

# Popular European Cinema in the Platform Era: Circulation Cultures on YouTube

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Over the last two decades, the platformization of viewing practices has transformed patterns of circulation, multiplying the possibilities for engagement with cinema: not only new viewing spaces themselves but also vast amounts of readily accessible related content (trailers, publicity, clips, etc.). The aim of this essay is to consider how these changes have impacted the potential for popular European cinema—which has historically strayed little from each national domestic market—to travel abroad and outside of “traditional” contexts of consumption. We shed some light on this question by examining how content related to a handful of highly successful European films is used on YouTube, the most widespread and accessible repository of online videos. Following a discussion of the changes in the digital distribution sphere, we identify the most lucrative European films from the five largest film markets of the continent—France, UK, Germany, Italy, Spain—since the launch of YouTube. Isolating seven examples, we then trace out their presence on the platform, questioning what kind of content relating to the films is available; engagement rates with these videos; indicators of local and global consumption; and what these results can tell us about the spectatorship habits of European cinema today.

**Keywords**  
European Cinema  
Circulation  
Platformization  
Reception  
YouTube  
**DOI**

<https://doi.org/10.54103/2036-461X/21011>

## INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

Over the last two decades, the platformization of European cinema and the digitization of viewing practices have brought about a number of changes: long-standing hierarchies and processes of intermediation shaping the divide between “popular” and “elite” tastes and patterns of circulation have been called into question. Not only has the multiplication of windows provided a plethora

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<sup>1</sup> This article is the result of a continuous collaboration between all three authors and the research was conducted and analysed collectively. Concretely, Valerio Coladonato wrote the Introduction and the section “Popular European Cinema: A Contested Notion”, Arianna Vietina wrote “The Circulation of European Cinema in Digital Platforms” and “Methodology”, and Dom Holdaway wrote “Popular European Cinema on YouTube”, “Industrial and Cultural Influences” and “Interactions and Comments”. The Conclusion was penned together. The authors thank the reviewers for their insight on the first draft of this essay.



of access points to film and other audiovisual media, it has also splintered our means of interaction with them, thanks to the many available paratexts (promotional, but also fan-made/uploaded fare). The aim of this essay is to question the impact these innovations have had on the circulation of European cinema. We do so by examining the mediations of a handful of popular films on YouTube. Specifically, we identify and categorize the most viewed videos related to seven European films that had previously succeeded at the box office, taking into account the types of content available, levels of interaction (views, likes, comments) and indications of how the films have traveled. In this way, we aim to contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of contemporary circulation patterns, as part of a broader, fluid culture shaped by a multitude of fragments of the films (and/or of related content) rather than the traditional, start-to-finish theatrical consumption.

Within this preliminary exploration, we limit our analysis to the five major Western-European industries in particular. As Higson writes, "In terms of the size of the local production sector and the size of the local market for films (and indeed the size of the population), there are five Western European countries that stand out: the UK, France, Germany, Spain and Italy" (2021a, 204). These industries, as he continues—also citing Jones (forthcoming 2024)—are among the most able to produce national production consistently, with theatrical success. Nevertheless, this often fails to translate to success beyond domestic markets across the continent, where it is Hollywood cinema that continues to prevail: "more than 1,000 US films achieved admissions of more than 1m in Europe in 2005–2015, compared to the 219 non-national European films": this translates to around 20 films per year (Higson 2021a, 202–04).

Our limited focus therefore shares an interest in the high-visibility of this national output, in addition to the intent to dialogue with previous works describing the effects of market concentration on European films' presence and circulation within Europe (see, for instance, Pardo and Sánchez-Tabernero 2012).<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, our focus on the "big five" is obviously partial, and does not intend to reinforce a limited and outdated notion of "European cinema" that privileges the Western European canon (Iordanova 2003).<sup>3</sup>

Further, as mentioned, we limit to a focus on YouTube in this discussion, as this offers a number of strategic advantages. First, in view of its industrial geography, it is a US-based business that, thanks to its transnational presence, inserts itself

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**2** This article both summarizes previous research and develops a convincing interpretation of how US distribution companies maintain dominance of the EU market, even in the contexts in which film production has been historically strong.

**3** Two helpful examples of this less reductive perspective include Anne Jäckel's 1997 study of coproductions, showing how film practitioners can promote cinematic "integration" between Eastern, Central, and Western Europe, and Andrea Virginás's 2020 essay on the regional affinities in box-office hits of Hungarian and Romanian cinemas. The latter demonstrates how markets smaller than the "big five" have recently developed transnational strategies that allow them to transcend the dichotomy of Hollywood and European arthouse codes.

into the pluralistic regional dynamics of a global screen ecology (Cunningham 2015). Second, it predominantly uses the AVOD model therefore making content consumable essentially for free—though films are also available via TVOD. Further relevance lies in the fact that YouTube functions as a social network, too, unlike most video streaming websites, since users can like, comment on and interact via videos: it is indeed often among the most used social networks in European countries (see, for example, McLachlan 2022). Finally, the site also hosts a wide variety of content that enables a cartography of reception: not only films but also official promotional materials, clips, remixes, personal videos, news reports, etc. As such, by studying YouTube we hope to broaden the scope of distribution scholarship that has focused predominantly on the feature film (e.g., Higson 2021a, 2021b, Holdaway and Scaglioni 2018, Smits 2022), dwelling (also) on the other kinds of “content” (Eichorn 2022) that shape our interactions. In this sense, the article also seeks to challenge another historical tendency, that is, overlapping film consumption with the notion of the single, uninterrupted consumption of a film, start to finish. While this was evidently never the case—channel surfing, rewinding or fast-forwarding, leaving cinemas or remaining for double bills, re-watching clips or trailers: these “remixing” activities that are certainly not new—the digital context and the tools of digital humanities enable us to provide a more detailed picture of consumption habits.

What follows, then, is only a first attempt to trace how the “popularity” and the circulation of the European films on YouTube are interconnected—with the hope that further research on other areas and more detailed inquiry into other platforms will follow.

## POPULAR EUROPEAN CINEMA: A CONTESTED NOTION, FROM THE 1990S TO THE VOD ERA

A great deal of scholarly attention has been paid to defining popular European cinema, especially since the 1990s, thanks to a series of conferences initiated in 1989 at the University of Warwick (Dyer and Vincendeau 1992). In the initial phase, some recurring questions characterized the debate: whether “European cinema” is most strongly (or exclusively) identified with arthouse and auteur films, and how such association can be deconstructed—or whether it should be; what are the conditions for a “popular” European cinema to exist (emphasizing for instance the historical role of genres and the importance of “local” star systems); whether the opposition to Hollywood is constitutive to European cinema; and whether “European” is a mostly empty label, only designating a geographic origin but not a common identity—let alone a popular one.

For our purposes, two articles are particularly helpful, both published at the end of the 1990s as responses to the previous decade’s debate. These two contributions do not only act as reminders of what the category of “popular

European cinema” meant at the threshold of the new century: they also highlight a few critical junctures that still persist, even after the widespread impact of digital technologies. The first one is a short piece by Philippe Meers (2000) which, consistently with the approaches of the New Cinema History, pushed for a re-consideration of popular European cinema from the perspective of its audiences. Thus, the author argued, an ethnography of the viewers would help scholars dispel any notion of homogeneity in the lived experience of each national cinema’s audience of Europe.<sup>4</sup> Transposing a similar approach to today’s viewing practices would entail the added challenge of a fragmented digital mediascape—and this is one of the reasons, we argue, for paying closer attention to what happens on platforms such as YouTube.

The second response to the 1990s debate that can be helpful here is Tim Bergfelder’s “Reframing European Cinema Concepts and Agendas for the Historiography of European Film” (1998).<sup>5</sup> Here the author noted that, at the time, few contributions “actually took account of the supranational implications” of a “popular” European cinema. Lamenting the shortcomings of this overlap between the “popular” and the “national”, Bergfelder proposed an “alternative agenda according to which one might redraw the parameters of European film history” (1998, 5): he put at the center of this agenda the impact of diasporas, as well as co-productions and cross-cultural reception as *constitutive of* (and not marginal in) European cinema. Since then, many steps have been taken in these research directions: to single out only a handful of examples from a growing body of literature, see for instance the collection edited by Mary Harrod, Mariana Liz and Alissa Timoshkina (2015) centered on the transnational dimension of European cinema; as well as other works shedding light on how producers anticipated a European vision for cinema (Corsi 2017), on instances of cross-country artistic cooperation in early co-productions (Lefevre 2020), and on the circulation of technicians working in today’s industry (Bonhomme 2020). But to return to the perspective of audiences: where does a contemporary European viewing experience take shape? Is it relegated to the cosmopolitan aspirations of arthouse theaters? (For example, the network of EU-backed *Europa Cinemas*, one of the most recognizable initiatives of the MEDIA programme). Or can the circulation of popular genre narratives, too, make audiences *feel* European, as indicated by another recent large-scale project focusing on crime fiction (DETECT; see Morsch and Re 2021)?

This is where an empirical look at VOD spaces provides insight into how

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**4** It is a line of inquiry that has since then flourished, resulting in large-scale historical projects, such as European Cinema Audiences, which has facilitated a new understanding of the entanglements of European film cultures and has provided empirical confirmation of Hollywood cinema’s centrality and persistence in the viewers’ memories and experience (see Ercole, Van de Vijver, and Treveri Gennari 2020, and the website <https://www.europeancinemaaudiences.org> for the full list of research outputs. The last access of all cited links in this essay was August 31, 2023).

**5** It also provides a useful overview of the key bibliographic references from that decade which, for reasons of space, we cannot fully account for here.

the “popular” can be articulated with European films in digital environments. Potentially, indeed, YouTube is an arena where the type of exchanges and connections theorized by scholars since the 1990s *could* take place: YouTube is a space of potential transnationalism, more so than the traditional theater (with the notable exception of film festivals). The platform is multilingual, and viewers from many countries can engage with an array of films (and related materials) that is potentially more diverse than in most other contexts.

In a recent, thought-provoking article Anne-Marie Scholz (2021) takes cue from two relatively obscure films directed by José Antonio Nieves Conde—*Marta* (1971) and *The Great Swindle* (*Historia de una Traición*, 1971)—to make a broader point about how they have survived oblivion. Scholz illustrates how YouTube, acting as an archive for popular films, might transform how we understand European cinema *tout court*—in other words, she asks: is YouTube “creating a new basis for a more appreciative and inclusive” cinematic history of the continent?”. Her argument is that the renewed appreciation for “Eurotrash” and growing fan engagement on YouTube (thanks to the upload of private, often low-quality copies) produces a “compelling nostalgic fantasy” (online), a different affective bond to lowbrow genre movies. Complicating a long-standing critical binary (entertainment-based Hollywood vs serious/high-brow European cinema), this fandom adds an alternative, bottom-up perspective to both academic definitions and institutional policies on European cinema (Scholz 2021). Though it would be a far stretch to extrapolate any general conclusion on *today’s* European cinema from this specific trend, we believe that it does beg the question: how is circulation on YouTube affecting our understanding of contemporary films? In other words, how does the US-based, Google-owned platform impact European cinema not only as an archive—a function that it performs “accidentally” (Burgess and Green 2009)—but also through its primary purpose? That is, a hybrid between a social network and video sharing platform, and more recently, a VOD service showcasing new releases. Despite its high potential for engaging users more directly, YouTube remains little studied as a distribution space for European cinema.

## THE CIRCULATION OF EUROPEAN CINEMA IN DIGITAL PLATFORMS

Understanding the changing circulation dynamics of European cinema in the contemporary context necessitates a recognition of the powerful impact of digital technology. Lower access barriers have facilitated the entry of many new players into the market, while digitization has allowed traditional gatekeepers to be challenged in the areas of audiovisual production, distribution and promotion. The resulting ever-increasing availability of products theoretically brings greater choice for the viewer (Waldfoegel 2017), while the growth of the streaming market has provided space for niches, such as horror cinema

(Shudder), anime (Crunchyroll) or arthouse film (MUBI), as well as more curated user experiences (Frey 2021).

The data regarding this growth is inconsistent, and while we can gain some insight into the libraries of certain platforms, viewer numbers and the popularity figures of specific content is often private. The LUMIERE Observatory's reports are particularly helpful in this regard, accumulating macro trends and indicating some relevant tendencies: for instance, platforms have increased by 71% the availability of European non-national films (with a previous theatrical release) in the countries considered, thus positively impacting also the film's exportability.

This growth has depended not only on the direct entrance of VOD platforms to the market and their investment in local production, but also on European institutions. On the one hand, the "streaming giants" have had a complex relationship with the EU (most commonly represented in the Cannes-Netflix conflict), with legal imposition that catalogue content must be at least 30% European (see Lobato 2019, Broughton Micova 2023). On the other, public production and distribution funding does succeed, to some extent, in creating a transnational European cinema: consider the cases of Eurimages, for co-production film funding, and the aforementioned MEDIA programme, for film distribution and exhibition (Cucco 2017, 2020; D'Urso 2023). The latter is increasingly conscious of the evolving contemporary landscape: according to the programme's website, one of its four areas of focus is "enhancing global circulation, promotion and distribution of European audiovisual works, taking into account the new digital environment".<sup>6</sup>

As Amanda Lotz has argued (2021), unpicking the complex strategies and power dynamics between the agents that enable the movement of media can be facilitated by prioritizing the notion of "circulation", with all its theory-building potential. When compared to the discipline of production studies, a hypothetical "distribution studies" carries additional complications, due to the plurality and fragmentation of operators with which scholars must interface, and often their reluctance to reveal the principles that regulate the sector (Garofalo, Holdaway, and Scaglioni 2018). The concept of "circulation", in place of "distribution", enables us to adopt a more inclusive perspective, that shifts away from a traditional, pre-digital and film-medium-specific model of production/distribution/exhibition (Lotz 2021, 49–50) to also include the other "windows" or "arenas" where audiovisual media can be accessed (Holdaway and Scaglioni 2018). Indeed, this can also include informal or illegal interactions. Ramon Lobato has effectively made the point in his *Shadow Economies of Cinema* (2012): collecting several cases of verified illicit distribution networks, he laid the groundwork for their subsequent study, also noting how these dynamics are revealing of the cultural policies of different countries. A further advantage of a focus on "circulation" is its capacity to integrate multiple actors within the film supply chain. In the

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<sup>6</sup> The other three are "encouraging cooperation", "nurturing talent" and "supporting the engagement and development of audiences". See the programme website: <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/policies/creative-europe-media>.

European context, the benefits of this approach are palpable in the evidence, for example, of how co-productions lead to wider circulation of films (Higson 2018, Lovascio 2020), or data from the European Audiovisual Observatory's 2021 report that confirms how wide theatrical success corresponds to a title's greater chance of circulation on over-the-top platforms (Grece 2021).

## METHODOLOGY

Therefore adopting an approach focusing on circulation, and responding to the above reflections that illustrate the potential of digital distribution spaces for European cinema, in the following sections we map out the "afterlives" of a handful of popular European films on YouTube. For this initial exploration, our sample was restricted to few films, defined through the same notion of popularity adopted in the MeCETES project (Higson 2021a): theatrical ticket sales. We began by identifying the European productions that had sold more than 1,000,000 tickets in Germany and Spain, and more than 3,000,000 in France, Italy and the UK, where "successful" films were of a greater number.<sup>7</sup> This included intra-European co-productions but excluded external ones. The timeframe adopted spans from the creation of the YouTube platform in 2005 to the time of writing (2023). We then compared the findings to the LUMIERE database of the European Audiovisual Observatory to gain an indicative idea of audience figures across the markets.<sup>8</sup>

In order to further restrict the content subsequently searched on YouTube, the sample identified above was narrowed down to seven films. We included the highest performing European title in each of the five countries of interest.<sup>9</sup> The sample of national successes—all medium budget, mainstream comedies—are:

- *Welcome to the Sticks* (*Bienvenue chez les Ch'tis*, Dany Boon, 2008, France);
- *The Inbetweeners Movie* (Ben Palmer, 2011, UK);
- *Spanish Affair* (*Ocho apellidos vascos*, Emilio Martínez-Lázaro, 2014, Spain);
- *Suck Me Shakespeer 2* (*Fack ju Göhte 2*, Bora Dağtekin, 2015, Germany);
- *Quo vado?* (Gennaro Nunziante, 2016, Italy).

The success of these five films was predominantly limited to their own country of production. Hence, to add a comparative element, we added two European

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**7** The sources for this data collection were statistical reports on cinema produced by film institutes in the countries: the CNC - Centre national du cinéma et de l'image animée (France), the Filmförderungsanstalt (Germany), Cinetel and the Ministero della Cultura (Italy), The Ministerio de Cultura y Deporte (Spain) and the BFI (the UK).

**8** We recognize that the LUMIERE data is not entirely comprehensive, though we take it as nonetheless indicative—especially with major box-office successes, thanks to their visibility and the lesser relevance of margins of error.

**9** In each case this was a domestic production with the exception of Germany, where *Intouchables* sold around 2 million more tickets than the highest performing German film, *Fack ju Göhte 2*.

films from the top performers that had greater box-office success also in the other four countries—the kinds of films that Higson refers to as “best travelled” (2021, 201). These are two medium-budget light-hearted dramas:

- *Intouchables* (Olivier Nakache, Éric Toledano, 2011, France);
- *The King’s Speech* (Tom Hooper, 2011, UK).

While the sample remains small, just seven films, the amount of “spin-off” content on YouTube is large yet manageable. The ticket sales of each film are reproduced in Table 1.

Film <sup>10</sup>	Tickets sold (domestic)	Tickets sold (total, 5 markets)
<i>Bienvenue chez les Ch’tis</i>	20,489,303	23,974,891
<i>The Inbetweeners Movie</i>	7,430,486	8,004,063
<i>Ocho apellidos vascos</i>	9,300,453	9,362,130
<i>Fack ju Göhte 2</i>	7,731,947	7,765,686
<i>Quo vado?</i>	9,367,995	9,752,614
<i>Intouchables</i>	19,440,920	34,480,583
<i>The King’s Speech</i>	7,538,428	16,094,953

Table 1: Sample of Seven Films with Theatrical Performances. Data source: [LUMIERE](#).

To gain an impression of the content relating to these films on the platform, we scraped the site, using the YouTube data tools (Rieder 2015), with a series of variations of search requests. The searches were all anonymous (i.e., with no account search history that could influence the algorithm; on the functioning of the YouTube search algorithm, see Rieder, Matamoros-Fernández, and Coromina 2018; Airolidi, Beraldo, and Gandini 2016). The searches were undertaken using the category of “relevance”, rather than popularity, date, rating or title; they were geolocalized to each of the five countries in order to recreate a realistic image of the “relevant” results nationally. Our searches also accounted for the translations of film titles. For each film, we recorded 100 results searching for the film’s original title and in its domestic market, as well as 50 results for the original title and 50 for the translated title in foreign markets.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Henceforth we refer to the sample with their original release titles.

<sup>11</sup> The limitation of 50 or 100 was implemented primarily to make the results manageable and relevant, though initial iterations clearly revealed that 100 results per film sufficed, since more results led to high fractions of irrelevant content. Relevance is certainly a subjective and therefore thorny category: for the sake of this data, our working definition was that the film content was explicitly mentioned in the video. At times, this was a difficult call: many videos were found to imitate or echo the title of a film, for instance, family road trips to Bergues that reference *Bienvenue chez les Ch’tis*, or speeches by Charles III of England or King Felipe VI of Spain labeled “The King’s Speech”. These were excluded unless the film was explicitly invoked.



Once compiled, this data was subjected to some cleaning: first, identifying, labeling and removing duplicate results from different national searches; second, eliminating any content that was deemed irrelevant, via a manual check of all non-duplicate videos. This resulted in a sample of 1,354 videos across all films. A summary of the data downloaded can be found in Table 2.

<b>Film</b>	<b>Search results (num. videos)</b>	<b>Duplicates (num. videos)</b>	<b>Relevant results (num. videos)</b>
<i>Bienvenue chez les Ch'tis</i>	482	199	200
<i>Intouchables</i>	500	230	194
<i>Quo vado?</i>	450	267	174
<i>Ocho apellidos vascos</i>	401	196	132
<i>Fack ju Göhte 2</i>	470	194	232
<i>The King's Speech</i>	497	190	219
<i>The Inbetweeners Movie</i>	483	205	203
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,283</b>	<b>1,481</b>	<b>1,354</b>

Table 2: YouTube Search Data Summary. Searches carried out 25-27/07/2023, with some further additions on 24/08/2023.

In the final stage of data preparation, each video was then categorized, using a simplistic coding system: a primary category (drawn from a predefined list) and further subcategories (to further categorize the videos, added more flexibly). The latter included, for instance, greater specificity in relation to the macro category ("music" could also be "soundtrack" or a "cover") and notes regarding the language or content.

## POPULAR EUROPEAN CINEMA ON YOUTUBE: ANALYSIS OF THE SAMPLE

The main categories and their distribution across the sample are listed in Table 3. By a significant margin, the most prevalent categories across the seven films were clips (c. 34% of the videos) and trailers (c. 23%). Clips are sequences from a film in its original form (i.e., not re-edited and excluding deleted scenes)—though this also includes other films that emerge in the search (e.g., clips from sequels of the searched film). Trailers refer to the promotional content produced in advance of film releases across any distribution window. They are inclusive of content uploaded officially, by distributors, but also by non-professional users.

Category	Occurrences	As %	Runtime (average)	Views (average)	Likes (average)	Comments (average)
Clip	457	33.75	2m 3s	281,046	4,405	78
Trailer	305	22.53	2m 7s	556,530	3,394	140
Review	99	7.31	11m 7s	223,492	5,779	263
Reportage	92	6.79	7m 47s	520,667	6,356	318
Remix	77	5.69	4m 33s	729,638	6,574	208
Interview	62	4.58	6m 57s	559,566	6,774	196
Music	56	4.14	3m 58s	9,069,783	74,266	1,561
Full film	56	4.14	36m 2s	105,365	1,161	24
Influencer content	28	2.07	7m 12s	798,591	27,054	1,797
Original content	23	1.70	2m 37s	460,769	8,154	174
Making of	20	1.48	3m 41s	675,702	7,532	120
Summary	19	1.40	6m 29s	463,614	5,226	1,001
Other promotion	16	1.18	1m 42s	1,410,096	20,928	336
Deleted scene	11	0.81	2m 37s	57,096	750	30
Star content	9	0.66	5m 40s	300,397	2,564	80
Mistakes/outtakes	8	0.59	8m 42s	738,028	9,057	103
Personal video	6	0.44	14m 40s	24,185	927	94
Full episode	5	0.37	22m 59s	214,483	1,484	104
Language	2	0.15	11m 17s	209,800	17,081	185
Reaction	2	0.15	4m 30s	12,576	46	40
Merchandise	1	0.07	1m 37s	655	6	8
<b>Average</b>			<b>8m 1s</b>	<b>785,793</b>	<b>8,169</b>	<b>248</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>1354</b>	<b>100%</b>				

Table 3: YouTube Video Categories<sup>12</sup>

<sup>12</sup> It should be noted that the results for the category of "full film" are inaccurate: the YouTube Movies account

It is worth noting that the 762 videos within these categories refer not only to the seven films in the sample but also to other connected audiovisual products that emerged in the results (that were deemed relevant), including sequels (in the “Ocho apellidos”, “Inbetweeners” and “Fack ju Göhte” series), remakes (*Benvenuti al Nord*, *Welcome to the North*, Luca Miniero 2012; *The Upside*, Neil Burger, 2017; *No manches Frida*, Nacho G. Velilla, 2016), or other products by actors/directors involved (in particular Dany Boon, Kad Merad, Omar Sy and Checco Zalone). Unsurprisingly, this impacts those films with greater quantities of related content: for instance, almost two thirds of the clips relating to *Fack ju Göhte 2* are actually clips from other films in the other series (strikingly, a high number of clips dubbed into Italian); around 20% of the clips for *The Inbetweeners Movie* and *Quo vado?* likewise relate to other content by the same creators or within the same series.

Attempting to understand how this content is distributed along national boundary lines is challenging. In general, as the data in Table 2 illustrates, there was a high level of overlap between the results among the different geolocalized searches: on average, 45% of the videos were duplicates. Already this is a potentially interesting result: on the one hand, it seems to indicate that even multinational and multilingual content is considered relevant by YouTube and therefore emerges in recommended results for different countries; on the other, however, one might argue that this is rather connected to a lack, within non-national European (NNE) markets,<sup>13</sup> of content relating to films that are only popular domestically—hence YouTube is forced to reach to foreign-language content to satisfy the search. Evidently a much larger sample would be required to reach more decisive conclusions.

A further element of difficulty when seeking to understand the national specificity of the videos is due to the great flexibility of YouTube: users can upload content from wherever, in any language, and often the video details—title, description, even user name—can be either geographically unclear or even in a language other than the audio of the clip itself (for example, a clip uploaded in a German dub with an original French title). At times, the videos have automated subtitles in different languages, at other times they have hard-coded subtitles—that are not necessarily mentioned in the title or description.

Taking into account the videos with dubbed audio or non-automated subtitles, on average, 44% of the trailers and 65% of the clips were available only in the original language. The data does not indicate any consistent variation between the domestic successes and the more global films: of the trailers, 27% and 67% of *Intouchables* and *The King’s Speech* respectively were in the production language, while the other films varied between 31% and 67%; as regards clips, 49% and 67% from the “best travelled” films were original language only, while the more domestic successes range from 21% to 94%.

Overall, the languages of the countries we searched were the most common foreign-language versions of the clips. German and Italian were most common, with, in total, 69 trailers and 31 clips dubbed into the former; 35 trailers and 81 clips dubbed in the latter language (this excludes the films produced in those countries). English subtitled videos (7 trailers, 14 clips) and French

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does not publicly record views and comments are switched off. The few views here are taken only from the handful of other (usually illegal) videos or links, so the data is skewed down. Moreover, the average length is under a feature-length film as the category also includes any content relating to full film streaming online, including e.g. linking sites.

**13** Here we use Huw D. Jones’s terminology, where “non-national” is shorthand for his NNE, “Non-National European” films, i.e. “films produced in one European country but released in another” (Jones 2018, 325).

subtitled or dubbed videos (15 trailers, 10 clips) were a lot less common. The Spanish figures lie in the middle (24 trailers, 16 clips). This potentially signals a greater openness among Italian and German-speaking audiences for popular European cinema, even comedies.<sup>14</sup> The results also produced clips and trailers with subtitles or a dubbed soundtrack in: Arabic (1 video), Czech (4), Dutch (1), Hebrew (1), Hindi (3), Hungarian (2), Galician (1), Greek (3), Mandarin (1), Polish (1), Portuguese (4), Russian (3), Turkish (3) Slovakian (1).<sup>15</sup>

## INDUSTRIAL AND CULTURAL INFLUENCES

Beyond the clips and trailers, some less recurrent categories nonetheless conceal further insight with regard to the consumption of these films, at the intersection of three different impulses: the importance of the promotional machinery surrounding a film's release, the specifics of a popular film's position within a national (if not continental) culture, and the standards of the forms enabled by the platform.

Regarding the first point, indeed, a great deal of the content that emerged in these searches—including, of course, the trailers and many of the clips mentioned previously—contribute to the promotion and publicity of these releases. In addition to trailers, this also includes further official production materials, such as deleted scenes and behind-the-scenes, as well as interviews, predominantly with the cast (or actor-creators, such as Checco Zalone). The results also included some original content with indirect promotional functions, for instance the cast of *Fack ju Göhte* in "switch off your phone" warnings for cinemas, or the protagonists of *Bienvenue chez les Ch'tis* in an advertisement for the Fédération française de golf.<sup>16</sup>

Stardom is an important key for this content. For each film, one or two actor names feature prominently in many video titles, descriptions and tags: Dany Boon and Kad Merad; Checco Zalone; Elyas M'Barek, Karoline Herfurth and Jella Haase; Clara Lago and Dani Rovira; Omar Sy; Colin Firth. This is slightly less common in the case of *The Inbetweeners*, perhaps due to the choral nature of the films and the TV series, as well as the earlier career stage of the lead actors, though interviews and gossip reportages about the four protagonists do appear.

The search algorithm's attempt to provide relevant results (Rieder,

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<sup>14</sup> In the Italian case, this result is moreover consistent with Jones's findings (2018), albeit his work focuses predominantly on arthouse production.

<sup>15</sup> Beyond the categories of trailers and clips, videos also emerged in the sample in Indonesian, Kurdish, Thai and Vietnamese: all review or summary videos. The searches also revealed much content that was specifically localized (in title and/or video description) to Australia, Quebec, Mexico and Latin America generally, in English, French or Spanish.

<sup>16</sup> @RatPackFilm, "FACK JU GÖHTE (2013) - 'Handy aus!' Spot \*\* HD \*\*", 07/08/2013: [https://youtu.be/\\_e75PI5seUc](https://youtu.be/_e75PI5seUc); @ffgolf "Le golf, pourquoi pas vous ? - Dany Boon & Kad Merad", 29/06/2018: <https://youtu.be/3w-tbJeXcU4>.

Matamoros-Fernández, and Coromina 2018) also draws on stardom. Indeed, many of the other films emerging within the results (including many of those that were deemed irrelevant in our manual data cleaning) were commonly connected to the same stars. This included *Nothing to Declare* (*Rien à déclarer*, Dany Boon, 2010) and *A Perfect Plan* (*Un plan parfait*, Pascal Chaumeil, 2012), both starring Dany Boon, for example. One striking example of this is the case of Antonio Albanese, who emerges in a dozen results for the Italian localized search relating to *Bienvenue chez les Ch'tis*. Though the Italian comic is not in the French film—nor indeed in the Italian remake—he produced a 1997 theatrical monologue with the title “Giù al nord”, which is the Italian translation and release title for the French film. This was enough to produce results relating to other (unrelated) films featuring Albanese.

Though the sample remains too contained to reach concrete conclusions, these results bear striking gender skew, with the most visible stars being male protagonists and just two female romantic leads. One exception is Jella Haase, who recurrently plays Chantal, a teenage girl and student who tortures/is tortured by the protagonist teacher in the *Fack ju Göhte* series. Here, the comic role is as visible as the actress herself: the search results contain original content featuring Haase/Chantal such as the “Chantals Klassiker” series, in which the character riffs “idiotically” about classic novels, made to promote *Fack ju Göhte 2* and *3*.<sup>17</sup>

In general, content relating to stars is evidently made for the domestic market, as it has little translation, with the exception of a few interviews that have dubbing or subtitles. One standout exception is found in the promotion for *Quo vado?* in Germany. The comic actor Bastian Pastewka, who dubbed the protagonist for the German release, features 19 times across the titles, descriptions and tags of the videos. This also includes a couple of promotion videos uploaded by the German distributor of the film, Weltkino Filmverleih, in which Pastewka greets audiences, speaks a few words of Italian, or makes jokes about the film and its title.<sup>18</sup>

Beyond the theme of stardom, some of the other video categories contain promotion of sorts that can have a much greater regional relevance. One instance relates to *Ocho apellidos vascos*, where twelve related videos were uploaded on the channel of EITB (Euskal Irrati Telebista), the public service broadcaster of the Basque autonomous region. This content, in Castilian or Basque, consists of regional promotional material such as maps of location shoots or reports of cinetourists visiting the region. This example can in fact

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**17** E.g., @ConstantinFilm, “FACK JU GÖHTE 2 Chantals Klassiker - Dschurässik Park”, 01/09/2015: <https://youtu.be/Al4eVf4HHZw>; @ConstantinFilm, “FACK JU GÖHTE 3 Chantals Klassiker - Romeo Julia”, 21/10/2017: <https://youtu.be/YjAEm75LZdc>.

**18** The German release title is *Der Vollposten*, referring to the “fixed post”/ permanent position that the protagonist is keen to maintain in the film, though it echoes the word “Vollpfosten”, meaning idiot or neanderthal. Hence, Pastewka humorously reminds audiences not to put the “f” in the title. @WeltkinoFilmverleih, “Der Vollposten | Bastian Pastewka Clip ‘Filmtitel ohne f’”, 26/07/2016: <https://youtu.be/7GQZudG0jCk>.

be situated within a broader tendency, whereby the kinds of videos indicate the terms in which the films' narrative motifs are tied to their role as cultural reference points in their own countries.

Specifically, one of the key themes that the seven films have in common is that of overcoming differences. In the more global successes, *Intouchables* and *The King's Speech*, this plays out through identity categories of race, disability and class; in the popular comedies with a more national reach, this is consistently elaborated at the level of regional or national difference. In *Bienvenue chez les Ch'tis* and *Ocho apellidos vascos*, humour is constructed through regional differences, while *The Inbetweeners Movie*, *Fack ju Göhte 2* and *Quo vado?* all feature travels abroad and renegotiations of national identity—or a comedic inability to adapt. Consider the nostalgia that Checco feels for Italy when he sees Sanremo on TV in Norway, or the ignorant stereotypes made by the “Inbetweeners” about foreign police officers. While, on the one hand, this seems to indicate a “pan-European” interest in these kinds of cultural tensions, on the other, they also have a declension in these films through a single-nation-specific humour that, as the box office data would seem to indicate, does not necessarily travel all that well (Higson 2021b, 223).

This tension, between transnational themes that play out on a national level, becomes apparent in the kinds of content that emerge in the YouTube videos. In this regard, one particularly significant category is what we labeled “reportages”: news reports, often broadcast on TV channels, if not online news, featuring issues related to the films. Hence, while these videos are a step removed from the content of the movies, their cultural or social impact is given some form. The reportages relating to *Intouchables* and *The King's Speech* are multi-lingual and relate, respectively, to the true story that inspired the former (for example, what are Philippe Pozzo di Borgo and Abdel Sellou doing now?) and to the royal family, especially true accounts of King George VI's stutter and recordings of real speeches that he delivered.<sup>19</sup>

While the reportages are almost universally made for other media, especially local or national news channels or, in the case of King George's speeches, newsreels that have been digitized, much other related content is more closely tied to YouTube itself and its own grammars. Here we refer in particular to the content created for social media, such as influencer or personal/family videos. A small amount of this is tied to the same regional dynamics mentioned here: family videos of trips to the Département du Nord, for instance, or humorous videos about what it means to be a Ch'ti.<sup>20</sup> Though they are not the most frequent form of content, these videos demonstrate how these popular films

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**19** For example, @Luca7423 “Quasi Amici, che fine hanno fatto i veri Driss e Philippe?”, 11/04/2020, <https://youtu.be/T44mNlamXsQ>; @Eloquent, “El verdadero discurso del Rey”, 11/05/2012, <https://youtu.be/wGRb7odxqvw>.

**20** @Journaldunemaman, “BIENVENUE CHEZ LES CH'TIS CHOUX - FAMILY VLOG”, 11/02/2018: <https://youtu.be/L1Kg1nUMW-w>; @NormanFaitDesVideos, “NORMAN - BE A CH'TI”, 02/09/2017: [https://youtu.be/ZO\\_M5bBQedI](https://youtu.be/ZO_M5bBQedI).

have entered into a common parlance as a cultural reference.

More explicit engagements with the films are found in the many reviews and remixes uploaded by YouTubers. Among these, the vast majority of reviews are simple recaps or summaries, though some are more complex analyses with a more academic tone; one such example is a video essay reading of Slavoj Žižek's thought via *The King's Speech*.<sup>21</sup> While made for video blogging, these clips tend to have a standard form with little editing and a duration of around 10 minutes. Short clips and remixes, differently, tend to demonstrate a quicker pace and editing by the user. The former are short clips from the films (on average, 42 seconds), reproduced in portrait mode and overlaid with words, emojis and/or hashtags; these are clearly designed for the YouTube "shorts" feature—but equally for TikTok or Instagram reels, i.e., a cross-social media format. These are consistently among the videos with the highest levels of likes, views and comments.<sup>22</sup> Remixes, on the other hand, recut and combine various clips that narrate the story of characters (and especially romantic relationships), and are typically overlaid with extra-diegetic music. Once again this can be understood as the films—and particularly short comic clips or romantic/friendship narratives—being integrated, as cultural references, within a different kind of grammar and for different kinds of audiences, potentially across social media. If the reportage clips mentioned above perhaps indicate how these films intersect with broader socio-cultural issues, these shorts and remixes potentially indicate a whole other reception dynamic: one that is more closely related to generic codes of comedy or romance.

## INTERACTIONS AND COMMENTS

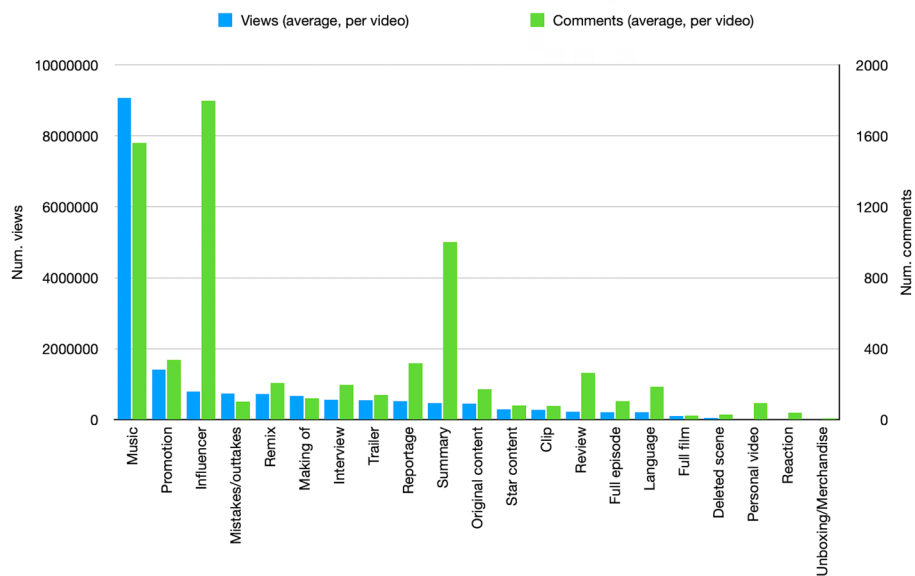
The average views and comments per video category are illustrated in [Figure 1](#), below, and detailed in [Table 3](#), above. Though space restricts us from providing an extended analysis of every category, one that merits a little attention is that of music, equating to 5% of the primary categories. This is commonly the official video of a soundtrack song, or a cover version. What is more, music videos have, by far, the highest interactions of all kinds. In terms of the average number of viewers per video in each category, music videos are by far the most viewed: over 9 million average views, six times more than the next category (promotional videos). While this is likely tied to a specific use of YouTube, as a music player, it is also noteworthy that music videos on average have the

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**21** @julianphilosophy, "Guide to Žižek: On 'The King's Speech'", 23/12/2022: [https://youtu.be/h\\_nptnlmpXc](https://youtu.be/h_nptnlmpXc).

**22** While "social media content" was not included as a principal category in our research, it was marked as a subcategory for clips, reviews and remixes in particular. Isolating and summarizing these in relation to the other categories (detailed in [Table 2](#)), it has respectively the 7<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> highest rate of average views and comments per video, but the second highest rate of likes, after music videos. We return to these general interaction rates in the following section.

Fig. 1  
Average views (Y1 axis) and comments (Y2 axis) per category



second highest comment rate (after influencer videos), with 1500 comments per video on average, hence, perhaps not merely a passive listening.

A further trend that is worthy of note is the importance of the comment rates for influencer and summary videos—two categories that evidently have porous boundaries. This is also not entirely surprising, given that creators who are versed in platform dynamics often seek the active engagement of users: suffice it to think of how, on YouTube, the request to “like and subscribe” has shifted into common vocabularies. Hence, a higher interaction rate here is to be expected. Moreover, the relative presence of a high comment rate in the categories of reportages and reviews is interesting, especially with respect to the average view count, insofar as they represent two lines of user interaction with the films themselves (film content and social impact), as we have suggested above.

The comments themselves are rich in insight. The scope of this article unfortunately does not enable us to study their content extensively. To provide preliminary insight from a manageable sample, we restrict ourselves to the top twenty videos with the highest number of comments from just two primary categories: trailers and film clips. We scraped all comments and ran them through an automatic language recognition system, before subjecting the results to a brief manual check. Though we recognize that the other kinds of videos will certainly have relevant comments, these two categories are most directly connected to the films and therefore, we hypothesize, potentially contain a more direct sense of audience responses.

Within this, a very clear tendency of linguistic segmentation appears. Indeed, among the twenty videos with the highest numbers of comments, in each case the majority—between fifteen and nineteen videos—are in the original language of the film. This signals that the most interaction in comments is skewed to original-language rather than foreign-language audiences in YouTube content, at least for these categories. Unsurprisingly, the vast majority of the comments



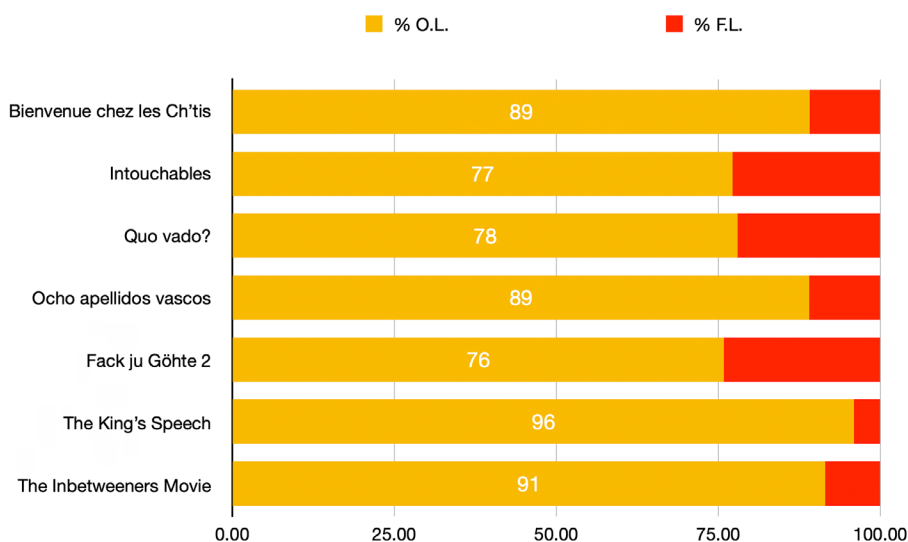


Fig. 2  
The percentage of comments in the original language of the video (OL) and in a foreign language (FL)

on these videos are in the same language as the audio (i.e., even if a French film is dubbed into Italian for the clip and trailer, the comments are also in Italian). Figure 2 indicates the percentages of comments that are in the same language as the video itself; as the figure indicates, this tendency is reproduced across the sample. As it demonstrates, then, the multi-lingual interactions with content are a minority.

One key exception to this trend comes in the case of *Intouchables*. For Nakache and Toledano's film, the videos and the comments are more variable. Eleven are French videos, the other nine consist of four English (including the two most commented videos), two Italian, two German and one Spanish. Overall, however, across all the comments, over half are in English (7500).<sup>23</sup> Moreover, across the 14,335 comments that were recorded among the videos relating to *Intouchables*, the automatic detection system that we used in fact registered more than 75 different languages. The top fifteen among these—all of which had more than twenty comments—are (in order of popularity): English, French, Italian, German and Spanish, then Telugu, Chinese, Portuguese, Malayam, Russian, Tamil, Arabic, Dutch, Polish and Romanian. Interestingly, the prevalence of Telegu and Tamil emerge in one video in particular—a short—which has very many comments from Indian spectators that highlight the connection to the Telegu remake of the film, *Oopiri* (Vamshi Paidipally 2016), also released as *Thozha* in the Tamil version.

Overall, while the regional inflections of engagement in the comments would seem to indicate that they generally do not shift beyond national geographic boundaries, the great success of *Intouchables* and the greater variety of

<sup>23</sup> It should be noted that the level of engagement varies quite significantly from film to film: the comments from the top 20 trailers/clips of *Fack ju Göhte 2* and *Intouchables* are very many (both around 15,000), while the comments on *Bienvenue chez les Ch'tis* and *Ocho apellidos vascos* are much lower at around 2,000 (the other three films vary from 6-7,000).

languages within its comments perhaps indicates that a wider circulation is not necessarily impossible to achieve.

## CONCLUSION

Observing the trends of circulation and interaction of some highly successful European films on YouTube, many of the patterns that characterize their off-line popularity are obviously repeated: linguistic segmentation, the importance of stardom in the construction of audience engagement, the difficulty in “exporting” films belonging to genres relying on cultural specificity (such as comedies). Nevertheless, other elements point to the potential capacity of this platform to also facilitate *different* forms of engagement—a potential that, at the current stage, seems to be exploited only in part, and without a strong coordination of the European film industry and the institutional programs that support it. For instance, distribution companies seem, for the most part, to respond to offline and traditional media logics in the content uploaded to YouTube (e.g., trailers, clips, publicity made for theatres or TV), drawing heavily on stardom. There is little attempt, at least in our sample, to tailor this content to YouTube—something that is surprising considering that the videos generating the highest rate of interactions are the ones made by influencers who are not directly affiliated to the films themselves.

From our initial survey, YouTube emerges as an interesting arena for the dissemination of a “popular European cinema” for a variety of other reasons. First, it is a platform in which the interaction between the films and other traditional media content (such as news/reportages) already happens consistently. In a fragmented mediascape such as the European one, characterized by national boundaries and multilingualism, the possibility of flexibly combining to each film a variety of national/regional contents could be a strong advantage over other contexts of circulation. This ties in with the issue of the films’ exportability outside of their respective national contexts: the example of *Intouchables*, cited at the end of our analysis, points to the fact that a popular European cinema that transcends boundaries (more than the majority of the films do) is hypothetically possible.<sup>24</sup> Another indication of YouTube’s potential can be found in the report of the European Audiovisual Observatory (Grece 2021) highlighting a slightly higher availability of films in countries other than their own on VOD platforms, as compared to theatrical distribution. The inclusion of YouTube within this report reminds us of the singularity of this website: it is also a VOD service and a means of shaping a film’s circulation culture, as well as a social network. As a repository of European films, indeed, it acts in different ways: it showcases the

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**24** See, for instance, the AHRC-funded project “Producing the Post-National Popular: The Expanding Imagination of Mainstream French Films and Television Series”; the first research outputs are available on the website: <https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/modernlanguages/research/french/currentprojects/postnationalpopular/>

continent's audiovisual heritage in forms that de-centralize the emphasis on the arthouse/auteur canon, as well as on theaters as the legitimate venue for the cinematic experience. It increases fan-based content and engagement, allowing conversations across European audiences (and outside), and creating new and diverse engagements with the archive of European films. All these elements suggest that further inquiry into audience engagements with European films through YouTube is necessary in order to better grasp what can make European cinema popular today.

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