

# Retoryka cyfrowa

## Digital Rhetoric

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### Watching people playing games: A survey of presentational techniques in most popular game-vlogs

### Przegląd technik prezentacyjnych najpopularniejszych vlogów poświęconych grom komputerowym

#### Abstract

This study is dedicated to the mechanisms of popularity of YouTube vloggers that upload gaming videos. The presentational techniques used in those videos are examined to identify the reasons of their popularity and the tools used by the gamers to engage the audience. Three popular 2016 YouTube gamers were selected and evaluated according to the ranking of online popularity (PewDiePie, Markiplier, Cryaotic). The study aims to explain the relation between the number of subscribers and the presentational techniques they use to gain popularity. Accordingly, the relations between the vlogger's uploads and the audience's response are grasped by analysing the content of the videos in selected channels along with the ways their owners present themselves.

Niniejsze studium jest poświęcone filmikom na temat gier komputerowych publikowanych na portalu YouTube oraz popularności vlogerów, którzy je nagrywają. Analizie poddano techniki prezentacyjne wykorzystywane przez vlogerów w celu przyciągnięcia uwagi odbiorców. Wybrano i oceniono trzech popularnych twórców (PewDiePie, Markiplier, Cryaotic), sugerując się internetowym rankingiem popularności. Przeanalizowano zależność pomiędzy liczbą subskrybentów a technikami prezentacyjnymi używanymi przez vlogerów. W ten sposób ustalono relacje między popularnością udostępnianych filmów o grach z wybranych kanałów na YouTube a treścią tychże filmów oraz sztuką prezentacji stosowaną przez ich twórców.

#### Key words

vlogging, YouTube, gaming business, presentational techniques  
vlogi, YouTube, rynek gier komputerowych, techniki prezentacyjne

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## Watching people playing games: A survey of presentational techniques in most popular game-vlogs<sup>1</sup>

### Introduction

This study explores the range of presentational techniques used in successful game-vlogging. *Game vlog*, according to the Oxford online dictionary is a blog with posts in a form of a video and the subject is games. As a result, this study traces the relation between gaming and the phenomenon of popular mediated culture through the prism of audience analytics (Boyd and Ellison 2007). It is based on the recent globalizing changes in gaming business and the role of networking for instigating entertainment trends (Castells 2000; Jones 1995). The sudden development of gaming industry affected many young and tech-oriented people and allowed them to record and exchange their progress in the gaming adventure. One after another websites dedicated to video games have emerged and soon the online gaming society has been sealed. The types of gaming-dedicated websites vary between guides (gamerguides.com), compendiums (gameshub.wikia.com/wiki/Games\_Hub) and forums (gamesforum.com). Game development enabled the users to communicate on a subject, or to broadcast and exchange their achievements with one another. When in May 2005 YouTube was launched, allowing users to upload and watch gaming videos, it made it accessible for the people who lacked the gaming experience themselves to participate in it. Nowadays, YouTube is hosting its own broadcasting branch dedicated to gamers all over the world, excelling at providing a family-like community (gaming.youtube.com).

The rising popularity of the phenomenon of “watching other people playing games” (Getomer, Okimoto and Johnsmeyer 2013) motivated this investigation of the mechanisms of game-vlogging, particularly in terms of how the vlogger’s persona is constructed and performed in videos (cf. Qian and Scott 2007). Noting the strategic aspect of this kind of self-presentation online, the study draws on the rhetorical aspects of vloggers’ performance, with attention paid to selected

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1. This article is based on a diploma paper submitted in partial fulfillment for the BA degree in English in Public Communication at the Institute of English, University of Opole.

successful YouTube gamers and the presentational techniques applied by them to achieve higher viewership. The study involves a comparison of a popular gamer persona with a less popular one, along with the interpretation of situational rhetorical techniques used by them and the role of strategic performativity (cf. Chen and Zhang 2010).

The notion of strategic self-presentation has been explored by researchers of various disciplinary backgrounds, including sociologists, public communication and marketing experts or language and rhetoric scholars (e.g., Goffman 1959; 1981; Forgas 1985; van Dijk 1998). Some of these scholars pay attention to the situational and performative aspect of strategic self-presentation. For example, Harre (1985, 175) defines self-presentation as “a display of one’s self as conforming to a certain image of value and worth” and, he notes that what is valuable and worthy is mainly socially construed. This study adopts Harre’s notion of strategic rhetoric as “a form of performance” realized in speech, writing, image, behaviour and appearance, but applies it to online video performances, which often simulate face-to-face interactions. The rhetorical perspective of this approach entails the vloggers’ strategic choice of “forms of performance” or presentational techniques to create in an audience a certain consistent impression of character (e.g., in terms of rationality, goodness, toughness, fun or trustworthiness), which enhances popularity. If the essence of rhetorical action in online performance is to construe a persona or a character, this links directly to Aristotle’s notion of *ethos*, and its fundamental role for persuasion. In the subsequent analysis of vlogging, the underlying conceptual framework is thus derived from the model of classical rhetorical performative action as realized through situational projection of *ethos* – the authority of the source (as a gamer, performer and presenter) is constructed as credible enough for the audiences to accept and follow (subscribe). The effectiveness of rhetorical choices in self-presentation oriented towards realizing *ethos* is estimated on the basis of popularity rankings. The analysis of presentational techniques will include such aspects as channel and video titling, language in expressive commentary as well as catchphrases, popularity boosting visual imagery, or video editing techniques.

### **Game vlogging genres and the role of vlogger’s personality**

Since 2005 YouTube has been the main social space for watching, uploading, sharing and discussing video content stored outside of the users’ computers. The main idea of YouTube is to let users publish their own video materials publicly or privately for free, allowing them to share the videos with friends, family, and everyone who happens to find them, in accordance with the main principles

of Web 2.0. Through the internet connection, the user can choose to watch anything from hundreds of millions of videos, leave a comment, start a discussion about the video, share it with other users, like or dislike the video, or subscribe to the channel the video is on to receive a notification every time a new video is posted on the channel. The subject of the videos posted by users can be anything, from a video of an animal, through a prank or a trick, to a talent show. Nowadays commercials are being displayed in a TV-like manner, before broadcasting the desired video. The rapid growth of the website allowed for new content such as gaming videos, which immediately acquired a huge audience. Moreover, the amount of time spent watching gaming videos by the users all over the world was greater than the time spent watching videos concerning all the other subjects available on YouTube just in the United States. Only in 2012 twice as much time was spent on watching gaming videos worldwide than it was in 2011 (Getomer, Okimoto, Johnsmeyer 2013), proving its thriving popularity among the internet users. That was also thanks to YouTube's mobility, because in the same year, one in three gaming videos were watched on devices such as mobile phones and tablets.

Among all the videos on YouTube, there are seven different types of game-related videos listed by OverbyteGamingUK in an article on damnlag.com. The first one to ever occur on YouTube is a Let's Play. A Let's Play is the easiest to record, can be very simple or very complicated, depending on the creator. This type of video can consist of the game-play only or it can have the player's commentary throughout the duration of the game. The amount of player's voice input in the video is a personal choice, and is usually focused around intros and outros. Another type of game-related videos presented in the article is a Review. These videos require more effort because of the extent to which the reviewer can use game content in their video, not being charged with copyright claims. A Review can be scripted, edited, cut and spliced to fit the creator's idea. The scenes can easily be retaken without too much effort, as opposed to a Let's Play, where the most natural and raw performances are most appreciated. To gain popularity, the reviewer should focus on games that are trending at the moment, rather than copying what had already been said years before.

First Impressions, similarly to a review game-related video, is described by OverbyteGamingUK as more spontaneous and relaxed. It is because a First Impression video is hardly ever scripted, that it creates the element of surprise for the gamer as much as for the viewer. The First Impression videos are time-sensitive and cover only the subjects which are trending at the moment, which makes the videos more engaging, hence they gain more views. A slightly different type of gaming video is a Reaction Video. OverbyteGamingUK depicts it as a video in which the gamer must be as natural as possible, performing openly and reacting

with no hesitation. It is crucial for the video to build the tension, so it should take at least a few minutes. The subject is completely up to the gamer, yet it is believed that the most viewed Reaction Videos are based on horror games, due to a psychological effect it has on the viewers. This might be because it is more comfortable for the viewers to watch someone else be terrified than to be scared themselves.

List Videos are the type of videos which bring most attention with the title and may or may not be rewarding to the viewer. They work as a sort of a game commercial, made by picking common aspects of different games and linking them together with the gamer's voice-over. This type of videos are most likely to start a discussion in the comment section, rather than gaining the gamer subscribers. How to Videos are the video manuals for gamers who encounter issues while playing a video game. They teach the viewers how to pass a certain level in a game, or how to improve skills. They also provide the gamers with tips and tricks necessary for ensuring the steady game progress. These videos are not very demanding when it comes to their creating, yet it is advised to have a certain proficiency in the area and experience. It is also likely that How to Videos are edited and worked on to leave out all the gamer's flaws and only show the mastery. The last type of a game-related video discussed by the OverbyteGamingUK is a Skill Showcase. These videos are the most difficult to make and are considered to be at the ability level of eSports. A properly made Skill Showcase video gains immediate popularity, if the gamer's skills are not based on one-time luck. Skill Showcase videos do not require much editing if the gamer is properly prepared. These might be treated as an inspiration for many viewers, yet are not likely to be considered as the same category with How to Videos.

All of the previously described types of videos have been created for various reasons; the ones with the biggest popularity are believed to fulfil one of three requirements, according to *This is Why People Want to Watch Other People Play Video Games* by McCormick (2014). Those requirements are: getting advice on purchase, belonging to a community built around the gamer's personality and the chance to observe a streamer with professional skills. These, together with the easy access to the website have widely contributed to popularizing this form of "spectator" entertainment. For this study, we focus on the reason why users watch, or even subscribe to a chosen player's channel, because of the YouTuber's personality – his constructed and performed ethos. The fans start watching the videos for the vlogger, rather than for the content, creating a loyal fanbase. While initially the gamers can gain their audience with game-related videos, once they have popularity, the subscribers will keep on watching the newest videos, no matter the subject, as long as the streamer appeals to his fans and continues to provide them with quality content. The ethos of the vlogger is established gradually through

performances that prove to have professional (game-related) value and worth for the audience. The videos fitting the rhetorical construction of gamers' personality may include traditional Let's Plays, Reviews, First Impressions, Reaction Videos, List Videos, How to Videos, and Skill Showcase, as these are both instructional and offering informed opinion/recommendation based on the authority and experience of the vlogger. However, once popular, vloggers also upload videos not related to games, arguably as a strategic choice of diverse "forms of performance" to create in an audience an impression of worthy and appealing character beyond the domain of gaming (championing certain social issues, charity activities and endorsing given lifestyles).

### Popular game-vloggers of 2016

The popularity of YouTube gamers is shown in a table *One Hundred Most Subscribed Games & Gaming Channel Rankings List by Subscribers* on vidstatsx.com which is being constantly updated. This provided a criterion for the choice of vloggers for the present study. As of April 2016, the number one YouTube gamer in the report ranking is PewDiePie, with 43,413,994 subscribers, gaining 24,407 subscribers per day and 127,520 subscribers per week. He has 2,800 videos on his channel and 11,85 billion views in total. Markiplier, 5<sup>th</sup> on the list, has 12,449,826 subscribers, is 32<sup>nd</sup> in the subscribers ranking with 11,891 subscribers gain per day and 119,107 subscribers increase per week. His channel contains 2,900 videos and the total viewership is 4,57 billion. The lower part of the ranking list hosts Cryaotic in the 86<sup>th</sup> position with 2,453,491 subscribers, and in the 600<sup>th</sup> place in the sub rank. The increase in subscribers per day for Cryaotic is 560 and 5,575 per week. The number of videos on his channel is 1,700 and the viewership is 347,400,000. The *One Hundred Most...* suggests that all the previously described YouTubers have three of the most popular YouTube channels with game-related content, but their positions on the list prove that the number of viewers subscribed to their channel as well as the level of their popularity is different.

These three gamers are of different backgrounds, with different styles of creating video content, with a different fanbase and a diverse level of popularity. However, all of these gamers are of the same age and started their channels around the same time, which means they all had approximately the same amount of time on YouTube to become popular and will be listed and described according to their level of popularity on YouTube.

Felix Arvid Ulf Kjellberg, known as PewDiePie, Pewds, Poods, Poodiepie or PewDie, is a twenty-six-year old video games player and commentator from Gothenburg, Sweden. He became well known on YouTube for his Let's Plays



on horror video games, indie games, flash games, and later for his reaction videos and many recordings. Today, PewDiePie has a fanbase of over 43 million subscribers on YouTube. His fans, which he refers to as *bros* call themselves the *Bro Army* and are an expanding community. A YouTube channel he created on 29<sup>th</sup> of April 2010 called PewDiePie ([youtube.com/user/PewDiePie](https://youtube.com/user/PewDiePie)) had started with a *Minecraft* playthrough video, in which the audience could see another player locked in a shed with a zombie. After *Minecraft* videos, PewDiePie made *Call of Duty 3* videos with commentaries and later Let's Plays about *Alone in the Dark* and *Wolfenstein*. Later on, Felix's videos were mainly Let's Plays and Playthroughs of horror games such as *Amnesia* and other types, like *Façade*, which is a flash game ([wikia.com](http://wikia.com)).

PewDiePie started his channel with game-themed videos, but soon after he began creating many other types of videos. These he called *Fridays with PewDiePie*, because he uploads them every week on Fridays. Those videos include vlogs in which PewDiePie talks about his day; Q&As, during which he reads the viewers' questions and answers them; opening fanmail or videos. Other types of videos PewDiePie posts regularly on his channel are montages of his own gaming videos known as *Funny Gaming Montage* and *Scariest Moments in Gaming*; but also many animated videos created by his fans called *PewDiePie Animated*, where the audio is taken from his own videos, cut and put together again, to fit the animation created by a fan (*Master Surgeon*, *Undertale*). Since 2013 PewDiePie also uses YouTube videos to raise money for charity and for those he uploads short videos to raise awareness or LiveStreams with other YouTube gamers like Markiplier, Cryaotic, CinnamonToastKen, and InTheLittleWood. For every 500 views he receives on those videos, PewDiePie donates a dollar to a charity and also asks his viewers to help reach the goal of \$250,000. Besides his own donations, the company Polaris donates two dollars on every 500 views of his video ([my.charitywater.org/felix-kjellberg/pewdiepie](http://my.charitywater.org/felix-kjellberg/pewdiepie)). Outside of his YouTube channel, PewDiePie is present on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and is featured on many other YouTube channels, like JennaMarbles and Smosh.



Figure 1. PewDiePie, found on [dailymdot.com/entertainment/pewdiepie-southpark-comedy-central/](http://dailymdot.com/entertainment/pewdiepie-southpark-comedy-central/)

Mark Edward Fischbach is a YouTube entertainer from Hawaii, currently living in Los Angeles, California. Since 6<sup>th</sup> of March 2012 when Mark joined YouTube, he is known online as Markiplier, Markimoo, Darkiplier or Wilfred Warfstache. Markiplier is a twenty-six-year old gamer, with a total viewership of 4,3 billion subscribers on his channel ([youtube.com/user/markiplierGAME](https://youtube.com/user/markiplierGAME)). Markiplier is famous for his various Let's Plays of horror games like *Amnesia: The Dark Descent*, *Knock Knock*, *Emily Wants to Play*, *Slender* and *Five Nights at Freddy's*. He was crowned *The King of Five Nights at Freddy's* by his fans and is always eager to protect his title. He is also known for many indie Playthroughs of different genres to give them the attention and was given many video games about himself made by his fans. Besides the indie games, Markiplier has been playing games such as *Minecraft*; where some of his videos were purposely recorded whilst drinking alcohol to stir controversy and revive subscriptions; *Happy Wheels*, *Cat Mario* and *GTA V*. He often collaborates with other YouTube gamers like Muyskerm, LordMinion777, Cryaotic, PewDiePie, jacksepticeye and yamimash ([youtube.com](https://youtube.com)). Outside of his game-related videos Markiplier records things such as Markiplier Highlights, Reading Your Comments videos, Milestone videos, on which he thanks his fans for subscribing after reaching a certain number of followers; and sketch comedy videos with Cyndago, where they record short dramas ([youtube.com/user/Cyndago](https://youtube.com/user/Cyndago)).



Figure 2. Markiplier, taken from [youtube.com/watch?v=1v2YjVrcIbI](https://youtube.com/watch?v=1v2YjVrcIbI)

Cryaotic, known better as Cry or ChaoticMonki is a twenty-six-year old YouTube gamer from Florida, USA. His real identity is kept private due to his professed social anxiety and he is only recognized on the internet by a small chibi character wearing a white mask to cover the gamer's face. Cryaotic's channel ([youtube.com/user/ChaoticMonki](https://youtube.com/user/ChaoticMonki)) started on 14<sup>th</sup> of March 2006 contains Let's Play videos, co-op gaming videos with PewDiePie, Markiplier, Minx, Sp00n and CinnamonToastKen, and a playlist named *Cry Reads*, which consists of 43 disturbing stories read by Cryaotic. Today, the channel has over 2 million subscribers and 347 million views in total. His main focus is horror-themed games but



occasionally he uploads full Let's Plays of other games like *Beyond: Two souls*, *Portal 2*, *Bioshock*, *Ibb and Obb*, *Unravel* and *Firewatch*. Like the previously described YouTube gamers, Cryaotic also makes charity streams, but he does not upload them on YouTube; he creates live streams on Twitch ([twitch.tv/cryaotic](https://twitch.tv/cryaotic)) and leaves only a video announcement on YouTube.



Figure 3. Cryaotic, taken from [fanpop.com/clubs/cryaotic/images/34744855/title/cry-photo](https://fanpop.com/clubs/cryaotic/images/34744855/title/cry-photo)

### Analysis of presentational techniques

In order to become popular online, a YouTube channel must meet certain criteria which concern such potentially rhetorical aspects as registering the name of the channel, giving titles to the videos, strategically selecting the language and subject of the videos, using catch phrases (intro and outro), designing thumbnails, editing of visuals and performing an act with appearance/behavioural choices while recorded. This section explores and compares these specific presentational techniques of the three vloggers with the aim of identifying which ones tend to work rhetorically to establish ethos through situated performances attuned to generating impressions of character credibility, professional worth and personal likeability.

The first element to focus on is the name of the chosen channels. None of the names in the top 10 of the *One Hundred Most Subscribed Games & Gaming Channel Rankings List by Subscribers* are difficult to read or remember, they are in English, which is certainly convenient for the majority of YouTube users, as English is a global language and difficult names might result in confusion when searching for them on YouTube. Markiplier, PewDiePie and Cryaotic are also in English, which shows the rule to be true. Markiplier, the owner of the channel MarkiplierGAME, comes from *Mark*, which is a common name in English, whereas both PewDiePie and Cryaotic do not have their own names included in their channel's titles. PewDiePie, is an intriguing name where *Pew* stands for the sound of a gunshot in an English written language, *Die* suggests dying in video games, and *Pie*, which is an American dessert all imply that creative uses of English that

are distinct and memorable are best when creating logins. Cryaotic, with his channel ChaoticMonki explains the name choice "Playing Counter Strike as a kid. See a guy named Cryosin. Think it's a cool name. Make a WoW character with the same name. Former name used to be ChaoticMonki. People called me Cry for short on that server with that name. It stuck. Then I wanted to somehow combine the 2 names into something I personally made, that fit me better. So. Cryaotic was born" ([youtube.wikia.com/wiki/ChaoticMonki](http://youtube.wikia.com/wiki/ChaoticMonki)). This once again shows that the favoured language used to create YouTube channel names is creatively manipulated English, so the name should be a novel and unusual combination of sounds or morphological stems, with a spelling twist to it.

Another popularity-enhancing feature is the way YouTube gamers title their videos. To persuade audiences to look at the videos, gamers write the whole title of the video in capital letters, for example PewDiePie's *FLAPPY BIRD – DONT PLAY THIS GAME* video achieved over 31 million views since it was uploaded in January 27, 2014 ([youtu.be/lQz6xhlOt18](http://youtu.be/lQz6xhlOt18)). Perhaps one explanation for its popularity is the attention-grabbing negation in the title, which made some subscribers want to check why they should not play it. Nevertheless the title suggests a clear and authoritative stance of the vlogger. If not the whole title, vloggers emphasize at least a part of the title, as in Markiplier's video called *WARNING: SCARIEST GAME IN YEARS | Five Nights at Freddy's - Part 1*, which brought him over 46 million views since it was released on August 12, 2014 ([youtu.be/iOztns-BPrAA](http://youtu.be/iOztns-BPrAA)). Capital letters, when used for more than just the first letter of the title are the recognized equivalent to screaming in online notation, which indicates that the message is urgent and should be examined. The use of emotional vocabulary and the superlative for a warning testifies to the vlogger's orientation towards audience needs. On the other hand, Cryaotic has never uploaded a game-related video with titles using more than a proper number of capital letters; all his videos are named in standard and formal notation without emotional expression. Those bring much fewer views than the other youtubers get, as for example *Cry Plays: Soma [P1]* with only 929,450 views since September 21, 2015 ([youtu.be/oauh0wLMEzM](http://youtu.be/oauh0wLMEzM)). That shows the likely influence the usage of capital letters and the address to the audience may have on the channel's popularity.

Apart from typography, the meaning behind the words chosen for titles can work rhetorically. Here the example would be Markiplier's video published on April 14, 2015 called *CLICK IF YOU DARE!! | One Night at Flumpty's, where the CLICK IF YOU DARE* part, adorned with two exclamation marks, challenges the viewer to investigate further. This implies creating a community of "daring" gamers under the leadership of the vlogger. That video brought Markiplier over 8 million views, which proves that the way of gaining audience based on emotional

appeal is mostly successful ([youtu.be/RH1Cjh-oVEU](https://youtu.be/RH1Cjh-oVEU)). The next example would be PewDiePie's *THIS GAME IS A PORNO?!... - Corpse Party: Book Of Shadows - Part 1* released in December 23, 2014 with 14,266,839 views ([youtube/dpc3R2rzXqI](https://youtube/dpc3R2rzXqI)). In this title (also note its question/exclamation formula), the beginning is not only in capital letters, but it is also controversial, the word *PORNO* is suggesting that the game consists of sexually explicit imagery, which is not legal on YouTube. That certainly raises curiosity whether the video really dwells on pornographic content, resulting in a higher number of views. Vloggers' ethos can thus be established around the notions of controversy and challenge.

Expression of evaluation, as the next technique of rhetorical performance is visible in the commentary to the game-videos presented. Depending on the subject of the video, the language should suit the situation. A video that brought PewDiePie 5 million views was titled *MY WORST JUMPSCARE - Sophie's Curse* ([youtu.be/FhKHn5r1mrA](https://youtu.be/FhKHn5r1mrA)). In that Let's Play, he starts with a short audio recording of himself from another video saying "warning: loud noised and jumpscare" and right after he comments on himself, stating "what kind of shitty intro was that, honestly", using vulgar language in the first 10 seconds of his video. In the next 20 seconds, he plays a compilation of jumpscare from his past videos, starting with the year 2012, through 2013 and 2014 while saying "I played so many fucking horror games, I know how they work now", which is supposed to make the audience believe he is the best horror-themed gamer and he is not likely to be scared anymore, which contradicts the title. The language he uses throughout this video is rather vulgar and he mocks the game's story in the 1:12 minute, laughing while reading "a lot of the people turned me down because they believe my place is haunted...", once again trying to prove that he does not fear the horror in the game. In 1:32 he reads "I created these lightning devices" from the game's story and immediately mocks it, saying "you made fucking flashlights!". This is once again his way of handling the horror-themed video games, which brought him popularity.

A different example could be PewDiePie's *THIS GAME WILL MAKE YOU WEEP (That, Dragon Cancer)* video gameplay of a game *That Dragon, Cancer*, which is a story created by the parent of a child who had passed away because of cancer. Here the youtuber who is known for swearing and mocking every move in the game avoided cursing and screaming. The language used by him in this gameplay was informal, for example when he was about to express stronger emotion, he said "oh boy", as in 39:19 minute of his video ([youtu.be/xBQYLXX2Mk0](https://youtu.be/xBQYLXX2Mk0)). This gameplay became popular because the audience could see another, more composed spectrum of PewDiePie's emotions and reactions, giving him over 3 million views since March 29, 2016.

On the other hand, Markiplier's horror-related gaming videos, which are what he mostly creates, result in a lot of screaming recorded. In the video *WARNING: SCARIEST GAME IN YEARS | Five Nights at Freddy's - Part 1* ([youtu.be/Zz8MCVJb0\\_k](https://youtu.be/Zz8MCVJb0_k)) uploaded on August 12, 2014 he screams 94 times in a 17 minute long video, not articulating words properly, and he often gets perplexed, verbalizing 10 *no*'s in a row, when most startled. This informal language demonstrates that Markiplier is honest and spontaneous while playing horror-related games and trusts that his audience relates to his fear. By openly showing how scared he is, he gathered almost 47 million views on this video and it is also the most popular gameplay on his channel. Its popularity is seen in an animated version of the gameplay titled *Five Nights at Freddy's ANIMATED* made by a fan called LixianTV ([youtube.com/user/LixianTV](https://youtube.com/user/LixianTV)), being the first video the channel shows when sorted by popularity.

Cryaotic, however, tends to be laconic in his gaming videos, speaking only when necessary, and his language is informal. During his *Let's Play*'s, Cry swears only when he finds something frustrating, like in *Angry Cry Plays: Rule of Rose [P4]* ([youtu.be/gDd8tBXBClk](https://youtu.be/gDd8tBXBClk)), when he could not overcome the obstacle in the game because of the difficult combat system. This video brought him 372 thousand views, which is over a hundred thousand more than *Cry Plays: Rule of Rose [P10]*, showing that the occasional outbreak of emotions brings more popularity to the channel than a calm, passive use of language.

Catchphrases help build a brand name and are important for self-presentation to induce loyalty and recognition. They have been developed by the three YouTubers after producing many videos and are the words which are most often repeated in certain situations, such as at the beginning or by the end of the video. During the beginning of the video, also called *intro*, PewDiePie, Markiplier and Cryaotic have a certain way of greeting their audience. Markiplier's usual intro is "Hello everybody my name is Markiplier and welcome to...", but if he was to continue a previously uploaded *Let's Play*, the intro would be "Hello everybody my name is Markiplier and welcome BACK to...", introducing the audience to a gameplay they are about to watch. PewDiePie's intro is "How's it going, bros? My name is PewDiePie!", but the word *pewdiepie* is prolonged to sound as *peeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeewdiepie* and spoken in a higher pitch, possibly to draw attention. Cryaotic usually opens his videos with "hey guys" or "sup guys" and later follows with some information about the game, but sometimes, when the game itself has an intro with an audio recording, he waits a considerably longer time before he speaks. Unlike other youtubers, Cryaotic does not introduce himself in every video, which indicates that the game he plays is more important than his own persona as a gamer, whereas PewDiePie and Markiplier had previously stated

that they are “too pro” in many of their videos. This brought the last two youtubers vast popularity, because they bring attention to themselves, tending to be self-centred and narcissistic. Cry with his modest approach is falling behind in the popularity ranking. This indicates that to achieve general acclaim and following, it works to rhetorically construe a distinct vlogging persona (however artificial and exaggerated it is) and to build its “character” through consistently performed situational acts, such as intros and recurring catchphrases.

The ending of the video, called an *outro*, is the YouTube gamer's chance to say goodbye and thank the audience. PewDiePie's outro is “stay awesome bros” followed by indistinct high scream, which resembles the word bye. Markiplier had changed his outro over the years, which used to be “Markiplier out!” but now is “And as always, I will SEE YOU... in the next video! Buh-bye!”, which is oxymoronic, because Markiplier cannot physically see his audience; it is the audience who can see him whenever he uploads a new video. Cryaotic, as the last, has a different way to end his videos. Instead of saying his outro out loud, he gradually darkens the screen and the words “more to come” appear. This once again shows, that when Pewds and Mark scream out their goodbyes with their own voice, they let the viewers know their true self and make more effort, while Cryaotic, trying to provide his audience with undisturbed gaming experience, omits to focus on himself.

The purpose of thumbnails, as the next aspect of the videos, is to bring attention to the video before it is even played. Visual icons in thumbnails, just like the titles, can be used to indicate what the video contains or it could be the rhetorical device by which the viewer is lured to the video. The best example of the thumbnail which attracts the audience is Markiplier's thumbnail to the video *FREDDY IS READY! (1st Shot) | Five Nights at F\*\*kboy's DRUNK - Part 1*, (Figure 4.) which shows Mark holding a shot glass shaped like a skull and his opponent smoking a joint, which is illegal. This video gained over 7 million views since April 3, 2015 ([youtu.be/cVjPFOQYFKY](https://youtu.be/cVjPFOQYFKY)), serving its purpose of increasing attractiveness, even though no alcohol or drugs were placed in an actual video.



Figure 4. Exemplary thumbnail 1, taken from youtube.com



PewDiePie, on the other hand, attracts his audience using nudity in the thumbnails, for example in the video *PEEKING ON GIRLS! - Lucius: Playthrough - Part 7* (youtube /ELgTmW6iNaU), which brought him over 14 million views (figure 5). This thumbnail shows a blurry view of a naked woman in a bathtub, being watched through a keyhole, which is disturbing and pornographic, yet creating curiosity.



Figure 5. Exemplary thumbnail 2, taken from youtube.com

Cryaotic's most popular video thumbnail (figure 6) was simply a screenshot of a game played by him in a video called *Cry Plays: Facade: Alexander Edition* (youtu.be/nw77QiSCAbE). The picture demonstrates the main characters of the game standing in their apartment, which is exactly what was shown in the video itself. Despite the fact that the thumbnail was ordinary and had no pornographic images, drugs, alcohol, or even the face of Cry, the video reached over 2 million views since November 24, 2011, proving that a well-made casual gaming video thumbnail has the same chance of reaching great popularity as a controversial one.



Figure 6. Exemplary thumbnail 3, taken from youtube.com

Video editing, if executed correctly, can help the youtuber to provide the audience with well-ordered, entertaining and clearly presented content, which later will help in achieving bigger popularity and can be regarded as an important presentational technique. On the other hand, a video edited too much can be overwhelming for the viewer and bring disappointment. The best example

of poorly edited video is PewDiePie's *Blacklight Tango Down: Team Deathmatch 38-4 (PC Gameplay/Commentary)*, uploaded on December 10, 2010 ([youtu.be/0U6ZgImZ5vo](https://youtu.be/0U6ZgImZ5vo)). The video seems to be raw footage of Pewds playing *Blacklight: Tango Down* with only voice commentary and no video of his face, which appears in most of his other playthroughs. This gaming video brought him only 606,630 views, proving the lack of editing is not liked by the audience. A good example of proper amount of editing is a video *Octodad Funny Moments* uploaded by Markiplier on February 6, 2014 ([youtu.be/n9ljxei43fs](https://youtu.be/n9ljxei43fs)). It features an insert video recording of Mark's reactions while playing, words popping out on the screen to stress what the gamer is saying, added music samples to fit the given situations, and looped footage of the funniest moments. It was made entirely out of Markiplier's list of gaming videos about the same game ([youtu.be/Yj4\\_A97DL9s?list=PL3tRBEVW0hiBtSRggPchUtMRLyIcpM6mz](https://youtu.be/Yj4_A97DL9s?list=PL3tRBEVW0hiBtSRggPchUtMRLyIcpM6mz)) by cutting out the most important parts and fixing them all together into one 2 minute video. That video gained over 6 million views. By contrast, the only editing Cry puts his videos through is cutting away pieces, during which his character is lost in a game, fading the outro screen into blackness and adding music samples. His videos seem rather raw when it comes to special effects, once again proving that he is more focused on the game content than on anything else. His most popular video *Cry Plays: Facade: Alexander Edition* ([youtu.be/nw77QiSCAbE](https://youtu.be/nw77QiSCAbE)) with over 2 million views has the same amount of editing than his least popular video *Cry Plays: Okami HD [P20]* with only 175 thousand views ([youtu.be/7MSi3RnzIOo](https://youtu.be/7MSi3RnzIOo)), confirming that, in the case of Cryaotic's channel, it is not editing that is the key to a popular video.

The presentational techniques referring to the behaviour of the YouTube gamers are the last aspect of their strategy that will be discussed based not on particular videos of the youtubers, but evaluated from the entire content of their channels. PewDiePie, as the most popular YouTube gamer is a sincere, positive and brave gamer. His fans enjoy the game-related content he makes just as much as non-game-related videos, which shows that his fanbase does not focus on the games he plays, but on his projected personality. Besides his openness and positive attitude, he tends to be loud, rushed and swears massively, mocking horror-games; however, it does not seem to put his fans off. He is a very successful youtuber and is not afraid to fail in playing a challenging game. Markiplier is perceived as engaging and courageous; he brags a lot about his strength, gaming skills and looks, but only as a joke for his audience, whom he is openly thankful for following. His fans cherish his wit and humour, which is seen in many animated videos made for him. Mark, in the 5<sup>th</sup> place in the ranking, is appreciated for his screams and stuttering in the face of danger, panicking and exaggerations of situations he finds himself in. Lastly, Cryaotic is the perfect YouTube gamer when the viewer seeks clean,

undisturbed game content with a mellow commentary in a silky voice. He does not expose his persona in a strategic attempt to boost popularity, leaving space for the game to take centre stage. This is why his popularity is dictated by the games he plays, not giving fans enough chance to subscribe because of his character.

The three examples of vloggers demonstrate that popularity is higher when the channel is based not only on instructional content and professional authority, but also on performing character, where the self-presentational techniques are rhetorically charged and titles and comments are strategically used to boost viewership.

## Conclusions

With the rapid development of YouTube, online gaming has become one of the most watched subjects, with audiences counted in millions. The growing YouTube gaming business is an example of what a substantial section of mass society chooses to consume, building the demand for more content. However, the need has arisen to have guidance, advice and additional entertainment from “watching other people playing games.” As much as the subject of the online videos studied here is game-related, the actual content of uploads and the way of entertaining can vary from one vlogger to another. Gamers and videos are picked by the audiences based on many recognised factors, including a vlogger’s rhetorically constructed persona and performed character, which was demonstrated as being capable of propelling a channel’s popularity.

According to this study, the most popular YouTube gamer as of 2016 is PewDiePie. That is why we can assume that his presentational techniques, such as the choice of titling and games genres such as horror or RPG, using expressive (vulgar) language, revealing personal information, and interaction with fans are the most successful forms of situational rhetoric that drive his popularity. The projection of his persona as provocative and easy-going, and yet as trustworthy and reliable is the ethos-producing outcome of his situational rhetoric in online performance. Not far behind him, we have Markiplier’s fun-driven situational rhetoric with which he presents himself on his channel with integrity and devotion to his loyal audience, as well as loud, playful behaviour; placing him in the top 10 most followed YouTube vloggers. Lastly, Cryaotic’s presentational techniques have been assessed as less successfully designed, which implies that his self-presentation tools, such as video editing, simple and neutral language, lack of personal information and non-engaging overall style of videos, fall short of the most effective standards of performative rhetorical capacity.

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