Being an online celebrity - Norms and expectations of YouTube's beauty community

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Abstract

This article is based on 22 months of online fieldwork examining YouTube's beauty community, specifically the beauty guru Bubz, her uploaded content, and user comments. We aim to conceptualize central community-specific dynamics and practices, particularly those related to self-presentation and identity-management and their affordances for legitimized online popularity. We explain how the guru's successful online persona is based on a performative blend of relatable, down-to-earth values paired with a more aspirational and worthy of emulation side. Being an "ordinary-user-turned-famous" is seemingly an advantage given the high relevance of authenticity when judging online celebrities. However, her inherent ordinariness also increases expectations of trustworthiness and honesty, precisely because she is, and continuous to perform daily, a regular user.

Keywords

YouTube beauty community, online celebrities, online popularity, community norms, legitimized popularity

Introduction

"learning a culture is like learning the rules of a game" (Boellstorff, 2008, p. 68)

YouTube has been for over a decade the largest and most visited database of online video content. Through popular content, the platform aims to accomplish marketable videos, which is profitable not only for the YouTube and its advertisers, but for content creators as well. Since its creation in 2007, the Partner Program offers revenue to users according to the amount of views their content achieves (see also Burgess, 2012; Burges and Green, 2009). Thanks to it, more than a million creators from various countries monetize their videos and thousands earn six figures a year (YouTube, 2014a).

Situating platform developments in the current "attention economy" (Burgess and Green, 2009; Goldhaber, 1997; Marwick, 2013a; Senft, 2013), which "value[s] visibility in and of itself" (Gamson, 2011, p. 1063), it is relevant to consider the role of views and subscriptions as important commodities within the beauty community and on YouTube in general (García-Rapp, 2017). In this vein, Marwick argues that "the presence of an attentive audience may be the most potent status symbol of all" (2015a, p. 141). The platform itself rewards visibility by awarding prizes to creators producing highly popular content. For instance, the Golden Button, is gifted to partners who reach one million subscribers. The promotional tagline of the prize reads: "Build your audience and be recognized for your success" (YouTube, 2016).

Here, drawing from ethnographic findings from the platform's beauty community, we focus on the case of a British-Chinese guru[1] known as Bubz. Beauty gurus are usually young women who regularly upload videos advising on makeup, hairstyling techniques, and cosmetics. They are active content creators and influential personalities within YouTube. Moreover, they are emulated, praised, and looked up to by millions of viewers. Bubz has been since 2010 one of the most viewed and subscribed YouTuber in the world. By early 2016 she had amassed more than two and a half million subscribers and almost 400 million views. She owns three YouTube channels

and a successful online shop of makeup brushes and has reached a status of renowned leader within the beauty community of YouTube.

Through her channel Bubzbeauty she advises on acne problems, gives tips to help choosing the best-fitting bra, demonstrates how to apply teeth bleaching stripes, but also films herself during her daily activities walking the dogs, cooking, or having a bath. Particularly these intimate videos contribute to sustain her popularity, generating many subscribers and renewing viewers' interest. Additionally, personal, connection-seeking vlogs can be seen as relational and motivational uploads that strengthen her social value within the community through an image of a friendly, everyday girl, who is close to her viewers (see also García-Rapp, 2017).

In opposition to the short-lived visibility of online trends, viral videos and memes, beauty gurus as Bubz achieve sustained popularity and are consolidated in influential, high-status community positions in a competitive cultural industry as YouTube. How is this achieved? What does it mean to be an online celebrity on YouTube's beauty community? What are its implications? Surprisingly, these questions are not addressed by current literature, which leads us to propose our own answers based on empirical study of the platform.

With this article, we aim to conceptualize rules and norms active within the beauty community and their shaping force in delimitating accepted and appropriate behavior. We discuss the community expectations directed to Bubz in her role as an influential beauty guru to assess her popular subject position. Our broader goal is to contribute to the theorizing of current developments within the field of digital and celebrity culture. In this case, it is particularly the juxtaposition of two opposing political economies (community and commerce; commoditization and connection), what renders YouTube a fruitful, complex and often paradoxical object of research (e.g. Burgess, 2012).

YouTube as a highly commercialized and competitive platform works as an industry in of itself. Internet celebrities may be bypassing traditional regulatory mechanisms of access and control but there is still no way around the set of expectations and regulations that both audiences and

commercially-oriented stakeholders as YouTube (Google) together with advertisers have for aspiring and established popular YouTubers. The local set of norms can be seen as a gatekeeping system.

Therefore, we argue that the simultaneous performance of a "regular user/public persona" in a creative industry as YouTube is not a contradiction, but a challenge that needs to be daily contended. The challenging practice of daily balancing tensions must be consistently and successfully performed. Through her expression of certain "work ethics" as well as her general "professional" self-presentation and respect of both community and corporate interests she daily sustains her popular position.

Methods

This article draws from a more encompassing ethnographic investigation that took place during 22 months between 2013 and 2015. The performed online fieldwork on YouTube, conducting systematic observation, coding, and interpretation, considered 313 videos (all available videos of the analysed channel until the beginning of data collection) and more than 10,000 user comments focused on the beauty channel Bubzbeauty. For this particular article, a purposeful sample of 50 videos, mainly vlogs, and 700 user comments was considered. These digital texts were chosen because they represent a wide range of data and variations in the dimensions of interest: community understandings and assumptions.

Kozinets explains the importance of a flexible and inductive approach to generate theory and offer descriptions, comparisons, and classifications that shed light to emerging areas (2010, p. 134). In this vein, we performed qualitative content analysis in an inductive and data-driven, iterative process of "systematization and thematization" (Boellstorff, Nardi et al, 2012, p. 168) with the analytical goal of developing integrative themes (Wolcott, 1995, 2010; Saldaña, 2013; Merriam, 2009).

Implicit assumptions and norms were identified by looking at two types of data: user comments praising and highlighting certain aspects of her personality and content as well as the narrative of

her own vlogs. During the phases of pre-coding and first cycle coding, which aimed at indexing and reducing data, we applied both descriptive and verbatim codes to transcriptions of her videos ("love", "friendship", "ordinariness", "honesty", "I'm here to inspire you", "I'm not really famous", "being thankful"). Then her videos were differentiated in two main categories of vlogs and tutorials. This emerged basic typology was further developed through second cycle coding of purposeful samples of up to 80 videos, according to the respective themes that needed to be explored and expanded (focusing on themes such as "motivations to participate", "authenticity", "intimacy", "work ethics and success"). A more detailed typology of four video categories emerged: motivational, relational, content-oriented and market-oriented (García-Rapp, 2016).

During second cycle coding, more conceptual and abstract than first cycle coding, the aim was to establish connections between the emerged codes, which turned into broader categories and then into interconnected overarching themes. The applied analytical approaches were the design of diagrams and the application of code mapping and landscaping (Saldaña, 2013), which are forms of visually organizing the emerged themes. This led to emerging norms and rules as well as implicit and explicit community[2] understandings and values.

User comments were manually coded; including specific analytical categories such as viewers' identification with different aspects of the guru's portrayed identity and lifestyle. In addition, a basic quantitative overview of her channel was performed, considering the number of views, likes, dislikes, shares, comments, and achieved subscriptions for each video.

If we understand field site as "an assemblage of actors, places, practices and artefacts that can be physical, virtual, or a combination of both", (Taylor, 2009, cited by Boellstorff, Nardi et al, 2012, p. 60), the channel, together with subscribers' comments, and the practices of uploading, sharing, commenting, and (dis)liking are the constituting elements of our field site. Moreover, Lange highlights the relevance of considering not only videos but also YouTube comments which often feature the active performance, negotiation, and redefinition of implicit community roles and practices (2014, p. 145).

Therefore, for us, looking to uncover patterns of shared rules and norms that guide practices (see also Strangelove, 2010) within the beauty community, it was important to analyze not only Bubz's tutorials and vlogs but also viewers' reactions and reflections. We consider seemingly trivial or random community practices as "legitimate data" (Boellstorff, 2008, p. 68) which build a relevant analytical scope. According to this, we offer examples in the form of written comments and extracts from transcriptions of Bubz's videos where she actively performs –and often discusses in a self-reflective way– these behavioral guidelines.

Edit yourself to be "safe-for-business"![1]

When addressing the power or influence of YouTube as a corporate agent, we must distinguish between the constraints and expectations posited towards gurus as "YouTube Partners"[2] and those directed to followers of these channels (the audience). For a Partner as Bubz, contractual relations, property rights and corporate guidelines are undoubtedly significant in framing her content creation and self-presentation.

However, in this paper we discuss corporate guidelines and the constraints this implies for Bubz only to the extent that they relate to the microcosms of practices and interactions we are examining. Before delving into community dynamics, we offer with this section a brief account of YouTube's role as a commercial, revenue-oriented infrastructure.

Celebrity, as an "organic and ever changing construct" (Marwick and boyd, 2011, p. 140) is a technique that must be deployed daily to achieve sustained attention and consolidate one's online brand. "In the Internet era microcelebrity is something people *do*" (Marwick, 2015, p. 140). We also understand the practice of online celebrity as a daily performance, necessarily juxtaposed with "edited-self" and self-branding strategies.

When we define celebrity as a daily performance, we do it from the perspective of symbolic interactionism, which considers everyday social interactions as (semi-)conscious performances

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[1] Based on Marwick's concepts "edited self" and "safe-for-work" (2013b, p. 114 and p. 5, respectively)
[2] YouTube Partners are content creators who achieve revenue by monetizing their uploads according to the platform's internal guidelines as determined by non-disclosed contracts.

(Goffman, 1959). Rather than cynically condemning the guru's participation on YouTube as purely instrumental and economically motivated or pejoratively labelling her fans' comments about their felt benefits from her content as "normative" or "romanticized", we see social media audiences as active seekers of entertainment and knowledge and conscious of the processes at play (Usher, 2015; Hills, 2002, 2006). Furthermore, we understand online creators like Bubz as social beings who are themselves personally influenced by the feedback and support they receive (e.g. Abidin, 2015; Baym, 2012; Lange, 2009, 2014).

YouTube's business model consists in, as already identified by Burgess, "delivering attention to ads" (2011, p. 326). In agreement with this, Jakobsson argues that, through its Partner Program, the company actively seeks to "recruit users to produce material that is suitable for advertisers" (2010, p. 110). Additionally, in recent years, YouTube has created especially dedicated production facilities for partners to make use of while filming (YouTube, 2017). This is evidence that the platform is interested in contributing to the creation and support of entrepreneurial communities to "reduce the ratio of non-monetisable content" (Burgess, 2012, p. 55).

Success on YouTube is rooted on sustained attention, thanks to an ever-growing, loyal and engaged audience. Here resides the relevance of subscribers as a valuable commodity: they represent the building blocks of sustained audience attention, which subsequently equals social and economic value. In this case, economic value (for the platform, for advertisers and herself as a commodified persona) speaks to Bubz's status as renowned beauty guru with an influential position. Her social value is established through her image within the community as a trustworthy, open guru providing rich content and also entertainment.

From the perspective of corporate guidelines, gurus' recommendations and evaluation of products, must remain "safe-for-work" (2013a p. 5), so as not to alienate prospective advertisers. This is something explicitly requested by YouTube on its official Creators Hub (see also Burgess, 2012) – an internal platform with guidelines directed to creators focused on how to market their online content. Here it is made clear that videos should not be "business-harming", but rather "advertiser friendly" (YouTube, 2014b). As such, YouTube's Creator Hub can be seen as an

example of the instrumentalization of a normative rhetoric, which leads to a careful self-monitoring of one's online persona.

Nowadays, celebrities and regular users alike have to undergo a certain type of identity management and online performance of the self (Marwick, 2013; Thomas, 2014). Similarly, Senft identifies the current necessity of carefully constructing and performing a "coherent online presence" (2013, p. 2). Something that Strangelove denominates the "performance of selfhood" (2010, p. 75). In line with this, Marshall terms it "the performance of persona" and points out that this is "what we all engage in as we publicize, perform and present versions of ourselves" (2014, p. XXXV).

The result is, a –to a further or lesser extent– the display of an "edited, controlled and monitored self" (Marwick, 2013, p. 5). According to Marwick's ethnographic findings from San Francisco's tech scene, the current need for being ever-present, updating often and sharing, while keeping away from possible business-detrimental situations such as losing face by disclosing too much or at the wrong time, furthers the creation of a self-monitored and appealing version of oneself termed "edited self". Building on this concept, we argue that a performance of edited-self, coordinated through ongoing content management and strong community ties seem to be key elements to achieve legitimized, sustained popularity within YouTube's beauty community.

The "edited self" (Marwick, 2013b, p. 195), as a strategy that users rely on when interacting and creating online content, is grounded on more than one factor. On the one hand, internal norms of each community regarding online self-presentation, and, on the other hand, intrinsic features of online social content such as "searchability" and "replicability" (boyd, 2010, p. 46). Users need to remain aware of their audience, which, through the "context collapse" (Marwick and boyd, 2010, p. 123) happening online, can be comprised of family, fans, and close friends, as well as potential clients and advertisers and millions of strangers. This keeps them from targeting a specific audience with a certain self-presentation, which is in common in everyday social interactions that we all perform (Goffman, 1959).

The importance of following certain behavioral rules is at the heart of YouTube's beauty community values. For Bubz, being successful on YouTube's beauty community is coupled with the necessity to foster the sense of connection with the audience that eventually leads people to like, comment, and follow her content. She has to balance being "aspirational" enough, like cinema stars with their "larger than life" images, and the "auratic distance" (Marshall, 1997, p. 187) they portray, with remaining a down-to-earth "regular girl" to ensure relatability and the grassroots authenticity that legitimizes her in her role (Tolson, 2001, 2010).

Moreover, some gurus eventually achieve status positions where the expected close connection and individualized attention gets increasingly difficult to balance. Bubz, with her millions of subscribers and the thousands of comments that her content receive, is one of them. She rarely replies to her viewers, which reproduces the traditional "dialogic asymmetry" (Lovelock, 2016, p. 7) present in the interactions between mainstream celebrities and their fans. This is also identified by Marwick (2015) and Lovelock (2016) in their examinations of popular YouTubers. Even though beauty gurus are not mainstream celebrities, they have to be at least recognized as famous. Viewers must recognize the "unequal status" to position themselves as fans (Marwick and boyd, 2011, p. 155).

In addition, the behavior matches Hill's argument (2006) that subcultural celebrities, once famous, recreate with their fans the same distant and elusive relationships as mainstream celebrities. Even though this is the case with Bubz, according to user comments, her audience understand that she cannot reply to them all and are thankful when she uploads Q&A videos answering their questions and requests. They are surprised and amazed when she replies to one of their comments and reward her with praise for being appreciative of her fans. Rarely engaging in direct interaction with fans is not only a consequence of the many comments she receives, but also a performative sign that directs attention to her high status. It is part of her acting her part as a famous beauty guru.

Following the rules

In this section, we conceptualize ground rules active within the beauty community and examine how they frame daily practices. Given their high relevance for community members, these expectations are part of the essential steps to be understood and performed to achieve and sustain long-lasting popularity within YouTube's beauty community.

Earlier we addressed the influence of YouTube in framing "professional behaviors" as daily performed by popular content creators. But, when we are looking at the community settings of expectations and the specificity of "micro settings of media consumption" (Sandvoss, 2005, p. 154), YouTube as a market and commercial infrastructure, we argue, plays less of a role.

Of course, this is not to say that the platform's own algorithms prioritize certain channels over others and, by "recommending", guide (or even steer) viewers in their choices of what to click. But at the end of the day user engagement and sustained attention cannot be commanded. Audiences do decide what to love, like, subscribe to, share and comment as well as how to spend their time on what channels and whom to offer direct attention.

Therefore, we suggest here that behavioral and self-presentation guidelines are dynamically built, negotiated, enacted and enforced by the "community of interest" (Lange, 2014, p. 16) made up of casual viewers, loyal subscribers and other gurus. As well as members of other social groups, gurus learn norms "by doing": by interacting, reading and posting comments, as well as watching and creating content. As implicit social contracts, rules turn visible when broken because of the negative responses it leads to, in form of comments and eventually seen through channel metrics. User comments make explicit the positive values that Bubz embodies, by underlining then and praising her for it. These values and ways of being that are foregrounded in her person and her performative self-production.

We know that online groups develop standards which frame members' practices (e.g. Baym, 2010). These community norms of practice are constantly evolving since they are actively negotiated and learnt through members' ongoing interaction and participation. In this vein,

Marwick points out that groups "reward with higher social status the use of [certain] behaviors and self-presentation strategies" (2013, p. 14). These can be thought of as platform and community-based types of ideal personas (Duffy and Hund, 2015; Lovelock, 2016) which are relevant models to orient towards when defining and performing online selves.

Microcelebrity as a social practice, as defined by Senft (2013), is linked to the drive to achieve online visibility and success, which, implies commanding a fan base and gaining sustained attention through loyal followers or subscribers. In order to achieve this, celebrities, wannabe celebrities, regular users, and beauty gurus alike need to project a coherent online presence, focused on the characteristics and skills valued by that community or platform and following specific group norms grounded on ongoing interactions and community values (Lange 2010, 2014).

For instance, Baym names humor and self-deprecation as established and shared attitudes on Facebook status updates and comments (2010). Similarly, we identified certain personality traits as especially beneficial in constructing a profitable self-presentation on YouTube's beauty community, as for instance, self-motivation and being positive, availability and accountability. Moreover, our findings suggest that it is essential for gurus to be kind and supportive of their audiences. The following is an example of Bubz motivating her viewers:

> It is in my prayer that you will all realize one day that you are
> capable of greatness.
> First you believe,
> Then you achieve.

Furthermore, if Bubz was not able to upload a video tutorial when promised, she is expected to address this issue in her next video and apologize for "not being there", usually naming the reasons for the delay. For example, she writes in the textual description of her video "How to treat hormonal acne 101" from December 2012:

> Sorry for not uploading a video for like a week. Not been feeling too
> well lately. Must be the weather x_X

Similarly, Bubz explains during her video "Fav Products of March" from 2011, why she has not uploaded her usual monthly video:

> again, apologies, I skipped like a month again. I don't know how I did that (on screen: Damn you tiredness + florescent lamp). Guess there wasn't really any products that stood out to me last month.

Sometimes she also apologizes for the condition of their skin, poor lighting, or video quality. For instance, Bubz writes in her description of the video "Get ready with me – Wedding" from November 2012:

> My skin isn't in best condition either because I had an allergic reaction to the makeup used on me for our PreWedding Photoshoot. Hope you guys don't mind ^^
>
> sorry about the noob quality guys...our camcorder was low on battery so I used our macbook pro isight cam...=D

Moreover, it is important to support and motivate her viewers, and to engage with them. According to this, Bubz wrote in January 2010: "*bubzbeauty doesn't care about how many subbies she has. She is just grateful for every single one.. <3*". As Spyer points out about this same community of interest: "the audience is constantly and also enthusiastically reminded of their importance and of their singularity in the life of that guru" (2011, p. 44). In line with this, we found that it is important to maintain a sense of egalitarian relationship (see also Abidin and Thompson, 2012) and closeness with the viewers.

If the guru receives too many comments and cannot answer them all, she is supposed to address requests and questions, as well as to thank viewers for their ongoing feedback and praise during her videos. An example of the latter can be found on her upload "Surprise from YouTube" from November 2012, where the following text appears below the video:

> Thank you for believing in me
> Thank you for keeping me going.

Thank you for inspiring me.
Thank you for showing me what I can be.
Thank you for walking this journey with me.
Thank you for building me up.
Thank you thank you thank you.
It's been such a wonderful journey here on YouTube. I never ever thought I would ever get here and each day, I am amazed how did I get here. None of this is possible without your support and love. You guys have done more than I can ever say. Thank you so much for giving me meaning in my life by helping me realize what person I want to be.
From the bottom of my heart, thank you. I'm forever grateful.

She also uses the space below her videos to actively promote her incoming uploads and her line of makeup brushes. "*Video on hormonal acne coming up soon!*", "*New range of Bubbi brushes are coming soon. 2012 baby!!*". In order to heighten visibility and through it, value, gurus have to deploy self-branding strategies (Hearn, 2008; Senft, 2013). These efforts were also identified by Strangelove, who sees popular YouTubers as "constructing themselves as valuable commodities" (2010, p. 42). Besides drawing from marketing strategies such as recommending interested viewers to "hurry" and order her makeup brushes because they are almost sold out, she includes at the end of her videos a signature with links to her online shop, her website, and her social media accounts for viewers to engage with her and her content:

Check out my makeup brush line & T-Shirt range:
http://www.shopbubbi.com
For updates on my life, doggies, beauty, fashion and boyfriend,
check out:
http://www.bubzbeauty.com
Follow me on Twitter:
http://www.twitter.com/bubzbeauty
LIKE me on Facebook
http://www.facebook.com/itsbubz

In December 2012, she slightly changed her signature, describing her website as follows: *"Check out the Bubzbeauty website. A place for Beauty, Life, innovation and Inspiration"*. A more comprehensive and somewhat sophisticated, broader type of content, than the one implied in

the earlier signature. This was simultaneous to her inclusion of "motivational videos", where she gives advice on topics such as self-development, career, love, and life issues. In addition, at that time she also introduced a change in the signature part that promoted her Facebook page. Where it used to read "*LIKE me on Facebook*", it now reads: "*Connect with me at the Buzbeauty Fanpage where I chill n catch up with you guys ^^*". She changed from a regular Facebook profile to a fan page, which indicates the rising number of subscribers and followers. These are all considered performative practices and strategies to improve and sustain one's online position and visibility.

How passionate are you?

As discussed above, our analysis of video content and user comments identified some important rules to be followed when seeking popularity on YouTube's beauty scene. In addition, we collected various pieces of relevant community-specific data highlighting the notion of "passion" and of "being passionate" e also) about work, career, content creation, and YouTube, among others. We suggest that the most important step is to clearly convey the message that you do whatever it is you do online because "you *really* want it" and not to gain status, money or perks, but due to selfless, "altruistic" (see also Duffy, 2015; Duffy and Hund, 2015; Marwick, 2013a) and passionate reasons.

Moreover, on YouTube, usually being passionate about something, means exactly the opposite of "doing it for money". There is no middle ground. There seem to be only two possibilities: if a user does not create a channel and uploads videos (only) because it is their biggest passion, and with the aim of motivating or helping others, then it must be surely created out of greed. These users are, then, seen as "just seeking attention" to gain views and to monetize their videos. On YouTube, paths to fame and recognition must not seem premeditated; moreover, they better be unintentional and unplanned.

This would mean, depending on the specific community, having a certain "vision", which can, and will, in some way, help people or contribute to making their lives, easier, fuller, and happier. For instance, a YouTube channel dedicated to "*finding your inner beauty*", and to "*inspire others*" as Bubz described her aim when uploading content. Gurus have to be authentic, honest and

trustworthy, and, must accordingly, only upload content or even decide to create a channel for the "right reasons". This implies, for instance, that it would be not well-seen to name money or fame as reasons for starting a new YouTube channel. Therefore, and similar to the narratives of makeover and reality TV shows, aspiring practitioners and influential gurus like are supposed to participate for the right reasons: this can be a deep-rooted dream, or selfless, solidarity missions such as "helping others".

Her YouTube profile biography illustrates someone who thrives through effort and willingness ("*Willing to try, Willing to Learn*"), coupled with a strong positive attitude, spontaneity and an open heart ("*I'm an unpredictable girl with a passion for beauty hair and fashion*"). Additionally, it is important to note that her intentions on YouTube were, and still are, depicted as almost purely inspirational and solidarity-motivated, which agrees with dominant community rules: "*My channel is to help make people realize their own beauty. In their hearts*".

In this context, it is essential to contribute to the image of "working hard to achieve" dreams, with passion and commitment. Then, and only then, the person would be considered by the community as deserving their eventually successful career, as well as the subsequent professional, social reputation, and fame it entails. The relevance of authenticity, particularly a successfully and consistently performed authenticity, as well as the notions of talent, and hard-work as seen by this community are very relevant to understand the subject position of "beauty guru" (see García-Rapp, 2017b).

Being an attainable role model

Successful gurus must be fun, creative, open, honest, spontaneous, and most importantly, they have to, always and at all times, be authentic. These habitualized and shared community norms helped establish authenticity as the epitome of legitimized online popularity (also Abidin and Thompson, 2012; Duffy, 2015; Duffy and Hund, 2015; Marwick, 2013b). As Hearn and Schoenhoff write, authenticity is currently "the ultimate arbiter of value" (2015, p. 200).

At the end of the day, it all comes down to how authentic someone is or is displayed to be, something which has also been traditionally relevant for cinema stars (Dyer, 1986). Bubz remains worthy of emulation and praise for being "a regular girl": down-to-earth, relatable, humble and ordinary. As seen on these examples of user comments, Bubz is considered a relatable person and praised for her truthfulness and honesty:

> *Oh Bubz I've been using youtube a long time and have been subscribed to* you for three years now. And when I look at the other gurus out there now, it makes me feel sad at how fake they've all become. They're almost identical to each other, like youtube has become one big commercial. So behind this rant, I'd just lie to say, thank you for being real. For inspiring us.
> For not selling out. I am very happy i found your channel and very proud to be one of your million.
> I LOVE YOU BUBBI <3
>
> Thank you for keeping it real with us viewers and not selling out by pushing products onto us that you've been sent :)
> we appreciate it!
>
> You are TRUE, Bubz. REAL. And we can ask for nothing more than that. I am a better me because you are trying to be a better you. We may live continents apart, but we are sisters. I hope to one day meet you. Until then, m'dear, keep filming. I'll be here ^_^

To summarize, in order to sustain interest and popularity, she is expected to reveal the right amount of information to remain down-to-earth by displaying transparency, honesty, and commonness. At the same time, she has to balance the need to remain aspirational, worthy of emulation, and somehow unreachable enough. After having started sharing content in 2008, by the end of 2009 she already was the 5th most subscribed YouTube user in the UK but still depicted herself as an "everyday girl" and far from being a beauty expert. Moreover, she described herself on her channel profile as "*the biggest dork on the planet*", always highlighting her amateur nature: "*Just your everyday girl who wants to share makeup, beauty and hair innovations*".

Finally, it is relevant to relate Bubz to Gamson's work on how different types of celebrities are understood and consumed. The scholar differentiates between "artificially produced" famous people and those well-known due to merit. While the latter are to be "revered", the former are

"consumed as objects of identification" (2011, p. 1063). In this case, both forms of engagement play a role in the dynamics guru-subscriber. Bubz must display and sustain a bifold image as an admired and praised *role model*, who is simultaneously relatable and close to her viewers: an *attainable role model*.

Attainable in two senses: as a self-aspiration for viewers to emulate and "better themselves" through self-development −as brought forward by her motivational videos− and also as someone they feel close to, and can relate to −a side mainly fostered by her intimate vlogs. For gurus, there must be a balance between the "edited self" they monitor to participate as a YouTube Partner and the authentic, open guru their followers admire and praise.

Producing content and producing the self as a subcultural celebrity
In a time when "following the content of one's friends involve the same technologies as observing the follies of a celebrity" (boyd, 2011, p. 53), the once clearly differentiated categories of fan/celebrity, as well as audience/consumer and producer of content are increasingly and necessarily blending (e.g. Burgess and Green 2009; Senft 2012; Marshall 2006, 2010; Smith 2014). This means that not only the celebrity persona but also "the social category of the audience is challenged in the uses made of the Internet" (Marshall, 2006, p. 637).

In this vein, Burgess and Green write that YouTubers, as "entrepreneurial vloggers" (2009, p. 96), are producers and also participants, since they are simultaneously commenters, followers and subscribers to other channels. Similarly, Senft argues that, nowadays online "production, distribution and consumption tend to be interlocking affairs … users frame themselves simultaneously as seller, buyer and commodity" (2012, p. 3). Building on this consideration, in her videos we can clearly see Bubz's roles as *buyer* of products, as *seller* of her own makeup brushes, and of course as active agent in the building and maintenance of her own role as beauty guru (*commodity*).

Hills argued before the rise of social media technologies that the opposed categories of fans as mainly consumer and celebrities as producers was obsolete (2002, 2006). In turn, he proposed to look at the phenomenon of "subcultural celebrities" (2006, p. 103), who, while remaining

unknown to the general public, turn into "figures of recognition within their own subcultures" (p. 103). Marwick also builds on these concepts of "users-turned-famous" and "niche personalities with very specific audiences" (2015b, p. 316) in her works on renowned YouTube and Instagram users (2015a, 2015b).

In this case, Bubz achieved her own subject position as influencer and popular YouTuber thanks to her tutorials, as legitimating evidence of her expertise and talent. Subcultural celebrities like her achieve recognition through "working on the very texts which they are fans of" (Hills, 2006, p. 103). Here by producing content pertaining to her community of interest: beauty.

Aside from the earlier mentioned norms that she complies with and the self-branding strategies she draws from, like capitalizing on her "ordinariness" (Holmes, 2004; Dyer, 1998) and commonness. In the most literal sense, she is a regular user, a consumer of cosmetics brands, and through her know-how and creativity begins producing videos demonstrating makeup styles, which eventually transform her status. Actually, a facet is added, because she never stops being a "regular user" who watches other channels, consumes products and, as she discloses, is herself inspired by other creators.

In terms of her online identity and high-status position, we can see the blend and the development from a consumer ("a fan of brands"), to a specialist, as expert and instructor. Through this process she achieves the position of celebrity within the platform. Her status is then sustained in time by her connection-seeking vlogs (García-Rapp, 2017).

Her position, even as "just" an online celebrity, comes coupled with the usual accompanying social, symbolical and practical values and uses that viewers "exercise[ing] their semiotic self-determination" (Hartley, 1999, p. 179) have found in mass-media celebrities for decades. Gurus like Bubz are sites of admiration, identification, criticism, inspiration, emulation, as well as topic of conversation and   knowledge/learning. Bubz's subscribers admire, emulate, and are inspired by her. The following comments exemplify the uses of her shared content as experienced by

viewers. Some thank her for the big influence that she has had in their lives, and others write about her being a role model. The first comment was liked 21 times by other viewers:

> you were the first beauty guru i ever watched. you completely changed my life. i went from feeling terrible from myself. i felt ugly and worthless. now i feel beautiful and loved. thank you bubz for changing my life. i hope to be like you one day <3

> You don't realize how much I love u, ur videos help me SO MUCH u wouldn't believe, your an inspiration and my role model, I am staring videos like yours very soon and I hope and be as good as u are!

Conclusions

The phenomenon of YouTube beauty gurus clearly brings together the social aspect of sharing personal information, footage of daily activities and building affective connections with revenue-oriented aspects: namely self-branding, achieving high status and maintaining good reputations as professional, responsible and influential personalities. This juxtaposition of two differing, and often antithetical, societal spheres –the commercial logic of self-promotion and the social creation of feelings of closeness with the audience– has implications for the construction of gurus' subject positions. These creative, cultural activities are also commercialized and due to this, they are ambivalent and often contradictory (Tolson, 2010).

We undertook this ethnographic project in order to better understand the culture surrounding Bubz and her viewers in view of online popularity. More specifically, it was our objective to address and help articulate the dynamics of YouTube's beauty community and the core values guiding online practices. Because groups foster certain types of community-dependent ideal personas, it is relevant to note that "achievement that is considered sufficient to rightfully inhabit the micro-celebrity subject position is highly variable and context dependent" (Marwick, 2013a, p. 135). Therefore, we sought to shed light into the politics of success of this particular community.

In the case of YouTube's beauty community, the right to self-branding is awarded only to those considered "real", honest, hard-working, talented and inherently "deserving" gurus (see also

García-Rapp, 2017). While YouTube expects gurus to perform a carefully monitored, business-oriented, online persona, the community of pairs and viewers expects them to always be reachable, trustworthy, honest, and authentic. This implies in daily practice that she needs to manage with care the opinions she shares so as not to damage her reputation in the eyes of advertisers, while being relatable and close to her viewers. We connected this tension to Marwick's argument of the different expectations leading to a monitored, self-censored, "edited self" (2013b, p. 203). To finalize, we explained the concept of attainable role model in view of its bifold meaning: attainable as a model for viewers to perfect themselves and also in a sense of closeness and reach.

In addition, it is noteworthy how Bubz's position as "regular user" together with her active performance of online persona ("content creator", "famous guru") is a double-edged sword. On the one side, online celebrities are seen as inherently more authentic than mainstream celebrities because of the technologies they make use of when performing their online selves and due to their intrinsic qualities as "regular", amateur users, "ordinary people", seemingly untouched by industry pressures (Ellcessor, 2012; Lovelock 2016; Banet-Weiser, 2012; Burgess and Green, 2009). This is how "ordinariness becomes a credential for stardom" (Gamson, 2011, p. 1065).

On the other side, the sense of "default" authenticity implies that expectations are higher for them: people expect gurus as Bubz to sustain their ordinariness more than mass-media celebrities. The policing of norms that comply with "realness", –in this case, authenticity and trustworthiness– are active because, in the end, the same ordinariness that needs to be highlighted and makes them authentic and relatable, often also condemns them to remain not deserving of their fame and the perks it comes with. Online celebrities are often seen as "not real celebrities", meaning mainstream celebrities such as television and cinema personalities. This could affect their legitimacy, because "the right to publicity only applies to those considered 'celebrities'" (Hearn, 2008, p. 208).

As a "subcultural celebrity" (Hills, 2006, p. 103), Bubz grows from her niche community to actively perform not only consumerism but celebrity. Thanks to the blend enabled by her tutorials and

vlogs, legitimized and accepted by the viewers, she continues working on her external, commercially-oriented positioning and value by uploading more tutorials. She gains recognition through her informational tutorials and achieves the strongest sense of connection through her vlogs, which not only sustain and renews viewers' interest but also re-signify her condition of "ordinary" relatability (García-Rapp, 2017). By doing this, her vlogs confirm and legitimate (Dyer, 1998; Tolson, 2010) her subject position as a renowned personality, a YouTube celebrity.

Hearn argues that "rules seriously delimit the field of possibilities with which any imagined 'authentic self' might be performed, reducing the self to a set of purely instrumental behaviors and circumscribing its meaning within market discourse" (2008, p. 206). However, Bubz's viewers and subscribers, conscious of her role and with a pragmatic understanding, grant her the higher status and do not begrudge or resent her for making a (very good) living out of her position as famous guru. People see her, as expressed in comments, as a real, open person who deserves her popularity and the economic and social perks that come with it because she "sticks to her values". She is passionate about what she does and is there for the "right reasons". This means that she helps and motivates others, and shows vulnerability, as for instance when disclosing sad and difficult aspects of her life.

To finalize, a last reflection on Bubz's subject position. Van Dijck (2009) critically assesses the notions of user agency and the seemingly ubiquitous "active participation" on social media. We agree with the scholar when she argues that here are actually different typologies of more and less activity/productivity within online users (and producers). There are indeed many types of content creators, users, as well as audiences and celebrities, because cultural identities are overlapping and interlocking. What is clear is that, Bubz, like many other online celebrities who simultaneously perform their roles as users/fans/audience and producers/influencers/celebrities, is recognized both as audience member and producer. As reality TV participants-turned-famous did it before (e.g. Holmes, 2004), beauty gurus reinforce and make even more literal the long-lasting notion of celebrities embodying both ordinary and extra-ordinary values (e.g. Dyer, 1986, 1998; Gamson 1994, 2011) and subject positions.

Notes

[1] In addition to the connotation of wisdom of the word guru, it is how Bubz herself names her role and the way her viewers call her. Moreover, 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.

[2] When using the term "community" we do it aware of the discussion regarding this concept. We opt for this term because users and Bubz herself describe the group of YouTube viewers and creators participating of beauty topics as a community. In addition, we see the debate of up to what extent online communities are actual communities, as already extensively addressed and repeatedly clarified in previous literature. As well as Baym (2010), Duffy (2015), and Tolson (2010), we 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.

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