

**It's a video!**

**It's an essay!**

**IT'S A VIDEO ESSAY!**

Examining the effects of sources of income on YouTube-based video essayists

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## **Abstract**

This study explores the phenomenon of YouTube video essays. As the internet and digitalization made cultural goods more accessible, new contemporary forms of content emerged. Video essay is one of them. By building on original works of art, the video essayists create a new content from which they can generate revenues. However, creating and sharing video essays online comes with certain struggles for the creators. In order to gather insight into how the sources of income resulting from making video essays affect their creators, twenty qualitative interviews with video essayists based on the platform YouTube were conducted. The collected data were examined by the means of thematic analysis.

The results show an uncertainty connected to the dynamic environment of the internet and the platforms on which the creators operate. A recurring storyline among the creators includes initial passion-driven content creation followed by financial motivation as their channels progress. To deal with the uncertainty, the creators diversify their sources of income. The means they use for financing the creation of video essays are YouTube and Google AdSense, Patreon and sponsorships. YouTube as the primary platform where the work of the creators is published affects the video essayists in many ways. However, it is mainly through the copyright system YouTube has created within the lawful boundaries. Patreon serves as a steady source of income with a possibility to create a community around their work. The last revenue stream, sponsorships, are the most lucrative and are a way of pursuing video essay creation as a full-time career. All three sources of income are connected to audience potential. No matter how the creators perceive their activity, they hold a certain level of professionalism in the way they approach managing their video essays.

## **Key words**

Video essay creators, motivation, YouTube, copyright and fair use, revenue streams

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# 1 Introduction

Can You Judge Art Objectively?

The Most Disturbing Painting

Who invented metal?

How Donald Trump Answers a Question

Stripes in Movies: Why Do Characters Wear Them?

Are you intrigued by these statements? You should be. These are several titles of video essays that can be found on YouTube. From film through visual arts and politics, video essays tackle a diverse range of topics. But what exactly is a video essay? And why is it important?

The video essay is a difficult concept to describe. To define it is as hard as to define a written essay. Both have a protean form, meaning, bearing various aspects and therefore are in their core undefinable. Nevertheless, an essay of any style contains some form of subjectivity and reflectivity (Rascaroli, 2008). The core of video essay is an expression of something subjective by using audiovisual means in the form of a video. But to truly understand what a video essay is, it needs to be experienced.

YouTube-based video essays began to emerge around five years ago, when creators such as Tony Zhou from Every Frame a Painting or Evan Puschak from The Nerdwriter started to create short videos that had a distinct feeling and certain attractiveness to them. The phenomenon quickly inspired many other creative minds to follow in their footsteps. It's now five years later and YouTube is flooded with video essays.

This thesis aims to take a look into the video essay world by interviewing the creators of video essays based on the internet platform YouTube. The video essay creators were selected as a subject of the research because of the unique nature of their work. Not only are video essays a new phenomenon but they also use original works of art, such as film, music or photography and transform them into new creations. In this sense, video essay is foremost an appropriation of art (Landes, 2002) and the video essays are owned by their creators (Rushton, 2011). However, determining what appropriates art in transformative way and what could be deemed as infringing is often problematic.

Whether the content that is being created by the video essayists is an original work, is of transformative nature, and or infringes the other original works, comes with many issues that need to be addressed. Video essays are one of the many new creative forms that are now

a part of the cultural sector. Their origin was enabled by the changes caused by digitalization and the rise of the internet. Internet and especially WEB 2.0, that brought the possibilities of interacting and participating between users, transformed the world (Henten & Tadayoni, 2011) and caused many changes in the cultural sector. “Goods and services that were previously rival and excludable at least to some extent, have become in effect public goods for Internet users” (Handke, Stepan & Towse, 2016, p. 5), with reproducible goods being accessible virtually for free through more distribution means than ever. Online, amateur users as well as professional artists work with reproducible goods, which creates unexplored and complex problems (Handke et al., 2016).

As copyrighted works became easily accessible online, it enabled new genres such as video essays to develop. However, copyrighted works are being infringed online uncontrollably (Handke et al., 2016) and the copyright law struggles to keep up with the changes of digitalization. As video essays use copyrighted works as their source, producing them comes with several issues. The production of video essays can be recognized as a form and a part of creative industries under the provisions of the fair use doctrine. The distinction of what constitutes a fair use of copyrighted material is another concern that has become even more intricate with digitalization.

This thesis will investigate the issues connected to the creation of transformative content online and how it affects the video essay creators. As the research in cultural economics on internet related topics is in the beginning, engaging in a research on video essays on YouTube could provide a better understanding of the implications the internet environment has on the creators of a new cultural content.

This research will consider specifically YouTube-based video essay creators as a subject for three reasons. First, YouTube was chosen as a primary platform due to its sheer size and influence. It is the most popular video sharing website and the second most popular online platform in general. It provides cultural content for free for the users to consume and free platform for creators to fund a channel. Every minute of each hour, more than 300 hours of videos (Omnicore Agency, 2019) are uploaded to YouTube. Second, it has to be noted that YouTube is the platform where the video essays are primarily embedded. And third, it offers automatic monetization of videos, so it serves as a source of income to the video essayists.

The influence of YouTube and my interest in the video essay phenomenon inspired me to explore it further. By observing video essays on YouTube and trying to recognize how the creators manage their activity, I noticed that a lot of them use other sources of income besides YouTube. Patreon, a platform that allows for direct support of the creators by their

fans and sponsorships are often used by the video essay creators. With this in mind and considering the complex online system of reproducible goods, I decided to examine how is the work of video essayists affected by the diverse means of income they use to support their creative activity. Ultimately, thesis intends to answer the research question:

How do the sources of income resulting from making video essays on YouTube affect the video essay creators?

To get a better grasp on the topic and to help answer the main research question, the following sub-questions were formulated and will be resolved prior to answering the main research question:

How do video essay creators perceive video essays?

What motivates the creators to make video essays?

How do the creators perceive their activity?

What sources of income YouTube-based video essayists use to support their activity?

What issues do video essay creators struggle with?

To answer these questions, twenty qualitative interviews with English speaking video essay creators that use YouTube as a primary sharing platform were conducted. By exploring the background surrounding video essays on YouTube through the eyes of the creators, I aim to provide an understanding of this new phenomenon.

The effects deriving from having several means of income are diverse and connected to different themes. The results of the research indicate, that the video essayists face a great uncertainty online and therefore opt for the diversification of revenue streams. Collectively and separately, the sources of income affect the work ethic of the creators, the way they approach their career and the creation of their content. Compromise and the loss of autonomy for the creators are an interesting topic to research and will be discussed in the thesis, however, are not the main focus of this paper.

The thesis first provides a theoretical framework that regards the main issues and concepts related to the online video essay creation. The theoretical framework serves as a support in order to get a better understanding of the environment surrounding video essays. First, the notion of video essay as a genre will be examined. Second, several aspects of the economics

of the internet will be discussed. This will be followed by a section on motivation. After, I will review the notions of copyright and the fair use doctrine from the economic standpoint. And lastly, the examination of YouTube alongside with the other means of financing will be presented. To gain preliminary knowledge that will later be used in the analysis, I used both academic literature and available information from daily practice in the theoretical framework.

Next, the methodology chapter will explain the research strategy and method used to gain the most relevant results. For the most part, qualitative semi-structured interviews were applied as a method, yet open question interviews were used as well. The data was analysed by using a thematic analysis.

The results of the interviews are sorted in three central themes. First theme provides insights into the creators' perception of video essays. In the second theme, I will move to the motivation of the video essayists and how they perceive their activity. Central topics of this section are passion and professionalization. The end of the second theme will provide an insight into the stakes when it comes to the financing of video essays. Finally, the third theme relates to the sources of income. The financial means and the effects they have on the activity of video essayists will be discussed both in general and separately. Lastly, the main research question will be answered.

## 2 Theoretical Framework

### 2.1 Video essays

As a starting point of the thesis, I will try and establish the concept of the video essay. This chapter aims to introduce the form to the reader based on existing literature and various sources. This will provide a background which will then be developed in the results chapter based on the answers of the interviewees.

Video essays are quite a recent format connected to digital media. As a contemporary video essay is very current form of medium, there is not much relevant academic research written. Therefore, the thesis will also examine articles and opinions outside of academic literature to look for connecting qualities of video essays. The chapter results in stating several expectations about video essays, which will be later compared with the outcomes of the interviews.

The YouTube video essay is a new genre that is hard to grasp. Some sources relate video essay to the essay film, a part of an avant-garde cinema that started to emerge around the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Ned Stuckey-French marked video essays as the evolution of essay-films: “Essay-films have become video essays, and they’re everywhere” (Stuckey-French, 2012, p. 14). John Bresland in his article “On the Origin of the Video Essay” (2010) referred to video essays as a new form of the essay film. However, he emphasized how the digital revolution and the internet changed the production of film and the experience of watching it. He mentioned the transformation of the film creation process, that has changed from the highly collaborative and expensive project that once was the essay film, to the personal and low-cost video essay (Bresland, 2010).

Whether there is a connection between the essay film genre and the video essays is left for discussion. One thing that is certain is, that video essay is a product of digitalization. As of now, anyone can make a short video essay on their smartphone and anyone can consume it there (Bresland, 2010). McWrither in his article (2015) defined video essay as: “...short critical films about cinema, films or artists in one or a series of online clips that usually last no more than fifteen minutes per video” (McWrither, 2015, p. 370). According to him, video essays are characterized by concerning films and television media.

In an article for Filmmaking magazine (2016), several video essay creators contemplated the question of originality of video essays, and where is the line between a video essay and a completely new film, made by transforming a piece of cinema. No

conclusions regarding this were drawn from the article, but the video essay was contemplated as a new form of commentary and was defined as “a short online video which cuts together footage from one or more films in order to reveal new insights about them” (Bernstein, 2016, para. 7).

In a “What makes the best video essays so great?” article, the author explained video essays as follows: “...just think about a regular essay, but with accompanying visuals and music. It’s really that simple. There’s a misconception that video essays on YouTube exist specifically to critique, explain or analyse films—and indeed it seems that a vast majority of video essays do precisely that—but there’s no limit to what a video essay can tackle, just as there’s no limit to what someone can focus a written article on” (Wilhelm, 2019, para. 2). Apart from stating that video essays on YouTube can be done on any topic, the article also distinguished how does video essay differ from a documentary or a review. According to Wilhelm (2019), a video essay raises a thesis and then proceeds to support it with several arguments, analysing the topic in the process. The subjective element of the video essay is what it makes it separate genre from documentary. The analytic approach distinguishes it from a review (Wilhelm, 2019).

Simon Owens (2016) also considered YouTube-based video essays and their distinct approaches, whilst stating that “video essays almost always feature a narrator who presents a thesis via a series of still images, animations, and video clips” (Owens, 2016, para. 5). He acknowledged the massive popularity of film-related video essays, but also mentioned that it is not the only topic video essay can take on, stating cultural criticism and educational essays such as the ones The School of Life channel publishes (Owens, 2016). The educational aspect of video essays was also referenced by Puschak (2016) in his TEDx Talk, when he mentioned an interest in engaging curated knowledge.

The educative element of video essays connects to academia. Many video essayists research their topics and include a reference list in the caption of their videos, as they would have done with an academic essay. Some form of the academic approach of video essays was mentioned by Owens (2016) and McWrither (2015). Puschak (2016) referred to academia as one of the influences on contemporary video essays. Monaghan (2017) suggests that video essay may become a new scholarly form.

### **2.1.1 *Expectations and conclusion***

Drawing from the gathered insights on the contemporary video essay, I will now state several assumptions about the form, that I will later compare with the answers of the interviewed video essay creators. The expectations I have regarding the perception of video essays are:

- there is a thesis, presented by using a subjective point of view,
- the perception of the video essay as a written essay in a video form,
- video essay can take on different topics, but film and audio-visual media themes are prevailing,
- the length of video essays is short,
- and there is an educational element to video essays.

The first assumption is the presence of a thesis and a subjective point of view. Video essays have a certain subject that they want to portray by using clips, pictures, photography or animation, that is accompanied by some form of narration or a text. This combination serves as a tool for the creators to present their thesis and arguments. Second, the video essay is simply any written essay, only presented in a video form. Third, the sources imply that the subject video essays frequently deal with is a film or another audio-visual media. However, there is also acknowledgement of other topics that video essay could potentially present. Fourth, video essays are of a short length, approximately around ten to fifteen minutes. Lastly, I expect that there is an existence of an educational element to video essays.

These five assumptions will serve as a stepping point to the beginning of the results chapter, where I will compare these expectations with the perception of video essays by the interviewed creators. Their perception and the connection to these expectations will then result in the more developed concept of the video essay as a genre.

## **2.2 The economics of the internet**

Since this thesis studies video essay creators based on YouTube, which affects their activity, this next chapter is dedicated to the economics of the internet. In here, I will present theories connected to the economics of the internet and to cultural economics, that have some relation to the creation of video essays on YouTube. The reviewed concepts here serve as a background understanding for several outcomes from the interviews, as the internet ecosystem and its' aspects undeniably have an influence on the video essay creators.

First, this section presents the model of two-sided markets, because it defines the existence of the platform YouTube and results in the possibility of offering free content for the viewers. Second, I will review the Long-tail theory and the Superstar phenomenon and their connection to the internet and digitalization. Third and last, I will look into the notions of professional and user-generated content, because one of the aims of the thesis is to find out how the video essay creators perceive their activity on YouTube. As the interviews were conducted with creators in different career stages, having a certain perception of professional and user-generated content and the issues that surround them, will serve as one of the inputs when considering the results.

### **2.2.1 *Two-sided markets and culture for free***

Two-sided or the recent and more complex multi-sided markets are models, where the two or more different agents interact via the platform and are mutually influenced by their actions (Farchy, 2011). This two-sided model is used by YouTube as well as many other internet platforms. The platform then serves as an intermediary and grants the players an opportunity “to maximize the profits of their transactions” and therefore, “is not economically neutral” (Farchy, 2011, p. 249). Associated positive network effects then create a pricing strategy that “involves subsidizing one side of the market to attract users from the other side; when the subsidy is completed, the other side of the market becomes accessible for free” (Farchy, 2011, p. 249).

The platforms exploit network effects to offer a joint product. Joint product is created by supplying the audience with free content and then offering a substantial audience as a product to the advertisers. On the one hand, the platform provides the audience with free content, but in exchange, it has the advantage of gathering information about them and is then able to target a specific audience. This makes the commodity even more valuable to the advertisers. The content is therefore seemingly free for the users, but it serves as an asset to create profit (Farchy, 2011).

This plays in favour of large firms, because smaller players on the market are unable of proving as large of an audience to the advertisers (Handke et al., 2016). And as this model is carried out by private ventures, there is a possibility that “potentially abusive, monopoly-like domination” (Farchy, 2011, p. 250) will arise.

## **2.2.2 Long-tail theory and Superstar phenomenon**

Nowadays, the internet offers easily available quality content for practically anyone to use and consume. This also simplified the process of creating new content, therefore, a larger product differentiation emerged. In the cultural sector, it is typical that the small group dominates the differentiated market. Two theories – Long-tail and Superstar – speculate how this was changed by digitalization (Handke et al., 2016).

Chris Anderson's Long-tail theory (2004) suggests, that with the progress of technological change, the percentage of sales of the niche products will rise. Reduced costs of creation alongside with the costs of inventory would make possible to create products even if the expected sales are low (Anderson, 2004). And even though the diversity of creations online has arisen and the opportunities have become more equal, Epstein (2017) argues that, despite the digital development, consumers still prefer the Superstars.

The Superstar phenomenon means that “relatively small numbers of people earn enormous amounts of money and dominate the activities in which they engage” (Rosen, 1981, p. 845). This signifies that the vast majority of creators receives low incomes and in contrast, the minority accounts for the bulk of it. This distribution is not essentially altered by the talent a creator possesses (Adler, 1985).

Epstein (2017) used empirical evidence to show that the Superstar phenomenon is still very prevalent in cultural industries today. He argued that the Superstar effect makes an obscure product very cheap, because online content is nowadays, for the most part, expected to be for free. Content is also being supplied in massive numbers, appearing very similar to one another and as a result being perceived as worthless (Epstein, 2017). Low barriers of entry create almost equal opportunities for anyone, therefore creating successful content online is like buying “a lottery ticket to stardom” (Epstein, 2017, p. 6).

Although becoming a superstar creator may be the goal, being one may also come with limitations. The large base of users will result in different preferences and would make it difficult for the creator to customize their product or service to keep satisfying their customers. There is also a possibility of negative influence on the utility of the consumers with continuous repetitive product and overexposure.

By reviewing these two theories and how they apply when it comes to digitalization, it seems that Superstar theory is still predominant. Empirical evidence provided by Epstein (2017) suggests that, thanks to digitalization, Superstar phenomenon is even more entrenched at the present.

### **2.2.3 Professional and user-generated content**

The content that is available via the internet is supplied by either professionals, who seek to gather possible pecuniary rewards or content that is generated by users and is not created with an intent of making an income (Handke et al., 2016). It is hard to distinguish accurately between these two. However, some indicators such as “payment for their work; use, performance or exhibition of their work; or the proportion of working time spent on creating” (Handke et al., 2016, p. 12) can be used for clarification to some extent.

Internet enabled the creators of content that seek to gain monetary rewards to operate and sell their product without intermediaries, which means that almost anyone can do so. Creating content professionally is an option for more creators today than it ever was. However, without intermediaries, there is a layer of certification missing. Also, intermediaries often carry a substantial part of the risk in the highly uncertain cultural sector. Professionals then need to take certain steps to try and deal with this uncertainty (Handke et al., 2016). One option is crowd-sourcing “where the production of creative work is subject to the provision of up-front finance from private individuals” (Handke et al., 2016, p.13).

User-generated or amateur content, in spite of being created without a financial goal in mind, can later gather financial rewards as well (Handke et al., 2016). However, the user-generated content needs to be certain quality to gather an audience for the advertisers to be able to generate income. Under these circumstances, it is hard to tell when the user-generated content ends and the professional begins. Connected to user and professional generated content is the motivation of the creator, an issue that will be discussed in the next section.

## **2.3 Motivation**

Creators of video essays need to be motivated in order to produce their content. Their motivation then contributes to whether their content can be considered professional or amateur and also provides insight on how the creators perceive their work.

Two motivations push a person to work – intrinsic and extrinsic (Frey, 1997). Intrinsic motivation reflects persons’ will to learn and grow (Ryan & Deci, 2000) and is related to inner feelings and principles and leads to ones’ satisfaction, whereas extrinsic motivation refers to stimulants outside of the individuals’ concern. Extrinsic motivation can be positive, such as financial rewards or negative like threats or punishments (Frey, 1997).

If the extrinsic incentives grow beyond their normal disciplining effect, they can crowd out intrinsic motivation and cause a lessening of work morale. Being overly exposed to both motivations, individual unconsciously reaches to the intrinsic motivation that lies within

their control range and lowers it. It is then consequently replaced by the extrinsic incentives. In the case of inadequate satisfaction, the individual tries to make sense of the work and finds reasons to appreciate it (Frey, 1997). When the “intrinsic rewards are perceived and are attainable” (Frey, 1997, p. 430) the importance of extrinsic motivations decreases and results in crowding in effect. Crowding in effect can also occur when “an external intervention may raise intrinsic work motivation when people regard this action as acknowledging their high work morale” (Frey, 1997, p. 430). In his article, Frey (1997) concentrated on the crowding out effect for the possibility of managing the extrinsic incentives. According to Ryan and Deci (2000), most actions are motivated extrinsically.

The motivation of video essay creators and what effects occur there can vary from case to case. One depending factor is how they realize their activity on YouTube, whether they perceive it only as sharing their artistic work or as an entrepreneurial opportunity to start a career (Holmbom, 2015).

This would also influence the way they approach it from a career perspective. Creative artists often have multiple jobs, both arts-related and non-arts related (Towse, 2010). Frequently, the artistic work does not pay as much as regular jobs, therefore creators often support their favored artistic pursuits with income from non-arts related jobs (Throsby, 1994).

## **2.4 Copyright and fair use**

For the most part, creators of video essays build upon original works such as film, music, photography to create their content. Because of digitalization, professional and amateur creators have easy access to a massive supply of them. Transforming an original work is therefore a fundamental part of the video essay creation. However, these original works are protected under copyright law.

In this chapter, the issue of copyright in the cultural sector will be discussed, as well as the notion of fair use. Copyright policy states the rules for ownership of work and how it can be used disseminated within legal boundaries. Fair use grants the usage of copyrighted material under certain conditions and is an essential concept, for it allows the existence of video essays. Asserting these concepts from an economical point of view will later lead to a better understanding of the specific copyright system on YouTube.

### **2.4.1 Copyright**

Copyright is a fundamental issue in cultural industries because it “covers not just unauthorized copying but also rights over the distribution of copies, derivative works and

public performances and displays" (Landes, 2011, p. 100) and gives exclusive rights to the creators to control their work. Apart from the author or the creator the holder of the rights can also be an intermediary firm which is a frequent phenomenon in cultural industries (Handke, 2010).

The internet and online distribution quickly changed the copyright system and caused major problems, such as an extensive range of unauthorised use and infringement of copyrighted material online (Handke et al., 2016). Copyright rights became hard to manage and as WEB 2.0 is evolving into a more complex structure, the copyright laws struggle to keep up and are creating confusion (Handke et al., 2016). Despite these problems, copyright remains a crucial system that, according to Landes (2011), needs to be protected, as it encourages the creation of new cultural products.

#### **2.4.2 Fair use**

However, when it comes to the creation of video essays, the central problem is not the copyright per se, but its limitations. Essential to the creation of online video content is the fair use doctrine. Fair use restricts the rights of the copyright holder under certain conditions. It grants use of the original material to users who comply to them without the permission of the copyright holder, and therefore allows the mere existence of formats such as video essays. It also serves a balancing role in the copyright protection system (Handke, 2010).

When the level of copyright protection is correspondently balanced, it inspires the creation of new works. However, if the enforcement of copyright would become too excessive and fair use and other restrictive doctrines were limited, copyright would not serve as an encouragement of new works, but would rather "raise the costs of creation to artists that seek to build on previous works" (Handke, 2010, p. 31). Consequently, the supply of new works would decrease.

The articles that would allow fair use exceptions vary within countries, but generally speaking, works such as reviews, parody or educational pieces fall under fair use. "In the US and the UK, exceptions and limitations are evaluated on a case-by-case basis. By contrast, in European countries exceptions and limitations to the author's exclusive rights are specified in the statutes, which stipulate situations in which the exclusive right of authors or subsequent rights holders to authorise use is limited and lists exceptions where copyright material can be used without the author's explicit consent and often without payment" (Handke, 2010, p. 31).

The system that nowadays exists online involves many particular players and products, each of them with distinct attributes that make the administration of copyright and

fair use challenging (Handke, 2010) and therefore can fail to rightfully distinguish a piece that falls within fair use from copyright infringement.

## 2.5 YouTube

YouTube is an online video streaming platform on which anyone can upload and view videos. YouTube as a platform is the focus of this chapter, for it is the primary sharing platform for the investigated video essay creators. It is the central publishing medium as well as one of the sources of income for the creators. Therefore, it has an enormous influence on the creation of video essays. This chapter serves as an introduction into the YouTube ecosystem, so the reader will be familiar with how it works, which is necessary in order to understand the effects it has on the video essay creators.

First, this chapter will shortly present the history of YouTube, its' community and how it changed from solely user-generated website to hosting professional content as well. After, I will present the business model of YouTube, in order to recognize how the platform profits. Third, I will try and describe the copyright system on YouTube and the specific elements that define it. Finally, Multi-channel networks, a new and rising element of the YouTube ecosystem, will be considered.

### 2.5.1 *Introduction and history of YouTube*

The platform was founded in 2005 by Chad Hurley, Steve Cham and Jawed Karim. One year later it was bought by Google for \$1,65 billion (Burgess & Green, 2009). The content of the website was created by the users themselves, which enabled arising of an online community. The participants made YouTube what it is now and its culture is in its core participatory (Burgess & Green, 2009), creating a holistic economy concentrating cultural, economic and social value creation (Grünwald & Haupt, 2014).

However, YouTube is a private venture, meaning that it needed to evolve in order to profit. YouTube first introduced advertisements in 2007 and since then it opened to professionally generated content as well. Kim (2012) argues that the professionally generated content first came with the advertisements, because advertisers did not want their product being displayed with low-quality videos. Consequently, this made YouTube an institution of professionally generated content (Kim, 2012). However, YouTube is an unstable platform that is constantly changing its organization and nests a range of professional, semi-professional and amateur creators (Burgess & Green, 2009). Some of the creators use YouTube as a business venture, either full-time, part-time or as a simple extra earning. In order to

understand how is this possible, we must take a look at YouTube's business model and how it collects profit.

### **2.5.2 The business model of YouTube**

Most of the content on YouTube is free to consume by anyone and the platform is visited by more than 30 million users daily. YouTube operates within the two-sided market model. By consuming the videos on YouTube, the viewers are of value to advertisers.

The main source of revenue for YouTube are advertisements. There are three methods of how YouTube can earn revenue from advertising. First is through sponsored videos, which are then displayed more visibly and the advertiser pays YouTube in line with the number of views. Second are the embedded advertisements, where the advertisement is linked to the beginning of a specific video and again, pays according to the views. Embedded advertisements are the ones that play before or during watching a YouTube video. The third option are the homepage advertisements. From them, YouTube earns money with the number of views and also clicks (YouTube Business Model: Strategy and Insights, 2018).

The second source of potential profit for YouTube are the premium services, such as YouTube Premium or YouTube TV. YouTube Premium gives its users an ad-free experience with an access to YouTube Music and YouTube Originals for \$11,99 per month. YouTube TV comes with a monthly fee of \$40 (YouTube Business Model: Strategy and Insights, 2018).

### **2.5.3 The specifics of the copyright system on YouTube**

YouTube accumulates an extensive mass of content. This content can be categorized into three different types. First is a purely original content. Second, transformative derivatives which take original content and change it to create a new product. And third and last a copied content, which means reproducing original work without any altering elements (O'Brien & Fitzgerald, 2006). To protect the creators of the original and some transformative works, YouTube has created a specific copyright system within the legal boundaries. YouTube is obliged to answer to the laws of a specific country. For the purposes of this thesis, the laws of the United States of America are used as an example, for most of the creators are U.S. based and YouTube is an U.S. platform.

According to the US law, there are four conditions under which works "for purposes such as criticism, comment, news reporting, teaching (including multiple copies for classroom use), scholarship, and research" (U.S. Copyright Office, 2019) can be considered within the

line of fair use. The conditions are determined in section 107. Limitations on exclusive rights: Fair use of the Copyright Act and include:

1. the purpose and character of the use, including whether such use is of a commercial nature or is for non-profit educational purposes;
2. the nature of the copyrighted work;
3. the amount and substantiality of the portion used in relation to the copyrighted work as a whole; and
4. the effect of the use upon the potential market for or value of the copyrighted work.

(U.S. Copyright Office, 2019)

The ultimate decision whether content falls within fair use or not, does not fall upon YouTube. It is determined in a court by an objective judge, who applies the conditions stated above to each specific case. YouTube is not legally responsible for the content the users upload on it, because the platform adheres to the Digital Millennium Copyright Act of 1998 (DMCA). The Online Copyright Infringement Liability Limitation Act of DMCA authorizes digital platforms a safe harbour. That means YouTube is not legally responsible for any unauthorised reproduction of copyrighted material if, upon notice, YouTube either compensates the copyright holder or removes the infringing material. Following this, YouTube conducts the notice and takedown of any content that has been reported as infringing by the copyright holder (Plovanic, 2019). To ensure that it operates within the copyright law and keeps itself from conflicts with the copyright holders, YouTube has implemented several tools.

The owners of copyrighted material can use an artificial system called Content ID, which identifies the use of unlicensed copyrighted material and enables the owners to manage it. When the rights owners of the copyrighted material get notified, they can issue a Content ID claim. When the video is claimed, the rights owners can decide whether they will block the video fully or partially on certain platforms, mute the video, monetize it and claim the whole revenue or split the revenue with the user who uploaded the video or view the analytics data of the video. The copyright owners can also file a claim manually.

The user or creator who uploaded the claimed video has several possibilities to how to deal with it. He can either do nothing, remove or swap the copyrighted material, share the revenue with the copyright owner or dispute the claim (Google, 2019a). The dispute can be filled if the user has rights to use the copyrighted material or believes that the Content ID

wrongly identified the video. After the dispute, the copyright owner will be notified and has 30 days to respond. If the dispute is rejected by the rights holder, the user can appeal their decision. After an appeal, the copyright owner can do several things. Do nothing and let the claim expire or, if the owner agrees with the appeal, release the claim. If the copyright owner does not acknowledge the appeal, he can either schedule a takedown for the video and the user who uploaded the infringing material has seven days to cancel their appeal or the owner will request immediate removal of the video, causing a copyright strike (Google, 2019b).

YouTube gives copyright strike to a user who has uploaded a video with unlicensed material that the copyright owner legally requested to be taken down. YouTube then removes the video according to the DMCA law and notifies the user that he had received a copyright strike. Copyright strike has an effect on the monetization of the videos. After receiving a copyright strike, the user can wait for 90 days for it to expire and as long as he attends a Copyright School course, his channel will be fully functioned again. The creator that uploaded the copyrighted material can also contact the copyright holders and ask them to retract their strike. The third option is to submit a counter-notification in a case that the video was wrongly identified as infringing and falls under fair use. If a channel gets three copyright strikes, the account alongside with all the connected channels is cancelled, which results in deleting all the videos and the user is consequently not able to create new channels (Google, 2019c).

#### **2.5.4 Multi-channel Networks**

Multi-Channel Networks (MCNs) are companies with commercial intentions and are a relatively new type of character that has joined YouTube's economy (Grünwald & Haupt, 2014). They act as a third party (apart from the creator and YouTube as a platform) that provides services such as "audience development, content programming, creator collaborations, digital rights management, monetization, and/or sales" (Google, 2019g).

MCNs can either have affiliate channels or own and operate channels, that are not endorsed by YouTube or Google, yet approved by them. Joining a MCNs can bring many benefits for the creator, from increasing the content quality by providing knowledge and access to equipment to arranging external relationships (Grünwald & Haupt, 2014). Research of Grünwald and Haupt (2014) suggested that MCNs "act as actors that widen one's scope of action for participation and value creation in the YouTube economy by influencing processes of media intermediation" (Grünwald & Haupt, 2014, p.15).

## 2.6 Sources of income

YouTube is highly saturated with various types of video content. Even though video essays are just a small part of it, the saturation of channels dedicated to creating video essays or related content is still very high. Because of this, the majority of the channels are unable to gather an audience big enough to generate a sustainable income from one source only (Holmbom, 2015). However, a creator based on YouTube has several options of gathering financial resources (Grünewald & Haupt, 2014). Mostly used sources of income for YouTube-based video essayists are Google AdSense, Patreon and sponsored videos.

In this last section the theoretical framework, I will provide background information on the sources of income video essayists use. Being familiar with how the different financial means operate, will help when the results will be examined.

### 2.6.1 *YouTube and Google AdSense*

YouTube uses program Google AdSense that enables its creators to generate revenue on their content through running advertisements before their videos. To gather revenues from YouTube, the creator first needs to have a channel. A channel is a homepage of the creators account on the platform. It serves as an archive that collects his videos.

A creator can financially benefit from Google AdSense by entering a Partner Program and then generate revenue. The revenue is based on the number of views the videos get on a channel. If a channel adheres to a set of conditions, a creator can enter the Partner Program (Google, 2019d) and then he can monetize their videos through the AdSense. Monetization means, that their videos will be embedded with advertisements and the creator is able to claim a percentage of the advertisement revenues from YouTube. The revenues differ based on several factors such as number of views, subscribers or the genre of the content. The creator receives 55% of the revenue, YouTube gets the rest. The ownership of the content stays with the creator (Plovanic, 2019).

Apart from the advertisements connected to Google AdSense, the creator can earn financial means from YouTube by Channel Memberships, merchandise panels in their videos, by activating Superchat or activating revenues from YouTube Premium (Google, 2019e).

A video or the entire channel can get demonetized if the content breaches the policy of YouTube Partner Program, including Content ID claims, Copyright strikes and subsequent copyright issues, as well as breaching the Community Guidelines of YouTube.

## **2.6.2 Patreon**

Patreon is a membership platform that gathers all types of creators from visual artists to video game streamers and allows them to establish a stable and predictable income, while maintaining their creative freedom (Patreon, 2019a). The platform was created in 2013 by musician Jack Conte and Sam Yam. It uses the concept of Renaissance patronage, where the creators are supported by patrons. Patrons on Patreon are the people who want to support the work of favorite creator with an amount they choose. Anyone can register as a creator and anyone can be a patron. Nowadays there are more than 130 thousand active creators and over 2 million active patrons on the platform (Patreon, 2019b). Patreon can provide creators with a stable income while the creators built a community around their creations.

When a creator makes a Patreon page, his revenue is based on the number of his patrons and the different amounts they pledge. The platform then charges a 5% fee of the patrons' contributions. Other 5% is charged as a transaction fee and the creator keeps on average 90% of the financial contribution (Patreon, 2019c). For the 5% platform fee Patreon manages the transactions and questions from patrons regarding the payments. The creators then can focus on their product and managing their brand. The ownership of the content remains with the creator and he or she is free to run advertisements, work with sponsors or take on brand deals. The platform serves only as a facilitator between the creator and his or her patrons, and leaves the creator in a complete control of managing his or her brand (Patreon, 2019c).

The creator gets to choose whether he or she would like to charge their patrons monthly or per creation (Patreon U Team, 2018). Based on the amount the patron pledges to the creator, the patron can get several advantages, from exclusive content and early access to the content to merchandise. The types of advantages a creator uses to motivate the patrons are in the creators' power to decide. The patrons get access to the community surrounding a creator, so they are able to connect with other fans.

## **2.6.3 Sponsorships**

YouTube-based creators with substantial following base are an opportunity for businesses to market their products. The businesses partner with the creators to promote a product or a service for a certain amount of money. These sponsorships occur on YouTube but they are independent from the platform and are arranged between the creator and the sponsor. A sponsorship can occur in three forms:

- Explicit sponsorship,
- affiliated links,
- and free product sampling.

(Wu, 2016)

Explicit sponsorship means that the company and the creator partner on a video that promotes a product or a service. The product can be either incorporated in the video or be mentioned in the beginning or the end of a video. The sponsor gives the creator either a flat fee or the paid amount is based on the number of views the video generates. Second, the purchases made through affiliated links or coupons provided by the company will grant the creator with the commission of the sold items. And last, the sponsors can send free products to the creators to try and develop brand exposure. The sponsoring company can offer deals either based on per click or per impression (Wu, 2016).

The terms between the sponsor and the creator are often not disclosed, according to Wu (2016), due to confidential agreements. Wu (2016) suggests, there is a need for a bigger transparency with private endorsements and that creators are obliged to also include the fact that the product they are promoting was provided to them as an endorsement deal. Some creators provide the information whether the video or the product was endorsed either in the video, in the description link or in both (Wu, 2016). Sponsorships can change or replace the content of a YouTube channel, depending on the terms between the creator and the company that wishes to make a deal with him (Wu, 2016).

The sponsorships and YouTube advertisements are different in form, when the sponsorships come to the customer through the creator and the YouTube advertisements resemble traditional TV commercials (Wu, 2016).

### 3 Method

The theoretical framework presented previously should aid in understanding the video essay phenomenon, the internet environment and how does YouTube as a platform alongside with other sources of income affect the video essay creators. This chapter will present the reader with the research strategy, method, sample and analysis used in this thesis. The aim of the thesis is to bring familiarity and understanding of the creation of video essays, through the subjective view and experiences of its' creators.

#### 3.1 Research strategy

A qualitative research strategy was chosen to provide the most relevant outcomes of the research. Because of the nature of the thesis and considering that video essays are rather a new form of video content on YouTube, qualitative research was appointed as the most appropriate strategy (Bryman, 2016). The research was arranged by using semi-structured and open questions interviews with twenty English-speaking video essay creators primarily based on YouTube and then analysed by the means of thematic analysis. The research strategy and particular method were chosen in order to try and start to understand the emerging video essay phenomenon on the second biggest internet platform of today.

Even though the literature and research in cultural economics provides fundamentals for Internet and information goods, there is a need for further research in new and insufficiently researched areas. And as YouTube video essays are one of them, exploratory approach with aspects of descriptive views on the matter was taken. This will provide the basis of understanding for the phenomenon. However, since the conclusions are based on the subjective reality of the involved actors, general observations cannot be assumed.

Inductive approach was used in order to collect patterns and relationships that were developed from the observations. Based on that, results and final conclusions were drawn. Inductive reasoning is usually connected to a qualitative research strategy (Bryman, 2016). Theoretical framework was altered through out the process when new insights were emerging, so that it could provide the best possible foundation for the reader. As an example, the specific system of copyright policy on YouTube was added in the theoretical framework after the first few interviews, as it turned out to have one of the biggest effect on the creators.

Because of the nature of inductive reasoning, no prior hypotheses were formulated. However, there are several expectations that emerged from the theoretical framework and concepts that will be discussed later in the results chapter.

### **3.1.1 Research question**

The research question this thesis aims to answer is defined as follows:

How do the sources of income resulting from making video essays on YouTube affect the video essay creators?

To help answering the main research question, based on the initial observation of the phenomenon online and the theoretical framework, several sub-questions were formulated as follows:

How do video essay creators perceive video essays?

What motivates the creators to make video essays?

How do the creators perceive their activity?

What sources of income YouTube-based video essayists use to support their activity?

What issues do video essay creators struggle with?

## **3.2 Methods**

The thesis will answer the research question and sub-questions stated above mainly by using semi-structured interviews, but also open question interviews. The sixteen research units of the final sample were interviewed by using semi-structured interviews, while four units provided their answers by an open question interview. The initial aim was to realize the research using only the semi-structured interviews. However, few of the contacted participants expressed interest in taking part in the research, but either did not want to be recorded or did not have time in their schedule for a full semi-structured interview. Therefore, the interview guideline and the list of question were send to them by email to be answered in their own time. The data gathered from semi-structured interviews is predominant in this research, with the open question interviews serving as supplementary data, for the interviewer was not present in the process and was unable to moderate the interview.

The semi-structured interview was chosen as the main method for this research, because it has a capacity of bringing an understanding into the researched participants' point of view. It also brings new insights, which is suitable for an explorative research (Bryman, 2016). Semi-structured interviewing allows the researcher to have an interview guide with a list of questions to be answered, but at the same time it is flexible enough to enable the interviewees to express their perspective on the matter (Bryman, 2016). For these reasons,

semi-structured interviewing was recognized as the most suitable method, regarding the starting stages in research of YouTube video essayists.

To ensure covering of the most important topics, an interview guide<sup>1</sup> with a list of crucial questions was developed by the researcher. This guide was based on initial observation of the video essay community and the theoretical framework. The questions and concepts were altered during the process of the data gathering as the interviewees provided new insights during the interviews. Constant improving and addition of questions allowed to gather a variety of insights into the matter.

### **3.3 Sampling**

To collect the most relevant understanding of the phenomenon in question, purposive sampling was used as a sampling method in this research (Bryman, 2016). Starting the sampling process, the possible participants of the research needed to be found. To be considered as a research unit, the potential interviewees needed to have a YouTube channel dedicated to video essays. To first find potential channels, a combination “video essay” was typed into the search area of YouTube. The first hundred results of videos served as a foundation of channels that were then considered as potential participants. After this initial selection, more channels were discovered based on related channels preferences on each of the channels’ pages and YouTube’s recommendations system. In order for a channel and its creator to be regarded as a potential participant, several criteria were established:

- The channel and the video essays are created and run by an individual or a duo of creators, not by a company
- its primarily focus is creating video essays;
- uses Google AdSense;
- published at least one video essay in the last six months;
- has at least 1000 subscribers.

Based on the criteria, forty-seven channels were contacted about the research by email provided by the creator in the information folder in their channels. Social media accounts such as Facebook, Twitter or Instagram were used if email was not available. There were other channels that obliged to the criteria, but did not provide means of contact other than

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<sup>1</sup> The interview guide can be found in the appendices.

YouTube comments, therefore were not contacted for the research. From the forty-seven sent messages, twenty-five responses were received. Twenty of them showed interest and proceeded as participants of the research. Four of them initially agreed to participate but stopped communicating later. The one other answer was from a creator that was not interested in taking part in the research, as he stated that he does not feel established enough for the interview. The rest of the contacted creators ignored the request. Geographical location of the creators was not considered, recognizing that YouTube is an internet platform and is used worldwide.

The final sample consists of twenty independent English speaking video essay creators that have their own channel on YouTube<sup>2</sup>.

### **3.4 Data Collection**

The data for the research was, for the most part, collected through sixteen semi-structured interviews that were conducted by using audio-visual or audio online communication means, such as Skype, Discord, WhatsApp or Google Hangouts. The other four interviewees answered the questions via document that was send to them by an email. In the process of data collection, no major difficulties arose as the interviewees were on time and the communication channels worked as they should have. The only minor complication appeared when scheduling the interviews according to the different time zones.

The interviews were conducted between March and May 2019 and lasted from twenty-five minutes to one hour and ten minutes. The interviews were then transcribed verbatim. The transcription process began in the second half of April and ended in May. As the interviews were recorded using either build-in Skype recording software or the OBS software, the quality of the audio was for the most part high and allowed for thorough transcripts.

### **3.5 Data Analysis**

The transcribed interviews were then analysed by a using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis was selected for this research as it is one of the most prevailing approaches to analysing qualitative data (Bryman, 2016), and allows to discover recurring motifs in data sets. The data was analysed by several reads and followed by a manual coding. Initially, the coding resulted in constructing an index of the main themes and sub-themes that emerged during the analysis.

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<sup>2</sup> The list of interviewees can be found in the appendices.

The transcribed interviews were printed out and coded manually to discover recurring themes. The process of finding themes consisted of two phases. First, the initial coding, where the data was read through several times while starting to identify themes. During the first few initial reads through the data, many different themes emerged. However, for the theme to be considered as applicable to the research, it must have been relevant to the research question and the sub-questions. Second phase comprised of more focused coding, where the themes that were relevant to the research questions were emphasised and the irrelevant themes from initial coding were abandoned. The main themes and subthemes that emerged from the focused coding were then re-evaluated and reflected on, while focusing on the links between them and the theoretical framework and then organised in an index<sup>3</sup>.

### **3.6 Limitations of the method**

To conclude the chapter on method, it is important that I also acknowledge the limitations of the research strategy. In its nature, qualitative research is more subjective than quantitative. Qualitative research is therefore difficult to replicate as it is unstructured and depends on the interpretation of data influenced by a subjective view of the researcher (Bryman, 2016).

Reservations can also be implicated with the sampling method. The way the sample was chosen could have resolved in research units that are influenced by the algorithm on YouTube. The size of the researched sample also suggests that the results of the study cannot be generalised.

The thematic analysis chosen as a tool to process the data has several limitations of its own. Thematic analysis is an underdeveloped analysis which lack specific outlines to its process. It does not have a tradition as other qualitative tools of analysis do. Flexibility was stated above as one of the reasons this analysis was selected, but can be also considered as a limitation, as the procedure of it is not codified and therefore hard to replicate in further researches (Bryman, 2016).

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<sup>3</sup> The coding index can be found in the appendices.

## 4 Results

In the following chapter, I will discuss and interpret the results of the interviews. The results of the research are structured around three central themes – the perception of video essays, the motivations of the creators and their perception of their activity on YouTube and lastly, the sources of income and the effects they have on the creators of video essays.

Each theme is connected to a theory or a concept reviewed in the theoretical framework and provides an answer to one or more sub-questions. The themes are organized in a way so the connections between them will follow the topics discussed in the theoretical framework. Ultimately, by implementing the complete results in this chapter, the main research question will be answered and the thesis will proceed to draw final conclusions.

### 4.1 The perception of video essays

The first theme considers how do the creators of video essays perceive a video essay. To begin, the discussion will revolve around the understanding of video essay as a genre and what the creators consider to be the most important aspects of it. This will be compared with the several expectations I have formulated in the first section of the theoretical framework. Following this, I will include a short section about the future of the form from the point of view of the creators. By looking into their current perception and what the creators see as a future of video essays, the thesis will identify aspects that video essay creators associate with video essays and what are the problems they see with the genre in the present and forthcoming.

#### 4.1.1 Aspects of a video essay

As it was stated before, the video essay is a difficult concept to define. The creators proved that with their reactions and answers. By looking at the first reactions that followed the question: According to you, what is a video essay? I saw that the creators struggle with defining the format as well. Initial responses such as “Oh that's tough” (Creator 11); “Oh God” (Creator 18); “I wouldn't be able to tell you. It's a very complicated idea.” (Creator 6); “That's a question that I struggled with as well.” (Creator 7) and “I mean, that's a tough one.” (Creator 19) show, that video essay is a term that even the ones who create them have troubles defining.

However, there are some aspects that emerged and provide deeper insights into the video essay as a genre. At the end of the first chapter of the theoretical framework, I

formulated five expectations that could indicate whether a video is a video essay. The expectations of video essays were stated as followed:

- there is a thesis, which is presented by using a subjective point of view,
- the perception of the video essay as a written essay in a video form,
- video essay can take on different topics, but film and audio-visual media themes are prevailing,
- the length of video essays is short,
- and there is an educational element to video essays.

Regarding these expectations, I examined the answers of the interviewees and looked at whether there are connections or differences to be found.

Firstly, I expected a video essay to have some form of a thesis presented in a subjective manner. This is something many of the interviewees backed up. They stated video essay has a certain thesis, opinion or an argument that is supported by using evidence. The subjective perspective of the video essay was also mentioned several times.

The second expectation was also met. Several creators remarked that video essay is an essay in the form of a video. “Well the really annoying answer is the most obvious one, it's an essay that's in a video form, that's what it is.” (Creator 2); “I mean, just writing with a visual component.” (Creator 4); “...essentially the kind of essay you might find in an academic journal – only in video form.” (Creator 12); “It's an essay that you write down but then you create a visual aspect to it.” (Creator 9); “I think it can be anything you want to be, within those two parameters. It has to be a video, and it has to be a written essay, but that could be so many different styles on an infinite variety of topics.” (Creator 14). However, few creators also added that thinking about video essay only in these parameters is limiting as it is a broad genre that can take on different forms.

What exceeded the second expectation was the relationship between the script and the video aspect. The audio-visual component of the essay should add another layer or help to convey the thesis of the video essay better, to enhance the experience. This was something a majority of the interviewees mentioned at some point. The relationship between the script and the audio-visuals of the video essay is, nevertheless, a complicated one. When approached with the question of whether the script or the audio-visuals of a video essay are more important, the responses varied. Even though a lot of the creators said that good video essay

should balance the two features, it is not a condition that makes a video essay what it is. Whether one of them is more prevailing, depends on the creator.

Third expectation considers the topics a video essay can tackle. Based on the answers but also on the topics they chose to deal with in their channels, the third expectation was substantiated. Majority of the interviewed creators focus primarily on film-based video essays. The film video essays range from mainstream film analysis to investigating topics within foreign or art films. In addition, other visual media, such as TV shows, anime or video games are frequently discussed in their channels. One of the channels is dedicated to video essays just on TV shows. However, there are also topics outside the film and TV realm. Two of the interviewed creators make music-related video essays and one channel exclusively talks about the environment. And apart from the primary topic of their channel, some videos that are related to other pop culture topics are also present.

In general, the interviewed creators agreed that the subject matter a video essay can convey is very diverse. Few interviewees mentioned the strong connection between a film subject and a video essay. Creator 7 said that YouTube video essays are linked to film criticism in a way, as was also mentioned in an article by McWrither (2005). Conveying a thesis about a film works well when presented through video essay, because the problem that is talked about is being shown at the same time.

The fourth expectation considered the length of a video essay. The creators agree, for the most part, that video essays are short. Their own videos range from four to thirty minutes but are mostly kept around ten minutes. The creators do consider the length factor when editing but ultimately make their essays as long as they need to be to get the message across.

Regarding the length, creator 19 had a unique impression. He mentioned, that having videos longer than ten minutes will allow the creator to put as many advertisements into the video as possible, which will double the revenues. However, he said that reaching over ten minutes is not his main goal if it would compromise the quality of the video, adding, that he saw a lot of other people abuse that.

The fifth and final expectation was a certain educational element in video essays. This is something some of the creators acknowledge. “Just because it [video essay] does so well at combining like entertainment and education in a way that a lot of like talking to the camera like vlog style educational videos do not;” (Creator 18). Few creators also mentioned the influence of academia, as most of them have an academic background and therefore have an experience in writing academic essays.

For the most part, the educational aspect was mentioned when talking about fair use doctrine. The creators commented, that the video essays are of educational and entertainment nature and should, therefore, fall under the conditions of fair use. Creator 19 said: "...for fair use to work you have to be constructive in how you use the audio or visuals and or in a way to entertain or educate." Apart from the fair use, education was brought up with reference to the sponsors, which have for the most part some educational quality in their mission. As creator 17 put it: "...what's really cool about being an educational youtuber is educational sponsors."

However, when it comes to the educational aspect some creators expressed a concern about how this educational feature can clash with the subjectivity of a video essay. Some of the creators articulated that there is a need to distinguish between opinions and what is considered a piece of an objective information. As creator 1 put it: "...it's hard to draw that line between like this is my opinion about this thing and this is like a more objective technical look at it. And so I try to be very clear about sort of where those lines are, especially when I'm being critical of something to kind of say like you know, I'm just this person and here are the caveats and those that type of thing." And creator 19 feels similarly: "I think when you create like something that's opinionated, you always have to make sure that everyone knows that it's opinionated."

Here, the connections between the expectations that arose from the theoretical framework end, as the results brought other aspects that a video essay can possess that were not previously considered. Two additional features were disclosed – digestibility and experimental nature of video essay.

Creators stated that one of the reasons behind video essays recent popularity is its accessibility to a broader audience. The combination of an essay and a video makes the video essay more digestible and easier to consume than a regular written essay. "I think that what [video essay] is doing really well is taking kind of textual cultural analysis and making it digestible through audio-visual mediums." (Creator 11); "...so I think it's a means through which you can communicate those ideas to a greater number of people more effectively." (Creator 15); "I think that one of the good things about a video essay is it's so digestible." (Creator 2); "...the form does help the audience digest the content;" (Creator 16).

Second, the creators talked about video essays and how experimental they can get. This experimentation is perceived very positively amongst them. "I love how experimental the video essay format can be," said creator 13, also mentioning that during his time making video essays, he found that they are limitless. The affectionate feeling towards the experimental aspect of video essays was clear with several creators: "I really like that there's

much more room to experiment within its borders.” (Creator 12); “...it [video essay] has so much to do with experimentation and riding the boundaries between documentary and fiction, all those things.” (Creator 6). Creator 18 expressed it in this way: “Yeah, it's such a wild genre, thankfully.”

#### **4.1.2 Conclusion and future of the form**

Concluding this, the expectations from the theoretical framework were met to some extent and broadened with two more aspects. One or more of these aspects, from a viewpoint of the creators, can be a sign of a video essay:

- there is a presence of a thesis, opinion or an argument;
- the video essay is an essay with an audio-visual aspect;
- video essay can take a variety of subjects as its topic;
- the video essay is short in length;
- there is a presence of an educational or academic layer;
- the video essay is easy, digestible and accessible;
- the video essay is experimental.

In addition to these aspects, I asked the creators about their thoughts on the future of video essays on YouTube to get a more profound idea about how the creators perceive the form. As it is not central to the thesis, it won't be discussed in great depth, however, some of the answers provided more insight into the genre.

The creators have different points of view when it comes to the future of the form. Some are pessimistic. For example, creator 6 mentioned how most video essays of today are following a formula and are getting less experimental as the time goes. Creator 7 said that part of him is experiencing a video essay fatigue, especially in the film analysis field. However, he also proposed that because of that, different directions may emerge.

The prediction of different directions and more topics were also present when talking about the future of video essays. This was mostly presented in a hopeful manner, as the creators would like to see more distinct voices and different subjects of video essays in the community.

What a lot of creators agreed upon was that video essay as a genre is expanding and that there will be more video essays available on YouTube in the future. Creator 13 attributed

it to the low barriers of entry and a great demand for good video essays. But as will the supply grow, there will also be a lot more mediocre video essays and it will become harder to find ones that are of a good quality.

Few creators also stated that they would like to see video essays recognized more formally, as a generally accepted genre. Creator 20 said that video essays may be considered as a category at a film festival, which he found as a positive evolution, but at the same time also expressed the difficulties that would come with defining what videos would fit into the video essay category. Creator 17 said that he would like the video essay to be more recognized as a form of film criticism, so that he would be able to conduct interviews with the filmmakers and be more in the charge of the narrative.

A new occurrence and possible future evolution few of the creators mentioned was the influence of video essay form on a mainstream media. Creator 20 shared: "...when we went to the film festival in Orlando last year, last November, it was really nice to see some actual filmmakers, who were already like a newer generation of filmmakers, that were in part like inspired by video essays." And creator 11 said: "And I think that that's one of the things, I think the video essay is going to be influencing mainstream documentary a lot."

The creators see the future of video essays differently. There is hope for more diverse topics and more experimentation, as well as some fear that video essay is turning into a formula. However, the creators mostly agreed that there would be more video essays on YouTube in the future.

## 4.2 Motivation

The following paragraphs concern the motivation of the video essay creators, how and whether it changed over time and how do the creators perceive their activity. Understanding the motivation and the reasons the creators had behind making video essays will provide a perspective on the effects the sources of income have on the creators.

In these sections, I will begin by examining what motivated the creators to start making video essays and then move to their current motivation. By looking at these two stages and comparing the results with the theories in the theoretical framework, it will bring closer awareness to the notions of user-generated and professional content, which will be developed later in the section relating to the perception of their activity. There, I will study whether the creators look at their activity as a hobby, extra income or a full-time job and what are their goals and aspirations for the future. The level of professionalism will be assessed based on the information gathered in the theoretical framework. Few pointers that suggest a

level of professionalism, and were not mentioned in the theoretical framework, will also be voiced.

#### **4.2.1 Starting motivation**

Following the work of Frey (1997) and Ryan & Deci (2000), regarding intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, the starting motivation of the creators was deemed in the majority as intrinsic. Several reasons related to intrinsic incentives that motivated them to start creating video essays were mentioned. The most recurring themes were – inspiration by other channels, passion for the subject of video essays and the genre, expressing an idea or an opinion and a wish to learn more and cultivate skills.

Most of the creators mentioned, that channels such as Every Frame a Painting, The Nerdwriter or The Lessons from the Screenplay had played a part in their starting motivation. They mentioned watching their video essays and how that had an effect on starting their own channel. Other video essayists or videos were also regarded as a factor that motivated them to start producing video essays.

The inspiration by other channels is connected to passion. Passion both for the subject of the video essays and the form itself also played out as a starting motivating factor. The creators talk about their love for film or music and how they wanted to share this passion with others through the medium of the video essay. In most cases, this emerged after they saw other video essays online.

The passion translates into their need to convey their ideas about the subject they are passionate about. Creator 5 had put it in this way: “I think it was probably, just that I really love movies and I want to, like I have a lot of opinions about movies that are kind of balled up inside and I need to express them somehow, you know. I think video essays are a good way to articulate your thoughts about something and then get them out to the rest of the world.” Although the passion that has motivated the creators to start making video essays was for the majority positive, creator 15 expressed her motivation as follows: “Honestly, I watched a TV show that I really hated and I wanted to talk about how much I hated it because it just had bothered me so much.”

The last incentive that made video essay creators begin with their channel was a wish to keep learning and to cultivate a certain skill. “I had kind of always wanted to give YouTube a serious shot, and after a few short-lived channels and discovering channels like ‘Every Frame a Painting’ I thought I’d see what I could bring to the table. It seemed like a good way to work on developing skills I was interested in, while deepening my love and understanding

for film.” wrote creator 14 and creator 18 expressed it in this way: “I wanted to learn and keep on learning out of college.”

Passion was present throughout all the intrinsic themes that motivated the creators to start a video essay channel. Passion is also a big element in their present motivation.

However, the current motivation of the creators is also driven extrinsically.

#### **4.2.2 *Current motivation***

The present motivation of the creators still stands on passion and other intrinsic incentives. Nevertheless, other factors have entered, including extrinsic motivation. Several creators acknowledged that monetary reward is now a part of their motivation.

The financial reward from their activity is regarded by the creators as an important part of their motivation to keep creating video essays in the present time. But the intrinsic elements still prevail. Creator 13 had put it in this way: “I always try to start fresh with each video and never make the same thing twice, so I'm always pushing myself to go in different directions and make the films that no one else in the world could make. Honestly, I'm just totally in love with filmmaking – even if I wasn't making any money from them and if no one was watching them, I'd still be making videos.”

On the same topic, creator 11 said: “I think there's a passion element. I really enjoy, especially, video editing. I've really love editing video and that's kind of what I enjoy most about being a video essayist. And then obviously now there's there's financial motivation too, because it's my full-time job.” Creator 3 expressed his current motivation similarly: “Partly I want to you know, push myself, make better videos, have more followers, you know, that kind of thing. But, you know, I think it's also like very real thing, I get money from doing this.”

Apart from the intrinsic incentives mentioned as motivating factors in the beginning, the creators also want to push themselves in what they do and they are also motivated by the audience they have cultivated. “Definitely the fact that there's kind of a now a community of people who watch my videos who are very nice and very motivating. I feel like I have a bit of a duty to them to keep making videos, keep making videos at a fast rate. And then I also do have a financial motivation too, because I do have a Patreon now. So because like it also pays the rent I'm also motivated to keep making them.” said creator 15.

#### ***4.2.2.1 Concluding the motivations***

By looking at the motivations of the creators and how it evolved over the course of time, I will now consider the theory of Frey (1997) and Ryan & Deci (2000) presented in the theoretical framework and how it aligns with the results of the interviews.

Intrinsic motivation prevails in both the starting and the current phase of creating video essays. The intrinsic rewards are identified by the creators and are largely present in their motivation, despite the monetary rewards. This means, that crowding in effect is more likely to occur with video essay creators than crowding out effect. Ryan and Deci (2000) stated that most activities are motivated extrinsically which, considering the results, does not apply to video essay creators.

Although the motivation of the creators is in majority driven intrinsically, there are other factors that are influencing how and why are the creators devoting to making video essays. In the next chapter, I will delve into how the creators perceive their activity on YouTube.

#### ***4.2.3 Professional and user-generated content***

This section is a continuation of the chapter on motivation. In the first part of this section, I have looked into the starting and present motivation of the creators. In this second passage, I will review the themes around the creators' perception of their activity and consider the line between professional and user-generated content.

Whether a creator could be considered as a professional depends on several criteria. As a starting point, I will use measures stated in Handke, Stepan and Towse (2016) that were reviewed in the theoretical framework. The criteria are: "payment for their work; use, performance or exhibition of their work; or the proportion of working time spent on creating" (Handke et al., 2016, p. 12).

The first impression I want to mention is a theme that recurs constantly, and that is passion. Second, depending on the creator and the stage of their channel, I will review whether they perceive their YouTube channel as a hobby, part-time job, an extra income, or as a full-time job and how it affects their creative process. Also, the aspirations of the creators will be regarded. This will connect to the level of professionalism and the criteria for a professional creator, found in Handke, Stepan and Towse (2016).

#### *4.2.3.1 Passion*

One theme that is presented throughout all the interviews is passion. The creators have an enormous passion and love for what they are doing on YouTube. No matter the subject their video essays deal with, they have a passion for it. This love means that they have a respect and appreciation for the original work and for the ones that have created it and their craft. For example, creators 10 and 14 had put it as follows: “I really appreciate all the hard work that goes into creating television and I kind of want to recognize and celebrate that in any way that I can.” (Creator 10); “The amount of work that goes into everything you'll see on the screen, silver or small. I just appreciate every aspect of filmmaking, in front of and behind the camera. And hopefully, if you watch one of my video essays on a film you didn't enjoy, you'll walk away appreciating it more than you did before.” (Creator 14).

The statement of creator 14 shows another point, that is that they want to make their audience passionate about their topic as well. Because of the love and passion, the creators care about the quality of their content, in spite of the fact that the video essay format on YouTube is not the most lucrative, as it requires more inputs than, for example, vlog videos.

#### *4.2.3.2 The perception between a hobby and career*

As each unit of the research sample is in different position career-wise, the results of this next section will differ in a way that the creators see their channel. There were a lot of different mind-sets connected to this and most of the creators’ views on their activity on YouTube changed over time. The goal of this section is to see, whether some patterns emerged among the creators that could help to indicate the line between professional and amateur content.

All the creators interviewed for this research gain some financial amount from their videos on YouTube. To put the different situations of the creators into perspective, I will first review whether they are able to earn an amount from their activity on their YouTube channel, that would sustain them a living.

Of the twenty interviewed creators, five are able to earn enough from the channel that it sustains them a living. However, only three of them create video essays for their YouTube channel as their main career, the other two keep their channel as a very profitable side project. Other five creators said that they are almost at the point that the channel could become a full-time job. The rest of the creators earns some form of extra earning from the channel, but not substantial enough to enable them to live off of it. Now, let's put their perception into a time perspective.

As the creators started their channels from passion, most of them perceived the video essay creation as a hobby at first. However, some thought of the channel as a possible career from the start and therefore treated it like a business even in the stages when the channel did not generate any revenues.

Based on the speed of how their channel grew subscriber and viewer wise, their perception and the level of commitment changed. The creators that started with the channel as a hobby at some point realized that it could also be turned into a full-time career. Some creators achieved having their channel as their full-time job and a lot of the ones that use the channel now as an extra earning aspire to make it full-time as well. However, few creators, no matter how much revenue they generate, do not want to make a YouTube channel as their career. Creator 17 earns enough to have his channel a full-time career, but chose not to: “Yeah, everybody at my level is full-time. Like I’m only one that’s not. I kind of get burned out, I think if I just did YouTube I’d get burned out.” And creator 12 does not want YouTube to become a career, yet wants to be compensated for the work: “I don’t think I ever want to do YouTube full time, or completely make it my life, but I’d like to get my Patreon to a level where it’s reasonably compensating the number of hours I put into each video.”

The creators who do not have their channel as a full-time career have either a full-time day-job, side-job, study, do freelance work as editors or combination of those elements. The side jobs are related to the video essay creation, such as the freelance editing work or unrelated, as few of the creators work as baristas. This links back to multiple-job holding (Towse, 2010) and supporting artistic endeavours from non-arts related income (Throsby, 1994).

The fact that they need to tackle a job and the channel at the same time comes with a problem of prioritization. Even though they have a great passion for the channel, sometimes they need to set priorities that give them either a greater monetary reward or will be prosperous in another way. This then clashes with their passion for making video essays and the prospective goals of making their channel into a career.

The creators have diverse aspirations for the future. As mentioned above, some of them wish to make their channel a full-time career. However, other aspirations also emerged, such as branching out their content into podcasts, making different formats of videos and even creating content outside YouTube. Several creators suggested, that their channel could be used as a portfolio for other career opportunities. Few of them presented instances, where the channel was a gateway to other projects.

Based on these results, let's take the first measure found in Handke, Stepan and Towse (2016), the payment for their work. Considering this one criterion, five of the twenty creators could be acknowledged as professionals, as they are able to generate an income that provides them with an equivalent to a full-time salary. However, there are also different criteria, which will be regarded next.

#### *4.2.3.3 Signs of professionalism*

In this section, I will look into the remaining two criteria found in Handke, Stepan and Towse (2016) to try and assess the level of professionalism with the creators. Also, few additional indicators were found while analysing the data that demonstrate professionalism. It needs to be said, that no matter the amount of income they earn, there is a certain level of professionalism about how all the interviewed creators approach their work on their YouTube channel.

In their article, Handke, Stepan and Towse (2016) mentioned few measures that could distinguish between professional and user-generated content. The first one, the payment for the artists' work, was already contemplated above. The other two criteria mentioned in their text are "performance or exhibition of their work; or the proportion of working time spent on creating;" (Handke et al., 2016, p. 12).

The performance or exhibition of their work is a tricky concept to apply to the interviewed creators in a qualitative manner. Assessing this would be done more efficiently in quantitative approach, by considering the numbers of the subscribers and views on YouTube, patrons on Patreon and the number of sponsorship deals they have. As this thesis concerns the subjective views of the creators, one emerged theme that is close to this criterion is a pragmatism about the content the creators put forward.

Several creators are pragmatic and self-reflective about the content that needs to be created in order to gain views on YouTube. There is an awareness amongst the creators, that creating video essays on popular topics will get more views. But the creators that mentioned this, also said that the pragmatism should be balanced with a topic that the creator is actually passionate about, to not lose his artistic integrity. Some creators combined the balance of their passion subject and the pragmatism by finding a niche audience in the market.

The third measure differentiating between a professional and amateur creator concerns work hours they put into creating their video essays. Interestingly, the proportion of work hours does not differ greatly between the creators who make video essays for their channel full-time and the ones who have the channel as a side project. A creator that is able to earn

only a half of his monthly income from the video essay channel puts in the same amount of work hours as someone who is only one step away in having their channel full-time.

The vast majority of the creators was aware of the working hours they put in either per month or per video. However, a lot of them also expressed that it is hard to quantify the thinking process they put into the video essay work.

After contemplating the level of professionalism the creators possess from the perspective of the criteria found in Handke, Stepan and Towse (2016), there is one more theme that emerged from the interviews. That theme is responsibility and was present in the majority of the interviews. The fact that the creators feel responsible, no matter their career stage, shows a certain level of professionalism. Two types of responsibility appeared in the interviews – responsibility for the information and responsibility for the audience.

The creators realize that they are responsible for the content and the information they publish. Most of them research their topics and try to present verified information. Also, with connection to the subjective nature of a video essay, they are aware of the difference of objective information and an opinion. Creator 9 had put it as follows: “We have to try our best, if we do use factual information to back up maybe an opinion that we have. We have to do our best to sort of research that and look into it and make sure that it's able to be verified.”

The interviewed creators also feel a responsibility to the audience. They value their audience as they realize that the audience is the reason their channel is able to grow. They want to offer them a frequent and consistent quality content, taking the wishes of the audience into considerations.

#### **4.2.4 Conclusion**

Based on the results gathered in this chapter, it can be said that currently, the line between professional and user-generated content when considering video essay creators is thin. Nevertheless, one implication here is clear – the creators started making video essays out of intrinsic incentives. The passion that made them create a channel dedicated to video essays would imply that their content was, at least in the beginning, user-generated.

The difficulty comes when talking about the activity of video essayists on YouTube now. Considering that all the interviewed creators gain some monetary rewards from their channel, none of their video essays can be purely recognized as user-generated in the present moment. By looking into insights from the theoretical framework and contrasting them with the results of the interviews, it can be said that there is a certain level of professionalism with the interviewed creators. However, this varies depending on each individual creator and how

developed their channel is. What all the creators have in common, is the fact that they have Google AdSense. This and other sources of income for the video essayists will be examined in the next section.

### **4.3 The effects of the sources of income**

The goal of this last section is to present the sources of income that the video essayists use to support their YouTube channel and what effects do they have on the creators. I will consider how the creators see the platforms and other sources of income for their activity and how do they affect them in a positive matter. In addition, by examining the general struggles the creators face when it comes to financing their channel and specifics that arise from each separate source, I will proceed to conclusions and answer the main research question: How do the sources of income resulting from making video essays on YouTube affect the video essay creators?

This section will first present overall theme that is connected to gathering some form of income from creating video essays online – diversification. Then, each source of income and its influence will be discussed. The sources of income that will be examined are as presented in the theoretical framework: YouTube and Google AdSense, Patreon and sponsorships. A small portion of the creators mentioned having merchandise as an additional revenue stream. However, merchandise will not be discussed in the thesis, as the results showed that it does not affect the video essayists remarkably and does not earn amounts that could compare to the main three revenue streams.

#### **4.3.1 *Diversification***

A central theme that the video essayists mentioned regarding the sources of income was diversification. Diversifying the sources from which they are gaining income was indicated as a vital element to consider when it comes to the creation of video essays on YouTube.

The main reasons for diversifying are unpredictability and uncertainty. The unpredictability and uncertainty were related to the internet ecosystem as a whole as well as to the sources of income specifically. YouTube and sometimes the sponsorships are perceived by the creators as unpredictable sources, whether Patreon is mostly seen as the most stable one. With the nature of the sources and the environment the creators work in, diversification brings them stability and security. Creator 13 expressed it in this way: “I think it's important for any incoming creator to know that one should never place all their eggs in one basket. Diversifying income streams is very vital.”

However, diversification comes also with certain struggles that the creators have to face. The biggest one is the additional work that comes with managing two or more sources of income. As most of the creators manage the channel by themselves or have a minimal help, the diverse sources of income can become hard to manage in a way that would be the best for the channel and the goals of the creators.

Diversification also means that certain issues between the different sources of income can arise. Most creators reported that the income streams coexist peacefully together. However, some creators noticed few potential influences the diverse sources have on each other. For example, creators 1 and 7 used an example of sponsorships influencing Patreon: “I think people just naturally aren't going to give as much if they see you're making money from other sources. If they see you have a sponsor you know they're not going to be likely to pledge, which makes, you know, makes sense to me.” (Creator 1); “...one of my initial concerns was, when I was wanting to focus more on Patreon one time, one of my concerns about getting sponsors was that if viewers see you have sponsors, they will say well this guy is making lots of money so why would I support him?” (Creator 7). Another speculation about the mutual influence of the income streams was brought up by creator 3: “So basically there's this thing, I'm not 100% sure is a thing that exists or is in my head. But I believe the sponsor videos on average do worse than on unsponsored videos.”

Last thing mentioned by the creators regarding the diversification, was a perception of being a sell-out by the viewers. Creator 14 mentioned this when talking about his merchandise line: “Some people might think you're a sell-out, but creators deserve to make a living if they're spending a full-time job's worth of time creating.” Creator 20 talked about similar topic around sponsorships: “There's always some comments, you sometimes get with when you're putting a sponsor at the end of your video, that people are worried you're a sell-out or whatever. But I tend to be more realistic about it and know it's just sort of a necessary element of making this sustainable, so yeah.”

#### **4.3.2 *The effects of sources of income specifically***

In the following paragraphs, I will examine each stream of income for the creators and how it affects the creators. The revenue sources discussed in the results section are YouTube and Google AdSense, Patreon and Sponsorships.

Each of the creators has a Google AdSense account, meaning that they generate income from the advertisement on YouTube. The other two sources and their proportions vary between the creators from case to case. Fourteen of the twenty interviewed creators use all the

main sources of income: Google AdSense, Patreon and sponsorships. Five have only two sources of income, four creators have Google AdSense and Patreon, the other one has Google AdSense and sponsorships. The last video essayist uses only Google AdSense.

First, I will look into YouTube and Google AdSense. For YouTube is the primary platform, where the interviewed creators gain some amount of financial reward, it will be discussed in more depth than the other sources.

#### *4.3.2.1 YouTube and Google AdSense*

YouTube is a central platform for this thesis and for the video essayists who were interviewed because it is the primary platform on which they publish their work. How YouTube as a platform functions and makes money was reviewed in the theoretical framework, as well as its complex system regarding copyright protection. This information will now serve as a stepping point to understand the positive and negative effects the video essayists face.

YouTube is the biggest video sharing website there is and is perceived in such a manner by the creators. “Well the thing is this, the nature of my content is, I don't think there's a single platform out there in the world that would be viable for me asides YouTube.” said creator 2. Farchy (2011) mentioned in his chapter, that the two-sided models and subsequent culture for free, could result in a monopoly, as it plays in favour of large platforms. This monopolistic nature of YouTube is seen by the creators. They realize that there is no alternative on the market and therefore stick to YouTube, despite reservations they may have. First, let's look at how a creator benefits from having a channel on YouTube.

Every video essayist mentioned the audience on YouTube and its potential to create a substantial viewership. “I think the biggest advantage is the audience on YouTube. It's kind of just everyone's default to go watch a video.” said creator 11. Building an audience and subscriber base is a crucial element for video essay creators, no matter if they want to pursue creating video essays full-time or not. Even if they want to only share their ideas, they want to share it with the biggest potential community of viewers.

The audience knows the platform and uses it daily. Connected to this was a familiarity of the website for the creators. Some of them mentioned having other YouTube channels before starting with video essays and growing up alongside YouTube. Some gained experience on how to run a channel on YouTube before starting a video essay channel: “Where it was, it definitely [...] taught me a lot about marketing and branding and how to put yourself out there;” (Creator 5).

The built-in monetization system Google AdSense that is central for the creators to make money on YouTube was brought up as a positive influence. Some of the creators also praised other features, such as analytics that YouTube offers. Also, when it comes to the size or quantity of the videos, YouTube does not limit the creators in what they upload.

Lastly, a positive effect that the creators mentioned, was YouTube recommendations algorithm. The algorithm provides personalised recommendations to the users based on user activity and titles and descriptions of the videos. The creators talked about it as sometimes being helpful in gaining exposure and bringing in a new audience. Quite a few creators mentioned that when one video went viral thanks to the YouTube recommendations algorithm, their channel grew substantially afterwards.

However, the recommendations algorithm was also brought up when talking about the negative effects of YouTube. It was discussed in reference to the unpredictability of YouTube. The algorithm is unreliable, as it sometimes can help to get exposure, but sometimes a video is not promoted. In connection to the unpredictability, several interviewees mentioned that the way YouTube and the algorithm works is a mystery and therefore it is impossible for them to rely on it.

Following this, the revenues the creators earn from Google AdSense account fluctuate greatly. The income they generate from YouTube only is based on the number of views their videos get, therefore is different each month. Because of this, YouTube and Google AdSense is perceived as an unreliable revenue stream by the majority of creators and is one of the reasons behind diversification.

Other influences that the creators perceived were derived from the size of the platform. There is a great mass of content on YouTube. In the theoretical framework, I reviewed the Long-tail theory and the Superstar phenomenon, both related to this theme. From the creators' point of views, the environment on YouTube is connected more to the Superstar phenomenon, but some aspects related to the Long-tail theory were also observed.

Creator 18 described the situation on YouTube in this manner:

“So that is like a huge disadvantage of YouTube, where you could be working for like four years on videos and nothing happens. But on the flip side of that like once you're in that like pocket of like getting people to watch your videos, once you've sort of broken across like a threshold like once you put out a video people will watch it and then YouTube, the YouTube algorithm will just pick it up and you get like thousands and thousands of views. So you can simultaneously reach a huge audience but because there are so many videos on YouTube you

can also reach no people because your video just gets like shoved into a YouTube abyss and you can never come out.”

According to the creators, there is a gap between the Superstars and the rest, but even the smaller channels can find some audience on YouTube, which also relates to the Long-tail theory. The question is, whether the smaller channels will ever be able to make enough revenues from the channel to sustain them a living.

The sheer size of YouTube also brings problems with communication between the platform and the creators. The creators sense that they have no say and no control when it comes to the YouTube system and the changes that are being applied. This lack of control is apparent in the biggest effects YouTube has over the creators' revenues: the copyright system and community guideline issues.

Issues that arise from copyright policy create problems that directly affect video essayists and their work. The vast majority of the creators encountered copyright problems on YouTube first hand. The creators have had experiences with copyright claims from Content ID or manual claims, copyright strikes and in one case even a legal prosecution in relation to copyright infringement.

The specifics of the copyright in relation to YouTube are complex, yet the creators are aware of it and the rules that come with it. There is also a lot of understanding amongst the creators because they are familiar with the copyright law and do not blame everything on the platform. Creator 2 acknowledged that “...YouTube's system is honestly the best it could be.” and creator 5 perceives it as follows: “YouTube's copyright system is it's understandably complicated, because this truly is a new frontier on the Internet, where people are putting up clips that they do not own and talking over the top of them and assuming that they can make money.”

Because of the Digital Millennium Copyright Act of 1998, YouTube is not responsible for any infringing content that is posted on their website but is legally obliged to take action if the copyright owner finds an infringing material there. Through the platform, the creators connect with the copyright owners. The copyright owners are for the most part film studios and music production companies or digital rights protection agencies, whom the studios hired as third parties to exclusively deal with copyright claims on YouTube. Because of the way the U.S. copyright system works and the specific laws which YouTube needs adhere to, the copyright owners are the first in power when deciding whether a video essay falls under fair use or if it is infringing.

The creators described the process of copyright claims on YouTube as very problematic. For the most part, the copyright claims are made automatically by the Content ID, which is a machine that cannot recognize whether a video is within fair use doctrine or not. The studio can also claim a video that has part of their copyrighted material in it manually. Then, it is in their power to decide what to do with the video. The creators said that most of the times, the studio keeps the video on the platform, but collects the money that the video makes.

The creators then can change the content so it does not contain the copyrighted material or edit the material. However, because the creators are aware of the fair use doctrine, they feel that they are in the right to use the copyrighted material. Therefore, they can dispute the copyright claim. The problem here is, that the first actor who judges whether a video is in fact fair use, is the copyright holder. This creates a conflict of interest. Some copyright owners acknowledge the fair use when it is pointed out to them by the creator of the video essay and take down their claim so the creator is allowed to put the video back on YouTube and gather revenues from it. However, many other copyright holders use the power they possess and do not take the copyright claim over a video essay down. Creator 5 commented on it in this way: “But even then when you make an appeal to the creator of the content or the, you know, owner of the copyright still has all the power. They can just say ‘nope it's not fair use’, even if it is legally fair use. And so like that's undoubtedly annoying and so you're really depending on the studio or the owner of the copyright to play by the rules. And sometimes they don't.”

As it was mentioned in the theoretical framework, the creator can appeal a claim even if the first one was declined. However, a lot of the creators are careful when it comes to the second appeals because they fear that they could get a copyright strike. Creator 11 said on this topic: “...and then if they overturn that, the only other appeal is appealing to them again but then the consequences if they deny that one, are that I'll get a copyright strike, which can severely affect my channel and my monetization and my income.”

The copyright holders, therefore, have the full capability to affect the fate of a YouTube channel by striking it and ultimately deleting the channel, before the case would ever reach objective judging in the court. Some creators mentioned that they feel powerless in this system because even though their content should fall under fair use, the only way to settle it rightfully and objectively would be in court. But the creators do not have the means to take on a copyright owner such as a big film studio in court. So they adhere to the system that

YouTube has created within the lawful boundaries because they feel that they have no other choice if they want to keep producing content.

This brings a lot of frustration for the creators. The nature of their work is based on the notion of fair use and they are aware of their rights. However, if the creators fight for their rights, their channel can ultimately get deleted and their career or any potential for it will be stopped. The copyright owners on the other hand do not suffer any consequences for false copyright claims. This unevenness makes the creators cautious of their actions and the content they create, even though they may legally be in right.

To deal with the copyright claims and or to prevent the appealing process which is time-consuming and intrudes with their creative work, the creators often alter their content. They feel that it interferes with their creative goals, but also acknowledge that it is necessary in order to keep their channel working and to satisfy the copyright holders.

Apart from the copyright issues, the creators also experience demonetization problems in reference to the Community Guidelines of YouTube. The guidelines state the rules of the content the creators post on YouTube and concern issues such as nudity and sexual content, violent or harmful videos, harassment, thread, privacy neglect etc. When a video gets demonetized or blocked based on this, the creator is not provided with the reason. The creators need to assume what part of the video could be violating the rules to change it so the video could be monetized again.

The creators are willing to change their content to avoid further troubles and keep their videos monetized. Some of them reported, that when a video got demonetized at the beginning of their YouTube activity, they often did not appeal it or changed it, because they perceived it as a hobby and thought that the appeal process was not worth the trouble for them. However, as their YouTube channel got bigger, the revenue grew and it got more important to the creators as a serious source of income, they needed to find ways to keep making quality content and at the same time adhere to the rules of YouTube and the copyright holders to keep their channel active.

#### ***4.3.2.2 Patreon***

Eighteen of the interviewed creators also use the website Patreon to gather income. For the most part, the creators perceive Patreon positively, as it brings them income that is much steadier than Google AdSense or sponsorships. However, there are also issues arising from Patreon that have several repercussions for the creators.

For the most part, the creators see Patreon as a straightforward and simple platform for crowdfunding their activity that gives them a stable income. The fact that the money that is being processed through Patreon comes from the fans of their work, is important for the creators. Having this income that is not affected by advertisers was mentioned by a few creators as a big asset, some also mentioned that being funded solely through Patreon would be their career goal. By gathering a proportionate income from Patreon, the creators feel that it would give them creative freedom for the topics they could engage in.

Patreon is perceived by the creators as a monopolistic platform when it comes to long term crowdfunding. The creators feel that there is no alternative to the website that would be financially viable for them, as the group of patrons and or potential patrons is the biggest on Patreon. The familiarity of the platform makes it easier for a promising patron to pledge to a creator. So the creators do not look for another website, because it would make it more complicated for a potential patron to pledge. The audience is crucial to Patreon and to the creators. The creators are aware of the value the fans are bringing to them.

The value per user of the creators' page on Patreon is much higher than on YouTube. The amount of money a creator gets for one patron is incomparably larger than he gets for one view on YouTube. The creators know this and have a big appreciation for their patrons. Therefore, the creators try to offer their patrons value in return by having exclusive content in their profile or they try to connect with the patrons in other ways. The creators appreciate that they can choose what and under what conditions they offer to their patrons as rewards. Few creators send emails to their new patrons with a thank you note and some also have a chat service connected to their Patreon page.

This brings up the community aspect of Patreon. Patreon gives the creators and patrons outlet to connect with each other. The creators, for the most part, want to interact with their patrons and create a community of the “super fans” around their content. Creator 2 mentioned his connection with his patrons and how it has brought him new opportunities: “...because Patreon is where all the creators find their super fans. Like for Patreon, their most loyal fans are on Patreon and it's, I mean, what I've done is I've linked Discord which is a chatting service to my Patreon page. I'm very active on there I mean like literally yesterday like me and four of my patrons decided to just start a creative writing project together.”

However, even though the creators want to interact with their fans and offer them the best value as possible in return, they struggle with managing the Patreon profile. As most of the creators work on their YouTube channel alone, having another platform as a source of revenue brings time management issues and makes the creators prioritize. Creator 19

summarized the situation in this way: "...I'm always trying to engage with my audience more and I try to do it with Patreon. Cause patrons are actually paying for extra content so I'm always trying to do more for them. Patreon, some patrons they don't even get any exclusive content it's just for the people to be able to support the creators so that like alleviates my heart a little bit. But I try as much as I can and I'll try to do more this summer. It's really really tough, a lot of things to do." And creator 13 mentioned the time management issue as well: "Honestly, this is something I'm still working on. I make sure to post exclusive content for patrons at least once a month, but my time is often occupied and I haven't been able to take the time that I'd like to to really promote the current Patreon page. It's very much a work in progress."

Quite a few of the interviewed creators expressed a certain confusion about how does a creator become successful on Patreon. Some mentioned that there is a disproportion between how many subscribers a creator has on his YouTube channel and his patrons on Patreon. Creator 14 expressed it as follows: "I honestly couldn't say, I've never really figured out the whole Patreon thing. I know video essayists with half a million subs and only a few dozen patrons, or video essayists with ten thousand subs and hundreds of Patrons. So I'm not exactly sure what's going on over there."

From the answers of a few of the creators, it seems that there is a certain restraint on promoting their Patreon page, as they do not want to be perceived as sell-outs by their viewers. Creator 3 said: "I don't want to push it too much, because like obviously I'm making money because of YouTube and, you know, if I'm making money from a big corporation that's fine. If, you know, someone who can't necessarily pay you know a dollar five dollars a month, wants to pay me then I feel a bit more bad about that."

Lastly, the creators mentioned that when the platform modifies their policy or does something that is questionable, they as creators are affected by it. One example referred to by many creators was a political issue when Patreon banned a number of creators accounts in the end of 2018 and caused creators and patrons alike to leave the platform. Creator 2 commented on the situation: "But it's more than that because Patreon, if they do something morally abhorrent, you as a creator pay for it because, like that happened a few months ago where like Sargon of Akkad said the n-word and they banned him on Patreon and as a result everyone was screaming this is against free speech. And people boycott Patreon, people are still boycotting Patreon and I lost like 30 patrons because of that whole drama deal."

#### 4.3.2.3 Sponsorships

After YouTube and Patreon, sponsorships are the last source of income that will be examined. Fifteen of the interviewed creators use sponsors to partly fund the creation of their video essays. Eight of them stated that sponsorships make for more than a half of their overall income from creating video essays. For few creators the sponsorships take over eighty per cent of everything they gain financially from their artistic activity. For the most part, the creators use explicit sponsorships, where they promote a product or a service at the beginning or the end of their video for a flat fee or pay based on the viewership the video gets. Few of the creators also mentioned using affiliate links.

For the reason that sponsorships can get very lucrative for a creator, the interviewees perceive them positively. As creator 14 said: “I’ve been working with sponsors for a couple of years now. It seemed like the only way to really possibly make this work from a financial standpoint, and I’ve just never had any qualms about sponsorships on YouTube.” Sponsorships can bring a substantial amount of a monthly income for a creator and are related to YouTube channels that have a considerable subscriber base. The creators, therefore, see it as a sign of professionalism and are proud when they get into a connection with a sponsor. However, the creators have certain conditions when accepting a sponsorship deal.

Because of the responsibility the creators feel towards their audience but also towards their own morality, the vast majority of the creators has rules under which they would or would not accept a sponsorship. They want the sponsorships to reflect well on them and their channel, so they are being careful of whom they choose to work with. To meet their conditions, quite a few creators stated that they research the potential sponsors or they rely on big and recognized brands in the video essay community.

There is a circle of sponsors around video essayists that are mostly connected to either educational sector or film industry. The creators appreciate working with brands like this because they are recognized in the community as trustworthy and therefore working with them reflects well on the creator. Few of the creators also stated that they prefer working with bigger companies because they are more professional and aware of the process and the arrangements that should be made between them and the creator and are more efficient for the creator. Some creators mentioned complications when working with smaller sponsors, as they were unaware of the worth of a viewership that the creator offers to the sponsor. The negotiations then take longer time and more energy.

The creators have not experienced many negative effects from the sponsorship deals, because the creators are able to set the conditions with the sponsors in a way that is beneficial

for both sides. Sometimes the creators need to compromise, but they feel in control when it comes to dealing with sponsors. Therefore, the creators are not pushed into doing something they do not want to do and are comfortable with the commercial deals. Creator 10 mentioned a compromise he made with his sponsor about his content: “And this this sponsor that I'm working with, you know, gave me the caveat don't get too political in your video. Other than that, no. They have been great.”

Compromising the content can also occur solely from the side of the creator as a way to attract potential sponsors. Few of the creators mentioned self-censorship of their video essays, where they chose to focus on a topic that is more likely to attract a bigger audience and sponsors. This connects to the theme of pragmatism discussed in the professionalism section.

However, there is an uncertainty when the creators first start to work with sponsors that can lead to confusion at the side of the creators. There is no prior information for the creators on how to work with sponsors, how to set conditions and how much is their viewership worth. Creators 2 referred to this problem as follows: “I find it quite interesting because there is, I looked online and there is basically nothing, there is there is like no resource I could find that tells you what it's like to try and organize like that like the inner politics of brand deals and like I'm still trying to learn it myself.”

There is also another uncertainty when it comes to sponsorships. Even though some creators mentioned that they are contacting potential sponsors, most creators stated that the sponsors approach them. To seal a successful contract with a sponsor, the first initiative comes in the majority from the company. Therefore, not all creators can rely on the sponsorships on a monthly basis, as they can occur once in a while, depending on the video. However, some creators learned how to deal with this by working with third party companies.

These third-party agencies help the creators with finding potential sponsors and managing the deals. They work on a similar concept as Multi-Channel Networks described in the theoretical framework. Five of the interviewed creators mentioned working with an agency like this, whereas four of them use the same one.

The third party agencies are perceived very positively by the creators that use them, as they save them time and energy they could then focus on their creative activity. The creators appreciate that they do not have to deal with the sponsors directly, as their agency is aware of the creators' conditions and bring in only arrangements that are suitable for them. It also brings stability to the creators, as the sponsorship deals from the agency are continuous. Creator 17 talked about his agency in this manner: “Yeah so my agency, like I'd give them my

schedule of what videos I'm going to post, of when I'm going to post and then they have my analytics data on my channel and then they use that to get a dollar amount offer from like an ad place. So I don't do any of that stuff, which I really like. [...] So it's pretty streamlined and I like I'm like very happy with how it goes."

Overall, agencies like this are perceived as beneficial and are a sign of professional content creator. All the interviewed creators who work with agencies like this are able to gain an income that enables them to sustain a living solely from creating video essays.

#### **4.3.3 Conclusion on sources of income**

No matter if a creator makes video essays on YouTube full-time or part-time or mainly perceive it as a hobby, they gain income from YouTube's attached system Google AdSense. YouTube is the primary platform where the video essays are embedded, therefore it has the biggest influence on the creators as a platform and also as a source of an income. Because of its sheer size and the potential for an audience, no matter what struggles it brings to the creators, they stay with YouTube. The importance of an audience is present throughout all the sources of income. With AdSense and sponsorships, it depends on the number of views how much money a creator earns. On Patreon it is in the hands of the patrons. The size of an audience is, therefore, the starting point for a creator to consider a source of income.

## 5 Conclusions

This thesis researched the phenomenon of video essays on YouTube through the perspective of the video essay creators. The aim of this thesis was to ultimately answer the main research question:

How do the sources of income resulting from making video essays on YouTube affect the video essay creators?

To gain a further perspective that would help in understanding the results of the main research goal, several sub-questions were formulated as follows:

How do video essay creators perceive video essays?

What motivates the creators to make video essays?

How do the creators perceive their activity?

What sources of income YouTube-based video essayists use to support their activity?

What issues do video essay creators struggle with?

The results were gathered by qualitative semi-structured and open questions interviews with independent video essay creators based on YouTube. Finding answers to the sub-questions served as a background to thoroughly determine the answer for the main research question. The answers for the sub-questions and the main research question are established in the following paragraphs.

Concerning the perception of video essays, the results show how the video essay is hard to define. The creators struggled with the definition. However, they stated several features a video essay can have. On top of one or more possible aspects that could determine a video essay and that were found prior to the research, two new features emerged from the research. First feature is the digestibility and accessibility of video essays. Second one is experimentation. Experimentation is also connected to the future of video essays, as the creators feel that the genre will expand. According to the creators, more diverse competition in video essay community will arise in the future.

Regarding the motivation, the interviewed creators started making video essays on YouTube from intrinsic reasons. As their activity progressed, extrinsic motivating factors in the form of financial incentives started to play a role in their motivation as well. However,

intrinsic motivation still dominates today, suggesting that crowding in effect (Frey, 1997) is more likely to occur with the video essay creators. The thesis also discovered a lot of passion and love for video essays and their subjects. The passion for the video essays serves as an intrinsic motivational factor, which outweighs some of the issues they face.

With creating online content such as video essays, there is an ambiguous line between an amateur and a professional creator. The results connected to the third sub-question discovered that, for the interviewed sample, no matter how much time and work they put into the creation of video essays and how much the creators earn from their activity, the creators have a certain level of professionalism. Being aware of their income from creating video essays, work hours and what to publish online to gather the most views, the creators have shown that they look at their channel as a business, leaning more to a professional than user-generated content. This finding is in line with the suggestions of Kim (2012). Responsibility is a new insight about professionalism that the results have indicated. The creators are aware of the responsibility for the information in their video essays and also for their audience. However, depending on an individual creator and his work philosophy, the level of professionalism varies. The results have shown that several creators have side-jobs or projects that are both artistic and non-artistic. By handling several projects at once, the creators need to set priorities and make compromises between their creative goals in video essay production and the ability to support themselves financially.

The main research question of this thesis was to examine how the revenue streams coming from creating video essays affect the video essayists. The interviewed video essay creators use three main sources of income that derives from their creative activity – built in monetization system Google AdSense on YouTube, Patreon and sponsorships.

The results show that it is vital for the creators to diversify their revenue streams, as the environment they operate in is highly unpredictable. The diversification brings certain steadiness to the creators but also causes difficulties. Managing several financial streams at once influences the creative process of the video essayists because they need to find a compromise between making the creative content and handling the financial part of their activity.

The research focused in depth on YouTube, as it serves as a primary platform where the creators publish their video essays. YouTube enables the activity of video essayists by providing them with free tools. Having built-in monetization system Google AdSense is of importance for all the interviewed creators when talking about the influences of YouTube on the creators' income. This revenue stream depends on the number of views a video gets, and

due to this fact it fluctuates and makes impossible for the creators to predict the revenue they could earn from YouTube.

Affecting the creators' revenue from Google AdSense are mostly the issues connected to copyright protection. Although in line with the law, YouTube created a copyright system that removes the power from the creators when defending their work, which is for the most part within the lines of the fair use doctrine. In this system, the copyright holders have the leverage over the creators and can cause severe consequences for their channel, while avoiding repercussions for false infringement claims themselves. Considering the resources creators have in comparison to the copyright holders, the creators have little to no control when fighting for their rights. To continue their passion, they often need to restrain themselves to satisfy the copyright holders and prevent problems that could harm their channel and income. As a consequence, their autonomy and creative freedom is limited. However, even though the copyright policy restricts the creators, the video essayists are still inspired to create more cultural content as the fair use doctrine balances the degree of the copyright protection.

Another effect on the income of video essayists is a content change in regard to the violation of Community Guidelines. YouTube lacks communication in this manner and creates a complication that could be easily solved by the platform providing the exact reasons for demonetizing a video essay.

The creators perceive environment on YouTube as mostly run by Superstar phenomenon (Rosen, 1981), but acknowledge also elements connected to the Long-tail theory (Anderson, 2004). As some creators stated, the competition of video essay channels could even grow in the future. Whether the new diverse video essays will bring more of niche products that could find an audience and bring in more of a Long-tail theory environment, remains uncertain.

Issues that affect video essayists coming from YouTube frustrate the creators. However, they are aware of YouTube's monopoly when it comes to audience potential on video sharing websites. Therefore, they stay on the website, aware that there is no viable competitor or alternative that could provide them with substitute services. The monopoly like effect of internet platforms as a consequence of two-sided markets model was mentioned by Farchy (2011) and is also apparent with the website Patreon.

Patreon as a platform processes pledges from fans and delivers them to the creator. Managing their Patreon page, providing Patreon only exclusive content and creating a community, is extremely time demanding and influences the video essayists. Therefore, a lot

of the interviewed creators do not manage to run their Patreon page in a way they would find satisfactory. In effect, they do not earn as much income as they would deem possible. Patreon also affects the creators when the website changes policies, as the creators are automatically connected to the Patreons decisions but have no say in them.

Apart from relying on internet platforms for finances, some of the creators work with sponsors. The results of the interviews indicate, that sponsorships are the most lucrative source of income for video essay creators. They also retain the highest level of control when it comes to conditions with sponsorships because they can negotiate the details of partnership deals themselves. Therefore, this revenue stream is mostly beneficial for the creators and influences them in a positive matter. Minority of the creators self-censor their content in order to gain sponsorship deals. Some video essayists use the services of third party agencies that help them with managing sponsorship deals, making it easier for the creators to focus on their creative process.

With respect to the main research question, the sources of income arising from managing a video essay channel on YouTube can have different effects on a creator. The video essayists cherish their creative work and want to produce more to show their passion for media and pop-culture. All the interviewed the creators have a certain level of professionalism and are aware of the issues they need to face and have developed ways on how to try and deal with them. The specific way they chose to approach this depends on their career perception and goals.

The ever-changing nature of the internet brings about issues such as monopolization of websites for the creators to deal with, in order to pursue their creative goals. YouTube-based video essay as a genre was enabled by digitalization. It still remains in its nature affected by copyright policies and its existence is provided under the conditions of fair use doctrine. The issues arising from this could only be resolved by changes in legislation, that would reflect the dynamic environment of the internet.

## **5.1 Limitations and further research**

Despite the preparation of the research strategy and implementation of results, the thesis has limitations. The qualitative nature of the research and the size of the researched sample does not allow the generalization of the results. A more diverse sample could improve the analysis. The results regarding the researched phenomenon were interpreted from the perspective of only one side of the complex environment that surrounds the creation of video essays.

Consequently, the findings could differ if diverse actors connected to the researched topic were interviewed as well.

Because the video essay is a rather new phenomenon in an ever-changing internet environment, there is a lack of previous academic research that could shine a light into it. Despite the presence of literature on cultural economics and the internet, the connection between them and video essays was not established in academia yet.

Therefore, the research was conducted in an explorative manner, meaning that a lot of prior information had to be provided in order to understand the problem in question before establishing the results. As a consequence, the thesis has a broad grasp of the topic. This broadness and unfocused manner may have prevented the research to delve into more specific issues the creators face.

Another limitation linked to the topic being under-researched is the interview guide and preparation for the interviews. As the first interviews were based on a version of the interview guide established from initial observations and theoretical framework, they were not as complex as the later interviews that were conducted upon the improved interview guide.

Another limitation may lay in the decision to focus on U.S. based copyright law and YouTube connected specifications. More than half of the creators were U.S. based, but the rest could have provided experiences that do not per se relate to the U.S. copyright system.

As the video essay is under-researched in academia, further studies could be taken in many ways. First, conducting a study on influences on video essayists from different points of view as are the platforms, sponsors or third-party agencies, would bring more perspectives into the topic. Second, a quantitative perspective on video essayists comparing the financial performance of creators channels across platforms. Third, answering what incentives motivate the viewers to consume video essays. Fourth, an analysis focusing primarily on the change of content would provide deeper insight into the loss of autonomy of the creators. And lastly, focusing more on the copyright system on YouTube and the unbalance between creators and copyright holders to point out issues surrounding the outdated copyright policy. The changes in the dynamics of the internet and content enabled by digitalization of cultural goods is a field to be researched further from different perspectives, as it is fast changing and affects everyday life and culture more each day.

# Appendices

## Appendix A: Interview Guide

### Introduction

- Can you please introduce yourself, your channel and what you do in a few words?
- What is your academic background?

### About video essays

- According to you, what is a video essay?
- Would you say a video essay is more about the textual part or the audio-visual?
- On average, how much time per month do you spend on working on video essays (the whole process: research, creating the essay itself, branding...)?
- How long (on average) would you say your video essays are?
- How do you perceive your peers that also create video essays? Is there a community of video essayists?
- Do you have a channel or a creator that is your inspiration?

### Motivation

- What motivated you to start making video essays?
- What motivates you to keep making video essays?
- What is the message you would like to convey through your work?
- How do you perceive your activity on YouTube? (As an entrepreneurial opportunity, trying to create community, creating a brand, simply wanting to share your work with others or something else?)
- What do you hope to achieve with your activity on YouTube?
- Do you have a strategy, some a long term plan, when it comes to video essay making?

### The sources of income

#### In general

- How do you support the creation of your video essays?
- Are you able to earn an amount of money that would enable you to sustain a living?
- Do you have another project, job or side job apart from creating video essays?
- What are the sources of income for your activity as a video essayist on YouTube?
- What are the proportions of these sources (in percentages if possible)?

#### YouTube

- Why did you choose YouTube as a platform to upload your essays?

- Apart from YouTube, are there any other platforms you share your video essays on?
- How can a creator earn money from YouTube?
- What do you say are the advantages and disadvantages of YouTube for a video essay creator?
- Are there any problems regarding the monetization of video essays on YouTube?
- What are the struggles for you, as a video essay creator, that arise from sharing your work on YouTube?

#### Patreon

- Do you use Patreon?
- Why did you choose Patreon to support your activity?
- What do you say are the advantages and disadvantages of Patreon for a video essay creator?
- Are there any issues that arise from creating a Patreon page for video essay creator?
- What is the relationship between you the creator and the patrons?
- What do you do to motivate your patrons or potential patrons to support your work?
- Do you know the proportion of your patrons that pledged the smallest amount and the highest amount?

#### Sponsorships and brand deals

- Are you using sponsorships? If no, why?
- Under what conditions are you choosing to accept sponsorships?
- What type of sponsorships or endorsements do you choose to accept?
- Are you approaching sponsors or are they approaching you?
- Have you ever encountered any problem between the sponsorships, YouTube and Patreon?

#### Merchandise

- Do you have merchandise?
- If yes, what was your motivation behind making the merchandise?
- If yes, what would you say is the advantage and disadvantage of having a merchandise line?

#### **Copyright**

- Have you ever encountered problems regarding copyright? If yes, what were they?

#### **Concluding**

- What do you think is the future of video essays on YouTube?

## Appendix B: List of Interviewees

Creator	Channel name	Date of the interview	Type of the interview	Length of the interview
1	<b>Thomas Flight</b>	20. 3. 2019	Semi-structured	47'16"
2	<b>The Closer Look</b>	20. 3. 2019	Semi-structured	39'25"
3	<b>Trash Theory</b>	21. 3. 2019	Semi-structured	50'26"
4	<b>What (it all) Meant</b>	22. 3. 2019	Semi-structured	29'57"
5	<b>Houston Productions1</b>	22. 3. 2019	Semi-structured	37'43"
6	<b>Beyond the Frame</b>	26. 3. 2019	Semi-structured	29'18"
7	<b>The Discarded Image</b>	27. 3. 2019	Semi-structured	47'21"
8	<b>Screened</b>	28. 3. 2019	Semi-structured	27'14"
9	<b>Medium D Speaks</b>	28. 3. 2019	Semi-structured	29'10"
10	<b>Skip Intro</b>	28. 3. 2019	Semi-structured	29'53"
11	<b>Polyphonic</b>	1. 4. 2019	Semi-structured	33'45"
12	<b>What's So Great about That?</b>	2. 4. 2019	Open questions	-
13	<b>Royal Ocean Film Society</b>	4. 4. 2019	Open questions	-
14	Wished to stay anonymous	4. 4. 2019	Open questions	-
15	<b>Sarah Z</b>	8. 4. 2019	Semi-structured	23'46"
16	<b>Accented Cinema</b>	22. 4. 2019	Open questions	-
17	<b>Now You See It</b>	3. 5. 2019	Semi-structured	51'40"
18	Wished to stay anonymous	9. 5. 2019	Semi-structured	68'50"
19	<b>Browntable</b>	12. 5. 2019	Semi-structured	68'11"
20	<b>Like Stories of Old</b>	17. 5. 2019	Semi-structured	48'03"

## Appendix C: Coding index

Theme	Subthemes	Coding categories
<b>Video essay</b>	Aspects	Argument, thesis Opinion, subjective Hard to define Essay with video aspect Relationship between script/audio-visual element Digestible, easy, accessible Academic Experimental
	Future	Unpredictable Pessimism Hope Experimental Diverse topics Different direction Evolving Influencing mainstream Journalism
<b>Motivation</b>	Starting motivation	Inspired by others Passion Expression of opinion or idea Academic influence Cultivating skills Keep learning
	Current motivation	Passion Monetary incentives Future career incentives Cultivating skills Keep learning Audience feedback Routine
<b>Perception of activity</b>	Passion	Passion for the form Passion for the medium or subject of the video essays Respect for the original creators Quality of the content
	Hobby/Career	Priorities Hobby/Side-job/Full-time job Opportunity Changing perception Consistency
	Aspirations	Branching out Channel as full-time job Future career opportunity Channel as portfolio
	Professionalism	Pragmatism about content Finding a gap/niche Responsibility for the content Responsibility for the audience

<b>Sources of income</b>	Diversification	Security Stability Backup Uncertainty Fluctuation Time consuming Perception as a sell-out by the viewers Using one source weakens the others
<b>YouTube</b>	Perception of the platform	Monopolistic Central Uncertain future 'Place where everybody is' Familiarity Oversaturation/Superstars
	Positive influence	Audience, community, following, views Build in monetization Recommendations algorithm Unlimited Grow potential Analytic tools
	Negative influence	Inconsistency 'Nobody knows' Algorithm Communication issues Fluctuating income No control as creators Copyright issues - Constant - Automatic/Manual - All the power with studios - No consequences for the studios - Fair Use rules awareness - Frustration - Fear of strikes, infringement Community guidelines issues - Demonetizing without giving reason
	Dealing with the issues	Changing content Playing by the rules Workarounds
<b>Patreon</b>	Perception	Monopolistic Freedom Way of diversifying Familiarity User value Streamlined website
	Positive influence	Stable Community interaction Direct support Customizable
	Negative influence	Time consuming Political issues Charitable perception Mystery of success

<b>Sponsorships</b>	Perception	Big income Good thing Reliable Third party agencies
	Positive influence	Large income Educational circles of sponsors Conditions
	Negative influence	No prior information before getting sponsors Changing content Mystery around sponsor deals

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