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'I was doing something that wasn't aligned with me' : quit discourse on YouTube video diaries

'I was doing something that wasn't aligned with me': Quit Discourse on *YouTube* Video Diaries

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Abstract

The Great Resignation was a mainly American economic trend in which record numbers of employees voluntarily resigned from their jobs, beginning in early 2021 in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. Within the neo-liberal thought, quitting could be viewed as a sign of weakness or an act of disobedience. This may partly explain why many American "quitters" (i.e. individuals about to or who have already left their jobs) have turned to social media platforms to upload (semi-)spontaneous videos in which they express their reasons and motivations for quitting their jobs in the form of public diaries. Within this specific historical and socio-cultural background, the present study offers a snapshot of the "Quit Discourse" by first adopting a linguistic perspective. Particularly, to understand how these individuals determine and redefine their emerging identity, the study combines sentiment analysis and corpus-informed methods with qualitative discourse analysis that draws upon recent theoretical insights from critical work sociology. Findings reveal that speakers construe quitting as a positive and beneficial experience of the self and represent themselves as purpose-driven visionaries.

Key words
Digital discourse; identity; mixed methods; Great Resignation; video diaries

1. Introduction[1]

The Great Resignation (Klotz 2022) is the term used to describe the record numbers of people who voluntarily resign from their jobs. While not a new phenomenon, it gained attention during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, when it reached its peak (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 2022) with millions of workers quitting their jobs, whether by deciding to downshift on the career ladder or by simply taking time away from the workforce. The phenomenon has been observed in many industrialised countries and, in particular, in the US (d'Aniello 2022). It seems to have gone beyond typical identity segmental variables (e.g., age, gender, social statuses) representing a "transformation in how people engage in work" (Gloudemans 2021: 2). This trend has naturally been extensively studied from the economic viewpoint, since it caused significant repercussions to the workflow

system, and has also originated parallel phenomena, e.g., the "quiet quitting" (i.e., keeping one's job, but without career ambitions or the desire to go beyond one's basic tasks).

Leaving a job is naturally a very defining moment in any individuals' life, since in contemporary societies having a job means having an economic, as well as a social, status within the world, i.e., being part of the societal system. Being unemployed is a matter of concern for the individual, and for both their micro (e.g. families) and macro (e.g. national policies system) community, a concern which may lead to stigma and ostracising phenomena. In consideration of this, presumably with the aim of obtaining social acceptance, many "quitters" (i.e., individuals about to or who have already left their jobs) have turned to social media platforms to upload (semi-)spontaneous videos in which they discursively negotiate their (new) identity and articulate their reasons and motivations behind their decisions to quit their jobs, in form of public diaries. Such broadcasted narratives (Aran, Biel and Gatica-Perez 2014) may be understood as discursive reinterpretations of a societal change, and explored from a critical-linguistic perspective, with the aim of understanding the shift of values, beliefs and interpretations in (and of) contemporary society.

This study is a pilot analysis conducted on a small scale to test feasibility and yet, it contributes to the existing body of research on the Great Resignation phenomenon going beyond the economic and financial, as well as sociological, aspects that have already been extensively examined (Briggs 2021; Gallup 2021; d'Aniello 2022; among others). It also expands the linguistic studies to the workplace dimension, which have mainly focused on linguistic diversity (e.g., Dale-Olsen and Finseraas 2020) and workforce's usage and needs. More specifically, this paper intends to explore the phenomenon from a different angle, adopting a "human" perspective and focusing on the narratives of the social actors, who explore the discourse of quitting as a confessional subjectivation technique. Grounded in critical discourse analysis, critical stylistics and corpus linguistics, this study aims to understand the changing values, as well as the inner desires, surrounding career choices. It contributes by finding how the individuals' conceptualisations regarding job resignation change from being associated with lack of perseverance and determination to the craft of quitting as a positive and beneficial experience *of* and *for* the self.

This contribution is organised into distinct sections. To set the background to the study, we review the relevant literature in the domain of workplace and work system studies. This allowed us to acknowledge the scarcity of research into the discourse of job resignation from a more linguistic-oriented perspective. Subsequently, we elucidate the context that underpins our data selection. The chosen corpus and the employed methodology for its examination are then described. This is followed by an analysis of specific relevant segments, which are finally discussed in the concluding section.

2. Background

2.1 Perspectives on the Great Resignation phenomenon

As seen in Section 1, the Great Resignation is a term to define the phenomena that occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic and peaked in 2021, with a large number of employees voluntarily leaving their jobs (Gardner 2021). Together with "Great Resignation" (Klotz 2022), which eventually gained consensus, other labels were used in the mediasphere, as "Great Reshuffle", "Great Renegotiation", "Great Rethink", "Great Realization" (Goldberg 2022; Gulati 2022; Maister 2022), which all index the experience as a crisis of extraordinary dimension. The phenomena did not seem to have a pattern among those who resigned (it included top earners as well as recent hired), who moved to new and unrelated jobs for reasons of reshuffled priorities, including a new sense of self-awareness, which had made them question and (re-)evaluate work-life balance decisions. Although resignation rates were particularly high in the US, a similar trend was observed in Western Europe (YPulse 2021). Results did not show significant differences across gender and working experience samples, although significant differences were found for the reasons why people quit, in particular in samples analysed by educational attainment and by race and ethnicity (Parker and Horowitz, Pew Research Center 2021). Furthermore, it was observed that younger adults and those with lower incomes were more inclined to resign from their positions adducing reasons such as inadequate pay, time pressure, lack of opportunities for advancement and feelings of disrespect (Parker and Horowitz, Pew Research Center 2021). As highlighted by Gloudemans (2021), the Great Resignation can be defined as a trend which was occurring "due to a confluence of factors coalesced to create a transformation in how people engage in work" (Gloudemans 2021: 2). One possible reason for quitting has been hypothesised in the work-from-home situation, which affected peoples' behavioural, affective, and cognitive processes (as argued by Serenko 2022, among the others), since employees redefined life priorities downgrading on the career ladder. Moreover, they faced a different (e.g. hybrid/remote) working experience, willing to achieve a sustainable work-life balance and limit burnout. This trend deeply affected companies' retention strategies (Perry 2021), which included a more focused employee-centred approach (Hirsch 2021). Given its social resonance and economic implications, the Great Resignation has attracted scholarly attention, with a focus primarily on exploring how organisations perceive and respond to the issue. For instance, while recognising the effects on the individuals, numerous studies have mainly focused on the managerial and organisational dimensions. These include reduced business process efficiency and knowledge loss, damaged intra-organisational knowledge flows, as well as lower relational capital, lost networks, and a decline in general human capital (Serenko 2022). Consequently, this trend has encouraged a change in human resources policies, strategies, and practices (Tessema et al. 2022). Concerns are therefore raised on how to adjust organisational strategies aimed at using the available human capital more efficiently. In other words, a scholarly and intra-management dialogue has started looking at the

crisis by examining the individuals' priorities, decision-making processes, and the underlying causes of instability.

2.2 *The context: Video Diaries*

YouTube has been studied for its multiple communications styles and genres within ethnographic, sociological, and linguistic approaches to analyse how participants maintain social networks and develop sharing activities. This platform represents a source of data to examine daily social phenomena and lived realities since it captures multimodal (verbal and non-verbal) dimensions of an experience (Benson 2016). Social interactions, on the other hand, are studied for their influence on determining the extent of impact that a video exerts on users (Susarla, Oh and Tan 2012), or to investigate the drives behind users' engagement (Khan 2017). Research has addressed various linguistic issues involving computer-mediated styles, interaction, storytelling, multimodal features (Benson 2016, Johansonn 2017), as well as pragmatic features (e.g. the opening sequences in videos, Frobenius 2011; or networking Johansson 2017, Dynel 2014, among others). Learning from this "messy fieldwork environment" (Postill and Pink 2012: 126), the present study looks at YouTube as a valuable source of data, thanks to its affordances (i.e. the constraints and possibilities the platform allows) within the theme of user-created confessions. As argued by Mostafa et al. (2023), COVID-19 has emerged as a trending topic since 2020, especially in discussions revolving around professional concerns and dynamics. In particular, work-related issues were the starting point to narrate one's experience in a confessional manner, exploiting the well-known self-healthcare practice of video diaries.

A video diary serves as a means to explore the inner parts of the Self, and to analyse feelings and emotions in the style, and within the genre, usually associated with a confession. In linguistic terms, the confession is a highly structured speech act (Carr 2013), in which the Self employs specific strategies to be presented to Others as a coherent, authentic self (Gershon 2016).

As a new articulation of confessional modes, video-diaries showcase similarities with traditional/literary confessional forms in their incorporation of self-performativity and self-reflexivity, as well as discussions of taboo topics; other than issues associated with personal conflict and/or trauma. In traditional confessions (e.g. therapeutic confession), such disclosure of personal feelings and secrets are linguistically marked by the use of the first personal pronouns and present tenses, colloquial speech and direct language to reduce the distance between the speaker-persona of a text and the writer's personal voice (Reyes et al. 2008, Carr 2013, Gershon 2016). Hence, video diaries are a (relatively) new practice used by people to engage in introspection, and considered a tool for capturing and processing experiences and/or emotions. The therapeutic benefits are elicited by a better understanding of personal emotional regulations, in particular when people struggle with self-expression, because the visual recording of facial expressions and body language can encourage the connection to a deeper level.

Due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the stay-at-home measures, video diaries became a widespread practice across many countries, used

by individuals to investigate their feelings (Feng, Feng and Ivanov 2022), while adjusting to the then called "new normal". This trend was particularly noticeable in the US, at times spectacularised by media shows, as in the case of CBS This Morning.

Video diaries began appearing on YouTube prior to 2020, possibly as a response to the "fragmentation and uncertainty that are said to characterize the present postmodern moment" (Strangelove 2010: 67), in an effort to alleviate existential uncertainties (Evans 1998). It should be noted that YouTube offers the possibility of exploring one's true identity providing (a pretence of) authenticity while acknowledging the social platform audiences, in the attempt to provide media fame. It has been chosen as the preferred platform for video diaries especially due to its widespread accessibility, user-friendly interface, and ability to reach a large and diverse audience. These factors facilitate the individual response to the new aesthetic value of sharing the "authentic self" in widely interactive processes while exploiting audience feedbacks (Strangelove 2010).

The impact of the digital platform on identity performances should be further investigated to understand the reasons why individuals choose YouTube and how this platform influences the production and circulation of quitting narratives. However, because of space limitation, this study focuses on video diaries as a media practice, which is still an evolving genre. Yet, they have been studied within different approaches and for different goals, from the epistemological standpoints that focus on what is to be understand to be "real" or "true", to the view of a post-television practice, where communication is seen either as more authentic than traditionally allowed (Tolson 2010) or as the antithesis of the aesthetic of transparency (Bolter 2007).

We decided to look at video diaries as they were published on YouTube, since it represents a multisemiotic platform for self-expression, entertainment, education, and business (Tay 2021). In fact, as articulated in scholarly studies across different disciplines, this platform facilitates various "freedoms: freedom of expression, freedom of information, freedom of opportunity and freedom to belong [...], which makes YouTube one of the most dynamic spheres of societal creative practice and exchange" (Shiryaeva et al. 2019). In particular, video diaries represent a confessional space (Strangelove 2010) where individuals turn to negotiate their identity, or to self-represent themselves, probably in answer to the surrounding contemporary confessional culture, as well as to the societal urge for publicness.

Uploading a video is a simple procedure, although video makers have acquired a set of skills to make them more entertaining and more aesthetically appreciable. Video audiences too have developed a set of skills to look at these texts and appreciate their content, distinguishing between the different goals they accomplish, namely advertisement, newscasts, personal drama, etc. (Strangelove 2010). Video diaries are constructed according to the set of skills producers have (for instance, many videos have images or words over-imposed on the screen, and music completes and accompanies certain voice tones or narratives). However, they maintain the desire for document realism and the pretence of a non-edited (multi-semiotic) text.

As previously mentioned, authenticity in media communication is a heavily debated issue, in consideration of the fact that reality is already a quite complicated concept open to interpretation. In our view, video diaries can be defined, adapting Kalakh's (2022) description for animation, as both "documentary realism" (in that they reproduce at least a part of reality) and "realism in fiction" (since the reality is performed for an audience in a media product). Whether the image that is offered is filtered by the consciousness of an audience – and therefore the "real you" (Strangelove 2010) is to be understood under the authenticity offered in media communication (Zummo 2020) – certainly video diaries represent a dramatic change from what was considered to be private (and even a secret) to what is offered as a public practice, negotiable both in video (under the pretence of a dialogue with the audience) and in the comments that follow the video (as an asynchronous interactive practice offered by the platform). Individuals spontaneously narrate their experiences, recording their emotions within a sobriety of tones (that empowers their narratives as indisputable and yet, relatable), blurring the boundaries between a constructed media product and a spontaneously-given testimony of certain social experience.

In addition, video diaries respond perfectly to the participatory and connectivity culture and create an online environment that is open to anybody, but is mostly visited by people belonging to Generation X (born between 1965–80), Millennials (1981–96) and Generation Z (1997–2012) (Statista 2022). This particular audience is able to receive the video-content as a construction of reality while also finding the narratives relatable to their own social reality, thus deeming them "authentic". In fact, although every experience is unique, some emotions, ideas, and experiences are common among individuals living in contemporary society. Sharing and consuming these online seems to be an everyday practice that creates relatability among viewers and creators. Quitting confessionals, in particular, emphasise emotions (e.g. fear, anxiety), and highlight the risks of the situation (i.e. living without an income in a capitalistic society, living with a stigma, etc.), which resonate with (both old and young) adults at large.

However, the focus of this study is on the quitters' videos, therefore their framing of resignation discourse and their struggle to represent their values, beliefs, and emotions. Guided by this, video diaries are considered as important insights into the individuals' experiences, or at least into what individuals consider important to share, and their understanding and perception of their experiences. Since video diaries pivot on reflexivity (ultimately, the subject matter is the self as well as a subjective reality), they offer a direct way to understand people (Khan 2017), as they show intrinsic truths of an external reality (Kalakh 2022). Video diaries, therefore, belong to the discourse(s) of the real and contribute to the "construction of social reality" (Nichols 1991: 10 as in Kalakh 2022).

These are the main reasons why (semi-)spontaneous videos are investigated as a source to study how individuals discursively negotiate their (new) identity as quitters, and express their reasons and motivation about quitting their jobs in the form of public diaries, which eventually show how these subjects re-articulate/re-imagine the world of work (i.e. what worker's image these confessions enact).

3. Data

In recent years, the paradigm of data collection for linguistic studies has undergone a significant transformation, with an increasing emphasis on utilising digital sources. The vast user-generated content available on social media platforms offers researchers unprecedented access to authentic language usage, making it an invaluable resource for investigating linguistic patterns, discourse dynamics, and societal issues (Herring 2013). The suitability of the sample is contingent upon several considerations, encompassing the research's objectives and the domain from which the data is being collected. In the context of this pilot study, the primary aim was to collect a dataset that achieved the highest possible level of representativeness concerning the personal digital narratives of individuals who have voluntarily resigned from their jobs, as these narratives are expressed on *YouTube*.

The available data acquired for this research and named as the *Resign Corpus* (ReC), comprises 12 videos totaling 28,831 words. It is worth noting that despite its seemingly modest size, the ReC offers many elements of interest making it possible to study a specific context of language use with specific aims, structures of discourse, and participant roles and expectations. As will be elucidated in the subsequent sections, a combination of quantitative and qualitative research tools and methods were adopted to uncover the linguistic and discursive nuances within this small yet valuable dataset. It is also important to highlight that the selected videos are authored by a heterogeneous cohort of non-professional youtubers, whose ages range between 20 and 30 years (See Table 1) and are indexed as American speakers. This assemblage of content creators exhibits a diverse spectrum in terms of gender representation and professional vocations. Furthermore, the focus on non-professional creators has been instrumental in augmenting the prospects of obtaining unrehearsed and unedited content, affording significant value in understanding how language is used within a less regulated and more authentic milieu. Notably, our emphasis resided in the content generated throughout the duration of the COVID-19 pandemic and its subsequent aftermath. This time frame was motivated by the pandemic's instigation of the Great Resignation phenomenon, among other significant factors. Although it is acknowledged that the videos are multimodal products (which are in some examples highly edited, often with intercut visual scenes and overlay graphics), the non-verbal resources are not investigated in this paper, which focuses instead on the spoken-word narratives that is deemed as crucial in these videos for their confessional message/appeal.

Table 1. Video diaries in ReC

Sample	Video Title	URL	Duration	Wordcount
1.	How I knew it was time to quit my job to focus mental health	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p-pzdevWY62Q	9'44''	2031
2.	I resigned	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n6oG-bOWKWSE	10'06''	1891
3.	I quit my accounting job	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y_uw17Z-Abac	8'01''	1254
4.	Why I quit my high-paying job	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VCX-p7_4NUnA	10'06''	1819
5.	I QUIT My 9-5 Job and it was the BEST decision ever	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-Bx1xOD-dt4E	17'20''	4140
6.	Physician burnout: why I quit my last job	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zu5Ssqlx-puw	18'35''	3041
7.	Why I quit my job | vlog	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_giwre-phbHI	12'47''	1840
8.	I quit my job… without another lined up // healing my mental health	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ILxBLY-fZENg	7'49''	1668
9.	Why I am quitting my 9-5 job… (quitting architecture)	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eQvEsYv3P64	15'02''	3333
10.	How I QUIT my job without having another job lined up Career change	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Safax-eQU9dY	13'31''	2481
11.	I quit my job after realizing this	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vv4E-2TyGHao	6'57''	1419
12.	I quit my job - here's why	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fD-kFOWIXNK4	22'51''	3914
		Total	**150,49**	**28,831**

4. Theoretical and Methodological Framework

To gain a comprehensive understanding of the linguistic and discursive traits within the data, an exhaustive review and repeated examination of the transcripts were undertaken by both authors. Although initially generated through automated processes, the transcripts underwent rigorous manual checks to ensure their accuracy and fidelity to the original content. This validation process was crucial in establishing familiarity with the data and forming a solid foundation for subsequent analysis. Once the integrity of the transcripts was confirmed, a dual approach combining both quantitative and qualitative research tools and methods was employed.

The initial phase encompassed sentiment analysis, that is the computational study of opinions, emotions, and attitudes expressed in a text. It is a software-assisted technique that automatically analyses datasets for opinion and/or sentiment polarity (positive, neutral, or negative ones) to understand the feelings and reasons behind statements (Pennebaker and Francis 1996; Tausczik and Pennebaker 2010; Pennebaker et al. 2015). In particular, the Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count (LIWC, Pennebaker et al. 2015) was used as emotion and part-of-speech tagger, since certain word categories act as indicators of specific psychological characteristics. Notwithstanding the conventional usage of LIWC for discerning psychological states in text (Tausczik and Pennebaker 2010), sentiment analysis is regarded as a first step into textual examination that necessitates validation through qualitative analysis. Therefore, LIWC has been used as the initial stage in the triangulation process, categorising messages based on socio-psychological variables that reflect pertinent facets of identity. The software does not simply map the emotive content nor count the expressions of emotion. In fact, a word can be associated with different verbs and change the meaning, or a particular phrase can be used in active or passive voice, changing, therefore, the sense of what is being said. By taking into account the parts of speech (e.g. pronouns, negations etc.), LIWC investigates verbal behavioural markers that offer reliable indicators of a person psychology (Pennebaker et al. 1996), comparing individuals' texts to built-in theme dictionaries evaluated from a psychometric perspective (Pennebaker, Boyd, Jordan and Blackburn 2015)

Secondly, corpus-based tools, as outlined in McEnery and Brezina (2022), Baker (2023), among others, facilitated the identification of recurring patterns, frequency distributions, and collocations allowing a more fine-grained analysis (Baker 2023). As previously mentioned, the size of the corpus used for this study may seem modest or even insufficient if compared with much larger general language corpora in corpus linguistics research. However, the usefulness of a corpus depends not solely on its size but on the specific information one aims to extract adopting analytical tools (Koester 2010; Anthony 2012). Hence, the corpus used in the present study remains an important resource for addressing questions requiring specialised data not found in large, generalised collections. More specifically, it contains data limited to a single topic (job resignation), genre (video-diaries), and type of text (semi-spontaneous speech), while also addressing a specific purpose of investigation and contextualisation. As it allows the iden-

tification of grammatical and lexical patterns occurring with regularity within a specialised discourse, it can be considered large enough for a reliable analysis. Furthermore, the familiarity with the context has allowed us to supplement our quantitative observations with supportive qualitative analyses (Flowerdew 2004).

The purpose of the qualitative examination is to uncover the underlying meanings, discursive strategies, and socio-cultural implications embedded in language use, and is therefore consistent with Discourse Analysis (DA, Van Leeuwen 2008). Specifically, discourse analytical categories are relevant to explore how legitimations, moral evaluations and social practices are constructed in discourse(s). A salient focal point in this investigation was the exploration of identity construction within the *YouTube* videos, a topic that finds resonance in the work of Schwartz, Koen and Vignoles (2011). Drawing upon their studies, the research focused on how individuals, within the context of the pandemic and its aftermath, projected and negotiated their identities through linguistic choices and narrative presentation. The intersection of identity construction with the broader themes of job quitting and experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic enriched the analysis, offering valuable insights into the ways in which language plays a pivotal role in self-expression and social positioning on digital platforms like YouTube.

In essence, the adopted mixed methods approach, incorporating sentiment analysis and corpus-informed discourse analysis, supplemented by prior research on identity construction, provided the opportunity to obtain an examination of the video diaries' linguistic and socio-discursive dimensions, ultimately contributing to a deeper understanding of the digital discourse surrounding the Great Resignation phenomenon.

5. Findings and Discussion

The findings presented in this study were derived from a combination of tools, namely LIWC (Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count) (Pennebaker et al. 2015), a dictionary-based lexicon that maps words and word stems to psychologically relevant categories, and Sketch Engine (Kilgarriff et al. 2014), a web-based concordancer for the analysis of corpus texts. To ensure clear presentation of the findings, the description is organised into two distinct sub-sections, each dedicated to results obtained from their respective techniques.

5.1 Preliminary Results from Sentiment analysis

The computational analysis by means of LIWC enabled the identification of personal pronouns, serving as indicators of human actors in the texts. These are shown in Figure 1.
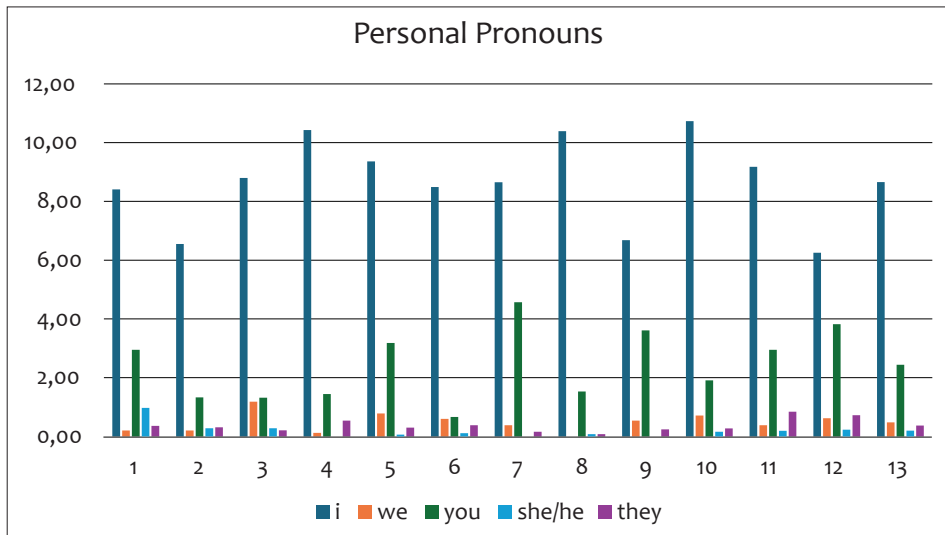
Figure 1. Dimension of occurrences for personal pronouns in ReC

The highest rate for the first personal pronoun *I* reflects the diaristic mode of the videos, while the second person pronoun *you* occupies the second most frequent occurrence, and is evidence of the (pretended) interactional nature of these digital narratives, although it is also employed as a strategy for generalisation. The use of *you* is a linguistic strategy to address and establish a relation with a collective receiver in interaction. On YouTube videos, however, the audience engages with the content as a form of media-viewing first, and contributes to the interaction as a secondary activity, exchanging asynchronous text-based posts as is typical of the platform's design (Dynel 2014). In this scenario, more than expecting a typical sequence construction among participants, the speakers employ the interactional *you* to construct a therapeutic alliance, in which they feel listened to and understood.

Time orientation (see Figure 2), that is a meta-category not directly related to social and affect (Pennebaker et al. 2015), has been used as a diagnostic tool for assessing the focus of speakers' attention.

Figure 2 shows a focal interest to the present, while past orientation mostly refers to anecdotes. Quite interestingly, utterances related to Future are not relevant in these texts, as if the speakers were addressing only the immediate contingency of the act of resigning. By going further into detail, it becomes evident that the most useful semantic area seems to be related to the affect dimension as well as to the drives. These include categories employed to reveal a spectrum within which people choose to self-disclose their feelings and motivations. When articulating results in Figure 3 and 4 (see below), speakers employ a similar language and display sensitivity to certain drives, such as needs and motives. They also tend to favour positive expressions over negative ones. As widely recognised, this inclination is typical, as most video-creators aim to convey a positive self-image.
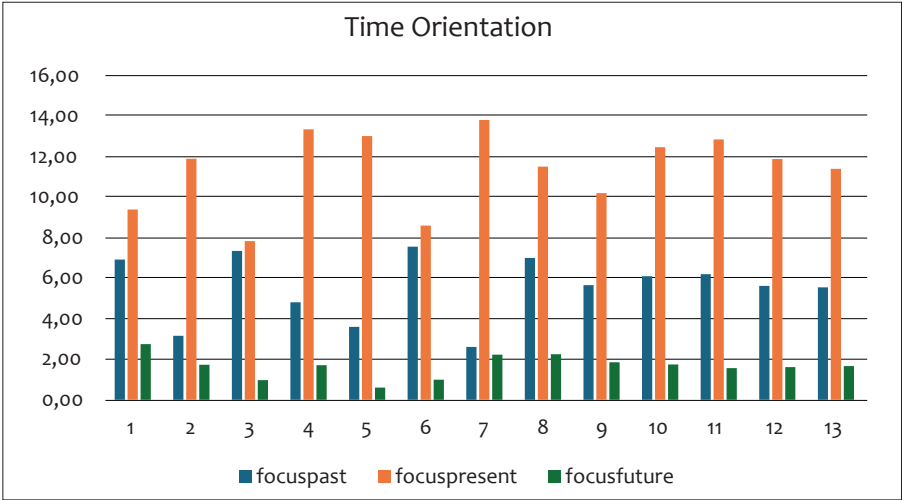
Figure 2. Time orientation in ReC

Negative emotion encompasses words signalling specific psychological states (anger, sadness, anxiety), which are further differentiated in expressions of depression (e.g. *bad*), anxiety (e.g. *worried*, *fear*), and stress (e.g. *cry*). What seems to be interesting, though, is that when negative load is involved, it predominantly centres around feelings of anxiety rather than anger, which might have been the more expected emotion to manifest. Concerning the analysis of drives, it is evident that speakers place a greater emphasis on the domain of achievement, which includes references to both success and failures, as well as power, such as statuses. Additionally, the concept of reward garners substantial attention, while the domain of affiliation does not appear to have high occurrence rates.
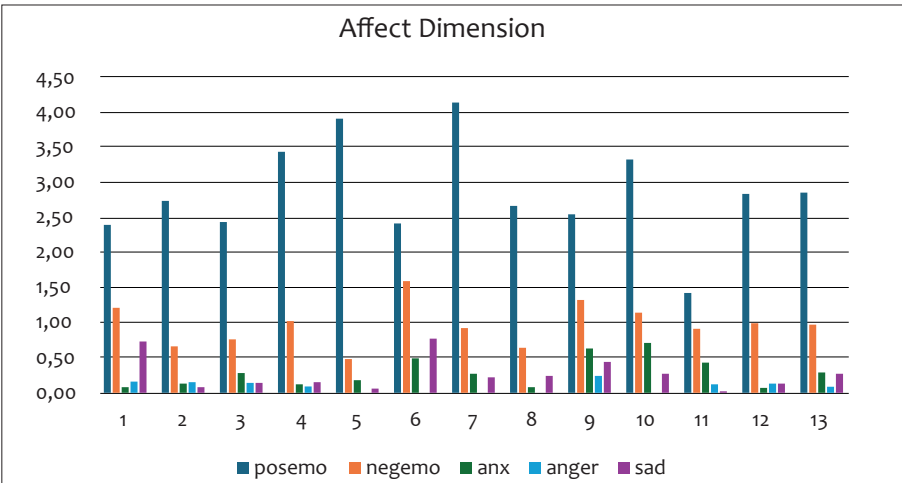

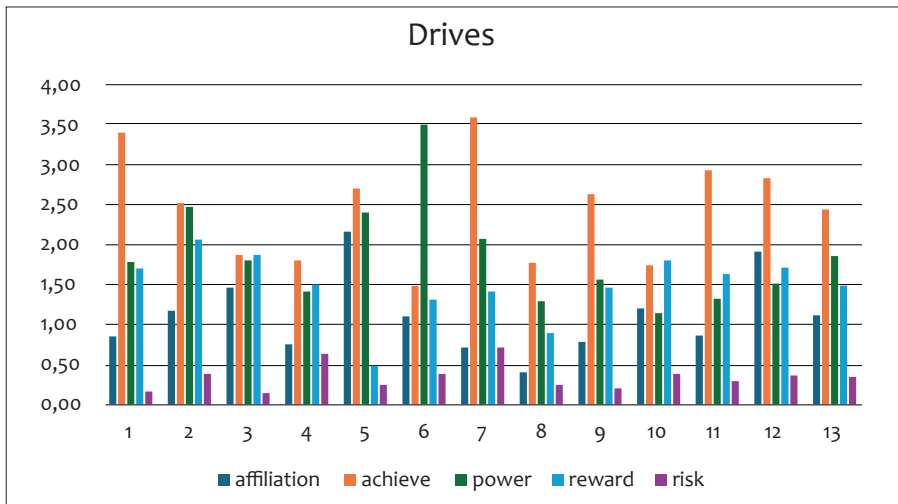**Figure 3.** Dimension of emotive expressions in ReC

Figure 4. Selection of most relevant drives as found in ReC

This result holds significance, given that affiliation pertains to the drive concerning relationships with others. Hence, despite the public nature of these videos, it can be hypothesised that these narratives primarily serve the purpose to address the self, rather than be used in relation to others, e.g., to justify the speaker.

5.2 Corpus-informed analysis

As previously highlighted, the corpus was designed to capture language usage related to the theme of job quitting on YouTube video diaries, making it well-suited to the specific target matter. As the texts within the focus corpus (the one studied) primarily exemplify spoken and informal American language, the selection of the *Open American National Corpus-Spoken* (OANC) as the reference corpus (a general corpus of the same language as the focus corpus) was considered particularly apt. The reference corpus covers various aspects of spoken American English from 1990 onward, therefore it provides an ideal benchmark against which the content-specific ReC can be contrasted and contextualised.

To begin the analysis, a list of keywords was initially extracted from the focus corpus. It soon became clear that in order to obtain a more representative picture of the discourses surrounding job quitting in the corpus as a whole, consideration needed to be given to the distribution of keywords across the texts. In light of the corpus's modest size, the determination was made to incorporate keywords appearing in no fewer than four of the twelve texts. This led to the acquisition of a set of ten keywords (Table 2) from the initial one hundred.

Table 2. Shared keywords in ReC

Nr.	Word	Freq.	Doc. Freq.	Score
1.	*youtube*	16	6	498.2
2.	*nine-to-five*	10	5	306.1
3.	*pandemic*	9	5	275.6
4.	*journey*	21	6	161.7
5.	*instagram*	5	5	153.6
6.	*quitting*	13	4	143.0
7.	*fulfilling*	9	4	81.7
8.	*path*	22	8	70.0
9.	*focusing*	7	4	69.7
10.	*videos*	30	9	57.9

In order to ascertain the discursive context of resignation within the corpus, the shared keywords were arranged into semantically related groups of words (Table 3). This approach allowed for the swift identification of the major themes in the YouTubers' accounts:

Table 3. Keywords arranged into semantic groups

1.	Digital Platforms: *youtube, instagram, videos*
2..	Work and Career: *nine-to-five, quitting*
3.	Personal Growth and Development: *pandemic, journey, fulfilling, path, focusing*

Encountering words associated with digital channels and genres as some of the most frequent and statistically significant lexical items in the data was rather expected. Consequently, attention was directed towards what evidently denotes the most indicative themes in the corpus. These will be analysed in the subsequent parts of this section.

As regards the group of keywords pertaining to "Work and Career", it is worth highlighting that the expression *nine-to-five* encapsulates various aspects of contemporary work-related discourse. While *nine-to-five* is sometimes used interchangeably with *full-time job*, it tends to carry connotations of a traditional, potentially monotonous office job with set hours and to be associated with a lack of flexible working arrangements. Beyond its literal meaning, the expression *nine-to-five* invokes the idea of an outdated work practice in line with older generations' values and beliefs leading to a rigid and unfulfilling work life, contrasting with more satisfying career paths. Specifically, it tends to arise within video segments

that address the topic of the so-called "work-life balance". It can imply a desire to escape the constraints of a strict work schedule and explore more flexible lifestyle choices, possibly towards remote work, freelancing, or non-standard working modes:

(1) It was in 2021 where I thought to myself: I am going to go so hard at doing this content that I'm gonna make this my job. I am not going to work in an office for 30 more years of my life. Now in 2022 I really doubled down on my content and working with brands. Ended up making more than I actually did at my **nine-to-five job**. I really wanted to create a lifestyle around what I love to do, rather than having to do something I went to college for, when I declared a major at when I was 18 years old and didn't know anything about life. Basically, every single time I went to work in 2022, I was absolutely miserable, because I was seeing it as I was getting time taken away from this, from basically building myself. I realized that the more effort and the more time I put into creating content, the more I would get paid and the better I would feel about it, and the more passionate I was and the more snowball effect that it created for me.

As illustrated in the excerpt above, when *nine-to-five* functions as an adjective, it exclusively modifies the noun *job*. While *job* does not appear in the keyword list (Table 2), its significance within the corpus cannot be overlooked due to its alignment with the overarching themes. Therefore, a word-sketch analysis of *job* (166) has been conducted to further explore its grammatical relations and implications within the corpus. Analysing the discourse surrounding the concept of *job*, especially when taking into account the adjectival modifiers, provides a more comprehensive insight into the nature of the jobs under discussion. These aspects include various working arrangements and characteristics, such as the aforementioned *full-time* (12) and *nine-to-five* (7), but also *corporate* (3), *engineering* (2), *part-time* (1), *specific* (1), *real* (1). For instance, *full-time* and *part-time* reveal the duration and commitment level, while *engineering* and *corporate* specify the industry or sector. *Specific job* implies a particular role or function, while *real job* contrasts with hypothetical or temporary positions. Other collocates, such as *last* (3), *new* (1), and *interim* (1) introduce temporal elements to the discourse. Particularly, *last job* reflects previous experiences, *new job* anticipates future changes, while *interim job* suggests transitional roles. Notably, *good* (2), *perfect* (1), and *wrong* (1) reflect individuals' emotions and evaluations regarding their jobs, while *different* (2) is used when varied employment experiences or work activities are talked about. *Other* (3) and *potential* (1) suggest that individuals within the corpus are contemplating or exploring future job opportunities. In particular, *other* is used to emphasise the contrast between the jobs being discussed (i.e. teaching) and the alternative jobs being considered. Within this pattern, references to salary are infrequent, with *85000-a-year* (1) being the sole pre-modifier related to the financial dimension of employment. Collectively, these modifiers offer a more comprehensive picture of how individuals perceive, evaluate, and talk about work within the limited scope

of the corpus. They shed light on the type, nature, and context of various job-related experiences, preferences, and choices made by individuals represented in the corpus.

The Word Sketch tool also identifies the verbs that frequently co-occur with *job* as an object. This reveals which actions or processes are commonly associated with employment in the dataset. As expected, *quit* (43) and *leave* (10) are the most frequently used collocational pairs. The primary and most common meaning of *quit* (v.) is to leave or depart from a place, position, or situation voluntarily. As a more casual lexical choice than *resign* (9), *quit* is often used in everyday conversation to describe leaving a job or ceasing an activity without the formality and structure associated with the term *resign*. In the video diaries under analysis, it is not surprising to find a higher frequency of *quit* compared to *resign*. This trend is in harmony with the genre's informal character, which enables individuals to candidly disclose their experiences. However, the verb *quit* is not merely a more register-appropriate choice, but its analysis within the corpus pinpoints the speakers' underlying imagery, as "[n]o terms are neutral. Choice of words expresses an ideological position" (Stubbs 1996: 107). In common usage, the verb quit has a nearly universal negative connotation as a near-synonym of "failing", "capitulating", "giving up", all of which encompass the idea that quitters are losers and have been beaten down by the system. For instance, in the reference corpus, the *quit* (v.) counts 208 hits and its strongest collocates are *job* (14), *smoking* (10) and *drinking* (7). In the cases in which *quit* correlates with *job* and other related words, such as *work* (6) or *working* (4), it is mostly used in a context that suggests that quitting was not an ideal or preferred choice but rather a decision made out of difficulty or constraint, as this example shows: "I don't think to be able to take care of your own kids without you know with everybody working these days well I had to quit my job because of uh my my two you know uh day care wise or babysitting wise and stuff uh". Instead, the act of *quitting* takes on a positive evaluative sense of courage, strength and self-love and is discursively constructed as an empowering choice to have what these individuals want being then essential for independence and happiness:

(2) **Quitting** a new job is a big deal. It was a big deal for me, it is a big deal for anyone in any career path, and focusing mental health is just as important as the decision on whether or not you should quit your job, take a leave of absence, start that school program one year later, or honestly make any change in your life, **because you are not feeling happy**.

One may argue that this positive implication of the word can be regarded as a way to reaffirm their individual commitment and value. In the data, *quitting* rather than *resigning* further reinforces the idea of giving up something obviously bad like smoking, alcohol, drugs, or an abusive relationship. More specifically, it is used in the context of leaving a job that is considered detrimental, stressful, or unsatisfying and represents a constructive move toward personal well-being and self-improvement, as in the example below:

(3) The job was the thing that was **making me dread waking up every morning**. The job was the thing that was **making me miserable**. Once I realized that it was only me that was going to be able to make the change that I needed, to change the way that I was feeling, nobody was going to do it for me, not my employer, not my parents, not my fiancé, nobody. And once I knew that it was the job that was **standing in my way**, I knew what I had to do. So, months before **I quit**, I made the decision: in a couple of months **I will leave this job**, and I had a rough timeline planned out. And I can tell you that the moment that I accepted that reality that I was going to leave that job, **the entire world got a little brighter**.

Furthermore, *quit* as a verb mostly appears in past tenses and aspects ("I quit my job in banking and left the industry a long time ago") as well as future tenses and aspects ("I hope that sharing this experience can be useful for those of you who are also planning to quit your job or your industry all together soon or sometime in the future"). While providing information on what makes this action a justified and brave one, speakers also deconstruct the common idea that leaving a job is a hasty or ill-considered decision by emphasising a representation of *quitting* as the outcome of thought and necessary choice ("So, months before I quit, I made the decision"), rather than a sudden, unexpected crisis:

(4) There are always going to be a lot of things at play when **you think** about **making a major decision** like **quitting** your job, or **quitting** an academic program, or taking your career in a different direction, and when you involve mental health that calculus changes even more, because mental health is very stigmatized, mental health is not simple, mental health is a lot of work, and of course mental health is very complicated.

This is also shown by the collocational profile of *quitting*, which is the most salient verb form across the dataset (see Table 2) and is frequently preceded by constructions such as 'considering,' or 'thinking about/of' that compel the months and even years to bring the closing of the working relationship that some mistakenly think is only a matter of lack of perseverance and responsibility.

Concerning the third cluster of keywords related to discussions of "Personal Growth and Development," it is significant to observe the pervasiveness of the conceptual metaphor of LIFE IS A JOURNEY (Lakoff and Johnson 1980) in depicting individuals' decisions regarding their professional choices and lifestyles. Within the scope of the analysed context, the findings not only reaffirm but also contribute to the substantial and continuously expanding body of evidence indicating that conceptual metaphors significantly shape and influence our interpretations of the fundamental abstract themes that govern our lives. The analysis of the examples collected from the corpus has shown that as the speakers share their experiences and viewpoints on work choices and career, major professional events, such as starting a full-time job, facing challenges and setbacks, seeking

fulfilment, and ultimately deciding to depart from their current employment, are talked about as landmarks along a *journey* and/or *path*:

(5) This is the norm: **study hard**, **get a job**, **move up the career ladder**, **earn a fat salary**. Growing up, I've never made sense of all these things. Why do we want to spend most if not all of our life building someone else's empire, **playing by someone else's rules**, when **there are so many different paths that we could take** and this is exactly why I wanted to make this video. I want to inspire you to design **your own career**, **your own path**, **your own lifestyle**.

By forming a coherent narrative of one's professional life, the stages leading up to quitting tend to be interpreted as mirroring societal conventions. For instance, in extract 5, the main clause ("This is the norm") is followed by a series of co-ordinated clauses and phrases, connected by commas and conjunctions. These elements express the traditional career trajectory ("study hard, get a job, move up the career ladder, earn a fat salary"), but also convey a critical perspective on conventional career standards. This is also reinforced by another frequently used metaphorical expression, namely "playing by someone else's rules," which implies that adhering to societal expectations in careers involves following pre-defined rules and strategies. This particular instance, as well others within the corpus, highlights the importance of individual empowerment and autonomy in making career decisions:

(6) But all of that said, the thing that I **ended up** focusing on and that **led me** to quit my job, and I think the thing that many people need to think about, is the **path** that you are on is sustainable for you, no matter what **path** it is.

In this case too, the speaker frames one's career as a *path*, which implies a sense of purpose and progression, suggesting a journey with a direction and desti-nation. The manual analysis of concordances of potentially relevant words or phrases reveals patterns of use of further realisations of the JOURNEY metaphor including *direction*, *stage*, *way*, *route*, or *point*. The experiences expressed through this metaphorical construction are also those of making choices about what to do with their lives (e.g. "I decided that this was the route that I wanted to take."; "whether or not it is time for you to move on from whatever it is you are doing"). In most cases, the words *path* and *journey* are used to frame a route that deviates from the conventional trajectory. What the speakers tend to convey is the idea of forging one's own way, designing a unique career, and creating a lifestyle that aligns with individual aspirations and values which may or may not conform to society's traditional definition of success.

Many accounts primarily focus on the emotional well-being and mental state of the speakers, particularly concerning their past job experiences. For exam-ple, the following excerpt vividly illustrates the speaker's struggle with spending long hours at a desk and questioning the purpose and direction of their work.

Here, the repeated use of words and phrases including "burnt out," "stressed," "fulfilling," "completely off balance," and "scattered" underscores the significant emotional turmoil and dissatisfaction the speaker was experiencing, emphasising a sense of being on an unwanted and disorienting life path:

(7) The problem was what I wasn't realizing at the time is not only was I **burnt out** and was I **stressed**, I was also doing something that **wasn't aligned with me**. I was doing something that I **didn't find fulfilling**. I was sitting at my desk 40 to 50 to 60 hours a week, **stressed out** and wondering why I was still doing this and **where I was going with this**. I felt like I was sitting on a train, going to a city that **I didn't want to go to**, **moving to a place that I didn't want to be**. Everything just felt **completely off balance**. I felt just **completely scattered all the time**, that I was just **not where I was supposed to be**.

Particularly, the segments "moving to a place that I didn't want to be" and "not where I was supposed to be" evoke the sense of being on a journey or a path that the speaker feels is leading them to an undesirable destination. Additionally, expressions such as "felt completely off balance" and "completely scattered all the time" convey a sense of disorientation and lack of stability, which are commonly associated with feeling lost or off course during a journey. This is not the first passage (see n. 2) that underscores the idea that the decision-making process should prioritise personal happiness and well-being. Within the corpus, the word *health* (40) predominantly collocates with *mental* (31), totaling 28 occurrences throughout the corpus. Notably, discussions frequently incorporate this issue when addressing the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, as exemplified below:

(8) The first three weeks of the school year were really, really hard, and it really kind of started taking a toll on **my mental health**. I began thinking that switching jobs in the middle of a **pandemic** while teaching remotely in a new school, new district was just not the smartest choice for me at the time, at least not this year.

The corpus-informed analysis also took into account the representation of identity, social roles, and interpersonal relationships. For this reason, a wordlist analysis was carried out to gain insights of the frequency of pronominal reference in the material.

Table 4. Pronouns in *ReC*

Pronoun	Frequency
I	1,750
you	569
my	420
me	229
your	119
we	82
they	63
myself	40
their	36
them	32
yourself	20
our	20
us	11
themselves	3

The results show that two statistically prominent groups of pronouns can be iden-tified in constructing the speakers' identities: *I/me/my/myself* and *we/us/our*. These interact with *you/your/yourself* to indicate direct appeal to the addressee, and *they/them/their/themselves*, referencing other groups (mainly employers and society at large). Within the corpus, the primary function of the pronoun *I* is to express individual positioning through both internal and external categories. Regarding the former ones, speakers mainly express emotions, ideas and interior aspects related to personal identity. This is exemplified by the fact that among the most frequent verbal collocates of *I* (1,754) we find *feel* (116) and *think* (111): "I think that without having this clear plan I would have kept postponing this ...". The pronoun *I* also triggers reference to external categories including experiences, people, places relevant for personal identity of the speaker: "I've worked since I was 18 years old and not a day goes by where I don't aspire to become my own boss". As regards the manifestation of collective positioning, it is worth noticing that speakers tend to employ self-descriptions and references to experiences and people shared by the whole 'community', therefore relevant for the collective identity:

(9) Do **you** want to spend the rest of **your** life prioritizing **somebody else**'s dream? **We** are taught how to make **someone else** rich, **we** are taught how to be a really good worker for **somebody else**, **you** have to unlearn everything that capitalism taught **us**.

The example above also constitutes an additional instance of "otherness", articulated through "*somebody else*", a generalisation that addresses and brings out the juxtaposition between *We* and *Them*. One additional aspect to consider is the use of direct interpersonal positioning by means of explicit reference to the second-person pronoun *you/your*. Although speakers draw on a range of different strategies to engage with their audience, they also use *you/your/yourself* as a form of generalisation to imply that their personal experiences applied to everyone. This is also evident in the following example:

> (10) There's going to be bumps, there's going to be inconsistencies, but the important thing is to stay focused, stay grounded and keep practicing the tools at **your** disposal to focus on **your** mental health. It's very easy to feel like we are judging ourselves, when we make a decision as monumental as taking time off, for mental health or focusing on mental health. But that self-judgement is the thing that holds many of us back. If **you** think about making this decision for **yourself** or through **yourself** down the line, if **you** remember this video, really think about what is holding **you** back from taking that leap of faith: is it the expectations of others around **you**, or is it the expectations of **yourself**?

By deconstructing the conventional negative imagery surrounding both the act of leaving a job and those who perform it, speakers involved in this case study construe quitting as a positive and beneficial experience of the Self. The analysis offers evidence of various linguistic methods (topic choice, narratives and interpersonal strategies) used by speakers in order to engage with their audience in a digital environment and how these help them to generate a coherent identity for themselves. Particularly, the sharing of both their success stories and cautionary tales constitute a common way of giving their narrative more emotional impact. Taken together these results show that, by foregrounding notions of self-discovery and re-alignment with their intrinsic values and needs, these individuals introduce a novel identity as purpose-driven visionaries. Contrary to the initial hypothesis, job quitters do not express any feeling of resentment, shame or guilt. Instead, they depict themselves as resolute individuals who have deliberately reassessed their careers, redefining the concepts of professional success and life satisfaction.

6. Conclusion

In this paper we have explored the speakers' identities as they emerge from the video diaries, considering these texts as a confessional space where speakers allow their Self to emerge (Strangelove 2010) to an external reality (Kalakhs 2022). Despite the obvious fictionality of the performance, video diaries document a part of (the speakers') reality, and are to be considered as a creative practice (Shiryaeva et al. 2019) where people reproduce and exchange social reality. Considering this theoretical framework, we combined quantitative and qualitative analyses to

investigate the insights that are shared within the resignation discourse. Given the small scale of the research, the study may not fully capture the phenomenon of job quitting *en masse* and certainly cannot provide a comprehensive understanding of contemporary workflow dynamics and societal expectations. The outcomes arising from the synergy of the chosen quantitative tools, however, have produced shared insights and tested feasibility for further studies. From a methodological standpoint, our study demonstrated that with a carefully selected small-scale corpus, quantitative tools can provide valuable insights and contribute significantly to the understanding of linguistic phenomena within a specific domain, such as non-professional *YouTube* content related to job quitting.

In fact, exploring the world of employees from a different angle than the one offered in literature (Serenko 2022; Tessema et al. 2022), the data shows that these individuals have stepped away from traditional employment to explore new careers, entrepreneurial ventures, or personal growth opportunities. At the core of this discursive construction lies the metaphorical model of life being structured as a journey and a person living life as a moving entity. These metaphorical constructions play a crucial role when work-related experiences and choices are considered.

Furthermore, from the data emerges that the reasons behind job quitting vary, including a desire for work-life balance, disillusionment with the corporate world, and a shift in priorities. In the process of repositioning themselves, they emphasise personal growth and health, seek careers aligned with their values, and embrace flexibility and independence.

Based on the current analysis, it is evident that the individuals included in this case study predominantly express positive emotions of empowerment and motivation. In so doing, they style themselves as innovators rather than outsiders, foregrounding an elitist perception and construction of self as new leaders, precursors, and trend-setters. In this respect, the post-pandemic job quitters do not depart from the materialistic world leaving everything behind or see themselves as victims of society. Although they refuse to be tied down to a nine-to-five job, they are not driven by a rejection of the status quo or a sense of victimhood, but rather seek fulfilment and purpose in their professional lives, constructing themselves as courageous and determined individuals. This shift does not inherently dismiss traditional work values such as endurance and self-organisation, to name only a few, but rather presents an alternative perspective based on personal fulfilment and autonomy alongside traditional markers of success such as a higher salary or position. These video diaries seem, as a result, a way to exercise and enact a different discourse of power, where the self exerts control over what individuals conceptualise to be satisfactory, decent, and healthy.

From a more critical perspective, although this paper starts by looking at video diaries as digital productions of confessional nature, further considerations should be addressed. As Carr (2013) notes, confession is a "highly ritualized, dialogically structured speech act" (2013: 34) that reveals and reflects the inner states of the confessant. Within the digital context of YouTube, these confessions can also be considered as a performance genre, a way to brand oneself (Gershon 2016). Although these confessions are about scripted constructions of the self, they

also represent renegotiations of work and what should count as acceptable work. The adjectival modifiers found in association with the word job specify various characteristics including duration and commitment that are articulated within individuals' emotions and evaluations as well as conceptualisations about transitionality. Quitting becomes a (at times hypothetical) process towards "salvification", a "journey" that starts by questioning professional choices and personal lifestyle. What these confessions enact is not simply a personal renegotiation of identity as quitters and quitters-to-be but new re-conceptualisations of what a worker should be, or should not be, i.e. someone who lives a life to "build someone else's empire", "play by someone else's rules", who feels "scattered all the time". Although these videodiaries have the linguistic form and tones of confessions (with the use of first personal pronouns and present tenses, together with the results pertaining the drive of the achievement domain), they also rearticulate and reimagine the world of work as a path towards kind sociality, personal growth, and emotional balance. Workers' decision-making processes should, therefore, prioritise personal happiness and well-being, associating a new "humanistic" view with the job dimension. The negative feelings evoked and maintained in these confessions are a stimulus for empowerment recognition since they move from "private" meaning-making to "public" pronouncement. The final product seems to be concerned with personal branding, based on the focus on subjectivity and ideals of entrepreneurial self. However, contrary to previous studies on personal branding in job dimensions (Gershon 2016), the performance that emerges seems to be designed to challenge neo-liberal conceptions of the ideal working self. If viewed from this perspective, what has been first hypothesised as a form of freedom is, in fact, a product originated by imbalance of power and subjects' constraints.

Finally, it is important to acknowledge that this study represents a snapshot in time and that ongoing developments may shape the discourse further. Future research should continue to explore the complexities of the post-pandemic work landscape, including the long-term implications of the Great Resignation and the evolving narratives surrounding work, well-being, and professional identity.

Notes

[1]   The authors have jointly discussed and conceived this paper. Nevertheless, individual contributions in writing this research are identified as follows: Zummo is responsible for Introduction, Section 2, Section 5.1, and Conclusion; Tommaso is responsible for Section 3, Section 4, and Section 5.2.

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