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The Digital Media Phenomenon of YouTube Beauty Gurus: The Case of Bubzbeauty

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Abstract

This paper, based on broader digital ethnographic research performed on YouTube, aims at framing issues of online popularity development through the examination of videos and user comments. To explore the phenomenon of beauty gurus I analyse a purposeful sample of 80 videos from the channel Bubzbeauty and introduce an emerged typology of two video categories: tutorials and vlogs. Findings suggest that the strengthening of the guru's role as a popular online personality is the result of two spheres of influence. The commercial side consists of YouTube as a business platform and is represented by her tutorials. The community sphere, sustained by the power of affective ties with her audience, is represented by her vlogs. I argue that her market value as a renowned guru is built through her know-how expressed in straight-forward tutorials. Conversely, her social value as an interesting, trustworthy personality is fostered by intimate vlogs.

Biographical notes

Florencia García-Rapp is a PhD Candidate in Communication Studies at Pompeu Fabra University in Barcelona, Spain. She holds a degree in Audiovisual Communication obtained in her homeland, Argentina, and a Master's Degree in Media Culture from the University of Paderborn in Germany. Her doctoral research focuses on the practices and dynamics of the YouTube beauty community, with a special focus on the phenomenon of beauty gurus and their online popularity.

Introduction

YouTube was launched in 2005 and has rapidly grown to be the worldwide largest, most visited database of video content. Its Partner Program, created in 2007, allows more than a million creators from over 30 countries to earn money from their videos (YouTube, 2014). These users and their

contributions have a considerably high number of subscribers who regularly follow them. Thousands of channels are making six figures a year and millions of subscriptions happen each day (YouTube, 2014). One of the most viewed and subscribed video category is How-To, being How-To beauty videos the most popular subgroup within.

Beauty gurus are usually young women who regularly upload videos advising on makeup and hairstyling techniques and products. In addition to the implication of wisdom, the term derives from YouTube's own channel category. Until 2015, when creating a new channel, one had options to choose from such as comedian, musician, or guru. Besides possessing the needed know-how and creativity to develop and teach the different looks and styles, gurus' personalities and private lives also come to relevance because they often establish close ties with their audience. They usually treat their audience as friends, gaining feedback from them and offering tips by sharing personal thoughts on a variety of topics such as love, life, or career. Through this ongoing sharing of their personal lives and creativity to create looks and explanatory video tutorials, many have successfully positioned themselves as YouTube celebrities, enjoying the economic and social benefits this status entails. Renowned beauty gurus on YouTube turn to be influential online personalities, praised, emulated, and looked up to by millions of viewers. These type of content creators are also denominated in the literature as "social media influencers" (SMI) (Hearn and Schoenhoff, 2016, p. 194)

I focus my examination on a beauty guru named Bubz. She is a young British Chinese woman, born in Northern-Ireland and currently living in Hong Kong, who has been uploading videos on YouTube since September 2008. Bubz does not only make her living out of YouTube, but has also achieved the status of celebrity on the platform. Her makeup and beauty channel, Bubzbeauty, is one of the most viewed and subscribed in the world and holds as of November 2014, the 27th position in the ranking of UK's most subscribed users, with the monumental amount of 2.5 million subscribers. This means that more registered YouTube users have decided to be kept updated every time Bubz uploads new content than to subscribe to the official British YouTube channel. Her subscriber figures surpass even those of the music band Coldplay and the BBC's official YouTube channel (Socialblade, 2014). Additionally, her more than 300 uploaded videos were watched a total of 300 million times.

Such a massive and ever-growing digital media phenomenon is a relevant terrain to explore current shaping forces of community and commercial spheres as well as implications for online self-presentation

and communication practices. As such, the phenomenon of YouTube beauty gurus constitutes a significant socio-cultural object of inquiry. In this vein, the development of gurus' popularity and their viewers' responses to their content are fruitful research areas to examine. A relevant question to explore is: how does shared video content foster and sustain popularity development on YouTube's beauty community? Even though self-branding and attention-seeking online practices have been researched, especially those related to Twitter and the platform's specific affordances for visibility development (Marwick and boyd, 2011a, 2011b; Marwick, 2013a), not much has been written on the phenomenon of YouTube beauty gurus yet. Burgess and Green discussed in several occasions the platform and its characteristics, especially in relation to user agency, creative and production practices as well as habitualised interaction (2008, 2009a, 2009b). Additionally, there have been ethnographies focused on YouTube as a cultural repository (Strangelove, 2010) and as a learning platform (Lange, 2014), however, there is a lack of studies addressing its beauty community. An exception is provided by Spyer (2011), who offers a compelling ethnographic examination of YouTube beauty gurus exploring, among others, the use of tagging practices and their affordances for dialogue and interaction within the community.

When using the term "community" I do it aware of the discussion regarding this concept. I opt for this term because I see it as already extensively addressed and repeatedly clarified in previous literature. As well as Baym (2010), Duffy (2015), Schmidt (2007), Spyer (2011), and Tolson (2010), I chose it to write about "categories of socially-interconnected users" (Spyer, 2011, p. 8). In this case sharing mutual interests, information, practices, norms and values. Besides, users and Bubz herself describe the group of YouTube viewers and creators participating of beauty topics as a community.

Here I discuss some of the emerged findings from my research in view of their connection with relevant literature and the implications for the examination of how social media, especially YouTube, reshape online popularity. The aim of the study is theoretical and not practical. I seek to develop theory on a current, dynamic phenomenon through the identification, description and conceptualization of practices and content. Therefore, it is not thought of as a practical contribution in terms of popularity development through a guideline or list of recommendations for practitioners and aspiring gurus.

After having explored the guru's uploaded content with the aim of conceptualizing its particular characteristics and affordances for popularity development and maintenance, I developed a twofold

typology of uploaded content: tutorials and vlogs. According to my findings, the phenomenon of Bubz's existence and the strengthening of her role as a popular online personality can be seen as the combination of two active spheres of influence or media ecologies. On the one side, the *commercial sphere*, made up of YouTube as a business platform –focusing on delivering viewers' attention to advertisers through engaging content– and embodied by her straight-forward and quick tutorials. On the other side, there is what I term the *community sphere* based on the power of the guru's emotional ties with her audience, as well as the framing given by community-specific norms, hierarchies, and active practices. This second sphere is represented by her spontaneous and connection-seeking vlogs.

The performance of online identity-management strategies such as "self-branding" (2013, p. 183) and "lifestreaming" (p. 16) –as analysed in depth by Alice Marwick with respect to the San Francisco tech scene– are helpful constructs that aid at theorizing current practices on YouTube. I relate her vlogs to the practice of lifestreaming and draw from Lange's consideration of vlogs as "videos of affinity" (2009, p. 71), aimed at building connections. I point out that Bubz's market value as a renowned and influential guru –economic value for advertisers wishing to invest in her– (see also Marshall, 2014, p. 195) is built through her know-how as expressed by her tutorials. Bubz heightens this through self-branding techniques such as advertising her website and own brand of makeup brushes, as well as encouraging viewers to "connect" with her through her other social media accounts and asking them to subscribe to her channel. I argue that her commercial and economic relevance as an influential personality for YouTube and sponsoring brands is promoted particularly by her tutorials. Her social value and, ultimately, status within the community, is enabled and further promoted by her vlogs and the audience's reactions they create. My objective throughout this paper remains to interpret my qualitative findings so as to explain how and why this is the case.

Exploring the phenomenon

With the broader goal of contributing to current debates on online popularity development, self-presentation, and audience building, I introduce and interpret in this paper my ethnographic findings of the YouTube channel "Bubzbeauty". The performed online fieldwork (Boellstorff, 2008; Boellstorff, Nardi et al 2012; Kozinets, 2010) took place during 22 months between July 2013 and May 2015, after getting to know and subsequently having started following the chosen guru's channel as a member of her audience in 2010. During my active research time I first observed, collected and analysed audiovisual data and basic channel statistics[i] in form of 313 videos from the same guru in order to build a

preliminary, emergent content typology. This sample amounted to a total of 60 hours of audiovisual material, which covered all available content dating from the start of her channel in 2008 and the beginning of data collection in July 2013. It followed an immersive and extensive coding process –from open coding to more analytical and thematic coding– where I focused my analysis on a purposeful sample of 80 main videos to be considered for this paper. Additionally, I collected and coded more than 5.000 user comments[ii], mainly from her most commented uploads, pertaining to the video category vlogs. Emerging findings of the performed holistic, exploratory, inductive research (Merriam, 2010; Wolcott, 1995, 2010), were framed as themes, processes, and practices, including the outlining and interpretation of community norms and habitual actions.

The broader research aim remained to analyse data in order to develop theory to better "understand others in context" (Markham, 2003, p. 373). Her uploaded content and the interactions generated by it, together with the role played by Bubz, including her own reflections (as heard during her vlogs) on being a beauty guru and an online celebrity were considered as key data to be interpreted and because of this, transcribed and coded. Especially relevant to this study's research design was Lange's proposal to examine YouTube channels through encompassing analysis, considering its paratexts such as video descriptions and textual comments, since it is through these interactions that roles and practices are often contested and redefined (2014, p. 145). Additionally, the anthropologist pleads for a comprehensive study of complete channels taken as complete "oeuvre" and not only considering prominent viral videos (p. 217). Similarly, Burgess and Green point out that the actual value of user-led content lies at its "locatedness" and "ordinariness" and not at radical, revolutionary, or viral content (2009b, p. 30). Everyday cultural practices and interactions are the essence of YouTube and its most productive research issue. Moreover, according to Boellstorff, Nardi, and colleagues, it is especially relevant and fruitful to study the "ordinary, the banal, the trivial and the mundane" (2012, p. 69). From a similar ethnographic understanding, Markham writes that it is through the examination of "mundane social interaction" that we get to map out "grounding assumptions" which provide rich insight into a culture (2013, p. 65).

Tutorials and Vlogs: The Building Blocks of Bubz's Popularity
Following my findings, Bubz uploads two different types of content: *video tutorials* and *vlogs*. I identified each one as part of a sphere of influence or active media ecology[iii], which I denominate the *commercial* and the *community* spheres. Tutorials and vlogs are shaped by their respective sphere creating two

powerful and dynamic sides to the same online phenomenon. I developed this twofold typology because these two categories of content –although equally important to the strengthening of her role as beauty guru– influence different aspects of her popularity. The commercial sphere is made up of YouTube as a business platform and the brands, in these case cosmetics manufacturers, that advertise through Bubz. It has the aim of generating economic value from uploaded content. It focuses on marketing strategies and community-specific expertise. The community sphere is represented by viewers and other beauty gurus, and focuses on sharing, social ties, and relationships. I argue that tutorials are simply structured video guides and demonstrations of hairstyling and makeup techniques that foster her visibility and *generate* attention. Contrastingly, vlogs consist of spontaneous footage of her daily life that *sustain* the generated attention through time. They are personal, affinity (Lange, 2009, p. 70) and connection-seeking uploads. Through them she also shares her thoughts, advice, and tips on career, love and life, strengthening through disclosure both viewers' identification and engagement with herself and her content.

Tutorials, also called How-To videos, are informational and straight-forward in their structure. During her tutorials, Bubz does not directly address her viewers, other than when giving instructions, this is why tutorials are rather objective and focused on content. As content-centred uploads, they show a high degree of circulation because of their easy "searchability" (see also boyd, 2011, p. 46). In other words, thanks to their specific titles and keywords these videos are easily accessible and as such always open to new viewership.

These videos, in terms of both structure and content, are the so called "basics" which populate YouTube following the same organizing principles and style. The introductions and the endings are usually exactly the same; repeating the same footage showcasing the achieved completed look, usually with background music. Here Bubz displays her expertise (community-specific know-how) as a beauty guru offering quick, easy to achieve and creative new looks. The titles of her tutorials range from "Tea bag face scrub", "Natural beauty (summer-proof makeup)", "Bra fitting guide" to "6 easy ribbon hairstyles".

As noted before, I locate tutorials within the *commercial sphere*. These videos are examples of *market-oriented* content since they act reinforcing her economic value as an audience influencer and motivate brands to contact her for reviews. They achieve this through a visible high amount of views and, to a lesser extent, subscriptions, as commodified metrics implying good content quality. This is grounded on

the current prevailing attention economy (Burgess and Green, 2009b; Hearn, 2008; Marwick, 2013b; Senft, 2013). Nowadays, in the highly competitive environment of social media, value and legitimacy are determined by the amount of attention one receives. Attention, and consequently, community and market value can be measured in likes, views, followers, and subscribers. These "metrics of popularity" (Burgess and Green, 2009a, p. 20) determine a user´s relevance for both inside and outside the community. The former being fans and based on affective ties and the latter meaning advertisers and based on monetary value.

I suggest that it was precisely with tutorials that she made herself as a beauty guru. This is how she started her career as a beauty guru and how she first generated and directed attention to her content. Her content-centred know-how and particularly her reach to viewers are essential factors in the creation of attention, and ultimately, popularity. I argue that these videos are not only emblematic examples of YouTube as a learning platform, since they act as teaching tools, but represent also the building blocks of its beauty community. By reaching a broad audience, Bubz generates a name for herself, a self-brand, fostering her popularity. Here it is relevant to mention Jakobsson's argument that "popularity leads to visibility and the chance of spreading that popularity" (2010, p. 111). Moreover, years after her first uploaded video, her regularly uploaded tutorials still play an important role in her status within the community.

TUTORIALS

content: LOOK/PRODUCT

focus: KNOW-HOW, beauty

characteristics: STRAIGHT-FORWARD, easy, quick neutral/objective

aim: TEACH, help, inform, look itself

relevant for: BRANDS

Figure 1: Characteristics of tutorials

Furthermore, she sometimes presents specially tailored uploads focusing on specific products that she chooses as her favourites of the month. The "Favs of the month" video category is very popular among beauty gurus and I suggest it is through these videos that they most noticeably manifest commercial connections with cosmetics manufacturers. The promoted products are usually new cosmetics of well-known brands which are candidly introduced to the viewers, through reviews that underline their advantages.

As mentioned before, vlogs consist of daily-life, personal, and spontaneous moments and are among the most liked, and commented videos of hers. Through them, she answers user comments and questions but mostly shows and shares with her global audience her everyday life and activities in Hong Kong. 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. Activities such as taking the dogs for a walk, going shopping, as well as events like weddings and parties she attends to, together with weekend trips and summer vacations are offered to her subscribers and anyone who clicks on her videos as an open window to her life. She included along the years intimate and emotional moments such as her husband's marriage proposal, her wedding and honeymoon, the moment she tells her husband that he is going to be a father, as well as the evolution of her pregnancy.

We know that disclosing personal information is a powerful way of bonding. Feelings of connection and support are, together with shared norms and resources, important aspects to community-building (Baym, 2010, p. 86). In line with this, I situate her vlogs in the *community sphere*, through which, as I suggest, Bubz aims to establish a meaningful connection with her viewers by sharing her everyday life. During vlogs the focus is on herself as a guru, a friend, and a person, and not in the content itself, as in the case of tutorials aimed at achieving a certain makeup style. Many times, viewers even thank Bubz for helping them change and "better themselves" through her tips about relationships, time management or career. Below some examples:

> *Oh Bubz<3 thank you so much for this video. I kind of thing I'm one of those fat lazy queens of procrastination. Every time I procrastinate so much that I want to punch myself (but I still can't get myself off bed, or stop watching videos), I force myself to come and watch your video. I'll let myself sit (or lie down) and just listen to each and every word you say, then kind of roll myself off bed and get to work. I don't know where this is going but, thanks Bubz <3 you're so motivating! <3*

so bottom line is....that only u can change yr life....so happy i watched this i feel energized and motivated... and suddenly I just feel the hunger of the person inside me to be loved by me... I WILL GET UP AND TAKE CARE OF MYSELF !!! thank you

Seriously, I am going to frame a quote of yours and hang it in my room. I love your advice~

To summarize, vlogs, as relational uploads, can be thought of as g*uru-centred*, because the interest lies at herself as a person and is sustained over time through mundane and trivial footage of her life. To the contrary, her more commercially oriented type of videos, tutorials, are *content-centred*, focusing on hairstyles and makeup techniques and primarily influence the generation of interest and attention.

VLOGS

☐ content: GURU

☐ focus: LIFE, thoughts, experiences, reflections

☐ characteristics: PERSONAL, spontaneous, fun, deep, emotional, subjective

☐ aim: BONDING

☐ relevant for: COMMUNITIES

Figure 2: Characteristics of vlogs

A quick overview over some channel statistics confirms my claim that Bubz's vlogs generate a stronger response from viewers than her tutorials. According to the analysed data, her vlogs are more commented, more shared, and lead to more channel subscriptions than her tutorials[iv]. Her most commented videos reached between 10.000 and 27.000 comments each. If one takes for instance her 20 most commented videos –from a considered purposeful sample of 313 videos– only four of them are tutorials and the rest are vlogs. Additionally, from her most liked videos, which range from 10.000 to 100.000 likes each, 60 are vlogs and 40 are tutorials, figures that further confirm the emerged patterns of comments discovered during my research.

Tutorials generate mainly short, positive responses such as "great video, thanks", or "this is amazing", as well as specific questions about the look or the product. Vlogs, on the other hand, foster viewer's engagement, as seen through the more developed and longer comments this category receives, where viewers express identification with Bubz and share personal life stories. As examples of this type of comment we can consider the following:

> This helped soo much! I'm kinda going thorough a stage in my life where I really don't like myself and I'm always trying to change. This helped me to realize that I should just be myself. Thank you so much! :) <3

> That was very touching I will admit I wanted to cry but this is one thing I can relate to my parents have been divorced for 12 years now and life has still been hard on me because my mom pressures me to have straight a's and it make life sort of suck but it seems like when I was with my grandpa I had all my stress had been released my grandpa died 2 years ago and I cried for 3 months

Although it is clear that both types of content structure and define her image as a successful beauty guru, they do not seem to equally influence all aspects of her online personhood, or "mediated personhood" (Lange, 2014, p. 31). This is to say, both types of uploads are part of the same phenomenon and contribute to increase her popularity and market-value, but ultimately influence certain aspects more than others. I suggest her tutorials frame her as a worthy investment for cosmetic manufacturers and advertisers, as well as for YouTube, as a successful partner channel. Additionally, they strengthen her status within the community as a knowledgeable guru who provides information-rich and easy accessible tutorials. Contrastingly, I suggest that the specific know-how of her "community of interest" (Lange, 2014, p. 16), or "community of practice" (Burgess and Green, 2008, p. 8) is brought to a secondary position during vlogs.

Senft parts from the assumption that, while audiences want "someone to speak at them", communities, in contrast, seek "someone to speak *with* them" (2013, p. 4). Interacting and self-disclosure are, as effective communicative practices, essential elements in the construction of relationships (Baym, 2010, p. 128; Marwick, 2013a, p. 216). This is why I suggest that in the case of Bubzbeauty, intimacy promotes visibility and consolidates a loyal viewership. As Marwick and boyd argue regarding Twitter practices, "popularity is maintained through ongoing fan management" (2011b, p. 140), which here is achieved through the creation and promotion of strong emotional ties with her audience. During her vlogs she also reflects on her role as a popular personality within the beauty community and the major role she plays in the lives of her viewers, who express through comments their appreciation and esteem. When

asked how she deals with fame and success, as part of the video "Ask Bubz: Up-close & Personal", she said:

> *YouTube fame (makes quotation signs with hands), or whatever, it's good. I feel pretty blessed. I feel my life is pretty normal, maybe because I live in Hong Kong city so I get a lot of privacy. But nonetheless, when I meet you guys, I love it, because I love to hang out with you guys. I realize there is one struggle that I forget which is pressure. And not necessarily bad pressure, but sometimes I get girls telling me that I'm like a role model and it's like "wow! Wow! Fantastic, baby!" It is a wonderful thing and I feel very honoured, but I'm not a perfect person and I make mistakes every single day. So I feel, like, I have the responsibility to not let these young girls down. I will try my best to be someone who can… I'm trying to put this in words. To be someone who can motivate and inspire you, guys. (exhales) I shall try it for you, guys.*

Both the symbolic and discursive power of "inspiring" others and being an "inspirational" influence for them is ubiquitous on You Tube's beauty community. The fact of creating an inspirational effect through her videos is evocative of the strong connection between her and her fans.

> *You are such an inspirational person and such a role model!*

> *This video is so relaxing! :) Thnx Bubz! You really inspire me!*

> *i love watching other youtubers but you are the only youtuber and person who can inspire me! everyday i try my best to be more organized, work out, eat healthy and be nicer to other people...just because of you! :)*

> *You are the most beautiful person inside and out. You inspire me to love my life.*

Self-branding to gain visibility and consolidate status

Self-branding as an online self-management strategy is defined by Alice Marwick as "to think of oneself as a brand and promote it" (2013, pp. 15-6) in close similarity to what Patricia Lange describes as "performative identity displays" (2014, p. 23). In everyday practice, they involve, among others, a rigorous "content planning to satisfy viewer's interests" (p. 217). Framed by the dominant rhetoric of self-advertising techniques and identity management currently active online, self-branding practices imply a "strategic creation of an identity to be promoted and sold" (Marwick, 2013a, p. 192). This involves daily performing and monitoring. Closely tied to this practice is what Marwick defines as an "edited self" persona (p. 195), which strategically follows certain community-specific norms and is needed in order to be a successful self-brander, and, ultimately a renowned online personality. These

widespread strategies follow an implicit but dominant online rhetoric establishing that, seemingly, "everyone has an easily marketable passion that needs only to be uncovered" (p. 193). Moreover, the successful performance of self-branding on social media platforms, as seen on YouTube and its many beauty gurus, brings not only economic success but social benefits such as a fandom base, support, and status within the local community hierarchy.

For instance, on YouTube, a common self-branding practice is to actively ask viewers to subscribe to one's channel at the end of every uploaded video and also include it in writing in the video textual description. Additionally, it is customary to add links to the guru's presence in other social media platforms. Furthermore, it is a widespread and accepted practice for gurus to have an especially dedicated email address for "business enquiries only" (see also Syper, 2011, p. 43), which denotes the community's flexibility but also ambiguity when legitimating certain marketing and audience building strategies while condemning others. There is indeed a fine line to walk between being considered a "fake" or a "sellout" and a "real" and "honest" guru, whose opinions can be trusted (see also Marwick, 2013a, p. 135; 2013b, p. 161).

Bubz openly advertises her website and her online makeup brushes shop at the end of her videos, with lines such as: "Take care everybody, and again, if you want to see what I get up to and stuff, then subscribe to my vlog channel below (on screen- www.bubzbeauty.com)". Similarly, after her tutorial "How to get a slimmer face", also from 2012, she promotes her brand as follows: "Ps. Just letting you guys know that the Holiday Clearance Sale on ShopBubbi.com is still going. We had to do an emergency restock because we didn't expect so many orders. If you've been meaning to shop from us, hurry because it's running out again! http://www.shopbubbi.com"

Another common self-branding practice active in the beauty community is to organize giveaways of certain products, in order to create audience participation and foster visibility of the guru's channel. Bubz announced several giveaways through the years, the following is an example of one. She started a giveaway through her video tutorial "My everyday curls", sponsored by the hairstyling brand LivingProof. After reviewing the product and indicating where people can buy it, she announced the giveaway and its conditions on the textual video description below the tutorial, not without thanking the sponsor for the products they provided. This self-branding strategy has a double function. Bubz promotes through it the endorsed product, something for which she probably gets paid for –even

though she does not disclose this– and, at the same time, also encourages audience participation through the commenting on her channel, aiming at audience building.

Lifestreaming your way up to the top – the power of vlogs

Here I offer a description and interpretation of a tutorial and a vlog, looking to shed light to its similarities and differences. On this 6-minute tutorial, titled "Dreamy Summer", Bubz shows how to achieve a fresh summer look. The video dates from 2013 and was watched more than 300.000 times. The first and last shots are, as usual, dedicated to showcasing the finished look. Here, she poses as seen during making-off of photo-shootings, including the plain unicolor background. Korean Pop music in the background and a voice-over commentary with the instructions complete her regularly uploaded tutorials. The introduction consists of a carefully edited sequence of lively and spirited photo-like shots, where she smiles for the camera and waves her hair, which is then repeated at the end of the tutorial. It follows a step-by-step sequence of Bubz demonstrating how to apply concealer, eye primer, eyeliner and the needed products to create the look. She adds on-screen texts with instructions, relevant comments, or the names of the products she is using – such as "Urban Decay eyeshadow in virgin" or "Blend away and watch your complexion brighten". For this look she uses her own brand of makeup brushes, named Bubbi, and signals this by adding an on-screen text with the product name such as "Bubbi Dome Brush". Both in the textual description of the video, and again near the end of the tutorial, Bubz highlights the practicality and versatility of the style: "This healthy look will look great on anybody. It works well for brunch, walks on the beach, shopping, cocktail nights - any occasion. Whatever eye colour you have, this look will bring them right out!".

The tutorial ends with a behind-the-scenes outtake of her husband passing behind her during the shot and an on-screen "typical!!", with the aim of highlighting Bubz's spontaneity and openness to her everyday life while filming. The last seconds are dedicated to advertising her brushes, by showing a promotional brand banner and her website address. At the end of the video description, she includes the phrase "connect with me" together with links to her social media accounts such as her Twitter, Instagram, Facebook as well as her website and her online makeup brushes store. This signature below the tutorial can be seen as a multi-platform self-branding strategy which aims at not only improving her *Bubbi Brushes* brand visibility but that of herself as a brand for cosmetic companies to continue endorsing and sponsoring. Through this "connecting" with her and motivating people to reach out, she maximizes the "quantifiable metrics" (Marwick, 2013a, p. 110) such as subscribers, views, and

comments that legitimize her status – inside the community as a popular beauty guru and outside, for advertisers, as a renowned community influencer.

Contrary to the content-centred tutorials, her vlogs lack of a fixed structure. They feel like a spontaneous rollercoaster of emotions and everyday situations. Among this category we find videos such as "A day in my life" and "Beauty day with Bubz". On most of her vlogs Bubz talks heart to heart to her viewers, addressing them as friends. She discloses personal information, shares her everyday activities and motivates users to comment. She opens us a window to take part, making the viewer feel at home in her home, with her dogs Bubby and Chub and her newly-wed husband Tim. These uploads aim at maintaining the attention and interest generated by her tutorials. They are, as I point out, the reason for her sustained popularity – building bonds with her subscribers, who follow her through her day. Her vlogs are engaging and compelling invitations that move us viewers closer to her.

Uploading vlogs and displaying one's daily life is a way of giving a chance to close and meaningful connections with unknown people. As noted before, sharing is one of the most effective tools to unite people (Baym, 2010, p. 128). In other words, to make people watch your content, you have to make them get to know you, and create a connection. Further, through "the dynamic and ongoing practice of disclosing the everyday", vlogs create a sense of friendship (Crawford 2009, p. 259, cited by Marwick, 2013a, p. 216). Baym also discusses this "sense of connection" that often arises online even without direct interaction as for instance simply through accessing daily updates (Humphreys, 2007, cited by Baym, 2010, p. 135). Similarly, and, as already noted, Lange considers vlogs to be "videos of affinity" (2009, p. 71), aimed at building connections which can also be thought of "communicative attempts to negotiate attention" (p. 73). These videos are usually personal, and designed for "communities of practice" (p. 73), in this case, her subscribers and fans.

Lange notes that vlogs, although often "perceived as narcissistic and self-centered" (p. 68) are more "realistic, less flattering portrayals" usually displaying some sort of "hanging out at home" style. This notion is in agreement with my findings, since in the case of Bubzbeauty, especially during her vlogs, we often see in the background her household cleaning products, her laundry, or even her husband lying on the sofa in his underwear and unshaved. This is something that Bubz does not hide; to the contrary: she even jokes underlining her husband's state or her dogs' inappropriate behaviour in the background. These scenes can also be analysed from a different angle. For Spyer these supposedly spontaneous and homely-like settings are part of the "trap" that gurus organize in order to catch viewer's attention: "by

portraying an image of amateur production [...] that inculcates values such as intimacy and closeness" (2011, p. 44). This is often achieved by displaying a reachable, "girl next door" image, to foster empathy and identification (see also Abidin and Thompson, 2012, p. 472). Something that Lange acknowledges too, when she writes that many videos are planned and produced with "different levels of sincerity" (2009, p. 71) and that vlogs can be "used to promote and gain visibility" (2014, p. 134).

Marwick and boyd bring forward similar viewpoints when considering many online interactions between renowned personalities and their audience as grounded on "performative intimacy" (2011, p. 148). In the same vein, Marshall denominates these same efforts "performance of connection" (2010, p. 40). This image of ordinary, everyday girl is essential for identification and ultimately for legitimation as a personality deserving of the attention, clicks, views and subscriptions. Through this, her position of high visibility and popularity, including the social and economic benefits it entails, is not only accepted by the community but also celebrated.

The online practice of lifestreaming is defined as the "ongoing sharing of personal information to a networked audience" (Marwick, 2013a, p. 16) with the aim of creating and "maintain[ing] affective ties" (pp. 15-6). Burgess and Green also examine a similar concept: "life-blogging" (2008, p. 6), as well as Strangelove, who writes about "life-casting" (2010, p. 188) –which involves a direct stream, something that does not happen in the case of Bubz, but also follows the purpose of being seen and building an audience (p. 127). I draw from this concept to further illustrate the characteristics and aims of Bubz's vlogs, since I suggest that she deploys this same strategy when creating and uploading her content. I argue that the power of her vlogs lies at the friendly and affective ties that Bubz establishes through them. Being open, sharing thoughts, laughing of herself, and disclosing personal information, including problems and sad memories such as being bullied at school because of being Asian are key elements of her vlogs.

"Get ready for bed with me" is an example of the type of content that I consider part of the community sphere; it was watched more than a half million times, and commented more than 6.500 times. The 7-minute video focuses on her usual night routine. It starts with Bubz coming home to her dogs (voice-over: "coming home to my dogs is one of my highlights each day"), lighting scented candles, having a bath and applying a sheet mask, washing her teeth, and drinking green tea. Later she writes her prayers and reflects on the things she is thankful for, to finish the video with her evening reading session and

"IPad time" in bed cuddling with her dogs. Many users comment on the soothing effect of the video and thank her for sharing. They remark taking Bubz's videos as an inspiration and express their appreciation for her many useful tips and examples of soothing activities that they want to incorporate to their own routines.

> *This video makes me happy, calm, sleepy ☺ ah.* (comment was liked 45 times)

> *your routine videos are so relaxing…just watching them make me get all comfortable and relaxed…*

> *I gotta start doing this. I have crazy insomnia and this looks like a peaceful way to go to bed*

Humour is an always-present aspect in her videos. She adds humorous on-screen texts and includes funny moments such as scaring her dog with a hairdryer. Some viewers observe that these amusing moments are maximized by her Irish accent and her petite body. We witness her picking up her dog over her head with extended arms and singing "Circle of Life" from the Disney movie Lion King, we find out that she is scared of chickens and that she feels that blankets protect her from bullets. Besides, she loves to paint and used to play the violin, her favourite colour to wear is grey, and she cannot swim.

Bubz is "different". There are certain aspects of her personality which are praised and brought to the foreground when comparing her to other gurus. She is seen as being "beautiful on the inside", and correspondingly sharing that same beauty and joy of the "important things in life" with her audience. She is depicted as a positive, cheerful, inspiring person:

> *I love your videos bubz. Been a fan since your first video haha <3 for an aspiring beauty guru like me, you are a great inspiration because you stay true to who you are :D*

> *bubz the reason that we all love you is because your an awesome beauty guru […] also a really good internet mom for me. you help us with things that every girl deals with and tell us its not all about beauty! love you bubzz :P your such an inspiration and […] and I think that is a big part of being a beauty guru <3* (comment was liked 13 times)

> *You look like Michelle Kwan. But prettier! What makes you prettiest though is your positive outlook on life and how you're inspiring other girls to self reflect and develop self respect.*

> *out of all the beauty gurus you and april are the cutest, most purest characters. love this video :)*

Conclusions: broadcasting (friendly) popularity

Based on my extended exploration of Bubz's channel, I introduced in this paper a bifold typology of video content and characterized vlogs as relational, *guru-centred* uploads, whereas tutorials were seen as *content-centred*, focusing on the look or style as the main topic. I suggested that *tutorials* are an example of what I term *commercial sphere.* While they have the aim of teaching how to achieve a certain look or style, vlogs focus on bonding. I argue that Bubz's market value as a renowned, influential guru –and thus, her economic value for advertisers– is built through her community-specific beauty know-how as expressed in her straight-forward tutorials. Conversely, her social value for viewers as an interesting, trustworthy personality, and, ultimately, her status within the *community sphere*, is enabled and further fostered by her vlogs. Besides, viewers engage stronger with vlogs, which is reflected in the amount of comments and shares they achieve, surpassing tutorials.

Drawing from concepts such as "self-branding", and "lifestreaming" (Marwick, 2013a) as theoretical tools, I focused on the question of how Bubz's shared content fosters and sustains her popularity development on YouTube's beauty community. The act of performing a commodified online-persona by following community-specific self-presentation norms, further strengthens her personal brand. As Lange also identified, creators often employ "tactics to address wide audience and entice viewers to interact" (2014, p.141). This is seen for example in the active promotion of her channel encouraging subscriptions and comments, so as to engage viewers. But her closer connection is best exemplified by her candid and emotional vlogs. I argued that through these videos she practices an almost daily disclosing of her personal life with the aim of fostering relationships and promoting viewers' identification with her. Because, ultimately, "what is being manufactured when it comes to the production of celebrity is structures of affect, ripples of feeling, centred in commodity identification…" (Redmond, 2014, p. 85). Through vlogs people engage and interact with Bubz as the central content, something that fosters viewers' identification with someone "just like us". She is an ordinary girl who is "willing to learn, willing to try" as she writes in her profile description. This subsequently sustains her popularity and maintains her online status as a relatable, sweet, honest, and friendly guru, who also endured sad life moments, who cooks and cleans, and gets bored like anyone else. As Redmond writes regarding the function of celebrities, "[they act as] entities with deeply affecting effects" (2014, p. 85).

The combination of a lifestyle, personality, and knowledge worthy of emulation and praise as an influential guru together with her image as an everyday girl and her sharing of personal moments can be

further identified as the "production of celebrity" (Redmond 2014, p. 85). In this case, it is the building of new media renowned personalities powered by social media technologies, specifically the construction of a YouTube celebrity.

In future research, it would be relevant to analyse the implications of particular rules and norms active within the beauty community of YouTube for the construction of internet fame and online celebrities. Additionally, it would be fruitful to examine the growing role of authenticity in the strengthening of online legitimacy.

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[i] Basic quantitative information was collected and organized on a statistical grid on Microsoft Excel as supportive analytic base such as likes, dislikes, number of views, date pf upload as well as number of shares and subscriptions generated by each video.

[ii] Even in the case of Bubzbeauty, where single uploads can generate up to 27.000 comments, YouTube only allowed to visualize and collect up to 500 comments per video until the end of 2013. Afterwards, the maximum number of comments plausible of analyzing was of only 100 per video. Because of this technical restriction, I was able to consider the maximum given sample of comments only for data prior collected and locally saved by me until 2014.

[iii] Here I use the term ecology merely as a synonym of environment or ecosystem, and not as a discipline or theoretical framework (see Scolari, 2012). I imply with it, the practices, processes, and actors taking part in the platform.

[iv] YouTube made statistical information regarding shares and subscription figures for individual videos available on the channel in question in early 2012. The data includes a total of 107 (2012-2013) of Bubz´s videos, all content for which this information was available at the moment of begin of data collection (July 2013). By a ratio of 60 to 40, or 3 to 2, vlogs are more shared and subscribed than tutorials.