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YouTube: Video Commercialization, Value Creation and Identity

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Thesis presented for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, in the Department of Anthropology at the University of Witwatersrand, December 2021

Supervisor: Dr Hylton White

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Abstract

Social media has been blamed for promoting unrealistic flashy lifestyles and an increase in influencer brand marketing. The outcome of this is said to put extreme pressure on individuals to maintain a certain lifestyle to the detriment of their self, promoting a performance of life rather than real life experiences, resulting in the breakdown of social bonds. Yet social media platforms such YouTube, Twitter, Instagram and many others are growing at considerable rates, despite all the critiques. The thesis overall questions how YouTube vloggers turn the intangible value of activities in everyday life into monetary income by attracting online audiences to their vlogs. The research is located as part of transformations taking place in late capitalism, that used to characterise the organisation of labour and, therefore, society in nineteenth and twentieth-century iterations of modern capitalist society; and the changing concepts of "private" and "public" that are described as part of the technological development and integration into our everyday lives. This thesis traces the changing structures and relationships between YouTube, YouTubers and viewers as the economy of YouTube has continued to grow. Whilst influencer brand marketing and social media reach are popularly viewed as detrimental to the individual and society, this thesis argues against this general view. Instead, I argue that in the wake of influencer marketing and the financial economies, embedded within YouTube and other social media, new ways of being and belonging are being negotiated. This thesis, using ethnographic data, focuses on these new ways of being and belonging by explaining how ideas of value, suspicion, affect, and digital footprint are factors in creating online community ties and online identities that continue inside and outside of the online space.

Keywords: Belonging, Digital Footprint, Online Community, Online Identity, Suspicion

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Abbreviations and Glossary

(In alphabetical order)

AD: advert/advertisement

CGM: Consumer Generated Media

CPM: Cost Per Thousand

MCN: Multi-Channel Network

OCC: Online Content Creation

PGC: Professionally Generated Content

PR: Products received from companies and brands for public relations purposes

SEO: Search Engine Optimiser

UGC: User Generated Content

YPP: YouTube Partner Program

Content Creator: Anyone on social media who does it to potentially build and maintain a subscriber base with potential income benefit in mind

Content Producer: Mainstream media content

Participatory Web: Users contribute but do not control content

Prosumers: Produce and share content

Prosumption: A characteristic of Web 2.0 of people as both producers and consumers of content

Publisher: Someone with a YouTube account who posts videos and makes them public without focusing on earning an income on YouTube

Subscribers: People subscribed to a YouTube channel. They may or may not follow the channel regularly as long as they are subscribed

User(s): A person or people who use the YouTube platform either for viewing, publishing or both purposes with and without the intention of growing large subscriber bases and monetising videos.

Viewers: People who view videos and the commenters in the comment section of the videos. In this instance, viewers are based on their role as watchers of, and commentators on, videos versus uploading videos. Viewers do not necessarily need to be subscribed to that or any other channel. They can also be both viewers and subscribers.

YouTuber: Someone who produces video content for YouTube. I use it specifically to mean a user with the aim of building a large subscriber base and potentially doing YouTube full time. Or I use it specifically to refer to the person who posted the video content and not the viewer of that video being referred to.

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Channel names have been written and kept as they appear on YouTube, including using either full capitals or lower-case letters for channel names. Inverted commas have been used to show channel names. In the case where the person’s name is the same as the channel name, no inverted commas have been used when referring to the person. All transcripts have been edited for better flow and easier readability to allow for better understanding.

Chapter 1: Introduction

…well actually it started back in 2008 when I was a college student studying psychology. I worked at a foster care agency part-time, and I also worked at a make-up store, and that's when I really found my passion for make-up. I discovered a YouTube video.

I think one of the first YouTube videos I saw was Michelle Phan, and it was a girl in her room teaching us how to do a smoky eye in like three minutes. That was back in the day where three-minute videos were very foreign because that was longer than normal. Usually, there were 30-second clips of like pandas sneezing – like cute little clips.

And so, when I discovered YouTube after watching Michelle Phan's video, I discovered this really tiny beauty community and everything. Everybody knew each other, everyone commented on each other's videos, and I decided hey I want to try making a video. I recorded my very first on how to curl your hair with a curling iron. I don't even know if that video is still up. I may have deleted it; I don't remember. Honestly, I don't like looking back on old videos: it's like so embarrassing.

I had a point-and-shoot camera – I think it was one of Benji's handheld cameras, maybe it was like 50 bucks or something – and I would stack shoe boxes at a window: sitting on the floor I would put the camera on top of those shoe boxes. I had a compact mirror in the back to make sure I was in the shot. I pushed record, and I just stared at the camera blankly, and I was like, "Hi guys so today…" and then, yeah. So my first tripod, my very first tripod, was stacked boxes.

Yeah! I think I did gain a lot of confidence at that time because I noticed I was getting feedback. I was getting views and comments and people – girls my age or even younger – were saying, "Hey, can you show us how to do a smoky eye" or "How you do this colour combo?" and it was like at the beginning of a new, now I call it my family, but a new community that was so foreign to me and just to know that it was online and women, girls from all over the world. Actually, I think it was just the United States girls from all over the nation coming together and sharing their passion for make-up. I was so like glued on to it. That is amazing.

So, I started really getting into the beauty videos…I had been recording from my boyfriend's, now husband's, bedroom at the time. I was recording on the floor. He saw how passionate I was and into it and so he gave me his office. He was like "here honey," oh, and he bought me a vanity.

I thought that was so sweet. It was my very first vanity, and he set it up in his office, and I was able to record over there but in the background was obviously his inspiration board, his computer and sometimes he would be sitting in the back while I would do my make-up, sometimes he would be eating an orange or have headphones on, and people were asking, "Who is that guy behind you?" "He is so cute," "We want to know more about him." That is when I thought okay well I'll start a personal channel called "itsJudysLife" and that will be more casual more vlog style it won't be as much beauty, and that was the birth of It's Judy's Life. I think that was in 2010 so I was doing YouTube for about two years by then.

I don't even remember what the first video was, but it was more vlog style.

> I remember especially one day I picked him up from his real estate business and I was like, "Hey, I'm going to go and get Benji and we're going to eat Thai food, we have this coupon, and we're going to try it out." I literally remember picking him up and then like recording him as he's getting into the car thinking this is kind of weird but fun at the same time to share my life outside of in front of the camera talking about make-up, that's awesome. (Judy February 2016)

Above is a transcription of Judy's YouTube video interview from "itsJudysLife"[1] where she is being interviewed about her YouTube career by Sean Cannel from "Video Influencers."[2] Judy currently has +1.6 million and growing subscribers and over a billion views on her vlogging[3] channel "itsJudysLife," +1.3 million subscribers on her mommy channel "itsMommysLife,"[4] and over three-hundred thousand subscribers on her beauty channel "itsjudytime."[5] From her YouTube channels, she and her husband have been able to make a living and provide for their family for over five years. She used to post videos on her vlogging channel every day until late 2018, whereas she is now averaging about five videos a week as she takes two days of the week off from vlogging. Her beauty channel called "itsjudytime," established on April 7, 2008, was her first channel, and it is the channel she is referring to when she describes her early days on YouTube. On March 10, 2010, she established "itsJudysLife" as a supplementary to her beauty channel. Her vlogging channel eventually took over and became her primary channel. After her first child's birth, she started a "mommy" channel called "itsMommysLife" on July 9, 2013. She started the channel to deal with what on social media[6] is

[1] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bhqlei-zAYE&t=57s accessed March 3, 2020 YouTube/itsJudysLife.

[2] https://www.youtube.com/user/videoinfluencers accessed September 16, 2019 YouTube/Video Influencers.

[3] Vlogs are a video/visual form of blogs. A blog is different from a website and is a "…kind of online public journal or diary: a place of expression, characterized by consistent or scheduled uploads. Reverse chronologically ordered posts on a common webpage" (Hookway 2008, 92 in Olive 2012, 73).

There are different types of vlogs, and they mean different things to different people, however, it is accepted that it is an "expression of self" (Christian 2009, 1). Daily vlogs do not need to be uploaded daily, however, they are set apart in that the YouTuber or vlogger turns the camera to him/herself and puts up a video showing a portion of his/her everyday life – a kind of self-filmed reality video. Tutorial videos on the other hand have YouTubers showing or explaining how to do something in particular, whether it is make-up, cooking, gaming, sewing…There are also conversational type vlogs where YouTubers discuss a certain topic, and/or tell a story to the viewers.

[4] https://www.youtube.com/user/itsMommysLife accessed March 3, 2020 YouTube/itsMommysLife.

[5] https://www.youtube.com/user/itsjudytime accessed March 3, 2020 YouTube/itsjudytime.

[6] Social media is defined as "the group of internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content" (Kaplan and Haenlein 2010, 61). Social media depends on mobile and web-based technologies to create highly interactive platforms through

referred to as mommy-related content. When she fell pregnant again, she posted all her pregnancy updates, baby items and anything pregnancy and post-partum related. She stopped posting there regularly after her twins were born. Instead of posting major milestones updates, for example, she posted a six-month postpartum update of the twins in 2014 on "itsMommysLife." In 2020, she posted a video about what was in the hospital bag she took for her most recent birth. She occasionally posts there when she wants to discuss particular mommy-related content such as a segment she calls "Real Talk" where she has very informal sit-down videos where she talks about balancing life, family, children and working. Sometimes this content gets personal and serious, and other times it is lighter and more general in topic and feel. She shares different aspects of being a mother and wife.

When Judy's channel 'itsJudysLife' started picking up her husband, Benji, quit his job to help manage her career, which he did for years. He started a cooking channel at the time called "BenjiManTv,"[7] now named "Benji Travis." However, his uploads were never regular enough, nor his views big enough, to sustain a family when only looking at YouTube ad revenue. He also does not have a lot of sponsored content on this channel. He does still post on this channel a bit more regularly than when he first started. He later started the channel "Video Influencers" that interviewed Judy (an extract from which is quoted at the beginning of this chapter). The interview with Judy was conducted by Sean,[8] the other half of "Video Influencers." "Video Influencers" is a "How-to Channel" to help people start and grow their YouTube channel(s) into commercial successes. On their channel, they interview other YouTubers[9] who in their eyes are "crushing it," meaning working hard on their channels, putting out content and being considered relatively successful on YouTube. They

which individuals and communities share, co-create, discuss, and modify user-generated content (Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy and Silvestre 2011). On the other hand, a social network site is defined as "web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system" (Boyd and Ellison 2008, 211).

[7] https://www.youtube.com/user/BenjiManTV accessed March 3, 2020 YouTube/BenjiManTV.

[8] https://www.youtube.com/user/seanTHiNKs accessed March 3, 2020 YouTube/Sean Cannell.

[9] I will use the term YouTuber to refer someone who produces video content for YouTube. I use it specifically to mean a YouTuber with the aim of building a large subscriber base and potentially doing YouTube full time. Or I use it specifically to refer to the person who posted the video content and not the viewer of that video being referred to.

also do quick tip videos on a wide range of topics and provide advice and information on different equipment and software depending on the YouTube content. Sean and Benji are friends who met on other projects and after years of friendship started this channel. Sean also has his own separate channels.

"Video Influencers" currently has over 571 000 subscribers. It was started on September 11, 2014, but the first video was posted on December 29. Their second video was posted on February 5, 2015. Their channel quickly gained momentum because it "demystified" YouTube from an insider's perspective as their videos' main content was about how to be successful on YouTube. Both Sean and Benji have successful YouTube channels either directly in the case of Sean or via their spouse in the case of Benji. Because of this, they were able to interview many industry insiders. Their proximity to them or even having had working or social relationships with some of them, and their personal experience in dealing with YouTube, commercial companies and brands all mean that they are seen as legitimate insiders.

The progression from how Judy's beauty channel started, to the subscriber interests that influenced the commencement of her vlogging channel, to the "Video Influencers" channel aims, captures the cycle of YouTube. It shows the development and evolution of YouTube from a social, amateur site to a place of work and YouTubing as a form of work. Whilst Judy started initially experimenting with posting beauty videos; her content changed direction to vlogs as YouTube's audience and YouTube video content altered and expanded to other areas of life. The change and evolution of those channels in those early years could be described as organic and, in many ways, the economic outcome is a surprise to Judy.

In the transcript above, Judy details her start on YouTube. She draws attention to discovering "new" or unknown kinds of video and the unknown YouTube community. Judy explains her first discovery of a make-up tutorial video by Michelle Phan, who has also been described or noted by

other long-established YouTubers such as Anitra (popularly known as "Nitraa B"[10]), "Jennie Jenkins"[11] (with a self-titled channel), Judy and Tati Westbrook, who are referred to throughout my research. They all mention how Michelle Phan was one of the earliest YouTubers they watched and a significant influence in deciding to start posting YouTube videos. This idea of discovering YouTube, in particular the tutorials and vlogs, is a slowly decreasing one. As YouTube and these kinds of content grow globally in popularity, the increased use of YouTube in everyday life means that more and more people are exposed to different types of YouTube content and don't have that sense of discovery. This discovery that Judy describes gives us a glimpse into the beginnings of the establishment of YouTube as work in the late 2000s into 2010 and beyond. Furthermore, it shows how YouTube becoming Judy's work was unplanned. Her social media career was a response to requests from viewers asking for more content and responses to questions about what viewers saw backgrounded in the videos – the people, the surroundings and eventually her life. The viewers' comments requesting more make-up tutorials, her growing confidence, the passion her then-boyfriend recognised and fed with equipment and tools in the form of a vanity, helping her set up a space in his office and eventually the viewers' questions about the male in the background, all organically led to the establishment of a new career path and a new form of work.

The transcript alerts us to the development of a new form of work by explaining how this form of work evolves as a reaction to the context and circumstances. It is exemplified by Judy's expansion of her channel range, the focus of her videos changing in response to her viewers' requests, and the new industry's growth. These then led to purchasing basic equipment and expanding into other kinds of content creation, in this case, vlogs. These vlogs were geared by audience curiosity and the sense of willingness from Judy's side to satisfy their curiosity and interest in her life. This has now

[10] https://www.youtube.com/user/nitraab/about accessed April 2016 YouTube/Nitraa B.

[11] https://www.youtube.com/user/beautybyjj accessed May 2016 YouTube/Jennie Jenkins.

developed into “itsJudysLife” with over 1.6 million subscribers, over a billion views, upgraded recording equipment and a full career and lifestyle.

The establishment of channels such as “Video Influencers,” on the other hand, shows the realisation and recognition of YouTube as an economic or income source and as a form of work. The channel serves as a platform for putting into place processes and procedures on how to do YouTube as work, at least from a technical aspect. They showed this through their interviews with well-established newer and older YouTubers about their YouTube journeys, the equipment they use, and how they deal with the economic and business aspects of YouTube. They ask questions like, “How did you get started on YouTube?”, “What do you think has helped you grow on the platform?” or “How can one be more confident on YouTube?” They ask YouTubers for tips that “Video Influencer” viewers could implement to grow their channels, how to attract brands and get sponsorships, or even how to most effectively collaborate with other YouTubers. When it comes to technical support, they provide information on filming equipment for different set-ups, equipment reviews, dealing with brands, and information on algorithms and how to manipulate these so they work for you to grow your channel. They have since written a free online book called *YouTube Secrets: The Ultimate Guide to Growing Your Following and Making Money as a Video Influencer* (2018) aimed at people who are starting YouTube and want to grow their channels.

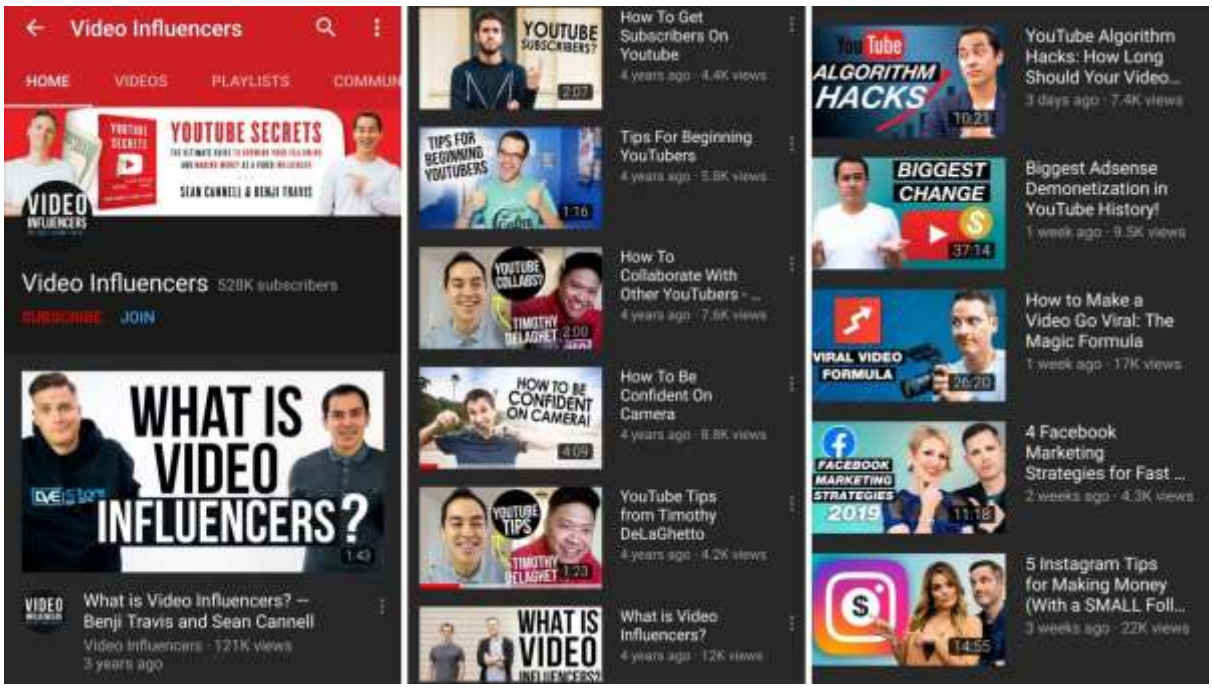


Figure A: Screenshots of "Video Influencers" channel video thumbnails (screen grabbed September 16, 2019).[12]

As seen in the screenshots' video titles in Figure A, the left panel indicates the channel's overall focus and viewer interest in the business and work aspects of YouTube. The middle and the far-right panels show that this has been a continuing theme for over four years since the channel first started. The channel speaks to the growing base of users who see YouTube as a business opportunity rather than only for self-broadcasting or as a platform for social networking.[13] As Gannon and Prothero (2018), Hou (2019), Kim (2012), Lobato (2016), Morgan, Wood, and Nelligan (2013), Morreale (2014), and Postigo (2016) have shown, YouTube has been formalised and institutionalised. YouTubing has become a recognised and, some would argue, a sought-after career.

[12] "Video Influencers" channel: video thumbnails (Panel 1 – channel overview; Panel 2 – first videos; and Panel 3 – latest videos on the channel. A thumbnail is the picture you see meant to represent the video (pictures screen grabbed September 16, 2019).

[13] This means that users over the years have changed or the purposes of the platform differ according to the user. However, it does not mean a user cannot view the platform in more than one way. In fact, the platform can be seen by a user in various ways, in the same way that users can be viewers and YouTubers/content creators simultaneously without these roles clashing with each other. So, YouTube can be an archive, a place for self-broadcasting, a social network space, as well as a workspace.

Background

The YouTube platform was created in 2005 by Chad Hurley, Steve Chen and Jawed Karim to make online video sharing easier. Since then, YouTube has evolved into an online marketing platform where YouTubers earn a living from monetised content, social fame, and brand associations. YouTube has continued to grow exponentially, with over 2 billion users globally by 2019¸ and annual revenue of between $16 and $25 billion from the time Google bought it for $1.65 billion in 2006. However, this concept of financial value is unique to the contemporary postmodern era, characterised by neoliberal economic structures where major companies do not produce or own any of the goods, tools, or services they facilitate in rendering. These platform-based companies act as middlemen in the production and value chain. However, in the current global economy, these companies have become some of the world's leading transnational conglomerates. YouTube is one of these. YouTube is a platform for, and an aggregator of, content, but it is not a content producer itself. It is an example of what David Weinberger (2007) calls "meta businesses": "the new category of business that enhances the value of information developed elsewhere and thus benefits the original creators of that information" (224).

An example of this is the Uber taxi service which makes a profit from selling taxi fares but does not own any of the cars or employ any drivers. Instead, Uber makes the drivers more "more searchable, more findable, and more usable" (Weinberger 2007, 225). Similarly, YouTube, as a social media platform, does this by allowing people to produce videos. It can draw attention to viewers and profits from titles and other search markers and make a profit for YouTubers through advertising revenue.

YouTubing has not always been a sought-after career path. Earlier, YouTubers had a difficult time describing YouTubing as a long-term career option. It is possible that the YouTubers themselves did not see the market value of their online activity, or that this value was not recognised outside of YouTube. Instead, YouTube was positioned as a passion project, with people saying that they did it for the love of it and that the money was not the main reason for uploading or a step to elsewhere and

other career paths. From mid-2015 until the end of 2016, in the first year and a half of my research, I came across many videos where YouTubers would often be asked in question and answer (Q&A) videos[14] what they would do after YouTube, or what their long-term plan was outside of YouTube, or what they would do one day if YouTube ended like Vine.[15]

YouTube, as a long-term plan, or even being considered as a long-term plan, was openly, explicitly and sometimes implicitly discouraged by the YouTube community from both the YouTuber and the viewer sides. Although this was not the case with all users, and it is hard to say if it was the majority of users or not, it was common enough in everyday videos and comments remnants that still exist today. In 2017, having graduated from university in 2016 and moved to New York City, Jayla Koriyan received many questions about what she would be doing or wanted to do career-wise post studying. Soon after moving to New York City, she did a Q&A video. This was a way of responding en masse to the questions she was getting on her decision to move and her career ambitions. In that video on her "Jayla Koriyan TV" channel, Jayla reads out a question, stating that it is a question she gets asked a lot.[16] The viewer had asked, "What are you going to do with your degree?" She then explains her degree and how that degree fits in with her work as a YouTuber and ambitions in the social media space.

In her response, she says people ask that question assuming that she is not already using her degree. In the same video, a viewer and fellow YouTuber comments stating, "Why are people so pressed [meaning concerned] that you went to school and you now graduated but aren't working a so-called real job??! You have your own business, make good money, and have a following. Why not capitalise on that now. You can always work a 'real' job later if it ever comes to that. *Smh* [means

[14] A Q&A video is when a YouTuber requests questions from their viewers' either on a specific topic or on random topics.

[15] Vine was a video platform where people could post videos lasting up to six seconds. It closed down in 2016 because it was not profitable despite reaching over 200 million users.

[16] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pAtaIUkvzxw accessed August 15, 2017 YouTube/Jayla Koriyan TV.

‘shaking my head’] I just don't get it” (2017). This comment starts a thread of comments in response to it. One viewer said: “They’re worried YouTube won’t always be there. A ‘real job’ will. Plus they want a real job, so they force that on others. People don’t condone what they’ve never seen” (2017). Whilst another said: “A real job will always be there? Huh? There is no better security than working for yourself and building a brand that no one can take away from you. A ‘real job’ where you are working for someone else and building THEIR empire, can quickly be taken from you. Being laid off, let go, etc. It’s a genuine reality. Jayla has a degree that she can always use, experience that she can always sell herself on, and a following/platform that she has built and will always provide an opportunity for her to be great” (2017).

This was all happening despite the growing number of YouTube users, and the torrent of “How to earn an income from your YouTube channel,” “How to make your channel profitable,” “How to grow your Subscribers” and many other variations of these titles all aimed at ensuring financial returns for online activity. As such titles show, more and more people are looking to make online activity a conscientious career choice or at least a factoring of the commercial viability for starting and maintaining a YouTube channel. By the end of 2016 and by early 2017 more and more vloggers were saying “YouTube is my work, this is my bread and butter,” and in doing so emphasising the monetary returns of YouTube work and setting it as a means of making a living. This emergence of the acknowledgement of monetary returns as drivers for being on YouTube is still followed by the disclaimer that “I don’t just post to make money, I post because this means something” or “I have something to post about, it just so happens that I make money off this.”

At the same time, the popularity of these YouTubers cannot be ignored. With millions of followers, some have more followers than traditional media, exceeding the numbers of some radio stations’ listeners, viewers of some TV channels, and newspaper readers worldwide. In May of 2019, two of YouTube’s well known and popular beauty YouTubers, Tati Westbrook and James Charles had a public disagreement that started on Instagram but played out on YouTube over that month.

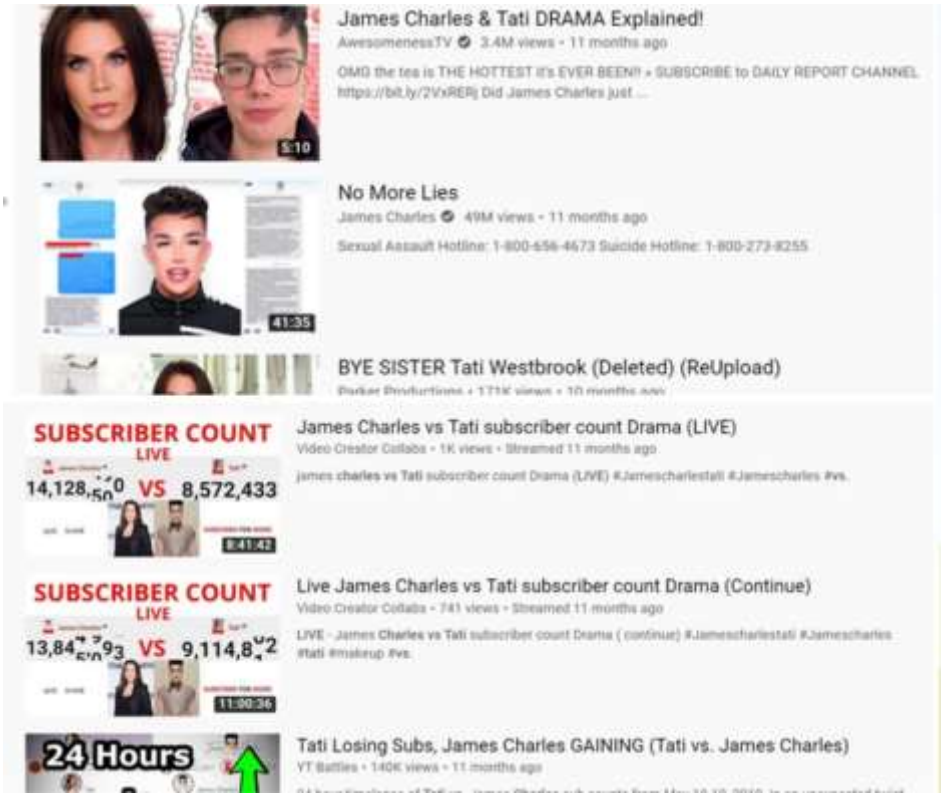


Figure B: Screenshot of YouTube searches about Tati (from "Tati" channel) and James (from "James Charles" channel): Their social media disagreement and the subsequent impact on their subscriber count (screen grabbed February 21, 2020).

In that month, they managed to impact over 5 million viewers. On May 1, Tati had +5 million subscribers, and James Charles had +16 million. Late mid-month when the disagreement happened and viewers chose Tati's side, Tati's subscribers rose to +10 million whilst James Charles's dropped to +13 million. After James Charles's explanation video at the end of the month, they were sitting at +10 million and +15 million, respectively. Currently, Tati has +9 million subscribers, and James Charles has +17 million subscribers. James Charles' and Tati's disagreement highlights the massive reach YouTubers can have. Their influence and reach can amount to millions of people following one individual on social media. It also highlights how these online communities are impacted by public opinion and the potential fickleness of these communities.

Digitisation[17] has brought about indelible chanages to media resulting in the, major impact on the production and consumption of media. However, these changes have also occurred in many other industries and areas of life. With the advancement of digital technology and subsequent changes in knowledge production and consumption, capitalism has also changed and shifted. This change in capitalism is salient. It is a visible shift from a Fordist type of production centred on factory production in a specific place, space, and time to a system where cognitive creative activity has become the primary type of production. This can occur outside of particular locations, spaces and times because users are now producers and consumers of content (Jenkins 2006). Particularly now, we see how media production has moved from media houses to our homes and everyday life, as highlighted by Strangelove (2010), and Burgess and Green (2009). We see the culmination of this in the emergence of influencer marketing and the emergence of content creators.

This has led to social media breakout people who have turned their online activity into profitable businesses and made some well-recognised personalities and brands referred to using many titles such as content creators, micro-celebrities, influencers, etc. Brake (2014) defines Online Content Creation (OCC) as using technology and online spaces to create and share content. Advancements on the internet and in technology, especially Web 2.0, have internet activity moving from the desktop to online spaces. Consumers have become producers, taking a place in some instances parallel to firms and industries, including the media industry. This is said to have shifted power from industries and companies to consumers (Berthon et al. 2012, 262). This has led to presumptions that these changes result in new economic models (Benkler 2006) and increasingly participatory societies, potentially causing political and cultural emancipation (Bruns 2008).

However, the focus on defining this online activity has extended to recognising emerging trends in this space. Senft (2008) has conceptualised the term micro-celebrity and stated that such

[17] Digitisation is the coding of text, sound and images using the same code made up of 0 and 1 thus allowing for all of these to be created, edited and transmitted by the same devices (Balbi 2017, 5).

individuals are "best understood as a new style of online performance that involves people 'amping up' their popularity over the Web using technologies" (25). Marwick (2013) added to this definition, noting that although micro-celebrities[18] were public figures, their large-scale following was within a niche demographic. By 2015b Abidin pointed out that these micro-celebrities had grown and received recognition and status beyond their niche networks. Instead, they were public celebrity figures on multiple platforms online and offline in what can be called mainstream or traditional brand and media industries. Abidin (2015b) also moves away from the term micro-celebrity, preferring to view influencers as a form of micro-celebrity instead. On the other hand, Hou (2019) uses the term social media celebrities firstly to recognise the origins of that fame in social media and secondly to highlight the scale of that fame outside of the niche markets that Marwick (2013) first defined them around. However, whether thinking of them as micro-celebrities or influencers, a common theme emerges from the open lines of communication between the "celebrity" and their followers: the communities that are built from this open communication and the perceptions of intimacy.

For my research, I use the terms content creator, influencer or YouTuber rather than micro-celebrity, depending on the chapter. Evelyn from "Evelyn From The Internets" stated in a February 19, 2020 video that "an influencer is not a skill; it is an end result." I do not view content creators and influencers as forms or micro-celebrity. I use the different titles to emphasise the unique aspects of that form or as a tool to highlight that specific chapter's arguments. I use the term influencers to stress the outcomes or outputs of content creation and the socio-economic capital that comes with online recognition. I use the term content creators to emphasise the work that goes into being a content creator and its impact on how one views life experience. Ultimately, I aim to show how content

[18] Becoming a microcelebrity requires creating a persona, producing content, and strategically appealing to online fans by being "authentic." Authenticity in this context is a quality that takes many forms, from direct interaction with admirers to the public discussion of deeply personal information, and it is tenuous at best. Although microcelebrity takes the principles of celebrity culture and applies them to online interactions, online celebrities are not traditional celebrities. They do not have teams of agents and managers to protect them from the public, and they lack vast sums of money. Moreover, they are working within a different milieu, that of the internet, which idealises transparency and thus expects a certain amount of exhibitionism (Marwick 2013, 114).

creation becomes work to stress online activity as a form of labour. I use the term generally throughout the thesis to emphasise the location of the research. I also use the term to differentiate between the two actions on YouTube, either uploading or watching content. I realise that these can be the same on YouTube, as most viewers also put up some content, making them pseudo-content creators themselves. Throughout the thesis, I mostly use the term YouTuber to encompass micro-celebrity, influencing and content creation. I distinguish between YouTubers, viewers and users. YouTubers are as stated above, viewers describe the action and position of being a watcher of that video, and users is used to recognise and position those being referred to in the position of being both YouTubers and viewers.

The rise of content creators, otherwise referred to as influencers, has proven that a successful and commercially viable career can be made on social media platforms such as YouTube. This despite the initial resistance on YouTube to claim YouTubing as work, or at the very least, work linked to monetary remuneration and making a living off it – what Alice Gerber (2017) calls the occupational turn. In her book *The Work of Art*, she describes a time when art became work which is different from being paid for one's art and characterised by a change in practices and the rationalisation of the "increasing numbers of artists making sense of their practice as a modern job" (Gerber 2017, 13). Similarly, YouTube has had the same turn, which is an account of that process from a YouTuber's perspective. From Gerber, we see that the concept of work and a job is made tangible by a set of practices, identifying and perceiving that what is being done is work.

Very little literature has considered the production process of creating and uploading a post from the beginning to the end, except for a few such as Abidin (2016) who details the process of photographing and posting Instagram posts by Singapore influencers. Much of this literature has discussed online activity. It frames online activity based on the uploaded posts and activity on these posts, theorising about this online activity from the finished products or uploads or posts. This ignores all the work that goes into the post's actual production, thus, placing the value of the activity solely on the online activity, which then enforces a manufactured separation of the online and offline

distinction, in that what happens online has little or no effect on the offline world. This then allows for the online activity to be seen or considered with scepticism due to the cynicism about the internet and online activity in general brought about by assumptions made about the nature of the internet uploads. Put simply, uploads are perceived to be done from home, just as everyone is living their lives. Hence there is supposedly no production process: this is just someone living their daily life and broadcasting it. Of course, this is one of the main drivers of this research – understanding how online practices are extensions of everyday life or are indeed work. If these practices make money off documenting daily life, what does it mean socially and culturally? Thus far, the literature has also not asked the uploaders themselves what they think their activity is and what is the work to them.

Despite the many ways YouTubing, and more broadly social media participation, has grown and become an established form or work, there have been a lot of theories about how to understand this online activity and now, more so, how to reconcile those theories of the kind of work it is and the outcomes of this work, namely: the work of intimacy creation resulting in online communities and online identities.

Context of Online Activity and the Economic and Political Outcomes

There have been many ways online activity has been theorised, starting from when online activity occurs parallel to media and other industries to where online activity is fully commercialised[19] and integrated into the formal economy. The theories have also highlighted the impact of this online activity on society and the individual.

When online sharing culture emerged, media, social, and economic theorists disagreed on what this online activity meant for labour concepts. Jenkins (2006) broadly described this online

[19] I use the term commercialised to mean user activity driven by profit. The two main forms of commercialisation on YouTube are adverts placed in the videos via YouTube or sponsored videos where YouTubers deal with the brand directly and the brand will sponsor the agreed upon number of videos and types of video content.

activity as digital labour[20] and the digital economy.[21] Some viewed it as a form of democratisation of labour, coming from the idea that the internet and social media foster a participatory culture, empowering consumers through their control over media content (Banks and Humphreys 2008; Benkler 2006; Bruns 2008; Hartley 2009; Jenkins 2006; Strangelove 2010). Henry Jenkins explains this connection between the digital and traditional economy by merging traditional and digital media called convergence. Convergence is defined as "the flow of content across multiple media platforms, the cooperation between multiple media industries, and the migratory behaviour of media audiences who will go almost anywhere in search of the kinds of entertainment experiences they want" (Jenkins 2006, 2). This flow of content is facilitated through social media. Hence not only are audiences and readers interacting with media industries, but they are also influencing and producing media content. Therefore, their actions on social media and social networking sites become viewed as valuable and, therefore, labour.

This has led to a body of literature on the types of network spaces and ways of relating produced by online activity and on social networking sites[22] that views online activity as a form of collectivism and community-building which broadly can be understood as a form of digital citizenship. This belief in internet action as a democratisation of labour is supported by the idea that the internet and social media foster participatory cultures (Deuze 2006; Jenkins 2006). Consumers

[20] Digital labour is defined as "the activation of our behaviour on the social web as monetizable labour" (Scholz 2013, 1).

[21] The digital economy is an economy where the production and consumption of goods and services is based on digital economies (Fuchs 2014; Terranova 2004). "The digital economy is also sometimes called the Internet Economy, the New Economy, or Web Economy. Increasingly, the digital economy is intertwined with the traditional economy making a clear delineation harder" https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Digital_economy accessed January 26, 2016.

[22] Social networking "emphasises relationship initiation, often between strangers" (Boyd and Ellison 2008, 211). Unlike social media which seeks to create and exchange content, social networks facilitate the meeting of individuals as well as making social networks/connections visible (Haythornthwaite 2005). Social media networks' connections are also not the primary focus of the interaction and in some instances social media platforms can allow users to "hide" or be invisible to others they are not connected to. YouTube informs culture because according to Potts et al., "In order to function as a participant in the YouTube community, it is not possible simply to import from elsewhere (e.g. from professional television production) existing conventions for creative practice and the cultural competence required to enact them. Success instead is gained by exploiting these site-specific competencies" (2008, 13). This means that YouTube has its own rules, values and roles that get related, or played out, and which inform both online as well as offline spaces.

become participants and creators of media, political discourse and narratives on both global and local issues alike.

This, in turn, introduced debates on the ability of the internet to cultivate public spheres (Dahlberg 2001; Dahlgren 2005; Graham and Hajru 2011; Witschge 2004). These debates have centred on the impact of the internet on politics: how the internet facilitates political spaces, and discourse amongst individuals and organisations. Notably, the literature highlights the politics of the everyday contrary to previous political literature, which viewed politics and democracy as deliberatively driven and institutionally centred (Dryzek 2000; Fearson 1998; Mansbridge 1999). Instead, these contemporary theorists argue that popular culture, online and offline are not separable and instead political talk occurs most often in the everyday (Couldry 2006; Graham and Hajru, 2011; Street 1997). Van Zoonen (2007) argues that popular culture and online political discussion tend to be more personal and experienced-based, allowing individuals to speak on political matters with authority and empowered positions. Juris (2012), and Tufekci and Wilson (2012) have argued that social media can politicise individuals into active political organisation and action. Since social media allows fast dissemination of information, it can integrate with traditional commercial media allowing for greater human and financial resources. In contrast, seemingly non-political platforms such as social media and social networking sites allow for reduced targeting of political dissidents. The notion of a public sphere online is founded on the idea of the technology allowing for a wider personal and social footprint merged between offline and online worlds, creating a continuous experience of subjectivity between online and offline spaces.

An alternative to democratisation as an outcome of the internet and social media has been from arguments posed by postmodern theorists such as Nguyen and Alexander (1996). They have argued that despite changes and technological improvements to real-time mass communication, these are ineffective in creating a public sphere (Poster 1997; 1999). This is because the individual or subject of this time is neither whole nor rational: instead, they are "decentred, dispersed and multiplied in continuous instability" (Poster 1990, 6) because they are living in a constant state of

"hyperreality" (Baudrillard 1994). This would be a state where the subjects are being pulled continuously between different realities brought on by the online and offline movement, thus putting people's subjective lived experiences in constant conflict, pulled apart due to the binary positions each space places them in Baudrillard (in Poster 1998). This particular argument is founded in the view that the compression of space and time as described by Harvey (1990) in *The Condition of Postmodernity*, as well as the creative altered spaces for interaction that digitisation and other such technological advancement provide, uproots, dislocates and disembodies the individual from space, time, place and self (Benedikt 1991; Buchanan 1997; Stenger 1991; Waskul and Douglass 1997). In this conception, an action is a form of creative or cognitive labour that increases individual isolation and breaks down public and civic engagement. This research seeks to add to understanding online action and interaction and how it works in relation to online communities. The aim is to understand how action works online and how this interaction influences the establishment as well as affective bonds in online communities, to be able to understand the impact of this interaction on the individual and society's experience and sense of connectedness and belonging to a place, space, people and self.

Online action has also been linked more directly to ideas of labour and economic gain as it has been argued to result in the exploitation of prosumers[23] who end up providing free labour, talent and information (Andrejevic 2004, 2008; Arvidsson 2008; Ross 2009, Scholz 2008, 2013; Sennett 1997; Terranova 2004). These theorists have argued that traditional media has adapted to the changes brought about by Web 2.0 and the changes in the relationship between viewers/consumers and media to their advantage by tapping into and using the input of consumers in their business models (Fuchs and Sevignani 2013). This theory is founded on Marxist concepts of labour defined as an "alienated form of work, in which humans do not control and own the means and results of production" (Fuchs and Sevignani 2013, 240).

[23] Prosumers produce and/or share content (Morreale 2014, 114). Prosumption describes the production and consumption characteristic of Web 2.0 (Morreale 2014, 114).

Other research has shown that the free labour exploitation theory does not always fit as prosumers are not forced to engage. Instead, Tiziana Terranova (2004) states that "free labour…is simultaneously voluntarily given and unwanted, enjoyed and exploited" (73-4). The free labour framework is based on autonomist Marxist concepts of immaterial labour defined as "labour that produces an immaterial good, such as a service, a cultural product, knowledge, or communication" (Hardt and Negri 2000, 290). This is not the case as we can see from Judy's example and the table below – online activity can create both immaterial and material wealth for those engaged in that labour and those who use that labour for commercial, social and political purposes.

Below is a table of the different types of influencers or content creators. There are many ways of defining these terms, but one of the best and most transparent ways is through reach, usually measured through numbers. Reach can include the number of subscribers, engagement/activity on posts and platforms, and engagement within the wider society. However, this picture only illustrates subscribers. The issue is more than just a matter of popularity and being liked. In a news article for BBC News, Jones and Gilbert (2018) tried to show a link between make-up sales, YouTuber views and YouTuber subscriber base. Although the article was not conclusive, the rise in the YouTuber subscriber demographic's make-up sales strongly implies a connection.

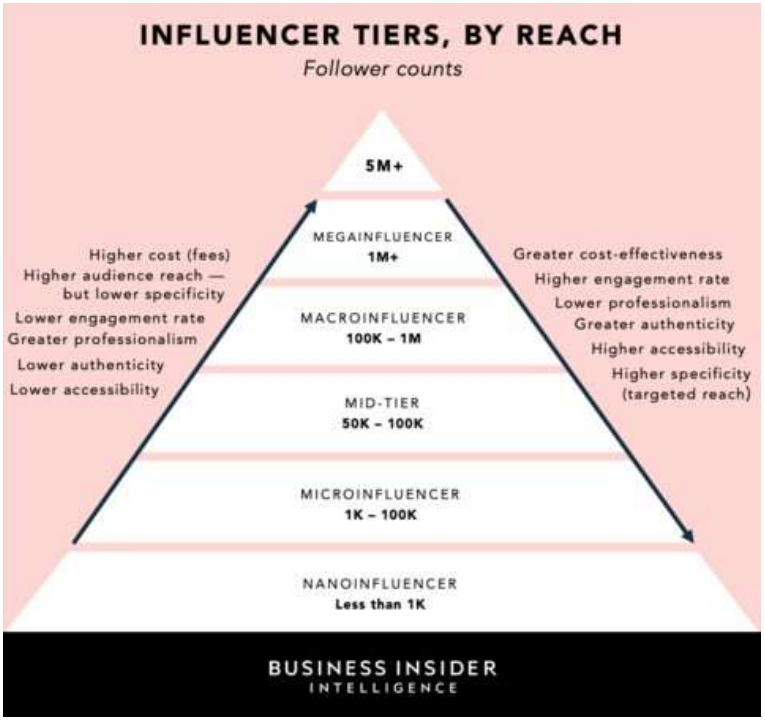


Figure C: Influencer Tiers by Reach or Subscriber Count [24] (screen grabbed February 21, 2020).[25]

The relationship between YouTube, YouTubers and brand companies does not end with video uploads. In an article for South Africa's *Sunday Times*, Odwa Mjo interviewed South African YouTubers who illustrate how direct relationships and deals with companies supplement their YouTube income and the bulk of their income (2018).[26] This relationship illustrates direct links between YouTube, YouTubers and brand companies, as well as an established working relationship with supporting structures that makes that commercial viability possible. However, probably most worthy to note is that many YouTubers do not reach the million-subscriber mark. Many YouTubers who make a living from YouTube are between the one thousand to one-hundred thousand mark. Still fewer make it to five-hundred thousand and more. Thus, despite the scale and possible reach of

[24] Original source: Business Insider Intelligence accessed from: fredericgonzalo.com on February 21, 2020.

[25] Frederic Gonzalo, "The Hidden Cost of Working With Micro Influencers," October 7, 2019, http://fredericgonzalo.com/en/2019/10/07/the-hidden-cost-of-working-with-micro-influencers/ accessed February 21, 2020.

[26] Odwa Mjo, "Inside the business of SA's professional YouTubers," *Sunday Times*, December 25, 2018, https://www.timeslive.co.za/sunday-times/lifestyle/2018-12-25-inside-the-business-of-sas-professional-youtubers/ accessed December 25, 2019.

YouTubers, for many, the scale in relation to internet scales is not that large – many of these YouTubers who make a living off YouTube fall in the micro-influencer tier.

Therefore, it is beneficial to consider David Hesmondhalgh's (2010) claim that free labour or unpaid labour is not the central issue as unpaid labour has existed throughout time. Instead, he and Cohen (2012) argue that social production should be understood more as unalienated labour, allowing the producer to self-realise their ideas and productive ability. Hence instead of focusing on waged and unwaged labour, the focus should be on good and bad labour. An alternative to the free labour theory has been *affective labour* as described by Nardi (2005), who argues that certain activities on social media are not meant to pass information but rather create a certain affinity or feeling of connection that shows openness for interaction (92). This implies a notion of online activity as a way to build social capital and support for offline work or careers (Jarrett 2008; Slater 2002). Building on this research, recent work has linked online activity to identity creation (Gössling and Stavrinidi 2016; Lange 2007a; Yılmaz and Kocabalkanlı 2019). When sharing culture emerged, media, social, and economic theorists disagreed on what this online activity meant, particularly for labour conceptions. While many agreed that this is a form of labour, they also disagreed on what kind of labour it is. Jenkins (2006) broadly described this online activity as digital labour[27] and a digital economy feature.

Notably, however, most of these theories emerged from social media platforms' analysis early in their development. They could not foresee what the space has become and the newly emerged online economies that have come from there. Nor do they consider the new kinds of users and usages of the internet. There was a time when online content sharing went from users into established traditional industries such as comments on newspaper articles or stayed in niche platforms such as Friendster. The merging of these online platforms with traditional industries and the formal economy

[27] Digital labour is defined as "the activation of our behaviour on the social web as monetizable labour" (Scholz 2013, 1).

has created a new way of thinking about online activity and users' expectations of online activity. Economically, internet users can now turn this online activity into profitable businesses and careers (Abidin 2016; Berryman and Kavka 2017; Marwick 2013; Senft 2008. Recent research has argued that online activity is a way to build social capital and support for offline work or careers (Jarrett 2008; Slater 2002). This has been directly linked to identity creation (Lange 2007a; Yılmaz and Kocabalkanlı 2019).

YouTube is considered a social media site and a social networking site, although it does not have a social networking space's apparent characteristic. YouTube is the largest video sharing site in the world. It has evolved into a social network site through the years due to how its users utilise it. Much of the literature focuses on YouTube as an alternative site to mainstream media: YouTube has achieved mainstream media status while being an alternative media site (Burgess and Green 2009). This is because YouTube uses videos rather than user profiles for social clustering and communicating (Burgess and Green 2009). YouTube promotes the community platform model, as this is where the value of YouTube is or where the "*YouTubeness*" of YouTube is. Michael Strangelove's (2010) work emphasises this point as he takes us into the videos and away from the macro-scale discussions around YouTube. Strangelove (2010) argues that mainstream media and alternative media such as YouTube are not only converging but feed off each other, and that it is these relationships that need to be further studied. He locates his study in the everyday viewing amateur videos on YouTube. He then uses these videos to discuss social issues such as identity, representation, gender, politics, religion and community by looking at the video content itself and how it provides everyday life commentaries on society. Both Burgess and Green (2009) and Strangelove (2010) bring up questions about the role of YouTube within society as mainstream media and alternative media. This is especially so when, although YouTube continues to promote itself as a user-driven site and a community platform, it is a multi-dimensional site. It encompasses commercial interests and non-commercial interests while at the same time operating under political conditions and legal boundaries within traditional and alternative media, operating as a profit-based business that is driven by a

capitalist business model in a global media industry (Burgess and Green 2009; Jarrett 2008 Snickars and Vonderau 2009).

This profit-based business model is not restricted to the business side of the platform. It is also found on the users' side of the platform. YouTube and other similar social media platforms have grown, and this growth has been a cause for concern over the change in these platforms' nature. Recent works have highlighted the changes on YouTube, arguing that there is "an emerging industrial structure behind social media celebrity" (Hou 2018, 4). This industrialist structure is said to be changing YouTube from an amateur site of User Generated Content (UGC) (Postigio 2014) into an institutionalised, professionalised site (Morreale 2014 where amateur videos are competing more and more with Professionally Generated Content (PGC) (Kim 2012). These PGCs have raised concerns about the platform's mentioned changes and the value generated by users on YouTube being appropriated by capital, thus transforming a participatory social site into a commercially driven site. However, Morreale (2014) notes that, despite this process of institutionalisation and professionalisation, amateur and professional video producers are existing side by side, adding a multi-dimensional complexity.

The process of institutionalisation and professionalisation of YouTube has also brought up questions about the kinds and qualities of interactions online, especially when that interaction is seen as being driven by commercial outcomes. The idea that some interactions have a higher social and meaningful value than others has long been expressed in health and psychological studies (Lomanowska and Guitton 2016). These studies have shown that meaningful engagement can potentially result in well-being for society at large (Lomanowska and Guitton 2016). As the internet and other technological advances connected to it (such as mobile and digital technology) have changed how we communicate and engage with each other, the question of the quality of engagement hangs in the air. These advancements have made it easier for us to communicate with each other, overcoming scale, space and time. Internet technology has allowed for almost immediate real-time communication globally with only milliseconds of delay. Digitisation has changed how we

communicate, allowing for online face to face visual communication on top of the voice or telephonic communication we already had. Social media platforms allow us to communicate privately and publicly at the same time to individuals and hundreds of thousands, even millions, of people. However, research has shown that, despite the increase in numbers with whom we engage and the social capital we amass from those numbers, these interactions may not always be meaningful social connections (Dunbar 2012; Ellison, Steinfield and Lampe 2007).

The main concern in determining how to understand and define this online activity is that it speaks to the relationship between users, consumers, producers, and capital. This is because how things are produced, by whom they are produced and how they are produced, has a significant impact on social structures and how society is regulated and politicised (Fisher 2010). The goal is to ultimately determine who controls the activity and the value that comes from it, including what is produced, and the social and cultural meanings that come from what is produced. This relationship determines how users and producers generate capital. Arvidsson (2005) argues that in the prosumption society where everyday people use, produce and consume media, "an ethical surplus- a social relation, a shared meaning, an emotional involvement that was not there before [is created] around a brand [and] can be understood as the direct basis of its economic value" (237). The argument then is that if this ethical surplus is commodified instead of adding social value from what is produced, economic value will be the primary outcome, leading to a rise in consumer culture. The impact would be both on a social level, where social relations would be determined and managed through processes of consumption, and on an individual level where individuals would become brands to be commodified and consumed. This is potentially frightening if we are to imagine our social relations and social fabric as determined by market forces.

This fear is not unfounded when we consider how YouTube and other social media platforms have grown in user numbers and how they have integrated users' content into the formal economy, turning many users into professional content creators. This is especially so when considering that content is based on personal use and everyday life experiences: the notion of branded humans as

commodities does not seem far off. Already research has shown that online relationships amongst content creators are influenced by the number of subscribers one has because of the inherent drive to grow one's numbers (Marin 2017, 28). As social media platforms, including YouTube, have formalised and institutionalised ways of commercialising prosumer-generated online content, creators gain online and mainstream status and recognition. Commercialisation on social media is viewed by the YouTube community in an unfavourable light. Despite the negative views, various forms of commercialisation are growing on YouTube and across all other social media. Success as a YouTuber (success defined by having a high number of subscribers in this instance) means that there is potential for monetary profit. However, the more vloggers commercialise their content, the more the viewers become disillusioned. Viewers have been noted to respond to increasing commercialisation by, for example, posting their views in the comments section, unsubscribing from the channel, or even calling out the said vlogger in their own videos. Previous research has shown that commercialisation is viewed unfavourably because it throws into question the motives for engaging in social media, which then puts into question the authenticity of the relationships and interactions established and maintained on these social media (Brunel, Fournier and Lawrence 2013:3; cf. Ertimur and Gilly 2012; and Fred 2015).

Aims and Objectives

This thesis is an ethnography of YouTube vlogging that explores emerging configurations of work, subjectivity, and value in the digital economy. Specifically, my research looks to understand how commercial business has influenced YouTube users and, more broadly, social media users. I do so by looking at the methods and tools YouTubers use to form and maintain online communities and affective bonds with their viewers; and how these communities and affective bonds are then incorporated into the commercial business interests of YouTubers' social media activity and interests are explained and legitimated to other users. I do so to understand different meanings, spaces and ways of belonging on YouTube. The research does this by looking at how belonging on YouTube is

produced, reproduced, and contested, and the frames and boundaries set to establish belonging on YouTube in the context of YouTube and YouTubers using the platform for social and commercial purposes. Hence, I will be looking at intersecting points between users and commercial business. My main research question is: How do YouTubers earn a living off YouTube? I approach this question by looking at how people who use YouTube earn income from it, how the platform mediates this, and what debates emerge around translating YouTube activity into revenue. I frame this main question around broader questions such as: How should this income-generating activity be theorised in relation to wage work and non-waged forms of income, given that it is part leisure and part work? What does this say about hidden forms of online work, and the changing configuration between work and leisure, the private and the public, and the home and the office? How does income generated on YouTube complicate our understanding of YouTubers as simultaneously engaging in production and consumption? How does online gift-giving play into online practices of competition, marketing, social networking and brand manipulation?

Many of these questions initially derive from how online and offline are perceived and negotiated. To understand the distinctions between private and public, work and leisure when dealing with YouTubing, it is essential first to analyse the online and offline conceptual differences. Distinctions between online and offline activity are based on the assumptions that online and offline spaces and personas are conceptually different. This comes from the notion of presupposed shifting identities when online versus offline. These shifts cast doubt on the online's authenticity, raising questions of what is real and what is fake, authentic and inauthentic behaviour and intentions. Questions around these concepts are a factor in perceptions about online identities and online communities, and how strong these are. Slater (2002) argues that the research question should determine the distinction between online and offline. Where do online and offline begin and end respectively, and how can one tell where they do so? Do new media users make a distinction between the online and the offline? When do they do so, and how? Asking these questions means recognising that online social interaction creates new social spaces, rather than extending existing social relations

and practices to new spaces. This then raises questions about the nature of online relationships, instead of merely addressing what people do online. It means looking at online cultures, how they are sustained, and how they relate to the offline in relation to the compression of time and space, which supposedly results in the sustained, entirely virtual communities. It means asking how new media create and sustain virtual communities rather than the relationship between online and offline social processes, all of this happening within a unified internet culture. There is no unified internet culture[28], but there are theories that have arisen from the idea of cyberspace and/or online spaces[29] and virtual spaces.[30]

Questions have arisen on how and what to think about individual online activity. There have also been questions on how to think about the online networks formed on these social media platforms. Central to these has been whether we can even consider these networks as communities (Gannon and Prothero 2018). These online networks have been defined in various ways throughout the years. The earliest noted was by Rheingold (1993, 6) who identified virtual communities as "social aggregations that emerge from the Net when enough people carry on those public discussions long enough, with sufficient human feeling, to form webs of personal relationships in cyberspace." The most prominent feature of these communities is that cyberspace can form multiple spaces and multiple forms of communication, including email, or discussion lists (Gannon and Prothero 2018).

In contrast, Jones (1997) defined online communities in terms of their occupation of online place-based communities such as virtual world programmes. This defined online communities in

[28] "Computers and the switched telecommunication networks that also carry our telephone calls constitute the technical foundation of computer-mediated communications (CMC)…The Net is an informal term for the loosely interconnected computer networks that use CMC technology to link people around the world into public discussions" (Rheingold 1993, 6).

[29] Cyberspace, originally a term from William Gibson's science-fiction novel *Neuromancer*, is the name some people use for the conceptual space where words, human relationships, data, wealth, and power are manifested by people using CMC technology" (Rheingold 1993, 6). A conceptual space is accessed and exists in the internet. For this research, I use the term online rather than cyber because online emphasises the notion of remote connection.

[30] "The terms 'Virtual Reality,' 'Virtual Space,' and 'Virtual Environment' (VE) are used interchangeably to describe a computer-simulated place or environment with which users can interact via an interface" (Burgess and King 2001).

relation to particular spaces and specifically created worlds. The emergence of social media questioned this virtual place-based conception of online communities as these were no longer based on "place" as we understand the term, but instead on networks (Wellman, Boase and Chen 2002). In the last fifteen years, from the mid-2000s, though, there has been a shift from thinking about online communities in terms of their location to a more *affectively* based definition. The notion of sharing a virtual or imagined sense of belonging to an online community, as a shared consciousness along with shared practices, has come out strongly (Blanchard, Askay and Frear 2010; Muñiz and O'Guinn 2001; Porter 2004). However, there has been disagreement on this as some have argued that YouTubers, rather than forming communities, are building audiences (McQuarrie, Miller and Phillips 2013, 146). For this study, I conceptualise the online community as having this sense of shared community and belonging while being a marketable audience.

YouTube has always projected itself as a space for amateurs (Burgess and Green 2009; Jarrett 2008; Morreale 2014 Strangelove 2010). This has translated to YouTubers' positioning their online activity as passion projects to viewers, and as something that was done outside of monetary considerations, in keeping with this amateur imagery. Commercial outcomes were always seen as a by-product, and never the incentive for doing YouTube. Berryman and Kavka (2017) illustrate this in their analysis of the use of authenticity and intimacy on YouTube using their case study of Zoe Sugg vlogs.[31] In videos, YouTubers would say that "I do this for the love of it and yes I make money off it, but that does not drive why I upload." Similar statements were made throughout the first year of my research. By the end of 2016, more and more vloggers were saying, "YouTube is my work; this is my bread and butter." Even now, these statements are still followed by a disclaimer version with backgrounds such as "YouTube is more than money to me." The social impact of this has been illustrated in how distinctions between online and offline realities are becoming harder and harder to keep. Prior research has problematised this merging of the online and offline by stating that it creates

[31] Zoe Sugg is a well-established YouTuber with over 4.82 million subscribers on her channel.

a lack of distinction between the boundaries of the online space, muddying the waters of what is offline which in turn causes further ambiguity in distinguishing between what is public and private, and work and leisure (Ross 2003; Scholz 2013).

This same research sheds light on larger questions about how people are navigating and negotiating the changes brought on by technological advances, rather than making a value judgement on the impact the changes have made. Previous research has described viewer reactions to commercialisation and explained why viewers see commercialisation as unfavourable. However, it has not been able to explain how commercialisation continues in vlogs and why it is growing at such a phenomenal rate across all social media if it is so un-favoured. Hypothetically, so many unhappy viewers should result in fewer views, resulting in a reduction in commercialisation. This has not been the case. Instead, Chen (2013) has shown a growing push for brands to engage in social media. Also, there has been a visible growth of commercially successful YouTubers.

I employ commercialisation because it serves as a marker of intersections between online and offline spaces, helping to manage the research focus. Viewers' disapproval of commercialisation shows that there is disagreement on how online activity is valued. There is disagreement on the kinds of value rewards that should be awarded for online activity. By looking at the intersection of commercialisation with belonging, I will be able to explore the interactions between vloggers and viewers by examining video content to see how issues of commercialisation are navigated and negotiated. By watching videos and reading the comments sections, I gauge viewers' responses to commercialisation in vlogging. I also show how vloggers respond to their viewers' apprehensions. The responses show how vloggers and viewers define vlogging and what meaning is given to activity on YouTube. The interaction between vloggers and viewers also shows how relationships are initiated, negotiated and maintained on YouTube.

Historically, the internet and online activities have been looked upon with scepticism. Significant issues have included privacy concerns, authenticity concerns, and breakdown of social structures and social forms of interaction leading to a more individuated society (Castells 2013; Chen

2014; Lange 2007a; Nardi 2005; Slater 2002; Thumim 2012). My research questions how people make sense of their realities as they integrate their online and offline lives, and the potential for creating new kinds of identities and new forms of livelihoods. Researchers such as Jenkins (2006), Lange (2007a), Slater (2002) and Thumim (2012) have shown the increasing blur between the online and offline distinctions. Thus, they have argued for a disregard for them as analytical tools in internet research. While I understand this argument, I nonetheless frame these as two distinct spheres as I use the movement between online and offline by viewers and YouTubers in my analysis of the data. It is a distinction that was brought up often during the research on videos and in the comments. The distinction also helps to bring about more nuance in broadly understanding the impact on social and individual phenomena when the online and offline intersect; how people react to the moment of intersection, and how people navigate between and through an online and offline moment of intersection and the meanings created in that moment.

Chapter Outline

Chapter 1 provides context to the research by providing a broad background of social media and YouTube. The chapter then uses this context to pose the questions and discuss the aims of the research, ending with the outline of the thesis.

In Chapter 2, I frame the research around a theory of belonging to understand the data concerning the main question and the broader thesis aims and objectives. The belonging framework situates the research and online activity against popular critiques of online activity as enhancing individualism, consumerism and a breakdown of social cohesion.

Chapter 3 tracks the methodological framing, processes, difficulties, and ethical considerations. The study allowed for innovative data collection methods and methodologies. By incorporating traditional ethnographic principles in new ethnographic fields, the research also offered an opportunity to re-frame existing principles, critically reflect, and question long-held beliefs and assumptions about the relationships between the anthropologist, the field, and the participant.

In Chapter 4, I trace the history of YouTube and the evolution of video monetisation on YouTube. I do so to reveal the changing value systems that allow for integrating economic and affective value within YouTube relations. This chapter underpins the rest of the thesis as it highlights the ability of YouTube to capture online actions, rank them and rate them to turn them into monetary value. This underpinning of a well-structured and entrenched economic system helps explain and contextualise the feelings and perceptions of suspicion discussed in Chapter 4.

Whilst Chapter 4 focuses on the YouTube platform and business, Chapter 5 focuses on online communities. In this chapter, the concept of dispelling suspicion is used to understand how online communities fortify their social, affective bonds despite being driven by economic outcomes.

Chapter 6 closes the gap by looking at the impact of online activity on the individual. In this chapter individualism and authenticity are seen as moral and ethical drives rather than the social destructors that they are generally perceived to be. Instead, individualism within YouTube and social media becomes the drive that allows for creative, curated belonging that provides for a flexibly continuous identity rather than the constantly modern reflexive individual who has no sense of others and the social described earlier in Chapter 1.

Lastly, Chapter 7 concludes the thesis by summarising the main findings of the preceding chapters.

Chapter 2: What Happened Yesterday? Belonging as an Analytical Framework

On September 26, 2017, Cullen and Katie, a husband and wife from the "Cullen & Katie" vlogging channel, missed their first video upload in six years. In a video titled "What Happened Yesterday?" Cullen and Katie end that day's vlog by briefly acknowledging and explaining the previous day's missed upload, saying that there was no major reason for the missed upload other than not having anything to say (Katie 2017a).[32] Comments from that video like all comments on their channel are turned off.[33] The following day, however, they end up having a said-to-be unplanned sit-down video where they go into further details and explain their state of mind and some of the issues they deal with and manage as YouTubers and vlogging as a job. They do this in a video titled "Changes" (Cullen and Katie 2017b).[34] In this video, they discuss issues around the impact of doing YouTube and vlogging on their lives, marriage, and family life. They bring to the fore assumptions by viewers about vlogging as a job and the complicated relationship between viewers and YouTubers. This video highlights the very complicated nature of YouTubing and social media activity as work. It ultimately draws out the very practical issues navigated by viewers and YouTubers about belonging and ways of belonging on YouTube. Based on this, the rest of this thesis is framed using belonging as the analytical framework.

[32] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WxrTRq0s-M4 accessed September 27, 2017 YouTube/Cullen & Katie.

[33] YouTube turned off many comments on family videos. It is impossible to know whether comments on videos and channels are turned off by YouTube of if those YouTubers have decided to turn off comments on their channels. However, if comments are turned off on newer videos but other videos have comments, one can assume that the comments are turned off by the channel owners and not YouTube. This is because YouTube turns off all comments on all video uploads on that channel.

[34] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y-MCWJv5VbA accessed September 28, 2017 YouTube/Cullen & Katie.

The video "Changes" starts with upbeat acoustic guitar music in the background, Cullen and Katie are on the couch, camera set so they are close up. They are fidgeting, trying to settle down and get into the video by fixing the camera and positioning themselves in front of it. They then go into the rest of the video, discuss the current state of family life and marriage, the impact that YouTube has had on those areas, and how they plan to address some of the personal issues they face due to YouTube.[35] Cullen explains from when they first got their YouTube channel, claiming that by jumping straight to daily vlogs, they made a "very big commitment" (Cullen 2017b). He further emphasises the commitment and what responsibility it takes by saying,

> I know it does not sound like a lot [and adding general views of comments from viewers] *"oh…y'all don't have real jobs and y'all stay at home and blah, blah, blah"* all those comments! For those of you who understand daily vlogs and what daily vlogging actually, ahh, does to your brain and body and family and relationships [laughs], everything else over the years, then you will understand where we are coming from. (Cullen 2017b)

This statement highlights the commitment and demanding nature of the work in terms of labour time. In the statement he brings in two aspects, the first is how viewers' general views and comments on the channel show their perception of vlogging work and, second, is Cullen and Katie's lived experiences and how these are perceived by viewers versus how they see them. Similarly, Katie reiterates and reminds viewers that "above all else, we have still put them first a priority over ourselves and everything else" (Katie 2017b). This life lived, experienced, shared and then commercialised comes with public scrutiny and also requires public accountability and, in many ways, justification by those sharing it. Katie justifies their feelings for what they are going through stating that:

[35] The ellipsis between the video transcription sections show where sections were left out from the original video and transcript.

> I'm not saying that we love doing it. I'm saying that is something else. We are really great at being business partners. We are really great at parenting our kids together, we are really great at planning parties together but, um, we have kind of forgotten to be great at being married together and having an emotional marriage relationship together. It has become a lot more like a business, which it is. It is our job. There is that whole business side. We talked about how it was nice the other day to have a camera-free day. We did not have cameras, were able to live as normal people, we were talking about how our instincts when anything cute, funny, happy, sad, upsetting, dramatic, adorable happens "pull out the camera" [Laughs]. Anyways, we just want to make sure that there is a time that we know that what we are doing throughout our day is for ourselves and not for the vlog and not for anybody else, because I know I have times when I think "Argg! Cullen just hugged me because it was for the vlog or because he just…" (Katie 2017b)

In doing so, Katie foregrounds the complicated tensions in their lives due to their job. Not only are they married and in a marriage partnership, but their marriage and family are their business and business partnership. This leads to questions about how to live their lives and balance the business, public, personal, and private aspects of this work. The pressure to live for work and create video content is expressed when she questions if Cullen's actions and affection towards her are done for the videos or reflect how he feels in the moment. The questioning of intentions of actions and things said is prominent for both YouTubers and viewers. This is later discussed in a separate chapter on suspicion. However, what it does show is the impact of vlogging on subjective experiences and perceptions.

> If you think about, it three years [ago] we could make a vlog it didn't have to be that interesting, which, yes, we can do that but I feel like, the way YouTube is now, I feel like there is a lot more pressure for everything to be something EXCITING or DRAMATIC or, you know, you cannot just have a regular old day and I mean you can whatever it is. (Katie 2017b)

Researchers who have done more qualitative YouTube research, such as Patricia Lange (2007a; 2007b; 2007c), foreground user interactions. Such work challenges the notion of a single casual user inherent in most social networking sites and social media activity. Instead, it captures the complex and dynamic nature of internet activity. This was coupled with research, such as that of Christian (2009), on the rules, values, beliefs, and practices that govern YouTube. Fred's (2015) work locates itself at the intersection of viewer perceptions, advertising, and the economics of YouTube.

The work shows how underlying concepts of authenticity and trustworthiness are continually being measured against YouTubers as viewers try to judge YouTubers' intentions. The work interrogates how brands influence YouTubers and highlights some of the guidelines regulating the YouTube space and financial economy. It does not consider the reverse: how YouTubers and viewers influence brands and brand construction. As Web 2.0 has developed and social and economic relationships become more prevalent on social media and other online platforms, there is a need for further research into more interpersonal and relational areas, focused on not just what users do but the meanings behind those actions.

In the video, we hear how this pressure of viewers' views and expectations is understood and, in some ways, contested. Cullen pits directly against this pressure to have exciting video material and the perceptions of the viewers of the intentions and underlying emotions behind their behaviours and actions towards each other. The idea that their lives are in some ways not only edited to look a particular way but also that they need to live "exciting and dramatic" lives underlies the business aspects of YouTubing. Ultimately, this is about the views and channel traffic determined by algorithms that sort and organise YouTube data on the platform. Working and trying to beat the algorithm so that their content is always more likely to be recommended to subscribers and viewers is a big part of YouTubing.

The idea that viewers can pick up something unseen beyond what is put on screen, what they (Cullen and Katie) say and how they act, and can discern a mood, a feeling, or a disconnect between them, is ever-present. This relationship between YouTubers, viewers and the assessment of intentions and authenticity is an ever-present one in the intersections of doing YouTube as work.

> Obviously, y'all have seen, I have read the comments, y'all see it. We cannot hide our emotions y'all know us too well. This is us. This is what we used to do. Y'all know what up we could talk to you forever on this. Now it is just the algorithms and the apocalypse and the blahaah, blah, blah, blah. (Cullen 2017b)

Cullen and Katie end the video by thanking their viewers and stressing their appreciation for watching and questioning them and even making suggestions on their lives. They address this to old and new

viewers, ending with a promise of "fun stuff" coming up in future videos (Cullen 2017b). Cullen then says "I love you," to Katie, she says it back to him and they kiss and the video ends.

Belonging on YouTube

Using McLuhan's (1967) notion that the "medium is the message," sets the tone in thinking about the impact of digitisation on daily life. It establishes how questions about digitisation can be about more than how digitisation has changed ways of being to include what those changes mean. It can do this by asking what the impact of digitisation is on meaning, values and beliefs, new reorganised ways of life, changes in ways of interacting, changes of needs, and how life is marked. One way to address these questions is by thinking about them in relation to belonging. This is because digitisation as the medium has changed and reshaped everyday life socially and individually. And, if life and people's lives have changed, how have those changes impacted how to understand the subjective and collective construction and experiences of this changed life. Belonging as an analytical framework considers these changes and ultimately asks how individuals and society be (exist); how to exist in these different spaces and mediums digitally and physically, otherwise known as online and offline. Katie raises these same issues in the video, trying to think through how to continue, with the changes happening in their lives, the uncertainty, the demands and having to balance private, personal, public, and communal. In the video, she says: "This is us working through our emotions working through changes in our life, um, as you have kids, as you move as you do different things as you go through different stages and get older, things change, and you have to accommodate, and you have to kind of figure out what works better in this stage of life" (2017b).

Despite being used across various social sciences disciplines, belonging has been mostly left undefined (Bromley 2000; Malone 2007; Marshall and Foster 2002). What can be considered an oversight supports Yuval-Davis' (2006) assertion that belonging is "naturalised" adding that it is "only articulated or politicised when threatened" (197). Belonging is said to be characterised by emotional attachment and feelings of safety (Ignatief 2001), meaning that the emphasis is on how it

makes the individual feel, impacting their subjective experiences and perceptions of themselves and the world. However, emotional attachment does not exist in a vacuum. It is based on real-life circumstances where power, socio-economic and political, have a considerable impact on how strong the feelings of attachment are (Bhambra 2006; Crowley 1999; Jayaweera and Choudhury 2008). Antonsich (2010) argues that the emotional attachment should specifically be considered a sense of "safety" and "home" (646) created and maintained through socio-economic, political and psychological factors. Other ways of belonging have been conceptualised to mean belonging linked to a place, space or group, belonging as a resource and belonging as a way of demarcating borders of nations and otherwise (Youkhana 2015, 11). Hence, much of the initial research on belonging has looked at the psychological, affective aspects of belonging, including belonging within the political fields, explaining how the literature on belonging tends to intersect at the affective level, identity forms and national and civic citizenship.

This then means that belonging is produced, and exists in multiple ways, levels and frames of existence. Rules, values and roles, like in any society, create boundaries, ways of being, and not being for YouTube, YouTubers and viewers. These ways of being and boundaries become how we know, behave, and feel about the platform and more broadly about society, online and offline spaces and life in general. They are one of the ways in which belonging online is created, maintained, and contested.

This means that even though belonging is based on individual emotions, the emotions are impacted by the individual's context, which affects the experiences, perceptions and sense of self in the individual's world. Therefore, belonging needs to be established and felt in relation to these different external factors to some degree for a strong sense of belonging, and if not, it results in feelings of not belonging. In this regard, belonging as a framework according to Yuval-Davis (2006) must be studied in three areas and levels: firstly, the social locations or the social demographics of the individual; secondly, the identifications by the individual, and of the individual by society, with the corresponding emotional attachments attached to how one identifies and is identified; and lastly,

the ethical and political values that such identification, attachments, and social locations are valued and judged (Yuval-Davis 2006, 199).

This research will use the same framework to conceptualise belonging. However, the research is mostly looking at how to belong rather than if the users belong or feel like they belong. Research on whether YouTubers belong or feel like they belong would require a different set of questions and methodology. That is not to say that belonging is completely removed, far from it. The methodology speaks to researchers belonging in online spaces as part of data collection and thus leading to questions on how belonging has been framed or said to mean the same as identity (Colombo, Leonini and Rebughini 2009; Migdal 2004; Veronis 2007; Warriner 2007) which has been extended to notions of citizenship (Clark 2009; Rosaldo 1994; White and Gilmartin 2008). This citizenship is that of nationhood, gender, and ethnicity (Croucher 2004; Hartnell 2006). However, this research's primary focus is on how this sense of belonging is produced, maintained and contested. Hence it focuses more on what Yuval-Davis (2006) calls the politics of belonging.

The politics of belonging are the "specific political projects aimed at constructing belonging in particular ways to particular collectivities that are, at the same time, themselves being constructed by these projects in very particular ways" (Yuval-Davis 2006, 197), what others such as (Sicakkan and Lithman 2005) have deemed "modes of belonging." This means that belonging and the politics of belonging are emotive states of being on an individual and social level whilst being enacted and practised at an individual, and social level. They are fluid, dynamic concepts that are continually interacting with each other. This research focuses on how belonging is created, reinforced and contested on YouTube. It does this by looking at how the boundaries between "us" and "them," "work" and "play" are drawn as well as moved between; looking at how identity is formulated and the specific ways of the formulation; and the different values and norms on YouTube, to see not only the behaviours they reinforce and undermine but, more importantly, the principles that guide those values and norms.

Primary research on belonging and the politics of belonging has come from psychology and sociology yet remains unclearly defined (Skrbiš, Baldassar and Poynting 2007) and under-theorised (Mee and Wright 2009). From the psychology discipline, the main areas in which belonging has been looked at have been the effect of belonging and the need to belong. The research has mostly approached belonging as a natural drive or basis for welfare, as noted by some of the research areas that have a psychological analysis of belonging such as the fear of separation (Rank [1929] 1973), belonging as a basis for conformity (Tajfel 1982), and the fear of exclusion (Billig 1976). In sociology, the central area of focus on belonging has been how people belong to collectives and the state, and the effects on the socio-economic and political states and on the individual and group when belonging is disrupted (Yuval-Davis 2006). More specific to this research has been the sociological research on belonging in a capitalistic (Marx) modern society (Castells 1996) and the impact of modernity on the feelings and perceptions of belonging and how people belong or are excluded (Marx [1844] 1975). Anthony Giddens (1991) has argued that with modernity people become reflexive. In contrast, Manuel Castells (1996) states that contemporary society is a "networked society" of identity communities rather than being based on civil, national or state-based belonging.

Thinking about what ethnography is and, in particular, where it is done and how it is done have had a significant impact on the adoption of online ethnography and digital ethnographic tools in research methodologies. For this study's purposes, I will keep to the terms virtual, digital and online to refer to field sites and theoretical approaches in ethnography, as these are the more commonly used contemporary descriptions. Specifically, digital refers mostly to digital media as defined in terms of digitisation; and online will refer to internet-based communication through social networking sites, social media sites, email, or telephonic apps such as WhatsApp. On the other hand, terms such as cyber ethnography will refer to an earlier era of internet research. Boellstorff (2008), Boellstorff et al. (2012), Nardi (2010) and Taylor (2012) argue that the term virtual has "mostly been deployed in online gaming environments and shared virtual worlds, where the notion of virtualness refers to augmented realities, role and identity play, and imagined selves and spaces" (Haverinen 2015, 81).

Pink et al. (2015) and Postill and Pink (2012) show that "digital ethnography, on the other hand, is used in contexts where researchers analyse how offline phenomena readily affect the use of online phenomena, such as in political movements" (Haverinen 2015, 81-2). A researcher analyses "online environments, such as social media applications, discussion forums, media resources and other online materials with a contextually rich approach and with the objective of analysing what and why something is happening in an online realm" (Haverinen 2015, 81-2; see Hine 2015).

These terms and definitions about what kind of ethnography is being conducted on the internet have been part of trying to understand what the internet is, how it is used, its impact on the lives of individuals and the social fabric. These questions would extend to the impact of how to, and what it is to, belong. The terms of virtual, online, digital, and even cyber have all come from different focuses on internet research. They focus on different aspects of the internet, and they all interrogate these different facets. These questions have arisen as the internet has grown and evolved. The impact of the internet on everyday life has boosted the call for adopting these digital methods and online methodologies. Scholars such as Burawoy et al. (1991) argue that ethnography "is the study of people in their own time and space, in their own everyday life." Because "lived realities increasingly include online interactions, ethnographers studying contemporary social life should consider online spaces as another 'level' or site where their participants live" (Hallett and Barber 2014, 307). To avoid this data and corresponding methods for gathering it would be excluding a data collection method of great importance (Garcia et al. 2009). In this chapter, I use virtual, online and digital ethnography interchangeably.

As the uses of the internet become more ingrained in everyday life and technology advances change how people interact with the internet and each other, questions and focus of online ethnography also change. These changes have not been easy. The adoption of digital technology in research, as well as the adoption of digital methodological approaches outside of cyber ethnography, has been slow according to Beaulieu (2004), Garcia et al. (2009), and Rogers (1995). Many studies that include online research view the online aspect of this type of research as secondary, as support

to the primary offline research, and never the main focus (Beaulieu 2004; Hallett and Barber 2014). This is despite the fact that the internet[36] and online spaces are central to everyday life and have changed the ways in which people live life (Airoldi 2018; Boyd 2011; Burawoy 2003; Burawoy et al. 1991).

Earlier research on YouTube was focused mainly on more quantitative and positivist methods of study, and this is still a large part of the research on YouTube currently. This positivist research includes, for example, Biel and Gatica-Perez's study (2012) on interpersonal perceptions in social conversational videos; Biel and Gatica-Perez's (2014) study of vlogging styles and the frequent communication cues in vlogs; Davidson et al.'s look (2010) at the challenges of the video recommendation system on YouTube; and Molyneaux et al.'s study (2008) of the dominant messages conveyed in vlogs. Even though Molyneaux et al.'s study (2008) employed a quantitative research method that looked at cause and effect, it did move away from the traditional forms of analysis of visual media; they focused on the content of the material instead of the "production or reception of the material."

Researchers who have done more qualitative YouTube research include Patricia Lange's work (2007a; 2007b; 2007c) which brings the interactions between users to the forefront. She challenges the notion of a single casual user inherent in most social networking sites and social media activity, emphasising the complex and dynamic nature of internet users and internet activity. This was coupled with research on the rules, values, beliefs and practices that govern YouTube, such as that of Christian (2009), for example. Fred's (2015) work locates itself at the intersection of viewer perceptions, advertising, and the economics of YouTube. The work shows how underlying concepts of authenticity and trustworthiness are continually being measured against YouTubers, as viewers try to judge YouTubers' intentions. The work interrogates how brands influence YouTubers and highlights some

[36] I differentiate between internet and online as a way of specifying place as the internet and space as online. However, these can be used interchangeably to refer to online spaces inclusive and exclusive of virtual spaces.

of the guidelines regulating the YouTube space and financial economy. It does not consider the reverse: how YouTubers and viewers influence brands and brand construction. As Web 2.0 has developed and social and economic relationships become more prevalent on social media and other online platforms, so too has research into more interpersonal and relational areas, where research is about meaning for users.

This research has shown that the internet is no longer only for passing information, as traditionally. Web 2.0 incorporates hardware and software technology that makes the production, sharing and retrieval of content easier while facilitating online interconnection between people (Berthon et al. 2012; Brake 2014; Kaplan and Haenlein 2010; Kietzmann et al. 2011; van Dijk 2006). This has had significant social, economic and political implications in the ways people, businesses and governments, communicate, work, and play. It is changing existing and bringing in new economies. The change that came with Web 2.0 is the rise of social media platforms founded on this model, creating user-generated media (UGM), and user consumed media (UCM). Advances in technology and resulting social media have now made previous consumers of media producers and co-creators of media (Banks and Humpreys, 2008; Grossman 2006). It is this media that forms a large part of the media industry today.[37] These changes facilitate new ways of being and belonging.

Where is the Field?

Virtual ethnography is a relatively new field. A lot of the data collection techniques are still being created and tested. The use of technology as the primary interface in and for data collection has been a great cause for concern in terms of establishing the legitimacy and validity of the data (Jones 1999). It has also been a matter of concern in that there have been questions regarding the internet as

[37] "From a marketer's perspective, CGM varies across a spectrum of creativity. The spectrum begins with informal discussions about products and services; for example on Facebook or Twitter. It then progresses to consumers creating structured reviews and evaluations in text or video. Next, consumers become involved in the promotion or demotion of brands through self-created advertising videos (Berthon, Pitt, & Campbell, 2008). Finally, consumers become involved in the modification of proprietary products and services and the distribution of these innovations (e.g., Berthon et al., 2007, Mollick, 2005)" (Berthon et al. 2012, 263).

a research site (Eichhorn 2001; Fitzgerald 2006). The internet has been seen as a cause for the breakdown in the community as an effect of ensuing modernity in Wellman and Gulia (1999). For Barney (2004, 32), the internet does not enrich shared reality but rather impoverishes it. Added to this, Borgmann (2004, 63) states that the internet is a commodifying space that does not allow for people to find meaning, and creates communities that are a means to an end rather than "end communities." This alienation is said to be founded on the reduction of person-to-person contact – the glue that binds societies together and forms communities, thus arguably fostering increased isolation. Questions about the meaningfulness of online activity have thus been raised, but researchers such as Rheingold (1993, 6) have argued that the internet provides spaces for communities that have been lost to be reformed and that it will restore people's sense of community through the formation of virtual communities. As Jenkins (2006) articulates, internet research is therefore necessary in the times we live in as the internet is intrinsically woven into everyday life. Markham (1998) further adds that the internet is to be considered a cultural space in its own right, and Hine (2000) extrapolates that this cultural significance exists despite the lack of physical contact.

Digital ethnography challenges notions of what ethnography is and looks like. It challenges these notions in that it complicates the idea of what constitutes "the field" or "field site." It challenges the basis for face-to-face interaction as part of good ethnography and it forces us to think about what constitutes good, reliable data. Gupta and Ferguson (1997) have argued against this localisation of field sites to places and time, stating that this creates a notion of the other, a hierarchy of what and who is and is not data, by way of deciding what is and is not the field. These challenges are not limited to anthropology and doing ethnography. They form a part of broader questions on the depth of connections and interrelations of online engagements. They, thus, essentially raise questions on whether belonging in online communities has the same value and meaning as offline communities and if personhood exists with the same or similar forms of meaning online and offline. Therefore, questions and the evolution of online ethnography extends to and is underpinned by questions of belonging.

In the early conceptual days of this research, I was asked a lot about my research methods and data collection. I faced questions such as: How will you do research online? Will it be enough if you only collect data online? Who will you speak to? How will you pick your participants? Don't you think you should do both online and offline research? How will you know that what is posted is true? Theories on the distinction between online and offline activity have emphasised the idea that there is a distinct difference between these two spaces with the implication of both figurative and literal intentional movement between the two. From the early 2000s, counter-arguments have emerged, arguing that people live meaningful lives both online and offline, and that the line between online and offline has blurred to such an extent that it is difficult to say where one ends and the other begins (Jenkins 2006). This movement between spaces is harder to trace because even though people may be offline, they could be working, thinking or planning for online interactions. It is to be noted that this still does not take away from the notion of movement between these spaces; it only argues against the idea that there is a distinct demarcation of these spaces. I conceive of the notion of online and offline spaces as relevant distinctions for this research. Earlier work on internet research focused a great deal on the distinctions between online and offline activity.

This focus has come under some criticism and current research has moved away from the distinction with the understanding that people and the relationships established online and offline move between online and offline constantly (Lange 2007a; Nardi 2005). This is in accordance with Slater's (2002) argument that distinctions between online and offline were part of early digital and internet research, a transitional phase for ways of thinking through communication potentials and specifics of online communication and interaction (544). Hakken (1999) claims that online and offline distinctions can be reductive as they only view the online as a way of explaining the offline when there could be a multi-dimensional and intersectional relationship between the two. Therefore, in thinking through the role of YouTube and the ways in which users interact with each other and use YouTube it becomes necessary to consider how these inform both the online and offline. Lehdonvirta (2010, 2) states that this distinction between online and offline needs to be removed and that online

activity needs to be treated as part of everyday life as much as playing golf or going to the movies. By removing the distinction between the online and the offline, research on social media would then move from research on structural changes, such as research on the impact of social media on traditional media. Instead, it would address the changes that technologies and new media have had and continue to have in everyday life. As previous research on traditional media has shown, media does have an impact on the everyday (Livingstone 2002; Spiegel 1992; Tacchi 2002). However, in my research, I found that this distinction still existed in the everyday language of YouTubers and people in general.

In line with Burrell (2009) who argues that the "field site is constructed rather than discovered" (152), I have always understood the field site to exist because of the choices made by the researcher. The field site as a notion and as a site for research, where research is carried out, is a matter of choices and boundaries set up by the researcher. Space is always bound to context and the field site is as much a space as it is a place. Ethnography occurs within these contextualised places and spaces. Therefore, what constitutes the field has always been based on and bounded by the various choices we as researchers make when we design our research methods and also the choices we make during fieldwork analysis and writing. The field site does not exist outside of this designed context, the place and space in which the field site exists, as in the particular ways it has existed before the research. For I, as the researcher, set the boundaries; I set them in the particular order I deem best to get to the results for the research. The boundaries are also set by my own context and opinions of what the field site is.

This notion of a created field site has been downplayed in anthropology largely due to the fact that the field has historically been a physical place or bounded space. This has largely to do with the history of the discipline and its early emphasis on researching the other, the other in specific locations and later research on spaces. I distinguish between place in terms of a geographical location and space which is more abstract and potentially subjective (Fabian 1983; Gupta and Ferguson 1997; Magubane and Faris 1985). I do so with the aim to also articulate the subjectivity of space. It could also be the

influence of early scholars in the claim for truth and objectivity in scientific inquiry. This also affected anthropology, as despite the emphasis of deep hanging out and immersion in the field, "going native" was historically frowned upon and therefore the research was always expected to keep some distance and objectivity from the field and those being researched.

As Daston and Galison (1992), Dehue (2001) Galison (1997) and Shapin (1994) have argued, the concept of objectivity is not a simple one because objectivity itself is founded in context, and therefore it cannot be taken for granted that the field site can be neutral and fixed in particular ways. If objectivity is not neutral then neither can the field site nor the research questions be, as they are determined by the notion of neutrality. Participant observation is an open-ended methodology as it takes into consideration an open-ended participant group no matter the designed or preferred sample. The method of participation assumes a level of disruption by the mere presence of the researcher: it has uncertainty and an element of the surprise to it. Its limits are imposed upon it rather than inherent to it.

Thus, the traditional idea of the field site needs to be reconceptualised. Internet ethnography has brought the need for reconceptualisation to the forefront as it directly questions the assumption of physical space and place as a field site and rather takes seriously Trouillot's (2016) notion of the field as a complex space of locations. It was within this paradigm as well as within the idea of an ever-present internet that cannot be separated from "real life" that I framed my methodology as one to be completely carried out online. If the field is created and subjective, then it can be created anywhere and is not determined by physicality. Therefore, an online ethnographic field site is as plausible as any other and does not need to be supported by an offline ethnography. Instead, a more important question would be to examine the value of the online and offline ethnographies as research fields for the research aims. It would also be prudent to ask what such a distinction even means? For me, not considering the offline and only focusing on the online was a way of experimenting with what online ethnography could look like. Up until this last decade, internet ethnography has largely been conducted in a by-the-by manner, where the internet is an aspect of the research and not the

main focus. The times that it has been the focus in early research, it has been conducted either covertly (Richman 2007) or on "risqué" topics such as the dark web and pornography (Sharpe and Earle 2003), or on virtual or cyber ethnography (Schaap 2002). Although this is changing, the legacy of the lurking researcher online prevails (Denzin 1999). My intention was to have an intentional, overt and non-risqué topic that also changes the view of online ethnography as the problematic side of the discipline. Therefore, I considered what it would be like to put online ethnography at the centre of the research, to take that data as the primary source of data, meaning that I would have to take what occurs online at face value rather than extrapolating from what is not shared online or hidden.

This concept of a subjective field further contributed to my choices in participants. The internet is vast. In its sheer number of users, with over 2 billion users recorded in 2019 (Iqbal 2019), YouTube represents a large portion of internet users. The full extent of conceptual research on such a large field as this cannot be undertaken by a lone researcher. YouTube has as many users with similar experiences as there are users with stark variances between them. There was no way of coming up with a systematic way of choosing my participants as a lone researcher working on qualitative, not Big Data,[38] research. Whether I chose the participants by language, by physical geography, by race, or even by type of YouTube content consumed, I would still have had too many participants to choose from. My participants were, therefore, chosen based on my personal views and constituted primarily of those that I followed on the platform.

As Driscoll and Gregg (2010) have argued, online ethnography makes the line between researchers and participants much harder to determine. This becomes a lot more complex because of the ways in which intimacy is used as part of social media interaction. The only loose guidelines I had were that the participants were vloggers – that is, they created video content about different elements of daily life, and that they spoke English in their videos.

[38] Defined using Laney (2001), characteristics of big data include the "dimensions of volumes, velocity and variety" (accessed June 20, 2017). Gandomi and Haider (2015) elaborate on these further stating that volume represents the "magnitude of data"; velocity represents the "rate at which data are generated and the speed at which it should be analyzed and acted upon" and variety represents the "structural heterogeneity in a dataset" (138).

Belonging as a framework allows these multiple and entangled ways of being, locations of being and forms of being to exist at the same time. This is because the framework applied not only considers how to belong, it also considers who belongs, when and where belonging occurs (as in the example of movements between online and offline) and the meanings behind those online and offline activities, in a single or multiple spaces at the same time.

Chapter 3: Methodology

My research aimed to understand the drives, motivators, and value systems of online communities, in particular YouTube communities, in their own terms. When considering the framework of belonging used, this research assumes that the different ways of belonging are always intersecting at multiple levels in constant movement. This means that one is not more relevant than the other but there is a need to understand how they impact each other, and the effects on the individual and society. For this research, I had to rethink and extend the definition of social locations, and demographics tend to be one of those social markers. I also included YouTube data sets as demographics. Usually, when demographics are being considered it would mean looking at race, age, ethnicity and so on. However, for this research, I framed demographics in terms of subscriber count, channel engagement, and the type of content they upload. For example: Are they vloggers? Do they do tutorials? Is it beauty-based or travel, etc. content? This is not to say that things like race, age and gender did not have any basis of consideration in this research. It did because people do decide on videos based on the persons, age, race, gender and so forth, however, they can also be picked depending on content category or editing skills and even subscriber count. YouTubers themselves position themselves and their content according to race, gender, marital status, and so on. For example, Toni from the "Toni Daley"[39] channel follows mostly black female YouTubers and uploads content promoting black female businesses. At the same time, YouTubers will consider subscriber count when deciding on their content. For example, Owamie from "Owamie Hlongwane Entertainment" posted a video[40] on why she does not post videos about South African YouTubers. Owamie's channel is a gossip channel that discusses South African celebrities and famous people. In

[39] https://www.youtube.com/user/tonidaley80 accessed 2017 YouTube/Toni Daley

[40] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KoyMW36dxdY accessed August 15, 2020 YouTube/Owamie Hlongwane Entertainment

the video, she states that she only speaks about YouTubers with higher subscriber counts than hers as that would give them an even edge on the possible negative consequences that could come from what she says (Owamie 2020).

There can be many reasons why these YouTubers and viewers have decided on what, who and how they watch and create content over and above what they have mentioned on their videos. I discuss this in more detail in a later section on trust in this chapter. There I discuss in more detail my approach to what I see, read and hear on YouTube. Similarly, YouTubers identify themselves in particular ways, be it social markers, economics, ideology, values and so forth. At the same time, YouTubers are identified by their views in particular ways. This also does not mean that all the viewers would agree on their views of the YouTuber, however, there may be an overwhelming opinion on how they are identified. Notable though, is that on YouTube as in the offline, identities are expected to be continuous to some degree even if they change. Also, they speak to, for or against a homogenous sense of values and ideologies which Yuval-Davis (2006) assumes in the analysis of belonging. At the same time, it must be noted that these homogenous values and norms come from a diverse society from all around the world with different backgrounds, values, norms and expectations. This research is, therefore, about the way in which a sense of place and space is created online.

I made three choices as to how I would proceed with the research based on the above. These choices provided some freedom to interrogate the basis of ethnographic research assumptions, while also providing answers to the research question. The first of these choices was made early during the research planning stage: most if not all of the research was to be conducted from interactions online. This translated to limiting face-to-face interactions as much as possible. In line with this choice, I sought to limit interviews with other YouTubers as well as any other forms of direct contact or interaction with them. Second, I made the choice to use my own YouTube channel as a data collection tool and a methodology. This decision was again made early on in the research process. The third choice was to base the sample of participants on personal preference or affinity with their channel

and its content. Each of these choices will be discussed below, together with other related choices and decisions.

To understand these choices, it is best to first situate them within the intentions of the research. My research broadly looked at how YouTube economies are constructed and how they work, with particular focus on how YouTubers make revenue from the platform. One of the main ways that YouTubers make money off the online platform is through an actively engaged subscriber base on YouTube itself, as well as cross-promotion on other social media platforms. The bulk of the interactions takes place online. Therefore, one of the research questions asked was how YouTubers grow and maintain their subscriber bases in order to make online activity commercially viable. This allowed for a better understanding of how the commercial aspect of these relationships affects the ways in which YouTubers and subscribers interact, and further, how subscribers interact amongst themselves.

The three choices I made speak to the main areas of concern when it comes to online ethnography. These areas include: firstly, the questioning of online research as ethnographic and if indeed it is a call to reconceptualise the field; secondly, the lack of verification processes for online identities and reported claims or actions; and finally, the problems that arise during the analysis phase due to the irregularity of online data in that it can be deleted by the time of write-up, as well as online pseudonyms and "fake profiles" (Jones 1999; Kozinets 2002; Prior and Miller 2012). My initial choice to do only online ethnography was a response to these questions and concerns about online research.

The first choice to keep all the research online was not meant to negate the relationship that exists between the offline and online nor was it meant to create distance between these two spaces. Instead by foregrounding the research online, I was placing emphasis and importance on the actions and interactions that occur online. Many online communities are based on members that never move their interactions offline nor do they move to more private online communication platforms. The public comment sections of posts and video uploads is how and where a majority of these online

communities are based. I have delved a little deeper into the distinction between online and offline in the previous chapter to try and resolve the ambiguity of the distance I am trying to cover theoretically whilst creating it methodologically when I choose only online research. For now, I note how online and offline experiences are inseparable in many ways and each is a continuation of the other and a component of the other. As the aim of the research is to understand online activity in the online context *as its own* normative value system, it was important to zoom in on online processes. It is worth understanding this context on its own, only later adding to the research by looking at the online and offline impact and effect. The aim of the research is to understand what occurs online rather than explanations of what YouTubers do offline to make their online experiences successful. This is not to say that there is no relationship between online and offline experiences. Doing research completely online was meant to challenge existing ideas of what the ethnographic field was and where it was. Ultimately, it served to reconceptualise the field and what doing fieldwork was and looked like.

Participant Observation

I started my YouTube channel in 2015 with the hopes of doing my research on YouTube but was unsure if it was feasible. My growing excitement and interest in YouTube made me finally decide to turn it into my research topic. In 2016 when I was certain about my research interests and the focus that this YouTube research would take, I started preliminary research on YouTube. My main active research started in 2016 and I intensely and actively collected data from mid-2016 up until the end of 2017. In early 2018 I started analysing the collected data. As themes were emerging, I was also collecting specific data for themes I felt were not properly covered or that needed extra elaboration and clarity. I continued to watch YouTube throughout the writing of this thesis up until the last day of writing in 2020. This is because the online space changes very quickly and I, therefore, had to make sure my data and the themes I was addressing were not outdated and irrelevant. I also found that some concepts and themes became more openly discussed and over time. So more recent videos

would provide more overt examples of an earlier established theme, as compared to the earlier videos where they may have been implied or discussed indirectly.

On August 1, 2019, I posted a video on my YouTube channel, "Hey Gabster," titled "LEAVING YOUTUBE!? Weekly Vlog #9."[41] In the video, I inform my subscribers that I will be taking a break from YouTube to focus on writing this PhD thesis. Having started it four years ago on March 23, 2015, I was finally leaving the field. I do not think that it is actually possible to leave the field whether it is YouTube or any other research site. One can leave physically but we leave parts of ourselves wherever we go, and we take those places and people with us. Clifford Geertz (1973) reminds us that fieldwork is an intensely altering experience that we should never come back from unchanged. Although ethnography is a particular form of knowledge that comes from "being there" it also requires us to be able to distance ourselves from being there in order to write it up (Hastrup 2004). This video was an act of distancing, a way of changing the relationship and expectations between myself and my audience. It was the physical gesture of leaving that started in 2017 when I started sorting through my data and more so in 2019 as I wrote this thesis and looked towards the end of this period of my life.

In the video, I do not say that I am ending my channel but rather that I will be focusing on my writing and that uploads will be very irregular and scarce. I said this because I am not sure what I intend to do with the channel after my thesis. To me it is more than a data collection tool: it has become a part of my life, and it has had a great impact on how I view life and how I navigate through life. I also find the idea of breaking all those ties with my subscribers daunting, but the video I put up allowed me the time to figure things out.

Using my YouTube channel was possibly one of the most significant things I did in this research. I was able to gain the phenomenological experience of what it was like to be a YouTuber,

[41] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vnhke9INbdE accessed August 1, 2019 YouTube/Hey Gabster.

and in many ways become a digital subject. I am not what is considered a digital native.[42] The internet for me was, and still is, an unfamiliar place, a somewhat foreign and oftentimes anxiety-filled space. I was born before cell phones and even VHS videos. I got my first cell phone almost at the end of my high school years. The first computer I ever used was after high school and it worked using MS-DOS. Certainly, there was no Google or YouTube. I started off very scared of pressing the wrong button that would cause either a system crash or would expose me to the world and end my life as I knew it. This is still very much a fear, but a manageable one now. Starting a channel was important in many ways as it helped me immerse myself and become that which I was not comfortable to be on social media and in ways I would not have been had I not started the channel. The channel forced me to use social media and engage in social media interactions that I do not think I would have done had I not had the channel.



Figure D: Current "Hey Gabster" channel page (screen grabbed April 18, 2020).

[42] I use the term digital native broadly to mean someone born at a time where computers and cell phones were abundant to such a degree that they were familiar with at least one of these growing up. The term is largely contested and not a lot of research has gone into this concept. The term "Digital Native" was coined by Prensky (2001a, 2001b). Prensky uses the terms "Digital Native" and "Digital Immigrant" to distinguish between those who were not born into the digital world (Prensky, 2001a) and those who have grown up familiar with multiple technologies…" Gallardo-Echenique et.al (2015, ILV).

To do research on YouTube one must sign up to YouTube. This function enables users to comment, like and subscribe, taking part in the overall culture of the platform. Uploading videos is a separate factor, but I needed to start the channel. This was done so that I could subscribe to and follow YouTubers and be able to get notifications when they upload videos, which helps for consistency. I started my channel before I decided on doing my PhD research on YouTube. I specifically started my channel with the intention of growing an audience. Later on during my research, I applied different ways of growing an audience and seeing how effective these were. This was done to really participate in the YouTube economy as this was the focus of my research. Initially, I posted videos as and when I felt like it, averaging about one video a week. In 2016, I decided to be a lot more consistent and started posting twice a week, every Monday and Thursday. I found with consistency I gained a lot more followers and views than in the previous years. In 2017, I decided to cut my vlogs' and other videos' time and try to limit the content to 10 minutes or less. This, and again increasing the videos, to three days a week, proved to be hugely successful. Because I was focused on growing that audience and learning about monetisation and monetary returns from YouTube, I got to have a working understanding of the value economy on YouTube – how different elements of the platform work together in making value.

Through my channel, I was able to learn about analytics and how to read the numbers on YouTube (analytics are described in Chapter 3). These numbers are very important on YouTube. These are the numbers that determine how much you make and illustrate your impact on the site by stating the numbers of people that visit and engage with your channel. The numbers give you pull, they in some ways determine your net worth and they also render you visible. Although large numbers give you visibility and social capital, they also can make you seem unrelatable to your viewers. That is because big numbers are considered to impact lifestyle. On March 5, 2020, Liza Koshy posted a video titled "CRYING AT PARIS FASHION WEEK • WARNING: Content not relatable" to that

effect on her "Liza Koshy Too" channel.[43] Liza Koshy has over 7 million subscribers on this channel and over 17 million subscribers on her main channel. Sometimes actions by YouTubers are judged according to the number of followers that they have: "You are acting like this because your channel is so big you have lost touch with reality" or "It is so lovely to see that even though you are growing or have grown you are still so relatable." Reading analytics is a skill. Statistical analysis in fact is not easy because the numbers have meaning, and one has to know the meanings to understand the impact of the numbers and the actions that go with the numbers. For example, which content is better received, what the demographics of your viewers are and what that means to advertisers and brands, your advertising revenue actual versus potential revenue: all of this comes with the channel. Hence YouTube is not only a place to collect data but also a methodology in itself.

When I first started my channel, I would get a lot of "sub for sub" requests; that is a subscription for a subscription request from another YouTuber as a way to grow subscriber numbers. Using this method, I gained about fifty subscribers, yet my views did not grow in line with the number of subscribers. My videos were still getting fewer than twenty views. It was then that I realised that the value of sub for sub was limited and that depending on what the goal was, they were useful only in part as no views meant no advertising revenue.

I learnt how to network on YouTube and grow a network with other YouTubers. I learnt about the differences in how other content creators will respond to videos compared to the way a non-content creator user would. The content creators that you are affiliated with or share networks with tend to comment on the different parts of the video from beginning to end, in many ways showing that they watched the whole video and are supporting you. A viewer, however, tends to comment on anything whether it is a part of the video concerned or non-video related (for example a YouTuber's comment on another YouTuber's video would include various references to what the video was about as seen from one of my videos: "You look gorgeous and I love the lip colour. I workout whenever I

[43] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B4h0_7fUZIU accessed March 5, 2020 YouTube/Liza Koshy Too.

feel meeeh. So good to find a Swazi YouTuber. Love your channel😊" ("Hey Gabster" video[44]). Or YouTubers' comments somehow refer to their channels as well, for example, "lovely tag, it's more of a tip. I'll be trying this tag as well. good job girl" ("Hey Gabster" video[45]). An example of a viewer comment on the other hand makes fewer references to the video content; instead, they focus on what really stood out for them whether that was in the foreground or background of the said video: "Notification squad 🕺🕺🕺🕺" ("Hey Gabster" video[46]). The content creators' comments tend to show that they watched the whole video. This is important because as a YouTuber you earn more revenue for the full view of the video, and it also increases the value of your videos on the YouTube algorithm. It also shows that their support, or the network you are in, is valuable and they are not an empty, unbeneficial ally. It means that people are interested in the videos, which means that you have pull – an indicator that the videos are meaningful to your audience and have an impact that equates to monetary value for both YouTube and the content creator.

I was able to see the different kinds of relationships that exist on YouTube and social media platforms because my channel allowed me to have a view of the whole. This experience was unlike that of a user, where I would only be able to experience relationships between other users in more of the same levels. However, even before there are relationships and networks, the focus is to build them, which I did through my YouTube channel. I built relationships with other content creators mostly by commenting on their channels. This was especially true with South African YouTubers. When I started my research, the South African YouTube space was small. Many videos had been posted but many content creators were inconsistent and had stopped posting.

[44] I have not referenced this video as I was not able to get a response from the viewer. I do have a lot of videos so it would be difficult to find this exact comment easily and, therefore, I feel a relatively good measure of anonymity has been maintained.

[45] Not referenced for the above reasons.

[46] Not referenced for the above-mentioned reasons.

However, in the years 2018-19, I noted a boom in South African YouTube. There is now an almost endless addition of new YouTubers and it is much harder to follow them. At the beginning of the research, the field was small and it was also easier to find new YouTubers and engage with them before YouTube got too big and also before they got too big to notice my interactions (comments) on their videos. With the more successful YouTubers I follow from overseas, their responses to comments are different. Most big YouTubers comment on the first comments posted soon after the video is posted. However, because they get a lot of comments they may only respond with a like and it is easy to be just another user name in their comments section. So in South Africa, it was much easier to make contact and build relationships with YouTubers than with bigger overseas ones.

This is not to say that in South Africa YouTubers have not become big or successful, but that the newness of the industry means that a lot of YouTubers are still getting established and building their brands and what they do, hence they engage in a lot more one on one responses. Nonetheless, the bigger South African YouTubers, who now get thousands of views on their videos and hundreds of comments, are starting to slowly move to generic responses like liking a video or giving it a heart, which are all pre-set responses by YouTube where you only have to press a button and not necessarily respond to the comment.

Once subscriptions are gained, they need to be maintained and much of this is done through communicating and building relationships with the subscribers. They need to move from being networks to relationships and having my channel as well as watching other YouTubers helped me see that. Comments from viewers on what they wanted to see next on the channel, or meeting viewers outside of YouTube "offline," for example on campus and at home in Swaziland, provided invaluable insight on how to build and maintain these relationships. All of these things were possible because of the visibility the channel gave me. In return, I lived as a YouTuber and saw the world through YouTube and YouTube became a major factor in my choices, what I did and how I did it. My life converged with YouTube to a large extent.

Online research does for many what other kinds of social research have achieved over time – it allows the researcher to be a native of their research field. Though digital anthropology and the internet are diverse, at the end of the day both are about creating an online identity. That identity becomes native in the field in ways that geographically located face-to-face fieldwork does not allow. The internet has many users who use it for different reasons depending on their respective contexts (Fuchs and Horak 2008; van Deursen and van Dijk 2011). There are those who are competent at it, then there are others who are more naive as to its impact. Those who are affected by this naivety are still a part of the space. Insider status comes from usage. Yes, there may be rules and behaviours acceptable and unacceptable but those are also subjective to yourself and the kind of network you are in. There are many users who go against your network norms but find that it is acceptable in theirs.

As the uses of the internet become more ingrained in everyday life and technology advances change the ways in which people interact with the internet, the questions and focus of internet ethnography also change. These changes have not been easy. The adoption of digital technology in research, as well as the adoption of digital methodological approaches outside of cyber ethnography, has been slow according to Beaulieu (2004), Garcia et al. (2009), and Rogers (1995). Many studies that include online research view the online aspect of this type of research as secondary, as support to the main offline research, and never the main focus (Beaulieu 2004; Hallett and Barber 2014). This is despite the fact that the internet[47] and online spaces are central to everyday life and have changed the ways in which people live life (Airoldi 2018; Boyd 2011; Burawoy 2003; Buroway et al. 1991).

Where is the Rigor? Difficulties in the Field

By mid-2017, I decided to start actively sorting through my data and analysing it. I had over 450 videos saved on my YouTube playlist. To arrive at these four hundred-odd videos I marked for

[47] I differentiate between internet and online as a way of specifying place as the internet and space as online. However, these can be used interchangeably to refer to online spaces inclusive and exclusive of virtual spaces.

final analysis, I must have watched over ten thousand videos with over one-hundred thousand watch hours. This is considering I was watching an average of ten videos a day lasting for at least ten minutes each over a twenty-four month period of in-depth data collection outside of the rest of the videos I watched between 2018 and 2020. The final 450 videos I selected as potential resources for the research were made up of content created by over forty YouTubers. After sorting through the data initially, I was left with 226 non-African YouTuber videos and thirty-nine videos from African YouTubers. There were thirty-seven YouTubers I was following specifically for this thesis-writing process. These thirty-seven YouTubers shared many major life events with their viewers: twenty-seven births, seven miscarriages, nine marriages, seven breakups and two divorces, and nineteen house moves. As the main focus for the ethnography, I worked with about a hundred videos; although this number continued to change as I added new videos to accurately describe the current trends in YouTube spaces and illustrate that key themes are still as pertinent today as they were in 2015. I always tried to find a recent video to reference as well to highlight this.

I have already discussed my participant choice and my use of the snowball effect to pick them rather than trying for a more systematic method. Snowball sampling is further complementary to the qualitative nature of the research. Since I was interested in finding out how online activity (in this case YouTube) can be translated to material and immaterial value, this form of YouTubing gave me the best entry point into any form of analysis. By choosing vlogging as the content type, I was able to limit my sample size by using superficial elimination.

By not setting up overly defined sample criteria over and above those I was already watching, and then allowing the participant sample to organically grow as per my tastes in vlogs and YouTube, I was not faced with too big a sample size, and thus further had space to interact with the sample in more personal ways. For example, I would try to watch everyone every time they uploaded a video and was able to comment on the videos and sometimes have conversations with the other viewers and the YouTubers themselves. Some participants I dropped during the study, others I picked up and others I would watch intermittently depending on how I felt, my interests at the time, as well as how

they made me feel. There was a lot less responsibility to keep up with them as one would with a study participant in controlled samples and I could fully engage in the experience of YouTube as a viewer and a content creator while conducting my research at the same time. This would not have been possible had it been classical ethnography, considering the kinds of relationships that are expected and are ethically promoted by this method.

All research is about choices. Choices on what the research focus should be, and choices on the best way to conduct the research so as to yield the best results in order to draw legitimate and insightful conclusions. Qualitative research and in particular ethnography, which has more uncontrolled variables, presents a format through which many choices are made during the data collection phase. In the field, ethnographers are faced with both expected and unexpected situations which require them to constantly make decisions. Some of these choices seem small and hardly a second's thought goes into assessing them. Others have significant consequences in the field, for the data, and for the resulting conclusions, thus requiring more scrutiny. Many of these choices are about the methodology and weighing up the impact of actions against possible outcomes of data. Sometimes the choices are about the ethics of our actions in the field. The trope in these circumstances is that there is no single right way to conduct research, but rather that there are more or less ethical ways. Other than ethics, particularly in qualitative fieldwork, choices include finding better-suited ways of receiving the necessary data, whether it be through the framing of the question or the choice of participants. No matter the method we employ to collect data, our research is often attached to the choices of researchers. Even without prior arrangement, the raw data we collect can tell many different stories depending on who is interpreting it, when they are interpreting it, and their reasons for doing so.

Part of my research was also about *how* to conduct online ethnography. It is experimental in that way. It is not necessarily meant to work efficiently, but instead reconfigure the status quo by reimagining ethnography in new spaces and on new topics. I wanted to experiment with new methods, adapt existing ones, and where needed use tried and tested methods in new spaces. In this regard, trial

and error were used rather than conforming to accepted and widely used data collection methods and tools. This trial and error was founded on anthropological interests and ethnographic principles that I analysed for online and digital research.

Anthropology is concerned with how people live, interact and react to each other. Ethnography is one of the tools used to get answers to these questions. It is the cornerstone of anthropological research. In ethnography, there are long-held notions of what ethnography is and how to do it. These include the concept of going to the field with the field assumed to be a physical space, as in Geertz (1973) and Malinowski (1922; that there should be a long time spent in the field where the ethnographer must "totally immerse" (Coleman 2013) themselves in the field; and as Yanow (2012) argues, an ethnographer "should be able to respond to the moment " (192). Simply put, the ethnographer's time in the field should bring about an understanding of the society one is immersed in, to the point that the ethnographer is able to pick up when a "moment" is occurring and respond to it. So, time in this instance is not only quantitative but is also expected to bring about changes in the ethnographer – in their understanding of the society, and changes to their being as well (Geertz 1973; Hastrup 1990; Malinowski 1930. Face-to-face interaction is, above all other ways, the primary mode of interacting in the field (Hallett and Barber 2014; Slater 2002). I wanted this research to be both research on online activity and on social media as it was about research methodologies.[48]

For example, when I started my research there were only two consistent South African-based YouTubers that could fit this criterion (Mommy and Baby Approved and Jessica van Heerden), and only one of those had worked with brands at the time. However, four years later there had been a drastic increase of South African YouTubers and vloggers, and at the time of writing they could form part of the research. I searched for South African YouTubers, such as family or student vloggers, or whatever it was that I was interested in. Sometimes I clicked on the suggested videos and found

[48] As a side note, I have taken this experimental reasoning to the writing of this thesis because one of the main things I struggled with in starting to write this thesis was style and finding my own writing style.

another YouTuber. It was as organic as it gets, and that is why even now it is hard to separate the participants from my non-participants. I do not think that I can, actually. What I have done instead is that, although I am subscribed to many YouTubers and watch many other channels that I am not subscribed to, there is a core group of YouTubers that I have followed mostly throughout my research, and these are the ones that I use and refer to in this thesis.

In South Africa, many channels started as non-vlogging channels and later grew to include vlogging content. Therefore, I grew my participant list as anyone else would grow who they subscribe to on YouTube. I discovered YouTubers recommended or mentioned by other YouTubers.

Similarly, there are many other YouTubers globally whom I started watching for pleasure but whom I now find I want to use in the research because their video content speaks more clearly to the case I am building. There are also other YouTubers that I specifically followed with the intention of being part of the research that I subsequently stopped following for various reasons. These reasons include me no longer finding them interesting, never clicking on their videos and ultimately unsubscribing from their channels after a few years or remaining subscribed but not watching or actively keeping track of their uploads and their lives. Or, they stopped uploading or I found other YouTubers who were saying something similar or represented the reason I was following the initial YouTuber but perhaps did it in a more overt manner, making it easier to describe during the writing process and not needing as much inference.

Doing online research and writing the thesis did not go together easily. The internet is fast-growing and ever-changing. Social media is that and more. The immediacy of social media and the number of changes and things that occur on a daily basis means that a lot of the time data could become irrelevant by the time I worked it into writing or aimed to publish it. Fast publishing mechanics and platforms need to be created to be able to be relevant or even to keep data at a manageable rate. The changes mean that there is a lot of data one needs to sort through constantly.
One of the things I have had to do in order to prove that my analysis is still relevant is that, out of the videos I set aside to use in my write-up, particularly those from much earlier in the research, I would

look for newer videos with the same theme to use in my data. I then state that I initially saw *x*-video in 2015 and it is still relevant as *y*-video produced in 2019 continues to explore similar discussions or to illustrate a major change in trend or thought. This has meant that there is a lot unmentioned in my thesis. At some point, the decision to write up means data collection stops or at least decreases to a minimum. The result is that exciting developments, such as the new monetisation policy or the disabled comments on certain channels by YouTube, could not be captured. I can only mention them in passing if they are directly linked to my research. I leave them behind if they, for instance, take me in another direction I do not want to go in. This means that my research runs the risk of being stale.

The videos I watched initially were saved with bookmarks on my browser to allow for easy access. Due to the sheer number of videos, this system quickly proved confusing. Later on, I started a private playlist on my YouTube account where I would add those videos into the playlist for watching later. I also made sure to add all the ones that had been bookmarked earlier to the playlist. The videos added to this playlist were random. They were videos that had interested me for one reason or another. Eventually, I started seeing themes emerge from the videos and a pattern where what I found interesting kept on repeating itself. For the videos whose content was not clear from the titles or that had an uncommon theme, I would save their URL and access them via a dedicated word document. I did the same for any other social media such as Facebook. For Instagram and Twitter, I would take screenshots and save them on the same document. As I usually accessed this media on my phone, the screenshots were the best way to save them. For Facebook and YouTube, I normally accessed content via my laptop. This document was the place where I initially correlated all my data. It is also where I wrote many of my field notes and ideas and experiences of the field.

To sort through the data and for starting the analysis I used the Evernote app. It is a free application that can be downloaded to the computer and phone and synchronises all materials and data to all gadgets when online. It also allows you to save different kinds of data and be able to make notes on each one as well as organise these into themes. I went through every video from my playlist and updated it on Evernote. On Evernote, I would save the video using the URL, then I would add a

note as to why this particular video was important or sometimes I would then TAG[49] the video with words that I felt represented what the video meant for my research. The TAGS were divided into two areas. They located the YouTuber geographically, for this research it was divided between African and non-African YouTubers (African meaning geographically). This distinction was important because, initially, I was not sure if I was going to use African YouTubers, especially South African YouTubers, because at the time of initiating the research the South African YouTube scene was small and inconsistent. Hence even the videos uploaded to the channels were usually inactive or the uploaders uploaded sporadically, and they were not uploading to be a YouTuber, so the archive was shallow and inconsistent. I decided to stick to mostly American and British videos. By the end of the period, I had over 450 videos from all over the world saved on the playlist.

Interest became the guide for me. The longer I was conducting my research, the more South African YouTube grew, and I was able to use the data. Like YouTubers from other countries, their archives grew. They, therefore, entered the money economy that comes with social media, which is what I needed. However, I was still not sure how I would use the data, whether I would write a separate chapter in the thesis on YouTube in South Africa or if I would incorporate it in the general thesis. I have decided for the purposes of this research to incorporate it in the general thesis and highlight differences or exceptions when they come up during the analysis. I am aware that South Africa is not a representation of Africa. I do follow African YouTubers. Many of them do not have vlogging channels and even if they did, they would not be representations of their countries or of Africa in general. Their archive might however be bigger because South Africa has been much slower in catching onto the social media industry than other African countries, especially Kenya and Nigeria. I also found and follow many African YouTubers who live overseas.

[49] A TAG is a keyword(s) used to make your upload/post more searchable and easier to find. They can be used to make reference to what the content is about as well. Keywords are used to include and exclude videos from other videos or posts. For example, a hair video can be further tagged to say natural hair and even more specifically reference the kind of hair texture by stating the pattern of the hair be it straight, curly or wavy.

When I was sorting through the data and categorising it, I found that some of the videos I had saved on the playlist had been deleted. It was difficult and sometimes impossible for me to track down the video or figure out what the video had been about or who had posted the video. I initially wanted to treat these videos as lost participants, but I did find that they were analytically useful in understanding YouTube and memory and community building. With some YouTubers that I stopped following, I decided to treat this as data that has not been followed up on or as a lost research participant, as sometimes happens. Because of how big the sample field was, realistically, it was impossible to keep up with everyone.

Ethics: Are They Really Participants?

I had a most interesting conversation on Twitter towards the end of 2019. Someone posted a tweet noting the use of Twitter as a data field where academics extract that data to build their careers but never request consent for it. We had a back and forth on questions about the extension of personhood, ownership of ideas, and the ill-use of the law to cover for ethical offences or ethical inadequacies. The complaint was that it was not enough to say that because the law considered this public data there was no need to ask for consent. Questions were raised about who owns the data, and if that data is public or private data, or simply put: Can a tweet posted by an individual in a public forum be treated in a similar manner to what a newspaper article would be? What is the legitimate use and transferability of this data outside the social media structures and economies that it was made for? A tweet shared on Twitter, even a screenshot shared on WhatsApp, may mean something different to a tweet saved and used for an academic paper. These economies and spaces have different meanings as well as different weights, socially and institutionally. They are also linked to purpose, hence the notion of social sharing versus academic sharing and use. Is one to consider online and offline lives as equally meaningful and integral to the life course of an individual due to the earlier-mentioned blurring of lines between the two? If online activity is to be considered as connected to identity creation, as argued by Jenkins (2006) or Gössling and Stavrinidi (2016, 726) and others,

rather than merely conceptualising YouTube and other social media posts as public material, is it not therefore essential to consider what this means ethically? It is for these reasons that I have decided to incorporate post-research consent.

The concept of post-research consent may seem contrary to the Latour (2005) definitionand principles attached to that idea. This post-research consent is able to really bring to the forefront the option to "negotiate" and co-create common worlds. This is because, with the post-research consent, I was able to specifically tell my participants which videos or social media posts I was going to use in the thesis and for what purposes. For example, part of the consent email request sent to Jayla from the "Jayla Koriyan" channel stated: "Specifically I would like to use this video https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pAtaIUkvzxw as an example of how YouTube is not considered to be work by many." In the consent request email, I also included journal articles used in this research on YouTube and YouTubers to show participants examples of the kinds of analysis I will be doing for the research. The articles I used were Hou (2018), Gannon and Prothero (2018) and Raun (2018). Therefore, they were able to decide on being part of the broader research in general and, more specifically, consent to the specific uses of their videos in the research. Early in the research, I decided that I would have to focus beyond South Africa because of the lack of an established participant field in the country. When I first started watching South African YouTubers, it was not with the intention of using them for the study because I had determined not to use them as part of the research, and when I met some of them and interacted with them I did not presume them to be in the study. It is only now in hindsight and seeing them maintaining their channels that I can incorporate them in the study meaningfully. This has caused ethical concerns in terms of using any of their videos, especially those I met with in person. This is because my not declaring my intentions to use their videos in my study could be interpreted as misleading behaviour. Similarly, I had intended to keep my research focused on YouTube, but in the process of collecting data, I found that there was a need to locate the research on multiple platforms.

When I applied for ethics clearance for my research, the two main areas I had to focus on were consent and anonymity. In my ethics clearance application, I stated that I would request informed consent for all interviewed participants for voice and video, as well as use a general participation consent process. I argued that most of the remaining data I would be dealing with is considered public as it is found on a public platform that does not require prior approval or access to view and, as such, I would not request consent for this. Instead, I would request consent from any participants who decided to use direct private communication, meaning that they messaged directly, and they did not use public forums to contact me and participate in the study. I would also request prior written or verbal consent for any private interviews whether they were voice recorded, video recorded, face-to-face or online. So, these would include Skype interviews, direct messages, and face-to-face meetings.

Throughout my research, I focused mostly on the public platforms from which I collected my data. Initially, my participant base was outside of the country, because I was focusing on vloggers who vlog their everyday lives and who had consistently posted on their channels for over two years. This way there would be an archive I could access that could give historical background and context. At the time of starting the research, there were too few consistent South African YouTubers who fit these criteria to be able to base the study on them. Of the two I did find who posted consistently, only one had worked with brands at the time. Thus, to my mind, I was watching them for personal reasons, not for the research. However, by the end of my research period, South African YouTube had grown drastically, and some had built an archive that had grown over time and was able to provide the information I needed. Many of these have also managed to work repeatedly with brands.[50] I had met with some South African YouTubers in person or spoken with them either via direct messages or other internet-based media such as WhatsApp. So now the dilemma I faced was how to incorporate them ethically.

[50] In some cases, they worked with both local and international brands.

My response to both these quandaries has been to apply post-research consent procedures. As I wrote the thesis and I made decisions as to who would be included in the write-up, I also sent them consent forms to use their "public data" in my research. However, post-research ethics does not solve the problem of anonymity. In my ethics clearance application, I stated that:

> Anonymity will be extended to research informants who request anonymity; otherwise participants will be referred to by their Social Media handles. For participants who request anonymity, I will give them pseudonyms. This will be for any information that is given via private means (that is not on a public platform). So, for example, any privately sent emails direct messages or face to face meetings or private skype conversations will be treated as confidential. Material gathered on social media comments sections on my videos will be considered public. Material gathered on other YouTubers' comments section I will ask the owner of the post on if they want to be anonymous or not. Comments made on my videos will be considered public comments as I will have a video stating the site is being used for research and data collection and that comments can be used in the research without notice. Should a viewer request to remain anonymous they will be kept anonymous.

Pseudonyms are generally used to ensure anonymity for research participants who want to participate but do not want to be known. Nonetheless, when it comes to online research, pseudonyms do not have the same effect because of the location of the data. For example, as stated above, I used pseudonyms for those who wanted to remain anonymous, and that would be easier for those I had conversations with in private, either via email or direct messaging. However, I did not include any private communication in this thesis. Technology, as it stands today, is such that changing someone's Twitter handle or profile name is still not enough to guarantee anonymity. If I quoted their tweet or comment, it would still be discoverable to the public because someone else could have screenshot the same tweet and have saved it for use at another time. Also, depending on the social media platform and the person's privacy settings, comments are searchable on Google or on that platform's search icon.

If their account is public then they can be traced via the search bar of that platform. Therefore, in the writing of my work, I needed to change the handle name as well as to paraphrase the tweet, to make it truly anonymous. Depending on the YouTuber, for example, comments are visible for all to see and depending on the number of comments, it can be easy to go through them if there are not that many, but when there are a lot, it can be difficult to find specific comments. So I have decided to

remove the names of those commenting on videos I refer to in the thesis if there are over one hundred comments on the video. If the video has fewer than one hundred comments, I do not reference the video. Instead, I have stated that "I have not referenced this video as I was not able to get a response from the viewer at the time of sending to the examiners." The only time I have done so in this thesis is when referring to comments from my own videos from my YouTube channel, as those did not get too many comments on them. In my other examples and screenshots of videos and comments, the names are removed, as they are in that high-comment selection. I do have a lot of videos where it would be difficult to find the exact comment easily and, therefore, I judge that a relatively good measure of anonymity has been maintained. In this regard again, however, post-research consent is applied as an extra measure.

Both these issues and their solutions still do not really consider the underlying assumption being made which is that the legal guidelines that apply to public institutional data are the same and should be invoked the same way as for public social media data. This assumes that all public spaces are the same and that all publics are the same. The rules of each public are different, and what is and is not acceptable in these spaces differs greatly.

Despite using public data without prior consultation with those who uploaded the material, I still consider YouTube users as research participants. I have had to question this and wonder if indeed they are participants in the sense that by being able to control what they put out they are participating by guiding and controlling what we can access on them or if by the mere fact of not being consulted for permission beforehand they cannot really be called participants. Is this a scenario of data extraction and armchair ethnography? If this is not participation, how then do I reconcile this ethically? I suggest that post-research consent does this as it may also allow for the participant to consent with even the knowledge of how their posts have been analysed. This is, of course, dependent on when the post-research consent is attained: at the beginning of the writing phase or at the end. In the beginning, the likelihood is that it would look like a general consent form with broad research

information. However, I have chosen to carry mine out at the end of the data-collection phase. This way, I could even send the "participant" the chapter to give them the whole perspective.

This method, nevertheless, comes with a risk that the participant could say no. However, in my research I have ensured that I have multiple videos from multiple users for each theme that I address in the thesis, thereby limiting the impact of unwilling participants. Therefore, should a "participant" say they do not want to participate, I already had alternatives. Although this meant rewriting some sections, it was the most transparent method of attaining consent for online activities.

Trust in the Field

In order to reach my aim of understanding the drives, motivators and value systems of online communities in particular YouTube communities in their own terms, I had to pay attention and take seriously what I watched in the videos. As well as interactions between YouTubers, viewers and subscribers both in the comments sections and in the videos. To do so, I decided I need to take on a trusting approach that accepts online data material at face value, seeking to understand the meaning of actions rather than their realness or trueness. This approach takes its lead from Bruno Latour (2005) and Malinowski (1930) who argue that scientific truths are not the objective concepts we think they are. Rather these truths are produced in social process (Latour 2005) steeped in individual perspective (Malinowski 1930). Latour (2005) takes this argument further by stating that,

> It does not mean that those who have been studied have the right to censor what has been written about them, nor does it mean that the analyst has the incredible right of ignoring what his 'informants' say about the invisible forces that make them act. Rather, it means that a new negotiation begins to decide what are the ingredients out of which the one common world might be made—or not (135),

thus, highlighting how researchers, through a process of noting, writing up and analysing, are exposing truths beyond the participants and what the participants see.

In this chapter, I detail the methodological choices I made in terms of defining the field, defining interactions and their legitimacy as well as validity. I also discuss the ethical dilemmas I

came across and how I have dealt with them whilst doing ethnography on and in a space that is non-geographical.[51] These ethical concerns came into the forefront during the writing phase. As I wrote this thesis, I was constantly changing how I viewed and treated the participants in the research. I questioned whether I should even call them research participants. Should I use real names or pseudonyms? Should I use direct quotes? The ethics of doing research online, like most ethical quandaries, is complicated and not as clear cut as one might imagine. The complexity of ethical practices that take into consideration individuals as well as the research and society is difficult to navigate as each of these elements has different requirements and, as researchers, we have different responsibilities towards them.

Trust in the field is important for any ethnographical study, and internet spaces are no exception. It is therefore important to assess how content is created and consumed on different platforms to illustrate how trust is fostered in the aforementioned field site. As alluded to earlier, face-to-face interactions have been said to be the glue in establishing relationships in ethnography. Similarly, they have been assumed to be the basis for rich descriptions and legitimising valid research, establishing reliable and, to some extent, truthful research participants. This face-to-face interaction is what gives validity to the researcher-participant relationship. It is seen as the foundation of genuine responses and provides the basis of value and trust in the data. This revered relationship between participant and researcher is what sits at the centre of ethnographic fieldwork. I would go as far as to say that the work of research is actually the work of making relationships. This bond is created through immersion in time and space with the participant as well as regular contact over a long period of time. It is this physical interaction that forms the basis of data verification and reliability.

[52] I use the terms place and space in their broad senses. Space is used in terms of it being an abstract concept whilst place is used to refer to the idea of a geographical location. In terms of YouTube, although it does not exist as a physical space it is still considered both place and space in everyday language. Hence "online" and "offline" would refer to YouTube as a space but "Check YouTube" or "I am on YouTube" is referring to it as a place.

As I have stated, in terms of verification of data, I took at face value what I saw on YouTube and what was presented by YouTubers. I did later meet with other YouTubers and Bloggers[52] as it was impossible not to. As an active YouTuber and owner of a channel, the culture of the platform further requires some physical participation through meet-and-greets as well as collaborations between vloggers. By virtue of my channel, as any YouTuber would, I was invited to YouTuber and Blogger events where I was able to interact with influencers from various platforms. Through virtual engagements on videos such as commenting, liking and subscribing, some relationships formed that were later continued offline. I also did collaborations with other YouTubers and these added to a form of offline interaction as some of them were filmed together. Besides work-related relationships, I built friendships with some YouTubers. Some of these relationships stayed on the internet with a few physical meetings at brand functions, whilst others moved from YouTube to other mediated forms of communication such as WhatsApp and direct messages (DMs). Others have moved offline to face-to-face interactions. Thus, that aspect of sociality and connection cannot be separated; it would only be a boundary, another control added to this field site.

YouTubers themselves use variations of the concepts of online and offline when they express standard tropes like "in real life" or when they set up meet-and-greets to get to know subscribers. It is ultimately this movement that led me to consider the offline activity as well, understanding that by disregarding this movement between these spaces I would be disregarding an aspect of YouTubing and YouTube community building. Communities on YouTube are built between YouTubers and subscribers as well as YouTubers and other YouTubers. There have been times that I have watched a couple of YouTubers on different channels, only to find they are friends with other YouTubers and that through these group formations they create a network of sorts. YouTubers also spend a lot of time creating and highlighting offline interactions with their subscribers to reinforce relations. It was,

[52] Bloggers are people who keep logs of their lives in text form, on websites and blog pages. They were the influence from which vlogging emerged. With video platform technology growing text logs or blogs were able to move into video format.

therefore, important to acknowledge this movement between online and offline within the YouTube economy.

Consequently, I realised that by choosing online research only, I was further instilling the idea of online and offline as separate and easily distinguishable spaces. I was disregarding the data and my field. All these fluid interactions I was seeing that move between online and offline made me realise that in order to be "true" to the spaces and the people that constitute these spaces I needed to move with my participants rather than force a rigidity that did not reflect their realities. Hallett and Barber (2014), and Markham (1998) have argued the same. By trying not to have offline interactions I was ignoring the ways in which my participants interact and use these spaces. The boundaries I was setting up for my field were not reflective of my participants, meaning that my research data would not constitute data reflecting that which I was trying to find.

The exploration of what online ethnography is or would look like has also allowed me to analyse the concept of trust in the field, and the role of trust for data validity and reliability. It is a concept that is hardly overtly referred to in ethnographies, but it is an important aspect of research. Trust in research is established in different areas: it is trust in the researcher, trust in the participants and trust in the data. The research must prove to the readers and the broader community they are writing for that they have done a thorough and rigorous enough job at collecting the data. They must also prove that their analysis of the data is logically sound and accurate. At the same time, the researcher needs to prove the realness of the relationship between themselves and their participants; it is this relationship that is then used to validate the trueness of the data collected.

In the social sciences, especially in conducting qualitative research, the participants (human subjects) are at the forefront of research. We have entire schools of knowledge and practice based on how we should interact with our participants, what is ethical and acceptable behaviour and, from the mid-1980s, how best to represent them in our works. University and research institutions' codes of ethics set guidelines for ethical research in general as well as specifically for vulnerable groups. In anthropology, the emergence of applied anthropology was a response to the unethical and hierarchical

othering in anthropological practices. From anthropologists like Sillitoe (2006), who argues that the value of ethnobiology and applied anthropology can help guide technological advancements, to Pink (2001), who writes about ethical visual anthropology, social anthropology is consistently analysing and re-assessing best practices in an ever-changing world. In their book *Righteous Dopefiend*, Philippe Bourgois and Jeff Schonberg (2009) explore ways of doing an ethical ethnography of illegal activities amongst a group of people society characterises as deviants and lost. Mkhwanazi (2016) urges us to go beyond single stories or rather singular explanations of our data arguing against the idea of set ways of analysing data, set theories and set singular styles of writing.

Ruth Behar (2011) in her work argues that the researcher's personal motivations are also to be considered with the aim of the work. As she states, she writes for her mother, and her objective is achieved only if her audience understands her research and the participants and society at large have access to the research. One of the main assumptions of face-to-face interaction and long-term immersion in the field is that the researcher builds reliable and trustworthy relationships. If those relationships in the field turn out not to be cooperative, then the notion of the realness of those interactions, no matter the description of the relationship between the researcher and participant, is used to carry the validity of the data. This defaults face-to-face interactions as more real than online, mediated interactions. Such interactions only further the assumption that the researcher gets an in-depth understanding of the field to be able to critically analyse their field of study. However, online research is thought less likely to achieve this because it is missing that richness and depth of field.

This is based on the presumption that only physical contact brings about true and reliable interactions between the researcher and the participant. However, as research amongst clinical trials has shown, participants participate for reasons outside of the moral and altruistic. They also participate for personal gain, sometimes due to socio-economic conditions, and a variety of other reasons (Townsend & Cox 2013). Stadler et al. (2016) have shown that participants do not always tell the (whole) truth, and sometimes omit information because of various reasons, including to misinform, as well as for socio-economic reasons and for a sense of agency and control. Thus, we

need to be always aware of differences in motives for participant involvement in research studies. These are not always altruistic motives. Therefore, the assumption of the noble virtues of face-to-face research is not necessarily true.

Nevertheless, it is not only the participants whose intentions should be questioned but the researcher's as well. We anthropologists still generally subscribe to earlier scientific modes of inquiry that enforce distance between the subject and researcher, which is then enforced by practices of research that are meant to catch out participants and show any flaws in their arguments and statements. We seek to explain their beliefs, actions, and arguments better than they can, we question if what they say is really what they mean, for example (Rosaldo 1993, we look for discrepancies between actions and words to get to the "real truth." We do not, in fact, take at face value what we see, hear and touch in the field. Anthropologists such as Abu-Lughod (1996) have argued that knowledge is situated in particular value systems and that as anthropologists we need to understand these value systems rather than questioning their legitimacy and the social fields that create them.

Hence, the decision to question the assumption of face-to-face interaction as the basis for true and reliable data. This then raised the question: How do researchers ground data if not on the integrity of face-to-face interaction? Online interaction and its reliability have been questioned due to the lack of physical or behavioural cues that are evident when observing the participant. This aspect of communication is absent in many online communications, for example, over email and text communication, and sometimes delayed in virtual spaces. The mediated aspect of internet interaction has been seen as negative when it comes to online research because it only offers an edited view of whoever you are interacting with. Coupled with that, it provides much narrower insights into a person and their life as we only see what they choose to share and that would not constitute even half a day's worth of life, nor does it give a wide view of people in different contexts. Furthermore, online posts generally align with the brand the content creator is building, giving a limited spectrum of contexts. Spaces are never empty: they carry meaning and that meaning is highly subjective and contextual (Howarth 2006).

YouTube is a created space with particular objectives, which means that ways of analysing research on the platform, and the means which are used to understand and read the results, require that the researcher comprehend the rules that govern YouTube as well as how meaning is constructed on this particular platform as opposed to other internet spaces (Burgess and Green 2009). Likewise, different online platforms have different ways of engagement, rules, and accepted behaviours. These are not always overt, and it takes knowing the medium and being engaged and active on it to learn how to navigate the space and interact within it (Postigo 2014).

For example, Twitter, Facebook, YouTube and Instagram all have different ways of engaging because of the ways in which the platforms are constructed and the intentions of the platforms. Twitter has concise and direct communication because of its limited number of characters per tweet: historically 140, but now up to 280 characters. Facebook facilitates long monographs and backstories leading up to them. This is evident in the common practice of posting long jokes or book chapters on the platform. YouTube is partially textual via the comments section, while also retaining the predominantly visual nature of communication with a combination of high to low production input. It should be noted that YouTube does not always need high production: it can be informal as easily as it can host formal productions. Where Instagram is visual as well, it focuses on high production value with image and video content posted with a more overt emphasis on its curatorship, evident in the emphasis on the use of filters to increase content quality. Knowing how these mediums work and what fosters conditions for success within their respective limits was important in thinking about what content creators consider for use on these different platforms. It was also important to understand where the value was placed on these different platforms as this directly influenced the monetary aspects of each space.

In considering the economies of social media platforms, one must note that they are not only spaces to make money. YouTube and other social media platforms are spaces of conformity and also for the contestation of identity and belonging. Hine (2000) argues that "the meaningfulness of the technology does not exist before the uses themselves, but is worked out at the time of use. At the

same time, making the use of the Internet meaningful involves representing it to others as valuable in recognisable ways" (29). This means that online activity is culture because there are social interactions that play out in that space and it is also shaped by other processes. For my research, I conceived spaces of interaction between content creators and subscribers as cultural spaces, whose value systems, rules and ways of being I needed to understand within the platform and also in how the platform fits into the rest of the world, both online and offline. To do so I read the comments sections of videos and other social media posts. The discussions in this section proved indispensable in helping me understand YouTube as a cultural space. I was able to see what was deemed as acceptable behaviour of YouTubers and users alike. I was able to see different kinds of interaction as well as the language used to facilitate these interactions. This assisted in adding to important information on the ways in which online communities engage and support each other as well as how they are tested and contested.

As the research progressed, I moved from YouTube-based research and data collection, and I started following the YouTubers on their other social media platforms as well. This was done to understand how various other social media platforms interact with YouTube and are used in the online value creation process, both commercially and socially, in the online communities. In particular, these other platforms helped in understanding how content creators use other platforms as a means of dispelling suspicion and creating authenticity online. I discuss this in more detail in the following chapters. A point to note is the movement by YouTubers between platforms and how this movement is characterised by interconnectivity rather than separation. This means that they should always be understood in relation to each other and never separately. This viewpoint is shaped by the idea that the boundaries between offline and online have converged to such an extent that they are indistinguishable. See Hakken 1999; Jenkins 2006; Sade-Beck 2004; Slater 2002; and Thumim 2012. Most noted of these is Jenkins (2006) and his definition of convergence where he states that

> …convergence does not occur through media appliances…Convergence occurs within the brains of individual consumers and through their social interactions with others. Each of us constructs our own personal mythology from bits and fragments of

> information extracted from the media flow and transformed into resources through which we make sense of our everyday lives. Convergence doesn't just involve commercially produced materials and services traveling along with well-regulated and predictable circuits. It also occurs when people take media in their own hands. Entertainment content isn't the only thing that flows across multiple media platforms. Our lives, relationships, memories, fantasies, desires also flow across media channels. (3-17)

Equally, as ethnographers, we need to blur the boundaries between different online platforms because these platforms are never used exclusively but in conjunction with each other. In this research, recognising the interconnectivity of these platforms was central to thinking about online identities, their establishment, how they are maintained and how they are kept consistent with self and with brands in the fast-paced space of the internet. Online activity has been linked to the creation of identity and as part of making personhood (McKay 2010). This entails personhood both "online" in the form of the digital identity but also "offline" in that the online identity matters and becomes part of the person offline. This also means that digital identity and occupying digital spaces have experiences that add to the subjective experiences of the individual.

YouTubers and content creators in general work with many brands over time and they continuously need to align themselves to the brands they work with whilst keeping an ever-growing, varied audience that enters the community at different times throughout their career. These experiences are part of the subjectivities created from these "online" and "offline" interactions. The movement between and through the boundaries of "offline" and "online" and movements between different platforms online became important for this research not only for how users moved between these but also for what these moves represented and how these various other platforms were used and for what means. I found that the advancement of digital communication and the growing emphasis on live videos as a means of communicating with users or followers allowed for more intimate moments with YouTubers, as one got to see the behind-the-scenes activity.

YouTubers on live platforms such as Instagram Live and Snapchat were more likely to speak about things they would not speak about on YouTube channels, although these have now also become edited, commercialised, and some might even argue commodified spaces. This also allowed me to

get a more holistic view of each YouTuber because of the ways in which different media make people engage. For example, on Twitter, the limited characters can make people very witty, sarcastic, and to the point, or use emojis, memes and GIFs to fill in the missing words, all of which then gives an impression of the user. It also helped me avoid getting a one-sided view of the YouTuber by looking only at their YouTube channel. Instead, I was able to get the rich and thick description that Geertz (1973) advises for good ethnography.

Whilst online research has been considered fast research, this chapter has sought to prove that that is not the case. Instead, the rigour, detail and complexities of physical, traditional field sites exist requiring the same intensity of the researcher as any traditional field site. More than questions of whether we should even consider online spaces as plausible ethnographic field sites, questions about the ethical dilemmas that are particular to online research need to be addressed. Historical ethical guidelines may not always be able to cover these online field sites as these online lives upset the boundaries of founding concepts in ethics such as personal, private, and public. The choices we make in the field impact our data sources, the data we collect, how we perceive participants in the field and our relationship to them. The choices I made ultimately spoke to concerns about where knowledge is situated, who is knowledgeable and how knowledge is created, whilst the larger research broadly engages with the notion of what is knowledge as social media asks us to really consider the impact of this online activity on our everyday lives and even if this is a field worthy of study. This chapter looked into traditional answers to these questions, and how these have migrated to online spaces making it imperative for us to learn new ways of learning, new languages and seek clearer answers.

Chapter 4: Defining Value on YouTube

Simply creating a video on YouTube does not guarantee a monetary return. Instead, creating a video that garners significant invested engagement is needed to produce revenue. The digitising of media through Web 2.0 also facilitated the creation of social networks and related media, the financial efficacy of which I argue is predicated on capturing affect and putting a price tag on such offerings. Significant invested engagement is evaluated by ranking relative to the intentional action of the user, with incidental interested encounters weighted less than suggested videos, which in turn are weighted less than active searches, etc. However, what this entails is, arguably, the allocation of a monetary value to the most ephemeral of all things, namely affect – notwithstanding how, according to Graeber (2013), this should not occur. For Graeber (2013), "the value of 'values' in contrast lies precisely in their lack of equivalence; they are seen as unique, crystallized forms. They cannot and should not be converted into money. Nor can they be precisely compared to one another" (224). I say this because if we take the example of beauty videos or technical videos, a lot of the time, these videos contain information that we have seen many times over. If not actually seen, it is widely available either on YouTube or on Google and other search engines. There is nothing new in this information. Rather, I agree that the ways in which viewers relate to the YouTuber become what makes the information relevant. At the same time, vlogs are videos portraying segments of everyday life where, although one learns a lot from how other people live and negotiate life, this is also very subjective and applicable to people living in similar contexts. For others, and many viewers, it may be impactful but not applicable.

Yet YouTube and other social media convert values or make values measurable and quantifiable in order to be able to give them a value amount. This is done using analytics which have been deemed as suitable measuring tools. In this chapter, I aim to show how the product or thing of value is commodified on YouTube. I do so by tracing the evolution and development of the YouTube

Partner Program[53] (YPP), focusing on what the analytics measure and how monetisation is formalised and structured on the platform. I review changes in the business model and argue that these changes mirror changes of value within the YouTube economy. These changes highlight the shift to an economy that values perceived active engagements between content creators and users. I will show this by tracing the history of monetisation on YouTube. In doing so I will trace the different ways in which what appears to be affective value is made measurable by a process that includes observing, measuring, calculating, and then equating it with a monetary value. What I conclude is that YouTube is not quantifying affective value nor working with affective value but rather is more invested in action value. This is made evident when tracing engagement from the user's perspective to the platform and the advertiser's perspective. Whilst the development and evolution of the YPP has been a process of wanting to make affect quantifiable by assessing and giving different kinds of engagement different financial values, the result has been the solidification of action value instead. Although YouTube and the YouTube economy is entrenched in this action value it does not negate the affective connections that exist between YouTubers and users. It is instead that when there is no way of proving or measuring affect, action becomes a means for users and YouTube to seemingly commodify this affect and bring a sense to an affective economy. This chapter specifically follows YouTubers and how they make money off the platform, not how YouTube makes money off YouTubers, although these cannot be practically differentiated from each other.

According to Graeber (2001), there are three broad categories in which theories of value have been used in social theory. These are,

> 1) "values" in the sociological sense: conceptions of what is ultimately good, proper or desirable in human life 2) "value" in the economic sense: the degree to which objects are desired particularly, as measured by how much others are willing to give up to get them 3) "value" in the linguistic sense: which goes back to the structural linguistics of Ferdinand de Saussure ([1916] 1966), and might be more simply glossed as "meaningful difference." (1-2)

[53] https://support.google.com/youtube/answer/72851?hl=en accessed March 8, 2020 YouTube Help/YouTube Partner Program overview & eligibility.

Between these three categories are differences in their approaches to value as well as their definitions and meanings of value, such as: describing value as driven by society in the case of the sociological school of value, where desire and desire in relation to society are what is valuable (see Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck 1961); versus value as driven by individual activity that seeks to economise activities and outputs as seen in the economic school of value (Boas 1987; Malinowski 1922; Polanyi 1957; Sahlins 1972); or as within the linguistic framework of value where both society and individual form the basis of value as words are given meaning in society and at the same time can be individually driven (Evans-Pritchard 1950; Graeber 2001; Saussure ([1916] 1966).

Within these three areas where value is discussed, there are many theories of value that try to explain what value is, and how value is created. Most of these theories were based on comparing gift and commodity economies which either saw value driven by individual desire in commodity economies or human relations in gift economies (Graeber 2001). For example, Marx's ([1867] 1978; 1990) theory of value argues that commodity value comes from the human labour that goes into producing that commodity. He further argues that the human labour is then forgotten and that is why commodities seem to have an innate value but that this is not true. Simmel (1990) argued that the value comes from exchange which is brought on by human desire and the level of desire gives the object being exchanged value. Gift economy theories of value argue that gift economies can but are not always interested in making a profit, such as with the Kabyle where Bourdieu (1977) argues the drive is for both economic and symbolic capital. In other accounts of gift economies, there are other non-capitalist drivers such as creating social relations (Mauss 2002), creating networks of alliances (Lévi-Strauss 1969), or to create qualitative relations between people (Gregory and Strathern 2015).

In Graeber's (2001) account, Munn (1992b) advances between the gift-commodity distinction by arguing that value is a representation of action, or where one invests time, be it the production of commodities or social relations. Value is therefore formed by the action we put into what we consider most important and meaningful (Munn 1992b, thus merging both desire and human relations in a theory of value through action. This merger means that value is not derived from a singular place or

source: it can be an individual desire or a social factor or both that could be driving action. This multiplicity of the sources of value and the location of value, as well as the drive of the action that creates value, makes the concept of value dynamic and more complex in the way that it works in everyday life. Munn's work is valuable for this study because it considers value levels which are measured in how one is able to control or exert control over time and space or what she calls "intersubjective spacetime" (Graeber 2001, 44). This makes it possible to frame action(s) and value in different contexts, spaces and time in a space like YouTube where different actors come together with different goals (users, YouTube itself, and mainstream industry).

Value theory has always distinguished between commensurable and incommensurable values and has tried to theorise value as either one or the other. In doing so it has made the concept of value a dichotomous one where it is seen as one thing or the other: commensurable or incommensurable, gift economy or commodity economy, material or immaterial. Graeber (2001) and Lambek (2013) refute this framing of value by arguing that value is both "substance and relation, absolute and relative" (Lambek 2013, 142) and rather see value as a multifaceted concept. This framing of value means that I can again look at how value works in different spaces, places and times but it also allows me to think of the relation of different notions of value and values to each other. This means that for my research I can consider the ways in which people on YouTube, YouTube the company, and mainstream corporates are differently framing value and values to be able to form the monetary equivalence of values for themselves without that cancelling out the other parties' concepts of value. It is Kockelman's (2016) theory of value that states that value is in actions that encourage social interactions which I will be drawing from. This chapter will be building on Munn's work in thinking about the transformation of value through action. It will do so by looking at the different ways in which affective value is mediated by certain actions and turned into commensurable value with a monetary equivalent.

Different Streams of Income

The YouTube business model has changed over the years, not only in how YouTube engages with business but in how YouTube engages with its users and vice versa. There are three broad areas from which YouTubers can generate an income: from YouTube via advertising revenue called monetisation, what I call third parties (these include media and all other private, public or state entities), and through their own enterprises. These streams of income are not exclusive of each other. A YouTuber can earn an income from all the streams at the same time, or exclusively from one, or from two at the same time. That is dependent on the YouTuber and existing contractual obligations they might have. It is also important to recognise that when I talk about earning an income from YouTube, it is not necessarily always an income directly from YouTube but can also be external to YouTube. In the same way, an actor can earn a living off their acting work, by being a brand ambassador, through merchandising, and so forth. Although I do not focus on these other streams of income, I mention them in passing because YouTubers always comment on the ratio between YouTube income and brand income. Brand sponsorships and deals are said to bring in larger sums of income than YouTube videos, even over a long period. In an upcoming example, I show how YouTube ad revenue is calculated to illustrate this point better.

The first way to generate income is from advertising revenue from YouTube. To be able to monetise[54] your videos, you have to fulfil certain conditions. The YouTube account needs to be verified, and the YouTube account must be accepted into the YouTube Partner Program. The partner programme allows the YouTuber to monetise published content. Being accepted into the YPP has meant different things at different times, and the qualifications for verification have changed over time.

[54] By putting advertisements on the videos uploaded and possibly earning an income from those advertisements placed.

Initially, YouTube's partnership programme was between YouTube, mainstream media, corporates, and a select few YouTube content creators (Delaney and Karnitsching 2007; Official Blog).[55] However, this has changed significantly. By 2017, the updated terms of the partnership programme were far removed from the initial purpose and sought to value human engagement. I discuss this in the next section. The YPP was initially instituted as a way of dealing with copyright claims laid by traditional commercial media against YouTube, and it included removing highly contentious content[56] from the site, signing commercial distribution deals with mainstream media companies to be their content distributor, and sharing advertising revenue with selected content creators (Burgess and Green 2009; Jarrett 2008).

YouTubers also make money from third party revenue streams. These include traditional media, private and public or state entities. Within these categorisations are sponsorships, product placement, product reviews, and affiliate links. For this study, I attribute the opportunity to work with these entities to the YouTuber's social media presence and visibility. However, income need not go through YouTube. These partnerships and collaborations are negotiated outside of the platform and can include event appearances, social media posts (on the company or product), public speaking engagements, brand collaborations with companies such as make-up releases, book launches, etc. These third-party revenue streams are directly linked to the idea of YouTubers as brands or influencers who can be used to market or be marketing partners in business.

Own enterprises are any other enterprises that exist outside of YouTube such as self-owned businesses, formal or informal employment, and blogging platforms (although the latter are even harder to separate from YouTube as they tend to support each other, and content created is shared on both platforms). For my research, I did not focus on these, and I mention them in passing. I separate third party income from own enterprises as in some instances people may use YouTube to support

[55] https://youtube.googleblog.com/2007/12/partner-program-expands.html accessed August 16, 2017 YouTube Official Blog/Partner Program expands December 10, 2007.

[56] This referred to contentions based on copyright violations by YouTube creators on YouTube.

already existing enterprises, and at other times YouTube becomes the springboard from which other avenues become available for the YouTuber to branch out into. Also, self-owned businesses may not entirely depend on the existence or continuation of the YouTube channel, especially if the business has nothing to do with YouTube, already existed prior to the creation of the channel or becomes so well established that YouTube support is no longer necessary. It is, however, hard to draw a distinct line between where YouTube influence starts and where it ends in terms of these business ventures. So, in as much as I distinguish between third party revenue streams and own enterprise revenue streams, it is not an unproblematic distinction and not one that is easily made when applied to real-life situations.

Engagement: The Click and the Search for the Human

> If you are not subscribed to my/our channel, please do so and make sure you hit that bell button to get notifications every time I/we upload…don't forget to comment, like and share this video with your friends and family.

This is a running joke when I meet people and tell them I have a YouTube channel. They will say one of these or both mockingly. The above is one of many versions of frequently heard phrases on the platform. They speak to the two main accepted sources of value on the platform: a large subscriber base, and engagement that can loosely be defined as interactions on and across various social media. These actions are different depending on the social media platform but can be characterised as any action outside of watching or reading the post. On YouTube, engagement can include any, or a variation, of a wide range of actions such as Liking, Disliking, Commenting on or Sharing the video, or Subscribing to the channel. I discuss these in more detail below. These are used

to determine the influence of the YouTuber as well the affective bonds the YouTuber has with their viewers.[57]

Having a large subscriber base is, however, no longer the main basis of value online. It does not guarantee that the channel will generate large ad revenue for the YouTuber, and it does not determine the value of the channel to brands or add to negotiating power when approaching brands to work with. This is because a large subscriber base does not always equate to large views and extended views (meaning watching the whole video rather than parts of it). It shows the potential of it. A large subscriber base, although it holds no long-term value, does show a YouTuber's ability to capture an audience enough to get them to subscribe. It does not show their ability to maintain active engagement over time. Instead, engagement is the source of value on YouTube. A channel with an active, engaging viewer base holds a lot more value than a channel with an inactive but larger subscriber base. Although there are pros and cons between having a large subscriber base with no views, or more engagements with a small subscriber base, each speaks to the ability to get their viewers to commit, to being a subscriber for that YouTuber or channel. Thus, having a large subscriber base still holds some value.

Theorists have written about the value and meaning of the "Like" button on social media since the birth of Facebook. Research has gone into what it means when people click the like button (Scissors, Burke and Wengrovitz 2016), while other work has focused on the impact of these online actions, particularly to social calls and what value pressing "Like" has to a petition, for example (Ringelhan, Wollersheim and Welpe 2015). Users, on the other hand, have requested the addition of more and more icons to click on, to enable them to better or more accurately relay their reactions and opinions to posts. Today, in May of 2020, Facebook has seven icons/emojis: Thumbs up/Like, Heart, Care Face, Laughing Face, Surprised/Wow face, Crying face and an Angry Face. Yet they still refuse

[57] I differentiate between subscribers and viewers as people not subscribed to the channel also watch the videos. Hence the term viewers is used to include subscribed and not subscribed people who watch the videos on a channel.

to put a Thumbs-Down/Dislike emoji. Users on Twitter have argued for more icon space and in 2018 Twitter increased the icons from 140 characters to 280, in the vein of keeping their users happy as well as the founding premise of the app as a concise text app. YouTubers, like all online users, covet these reactions by viewers as they use these to claim the value of their channels because they are used to mark points of engagement.

The first point of engagement is by way of subscribing, which helps YouTubers build their subscriber numbers. This is not necessarily video-based. Subscribing is when a viewer decides to follow a YouTuber and become linked to that YouTuber, even if a subscription can be made public or private. A subscriber can also click on the notification bell icon, which notifies the subscriber every time a YouTuber uploads a video. Both increase the likelihood of views of videos. Once a video has been uploaded, subscribers can click on the video to watch it. When watching, they can click the "thumbs up" icon to indicate that they like the video or the "thumbs down" icon to dislike. If they are unable to watch the video directly online and have the YouTube app on their phone, they can download[58] it onto the YouTube app and watch it later. They can also comment on the video and respond to other comments. Viewers also have the option of liking (thumbs up) or disliking (thumbs down) another viewer's comment as well as responding to it. Finally, they can share the video either to other social media or via WhatsApp, email and anywhere a link to the video can be sent.

[59] Downloaded videos can be watched when offline. When watched offline they do not have adverts on them and do not count for ad revenue but still count towards number of downloads and are seen as some form of engagement.

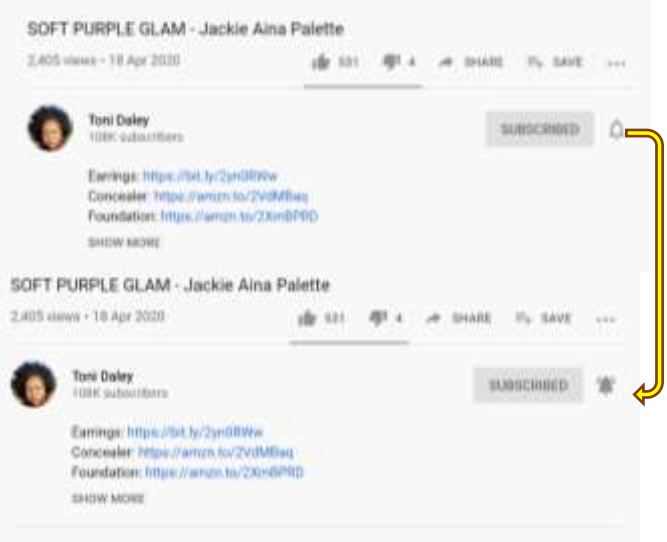


Figure E: Showing when notifications have not been enabled (top) and when they have been enabled (bottom) (screen grabbed April 18, 2020).

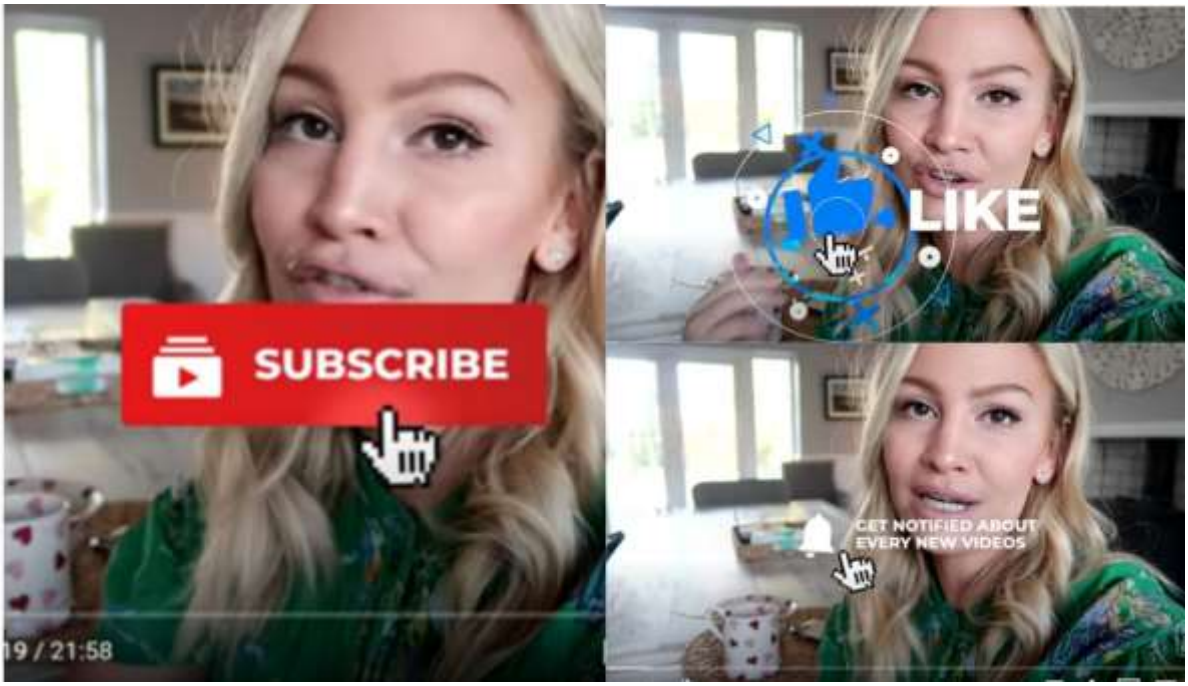


Figure F: Screenshot of one of the SACCONEJOLYs' videos asking viewers to subscribe, like and update for video notifications (screen grabbed April 19, 2020).[59]

[59] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CdIU_EhxYDE accessed April 19, 2020 YouTube/SACCONEJOLYs.

All these clicks (Liking, Disliking, Sharing, Subscribing, and Commenting) become statistics and, more importantly, engagement points. YouTubers work hard to create these moments or reasons to click. They adopt various strategies to ensure that views are followed through with a click. In a video, a YouTuber can employ various methods to get engagement clicks. For example, they could ask the viewers' opinion on something and tell them to comment below.[60] This can be for something that is going to happen or has happened already. Nikki from "Simply Nikki" asked her subscribers to comment on which shoe looks better with an outfit she was wearing. She ends the clip by saying, "so I was going to wear it with some fire highs today, but I've decided to just wear these little, short little heels instead, but I don't know. I'm thinking I might do my DD boots from Tony Bianco instead." The clip changes to the next scene where she is holding the boot to show the viewer and she says, "just these ones here…'cause I feel like they kind of go more with the vampy look…I'll try one of each and y'all tell me which one. Actually, by the time this video goes out I would have already chosen anyway, but I'll just try it with this anyways…I just wanted to show you guys and tell you where it's from cause I know someone will ask."[61] The clip changes to the next scene, where she is wearing one of each of the different shoes she is talking about, for the viewer to see and be able to comment on. In the clip, Nikki clearly states that the comments and suggestions made will have no major possibility of impacting her decision because, by the time the subscribers commented, the day would have passed and the decision would have been made already.

Interestingly, this video had 2056 comments, but I only saw two comments referring to the boots. The rest of the comments were on her choice of lipstick, her beauty/features and body, the entire outfit, her glow, her happy attitude despite her recent separation, and some even commented on how they were there for her. YouTubers can try to foreground areas of engagement, however, the response from the viewers does not always match where the YouTuber is directing the viewers. In

[61] In the comments section of the video.

[62] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PQOGUxEHdBI&t=851s accessed November 13, 2019 YouTube/Simply Nikki.

this instance, viewers were more inclined to comment on Nikki's emotional state and appearance as well as her deemed "bouncing back" after going through the emotional upheaval of a marital separation. Posting online opens you up to people commenting on all areas of your life, and even though Nikki and her still-husband (a fellow YouTuber) never went into the details of their separation other than to announce it, viewers commented on it and even that becomes a source of value, despite it not being directly brought up in the videos.



Figure G: Screenshot of Nikki's video and some of the common comment themes (screen grabbed April 19, 2020).

As much as these engagements are drivers of the YouTube economy, they are also, in essence, a search for the human. The argument can be made that the search for the human is to put human interaction into the market to be traded. Great value is placed on ensuring that YouTubers get humans interacting with their videos through different forms of engagement. At the same time, YouTubers spend a lot of time imagining the human on the other side of the camera. They do not assume they

are talking to a void. Instead, they direct their conversation to a person, as in the example with Nikki. In the clip above, Nikki imagines people on the other side of the camera. Her action may have to do with driving engagement through questions, but she is asking people at the other end of the camera. She is breaking that "fourth wall" in cinematic or theatre convention.

The fourth wall in traditional visual media is the wall between the audience and actors. Usually, the actors pretend the audience is not there, or that they are not in a film, however, when they break the fourth wall, they acknowledge the audience. They break the façade of this imaginary world crafted through performance, visuals, sound and sometimes text to envelop the viewer and keep them suspended from reality for the duration of that video. This break in the fourth wall on social media is an invitation to the audience to be part of the production as well as for the actors in some ways to be part of the audience.

In addition to YouTubers envisioning themselves as part of an imagined community, this example also illustrates how YouTubers place themselves in history as well as the future with their viewers. When Nikki says that the clip won't matter, she is noting how her videos and her viewers are located in the past and present in relation to each other. She filmed it in the past, but they are watching it in the present. When she pre-empts her viewer's questions around the products, she is involved in the act of audience marketing or that consumerist culture. At the same time, she is using previous knowledge of similar questions to meet her viewers wants.

Another example in this search for the human is the rating of videos where a thumbs-down (dislike)[62] is not necessarily a negative action as it is still an act of engagement. It rates higher on impact than a video watched and ignored or no action responding to it whether it is a like or dislike. As part of the engagement-value economy, a dislike is rated higher than a view from watching a video with no other action. It is at the same time impossible to tell what the reasons for a dislike or even a

[63] YouTube is also the only social media platform I have come across that had a dislike button. All other platforms generally stick to the Like, Share and Comment actions and variations thereof.

like are as they do not come with explanations. So, the dislike could be a general dislike for the YouTuber, or it could be related to the video content.

This search for the human is highly valued and aspired to by YouTubers and safeguarded by YouTube. Initially, when this research started, YouTube had a watch counting system that used to stop when the video reached 301 views. Many viewers would aim to watch a video before it hit this mark. Comments such as "301 club" were common by viewers who managed to watch the video before this mark YouTube used to verify legitimate versus counterfeit views after the 301 mark (Numberphile 2012).[63] This is because of how advertising revenue is priced on YouTube. It pays out after a large viewership and not per view. At the time, this freezing of viewer counts was considered a glitch by YouTube and has since been fixed. In Numberphile's video (2012) the YouTube representative explains that a view is considered a view when a user clicks on the video, watches and is satisfied with what they are watching. One of the things they look for when they assess the views at this time is for how long people watched the video. They consider a significant number of people clicking on a video watching for a few seconds and clicking out of the video as potentially counterfeit viewing in that they may have been directed to watch the video under false or misleading advertising by the YouTuber.

However, what happens when human interactions, or at least engagements, are commodified? In this chapter, I have shown how engagement is tracked and analytics used to measure affect by using points of interaction. Yet ultimately, we see that affect, as well as the video, is less important than the doing, the human action, which is used to gauge affect, and so we see how action becomes the thing of value. Tsing (2013) argues that "commodities come into being by using-and-obviating-non-capitalist social relations, human and non-human" (21). She shows how through the supply chain process goods are embedded in either social relations or commodification processes which then are

[64] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oIkhgagvrjI&list=RDCMUCoxcjq-8xIDTYp3uz647V5A&start_radio=1&t=39 accessed April 19, 2020 YouTube/Numberphile.

used to give that good a price value, such that capitalism requires non-capitalist social relations to exist. When it comes to YouTube, though, we see that from an advertiser as well as a YouTuber perspective value is engagement actions. The question then becomes what happens when the supply chain is removed and social relations become embedded in commodification processes. As in Tsing (2015), the supply chain allows times for the goods to be alienated that allows them to be commodified despite the social relations that they are embedded in throughout the supply chain process. The YouTube video does not go through a supply chain process though. It is made by the YouTuber and edited and posted by the YouTuber.[64] They do not choose which adverts will go into the video, although they can decide to monetise the video or not monetise it.

I contend that the process of filming and editing is the supply chain process: choosing what to film in the moment, how to film it as well as what to keep in the editing and what not to keep based on what the YouTuber thinks will be most liked by viewers. Yet the individual and creative cognitive labour of the YouTuber is still very much attached to that video no matter how mediated that video is. Instead, the different ways in which engagement interacts with and is read by users, the platform as well as advertisers becomes the way of changing and transforming engagement into a measurable item of value.

This is potentially why the analytics focus on the actions rather than the video content and quality of the video as that cannot be quantified outside of the feelings viewers have towards the YouTuber, which cannot be seen or measured. At the same time, then, I conclude that rather than a measurement of affect, what is being measured is action: action with unidentified meaning (referring to both the reason why the person did the action as well as the intention for the action). As has been shown, it is hard to explain the meanings of many of the analytic points although YouTube has tried to rank the actions in terms of intentional actions versus unintentional actions which have the potential of associating YouTubers and viewers with a particular person, idea or brand. Hence, dislikes or

[64] Some YouTubers do use editors and cinematographers, but this is not the norm.

likes carry less weight on YouTube than commenting on or sharing a video. They can be hidden from public view and, unlike a share, they have less range in terms of accessing other people and potential viewers. A comment is more likely to relay a person's views, or at least views they wish to share, and they also prove that someone, a person, is watching and had a response to what was said. A shared video exposes the sharer's viewing choices to the public, which means it aligns them publicly to whatever the video says, whether that be an agreement or disagreement with the video contents.

Discussed above are a few ways of engaging on YouTube with and on a video or YouTuber. These ways are observed by users(YouTubers and viewers), and they are observed and captured by the Google analytics software. This software then creates a set of data that is used to measure affective value, and then uses that to calculate affect into its monetary equivalent. Without the tracking and capturing of engagement as well as the hierarchy of engagement actions, analytics would not be able to measure these nor be able to turn them into calculable financial returns.

Measuring the Value of Engagement

Recognition, influence and legitimacy have become the new sources of value on YouTube. By changing the business model and YPP, definitions of value have been reconfigured. Using the verification and 4000 views criteria, and the concept of "Good Standing," I will illustrate the shifting meanings of value. A YouTube Channel and a YouTube Name get verified at different times in a YouTuber's career, and these verifications mean different things. The YouTube channel verification is initially to ensure that the channel belongs to a person and that the person signed up is aware that their channel exists. YouTube sends a verification email that the channel owner is supposed to confirm for verification to occur. Before 2012 and the opening up of YPP, verification came with status because it came with all the benefits, status and recognition of being chosen as a YouTube partner. Verification meant you had achieved success numbers-wise, but also that you might be at a place where someone may want to copy you, and you need to prove your channel legitimate, i.e. the

original. Once your channel had reached one-hundred thousand subscribers your channel name would get verified, reflected by a little tick next to the name [✓].

This verification held high status and was coveted on the platform as it symbolised some degree of success and recognition. Verification no longer symbolises success and status as its meaning has changed. To be verified now means that your channel has been proven to belong to a person and not a robot. Your channel is verified almost immediately after signing up. Verification[65] gives you access to all the standard tools, such as longer than fifteen-minute videos, live stream, custom thumbnails and the ability to appeal content ID claims, meaning that if you get a copyright strike against your video, you can appeal it. Content ID allows YouTube to automate the identification of copy-written content by owners (YouTube Help).[66]

Through the YPP, creators are able to get access to resources and features from YouTube, including access to creator support teams, copyright match tools and monetisation features (YouTube Help). When the YPP essentially opened up to all YouTube users in 2012, JLynnCognito (2012)[67] made a video motivating YouTubers not to be discouraged by the loss of clout received by being recognised by YouTube. His argument was about the increased competition on YouTube as all publishers now had the same tool available to them as he did. It was a loss in his status and prestige on the platform. It was also a reaction to the possible inability to generate further income or reduced income due to the opening up of the market, as well as uncertainty regarding a changing basis of value.

Value prior to this was based largely on being recognised by YouTube and then being elevated further by the status gained from that recognition, being technically supported and having further growth facilitated by YouTube. The responsibility of getting the channel recognisable shifted more

[66] https://support.google.com/youtube/answer/171664?hl=en accessed November 16, 2019 YouTube Help/Verify your YouTube account.

[66] https://support.google.com/youtube/answer/3244015?hl=en accessed November 16, 2019 YouTube Help/Using Content ID.

[67] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uHe0VSscoB0 accessed May 3, 2017 YouTube/JLynnCognito.

to the publisher while at the same time having even more competition in the process, further entrenching free-market rules on the YouTube economy. Also, recognition has further and further moved from acknowledgement by YouTube to appreciation by viewers or users. This is seen in the criteria changes from selection to thirty days active and currently 4000 hours watch time in a year. This is a major shift in perspective because what it is essentially saying is that participation on the platform is not the thing of value or a way to recognise channels. Instead, recognition and value are generated through viewership and social acknowledgement.

At the same time as shifting from activity on the platform to views, YouTube has shifted its focus and value definitions from mainly high subscriber numbers to user engagement and quality subscribers. This is in line with Arvidsson and Colleoni (2012) and Negri and Hardt (1999) who argue that value in economies of informational capitalism is based on "affect." The criteria for 4000 hours of valid[68] views imply a *kind* of activity: mainly, active engagement with the broader community excluding videos that are private, unlisted or part of TrueView campaigns. Therefore, value, as based on numbers of subscribers (quantity of interactions), is increasingly an amalgamation of the quantity *and* the engagement/interactions (quality of interactions), and more so now the value is being defined by meaningful engagements. What we see on YouTube is how meaningful engagements are being defined and how those definitions are being used to create measurements to be able to remunerate YouTubers accordingly, and for YouTubers, in turn, to earn a living off it or extract monetary income from it.

As affective economies of value grow, we see the creation of measurement tools that gauge the number of engagements as well as the quality of said engagements. There is an effort to formalise and legitimise the income made from these intangible values through these measurement tools. The formalisation occurs in a space where it cannot be fully formalised because of the intangibility of

[68] https://support.google.com/youtube/answer/72851?hl=en&ref_topic=9153826 accessed November 16, 2019 YouTube Help/YouTube Partner Program overview & eligibility.

emotion, but also the intentions/goals of the different sectors are not always mutually shared. So instead of being formalised, they are counted in occurrence, and their impact "measured," as much as it can be measured, considering there is a lot of ambiguity between what one sees and does and what one feels.

In 2009 Schepp and Schepp argued that the YPP still is generally linked to the YouTuber's having a large number of subscribers and their "standing" in the YouTube community. Even though the subscriber quantity is now mostly parallel with interactions, the meaning of "standing" in the community remains obscure and only partly defined. This may be because the different sectors (YouTubers, YouTube and corporates) have different goals/targets and intentions but also because good standing allows for an evolving adaptation and unequal applications where cases/channels can be read in context. It allows for individuality/individual creativity to draw value and also for the three sectors to intersect at different points for varying reasons even if this is between the same actors. For example, "Good Standing" for a YouTuber is between the YouTuber and their viewers, as well as with YouTube and potential advertisers.

Unlike the previously mentioned requirements, which have clearly defined boundaries and are mostly directed to YouTube, "Good Standing" enters the ambiguous territories of the immaterial although somewhat measurable or quantifiable. Being in "Good Standing" with YouTube means no copyright violations or community guideline violations. Yet good standing has also taken another meaning as of 2017. In early 2017, YouTube amended its advertising policy, resulting in massive demonetisation of previously monetised videos across the platform. Many YouTubers found their videos demonetised without any notification or explanation from YouTube. Upon further enquiry with YouTube, they found out that a request for review could be made with YouTube. Some videos were re-monetised, while other videos were not. YouTube did this despite these videos having no community or copyright guidelines. It caused major outrage within the YouTube community with

many YouTubers such as "CaseyNeistat" (2017)[69], or "Valencia's Life" (2017)[70] and many others making videos about their own experiences with YouTube on this matter. YouTube on their YouTube Help website claimed that according to their AdSense policy and guidelines:

> … [YouTube] reserves the right, at its discretion, to not show ads on videos and watch pages—including ads from certain advertisers or certain formats. This article provides some guidance about our policies and best practices to ensure your videos are eligible for advertising. We aren't telling you what to create—each and every creator on YouTube is unique and contributes to the vibrancy of YouTube. However, advertisers also have a choice about where to show their ads. As with everything related to YouTube, use your common sense, don't abuse the site, and be respectful of others. (YouTube Help)[71]

This action begged the question about the responsibility of "Good Standing" YouTube had with their users. Further considering that the majority of complainants during this period were critics of the pro-right conservative wings in American politics and moral values, the idea of what values make up "Good Standing" came to the fore. Videos that went against this political rhetoric seemed to be getting the most demonetisation. This was seen as a push to make users more compliant to mainstream media and not their own views if they wanted to continue being profitable on the platform. In many ways, it brought into question who has control and power over whom on YouTube. YouTube's demonetising already monetised videos, in some instances going so far back as to access a publisher's video archive without notifying the YouTuber, was, according to many users, in bad standing with the community.

YouTubers had to go into their archives and verify if any of their videos were demonetised because of how YouTube had chosen to handle this new "advertiser-friendly" policy. A narrative of participatory culture between YouTube, the company, and its users had long since been portrayed, although Burgess and Green (2009) and Jarrett (2008) have argued against such a simple

[70] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HZakJFqdpRY accessed October, 17 2017 YouTube/Casey Niestat.

[70] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RH-zxcmcLCU accessed October 16, 2017 YouTube/Valencia's Life.

[71] https://support.google.com/youtube/answer/6162278?hl=en accessed March 29, 2017 YouTube Help/Advertiser-friendly content guidelines.

understanding of the relationship between users and YouTube. This is highlighted by the surprise and outrage at the demonetisation of videos and advertiser-friendly policy instituted, which YouTubers have argued against without much success in reversing it. The question then becomes whose numbers matter more? From the YouTuber's perspective the advertisers count more.

This mass demonetisation of videos foregrounded assumptions of freedom of participation, creativity and speech on the platform. The argument made was that this was pushing content creators to have to conform to conservative standards to be able to make money on YouTube, meaning that representation of multiple and diverse sectors of society would be limited as the YouTuber had to conform to be financially successful. This conformity would ultimately lead to a regulated and homogenous commodified internet. Conversely, the argument is not against the monetisation or commodification[72] of the different varieties or genres of videos, which means that YouTubers are not saying that they do not want advertisers or ad revenue, but rather that they expect brands to widen their brand profiles to be more inclusive of social diversity instead of YouTubers having to conform.

In 2019, this demonetisation had a major effect on YouTube, although this was not explicitly visible. This impact could be seen in YouTubers not using technical terms (instead, using pseudonyms) for topics that may be deemed sensitive; for example, body parts when talking about reproductive health/issues. YouTubers who used to do a lot of special effects make-up no longer do so as it tends to be demonetised or seen to be placed negatively on the YouTube algorithm. YouTubers are avoiding certain topics altogether. Although this may not be visible to a new subscriber, a subscriber who has been on the platform for longer or a subscriber who subscribed to channels that dealt with controversial topics, or health channels or these special effect make-up channels can readily see and feel the impact of these changes. Probably more important is the lack of visible impact of these changes; the normalcy of an absence of or reduction in certain content is possibly even more

[72] For this section of the research, I use the Marxist terms to define commodification, which is seen to be the process of bringing in labour and services that existed outside of the market into the market (Marx [1867] 1978).

alarming as this is harder to quantify or speak to. On top of this, newly enforced child advertising policies have led to more channels having their comments shut off. Specifically, this has affected family channels which are more likely to be viewed by children under the age of thirteen years old, as well as content produced for children under thirteen years old. This impact and the ways of negotiating the lack of viewer interaction will need further study and are beyond the scope of this research.

Calculating the Value of Engagement

YouTubers, in return, have stated that the money made from advertising revenue is not as much as it is perceived to be and that the bulk of their income is made from third party business deals. Advertisement revenue is the only source of income facilitated directly through YouTube. All other sources of income depend on third party agreements between the YouTuber and a company or individual outside of YouTube. The amount of income one can earn from a YouTube advert is based on a calculation of the number of views per thousand, known as Cost Per Thousand (CPM). The views are monetised, meaning per thousand views of the advert and not the video, and so YouTubers are paid based on how many adverts were watched and not how many videos were watched.[73]

- 45% YouTube share

$$\frac{\text{Video Views}}{1000} \div \frac{1}{2} \times \text{R10 (ad value per CPM)} \times 55\% \text{ YouTuber percentage} = \text{Total income}$$

½ (skipped or unwatched ads) is a generalised assumption that at least half the videos will have their adverts unwatched – it could be more, it could be less.

$$\frac{5\,000\,000}{1000} \times 5 \times 55\% = \text{R13 750 Total income, if divided by 2 for skipped ads total} = \textbf{R6875}$$

Figure H: Table replicated from video showing how YouTube advert revenue is calculated. Adapted from ProfessorPuppet (2014).

[73] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=diPHM0l8zFU accessed May 20, 2016 YouTube/ ProfessorPuppet.

The CPM rate is different from the ad revenue or the cost of the adverts before any deductions have been made. So YouTubers look at their estimated ad revenue, which revenue after the deductions by YouTube included calculated CPM. CPM is not calculated automatically by the presence of an advert on a video. Instead, it requires the viewer of the video to watch the advert for the revenue to apply. For example, when you click on a monetised video, an advert will start playing. After about a few seconds there will be a "Skip ads" icon that pops up on the screen. If the subscribers continue to watch that advert, then that view goes towards the CPM count. If they click on the "Skip ads" icon, then that view is not considered a revenue-generating view. The more people click on the adverts, and the longer they watch, the more revenue can be made from that advert. All of this viewership and clicks on adverts is captured on the analytics page of the channel.

Ad revenue is also not standard across the platform. The value of an advert is different depending on various factors, such as the country an advert played in, the type of advert (for example, a skip-abled advert has a different value to a display advert), the time of year, and so on. This is different from different brands' adverts having varying value. It means that a brand advert can equal a different value amount in one country as opposed to another country. It also means that adverts in certain industries have more value than adverts in others. Similarly, some brand associations have greater status than other brands. Therefore, if a well-established brand advertises on your channel, it will carry more status and recognition than less established brands. Every YouTuber has an analytics page that captures all of their data, from the demographic details of their viewers and subscribers to the viewing behaviours of, and number of engagements with, the viewers and subscribers. For example, it can tell you how many people liked a video, and the average watch time of each video.

At the same time, companies are not able to choose the videos their adverts will go on. That choice is done via the YouTube algorithm. The algorithm places the adverts based on the video descriptors as well as tags that are inserted by YouTubers. It must be noted that CPM is not the full measure of the value of your channel. That comes from your engagements. While CPM calculates ad

revenue, analytics also help to calculate engagement, and it is this engagement that gives your channel value for those third-party partnerships I described earlier.

Let's Monetise Affect

The YPP started in 2007. To date, there are currently ninety-seven countries on the programme (YouTube Help 2017).[74] The criteria for partnership from 2012 up until 2017 were on the condition that the YouTuber was of good standing with YouTube (good standing especially when it came to copyright violations and the rest of YouTube's policies, terms and conditions); the YouTuber had to be 18 years or older; the channel had to have been active for over thirty days; and the channel had to be verified (Drost Video 2013).[75] On April 18, 2017, the thirty-day active channel requirement was amended, and currently, the requirement is that the channel must have 1000 subscribers and 4000 valid public watch hours over the last twelve-month period to start applying and be accepted into the partnership programme (YouTube Help 2013).[76]

[74] https://support.google.com/youtube/answer/7101720 accessed August 17, 2017 YouTube/YouTube Partner Program availability.

[75] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FrjlnygHhPQ accessed November 15, 2019 YouTube/Drost Video.

[76] https://support.google.com/youtube/answer/72851?hl=en-GB&ref_topic=6029709 accessed August 20, 2017 YouTube Help/YouTube Partner Programme overview and eligibility.

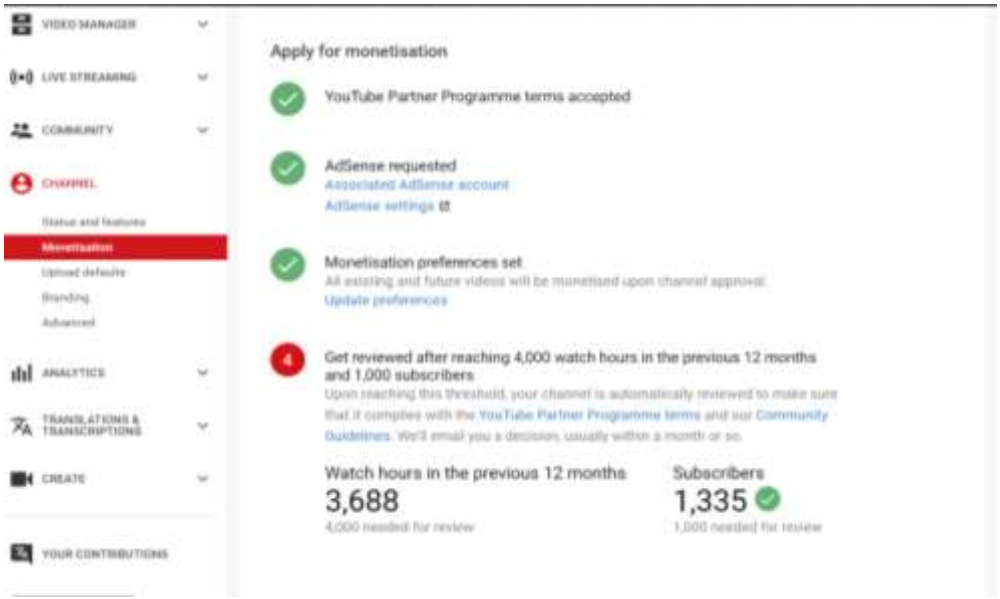


Figure I: Screenshot of "Hey Gabster" YouTube back end monetisation page, detailing monetisation requirements and current status of "Hey Gabster" channel (screen grabbed March 11, 2019).

This is not the first change that has occurred in the partnership programme. It has been amended and has evolved over the years and extended to more and more countries worldwide. The process has moved from entrance by invitation in 2007, to being open to all applicants from 2012 until now (Creator Blog 2012).[77] When the programme was first introduced YouTubers invited into the partnership were considered the cream of the crop of YouTube. With a large subscriber base, they held a high status within the YouTube community, on top of which they received perks from YouTube such as the ability to customise thumbnails, the ability to put personalised channel banners on their page, live streaming, to be part of a YouTube network also called Multi-Channel Network (MCN), the ability to monetise videos, and added technical support and almost mentoring from YouTube, which set them and their channels apart from the rest of the other YouTube channels.

There were changes in 2012 when YouTube extended the programme to twenty additional countries, and they opened up the programme to creators who wanted to join rather than by invitation. The criteria became more formalised and procedural, focusing more on copyright regulation and good

[77] https://youtube-creators.googleblog.com/2012/04/being-youtube-creator-just-got-even.html accessed August 15, 2017 YouTube Creator Blog/Being a YouTube Creator Just Got Even More Rewarding.

community standing. The perks that were associated with the 2007 partner programme became standard to all YouTubers' channels who had their account verified. The only difference is that partners have the option to monetise their videos.

Once an account has met the YPP criteria, its owner is then able to monetise their videos. To do so, they must set up an AdSense account with Google and link it to their YouTube channel. Then they must enable monetisation on the channel and set preferences, for example, when they want to get paid. The minimum amount that can be paid out is $100, but if you prefer it higher, you can customise it. The payment schedule, for example, can be daily, weekly, monthly, or bi-monthly and is also customisable. Lastly, YouTube reviews the channel and enables monetisation if all terms and conditions are met (YouTube Help).[78] Notice that in figure I from 2019, the channel does not have monetisation as it did not meet the new requirements set in 2017 after the picture in figure J was taken.

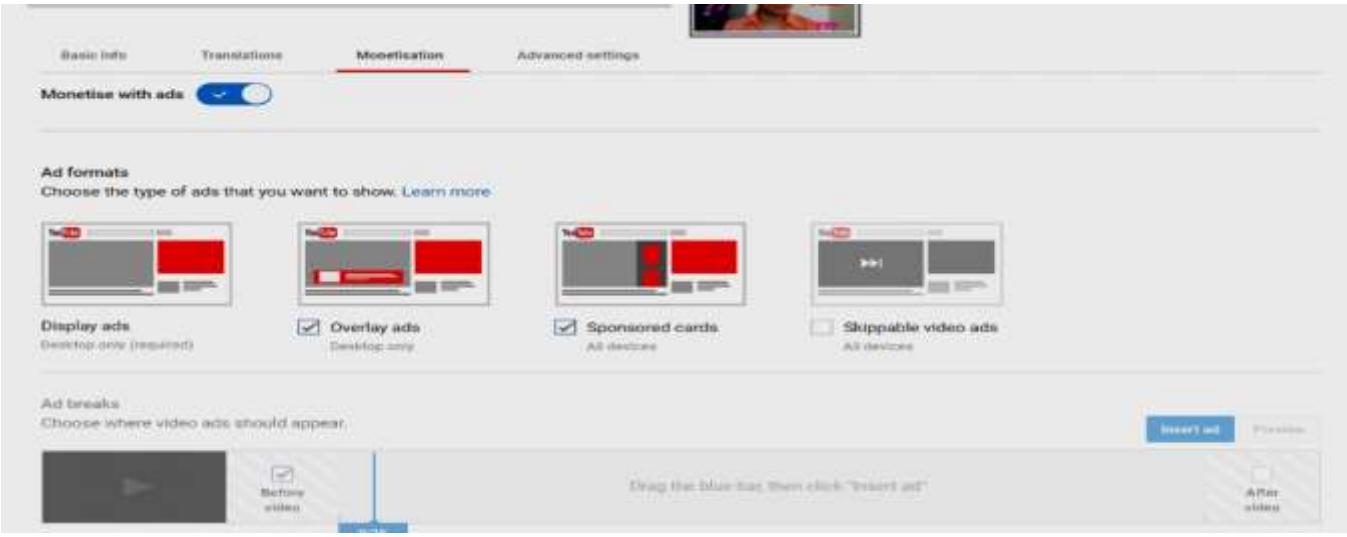


Figure J: Screenshot of a video being monetised from "Hey Gabster" YouTube channel creator studio (screen grabbed August 22, 2017).

[78] https://support.google.com/youtube/answer/72857?hl=en accessed August 22, 2017 YouTube Help/How to earn money on YouTube.

The changing procedures for getting into the YPP reflect the changes that YouTube has gone through in its business model. YouTube started as a video sharing site, and has currently set itself up as and is seen as a platform of self-expression and a model for participatory culture as we see in the evolution of their tagline from "Your Digital Video Repository," to "Broadcast Yourself" (Grossman 2006). These changes in the business model were in line with the growing focus on participatory media culture, which includes User Generated Content (UGC) and, presently, Professionally Generated Content (PGC). The changes in criteria from an unclear selection process – as Schepp and Schepp (2009) put it, a selection process "shrouded in secrecy" (155) – to an open online application that anyone can apply to, changes how YouTube and online video posting are viewed.

The relatively clear guidelines and processes allowed for individuals to pursue entrepreneurial goals on YouTube. An open call to monetise meant that people could imagine having their videos monetised and that with the explicit terms for achieving partnership, they knew what it required to move from an imagined monetisation to an actual generation of income from their videos. It was no longer about being favoured by YouTube; it was attainable to anyone who met the criteria. It also placed the responsibility and ability to make money on the YouTubers rather than on the platform (YouTube). It became about the YouTuber's ability to make the most of their online activity, by growing their subscriber base, growing views and engagement on their channel. This was later used to quantify, demonstrate and rationalise, as well as assess value, particularly when approaching brands and when other monetary opportunities presented themselves.

Monetisation changed and highlighted the commercial potential of YouTube content, and it was later an incentive for the further professionalisation of YouTube (Jarrett 2008; Kim 2012; Morreale 2014). It can also be said that it served as an incentive for publishers not to break copyright regulations with the hopes of being included in the partnership programme. Monetisation meant that there was potential for revenue, so YouTube became a business platform for all publishers as opposed to just for the mainstream industry and YouTube itself. This puts these three sectors in an economy in relationships which have previously not existed. This relationship binds user content to mainstream

laws, whilst giving economic reward to prosumers who were previously considered exploited labour (Andrejevic 2008; Arvidsson 2008; Fuchs and Sevignani 2013; Ross 2009; Scholz 2008). It also meant that the three sectors needed to find ways of working despite their varying intentions and values.

YouTube had to conform to advertising requirements after a few high-profile court cases that impacted their revenue and business profile. Similarly, when a YouTuber monetises a video, they are subject to copyright laws that regulate the amount of copy-written material that they can use, and still earn an income. Conversely, a non-monetised video can use over and above that allocated amount of material and they are not under any obligation to credit the original content although it is preferred. Instead of publishers only sharing videos and uploading content, they are now inadvertently allowing corporations to have a say in their video content through the value of ads placed on particular video titles. Content creators and corporations now have the chance to determine the financial value of the video through these adverts, unlike publishers who upload videos without monetising them. Theirs is an indirect relationship with mainstream corporations and thus less binding to the other because there is no financial gain attached to it.

When YouTube adopted copyright policy and opened up ad revenue to all its publishers, they essentially created a structure to facilitate the entry and participation of YouTubers in the formal economy. At the same time, by basing the partnership programme and monetisation on views via watched hours, it put the responsibility of being commercially successful on the YouTubers. Their commercial success was based on the ability to grow and maintain a subscriber base, viewership, and as I will show later, on engagement rather than on the kind of video content or video production quality. With the progression of the YPP, we see YouTube seemingly having a less and less hands-on approach[79] to channels and the development of channels, making the relationship between

[79] YouTube does provide a YouTube consultant for larger YouTubers with over 10 000 subscribers. They do not run the channel but rather explain and give insight on YouTube processes and policy.

YouTube and its publishers top-down. For example, being accepted into the YPP originally meant that you were picked out from all other publishers and identified as exceptional in some way, and this then gave YPP participants status within the YouTube community. This, added with the benefits of longer videos, customised thumbnails, channel banners and MCN partnerships, meant that your channel received intangible endorsement and further had a comparative advantage in making it better than channels not on the partnership programme. This almost ensured the continued success of that chosen channel over other non-partnered channels. YouTube was directly involved in overseeing these chosen channels. This hands-on management has been reduced in the current model as most YouTubers start off with the same access and tools on the platform. The only restrictions are the ability to monetise your video, live stream and the YouTube Partner manager appointed to work with you by YouTube once you have one-hundred thousand followers. This means that YouTube broadened and opened up the platform.

Free markets and free trade are deceiving terms, as they do not mean that there is no regulation of these markets and trades. Instead, it has been noted (see Sennett 1997) that these market and trade regulations are replaced by a difference in what is regulated, who is regulated, and who regulates. YouTube changed its YPP benefits from focusing on regulation and enhancing the performance of individual channels. The benefits became more interaction-based on more of the soft rewards, for example, a plaque for reaching certain subscriber milestones, having your channel name verified, and growing and mentoring the publisher into a YouTuber (or giving them more opportunities and allowing them to become more professionalised and industry-acknowledged/recognised). These changes allow for the growing recognition, influence and legitimacy of the YouTuber.

1-1000 Graphite	1000-10K Opal	10K-100K Bronze	100K+ Silver
• Manage your channel with Creator Studio • Get help when you need it • Learn with the Creator Academy	• Join a Creator Day to meet and learn alongside other creators • Visit a YouTube Space event or workshop near you • Attend local meetups and get to know creators in your area	• Join the channel consultation programme • Become eligible for the YouTube NextUp contest • Unlock production access at YouTube Spaces • Become a YouTube Ambassador	• Redeem your Creator Award (the next award is at 1 million) • Claim your spot in the Creator Hall of Fame • Access exclusive events • Get your very own partner manager

Figure K: Creator Benefit Levels **(**YouTube Creators accessed August 22, 2017).[80]

This ranking of actions and analytics searches for the human at the other end of the screen but it also does what Vicanne Adams (2016) has argued about public health statistical data, which is that it has been integrated into commercial business and that their value is not about how they relate to public health and the interventions but how they can be used to create other business opportunities. Similarly, the Google Analytic algorithm works with analytics to show you what is most relevant to you (Mendenhall 2018), meaning that the action involved works to further embed you in the brand networks you are already in as well as the same communities and ideas, rather than to expand your exposure.

This is important as it serves to create the boundaries of your social and consumption networks and ultimately make you visible as a potential consumer. As has been noted, statistics do not give meaning to data, nor can they measure the quality of the data. Their real purpose instead is to merge

[80] https://www.youtube.com/intl/en-GB/creators/benefits/ accessed August 22, 2017 YouTube Creators/Creator Benefit Levels.

the affect to the commercial economy (Meyer and Rowan 1977). The meanings that have been given to analytics have been as gauges to the meaningfulness of interactions and affective bonds between YouTubers and their viewers. In doing so, analytics have put that which Graeber 2013, said could not be converted into money into a money market. I have shown that despite the best efforts of analytics to capture these affective bonds they are not able to do so, therefore, they instead seek to identify and define the human at the end of the computer. More than that, they also seek to then define what meaningful human interaction is, but they have also made being human and being identifiable as human a source of economic value.

These forms of measurement and ranking systems of actions have ultimately not been able to standardise affect calculated to monetary value. As stated earlier, many YouTubers make the bulk sum of their monetary value from other revenue streams and not directly from the ad revenue on YouTube. Yet it is in this area that many YouTubers have a hard time valuing their work. The worth of the work they do, the actual value proposition of what they do remains unquantifiable. This is because the creative process of making a video is relative and hidden. The quality of the video cannot always be measured in production quality but also in terms of the "connection" it makes with its viewers, which is also unquantifiable. It is, further, unclear how one goes about rating intimacy and emotional attachment, especially when the post, although it is meant to elicit sales, is also meant to elicit brand trust and loyalty, which can be more valuable than a single sale. There are "standard" systems of rating that many want to be able to use, at the same time these systems have the potential of limiting monetary income in as much as they can serve to protect YouTubers from underpayment. There are also online sites and apps that YouTubers and other social media creators can use to see what rates they can charge.

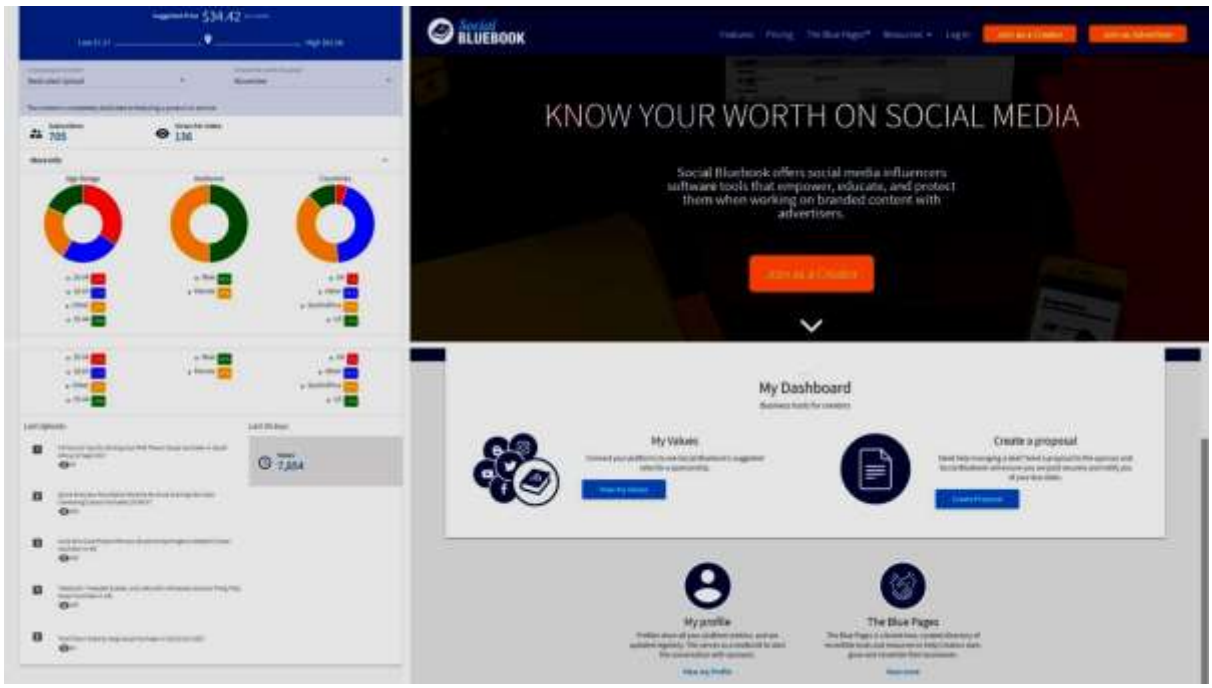


Figure L: Screenshot of "Hey Gabster" Social Blue Book page and statistics (screen grabbed November 18, 2019). [81]

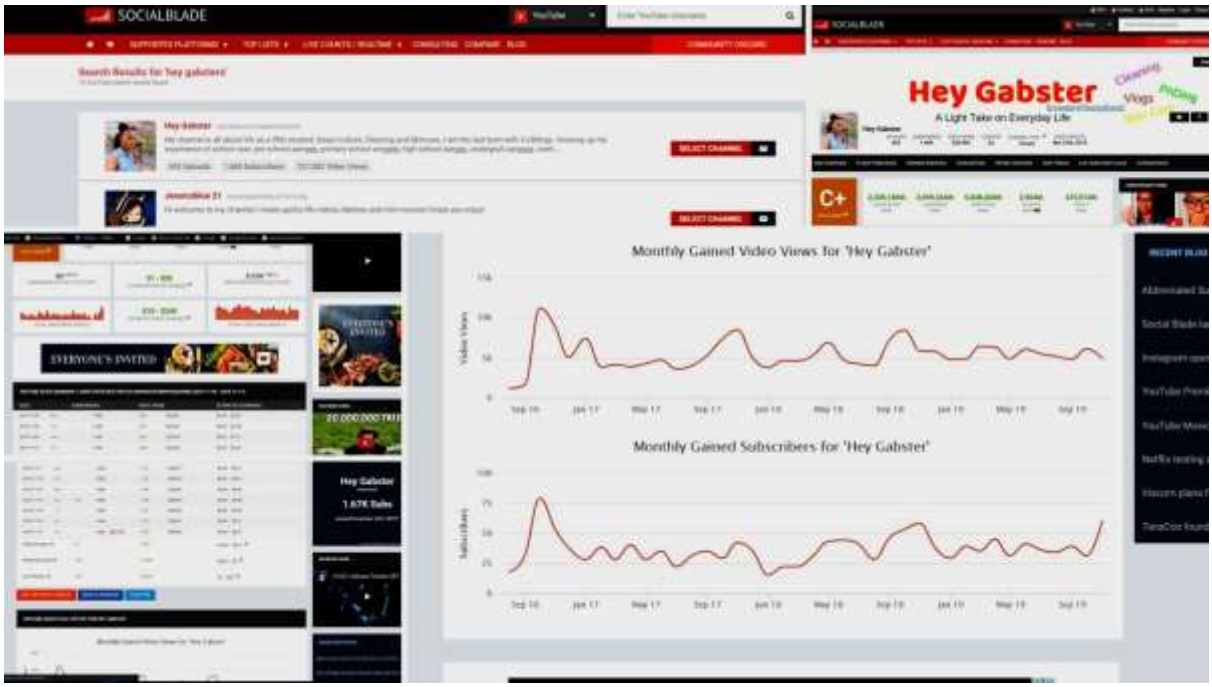


Figure M: Screenshot of "Hey Gabster" Social Blade page and statistics (screen grabbed November 18, 2019). [82]

[81] https://home.socialbluebook.com/ accessed November 19, 2019 Social Blue Book.

[82] https://socialblade.com/youtube/channel/UCv-M9iwVic81obNVH2QvdmQ accessed November 18, 2019 Social Blade

Figure J, above, is information on value pulled from my Social Blue Book account. It is an online platform used by online creators and advertisers to find each other for possible brand collaborations. It also shows the analytics of the creator whilst showing possible campaigns advertisers and brands have at the moment. The platform pulls analytic data information from the creator's social media and works out values/rates that the creator should be charging. It also allows the YouTuber to create and send proposals for collaborations to advertisers/brands via the platform where the advertisers can see their analytical/engagement value to decide if they should work with them. Figure K is Social Blade, a site open to the public. You can search for any creator by using their handle. It is public information and you do not need to log in or get an account with them to access this information. Social Blade also allows you to compare up to three creator profiles at the same time next to each other.

When I started doing this research, I wondered how to make sense of the numbers on YouTube. So much depends on them. Viewers make judgements about YouTubers based on their numbers, sometimes commenting on how "they no longer interact with subscribers now that they are big."[83] Interactions and behaviours are associated with YouTubers based on their numbers. YouTubers use these numbers to make a profit; YouTube uses these numbers to grow their platform further and as Mau (2019) has argued, numbers are used to "quantify aspects of social" life and "establish and ascribe social worth" (1).

My initial reaction was to say that the numbers ultimately mean nothing. That rather, the need to create numbers is to give value to something that holds no commercial value as it is even hard to define as a product because it is not clear how we can define what has been produced. However, through the understanding and valuing of numbers by YouTubes policy, the visibility they provide YouTubers to advertisers and ultimately how they link to human action and engagement, I have come to understand the importance of numbers. Not only in their accumulation but in their form and the

[83] "Big" meaning having a large subscriber base.

ways they are treated and understood by the different become the way to transform and mediate one form of value (affect) to monetary value. However, they do not do this by doing what numbers do, which is in essence to measure and make whatever is being measured comparable. Yes, one can measure likes, the number of engagements, the subscribers, and all of those clicks, as well as compare YouTubers' videos to each other or compare a YouTuber to another YouTuber. However, it is not possible to quantify these in any standard manner nor apply these measurements with any sort of uniformity. The numbers at the end of the day mean very little. When views can trump subscribers, and watch time can trump subscribers and views, there is no basis on which these numbers hold any integral or innate value. They provide a sense of reality and concreteness in a very magical industry. For example, this is why viewers can ask their favourite YouTuber for a recipe on how to make spaghetti bolognese when there are hundreds of videos using many varieties of ingredients and cooking methods to choose from. The value is not in learning how to make spaghetti bolognese it is in how the specific YouTuber you are following makes it. Similarly, you can also ask twenty or however many other YouTubers the same question and it would not make the information any more or less useful than if you had asked only one. There are times when you watch a video and you learn something new. That is not the argument.

The argument is that YouTuber videos do not serve to provide information as their base point. They are about sharing. They are about recognising your impact on another life and their impact on yours. The search for the human is by far the most non-human thing about YouTube, as it breaks down human interaction into calculable moments, but it is also the most telling. It is the reason why YouTubers and viewers spend so much time trying to verify authenticity, authenticity of intention and authenticity of human interaction. As Khamis, Ang and Welling (2016, 3) have argued, human brands are more than just a persona involved in marketing a product; more than that, a "human brand can now bring his or her own audience into the equation." This then leads to the next question: How are these online communities sustained and what do they mean considering that they are produced as part of a commodification process?

Chapter 5: Dispelling Suspicion, Making Online Communities

Hi guys, welcome back to my channel, it's your girl Jackie Aina. I'm going to get right to it. I talked about this on Snapchat two nights ago and I know if I don't film this video, as I said I would, I would probably forget and not do it. Anyways we are going to chat a little. We are going to get very real about sponsored content: coupon codes, affiliate links, all the deal. They all kind of fall under the same umbrella if you think about it. I had to make this make-up related so I figured, might as well make this a Get Ready With Me [GRWM]. If I seem a little bit mellowed out, a little chill than usual, it's because I had planned to film this video then mother nature was like "oohhh, surprise mother sucker." So um, I'm feeling a way about that. I mean really feeling a way kind of cramps and stuff. By the way, I am also going to be using some new stuff, so I'll be plugging that in and talking about it as we go.

Before we get into it, if you don't already know what this!!! Yaahhhhh, I haven't effectively announced this to you as yet, but I will. I'll be using my Sigma brush set. Yes, you heard that correctly. I am coming out with a brush collection with Sigma, so you will see that splashed throughout. I'm going to be starting out with my Lancôme stick foundation in beige. A really, good stick foundation. Anyways what prompted this video for me was my last Sephora haul video which had more comments than normal about using affiliate links. If you are new to my channel, hi again, I am Jackie Aina. I have been doing beauty tutorials since 2009. My channel has always been about beauty and I have had a very specific focus on beauty and women of colour. It has taken me a very long time to build, basically this empire, into what it is today. I enjoy YouTube now just as much as I used to. It's changed. It has changed a lot. So if you are new, let me just backtrack. Basically, I went on a bit of a rant on Snapchat the other day…especially when I am passionate about something. I was basically talking about how I was a little bit annoyed about a lot of the backlash people typically get for using affiliate links. One, because it is not a new concept. Two, it has made YouTube into a community of "who can I trust?", "who should I trust?" and I feel like if you are not going to trust someone, it shouldn't take a drama channel telling you "hey do not trust them" for you to do it, you know. I kind of feel there's other outside reasons and influences why you would want to question the integrity of a YouTuber when it comes to sponsored content, affiliate links, coupon codes.

The next thing that I want to say is that I am not mad at the drama channels that are exposing a lot of the dishonesty that goes on in YouTube, mainly in the beauty community. I am not mad at the channels. What I do find a bit irritating is how the information gets taken and… [talks about a concealer] …A lot of these drama channels which are very entertaining, I watch them, they come with the information. It is interesting to see a new genre come to light on YouTube. I don't blame them for what they do. I do not always agree on how they go about taking on different topics. I will definitely say that. Sometimes it can be very aggressive, and I don't agree with that necessarily. And a lot of these drama channels create content that is… What I do find very annoying is a lot of people are taking their content as like biblical and we are not enjoying it responsibly. I will give an example. My Sephora haul; I put affiliate links for every product I used in the video. I will give you 100% honesty; I always have, and I think that has to do with why my channel is where it is today. You have got to be out of your mind if you think with the amount of time I put into the content that I

create, the money that goes into this equipment, the stuff that I buy to try and review for you guys as viewers. You have got to be out of your mind if you think we should do this for good merit and not reap any benefits.

So, I did the Sephora haul, and I got more comments than I usually do of people basically saying "argh, typical, you used affiliate links." And it wasn't like that were saying "Jackie, you used affiliate links, do you have any type of relationships with the brand?" It was just people complaining that there were affiliate links in the description box. With no background, with nothing. You gave me nothing else to work with. So, I am going to assume you do not like me making a commission out of people purchasing products. One lost your mind if you think I do not deserve a commission on things that I recommend. For one if you buy a car like the person makes a commission. When you walk into the office do they tell you "hey, I'm making a commission out of this just letting you know…It might be between ten and fifteen thousand dollars" depending on the value of the car. I am not trying to be defensive, I am just hyped. The beauty industry is not the only industry that makes commission when people buy. With that being said, it is very important to disclose.

It's like I am seeing a lot of comments online saying we need to disclose when we use affiliate links and when we do, people still get mad. It's like "do you want me to tell you the truth or now can you handle the truth?" Obviously, I am being very specific, because I know most of you guys do not have a problem with me using affiliate links posting sponsored content and you know, "making the coint." You guys have been nothing but extremely supportive, but there will always be that select few. I am not sure if it is because I recently hit a million [subscribers] so I have a lot of new people who are still trying to figure out my character. But I have never needed to prove how honest I am. I feel like, first of all, that's where your track record comes in. I got a comment the other day, and I picture her yelling because it was all in caps and it said "YOU NEED TO DISCLOSE YOUR RELATIONSHIPS AND YOU NEED TO DISCLOSE YOUR AFFILIATE LINKS" or something like that. And I was like, one "I don't know who you talking to but it ain't me. I don't know why you are yelling ma'am my disclaimer says, 'affiliate links are used'" and apparently for a couple of people that was not being open enough. That I am supposed to dive and open up more about what that means. I am not sure in what capacity but, I'm not saying this to be negative. If you see in the disclaimer say affiliate links are used and you wonder "hmm I wonder what that means," it takes like two minutes to google. Like I can't, you help me and I'll help you, because there is nothing that says that says you have to describe in great depth what affiliate links…it says affiliate links are used. Legally that is disclosing, that is me being open and honest.

A lot of people assume that because we get stuff for free our opinions are biased. Do y'all actually think we get that excited over lipstick. I don't think you understand. If it is not L'Oréal it will be Maybelline, if it's not Maybelline it will be Lancôme. I will get stuff either way. So when people say that it is a little insulting, because one, I can buy lipstick on my own. I don't need it to be given to me. Not at this point in my career. I have enough relationships with those brands, and I get it everyone starts from somewhere and including me. And the whole PR thing is still fairly new but for you to insinuate that I would get that excited for one free lipstick when I could just buy, and I do that anyways, it's like do you really think I am that thirsty? That my loyalty lies with sucking up to them before being open and honest with you guys. So I am really not a fan with that logic. Not at my volume not at where I am with my career. Especially when I have such a great relationship with so many brands for you to say I have to say good things. No, the hell I don't. (Jackie Aina 2017).

This is a part of a video transcript of beauty YouTuber Jackie Aina from her video titled "The Truth About Sponsored Videos/Coupon Codes? RANT/GRWM" | Jackie Aina[84] on March 10, 2017, from her self-named "Jackie Aina" channel. The video was made in reaction to a previous Sephora[85] haul[86] video she had posted where she was getting negative comments for her use of affiliate links. YouTubers use affiliate links to earn commission on products sold using their links. The price doesn't change for the consumer whether an affiliate link was used or not, however, the YouTuber gets commission on that sale. Consumers must purchase the product using that link in order for the commission to be made. These affiliate links are not dependent on the YouTuber having working relationships with the brands of products they are using. Some companies have a sign-up option where "anyone" can sign up and get an affiliate link to share. This is important because viewers see it as speaking to the intentions and drives of the YouTuber as to whether they are doing it as a "passive" form of income generation or they are working with a brand to promote and sell those products with affiliate links. Similarly, coupon codes can work in a similar manner, however, there the YouTuber might need to contact the company and ask for a coupon code that allows a particular percentage off for anyone who uses that code. These are sometimes limited to a certain number of people or are date-based. Both these forms of income generation do not rely on lasting relationships with brands. They are seen more as passive income, and less about particular brand promotion. At the same time, despite the negativity that Jackie Aina received she is also still releasing a brand collaboration, her brush set with Sigma, whilst talking about other beauty and make-up brands. This highlights the entangled web of branding, social and financial economies of users, viewers, consumers and sellers that make up YouTube communities and monetisation within these YouTube communities. The negativity Jackie

[84] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FQPeK9RaLT0 accessed March 10, 2017 YouTube/Jackie Aina.

[85] Sephora is a popular make-up shop found in the United States of America as well as other European countries.

[86] Haul videos are when YouTubers show recent purchases made or gifts received. They are generally characterised by a large quantity of goods or products. YouTubers will also refer to hauls when a few items are used but that is generally done within a video focused on something else. Haul-specific videos require at least more than five items.

Aina received from the Sephora haul video highlights the complicated nature of these online communities. This shows the suspicion that monetisation on YouTube has brought. YouTubers' actions are now looked upon with suspicion.

This suspicion is based on the monetisation of videos and the advertising of products built into YouTubing. For example, in the video, Jacki Aina is discussing reservations viewers had about her and her use of affiliate links. In the video, she is making claims about who she is, her intentions on YouTube, her integrity and the authenticity, and transparency she has with her viewers. In the same video, she is advertising her new collaboration with Sigma brushes. She also discusses the beauty products she is using in the video, which is both informative and potentially a brand relationship building and maintenance exercise.

Suspicion on the internet is not only reserved for social media influencers. Whilst there was a strong techno positivist movement in the early years of the internet (see McLuhan (1973) who argued that the medium is the message or Nicolas Negropointe (1995) who said the world is as much bits as it is atoms), there is also a long history of suspicion *of* the internet and *on* the internet (Naughton 2016). With technological advances, there has been great excitement about the impact of this technology on everyday life, such as easier communication, faster service delivery, the sense of the global village, access to knowledge and many other things (Naughton 2016). Parallel to this has been a general anxiety caused by advancing "modernity" – trying to understand what it is, and what it means for society (Hearn 2010). The early mistrust of online communication and the unseen person has continued onto social media platforms and amongst social media users. This suspicion is not surprising given the context, as we are constantly warned about aspects such as internet scams. There are even TED Talks on scamming the scammers, catfishing, and hackers. On top of that, much discourse suggests that instead of bridging the inequalities gap and building active civic societies online, the internet has contributed to the breakdown of the social, towards fostering individuated societies. Yet we still post. We post every day and YouTubers post a lot more regularly, widely and a lot more "publicly" on many aspects of their lives.

Within the YouTubing influencing world, most of the scepticism presents itself in terms of subscribers being suspicious of YouTubers even though suspicion can also be directed towards the viewers by YouTubers. When directed towards YouTubers or influencers, the suspicion is considered or framed in relation to YouTubers potentially misleading or lying to their viewers for their own commercial gain. On the other hand, suspicion and mistrust of viewers by YouTubers are generally framed in relation to viewers' disregard of privacy and space, and sometimes, in relation to physical safety and potential harassment online and in person. Thus, suspicion and mistrust on YouTube and in social media influencing are always present. Disregarding this element in social media interactions and engagements underplays the important role that suspicion and the dispelling of suspicion plays in setting up and establishing online communities. In this chapter, I show how this is the case and how the work of actively dispelling suspicion manages to create a sense of online community. I argue that collective memory, intimate knowledge and the digital footprint become the main ways in which suspicion is dispelled, and online communities are formed and maintained.

Within all areas of life, including academia, politics, religion, popular culture and socially it has largely been assumed that trust is a "good and necessary" part of life for both the individual and society, essential for holding together the social fabric (Bok 1978; Carey 2017; Lewis and Weigert 1985; Möllering 2001; cf. Simmel 1906). The history of trust has been a central theoretical concept of focus in academia in recent years. Although it has been an underlying assumption in classical theoretical texts, it was only in Simmel's work that it took prominence. In the early years of contemporary research and theorising on trust, the study of the issue was dominated by sociology and psychology. Within sociology, much of the literature has been on the relationship between trust and social capital (Putnam 1995), trust and cooperation (Gambetta 1988), and the functionality of trust Lunham (1979b). Within psychology, the literature was on the role of trust in risky behaviour (Coleman 1990), and the perceptions and attitudes towards trust Simpson (2007). There has been a shift towards questioning the concept of trust itself, thus going beyond thinking about the functions of trust to the means of reproducing trust (Lewicki and Bunker 1996; Zucker 1986). By doing so trust

becomes a lot more than a functional output of society something that is entrenched in many areas and layers of society. This further underpins the assumption in all the literature that views trust as not only a way of viewing the world, but of being in the world. The basis on which we view the world and have expectations of certain behaviours and outcomes is familiarity, in the process thus limiting possible futures and outcomes as that familiarity and viewpoint becomes centred around limited possible outcomes (Carey 2017, 9-11; Luhmann 1979a, 10).

Conversely, mistrust has been viewed negatively and ultimately seen as destructive to the individual and society because it is thought to breed confusion, isolation and lack of communication, which causes a breakdown in interpersonal and professional relationships, not to mention society in general (Banfield 1958). Within this notion of mistrust lie other concepts such as uncertainty and suspicion, of which, I will be discussing suspicion in this chapter. Psychologists have defined suspicion as entertaining alternative interpretations of behaviour, a situation, or motives whilst having the potential to have different and even opposite meanings (Fein 1996; Fein and Hilton 1994; Reeder 2009). Using suspicion and not uncertainty as the framework for this chapter allows for alternative interpretations of YouTubers by their viewers. Suspicion as a framework allows room to question and consider multiple possible alternative outcomes and even multiple applicable alternatives or truths because suspicion is essentially a question of a scenario, person or thing. It allows for the interpretation that many aspects can simultaneously be true and valid. Uncertainty, on the other hand, does not do that because it is specific towards a particular person, event or thing; it is about not being sure about a singular thing (Tiedens and Linton 2001).

Similarly, I will not be using the term “distrust” which is often used interchangeably with suspicion (Deutsch 1958; Fein and Hilton 1994; Kramer 1999). This is because the main component of distrust is the negative expectation associated with people’s motives (Deutsch 1958; Kramer 1999; Rubin and Brown 1975; Sinaceur 2010). As Descartes stated (2006) suspicion is important for knowledge acquisition because it is a curiosity and serves as inspiration for finding out, and not accepting the world as it is.

Suspicion as a framework makes it possible for numerous layers of reasoning to co-exist as well as multiple values such as those we see online; such as the simultaneity of commodification[87] with affective ties. The process of dispelling suspicion does not mean that once trust is established, it stays forever. The mediated nature of online relationships, as well as the commercial aspect of these relationships, are causes for concern, and questioning of the authenticity of these relationships is always present. As YouTubers work with different brands and find different ways of inserting brand partnerships into their videos, so too does the questioning of intention occur. A continuous dispelling of suspicion occurs in response so that online relationships and the authenticity of the YouTuber are always being verified. In Chapter 3, I argue that the creation of numbers or statistics becomes the main focus of YouTubers and of YouTube activity. At the same time, viewers pay attention to numbers to judge the authenticity of the YouTuber and even YouTube itself as a platform. As Vincanne Adams (2016) has argued, statistical data becomes the main focus in public health, not to make health interventions better but to create funding, for business and even pharmaceuticals, from data numbers. The value of the data is not in what it can do for public health but what it can do for corporates. She states,

> …the growing and well-established concept of accountability analytics in the health sector particularly public health of which value then becomes the definition of the quality of the current moment which is calculated using the statistics/data. Accountability metrics are the numbers needed to not just account for money spent, to gauge program impact, or to evaluate health out-comes-those retrospective metrics-but also to make future actuarial wealth. (148)

It is this actuarial wealth that causes the basis of concern for many social media users, including the suspicion of YouTubers' and viewers' actions. At the same time, we are reminded by Tsing that commodities need social relations – they are not abstract from them (2017). And so, suspicion allows

[87] For this section in the research, I use Constable's (2009) definition of commodification: "By commodification, I refer to the ways in which intimacy or intimate relations can be treated, understood, or thought of as if they have entered the market: are bought or sold; packaged and advertised; fetishized, commercialized, or objectified; consumed or assigned values and prices; and linked in many cases to transnational mobility and migration, echoing a global capitalist flow of goods" (50).

us to think of online communities as both acts of social engagement and relations and as part of a money economy where these social relations are commodifiable when needed. Suspicion as a framework also allows for considerations of the hidden motives of the other; in this case, for both the YouTuber and the viewers. The ambiguity in the nature of suspicion allows for a better and more complex understanding of online communities instead of the definitive and usually dual ideas of the internet as either this or that: exploitative or inclusive; individualistic or social; private or public.

Suspicion and the dispelling of suspicion is not excluded from these seemingly different economies of commercial and affective value. Instead, it plays a vital role in both economies. The increase in engagement in the form of comments that serve to question or answer questions raised by other viewers are moments of dispelling suspicion that help to create and reinforce the collective memory of online communities. From this collective memory, continuity is established – continuity of the YouTuber and their online identity as well as continuity for the community. A consequence of this continuity is the establishment of the accountability of the YouTuber. Another way to establish authenticity and dispel suspicion is by creating a large digital footprint. This digital footprint serves to represent content creators in a wide range of settings, giving a more holistic view of them as individuals. This is because online communities understand that mediated content is edited and highly curated, and at the same time, different platforms are better suited to different types of interaction and communication which showcase different aspects of uploaders. Digital footprints also serve as places for more intimate knowledge to be created while again serving as a basis for economic growth as content creators can also make money off other platform uploads.

Suspicion on YouTube

A very large number of YouTube videos make claims about or reiterate the honesty and truthfulness of the content, the realness of YouTubers and their intentions. Titles such as the ones I mention below have increased significantly and are now a regular feature in videos. The videos can be on product reviews (sponsored or non-sponsored), sponsored videos, an incident, or anywhere else

an opinion or even a lifestyle is being portrayed. Titles such as, “My honest review of…”, “What really happened?”, “How I really feel about…” as well as statements such as “I am being my true self when I come on here…”, “just because this is a sponsored video it does not mean I will not give you my honest opinion,” or variations of all of the above show up on the YouTube homepage daily. Examples below:

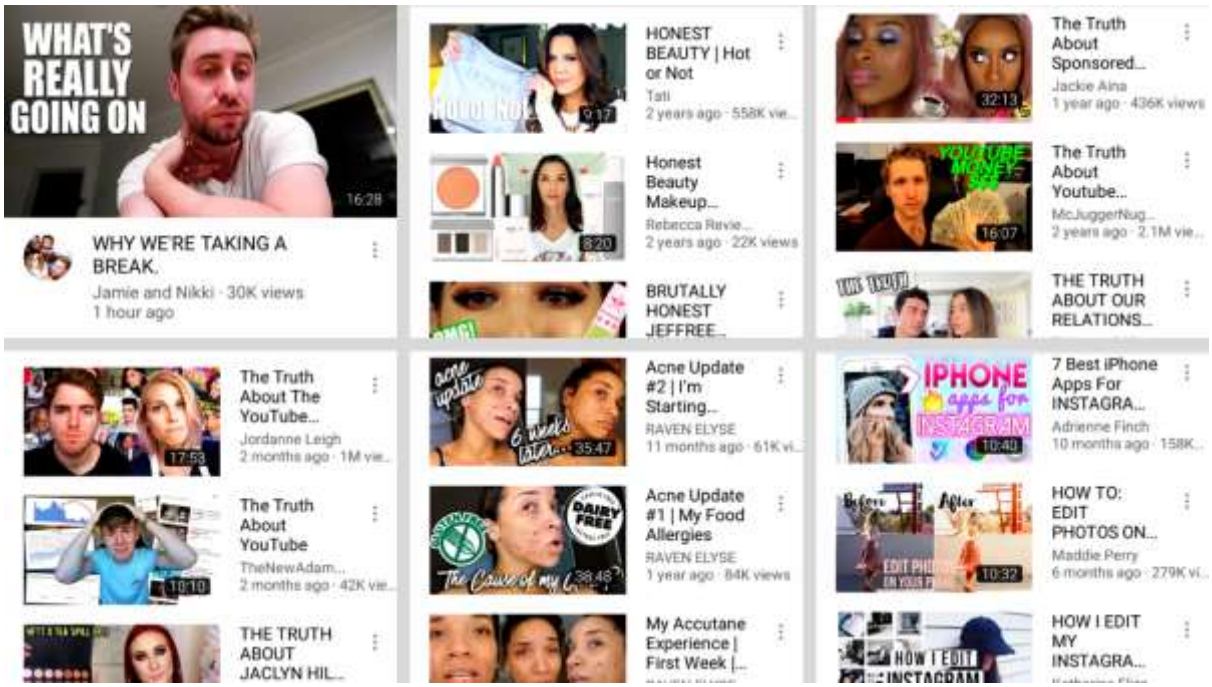


Figure N: Honesty thumbnails (screen grabbed in 2018).

There are vested interests in the authenticity of posts, enforced by all parties: YouTubers, subscribers, YouTube itself, and brands that sponsored posts. This is because it is this authenticity and perceived connection that builds and maintains the subscriber bases that are central to the online influencer economy. This interest in authenticity can be linked to the commercialisation of YouTube and the need to maintain subscribers to be economically viable. Suspicion and authenticity sit at the centre of a YouTuber’s commercial viability. In particular, YouTubers are constantly trying to prove their authenticity and realness to maintain and build their subscriber base, while subscribers are constantly testing, proving or dispelling the YouTubers’ authenticity to assess the existence of a real connection beyond the economics of posting.

Honesty and authenticity are perceived to be integral in the connections formed with an online audience, for building an online subscriber base, and for building an active and engaged audience. This active audience is what allows online content creators (specifically for this study, YouTubers) to make money and possibly earn a living off their online activity. However, the internet is a place of suspicion. There is suspicion *of* the internet and suspicion *on* the internet (Naughton 2016). This suspicion is paired with the current monetisation of content that allows YouTubers to benefit from online activities financially. Of particular concern are social media content producers' motives and the reliability of their posts especially when monetised. These are under constant suspicion, always under scrutiny. I argue that this constant claiming, questioning, proving and disproving of the authenticity and motives of content creators and subscribers is one of the ways that online communities are created and sustained. I argue that dispelling suspicion is essential to *making online community*.

When I started my research, I was very set on the idea of decentring the money from online activity. It seemed easy to say that everyone was doing it for the money and then look for proof of that, as proof there is. Instead, I wanted to find alternative explanations about the basis of engagement, other than the commercial returns being the main driver. In a recent video, Wendy Sibiya (2020) said the following about a YouTuber:

> I started following this lady. I think her name is Emitaz or something. I don't know. I really, really love her content. She just posted a video um about…I think the title of her video is "If I had to choose one" and I think I also want to film a video like that because I really enjoyed watching and I just love her personality. She's, she's like. Do you know? Do you ever like to watch someone video and just…just fall in love with them? That's just how I feel about her; I really, really love her. Her personality. Her spirit. She is just amazing. I love her.[88]

I had very similar experiences when I first started watching YouTube. I was high on the buzz of discovering YouTube and the YouTube community. I felt connected to people across the world, all of us meeting around these videos, invested emotionally. We were going through similar offline

[88] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p5gd3Z40BGU&t=810s accessed February 8, 2020 YouTube/Wendy Sibiya.

experiences, or completely different ones depending on our context but had decided to converge here at this place. At the centre was the YouTuber who was opening themselves up to us, the users. I did not want to taint that experience, to taint the video with the thought that it was put up on the platform to make money for the YouTuber, that this content was created for commercial purposes. And so, going into the research, I referred to this in framing some of my approaches. I am still not sure why this notion disturbs me; I guess it is one of the main reasons why I did this research. I am not sure if this research answers that question, but it does try to answer it. At the same time, I was set on not separating the boundaries between online and offline, which I have also eventually conceded on. The online/offline distinction helps me to think through how particular forms of engagement allow for the self-work necessary to have these social while commercially-driven communities, which I discuss in the next chapter.

I must clarify that not everyone who starts a YouTube channel has the intention of being an influencer. People post for many reasons as shown by University College London (UCL)'s *How the World Changed Social Media*.[89] Similarly, research by Fuchs and Horak (2008), van Deursen and van Dijk (2011, 2014), van Dijk (2006) and Schradie (2011) on the digital divide has shown that multiple variables impact people's ability to access and use the internet, which then impacts the outcomes of said internet activity, namely posting. At the same time, YouTube and other social media platforms are businesses and offer potential career avenues that are more formally recognised by all of society, whether it be institutions or legal or economic structures.

The feeling of discovering a YouTuber you connect with is like beginning a new relationship: a pleasant surprise. The viewer will want to find out everything about them. What their channel is about, who they are, what their quirks are. They go through a binge-watching phase, from that first video discovery to the next video and the next, until they are years back into their video archives,

[89] Miller et al., 2006, *How the World Changed Social Media,* February 29, 2016 https://www.uclpress.co.uk/collections/series-why-we-post/products/83040, accessed September 12, 2016.

trying to get to know them, seeing how they have changed over the years. And while they are discovering a new YouTuber, the viewers will also start going through their comments section. There you find different layers of that channel's "community." For example, in older vlogs it is common to find comments such as "Who is watching this in 2015?" or "I just discovered your vlogs. I decided to go back and binge-watch some old vlogs." By comparing comments posted closer to the time the video was posted and more recent comments like the ones stated above, similarities and differences in the channel's community can be traced and noted. There is also a nostalgia that comes into play and is expressed in these comments as older viewers sometimes go back to older vlogs when the YouTuber has changed their content or style of video. For example, a viewer of Sibu Mpanza's video posted in 2017 commented in 2019: "I love your new videos, the vlogs and challenges, but I miss these videos from you. I am a South African living abroad and love your view of things in SA. Keep up the good work" (Viewer 2019).[90] Sometimes it is a new channel and they do not have that many videos up so there is no archive or it is very small, and it becomes a wait for the next video upload. Day in and day out you wait for the next video upload. In this instance, seeing and being part of the development and growth of a person and their channel becomes part of the appeal.

That is why there had to be more to it, this relationship, than simply a transaction and consumption of a product. How else could these emotional and physical attachments be explained – and yes, physical, because if you have ever binge-watched a series, you know how physically hard it is to walk away before the end of the season? The notion that commercial interests drive it made it feel less than. It took away from the emotional connection. In this, though, I realise many viewers (and I) base this sense of tainting on the old adage "money is seen as the root of all evil." This notion can be extended into thinking of viewers as being aware of the commodifiable nature of these online relationships and communities, and their potential contestation of being commodified. They are not willing to compromise social relations, and even potentially erode them until no such relations exist

[90] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zrbKBv4O1Dg accessed March 3, 2021 YouTube/Sibu MpanzaSA.

should commodification and consumerism take over. YouTube and social media influencing are showing that this is not the case. In fact, what we see are ways of accommodating those market relations, monitoring them and then structuring social relations accordingly by online communities within those very market relations.

A few years after its inception it is unavoidable to dismiss the central role of the commercial aspect on YouTube. One can even go as far as to say that it has become the reason many start their channels and why many keep on posting on their channels as YouTube and other social media platforms become more formalised and institutionalised. Commercial interests do drive the content uploads, the reliability in scheduling, the production, and the continuous engagement for those interested in making YouTube work and earning a living from it. It is work, and it must get done so they can get paid. So I find myself asking: What does the money do? Or rather, what have been the consequences of the money aspect to how YouTubers are viewed and how YouTube communities engage? Despite this change in approach, I will say that there is a real, concrete sense of community between viewers and influencers, and of viewers with viewers. In *The Virtual Community* Rheingold (1993) shows how online communities can rally together in a shared cause or situation. Granted, at the time Rheingold wrote this work, these online communities did not have the commercial aspect included and digital influencers did not exist. Thus, the argument can be made that the basis of these communities is not the same and should not be compared because one comes from a need to connect online and the other is intentionally built to increase economic viability. It is this sense of community, of something over and above the commercial aspects, that makes the money question such an important one because it questions the integrity of communities built on economic factors. Questions such as: “Is what I am feeling, and is this sense of intimacy, real?” “Is this them just working, or is it more?” “If you, in essence, turn your life and yourself into work by virtue of living your life via YouTube, when and how can viewers tell when work starts and ends?” This brings into question the intentions and authenticity of video posts. Suspicion is important in understanding how relations are negotiated and the values that underpin relationships on YouTube.

Fostered Intimacy

Intimacy as a business strategy or as a commodity has been studied extensively. This includes work on lifestyle entrepreneurship, such as in the bed and breakfast industry (Cederholm and Hultman 2010), studies of people in the service industry such as child care, nurses and hospice care, by Hochschild (1983) and Russ (2005); as well as in the entertainment industry (Constable 2009). Initially, however, research showed that those involved in intimate labour relations[91] preferred to keep a sense of distance from those they were giving care to or providing with services. Studies by Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995) and Zelizer (2000) showed a growing increase in the commodification of reproductive labour relations. More recent research shows that there is a growing trend for intimate labour relations (Bernstein 2010; Faier 2007), where emotional distance is required or feigned, instead of the previous conception of the distance between the service provider and client. Abidin (2015a) argues that influencers do the opposite of distancing themselves from their followers, by purposefully engaging in "displays and impressions of intimacy towards their followers in order to convey the closeness and relatability upon which the success of their advertorials lies."

In Abidin's work on Instagram influencers (2015a) she argues that influencers chiefly engage in displays and impressions of four kinds of intimacy towards their followers in order to convey the closeness and relatability upon which the success of their advertorials lie. These forms of intimacy are: a) commercial intimacy, where communicative intimacies have a double result of commercial and engagement gains to them; b) interactive intimacies, fostered on social media platforms but extending to the physical world in the form of meet-and-greets and selfies with the influencer; c) reciprocal intimacies, when influencers reciprocate subscribers' online activity such as retweets, and shout-outs online; and d) disclosive intimacies, when influencers share aspects of their everyday life

[91] Intimate labour relations and intimate relations "refers here to social relationships that are – or give the impression of being – physically and/or emotionally close, personal, sexually intimate, private, caring or loving" (Constable 2009, 50).

outside of their regular posts based on their online work and profiles; a look into their lives. As Abidin (2015a) argues, all of these are driven by commercial interests and the same can be said for YouTubers. Below are examples of shared intimacies.

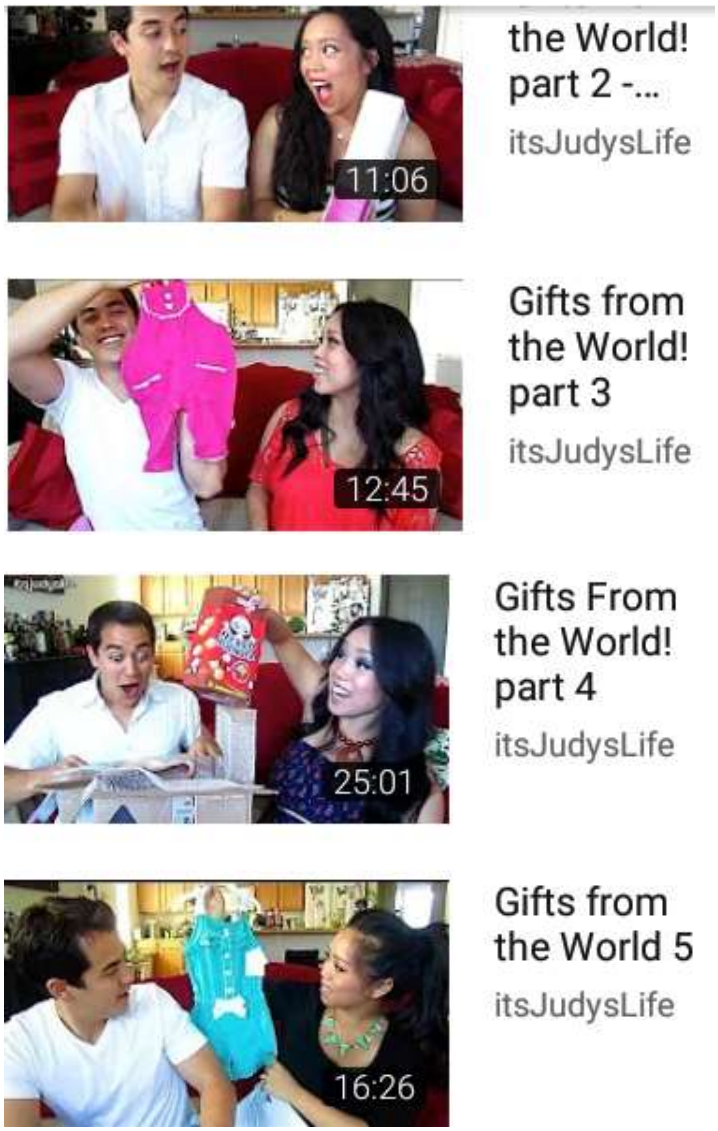


Figure O: Thumbnails of Gifts from the World videos (screen grabbed in 2018).

The picture above shows a series that used to be on the "itsJudysLife" channel. Judy and her husband Benji Travis would receive gifts from subscribers, and they would show these gifts on their channel. The gifts continued to be received, and further accelerated in frequency, especially when Judy fell pregnant and was expecting her first child in 2012. Given the popularity of this segment, Judy and Benji then "formalised it" and made it a separate dedicated video on their channel called Gifts from the World on July 18, 2012. These started as spontaneous gifts from viewers, even when

Judy and Benji made clear that the gifts were not requested or required. The gifts consisted of a variety of things for both Judy and Benji as well as their then-expected baby. They included clothes, food, paintings, gift cards from shops, and baby goods such as feeding bottles. Sometimes they would receive "gifts," or products in the form of gifts, from Etsy[92] shop owners and other business owners wanting to get exposure or "advertise" their goods and services via this channel because they were all mostly unboxed in a video.[93] Judy and Benji would sit and open up all the presents and mention who they were from (unless requested not to). They would read out the notes, try the food, and talk about the gifts or something related to the gift. Sometimes they would even eat the food and say they were trying foods from around the world. Subscribers would send delicacies and common foods from their region for them to try and they would give their opinion on air. Through this, subscribers would learn things about the family, such as food tastes or clothing preferences and so on. They would also get to share their life stories with them.

Looking at the "itsJudysLife" example, we see how this segment of their video series evolved from a few gifts from viewers to a whole separate channel. They did later stop this segment because they said they did not want to foster an environment where their subscribers felt compelled to give them gifts because they had enough and were content and blessed. The backlash from some of their subscribers for even accepting these gifts was probably an added reason to stop the segment. Some viewers felt that they were undeserving of the gifts since they felt that they made a lot of money off YouTube already. Added to that was also public relations (PR) material and products from brands.

[92] Etsy is an online business made up of various shops that sell primarily craft supplies, handmade and vintage items.

[93] The online gift-opening and shout-outs are not compulsory as not every gift is opened online, neither is every company given a shout-out nor every item used. Sometimes the items are donated to others or returned or given to others.

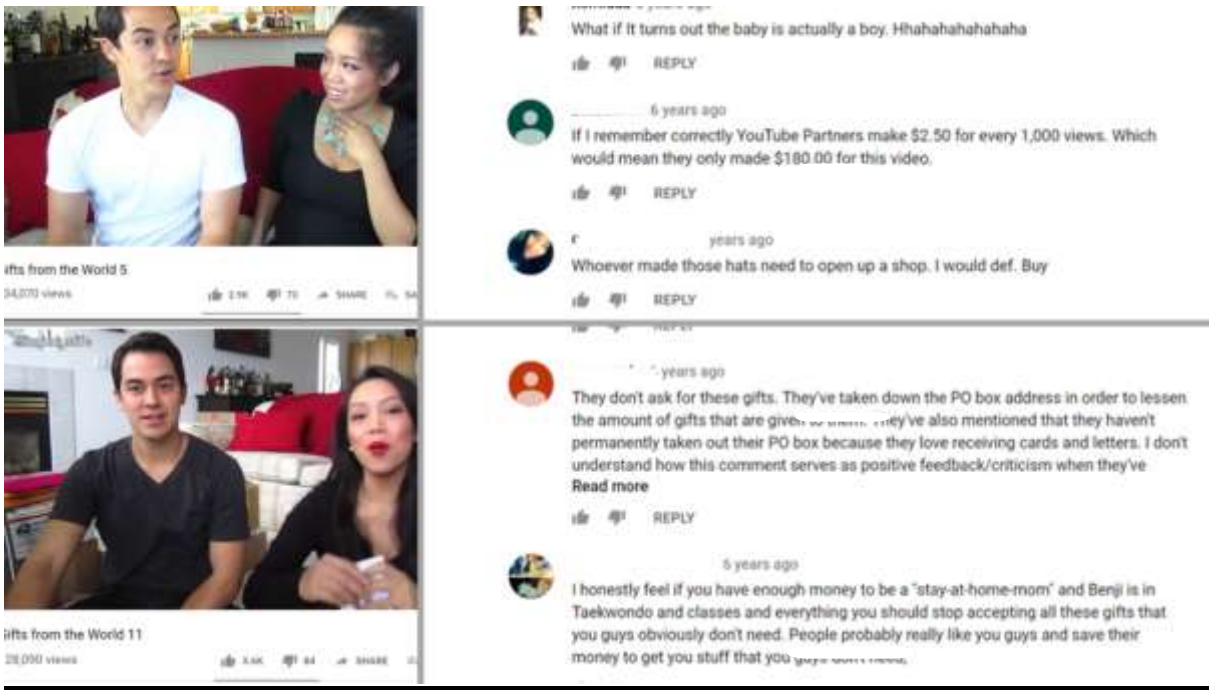


Figure P: Comments from Gifts from the World videos (screen grabbed April 22, 2018).[94]

YouTubers at the time, and even in 2016 when I was doing my data collection, received a great deal of backlash regarding the gifts they got from viewers and the PR materials they received from companies. A lot of the backlash that YouTubers get in general comes from perceptions about YouTuber earnings and a general lack of understanding of what YouTubing and online work entail. The three most common arguments in relation to gifts include: first, the lack of transparency of YouTuber earnings and sources of income; second, a non-understanding of YouTube as work and therefore the perception that these goods and gifts are being received for nothing (or, if YouTube is recognised as work, then it is seen as a comfortable job or not a real job, again as not deserving of gifts from viewers); and third, the perception amongst viewers and others that YouTubers expect gifts and perceptions of there being too many gifts at the viewers' personal expense.

The comments above show the rules and the values that underpin gift-giving on YouTube. Gift-giving forms part of both social and economic structures in all societies (Carrier 1991).

[94] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JZMQ2w2wzRM&t=667s and https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aeAO-T8SkDg accessed 2018 YouTube/ItsJudysLife Gifts from the World 5 and 11 respectively.

Depending on the kind of economy that a society is based on, they can either be the basis of the social and economic structures or they can be an aspect of it. Gifts, therefore, play an important role in communities, both socially or economically (Mauss 2002). Hence, gift-giving is a structured event with rules and norms that guide it. Some of the norms within the YouTube space is that gifts are exceptions, seldom requested for personal use, and must be seen as deserved or needed. We see from the last two comments in figure H that there is tension between gifts needed and asked for. One viewer points out that the Travis family does not need the gifts. The basis of need is further compounded by the fact that the Travises cannot ascertain the conditions of each giver and if that giver can afford to give the gifts they buy for them. Thus, the responsibility for the gifts received becomes Judy's and Benji's because they continue to accept them. Even though at the time Benji and Judy repeatedly asked their viewers not to send things, they could not also outwardly reject the gifts because that would be seen negatively and have a potential effect on the sense of intimacy derived from sharing between them and their viewers. Further, this could negatively impact their views as well as subscriber count. The question posed for discussion in the comments was: "If they do not want the gifts why have their postal address public?" To this, another viewer responded by stating that and Benji never requested the gifts to begin with and that their postal address was on the description box[95] of their videos to enable companies to contact them or send them PR materials. In these instances, we see the conflict between the need for visibility to brands and how that can cause conflict with the viewers.

With online work, YouTubers work at making themselves visible to brands while being relatable to their viewers. The fine line between work and relationships has to be constantly maintained. This is why YouTuber authenticity and intentions are always being questioned. In the same series, the opening of the gifts revealed that viewers had been buying gifts from Benji and Judy's baby registry and sending those gifts to them. Many viewers found this strange and even

[95] Benji and Judy have since removed the postal address from their videos' description box.

considered it a crossing of the line between personal and public space. Some viewers, on the other hand, argued that gifts should not come from the registry as offline friends and family of the Travises would have nothing to choose from for the baby shower when the time came.

While YouTubers open up parts of their lives to the world and try to build and maintain intimacy with their online communities, questions of privacy and personal space versus public spaces and actions come up. Previous research by Lange (2007a) has shown that private and public are concepts that change according to context. Hence, space can be considered both private and public depending on the situation at hand and who the actors are in that moment. On YouTube, the same applies. These aspects play out more so on YouTube as the boundaries of private and public are constantly being negotiated when YouTubers and viewers actively engage in creating public intimate community relations, which are equally invested in the community and financial gain.

The above example from Judy and Benji comes from 2012. At the time, there was still much confusion regarding whether a YouTuber could earn a living off YouTube and how they went about doing that. There were also a lot of questions at the time about whether that money was solely based on YouTube or if they supplemented it with side work[96] that they did not declare. There was also debate on whether being on YouTube could even be called a job. The idea that a person could stay at home and post videos either about their passion or life did not make sense when considered a job, which ultimately led to questions around what can or cannot be considered work. As the last comment on the above figure shows, a viewer refers to Judy as a "stay-at-home-mom" rather than a "work-from-home-mom," which mean different things. The emphasis on staying at home highlights time to take care of children and to do shopping for things they need, and less on the work of filming, editing and posting videos, and any other administrative functions that come with running a business. I elaborate further on ideas of work and YouTube as work in the next chapter.

[96] By side work I mean a non-internet/social related form of employment, and not necessarily income coming from YouTube or social media presence.

Tied to these concepts is the value of the gifts from companies such as paid-for travel, clothing, food, cosmetics, various other items and even fame, which have created the impression that YouTubers earn a lot of money. The ways in which YouTubers have grown to increasingly curate their content, making it more technical, and even the emergence of a YouTube aesthetic, have all created the impression of an easy life with subsidised lifestyles. Hence, the notion that YouTubers make a great deal of money. This notion is important in understanding why gifts to YouTubers have become so contentious. Not only are the reasons for giving gifts being established but also, on a macro level, a culture of expectation is being contested and defined on YouTube. All of this is happening in a context where influencer marketing is growing dramatically, and with that, an increase in the suspicion of brands and products that appear in videos.

Viewers have begun to see gifts differently. There has been much less focus by YouTubers and viewers on gifts from subscribers. Viewer gifts are no longer common features in many videos even though they still appear. However, it is not to the extent that it was around the 2012 to early 2016 mark. The focus has shifted to YouTubers receiving PR materials, and the need to show the kinds and amounts of PR material they receive. PR is seen as a form of legitimacy to influencer status as well as a sign of being established and making money on YouTube or any other social media.

Another way of fostering intimacy is through nicknames. For example, Olerato from "Mommy and Baby Approved"[97] in her vlog calls herself Oluv, which is a direct translation of her name. She is a mommy vlogger, meaning she vlogs her family life and focuses on her role as a mother. She uses nicknames for all her children, which viewers also use. For example, in one of her most recent videos,[98] a viewer left this comment using Olerato's middle son's nickname "Peanut," at the same time referring to her own son and how her son was picking up behaviours from Peanut: "I

[97] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zmkIXgZt2MY, accessed April 20, 2021 YouTube/Mommy And Baby Approved.

[98] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mYSaTHK393w accessed April 29, 2021 YouTube/Mommy And Baby Approved.

always watch your videos with my 20 month old son and now this gent has decided to suck his finger like peanut😂😂😂 ke mo mathateng bathong😂😂."

Nicknames also foster intimacy by creating shared histories and shared memories. Valencia, previously known as ProductJunkieXOXO, left her husband and father of her four children in 2016 after he had cheated on her repeatedly. She moved in with her parents and during this time she posted videos of her coming to terms with the separation, discussing details of her marriage and the state of the separation. She even recorded and uploaded a telephone conversation between her and her then-husband to prove how he had been cheating and was refusing to see the children. She was constantly berated for sharing what many thought to be inappropriate for social media, whilst others appreciated her openness and her willingness to share the bad and ugly as well as the good times claiming that, unlike other YouTubers, she was showing real life.

After about a year of at least one video a week on her ongoing separation, she decided that the videos of that time would be privatised as she did not want her children growing up and seeing that side of her or hearing her speak about their father like that. She has since also changed her channel name to "Valencia's Life" where she has spoken very little of her now ex-husband and, even then, in a much more civil manner. In the last two months of 2020, she has started discussing more of her divorce and child custody court battle. In the videos, she explains that she had to stop filming to ensure that the footage would not be used against her in court. She says:

> …I felt so vilified the whole time and under so much scrutiny. My motherhood has always been under so much scrutiny like I wasn't good enough, but I was good enough to make the children…you know what I'm saying. All of a sudden now I'm just this horrible person but I was good enough to be a stay-at-home military wife and you know be that person. Y'all have seen me right I've built my platform on being this stay-at-home mom military wife who could do it all and you know still have a peace of mind but little did y'all know what…was going on behind the scenes. Little do y'all still know what I was going through behind the scenes but God. Okay so um yeah that took a toll on my confidence as a mother and as a human being. I definitely went through some bouts of depression. I definitely went through feeling very unworthy somedays still I feel like man, 'am I, am I doing okay, and am I, am I good enough' and then I have to snap myself out of it honey. I go back to y'all's messages and I see this is what I'm here for and my kids are happy and I should be happy sometimes you got to live in the now and not in the past or in the future. Where you want to be you

> have to live in the now honey be in the now, okay friend, be in the now and be present in the now… (Valencia 2021)[99]

Viewers in the video share encouraging messages of support for her and what she went through. One viewer referred to old content that used to be a part of the videos saying, "I've been following you since u were still married and used to sing "good morning good morning today how are you!" That used to make my entire day when you sang that. And when you used to do coffee cup shoutouts and I used to PRAYYY my name would be on the cup 🤣🤣" (Viewer 2021).

In the video "YouTube Saved My Life…For Real"[100] she discusses the recent changes and the plan she has for her channel, after this video she starts with the custody detail vlogs. In response to her laying out the plans for her channel focus, viewers expressed their appreciation for her channel as well as their view of her emotional journey through her divorce. Part of this is the viewers expressing their reasons for subscribing and continued viewing despite the changing content over the years. These expressions show how the viewers have been a part of her life and that she has had an impact on their lives as well. One viewer said, "I subscribed because I was going through a similar situation the same time that you were. My husband left me for another woman. It felt good to see someone being transparent and letting you know that you're not alone and we all go through things. Stay strong sis and keep going, sky is the limit!" (Viewer 2021). Another comment on the same video says: "I subscribed because of my girl Toni Daley, I stayed because you are HILLARIOUS! 🤣" (Viewer 2021). Toni Daley is a YouTuber I discuss in this thesis. The shared internet relationships serve to create networks but also foster the intimacy of a friendship group.

[99] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FBraxuoKEwA&t=143s accessed April 17, 2021 YouTube/Valencia's Life.

[100] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tW7V0uTLz6M accessed April 2, 2021 YouTube/Valencia's Life.

The Business of PR: Nothing is for *Mahhala* (free)

Although much has changed in terms of viewers giving YouTubers gifts, there is still some contention on the topic. Even though YouTubers still share posts on the gifts that they receive from viewers, there has been a marked reduction of videos showing the opening of gifts received on the YouTube channels I follow and in general. Instead, of late, there has been a larger spotlight on the receipt of PR packages. This change in direction has been because of some of the negative comments by viewers on YouTubers receiving gifts from viewers. It has also been largely growing as YouTube has become more and more professionalised, and the commercial aspect of YouTubing has grown and become more of a motivator. Receiving PR packages means that companies and brands recognise you as someone they either align with in terms of their branding or as someone with influence over their viewers. This PR is then used in a variety of ways by YouTubers. Some share with their friends and family. Other materials are used in videos for promotion, while some are given away to viewers or donated. The PR materials are never sold. It would be considered unethical of the YouTuber to sell something they received for free, or even illegal, as the products given by brands are not for resale purposes. YouTubers are under no obligation to show or share the PR products they receive from brands, nor is there an obligation to use these products on- or off-screen.

Unlike gifts from viewers, with PR gifts there is an emphasis by YouTubers on the number of gifts, so video titles including words like “Huge,” “Massive” and “Biggest” are common on such unboxing videos. At the same time, in these videos YouTubers always refer to their gratefulness for the opportunity to be able to receive PR. They are always aware and share their gratitude for the lifestyle they lead. They thank viewers for their role in the lifestyle and opportunities they have because of their viewers’ and subscribers’ support. Hence there is always a sense of YouTubers needing to justify their lives to the viewers, and they work hard to ensure that they are not seen to overlook the viewer in their acknowledgement of the impact viewer support has on their lives. Their sense of existence and even ownership of their achievements or ability to create the lifestyles that they have is always seen in relation to the viewer. Thus, despite the worry that technology and the

money economy are the causes of a breakdown in social relations, we see how a notion of "you have your life because of us" keeps YouTubers and viewers within reciprocal social relationships that need to be maintained. Whether these social relationships are real or strong does not remove the fact that they are enforced regularly to ensure that they are continued. As Zelizer (2000, 2005) has argued, the commodification of intimate areas of life does not lead to these social relations being impersonal and pragmatic. Instead, personal relations find new ways to exist within the framework of commodification or rather within a framework that includes commodification but does not result in the absolute commodification of persons and actions into goods or services with market value prices (Zelizer 2000, 2005). The expected market relations are instead often "denied, mystified, transformed or disguised" (Constable 2009, 58).

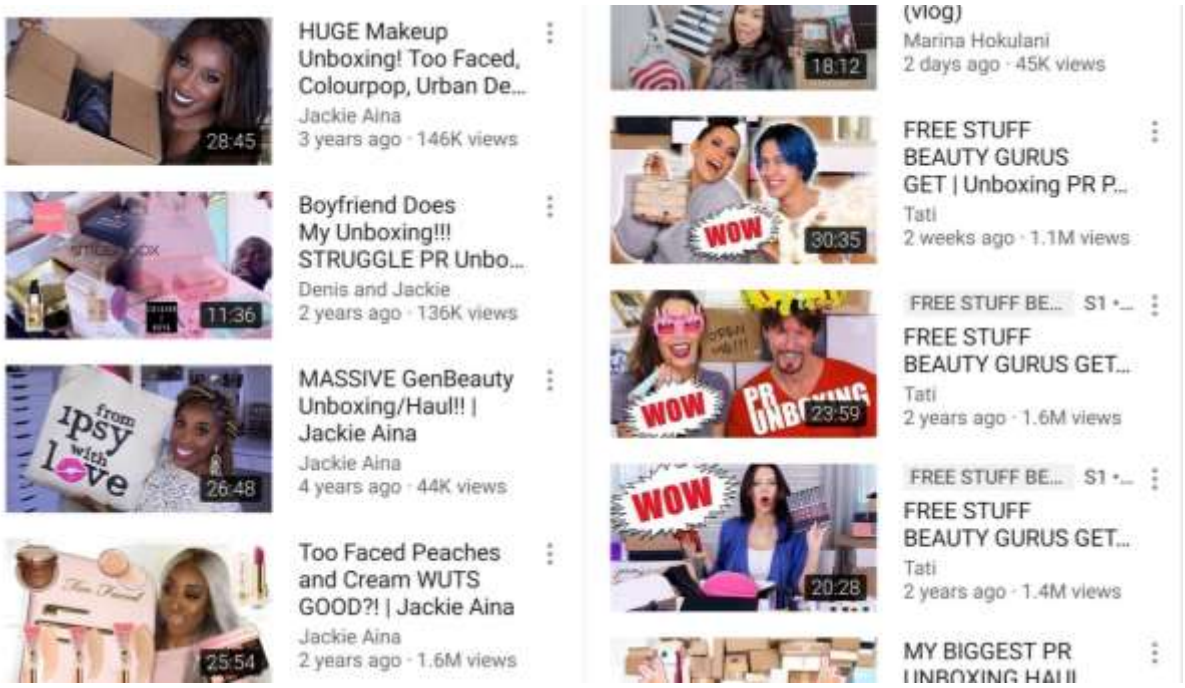


Figure Q: Beauty YouTuber video thumbnails – unboxing PR (screen grabbed February 16, 2020).

Receiving PR materials makes YouTubers visible and perceived as valuable to brands. It acts as a sign of their status as an influencer, and it acts as a sign that they have "come up in the world" to their viewers. It also shows brands that the YouTuber is valuable to other brands which also increases the YouTuber's value. The exchange value of PR is hard to specify as YouTubers are always

managing viewer perceptions as well as their own brands. Not all brands are created equal, and YouTubers do not post or use all brand PR they receive as a means of managing their brand status and their brand alignment. For example, when starting off YouTubers will generally be a lot less particular about the brands they work with or showcase in their videos. However, as they grow, they may decide on particular brands over others. If the YouTuber is clear about their own brand identity, then they can focus their brand partnerships from early on. For example, I received an email about partnering with a brand of children's toys that wanted to send me free products to feature on my channel. I, however, declined the offer as my channel had very little to do with children. Added to this was that it was a British-based toy company that I had never heard of before and importing toys is not the most viable option for my viewers who may have been interested in the toys, particularly ones subject to high import duties. I decided that making a video for a free product would not be beneficial for me or my channel and branding insofar as I was not planning on growing a children's subscriber or viewer base. I also could not verify the prestige of the brand or how well the brand was instituted into the everyday lives of the people I engaged with as viewers. This meant that this strategic partnership was not a viable option as it was not going to be of any direct use for me or my viewers.

Brand partnerships play a big role in establishing the perceived value, prestige and subscriber base of a YouTuber. YouTubers are always aiming to get to work with well-established brands to align themselves and be associated with the brand. It also allows them to appeal to that brand's clientele (this includes current, past or future clientele), which can mean an increase in subscribers by association. Different brands have different appeals. Some are well-established, some are new and hip, and so mixing the right brand and YouTuber is important to ensure that the business transaction is not perceived as a way to exploit the subscribers of that channel. In the same way, when the match is accepted as aligned, viewers and subscribers tend to be very happy for the YouTuber and even promise to support by buying brand merchandise.

On February 28, 2018, Tati Westbrook, a well-known beauty YouTuber, announced the release of her first line of products. Everyone expected it to be some form of make-up. However, she

released Halo Beauty, vitamin supplements specifically for skin, hair, nail and general health. Her announcement was met with a lot of backlash and questions about the choice of product. She later disabled the comments from the announcement video, and the comments are now unavailable. Many of the comments implied she released vitamins as a way of making money because vitamins are more expensive than the expected beauty products, and there is no real way to measure if they work or not. This was compounded by the fact that vitamins are themselves a contentious topic in medicine, with doctors not agreeing on whether they are necessary to maintain and supplement the body's nutritional needs. Vitamins for skin and nails, in particular, got even more of a backlash. On March 6, 2018, Tati released another video addressing all the comments, rumours and backlash from her product launch. In the video, she talked about her passion for healthy living and good ingredients and how beauty depended on what was happening inside the body. Hence she decided to start with vitamins because she wanted the first product in her company and brand to communicate that she viewed beauty holistically. She stated that beauty needs to be approached through the mind, body and spirit. She then discussed most of the ingredients in the vitamins and her choice of packaging. In both instances, she talked about sourcing the best materials while aiming for low environmental impact.

Two of the comments seen below really stress the notion of brand building and alignment as well as the YouTuber-viewer relationship. Inadvertently, they explain the negative response to her product launch and the cause for questioning Tati's motives. The one comment addresses the brand alignment, which speaks to the narrow views that online activity provides. Tati's channel is a beauty channel. On there she reviews various cosmetics, hair and beauty tools and products, and mainly discusses skincare. She has been on YouTube for over ten years, and the entire time she has focused on this area. Although she often speaks about health and wellness and the role of good ingredients to promote this, her channel has mainly been seen as a make-up channel. And so, this shift to the clinical side of beauty did not make sense nor did it elicit trust in the product because there was concern about her knowledge in this area.

The concern was not necessarily a concern in her lack of a medical background, but rather her lack of personal and experiential knowledge. Within social media platforms, there is a focus on how much you have interacted and have personal experience with products and services. Professional and disciplinary knowledge in terms of product development is always set against experience, with the understanding that professional help can always be outsourced. For example, the commentator who raises Tati's lack of medical expertise then also brings up her make-up background – stating that "…you haven't spent the last seven years gaining our trust about vitamins" (Tati viewer 2019). They highlight this need for built trust and experience. Hence the requirement for authenticity as knowledge becomes based on personal rather than the technical aspects of the subject.

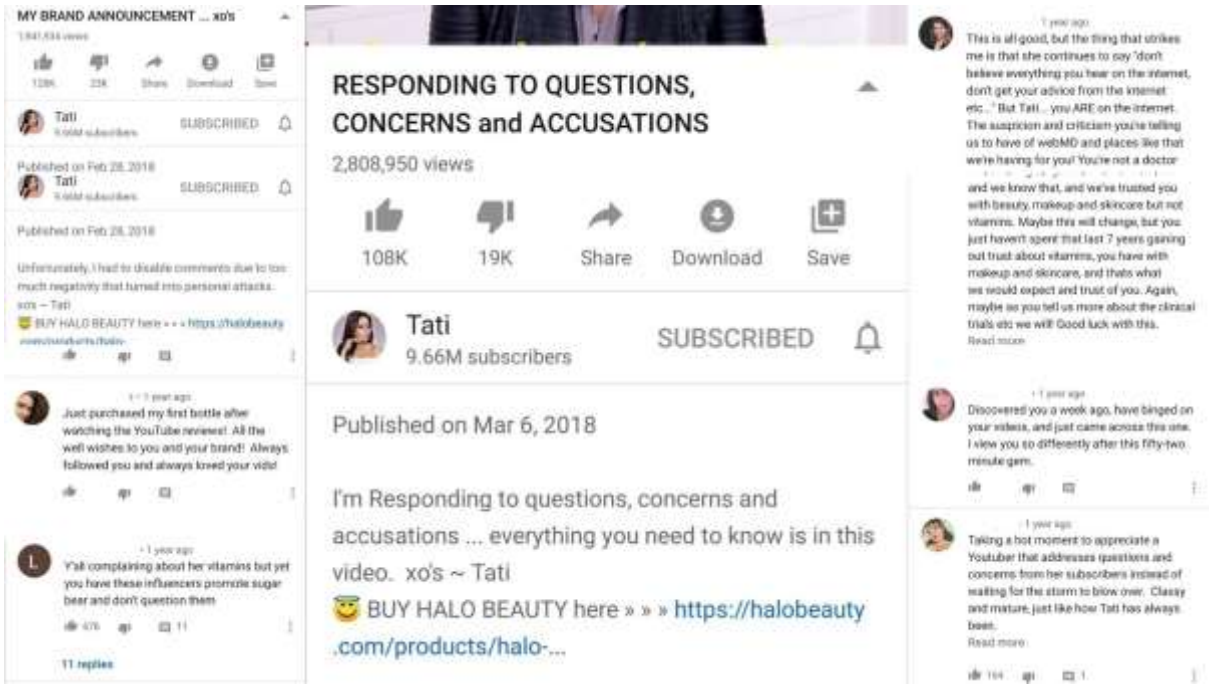


Figure R: Tati's video and comments responding to her vitamin release (screen grabbed February 3, 2020).[101]

The example below is of a new make-up eyeshadow pallet launch. This was especially exciting because a YouTuber had started her own company and was launching her first make-up

[101] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pmIpcK1QKs0&t=132s accessed March 6, 2018 YouTube/Tati.

product. Usually, YouTubers partner with brands and produce particular products under that brand's portfolio. In these instances, a YouTuber might be asked to come up with a line of lipsticks for a cosmetics company. They lend[102] their name and "creative"[103] input to the product; however, proceeds and the product belong to the cosmetics company. This time Tati launched the product under her own cosmetics brand. Her public relations team worked hard to ensure good exposure of the product. And in doing so, they sent various make-up sets to other YouTubers with varying subscriber counts and different subscriber bases.

Ohemaa Bonsu was one such YouTuber. As a black woman YouTuber with dark skin, she represents what is seen as a niche viewer-base on YouTube, and within the cosmetics industry, this niche is ever-more important given the historical lack of representation of products for those with darker complexions. When Ohemaa received the products and tried them on her page, the responses from her viewers were varied. Some commenters were happy that she was on the PR list, while some asked questions about the performance of the product under varying circumstances and requested to see it in different conditions to make an informed decision about their feelings towards it. This was particularly because Tati is a white woman YouTuber, and there were questions about the considerations of pigmentation and colour payoff on darker skin tones, as mainstream cosmetics companies have not paid a lot of attention to that, making some products "not dark skin-friendly." Thus, the questions from viewers about the different applications of the product. They asked to have the products put to the test to determine the "real" capabilities and qualities of the product on darker skin shades. Viewers especially wanted to see how well the product worked on dark skin and not how the product could be made more suitable for darker skin shades. For example, viewers requested that Ohemaa not use a light make-up base as a light eyeshadow base helps the colours to stand out, which then would give a false impression of the actual pigmentation of the product. This is important

[102] At negotiated contract terms and conditions.

[103] I have put this in inverted commas because no one ever gets to see how much creative input and license the influencer has in the production. It is based on what they say or assumptions.

because *making products work*, as opposed to testing to see *if they do in fact work*, would potentially be seen as being untruthful and therefore inauthentic. This would be detrimental to the YouTuber as it would create the impression amongst their viewership that they are willing to mislead the viewer to stay on a PR list or be liked by fellow YouTubers.

Another category of comments on the video was related to how some viewers perceive the YouTuber whose product Ohemaa was reviewing. We see in this instance that collaborations with other YouTubers as well as companies and brands can have a negative impact on the YouTuber themselves. There have been instances where subscribers unsubscribe to a YouTuber if they feel that they represent something they do not want to be associated with. It is on that basis they revoke their support for that YouTuber for the larger cause. Another comment in the example is a viewer recognising the factors that could have impacted Tati's choice to send Ohemaa the PR beyond Tati maybe liking her channel, personality or make-up style. They point out that the PR was a way for Tati to access Ohemaa's subscriber base that may not watch her because of her race and ethnicity as they may not relate to her or see value in watching her use make-up products they are not sure would work on them. Thus the intentions behind the actions come into question. Intentionality forms a big part of online interaction, and it becomes one of the ways of addressing and considering suspicion online.

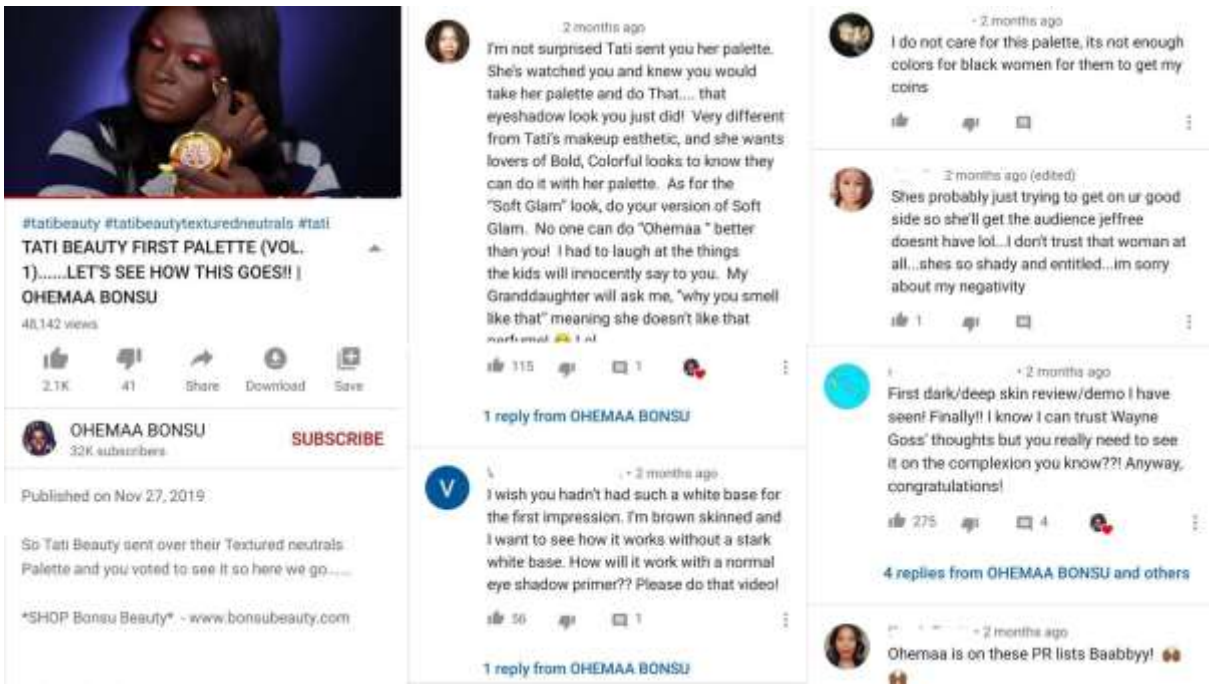


Figure S: Ohemaa Bonsu from "OHEMMA" channel – video thumbnail and comments on her Tati palette review video (screen grabbed 2020).[104]

Simultaneously, brands and companies seek to work with particular YouTubers to establish themselves within specific markets when entering new markets. They work with particular YouTubers to secure and raise their market share, improve product sales, and/or rebrand brands into something new. For example, on December 15, 2017, Will Smith started his YouTube channel. His channel currently has +7 million subscribers. On Instagram, he has over 43 million subscribers. In an interview on the Daily Show,[105] Trevor Noah asked Will Smith why he had decided to get a YouTube channel and sign up to social media.

> TN: You were, you were Will Smith. We saw Will Smith at the movies. We were used to that private man. You were an enigma! We would see you at movie premieres; magazines and...but we didn't know Will Smith, right? All of a sudden, we saw Will Smith on YouTube, we saw Will Smith on Instagram, but we didn't see a curated Will Smith. We saw Will Smith teasing his kids and having fun with them. We saw Will Smith goofing around with Jada. We see Smith going, "Hey, man, I'm a human being,

[104] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YEYhwIiMDyA&t=562s accessed November 27, 2019 YouTube/Ohemaa Bonsu.

[105] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W-eN3O9RCYU&t=62s accessed October 16, 2019 YouTube/The Daily Show.

> who is also a megastar, but I'm a human being" (Trevor Noah 2019 paraphrased/edited).
>
> WS: I wanted to be the biggest movie star in the world. And that was pre-Internet, pre-social media. During that time, the idea was you couldn't be a movie star if you didn't maintain mystery, right? So, the common belief was nobody's going to a movie theatre if they see you every day. So you would stay out and you would maintain the mystery. The only time that they'd get to see you is the Fourth of July on the big screen. So what happened was as social media came, there was a shift. And I trying to hold on for-for a little while, but I realised that the new mentality is nobody's coming to the movie theatre if they don't see you every day. People want to feel like they're your friends. They want to know. So it's a completely different shift. And another thing happened for me with social media. Um, I had so many creative ideas that were dying on the vine inside of me. When you put out a movie, i.e. "Gemini Man" it might be two and a half years from the time we started till it comes out. That is one piece of content in two and a half years. But what social media's allowing me to do is all of those ideas and all of those concepts to come out. And there was a, there was an analogy I used, I said I was experiencing "creative constipation." So the internet has allowed me like a laxative, to just start flowing. And now I get to put it all over the fans. (Will Smith 2019)

This Will Smith example highlights a few points: first, that offline fame does not transfer to online fame; second, that online activity not only grows one's reach but also opens up new markets or economic value potential; and last, which I will discuss more elaborately in the next chapter, is the idea of a shift in the way of being. The shift from being a man of mystery to being in the public changes how one is in the world and one's interactions with the world.

Brand PR and partnerships add to a YouTuber's credibility and legitimacy and help grow their channel. YouTubers who collaborate or receive PR from well-established brands, in particular, are seen as having "made it." This "making it" translates to being able to turn that large online platform-based partnership into a potential source of income outside of YouTube. This means that not only are the large subscriber numbers a potential sign of many views and, therefore, an indication of high advertisement revenue, but they also illustrate the potential to turn YouTube popularity into a market that brands would want to invest in. PR forms part of this investment as YouTubers also use it to grow their channels. For example, reading a part of Raven Elyse's description box from her videos

on her channel prior to October 2019,[106] one would find the below section (see figure T) with the mystery giveaway details. In her video titled "NO MORE GIVEAWAYS AFTER THIS ONE! Here's Why:" she explains that she will stop doing the mystery Monday giveaways. Instead she will be doing the giveaways randomly on her Instagram, picking winners based on their ongoing interaction with her posts on her various social media. As in this example of Raven Elyse, YouTube giveaways have terms and conditions. Usually, they require those entering to either be a subscriber or have made a significant impression on the YouTuber's online community. Sometimes the viewers are also asked to comment on the video or follow them on one or various other social media. There are many nuances to these requests; however, the main thing is that they make the viewer *have to* engage with the YouTuber and their content somehow. Whether viewers engage by commenting or subscribing, the YouTuber's profile becomes extended, and they grow. This increases their engagement levels on their analytics which then increases their "value."

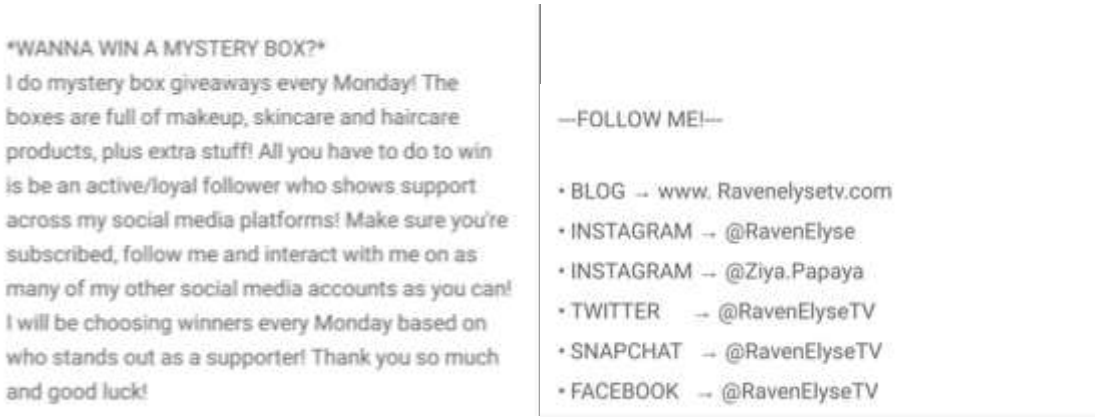


Figure T: Raven Scott from "RAVEN ELYSE" channel showing how subscribers could enter mystery box giveaways channel (screen grabbed March 17, 2020).[107]

[106] She decided to stop doing giveaways because she said she was trying to reduce waste and be more conscientious about what she consumes and the world. She said that she receives a lot more PR than she knows what to do with and it becomes wasted even with the giveaways. She also said that brands spend a lot of money and material on packaging these PR packages causing increased waste of environmental materials. Particularly, she spoke to the amount of plastic and non-recyclable materials used to make these PR boxes stand out from the rest.

[107] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jk2oXVA2PPg&t=3821s accessed October 15, 2019 YouTube/Raven Elyse.

As I have shown, gift-giving to YouTubers is quite common when in the form of the giveaways mentioned above, but also when the influencers are going through a life milestone such as marriage, pregnancy, a death, or even moving to a new area. During such times, YouTubers tend to get higher rates of subscriptions on their channel, as well as a general increase in views and engagement on their content posts. Such times are a great opportunity for YouTubers as they are generally times of growth for their channels and businesses. These milestones also serve as a means to establish intimacy and grow knowledge about a YouTuber. For example, during pregnancy, we might find out more about a YouTuber's family and siblings, or their journey to conception as well as possibly see more of their house as they do nursery decorations and other home preparations.

Connections between viewers and YouTubers are built by providing moments or a situation/moment/experience around which those intimacies can grow. A focal point to direct viewers' and YouTubers' connection building is essential for those intimacies that Abidin (2015a) describes. As one YouTuber said, "*I need a situation.*" These milestones are important because the internet is so big and in vlogging YouTubers are showing and sharing their lives, and they provide insight into something very difficult to capture. How do you quantify a person, who they are, what they stand for, and their temperaments? People are so complex and multi-dimensional. It is through these "situations" that viewers get what they perceive to be a view of the private.

One of the reasons for this is that these milestones come with somewhat of a barometer on social norms, how people are supposed to act and react, and this allows viewers to gain insights on the YouTuber that may otherwise be hidden. This sense of intimacy that influencers facilitate is not one-sided. The viewers also do the work of community and intimacy building via the comments section of videos, cross-promotion on other channels and interactions on other social media platforms, for example. This means that the viewers are not passive recipients, nor do they interact according to pre-empted cues. Rather, promotion can be a result of disagreements with the content or each other, which in turn can influence the content and, more importantly, build the channel's engagement and enhance those feelings of intimacy, connectedness and community.

Communities of Suspicion

During the research, I found that in the creation of intimacies between YouTuber and audience, viewers and subscribers are not passive receivers or uncritical viewers. Instead, they are active in their queries about posts and the intentions behind the post. It is this activity, and suspicion concerning actions, that I will focus on for the rest of this chapter. I argue that, together with intimacies, collective memory, intimate knowledge and the digital footprint become the main tools for building online communities with strong ties.

How do we think about this "like-" or numbers-driven industry? Appadurai (1986) and Faier (2007) offer some insight on how to approach commodified social relationships and transactional intimacies by arguing that we need to look beyond the commodification as an endpoint of analysis. Rather, we should seek to understand the underlying complex forms of intimacies, love and emotion that are a part of these transactional intimacies (Constable 2009, 56). One way of doing so is to understand how commodified and commercialised intimacy is given meaning and understood within social media, or YouTube in this instance. Ahearn (2001), Chao (2005) and Rebhun (1999) have shown that the importance and meaning of commodities in relation to subjectivities and intimacies are transformed by local understandings (Constable 2009, 55).

One of the ways in which commodified and commercialised intimacies are made sense of on YouTube is through the use of suspicion. Suspicion is used to contest the notion of intimacies for purely commercial purposes while simultaneously acknowledging a social economy that is increasingly intertwined with commercial gains. By being suspicious of YouTubers, users are constantly questioning YouTubers' motives and intentions. This questioning of motive and intention allows users to gain and build in-depth knowledge about the YouTubers. The users then share this knowledge which; then helps build and strengthen online communities similar to Anderson's imagined communities (1991). Simultaneously, the process of articulating and dispelling suspicion creates points of engagement that drive and add to the commercial viability of the platform and

YouTube activity. Hence suspicion is integral to the growth and sustainability of YouTube communities as well as the money economy. I argue that it helps reinforce online community bonds that are necessary for the growth and maintenance of online communities that can exist within a commodified relationship and despite this commodification.

Sinaceur (2010) argues that suspicion is likely to increase searching for information, and thus is to be distinguished from trust, as trust decreases the search for information by increasing the acceptance and openness of communication flows (Parks, Henager and Scamahorn 1996). Although trust increases information shared (De Dru, Giebels and Van de Vliert 1998; Pruitt 1981; Rubin and Brown 1975), it produces a different value proposition to suspicion. With suspicion, the value-creation is gained from the search for information (Thompson 1991). Searching creates more points of engagement on YouTube because it engages both the number of searches as well as information shared on the searches.

I would be remiss to leave out a discussion of the impact on monetary value that searches have, considering that the value discussed above is the value in creating those affective bonds or social relations as well as establishing trust. This includes general trust towards the YouTuber as well as trust about a particular video. Earlier in the chapter, I described the moment of finding a YouTuber you connect with and the process that follows: the binge-watching of videos and going back into their archive for older videos. Sometimes viewers go as far as following the YouTuber on their other social media platforms, watching people that they consider similar to the YouTuber, comparing them and their content, or watching other YouTubers they know have some association with the YouTuber they have just discovered. This "stalking behaviour" as some would consider it, is what Thompson (1991) is referring to when he talks about the value creation in the search. Viewers will also search through the comments section of each video, building a much broader view and network of that YouTuber. This gives the viewer an understanding of not only who the YouTuber is, but who other viewers perceive them to be and how they perceive them. All of this adds to the levels of trust or suspicion. For example, viewers will comment on the kinds of comments YouTubers receive, noting how they

are always negative or positive. They will seek validation from each other as well as try to find out who they are interacting with. This is important because of legitimate concerns over the internet's negative impact on maintaining the social fabric, especially when internet interaction is deeply embedded within economic transactions and moments of commodification.

On YouTube and other social media platforms, the search becomes even more important as the role of time is different. Videos on YouTube have a different timeline. A video is most likely to attract attention in the first 24 hours, which is why YouTubers spend so much time on their social media promoting the video soon after, or sometimes before, uploading it. The video in that time will either become a contender for high views, normal views or low views. On YouTube, this process is slower than on other social media because the rate of uploads is slower, whereas on Twitter this is generally very fast as a person can have over a hundred tweets in the space of two hours. Instagram sits in the middle of these two.

To be found on the internet, one has to be searchable. It then becomes the role of the content creator to create a digital footprint in order to be accessible and searchable. The digital footprint is used to create as many search pathways as possible to be easily found or for people to come across a content creator's profile and content even if they have not searched for that specific content creator directly, thus, making it easier for users to find a creator's content and profile when searching for content similar to that creator. This digital footprint is created via other social media platforms, by commenting on other YouTube videos, as well as collaborating with other YouTubers. This digital footprint is the making of visibility by actively engaging on social media, whichever platform you have chosen. Earlier I discussed visibility to brands and the role this has in creating suspicion. This is countered by visibility to viewers. It is not always done as part of the action of creating transparency. By this I mean it is not always about the YouTuber posting videos on their channel. The visibility has to be as a user in both aspects and roles: of content creator as well as viewer. How you are seen to relate to other content creators on YouTube is just as important as how you relate to your viewers. All of this means that the multiple digital locations of a content creator through the

various platforms exist to allow for a multi-dimensional search outcome which builds into the suspicion framework as it allows for multiple alternatives. If the search yields too few results, then it causes more suspicion. This is particularly true for "factual" content like the news and online shops with few or no reviews, where viewers and users tend to want to see it repeated over various platforms. In content creation, it may be okay not to have a large digital footprint if a channel is considered small. However, as the channel grows, the digital footprint must grow with it – the footprint via what is put out as content, for example, videos and posts they put up, or content they put up responding to other content creators' content online, and the footprint via what others put out of the creator and their content. An illustration of this is when content creators are tagged on posts, viewers' reposts of content, the number of views in relation to subscribers, and the number of comments in relation to views. Falling short of these metrics leads to the perception that your subscribers are not real; that is, that they are bought or bots.

YouTubers themselves use this suspicion to drive views up. For example, Ohemma's video titled "TATI BEAUTY FIRST PALETTE (VOL. 1).....LET'S SEE HOW THIS GOES!! | OHEMAA BONSU" (2019) insinuates the possibility of the palette not being good. Ohemma's niche of being a dark skin-toned beauty YouTuber also means that part of her make-up reviews includes comments on the compatibility of the products for darker skin tones. Considering that by the time she titles the video, it has been filmed and she has tested the product and knows how it works on her skin tone, the title could have been a lot more direct and less ambiguous. That is not the case because direct titles do not drive up views and they also do not allow for the questioning of the pallet from her side. Saying "let's see" how it goes also puts the viewer in her possible frame of mind: how she felt when she was approaching the palette. It allows for different things to be read, it allows for that suspicious searching to occur: a search of her and her intentions, a search of her relationship with Tati, and a search of her feelings towards the pallet. It also brings in the viewer to be open to possibilities of different outcomes. "...Let's see how this goes" is a journey, and the ending is not definite.

Collective memory bases itself on the ability of YouTubers to maintain and grow with different viewers at different stages of their lives as well as at different stages of the YouTuber's life. That collective memory provides a sense of shared community, at the same time as it allows for a placing of YouTubers and viewers within a historical timeline. For example, when viewers in the comments section of videos ask: "Who is watching this in 2019?" or "Who came back to this video after watching such and such a video that was uploaded?" it illustrates the historical timeline that the YouTuber creates for themselves as well as the viewer. It also happens that viewers stop watching but do not necessarily unsubscribe, coming back during those situational moments. For example, when Judy announced her pregnancy on "itsJudysLife" many comments on the video referred to how the viewer had stopped watching earlier when her last children were born and still young but now were back and excited for this chapter. This historicisation also works to build that intimate knowledge. This happens, for example, when comments on the same video let newer viewers know that Judy's husband, Benji, would like a son, or provide information about her previous pregnancy: details such as her cousin doing a pregnancy gender prediction test for those children and future ones. That video is brought up in this pregnancy announcement video as both collective memory, because many come in to help the memory take shape and be confirmed, and as intimate knowledge passed from older viewers to more recent viewers.

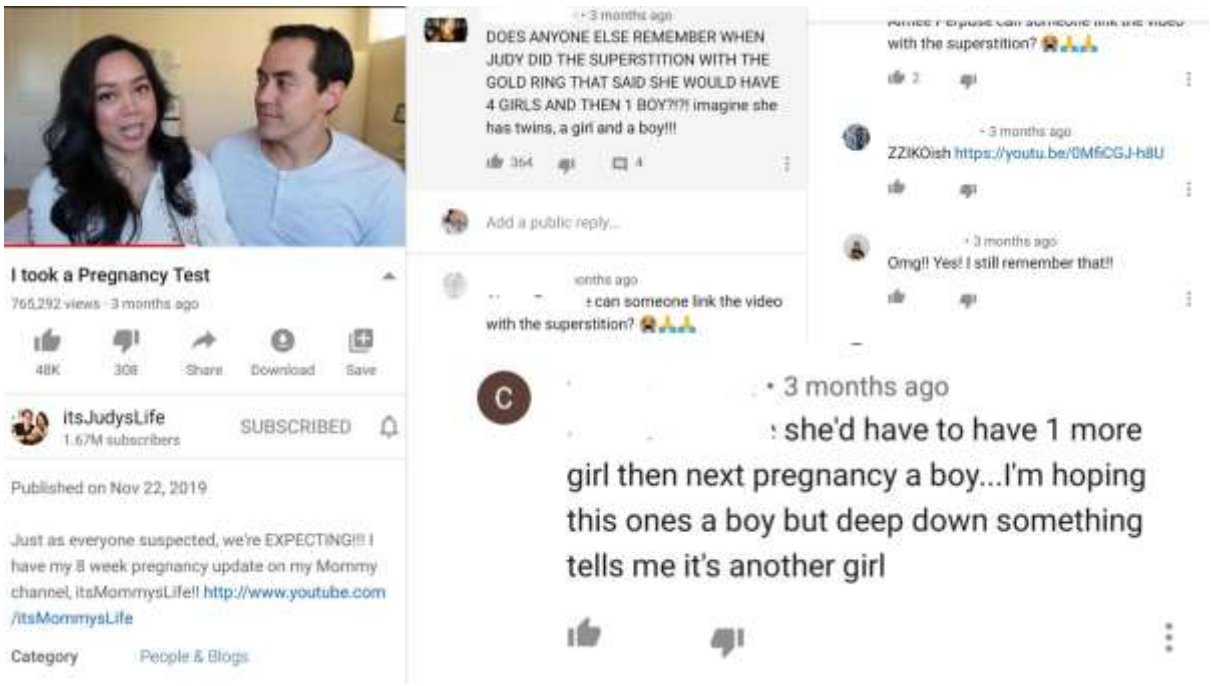


Figure U: 'itsJudyslife' 2019 pregnancy announcement and comment responses (screen grabbed 2020).[108]

This intimate knowledge is slightly different from what came earlier as it depends on social memory. It is not shared by the YouTuber in the moment; instead, they depend on the viewers to remember. Intimate knowledge bases itself on the ability of YouTubers to be able to maintain viewers over a long period while at the same time being able to gain new viewers. This means that as YouTubers grow their channels, as well as grow older and go through changes, they have to be able to translate that growth in the past for older viewers, in the present for newer viewers, and to some extent into the future. The brands they build have to be able to accommodate change in all aspects of a person and their life. It is generally this growth and change that can also serve as moments of suspicion. If viewers are not able to place an action in the history of the Youtuber, based on something they have said or done in previous videos, then suspicion arises in terms of the authenticity or intentions for the change. For example, in the case of Tati and her vitamin product launch, the lack

[108] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bhqlei-zAYE&t=320s accessed November 22, 2019 YouTube/itsJudysLife

of continuity and the perceived “suddenness” of the interest in vitamins caused the negative response to her product.

In this chapter I have shown how, despite the very commercial entanglement that online communities find themselves in, these communities exist and are growing. In a time when online and offline lines are blurring, and as we continue to make life and meaning over both, this understanding of how online communities function and make meaning for themselves is important. Viewer suspicion never goes away. It is a constant presence, no matter how many times a YouTuber explains their actions or intentions. This is one of the reasons why I chose suspicion as the framework rather than trust. If, as stated, trust is a way of seeing the world, and familiarity is the basis for this trust, then the familiarity created over time between viewers and YouTubers would wear away at this suspicion. Yet, it does not. As the YouTuber grows, so do the suspicions. As time moves on and the YouTuber’s personality and interests change, so does the suspicion. This suspicion is also maintained due to the inherent suspicion of technology and the platform being a technological product, wherein there is always a need to get new viewers which means that familiarity is always at different levels between all the viewers.

Chapter 6: Living Brands, Making Living Work

> Contrary to the utopian theories of transparency and openness promoted in Web 2.0 discourse, and the moral panics around lack of privacy online, life streaming is not an unvarnished digital stream of someone's online actions. Instead it is a carefully edited, purposeful construction of self. Life streamers choose what to reveal and conceal: they monitor their own and other's actions, publicizing certain aspects of their lives while keeping other parts to themselves, and they may even exaggerate or falsify information to produce a desired effect. The resulting life stream is an attempt to inculcate a particular version of oneself that appeals to others in the networked audience. This should not surprise anyone familiar with the intricacies of face-to-face communication. (Marwick 2013, 242)

This chapter traces the online lives of content creators, increasingly referred to as influencers, whilst they more and more refer to themselves as brands. I focus on vloggers who create content and make a living off posting videos online about their daily lives. This chapter looks at how these vloggers are defining what work is and how they are setting boundaries between work and non-work even though they make a living from the representation of everyday life. I will be discussing the work that they do and how they separate work from private life, to get to what the work actually is. The chapter illustrates how, by turning life into work, YouTubers have set up new boundaries between work and play, the private and the public. Having shown how analytics are used to define meaningful interaction and how new definitions of trust and community are being establised through suspicion, in this chapter I show how work and play are separated online in order to be able to make life into work while sustaining individual time and social time that is outside of the market. By making living work, they have defined new areas of work and play and created new boundaries between these and areas of online and offline, or public and private, activity.

YouTube is Not What it Used to Be

Technological advancements in communication media and the internet have been shown to impact everyday offline life. The impact has been felt in individual identity construction, social organisation, economic operations, political organisation, and how media are produced and consumed

(Castells 2013 Chen 2014; Lange 2007a, 2007b; Slater 2002). How these changes come about, how these changes are implemented and what these changes mean is the overarching focus of this study.

On July 14, 2017 "ulovemegz" posted a video on her channel titled "Followers Validate You? Stress For Perfection In A Fake Social Media World."[109] This was a follow up from a previous video she had posted on July 1, 2017, titled "Young & Broke to Being Blessed With YouTube Success & Opportunity."[110] In the earlier video Megan, or Megz as she is referred to by her viewers, had mentioned that YouTube had changed. The comment initiated a lot of discussion and prompted the filming of the later video. Both videos were filmed in the early hours of the morning with Megz in bed and looking ready for sleep. In her later video Megz (2017) blames professionalism on YouTube for taking away the spontaneity and rawness of YouTubing, resulting in more formulaic videos to ensure assured views. She also contends that the professionalisation of YouTube has caused a loss of community within the platform because YouTubers are now driven by monetary gains rather than being part of a community.

> I just wanted to chat with y'all because in that previous video I mentioned how YouTube isn't really the same as it was before. I feel like there's a new era of YouTube, it's a new wave, it's just new all the way around. It is a lot different from the YouTube that I remember even from two years ago, three years ago, four years ago, five years ago, six years ago. It's very, very different. Back then things were kind of, more kind of like easy-going. In my opinion, it was more organic, more real. It was more laid-back in a sense because everyone was on there just organically on there because they wanted to. Fast forward to maybe like three years ago, right, I started to notice that things were kind of changing in a way like the standard for YouTube as far as the beauty room, because I don't know how any other genre is doing, but specifically the beauty room things are starting to change, and I'm starting to notice the change as well. I would just hop on camera and not really care about the visuals of what I was giving. I started to notice that people were starting to say that my video quality sucked and my visual sucks and so I was kind of like: "What do you mean? What are people talking about?" When I started out I was filming on the floor, I was filming in really random places. I didn't have the best video quality because I didn't think that much of it because I just got on here making videos doing it exactly what I loved. But now in the new YouTube world, the standard of video quality is a lot higher. Do you ever notice when you're watching some of these videos, or videos in general, they all kind of have the same vibe and feel and overall look? I'm not saying that everybody's videos look exactly the same but they kind of have the same kind of

[109] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PehaFsEXh1g accessed July 14, 2017 YouTube/ulovemegz.

[110] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1k--xIp8XiM accessed July 1, 2017 YouTube/ulovemegz.

aesthetic, kind of clean white or kind of like a colour background but very crispy, you get what I'm saying. The video quality is much higher now than it was back in '09 when you could just do whatever, but that's not to say that save you are starting a YouTube channel that you can't just film on your phone. A lot of our phones have way better quality than they did in 2009 so you can get away with that.

I read and I hear a lot of things and you know one day…I read about myself, in a way it was very constructive criticism but the delivery, of course, isn't going to be constructive, it's going to be a little petty. I read and it did hurt a little bit because I just genuinely didn't know…I was like, "okay, I need to step it up" because you know my peers were moving right along with their video quality so then that's when I decided, "okay, I need to get a DSLR camera." This was back in like 2010-ish I think because Missy was selling her old camera because she was getting a t3i at the time. She had a t1; I bought her t1. I started using it for a while and you know gradually the views started to increase because I had better video quality, this and that, was the first wave of quality starting to increase because a lot of people were saying that, you know, need to up your clothes. So that was the first wave but still I would come filming on the floor, you know, just coming on as it is in some videos. It started to flip as far as the beauty world because everything has to be kind of like this now, right? It's all about visuals. Because before then, girl, I was filming on my flip camera. You guys can, you know, go check out from my older videos. I could only do so much with that flip camera because it didn't pick up any lighting, and I didn't have lighting, I didn't have the best camera. I just kind of like just got on camera and just posted it as is. Today's real, you cannot do that, not really, because people will lose interest very fast. So with that bleep camera the quality, the camera quality was awful – you couldn't see any of the colours of the make-up that I was using, I don't know how people watch because right now it's very difficult for me to watch those videos and really try to follow along. I do want to say thank you for watching those videos and being with me during that time and, you know, grown with me and to the place that we are today because I had no clue, I had no clue, but then again that's what kind of like makes me love YouTube because you can see the gradual growth and individual. I kind of like those days more because people didn't know any better. They was just really all here because we love to do this, right? Right now the visuals look a lot different: people have their ring lights, they have their soft boxes, they have their umbrella lights, they have their drop boxes, they have their set up pop background. I'm not saying that this is totally the standard but a lot of the videos that I tend to watch or run across all look a little like this, even myself. I invested in a new camera: I have a Canon 70d. I purchased that back in 2015 and I purchased some paper backdrops and I purchased some lighting. When it comes to YouTube you kind of have to go with the wave of what everything is doing, you know, the trends and how the quality of people's content is looking so you won't get lost in the sauce, in a way, because a couple times I found myself feeling lost in the sauce and getting lost in the sauce because the quality of my video wasn't all the way there, for what the standard of content that's being put out that people expect. Once I upgraded my video quality and this and other, that's when I noticed that companies start knocking at my door a little bit more and this is where YouTube is a lot different now right because now companies understand the importance and the value of YouTube influencers. I'm not even gonna call them beauty gurus because I feel like that term is so over and they're influences not gurus because a lot of YouTube influencers aren't gurus. Now companies see YouTube as a major platform to put their products on so now people actually start to see that people are able to make a living off of YouTube so now you have this whole new wave of

> people who maybe start YouTube just because they see other people doing it and making a living off of it even though they may not have a real passion for it. So you have all of those people in there on here or just kind of here just because it's trying to catch whatever way they can get on because of the value in it. Now it seems like it's seen as like "oh, let me get." (Megz 2017)

Like Megz, Patricia Bright, a British YouTuber with over 2.8 million subscribers on her main channel, which she started in 2009, shares these opinions on the changes on YouTube. Both she and Megz have highlighted the need for higher quality production of videos that are more technically advanced and competitive within the YouTube community and with television and other traditional media. It also means that there are higher equipment costs, such as lighting, and more emphasis on looks and composition (Patricia Bright 2017). Talk about this change centres on the video as the object in which value is intrinsically situated.

Ultimately, with this kind of content, it would be easy to ascribe the commercial success of a YouTuber to their content and in particular the videos, similar to how in traditional media the movie or series or programme is the object of value. The technical aspects are highly appreciated by viewers because they are able to see the products being discussed clearly as well as see what the YouTuber is doing when it comes to applying make-up and other beauty-related content. Yet the video has a different role to that of videos in traditional media, although it does maintain some of these aspects. These videos serve as sites of work and effort, and of community, with viewers appreciating the effort that goes into upgrading one's equipment and the technical aspects of video-making. Viewers will comment on backgrounds, camera lighting and even offer advice on how to set up the filming space. Similarly, YouTubers will go to viewers and ask them how they want different content filmed, as seen on Kristi's channel (2019).[111]

Kristi from "RawBeautyKristi" posted a video on August 23, 2018, titled "THE BEAUTY 'COMMUNITY'... | GRWM" discussing the negative effects that money has had on the YouTube beauty industry. She claimed that the large commercial success of this community through the

[111] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xSQgKksCUF8 accessed September 4, 2019 YouTube/RawBeautyKristi.

integration with brands and mainstream media had made the YouTube beauty industry more egotistical, elitist, less passionate, less artistic and more profit-centred. In the last three years many YouTubers, both creators and users, have noted that YouTube has changed. All of this she said as she was filming a Get Ready With Me (GRWM) video. Where she was applying her make-up and sharing make-up tips and beauty product views:

> I have a video coming. You guys may have seen in the vlog that I did a vlog of LA,[112] which if you guys didn't watch it, please watch it. There's some parts that I really like. It's so interesting, vlogs are something that a lot of people don't watch and like, and watch, it seems! But, oh my gosh, they're like my favourite. I did like a little teaser for the next one which I'm still editing – it was a lot of footage. It was literally like six hours of footage, and this is where I did the Beautycon Meetup,[113] and that was so wonderful.[114] I did also go to a few events that week maybe like five different events and I just met a lot of people in the community it's not even a community anymore. Calling it the beauty community I feel like is such a joke. Now it's the make-up industry. I remember when I first started on YouTube and I talked about this in the sit-down part of the video that I did. But I remember when I first got into the industry, it was so make-up focused, it was about artistry, it was about with your audience, it was not about drama and who hates who and who likes who and cliques. It has just changed so much I feel such an interesting dynamic how things have changed over the years and I don't know why they did, like, what was it about the beauty industry, is it money? Is it money? That fuelled how things change. I do feel like money is a huge factor and the reason a lot of industries do change because a lot of people, and I'm not just speaking on influencers but I'm speaking on celebrities, I'm speaking on other companies: they realise that there's money in it and so they infiltrate. They come in, they create their line, and they do what they know is going to bring in revenue, and that is creating a beauty line because right now beauty is such a huge industry but it waters down the true beauty and passion behind make-up.
>
> I do feel that over the years it's gone so far from make-up and it's so centred around ego and I've seen it in person, you know, I, I'm not gonna drag anyone or shit-talk anyone but I, and I say this in the other video that I haven't uploaded yet, but a lot of times the people in this industry that you think are gonna be the meanest are the nicest and vice versa like you think…
>
> …[when] I got back from LA I had a really jaded mindset which is why I almost want to upload what I said because I was so disheartened by some of the interactions that I had when I was there and I'm not blaming LA when I say LA people get so defensive,

[112] Los Angeles, California.

[113] "BeautyCon is a beauty, fashion, and wellness summit held annually in both New York City and Los Angeles. Attendees are able to purchase make-up on a discount, meet their favourite YouTubers/celebrities/influencers, get their make-up professionally done, or just grab a ton of free stuff (more on this later!). You will also get a chance to watch informational panels" (Meagan 2019).

[114] "BeautyCon 2018 Review – Was It Worth Attending?", My Life Parade (Meagan 2018), https://www.mylifeparade.com/experience/festivals/beautycon-2018-review/ accessed April 6, 2020.

they're like: "It's not LA!" I'm not talking about the city of LA being superficial. The city doesn't have anything to do with that, it's the people who move to said city. Just because there are good people there doesn't mean that I haven't met a bunch of shitty ones. Being on YouTube makes people get this like weird elitist personality. Like, we are fucking YouTubers, we put powder on her face with brushes and we're like step aside. I think it's one thing that's kind of not lost on people but it's something that we all need to remember is that regardless of status [we] are all exactly the same. And I think we need to break down those barriers because as viewers, because I'm a huge fan of YouTube as well, like, I watch YouTube not just as a YouTuber myself but as a viewer I enjoy YouTube so much…it's not what this needs to be this, this community this industry needs to go back to make-up and back to being a community because right now I can't even use that word to describe us because we are so a fallen community. If we ever were one, we aren't one now and that's just so unfortunate. Reality is that the majority of people watching work a strenuous nine-to-five or longer and are having to sit around watching the drama of a bunch of entitled rich YouTubers fighting about nonsense. Well, we could all just be adults and talk it out and be real with you guys and realise the privilege that we have to be doing what we do online. I don't want any part of it, I just want to do make-up, I just want to have my group of loyal, amazing subscribers who continually uplift one another.

I hope this video doesn't come off as too preachy and too negative. This shit has to end, like, I've come to the realisation that we just need to realise our influence. I think that's something that so many people forget. They forget how important our influence is. I used to be this way, I used to be such a controversial little bitch, like, I think it's just really important for all of us to realise that our influence, that's literally our job title. We are social media influencers and if we're not influencing people in a positive way… This video has turned into a rant as well which I don't like because I'm not trying to do this every time I get on camera. I just want…there to be positivity. I know talking about some of this stuff is considered not positive to a lot of people, but I think that having tough conversations is the beginning to positive changes. That's what I hope for in the make-up industry. I hope that we can become a beauty community again because it's really sad to me to see the community aspect of YouTube which is why I joined YouTube in the first place…

…this is the lip combo but that I've been using lately. I may have talked to you guys about this already but I may not have, so if I haven't yet, I just wanted to show you guys I think I'd have those so it's probably gonna be broken record but this is the lip pencil, it's completely sepia by Make Up For Ever. I line my lips with this.

…then I put some of the Charlotte Tilbury Kim KW lipstick on. And it's really nude once you put mocha-licious on, which we all know I'm gonna do. This is Wet *n* Wild mocha-licious, is perfect for the centre so you get rid of that butthole lip and then this is that my new favourite gloss, this is the Bite Beauty French Press lip gloss in the shade Flat White. It is so perfect for a nude lip, oh my god, it's so pretty. I feel like I need to just quit worrying about uploading this video. I was like so worried about uploading this video because I think it's gonna be received wrong, or people are gonna take what I'm saying incorrectly, or they're gonna start speculating on who I'm talking about and I'm really not talking about one person in particular. That's really not the case.

> I just hope that the beauty community can come back. I hope the community aspect can come forward and be back because I do miss it. I missed so much when I would hop on Instagram and I would see like these crazy beautiful, amazing looks and I would feel inspired to create, and I would feel inspired to do things. I find that if I'm super stressed out at the end of the day and I hop on YouTube to an escape, it's not even escaping for me anymore. It's like stressing me out more and I feel like so many creative people and so many YouTubers are saying that they're in a rut right now. Because there's this huge comparison going on where people are pitting YouTubers against one another. Like, I feel like that's such a common thread right now of being like, "oh, nobody can do it like this person can" and that's an unhealthy mindset just because I don't get as many views as the other person. I'm still valid, I'm still a person. (Kristi 2018)

Researchers such as Hou (2018), Kim (2012), Morreale (2014) and Postigio (2016), as well as YouTubers other than those mentioned above, have argued that this change has been for the worse due to the monetisation and the institutionalisation of the platform and the interaction upon it. These sentiments lament a vision of the recent past and the idea of a YouTube of amateurs uploading for the love and enjoyment of doing it, and of being part of an imagined and present community. However, the three YouTubers I have just mentioned, Megz, Patricia Bright and Kristi are mainly beauty YouTubers with some vlogging content. Hence, the emphasis on technical aspects such as production value and equipment as this tends to be much higher for content videos versus vlogs. On YouTube, it could be argued that because the videos are providing information on a particular topic, whether that be beauty or DIY or any other tutorial or information-based content, the video is the object of value. In reality, this is not necessarily the case.

When asked how one starts a YouTube channel, or what equipment one needs to start a channel, many YouTubers will say to just start, or even just use your phone. "People are more interested in engaging with you than the equipment" is a common refrain, especially, as Megz has said, with the current quality of phone cameras. This again reinforces the notion of YouTube as an amateur space. This is despite the fact that as YouTubers post more high production value videos and as the channels grow, the equipment becomes a big factor in the growth and value of the channel. YouTubers do a lot of learning about technical aspects of video production, and they also invest in

equipment as the channel grows. Many YouTubers have spent large sums of money on camera and filming equipment. In the example with Megz, we see how she adapted her filming equipment and learnt about the technical aspects of filming. Her discussion of her move from a point and shoot cameral to a DSLR, to buying lenses, lighting, and wardrobe: all of these things work towards creating a set and a feel to the video over and above its content. Some YouTubers will even hire a filming crew as well as editors[115] to ensure high-quality videos.

As a YouTuber, you generally need to learn basic filming skills, such as learning about light and lenses, as well as basic editing skills. This includes, for example, filming with your back to the light and not into the light for clearer pictures, although in this digital age some technicalities are becoming normal due to selfie culture and the use of cameras in everyday life. With time, editing software may be updated or more complicated editing be done on the existing software. YouTubers learn about different apps for editing videos for YouTube, or still pictures for other social media. Choosing the right thumbnail, getting the right title for your video in order to maximise its searchability: all of this requires a lot of online apps, filming, photography and sound skills, as well as time and money. A lot goes into the production of a YouTube video to make it seamless and natural. This excludes all the creative planning that goes into deciding on the look and feel of the video.

YouTubers need to be multi-skilled, not only concerning the YouTube platform but about other platforms and in various fields: filming, photography, graphic design, business, marketing, curatorship, presentation, relationship building, and statistical analysis. It is, therefore, hard to really quantify what YouTubers do for work. When asked what they do for a living, many YouTubers will say "I make videos for a living" or "I'm a vlogger," and in the last five years the terms "influencer" and "content creator" have become prevalent. This is possibly due to the taboo that has existed about

[115] Filming crews as well as editors are generally used by YouTubers who film specific technical content such as cooking videos or YouTube videos rather than vlogs. Vloggers who regularly use extra help in filming or editing are usually perceived to be an exception rather than a norm. There are vloggers who have taken a more cinematic approach to their vlogs but these are the exception.

YouTube being considered work. Even now the fixation on how much YouTubers make is as strong as ever, along with the question of whether they should be making so much money. And even though most of the YouTubers who acknowledge and claim "YouTuber" as their work description do so with the emphasis on YouTube as a privilege to do whilst still stressing just how much work actually goes into making YouTube work. YouTube has become work, and in doing so, work and leisure have been somewhat separated from each other.

There has been a shift on YouTube in terms of the ways in which YouTubers present themselves to their viewers and on other social media platforms. This shift expresses itself as part of the social media interactions. More than that, however, it needs to be seen as part of the increasingly intimate nature of the labour of online work. It also needs to be understood within the larger economic and political framework of the digital market. In the previous chapter, I argued that social media allows us to consider a different kind of individualism, which is not a negative erosion of self and society but instead serves new ideals about what counts as authenticity. In this chapter, I take this argument further to show how the evolution to more personal videos is indeed a move to the reflexive individual described above but that, instead of a fragmentation of the individual and society, there is instead a consolidation of person and society within a highly consumerist and commodified framework of online influencing. This is done through what I term the work of self, the creation and maintenance of the digital footprint in order to make boundaries between work/leisure, online/offline, private/public.

I Work Therefore I Am

Whilst the social and moral effects of the formalisation and professionalism of the platform have been widely spoken about on YouTube, they have also been written about. This has been done specifically (as I have highlighted above) and more broadly in literature about marketing or branding on YouTube and other social media, about influencers and micro-celebrities, and even more broadly in the literature on the impact of digitisation on social relationships and on individual identity and

subjectivity. All of these have expressed the changes that professionalisation introduced in YouTubers' vlogs, the kind of content they put up, the discussions they have on YouTube, the culture of YouTube and its impact on the larger society. YouTubers' practices have changed vlogging into work, which has impacted how YouTubers see themselves, identifying as vloggers rather than a person who vlogs. Gerber (2017) states that work impacts the development of an individual's identity and practices (119). Viewers also accept this identity and form of work, reinforcing it when it comes to the expectations of the YouTuber. For example, in a now-deleted video by the Nive Nulls titled "They have a baby," a viewer responded to a comment the Nive Nulls made about inconsistent vlogs and how they were taking their time filming, saying that "they were not taking their time…and that they were not doing their job with vlogging footage" (Nive Nulls December 21, 2015).

One of the fastest-growing kinds of videos on YouTube has been vlogs. Historically, YouTubers have moved from specific, technical-based content videos to vlogs, and in the last four years, it has become common for people to start and only have vlog channels. Hou (2018) has argued that people come for the technical videos but they stay for the vlogs. This allows for a larger scope in the brand of a YouTuber and larger marketing areas in terms of their work with companies. More than that, it has brought YouTubing and influencer marketing into the intimate spaces of the home. It has allowed viewers a behind-the-scenes perspective on YouTubers' lives, and it has also made living and going through everyday life a form of work.

Many YouTubers either started second channels for their vlogs or have mixed vlogs into their main channels. Initially, the two channels were the format, but within a few years those that included vlogs usually merged the two. As vlogs were growing in the YouTube space so were the ways in which people put themselves out there. Many have shifted from using avatars to changing their channel names to their offline names. For example, "Sprinkle of Glitter" changed her main channel

name to "Louise Pentland,"[116] and merged her vlogs into her main channel, shutting down her vlogging channel. This shift highlights the change from how YouTube was considered as a virtual space on the internet, separate from real life. By moving to the use of real names and more real-life images we see the integration of the internet into the "real" or offline world.

As new YouTubers are starting directly with vlogging channels they are skipping the idea of a main channel with technically skilful videos. That does not mean that vlogging channels do not have a focus. The understanding of this online activity being about branding is clear and known. Thus vlogging channels will either be branded around a particular person or an aspect of that individual or family or friendship, or they will focus on a specific type of vlog content, such as prank videos or story times. This is because no matter what the circumstance people still need a reason to like you. So, giving them a focus area for what to expect from you is important in establishing your place in the YouTube space. This is for both the viewers as well as the YouTube algorithm, as it also needs to know where to place your videos. That is why YouTubers spend so much time titling their videos and filling in the description box of each video, and are now adding hashtags to videos. YouTubers will use different apps and methods to find the best ways to title videos. Some search for similarly titled videos and use wording similar to the highest watched video (Yolz 2018),[117] while others use apps such as Google's Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) (Sibu Mpanza 2020),[118] which searches through websites for the best, most used, or most relevant words for you to use to increase traffic to your site. These SEO search engines, including Google, run through the algorithms to discern what has occurred the most frequently which you can then use for your titles.

This personalisation of channels comes at a time when YouTubing is also turning into a job. In these personalisation changes, we see the signs of the intimacy labour discussed in the previous

[116] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rwrNa1s2Mwk&list=PLsz4DBL-Awj-AKeQ9on64pnNRJlYQfmL1&index=88&t=0s accessed September 1, 2016 YouTube/Louise Pentland.

[117] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mgvm1nk-cY0 accessed December 2, 2018 YouTube/Yolz Channel.

[118] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E0PGl_q9XxU&t=126s accessed February 10, 2020 YouTube/Sibu MpanzaSA.

chapter. More than intimacy labour, we see the convergence of personal identity and their work of content creation. It is clear that a shift in the relationship between work and the individual has occurred, from "I **make** shoes" to "I am **a** cobbler," to "**I am** Hey Gabster" or whatever channel name you pick for yourself, partly explaining how the internet and online activity can be a part of identity creations. This shift shows how YouTubers and, more broadly, social media content creators through time have changed how they identify with their work partly based on what the work is, how that work is carried out in terms of the production process and the requirements of the work on the individual.

The current shift has resulted in the convergence of the person or their identity and everyday life with commerciality, as "I am Hey Gabster" is both the person and a brand. This adds to viewers' and, more broadly, society's fears of commodified lives, as individuals become brands, and lifestyles become purely consumption-based. It is no wonder the increase of influencer marketing and its social impact has been in the spotlight of late. Added to that, not only have influencers moved from focusing on products, but they are now posting videos on their "everyday life." However, it is not a seamless convergence. The line between online and offline is still very marked when it comes to vlogging. Turning on that camera changes things. It changes the space. It changes the way people react to you because people react positively and/or negatively to cameras and being recorded. Not least, it changes your experience of any situation. Vloggers often refer to the impact of vlogging on experiencing events, stating that vlogging takes you out of the moment and you are not able to be present in the moment.

For example, Toni Daley, who refers to herself as an "OG"[119] YouTuber, had been vlogging her husband's abandonment of their marriage and the subsequent separation. As part of this separation, she put their house up on the market and after a few months it was sold. In her final video leaving their house she takes down a picture of her and her husband that has been hanging on the wall

[119] The term OG stands for original gangster. It is an old slang term meaning someone who has been doing something for a long time. In this instance, it refers to someone who has been a YouTuber for a long time.

and she throws it in the bin.[120] In the following video she responds to a viewer who was surprised by the fact that she kept the picture during all these months. In her response, she said that when she decided to film her journey and the process of her separation, she knew that this was a scene she would want as an end to that time in her life. So although she was going through a lot and she had mentioned not wanting reminders of their time together or any of her husband's belongings, she kept the picture for visual effect and artistic creativity.[121]

When I have vlogged, I have had similar experiences. It might be that I would be recording the whole time, or something happens and decide I want to film and immediately the creative curating brain comes on. It becomes a creative working moment where you are thinking about capturing a moment, the best way to do so, the technical aspects of filming, for example, lighting and how to edit it later, how to fit what is going on into the rest of the vlog or what moment you want to highlight. These creative working moments cause one to disengage from the moment and what is happening and to see it as well as experience it differently – to be alienated from the group or an experience.

In March 2018 my mother, sister and niece came from Eswatini to Johannesburg for a visit. These were regular visits, and they were used to me vlogging as they had appeared on numerous videos since 2015 when I started my vlogging channel. They had just arrived, and I was opening up all the packets they had brought as I had requested some items from home not easily found in Johannesburg, as well as some home pre-cooked meals. I decided to film myself opening the packages and sharing my goodies with the audience, particularly because there were a lot of "traditional" foods such as boiled nuts, home-brewed amarula beer, some maize on the cob, sweet potato, and taro root.[122] My mom laughed, looked at my partner and asked if he would be able to handle having a camera in

[120] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y5j8kSIO5-c accessed February 18, 2020 YouTube/Toni Daley.

[121] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9gcZ2X7P0xU accessed February 25, 2020 YouTube/Toni Daley.

[122] This was filmed and the video is – Hey Gabster March 2018 *Emaganu/Amarula Beer, Townships, Potholes and Cape Town|Swazi YouTuber|23 March 2018.* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8okR2uyU35E Both my niece and sister have since become regulars on my channel.

his face every day. Everyone laughed. Yet this moment highlights the nature of interaction when the camera is on and when it is off.

My family knew of vlogging, and they were not necessarily concerned about how they were going to be portrayed, as we had been through these discussions already. My sister had initially not wanted to appear in my videos, nor did she want my niece to appear. However, as time progressed and as my niece grew up and had her own social media that she was managing, my sister felt further exposure on my channel would not be too negative as my niece was already privy to online engagement and online safety precautions. My sister initially was also trying to manage how she would be perceived online. Living in a small country like Eswatini, where anonymity was not the norm and keeping her online presence out of her workspace was not possible, she initially wanted to stay off the channel and out of the videos. Furthermore, the interaction and, in particular, this question of having a camera "in your face" all day illustrates how cameras are an addition and distraction in everyday activities: not necessarily a good or bad distraction, but a distraction. Cameras are something to be managed, potentially having an impact on how people interact with each other.

Listening to YouTubers on "Video Influencers," and many others on the platform based locally and abroad, the common statements on growing a YouTube channel are: 1) be consistent and post frequently, 2) be yourself/authentic, and 3) as YouTube grows there is a growing need to be easily searchable. There are many other pieces of advice but these are the most prevalent. All of these practices show how to YouTube and, more importantly, be a YouTuber, as they speak not just to the job description but also the demands of the job, which then are demands on the self.

Vlogging and the Work of Self

Starting a YouTube channel,[123] no matter the kind of content, generally involves following a few guidelines. These are very general guidelines, but I have noticed them on hundreds of videos. The YouTubers will generally start with introductory videos, Get to Know Me videos that allow for more in-depth knowledge of the YouTuber; they will do TAG or challenge videos that have high viewership rates and are easily recognisable; they will make videos on why they started their channel and they will make videos on what the channel is about. They will also either start by the haphazard posting of videos, using frequency of uploads to get the algorithm to start recommending them to others, or they may set up an uploading schedule to show consistency as well as reliability, again making the algorithm more able to see them and recommend them to other users on YouTube. These strategies are also used together, whereby YouTubers might start with everyday uploads and once they have what they consider to be enough momentum, set a more predictable but less frequent schedule. Daily vlogs where YouTubers uploaded videos every day were common early in my research but from 2018 or so many of the daily vloggers I follow such as, "itsJudysLife," "RAVEN ELYSE," "SACCONEJOLYs," "The Glam Twinz," and "The Michalaks," reduced their upload schedule. In their videos explaining why they were cutting back on uploads, they said they wanted to take certain days off vlogging or even replace vlogging days with either live videos on YouTube or with other social media content. This is said to give them time off work, from the filming, editing or post-posting marketing of the videos when they go out. This scheduling and the making of working times and non-working times has become a norm on YouTube. For example, "Cullen & Katie" (2017)[124] and "SACCONEJOLYs" (2017)[125] both had videos advising their viewers that they were stopping daily vlogging and would be posting on a less demanding schedule. In the videos they

[123] In this instance, I am referring to when someone starts the channel with the purpose of growing it and making an income from it, not as a general user who is doing it more for the experience or socialising factor.

[124] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y-MCWJv5VbA accessed September 30, 2017 YouTube/Cullen & Katie.

[125] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BcCIca8nfAQ accessed April 12, 2018 YouTube/SACCONEJOLYs.

discussed the strain of posting daily vlogs on their filming, on vlog content, as well as their personal lives, stating that it takes a lot of time from other everyday work and activities because too much time is spent on planning, filming and editing content, leaving little family, personal and socialising time outside of work. Many subscribers commenting on the vlogs understood this and said they preferred to receive authentic vlogs rather than forced content. The fact that frequency and consistency are also now recognised as different and equally important allows for boundaries to be set, as the notion that no activity means that you will be forgotten is no longer true. In fact, some viewers have argued that certain YouTubers use time off and not uploading as a strategy to garner more views and interest, with many coming back with "why I have not been on YouTube/Posting videos."

When daily vloggers become full-time YouTubers, they set up two kinds of working spaces in their homes. One of these is intentional and the other unintentional. Many vloggers set up home offices of some kind or what is referred to as filming space. For beauty YouTubers, for example, this could take the form of a "glam room" which is used for getting dressed as well as filming make-up and beauty-related videos. They do this even if they have moved on to mainly vlogging. Whilst many still keep such rooms, very few have actually used their offices or filming rooms on a daily basis in terms of filming or working. This form of separation between work and home did not work well enough because vlogging is so intertwined with everyday life. Also, as laptops become faster, more able to process high-quality video, and more portable, many have moved from a desktop to working on a laptop on the couch, or wherever they find themselves working. For example, Remi Cruz, popularly known as Remi Ashten, from the channels "MissRemiAshten" and "RemLife" does not use her Mac to edit. In her apartment tour video,[126] she shows us her dedicated workstation where her iMac sits on top of a work desk. Instead, she says she hardly uses it and tends to use her laptop instead. However, this notion of having an office space or filming space or glam room is not obsolete, as it still does something to create a sense of working from home and structure. Filming is a lot harder to

[126] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zqK5n0LHP8Q accessed March 9, 2020 YouTube/RemLife.

separate from everyday life than editing and administrative work which is easier to delegate to a particular room or space. For example, the "Daily Davidsons" have work offices where they do their administrative and editing work. These rooms are seen in use regularly in their daily vlogs. However, they also set up a separate filming room in their house which has gone through multiple changes in décor and is never used for any extended period. It was initially decorated as a guest bedroom, then it became a filming room. After that, it was redecorated to be TJ's (the husband and father of the family) office. It has most recently been converted into their eldest son's bedroom.[127] The vlogs have continued, capturing all these changes.

Thus, even if YouTubers find themselves moving, and they know that they do not use these rooms as they are intended, they keep them. Instead, these rooms become spaces that need to be worked on. They serve more as symbols of work and working than as workspaces as such. They also provide a workspace when one is needed, as some vlogs and videos require a more professional or formal kind of space, such as when a brand requests or a person chooses to film that way. These designated work or filming spaces are one of the ways in which the notion of the video as a product is continued as they serve as professional spaces of work. They also designate YouTubing to the work category rather than that of home videos. They keep a semblance of the brand that started it for YouTubers who started with specific videos.

If one was to watch vlogs, viewers tend to see the same areas of the house or the space the filming generally takes place in. Even when the YouTuber does a tour of the entire house, the actual everyday filming occurs in the same spaces, usually repeated over and over again. This may be due to them having decided not to film in particular rooms or because certain rooms have better lighting or are better for filming, or those are the rooms with the most activity or the least activity depending on the focus of the video. These choices are not necessarily based on the fear of privacy invasion, or viewers finding out where YouTubers live. Whilst YouTubers may choose not to film outside their

[127] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HxWp9x6Y35Y accessed May 4, 2020 YouTube/Tiffany Darlyn.

houses or close to their homes to keep their addresses private, this is different as I am referring to areas inside the home. The rooms most filmed in tend to be the common areas such as kitchens and living rooms, the workspace or glam room or filming room or office. They could also move to the car, as well as outside at shops and other public areas. Although not all vloggers have issues filming in their bedrooms and such, the thing to note is the chosen areas of vlogging that vloggers show rather than those which are shown most or not shown. Thus, Lange's (2007a) idea of a shifting divide between private and public space applies, and that shift also works as a shift in the boundaries between work and leisure, or online and offline activity.

These vloggable spaces are determined by personal choice and values as well as public acceptance. For example, a YouTuber may not be allowed to vlog in certain shops whilst other shops may allow and even encourage vlogging. A house can also have non-vloggable spots, either for privacy or for practical reasons, but these may still appear on some vlogs depending on the day. For example, if a YouTuber has a sponsorship with a toothbrush brand or company, we might see them vlogging in their bathroom, when normally we do not. In those moments, a sense of intimacy is created from this exposure to a new and unseen place. Similarly, not only are there working spaces but there is also vloggable content. Not all that happens in everyday life makes it to the vlogs or is even filmed. Whilst I will discuss mediated content later, and the choices that go into what is uploaded, there are two approaches to everyday life by YouTubers. The first is that not everything in the everyday is worth filming. The second is that YouTubers tend to turn the everyday mundane into the everyday exceptional. Both serve to define everyday life on YouTube, as well as further define boundaries between online and offline, work and home, and private and public.

The theory of everyday life emerged from sociology as a response to the structuralist perspective (Gardiner 2000, 4). This perspective holds that systems, structural and institutional, are what integrate the individual into the whole. In response to this, theorists of the everyday saw the lack of depth in only understanding structures and institutions and leaving out the daily practices of individuals from the standpoint of the actor. This led to the emergence of a focus on everyday life

which seeks to understand the meanings, practices and processes that individuals take on in day-to-day life (Gardiner 2000, 4). The concept of what everyday life is has changed over time. It has shifted from the notion that everyday life is mundane, simple, and homogenous, to a problematised notion of the everyday where it is fluid, ambivalent and contradictory (Gardiner 2000, 5-6). Critical approaches to modernity and postmodernity have also been used to critique earlier theories of the everyday, focusing mostly on the ways knowledge about the everyday is theorised, the kinds of knowledge that are created, and the environment in which knowledge and theory are created (Gardiner 2000, 8).

Theories of the everyday, particularly the modernist and postmodernist, have extended the location of the everyday to the body, stating that the body is a site of resistance (Bakhtin 1984, 48; Lefebvre 1976, 74). Foucault (2019), on the other hand, argues that the body is a site in which power acts on the subject by reconstructing the body accordingly. These theories of the body, and the body in the everyday, have brought to the forefront ideas of the embodied experience of the everyday. This then also makes the body central to identity and identity formation. In thinking about the everyday in my research I use Heller's (1984) notion that the everyday creates the whole person, meaning it is the everyday actions, the unextraordinary daily activities, that create a person, their identity and society as a whole. Therefore, the daily practices of vloggers are viewed as the everyday, and I explore how these practices create identity. I also consider Highmore's (2002) question: When we say the everyday, whose everyday do we mean? This is particularly pertinent when I look at the experiences of participants in different parts of the world. Further, I focus on de Certeau's (1984) notion of how culture is actively consumed and not just produced, applying this within YouTube, and look at the different ways in which strategies and tactics are employed by vloggers in different locations.

Whilst Strangelove (2010) and other theorists argue for the amateur nature of YouTube videos, Strangelove emphasises the notion of the everyday as an important feature of YouTube videos and its part in online cultural reproduction. He stresses the notion of an uneventful, mundane, routinised and habitual everyday life, as Heller (1984) does in the Western context. By

conceptualising the everyday as mundane, routinised and habitual, he assumes that anything exceptional that does occur is not part of the everyday. Yet, YouTubers work at making the everyday exceptional.

As already argued, YouTubers use space to create boundaries between work and home, and private and public. These techniques are not only used to differentiate these spaces but to create marked boundaries between them, even when they are vloggers and do the work of portraying their everyday life online as work. As part of using these spaces to create boundaries between these activities, routines and repetition are used on YouTube to create familiarity and feelings of comfort. Thus, YouTubers will use the same greeting in all their videos and they will find ways to repeat the ethic of what their channel is about, or their videos will contain similar scenes. For example, each video would have an introductory song that viewers recognise and will later associate with a particular YouTuber or a repeated scene or action such as making coffee or discussing coffee or a favourite coffee mug. Some YouTubers have favourite sayings. Some of these repetitions, such as the introduction, are planned and some evolve and become established from habitual use which viewers recognise.

In the "Cullen & Katie" video titled "Changes" (2017) where they announce that they will be cutting back on their daily vlogs due to the stress and strain it had been putting on them emotionally individually, as well as on their marriage and family dynamic, two viewers responded with similar sentiments, of which the quoted comment is an example "I think it's so unfortunate that YouTubers feel this pressure to put on these huge exciting shows. I think it has to do with trying to attract a younger audience. As an adult, I sooo appreciate the regular 'ol vlogs...nothing crazy or gimmicky. Just honest living. Thanks for being honest. Blessings to you both" (2017).

This idea of exciting vlogs is based on the notion of doing something and that something being productive. Thus, productivity rather than the mundane characterises YouTube everyday life. This is another way that consumerist culture and consumption become embedded in YouTube and other

social media platforms. This productivity may also be described as a characteristic of the reflexive modern individual.

It is not uncommon for YouTubers to say they "were not doing anything important or worth watching" when explaining a missed upload or why there is a timeline break in the vlog. This concept of "doing something" carries through to the concept of work of self that I explain towards the end of this chapter. However, what should be noted now is the idea that not all everyday moments are considered vlogging material, for example, watching TV. Unless the YouTuber is showing something specific in terms of the vlog narrative or storyline, things like watching TV tend not to make it into a vlog. Thus, things that show the idea of doing nothing or downtime are not usually vlogged. Instead, what is foregrounded is the notion of an everyday of doing something, whether this be cooking, cleaning, changing diapers, or even going to the gym. Unexplained moments or pauses in the everyday are not included. For example, when getting home from work there is usually a period of unsettledness that occurs and that period may end up being spent doing nothing in particular, or a day when there is nothing to do and nowhere to go may be spent "vegging out" on the couch. A twenty-minute vlog with someone on the couch watching TV is not vlogging material. Added to that, if you plan on monetising the vlog then you cannot show too much of what is playing on TV or have too much of its audio.[128] Whilst the everyday is considered in terms of mundane actions and homogeneity, we see this in terms of the repetition on YouTube. What becomes exceptionally clear, however, is that the everyday is also the parts of nothingness in every day: the moments when you have not decided on what to do or why you are doing a particular action. Sometimes it is the moments that you do not want to describe, narrate and curate for someone else that become private, home, and offline moments.

[128] A video of someone discussing what they are watching or explaining the context of what created the need to lie on the couch all day is normal though.

Whilst quiet moments of not doing become private, offline moments, the moments of doing and action become public. Added to their public status, they are exceptionalised no matter how mundane they are. For example, the idea of reiterating or placing emphasis on how one makes one's cereal in the morning, including such details as whether one puts milk before or after the cereal and if hot or cold milk is used. These everyday moments that would otherwise go unnoticed take centre stage. They also highlight the details we learn about people we are close and intimate with, hence viewers focus on them. An example of such details would be that in my family, everyone eats out of a particular dish or kind of dish, my sister preferring a bowl and spoon, my niece preferring a dish and my mom preferring a plate.

This exceptionalisation is done through the narration and curatorship of these moments by YouTubers, as well as by the audience. By exceptionalised, I mean that they become a foregrounded norm because of the mediation and curation process of online mediated content. An example of this is when we see the morning routine of someone or how they prepare for work, school or even staying at home. The filming, choice of filming angles, the music added to the production, and even the option to have commentary or no commentary in the clip, all create a scene or a narrative that foregrounds the morning routine when in everyday life one barely thinks about this in such detail, nor do others who see it pay much attention to it. The filming process and the mediated nature of these interactions therefore exceptionalise the mundaneness of everyday life. Similarly, productivity becomes exceptionalised, whereby it becomes not just about what someone did but what it means for the individual.

In the process of deciding what is vloggable, and by turning the mundane into the exceptional, what ends up occurring is that new definitions of what counts as online everyday life are defined. Central to this new definition and ways of conceptualising the everyday is the viewpoint that an action and doing forms part of what constitutes the everyday. This culminates in what I call the work of self. Part of doing is to be active and this activity is characterised by a purposefulness. It must have a purpose. It cannot be doing for the sake of doing. In many ways, it characterises the reflexive

individuated state of modern societies and late-capitalist states described by theorists such as Bauman (2000) and Harvey (1990). This is most realised in the work of self that occurs as part of online subjectivity.

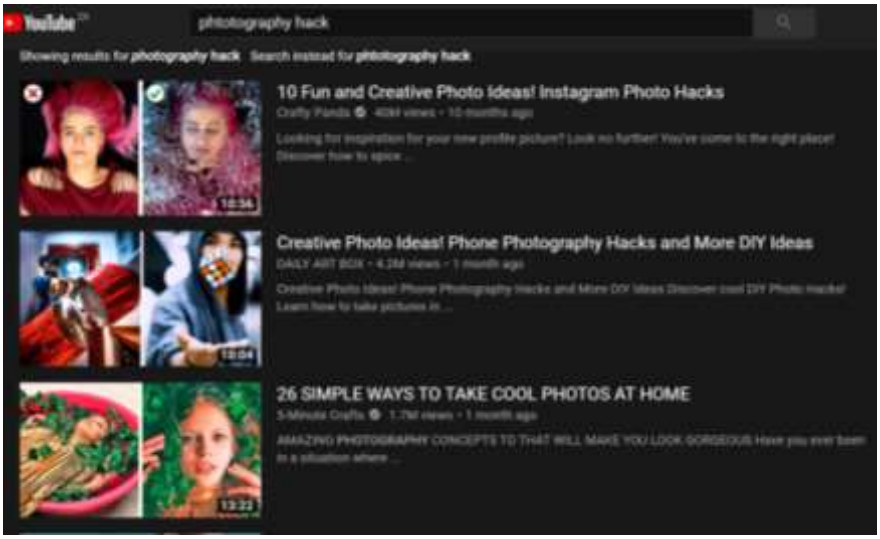
Given that YouTubers need to be active in order to post, they are always in the process of doing some form of self-work, be it internal, emotional, or physical; it is the creation of content. This work of self is also intrinsically linked to the work of curating and narrating the self that occurs as part of posting themselves and their lives online. Although a constant presence is necessary in online work, many YouTubers have found different ways to be present thus widening their digital footprint whilst still setting boundaries. Through their online presence, they are able to create digital footprints linked to online identities as well as online communities.

I Post Therefore I Am

If someone is to grow their YouTube channel to a profitable business, then most likely they will have to post on other social media as well. It is no longer the case that a single digital platform is the sole area of social media and digital presence. Growing followers on other platforms is integral to YouTube success as well as economic success as these other platforms can also prove to be sources of additional revenue. YouTubing can expand outward to other platforms, or sometimes people move from other platforms onto YouTube as established social media influencers and content creators. The interaction between YouTube and other social media platforms is two-way: it is a means for further engagement and more streams of income, and it serves to provide different ways of representing the individual and identity formation. By growing a strong following on other social media platforms, content creators are able to increase their means to generate income. This is due to the fact that creators can either monetise their content, similar to the way they do on YouTube with ad revenue, or they can work with brands and have their posts sponsored or run adverts for particular products.

Marwick and Boyd (2011) have argued that social media is "publicity culture" where content creators display themselves in an "easily-consumed public way using tropes of consumer culture"

(117, 119), where audiences expect authenticity and consumability (Hall 2015, 5). This ties in with the notion of content creation in the influencer or brand industry. YouTubers and other people who work by producing media are content creators. This means that they must find ways of packaging everyday life, random and planned, in ways that make sense to people close to them as well as strangers. All of this needs to be done whilst keeping that authenticity and intimacy discussed earlier. The kind of content that is produced or the outcome of what is produced cannot be void of the person producing it. It cannot stand outside of person and context. Mostly this is then thought to mean or equate to a real and true representation of the individual. However, as we have seen, on social media that is not the case. YouTubers film the behind-the-scenes of their videos, showing the differences between the final video and the process of achieving that final video. There are many posts on various social media on these behind-the-scenes processes. Most recent has been the photography hack videos found on YouTube that show how to take illusion pictures and even videos on how to edit your Instagram pictures and stories. Editing is an understood and accepted practice on social media. In Chapter 4, I discussed how authenticity has been separated from notions of real and true because things no longer need to be portrayed in their real and true nature to be considered authentic. Instead, we see context and the presentation of feeling, emotion, and state of mind as other markers of true, real and therefore authentic.



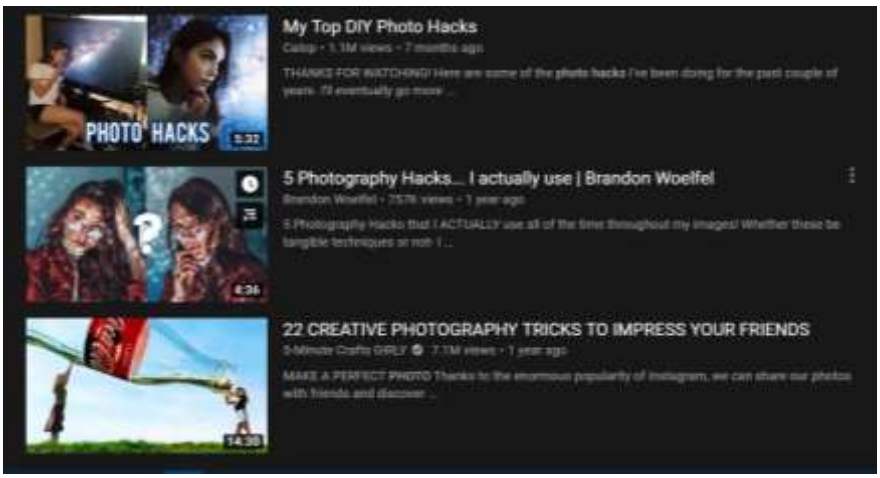


Figure V: Photography hack videos searched on YouTube (screen grabbed April 12, 2020).

The significance of not relating authenticity and trueness to realness, or the accurate description and portrayal of how things happened or looked, and focusing on how they made you feel or how well they work, is how this links authenticity to intention. Whilst intention leaves a large margin for misinterpretation by those perceiving the action, it allows for an alternative to viewing edits and creativity in social media posts as deception. This is important because one of the main arguments and critiques of influencer brand marketing is the notion that it facilitates the intense commodification of people and affect, and an increase in consumerist[129] society.

This is found in the larger arguments and critiques against late capitalism and neoliberalism. If we are to consider the idea of someone being able to relay how they felt in a situation or how an incident altered their lives, rather than what happened, this relates personal experience and the representation of events: a personally embodied experience instead of an objective truth that stands outside your context. This means that authenticity can be viewed in terms of Charles Taylor's (1991, 29) definition of authenticity: the idea of an ethical code for self-fulfilment, to be true to oneself. This

[129] Consumerism is typically used to refer to the historically specific set of relations of production and exchange that emerged from the particular social, political, cultural and technological context of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. It involves a shift away from values of community, spirituality and integrity, and towards competition, materialism, disconnection and conspicuous consumption, and destroys individuality and harms society. It has its roots in the everyday. The term has also been used to refer to something different, namely the consumerists' movement, consumer protection or consumer activism.

exceeds the idea of an individualistic critique of modernity characterised by loss of community and loss of being part of something bigger than the individual. Lost, because of increased rationality and technology use without soft reasoning that considers factors outside of efficiency and economics and the loss of political control, to be active participants instead of living on autopilot and allowing decisions to be made for us.

This works if we consider authenticity, mediated representation, and digital activity as linked to identity. During the writing of this thesis, I decided to post YouTube videos again. I had stopped because I wanted to complete this thesis without distractions. However, towards the end of this process I found myself under COVID-19 lockdown and so I started posting videos again as something to do to keep myself busy and as a way of socialising and having contact with the outside world. This is how I found myself one evening looking up at the time on my phone and finding three hours had passed with me on the Canva website.[130] Canva is photo-editing software that is desktop as well as cell phone user friendly. This is the site I use to edit pictures that I will use for my video thumbnails. It normally does not take three hours to edit a picture. Unlike other editing software, Canva edits the picture as a whole rather than the details of the picture. For example, I can place the picture in a particular spot, I can add overlays and text but I cannot, for instance, reshape my nose or remove an object behind me in the picture. It is mainly a quick edit app. My three hours on Canva were spent trying to decide how I wanted to edit my thumbnails going forward after my comeback. I was revamping. This was the perfect opportunity to bring in changes to my channel page. I was looking for something arresting that would entice people to click on the video if they saw it. However, I also wanted consistency. I wanted to create a template of how the rest of my thumbnails would look so they would be easily recognisable as thumbnails for "Hey Gabster" videos. I was also looking for something that would stand out from other thumbnails. It had to do all of this whilst still managing to be accessible to viewers. Therefore, I was dealing with considerations about text and the kind of

[130] https://www.canva.com/ accessed April 8, 2020 Canva.

font to be used; about the colouring of the pictures; about using filters; and about setting images apart. I also considered whether I should use one picture for every thumbnail or have multiple pictures. While doing all of this I had to decide on whether the font I planned to use made sense in relation to what my channel is about: was it too formal and austere, or too playful, was it legible? Similarly, questions about the picture and its visible aesthetic went through the same questions. Added to that was my having to decide whether I liked a particular font personally, or if a filter made me look good or not, or if having a boundary was too much like another YouTuber I liked and whether I was being really myself or just doing something I saw worked? Could I keep up this aesthetic, look and feel? Did the picture reflect who I was and what viewers were most likely to see if they clicked on a video, not just this one time for this one thumbnail, but for the foreseeable future until something else happens to make or allow for change. Thus practical issues, brand issues and identity issues all arose at that moment.

Figure W below demonstrates the different ways people choose to do their thumbnails. Of the below thumbnails, only Tanya Hela has frequently aesthetically changing thumbnails. “Hen and Lon Vlogs” always use the same font in white with a black border. Alisha Williams changes hers frequently as well but tends to keep the same feel. So, although she does use a single picture, she tends to prefer multiple pictures in a frame, cursive writing and well lit, bright light pictures. On the other hand, Raven Elyse has for years had the same pink border and white with black border with multiple frames, even keeping to the same font, despite her videos having changed in style and content. Similarly, “itsJudysLife” rotates the same fonts in her thumbnails mostly keeping to the same colours. She also maintains consistency and continuity by appearing in over ninety per cent of the thumbnails. Using yourself as a continuance is similar to Keesha and Jeremy’s thumbnails.

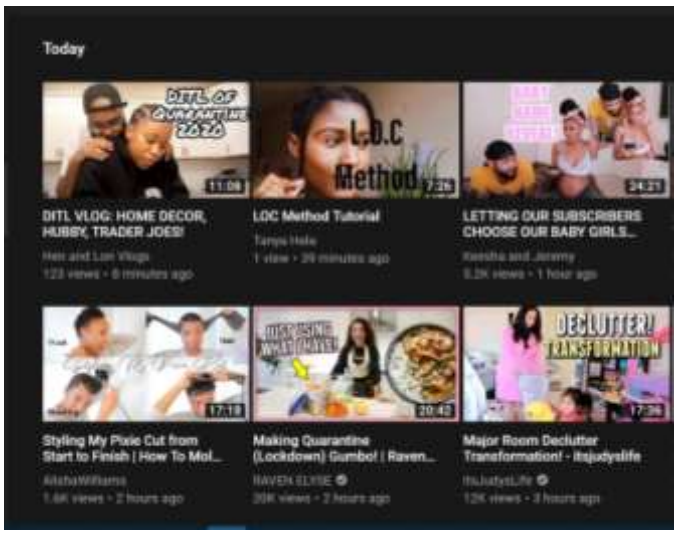


Figure W: Screen grab of my subscriptions page (screen grabbed April 10, 2020)

Goffman's work (1959) on the presentation of self suggests that we never present our 100% self. Instead, we take cues from those we are interacting with to present our best possible version in that context. So, we are constantly adjusting and re-adjusting who we are presenting to the external world. The same applies to the internet and online behaviours. In fact, it has been argued by Ikegami (2011) and Tiidenberg and Gómez Cruz (2015) that online activity, especially on social media and social networking sites, is a form of self-representation and self-awareness thus implicating the validity or authenticity of the representations of behaviours. Self-representation, being acts of representations of self, means one can say: "Is how I am presenting myself representative of me?"; "What does the action or behaviour say about me and do I agree with it?" If yes, then I am representing myself; if no, then I am not representing myself. This could, instead, be seen as a performance of self. Goffman's (1959) theory highlights just how established principles of presentation are, and these then become the basis of representation. I further agree with Thumim (2012), who argues that we should understand self-representation in digital culture as a movement between production, text and reception, as a mediation process. Mediation according to Thumim (2012) includes the fundamental changes in societies brought about by technological innovation and developments. Using mediation allows one to look at how technology interferes with face-to-face interaction, and what the broader

technological contexts are within which media meanings are made, remade and circulated. This mediated form of socialising and being is also intrinsic to individual and social identity.

Over and above being mediated, profiles, made up of pictures, text and audio (creative content) are forms of representation that we consider to be part of identity formation while they also form an integral part of the branding and economic aspects of online activity and social media influencing. These practices are deeply interwoven with consumerist branding and commodification culture at the same time as they are a part of personal branding and community culture. In a recent article, Lange 2020 discusses how people move from digital platforms to other platforms for various reasons. As a part of this move they need to decide, in the same way many migrants do, where to go to next, taking into consideration various socio-economic and personal factors.

This digital migration Lange (2020) describes is similar to those early theories of migration where one moved from one place to hopefully make a home in another. Whilst this is true in that earlier I described how YouTubers, and other social media content creators, will keep a base platform as their main platform and supplement it with others, they tend to have more of a digital transnationalism, where they inhabit many platforms and make a home in all of them. An example of this is Raven Elyse. Although YouTube is her main channel and main source of income, she keeps a very active Instagram profile. She had moved this activity from Snapchat, another visually based social media platform, to Instagram due to her high use of the filters and visual edits that Snapchat offered which she felt she was relying on too heavily. This, she worried, was impacting her sense and perception of self.

At the same time, she keeps a strong presence on Twitter, stating that is where she goes to vent and release. Many of her followers follow her on these platforms to see her and the different ways of being that these platforms allow. She also uses them to express different sides of her in ways that having a singular platform wouldn't allow. This transnationalism of digital platforms allows for a multi-dimensional, complex identity in which change, and shifting identity, is possible in ways that a singular mediated platform could not allow.

We could think about self-representation as the creation of curated identities – curated, as I described in my tale of deciding on a look for a thumbnail. Similarly, if we look at the "Mommy and Baby Approved" YouTube page, there is a definite sense of curatorship there as well. The thumbnails have a similar look and feel catered and focused towards mothers and young children.

Curatorship in many ways highlights the difficulty of contextualising complexities in a story, a persona, a person or an incident. One is always limited by the medium and the space being used as well as the story being told, for it is impossible to tell the whole story at once. If we consider how social media platforms allow particular kinds of interaction due to how the platforms are based on differing social rules, then the similar restrictions can be noted even if representation is being facilitated by the self. Thus, various social media platforms allow for the multi-complex nature of the individual as well as the brand to meet, interact, change and even stay the same. It is this complexity that becomes the basis for arguing against the notion of performed identity rather than a lived and experienced identity.

Raun (2018) argues that influencers or micro-celebrities partake in a form of "identity linked almost exclusively to the Internet, characterising a process by which people express, create and share their identities online" (104). This leads to concerns about the authenticity of these identities as well as concerns over the kinds of subjectivities and societies they are creating. In the previous chapter, I discussed the role of online communities in testing for authenticity and the work that goes into that to try to legitimise and validate these online identities.

In this chapter, I have shown how these online identities are formed through both personal perceptions and community input and are linked to social, economic and emotional factors. Part of this testing and validation of authenticity requires the YouTuber to have a wide digital footprint. This is because of the fact that different platforms require different ways of interacting with the audiences. These ways allow for "live, real-time reactions" when it comes to live videos or curated posts in terms of page posts and YouTube videos. Stories such as Instagram stories allow for a middle path between

the live and the curated because stories can be posted in the present time but allow for some curation, whilst they can also be part of highly curated or pre-planned posts.

For example, a YouTuber can post on their events of the day at the end of the day, or they can post in the moment and later put a video together and post it to YouTube on the same day.. The stories make viewers feel they are part of the everyday life and are up to date with the YouTuber, yet they also allow for less curating and a more relaxed outlook on posts. So, whilst a social media page can look uniform, story posts can be varied day to day depending on the mood: they can be bolder or toned down, allowing for a relaxation or an intensification of the brand aesthetic. Yet, they do not interfere with the look of the actual social media page as they are located elsewhere on the app and tend to be archived after an allocated time. It is in this interaction of different media that continuity of identity and performance of identity is created. These various platforms also allow for the opening up of other revenue streams.

However, validation of authenticity and a wider digital footprint do not stave off concerns over the reflexive individual and consumption culture that influencing is embedded in. Instead, the digital footprint means that the influencer or content creator must possibly be more reflexive in ensuring continuity across these various platforms and, similarly, these platforms all require different levels and kinds of consumption whilst at the same time pushing the boundaries of online, offline, work, leisure, private and public. Boundaries on social media do not look like the boundaries we are used to. It is imperative not to understand these differences as the loss of something in the individual and society. Ideas of the loss of privacy or of leisure reflect little of the rich social nature of online economic activity.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

This thesis has provided a paradigm shift in the conceptualisation and interpretation of the definition of "work." It has also put to question conventional concepts found in traditional economic theory, particularly, those pertaining to labour and economic participation. In the digital age, the boundaries of economic participation have expanded, allowing individuals access without employment or ownership of the physical means of production. The free-market economy, despite being subject to some form of regulatory framework, is more prevalent in the digital and social media economy.

Unlike traditional industries, in the YouTube social media space, social capital carries more value than monetary capital. YouTubers invest time and effort in building authentic online relationships. These relationships, in the long term, become monetarily beneficial to them. A few decades ago, fame was controlled largely by traditional media, and access to that media was often limited. In the digital age, there are fewer (if any) access restrictions, which means that individuals who would have otherwise not been likely candidates for fame, now have better prospects of becoming famous.

Fame comes with influence, and influence is often a viable marketing gateway for sponsors and brands. Although traditional media is often in denial of the equivalence between social media fame and conventional fame, describing the former as quasi-celebrity status or merely "YouTube fame," one cannot deny the fact that viewers, sponsors, and brands no longer see the difference. In fact, celebrities who come from the previous generation now interact on social media more than ever. Like other users of social media, they are accessible and have come to share various aspects of their lives in a way that only exclusive media coverage and access could in the past.

Ultimately, YouTubing, being an influencer or content creator is about a monetary value system that is embedded in community. By doing an ethnography on YouTube and more precisely

vlogging, this thesis has sought to understand the ways in which economic activity frames the ways in which online communities and identity are conceived, maintained and contested. By doing so, this research has sought to understand not merely the negative impact of commercial incentives on the social and communal aspects of social media, it has taken commerciality itself and placed it central to making community and individual identity-making. By considering commerciality as central to community, the thesis sought to understand the ways of being online rather than the lack and emptiness of depth characterised in online social relations. It also problematised assumptions about the negative impact of online activity on the social fabric and individual responsibility and connectedness to the other. In particular, it looked at how commercial business interests are incorporated into YouTubers social media activity and how users understand and explain these interests and activities. The research has considered how belonging is negotiated online. It did this by looking at the three broad areas of economic activity on YouTube, namely, YouTube the platform and business, the YouTubers, as well as the viewers. It looked at the history of monetisation on YouTube and how this impacted the perceptions of value and the negotiation of value and values, thus, also illustrating how boundaries of offline and online, and the boundaries of work and leisure are negotiated.

For the methodology, it was important to study and understand the field for what it is rather than what it is imagined to be, hoped to be and theorised as. Purely online research tends to be seen negatively particularly in the ethnographic field. This research was an attempt to show how to do online ethnography as well as to disprove some of the existing negative notions against online ethnography. The main aim was to show how rich, complex and nuanced data can be collected online and how scientific rigour is not lost by doing online ethnography. Instead, I hope to have shown that, more than ever, detailed, rich descriptions are necessary and possible with online ethnography.

In all economies, be they social, economic or religious, there are values that underpin the structure and organisation of those economies as well as a rewards value basis for meeting those values. Tracing the history of the YouTube monetisation programme emphasised the changes in the

YouTube value systems that allow for successful commercialisation of affect by measuring action and giving that value. This history of changing value systems also revealed the values adopted and how they are reinforced on YouTube as well as supporting economies outside of YouTube. In doing so, the conversion from values to value was exposed in order to understand what is of economic and social value on YouTube and how these two types of value work together rather than against each other.

The use of intimacy and authenticity for larger economic returns has become a common and seemingly natural part of YouTube and online space. The internet itself has a long history of suspicion which is linked to the suspicion of technological advancements in general. Suspicion was placed at the centre of analysis of online communities rather than being used as an example of the degradation of community in online spaces. In doing so, a much more complex understanding was achieved of the ways in which value and values are simultaneously negotiated and how YouTube and YouTube communities exist concurrently as both audiences and community members. It was ultimately argued that, through the dispelling of suspicion, community is reinforced, contested and maintained.

I further argued that the online identities created through digital footprints, online curation and narration help create a complex, continuous, fluid identity that can be both brand and person at the same time. The main aim was to think about new boundaries and ways of being online. Instead of conceiving online and technological advancements as antagonists which take away from the richness of social fabric and individual quiet, contemplative times, I argued that YouTubers and social media users are finding new places around which to construct boundaries. The ways in which these boundaries are being constructed take into consideration the value of the person and the economic value of the social activity.

These arguments all speak to the larger question of the commodification of ethical surplus. In the thesis I have shown that, through action, the value of affect has been made measurable and commodifiable, in essence, making ethical surplus a commodity. This, however, does not directly translate into an uninterrupted rise of consumer culture. Instead, I have shown how suspicion and the

work of clearing suspicions acts as a way of guarding against the complete commodification of social relations and doing so allows for creative ways of establishing and maintaining online communities that exist within these commodified interactions and relationships. I have also shown how content creators are creating boundaries in their lives despite them making money from living their lives.

The digital age has accelerated the democratisation of video content creation and publication. It has opened the market and granted access to individuals who would otherwise not have been able to participate in the industry. It has also lowered the barriers to entry by eliminating traditional requirements such as formal or informal education and employment. Thus, it has played a critical role in the creation of work opportunities and income stream generation, which ultimately has a direct input on the economy.

Often, income-generating opportunities rely on large infrastructure and capital investments; however, the digital age has, over time, lowered the requirements thereof. In the context of South Africa and other developing nations, this is a positive outcome. Income generation through online platforms such as YouTube can play a constructive and positive role in the economy. Successful YouTubers do not rely on finding employment or seeking major capital to earn an income. Effectively, they have the potential of becoming self-employed and contributing to the economy. This means that digital platforms can be recognised as legitimate economic development role-players. Hence, this thesis recommends further investigation and research on the value chains and economic development potential of digital platforms and how they can be formally recognised as moderators of unemployment.

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