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

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To Aiti and Heims

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A mi familia. A mi abuela Lidia, la mujer más chiquita pero la más grande. Por tantas risas contagiadas.

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Abstract

This thesis is submitted as a compilation of five publications. With the aim of contributing to the theorizing of digital media culture and practices, I explore the current phenomenon of online popularity as exemplified by influential personalities like YouTube beauty gurus. The study focuses on a popular beauty content producer, Bubz, and her channel *Bubzbeauty*. Looking at content, meaning, and interactions through qualitative, ethnographically-oriented research, the thesis sheds light into the politics of success of YouTube's beauty community. I examine content characteristics and affordances for the creation and maintenance of viewers' attention. I conceptualize community-specific norms that guide practices, particularly those related to self-presentation and identity-management and their implications for everyday celebrity practice. In addition, the value of her celebrity position as well as the uses of her content for the purposes of inspiration, creativity and identity work are thematized.

Keywords: online popularity, vlogs, beauty tutorials, YouTube beauty gurus, online communities, legitimacy, authenticity

Resumen

Esta tesis es depositada como un compendio de cinco publicaciones. Con el objetivo de contribuir a teorizar culturas y prácticas en medios digitales, exploro el actual fenómeno de popularidad online tomando como ejemplo el caso de personalidades influyentes como gurús de belleza de YouTube. El estudio se centra en una reconocida productora de contenidos de belleza, Bubz, y su canal *Bubzbeauty*. Se analizan contenidos, significados e interacciones a través de un estudio cualitativo, desde una perspectiva etnográfica, y buscando entender las ideas implícitas sobre popularidad de la comunidad de belleza. Examino características y funciones del contenido audiovisual para la creación y continuidad de la atención de la audiencia. Conceptualizo normas específicas de la comunidad que guían prácticas como la presentación y el manejo de la imagen propio de la gurú y sus consecuencias para la performance diaria de *celebrity*. Además, se explica el valor de su posición de celebridad y los usos de su contenido para inspiración, creatividad e identidades de usuarios.

Palabras clave: popularidad online; vlogs, tutoriales de belleza, gurús de belleza en YouTube, comunidades online, legitimidad, autenticidad

According to the normative established July 7th, 2010 and modified in October 13th, 2015, the following thesis is presented as a compilation of publications. The requirements as set by the academic commission of the doctoral program in Communication are as follows.

Alternative A:

- The thesis must present three academic articles (published or accepted for publication) in journals indexed by Web of Science (ISI) or Scopus.
- The PhD candidate must be the first author of all articles.
- At least one article must be in English

I am hereby submitting five publications in English: four articles (published) and one book chapter (accepted for publication, in press).

Extended abstract

This thesis is submitted as a compilation of five publications. With the aim of contributing to the theorizing of digital media culture and practices, I explore the current phenomenon of online popularity as exemplified by influential personalities like YouTube beauty gurus. Looking at content, meaning, and interactions through qualitative, ethnographically-oriented research, the thesis sheds light into the politics of success of YouTube's beauty community. The study focuses on a popular beauty content producer, Bubz, and her channel Bubzbeauty. The first and second articles examine the affordances of the guru's uploaded videos for achieving and sustaining online popularity through subscriptions and views. The first publication introduces a basic (*tutorials* and *vlogs*) content typology and the second a more developed one (*content-oriented*, *market-oriented*, *motivational* and *relational* videos) as well as a viewer typology (*casual viewers* and *loyal fans*). I argue that her market value as a renowned guru is built through her know-how expressed in straightforward tutorials. Conversely, her social value as an interesting, trustworthy personality is fostered by intimate vlogs, which renew attention and help maintain the interest first generated by tutorials, leading to treasured subscribers. In addition, I assess the role of views and subscriptions as platform-based commodities. The *third publication* arranges the proposed content typology in a scale of increasing intimacy and considers user reactions to her most personal videos. I contend that Bubz's videos foster the activation of three different types of intimacy along the reception and user engagement with her content. With the *fourth publication*, I 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. I 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. The *fifth publication* addresses issues of legitimacy, expertise and merit, as well as local expectations regarding online self-presentation, according to implicit and explicit community norms as disclosed by viewers in comments and portrayed by Bubz's own visual and textual narratives. It examines the relevance of authenticity for a deserved celebrity position. The article underlines the importance of performing and living by a certain community-defined authenticity that leads to, and sustains, a legitimized popularity position. To finalize, I argue against the banalization of online production and reception practices as displayed by the analyzed community of interest. In contrast to cynical, reductionist approaches to popular culture, I highlight instead the relevance of user-centered approaches where entertainment and information are legitimate reasons to produce and engage with online beauty content and personal vlogs.

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Introduction: Sustained popularity in the age of viral videos

This thesis originated, as many others, from a certain interest and a relevant research gap. I was curious to know why the phenomenon of beauty gurus got to be so popular and relevant on YouTube. These influential online personalities who teach over video tutorials and share their everyday lives by uploading personal vlogs turn into online celebrities. I wondered what was motivating many millions of people to watch, engage with and regularly follow not only specific online content but the actual people offering the tutorials. When I first discovered beauty-related tutorials on YouTube back in 2010, it was through my interest in nail art and hairstyling. I found one tutorial on braids and started reading comments of viewers not only praising the creator and expressing affection but making clear that they had watched most of her other videos too. For me, what first started as a content-related interest such as in a particular hairstyle, developed into a broader academic interest in understanding these new subject positions of amateur experts who develop into well-esteemed, popular members of a community and eventually become online celebrities.

As I watched each video, I decided to examine the specific gurus who created and uploaded content in order to learn more about the community. I went back and looked for their earlier videos and read user comments. One of the gurus was known as Bubz and her channel was Bubzbeauty. Most of her tutorials included instrumental background music and on-screen step-by-step indications. Her voice-over explaining the steps made the tutorials easy to follow. I noticed how Bubz's tempo and cadence of speech was slower and calmer when compared to other gurus. It had a soothing effect. Even her pitch of voice seemed to be lower and she spoke clearer than other content creators. I realized that many audience members were commenting positively on her "cute" Irish accent, which at that time, was not common among beauty gurus, since most of them seemed to be American. The trend of starting beauty-related channels started in 2008 and Bubz eventually (and quickly) rose to the top of the British YouTube beauty community as the most subscribed guru not long after starting uploading videos.

Considering that popular beauty gurus achieve *sustained* popularity over the years, this phenomenon is different than the ever-present viral videos, such as popular music videos (e.g. K-pop star Psy with his single *Gangnam Style*), memes or parodies. These rapidly achieve a great number of views and shares and even receive mass-media attention through newspapers and television. However, contrary to the short-lived 'fifteen minutes of fame' of much online

content, gurus are legitimized in their celebrity positions and enjoy from long-lasting audience attention and engagement. Eventually, some celebrity practitioners expand their activities beyond the platform and launch their own makeup brushes, eye shadow palettes or fragrances. These high-status beauty gurus, a position held by around ten of the most popular creators, command a loyal audience of followers who travel to meet them in person during especially organized 'meet and greets' around the globe.

Thanks to their commanding of large and engaged audiences, the phenomenon of 'users-turned-celebrities' is increasingly being addressed by the press and television with coverages that often oscillate between moral panics of the (purported) bastardizing of celebrity culture and romanticized stories of (democratized) access to online visibility, attention, and fame. Considering the magnitude and pervasiveness of the phenomenon, as well as its symbolic implications for celebrity studies, audience research, fandom and digital culture, there is a need for a more nuanced understanding of the complex dynamics at stake. I believe it is paramount to offer an account that "tolerates ambiguity" (Hills, 2002) of overlapping socio-cultural spheres of action and interest as consumption, commercialization, commoditization and everyday creative practices of learning communities (also Tolson, 2010). My earlier mentioned interest, its undoubted relevance as a contemporary media phenomenon and a research gap were the reasons why I started to investigate the topic.

General research on social media can already be considered broad, especially if considering quantitative oriented research on Twitter and Facebook. When it comes to YouTube, Burgess (2011, 2012), Burgess and Green (2008, 2009a, 2009b) as well as Lange (2007a, 2007b, 2009, 2014) discussed in several occasions the platform and its characteristics, especially in relation to user agency, creative and production practices as well as habitualized interaction. However, academic theorization on YouTube beauty gurus is surprisingly still under-developed. Not much has been written on the platform's beauty community, its specific affordances for popularity development or its everyday dynamics.

Without knowing much about the beauty scene on YouTube, and before entering the online field to research it, I had already framed in my mind two underlying research questions that needed to be explored and which eventually built the structure of the thesis. 1) *What do gurus offer?* From the viewers' point of view: what do they give the audience? As a repository of step-by-step, information-rich tutorials YouTube is a learning platform. What are the uses, effects

and implications of gurus' content for the everyday lives of audiences? 2) *What are gurus after all?* What do they represent as cultural and symbolic texts? How can we delineate the contours of their subject position as popular and influential online personalities?

Following these first two analytic themes, I further developed more specific research questions related to the "How?" of the phenomenon: How do gurus achieve and sustain merited fame in such a competitive and dynamic environment? And the "Why?": Why do people watch, what meaning does it have for them? I chose to focus on a guru known as Bubz, who is an example of "best practice" within the platform and recognized as an authentic and inspiring content creator. I believe this is a fruitful case to examine in order to reflect on the socio-cultural value of beauty gurus and their offered content, since performed and created by one of the most popular and influential personalities within YouTube's beauty community. The British-Chinese young woman has created a community of her own with loyal viewers who tune in every day to not only learn beauty techniques but also be inspired by her messages.

My purpose with this thesis is to offer useful and valid concepts as well as hypotheses for the analysis of the contemporary digital media phenomenon of YouTube beauty gurus. As many other media cultures, YouTube's beauty community is about knowledge, self-development and entertainment through content and connection. It is a phenomenon enabled by technologies (the Internet, computers, YouTube's interface and technical tools as a digital broadcasting platform) that grows from the intersection of digital cultures with mediated and unmediated everyday life practices and experiences (watching, subscribing, sharing, liking, and commenting together with emulating, learning, creating, discussing, and reflecting on one's own life, identity, preferences and self-development).

With this compilation of five publications, each focusing on different aspects of the phenomenon, I aim to contribute to scholarship on different substantial areas of research as digital and celebrity culture, as well as fandom and audience research. The thesis' main goal is to establish a solid and coherent framework to understand YouTube's beauty community and the cultural identity of 'beauty guru' as performed by Bubz through a meaningful, comprehensive, empirical and theoretical corpus.

Celebrity is closely tied to fandom; which is the other side of the coin of fame and stardom. Therefore, I believe that an examination of popularity without addressing reception and

consumption would be incomplete, since viewers are ultimately the ones sustaining popular subject positions through engagement fueled by affective connections. With this in mind, and to address the perspective of the guru's viewers, I analyze not only 313 of her videos but also 10,000 user comments.

The thesis does not follow an individual meta-theory but refers throughout to various schools of thought and related disciplines. Since there is not a unique theoretical theme −other than the underlying symbolic interactionistic understanding of co-constructed meanings through social interactions, provisional truths and the processual character of social life (Blumer, 1969; Charmaz, 2006)− a diversity of theories and concepts are considered by individual publications and some are confined only to specific articles.

I consider scholarship in the fields of anthropology, sociology, celebrity studies, digital culture and audience research, including works on mediated self-presentation, online identity and communities. To analyze the values and uses of the guru's content and her persona, I draw from the works of sociologists as John Thompson (1995) and Anthony Giddens (1991). I build on their understandings of self-development and creative identity construction through media and assess the inherent socio-cultural relevance of these influential personalities, based on Bubz's case. In this vein, John Hartley (1999) and also David Marshall (2014) look at symbolic and practical values of media and celebrity for the audience, in other words, how people make use of mediated elements as cultural commodities. I relate the pedagogical value of the guru's tutorials to the more abstract pedagogical value of celebrities as symbolic texts (Marshall, 2014), which foster not only gossip, entertainment or criticism but also constitute powerful sites of everyday self-reflection and inspiration for fans.

In addition, I build on the work of scholars who have discussed the relevance of notions of ordinariness and authenticity for legitimized celebrity positions in the cases of cinema, television, as well as social media celebrities. As reality television participants turned famous did it in early '00s (Holmes, 2004), online celebrities reinforce and make even more literal the long-lasting notion of (cinema) celebrities embodying ordinary and extra-ordinary values and subject positions (e.g. Dyer, 1998, 1991; Gamson, 1994). The celebrity position has been ever since increasingly occupied by "just like the audience" ordinary personas (Kanai, 2015; Ellcessor, 2012). Besides legitimating celebrities through a sense of authenticity, the "ordinariness" provides a sense of a simplified and more easily reachable access to fame (Marshall, 2014) and

fame increasingly turns into something 'achievable by anyone through the performance of "being ordinary"' (Usher, 2015, p. 312).

Online celebrities are often assumed to be inherently more authentic than their mass-media counterparts (e.g. Banet-Weiser, 2012; Lovelock, 2016; Tolson, 2010) because of their ordinariness and social media's own sense of immediacy. Particularly in the case of YouTube, its amateurishness, grassroots character and the DIY flair of its beginnings are still foregrounded. Online celebrities who simultaneously perform their roles as users/fans/audience and producers/influencers/celebrities, are recognized both as audience member and content creator, automatically bridging the inherent gaps of distance that mainstream celebrities still often display. Nevertheless, this duality also implies more pressure and heightened expectations (Marwick, 2013a, 2015) for renowned personalities to 'be real' and perform a self that is deserving of its privileged position.

Like Hills (2006) and Smith (2014), I emphasize the importance of considering different scales and hierarchies within the celebrity subject position. This implies that one can be more or less famous according to how celebrity is actively performed online on a daily basis (Jerslev, 2016; Lovelock, 2016; Marwick, 2013a, 2015; Marwick and boyd, 2011).

The objectives of qualitative research, particularly of ethnographic research, match my research aims, which are based on the understanding of experiences and the construction of meanings (see Merriam, 2009, Silverman, 2011). Following the premises of anthropological research (e.g. Wollcot, 2009, 2010; Lange, 2009, 2014; Boellstorf, 2008), when looking to understand a culture, it is essential to do it with an open, "emphatic mind" (Bazeley, 2013, p. 28). In addition, I believe it is possible to critically assess and interpret the practices and understandings of others without judging or quickly applying labels based on preconceptions. Parting from these considerations, I seek to delve into the social worlds I research without taking a higher moral ground or dividing cultural manifestations in 'worthy' or 'unworthy' (high-brow vs. low-brow culture).

Moreover, I look at the phenomenon and people involved from an equal footing that comes from recognizing that we are all fans. As Baym aptly puts it, "We all are members of audience communities of one sort or another, although some of the materials around which we organize might be granted higher social status" (1999, p. 4, also Sandvoss, 2005).

It is my belief that user practices provide otherwise 'empty' interfaces like YouTube, Twitter or Facebook with meaning and make them worthy of examination by us social scientists. In the words of Livingstone, "technological innovations are undoubtfully rendered socially meaningful through practices of use" (2004, p. 9). In this vein, I understand here the variety of data created and collected at the intersections of online experiences as a fruitful terrain to be examined.

In the following sections I briefly present my objectives and research questions. Next, I explain the theoretical framework I draw from in the publications and outline the general paradigms, debates, and research areas I build on and wish to contribute to. The following section covers methodological considerations and my own understandings on research practice to help delineate the interpretive heuristic and gestalt of my empirical and theoretical contribution. A self-reflective account of my role as researcher and the limitations of the study are also included. Afterwards, I provide a brief section focusing on the coherence of the study and a summary of results. The results section is made up of the five publications themselves and I finish with the conclusions and general implications.

Objectives

As briefly introduced in the last section, with this thesis I seek to theorize a current digital media phenomenon as exemplified by the birth and rise to fame of online celebrities, more specifically, YouTube beauty gurus. I am pursuing the aim of describing, understanding and generating a theoretical framework on the sociocultural processes at play and its impact on the audience. In addition, I shed light into the significance of knowledge and expertise within YouTube's beauty community, considering the high percentage of videos that offer instructional content.

Considering the millions of people that, day after day, engage with these high-status, influential personalities, the goal is to examine actors, practices and processes at play to better understand the internal workings of these subject positions and its socio-cultural implications. The four journal articles and the book chapter contribute empirically and theoretically to the fields of celebrity studies, audience and fandom research as well as digital culture.

Since this is an interpretive qualitative research account, I do not follow the testing of any a priori developed hypothesis but the construction of them through theoretically informed data analysis. I aim to offer new ways of thinking and reflecting on online celebrity and the ethos of contemporary digital cultures.

Focused on a particular guru, her audiovisual content, and the community of viewers formed around her, I aim to provide a comprehensive, compelling, research corpus achieved through five academic publications. In this case, it is relevant to assess the type of content, the value of it, the reasons to engage with it, as well as local community understandings surrounding authenticity, fame, ordinariness, talent, and effort. In addition, it is my goal to consider and acknowledge how viewers seek and obtain benefits from media consumption and address, based on user comments, possible affordances of online intimacy for viewer's own self-development.

From a more encompassing perspective, I consider the inherent multiplicity of categories and cultural identities as producer, user, celebrity, fan, and consumer, as a starting point but also relevant measure criteria worthwhile revisiting. Namely because it can aid in the understanding of an ordinary, famous online persona, who daily performs her role(s) according to community and platform-based dynamics. Following this, the underlying performativity of social interaction is a premise I build on (e.g. Goffman, 1959).

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Research questions

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 within a competitive, dynamic, cultural industry as YouTube. How is this achieved? What does it mean to be an online celebrity in YouTube's beauty community? What is the significance of the rise of users-turned-celebrities for celebrity studies and audience research?

Following a qualitative research approach through an interpretive case-study, I focus on the guru Bubz and the videos uploaded to her channel named Bubzbeauty. To what extent does such a figure embody the paradigmatic uses and values of celebrity −once reserved to cinematic stars− such as being a site for emulation, idealization, criticism, entertainment and knowledge?

The themes of *content*, *interaction*, and *meaning* underlie the research questions:

-How does online popularity develop in the studied case?

-How did the guru achieve celebrity status and how does she maintain it? How does she present herself and how is she seen by viewers?

-What are the different aims and affordances of her several types of videos?

-What is the role of authenticity in achieving a legitimized popularity position? How does it influence fame on YouTube?

- What are the main community norms and rules?

-What does the guru offer? What are the symbolic and practical uses of her content? What makes her and her content interesting (worth-watching)?

Theoretical framework

This thesis analyzes the phenomenon of YouTube beauty gurus from a sociocultural perspective. In order to assess the role of audiovisual content and online interactions as tools for achieving and maintaining popular positions, I build on disciplines and research areas as sociology, celebrity studies as well as digital culture and audience research. I first offer an overview of the most encompassing theories and paradigms, to later explain in more detail and revisit key debates in short subsections.

As a way to display the scope of the thesis, I created a diagram (Figure 1) where I positioned the array of perspectives, issues, and fields I am focusing on, and the ones that fall beyond the reach of this contribution. The blue spheres are the main topics I address, while the orange are understandings I pay attention to in order to analyze other key aspects. The red spheres represent the approaches I do not subscribe to or those which are simply not thematized here. The actual size of the words is technically determined and has no influence in the relevance of the spheres.
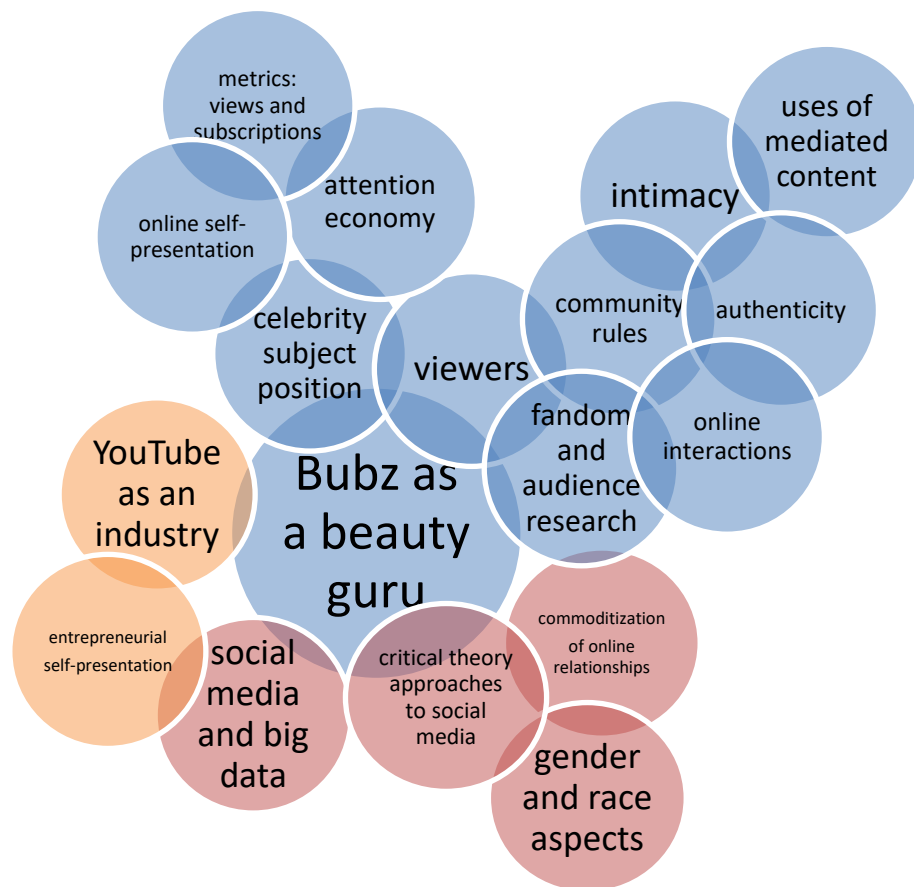

Figure 1. Scope of the thesis

The relevance of YouTube as a fruitful research topic for media and communication research has been consistently portrayed for over a decade by various scholars (Burgess and Green, 2008, 2009a, 2009b; Burgess, 2011, 2012; Strangelove, 2010; Lange, 2007a, 2007b, 2009, 2014). The platform's communities of shared interests and their local practices of producing, commenting, and sharing have been often referred to as significant cultural phenomena that merit our attention.

While the first two edited volumes focused entirely on the platform, "The YouTube Reader" (Snickars and Vonderau, 2009) and "Video Vortex Reader: Responses to YouTube" (Lovink and Niederer, 2008), were compelling and successfully identified new developments, they date from the beginnings of YouTube. Much has happened online during an otherwise short period of time and many new phenomena worthwhile examining have developed in this highly dynamic environment. In addition, there have been monographies focusing on YouTube as a cultural repository (Strangelove, 2010) and as a learning platform (Lange, 2014) but there is still a lack of studies addressing its beauty community. Nevertheless, we cannot fail to mention Tolson (2010), who examines communicative practices on YouTube, among others the performance of authenticity, and discusses the case of beauty content creators.

To put things into perspective and contribute to the general understanding and definition of the platform, I focus on research that sees YouTube both as a "platform for a branded personhood" (Smith, 2014, p. 256) and a 'network of creative practice' (Burgess and Green, 2008, p. 2) that makes possible the rising to fame of personalities as Bubz, known as "microcelebrities" (Senft, 2008, 2013; Marwick, 2013b). At the same time, the platform allows people to teach and learn skills by gaining topic-based know-how according to their own "community of interest" (Lange, 2014, p. 16). These "YouTube celebrities" (Lange, 2007; Gamson, 2011) are often "ordinary expert[s]" (Tolson, 2010, p. 283) on particular areas.

In addition, I build on scholarship at the intersections of celebrity and digital culture for both mainstream (Usher, 2015; Marshall, 2014; Marwick and boyd, 2010, 2011; Meyers, 2009) and online celebrities (Ellcessor, 2012; Marshall, 2010; Kanai, 2015; Marwick, 2013b, 2015a, 2015b; Smith, 2014). To explore the extent to which online celebrities embody both aspirational and relational values, I draw from research that reframes the paradoxical celebrity binary of ordinary/extraordinary (Dyer, 1998, 1991; Gamson, 2011; Holmes, 2004; Littler, 2004) in view of legitimized subject positions.

Within the current attention economy (Goldhaber, 1997) the 'right' online self-presentation (Marwick and boyd, 2010, 2011; Marwick, 2013a; Duffy, 2015; Baym, 2010) is key in achieving the amount of views, likes, subscriptions, shares and comments that sustain popularity and visibility. Viewers engagement through online practices are reflected in metrics, which can strongly influence a channel's popularity, and subsequently value, within YouTube's competitive platform ecology. The high relevance of metrics and attention is also discussed by Senft: "as we watch, link, click, and forward, we switch from being consumers to being producers of the most values resource of all: attention" (2013, p. 5).

For these new online celebrities and high-status influential personalities, a successful self-presentation involves "placing one's self for public display" (Marshall, 2006, p. 639). In this respect, I draw from Marwick's (2013a) work on online self-presentation strategies as 'edited self' and 'self-branding', which are performed daily by renowned content creators and regular users alike. From this perspective, I analyze the inherent performativity of everyday (online) behavior (Goffman, 1959).

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 and offline− status symbols, norms, and expectations always depend on the particular scene or community (Baym, 2010; Marwick, 2013a). Identities and the understandings of what an 'authentic self' means are in flux because the norms and rules guiding behavior are also contingent and contextual. They are dynamic, subjective, and negotiated on a daily basis. Dyer reminds us of this too: "yesterday´s markers of sincerity and authenticity are today's signs of hype and artifice" (1991, p. 137).

As Marwick and boyd, this thesis considers celebrity as an "organic and ever-changing performative practice" (2011, p. 140), which leads to renowned personalities of various characteristics. Popular users achieve their respective status according to community-specific norms, creating diversified status positions within the 'celebrity' category (Marwick, 2015a, 2015b). In line with this, different community norms lead to different expectations and understandings of authenticity (Banet-Weiser 2012; Tolson, 2010; Jerslev, 2016; Haimson and Hoffman, 2016) which subsequently frame the diverse celebrity subject positions.

This diversity of performative practices not only according to platforms, but also within them, generate local "typologies of fame" (Lovelock, 2016; Jerslev 2016). Through the practice of performing the self in compliance with particular standards, a myriad of 'authentic, real selves' come into play in different social situations. These considerations necessarily presuppose the inherent performative character for everyday self-presentation and celebrity practice. I will explain in more detail the relevance of performance for everyday interactions based on Goffman (1959) below.

It is clear that these "social media influencers" (Hearn and Schoenhoff, 2015, p.194), and "YouTube stars" (Burgess and Green, 2009b, p. 91) create "new models of entrepreneurship" (p. 91) by means of online self-commodification, but, besides reaching fame and making a living for themselves by producing and uploading content; what do they offer viewers? Putting audiences into play, and to analyze the values and uses of shared online content, as well as the inherent socio-cultural relevance of these influential personalities, I consider the works of sociologists John Thompson (1995) and Anthony Giddens (1991). The authors see the influence of media texts and celebrities as sites of not only aspirational wishes, but concrete inspiration for the creative and ongoing process of identity building.

In addition, various other scholars consider how celebrities are symbolic figures that provide viewers with chances of further defining their individuality (Gamson, 2011; Holmes, 2004; Marshall, 2006, 2010, 2014; Redmond, 2006, 2014; Smith, 2014; Usher, 2015). John Hartley (1999) and also David Marshall (2014) look at the abstract and more practical values of celebrity for the audience, in other words, how people make use of celebrities as cultural commodities. I relate user comments on Bubz's videos to these conceptualizations of the benefits and rewards drawn from the engagement with media and celebrities.

The core framework of the thesis consists of six themes, which will be presented in more detail below. The first one takes into consideration literature on social media as a context for the growth of new types of celebrities. The second focuses on research on YouTube, particularly the affordances of tutorials and vlogs. The third theme I present here covers the roles of audiences and the performativity of social interaction. The next subsection expands the theoretical view to include relevant literature on televisual as well as cinematic celebrities in order to examine various understandings of legitimized celebrity positions. The fifth subsection delves into community-based hierarchies and the inherent tensions that need to be balanced,

while the sixth and last subsection covers the uses of celebrities as cultural commodities and symbolic texts. In addition, I offer definitions of key terms as understood in this thesis.

New celebrities on social media

Hills argued before the rise of social media technologies that the opposed categories of 'fans' as mainly consumers and 'celebrities' as producers was obsolete (2002). In turn, he proposed to look at the phenomenon of "subcultural celebrities" (2006, p. 103), who, while remaining unknown to the general public, are recognized within their own groups. Marwick also builds on this concept 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 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), it is even more explicit how the cultural identities of 'fan/celebrity', as well as of 'audience/consumer' and 'producer of content' are increasingly and necessarily blending (e.g. Burgess and Green, 2009; Senft, 2013; Marshall, 2006, 2010; Smith, 2014). This implies 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 examined YouTubers as "entrepreneurial vloggers" (2010, p. 604), producers and participants, who are simultaneously commenters, followers, and subscribers to other channels. Similarly, Senft argues that online "production, distribution and consumption tend to be interlocking affairs" (2013, p. 3). Therefore, the analysis of these popular subjectivities can aid in the understanding of 'our individual public identities' (Marshall, 2014, p. XXXVII).

As introduced earlier, to further understand value and relevance within YouTube —and on online platforms in general— it is important to consider the concept of "attention economy" (Goldhaber, 1997). Various scholars recognize the influence of the prevailing attention economy currently active online (Burgess and Green, 2008; Hearn 2008; Senft, 2013). In the highly competitive environment of social media, value and legitimacy are often determined by the amount of attention one receives.

Attention can be measured in metrics as likes, views, followers, and subscribers. These "metrics of popularity" (Burgess and Green, 2009, p. 20) define online value and legitimacy and promote even more visibility and popularity. This is why Burgess and Green argue that users' clicks and comments have the power of acting as "performative" markers (2009b, p. 41),

contributing to heightening attention. These commodities are recognized similarly across the literature (Burgess and Green, 2009b; Marshall, 2014; Jakobsson, 2010), albeit with slightly different terms. Similarly, Marwick (2013a) discusses the values of social media metrics, where "online self-expression becomes valuable insofar as it is an instrument of attention" (p. 281). The more clicks and views you have, the more value is ascribed to your persona and content. Which, subsequently, generates more attention and furthers popularity (Jakobsson, 2010). A large number of followers "implies importance [...] high visibility and the ability to command and audience" (Marwick, 2013a, p. 77). This is why there is a tendency for established and aspiring popular online personalities to "monetize themselves by working to develop legions of followers or subscribers" (Hearn and Schoenhoff, 2016, p. 202).

Tutorials and vlogs on YouTube

Tutorials and vlogs are essential elements of YouTube. What is more, they constitute the oldest and most popular type of videos within its beauty community. Tutorials are step-by-step instructional videos on how to achieve a certain look or style. Vlogs are personal uploads where beauty content creators show their everyday lives, and also disclose in a conversational style intimate details of their past as well as dreams, thoughts, wishes and fears.

According to Lange, YouTube tutorials are pedagogical content helpful to understand the "ideologies of learning" (2014, p. 213) of the platform. As "socially encoded forms of knowledge" (Lange, 2014: 192), these step-by-step instructions speak to communities' understandings of information and knowledge.

I build on Hartley's consideration of the spheres of media and education as "institutionalized forms of self-realization" (Hartley, 1999, p. 7) to assess the blending of these areas within the beauty community. When teaching new makeup styles, performance and pedagogy work together (1999, p. 6-7) to create a "teaching of self-hood" (1999, p. 42). Similarly, drawing from Marshall, we see how video tutorials reinforce creators' own "pedagogical value" as celebrities (2010, p. 36), providing viewers with inspiration, creative new styles and the possibility of emulation.

Vlogs, on the other side, can be seen as "videos of affinity" (Lange, 2009, p.71), aimed at "performative intimacy" (2011b, p. 148). In the same vein, Marshall denominates these same efforts "performance of connection" (2010, p. 40). These connection-seeking videos and are usually personal, conversational and designed for specific "communities of practice" (p. 73)

with shared interests. Video creators disclose through vlogs personal stories, as well as dreams and hopes as if they were talking to close friends. They are effective communicative tools because they foreground essential elements in the construction of relationships as self-disclosure and interaction (e.g. Baym, 2010; Marwick, 2013a). In a similar vein, Senft parts from the assumption that, while audiences want "someone to speak at them", communities in contrast, seek "someone to speak with them" (2013, p. 4).

Relating to the earlier explained attention economy, vlogs as "communicative attempts to negotiate attention" (Lange, 2009, p.73) can be "used to promote and gain visibility" (2014, p. 134). As Lange, I acknowledge the fact that intimate videos may well have "varying degrees of sincerity" (2009, p. 83), but rather than seeing a major element of discovery or interpretation on it, focus on their affordances and users' response to them.

Audience and performance

As introduced before, I follow the theories of symbolic interactionism to look at shared community understandings and values guiding behavior. In the same line, I draw from Goffman (1959) when considering the performative character of everyday interactions according to diverse social situations. "Being yourself" −an essential premise within YouTube and widely active on social media− is inherently a performance which can be cynic or sincere (1959), and it is performed daily by online celebrities and regular users alike (Thomas, 2014). Moreover, many of the "everyday performances" focused on "impression management" are practices that we all engage in, as also understood by Goffman (1959) and Garfinkel (1967), who wrote on the relevance of dramaturgical actions as social actions in everyday human interaction and the notion of behavior being ruled-governed.

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'. However, if we acknowledge that 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 (e.g. Haimson and Hoffmann, 2016), the notion of a singular real self is rendered unrealistic. What is more, in the words of Tolson, this assumption would be an 'essentialist reading' (2001, p. 452). Identity, as well as authenticity, is not objective or stable, but rather performative, contextual, and shifting. Both 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.

Like Hills (2002, 2006) and Redmond (2006, 2014), I support an understanding of media and particularly of audience research according to which people make use of media to satisfy specific needs and obtain benefits (Katz and Blumler, 1974; Rosengren, 1985; Ruggiero, 2000). In the same vein, I draw from the research of scholars who acknowledge viewers' active and differing roles in the processes of (digital) media reception and consumption (e.g. Burgess and Green, 2009a; Lange, 2009; 2014; Meyers, 2009; Smith, 2014; Strangelove, 2010, Usher, 2015).

I argue it is fruitful to consider viewers' perspectives on how they make use of the available content. Therefore, I analyze user comments and feedback to videos. I believe perspectives focusing on 'audience manipulation' are not useful because the agency and understanding of viewers is overly simplified or simply not recognized to allow for the assumption of symbolic inequalities that position the audience as "disempowered fans (…) as a flattened mass or sameness of consumers" (Hills, 2006, p. 116).

Effort and the success myth

For the TV personality, it is the familiarity and regularity that fosters authenticity and renews viewers' interest (e.g. Marshall, 2006, 2014; Dyer, 1998; Holmes, 2004; Bennett, 2008). This is also the case for online celebrities, for whom it is particularly important to remain 'ordinary' in order to foster a sense of 'realness' and authenticity (e.g. Tolson, 2010; Ellcessor, 2012). What is more, for online celebrities, there is even a stronger expectancy of authenticity, due to social media's implicit values of immediacy, spontaneity as well as the inherent image of grassroots, DIY culture (Burgess and Green, 2009a; Banet-Weiser, 2012) that a platform such as YouTube started with and seeks to maintain. As Hearn and Schoenhoff write, authenticity is currently "the ultimate arbiter of value" (2015, p. 200).

It is nevertheless relevant to note that, in other scenes, such as fashion and lifestyle blogs (e.g. Abidin & Thompson, 2012) effort is not a requirement for deserved fame and is even obscured in order to portray a sense of 'glamor(ized) labor' (Duffy, 2015; Wissinger, 2015). For these communities, it is often about projecting an image of aspirational 'specialness' through having an innate certain 'eye for style' that defines the person as fashionable and worthy of emulation. The portrayed code is that style, taste, glamour, all 'come from inside', and that it is easy and it just 'flows' for those who 'have it' (Pham, 2015; Wissinger, 2015).

The "networked ecology" of communities of interest (Lange, 2014, p. 18) that make up YouTube have their own local norms and rules. I contrast the understandings described above

with YouTube's beauty community, where effort and relatability are foregrounded due to its amateur, instructional character. As Dyer (1998) argued regarding mass-media celebrities, hard work, as well as ordinariness and a certain talent are needed to remain in a legitimized celebrity position. I draw from this conceptualization to explore up to what extent celebrity positions are legitimized and fame is seen as a deserved reward for the invested time and effort (also Kanai, 2015).

In addition, I assess active community discourses portraying a certain 'success myth' (Dyer, 1998), that often tie future success to present and past effort. In the same line, Marwick's research on status within the San Francisco's tech scene (2013), explains that there is an apparent meritocratic hierarchy which actually hides the structural reasons that lead privileged individuals to taking further steps up the ladder to success (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'. Following this premise, which is also present on reality TV shows, those who do not achieve success are "blamed for 'not wanting it enough' or not working hard" (2015, p. 203).

Similarly, Oliva (2012) discusses this expectation when analyzing the framing of work and success on Spanish TV contest shows. She refers to a predominant view of success as the epitome of self-development. The portrayed narrative states that through hard work and personal sacrifice one can achieve all dreams −implying again an implicit meritocracy based on effort sustaining people's development and success.

Hierarchy and the balancing of tensions

Content creators need to successfully balance their "mediated personhood" (Lange, 2014, p. 31) in compliance with the diversity of interests active within the platform. I distinguish between *commercial*, revenue-oriented guidelines of YouTube as an industry and *community*, relational expectations made explicit by viewers, as well as other gurus and Bubz herself.

Through self-promotion and the strategic self-monitoring of an "edited-self" (Marwick, 2013) that remains professional and authentic enough online celebrities perform daily their online selves. Even though there is a strategic balancing of tensions, I argue it is important to consider creators as social beings who are also personally influenced by the feedback and support they receive (e.g. Abidin, 2015; Baym, 2012; Lange, 2009, 2014).

Celebrity, as well as power and success, are intrinsically scarce (Hearn and Schoenhoff, 2015) and framed by their singularity. Simply put, if everyone was famous, it would simply lose the appeal. Therefore, I agree with Meyers when she argues that "the celebrity cannot be classified as exactly the same as the average person, which, in turn, adds to his or her appeal" (Meyers, 2009, p. 893). I draw from these understandings to examine the careful and consistent balance that a beauty guru as Bubz needs to achieve daily when performing her role as an online celebrity who is relatable and also inspirational. Therefore, online celebrities replicate the "dialogic asymmetry" (Lovelock, 2016, p. 7) present in the interactions between mainstream celebrities and their fans, as identified by Marwick (2015) and Lovelock (2016) in their works on popular YouTubers. As well as with mass-media celebrities, viewers must recognize the "unequal status" (Marwick and boyd, 2011, p. 155) between them and online celebrities to position themselves as fans.

In addition, subcultural celebrities, even as niche celebrities, who were once just fans themselves, still replicate traditional structural hierarchies because they are known by far more people than they have met and, after achieving their new status, do not tend to directly interact with other fans (Hills, 2006, p. 114). In close relation to this, I explore up to what extent Bubz complies with the expectations directed towards her. Especially considering that she needs to position herself as a celebrity for people to admire her, while still remaining close and ordinary to foster identification.

I build on Marshall's (2014) argument that celebrity as a construct has always been in constant tension because of the antithetical forces of a certain trivial, superfluous character, and the cultural value of a legitimized commodity. Therefore, the symbolic power of celebrities is always on the verge of being condemned or disregarded by the wider social sphere (2014). The same can be said of commercialized cultural activities such as the production of YouTube content, which foreground their own ambivalence as commoditized creative practices (Tolson, 2010).

Uses of celebrity

As introduced before, people receive through media and consumer goods, including celebrities and renowned personalities, creative tools or, "mediated symbolic materials" (Thompson, 1995, p. 207) to choose from to actively construct their own identities (also Cohen, 2001; Hills, 2002, 2015). Considering the inherent value of celebrities as "pedagogical tools" (Marshall, 2010, p.

42) in the active reworking and updating of audience's identities (Holmes, 2004; Marshall, 2006, 2014), I draw from this scholarship to examine the influence of Bubz's content in the lives of her audiences, as expressed by viewers themselves.

According to Thompson, "lived experience" (unmediated) and "mediated experience" (1995, p. 230), as for example through media, both offer elements that people draw from to creatively and reflexively integrate into their "evolving life-project[s]" (p. 230). I relate this conceptualization to Redmond's parallel between "public intimacy" (2014, p. 111) −through public engagement as comments, and shares− and "private intimacy" (p. 111), established when directly engaging with the celebrity and the mediated text), which can lead to a "productive" sort of intimacy (2006, p. 35) seen through viewers' creative appropriation of elements for their everyday lives. Specifically in the publication addressing online intimacy, I build on this argument to transfer it to the case of Bubz's content and viewer experiences.

I connect these concepts to viewers' experiences of watching and eventually feeling connected to the guru. I interpret engagement through viewers' comments to see how, besides being useful in pragmatic terms, the guru's videos foster feelings of closeness and identification, that subsequently fuel self-reflexivity and often even self-development among viewers.

Definitions of key concepts

Guru: Historically, a guru is a religious Hindu teacher who guides people, often spiritually. Gurus' wisdom is considered a blessing and they are greatly respected and worshipped in Hinduism. Contemporary, in western countries, a 'guru' is also defined as someone who has the leadership capability, knowledge, and expertise to guide others intellectually. Online gurus are those who, thanks to their know-how and specialization in a given subject, regularly post instructional videos. The term 'beauty guru' as used in practice, implies activities on the Google-owned, largest and oldest online platform for video content, YouTube. Gurus have been since its beginnings and still are an important part of today's YouTube culture.

Community: When using the term 'community' I do it aware of the discussion regarding the concept. I opt for this term because I see the debates on online communities 'qualifying' as actual communities or not as already extensively addressed and repeatedly clarified in previous literature. As well as Baym (2010), Duffy (2015), Schmidt (2007), Spyer (2011), and Tolson (2010), I chose the word "community" to write about 'categories of socially-interconnected users' (Spyer, 2011, p. 8); in this case sharing mutual interests, information, practices, norms

and values. Besides, users and Bubz herself describe the group of YouTube viewers and creators participating of beauty topics as a community.

Microcelebrity: Following Marwick (2013a), I differentiate conceptually between microcelebrity as a practice[i] and as an identifying term to name these new popular cultural identities. In contrast to Marwick (2015a, 2015b), who then uses the term interchangeably *both* as a practice *and* a subject position, I make use of the concept only in the sense of the practices and strategies in play to achieve and sustain online attention and fame. Therefore, for me the concept is equivalent to self-branding and self-monitoring strategies of an "edited self" (2013).

What is more, I believe the term 'micro'-celebrity used to name online celebrities has lost its value since the definition of what is considered a 'micro', ('mega', 'super'?) or 'almost' celebrity in a highly diversified and dynamic celebrity culture is volatile and subjective. This is particularly evident when taking into account the myriad of celebrity practices in the different media channels and platforms, in both online and offline environments. It is arguably not about the size but the character of this new subject position. Even if we wanted to focus on size, they are not 'micro' at all, since many of them (particularly YouTubers) foster and achieve more users' engagement and higher metrics than certain television shows and personalities, according to U.S. reports (e.g. Strangelove, 2010; Lange, 2014).

I prefer the terms 'subcultural celebrities' and 'online celebrities'. The former brings forward the connotation of renowned personalities within particular communities (such as reality TV show participants), who are not recognized as celebrities by the public at large (as is the case with Hollywood, mainstream celebrities). 'Online celebrities' is the concept I use here the most since it is more specific than 'subcultural celebrities' and useful because it encloses at the same time several other subject positions such as Instagrammers, YouTubers, gurus, among others.

Methodological considerations and methods

Research paradigms, epistemologies, and "a particular sensitivity"

<div style="text-align: right">

"ever so curious…"

"the basic 'stuff' of ethnography is contained in myriad raw facts of observation, little kernels that we collect, sort through, and later combine with the help of culture to achieve our synthesis" (Wolcott, 2010, p. 110).

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By framing my research from an interpretive, constructivist perspective, I sought to distance myself from a certain 'positivist anxiety' still active within qualitative studies and, more generally, from unproductive 'methodological fundamentalisms' (Prasad, 2002; Denzin and Lincoln, 2013). Moreover, I have a pragmatic approach to research design, and believe in combining features form several models, as well as being guided by data to modify questions and approaches (Charmaz, 2006; Boellstorff, Nardi et al, 2012; Bazeley, 2013).

Over time, scholarly traditions produce shared conventions about ways of conducting research and presenting studies, which lead to certain styles that are associated with them. Still, methods are often appropriated in diverse ways within the same and different paradigms. As Charmaz (2006) argues regarding the case of grounded theory techniques −and Wolcott (2008) for fieldwork− researchers can draw on different strategies and methods without turning to rigid prescriptions concerning data collection and analysis. For instance, when working inductively to generate theory, most of us adhere to some form of grounded approach to building theory (Hine, 2009; Merriam, 2009), independent of conducting a phenomenologically oriented grounded theory or not. In any case, we are free to draw from grounded theory techniques of data collection and analysis, such as the constant comparative method, theoretical sampling or open coding (Glaser and Straus, 1967; Glaser, 1978; Charmaz, 2006;). Choices of strategies and methods are open to all, no matter the discipline or orientation, since "methods are guided but not prescribed by a particular philosophical or methodological perspective" (Bazeley, 2013, p. 8; also Denzin and Lincoln, 2013; Guba and Lincoln, 1994).

Therefore, two closely related beliefs frame my stance as a researcher: that inquiry paradigms do not imply particular methods, and that "research is actually more a craft than a slavish adherence to methodological rules" (Miles and Huberman, 1994, p. 5 cited by Bazeley, 2013, p. 11). As Guba and Lincoln argue, the defining question is the one about intellectual tradition or

paradigm: "questions of method are secondary to questions of paradigm, which we define as the basic belief system or worldview that guides the investigator, not only in choices of method but in ontologically and epistemologically fundamental ways" (1994, p. 105).

It is clear that anyone can perform fieldwork and observation since they are not exclusive to ethnography. As Wolcott explains:

> It is hard to imagine how anyone could purse a field-oriented approach *without* borrowing ethnographic techniques, except that the very idea of borrowing suggests that fieldwork techniques somehow 'belong' to ethnographers or to cultural anthropologists […] it is difficult to identify any field technique that is *exclusive* to ethnography (2008, p. 216f)

Moreover, while interviews and participant observation are main techniques of ethnographic fieldwork, ethnographers also draw from surveys and perform analysis of content and data. What is more, "not *every* ethnography met *all* the customary criteria" (Wolcott, 2008, p. 240) and no feature is absolutely essential, rather, it is about "firsthand experience in in naturally occurring events" (p. 49).

For me, it is not about 'borrowing' ethnographic techniques, but it runs actually deeper. It is about a certain vision, an underlying gestalt; the "following in the footsteps" (Wolcott, 2008, p. 224) of a particular tradition of seeing. I chose to frame this research design from a focal point on ethnographic fieldwork not only because of its underlying goals of naturalistic and holistic understandings, but also due to an inherent epistemology and axiology implied by a certain ethnographic 'way of seeing' (2008). As Markham writes, it is the particular "mindset or epistemological approach more than a specific set of interpretive procedures" (2009, p. 149) what best describes ethnography. For instance, sometimes there is not even a 'there' where an ethnographer could be situated, so "the seemingly inviolable prerequisite that the researcher be physically present proved to not to be inviolable after all" (Wolcott, 2008, p. 240).

From a more pragmatic understanding and based on my research questions, I chose to follow ethnographic strategies and aims because of the classical anthropological premise I also share: "culture is revealed through discerning patterns of socially shared behavior" (Wolcott, 2008, p. 71). In Bubz's self-presentation −as an example of a member of a group− in the value of the content she shares, and in user comments implying expectations and underlying understandings about the community and the platform, I saw the need to look for patterns. "Discerning patterns, cultural patterns perceived in segments of repeated behavior that collectively

constitute the abstraction we refer to as culture" (2008, p. 243). Moreover, I found in ethnography a systematization of ways of operating, and interpreting reality that I had devised for myself long before starting this project.

I chose this approach because of a particular *ethnographic way of seeing* the world and its understanding of research as a whole. Even though ethnography has many faces and there is no single model for it (e.g. Wolcott, 2010; Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007)[1], in general terms, ethnography is a craft that always implies a concern for cultural description and interpretation (Fetterman, 2010). In the words of Hammersley and Atkinson, it follows the "commitment to the value of understanding human social life" (2007, p. 236; also Morley and Silverstone, 1991). Whatever the collected data and impressions are, they will be interpreted in terms of a sociocultural perspective (Wolcott, 2008).

In essence, ethnography "is about something that you have personally tried to know and to understand rather well and something that you believe others will want to know about, at least as seen through your eyes" (Wolcott, 2010, p. 136). In its content, it is "an integration of both first-hand empirical investigation and the theoretical and comparative interpretation of social organization and culture" (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, p. 1). Usually, ethnographers do not make a grand theory explicit because they do not necessarily subscribe to one (Fetterman, 2010). The ultimate goal is "telling a credible, rigorous, and authentic story" (2010, p. 1). They can be midlevel personal theories about how the world or some small part of it works. I aimed here to offer an interpretive research account that presents a holistic, complex picture of being famous on YouTube, of the community and inherent values framing this as well as the meaning of teaching makeup techniques and disclosing one's life online.

I believe it is worth explaining my research rationale and the stance I have adopted as a researcher during this project, particularly because not all traditions of qualitative inquiry believe in the researcher as key instrument of data collection, or focus on the emic perspective and subjective views of participants (Prasad, 2002; Philips and Burburles, 2000). As Denzin and Lincoln (2013), I understand qualitative research as a mode of inquiry that crosscuts fields and disciplines and situates the researcher in the world. The fact that the understanding gained

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[1] According to Fetterman (2010), there are ethnographies situated epistemologically at the phenomenological end of the spectrum while others are located at the materialistic philosophical end and rely more on etically derived data. Ethnographies can also attend to micro- or macro cultural and sociological levels (also Jensen, 1991) or be focused on action research.

from the study is based on the researcher's interpretation of the examined phenomenon (Charmaz, 2006), draws our attention to the central role of the researcher, who has her own "theoretical sensitivities" (2006, p. 148) that she brings to the field. The interpretive value of "intuitive realizations" (2006, p. 5, also Merriam, 2009) make "*our* being there different from anyone else's" (Wolcott, 1995, p. 95).

With any ethnographically oriented inquiry we seek to "offer a reasonably tidy interpretation of a modest slice of a research field" (Baym, 2009, p. 174). What does this imply? What for studies based on different paradigms −such as postpositivistic qualitative studies− might be considered a limitation due to a loss in objectivity or validity, it is for constructivist and interpretive approaches key in building a situated, close-up view of a certain social unit (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011; Fetterman, 2010; Guba and Lincoln, 1994). As Baym and Markham argue "our goal is not to convert others to our way of seeing. We are not after one true explanation. Rather, we are after a thorough, grounded, trustworthy voice that makes meaningful contributions to ongoing dialogues and on which others can build" (2009, p. 189). Following this, the quality criteria to assess the study I have performed are: trustworthiness and authenticity (intellectual honesty reflected in the research account), referability (plausible of being referable to other contexts to be used for comparing and contrasting) as well as the soundness and complexity of both the interpretation and the various perspectives that are considered during analysis (Baym, 2009; Wolcott, 1995; Guba and Lincoln, 1994).

Moreover, being aware of how "we are inclined to view our own behavior as normal rather than as 'cultural' [we realize that] culture is an abstraction we reserve for describing the (sometimes strange) behavior of others" (Wolcott, 2010, p. 95). As researchers, it is important for us to recognize that we bring our own interpretive sense and cultural orientation with us to the field when seeking to portray the 'ethos' of a group from an emic perspective. This leads to two of the strongest tensions in anthropological and ethnographic efforts, which I will expand on below: 1) the one between the particular and the universal, and 2) the emic versus etic perspectives (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007).

Firstly, even though we remain focused on local rather than universal meanings we still need to achieve a general, comprehensive, overarching picture plausible of being referred to and compared to. While still respecting particularity, we seek to draw conclusions to offer a framework to be used when seeking to understand new situations. We want to transform

"observed *instances* of behavior into inferred *patterns* of behavior" (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, p. 99). Considering this, it is useful to reflect on the fact that "as a discipline, anthropology was founded on the horns of a dilemma that committed it to the detailed study of *individual societies* while professing passionate concern for all *humankind*" (Wolcott, 1995, p. 171).

Secondly, generating theoretical ideas necessarily involve "'fixing' the phenomena under study as belonging to particular categories" (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, p. 234). To do this, we also need to capture a certain analytical moment in the contingent and dynamic development of human interaction and cultural practices. With the clear aim of understanding the 'natives' view' or emic perspective, and still emphasizing the extent to which human social life does not take standard forms, we also interpret what is happening, to make sense of it and explain it. One cannot avoid employing analytical categories that presume general patterns and categorizing is essential to produce findings (2007, p. 235). Fieldwork, thus, is naturalistic *and* interpretive. This is why we dedicate ourselves to "make the strange familiar, so as to u*nderstand* it, and to make the familiar strange, so as to avoid *misunderstanding* it" (2007, p. 235).

If we see the etic respective as the external, social scientific perspective of reality (Fetterman, 2010) the dialectical play between the emic and the etic in ethnography can be compared to the more general iterative process of analyzing qualitative data through alternated inductive (data-based) and deductive (theory-guided) phases. For Fetterman, the emic and the etic perspectives can be seen as "marks along a continuum of styles or different levels of analysis" (2010, p. 22). Most ethnographers collect data from an emic perspective and then try to make sense of it in the native's view but relating it to their own scientific analysis. In view of this, it is important to consider that our perspectives are situated, partial, and subject to revision (e.g. Boellstorff, 2008; Bazeley, 2013). Therefore, "ethnographic accounts are essentially contestable, just as cultural analysis is a necessarily incomplete business" (Morley and Silverstone, 1991, p. 157).

When working from an ethnographic perspective, I believe in avoiding "prescriptive modes of argumentation" and "passing judgment" (Boellstorff, 2008, p. 26). Bearing in mind that we all "make sense of things in terms of our own cultural frameworks" (Wolcott, 2008, p. 247) and that people (researchers!) have diverse personal beliefs, biases, and individual tastes, it is essential to keep away from a judgmental orientation (Fetterman, 2010). Rather, we seek to bring forward an emphatic understanding of meanings and actions and, most importantly,

respect for the social worlds and views of the people we research (Jensen, 1991). In the words of Charmaz, we offer "a keen eye, and an open mind" (2006, p. 15).

To finalize, I would like to revisit the point made earlier in this section that ethnography represents a wider set of principles, an essence other than merely methods. In this sense, it is relevant to consider how one "can certainly live an ethnographically oriented life, drawing upon an ethnographic perspective for viewing the world around you" (Wolcott, 2008, p. 278). It is an enduring curiosity, a certain perception and this particular 'way of seeing' life, reality, the world −which are part of me as a person and as a researcher− that I want to transmit here. As many others, I see ethnography as a calling to embrace and respect diverse cultural worlds as well as being aware, recognize, and reflect on our own subjective values and socialization. "The hope that, to whatever extent we can convey the spirit of ethnography, […] we might someday achieve a society more truly tolerant of and committed to cultural diversity" (2008, p. 281).

"Being there" – Particularities of studying YouTube

The notion of 'being there' often represents a strict and somewhat idealistic way of performing fieldwork, because, maybe there is no 'there' after all, as for instance, when studying online communities that interact without face-to-face communication (Wolcott, 2010; Boellstorff, 2008; Kozinets, 2010). As Wolcott candidly puts it, "ethnography entails for many, a rather highly romanticized (and technically impossible) idea about 'living one's way into a culture'. If you happen to de studying a 'culture' that cannot be lived in, then of course you aren't really expected to live in it" (2008, p. 45).

Boellstorff reflects on how "anthropology has always been about avatarizing the self, standing virtually in the shoes (and on the shores) of another culture" (2008, p. 6). Nowadays it is only easier to gain access to a myriad of communities of practice, because, when online, 'being there' loses its geographical character. The online field is, thus, a space but not a geographically delimited place any longer and this deterritorialization should be capitalized on (Sandvoss, 2005) since it still is the real, naturalistic setting of the processes and dynamics we investigate. In essence: "No matter how close to home, ethnographers study culture" (Wolcott, 2008, p. 243).

The difference is that, in contrast to traditional ethnographic (participant) observation, which takes place in the site as the activities are unfolding, I did not analyze the posts, videos, or

interactions live. This is due to the inherent asynchronicity of the platform itself and the technically-determined attribute of "persistence" of online content (boyd, 2011)[2].

Considering all these points, it is worth embracing the diversity of viable and conceivable fieldwork experiences and perspectives:

> there is an implied sense of adventure, even of the exotic, in the imagery that comes to mind. I think that most of us who have conducted most of our fieldwork in the most ordinary, familiar, and easily accessible of places still carry around an idealized image of someone (even ourselves) outfitted in safari suit and pith helmet stepping into the shore and into the center of a circle of huts, with camera, binoculars, and notebook at the ready (Wolcott, 2008, p. 45)

However, these 'natives' do not 'live' there, in the field, on YouTube. They are 'there' daily or weekly for some time, perform that role and then they perform others within the same and other platforms. They are fans of Bubz and of other gurus, fans of singers, films, and book authors, they are creators themselves, they are viewers, critics, members, some share content, some comment on it, and others do not. They are anything and everything. This is, of course, in addition to their roles in their unmediated, offline contexts and lives (Boellstorff, 2008). Roles and practices are immensely diverse and dynamic (Lange, 2014). This means that YouTube's beauty community, or even Bubz's popularity, is unique but not an isolated case (Charmaz, 2006, p. 173). These formations are active in other contexts. Subsequently, the analyzed example and viewer comments are not representative but fit within some broader spectrum of contemporary production and consumption practices.

Following the point made earlier, it is relevant to highlight that people participate in multiple communities (e.g. Wolcott, 2008; Baym, 1999) and with this study we are gaining insight into a small part of who they are. In the same vein, Wolcott argues that "there is no way we can totally capture the lifestyle of another person or group of people, any more than we could ever satisfactorily convey to another all that constitutes ow own persona" (Wolcott, 2008, p. 5).

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[2] This is without considering latest developments in social media apps such as Snapchat, or features of Instagram and Facebook thanks to which videos can be live streamed and are automatically deleted after a certain amount of time. Therefore, from the persistence of online content as 'default mode', the possibility of inherently ephemeral online content is nowadays active.

Data collection, analysis and interpretation: How I proceeded

After explaining the thesis's vantage points regarding research paradigms and methodologies, I outline in this part of the section a more detailed structure of the specific techniques that were adopted and adapted for this study.

As stated earlier, I propose here an empirically grounded conceptualization of the position and cultural identity of beauty guru and its implications as an online celebrity. I follow fundamental ethnographic concepts and research values to offer a contextualized, holistic understandings of people, roles, and practices and the connections among them. Analytically, I aimed to propose an integrative model including different empirical aspects of the phenomenon: the processes within the community, the characteristics of four types of videos, two overarching spheres of interest and a dual viewer typology. Moreover, I follow the ethnographic premise of presenting conclusions of what people in a particular place of status do by drawing attention "to regularities that implicate cultural process" (Wolcott, 2008, p. 73).

Immersion in data was used as the primary source of understanding (Bazeley, 2013), and the guru was selected with the aim of understanding process and seeking explanation rather than correlation or describing range. In other words, sampling is aimed in this case "towards theory construction not for population representativeness" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 6). The case sample selection was purposive, also known as judgement or subjective sample. I could have chosen a different high-status beauty guru, since there are a few of the same hierarchy level as Bubz, and by now even higher. However, I realized that she was particularly praised for being very authentic and 'real' and I saw in her a good opportunity to examine the implications of her role and implicit values of the community. She is a member of a group, the beauty community, but also an example of a more reduced collective: beauty gurus, people who produce content for the community. Among those, she is part of an even more exclusive, high-hierarchy formation, namely the most popular beauty gurus. She is −and performs her multiple roles− a member of the audience, part of the community and, in addition, a content producer. What is more, she is one of the most well-known gurus, a celebrity among them, who has been active for almost ten years now.

As stated earlier, her case is individual but not unique, since other gurus must also achieve in some way a certain legitimacy that sustains them in their position of popularity. Also, the viewers, commenters and fans are often the same people, since they watch and follow several

YouTubers from the same beauty community, so the expectations and inherent local premises showed in comments can be thought of as being directed not only at Bubz.

The sample strategy for choosing videos was time based to allow for maximum variation, since I considered all videos uploaded to her channel since the beginning in 2008 until the day the actual data collection started, in June 2013. The further sample selection, within the videos themselves, was linked to the ongoing analysis to allow exploration of questions that arise from initial tagging (Bazeley, 2013). It was an iterative process alternating inductive and deductive phases; the latter performed when completing emerged categories through constant comparison (Merriam, 2009). I performed theoretical sampling to complete (fill up) variations within the emerging categories (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Glaser, 1978). This meant that, according to the topics and structure of the videos, I explored specific attributes to compare and contrast the video categories and was, for instance, able to expand the initial typology of two to four categories.
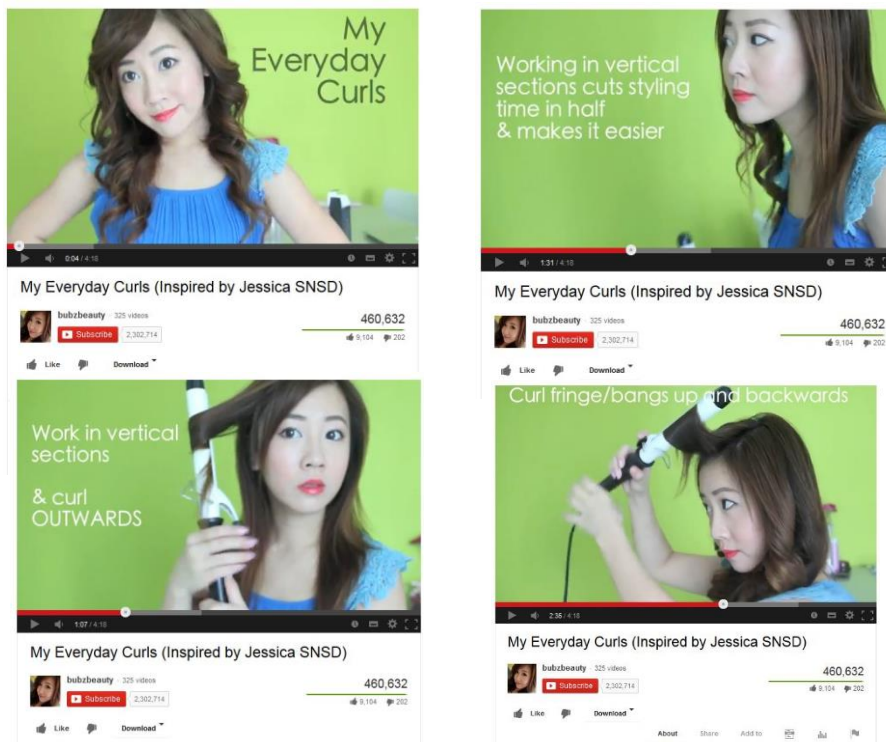

Figure 2. Tutorial "My Everyday Curls" by Bubzbeauty

Above I include an example of a tutorial titled "My Everyday Curls" (Figure 2) to show the type of data I worked with. The four screenshots I selected to add here show the progression of the step-by-step explanation of the technique. She includes in her tutorials on-screen text as

instructions and often voice-over (recorded afterwards and edited together) explanations. Tutorials are carefully edited following the same basic structure, include lively background music, are short and easy to follow. This type of videos begins and ends with the same shots of Bubz presenting the finished style by posing playfully for the camera while showcasing he style from different angles. Tutorials are creative, pedagogical, pragmatic, straight-forward and suggest professionality.

To contrast the different video categories, I offer here as an example screen captures of a vlog titled "A day in my life" (Figure 3). Here she shares what her typical day in Hong Kong looks like. In this case, she films herself by doing laundry, having a bath, training and going grocery shopping, among other activities such as cooking, going for a walk with the dogs or editing videos. Her vlogs are very diverse since they do not display a prescribed structure and are highly conversational. She often includes her husband, friends, and dogs in the videos. Instead of using a tripod, she usually holds the camera in her hand and uses direct sound as recorded at the time of filming. All these features confer vlogs with a sense of spontaneity and intimacy.
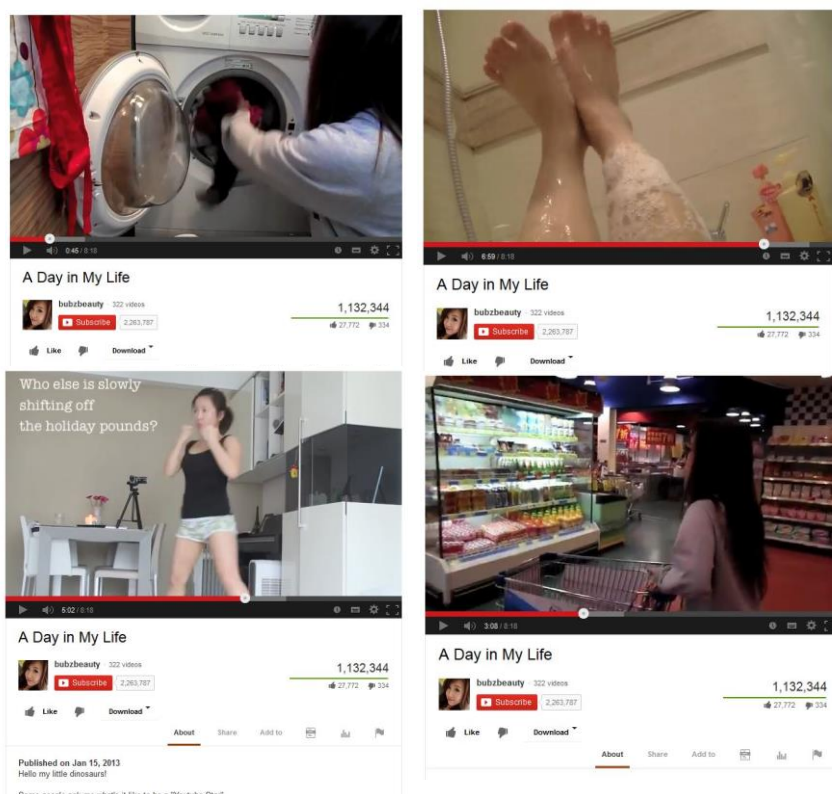

Figure 3. A vlog "A day in my life" by Bubzbeauty

The analysis was supported by quantitative variables as likes, shares, views and amount of comments that each video generated. When the affordances and impact of the video categories

were assessed, I used this information in the form of a metrics table to seek out explanations and test my idea, based on user comments, that vlogs created a stronger user engagement than tutorials, which were more viewed. A key attribute of her vlogs, which I divided into relational and motivational videos, was the high amount of channel subscriptions that they led to. The quantitative overview, thus, aided in the further description and characterization of each video category. This table is included in a reduced scale in the second publication.

Further, for a deeper analysis of her content, I transcribed more vlogs than tutorials, after realizing that these were much more diverse and conversational than her short and highly edited step-by-step makeup explanations. Also, for each publication, I focused on a different subset of videos that I described and quoted in more detail according to the goals of the particular article. Details on this are provided in each publication.

Videos and their attributes were listed in an excel spreadsheet, in order to be clustered by using filters −such as assigning colors and then filtering by them to allow for comparisons and make patterns explicit. Each row included, besides the title, a snippet of the video as it appeared on the channel's playlists with an embedded link to it on YouTube, metrics, shortcut access to locally saved screenshots of the video in .pdf as well as cells for description and memos, where I included brief quotes, text summaries and arising thoughts. Keeping a record of researcher memos aids not only in the building of a trail to audit data collection, but also as a meaningful way of advancing analysis. I usually stopped the video to write while watching since writing "often provides sharp, sunlit moments of clarity or insight - little conceptual epiphanies" (Miles and Huberman, 1994, p. 74, cited by Bazeley, 2013, p. 102).

The following capture (Figure 4) is an example of the spreadsheet I used. Cells with blue fonts are shortcuts and hyperlinks to easily access related information, as captures of comments or pictures of the videos.

Figure 4. Screenshot of coding spreadsheet

I often printed on color papers following the same color patterns of the emerging categories, to further analyze data manually, such as the video text description that Bubz added as well as the comments included in the first page below the video. For the selected videos, coding was done manually on printed transcripts. They had wider right margins for codes and I underlined, highlighted (pre-coded), draw lines to link words, scribbled and doodled emerging ideas in the margins (see also Bazeley, 2013). I used the back of the paper to record longer analytic thoughts as arising.

As soon as I felt the need to integrate the emerged codes into wider categories that lead to themes (Merriam, 2009), I would start diagramming and constructing visual maps. After analysis continued, most graphics were modified and expanded while others were not further considered. Many of them are included in the publications and I reserved some more encompassing, overarching visual models for the conclusions section included in this thesis summary.

To finalize this section, I discuss the limitations of the thesis. One of the limitations is that I have only considered Bubz's main platform, where she rose to fame, YouTube. She also updates her Instagram, and Facebook profiles often, as well as her Twitter account. It would have been interesting to compare her self-presentation and content on the different platforms, as well as the extent of users' reactions. In addition, I have noticed that currently there are more negative and critical comments towards Bubz on Facebook than on YouTube. On Facebook, there seem to be longer, sometimes heated, discussions and more interactivity since more people participate replying to earlier comments. These practices are dynamic and, nowadays, the tendency appears to be to first watch on YouTube to then discuss on Bubz's own official Facebook profile or on forums such as 'Guru Gossip', which contains threads dedicated to 'Pro-Bubz' or 'Anti-Bubz' posts, as well as on many other beauty gurus.

Another limitation is that I only analyze one guru who is, or was during the time of analysis, legitimized and highly valued by the community. It would have been richer to perhaps consider in addition a second case, middle-case, of a not so popular guru to compare and contrast. Alternatively, one could have also considered an opposite case, namely a guru who is delegitimized, not well regarded, or who receives many negative comments since it would have allowed to assess the limits and consequences of not 'following the rules'.

As already disclosed in the first publication, the third limitation is related to the amount of comments per video that I was able to analyze. It was technically determined by YouTube that only up to 500 comments were available to be visualized when selecting 'see all', which was even further reduced to 100 after 2013. This restriction is considerable since some of Bubz's videos would reach 27,000 comments.

Lastly, Bubz was contacted twice for an interview but, unfortunately, did not respond to the requests. Nevertheless, semi-structured interviews with her viewers could have provided an insightful account on reception and engagement.

Publication list

1st Publication: Journal article.

García-Rapp, F. (2016) "The digital media phenomenon of YouTube beauty gurus: the case of Bubzbeauty". *International Journal of Web Based Communities.* 12(4), pp. 360-375. http://dx.doi.org/10.1504/IJWBC.2016.080810

Indexed: Scopus (Q3 Communication), H Index: 17

Country	United Kingdom
Subject Area and Category	Computer Science
	Computer Networks and Communications
	Software
	Social Sciences
	Communication
	Education
Publisher	Inderscience Publishers
ISSN	17418216, 14778394
Coverage	2007-ongoing

2nd Publication: Journal article.

García-Rapp, F. (2017) "Popularity markers on YouTube's attention economy: the case of Bubzbeauty". *Celebrity Studies.* 8(2), pp. 1-18. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/19392397.2016.1242430

Indexed: **Scopus** (Q1 Cultural Studies), H Index: 11

Country	United Kingdom
Subject Area and Category	Social Sciences
	Cultural Studies
Publisher	Routledge
ISSN	19392400, 19392397
Coverage	2010-ongoing

3rd Publication: Book chapter.

García-Rapp, F. (accepted, forthcoming 2018) "My Friend Bubz: Building Intimacy as a YouTube Beauty Guru", In: Andreassen, R., Petersen, M., Harrison, K., Raun, T., "Mediated intimacies. Connectivities, relationalities and proximities", Routledge, London.

Anthology part of ECREA edited volumes

ISBN: to be assigned

4th Publication: Journal article.

García-Rapp, F. and Roca-Cuberes, C. (2017) "Being an online celebrity – Norms and expectations of YouTube's beauty community", *First Monday.* 22 (7), July Issue 2017. http://dx.doi.org/10.5210/fm.v22i17.7788

Indexed: Scopus (Q2 Computer Networks and Communications), H index: 55

Country	United States
Subject Area and Category	Computer Science Computer Networks and Communications Human-Computer Interaction Social Sciences Law
Publisher	First Monday
Publication type	Journals
ISSN	13960466
Coverage	1996-ongoing

5th Publication: Journal article.

García-Rapp, F. (2017) "'Come join and let's BOND': Authenticity and Legitimacy Building on YouTube's Beauty Community". *Journal of Media Practice.* Online first. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14682753.2017.1374693

Indexed: Scopus (Q2 Communication), H Index: 2

Country	United Kingdom
Subject Area and Category	Social Sciences Communication Education
Publisher	Taylor and Francis Inc.
Publication type	Journals
ISSN	14682753
Coverage	2013-ongoing

Coherence of the study and summary of results

All publications, the four journal articles and the book chapter, aim to contribute to the understanding of the phenomenon of YouTube beauty gurus albeit from different angles. As introduced before, the four articles have already been published, while the book chapter has been accepted and will be published in 2018.

The five publications are based on the same data sample of videos and comments but I consider sets of particular videos (a more detailed interpretation of a smaller sample) for the publications' respective main arguments. When examining popularity and celebrity, it is important to consider not only content and self-presentation −from the side of the celebrity− but also viewers' take on the matter, as they are clearly the ones making possible the phenomenon.

> 1) The Digital Media Phenomenon of YouTube Beauty Gurus: The case of Bubzbeauty
>
> 2) Popularity Markers on YouTube's Beauty Community: The case of Bubzbeauty
>
> 3) "*My friend Bubz*": Building Intimacy as a YouTube Beauty Guru
>
> 4) Being an Online Celebrity - Rules and Expectations of YouTube's Beauty Community
>
> 5) "*Come Join and let's bond*" - Authenticity and Legitimacy Building on YouTube's Beauty Community

Figure 5: Thematic Structure of Publications

To better outline and reflect on the coherence, thematic orientation and structure of the publications, I developed a diagram (Figure 5). Here the scope and depth of topics can be seen as evolving from general to more specific. The first two articles provide an overview of the general framing, processes and actors at play, including two content typologies and a user typology, while the other publications focus each on a particular aspect of the guru's online popularity. Building on the introduced content typology, the third publication examines the affordances of online intimacy (achieved through personal, relational and motivational content) for the lives of viewers. The fourth publication advances to map out the influence of

community-specific norms and understandings for a legitimized celebrity position. The fifth publication builds on said local rules to concentrate on the relevance of authenticity, as well as notions of talent, and hard-work for the merited role, and performance of, an influential beauty guru.

The *first publication* offers a structured approximation to the media ecosystem at play, considering key actors and processes. To assess the affordances of the guru's content for online popularity, I introduce a basic content typology of 'tutorials' and 'vlogs' and argue that two contrasting spheres of influence –together with their inherent opposing and sometimes contradictory expectations– are evident in her videos. I propose seeing YouTube, advertisers and cosmetics manufacturers as the *market sphere* of influence, while the community of viewers, and peers (other gurus) together with its local values, norms and hierarchies would constitute the *sphere of community*. I connected each sphere with one of her main video categories: tutorials and vlogs.

For the sake of a theoretical approximation, I divide her uploads in these two main spheres of influence, while bearing in mind that the phenomenon of her popularity is highly influenced by divergent but interwoven platform dynamics. As Burgess and Green explain, YouTube can be considered "the site of dynamic and emergent relations between market and non-market, social and economic activity" (2009b, p. 90). It is clear that all of her content as a whole leads to more visibility and attention, embodied in metrics such as views, shares, comments, and subscriptions. However, I argue that each video category has specific affordances and, accordingly, they highlight different aspects of her online persona. Each sphere fosters different types of content, or, in other words, Bubz responds to the expectations of both groups with different videos.

I suggest that *tutorials* are an example of what I term *commercial sphere*. While they have the aim of teaching how to achieve a certain look or style, vlogs focus on bonding. I argue that Bubz's market value as a renowned, influential guru –and thus, her *economic value* for advertisers– is built through her community-specific beauty know-how as expressed in her straight-forward tutorials. Conversely, her *social value* for viewers as an interesting, trustworthy personality, and, ultimately, her status within the *community sphere*, is enabled and further fostered by her vlogs. Besides, viewers engage stronger with vlogs, which is reflected in the amount of comments and shares they achieve, surpassing tutorials.

The *second publication* parts from the argument (briefly introduced in the first paper) that her tutorials first *generate* attention and her vlogs *sustain* it and argues that she takes her high-status as a knowledgeable guru a step further when successfully establishing feelings of connection with her viewers through her vlogs. Vlogs attend to the needs of the community and foster viewers' identification, which generates loyal subscribers. In view of this, I address the relevance of views and subscriptions as valuable commodities within today's attention economy and introduce an audience typology based on two categories: *loyal subscribers* and *casual viewers*. Here I further develop the basic typology of two categories into four video categories and assess the way different types of videos strengthen her popularity by generating and maintaining interest. Each theme is embodied by two types of content: 'content-oriented' and 'market-oriented' videos, as I term them, represent the commercial, while 'relational' and 'motivational' uploads are part of the community sphere.

The *third publication*, a book chapter, looks at her content from the perspective of the achieved intimacy with viewers. Building on the second article, I situate the emerged content typology in a scale of increasing intimacy and explore the affordances of her content considering the particular topics, modes of address, and Bubz's self-disclosure. In addition, I interpret in view of viewers' comments both pragmatic and more encompassing, abstract benefits and uses of her content. Closeness, identification and intimacy can be seen as fueling creative, personal, self-development. Here I draw from the work of Redmond (2006, 2014) on private, public, and productive 'types' of intimacy between fans and celebrities, to conceptualize the rewards and value of her persona and her content for her audience.

The *fourth publication* focuses on community understandings and active discourses related to self-presentation and identity-management and their affordances for legitimized celebrity positions. I suggest that the guru's online identity is based on a performative blend of the cultural categories of consumer, user, fan, and celebrity. I examine the inherent benefits, as well as daily tensions and constraints of performing an ordinary, "regular user" who is at the same time an influential personality within the community. Based on user comments and Bubz's own reflections, I focus on the relevance of being "real", relatable and ordinary, without leaving aside more aspirational, celebrity-like, and worthy of emulation characteristics.

The *fifth publication* builds on some of the norms introduced in the fourth article aiming in this case to conceptualize the relevance of authenticity for legitimized online popularity. The article looks at the politics of success of the community. It addresses community understandings of

expertise, talent and merit together with the notion of a deserved celebrity position. It maps out the ethics of practices such as reviewing products or self-advertising new channels on popular users' comment sections, which is often negatively seen as 'spamming'. In addition, I revisit the cinematic "success myth" (Dyer 1985, 1991) in view of current understandings of fame within the community.

Results

This section of the thesis is comprised of the five publications, which are included in the following pages.

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Final Refereeing Decision IJWBC_130723

July 11th, 2016

Dear Florencia García-Rapp,

Your manuscript titled "The digital media phenomenon of YouTube beauty gurus: the case of Bubzbeauty" is selected to be included in IJWBC volume 12 number 4.

Kind regards
Margriet Simmerling
Technical Editor of the International Journal of Web Based Communities
simmerling@helix5.nl

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ingn

The digital media phenomenon of YouTube beauty gurus: the case of Bubzbeauty

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

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

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

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Abstract

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

Keywords: YouTube gurus; makeup tutorials; beauty gurus; vlogs; YouTube; online communities; online popularity; digital ethnography.

Introduction

YouTube was launched in 2005 and has rapidly grown to be the worldwide largest, most visited database of video content. Its Partner Program, created in 2007, allows more than a million creators from over 30 countries to earn money from their videos (YouTube, 2014). These users and their contributions have a considerably high number of subscribers who regularly follow them. Thousands of channels are making six figures a year and millions of subscriptions happen each day (YouTube, 2014). One of the most viewed and subscribed video category is How-To, being How-To beauty videos the most popular subgroup within.

Beauty gurus are usually young women who regularly upload videos advising on makeup and hairstyling techniques and products. In addition to the implication of wisdom, the term derives from

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

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

Such a massive and ever-growing digital media phenomenon is a relevant terrain to explore current shaping forces of community and commercial spheres as well as implications for online self-presentation and communication practices. As such, the phenomenon of YouTube beauty gurus constitutes a significant socio-cultural object of inquiry. In this vein, the development of gurus' popularity and their viewers' responses to their content are fruitful research areas to examine. A relevant question to explore is: how does shared video content foster and sustain popularity development on YouTube's beauty community? Even though self-branding and attention-seeking online practices have been researched, especially those related to Twitter and the platform's specific affordances for visibility development (Marwick and boyd, 2011a, 2011b; Marwick, 2013a), not much has been written on the phenomenon of YouTube beauty gurus yet. Burgess and Green discussed in several occasions the platform and its characteristics, especially in relation to user agency, creative and production practices as well as habitualised interaction (2008, 2009a, 2009b).

Additionally, there have been ethnographies focused on YouTube as a cultural repository (Strangelove, 2010) and as a learning platform (Lange, 2014), however, there is a lack of studies addressing its beauty community. An exception is provided by Spyer (2011), who offers a compelling ethnographic examination of YouTube beauty gurus exploring, among others, the use of tagging practices and their affordances for dialogue and interaction within the community.

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

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

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

The performance of online identity-management strategies such as "self-branding" (2013, p. 183) and "lifestreaming" (p. 16) −as analysed in depth by Alice Marwick with respect to the San Francisco tech scene− are helpful constructs that aid at theorizing current practices on YouTube. I relate her vlogs to the practice of lifestreaming and draw from Lange's consideration of vlogs as "videos of affinity" (2009, p. 71), aimed at building connections. I point out that Bubz's market

value as a renowned and influential guru −economic value for advertisers wishing to invest in her− (see also Marshall, 2014, p. 195) is built through her know-how as expressed by her tutorials. Bubz heightens this through self-branding techniques such as advertising her website and own brand of makeup brushes, as well as encouraging viewers to "connect" with her through her other social media accounts and asking them to subscribe to her channel. I argue that her commercial and economic relevance as an influential personality for YouTube and sponsoring brands is promoted particularly by her tutorials. Her social value and, ultimately, status within the community, is enabled and further promoted by her vlogs and the audience's reactions they create. My objective throughout this paper remains to interpret my qualitative findings so as to explain how and why this is the case.

Exploring the phenomenon

With the broader goal of contributing to current debates on online popularity development, self-presentation, and audience building, I introduce and interpret in this paper my ethnographic findings of the YouTube channel "Bubzbeauty". The performed online fieldwork (Boellstorff, 2008; Boellstorff, Nardi et al 2012; Kozinets, 2010) took place during 22 months between July 2013 and May 2015, after getting to know and subsequently having started following the chosen guru's channel as a member of her audience in 2010. During my active research time I first observed, collected and analysed audiovisual data and basic channel statistics[i] in form of 313 videos from the same guru in order to build a preliminary, emergent content typology. This sample amounted to a total of 60 hours of audiovisual material, which covered all available content dating from the start of her channel in 2008 and the beginning of data collection in July 2013. It followed an immersive and extensive coding process −from open coding to more analytical and thematic coding− where I focused my analysis on a purposeful sample of 80 main videos to be considered for this paper. Additionally, I collected and coded more than 5.000 user comments[ii], mainly from her most commented uploads, pertaining to the video category vlogs. Emerging findings of the performed holistic, exploratory, inductive research (Merriam, 2010; Wolcott, 1995, 2010), were framed as themes, processes, and practices, including the outlining and interpretation of community norms and habitual actions.

The broader research aim remained to analyse data in order to develop theory to better "understand others in context" (Markham, 2003, p. 373). Her uploaded content and the interactions generated by it, together with the role played by Bubz, including her own reflections (as heard during her vlogs) on being a beauty guru and an online celebrity were considered as key data to be interpreted and because of this, transcribed and coded. Especially relevant to this study's research design was Lange's proposal to examine YouTube channels through encompassing analysis, considering its paratexts such as video descriptions and textual comments, since it is through these interactions that

roles and practices are often contested and redefined (2014, p. 145). Additionally, the anthropologist pleads for a comprehensive study of complete channels taken as complete "oeuvre" and not only considering prominent viral videos (p. 217). Similarly, Burgess and Green point out that the actual value of user-led content lies at its "locatedness" and "ordinariness" and not at radical, revolutionary, or viral content (2009b, p. 30). Everyday cultural practices and interactions are the essence of YouTube and its most productive research issue. Moreover, according to Boellstorff, Nardi, and colleagues, it is especially relevant and fruitful to study the "ordinary, the banal, the trivial and the mundane" (2012, p. 69). From a similar ethnographic understanding, Markham writes that it is through the examination of "mundane social interaction" that we get to map out "grounding assumptions" which provide rich insight into a culture (2013, p. 65).

Tutorials and Vlogs: The Building Blocks of Bubz's Popularity

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

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

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

As noted before, I locate tutorials within the *commercial sphere*. These videos are examples of *market-oriented* content since they act reinforcing her economic value as an audience influencer and motivate brands to contact her for reviews. They achieve this through a visible high amount of views and, to a lesser extent, subscriptions, as commodified metrics implying good content quality. This is grounded on the current prevailing attention economy (Burgess and Green, 2009b; Hearn, 2008; Marwick, 2013b; Senft, 2013). Nowadays, in the highly competitive environment of social media, value and legitimacy are determined by the amount of attention one receives. Attention, and consequently, community and market value can be measured in likes, views, followers, and subscribers. These "metrics of popularity" (Burgess and Green, 2009a, p. 20) determine a user´s relevance for both inside and outside the community. The former being fans and based on affective ties and the latter meaning advertisers and based on monetary value.

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

TUTORIALS

content: LOOK/PRODUCT

focus: KNOW-HOW, beauty

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

aim: TEACH, help, inform, look itself

relevant for: BRANDS

Figure 1: Characteristics of tutorials

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

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

We know that disclosing personal information is a powerful way of bonding. Feelings of connection and support are, together with shared norms and resources, important aspects to community-building

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

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

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

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

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

VLOGS

- content: GURU
- focus: LIFE, thoughts, experiences, reflections
- characteristics: PERSONAL, spontaneous, fun, deep, emotional, subjective
- aim: BONDING
- relevant for: COMMUNITIES

Figure 2: Characteristics of vlogs

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

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

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

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

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

Senft parts from the assumption that, while audiences want "someone to speak at them", communities, in contrast, seek "someone to speak *with* them" (2013, p. 4). Interacting and self-disclosure are, as effective communicative practices, essential elements in the construction of relationships (Baym, 2010, p. 128; Marwick, 2013a, p. 216). This is why I suggest that in the case of Bubzbeauty, intimacy promotes visibility and consolidates a loyal viewership. As Marwick and boyd

argue regarding Twitter practices, "popularity is maintained through ongoing fan management" (2011b, p. 140), which here is achieved through the creation and promotion of strong emotional ties with her audience. During her vlogs she also reflects on her role as a popular personality within the beauty community and the major role she plays in the lives of her viewers, who express through comments their appreciation and esteem. When asked how she deals with fame and success, as part of the video "Ask Bubz: Up-close & Personal", she said:

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

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

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

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

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

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

Self-branding to gain visibility and consolidate status

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

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

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

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

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

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

Here I offer a description and interpretation of a tutorial and a vlog, looking to shed light to its similarities and differences. On this 6-minute tutorial, titled "Dreamy Summer", Bubz shows how to

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

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

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

her through her day. Her vlogs are engaging and compelling invitations that move us viewers closer to her.

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

Lange notes that vlogs, although often "perceived as narcissistic and self-centered" (p. 68) are more "realistic, less flattering portrayals" usually displaying some sort of "hanging out at home" style. This notion is in agreement with my findings, since in the case of Bubzbeauty, especially during her vlogs, we often see in the background her household cleaning products, her laundry, or even her husband lying on the sofa in his underwear and unshaved. This is something that Bubz does not hide; to the contrary: she even jokes underlining her husband's state or her dogs' inappropriate behaviour in the background. These scenes can also be analysed from a different angle. For Spyer these supposedly spontaneous and homely-like settings are part of the "trap" that gurus organize in order to catch viewer's attention: "by portraying an image of amateur production […] that inculcates values such as intimacy and closeness" (2011, p. 44). This is often achieved by displaying a reachable, "girl next door" image, to foster empathy and identification (see also Abidin and Thompson, 2012, p. 472). Something that Lange acknowledges too, when she writes that many videos are planned and produced with "different levels of sincerity" (2009, p. 71) and that vlogs can be "used to promote and gain visibility" (2014, p. 134).

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

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

"Get ready for bed with me" is an example of the type of content that I consider part of the community sphere; it was watched more than a half million times, and commented more than 6.500 times. The 7-minute video focuses on her usual night routine. It starts with Bubz coming home to her dogs (voice-over: "coming home to my dogs is one of my highlights each day"), lighting scented candles, having a bath and applying a sheet mask, washing her teeth, and drinking green tea. Later she writes her prayers and reflects on the things she is thankful for, to finish the video with her evening reading session and "IPad time" in bed cuddling with her dogs. Many users comment on the soothing effect of the video and thank her for sharing. They remark taking Bubz's videos as an inspiration and express their appreciation for her many useful tips and examples of soothing activities that they want to incorporate to their own routines.

> *This video makes me happy, calm, sleepy ☺ ah.* (comment was liked 45 times)
>
> *your routine videos are so relaxing…just watching them make me get all comfortable and relaxed…*
>
> *I gotta start doing this. I have crazy insomnia and this looks like a peaceful way to go to bed*

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

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

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

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

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

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

Conclusions: broadcasting (friendly) popularity

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

Drawing from concepts such as "self-branding", and "lifestreaming" (Marwick, 2013a) as theoretical tools, I focused on the question of how Bubz's shared content fosters and sustains her popularity development on YouTube's beauty community. The act of performing a commodified online-persona by following community-specific self-presentation norms, further strengthens her personal brand. As Lange also identified, creators often employ "tactics to address wide audience and entice viewers to interact" (2014, p.141). This is seen for example in the active promotion of her channel encouraging subscriptions and comments, so as to engage viewers. But her closer connection is best exemplified by her candid and emotional vlogs. I argued that through these videos she practices an

almost daily disclosing of her personal life with the aim of fostering relationships and promoting viewers' identification with her. Because, ultimately, "what is being manufactured when it comes to the production of celebrity is structures of affect, ripples of feeling, centred in commodity identification…" (Redmond, 2014, p. 85). Through vlogs people engage and interact with Bubz as the central content, something that fosters viewers' identification with someone "just like us". She is an ordinary girl who is "willing to learn, willing to try" as she writes in her profile description. This subsequently sustains her popularity and maintains her online status as a relatable, sweet, honest, and friendly guru, who also endured sad life moments, who cooks and cleans, and gets bored like anyone else. As Redmond writes regarding the function of celebrities, "[they act as] entities with deeply affecting effects" (2014, p. 85).

The combination of a lifestyle, personality, and knowledge worthy of emulation and praise as an influential guru together with her image as an everyday girl and her sharing of personal moments can be further identified as the "production of celebrity" (Redmond 2014, p. 85). In this case, it is the building of new media renowned personalities powered by social media technologies, specifically the construction of a YouTube celebrity.

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

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

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

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

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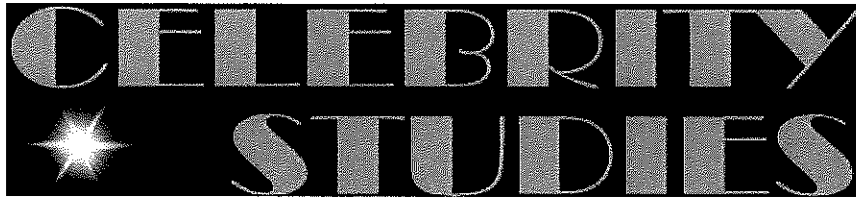
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Popularity markers on YouTube's attention economy: the case of Bubzbeauty

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ABSTRACT

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

Introduction

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

As Smith (2014, p. 259) argues, the notion of 'broadcast yourself' – YouTube's first official motto – became an inherent aspect of modern society. Since the launch of the platform's Partner Program in 2007 — which offers video creators revenue according to the views their content achieves — users have been increasingly turning into 'entrepreneurial vloggers' (Burgess and Green 2009b, p. 104). This is closely related to Smith's (2014 p. 256) consideration of YouTube as a 'platform for a branded personhood'. Furthermore, many users not only make a living from YouTube, but also construct

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

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Abstract

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

Keywords

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

Introduction

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

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

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

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

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

The beauty community on YouTube, focusing on makeup, skin care, nail art, and hairstyling products and techniques, is a particularly active and large community and also a gigantic market. The number of views that its beauty content reaches per month has been increasing exponentially from 200 million in September 2009 to 1.6 billion views in March 2015 (Pixability, 2015). There are more than 180,000 beauty gurus, who, together with 215 beauty brands, upload a total of 100 hours of content a day (2015). Beauty gurus are users who advise on cosmetics, makeup and hairstyling, demonstrating and teaching practical matters through regular video posts in the form of video tutorials as step-by-step How-To guides. The channel I am focusing on is owned by Bubz, a young British Chinese woman born in Northern Ireland who currently lives in Hong Kong. She has been uploading videos, and successfully sustaining her popularity, since 2008. Her 300+ videos have been watched more than 3 million times (YouTube, 2016). With almost 3 million subscribers, she is among the 55 most subscribed YouTubers in the UK (Socialblade, 2016). Her high subscription figures at times positioned her channel higher than the official British YouTube channel, the music band Coldplay, or even the BBC's account (Socialblade, 2014).

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

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

While examining celebrity from the perspective of the performance of authenticity (e.g. Dyer, 1991, 1998; Ellcessor, 2012; Marwick, 2013b; Meyers, 2009; Tolson 2001, 2010) and intimacy with viewers (Lange 2007b, 2009; Redmond 2014, 2006) are fruitful approaches, I focus here on how Bubz's celebrity subject position is constructed and sustained from the perspective of her video content. Likewise, considerations of YouTubers' constructions of gender (Anarbaeva, 2011; Jeffries

2011; Wotanis and McMillan, 2014) or national identity aspects on YouTube (e.g. Guo and Lee, 2013; Smith, 2014) are undoubtedly valuable framings but are not part of the scope of this article. Furthermore, online celebrities' embodying both aspirational and relational values (e.g. Marwick, 2013b; 2015) together with the re-framing of the paradoxical celebrity binary of ordinary/extraordinary (Dyer 1998, 1991; Gamson, 2011; Holmes, 2004; Littler, 2004) to allow for a legitimised famous persona are also relevant research areas. However, here I am interested in paying close attention to the community-based popularity affordances of her 'sustained programming' (Burgess, 2012: 55).

Exploring the Phenomenon with an Ethnographic Eye

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

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

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

The pre-coding phase and the first coding cycle (Saldaña, 2009), which aim at indexing data, covered aspects such as main topics and formal video structure. The categories were data-based; they

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

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

YouTube as a Multi-Purpose Online Platform

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

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

It is also relevant to underline the active role of YouTube as a 'broadcast platform' (Burgess and Green 2009a: 5) with the clear business model and aim of generating economic value from uploaded content. The platform works, as Burgess argues, with an 'aspirational strategy' (2012: 55) in which successful YouTubers are actively promoting their channels' content and their online personas 'selling his or her capital as a kind of brand loyalty' (Marshall, 2014: 95-6). Moreover, the platform also started a comprehensive guide –Creators Hub– offering assistance to creators regarding content-planning and audience management including specific rules and guidelines for acceptable content. This is part of what Burgess describes as the 'formalisation of amateur media production' (2012: 53).

The Claws of the Attention Economy

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

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

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

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

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

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

Views and Subscriptions as Popularity Markers

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

Bubz uploads weekly makeup tutorials and *vlogs*, or video blogs, as she calls her more personal and spontaneous videos. During tutorials, she quickly and easily demonstrates how to achieve makeup looks and hairstyles. She also offers tips, reviews, and recommendations regarding beauty products, especially makeup. In her vlogs, she answers user comments and questions, but mostly shares with her global audience her everyday life and activities in Hong Kong. Over the years, she has included footage of intimate moments that one usually shares only with friends and family, such as her husband's proposal, her wedding and honeymoon, the moment she tells her husband that he is going

to be a father, and the development of her pregnancy. These videos, as 'narratives of the intimate' (Marshall, 2006: 643), can be related to the many 'opportunities for the public display of once-private feelings' (Aslama and Pantti, 2006: 167) that today´s 'confessional culture' (168) facilitates.

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

I argue that, in order to analyse status and popularity on YouTube, one must differentiate between views and subscriptions. They are essential in terms of reputation and legitimacy within the platform and even outside of it, in offline scenes. As noted in the previous section, they do not only display but also actively perform –in terms of influencing– online value. Depending on how many views and subscriptions a channel achieves, it is accordingly deemed as relevant and attention-worthy or not. A very direct and easy way of measuring interest on YouTube is to consider the number of views a certain video achieved. Mass media usually pay attention to this when referring to viral videos or memes, as well as the general public when discussing YouTube popular content and trends. Even though this is a partially useful measure, I suggest that the most significant dimension of sustained interest –and the channel's subsequent legitimacy within the community– is determined by the number of subscriptions a channel achieves (see also Wattenhofer, Wattenhofer, Zhu, 2012).

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

Vlogs renew and reinforce audience interest in Bubz through the ongoing sharing of her personal life, as well as her thoughts and opinions on topics such as love, friendship or career. According to my findings, her guru-based vlogs are what guarantee that people keep on tuning in. The performed statistical overview of her channel figures further confirms this. My analysis showed that vlogs led

to more subscriptions and more shares than did tutorials. If one takes, for instance, her 20 most commented videos only four of them are tutorials and the rest are vlogs. I will expand on these figures in the next section.

In terms of engagement with the channel, we can identify two types of viewers: *casual viewers* and *loyal subscribers* (see also Burgess, 2012). Despite being watched and commented on by her regular followers, I argue that tutorials best reflect and foster a type of audience that I denominate as *casual viewers*, who first get to know Bubz through these uploads. As content-centred uploads, they enjoy high degrees of circulation due to their easy 'searchability' (boyd, 2011). Their specific titles make tutorials easily accessible through keyword searches and, thus, always open to new viewership (García-Rapp, 2016). Although there are no statistical data available, from a qualitative perspective, views can be seen in this case as generated through keyword searches, for example when looking for a tutorial on 'hair waves' or 'easy curls' (2016).[i] This is why I suggest that tutorials mainly *generate* attention for her channel, as also confirmed through the amount of views they receive.

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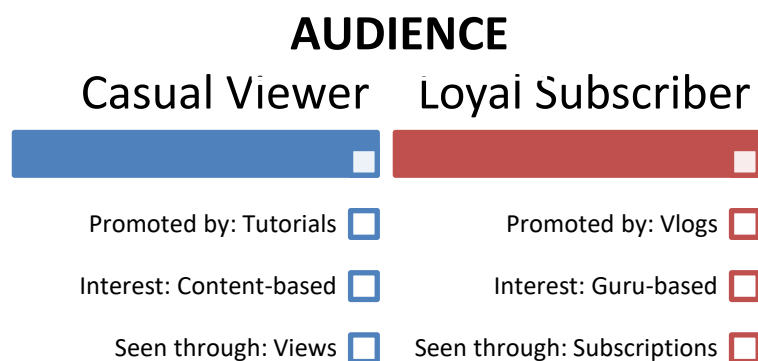

AUDIENCE
Casual Viewer   Loyal Subscriber

Promoted by: Tutorials   Promoted by: Vlogs

Interest: Content-based   Interest: Guru-based

Seen through: Views   Seen through: Subscriptions

Figure 1: Audience typology

According to this, vlogs help *sustain* that first generated attention and foster channel *subscriptions.* Therefore, I contend that her vlogs turn *casual viewers* into *loyal subscribers* through emotional

connection. This distinction between loyal subscribers and random viewers is important because through it we can see how her content shapes her ties with viewers. I developed a chart to visualise the two main types of viewers that follow Bubz and how tutorials and vlogs respectively help to establish these categories (Figure 1).

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

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

The sphere of *community* is embodied by other beauty gurus, as well as users, followers, viewers, and fans in their often undefined and changeable roles. I argued that this sphere is represented by her vlogs, through which she displays her everyday life with her husband and dogs in Hong Kong (García-Rapp, 2016). The sphere is framed by implicit rules and expectations that are dynamically constructed and contested by both gurus and users through videos and comments.

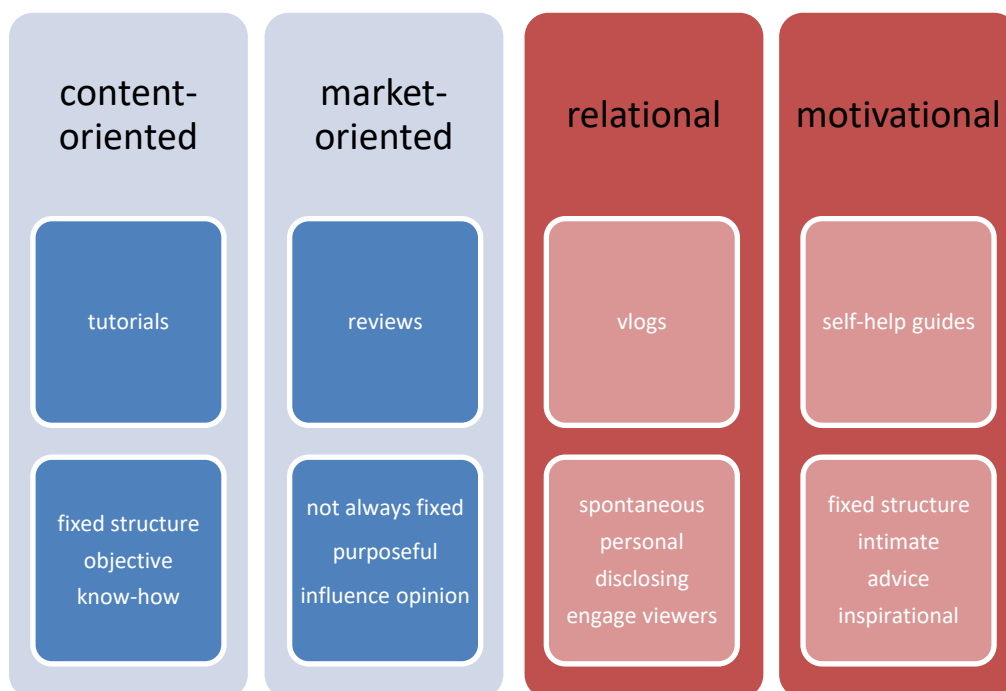| content-oriented	market-oriented	relational	motivational
tutorials	reviews	vlogs	self-help guides
fixed structure objective know-how	not always fixed purposeful influence opinion	spontaneous personal disclosing engage viewers	fixed structure intimate advice inspirational

Figure 2: Content typology and characteristics

In order to expand the bifold content typology of vlogs and tutorials (2016), I developed a further categorization leading to four emerging groups (Figure 2). The diagram helps visualise the complete typology and provides an overview of the four types of video uploads. As seen in the figure, the commercial sphere is made up by *content-oriented* videos and *market-oriented* videos, while the community sphere is formed by *relational* and *motivational* videos. In the following, I characterise each of the four emerged categories and then offer a description and interpretation of two videos.

What I term 1) *content-oriented* videos are mainly tutorials where Bubz explains a certain technique or look. They represent the vast majority of her uploads: 194 out of 313, and as I show later in the quantitative overview of her channel (Figure 3), they embody her most watched content. These include titles such as 'Chic Night Look', 'Korean Natural Makeup' or 'Perfect Spring Hair in Minutes'. These demonstrations are simply structured and straight-forward. Most makeup tutorials share the same organising principles and style throughout YouTube: the introductions and the endings usually repeat the same footage showcasing the completed look. Unlike her vlogs, Bubz does not directly address her viewers by talking to the camera, but offers a separately recorded voice-over explanation of the visual steps she follows to create the look. Tutorials are quick, easy to follow, music-laden, instructional videos. Through these videos, Bubz displays her expertise (community-specific know-how) by offering creative new looks and strengthens her status as a renowned beauty guru. I suggest that it was precisely with this type of upload that she 'made herself' as a beauty guru. Especially thanks to her creativity and the clarity of her explanations (García-Rapp, 2016).

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

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

videos, resembling infomercials, are carefully edited and include on-screen text with relevant product details.

Additionally, also under this category, Bubz creates content focusing on her favourite products of the month. The 'Favs of the month' video category is very popular among beauty gurus and it is particularly through these videos that they most noticeably manifest commercial connections with cosmetics manufacturers. The promoted products are usually new cosmetics made by well-known brands that are candidly introduced to the viewers underlined by their many advantages. Besides regularly displaying special, dedicated looks achieved with the chosen cosmetics (tailored How-To videos), Bubz also organises contests, giveaways, and presents 'hauls' that include several products from different brands. Examples of this video category are 'Casual shopping outfit of the day', 'Massive fashion & makeup Korean haul' and 'November beauty favourites'. As with her tutorials, I argue that these videos heighten her status as a renowned beauty guru, which is relevant for her status as an influential online persona. Bubz ultimately does call editing and filming videos for YouTube 'to work'; furthermore, she acknowledges that it is her full-time occupation.

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

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

The close and affective connection established between the guru and her viewers is also evidenced by the content of the comments. While tutorials reap mainly praiseful, short feedback such as 'great

tutorial' or 'love it, thanks', vlogs receive longer, more personal comments where viewers disclose that they have followed her uploads for years, or consider her a role model. Some even confess to wishing she was her friend in "real life" and having pictures of Bubz hanging in their rooms. Many viewers also disclose their own life stories in response to Bubz's emotional vlogs. They express that they identify with her and thank her for being open and honest. Bubz acknowledges and shows her appreciation for the support she receives − especially during difficult times such as family or work-related issues she trusts her viewers with. She has the role of an admired friend who supports them, who also shows herself vulnerable and needs their support.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

A market-oriented video: 'Products I'm loving'

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

Similarly, when she presents the products' name and shade, she reads this information from the packaging, as a way to indicate spontaneity and candour (Dyer 1991: 137) and to confer an authentic persona. By doing this, the review is not seen as rehearsed and implies −contrary to regular advertisements− that the importance is centred on the products' intrinsic qualities and not the brand itself (see also Rodrigues 2012). The message is that Bubz has been 'loving it' and wants to 'share', regardless of the brand. In this way, she underlines this way the honesty of the review, since it is shown as basing on her personal experience with the product. At the same time, she follows the golden rule of YouTube's video community when looking to convey an authentic, trustworthy message: she has tried the product beforehand and was able to test its properties. She talks from experience and her own personal opinion, keeping a transparent 'brand engagement' that reinforces her authenticity and, through it, the trustworthiness of the review.

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

A motivational video: 'Healthy relationships'

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The example of Bubz's statement brings forward two important considerations: first, we see how relevant it is for internet celebrities to rely on 'ordinariness' (Ellcessor 2012; Holmes 2004; Kanai 2015; Meyers, 2009; Smith, 2014) in order to make up for 'self-commodification' (Smith, 2014: 257). This way, her personal and everyday vlogs re-frame her daily as an ordinary girl, even after the fame she amassed through her tutorials. Second, it makes evident how, especially on YouTube, the production of online content highlights for viewers a certain 'performative agency we all could easily adopt or enlist ourselves' (261).

Conclusions

This article discusses some of my findings in view of their connection with relevant literature and the implications for online popularity development when situated in YouTube's highly dynamic and competitive ecology. Standing out in the volatile environment of rapidly changing trends, ever-present viral videos, and memes does not happen by luck. I parted from the notion that metrics as clicks, views, subscriptions, shares, and comments have the power of acting as 'performative'

markers (Burgess and Green, 2009: 41). This emphasises the role of views and subscriptions as valuable and much sought-after popularity markers.

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

I develop here a basic content typology of two initial themes introduced elsewhere (2016) into four distinctive categories of videos: market-oriented, content-oriented, relational, and motivational, to explain how her content promotes her visibility as an informational (knowledge-based) and relational (connection-based) content creator. Additionally, I bring forward a categorization of two types of audiences –*casual viewers* and *loyal subscribers*– fostered and sustained by her different types of videos. My findings suggest that the performance of self-presentation and self-expression, coordinated through ongoing content management and strong community ties, is key in the creation of a long-lasting supporting audience and loyal fans. According to the emerged typology, her market-oriented uploads (mainly product reviews) as well as her content-oriented videos (mainly tutorials) display an advertiser-friendly and a 'safe-for-work' (Marwick 2013a: 5) persona. These uploads legitimise her as a knowledgeable guru (García-Rapp, 2016).

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

Vlogs, on the other hand, are guru-based uploads that renew the already established interest through regular glimpses into Bubz's private life. She gains recognition through her informational tutorials but achieves the strongest sense of affective connection through her vlogs, which not only sustain

and renew viewers' interest but also re-signify her condition of 'ordinary'. By doing this, vlogs confirm and legitimate (Dyer, 1998; Tolson, 2010) her subject position as a renowned personality, a YouTube celebrity.

From a uses and gratifications perspective, the success of this extremely popular YouTube channel shows us the relevance of uploading frequently and providing varied programming that offers a combination of informational, community-specific content as well as personal, creator-centred vlogs to sustain viewers' interest and engagement.

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

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We are pleased to inform that Florencia Garcia-Rapp's book chapter "My friend Bubz: Building intimacy as a YouTube beauty guru" has been accepted for publication as part of the anthology *New Media, New Intimacies: Connectivities, relationalities, proximities*. The antology will be published as part of ECREA book series published by Routledge. The volume will be published in 2017.

Yours Sincerely,

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'My Friend Bubz': Building intimacy as a YouTube beauty guru

Florencia Garcia-Rapp

Introduction

The relevance of establishing feelings of connection and intimacy with an audience for cinema, television and online celebrities has been extensively researched. It has been argued that, for television personalities, familiarity and regularity foster authenticity and renew viewers' interest (e.g. Dyer, 1998; Holmes, 2004; Marshall, 2014). This is similar for Internet celebrities, for whom it is particularly important to remain 'ordinary' in order to foster a sense of 'realness' and authenticity (e.g. Tolson, 2010).

For online celebrities, there is a strong expectancy of authenticity, due to social media's implicit values of immediacy and spontaneity, as well as the inherent image of grassroots, amateur and DIY culture (Banet-Weiser, 2012; Burgess and Green, 2009) that the platform of YouTube started with and seeks to maintain. Successful online celebrity practice implies building intimacy through disclosure and connection-seeking. This legitimises celebrity practitioners' positions and reputations as renowned personalities (García-Rapp, 2016a, 2016b; Marwick and boyd, 2011; Smith 2014). As Cohen argues, self-disclosure is 'the engine that drives new relationships' (2001, p. 46; also Baym, 2010) and 'disclosing intimacy acts as a marker that defines authentic friendship' (p. 47).

To date, practices at play within YouTube's beauty community are still under-researched. The platform's beauty ecosystem is not only highly active and dynamic, but it also represents a large market that is steadily growing. The number of views for these videos grew by 50 per cent between January 2014 and April 2015 (Pixability, 2015). Moreover, the 1.7 billion beauty-related videos that populate YouTube have generated a total of 45.3 billion historical views and more than 123 million subscriptions (Pixability, 2015).

To understand the dynamics of YouTube's beauty community, it can be particularly fruitful to explore not only the celebrification processes of beauty gurus as *regular-users-turned-celebrities*, but, more specifically, to explore how they forge closeness and intimacy with their audiences. When compared to the '15 minutes of fame' of other popular content such as viral videos, the *sustained*

popularity of these beauty channels (often over several years), in such a competitive and dynamic environment, is a relevant aspect to consider. To locate this 'new public intimacy' (Marshall, 2014, p. xii), one must explore affective and discursive practices, as well as the particular 'bonds of intimacy afforded by interaction' (Usher, 2015, p. 313). In this vein, it is relevant to look at how self-disclosure through uploaded content further sustains the celebrity position of popular beauty gurus. Here, I explain how the renowned guru Bubz addresses her viewers through her channel, Bubzbeauty.

This chapter contributes to the scholarly dialogue focused on current digital culture practices at the intersection of digital fandom and celebrity culture (Kanai, 2015; Marwick and boyd, 2011; Smith, 2014; Usher, 2015). I examine the way in which content fosters different modes of address and promotes various types of connection with viewers. In addition, I describe how viewers consume Bubz's different types of content, and often reciprocate by engaging in self-disclosing narratives through comments. Like Lange, I see intimate YouTube videos or videos disclosing intimate and personal moments as 'videos of affinity' (2009, p. 73) that strengthen feelings of closeness and connection between viewers and content creators.

I do not aim at discovering whether Bubz's performance of intimacy is 'sincere' or part of her self-brand; rather, my focus is on the affordances of her content for sustaining and legitimising her position, and what viewers *do* with this – how they consume and respond to her videos. I leave aside the often simplistic considerations of 'true' versus 'false' for two reasons. First, any evaluation of truth claims would not influence the phenomenon of her popularity. In other words, independent of any moral dualism, Bubz owns a very successful channel, and I present the way she seems to connect with her followers. As Abidin writes, in reference to Singaporean lifestyle bloggers: 'the intimacies negotiated are felt by followers as opposed to whether or not these intimacies are actually "authentic" or "genuine"' (2015, p. 6). What is more, in many cases, viewers are aware of Bubz's restraints in self-presentation as a popular personality, and they know that producing videos and engaging with her audience is her occupation. My perspective is close to that established by Lange, who acknowledges that intimate videos may well have 'varying degrees of sincerity' (2009, p. 83). However, rather than using this as a major point of discovery or interpretation, I focus on the affordances of content and users' responses to it.

Second, and most importantly, Bubz's interactions likely blend her acknowledgement of community-based rules, attention building strategies and genuine, 'sincere' self-expression. This is probably also true for the interactions of most online and mass media celebrities, who are also social (and human) beings. What is more, many of Bubz's 'everyday performances' that focus on 'impression management' are practices that we all engage in, as shown by the works of Goffman

(1959) and Garfinkel (1967) on the relevance of dramaturgical action as social action in everyday human interaction and the notion of behaviour as ruled-governed, respectively.

Methods

This paper draws on a broader ethnographic examination of YouTube, specifically its beauty community, between 2013 and 2015. The data collection and analysis are based on 22 months of immersed fieldwork, which involved systematic online observation and interpretation of 313 videos and more than 10,000 comments. For this paper, I considered a purposeful sample of 20 videos, which were transcribed and interpreted in light of their qualities of building and strengthening feelings of connection and intimacy with viewers. Correspondingly, I analysed 3,000 user comments by manually coding them according to descriptive, verbatim and emotional codes (Saldaña, 2009) in order to assess the extent to which viewers reciprocated, responding to Bubz with their own self-disclosing narratives.

In crafting an ethnography, we look to achieve a 'theoretical description of the cultural patterns that cross-cut different domains of social activity' (Ardévol and Gómez-Cruz, 2014, p. 2), considering the meaning people give to their experiences and actions. My research follows ethnographic fieldwork techniques (Boellstorf, 2008; Kozinets, 2010; Wolcott, 1995, 2010) and aims at immersive observation, description and interpretation to uncover meanings that lead to practices and dynamics (Baym, 2010; Strangelove, 2010). In this vein, the project is structured as a data-driven, explorative study following an inductive rationale. I use qualitative data analysis to perform a contextual, open-ended examination (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 2009; Saldaña, 2013). I not only consider the inherent intimacy of the content, as determined by the personal and private nature of the topics and Bubz's disclosure practices, but also take into account Bubz's audience´s responses in the form of textual comments.

From content-oriented to motivational videos: A scale of intimacy

The focus of my study is a very popular British Chinese girl, Bubz, who has been uploading video tutorials on beauty and lifestyle to YouTube since 2008. She is known as a beauty guru: a person who creates video tutorials demonstrating looks and offering advice on makeup, hairstyling techniques and cosmetics. Makeup tutorials are widespread on YouTube and constitute an essential part of its beauty community (García-Rapp, 2016a; see also Spyer, 2011). Since 2010, Bubz has been one of the most viewed and subscribed YouTubers in the world. She is the sixth most viewed beauty guru in terms of historical views, which total more than 350 million (Pixability, 2015). Additionally, she has almost 3 million subscribers. Worldwide, only 30 other how-to channels – mainly beauty channels – have achieved such a high number of followers (Socialblade, 2016). The

longevity of her channel and her influential role, together with viewers' sustained interest in her content, is rendered even more relevant considering the highly dynamic, competitive and ever-changing environment of YouTube.

Bubz's more than 300 videos can be grouped into four categories, which I term 'content-oriented', 'market-oriented', 'relational' and 'motivational' (García-Rapp, 2016b). Content-oriented uploads are tutorials in which she demonstrates makeup and hairstyling techniques. Market-oriented videos are essentially product reviews of one or a set of products. Relational uploads are 'vlogs' (video blogs) that display her daily activities and depict her everyday interactions at home in Hong Kong, sometimes involving her husband and dogs. These videos also feature self-reflections on life and her role on YouTube, viewing it as both a platform and a community. Her content is often highly emotional and intimate, since she also discloses her own life experiences. Through her motivational videos, she offers advice and thoughts on relationships and career and personal development. In these self-help guides, she usually sits in her living room and talks to the camera in a frontal perspective, addressing her audience directly.

I argue that her videos can be arranged on a scale of increasing intimacy, with her subjective views and opinions progressing to personal, emotional narratives. I locate her videos on what I term a 'scale of intimacy', and propose this case study analysis because it can aid in the understanding of the creation of affective bonds online (Baym, 2010; Lange, 2007, 2009, 2014). Bubz's content ranges in intimacy, and her viewers' responses imply reciprocal feelings of connection and engagement, in line with the intimacy of her content. In other words, intimacy develops in a bifold sense: parting from the video content and finding its counterpart in the viewers' comments.
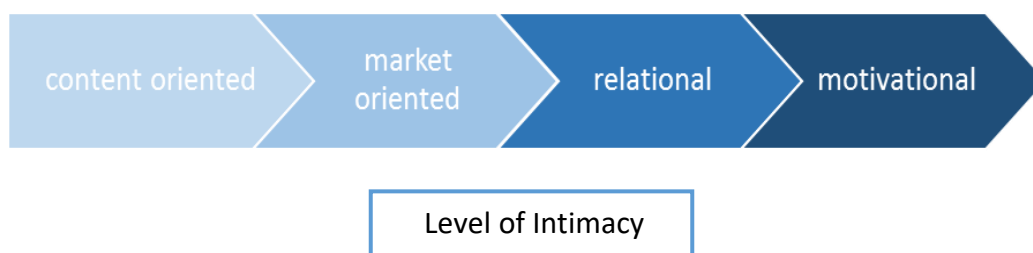

Figure 1: Scale of intimacy

Bubz's content-oriented video tutorials can be positioned at the beginning of the scale, due to their focus on rather objective and straightforward steps to achieving a certain makeup or hairstyling look. These videos are simply structured, with an introduction and ending showcasing Bubz posing with the finished look and a voice-over throughout, explaining the steps she demonstrates. A greater sense

of connection develops with her product reviews (market-oriented videos), which involve more subjective opinions and her personal experiences with the cosmetics. In these videos, as well as in her vlogs, Bubz addresses her audience directly, looking into the camera. Online intimacy continues to build through her personal vlogs (relational uploads), through which she shares her daily life and discloses life stories, dreams and even problems. Intimacy reaches its highest point in what I describe as motivational videos, in which she talks and advises her viewers with an implicit sense of trust and closeness, much as a friend would do. In this analysis, her content-oriented video tutorials and her motivational videos are on opposing sides of the scale, denoting the full range of intimacy and personal engagement.

Bubz's relational and motivational videos show the most explicit sense of intimacy, as evidenced by her personal disclosure and the feedback left in the comments. Her relational vlogs highlight subjective and personal topics, such as life stories, opinions and aspirations. Some of the titles of her vlogs are: 'A day in my life', 'Q&A with Bubz', 'Journey to Japan' and 'Meet my best friend'. In one of her vlogs, Bubz shares the experience of being bullied during high school in Northern Ireland because of her Chinese ethnicity. In some of the videos she cries and in others she laughs, and − according to the analysed comments − her viewers share these emotions and physical reactions with her.

This dynamic shows the extension of viewer engagement beyond beauty topics, which is a general thematic interest of the community. As Lange writes about YouTube vlogs: they 'give viewers the feeling of being connected not to a video, but to a person' (2009, p. 83). I suggest that, in this case, Bubz's viewers' feelings of closeness towards her are a prerequisite for their interest in watching and listening to her highly personal and subjective views on various life topics. Here, her know-how, centred on beauty and embodied by her tutorials, is relegated to the background by the increased relevance of her supportive and guiding role in broader life areas, including work and relationships. Bubz's vlogs motivate her viewers – through affective and communicative disclosure (Cohen, 2001) – to identify and engage with her and her content by commenting, sharing and discussing. As Abidin and Thompson argue, regarding fashion bloggers, the 'portrayal of their online persona is crafted through the narrative accounts of their everyday life' (2012, p. 472). These 'videos of affinity' (Lange, 2009, p. 73) can be seen as attempts at establishing closeness and a sense of familiarity (also Marshall, 2010).

Bubz can thus be seen as contributing to viewers' 'feeling of sharing a particular moment, large or small, or certain state of affairs in the creator's life' (Lange, 2009, p. 74). For instance, during the video 'Draw my life', she narrates the story of her life pre-YouTube. Some fragments are emotional – for example the fragment when she talks about her grandfather passing away:

> When I was 12 years old, my grandad was suddenly submitted into the hospital, he had gotten really sick and it really broke my heart because when I went to visit him, he couldn't even recognise who I was from all the medication. And he was only in the hospital for 2 weeks before he passed away. So, I didn't even get to say goodbye to my grandad and I miss him so much. I would go to his bedroom and crawl underneath his cover and just cry because I missed him so much and I would even get helium balloons and write messages on it and release it from his bedroom window. And I hoped that he would receive my message and just know how much I love and miss him.

To this 'private revelation for public consumption' (Marshall, 2014, p. xiii), viewers respond through comments that relate to her story and identify with her. This can be seen, for example, in the following comments:

> A tear went down my face about the grandpa part :/
>
> It is really sad about your granddad. but the balloon thing is kinda adorable
>
> Bubz on the hope you read this, you honestly made me cry. Because I can relate to you so much with your grandpa. It's so hard at the moment. Thanks for everything. Sam xx
>
> Omg the granddad part mad me cry T_T you inspire me! ^_^

During motivational videos – such as, for example, the video 'Finding happiness' – Bubz motivates her viewers to 'dream' and to 'try':

> If you try, it doesn't always mean you will win, but the only way that you could really lose is by not trying and I am willing to try. So if you have a dream, don't let it go! Hold it close to your heart and run with it! It's your dream and no one can really take it away from you. I believe that when you truly want something, you can actually achieve it. Whatever a mind can conceive, it can achieve but you have to make it happen and you have to believe.

In these videos, the topics do not pertain strictly to makeup or hairstyling; rather, they are oriented around themes such as friendship, career and relationships. Titles include 'Thinking about your future' and 'How to escape the friend zone'.

Additionally, and although they are located at opposing sides of the intimacy scale, the motivational videos are as pedagogical as her step-by-step tutorials (García-Rapp, 2017a). The educational videos make more literal the traditional value incarnated by celebrities as 'pedagogical tools' (Marshall, 2010, p. 42) in their audience's lives. While the tutorials aim more literally at teaching makeup and hairstyling techniques, the vlogs focus on promoting self-help and positive messages as motivation

for self-improvement − fitting today's 'therapeutical' society (Furedi, 2004, cited by Aslama and Pantti, 2006, p. 167). In her motivational videos, Bubz teaches and guides, much as she does in her tutorials, but rather than conveying a structured, step-by-step process, she advises her viewers through friendly, personal talk. She acts as a trusted friend and a guide/guru in the broader sense of the word, superseding her position as a 'mere' beauty expert. For example, during the video 'No pain, no gain', she says:

> Now a lot of people are miserable, and they complain about being unhappy, and they want to be happy. But then you would hear them just talking bad stuff about other people; they are always judging others and that's, like, no wonder you are miserable! And just, like, with weight loss, I think people should instead of focusing on 'Oh I can't do this and can't do that', I think what people should really focus on is just 'I'm going to lead a healthy lifestyle, I'm going to eat healthier, I'm going to be better for my body'. And, you know, when you do all of that, eventually your weight loss just follows behind.

Bubz's relational and motivational uploads create loyal subscribers, while her more content-oriented uploads receive more views (García-Rapp, 2016b). According to her channel metrics, the proposed scale of intimacy matches the like, comment and share figures achieved by her content. Additionally, her relational and motivational videos generate the most subscriptions, implying not only interest but the intention of sustained engagement from viewers. This is why I argue that this type of video constitutes a major tool in building intimacy and creating a sense of connection with viewers. Viewers' comments advance from short, positive pieces of feedback such as 'great video, keep on doing this' that are posted in response to her tutorials, to self-disclosing life experiences in response to her vlog stories (García-Rapp, 2016b). Furthermore, viewers thank her for helping them introduce changes into their lives and for contributing to them thinking differently about life and problems. We see, through the comments, how viewers express their appreciation to Bubz and underline their closeness:

> You are one of the biggest sweet hearts ever. You really make me feel better about things to come and I feel like even though you have no idea who I am, that we are close. Thank you so much. (:

Many viewers consider Bubz a positive influence in their lives – a 'role model' – and express admiration towards her. In line with the notion that 'celebrity taught generations how to engage and use consumer culture to "make" oneself' (Marshall, 2010, p. 36), Bubz's role in the lives of her fans is coupled with a sense of identification that fosters 'identity work' (also Marwick, 2013). This will be further explained in the following section:

> Maybe you will or will not read this, but you are our IDOL. I have watched all videos…
>
> Good Job Bubz! You are amazing! I watch ur videos everyday and you inspire me in EVERY video. U a seriously our favorite youtuber in the ENTIRE universe! I wish I was u. Ur our role model.
>
> I have lots of photos hanging in my room and one of them is a picture of you. :) When someone asks me 'who is that?' I tell them 'she is my role model' :3 Love you bubz!! never stop making videos!

The proposed scale of intimacy should not be seen as a linear development, since viewers may choose to focus on one or other type of video and not engage with the others. However, in line with the scale, the content grows in subjectivity, emotionality and, as a result, intimacy. I argue that this development pre-defines certain viewers' affinity, growing from contextual (i.e. beauty-related) to a focus on Bubz as a person. While market-oriented and content-oriented tutorials focus on beauty, the other two categories of videos focus on Bubz and her advice (García-Rapp, 2016b); this is why her role as a trusted friend and advisor is rendered more relevant through these videos. As Lange argues about vlogs: 'they typically interest delineated groups of people who wish to participate and remain connected social in some way' (2009, p. 73).

Thanks to Bubz I am 'a better version' of myself

In the previous section I explained how, when arranged on the scale, the development of topics in Bubz's videos progresses from content-based videos to guru-centred uploads that are increasingly subjective and personal. Through advice (e.g. motivational) videos, Bubz motivates her viewers to change aspects of their lives and improve themselves. These videos serve as self-development guidelines for 'being happier' and 'growing as a person'. As Lange writes, based on her ethnographic examination of online vlogging practices in 2007: '[bloggers] use intimacy to create reactions in viewers that encourage reconsideration of the blogger's own and viewers' ideas' (p. 1).

It is worth noting that I understand media, and particularly audience research, from the perspective of people actively using media to satisfy specific needs (Katz and Blumler, 1974; Rosengren, 1985; Ruggiero, 2000). This is why I leave aside perspectives focusing on 'audience manipulation', wherein the agency and understanding of viewers is not recognised or is overly simplified, automatically assuming symbolic inequalities and positioning the audience as 'disempowered fans […] as a flattened mass or sameness of consumers' (Hills, 2006, p. 116). Instead, I draw from the research of scholars who acknowledge viewers' active and differing roles in processes of (new) media reception and consumption (e.g. Burgess and Green, 2009; Lange, 2009, 2014; Meyers, 2009; Smith, 2014; Strangelove, 2010). It is fruitful to consider how viewers use the content that this beauty guru makes available.

In line with this, we can see (through comments) how viewers follow Bubz's advice and actively adapt and 'update' their identities with the aim of being 'transformed to "better" versions of themselves' (Marwick, 2013, p. 356). In particular, Bubz's motivational videos play an important role in guiding and 'inspiring' her viewers to act (García-Rapp, 2016b). The following comments help illustrate these points:

> i luv ya bubz! ur life may not be perfect but u definitely have made my life a step closer o here i want it to be
>
> This is amazing! Thanks Bubz for being such as inspiration and pushing us to leave our comfort zone and do new things...
>
> Bubz, you are amazing. Your videos are an inspiration to me and many others to go and live life beautifully.

People receive, through media and consumer goods ─ including celebrities and renowned personalities ─ 'exemplary models' (Marshall, 2014, p. 187) or, in the words of Thompson, 'mediated symbolic materials' (1995, p. 207) to choose from to actively construct an identity. According to the analysed comments, Bubz's videos aid viewers in building and transforming their 'narrative[s] of self-identity' (Thompson, 1995, p. 210). Marwick notes how identities are constructed 'through a bricolage of consumer goods, media, fashion, and styles' (2013a, p. 358), facilitated by media and technology. This is reflected in 'the necessity of lining one's own identities into some sort of pattern, from Twitter to Facebook, from YouTube and Flickr to Myspace, from blogs to Digg' (Marshall, 2010, p. 42).

Drawing on the work of sociologists such as Giddens (1991) and Thompson (1995), parallels can be traced between viewers' comments and the notion of active engagement with one's identity as an ongoing 'project' (see also Cohen, 2001; Hills, 2002). Viewers let themselves be guided by Bubz and imitate not only her makeup and hairstyle, but also her general attitude towards life. As a viewer puts it in the following comment, Bubz seems to offer 'much more than just makeup', since 'it isn't just for looks':

> You always seem so happy and bubbly (even if you really aren't) and you have encouraged me to do the same and build my own life how I want it. Your beauty channel isn't just for looks, it's for personality too. Thank you for doing what you're doing. Never stop.

In her motivational videos, Bubz advises her viewers to be thankful for what they are given, but without forgetting their own achievements. She reminds her fans that the key to happiness rests in themselves and their way of seeing life. She moves her audience to appreciate the little things in life and to be patient and understanding with others, but also with themselves.

> You have great beauty videos also great advice videos! PLEASE uploads many more. You've made me more of a happy person! Happiness is so contagious!!

> I just want to say, watching your videos brightens my day and makes me smile. You are so beautiful inside and out!

To conclude this section, I would like to build on Redmond's observation of two types of intimacy (2014). I argue that Bubz's viewers experience a *private* intimacy between the guru and themselves when watching her videos, but enact a '*public* intimacy' (2014, p. 111, italics mine) when commenting, praising and thanking her for her disclosure, her trust and the role she plays in their lives. Viewers feel her joy, sadness, highs and lows; they share her stories, hopes and thoughts and reciprocate by sharing the same. Redmond's parallel between public and private intimacy is similar to Thompson's conceptualisation of 'lived experience' (unmediated) and 'mediated experience' (1995, p. 230). People draw components from both sources to creatively and reflexively integrate into their 'evolving life-project[s]' (p. 230). From the feelings of connection and identification arise not abstract, but very concrete uses and benefits for viewers.

Conclusions: Public, private and productive intimacy at play

With this study, I sought to contribute to the understanding of current digital culture practices through an examination of the dynamics of the YouTube beauty community. Drawing from findings of my ethnographic examination of the platform, I analysed and interpreted the data corpus of videos and comments in light of what I term a 'scale of intimacy'. Aided by the content typology of four categories (García-Rapp, 2016b), I emphasised the relevance of Bubz's connection-seeking uploads for community building. Findings suggest that Bubz's development of closeness and intimacy with her audience can be seen as a progression that begins with tutorials (content-oriented videos), which usually catch the attention of random viewers through title keywords. Product reviews, in which Bubz addresses her audience in a more direct way and offers her opinion on products (market-oriented videos), are slightly more intimate. Intimacy then advances to her personal vlogs (relational videos), which generate stronger connections and maintain audience attention by showcasing her private life and activities. The highest degree of intimacy is found in Bubz's motivational uploads.

Considering the high number of shares, subscriptions and comments received by these two latter categories of videos, it is relevant to note how 'people may find a video personally meaningful in ways that merit attention despite its seeming lack of normatively valued "content"' (Lange, 2009, p. 70). I argued that Bubz's relational and motivational videos foreground her efforts to achieve a close connection with her audience, not least in order to sustain her popularity as a renowned beauty guru

(also García-Rapp, 2016b). Moreover, I suggested that the ties with viewers must be strong enough, a priori, for them to be interested in her experiences and highly subjective opinions about life and self-growth. In other words, viewing and commenting imply an interest in the person behind the channel – the guru, herself. Bubz turns from a stranger to a skilled guru who teaches useful beauty techniques, to a friend who shares her daily life and stories. At the same time, viewers turn from random viewers to loyal subscribers and fans (2016b).

All things considered, I believe it can be fruitful to not always see performers through 'the lenses of commodification', but to also recognise them as 'social and creative beings' (Baym, 2012, p. 294) who are not always 'selling us intimacy' (e.g. Littler, 2004, p. 4) or persuading us, but (and maybe even simultaneously) experiencing connections themselves and receiving personal rewards from the affective intimacies that are established. Rewards can be in the form of emotional support and feedback (Baym, 2012; Abidin, 2015), as Bubz herself discusses. Thanks to this approach, we can see how 'intimacy is not just something fans project onto artists, it can be something artists experience when they interact with their audiences' (2012, p. 312). Therefore, I locate viewers 'somewhere between unequal "fans" and equal "friends"' (p. 289), since celebrity/fan forms of connection are not only platform-based or community dependent, but often negotiated and experienced on an individual basis.

In conclusion, it is relevant to revisit Redmond's distinction between public, private (2014, p. 111) and 'productive intimacy' (2006, p. 35). In the case of Bubz and her viewers, three main practices are at play. As explained above, a *private* intimacy is represented by an individual viewer's experience of watching and eventually feeling connected to the content creator. Further, *public* intimacy is visible through viewers' engagement with the guru. Bubz's content fosters identification and promotes viewer engagement in the form of viewing, liking, subscribing, sharing links of her videos and leaving written comments on her channel. Lastly, a *productive* intimacy emerges from the feelings of closeness and identification, fuelling self-reflexivity and often even self-development. Besides being useful in pragmatic terms (by, e.g., helping viewers achieve a particular hairstyle), Bubz's relational and motivational videos are helpful as tools for motivating personal change and positive habits.

I argued that Bubz provides viewers with information-rich tutorials; personal, humorous and entertaining vlogs; and motivational self-help videos (García-Rapp, 2016b) that her audience enjoy, discuss, criticise, reflect on in relation to their own lives and emulate, modify and find inspiration in. This is up to them. Moreover, viewers' reception practices are not meaningful because they are 'active' and 'productive' in this way, or because the videos are supposed to be empowering. Rather, the practices are meaningful because they reflect what viewers choose to do with their time at that

moment. Some viewers claim that Bubz's content is helpful and useful in both practical and deep, personal ways. But I argue that other viewers may (also) 'just consume' the content as a 'mere' pastime to forget daily issues and overcome stress. This should not necessarily be understood as disempowering, nor should it reflect the often cynical academic view of the 'bad' side of fandom: 'the fan as consumer', as Hills aptly argues (2002, p. 30).

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LETTER OF ACCEPTANCE

May 29th, 2017

This is to confirm that the article titled "*Being an online celebrity - Norms and expectations of YouTube's beauty community*" by Florencia García-Rapp and Carles Roca-Cuberes, has been accepted for publication and will appear in the online July 2017 issue.

Sincerely,

Edward J. Valauskas

Home > Volume 22, Number 7 - 3 July 2017 > **García-Rapp**

Abstract

This paper 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.

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Introduction

"Learning a culture is like learning the rules of a game." [1]

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, 2013; Burgess and Green, 2009). Thanks to it, more than a million creators from various countries capitalize 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" [2], 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" [3]. The platform itself rewards visibility by awarding prizes to creators producing highly popular content. For instance, the Golden Button, is given to partners who reach one million subscribers. The promotional tagline of the prize reads: "Build your audience and be recognized for your success" (YouTube, 2016a).

Here, drawing from ethnographic findings from the platform's beauty community, we focus on

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 guru1 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 (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;

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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.

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).

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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.

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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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LETTER OF ACCEPTANCE
Your Submission RJMP-2017-0017 'Come join and let's BOND': Authenticity and Legitimacy Building on YouTube's Beauty Community

Jun 06, 2017

Dear Florencia García-Rapp,

We are pleased to let you know that your article, entitled ''Come join and let's BOND': Authenticity and Legitimacy Building on YouTube's Beauty Community', has been reviewed and that we would like to publish it.

Thank you for submitting your work to this journal.

Yours sincerely,

Julian McDougall

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'Come join and let's BOND': authenticity and legitimacy building on YouTube's beauty community

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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.

Introduction

Located within the present 'attention economy' (Burgess and 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

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'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:
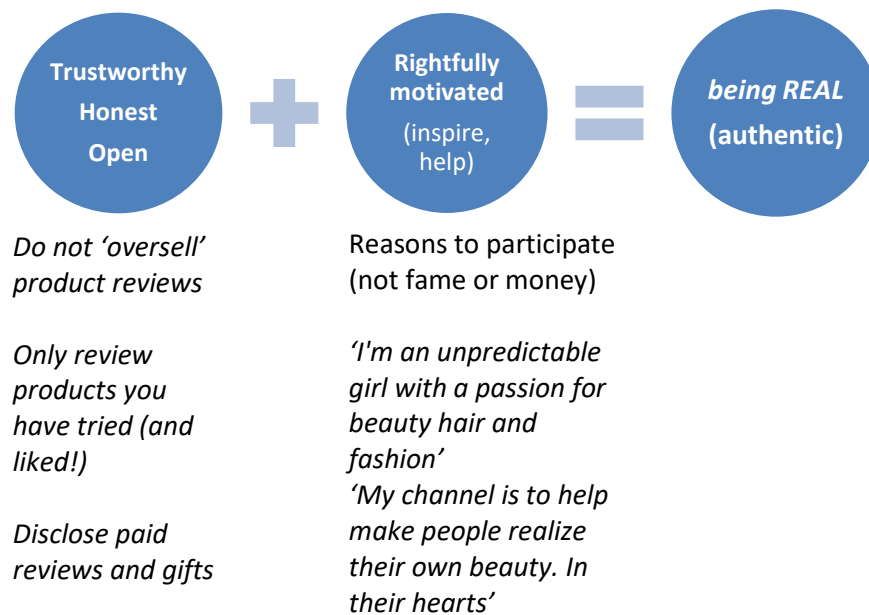
Trustworthy Honest Open

+

Rightfully motivated (inspire, help)

=

being REAL **(authentic)**

Do not 'oversell' product reviews

Reasons to participate (not fame or money)

Only review products you have tried (and liked!)

'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'

Disclose paid reviews and gifts

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, XIVIII), 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.

"Is it good or is it bad?" − Challenging binaries

"moral dualisms are created and sustained by systems of cultural value which defend communities against others" (Hills, 2002, p. 20)

"cultural critics and academics very often remain reluctant to relinquish evidently inadequate binaries" (Jermyn and Holmes, 2004, p. 11)

With this thesis, I am proposing to challenge certain, supposedly 'critical', conventions that remain active within academic rhetoric. As I argued in the methods section, I believe it is important to leave aside condescending discursive frameworks which −from a moral stance of superiority− judge the extent of 'resistance', 'subordination', 'normativity' or 'struggle' of cultural categories and systems of value. In the words of Hills "academics insist on reserving for themselves the ability to determine political significance" (2002, p. 13). In this sense, I also share the belief that "critical theory cannot claim superiority over fans' own understanding of the industries and cultural roles in which they are implicated" (p. 16).

As introduced in other sections before, I choose to distance myself from seeing through the lens of power and hegemony to look at media and audiences, identity and self-performances from a sociocultural perspective (Sandvoss, 2005). This is because I firmly believe that, as everything in life, audience communities, online practices, makeup videos, YouTube, and beauty gurus are not inherently good or bad. They are, most often than not, both; or, in other words, neither (also Boellstorff, 2008; Baym, 1999, 2010). Their value and meanings are subjective and contingent on needs and preferences.

Fandom is "one of the many facets of the multiple self" (Sandvoss, 2005, p. 46) and we know from symbolic interactionism how people play different roles in their everyday lives (Goffman, 1959, 1967). Audiences deserve to be given credit for their decisions, practices and discerning power. 'They' are not so different than 'us'. Following this, neither them, nor us, "need of smarter people to tell us what our experiences really means or to show us what we should be doing instead" (Baym, 1999, p. 8). In addition, people are often quite aware of their roles within structures of power and corporate interests (Lewis, 1992; Meyers, 2009; Usher, 2015) and "in control of their indulgence on popular culture texts" (Baym, 1999, p. 8).

In my view, social inquiry and criticism should always go hand in hand with a "respectful engagement" (Jenson, 1992, p. 26) with the worlds and people we encounter. Recognition and respect of audiences as cultural producers and creative respondents (Lewis, 1992) reflect my stance as a researcher (and as a fan myself). "Respect and value other people as if they were us, because they always are" (Jenson, 1992, p. 26).

The focus on media industry's ideological manipulation and exploitative tendencies, class differences, or the conceptualization of audiences as inherently and necessarily 'active/resistant' (good) or as 'passive/consumer' (bad) is limited and leads to labelling and stereotyping (Lewis, 1992; Hills, 2002; Jermyn and Holmes, 2004). What is more, seeing fans and audiences as 'others' and performing one's own cultural identity "through a raft overlapping and interlocking versions of 'us' and 'them'" (Hills, 2002, p. 28) makes evident the perpetuation of restrictive categories and simplified claims around cultural and expressive forms.

As Jenson eloquently puts it, often others turn into "victims of forces that somehow cannot and will not influence 'us'. We are protected by reasons of education or critical insight. Thanks to these special traits, we don't succumb to whatever it is we believe applies to 'them'" (Jenson, 1992, p. 25). Instead of listening closely to the emic perspective in order to understand, it seems that the argumentative orthodoxy of many academics is framed by a combative stance of 'being against' without really reflecting on if it actually could be different than what first assumed.

In the same line, many authors seem to somehow own the "privilege and prerogative to decide upon the political worthiness of cultures and practices" (Hills, 2002, p. 13). Asserting critical, aesthetic, political or ideological superiority over others implies the exercise of control over people's own self-determination. Judging on the inherent 'worth' of cultural forms and dividing practices between 'high' and 'low culture' is detrimental for the gaining of understanding and the advancement of knowledge that we seek to achieve. To offer an example, we can look at the existence of double standards of cultural judgment (Sandvoss, 2005; Jermyn and Holmes, 2004) by which, for instance, studies of YouTube's beauty community would be dismissed but those examining how academics use Twitter, celebrated.

Conclusions: 'just' beauty and 'only' entertainment

I begin this concluding section with a very relevant quote that summarizes the value of social inquiry efforts:

> our accounts never signal dramatic breakthroughs of the kind that hit the evening news telecasts or morning papers. But it is heady stuff nonetheless to be able to report well on topics of social significance, literally to 'bring them to life'. However modestly, that is how we make our individual contribution towards human knowledge and understandings (Wolcott, 1995, p. 234).

In this sense, keeping with the tradition of ethnographic research, my aim is to offer nuanced and thoughtful conclusions that increase the understanding of the phenomenon, rather than dogmatic assertions. Looking to not only expand existing theoretical points of view, but also to spark further research areas, I sought to "navigate the novelty of contemporary landscape while drawing on and contributing to the accumulated methodological and topical wisdom of relevant pasts" (Baym and Markham, 2009, p. XV).

As Grossberg (1992) and Lewis (1992) argue, people are fans of various sorts of things, and, in a sense, we are all fans of something. Human experiences intrinsically matter (Jenson, 1992) and seeing fandom as *enabling* (Grossberg, 1992) and *performative* (Hills, 2002) draws our attention to meaningful "micro-settings of media consumption" (Sandvoss, 2005, p. 154). Viewer's appropriation of media and celebrity as tools for self-reflection, positions engagement with media texts as a form of "shaping one's identity and place in the world" (2005, p. 154). In this line, audience's drawing from media and celebrities for semiotic resources to enhance social experiences and identities reminds us of the symbolic power of cultural commodities to "articulate private but common desires, feelings and experiences into a shared public language" (Grossberg, 1992, p. 64; also Marshall, 2014). Similarly, Sandvoss argues that "the object of fandom, whether it is a sports team, a television programme, a film or pop star, is intrinsically interwoven with our sense of self, with who we are, would like to be, and think we are" (2005, p. 96).

In this particular case, we see how value, meaning and uses of online content and celebrities are enacted and experienced by Bubz and her viewers. Spaces of cultural production and consumption as YouTube lead to local cultural systems of value as well as broader social formations and hierarchies. For a study as this one, framed by media sociology and media anthropology perspectives, what the phenomenon of beauty gurus and their online popularity is 'all about' must rest by its uses, rewards, and benefits. That is, close to its users. Viewers.

Fans. As usually expressed interchangeably on YouTube and as I have come to adopt here interchangeably as well[ii].

I see the most meaningful aspects of the phenomenon in those elements related to the reception and appropriation of Bubz herself as a symbolic text and of her useful and pragmatic beauty content. I frame most of the study to focus on these 'effects' and the cultural aspects of the active community, its norms and interactions, rather than on the 'commoditization of feelings', or the 'commercial implications of succeeding on social media'. I believe these aspects are of relevance for media studies −especially critical approaches− but most importantly for PR, advertising markets, the own corporate interests of companies as Google and Facebook, as well as those of Bubz and her colleagues: a reduced group of content producers who 'made it' to the top.

Although I mention it, I do not delve into their online entrepreneurial desires and the extent they reflect or do not reflect neoliberalist tropes, premises, and values. Instead, I acknowledge the influence and relevance of commercial interests and use it as a context to talk about something else. Because, at the end of the day, economic benefits and market-centered aspects are what the phenomenon means for a select group of people, but what does it mean for the rest? The fact that popular beauty gurus exist and their high-status positions have sociocultural implications for online content production and reception, and evidently, for the lives of their viewers. Closely related to this point is Hammersley and Atkinson's framing of the ethnographic effort as seeking to advance theoretical understanding rather than practical benefits:

> [ethnographers try to] understand people's actions, and the social institutions in which these are implicated, in such a way as to contribute to academic knowledge about the social worlds, rather than to further the practical enterprises in which the people they study, or others, are involved (2007, p. 231)

Following this, the study I present is empirical but not to be seen as applied research since it is not conceived as a guide of 'how to make it on YouTube', or a handbook for aspiring practitioners. Rather, it is a theoretical contribution to the study of digital cultures. Which is, in essence, the study of ourselves as inhabiting diverse roles and performing a myriad of daily sociocultural practices.

It is parting from the awareness of how "the self is framed inside culture" (Hills, 2002, p. 73) that we can gain meaningful insight into reception and appropriation processes. What is more, seeing engagement with media texts as cultural work, where affect is "playful" and "capable of creating culture as well as being caught up in it" (2002, p. 93) makes possible a more insightful examination of these practices. These considerations can be related to fan practices as made explicit through comments, which I examine when explaining public- and productive intimacy (Redmond, 2006, 2014) in the book chapter included here. I will revisit this point later in this section.

I started the project with the goal of exploring the processes through which Bubz achieved and currently sustains her popularity and −while attending to both her own words and those of viewers− what it means to be a famous YouTube beauty guru. But analyzing the norms of the community and the corresponding performances that allow her to succeed there, revealed along the way something even more important since it has wider implications. The legacy of these personalities lies namely in their pedagogically oriented content and the particular uses viewers give to that content, being it vlogs or tutorials. In addition, the value of the phenomenon rests by the gurus themselves as cultural commodities; to the extent that they are able to motivate, inspire, entertain and teach others. As Hills (2002), I am proposing to approach fandom −and I extend it to online celebrity, and even YouTube itself− from a perspective that tolerates ambivalence (Tolson, 2010), contradictions, and embraces the complexity of social worlds and human interaction.

As I argued in the first two publications when introducing the content typologies, her different types of videos speak to the diverse interests and tensions that she has to balance. We can see her tutorials as concentrating on the commercial interest, tied to her image of a knowledgeable and influential beauty expert. On the other side, her vlogs focus on fostering a sense of closeness by disclosing personal information through conversational vlogs as well as offering guidance and support during broader life issues. As seen in the integrative model below (Figure 6), the yellow side is the blend of these processes and diverse content and leads to the consolidation of herself as an online celebrity, a famous beauty guru. People respond differently to her tutorials and vlogs. The comments that tutorials generate are shorter and beauty-related while her vlogs achieve longer and more personal comments, where the viewers disclose their own stories and make explicit feelings of identification and connection with Bubz and her life.
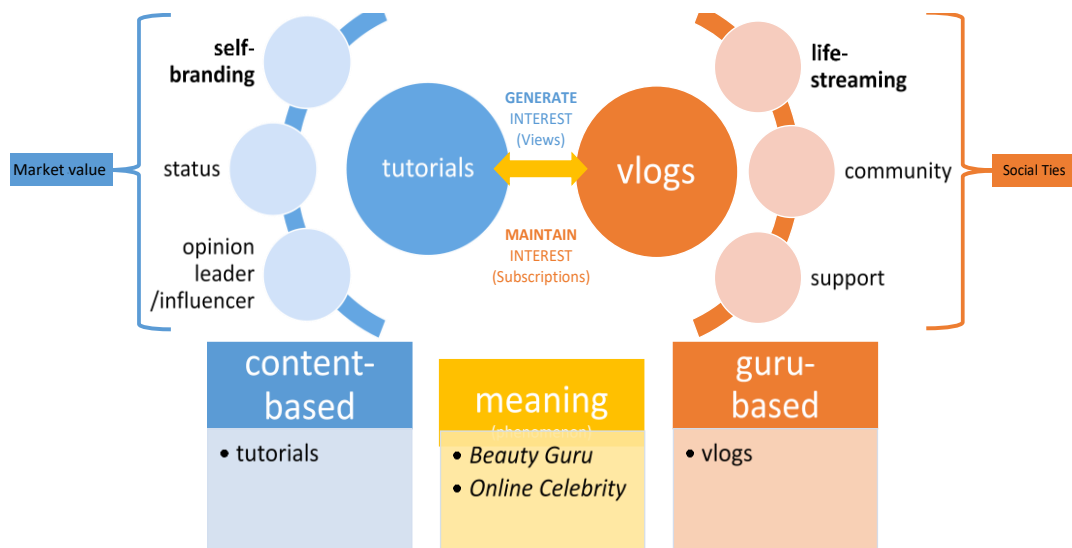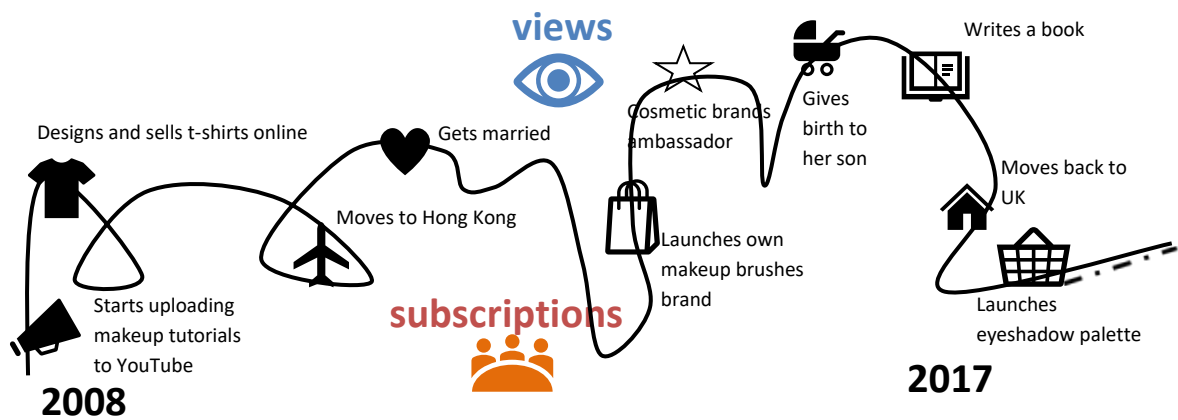
Figure 6. Integrative model of phenomenon

Bubz's contribution, the effects and uses of her content, are long-lasting since recorded, saved, and always just a click away for her audience. People can revisit, replay and re-try the techniques, tips and tricks she offers. No matter how her personal life and her role as beauty guru develops, or will develop in the future, the aspects of usefulness and attractivity of her content remain stable. This opposition between the evolution and versatility of both her popularity and her own personal life milestones, as disclosed by herself and confirmed by metrics, is opposed to the persistence of her content. That is what I sought to represent with the visual model below (Figure 7). She could lose her legitimacy within the community and the attention and engagement of fans but new people can always find her tutorials and vlogs to learn from them and be entertained.

The curved line can be seen as a chart of metrics like views and subscriptions changing along the years, together with her personal life events, as her own life evolves. But, as soon as she uploads more videos, these can be watched, re-watched, downloaded, used and re-used; the inherent persistence maximizes actual and potential benefits. One of her content's main uses is straight-forward and pragmatic: women have a party or a wedding to attend to and draw from Bubz's ideas and explanations to style their hair, nails and do their makeup. They now 'go around' their offline lives with a very tangible result of their online practices. A very simple but

powerful example of the continuity of online and offline contexts and experiences (Baym, 1999, 2010).

POPULARITY AND LIFE MILESTONES

Designs and sells t-shirts online

views

Gets married

Cosmetic brands ambassador

Gives birth to her son

Writes a book

Moves to Hong Kong

Moves back to UK

Starts uploading makeup tutorials to YouTube

subscriptions

Launches own makeup brushes brand

Launches eyeshadow palette

2008

2017

CONTENT AND USES

TUTORIALS

VLOGS

INFORMATION **TRANSFORMATION** **ENTERTAINMENT**

knowledge **creativity, identity work inspiration** **pastime, fun**
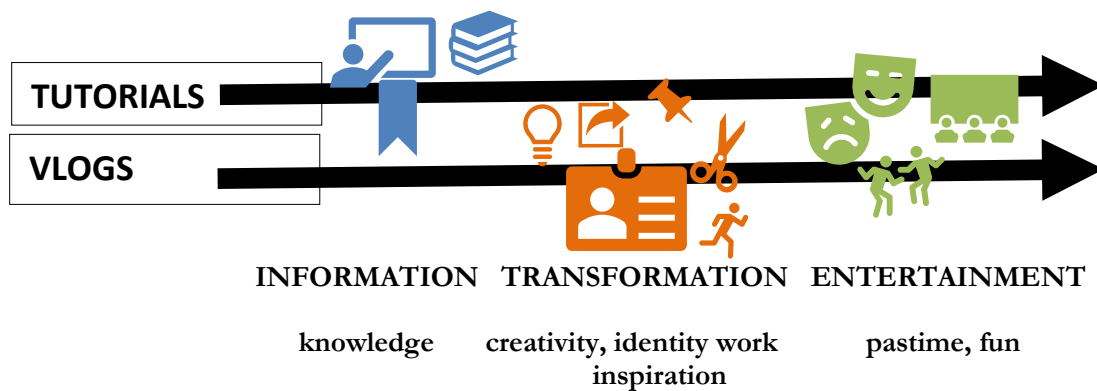
Figure 7. Visual model of popularity and content

The reality is that people inhabit a diversity of social worlds and their offline and online experiences permeate each other (Baym, 1999). This is how "different modes of reception reflect different interests viewers bring to their relationships with media and are shaped by the different social conditions which these viewers experience in their everyday lives" (Jenkins, 1992, p. 210). There is a multiplicity of purposes, needs and contexts that frame viewers' roles, interpretive resources and modes of reception. Appropriating texts and re-signifying them in view of their own lives and identities is performed daily. Audience members, "like all of us, move between communities, importing and exporting practices along the way" (Baym, 1999, p. 217).

According to the examined comments, the benefits of her tutorials and vlogs can be understood in three categories: *information*, *transformation* and *entertainment* (Figure 7). They offer useful beauty- related content and are sources of inspiration, emulation, identification, fun and entertainment. Her tutorials can be seen as topic-based instructional content and her vlogs are self-development tools. But is it 'just' knowledge and 'only' entertainment? Sometimes it is, but it often involves much more. As Grossberg argues regarding media texts, they provide audiences with "strategies, which further enable them to invest in new forms of meaning, pleasure and identity in order to cope with new forms of pain, pessimism, frustration, alienation, terror and boredom" (1992, p. 65). Bubz's role in the lives of their fans is coupled with a sense of identification that fosters identity work. Her videos aid viewers in building and transforming their "narrative[s] of self-identity" (Thompson, 1995, p. 210).

Seeing the phenomenon framed by current tendencies on self-presentation as well as active online paradigms as attention economy and self-promotion, I sought to 'zoom in' to discern its specificity. This is my contribution to comparative studies of digital cultures. The examination of these particularities is of academic relevance as theoretical and analytical raw data to be transferred and compared with other social formations, other celebrities and audiences, and other emic social norms.

As introduced in the methods section, what we study when we look at particular communities is just one small part of their members' identities as social beings. When examining these online audience communities and communities of practice brought together by common interests, we do not study fanatics, obsessed people who are 'only fans'. Or, in the case of YouTube's beauty community, superficial, vain or insecure women, although some of them may well be. Rather, we are observing only one aspect of their identities. In the words of Baym, "just as being a member of an online group is only one elements of one's life, being a member of an audience, even for die-hard fans is only part of being a persona and usually a fairly small part at that" (1999, p. 213).

The community of interest developed around Bubz and her content is focused on the goals of learning practical makeup and hairstyling techniques, as well as being entertained and motivated by the guru. The medium −Internet, YouTube− is what makes the connection possible, but the topic of interest is what unites them (Baym, 1999) and makes the group unique. The community shares systematic patterns governed by current intensified life choices: the regimes

of selfhood promoted circulate around feeling good, feeling beautiful and confident, having fun and being inspired to reflect on their lives and their personal self-development.

The figure below (Figure 8) shows how the guru's content can be seen as pedagogical in a symbolic and a literal sense. While Bubz's relational vlogs are entertaining and her market-oriented tutorials are highly promotional, her motivational vlogs and content-oriented tutorials are her most instructional content. They are pedagogical in different senses: while her tutorials teach makeup and hairstyling techniques, her vlogs teach, as well as provide support and advice on more general life issues such as relationships, work-life balance or self-confidence.
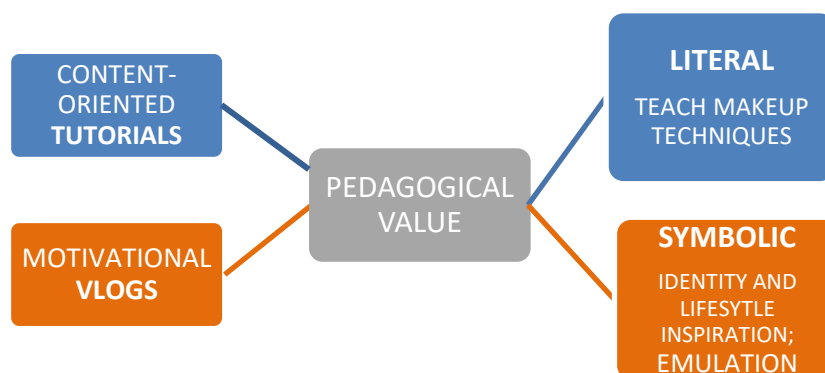

Figure 8. The pedagogical value of her content

Building on Redmond's concepts of private, public, and productive intimacy (2006, 2014), I developed a diagram to conceptualize three stages of engagement with Bubz's content. I argue that her vlogs establish a sense of 'private intimacy' between the guru and the viewer, when they watch the personal and emotional videos. Viewers feel connected, identified and may wish to offer support to Bubz through comments. This leads to a second stage, where viewers express their engagement by sharing, liking and commenting the videos, which leaves 'material traces' in the form of metrics (Baym, 2015) that are publicly visible. This second stage can be termed public intimacy because it involves making explicit their thoughts on Bubz and also self-disclosing on a public venue as YouTube as if they were talking to a friend. Similarly, Fiske discusses these reception processes and terms them 'enunciative intimacy' (1992, p. 37). The third stage can be seen as the most tangible or pragmatic form of intimacy because it leads to specific ideas, choices and outputs. Viewers' connection with the guru can lead to self-reflexivity and self-development regarding their own identities and lives. While the tutorials inspire them for their beauty-related aspects, her vlogs offer the chance of a broader and more

personal engagement. This 'productive intimacy' involves an appropriation of resources through "semiotic productivity" (Fiske, 1992, p. 37; see also Hartley, 1999; Thompson, 1995).

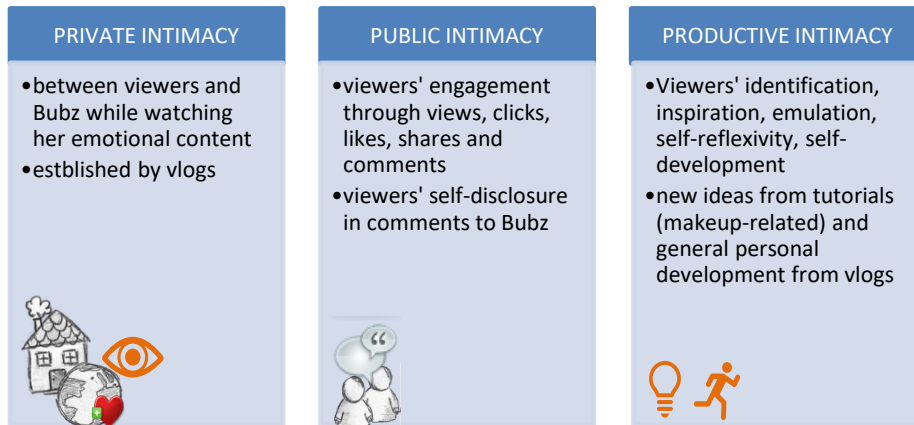| PRIVATE INTIMACY	PUBLIC INTIMACY	PRODUCTIVE INTIMACY
• between viewers and Bubz while watching her emotional content • estblished by vlogs	• viewers' engagement through views, clicks, likes, shares and comments • viewers' self-disclosure in comments to Bubz	• Viewers' identification, inspiration, emulation, self-reflexivity, self-development • new ideas from tutorials (makeup-related) and general personal development from vlogs

Figure 9. Three stages of intimacy

Turning to Bubz as a guru and the particularities of that subject position in view of similar personalities, two main points can be argued. Firstly, online celebrities, emerged from social media, differ in their personalities and life stories but all need to balance the same tensions between self-branding and the fostering of viewer's identification and eventual legitimation. They all need to perform an authentic self and remain 'real'. Secondly, the conditions of this 'realness' are particular to their communities of interest. Therefore, online paths to fame are particular but not unique.

authenticity
relatable
ordinariness
a regular girl
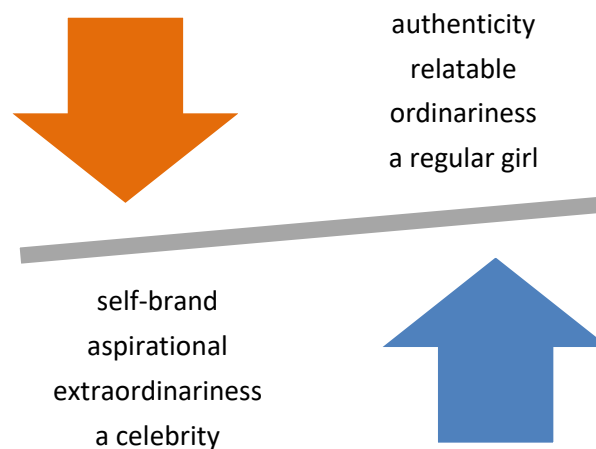
self-brand
aspirational
extraordinariness
a celebrity

Figure 10. Balancing opposed tensions and values

In the case of Bubz, as explained in the publications, she needs to incorporate and balance as part of herself opposed values (Figure 10). Being a celebrity 'versus' being a regular girl turns into being both, or alternating between highlighting one or the other. The same happens with the traits of extraordinariness and ordinariness, as well as being aspirational and relatable to the same grade. Her content and self-presentation speak to the two main spheres of interests, namely the commercial and community spheres.

In addition, another similarity between Bubz, other famous gurus, and a diversity of other online celebrities is that all of them are able to inhabit their status because they bring certain benefits to their audiences. Zooming out to consider the paths of other subcultural celebrities, as for instance reality TV contestants and their daily online performances (García-Rapp, 2017), we can see how cinema stars, *Bachelorette's* participants and beauty gurus alike foster viewers' emulation and admiration. Each one has particular personality traits that attract and sustain attention. In the case of YouTubers, by disclosing personal stories, preferences, and building a humorous, intimate rapport with their audiences (by making fun of themselves, establishing insider jokes or making references to past videos and other media texts) they foster singular affective connections.

Arguably, their roles and functions as symbolic texts and sources of semiotic sets of shared options are very similar. YouTube as an industry, as well as Hollywood, evidently has place for many celebrities. Audiences also have place in their minds and in their hearts for a myriad of celebrities, all different, but all very similar in their value and meaning as cultural commodities. The example of YouTube beauty gurus, who build affective connections within a revenue-oriented platform, epitomizes the antithetical values that mainstream celebrities have always had to embody: ordinariness and extraordinariness (Dyer, 1998, 1991; Holmes, 2004; Marshall, 2014).

Ordinariness can be understood in two ways: on the one side, in a literal sense of being a regular girl, and −at least in the beginning− amateur who produces content to help others. On the other side, as an essential daily performance of 'being herself' while closely following the community norms regarding authenticity and honesty. In addition, the same ordinariness that fosters viewers' identification also leads to heightened expectations (when compared to mainstream celebrities) of maintaining this profile of 'regular girl'.

Ordinariness as a daily performance, which involves authenticity and transparency, is essential in sustaining popularity and legitimacy. But the inherent, actual ordinariness of *being*, and not just *performing*, a regular girl −this is, being just a subcultural celebrity and not a mainstream celebrity− constitutes a limit for her self-branding and promotional strategies. This is because, in the end, beauty gurus are 'just like us' and produce content from their homes, something we all could do too, in theory. Therefore, gurus as Bubz need to be careful not to 'sell out' for two reasons: firstly, to guarantee identification with a relatable self, and secondly, simply because they would be seen as 'full of themselves'. Arguably, viewers could think, they are not a 'real (mass-media) celebrity'; why would they be taking it so seriously?

In the case of beauty gurus, the particularity is that they teach, since only a few media celebrities rise to fame by teaching a certain practice. Many online celebrities do. Mentoring and guidance are key aspects of beauty gurus' cultural identities. As explained above, their content lead to socially driven learning opportunities (also Lange, 2014) and have a strong pragmatic utility (e.g. useful for parties).

Bubz's high-status as a knowledgeable and creative beauty expert was established through tutorials in the beginnings of her time on YouTube. By 2010, two years after starting uploading videos, she maximized the achieved status by uploading more personal, less structured vlogs sharing her everyday life. Nevertheless, it is clear that she still needs to confirm and demonstrate her know-how, creativity and originality as an incident with a nail art tutorial exemplified. She once showed a nail art magazine to confirm that she had been inspired by it to create the video, as she had already disclosed during her tutorial. This was done to prove that she did not simply emulate another guru who apparently had recently uploaded a similar tutorial. She confessed afterwards being 'disappointed' because people would not trust her when originally saying that she saw the style on a Chinese magazine. To validate her claim, she then showed during one of her vlogs the magazine pictures of the nail art style she had previously demonstrated and included a note about this below the original tutorial.

The prerequisite of offering innovative, easy to follow, useful tutorials also applies to high ranked gurus as Bubz. Being talented when it comes to producing beauty content is a tacit requirement, which makes it the more essential. However, in a sense, once she established her reputation as a valuable creator within the community −and after viewers got access to her behind the scenes through vlogs− she arguably can keep on making it 'about herself' by

creating more vlogs and people will follow her weekly updates on her life and let themselves be surprised with the actual content of her videos.

What I mean with this is, just as when tuning in to watch their favorite show, it does not matter what exactly her fans will see, since it will ultimately be about Bubz herself as a topic of interest. They are namely clicking not on a straightforward tutorial title such as 'Bye bye dark circles' or 'How to make hair grow faster'', but on a vlog titled '50 facts about me' or 'Feel good video'. We can see them as offering fans a certain guarantee that it will be entertaining, fun, and it will generate opportunities for identification, catharsis or self-reflection because it is about Bubz herself, so it will not disappoint. She eventually did start a different channel titled 'Bubzvlogs' just for that type of content. From content-based tutorials, interested viewers turn to guru-based vlogs, which establishes a causality loop. People who come across her tutorials and are particularly interested in Bubz herself would probably click on her vlogs to get to know her better and that affective connection keeps motivating them to come back to a familiar place and person.

To finalize, the Internet has made possible an ever-expanding array of specialized communities of practice as well as audience communities (Baym, 1999); it has made them more accessible, visible, and common. However, and even while 'social media influencer' is nowadays an increasingly common career title for an increasing number of regular people, celebrity will always need to remain hierarchical to guarantee the aspirational engagement and "auratic distance" (Marshall, 2014) necessary for audiences to invest themselves. It is clear that not everyone 'working hard' will achieve fame on YouTube (or anywhere) because being famous is and will remain a privileged position within society. There are 180.000 aspiring and established beauty gurus (Pixability, 2015), how many of them are famous and can make a living out of it? Only a few.

The discursive construction of certain analytical categories or the implicit cultural prestige of communities and practices can and should not prevent us from listening closely to understand and acknowledge agency. In contrast to cynical, reductionist approaches to popular culture, I highlight instead the relevance of user-centered approaches where entertainment and information are legitimate reasons to produce and engage with online beauty content and personal vlogs.

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[i] As defined by Marwick (2013a), microcelebrity as a technique and tool to perform celebrity is rooted in the notion that projecting a commodified persona, appealing and sympathetic enough, is going to achieve the needed viewer engagement, for the performer to eventually enjoy the same "type of attention given to celebrities" (p. 134).

[ii] See publications for a more developed discussion on the 'online self', comprising users, producers, viewers, fans, and other dynamic cultural identities.