## 'Come join and let's BOND': Authenticity and Legitimacy Building on YouTube's Beauty Community

### Abstract

Contrary to the fifteen minutes of fame of online memes and viral videos in the volatile and competitive environment of YouTube, successful beauty gurus achieve sustained popularity, enjoy from long-lasting viewer engagement and inhabit legitimized celebrity positions. This article is based on a multi-year ethnographic examination of YouTube's beauty community, focusing on the popular British-Chinese beauty guru Bubz, her channel Bubzbeauty, and the community of viewers formed around her content. Parting from the question of what legitimates Bubz in her influential role, I conceptualize community-specific norms that guide practices, particularly those related to self-presentation and identity-management and their implications for everyday celebrity practice. Merited fame involves certain requirements that need to be consistently demonstrated. The importance of first demonstrating expertise and effort, and then consistently following the community rules of self-presentation and engagement with brands and viewers without 'losing your own self' is at the heart of the values of YouTube's beauty community.

### Keywords

YouTube, celebrity culture, beauty gurus, online popularity, online communities

### Introduction

Located within the present 'attention economy' (Burgess & Green, 2009a; Goldhaber, 1997; Marwick, 2013a; Senft, 2013) online platforms such as YouTube represent a competitive arena for both aspiring and established celebrity practitioners. YouTube's beauty community is an ever-growing environment that interests and fuels the engagement of millions of viewers. The 1.7 billion beauty-related videos populating YouTube have generated 45.3 billion historical views and over 123 million channel subscriptions. Moreover, interest in this type of content is rising: views experienced a 50% growth rate between January 2014 and April 2015 (Pixability, 2015). The phenomenon of YouTube beauty gurus achieving positions of influence and popularity within the platform is a fruitful terrain to explore cultural issues, since it can shed light on current understandings of online fame and community-based norms that legitimate and sustain it.

Beauty gurus are video creators who advise on makeup, hairstyling, nail art and skin care through step-by-step tutorials. They also upload to their YouTube channels more personal, everyday-life vlogs showcasing their activities with friends, family, and pets at home or outside shopping or during vacations. Many of these users achieve fame within the beauty community, accumulating millions of subscribers

and hundreds of millions of views. These influential personalities do not only make a living from YouTube through monetizing their videos through the platform's Partner Program[i], but also achieve commercial success by endorsing cosmetic brands and reviewing products.

Beauty creators upload information-rich tutorials and product reviews for which they often get paid, self-promote, and build their influential status and economic capital through these practices. This is often seen as contradictory to their 'girl next door' vlogs, through which they establish affective ties and feelings of trust with their audiences, by regularly just 'hanging out' or with more 'heart-to-heart' videos disclosing their life experiences. The active processes of celebrification at play within YouTube's beauty community necessarily combine the social side of sharing personal information, footage of daily activities and building affective connections, with commercial aspects: namely self-branding, achieving high status and maintaining good reputations as professional, responsible and influential personalities (García-Rapp, 2017). This combination of two differing, and often opposing, societal spheres such as the commercial logic of self-promotion and the social creation of feelings of closeness and connection with the audience renders the topic a relevant research area. As Tolson writes, these creative, cultural activities are also commercialized and due to this, they are ambivalent and often contradictory (2010, 286).

This article is based on a multi-year ethnographic examination of YouTube´s beauty community, focusing on the popular British-Chinese beauty guru Bubz, her channel Bubzbeauty, and the community of viewers formed around her content. I considered her uploaded videos along with viewer comments as meaningful data to be analyzed and interpreted in view of community-specific behavior guidelines that frame authentic personas and sustain legitimized online popularity.

With this article, I seek to contribute to ongoing scholarly dialogue in the areas of digital culture and online celebrity (Kanai, 2015; Marwick 2015a, 2015b; Smith, 2014; Usher 2015). I discuss the relevance of authenticity as an essential, much sought-after construct that legitimizes the privileged position of beauty gurus and further enables the ongoing strengthening of their online status. To do this, I map out norms based on community practices, such as reviewing products and self-advertising new channels on other users' comment sections. In addition, I focus on the relevance of expertise and hard work to achieve a legitimized celebrity position within YouTube's beauty community.

By using the term 'performance' I acknowledge strategic self-branding techniques, but also understand it from the notion of everyday social interactions as (semi-)conscious performances (Goffman, 1959). As Hills (2002, 2006, 2015) and Redmond (2006, 2014), I consider and acknowledge how viewers seek and obtain benefits from media consumption (Blumler and Katz, 1974; Ruggiero, 2000). Therefore, I build here on scholars who see online creators not as 24/7 strategic self-branding experts but as social beings

who are also personally influenced by the feedback and support they receive (e.g. Baym, 2012; Lange, 2009, 2014). Moreover, content creators and celebrity practitioners bring through their skills, talent and creativity certain momentary or long-lasting benefits, such as entertainment, knowledge, self-reflexivity and motivation as well as inspiration for viewers' own lives and identities (García-Rapp, 2017).

**Methods**

I performed a digital ethnography (see also Boellstorf, 2008; Kozinets, 2010; Lange, 2014; Wolcott, 2009, 2010) involving extensive community observation on YouTube between July 2013 and May 2015. The study followed an exploratory, data-driven, inductive rationale (Creswell, 2013; Merriam 2009). I considered 313 videos –all of the videos the guru had posted to her channel from her beginnings in 2008 until mid-2013– together with 10,000 user comments. I introduced an emerged content typology (García-Rapp, 2016, 2017) to further my analysis of popularity development and community dynamics. In addition to the qualitative analysis of her videos in terms of structure and self-presentation, I developed a basic quantitative overview of her channel, considering for each video number of views, likes, dislikes, shares, comments, and subscriptions.

For this article, I considered a purposeful sample of 20 video tutorials and 20 vlogs, together with 2,000 user comments. I transcribed and hand-coded her videos during two coding phases. The first cycle coding is usually explorative and has the aim of indexing and reducing data (Saldaña, 2009). Here I applied mostly descriptive, holistic and verbatim codes (2009) to both videos and comments. Later in the process, during second cycle coding, I performed thematic and analytical coding, applying theme and pattern codes (2009) to build conceptual maps and diagrams in order to establish more abstract categorizations and find meaning and structure. In order to preserve the culture of YouTube, I did not edit the textual comments. I left misspellings and sentence structure as they originally appeared, because they depict online community trends and individual writing styles.

The key role of the researcher in developing theory within qualitative frameworks of research, and the subsequent richness of her developed data connections and possible interpretations, can also be seen as a downside due to the apparent loss or lack of "objectivity" or "validity". I recognize that the analysis presented here is subjective and influenced by my own perceptions and experiences; I acknowledge that another researcher may have interpreted the data differently. Furthermore, considering the dynamic nature of social phenomena, my findings and interpretation could only be, and remain, preliminary. Nevertheless, they would still be part of the process of contributing to social research with interconnected, plausible and sounded theorization.

**Are you authentic enough to deserve fame?**

According to Marwick, authenticity as a community-defined social construct, is a 'fluctuating set of affective relations between individuals, audiences, and commodities' (2013a, 7). The relevance of authenticity for the online world is rooted on the DIY early ideals of internet culture, which framed the implicit notion of amateur content being essentially more authentic than mass media content (Banet-Weiser, 2012; Burgess & Green, 2009a, 2009b; Marwick, 2013a). Particularly on YouTube, as a highly commercial platform based on 'delivering attention to ads' (Burgess, 2011, 326), values such as authenticity and honesty are appreciated and even demanded on the platform. A user summarized this heightened expectation of authenticity in a platform that is still seen as (or expected to be) tied to grassroots values in a comment to one of Bubz's posts:

Most channels these days are becoming so commercialized and seem so 'paid' which viewers don't like because the honesty goes away. IF we want paid shows, we'd rather just watch TV and movies right? YouTube is YouTube because it was meant to express the normal people's thoughts, opinions, freedom, or maybe even craziness.

I focus on the case of Bubz, a British Chinese beauty guru who has been creating videos and successfully sustaining her online popularity for eight years. She uploads to her channel Bubzbeauty tutorials on makeup, skin care, hairstyle and nail art, together with more personal vlogs sharing her everyday life in Hong King with her husband and two dogs. The case that I present is an example of 'best practice' by doing it 'right'. She still is the sixth most viewed beauty guru worldwide by historical amount of views and holds the tenth place in the ranking of viewer engagement, a marker that includes total number of comments, likes and dislike on YouTube, as well as Facebook shares and tweets (Pixability, 2015). Even with the explosive wave of younger and innovative newcomers such as Zoe Sugg (Zoella) and Tanya Burr (pixi2woo) –who rapidly rose to first and second places in the ranking of most subscribed gurus in the UK– that left Bubz for the first time in the 3rd place with almost 3 million subscriptions, Bubz's popularity endures.

According to the community of viewers and fellow gurus, she has a deserved place, which she won with resilience and sustained effort since her first tutorials in 2008. She may well be on YouTube for entirely selfless or for completely individualistic reasons or even a mixture of both, as is most probable. What is clear is that her 'ethics' and personality fit the community expectations and thanks to complying with the norms she is seen as a reliable, trustworthy and authentic guru. The point that I am making is that her values and experiences are fitting to the community norms (García-Rapp, 2017), which is also a requisite to succeed. Therefore, I do not focus here on truth claims, such as discovering if she is actually 'manipulating' her viewers or up to what point she is a genuine guru.

Some gurus eventually achieve high status and influence which makes maintaining established close connections and individualized attention increasingly difficult. Not engaging with viewers implies not displaying the ethical standards required by the community and the guru is subsequently deemed as 'not real'. The person is then seen as 'seeking fame for its own sake', something that impacts hugely on online credibility and popularity. However, in the case of Bubz, she has achieved a position where it is understood that she cannot answer directly to comments, but she must nevertheless comply by addressing her viewers' request and questions during her videos.

Like Marwick and boyd, I see celebrity as an 'organic and ever-changing performative practice' (2011, 140) which leads to renowned personalities of various characteristics. Popular users achieve their respective status according to not only platform-specific, but also community-specific norms, creating diversified status positions within the 'celebrity' category (García-Rapp, 2016; Marwick, 2013a, 2015a, 2015b). Following the paradigm of symbolic interactionism, we know that social content and identity are collaboratively constructed through conversation and interaction (Blumer, 1962; Strauss, 1993).

Therefore, online status symbols, norms, and expectations always depend on the particular scene or community (Baym, 2010; Marwick, 2013a). They are evaluated and negotiated on a daily basis and liable to change over time. Dyer reminds us of this too: 'yesterday´s markers of sincerity and authenticity are today´s signs of hype and artifice' (1991, 137). The gatekeepers of the much sought-after status of 'famous beauty guru' are not only embodied by internal corporate guidelines and market politics of commercial ties with cosmetic manufacturers but also by powerful community-specific norms. These dynamic norms are practiced and enforced, contested and negotiated daily by celebrity practitioners and viewers.

In this vein, it is important to consider the idiosyncrasies of the local 'communities of practice' (Baym, 2010) where the processes of celebrification take place. For instance, the performance of celebrity on Instagram as analyzed by Marwick is different than the expectations and norms of conduct governing the YouTube´s beauty community, where Bubz is active. While for many popular Instagram users looking to "credibly inhabit celebrity subjectivity" (2015a, 157), it is important to imitate the "visual iconography of mainstream celebrity culture" (Marwick, 2015a, 139) and to visually highlight aspects such as luxury and glamour. This would be considered inauthentic and not down-to-earth enough for a YouTuber to sustain her legitimacy as a 'real' beauty guru.

The relevance of authenticity for the beauty community dictates that through the display of an authentic self, gurus are allowed to continue deploying self-branding strategies in order to sustain their market position and status. This dynamic, in turn, enables them to remain visible and valuable without losing

face or being 'fake'. Beauty gurus are "ordinary expert[s]" (Tolson, 2010, 283), who capitalize on their condition of authentic, everyday people to remain deserving of their fame.

In the same vein, Jerslev relates online authenticity to visibility-seeking performances of a "real, private me" (2016, 5240). The temporality of connectedness, availability and accessibility, together with a sense of unpretentious equality foster trustworthiness.

According to Tolson, the authenticity of YouTube vlogging 'is located in its excessive direct address, in its transparent amateurishness and the sheer volume and immediacy of "conversational" response' (2010, 286). Similarly, for Lovelock the 'self-revelatory economy' (2016, 21) of YouTube plays a key role in the 'unfolding of authentic selves' (2016, 12). Through revelation and narration, YouTubers perform authenticity and achieve validation.

But what is particularly important for YouTube's beauty community? This is what I aim to explore here. Being authentic is essential to reach sustained viewer attention and engagement. For the analyzed community, an authentic guru is someone 'real'. This implies following certain norms of behavior, but the notion that underlies them all is being genuine, true to yourself (spontaneous) and not in search of fame or money (premeditated). Similar to Dyer's interpretation of Hollywood's stardom system in the 20th century, where authenticity was constructed 'by use of markers that indicate lack of control, lack of premeditation and privacy' (1991, 137), on YouTube's beauty community it is also about premeditation (or better, the lack of it). Bubz's fame was achieved by doing what she loves; she was not looking for it. Her vlogs are not scripted, if she reviews or display products during her tutorials it is because she genuinely likes them and so forth. Effort, hard-work, dedication and creativity are also important in order to achieve a legitimized celebrity position. Her audience 'approves' certain self-commodification practices, as long as she is 'real'. Her authentic self-presentation allows her to self-brand and make a living out of her online content production.

### *All in a Day's Work* – The ethics of reviewing products

In this section, I examine and discuss the community-specific framing of self-promotional strategies and the extent to which it shapes daily practices. Gurus achieving many views and subscriptions are rewarded not only with higher positions in the community hierarchy and more popularity, but also with more so-called 'business inquiries' to review and advertise cosmetics (Spyer, 2011). According to my findings, for YouTube beauty gurus as 'aspiring tastemakers' (Duffy & Hund, 2015, 9), there is an important ethical guideline stating 'try (and like!) before you recommend'. This norm translates in everyday practice as having actually tried and genuinely liked the product recommended on the video (García-Rapp, 2017). This is clearly not verifiable, but nevertheless is considered important by the community to disclose

during videos. The relevance of 'believing in the product' (Duffy, 2015, 56) as a way of legitimizing (paid) reviews is also evident in Duffy's examination of normative codes among fashion bloggers. It would not be seen as honest to review products positively just for money. Within the beauty community, pursuing fame, success, and economic benefits for its own sake renders content creators as untrustworthy, and not transparent enough to 'deserve' fame.

Moreover, to avoid being seen as dishonest, it is essential to disclose if one is being paid for a review and when posting affiliate links[ii] below one's videos. Similarly, Rodrigues discusses the practice in Brazilian beauty and fashion blogs of including a disclaimer summarizing the experience with the product (2012). Such text –which usually includes the length of usage and any effects it may have had– can be seen as a strategy to remain trustworthy and transparent, for viewers to continue trusting their opinions. The dominant expectation of 'honest brand engagement' is a major requisite for a legitimized and authentic self, as also identified by Marwick for fashion blogs (2013b, 5).

The need for disclaimers and disclosure regarding the commercial side of beauty is often explicitly mentioned by Bubz, other gurus, and commenters; which shows how conscious the scene is of maintaining a trustworthy persona. For example, on her early video 'Autumn Favorites' from 2009, Bubz included links to the online shops of the cosmetics she mentioned and added the following text: 'I am not paid to endorse products!! I have been approached many times by companies to do so and I ALWAYS turn them down. Because my videos aren't about receiving free products/money. I give honest reviews ^_^'. Here Bubz equals paid reviews with dishonest reviews, which is a rather radical stance. The larger community actually only expects that if gurus praise a product it is because they really like it independent of any eventual payment. This is seen in opposition to lying to viewers and 'pushing products', as demonstrated by, for instance, the following user comment:

> I don't watch many other YouTubers, in fact, I´ve stopped watching a lot of the channels I enjoyed because in my opinion, they changed and I just couldn't enjoy their videos anymore. Not with every video being endorsed and products being showed down my throat. I don't mind youtubers taking offers to earn money because everybody needs a job but lately it´s gotten to the point that I don't trust them anymore. They're no longer credible.

It is interesting to note that over time, even Bubz –considered an ideal case when it comes to authenticity– changed her position. Later that same year Bubz wrote on her profile: 'For all Business & PR opportunities, please email'; which renders visible the embedded commercial logic behind the reviewing and apparently (entirely) selfless sharing practices. When she had already achieved one million subscribers, by late 2012, she wrote in a post to her blog:

> one of my biggest YouTube ethics is to be honest with my viewers because your trust in me is my number 1 priority. I am aware I have quite a large following but I never want to abuse with power/trust. Out of 100 business opportunities, I probably work with less than 1 (if even)…I'll have to believe in the company 101%. I'm not saying this to make myself sound righteous. I'm just saying this is my own personal preference and style of working I guess.

This statement confirms that she is complying with the community norms of expected honesty and trustworthiness over commercial opportunities. As an already established beauty guru with a large viewership, she frames her values as her chosen 'work ethic', acknowledging that she lives off this revenue and, legitimized as authentic and 'real', leaves behind the more amateur status that framed her in 2009, when she claimed to turn down *all* companies. In response to this, we see through user comments how Bubz is rewarded with trust and praise because of her implied honesty: 'You're the best bubz, you're no sellout' or 'Thank you for choosing to make videos to help us instead of for money'.

One could argue that there is a certain community-dependent degree of fame, but also of down-to-earth 'realness' needed in order to legitimately make use of self-branding strategies. Although being authentic is often seen in opposition to self-branding and commercialization, it is relevant to note that self-promoting and online fame – together with the social and economic perks this entails– can also be seen as deserved and subsequently legitimized by the community. In this case, it is acceptable to earn money from YouTube as long as gurus remain authentic, implying sincerity and trustworthiness[iii]. The performance of authenticity can be consistent or not, and in the case of Bubz, it seems to be performed successfully. For instance, many viewers praise and congratulate her on earning the YouTube golden button prize as recognition for having achieved one million subscribers.

> Congrats, Bubz, you are one hell of a guru! even the trashing threads praised you so much! I really look up to you Bubz, youre the only guru that´s so genuine.

> You´re the only 'makeup guru' that I think is so down-to-earth and trustworthy. Like you said, some seem even like actors acting in infomercials.

> Congratulations on the prize, you deserve it bubz! because youre real!

This recognition positions Bubz in an even higher hierarchy within the community, and more broadly on YouTube, which also implies higher social and economic capital and financial retributions, distinguishing her from her viewers. Nevertheless, as long as Bubz is successfully depicted and understood by her viewers as humble, and hard-working, she is not begrudged her fame and is granted her privileged position. The understanding seems to be that, at the end of the day, she is talented, a good person, and still remains 'one of us'.

To summarize, on a platform like YouTube, especially within the amateur and beauty community where authenticity and credibility go hand in hand, both established and aspiring gurus walk on slippery ground

when openly reviewing products. It is namely their perceived honesty and openness that ultimately protect their legitimacy and authority as admired online personalities. 'Recommending' –perceived as coming from altruistic friendly solidarity– and 'overly advertising' –perceived as fame-seeking– are seen as two opposing practices. There seems to be an implicit rule stating: if uploaders 'sell out' to cosmetic brands and overly advertise, leaving their true selves and honest views aside, they are simply not 'talented' or 'well-intentioned' enough to deserve views and recognition. As a viewer writes to Bubz, comparing her to another famous guru and highlighting her authenticity:

> I'm glad youre not going down the same route as Michelle Phan. I used to love her videos but no they just seem half-assed and a chore. Everything she does now just seems to be with the sole goal of selling herself and getting more money and I don't like that. Im so happy that you managed to escape from the lure of money and greed. You're such a genuine person bubz! I'm so glad you're not a sell-out like other makeup gurus that get popular. You remained true and remained you.

Bubz also reinforces this community value of hard work framed within the discourse of honest self-development:

> I completely understand that YouTube is now an actual career path/stepping stone for a lot of people now (including myself now) so being able to advance isn't necessarily a bad thing. In fact, I think it's actually very inspiring to see normal people suddenly become so successful through determination and preservance (sic).

This is connected to the community's politics of success. The most important requirement to achieve legitimized fame seems to be expertise and talent, demonstrated by beauty related know-how during video tutorials. The implicit requirement of being an expert is –perhaps precisely due to its high relevance for instructional videos– tacit. It is as if it went 'without saying' that gurus need to be talented, creative and innovative to succeed, especially among such heavy competition. However, expertise still needs to be validated.

Once an aspiring guru has showed their skills by uploading several tutorials over a certain period of time, and after metrics as views and subscriptions have confirm this, the community will eventually evaluate the possession of other relevant qualities. These include having worked hard to achieve a higher hierarchical position, implying the legitimating value of effort, as well as the disclosed and enacted 'actual' reasons for them to participate and upload, which can be 'right' or 'wrong' reasons. For instance, participating in order to help and inspire others is seen as a legitimate reason to create videos, while looking to become famous or rich are examples of unacceptable motivations. In addition, it is also important to project a thankful, positive, passionate and relatable persona. In the next section I will focus on the relevance of the essential value of hard work and resilience for a legitimized celebrity position.

**Achieving success through 'Personal Effort' or taking the 'Easy Road up'?**

*'The branded-self is a commodity sign; it is an entity that works and, at the same time, points to itself working, striving to embody the values of its working environment'*
(Hearn, 2008, 201)

Closely related to the discussed community-based norms of brand engagement is the notion positioning effort and self-motivation as the reasons for success (Banet-Weiser, 2012; Duffy, 2015; Hearn, 2008); something identified as neoliberalist rhetoric (e.g. Marwick, 2013a) and active within broader societal spheres. The norm dictating that 'if you don't achieve it, it´s because you didn't try hard enough', ties success to an 'ostensibly merit-based social order' (2013a, 78). Based on Marwick's research on status within the San Francisco´s tech scene, there seems to be an apparent meritocratic hierarchy which actually hides the structural reasons that lead privileged individuals to taking further steps up the ladder to success (2013, see also Marwick 2015a). These reasons include racial and gender factors, as well as aspects like existing hierarchies, social capital, access to others, and 'pure privilege' (2013, 257). Following this premise, which is also present on reality TV shows (Oliva, 2012), those who do not achieve success are 'blamed for 'not wanting it enough' or not working hard' (Marwick, 2013, 203).

There are around 180.000 active beauty gurus on YouTube, which, together with 215 cosmetic brands, produce 100 hours of beauty content daily (Pixability, 2015). Most of them are, and will remain, aspiring gurus, while only a minority (less than 100) has or will have the chance of achieving the position of established, popular experts. The harsh reality for most aspiring gurus is that it does not matter how 'hard they try to succeed', not everyone working hard will achieve fame on YouTube because being famous still is and will remain a privileged position within society. The essence of these elevated personalities rests in the fact that they are a few 'chosen' ones. As Hearn and Schoenhoff explain: 'The very logic of celebrity, like the logic of capitalism itself, is that only a select few can achieve success within it' (2015, 208). What is more, if everyone was famous, it would simply lose the appeal. 'Fame, like power, could never be evenly distributed, for even if it were possible that we could all be famous, if everyone were famous then no one would be famous' (McDonald, 1995, 65, cited by Holmes and Redmond, 2006, 14).

This is one side of the 'success myth', which works as a *promise* by tying future success to present and past effort. There is also a much more explicit and straight-forward premise at play in the community that *legitimizes* the achieved privileged position they occupy as famous beauty gurus. In this case, one's success is legitimized by present and past effort. Fame is seen as a deserved reward for the invested time and effort (Dyer, 1998; Kanai, 2015). The understanding is that it takes time, patience and resilience to build an audience. After a guru achieves fame, the community will then determine how much effort was

put into the path to success. According to values of the community, it is not acceptable to try to make it faster or easier.

Based on my findings, a popular but not positively viewed practice within the beauty community, is the promotion of one's channel through self-advertising comments below other guru's videos (see also Burgess & Green, 2008; Spyer, 2011). Many new creators employ the strategy of promoting their content by advertising their channels through 'spamming' already established, well-visited channels. These YouTubers usually write comments below a video asking viewers to 'check out' their channels and subscribe. Most of these creators consistently repeat the ever-present keywords that go hand in hand with the discourses and behaviors expected and subsequently enforced by the community. They even echo Bubz's own phraseology of inspiring, being inspired by others, and wanting to help others through content. As seen for example during Bubz's videos:

> I remember my first negative comment. It did put me down and made me question myself. Then I remembered what I am on YouTube to do and I'm on YouTube to do my thing, inspire people, I am on YouTube to be inspired. Put yourself on the mission to help people feel beautiful on the outside and inside. It [being part of YouTube] has taught me so much, mentally and physically and you guys inspire me every single day.

Like Bubz, these creators highlight their strong 'passion' (Duffy & Hund, 2015; Marwick, 2013a) and long-standing dreams as motivation to start their channels, while praising her, and thanking viewers in advance for the eventual views. Additionally, the discourse of being inspired by Bubz and wanting to 'give back' by inspiring others through their content is systematically activated and brought to the foreground (García-Rapp & Roca-Cuberes, 2017). In the following examples of comments, there are evident repeatedly deployed discursive practices of 'dreaming big', 'putting effort, soul, and heart' into content creation:

> i'm a girl with a big dream and passion for makeup i put my heart, soul, and time into tutorials. i started making videos this year and i'd appreciate your input and feedback: positive or constructive criticism. you guys are the experts on what people want to see, this is why i'm asking you to give me some feedback if you have the time. i know these get annoying, so i apologize, but if you have the time, please check out my channel! i hope you have a blessed day. thanks once again :)

> Ever since I was a young girl I've had the dream of becoming successful on YouTube. My dreams are impossible to reach, but I'm not giving up because I know that if I work hard enough I can reach them.It would mean the world to me if you took five seconds to check out my channel. My channel focuses on fashion, your feedback and support would make me the happiest girl on earth! You would bring me a step closer to my dreams, and you have no idea how thankful I would be for that! xo Zahria

hey girls, i know how annoying these get but I make beauty videos too, if you have a minute could you pretty please subscribe to my channel I wont let you down! thanks so much for caring :)

One of the users advertising her channel on Bubz's comments section wrote: 'Come join and let's BOND'. The comment sounds as if it was a matter of simply switching on a 'connect' button, clicking, and being automatically tied to each other. Here the post suggesting a type of instant intimacy through 'joining and bonding':

❤ COME VISIT MY CHANNEL! ❤ I´m a Beauty Fashion Guru. LOVE making videos about boyfriend advise, style and girly stuff. I´m doing a GIVEAWAY once I hit 200 subscribers. ❤ Come join and let´s BOND. ❤

These sort of posts, while in principle following community-based norms of being positive, thankful, and 'caring', are seen by other commenters as unrelated to the video in question and, as such, considered unsolicited self-advertisements and 'spam'. It is unknown if such posts result in the increased channel views that their authors seek, but it is clearly viewed as poor marketing. Their negative effect is also evident through its implicit understanding as 'annoying' that the aspiring gurus themselves mention in their 'self-promoting ads'.

According to textual reactions of other viewers, they come across too straight-forward and excessively self-promotional (see also Burgess & Green, 2008; Duffy 2015). This is why they are systematically ignored and some viewers are even angered by them. As we see in a user comment addressing these posts: 'Are these people for real? How tiring work your own audience folks!'. The practice is often seen as 'taking the easy road', since it does not comply in practice with the community expectation of hard work, diligence, and perseverance as factors that legitimize fame. The prevailing community rule stating that 'the audience will follow, if you work hard enough and follow your inner dreams' is simply not being followed by these newcomers.

The practice was also criticized by a high-status, influential person such as Bubz, which reinforces the already negative community reactions. In response to requests from new uploaders to mention and recommend their channels in her videos, Bubz herself expressed during her vlog 'No pain, No gain' her disappointment towards these practices:

You know, a lot of the times people comment 'Oh guys can you check out my channel' in the comment section of my videos, not just my videos but other people's videos. That's fine too, everybody is entitled to comment whatever they want in the comments below. Sometimes I even get people emailing me saying 'Bubz please check out my channel', which is something I love to do. And then some people push a little more asking 'can you share this with your subscribers?'. Please don't get me wrong guys, I mean, I get a little sense of disappointment when I do hear this […] And when I see people posting in comments 'please check out my channel' I can understand why you are doing it but isn't it so much more worth it when

someone like just comes across your channel by themselves? […] because I know what it feels to just accidentally stumble on someone's channel and I know the excitement i get from just thinking 'oh I love this girl she is so cool'.

She also talked about how difficult and how much hard work and perseverance it takes to 'make it' on YouTube. As a way of motivating her viewers to be determined, and to 'fight their own battles', she suggested them to just keep up the good work and be patient:

> there are a lot of people out there who don't have as many subscribers or views as they would like and when you read their emails it's easy to see why: because some people are just making videos for the wrong intentions. I was on YouTube for maybe like a year before someone, you know, people started watching my videos, so I was pretty much invisible, but I just kept doing what I did because I just enjoyed it. […] And you know the saying, 'no pain, no gain' and sometimes I get people just saying to me 'Bubz I wish I had as much subscribers as you do' or 'I wish I was as happy as you are' and, honestly, I just have to reply 'I didn't get it wishing', you know, things take effort and you just can't live life just expecting things will be served on a plate for you. And I don't say this in a way that I'm trying to be, like, ignorant, I say it as a sense of caring because I believe that this is how you can really gain. You know, from just putting more effort.

During this video, where she also disclosed that it had taken her more than six months to achieve her first hundred subscribers, she not only legitimizes herself as a hard-working guru who was resilient enough to achieve success, but also disciplines others by reminding them of the value of effort and of why she stayed. She makes it clear that she continued making videos because she did not care about fame or amount of views and subscribers, she was there to enjoy filming tutorials, to help others, to contribute positively to others' lives ('good reasons') thus reinforcing the active norms discussed above. The importance of consistently following the community rules of self-presentation and engagement with brands and viewers without 'losing your own self' is at the heart of the values of YouTube's beauty community. Below I include a diagram to help visualize the main community norms:



Trustworthy
Honest
Open

**+**

Rightfully
motivated
(inspire,
help)

**=**

*being REAL*
*(authentic)*

*Do not 'oversell'*
*product reviews*

*Only review*
*products you*
*have tried (and*
*liked!)*

*Disclose paid*
*reviews and gifts*

Reasons to participate
(not fame or money)

*'I'm an unpredictable*
*girl with a passion for*
*beauty hair and*
*fashion'*
*'My channel is to help*
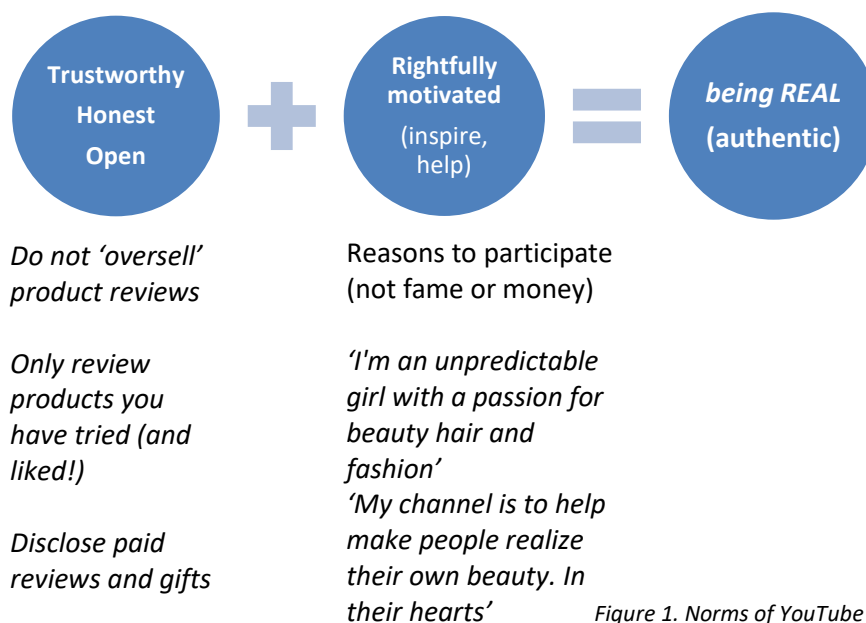*make people realize*
*their own beauty. In*
*their hearts'*

*Figure 1. Norms of YouTube beauty community*

**Conclusions: politics of success and the quest for authenticity**

Contrary to the fifteen minutes of fame of online memes and viral videos in the volatile and competitive environment of YouTube, popular beauty gurus achieve sustained popularity, enjoy from long-lasting viewer engagement and inhabit legitimized celebrity positions. This article sought to answer the question of what are the markers of authenticity in a commercialized platform where expectations for honest self-presentation and meaningful personal interactions remain high. The relevance of trustworthiness is rendered even more visible in this case because the beauty community is heavily commercialized and paid product reviews are ubiquitous. There is a concrete need for ethical guidelines to frame accepted, 'authentic' behavior.

Identity, as well as authenticity, is not objective or stable, but rather performative, contextual, and shifting. Both concepts are in practice contingent and dynamic, because people conscious and unconsciously 'work on them', modify them, and 'learn by doing' in their various social worlds. There are different ways of 'being oneself', according to situational constraints (with family, friends, at work, at a party) and all are 'real' and insofar authentic (Haimson and Hoffmann, 2016). Being yourself is a performance which can be cynic or sincere (Goffmann, 1959), and it is also performed online by regular users (Thomas, 2014). In view of this, it is worthwhile considering how most of the currently active expectations within social media –as well as the notions of the self that underlie them– assume the existence of a unique and stable core, a true, discoverable authentic self. In the words of Tolson, these understandings are 'essentialist reading[s]' (2001, 452) of an actual shifting self. To discover the real self beneath the surface of the public persona has been the appeal of stardom since the beginnings of cinema (see also Dyer, 1991). Elcessor draws from this when writing that for the audience there is an 'ultimately unknowable, yet persistently desirable' authentic self to be discovered (2012, 51). What is more, there is a certain 'harmony between the star image and some sort of authentic "real" identity' needed in order to succeed (2012, 51).

Jerslev and Mortensen (2015) write about a merging of self-commodification and authenticity on celebrity selfies on Instagram. In their examination of a popular Danish Instagrammer, they see online identity production through selfies to represent the 'celebrity self in control: being herself, making herself and branding herself at one and the same time' (259). In the case of Bubz and her video content production, rather, I would say there is a constant struggle between the 'being yourself' and the 'branding yourself' (García-Rapp, 2016). There is a fine line between separating being a 'sellout' and being 'real'. A certain balance needs to be kept and monitored daily, as exemplified by the discussed product reviews, promotional deals, or her interaction with fans and her content.

Internet 'Self-made, do-it-yourself celebrities' (Gamson, 2011, 1065) may well be 'bypassing the traditional celebrity industry' (2011, 1067) or 'doing an end run around the Hollywood gatekeeping system' (2011, 1066) but YouTube is a highly commercialized and competitive platform, equivalent to an industry. The gatekeeping system is embodied here by the communities' own set of norms. Internet celebrities may be bypassing traditional regulatory mechanisms of access and control but there is still no way around the set of expectations that the audience has for aspiring and established popular YouTubers. Because, at the end of the day, 'merited celebrity is rare, extraordinary and justifiably more heavily rewarded' (Gamson, 2011, 1068).

Merited fame implies hard-work, talent, honest interaction, and selfless motivation to participate. These traits are further confirmed by sustained views and subscription figures and rewarded with legitimized higher hierarchy positions, peer recognition, praise from viewers and economic benefits that arise from strengthening their roles as marketable, influential online personas. As Dyer (1998) argued with regard to mass media celebrities, hard work, as well as ordinariness and a certain talent are needed to remain in a legitimized celebrity position. Online celebrities, while possessing the everyday 'realness' needed to remain relatable and legitimized, at the same time –and even more than mass-media celebrities– need to establish a talent or know-how that makes them worthy of recognition. It is interesting to note that, within YouTube´s beauty community, while the expectation of authenticity is explicit as expressed in comments and during videos, the requisite of being talented is a tacit understanding that marks it as more essential. I suggest that popular YouTubers must show and demonstrate talent and effort because what they do is essentially regarded as 'something we all can do', since they often film themselves from home with (at least in the beginning) basic video equipment (Gamson, 2011; Smith, 2014).

Regarding the implications for practice, there are several aspects to take into account. For the particular case of beauty gurus, the instructional aspect of uploading tutorials demonstrating makeup styles plays an important role when evaluating their legitimacy. They need to be experts because they are acting as facilitators, guides and teachers through their tutorials (Tolson, 2010). This is why the role of expertise is more relevant for beauty gurus than for other popular YouTubers such as for example mommy bloggers, whose participation is based on sharing tips and ideas coming from their own experiences as mothers. To begin with, gurus need to know not only products but also specific techniques, like how to highlight and contour cheek bones and noses or master different liquid eyeliner and false eyelashes application styles. Moreover, the specificity of beauty-related knowledge, including creativity and innovation, is not enough to succeed, because the filmed process needs to be nicely tied up together in an appealing audiovisual manner. In addition to the technical skills of editing and filming, which are an implicit requirement for all video creators, are added the needed skills to explain the looks in an understandable, entertaining and easy to follow manner. To summarize, Bubz needs to continuously prove her knowledge and skills

through tutorials while reaffirming her appealing, 'ordinary authenticity'. She achieves this by balancing the role of consumer, which implies being a 'regular makeup lover', while simultaneously performing her celebrity status as an influential content producer.

Marshall sees celebrities as 'discursive vehicles' (2014, 246) always on the verge of being legitimized as a 'voice above other(s)' (Marshall, 2014, XlVIII), and being condemned as a 'fabricated commodity' (XIIV). This unstable situation puts celebrity as a construct in a constant tension between representing an 'authentic and [a] false cultural value' (2014, XIIV). I build on this understanding to argue that the ambivalence of being a meaningless commodity is even more evident for regular users-turned famous such as YouTubers. Bubz achieves through her informational tutorials, which confirm her talent and contribute to her merited high-status position as a renowned guru. With her vlogs, she strengthens her condition of ordinary, relatable, everyday girl, sustaining viewers' interest through entertainment and identification (also García-Rapp, 2016). Together, both types of content legitimize her position as a popular beauty guru.

There are moments when Bubz makes explicit the difficulty of balancing the tensions of being successful on YouTube and at the same time not contradicting her own morals. On the last day of her 2012 trip to LA, which was organized by her channel network, Style Haul, apparently for her to meet with brands interested in her eventual endorsements, she posted a vlog from her hotel room with blurry eyes and visibly upset. In the video, she disclosed having just cancelled over the phone her newly assumed commitments with certain cosmetic manufacturers, as well as other 'deals' and 'opportunities' in New York that she didn't not specify, due to personal, more specifically, ethical reasons. She explained how it was something inside her telling her not to go for these chances, because even though they sounded good on paper it was not what she really wanted to do. Some days later, she posted a lengthy and reflexive entry to her blog titled 'My Struggle on YouTube', where she admitted being at times confused about her role as a guru because of eventual profits getting mixed with her 'amateur' original motivations to start her channel.

> I really felt my head grow bigger in that single week I was sin LA. People were constantly praising me and it's so easy to suddenly think you're better than others when you're clearly not. I couldn't believe how nice everybody was treating me (which I have to admit I did enjoy lol). I'm sure lots of people can balance fame over there but if I were to live there for a long period of time, I know it would probably change me. While I love the shopping, sunny weather, food and people in LA, I know I can only handle it in small doses for my own good […]I asked myself what I want most out of what I do on YouTube. I really had to seek deep within myself for the answer and the answer was: 'To be able to reach out to others and encourage/inspire them because it gives me meaning. […]I'm not perfect guys. I face temptations every single day and some days I fall hard [...] I promise you guys that I will not change. If I ever change, it will only be for the better. I'm hopeful ^_^

While this text may 'just' well be a self-reflection of her experiences as lived in LA, at the same time the story fits perfectly well with her image of an authentic guru. Through this narrative she is communicating, and by it, admitting to viewers, even the times when she doubts herself, when struggling with the 'temptations' of money and status and even (almost?) 'closing the line' by signing contracts she does not believe in. By disclosing these difficult moments, she highlights the achievement of remaining 'herself', overcoming the struggle and eventually regaining the needed strength and peace of mind to continue doing 'her thing', which is helping others and enjoying being on YouTube for its own sake.

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[i] Many beauty gurus are YouTube Partners, a status which involves an undisclosed agreement with the platform and enables them to earn revenue from their content according to the number of views their videos achieve.

[ii] Posting affiliate links below a tutorial or a review video is a usual practice on YouTube`s beauty community. Through these links, their audience can directly buy recommended products from a certain online shop, and for every sale the guru gets a commission for the recommendation.

[iii] This is analogous to findings regarding celebrity-fan interaction on Twitter (Usher, 2015) as well as the audience's engagement with mainstream celebrities such as Britney Spears (Meyers, 2009), which acknowledge viewers' understanding (and support) of self-commodification processes.