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Popularity Markers on YouTube’s Attention Economy: The Case of Bubzbeauty

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Abstract

This article focuses on issues of attention and popularity development on YouTube’s beauty community. I conceptualise the role of views and subscriptions as *popularity markers*, based on a broader ethnographic examination of 22 months of immersed fieldwork on the platform. I consider the case of Bubz, a British-Chinese beauty guru, through a purposeful sample of 80 videos. A content typology is introduced, presenting four distinctive video categories: *content-oriented*, *market-oriented*, *motivational*, and *relational*. Drawing from the concepts of ‘attention economy’ and ‘metrics of popularity’, I explore content characteristics and affordances for the creation and maintenance of viewers’ attention. I argue that the guru’s uploads lead to two types of audiences –*casual viewers* and *loyal subscribers*. Vlogs renew attention and help maintain the interest first generated by tutorials, leading to treasured subscribers – an essential commodity within YouTube’s highly competitive environment.

Keywords

YouTube; online popularity; beauty gurus; attention economy; popularity markers

Introduction

The proliferation of the ‘presentation of the self’, which involves ‘placing one’s self for public display’ (Marshall, 2006: 639) together with self-branding strategies, is now part of social media culture. Because of the ‘increased access to technologies of content creation and distribution’, not only celebrities but also regular users are increasingly using social media ‘to develop and maintain an audience’ (Marwick and boyd, 2011: 140). Within this current context, celebrities and average users alike strategically manage their online personas and daily shared content with similar techniques and often the same coherence (Senft, 2013; Marwick, 2015).

As Smith argues, the notion of ‘broadcast yourself’, YouTube’s first official motto, became an inherent aspect of modern society (2014: 259). Since the launch of the platform’s Partner Program in 2007 — which offers video creators revenue according to the views their content achieves — users have been increasingly turning into ‘entrepreneurial vloggers’ (Burgess and Green, 2009b: 104). This is closely related to Smith’s consideration of YouTube as a ‘platform for a branded personhood’ (2014: 256). Furthermore, many users not only make a living from YouTube, but also construct successful careers, turning into renowned personalities. More than a million creators monetise their uploaded videos (YouTube, 2014) and thousands earn millions of dollars a year thanks to the high amount of views their content generates (2014).

Online likes and clicks are nowadays ‘defining the new metrics of fame and, by implication, value and reputation’ (Marshall, 2014: xxxiv). On YouTube, not only views are relevant, but also channel subscriptions, which accumulate in millions each day (YouTube, 2014) and contribute to channels’ legitimacy and status within the platform. Moreover, the relevance of those metrics is rendered more visible by the current vast variety and number of videos juxtaposed with the scarcity of available attention. This makes attention a precious commodity, fostering uploaders’ fierce competition for views and subscriptions (see also Burgess, 2012; Jakobsson, 2010).

YouTube and its communities with their practices of producing, commenting, and sharing have been consistently referred to as significant cultural phenomena that merit our attention (Burgess, 2012; Burgess and Green 2008, 2009a, 2009b; Lange, 2007a, 2007b, 2009, 2014; Strangelove 2010). While different types of renowned YouTubers have been examined (e.g. Burgess and Green 2009b; Lange, 2009, 2014; Smith 2014), the platform's beauty community, with the exception of Spyer's (2011) and Tolson's work (2010) is still mostly understudied. Aside from the ever-changing memes and viral videos that simultaneously renew and reinforce the platform's viewership— the consolidation of YouTube popular beauty gurus as legitimised new online celebrities and high-status influential personalities is a fruitful research topic for celebrity culture.

Considering literature that looked at core practices at the intersections of celebrity and digital culture for both mainstream and ‘native’ online celebrities (Ellcessor, 2012; Kanai, 2015; Marshall, 2010; Marwick 2013, 2015a, 2015b; Marwick and boyd 2010, 2011; Meyers, 2009; Usher, 2015; Smith, 2014), I aim to extend this scholarly dialogue to explore the celebrity subject position of ‘beauty guru’ on YouTube’s beauty community, based on the successful channel Bubzbeauty. I map out the most relevant and pervasive qualities of the channel’s tutorials and vlogs to examine the building of popularity and the sustaining of the owner’s role as an influential beauty guru through the years. In other words, I am interested in how her content provides her with an access to (YouTube) stardom.

The beauty community on YouTube, focusing on makeup, skin care, nail art, and hairstyling products and techniques, is a particularly active and large community and also a gigantic market. The number of views that its beauty content reaches per month has been increasing exponentially from 200 million in September 2009 to 1.6 billion views in March 2015 (Pixability, 2015). There are more than 180,000 beauty gurus, who, together with 215 beauty brands, upload a total of 100 hours of content a day (2015). Beauty gurus are users who advise on cosmetics, makeup and hairstyling, demonstrating and teaching practical matters through regular video posts in the form of video tutorials as step-by-step How-To guides. The channel I am focusing on is owned by Bubz, a young British Chinese woman

born in Northern Ireland who currently lives in Hong Kong. She has been uploading videos, and successfully sustaining her popularity, since 2008. Her 300+ videos have been watched more than 3 million times (YouTube, 2016). With almost 3 million subscribers, she is among the 55 most subscribed YouTubers in the UK (Socialblade, 2016). Her high subscription figures at times positioned her channel higher than the official British YouTube channel, the music band Coldplay, or even the BBC's account (Socialblade, 2014).

Further understanding the building of online popularity on YouTube not only contributes to conceptualising the specific ideology of fame on the platform, but can also inform us about the inherent social significance of new types of celebrities who, even as '*just* online celebrities', unknown to the public at large, appear to embody the same societal and cultural roles as mainstream celebrities. As a text, a site, and a sign of both symbolic and practical (everyday-life) values, they provide (and viewers actively make use of) the same paradigmatic opportunities once reserved only for the consumption of and interaction with mass-media celebrities: to discuss, learn, emulate, admire and criticise (Kanai, 2015; Redmond, 2014; Usher, 2015). Additionally, in the words of Marshall, they promote the chance of 'talk[ing] about sometimes very intimate and personal topics, but in a very public way' (2006: 639).

I argue that Bubz, as well as many other beauty gurus, provide viewers with chances of further defining their individuality (Gamson, 2011; Holmes, 2004; Marshall, 1997, 2010, 2006; Redmond, 2014, 2006; Smith, 2014; Usher, 2015) through 'forms of borrowing, creation and circulation' (Kanai, 2015: 323). This is why delineating the performances of popular subjectivities can also further our understanding of 'our individual *public* identities' (Marshall, 2014: xxxvii).

While examining celebrity from the perspective of the performance of authenticity (e.g. Dyer, 1991, 1998; Ellcessor, 2012; Marwick, 2013b; Meyers, 2009; Tolson 2001, 2010) and intimacy with viewers (Lange 2007b, 2009; Redmond 2014, 2006) are fruitful

approaches, I focus here on how Bubz's celebrity subject position is constructed and sustained from the perspective of her video content. Likewise, considerations of YouTubers' constructions of gender (Anarbaeva, 2011; Jeffries 2011; Wotanis and McMillan, 2014) or national identity aspects on YouTube (e.g. Guo and Lee, 2013; Smith, 2014) are undoubtedly valuable framings but are not part of the scope of this article.

Furthermore, online celebrities' embodying both aspirational and relational values (e.g. Marwick, 2013b; 2015) together with the re-framing of the paradoxical celebrity binary of ordinary/extraordinary (Dyer 1998, 1991; Gamson, 2011; Holmes, 2004; Littler, 2004) to allow for a legitimised famous persona are also relevant research areas. However, here I am interested in paying close attention to the community-based popularity affordances of her 'sustained programming' (Burgess, 2012: 55).

Exploring the Phenomenon with an Ethnographic Eye

This article draws from a broader ethnographic examination of the channel Bubzbeauty, part of YouTube's beauty community, performed between 2013 and 2015. I analyse audiovisual content, textual comments, as well as interactions and practices, looking for emerging categories and overarching themes that help us understand the phenomenon of beauty gurus and its central community dynamics.

I perform a contextual, open-ended examination (see Lange, 2014), through qualitative data analysis (Merriam, 2009; Saldaña, 2009). In this vein, the study is structured as an exploratory study following a data-driven, inductive rationale. The data collection and analysis are based on 22 months of immersed fieldwork, conducting systematic observation, coding, and interpretation (Wolcott, 1995, 2010) of videos and comments. The complete data corpus of 313 videos, all available videos of the respective channel at the beginning of data collection, and more than 20.000 comments, draws on online daily-life experiences within the beauty community of YouTube as exemplified by Bubz and her uploads.

As noted in the introduction, in this article I focus on the content of the guru's uploads and consider the emerged video categories' characteristics and affordances for online visibility and attention development. The chosen purposeful sample for this article is of 80 videos uploaded to Bubz's channel between 2008 and 2013. Together they amount to more than five hours of audiovisual material. I considered the videos and transcriptions, interaction and feedback from subscribers in the form of comments, and her own textual video descriptions. In line with this, Lange argues for the analysis and interpretation of whole channels as complete 'video oeuvre[s]' (2014: 217) and points out the analytic significance of user comments and textual descriptions of the videos offered by creators.

The pre-coding phase and the first coding cycle (Saldaña, 2009), which aim at indexing data, covered aspects such as main topics and formal video structure. The categories were data-based; they emerged from the videos and transcriptions and were not defined a-priori. Her videos were categorised according as for instance tutorials focusing on hairstyle, makeup, nails, skin care, contests and give-aways, tags, hauls, as well as relational, motivational, personal vlogs. The transcriptions of her videos were indexed, pre-coded and manually coded (Saldaña, 2009) and finally interpreted together with the audiovisual data sample for a holistic analysis. With regard to comments, after pre-coding, I manually assigned mostly descriptive, verbatim or *in vivo* codes (Saldaña, 2009). Because of the short length of the comments it was not necessary to employ separate software or perform second coding cycle to generate more abstract categorization, since the manual coding allowed for a straight-forward categorization.

Everyday cultural practices and interactions are at the heart of YouTube and, at the same time, a most productive research issue when looking at digital communities (Strangelove, 2010). As Burgess writes, 'the ordinary is core business for cultural studies' (2011: 316). Because 'culture is not simply a series of memorable events; it exists above all in the minutiae of everyday life' (Boellstorff, Nardi, Pierce, 2012: 81). As such, we can collect and immerse ourselves in (digital) data, as ethnographers with the aim of discovering the meaning-making actors and processes that guide experience and shape cultures.

YouTube as a Multi-Purpose Online Platform

YouTube has been described as a ‘media archive’ (Burgess and Green, 2009b: 5), a ‘repository’ (Lange 2014: 11; Strangelove, 2010: 13) as well as a ‘mediated cultural system’ and ‘communicative space’ (Burgess and Green, 2009a: 7; 2008: 15). Additionally, Burgess and Green, as well as Lange, concur in seeing YouTube as a ‘network of creative practice’ and a ‘networked ecology of communities of interest’, respectively (2008: 2; 2014: 18). In line with this, Strangelove contends that analysing YouTube implies examining popular culture, since ‘almost the entire lexicon of modern life is already represented’ in it (2010: 13). Lange writes that YouTube is ‘much more than a place to go and see viral videos’ (2014: 9).

As a site of ‘participatory culture’ (Burgess and Green, 2009b: 7) YouTube is a place where users are ‘co-producers of meaning’ because they engage in activities such as uploading, discussing, viewing, and reviewing (2009b: 95). Users’ actions leave ‘material traces’ that play a vital role in consolidating value for advertisers (Burgess, 2011; see also Baym, 2013). As will be discussed later in this article, these activities are reflected in metrics, which can strongly influence a channel’s popularity and subsequently value within YouTube’s competitive platform ecology. To summarise, users’ clicks and comments have the power of acting as ‘performative’ markers (Burgess and Green, 2009b: 41), heightening online visibility and attention.

It is also relevant to underline the active role of YouTube as a ‘broadcast platform’ (Burgess and Green 2009a: 5) with the clear business model and aim of generating economic value from uploaded content. The platform works, as Burgess argues, with an ‘aspirational strategy’ (2012: 55) in which successful YouTubers are actively promoting their channels’ content and their online personas ‘selling his or her capital as a kind of brand loyalty’ (Marshall, 2014: 95-6). Moreover, the platform also started a comprehensive guide –Creators Hub– offering assistance to creators regarding content-planning and audience management including specific rules and guidelines for acceptable content. This is

part of what Burgess describes as the ‘formalisation of amateur media production’ (2012: 53).

The Claws of the Attention Economy

Various scholars recognise the influence of the predominant ‘attention economy’ that is currently active online (Burgess and Green, 2008; Goldhaber, 1997; Marwick, 2013a; Senft, 2013). It is especially dominant on YouTube, where users increasingly compete for attention since the creation of the Partner Program (Burgess, 2012; Jakobsson, 2010). Strangelove identifies a strong ‘oversupply’ of options for us to watch on YouTube, which leads to users and their respective content actively competing with each other to ‘dispute our attention’ (2010: 71). Moreover, boyd sees online attention as a ‘limited resource’ that works as a profitable ‘commodity’ (2011: 53), something that Jakobsson agrees with (2010: 109).

Alice Marwick argues that social media-based metrics are currently turning status ‘into something that can be quantified, qualified, and publicized’ (2013a: 206). She suggests that achieving online attention implies ‘high visibility’ as well as the highly valued ‘ability to command an audience’ (2013a: 77). These factors combined help rendering an online persona, or self-brand, who turns more and more valuable with each click and view. For instance, on YouTube, these treasured popularity markers take the form of views, comments and, particularly, subscriptions. On Twitter they are embodied by followers and retweets and on Facebook they are expressed in likes or the number of friends a user has.

These ‘quantifiable metrics’ (2013a: 110), which define online value and legitimacy and promote through this visibility and popularity, are recognised similarly across the literature, albeit with slightly different terms. Burgess and Green call them ‘metrics of popularity’ (2008: 2) or ‘measures of attention’ (2009b: 40), while Marshall terms them ‘metrics of fame’ (2014: xxxiv), and Jakobsson writes about ‘measures of success’ (2010: 111). I name them ‘popularity markers’ and discuss them in view of my findings in the next section.

As Burgess and Green identified, it is interesting to note that these metrics not only act as markers of popularity, but indeed reinforce the status of the recipient of attention fostering their visibility. They have a ‘descriptive function’ and a ‘performative function’ (2009a: 41). Popularity is, thus, further consolidated by means of a ‘public stamp of approval’ (Marwick, 2013a: 164).

Baym discusses the use of these markers parting from the assumption that audiences have been actively participating and transforming both markets and industries, while, in return, ‘industries have appropriated the digital traces audiences leave’ (2013: 1). For instance, on YouTube, the number of subscribers a user has greatly influences their positioning and legitimacy as a successful YouTuber. This is because by subscribing, people knowingly decide to be notified every time the channel is updated with the purpose of not missing any new content. As such, and since subscribers deliberately intend to follow a channel through this action, they can be considered regular viewers.

This is rendered even more relevant considering the high amount of views that beauty gurus such as Bubz reach through their *regulars* –fans and subscribers– and how this figure further influences their popularity and status. The greater the number of clicks and views, the higher the degree of circulation and ubiquity of their content and personal brand. Subsequently, this further promotes viewership. This relates to Jakobsson’s argument that ‘popularity leads to visibility and the chance of spreading that popularity’ (2010: 111).

Views and Subscriptions as Popularity Markers

As noted before, views and subscriptions can be considered major metrics of success within the attention economy currently active on YouTube (see also Lange and Ito, 2011). Burgess sees the existence of a loyal YouTube audience that expresses sustained attention as ‘essential in demonstrating value to advertisers’ (2011: 327). However, Bubz’s uploads are not simply one-time viral videos; rather, her channel as a whole has been able to reach and *sustain* a high degree of interest and engagement through the years. Especially taking into

account that she has been uploading content and enjoying viewers' attention for more than seven years.

Bubz uploads weekly makeup tutorials and *vlogs*, or video blogs, as she calls her more personal and spontaneous videos. During tutorials, she quickly and easily demonstrates how to achieve makeup looks and hairstyles. She also offers tips, reviews, and recommendations regarding beauty products, especially makeup. In her vlogs, she answers user comments and questions, but mostly shares with her global audience her everyday life and activities in Hong Kong. Over the years, she has included footage of intimate moments that one usually shares only with friends and family, such as her husband's proposal, her wedding and honeymoon, the moment she tells her husband that he is going to be a father, and the development of her pregnancy. These videos, as 'narratives of the intimate' (Marshall, 2006: 643), can be related to the many 'opportunities for the public display of once-private feelings' (Aslama and Pantti, 2006: 167) that today's 'confessional culture' (168) facilitates.

As I will explain in the next section, these videos are among the most liked, subscribed, and commented videos of hers. Many of Bubz's videos focus on love, friendship, and family issues where viewers are addressed as trusted friends, as part of the same community. She receives thousands of comments on her videos, where users commend her for her spontaneity and candour, her creativity and know-how, and her friendly personality. Many of those commenters thank her not only for beauty tips, but for being a role model in their lives and helping them in their personal growth.

I argue that, in order to analyse status and popularity on YouTube, one must differentiate between views and subscriptions. They are essential in terms of reputation and legitimacy within the platform and even outside of it, in offline scenes. As noted in the previous section, they do not only display but also actively perform –in terms of influencing– online value. Depending on how many views and subscriptions a channel achieves, it is accordingly deemed as relevant and attention-worthy or not. A very direct and easy way of

measuring interest on YouTube is to consider the number of views a certain video achieved. Mass media usually pay attention to this when referring to viral videos or memes, as well as the general public when discussing YouTube popular content and trends. Even though this is a partially useful measure, I suggest that the most significant dimension of sustained interest –and the channel’s subsequent legitimacy within the community— is determined by the number of subscriptions a channel achieves (see also Wattenhofer, Wattenhofer, Zhu, 2012).

Sustained engagement with a channel is reflected through users’ ongoing commenting, sharing, and subscribing. Considering this, I argue that the main object of desire for video creators – and the most relevant measure of attention within YouTube’s beauty community – are subscribers. The number of subscribers subsequently equals both social and economic value (García-Rapp, 2016). Subscriptions imply long-lasting, sustained attention directed to the channel, and content creator itself, because they come from viewers’ conscious wish to continue following her updates. What is more, I suggest that Bubz could not have maintained her status and visibility through the years without her vlogs sustaining that first generated attention.

Vlogs renew and reinforce audience interest in Bubz through the ongoing sharing of her personal life, as well as her thoughts and opinions on topics such as love, friendship or career. According to my findings, her guru-based vlogs are what guarantee that people keep on tuning in. The performed statistical overview of her channel figures further confirms this. My analysis showed that vlogs led to more subscriptions and more shares than did tutorials. If one takes, for instance, her 20 most commented videos only four of them are tutorials and the rest are vlogs. I will expand on these figures in the next section.

In terms of engagement with the channel, we can identify two types of viewers: *casual viewers* and *loyal subscribers* (see also Burgess, 2012). Despite being watched and commented on by her regular followers, I argue that tutorials best reflect and foster a type of audience that I denominate as *casual viewers*, who first get to know Bubz through these

uploads. As content-centred uploads, they enjoy high degrees of circulation due to their easy ‘searchability’ (boyd, 2011). Their specific titles make tutorials easily accessible through keyword searches and, thus, always open to new viewership (García-Rapp, 2016). Although there are no statistical data available, from a qualitative perspective, views can be seen in this case as generated through keyword searches, for example when looking for a tutorial on ‘hair waves’ or ‘easy curls’ (2016).ⁱ This is why I suggest that tutorials mainly generate attention for her channel, as also confirmed through the amount of views they receive.

On the other hand, subscribers, even when interested in the content itself, illustrate a higher level of interest towards the guru herself, rather than just the tutorials. Many of Bubz’s followers express through comments that the experience of watching her vlogs is entertaining because it can be both inspirational and fun, because of her. Vlogs provide through their content and structure moments for audience engagement and identification with Bubz on a personal level, since they are not makeup-related. They are not only an ‘emblematic form of YouTube’s participation’ (Burgess and Green, 2009: 94), but also promote the sharing of a certain ‘behind-the scenes-life’ (Meyers, 2009: 893). Most importantly, they enable engagement and foster interest by giving viewers a sense of being connected to Bubz. Like tweets, they act reinforcing social ties (Marwick and boyd, 2010) and bring forward a sense of spontaneity (Ellcessor, 2012).

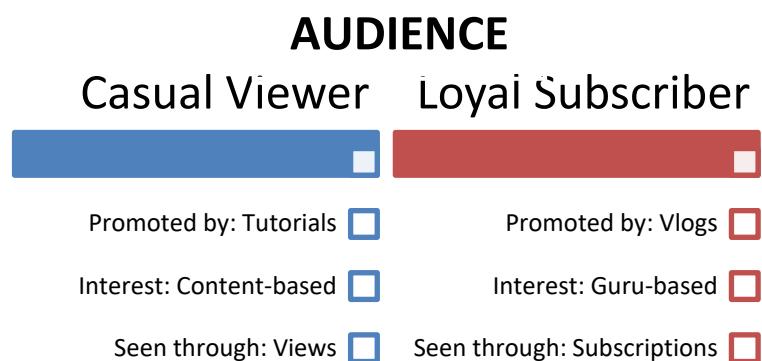


Figure 1: Audience typology

According to this, vlogs help *sustain* that first generated attention and foster channel *subscriptions*. Therefore, I contend that her vlogs turn *casual viewers* into *loyal subscribers* through emotional connection. This distinction between loyal subscribers and random viewers is important because through it we can see how her content shapes her ties with viewers. I developed a chart to visualise the two main types of viewers that follow Bubz and how tutorials and vlogs respectively help to establish these categories (Figure 1).

Variety is the spice of life: from market-oriented to motivational uploads

As argued earlier, the content of Bubz's uploads is influenced by what I term the 'commercial' and 'community' spheres (García-Rapp, 2016). The commercial, market-centred, sphere consists of YouTube as a business platform. Tutorials are emblematic examples of this sphere and of YouTube's beauty community in general. Through these quick, easy to follow, and straightforward how-to videos, Bubz strengthens and legitimises her position as a renowned beauty guru, highlighting her thematic know-how and creativity. Tutorials as pedagogical content re-frame 'ideologies of learning' (Lange, 2014: 213) within the platform and reinforce Bubz's own 'pedagogical value' as celebrity (Marshall, 2010: 36), providing engagement and the possibility of emulation.

The sphere of *community* is embodied by other beauty gurus, as well as users, followers, viewers, and fans in their often undefined and changeable roles. I argued that this sphere is represented by her vlogs, through which she displays her everyday life with her husband and dogs in Hong Kong (García-Rapp, 2016). The sphere is framed by implicit rules and expectations that are dynamically constructed and contested by both gurus and users through videos and comments. In order to expand the bifold content typology of vlogs and tutorials (2016), I developed a further categorization leading to four emerging groups that I introduce below. It follows a diagram to help visualise the complete typology and an overview of the four types of video uploads (Figure 2).

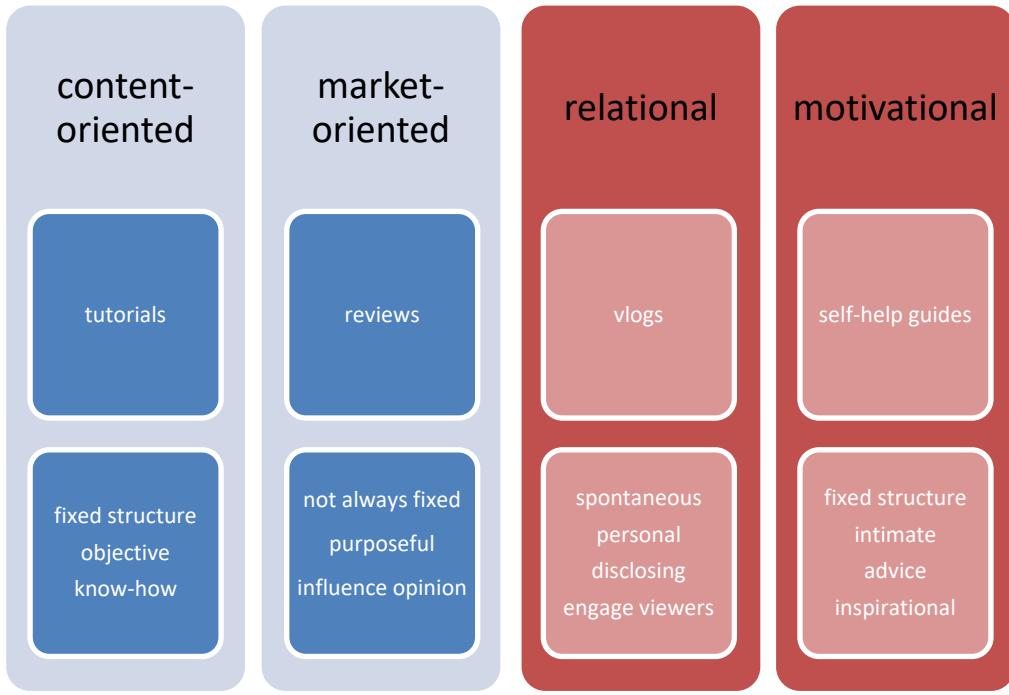


Figure 2: Content typology and characteristics

As seen in the figure, the commercial sphere is made up by *content-oriented* videos and *market-oriented* videos, while the community sphere is formed by *relational* and *motivational* videos. In the following, I characterise each of the four emerged categories and then offer a description and interpretation of two videos.

What I term 1) *content-oriented* videos are mainly tutorials where Bubz explains a certain technique or look. They represent the vast majority of her uploads: 194 out of 313, and as I show later in the quantitative overview of her channel (Figure 3), they embody her most watched content. These include titles such as ‘Chic Night Look’, ‘Korean Natural Makeup’ or ‘Perfect Spring Hair in Minutes’. These demonstrations are simply structured and straight-forward. Most makeup tutorials share the same organising principles and style throughout YouTube: the introductions and the endings usually repeat the same footage showcasing the completed look. Unlike her vlogs, Bubz does not directly address her viewers by talking to the camera, but offers a separately recorded voice-over explanation of

the visual steps she follows to create the look. Tutorials are quick, easy to follow, music-laden, instructional videos. Through these videos, Bubz displays her expertise (community-specific know-how) by offering creative new looks and strengthens her status as a renowned beauty guru. I suggest that it was precisely with this type of upload that she ‘made herself’ as a beauty guru. Especially thanks to her creativity and the clarity of her explanations (García-Rapp, 2016).

The value of tutorials rests in their intrinsic practical benefits for the community, namely, achieving a certain look. Moreover, people keep on watching her tutorials even years after their creation. As mentioned before, tutorials demonstrate an inherent long-lasting popularity or longevity. This is also argued by Yu, Xie and Scanner (2015), who considered a sample of 172,000 YouTube videos and found that the How-to video category enjoys longer phases of consumption compared with categories such as news or technology. Their persistent popularity is explained by the type of content: as well as comedy or entertainment, instructional videos’ appeal does not decrease over time. Content-centred makeup tutorials represent the majority of Bubz’s uploads and have a central, founding role within YouTube’s beauty community.

The second category of the commercial sphere is termed 2) *market-oriented*. These videos are often structured around a review of a specific product. I have found 39 of these videos within the complete data sample of 313. In these videos, Bubz makes her role as opinion leader and audience influencer more explicit: she uploads product reviews and how-to videos showcasing specific cosmetics. These videos, resembling infomercials, are carefully edited and include on-screen text with relevant product details.

Additionally, also under this category, Bubz creates content focusing on her favourite products of the month. The ‘Favs of the month’ video category is very popular among beauty gurus and it is particularly through these videos that they most noticeably manifest commercial connections with cosmetics manufacturers. The promoted products are usually new cosmetics made by well-known brands that are candidly introduced to the viewers

underlined by their many advantages. Besides regularly displaying special, dedicated looks achieved with the chosen cosmetics (tailored How-To videos), Bubz also organises contests, giveaways, and presents ‘hauls’ that include several products from different brands. Examples of this video category are ‘Casual shopping outfit of the day’, ‘Massive fashion & makeup Korean haul’ and ‘November beauty favourites’. As with her tutorials, I argue that these videos heighten her status as a renowned beauty guru, which is relevant for her status as an influential online persona. Bubz ultimately does call editing and filming videos for YouTube ‘to work’; furthermore, she acknowledges that it is her full-time occupation.

Unlike the videos that represent the commercial sphere, the uploads that represent the community sphere show a higher degree of subjectivity, intimacy, and spontaneity. Through her 3) *relational* videos –mostly vlogs– Bubz talks heart-to-heart with her viewers, addressing them as friends. In these 62 videos, she discloses personal information, shares her everyday activities and motivates users to comment. Besides having a ‘spontaneous feeling-tone of interaction’ (Lange 2014: 90), relational videos can also be reflective, autobiographical, and advance on life narrative and emotional topics (see also Lange 2014: 31).

In such relational videos, she builds ties with her subscribers, who are able to witness her daily life. She opens up a window for viewers to ‘take part’, making them ‘feel at home’ in her home, with her dogs Bubby and Chub and her newly-wed husband Tim. As Lange (2009) suggests, the content of vlogs is not always original or interesting for the larger public since it is aimed specifically at subscribers. Therefore, I argue that Bubz’s vlogs act as compelling invitations to move followers even closer to her. By revealing personal information online, these videos attempt to create an ‘affective connection to an audience’ (Marshall 2010: 37, also Lange 2014). Both celebrities and regular users, ‘expose their lives further in order to gain a following and an audience’ (Marshal 2010: 41). As introduced earlier, I suggest that these videos build on and maintain viewers’ attention and interest first generated by her tutorials.

The close and affective connection established between the guru and her viewers is also evidenced by the content of the comments. While tutorials reap mainly praiseful, short feedback such as ‘great tutorial’ or ‘love it, thanks’, vlogs receive longer, more personal comments where viewers disclose that they have followed her uploads for years, or consider her a role model. Some even confess to wishing she was her friend in “real life” and having pictures of Bubz hanging in their rooms. Many viewers also disclose their own life stories in response to Bubz’s emotional vlogs. They express that they identify with her and thank her for being open and honest. Bubz acknowledges and shows her appreciation for the support she receives – especially during difficult times such as family or work-related issues she trusts her viewers with. She has the role of an admired friend who supports them, who also shows herself vulnerable and needs their support.

Bubz also uploads self-help and advice videos on topics such as love, career, or relationships that I denominate 4) *motivational* uploads. These videos are very different from her content-based tutorials since she addresses her audience directly and expresses more subjective views rather than merely demonstrating steps to be followed to achieve a look. This, of course, also contributes to her status within the platform and ultimately to her positioning for advertisers. Here, similar to her relational uploads and vlogs, she is involved and open with her viewership: she asks questions to the camera and acknowledges her viewers as if she was talking to a close friend. However, on these videos she does not *show* much, because she sits in front of the camera, usually in her living room. These uploads are focused on giving advice and sharing her thoughts on life issues and various topics like jealousy, friendship and relationships. Some of the videos are ‘Secrets of truly happy people’, ‘Getting over break-ups’, ‘How to get a guy to like you’, ‘Being confident’, or ‘Dealing with negative people 101’.

Like relational uploads, these videos lead to the highest amount of shares, comments and subscriptions even though her tutorials are undisputedly her most watched videos. The following table (Table 1) presents the average amount of views, likes, comments, subscriptions and shares for the four video categories.

	Average Amount	Market-oriented	Content-oriented	Relational	Motivational
Views	457.416	1.219.732	1.066.752	815.166	
Comments	3.006	3.273	5.122	5.431	
Likes	4.086	11.481	16.521	14.394	
Subscriptions	347	1.902	4.490	1.975	
Shares	228	205	347	516	

Table 1: Quantitative overview of her channel figures by video category

Her motivational videos constitute only 18 of the total of 313 uploads considered, but, like her relational videos, function effectively as affective mechanisms for engagement. As seen in the table, they come second to her relational vlogs in amount of subscriptions and likes, but achieve even more shares and comments. This can be due to their combination of the best attributes of both her relational and content-oriented videos. Motivational videos combine feelings of closeness and trust established with Bubz, along with recommendations of high reflexive and practical value. The links to these self-help guides are widely shared by her viewers, with an average of 516 shares per video, demonstrating an implicit social value and relevance for viewers' personal development. Many times, viewers thank her for helping them 'better themselves' through her tips regarding relationships, time management or career.

Bubz, you are one of the most inspirational people. Be confident in who you are, you're worth so much more than a copy. Thanks Bubz for teaching me to be more positive and confident.

To summarize, the two categories of uploads making up the 'community sphere' demonstrate Bubz's ability to engage viewers and turn them into subscribers. Nowadays, in

order to achieve the much-sought *sustained attention* on social media platforms, one needs a *loyal audience*, and for this, gurus need to bond and interact (Marshall, 2010; Marwick 2013a; Marwick and boyd 2011). As Baym points out, self-disclosure is one of the most powerful communication practices that brings people together (2010: 128). The focus on the specific know-how of her ‘community of interest’ (Lange, 2014: 16) is brought to a secondary position during vlogs. As with relational uploads, the viewers’ interest lies in Bubz as a person and is sustained over time through mundane and seemingly trivial footage of her life (García-Rapp, 2016).

A market-oriented video: ‘Products I’m loving’

As an example of the category I denominate market-oriented, we can consider the video ‘Products I’m loving: May + Vidcom’ that achieved more than half a million views. In this video from 2010, Bubz presented her four favourite products of the month –a MAC powder, a blush, a Revlon foundation and a mascara– emphasising their best qualities with phrases usually found in advertisements. For instance, she says: ‘In winter this is going to warm you up, in summer it is going to give you that nice sun kissed bronze pretty glow...’. Nonetheless, she also mentions certain disadvantages such as the high price: ‘it’s quite pricey for a drugstore foundation, but that’s because they [Revlon] are catching up and improving’, but not without minimising her negative comment by stating: ‘I’ve always been a big fan of Revlon foundations’. This strategy appears to communicate honesty while at the same time not being damaging to the brand’s reputation.

Similarly, when she presents the products’ name and shade, she reads this information from the packaging, as a way to indicate spontaneity and candour (Dyer 1991: 137) and to confer an authentic persona. By doing this, the review is not seen as rehearsed and implies –contrary to regular advertisements– that the importance is centred on the products’ intrinsic qualities and not the brand itself (see also Rodrigues 2012). The message is that Bubz has been ‘loving it’ and wants to ‘share’, regardless of the brand. In this way, she underlines this way the honesty of the review, since it is shown as basing on her personal

experience with the product. At the same time, she follows the golden rule of YouTube's video community when looking to convey an authentic, trustworthy message: she has tried the product beforehand and was able to test its properties. She talks from experience and her own personal opinion, keeping a transparent 'brand engagement' that reinforces her authenticity and, through it, the trustworthiness of the review.

The video dates from a time when her online popularity as a beauty guru was just starting to expand. On that account, she arguably used the opportunity to reach a wide audience to announce her upcoming appearance at Vidcon, an online video convention of YouTube creators and viewers. Through a self-branding strategy of encouraging her viewers to stop by, she added: 'it's going to be a great blast'. Furthermore, she included an on-screen text as an invitation, 'come along if you are nearby and meet your favourite YouTubers', and the event's website.

A motivational video: 'Healthy relationships'

Her upload '♥Healthy relationships♥' from 2012 is part of this category that I denominate motivational. It was watched almost 500,000 times and received more than 3,500 comments, was shared more than 400 times and led to 700 subscriptions to her channel. The long-lasting appeal of her content lies here with her own person, since the content is not a specific trend or a style but the guru's own subjective views. Similar to the other categories, here she also incorporates on-screen text to, for example, make a list of the 'best ingredients' for a healthy couple, such as trust and respect, or relevant quotes. In this case the recommendations were: 'be willing to listen', 'trust is the foundation of a relationship', and 'think before you speak, because your words fuel emotions and they can cause a huge impact in your relationship'.

User comments to this video were positive; they mainly praise and thank Bubz for her helpful advice and share details of their own current relationships. As for instance:

Everytime I'm struggling with my long term boyfriend i come back to this and i feel better

Great advice and it goes to show that it's what is inside that counts. Hope I can find someone that cares about me and I can care for the way you and Tim adore each other :)

Fourteen other viewers liked the first comment, which implies agreement and identification with its content. These comments show how her opinion is highly valued and the way her affective bond with viewers is reinforced through these videos.

It is interesting to note that she included a sort of disclaimer stating, beforehand that she is not an expert, but a regular girl offering ‘just’ her opinion and sharing her experiences.

I'm definitely not a love expert but I can share my insight on how we maintain the positivity in my relationship. Share an extra point of view.

This statement aims to minimise possible negative comments by underlining the subjectivity of her thoughts. At the same time, by writing this she highlights her status of ‘regular girl’, furthering viewers’ identification with someone ‘just like us’. Online celebrities, as reality television participants-turned-famous did before them (Holmes, 2004), reinforce and make even more literal the long-lasting debate of (cinema) celebrities embodying ordinary and extra-ordinary values and subject positions (e.g. Dyer, 1998, 1991; Gamson 1994) because fame increasingly turns into something ‘achievable by anyone through the performance of “being ordinary”’ (Usher, 2015: 312).

The example of Bubz’s statement brings forward two important considerations: first, we see how relevant it is for internet celebrities to rely on ‘ordinariness’ (Ellcessor 2012; Holmes 2004; Kanai 2015; Meyers, 2009; Smith, 2014) in order to make up for ‘self-commodification’ (Smith, 2014: 257). This way, her personal and everyday vlogs re-frame

her daily as an ordinary girl, even after the fame she amassed through her tutorials. Second, it makes evident how, especially on YouTube, the production of online content highlights for viewers a certain ‘performative agency we all could easily adopt or enlist ourselves’ (261).

Conclusions

This article discusses some of my findings in view of their connection with relevant literature and the implications for online popularity development when situated in YouTube’s highly dynamic and competitive ecology. Standing out in the volatile environment of rapidly changing trends, ever-present viral videos, and memes does not happen by luck. I parted from the notion that metrics as clicks, views, subscriptions, shares, and comments have the power of acting as ‘performative’ markers (Burgess and Green, 2009: 41). This emphasises the role of views and subscriptions as valuable and much sought-after popularity markers.

I consider YouTube as a commercially oriented broadcast platform with the aim of generating economic value from uploaded content (see also Burgess, 2012). Attention on YouTube is rooted on sustained online popularity, thanks to an ever-growing, but most importantly, loyal and engaged audience. Here resides the relevance of subscribers as a valuable commodity: they represent the building blocks of *sustained* audience attention, which subsequently equals social and economic value. In this case, economic value speaks to Bubz’s status as renowned beauty guru with an influential position. Her social value is established through her image within the community as a trustworthy, open guru providing rich content and also entertainment (García-Rapp, 2016).

I develop here a basic content typology of two initial themes introduced elsewhere (2016) into four distinctive categories of videos: market-oriented, content-oriented, relational, and motivational, to explain how her content promotes her visibility as an informational (knowledge-based) and relational (connection-based) content creator. Additionally, I bring

forward a categorization of two types of audiences –*casual viewers* and *loyal subscribers*– fostered and sustained by her different types of videos. My findings suggest that the performance of self-presentation and self-expression, coordinated through ongoing content management and strong community ties, is key in the creation of a long-lasting supporting audience and loyal fans. According to the emerged typology, her market-oriented uploads (mainly product reviews) as well as her content-oriented videos (mainly tutorials) display an advertiser-friendly and a ‘safe-for-work’ (Marwick 2013a: 5) persona. These uploads legitimise her as a knowledgeable guru (García-Rapp, 2016).

Through their tutorials, we can see that beauty gurus are quite literal and paradigmatic examples of the blending of the spheres of media and education as ‘institutionalized forms of self-realization’ (Hartley, 1999: 7). When showing and communicating turns into explaining and demonstrating, performance and pedagogy work together (1999: 6-7) to create a ‘teaching of self-hood’ (1999: 42). While teaching new makeup styles, Bubz also embodies practical, social and symbolic value for her audience, thanks to the quite literal pedagogical value of her tutorials as ‘socially encoded forms of knowledge’ (Lange, 2014: 192); as well as the inherent symbolic power of celebrities as ‘pedagogical tools’ (Marshall, 2010: 42) in the active reworking and updating of audience’s identities (Holmes, 2004; Marshall, 2006, 2010, 2014; Thompson, 1995).

Vlogs, on the other hand, are guru-based uploads that renew the already established interest through regular glimpses into Bubz’s private life. She gains recognition through her informational tutorials but achieves the strongest sense of affective connection through her vlogs, which not only sustain and renew viewers’ interest but also re-signify her condition of ‘ordinary’. By doing this, vlogs confirm and legitimate (Dyer, 1998; Tolson, 2010) her subject position as a renowned personality, a YouTube celebrity.

From a uses and gratifications perspective, the success of this extremely popular YouTube channel shows us the relevance of uploading frequently and providing varied programming

that offers a combination of informational, community-specific content as well as personal, creator-centred vlogs to sustain viewers' interest and engagement.

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ⁱ Views can also come from internal features such as “Related Videos” or “Featured Videos” which are governed by YouTube’s organising algorithm. At the moment, however, it is not clear which mechanism leads to more views. See also Figueiredo, Almeida, Goncalves (2014)