model (Martínez Gutiérrez & Cabezuelo Lorenzo, 2010). This factor, together with the recreational capacity of the *youtubers'* videos (Khan, 2017), is key to understanding the high level of social interaction recorded and its mood.

Finally, the study has some limitations - the difficulty of a full understanding of cybernetic records from qualitative interpretation, expressed in previous studies (Orellana López & Sánchez Gómez, 2006), however, this can serve to encourage new research to increase the range of videos studied and support reasoning presented here.

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