# All in One: Digital Influencers as Market Agents of Popular Culture

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – Considering the growing relevance of digital influencers in consumer practices and the emergence of Brazil as one of the main popular culture markets in the world, this study aims to understand how Brazilian popular culture digital influencer channels produce paratexts that complement and broaden the consumption experience of media texts. **Theoretical framework –** Digital influencers operate as consumption mediators through the notions of marketplace ideologies and agencies established by media discourses, grounded by the Foucauldian Theory of Knowledge and the Theory of Paratextuality. **Design/methodology/ approach –** Using Foucauldian discourse analysis the research analyzes 4,006 video thumbnails posted between January 2017 and July 2019 from the top-five Brazilian YouTube channels specialized in popular culture and the entertainment industry. **Findings** – The identified discursive formations point to three ideological positions taken by the digital influencer channels: as press, analytically resonating the entertainment industry; as fans, touting popular culture to a captive audience; and as promoters, assuming a marketing role in demand development. Altogether, these discourses evidence an episteme founded in market agency. **Practical & social implications of research –** The study proposes an important theoretical insight, since digital influencers evidence an overlap of roles performed as market agents (e.g., consumers, producers, mediators), which are often well demarcated by the literature. Specifically, it evokes an ethical reflection on such conduct and reverberates their actions in authoring popular culture, bringing light to both social and practical concerns about it. Furthermore, the study also presents as a practical implication the importance of digital influencers in inducing consumption practices through their discourses. **Originality/value** – The study addresses the conception of paratextual production as an interdisciplinary theoretical dialogue for the Consumer Culture Theory research tradition.

**Keywords:** Digital influencers, paratext, marketplace ideologies, media, Foucauldian discourse analysis.

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# 1 Introduction

In recent years, the socio-cultural context has been continuously changing, which is reflected in consumer practices (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2017; Schmitt, 2019). Consequently, marketing research has started to consider an alternative approach as a possibility to investigate consumption as a cultural practice. In this venture, Arnould and Thompson (2005) present the existence of an alternative research tradition which is defined as Consumer Culture Theory (CCT).

Despite its name, CCT can be better understood as a research community (Jantzen et al., 2012); it is an emerging rhetorical construction, materialized through the analysis of consumption as a cultural practice, based on the combination of researchers' experience and social praxis (Bode & Østergaard, 2013). Characterized by the aegis of the interpretive paradigm, these investigations consider that consumption relations are no longer only interpreted from a utilitarian or behavioral perspective, but can now also be understood as a cultural phenomenon (Arnould & Thompson, 2005; 2015).

The cultural perspective of consumption that guides CCT studies does not view culture as homogeneous, but rather as heterogeneous, and they have investigated how marketplace ideologies are propagated by different actors in massively measured practices (Arnould & Thompson 2005, 2007). This conception overlaps with the political action present in consumer practices, observed from the point of view of how producers try to conduct and reproduce consumer behaviors that are satisfactory to them (Arnould & Thompson, 2007; Casotti & Suarez, 2016), thus establishing relationships of power (Arnould & Thompson, 2015).

The media has been fundamental in this process, as it articulates truths taken by market agents (Cronin & Hopkinson, 2017). This is because the media discourse manifests social values present in certain contexts from their representations of reality present in their production and reception (Fairclough, 1995; Freitas, Dornela, Silva, Valadão, & Medeiros, 2019). Producers build their media texts based on the assumption that they will be interpreted by consumers; however, consumers incorporate their own interpretative conditions into their reading (Charaudeau, 2006; O'Keeffe, 2006).

The media role has been changed by the resonance of social networks (Paiva et al., 2017). They are increasingly becoming a strategic resource to promote brands and products (McQuarrie et al., 2013; Uzuñoglu & Kip, 2014). Such platforms allow not only instant feedback on the level of interaction and scope for the propagation of the content produced for the media, but also allow users to form direct and interactive relationship channels (Van Dijck, 2013). Social media are exponents derived from possibilities for new marketing strategies based on communication practices that, among other factors, legitimize the role of digital influencers in this context (Sette & Brito, 2020; Zanette et al., 2013).

The impact of digital influencers on consumer practices is based on how they reach millions of users through their profiles on social platforms (Sudha & Sheena, 2017). Increasingly, consumers rely more on these influencers than on brand communications, hence they have become the target for marketing endorsements (Magno & Cássia, 2018; Uzuñoglu & Kip, 2014, 2014). Digital influencers build their authority from the trust and authenticity they display when expressing identity projects that are congruent with their audience's perspectives and expectations (McQuarrie et al., 2013; Sette & Brito, 2020; Zanette et al., 2013). When different marketing agents – as is the case with digital influencers and their audience – converge into manifestations of consumer identity projects, they are even able to legitimize, destabilize, or transform market ideologies (Thompson, 2004; Thompson et al., 2018).

Accordingly, it is common to investigate how digital influencers usually lead their audience's attitudes and perceptions, becoming relevant agents for the media promotion of brands (Sette & Brito, 2020; Uzuñoglu & Kip, 2014). The contents which they produce can be understood as complementary texts that allude to mainstream content. Those texts resemble the paratexts proposed by Genette (1987): texts which are produced in an allusive way to another text that, despite being autonomous of the paratext, can have its reading improved by it. The function of the paratext ranges from complementation to extrapolation, as it provides the reader with new interpretations of his/her readings (Gray, 2010).

In this sense, paratextuality is the production of a text that complements or extrapolates an original text (Genette, 1987; Gray, 2010). Its functions include passing on the products and preparing consumers for the consumption experience (Hills & Garde-Hansen, 2017; Sørenssen, 2016). So, the content produced by digital influencers regarding popular culture, a segment that has become increasingly emblematic for CCT studies

(McQuarrie et al., 2013; Sugihartati, 2020), can be understood as *in-media-res paratexts* (Mittell, 2015; Steiner, 2015) that allow the understanding of media products to be complemented or broadened (Duffett, 2013) and the discourses that emerge around them (Dalmonte, 2015).

Thus, this research **aims to understand how popular culture digital influencer channels produce paratexts that complement and broaden the consumption of media texts**. It contributes to a CCT agenda by addressing ideological mediations of consumption, a relevant theme that is much less investigated than consumer and even brand practices. Also, the current study focuses on an emerging market actor with growing interest in the research tradition.

The research is justified as it explores digital influencers' production of content as a way of exploring media discourses (Cotter, 2019; Godey et al., 2016; Uzuňoglu & Kip, 2014). This is something that increasingly allows marketplace ideologies and market agencies to be established and transformed (Cronin & Hopkinson, 2017; Thompson, et al., 2018). It also views paratexts as a fruitful concept in establishing market relations. Despite the paratext concept already being established in Cultural Studies (Gray, 2010; Hills & Garde-Hansen, 2017), it is still scarcely explored by consumer research (Hackley & Hackley, 2019).

To this end, we seek to present, in the literature sections, an articulation between media discourses present in marketplace ideologies and market agencies. Then, we explore how the role of digital influencers as consumer mediators works as a paratextual production of media products. Further on, in the methodological section, the concepts and our execution of Foucauldian discourse analysis are presented. After that, the results are discussed and, later, reflected on in order to give continuity to the theoretical basis of the study. Finally, we answer the research question and point out possibilities for future research agendas in the final considerations section.

## 2 Theoretical basis for the study

As mentioned in the elaboration of the research problem, the present study focuses on the paratextuality of digital influencers to establish market discourses. For this purpose, the paper briefly presents CCT as an alternative for consumer research. Based on one of its thematic domains, it assumes that marketplace ideologies establish media discourses. These discourses lead to the
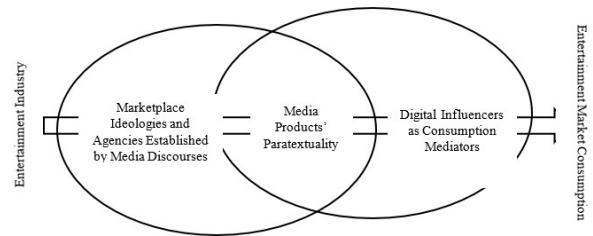


Figure 1. Conceptual framework

production of paratexts that deal with cultural objects. Digital influencers, who are responsible for creating and diffusing part of these paratexts, act as mediators of consumption practices, as shown in Figure 1. The sections below articulate these connections.

### 2.1 Marketplace ideologies: a consumer culture theory thematic domain

The proposition of Consumer Culture Theory as an alternative consumer research tradition which reflects a growing movement is to understand how recent sociocultural changes affect consumer practices. To do so, it is valid to investigate consumption related with concepts from culturalist anthropology, reality understood as a sociocultural construction, subjectivities present in human relations, and symbolic aspects that encourage interactional practices such as consumption (Gaião, Souza, & Leão, 2012; Jantzen et al., 2012).

In the original proposition, Arnould and Thompson (2005) present thematic domains that illustrate the existence of the alternative consumer research tradition since the 1980s. Two years later, the authors (see Arnould & Thompson, 2007) revisit their seminal study to indicate how the four domains presented are not fixed and disconnected, but fluid and overlapping. This characteristic reveals how CCT is a research tradition that encompasses a set of theoretical perspectives to understand consumption as a cultural phenomenon. These domains are mutually interrelated; they are manifested in different consumption contexts that reveal how CCT works as a heuristic exploration of the cultural element inherent to consumption practices (Arnould & Thompson, 2018; Arnould et al., 2020). The four thematic domains are: consumer identity projects, considering that market practices bring together a range of mythical and symbolic resources through which consumers – the people who

interact with a given product, whether through financial resources or not – build and maintain the manifestations of their identities (Belk, 1988; Holt, 2002); marketplace cultures, in the academic effort to unveil the processes by which specific cultural contexts instantiate the culture of consumption, addressing the ways that consumers forge feelings of connection with other marketing agents from common interests and consumption practices (Kozinets, 2002; Muñiz & O'Guinn, 2001); the sociohistorical pattern of consumption, a flow of research dedicated to investigating how socially institutionalized structures (e.g., class, ethnicity, gender) systematically influence consumption (Otnes et al., 1993; Wallendorf, 2001); and, finally, mass-mediated marketplace ideologies and consumers' interpretive strategies, which presents the studies that examine the systems of meanings capable of channeling and reproducing actions and thoughts of consumers who seek to maintain dominant interests in society – the marketplace ideologies (Hirschman, 1993; Thompson, 2004).

Marketplace ideologies articulate meaning-making and subjective positions (Casotti & Suarez, 2016; Gaião et al., 2012), establishing consumer politics that involve the fragmentation and reconfiguration of power networks (Arnould & Thompson, 2015; Bode & Østergaard, 2013), reflected in consumer relations (Cronin & Hopkinson, 2017). Likewise, such politics produce patterns to be incorporated into the new identity positions exercised by consumers (Arnould et al., 2020; Thompson et al., 2018). Thus, consumer politics are characterized by the way that different market actors exercise political actions and produce subjective meanings and positions (Arnould & Thompson, 2018; Coskuner-Balli & Thompson, 2013).

Analyzing the market as networks mediated by consumption allows us to understand culture as a discursive field that encompasses individual and collective practices capable of expressing the subjective interests of individuals (Arnould & Thompson, 2015; Peñaloza & Mish, 2011). Consumption-mediated networks also propose how dynamic sets of social practices reflect consumer relationships, interactions, identities, and experiences (Cronin & Hopkinson, 2017; Souza-Leão & Costa, 2018).

Like any social configuration, markets are characterized as ideological systems. For Arnould and Thompson (2005), mass mediated ideologies represent ways in which cultural production systems entice consumers to idealize identities and lifestyles. On this perspective, Thompson (2004) considers that certain market myths generate meanings. This occurs because these myths are, at the same time, the foundation of ideologies, but also present the flaws that allow consumers to dispute and transform the context in which they operate.

On the one hand, the contradictions of marketplace ideologies are questioned through the interactivity of specific consumer subcultures that challenge the way in which certain forms of advertising convey wrong cultural meanings (Souza-Leão & Moura, 2018; Kozinets, 2001). On the other hand, marketplace ideologies can dictate consumer actions. This can be seen from the perspective that cultural meanings allow consumers to be governed (Cronin & Hopkinson, 2017; Mick & Buhl, 1992). In both ways, advertising can transmit adverse cultural meanings: either to maintain ideologies that have already been established in certain cultures (e.g., brand communities) (Muñiz & O'Guinn, 2001), or to implement concepts that are unknown or have no cultural value for certain local contexts through massively mediated market practices (Giesler, 2012).

Also, both possibilities indicate an interstitial linkage (see Arnould & Thompson, 2007) among the thematic domains of the CCT which, later on, is adjusted as one of the conceptual axes of the alternative consumer research tradition (Arnould & Thompson, 2015). The axis considers that culture can be better regarded as a distributed network, since social actions reflect institutional structures. This is something that can be explained by the way in which interactional practices such as consumption are fundamentally shaped by culturally located institutions (Canniford & Shankar, 2013; Parmentier & Fischer, 2015).

## 2.2 Agencies established between marketplace ideologies and media discourses

In a world where cultural and economic globalization is increasingly incorporated into consumer practices, marketing discourses such as entertainment and the media are sources of connection between different consumers (Schmitt, 2019). In this process, the media plays a primordial role, with its content reaching the status of truth, when incorporated and propagated by consumers (Cronin & Hopkinson, 2017).

Considering that social reality is inextricably linked to ways of communicating, media influences and is

influenced by various social agents (J. B. Thompson, 1995). This is because the consumption of media products can be understood as a practice resulting from the interaction of different actors in dynamic arrangements. These, in turn, present market agencies in changing conditions and circumstances (Wallendorf, 2017). This can be observed in the way that marketing resources are usually appropriated to represent non-fixed market agencies: there is an inherent transition between the roles of consumers and producers (Ruckenstein, 2015; Souza-Leão & Costa, 2018).

From this perspective, CCT studies consider that consumers are co-responsible for the agency that guides them (Arnould & Thompson, 2015; Hoffman & Novak, 2018). This concept emerges from Assemblage Theory (see Giesler, 2012; Hoffman & Novak, 2018), when different elements line up in the face of distinct contingencies. These contingencies shape the contextualized meanings and effects of arrangements that work as assemblages of market relationships composed of different elements (e.g., consumers, producers) and their discourses in a power network (Canniford & Bajde, 2016; Woermann, 2017).

According to Thompson (2019), discourses produced with the objective of being similarities and, possibly, re-signified by consumers, usually have an impact on the agency in the market structure. In a broader scope, those discourses manifest representations of reality that reveal social purposes, identities, ideologies, and values (Fairclough, 1995; Freitas et al., 2019). Thus, such discourses produce truths and reflect power relations that modify cultures and social practices (Canniford & Karababa, 2013; Humphreys & Thompson, 2014).

Charaudeau (2006) proposed that media discourse is structured by conditions of production and reception. The structure emerges through a semiotic-discursive configuration that combines elements from different language systems. The production of this discourse presumes possible interpretative meaning effects on the audience, but receivers interpret it based on their own conceptions and interpretation conditions (Batinga et al., 2019; Charaudeau, 2006). Thus, media discourse can be understood as a representation of reality that is articulated through conditions of production and reception (Charaudeau, 2006; O'Keeffe, 2006).

Consequently, media discourse should not be considered homogeneous. Its construction happens through the juxtaposition of two contradictory purposes: the perspectives on information and capture (Charaudeau, 2006; O'Keeffe, 2006). While the former concerns the

ethical commitment to report accurately and objectively, the latter refers to the need to reach the widest possible audience. This duality can lead to a mitigation of the journalistic verve in favor of a dramatic charge to seduce a wider audience.

## 2.3 Digital influencers as consumption mediators

The role of the media has been re-signified based on the resonance of social networks (Pedroni, 2016; Sette & Brito, 2020). They lower barriers to social participation and debate, thanks to their public sphere nature, allowing different agents to take part in media text production (Paiva et al., 2017).

Among the media agents that can influence consumer practices, digital influencers have been increasingly prominent (Cotter, 2019). Considered as microcelebrities, they emerge from connections with specific audiences, whose relationships are established both by their informational capacity (i.e., expertise in certain subjects) and the sensory and affective stimuli they emanate (i.e., attractiveness, authenticity) (Cotter, 2019; Kapitan & Silvera, 2015). While traditional celebrities tend to maintain a protocol of distance from their audience, digital influencers appropriate the interactive potential of new media technologies (Hearn, 2008; Pedroni, 2016) to establish audience identification and proximity (Cotter, 2019).

Influencers are usually appreciated for their reliability and authenticity (Childers, Lemon, & Hoy, 2018; McQuarrie et al., 2013; Sette & Brito, 2020; Uzuñoglu & Kip, 2014), attracting consumers looking for identity projects with which they identify (McQuarrie et al., 2013), and affecting their choices and interests based on the personal influence they have on other individuals in their network (Sette & Brito, 2020; Zanette et al., 2013) based on what the marketing literature agrees is word-of-mouth communication (Godey et al., 2016; Zanette, et al., 2013). YouTube has become one of the most conducive platforms for digital influencers (Sudha & Sheena, 2017). This is because it has the ability to both provide content sharing between users (Van Dijck, 2013) and, through algorithms, direct users to content related to their preferences and quantify video views (Dean, 2010).

Recognizing the ability of digital influencers to affect audience opinions, organizations have come to regard them as potential endorsers of their products

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and services (Magno & Cássia, 2018; Uzuňoglu & Kip, 2014). Since consumers tend to rely on influencers more than brand promotion actions (Sudha & Sheena, 2017; Uzuňoglu & Kip, 2014), they have come to be understood as a medium for marketing communication, as a way of building consumer trust and credibility (Gardner, 2005; Sudha & Sheena, 2017).

## 2.4 Media products' paratextuality

When dealing with certain subjects, media discourse in general, and the content produced by digital influencers, can be understood as paratexts. Originally presented by Genette (1987), the notion of paratext refers to the textual elements that complement the understanding of a certain narrative, orbiting a certain central textual content. For this purpose, texts should be understood as any materiality that can be read and interpreted, whether in written, visual, iconographic, or audiovisual form, and so forth.

There are two paratextual dimensions: the peritext, widening the materiality of a work, maintaining a direct relationship to its content; and the epitext, setting a discontinuity. The peritext is defined with peripheral and dependent texts. Its content can only be understood in conjunction with the original text. Its function is to complement the reading of the text itself. The epitext is conceived as autonomous and allusive texts. It is proposed to expand the reading of the original text, but does not depend on it to be understood. Its function is to expand the possibilities of the text as a whole (Dalmonte, 2015; Duffett, 2013; Genette, 1987).

Gray (2010) appropriated the concept to analyze media products, assuming that every production referring to a main media text is a paratext, including those elaborated through other media and formats (Fathallah, 2016; Gray, 2010; Steiner, 2015). From this point of view, two functions can be assigned to paratexts: *entryway paratext*, which works on audience expectation and anticipates a consumption act (e.g., trailers, promotional actions, extra materials) (Gray, 2010; Janes, 2015); and *in-media-res paratext*, which fulfills the role of complementing the consumer experience (e.g., fan theories, reviews of the specialized media) (Gray, 2010; Jenkins, 2009; Sørenssen, 2016). Hills and Garde-Hansen (2017), in turn, proposed a third function for paratexts, which is to externalize the very own point of view of its producing agent. From this perspective, the producers understand that the media

capacity of the paratexts allows the readers to reconstruct, remember, and repatriate the (para)text, externalizing it to new audiences. Thus, the producers outsource to their readers the task of expanding the meanings of the text.

The paratextualization of media products can both resonate them and add new meaning to them (Gray, 2010). Thus, it can promote the extension of a media text, prolong its circulation time, keep it current, or reinforce its relevance. On the other hand, it can also highlight negative points of a media text, disqualify it, and associate it with socially devalued or criticized conceptions (Dalmonte, 2015). Therefore, paratexts are important both for the reception of the original texts they relate to and for new stages of the textual production of these original texts (Stanitzek, 2005).

With the advent of new media, the possibilities of paratextual production have been expanded, meaning the boundaries that delineate it practically no longer exist (Dalmonte, 2009). Thus, producers of texts on which such paratexts rely have had to deal with the growing paratextual production of both the media and consumers (Dalmonte, 2015; Fathallah, 2016), not always understanding this production as satisfactory (Fathallah, 2016). Specifically, in relation to the media, its nature indicates that the paratexts it produces acts in the elaboration of specialized criticism (i.e., YouTube) (Dalmonte, 2015).

# 3 Methodological procedures

As presented in the previous section, the theoretical foundations adopted to support the research objective assume the paratextualization of digital influencers as a way of establishing market discourses. In line with this construction, the study adopts a discourse analysis approach to the data.

The research method adopted was the Foucauldian discourse analysis (FDA), a post-structuralist approach. It was developed in the context of his archeological cycle, in order to reveal discourse regularities that allow conditions to identify the existence of epistemes related to such discourses (Foucault, 2014). The approach proposes to analyze the production of discourses as practices (Kendall & Wickham, 1999; Tadajewski, 2011). Therefore, FDA allows the identification of these discursive practices, revealing the means by which knowledge is produced and legitimized (Denegri-Knott et al., 2018; Thompson, 2017).

Thus, its entire process works as an objective way to present the historical conditions responsible for

conceiving epistemes (Costa, Guerra, & Leão, 2013). The method is, therefore, a conducive path to the elucidation and potential theorization of discursive phenomena (Deleuze, 2005). For that, the method seeks to analyze the conditions that allow the production of discourses grounded on what is said, how it is said, and from what position it is said (Kendall & Wickham, 1999). In this effort, FDA examines manifold social actions that make up the production of discourses in different investigated contexts (Tadajewski, 2011). According to Khan and MacEachen (2021), the method deepens the possibilities of qualitative investigations by distinguishing the role assumed by such social actions in the production of knowledge and, possibly, power relations.

### 3.1 Formation of research archive

The data set used is in a designated archive that is demarcated by a discursive event. This discursive event can be identified from the emergence of a novelty or rupture in some social phenomenon, culminating in the establishment of new discursive regularities (Foucault, 2014). Our research archive used as its data source Brazilian YouTube channels specialized in popular culture and the entertainment industry. The top-five Brazilian channels of the segment were selected based on the number of subscribers, viewers, and relevance in specialized blogs, namely: Ei Nerd, Operação Cinema, Omelete, Jovem Nerd, and Nerd Land (Woo! Magazine, 2017; Patio Hype, 2019).

The data collected were all the video thumbnails from the five channels posted between January 2017 and July 2019. The period marks (i.e., discursive event) the moment by the release of new products for the segment

and the production of popular culture content by Brazilian channels has increased dramatically (Ferreira, 2017). Through this procedure, our research archive consisted of 4,006 video thumbnails. Table 1 presents information about the chosen channels with a brief description adapted from their homepages.

It is valid to explain that thumbnail refers to the initial image of any video posted on YouTube. Additional information conveys how long ago the video was posted and how many views it has. YouTube thumbnails provide users with an instant and compulsory view of video content (Steiner et al., 2011), functioning not only as a summary of this, but to screen consumption choices based on the previous interests provided by the user algorithm (Gao et al., 2009), performing an important role in attracting the audience to watch a video. The level of elaboration present in thumbnails indicates how professional or amateur the video will be (Steiner et al., 2011). Consequently, some thumbnails, although attractive and possibly related to certain topics, may be linked to videos that do not deal with them. This is a clickbait strategy, when YouTube channels aim, as a priority, for their content to be accessed by a greater number of users in order to increase their monetization (Gao et al., 2009).

Thumbnails consist of a small image of the video overlaid with the video title and followed by a short text indicating its content. For analysis purposes, both the writing and the imagery texts were considered. It is therefore a secondary and multifocal data type (Flick, 2009). It is worth saying that, according to Foucault (2014), different types of texts should not be separated for the purposes of his discourse analysis.

Table 1

**Description of Top 5 YouTube channels about popular culture in Brazil**

| Channel | Thumbnails | Subscribers in December 2020 | Video posting since | Description |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Ei Nerd | 1714 | 10.8 million | Nov 2013 | Addresses diverse themes of popular culture, such as anime, comics, movies, series, and games. |
| Operação Cinema | 234 | 5.22 million | Jun 2015 | Specialized in cinema with a focus on popular culture productions. |
| Nerd Land | 595 | 2.66 million | Oct 2014 | Addresses curiosities, secrets, and speculation in popular culture. |
| Omelete | 1331 | 2.57 million | Dec 2007 | Covers the main products of the entertainment industry, such as cinema, comics, games, music, TV series, and literature. |
| Jovem Nerd | 132 | 2.48 million | Aug 2006 | Covers popular culture products, as well as internet and technology related themes. |

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It is worth explaining that, according to Foucault (1984), the authorship of a certain content (i.e., texts) is not located in the person who elaborates it; the authorship is in a function (i.e., author-function) performed by the discourse itself, in order to enable the recipients to interpret and re-signify it. Thus, texts must be analyzed by themselves, considering their producers as assuming an author-functioning role in creating content to be appropriated by recipients (Mittell, 2004). Therefore, the thumbnails were analyzed as texts per se, assuming that they were produced based on a particular purpose of the channels, with a view to reaching their audiences.

## 3.2 Categories and criteria of Foucauldian discourse analysis

The data analysis took place through the operationalization systematized by Souza-Leão and Costa (2018) and Souza-Leão and Moura (2018) based on the analytical logic and categories developed by Foucault (2014) divided into four stages (see Figure 2).

**Statements** reflect concrete themes that are inferable in discourse. They can be identified in the language signs, although they are not reduced to them, since they lie in the pragmatic context of discourse production. Built on the notion of discursiveness, statements are interpreted as instances of practices (i.e., discursive practices, according to Foucault).

Thus, statements express certain actions revealed by discourses, hence fulfilling certain **enunciative functions** – a relationship indicated by the left-most arrow in Figure 2. Those functions are identified by the syntagmatic combination of four criteria: reference indicates the objects of statements and their affirmed or contested truths and relationships; associated field points out the knowledge allowing the production of the statements and their relationships; subjects are discourse positions from which statements are enunciated; and materiality points to the ways in which statements are produced and can be repeated. Moreover, a statement can perform different functions, and an enunciative function can be performed by different statements.

In a similar way, discursive formations follow certain rules that indicate ordering principles present in statements and their functions. The two intermediary categories have a mutual and simultaneous relationship established by their criteria – illustrated in the ambiguous arrow in the center of Figure 2. Thus, **formation rules** are forged by criteria analogous to those of enunciative functions: objects derive from delimitations specified in the references of the statements; concepts indicate how the production of statements is based on certain knowledge (i.e., associated fields); modalities refer to the enunciative style used by subjects; and strategies are the discursive purposes manifested through the materiality of the statements.

The last arrow – the one most to the right – of Figure 2 indicates how those rules emanate the (co) existence, maintenance, modification, and disappearance of knowledge, providing conditions for the possibility of **discursive formations**. The later level of Foucault's archeology indicates how the regularity present in certain discourses provides evidence of the practice of knowledge that unveils epistemes.

We present the results (i.e., discursive formations) through the convergence relationship between the different analytical categories in the following section. These results are formulated and illustrated by examples taken directly from the archive. In the subsequent section our study returns to the literature to reflect on – based on the process that indicates the existence of discursive formations – and to make inferences about episteme(s) revealed in the Foucauldian archaeological process.
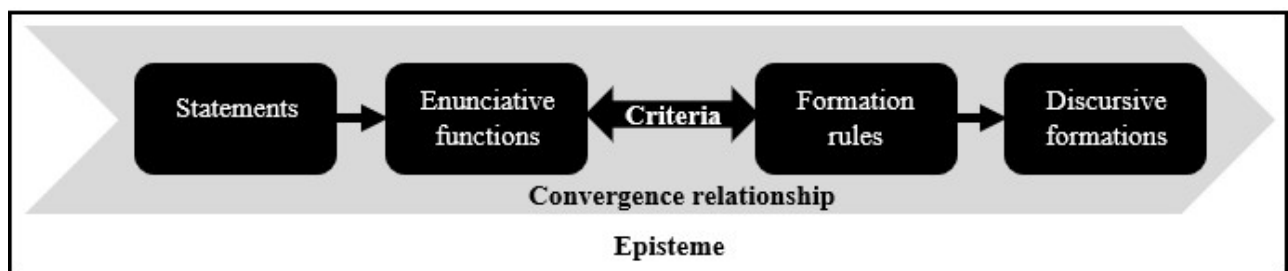


Figure 2. Analytical process of Foucault's archeology
Source: Prepared by the authors based on "*A arqueologia do saber*" (Foucault, 2014).

## 3.3 Illustration of Foucauldian discourse analysis

To illustrate the analytical procedure performed, we selected two thumbnails as guides to different discursive formations from the analysis. The first one (see Figure 3) is related to a video published on October 10, 2018, on the Omelete channel, about a newly released Japanese animation (i.e., anime): My Hero Academy.

This thumbnail analysis led us to infer the statement that points out how the **channels stimulate the consumption of products of popular culture**. This is because it stimulates curiosity about the media product (i.e., My Hero Academy) at the launch of a new series of videos – Bentô, focused on Japanese popular culture content – which is performed through a provocative title whose questioning tone raises a discussion about the quality of the media product.

Based on this, we interpret that the channel assumes the role of an agent (subject) who follows the market logic (associated field) to deal with the dissemination (referential) of media objects, simultaneously materializing praise and the fomenting of the popular culture product. In spite of us identifying only one subject, one associated field, and one referential in this specific thumbnail, those two materialities, under the archive as a whole, allow us to observe these combinations as two enunciative functions, since praising and fomenting are very different forms of concretizing discourses. On the one hand, praising encourages the **exaltation of products and producers of popular culture**; on the other hand, fomenting

enables the **dissemination of information that drives the entertainment market**.

Following this rationale, we interpret that the channel promotes (modality) the entertainment industry (object) by performing (concept) this consumption stimulus (strategy). Thus, despite their specificities, the two enunciative functions converge towards a single formation rule, which is to **develop the entertainment market**. This set of relationships allows us to identify the existence of a regularity based on the statement: the discursive formation that deals with the **promotion of the entertainment industry**.

The second example (see Figure 4) presents the thumbnail of a video posted on August 1, 2018, by the channel Ei Nerd. The image indicates a possible return of director James Gunn to Marvel Cinematic Universe productions.

The analysis of this thumbnail simultaneously indicates two statements: **popular culture channels highlight industry professionals** and **the progress of productions**. In the thumbnail, it is possible to identify the interest in reconquering the director of the Guardians of the Galaxy films – starring Chris Pratt, who is also present in the image. There is both an interest in continuing the narratives of this franchise, as well as in emphasizing the importance of the director's work. Both aspects deal with the industry backstage (referential) based on the development of productions and business (associated fields) resonating in popular culture. In this sense, this reveals how the channels of digital influencers assume the role of the press (subject) when discussing (materiality) the news of the segment. This reflects the function of



Figure 3. An Omelete thumbnail



Figure 4. An ei nerd thumbnail

**promoting a behind-the-scenes repercussion of the entertainment industry**.

This enunciative function in question is analogous to the formation rule that deals with **entertainment production**. When speculating (strategy) about the entertainment industry (object), digital influencers assume the perspective of evaluators (modality) of popular culture. Regarding how the channels discuss news from the sector (concept), the concatenation of the relationships between the elucidated categories reveals the discursive regularity present in the observed statements: how the channels seek to **echo the entertainment industry**.

## 4 Results

The results described in this section cover the analysis of all the data obtained in the five YouTube channels that produce content about popular culture. This arrangement was due to the fact that we did not identify discursive discrepancies between the channels – something that becomes more visible in the examples articulated in the next subsections with thumbnails from all sources – nor in relation to the period analyzed.

To provide that description, each of the following subsections present an identified discursive formation. Following the FDA analytical procedure (see section 3.3), the discursive formations are articulated through their formation rules (FR), enunciative functions (EF), and statements (S), which are highlighted in bold. The former two are discussed via their constitutive criteria (underlined), and thumbnails taken from the research archive to illustrate the statements and contextualize our findings. In each section the categories are presented in figures that demonstrate their relationships. They are numbered in order to facilitate this visualization.

### 4.1 Echoing the entertainment industry

The first discursive formation (DF1) concerns how digital influencers assume a journalistic role in the news broadcasting of the entertainment industry. They inform and analyze what happens in this industry, concerning both the **entertainment production** (FR1), which resonates different aspects of the entertainment industry's functioning, and the **cultural production** (FR2), which focuses on the relationship of the entertainment industry with contemporary society as well as its cultural impact.

In both formation rules, the channels assume a proposal of speculating (strategy) about the entertainment

industry (object), positioning themselves as evaluators (modality) of what happens in this industry. The formation rules are differentiated by the concepts they are permeated by. In the first of them, this happens through the resonance of the sector (concept); in the second it occurs through the relationship that the productions of this industry establish with the social (concept). Table 2 shows the composition of formation rules based on their criteria.

Table 3, in turn, shows how criteria configure the enunciative functions related to such formation rules. Two of the common formation rules criteria are repeated in the enunciative functions: the channels assume the role of discussing (materiality) the news through a press (subject) posture. The differences between the enunciative functions lie precisely in the uniqueness of the formation rules, as well as in how the entertainment industry is approached. Thus, relating only to entertainment production (FR1),

Table 2
**Formation rules (FR1 and FR2) and their criteria**

| Criteria categories | FR1 | FR2 | Criteria names |
|---|---|---|---|
| Object | X | X | Entertainment industry |
| Concept | X | | Sector |
| | | X | Social |
| Modality | X | X | Evaluators |
| Strategy | X | X | Speculating |

Table 3
**Enunciative functions (EF1, EF2, and EF3) and their criteria**

| Criteria categories | EF1 | EF2 | EF3 | Criteria names |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Referential | X | | | Industry backstage |
| | | | X | Dialogue with society |
| | | X | | Entertainment industry modus operandi |
| Associated field | X | | | Productions |
| | X | X | | Business |
| | | X | | Narrative |
| | | | X | Popular culture |
| Subject | X | X | X | Press |
| Materiality | X | X | X | Discussion |

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the channels **promote a behind-the-scenes repercussion of the entertainment industry** (EF1). News focusing on the industry backstage (referential) refers to both the development of ongoing productions (associated field) and the business (associated field) arrangements. On the other hand, relating only to cultural production (FR2), the channels involve an **interface between popular culture and contemporary society** (EF3). Popular culture is taken as an instance (associated field) of dialogue with society (referential). Finally, the channels address the **evolution of entertainment productions** (EF2), which is common to both formation rules. This enunciative

function presents the modus operandi of the entertainment industry (referential), both in relation to how it is thought of as a business and narrative (associated filed). Figure 5 shows all these relationships, as well as those with the statements, which we describe below.

Two related statements link exclusively to EF1. On the one hand, the **channels highlight industry professionals** (S01) through interviews with actors, directors, and producers, news about hiring and firings, staff participation in developing productions, and even about the personal lives of industry people. On the other hand, the **channels highlight the industry producers**
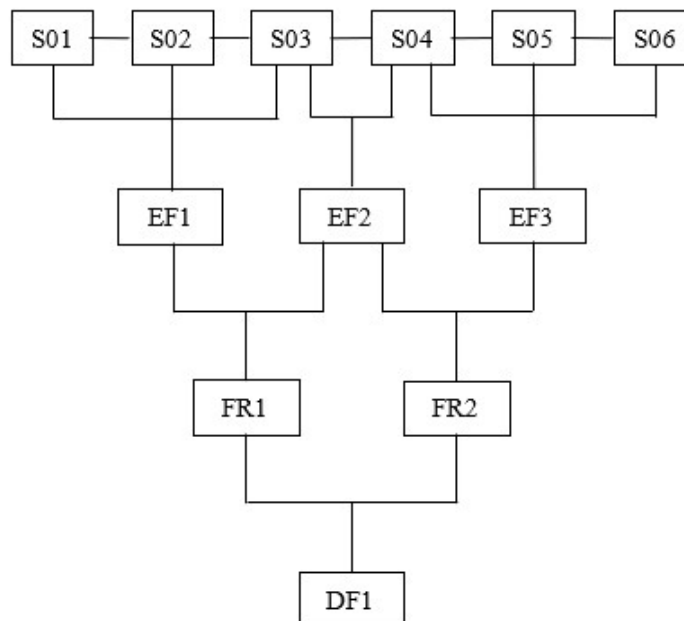


| Statements |
|---|
| S01 – Channels highlight industry professionals |
| S02 – Channels highlight the industry producers |
| S03 – Channels highlight the progress of productions |
| S04 – Discussion about the evolution of the entertainment industry |
| S05 – Popular culture gets into social life |
| S06 – Agenda of social and political debates in popular culture products |
| **Enunciative Functions** |
| EF1 – Promotes details of the entertainment industry |
| EF2 – Evolution of entertainment productions |
| EF3 – Interface between popular culture and contemporary society |
| **Formation Rules** |
| FR1 – Entertainment production |
| FR2 – Cultural production |
| **Discursive Formation** |
| DF1 – Echoing the entertainment industry |

Figure 5. Set of relationships echoing the entertainment industry

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(S02), spreading what they are doing or planning to do, both in relation to their products (e.g., new projects, development of narratives and characters) and their market behaviors (e.g., product development, acquisitions, partnerships). Figure 6 illustrates these statements. The first three images refer to S01 and the last three to S02.

Two more related statements relate only to EF3. On the one hand, the channels analyze how entertainment industry **productions incorporate a contemporary agenda of social and political debates** (S06), such as political ideologies, gender and ethnic diversity, and the role of women in society. On the other hand, the channels discuss how **popular culture gets into social life** (S05), spreading nerd and gamer cultures, as well as how popular culture themes are related to other social life themes and even used as a reference for fake news. This statement is illustrated in the second line of images of Figure 7, while the images of the first exemplify S06.

Finally, another two related statements link to EF2, each of which also relates to another enunciative function, as well as to another statement. Thus, also related to the repercussion of the backstage of the entertainment industry (EF1) and how the channels highlight the industry producers (S02), **the channels highlight the progress of productions** (S03), reporting the different stages of media products (e.g., movies, TV series, video games) under development, the way producers try to align them

with fans' expectations, and by analyzing or speculating on whether these productions adhere or not to narratives already developed in the franchises they took part in. On the other hand, the channels analyze how **popular culture has consolidated from the very evolution of the entertainment industry** (S04), discussing how technological and narrative development improvements have impacted the reception of media products, which also relates to the interface between popular culture and contemporary society (EF3) and to how popular culture merges with social life (S05). In Figure 8, the first three images illustrate S03, while S04 is demonstrated by the last three.

## 4.2 Touting popular culture

The second discursive formation (DF2) concerns how influencers speak from a fannish place of speech in spreading entertainment industry products. They set out to edify fan culture through their expert knowledge of popular culture and the medium at their disposal to propagate it. This discursive formation is based on two formation rules: **fannish expertise** (FR3), concerning the analysis of entertainment industry products from the point of view of their grip on popular culture, and **fan culture spreading** (FR4), which propagates to fan



Figure 6. Behind-the-scenes repercussion of the entertainment industry

Figure 7. Interface between popular culture and contemporary society



Figure 8. Evolution of entertainment productions

knowledge about media products, as well as behaviors that characterize fans.

In both formation rules, the entertainment industry (object) is approached from a fannish point of view (concept), with the purpose of indoctrinating (strategy) the audience into fan culture. They differ in the modalities adopted. In the first formation rule (FR3) this happens through the evaluation and judgment of industry

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productions, while in the second (FR4) these productions are disclosed, explained, and generate expectation. The composition of formation rules based on their criteria is shown in Table 4.

The criteria that configure the enunciative functions related to such formation rules are shows in Table 5. Among the common criteria of formation rules, two are repeated in the enunciative functions: the channels focus on the entertainment industry productions based on the understanding that they are products (referential) of popular culture (associated field). In addition, all identified modalities refer to a fan position (subject). However, materialities vary, which differentiates the enunciative functions. The channels **assign value to popular culture products** (EF4), which can happen both positively and negatively. This enunciative function is characterized precisely by the propensity of the influencers to qualify (materiality) the products and is linked to the fannish knowledge (FR3). On the other hand, related only to

fan culture propagation (FR4), the channels **elucidate aspects of popular culture products** (EF6) as a way of diffusing them (materiality). Finally, the channels make **conjectures about popular culture products** (EF5), which is common to both formation rules. This enunciative function is characterized by speculation (materiality) about the direction of franchise narratives, which is done as a way of disseminating or valuing. These relationships, including those with the statements described below, are shown in Figure 9.

Relating exclusively to EF4 are three interrelated statements. The **channels create lists of different aspects regarding popular culture products** (S07), such as the quality of the plots, costumes, or special effects of different productions (e.g., movies, TV series, animes), or the performance of actors who played the same character in different films, among others. Similarly, the **channels make comparisons in popular culture** (S08), whether between competing products or between products of the same franchise, setting stylistic, narrative, and technical parameters (e.g., Marvel vs. DC movies, character characteristics, video game consoles of different brands, original vs. adapted stories). In addition, the **channels evaluate popular culture products** (S09) through verdicts, commentary on teasers and trailers, and even resonating the press evaluation. These statements are illustrated respectively by the images in each line of Figure 10.

Two related statements link only to EF6. On the one hand, the **channels resonate the releases of major productions** (S14), presenting or discussing curiosities such as deleted scenes, continuity errors, post-credit scenes, Easter eggs, and even memes circulating on the internet. On the other hand, the **channels explain popular culture products** (S15), summarizing stories of fictional universes, explaining character characteristics, and unraveling information reserved for fans who know certain franchises in-depth. In Figure 11, these statements are evidenced through the first three and the last three images, respectively.
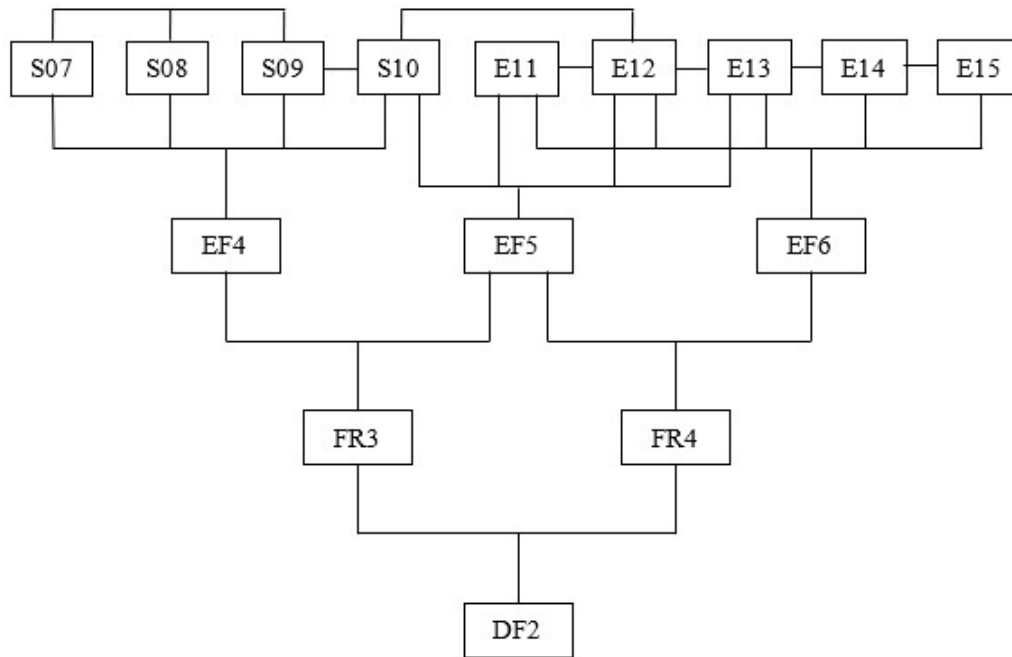
Four statements link to EF5, as well as to one of the other two. The **channels highlight the success of popular culture products** (S10), which is related to the influencers' evaluation of them (S09), as well as a way of valuing them (EF4). This happens as much from the standpoint of their marketing performance - which is relativized in relation to their proposal and production cost, for example - as it is about their ability to raise fans or impact culture - which is also considered in terms of

## Table 4
### Formation rules (FR3 and FR4) and their criteria

| Criteria categories | FR3 | FR4 | Criteria names |
|---|---|---|---|
| Object | X | X | Entertainment industry |
| Concept | X | X | Fannish |
| Modality | X | | Evaluators |
| | X | | Judgers |
| | | X | Disclosers |
| | | X | Explainers |
| | | X | Expectation generators |
| Strategy | X | X | Indoctrinating |

## Table 5
### Enunciative functions (EF1, EF2, and EF3) and their criteria

| Criteria categories | EF4 | EF5 | EF6 | Criteria names |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Referential | X | X | X | Entertainment industry modus operandi |
| Associated field | X | X | X | Popular culture |
| Subject | X | X | X | Fan |
| Materiality | X | | | Quality |
| | | X | | Speculation |
| | | | X | Diffusing |

Figure 9. Set of relationships touting popular culture

the segments to which they are addressed. On the other hand, the other three statements also unravel popular culture issues (EF6). As an epicenter of this articulation, the **channels create and disseminate theories about the narratives of fictional universes** (E12), a statement that relates to all others linked to this enunciative function. Influencers rely on their interpretations and on the statements of artists and directors involved in productions to add explanations of already released productions and speculate on what might happen to those in development. Also, the **channels give spoilers about popular culture productions** (S11) as a way of making assumptions about them. Finally, the **channels create a climate of expectation for new production releases** (S13), presenting in advance a large volume and diversity of information about certain franchises, whether they consider emblematic of popular

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Figure 10. Value assignment to popular culture products



Figure 11. Popular culture product elucidation

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culture, or those of great appeal and repercussions (S14). The images of each line of Figure 12 illustrate, respectively, S10, S12, S11, and S13.

## 4.3 Promoting the entertainment industry

The last discursive formation (DF3) concerns how influencers assume a marketing role in promoting the entertainment industry. This formation derives from a single rule, which concerns the **development of the entertainment market** (FR5), through the actions of influencers to stimulate the demand of this market. This formation rule refers to how channels promote (modality) the entertainment industry (object), through their performance (concept) – quality and product disclosure, events, market expansion – with a view to stimulating



Figure 12. Popular culture product conjectures

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(strategy) consumption. Table 6 shows the list of this formation rule criteria.

Thus, influencers act from a market perspective (associated field), as agents (subject) of its growth. On the one hand, the channels praise (materiality) the success (referential) achieved by industry organizations. On the other hand, they foment (materiality) their products through dissemination (referential). The criteria that compose both enunciative functions are shown in Table 7.

The differences between criteria singularize the enunciative functions linked to the rule of this discursive formation. Relationships supporting this discursive formation are shown in Figure 13 and described below.

The first of these enunciative functions **exalts products and their producers** (EF7). Three interrelated statements are linked to it. Some **entertainment industry producers are celebrated** (S16) for their contribution to popular culture, with their history and evolution presented and their main products highlighted and discussed. In addition, **product performance is highlighted** (S17), in which information on revenue, profitability, awards, and longevity (among others) are associated with quality. One of the main parameters used to qualify pop culture productions is the box office return achieved by films. Finally, the **channels stimulate consumption of popular culture products** (S18), indicating productions (e.g.,

series, movies, games, animes) that consumers should not miss. These statements are shown respectively by the images of each line in Figure 14.

The statement about stimulating consumption (S18) also links to the other enunciative function regarding DF3, which concerns **information disclosure to boost the entertainment market** (EF8). Linked to the other two statements of this group, the **channels support entertainment industry events** (S19), reverberating awards ceremonies (e.g., Academy Awards, Emmy Awards), as well as publicizing, covering, or even performing popular culture events. In addition to spreading expectations and evaluation of the awards, the channels highlight how pop culture events (e.g., Super Bowl, Comic Cons) present content (e.g., trailers, teasers) exclusive to upcoming releases in the segment. Finally, the **channels support the national entertainment industry's development** (S20), reporting about Brazilian products, producers, and professionals involved in the sector, as well as the country's appearance in international productions. Figure 15 illustrates these last statements in three images for each in sequence.

# 5 Unified fragmented roles: insight for market agency analysis

By taking a position typically aligned with that of the specialized press, digital influencer channels resonate the entertainment industry analytically (DF1), suggesting an intention to build credibility by legitimating themselves as informational media (Cotter, 2019; Kapitan & Silvera, 2015). On the other hand, they also assume the task of touting popular culture, making it increasingly relevant to a captive audience (DF2). To do so, they assume a fan role, which can be interpreted as a way of performing this doctrine through empathy (Cotter, 2019; Kapitan & Silvera, 2015) and identification with their audience (Cotter, 2019). Finally, they also act as entertainment industry promoters, assuming a marketing role (DF3). This practice has the potential to build trust with their audience since they present themselves as experts on the subjects they address (Sudha & Sheena, 2017; Uzuňoglu & Kip, 2014).
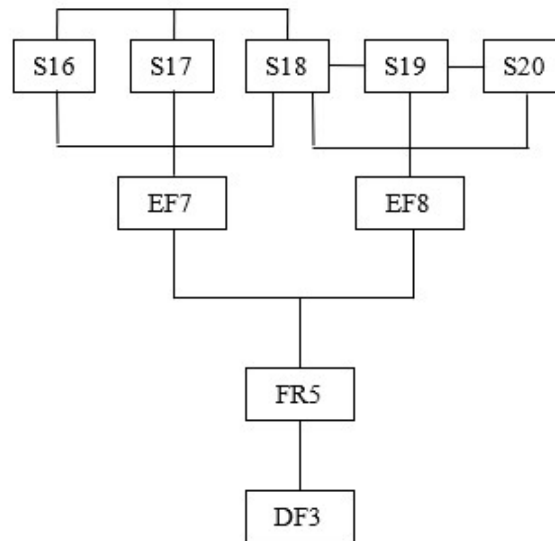
These different agencies should be discussed with the complexity they require, as they cannot be understood as variations of the same practice. In fact, they end up representing a fundamental tripod of the market structure: producers, mediators, and consumers. These

Table 6
**Formation rule (FR5) and its criteria**

| Criteria categories | FR3 | Criteria names |
|---|---|---|
| Object | X | Entertainment industry |
| Concept | X | Performance |
| Modality | X | Promoter |
| Strategy | X | Stimulating |

Table 7
**Enunciative functions (EF7 and EF8) and their criteria**

| Criteria categories | EF7 | EF8 | Criteria names |
|---|---|---|---|
| Referential | X | | Success |
| | | X | Dissemination |
| Associated field | X | | Market |
| Subject | X | | Market agents |
| Materiality | X | | Praise |
| | | X | Foment |

| Statements |
|---|
| S16 – Entertainment industry producers are celebrated |
| S17 – Product performance is highlighted |
| S18 – Channels stimulate consumption of popular culture products |
| S19 – Channels support entertainment industry events |
| S20 – Channels support the national entertainment industry's development |
| **Enunciative Functions** |
| EF7 – Exalts products and their producers |
| EF8 – Information disclosure to boost the entertainment market |
| **Formation Rules** |
| FR5 – Development of the entertainment market |
| **Discursive Formation** |
| DF3 – Promoting the entertainment industry |

Figure 13. Set of relationships promoting the entertainment industry

different positions represent different subjectivities and, consequently, different marketplace ideologies. Thus, we can say that the results demonstrate an episteme founded on a **market agency** (see Figure 16), in the way that popular culture digital influencers play different market positions. This is an important theoretical insight, since the roles involved in market agencies are often well demarcated by the literature (i.e., producers, consumers, mediators). In our research, such market agency roles correspond, respectively, to the three discursive formations: press (DF1), fans (DF2), and promoters (DF3).

Since media discourses are fundamentally affected by the spaces in which they are produced (Charaudeau, 2006), we can argue that the influencers' volatility aligns with the very singularization of digital media as transmedia spaces characterized by a proliferation of languages (Jenkins,

2006). The media environment can be understood as part language, assuming that each media, before being just a means of communication, has its own language (Franco & Leão, 2016; Martino, 2014). On the other hand, the growing media ubiquity has led to a process of social life mediatization, causing the media to become a permeating agent of social relations and the very configuration of societies (Franco & Leão, 2016).

This volatility aligns with the so-called postmodern condition, marked by a process of dissolution and reconfiguration of social structures and established truths. This process also produces what has come to be known as subject fragmentation, exemplified by socio-cultural practices such as consumption (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2017; Bauman, 2000). In CCT studies, individuals can be identified and understood through the ability to move in

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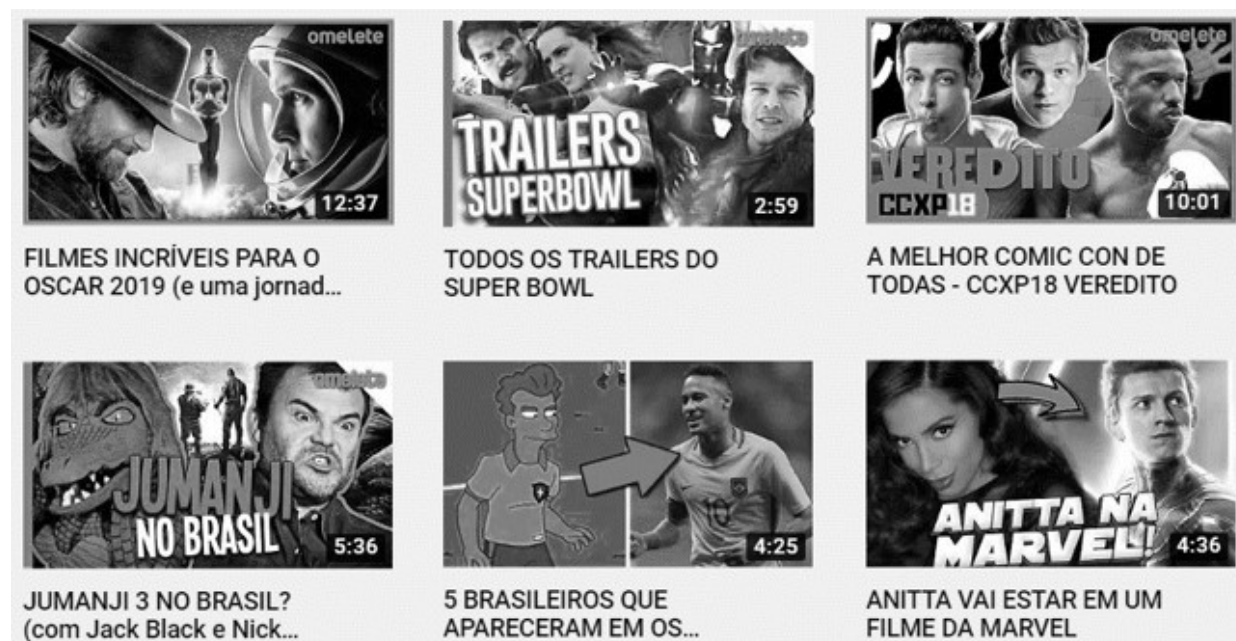Figure 14. Exaltation of products and producers



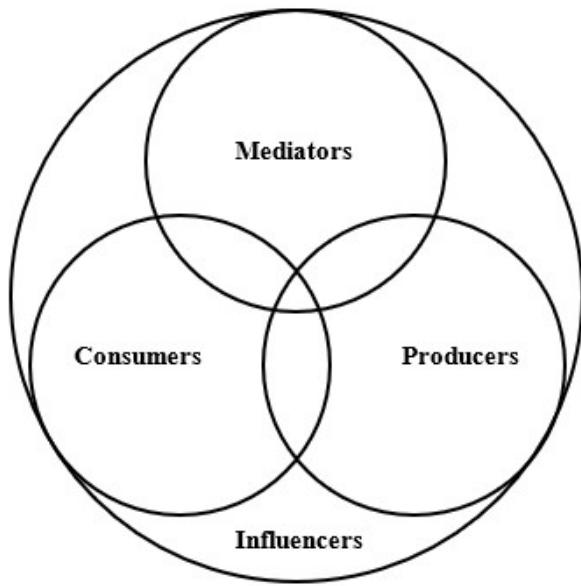Figure 15. Information disclosure to boost the entertainment market

Figure 16. Episteme framework

different social positions and, therefore, articulate among different ideological conceptions according to different social spaces of signification (e.g., media) (Arnould & Thompson, 2015; Firat & Venkatesh, 1995).

In line with this perspective, Foucault (2012) argues that the author of a text is not a clearly demarcated individual. Prior to this, textual production results from an author-function, as a mode of existence and circulation of social discourses. One same text can refer to different discursive positions according to the different points of view and pretensions of those who interpret and re-signify them, thus not being restricted to the purpose of its writer. Thus, texts have their possibility of production subjected to control, selection, organization, and redistribution of procedures capable of highlighting, manipulating, establishing, and mitigating truths through different signification contexts (Foucault, 2014).

Thus, the paratextuality of media products is the result of this author-function (Mittell, 2015), in the sense that this authorship concerns neither the material nor intellectual possession of paratexts (Humayun & Belk, 2018). On the other hand, media paratextuality can be expected to overlap different points of view and interests in different layers of meaning (Mittell, 2015; Steiner, 2015).

We can conclude, therefore, that the digital influencers' paratexts about popular culture refer to

different market agencies since they evidence a subjectively fragmented action in the consumer culture paradigm. This allows us to make two reflections. The first is about the transience between marketing roles that are assumed by digital influencers. According to Wallendorf (2017), the market context has two major forms of willingness: the moral and the economic. The latter restricts the actors to a structure that relates to monetary exchanges. The former (i.e., moral willingness), however, allows the influencers to transit between different market roles (i.e., producers, consumers, channels) and to operate outside a pre-established moral agency.

Secondly, when digital influencers perform different authorship functions in a transmedia environment closely related to overlapping market practices, such positions cannot be totally separated. In the assumption of the role of fan to create a captive audience, it cannot be said that digital influencers perform this only in a strategically thoughtful way, as they are expected to address issues they know and esteem. On the other hand, it is not possible to determine that the promotional function they perform is always sponsored, so it would not be incoherent to assume that it is associated with their interest in building a rapt audience. Amid this weft, it seems clear that these different positions are naturally performed, suggesting the influencers do not perceive as questionable conciliating the informational and the capture perspectives (Charaudeau, 2006; O'Keeffe, 2006).

If the ethical statute of these positions refers to distinct and sometimes irreconcilable interests and marketplace ideologies (Arnould & Thompson, 2015; Peñaloza & Mish, 2011), the identified episteme reveals the overlap of conceptually separate marketing positions. They blend in the way digital influencers articulate the content of popular culture: a critical and impartial posture (i.e., press) may match the fostering of demand for a market (i.e., marketing), and a consumer position (i.e., fannish) may be preserved amid these others.

This is possible because, according to Foucault (2017), ethics is based on the production of truths. There is not an ultimate truth; different truths constitute distinct ethical positions. However, truths that serve to underpin an ethical stance do not play the same role regarding other ethics. Therefore, a dispute for establishing truths is continuously played. This process constitutes distinct ethical positions that are sometimes dialogable, sometimes incompatible.

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# 6 Concluding remarks

The discursive formations identified indicate that digital influencer channels paratextualize popular culture through different market agencies. Because the different channels analyzed do not present a discrepancy between the popular culture themes addressed in their thumbnails, the discourses identified reveal how the role of ambassadors of this segment assumed by digital influencers overlaps with different positions regarding the content of the entertainment industry. When they disseminate news and information about the segment, without judgment, they act as mediators, emulating the specialized press; by qualifying through experiences and in-depth knowledge of the content, they reveal their fannish feelings, acting as consumers; in making disclosures aimed at driving ways to consume media texts they resemble marketing promoters.

The production of paratexts through social networks overlaps different marketplace ideologies (i.e., mediators, consumers, producers) that, more and more, are confused with the varied possibilities given to the individual in the digital context. Before they refer to alternative and alternate positions in their performances, these are concomitant faces of the same fragmented subject. The study reveals a unified episteme that is, in itself, a vehicle for different knowledge that underlies traditionally separate agencies that are revealed as integrated. In addition, the new communication and information technologies (ICT) popularized by the participatory logic of Web 2.0 – and, mainly, the use of social networks – illustrate how social media influencers are responsible for creating and maintaining market agencies.

Thus, in a specific way, the research brings a theoretical contribution to CCT by addressing the conception of paratextual production as an interdisciplinary theoretical dialogue for the research field. Towards a theoretical generalization, the study shows how the subjects play different roles in the market, without these being separated or even well delineated among themselves. Complementarily, it makes way for an important ethical reflection on the role of digital influencers as market mediating agents. This contribution makes room for theoretical advancements in market agencies, mainly the media role in this process. On the other hand, it brings light to both social and practical concerns about this process.

We recognize that the study was limited to the paratextual production of Brazilian popular culture digital influencers. However, the choice of a single market is justified by it allowing access to linguistically compatible data. On the other hand, the Brazilian popular culture market has become one of the largest in the world (Souza-Leão & Moura, 2018), and also one of the most appropriated by social media, and specifically YouTube, as a medium for propagating popular culture information and content (Souza-Leão et al., 2019). Thus, the collected data present the discourse historicity required by the adopted analytical method.

As possible developments, in terms of the empirical field investigated it seems pertinent to analyze paratexts produced by the entertainment industry (i.e., major movie studios, streaming services) and popular culture fans, with a view to theorizing the paratextual production of media products. Official brands' communication vehicles and fan forums seem to be rich sources for accomplishing this purpose.

On the other hand, investigations that focus on market agents that play different roles could make advances in the theoretical framework presented here. The prosumption concept provides a broad starting point. This concept reinforces the idea that market practices are exercised by productive consumers. From this perspective, the dualistic model of production and consumption is a continuum in which consumers act as producers and vice versa when they collaborate, co-create, and interact culturally in general (see Cova & Cova, 2012; Ritzer & Jurgenson, 2010). With such blurred limits between production and consumption practices, the paratextualization perspective could be applied in research investigating a range of interactions between consumers and organizational buyers.

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