"Maybe a Little Less Pre-Planned Dialogue and More Casual Convo"

How YouTuber Jenn Im Negotiates Authenticity in Sponsored Content and How Audiences Make Sense of It

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Abstract

This MRP aimed to answer the question: how do YouTubers push a promotional agenda without breaching YouTube's authenticity ideology and how do audiences make sense of their performance of the self? This research specifically examines how popular beauty YouTuber Jenn Im negotiates her authentic performance of the self with her sponsored content and how her audience make sense of her performance. I argue that Jenn Im's persona is a constructed performance of authenticity that relies on various strategic communicative practices of authenticity to build a sense of trust with her audience and affords her the ability to remain influential with her viewers while simultaneously endorsing products for her sponsors. Three different beauty community-specific sponsored videos from Jenn Im's channel were selected as case studies: the makeup tutorial, GRWM (get ready with me), and the "slice of life" daily vlog, as well as user comments from each video that related to the sponsorship. It was found that Jenn Im negotiates her authentic self within sponsored content by creating a sense of trust through the performance of various registers of authenticity, such as intimacy, ordinariness, originality, and ordinary expertise, as well as being open and honest in disclosing her sponsorships. While some users trusted Jenn's authentic performance and engagement with sponsored products, other users were rather skeptical of her motives for engaging with the featured brands. Analyzing growing beauty, lifestyle, and fashion vlogger Jenn Im's sponsored content not only reveals the challenge beauty vloggers face in maintaining the authenticity in overtly commercial content, but also that the audience works to define the expectations of authenticity for vloggers to perform.

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Dedication

To the YouTube beauty community for providing piping hot tea for researchers and viewers alike. Your immaterial and affective labour does not go unnoticed.

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"Maybe a Little Less Pre-Planned Dialogue and More Casual Convo": How YouTuber Jenn Im Negotiates Authenticity in Sponsored Content and How Audiences Make Sense of It

Social networking sites are popular spaces that afford individuals the means to present different versions of themselves and connect with others (Papacharissi, 2011). As Michael Wesch (2009) asserts, social networking sites inform new ways to think about the self, who we are, and how we relate to others (p. 19) and reinforce inquiry into what sorts of individuals are produced. Smith and Watson (2014) contend that users find social networking sites and other online spaces fruitful areas for constructing and experimenting with different versions of the self. With a plethora of social networking sites to engage with, individuals seemingly have an array of opportunities to present the self and attempt to communicate some sort of "truth" about an "authentic" self (Smith and Watson, 2014, p. 75). However, these virtual environments have the potential to manipulate identities, which puts into question one's authenticity or true self (Smith and Watson, 2014). Smith and Watson (2014) assert that some users may find that they have a choice to present and invent themselves in whatever way they like; thus, virtual environments reveal the ways in which self-presentation is performative and how authenticity is manufactured, which often causes users to become suspicious and skeptical of others, often speculating about the truthfulness of the identity set before them (Smith and Watson, 2014). While much of the literature on the presentation of online selves relates to MySpace and Facebook, Kennedy (2014) asserts, "It is now necessary to differentiate between the types of identity presented in distinct Internet environments" and that "new digital forms may result in new digital identities" (Kennedy, 2014, p. 29). Indeed, the popular social media platform and video sharing medium hybrid YouTube represents a complex mediated environment that offers a unique digital environment to examine how the site's features constitute performed selves and how audiences understand these performances.

The scandalous YouTube channel Lonelygirl15 illuminates how the self can be both performed and manipulated and how the audience may be suspicious and skeptical of the authenticity of online identities. Kimberly Ann Hall (2015) describes Lonelygirl15 as one of the early successes for YouTube due to the virality of the channel's owner, Bree. Started on June 16, 2006, Lonelygirl15 is a channel that was once solely dedicated to a series of video blogs (vlogs)

that centred on the life of a teenage girl named Bree (Hall, 2015). Bree would sit in front of a camera and remark about herself and events in her daily life, especially her complicated relationship with a boy named Daniel and the problems she experienced with her parents. While some viewers may have been immersed with Bree and her life, other viewers became skeptical of the vlogs' authenticity, citing the communicative practices, such as the regular uploading schedule, little direct response to viewers in the comment section, and the seemingly professional editing techniques as questionable (Burgess and Green, 2009). All of this quickly garnered the attention of not only the YouTube community, but also outside blogs and the press. People were dying to know: was Bree real or was she performed and carefully constructed? Thanks to three fans of Lonelygirl15, the channel was outed as a hoax and Bree's identity was confirmed; she was an actress by the name of Jessica Rose and the videos were connected to a commercial media company (Burgess and Green, 2009a). Even today, YouTube users continue to question whether the videos are real or not. The case of Lonelygirl15 illuminates how the actors breached the YouTube ideology of authenticity and amateurism and demonstrates the ways various communicative practices and video editing skills can shape and dominate viewers' reality of YouTube content. Kurt Vonnegut's (1971) famous line, "we are what we pretend to be, so we must be careful about what we pretend to be" (p. v) has never rung so true. Cases such as Lonelygirl15 illuminate how YouTube affords the possibility of performing inauthentic authenticity based on the potential for constructed reality (Burgess and Green, 2009a).

While the case of Lonelygirl15 may not necessarily be the norm on YouTube, the channel certainly points to the potential for users to exploit the amateur authentic self of YouTube to not only construct reality, but also attach commercial value to it. Once operating as a space of mostly user-generated content (UGC) that prided itself on amateur content and populism, YouTube has shifted and now favours professionally generated content (PGC) (Kim, 2012). This was first made possible by the YouTube Partner Program in 2007, which is a type of membership that allows users to monetize their content by placing advertisements on their videos (YouTube Help, n.d.a). Today, many YouTubers receive sponsorships, which further complicates the site's ideology. As a site of social media advertainment, YouTube blurs and naturalizes the amateur entertaining ethos of videos with the commercial.

Studies find consumers are rather skeptical and untrusting of advertising and commercial content (Calfee and Jones Ringold, 1994; Soh, Reid, and Whitehill King, 2007). In the

blogosphere, individuals are growing rather skeptical of bloggers who produce sponsored content, often perceiving them as inauthentic, dishonest, and untrusting (Marwick 2013; Rettberg, 2014; Hunter, 2015; Duffy, 2017), especially when the post does not immediately appear sponsored (Hunter, 2015). While this scholarship relates to written blogs, few studies focus on how audiovisual YouTube vlogs fit into this conversation. Smith and Watson (2014) contend that the audiences within online environments are deserving of attention, considering that these spaces rely on them. Thus, it important to take into consideration how audiences on YouTube come to understand and judge the content set before them. How can viewers trust that their favourite YouTube personality is remaining genuine and true to their viewers when they directly team with sponsors whose interests are in profit-making? How can viewers trust that the YouTuber's interest lies with the audience and not with the brands they work with? This research paper aims to interrogate this question: how do YouTubers push a promotional agenda without breaching YouTube's authenticity ideology and how do audiences make sense of this performance? With beauty, fashion, and lifestyle videos on the rise (Pixibility, 2018), these videos offer fruitful analysis to engage with regarding the negotiation between the authentic persona and a commercial agenda.

Beauty, fashion, and lifestyle vlogger Jenn Im represents one of these self-branded micro-celebrities that is growing on YouTube in terms of viewership and subscribership to her channel, as well as an increase in sponsored content in her videos. By analyzing only her sponsored content and omitting her non-sponsored vlogs from this research, I will gain better inquiry into how authenticity is negotiated in the growing commercial space of YouTube and explore whether or not her viewers trust that her performance of herself is not influenced by her business endeavors. Due to the subjective understanding of one's own authenticity (Moulard, Garrity, and Rice, 2015), I argue that Jenn Im's persona is a constructed performance of authenticity that relies on various strategic communicative practices of authenticity to build a sense of trust with her audience and affords her the ability to remain influential with her viewers while simultaneously endorsing products for her sponsors.

I begin this paper by briefly trace the contours of authenticity and attempt to work through various definitions of the term, understanding it as both a self-reflexive understanding of the self and as a performance of the self, both offline and online. I then specifically trace the issues of authenticity on YouTube, establishing it as a site that values amateur UGC over

professionally-generated content, even as it becomes increasingly commercial. I briefly uncover the community-specific norms that constitute the performance of the self for vloggers in the beauty community and discuss popular registers of authenticity that work to generate a sense of intimacy and establish trust between the vlogger and her audience. A brief discussion of the implications of sponsorships and how vloggers may relieve negative sentiments through careful performances of the self follows. I then examine Jenn Im's performance of the self within sponsored content as well as audience sentiments through a textual analysis of three of Jenn Im's sponsored videos as a case study to further explore how the self is negotiated in these growing commercial spaces. The final section concludes with a reflection on my findings.

A Brief Conceptualization of Authenticity

Authenticity is a fairly recent concept emerging from modernity (Taylor, 1992; Assi, 2000). Lionel Trilling (1972) explains in his seminal work *Sincerity and Authenticity* that the characteristic of sincerity was first an important and definitive characteristic of the Western world, entering the English language during the first part of the sixteenth century and losing its power in the modern period, lasting for about 400 years (Trilling, 1972). Trilling (1972) defines sincerity as the "congruence between avowal and actual feeling" (p. 2); thus, what an individual believes to be true they must also feel to be true. It is here that the notion of "being true to oneself" is emphasized because, as Trilling (1972) asserts, "Who would not wish to be true to his[her] own self?" (p. 4). For Trilling (1972), truth of the self is related to being loyal, consistent, and honest. Ultimately, being sincere means being true to one's own self and, thus, avoiding being false to others. The truth to one's own self should be understood as not an end, but as a means of ensuring truth to others. Somehow, sincerity became a devalued concept, coming to mean exactly the opposite of what it sought to express (Trilling, 1972). This was especially true by artists of this time period, who wanted to distance their personalities from their artwork and believed that sincerity was not necessary to analyze their work. However, Trilling (1972) finds this troublesome as the self is always tied to works, whether it be art or literature. Thus, the self cannot be removed from the product and no one can ever transcend the self. Even though artists may want to be impersonal, they exactly exist as persons and personalities in our minds. According to Trilling (1972), the term "authenticity" came to offer a deeper understanding of the self and what it really means to be true to it, and this is in part due to the concern over the credibility of existence and of individual existences

Taylor (1992) expresses authenticity as a modern ideal that individuals *should* desire and not merely what individuals *feel* they desire or need [emphasis added]. Individuals neither challenge the concept nor talk about it in great detail; it is something that just happens to be valued in societies. During this time, self-truth and self-wholeness became increasingly seen as something valuable for an individual's own sake. According to Taylor (1992), each individual has their own original way of being human, which in manifested in the discovery of one's own self through "giving expression in our speech and action to what is original in us" (p. 61) and this self-discovery requires poiesis making, something that did not exist before. This self-discovery involves the imagination, which Taylor (1992) compares to art. Originality is often linked to art and creativity as a characteristic of discovery of the self through artistic creations (Taylor, 1992). Even the fact that non-artists are described in artistic terms alludes to the ways artists are perceived as the ultimate achievers of self-definition. Trilling (1972) expresses that an artwork embodies the self-definition of the artist, thus rendering both the artist and the creation as authentic. He also asserts that works of art are considered authentic due to their embodiment of emotion or social controversy. After all, social conformity is the enemy of authenticity (Taylor, 1992, pp. 63) and authenticity "demands a revolt against convention" (Taylor, 1992, p. 65). Thus, the idea of authenticity is related to freedom inasmuch as it values finding the desire of one's life for oneself and not from societal norms (Taylor, 1992).

Authenticity is inextricably tied to the self. The birth of the "culture of authenticity" is strongly tied to the construction of the "individual" and the emergence of individualism in Western society (Trilling, 1972; Peterson, 2005; Taylor, 1992; Giddens, 2005). This shift from an inner-directed self to an out-directed one was not seen so positively. For example, Taylor (1992) contends that individualism fosters a self-centred "culture of narcissism" (p. 55) that places importance on the self and self-fulfillment, which "flattens and narrows our lives, makes them poorer in meaning, and less concerned with others in society" (p. 55). Indeed, the anxiety over the authenticity of objects was also quite prominent. McAleer Balkun (2006) asserts that in the late nineteenth century in America, the artwork's originality or "authenticity" became an issue of central importance due to the potential for reproduction. In "*The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,"* Walter Benjamin (1936) asserts that the aura of works of art illuminates the sentiments towards the threat to the originality of artworks and, thus, to authenticity as well. Benjamin (1936) believes that the artworks lose their aura, their uniqueness,

in the mechanical reproductions of an original art piece. Reproductions of paintings by way of photographs are seen as inauthentic because authenticity cannot be reproduced. The aura is inextricably tied to tradition and ritual because this is where its original use value is located. While the reproduction may be impressive, it lacks presence in time and space, which Benjamin (1936) classifies as "its unique existence at the place where it happens to be" (para. 4). Benjamin (1936) compared stage actors and film actors to illustrate this point. The aura is tied to being present, which is necessary for the embodiment of authenticity and this cannot be replicated. This is because, as Benjamin (1936) asserts, "the whole sphere of authenticity is outside technical – and, of course, not only technical – reproducibility" (para. 5); thus, the aura embodied on the theatre stage cannot be separated from the audience. When a camera replaces the audience in front of an actor, the aura that enveloped the actor decays as well as the aura of the character that is portrayed. Benjamin (1936) provides two reasons as to why mechanical reproductions have lost their authority. First, process reproduction, such as by a photograph, creates images that are unnatural to the human eye. Second, mechanical reproductions have the ability to displace the copies of originals where they would otherwise remain, affecting the object's historical testimony. While Benjamin (1936) believes the decay of the aura is neither good nor bad, his analysis certainly illustrates the concern and anxiety surrounding the authenticity.

These sorts of conceptualizations of authenticity are rather essentialist and view authenticity as an inherent trait of humans and objects; however, authenticity is more convoluted than this. There is no doubt that authenticity is a rather complex and contested term and is difficult to universally define (Banet-Weiser, 2012; Wilson, 2014). Even Trilling (1972) expresses that its ubiquity in modern society renders it almost useless to even try to define. Despite Trilling's (1972) contention, plenty of texts do define the term, albeit in many context- or discipline- specific ways. Merriam-Webster's dictionary defines authenticity as:

> worthy acceptance or belief as conforming to or based on fact; conforming to an original so as to reproduce essential features; made or done the same way as an original; not false or imitation: real, actual; true to one's own personality, spirit, or character (is sincere and authentic with no pretensions) (Authentic, 2018).

Like Merriam-Webster's definition, many defining characteristics of authenticity are often related to existential and natural characteristics of authenticity related to judgments of the

self, including, but not limited to, notions of self-reflexivity, self-fulfillment, self-actualization, and self-discovery. In terms of this self-reflexivity, authenticity is often described in terms relating to being "true" and honest with oneself (Berman, 1970; Trilling, 1971; Giddens, 1991; Taylor, 1992; Assi, 2000; Kernis and Goldman, 2007; Rings, 2017). It is an affective feeling (Doyle McCarthy, 2009) that one's actions are congruent with what one says or believes in (Vannini and Williams, 2009). Being authentic means looking within oneself and discovering *who you are* and living an honest and truthful life based on one's internal motivations, morals, and beliefs. Simply put, if sincerity is *saying* what you mean, then authenticity can be seen as *being* who you are. Authenticity is also popularly manifested in judgments concerning originality genuineness, and realness (Benjamin, 1936; Beverland, 2005; McAleer Balkun, 2006; Vannini and Burgess, 2009a; Vannini and Williams, 2009; Wilson, 2014; Enli, 2015) of both objects (food, museum artifacts, music, and artworks) and human beings.

Not all forms of authenticity are merely reflexive or inherent, based on an individuals' judgment of their own sense of authenticity. As Wilson (2014) points out, this worldview is privy to manifesting a rather narrow essentialist and idealist worldview. It is actually possible for individuals to perform authenticity. Erving Goffman's (1959) fundamental dramaturgical approach of the self demonstrates how individuals in everyday life in North America perform for others as if they are actors on a stage with different characters and roles depending on the scene and setting. He explains, "When an individual appears before others, he wittingly and unwittingly projects a definition of the situation, of which a conception of himself is an important part" (Goffman, 1959, p. 155). There is considerably more depth to Goffman's work than what I include here, but for purposes of my argument, I include the fundamental basics of his analysis. Just as audiences react to and understand a theatrical performance, so too do individuals in mundane real-world settings. Goffman (1959) divides an individual's performance into two regions: the 'frontstage' and the 'backstage.' The 'front' is a collective representation of an individual's performance that is constituted by routinized and socialized norms, scripts, and expectations in relation to the setting, the individual's appearance, and their manner. All of these front region components should be consistent and coherent with one another. Due to the various learned social roles and scripts of behaviour, Goffman (1959) asserts that fronts are usually selected by individuals and not created. Altogether, an individual's performance of their front is reliant upon the performer's awareness of audience expectations, which not only shapes how the

performer interacts in the front, but also how the audience views the performance (Goffman, 1959).

The second region of performative behaviour Goffman (1959) describes is the 'backstage.' Here, performers "behave out of character," shedding the socialized norms and expectations of performance and can be their true authentic selves; they "drop [their] front, forgo speaking [their] lines, and step out of character" (Goffman, 1959, p. 70) and they also rehearse performances for the front. Entry into the backstage is reserved for the performer and members of their respective team and closed to the audience. Thus, the performer can reliably know that no one in the audience will intrude on this space (Goffman, 1959).

Goffman (1959) uses the analogy of a partition to describe the separation of the front and backstage regions. This partition is important in what Goffman (1959) terms 'impression management,' which he calls "staging a character" (p. 132). Impression management is a conscious or subconscious act to control one's behaviour to avoid unwanted disruptions within a performance and "save [one's] own show" (Goffman, 1959, p. 146). The techniques employed come to constitute the specific performative situation. Here, individuals may change their own authentic behaviour depending on how they perceive how others would want to see them (Goffman, 1959). Impression management is important because unfavourable situations arise that might disrupt the norms of the performance, which may cause embarrassment on the part of the performer and confusion from the audience and the backstage must be ready to negotiate these situations.

Goffman (1959) contends that individuals are motivated to maintain an impression of self that corresponds to the institutionalized norms and expectations that are being judged and that sometimes performers feel they must manipulate this impression to achieve good impressions. While not all individuals purposefully try to deceive the audience of their performed self, it is possible that the performances of the front region may be completely fabricated. Goffman (1959) refers to these individuals as cynics. Whereas sincere individuals believe in their performances, cynics do not believe in their act and do not care about the impressions impressed upon the audience. The cynic's performance is often a means to an end, although some cynics may delude an audience for their own protection (Goffman, 1959). Goffman (1959) contends that most individuals fluctuate between sincere individual and cynic depending on the relevant role and the situation. No matter backstage or frontstage, individuals are always performing a particular

impression of the self that may or may not authentically reflect various socialized norms and expectations of roles to be performed. While Goffman (1959) does not specifically discuss issues related to authenticity, his analysis demonstrates that individuals have the propensity to act out various versions of the self in different environments. Thus, individuals have the ability to consciously perform a self that draws on the aforementioned characteristics and beliefs of authenticity, even if they are only acting this way for a given audience. I expand this argument in the next section through the analysis of the conscious constructed performance of the self on social media platforms.

The Performance of the Mediatized Authentic Self

While Goffman discusses performances taking place on the face-to-face social stage, performances of the self also occur behind screens. Gunn Enli (2015) expands on Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical analysis through his analysis on how individuals perform an authentic self to help construct and negotiate a particular version of reality for audiences in mediatized environments, such as on television and social media platforms. He calls this "mediated authenticity," which is loosely defined as the relationship between media and something that is constituted as authentic (Enli, 2015, pp. 1). Enli (2015) asserts that the media play a large role in constructing authenticity and reality and that mediated authenticity is merely a social construction. Mediated authenticity is a communicative process wherein the degree of authenticity is dependent upon symbolic negotiations between the participants in the communicative exchange. Similar to Goffman's (1959) ideas surrounding the illusory performances often rehearsed and constructed in the performer's backstage, mediated authenticity is achieved through various production techniques and what Enli (2015) terms "authenticity illusions" (p. 14). These illusions can either be textual or audio-visual and are comprised of anything from lighting and sound to the setting and large manipulative post-production edits. Just as audiences evaluate and make assumptions about a person based on a performance in the 'front,' authenticity illusions are also employed to make the audience understand the version of reality constructed before them (Enli, 2015). Unlike Goffman's analysis concerning the reveal of backstage information, in mediated environments, authenticity illusions are generally accepted and correctly interpreted by the audience. Enli (2015) defines this unofficial agreement between the audience and the producers of the program as an "authenticity contract" (p. 2). Just as performances in the 'front' are constructed by socialized

norms and expectations, so too is this contract. It relies on specific genre conventions, practices and expectations, which are negotiated between the producer and the audience (Enli, 2015). Mediated communication must make up for the loss of face-to-face interaction, and the authenticity contract fills this void. Thus, in Goffmanian terms, the genre system is an aspect of impression management and is key for mediated authenticity; producers employ specific genre conventions to avoid misinterpretation and misunderstanding from audiences as they evaluate and interpret the expectations in relation to the genre. Audiences believe in the authenticity illusions constructed by the producer because, as Enli (2015) asserts, they want or need the pleasure of believing the producer. The authenticity contract relies on this "suspension of disbelief" (Enli, 2015, p. 17), or a kind of irrationality, because audiences make a conscious choice to believe the production, even if they know it is merely a construction of reality.

When the authenticity contract is breached, the audience does not know what is real or fake anymore, and an authenticity scandal or puzzle forms (Enli, 2015). The scandal arises when mediated communication fails, consequently generating problems for audiences. These authenticity scandals usually occur in two ways: on the one hand, the producer might accidentally overestimate the audience's media literacy of the genre and on the other hand, the producer might purposefully want to deceive the audience for profit motives. Authenticity puzzles occur when the producer presents some sort of puzzle for the audience to work through. These puzzles are complex because it combines trustworthy and original material with inauthentic and simulated material combined with moments of scripted spontaneity. The audience is invited to solve the puzzle and figure out what is authentic and what is not, engaging in both meaning production and media criticism. For example, the Lonelygirl15 vlog hoax mentioned in the introduction of this paper represents the utilization of various authenticity illusions to construct a particular reality about Bree's life; however, various elements of her videos caused an authenticity puzzle for her audience, leading to an authenticity scandal that outed the vlog as a hoax.

This type of authenticity bind, the idea that the authentic self is tied to self-promotion, is what Jefferson Pooley (2010) terms "calculated authenticity," which he describes is about being "instrumental about authenticity" (p. 79) to achieve a certain end. Examples include the friendly and welcoming "glad hand" and "off-the-cuff" (Pooley, 2010, p. 79) jokes that are rehearsed before delivered. Calculated authenticity produces a carefully constructed performativity of

one's identity as a means to an end of self-promotion. On the popular social networking site Facebook, for example, individuals construct literal "personality profiles" (Pooley, 2010, p. 83) through an array of customizable features on the site that include profile pictures, cover photos, status updates, tagged photos, and lists of favourite television shows, movies, music, and interests to name a few. These personality profiles are consciously constructed; there is no spontaneity (Pooley, 2010). Pooley (2010) asserts that calculated authenticity relates back to Charles Taylor's ideas concerning two major moral ideals surrounding authenticity and the tension that exists between them (Pooley, 2010). On the one hand, individuals are encouraged to manage the self and work on it and on the other, individuals are encouraged to explore the unique characteristics of an inner self, and express a true self. This contradiction exists in calculated authenticity online, where the exploration to discover and express oneself is mistaken for objectifying the self, due to the cultural logic that insists the best way to work on oneself is to carefully curate an authentic persona (Pooley, 2010, pp. 78). Consequently, Pooley (2010) asserts that the goal of authenticity becomes a means to an end of self-promotion, which is perpetuated by the self-help industries, therapeutic industries, and advertising. With social media platforms increasingly growing into sites of commercial relations, this contradiction of authenticity is crucial to interrogate.

Another type of mediated authenticity relating to Pooley's calculated authenticity is Mingyi Hou's (2018) idea of "staged authenticity" (p. 15). She describes this type of curated self as a collective of constructed impressions based on the collapse of one's private and public selves, which works to reaffirm the audience's belief of authentic experience (Hou, 2018, p. 15). She relates this type of mediated authenticity specifically to the various vlogs of social media celebrities and asserts that, while audiences need to play a guesswork of a traditional celebrity's life behind the camera, social media celebrities construct a presentation that relies on the collapse of the public and private self and the interaction between the intimate and private self, affording them the display of equality and commonality with their fans.

Indeed, the performative possibilities of the self are arguably nowhere more contested than in online social settings. Social media platforms offer new environments and contexts to display, perform, and experiment with various selves (Pooley, 2010; Lim et al., 2015; Krämer and Winter, 2008; Chayko, 2017). They also make it difficult to evaluate the authenticity of users (Gilpin, Palazzolo and Brody, 2010). Mary Chayko (2017) asserts that performances of the

online self often render the individual inauthentic. Behind the screen, individuals can carefully curate profiles to project a certain identity for audiences to evaluate and make sense of. Users choose what they want to share and to whom. While not all users treat their online personas as a means to an end, there are individuals who do consciously edit themselves to appear more positive and more unique (Chayko, 2017) to maintain a good impression (Lim et al., 2015). Thus, in online spaces, every interaction is a conscious performance of the self, whether authentic or inauthentic.

Social networking platforms are increasingly becoming sites of commercialization as advertisers capitalize on the digital reputations and authenticity of users to sell their products, often teaming up directly with users to promote their brands (Cunningham and Craig, 2017; Duffy, 2017). Due to this transformation, concerns over the authenticity of content and its producers grows (Burgess and Green, 2009a; Hunter, 2015; Vannini and Williams, 2009). In particular, new possibilities for inauthentic authenticity on YouTube have influenced its culture, rupturing the site's authenticity ideology and replacing it with an ethos that constructs a type of authenticity puzzle; audiences try to figure out how much of a YouTuber's performance is real or whether or not the vlogger has a production team working with them behind the scenes (Burgess and Green, 2009a). Specifically, YouTube beauty vloggers offer a fruitful area of analysis to explore the negotiation between a constructed authentic self that is grounded in specific norms of the YouTube beauty community and the growing commercial activities of these vloggers. In the next section, I discuss the transformation of these YouTubers from amateur to social media celebrity and the implications the new space of advertainment has on the community-specific norms of authenticity that constitute the expectations of their online performances of the self.

From Amateur to Self-Branded Micro-Celeb: The Authenticity Dilemma on YouTube

YouTube is a complex and diverse environment and is a multifaceted medium that is viewed as a social media site, an archival space, and a video sharing platform (Burgess and Green, 2009a; Snickars and Vondreau, 2009; Andrejevic, 2009). It is, what Burgess and Green (2009a) call, a "platform-provider" (p. 62) and simply an aggregator of content. Burgess and Green (2009b) describe it as a "co-creative" culture whose content is dynamically produced by the participation of diverse individuals (p. 90). Thus, it is the users who participate on the site, whether traditional media companies or amateur ordinary individuals, who constitute the "YouTube-ness" (Burgess and Green, 2009b), or YouTube norms, for the site. Despite the site's

complexity, scholarship on the foundations of YouTube consistently assert that the site's beginnings are rooted in social, non-market related, amateur content and values modes of authenticity, such as self-expression and self-representation (Burgess and Green, 2009a; Burgess and Green, 2009b; Muller, 2009; Stiegler, 2009; Hall, 2015). Burgess and Green (2009a) argue that there is an inherent assumption that YouTube is made specifically for amateur UGC production. Indeed, the site's name in itself, its former tagline "Broadcast Yourself," and a fairly recent and temporary update to the site's logo that featured the word "ME" in the place of a trademark sign suggest and perpetuate the site's authenticity ideology. Burgess and Green (2009a) state YouTube's interests have always been in the business of content sharing, especially mundane amateur content as opposed to high-quality professional videos. The authors explain that these roots are residual of a DIY ideology that sprang from traditions of folk culture, favouring a specific authentic home-grown culture distinct from high culture and commercial culture.

While there is a host of "traditional media" content on YouTube, such as music videos or television show clips, vlogs are highly representative of the amateur authentic ideology of the site; vlogs exist as a specific form of user-generated video production and are an "emblematic form of YouTube participation" (Burgess and Green, 2009a, p. 53). Vlogs are reminiscent of webcam culture, blogging, and an overall type of 'confessional culture' that emphasizes live-ness, immediacy, and conversation, or more generally, the observation of everyday mundane life. Burgess and Green (2009a) explain that a vlog's amateur status, in comparison to traditional broadcast television, is defined by the general ease with which to create content or vlogs, requiring minimal technical equipment and basic knowledge of editing skills. A central component of the vlog is its direct address to an imagined viewer, which invites feedback through the social networking functions of the site, especially through comments. Most importantly, as a mode of authentic amateur UGC, vlogs are expected to be reflections of an individual's self who is perceived by audiences as "real" (Christian, 2009). For these reasons, YouTube is growing as an important site to analyze the performance of authenticity. Just as users on Facebook carefully curate personality profiles through the conscious performance of a self and construct a version of reality for the audience, YouTubers construct a personality channel and must consciously curate themselves through editing videos in their backstage that shows a version of their front region that they wish the audience to understand and evaluate.

YouTube is both industry and community-driven (Snickers and Vondreau, 2009) and has increasingly become more commercialized since the site's acquisition by Google back in 2006 (Van Dijck, 2009; Garcia-Rapp, 2017; Hou, 2018), shifting its ethos from amateur ad-free UGC to one favouring more ad-friendly professionally generated content (Kim, 2012). This cultural shift has raised many flags in the YouTube community, with audiences recognizing the introduction of more professionally produced content on the site as an intrusion of its original "grassroots" and "real" non-market ideologies (Burgess and Green, 2009b). Due to this collision of content, Burgess and Green (2009b) contend that the separation between amateur and professional and the commercial and non-commercial is no longer so clear-cut. In fact, platforms such as YouTube can create possibilities for the commercialization of amateur content and even entrepreneurial ventures for users on the site (Burgess and Green, 2009a).

A main player in the commercialization and entrepreneurial possibilities of YouTube is the introduction of the YouTube Partner Program (YPP) in 2007, bringing ordinary users into the site's business ventures (Wasko and Erickson, 2009). The YPP allows users of the site to monetize their content by placing in-stream or overlay ads in their videos (AdSense Help, 2018), consequently collapsing leisure and labour. However, in order to be eligible for the program, users must first create a Google AdSense account, since the advertisements are linked with this service, and ensure that they meet the requirement of at least 4,000 total watch hours within the past 12 months and a total of at least 1,000 subscribers before they can even be reviewed to become part of the program (AdSense Help, 2018). Thus, to achieve these metrics, a vlogger must attract an audience and get them to interact with their content. Video views, channel subscriptions, and video likes all influence a vlogger's digital reputation, legitimacy, and status on the site (Garcia-Rapp, 2016). This digital reputation works twofold: on the one hand, vloggers will earn more money from the YPP and on the other, their reputation adds value to brands, just as celebrity endorsers do (Amos et al., 2008). Indeed, many of these vloggers become YouTube "stars" (Burgess and Green, 2009a) or social media celebrities (Hou, 2018) based on a combination of these metrics and the growing professionalization of amateur UGC. Thus, homegrown YouTube stars are increasingly transforming into professional content creators and celebrities on the site (Hou, 2018).

The transformation of amateur content producers to professional entrepreneurial content creators is a product of what Cunningham and Craig (2017) terms "social media entertainment"

(SME). SME develop norms for YouTube that highly value the authenticity logics of amateur creative self-expression and community, and subsequently shape the way content creators interact on the site as well as the platform itself (Cunningham and Craig, 2017). Often, the amateur-turned-content-creator transforms into a self-brand as the vlogger's performative persona within their videos is associated with the various products they interact with, and this is valued by brands and advertisers. Banet-Weiser (2012) expresses self-branding as a "moral framework" (p. 59) that allows for and encourages one's expression of authenticity. Specifically, individual entrepreneurship in online spaces is a means for achieving this self-realization. While self-branding is not necessarily seen as a product of corporate and brand culture (Banet-Weiser, 2012), Hearn (2008) contends the branded self is an object only meant to produce cultural value and material profit for the market; thus, the branded self represents a commodity sign that is available for sale in the labour market that manifests its own unique and persuasive packaging and "promotional skin" that reflect the visions of the corporation, which in this case is both YouTube and the various brands vloggers work with. Individuals are turned into promotional objects that serve for others' consumption in the marketplace, and they are locked into their new branded self (Hearn, 2008). Through branding individuals, corporations find better ways to embed their products in the competitive media environment so they can better reach consumers by speaking directly to them, in a language that they easily understand. With a newfound star status on the site, many companies are leveraging the popularity of YouTubers to increase ad revenue and directly work with them to further promote products and work with brands through multichannel networks (MCNs) (Labato, 2016). MCNs are management companies who sign up popular YouTube channels to their network, sell advertising, cross-promote their channels throughout the community, and leverage YouTube stars into "fully-fledged video brands" (Labato, 2016, p. 349). MCNs are viewed negatively by audiences on YouTube due to their explicit role of commercialization within the "cultural-commercial-expressive space" of the platform (p. 349). Labato (2016) asserts the introduction of MCNs demand deeper critical analysis of the economic and cultural implications these intermediary networks have on YouTube as a platform and its various content producers. On top of this, brands may independently collaborate with YouTubers through sponsoring specific videos that the YouTuber must then create content based on (Duffy, 2017). In this sense, YouTube can be described as what Sarah Banet-Weiser (2012) calls a "brand culture" that blurs the line between the authentic

self and the commodity self and transforms into a space that expects these relations and tolerates them. The goal is to differentiate the product from more overt commercialized messages (Beverland, Lindgreen, and Vink, 2005). I also argue that SME falls under the umbrella of advertainment, which is an advertising technique that blurs the lines between what constitutes as pure advertisement and what constitutes as pure entertainment (Deery, 2004). Thus, the blurring of the authenticity logics of amateur creative self-expression and community as well as the commercial interests of both the vlogger and advertisers render YouTube as a new site of social media advertainment. Branded content and self-branded subjects become a normalized part of the authentic entertaining foundations of the site.

The new institutionalization of YouTube as a site of commerce has implications for the motivation to perform a specific self that will garner positive feedback and attention to maintain commercial appeal and appropriately be remunerated. Gone are the days of a mere vlog for vlog's sake. Today, social media sites like YouTube encourage users to compete for attention to increase one's digital reputation, encouraging self-promotion (Marwick, 2013). Duffy (2017), too, contends that authenticity often becomes a means to an end—to attract audiences and advertisers. To do so, social media stars often utilize micro-celebrity, which is a self-presentation technique consisting of a self-conscious, carefully constructed persona (Marwick, 2016) who uses strategic intimacy and a tactical effort of "realness" to bolster their self-branded image (Duffy, 2017) and attract individuals they consider fans. Alice Marwick (2016) asserts these individuals are distinctly different from other celebrities, due to a fame that is native to social media. These individuals strategically share information for the sole purpose of increasing their popularity and attention within the respective platform. This type of self-promotional work is often labour-intensive and requires much self-discipline (Duffy, 2017).

Borrowing from Duffy's (2017) analysis on fashion bloggers, the conscious purpose of content creators to market themselves contradicts with the amateur authentic foundations of fashion blogs; however, the reconciliation between the authentic self and the inauthentic commercial occurs through the bloggers' overt expressions of their self-brand. Various registers of authenticity, such as realness, amateurism, and uniqueness, work to maintain a distance between aligning themselves with brands as well as being true to their authentic roots. Can the same be said for the ways in which popular beauty vloggers, or "gurus," on YouTube negotiate their authentic amateur roots with their overt commercial relationships? If a main component of

authenticity is acting in accordance with what one says or does, are beauty vloggers still acting in accordance when their interests lie elsewhere? As a community whose amateur foundations are rooted in the engagement and promotion of commercial culture, beauty vloggers on YouTube complicate the authenticity narratives of the platform. In the next section of this research, I briefly discuss the prominence of the beauty vlogging community, establishing it as a site of social media advertainment and further contextualizing the community-specific communicative practices of mediated authenticity that operate within it.

Making Up the Beauty Community on YouTube

While YouTube remains home to a host of dynamic videos, the beauty community and the content within it exist as fruitful examples to interrogate how the performance of the self is shaped by the platform's cultural shift. Beauty videos on the platform are on the rise and do not seem to be slowing down. In 2016 alone, beauty vlogs collectively generated more than 55 billion views, with 2017 annual views topping that at over 88 billion views (Pixability, 2018). Advertisers understand that teaming up with these rapidly growing influential beauty "influencers" is a necessary marketing strategy (Duffy, 2017) that not only works to sell their products, but also saves them big advertising dollars (Swansburg, 2016). Through product reviews, PR (press release) unboxings, product haul showcases, in-depth product tutorials, and various platform tags and challenges, the producers associated with the content of these videos cannot be removed from the commodities that they display; the commodities are tied to the vloggers conceptualization of their online self. The objects that they possess and conspicuously consume become extensions of their selves (Belk, 1988; Thompson and Hirschman, 1995). As Belk (1988) asserts, "We are what we have" and throughout an individual's life, one "learn[s], define[s], and remind[s]" oneself of who one is (p. 160). In the case of beauty vloggers, the conscious performance of the self also defines for the audience who the vlogger is. In fact, these videos are only about commodities; the entire content comes to constitute one giant advertisement for brands, paid or unpaid, whether it is the beauty vlogger's intent or not.

It is no coincidence that the majority of the individuals who create beauty, fashion, and lifestyle vlogs are women. Traditionally, consumption and shopping as a leisure activity has been perceived as a gendered practice (Van Eeden, 2006). By the end of the nineteenth century, many British department stores attracted mostly women as both consumers and workers and excluded men from these practices (Van Eeden, 2006). Both shopping and window-shopping were

established as a social and leisure activity that was associated with women. Women could escape the traditional domestic confines of the home and enter a space of entertainment and leisure. Shopping evolved from going out and purchasing items that the household needed to leaving the house to simply have fun (Van Eeden, 2006). Stereotypical reasons for why women are the ones who shop include the nature-over-nurture theory, asserting that the prehistoric role of women as gatherers gave them a biological predisposition for skillful shopping; however, the nurture-over-nature asserts that patriarchy confined women to domesticity, relegating them to the role as consumers. However, these theories lack validity and Van Eeden (2006) notes other studies that demonstrate the ways in which women do shop rationally and men shop leisurely. Van Eeden's (2006) analysis of the gendered social construction of shopping demonstrates how shopping developed into a gendered leisure activity.

Studies have shown that gendered ideas surrounding consumption of commodities persist. A study conducted by McCarville, Shaw and Ritchie (2013) found that all nine women participants expressed that shopping is entertaining, rewarding, and self-motivating, using words such as "fun," "excitement," and "satisfaction" to describe their experiences with shopping. These women also viewed leisure shopping as a form of escape, echoing the historical analysis above that suggests women left their domestic duties at home for the same reason. Baker and Haytko (2000) demonstrate in their study that teen girls also view the mall as a place for entertainment and shopping. The interviews obtained from the girls in the study demonstrated that that the mall is a gathering place that offers multiple forms of entertainment, such as a place to hang out with friends and meet new people. Shopping and entertainment are not separate; trying on clothes is a form of entertainment, as well as hanging out at the food court, socializing with friends and boyfriends. When asked to design their own mall, girls wanted more entertainment options (Baker & Haytko, 2000). Thus, shopping is not seen as a necessity; it is viewed as an activity to relieve boredom and have fun.

Not only do leisure and consumption still exist as a gendered practice, but influencer commerce, what many of these beauty YouTubers engage in, is a growing gendered practice as well (Duffy, 2017; Abidin, 2016). As a form of impression management, influencers often engage in labour-intensive affective labour practices, managing and surveying their image to achieve a means to an end (Wissinger, 2007; Duffy, 2017; Abidin, 2016). As online personas whose cultural work is directly tied to the consumption and promotion of brands, beauty

vloggers are a rather noteworthy sample that are directly caught in the tension between the authentic and the commercial; because of this, beauty vlogger's must work extra hard to develop trust with their audiences so that eyeballs remain on them. How this sense of trust is performed and maintained is discussed in the next section.

The individuals who both produce and engage with beauty, fashion, and lifestyle content on YouTube are all part of the beauty community. Parks (2011) asserts that social networking sites exist as social spaces that often aid in the formation of different communities within them. I contend that YouTube does the same and has afforded the growth of various dynamic communities with their own sets of practices, norms, and social interaction that encourage "meaningful connection to others" (Parks, 2011, p. 106). Parks (2011) illuminates various recurring themes of community that relate to social networking sites as virtual communities, including "shared rituals and social regulation," "patterned interaction among members," "a sense of belonging and attachment," and a self-awareness of being a community" (p. 108). Users also create and visit profiles regularly, personalize profiles, and respond to other users (Parks, 2011). In the following section, I address the community-specific practices of beauty vloggers in relation to how vloggers perform authenticity and negotiate commercial relationships with brands.

The Vlogging Front: Constructing Mediated Authenticity Through Communicative Practices Online

Conscious and thoughtful communicative practices are necessary in the digital world because it must compensate for the void of face-to-face interaction (Enli, 2015). It is important that audiences trust the information that they are engaging with for performers in the media to maintain positive viewer relationships (Enli, 2015). As Enli (2015) contends, mediated authenticity should align with factual information and a real representation of the reality being projected to audiences. Thus, building a sense of trustworthiness is highly important when constructing one's mediated authenticity. Many of the communicative practices that occur within beauty vloggers' content are based on community-specific norms of self-promotional strategies that determine their success on the site (Garcia-Rapp, 2017). Complying with the norms within the community implies a reliable, trustworthy, and authentic image. Part of this is engaging with audience comments on videos or addressing viewers' comments and questions within videos, and if a guru does not do so, they are not following the "ethical standards" required by the

community, rendering them "not real" (Garcia-Rapp, 2017, p. 123). They may be seen as selfish in achieving fame as a means to an end, which may affect their credibility and popularity.

As long as beauty vloggers display an authentic self, they will be able to continue to self-brand and monetize their content to sustain their market position and status while avoid being labeled as "fake" or inauthentic (Garcia-Rapp, 2017, pp. 124). Garcia-Rapp (2017) asserts that in the beauty community specifically, being authentic and perceived as "real" is essential to achieving audience attention and engagement on content. The community-specific norms of the beauty vlogging community are based on being real, true to oneself (spontaneous) and not in search of fame or money (premeditated). Garcia-Rapp (2017) found these characteristics to be true of British beauty vlogger Bubz Beauty, whose fame was not premeditated; she has always done what she loves and was never looking for fame. Her vlogs do not follow a set script and she only reviews or displays products that she genuinely likes for herself. Effort, hard work, dedication, and creativity are important to her celebritization. Her audience approves of specific self-commodification practices as long as she stays "real." Her authentic self-presentation allows her to self-brand and make a living out of her online content production.

Registers of Intimacy

Kowalczyk and Pounders (2016) assert there is a positive relationship between authenticity and emotional attachment, and this positive emotional attachment formulates satisfaction, trust, and commitment, which is foundational for understanding how consumers construct relationships with celebrities. Due to a lack of face-to-face interaction, performers online must construct an illusion of a face-to-face relationship with their audience. A feature of television and radio, Horton and Wohl (1956) dub this characteristic of new mass media "para-social relationship" and the illusion of "conversational give and take" (para. 2) "para-social interaction" (PI). This interaction is a one-sided illusory personal and reciprocal relationship between the speaker and receiver, which is controlled by the performer and works to create a perceived sense of intimacy and emotional attachment, which is especially influential for audiences (Horton and Wohl, 1956; Lueck, 2015). Audiences are made to feel as active participants in face-to-face exchange as opposed to passive, who come to view the performer as friend through direct observation. Most of all, the persona formulated by the performer works to produce a continuing bond in the relationship. Horton and Wohl (1956) contend, "His[her] appearance is a regular and dependable event, to be counted on, planned for, and integrated into the routines of daily life. His

devotees 'live with him' and share the small episodes of his public [and private] life" (para. 8). The audience or "fan" believes that they "know" and understand the persona. What is interesting to note from Horton and Wohl's (1956) analysis is their contention that curated mass media personas render their performances standardized and "ordinarily predictable" to the point that audiences have no issue understanding them, creating a "reliable sameness"; their personas go unchanged in a world of "disturbing change" (Horton and Wohl, 1956, para. 9). These sentiments reflect the aforementioned analysis of community-specific authentic performance expectations of beauty vloggers. Thus, because there lacks face-to-face communication, their performances of the self render a uni-directional illusion of intimacy to make up for the lack.

Vloggers carefully construct an intimate front region through the use of PI to produce positive emotional attachment with their audience. In the vlogging community, the goal is to construct a co-presence with the audience and invite interaction with the producer, even though it is pre-recorded and not live (Tolson, 2010). Tolson (2010) emphasizes the use of the single camera in the YouTuber's bedroom and the direct address to the audience, especially when addressing the audience in the plural 'you,' borrowing from basic broadcast presentation forms. Indeed, Hartmaan and Goldhoorn (2011) assert audiences feel a strong sense of PI when the television persona establishes eye contact and directly addresses them both verbally and physically, which works to make the audience feel that the television persona is attentive of them. Together, these verbal and bodily characteristics of mediated personas are key for the development and understanding of audiences' para-social experiences (Hartmaan and Goldhoorn, 2011). Further, Lueck (2015) asserts that asking the audience direct questions creates a "friend-like" connection with the persona and the audience should respond as if it were a reciprocal exchange. To elicit a sense of everyday "realness" (Garcia-Rapp, 2017), many vloggers self-disclose personal details of their life (Hou, 2018). Enli (2015) asserts that self-disclosure of personal information online is a form of intimacy that helps to establish an authentic persona; users who disclose intimate details of their personal lives will be perceived as authentic and trustworthy. In Kowalczyk and Pounders' (2016) study, the authors highlight that their informants perceive celebrities as authentic when they show their daily routines and lives and sharing personal pictures and posts on social media elicits stronger feelings of emotional attachment. Hunter (2015) also agrees that developing trust with audiences relies on open and honest self-disclosure, especially relating to private details of the vlogger's life. If consumers

perceive celebrities to be more genuine on social media, stronger connections can be made (Kowalczyk and Pounders, 2016).

Vloggers' ordinariness is also confirmed by casual speech, especially vocal reactions that elicit a sense of spontaneity (Tolson, 2010). Indeed, Enli (2015) asserts that spontaneity is connected to authenticity and important for its construction and maintenance. The more spontaneous the message is from the producer, the more likely the message will appear more personal and directed toward the individual (Lueck, 2015). However, Enli (2015) explains that spontaneity is a paradoxical dimension because the performers in the media production are expected to "act natural" or "be themselves," yet these performances are formatted and scripted to merely seem spontaneous. Nonetheless, Horton and Wohl (1956) profess that in PI, the persona should work to maintain a flow of small talk in the form of replicating the gestures, conversational style, and setting of informal face-to-face interactions; the goal is to blur the line between the performer and the formalities of the show from the audience. Tolson (2010) confirms these characteristics, asserting authenticity in vlogging rests on direct address to viewers, transparent amateurishness, and immediate conversational responses as opposed to anything seen on traditional broadcasting. Thus, the ordinariness celebrated on UGC platforms like YouTube allows more open access to their lives than traditional celebrities.

Indeed, the elicitation of ordinariness, intimacy, and equality by social media stars generates a sense of authenticity (Hou, 2018). Popular vloggers must remain relatable and legitimized through their display of ordinariness. For example, scholars Berryman and Kavka (2017) assert vlogs' claims to authenticity cannot be separated from the vlogger's claims to ordinariness, which work to reinforce the vlogger's celebrity position as opposed to detracting from it. In their analysis of lifestyle vlogger Zoella, they find she maintains a sense of ordinariness through her display of incompetence with her camera equipment, rendering her equal to her audience. She is simultaneously ordinary and celebrified through framing herself as an ordinary subject, assuring she is still "real," and has only merely been celebrified thereafter. This is often done through daily vlogs or "slice of life" footage that shows the vlogger's mundane life; however, this can also be done within regular content.

Garcia-Rapp (2016) contends that online celebrities rely on 'ordinariness' to mask the self-commodification that is inherent when creating content on YouTube. Lueck (2015) extends this point, asserting that the constructed sense of intimacy within social media content has the ability

to drive sales of commodities with the intent to sell and endorse products. In her study of para-social interaction on Kim Kardashian's Facebook, Lueck (2015) finds the star's audiences want to imitate the social media star and purchase the brands that fit her lifestyle. Ultimately, an emotional attachment is formed with the celebrity as well as with the product or brand, which leads to positive purchasing decisions.

Ultimately, individuals trust celebrities who are authentic and individuals want to embody their lifestyle (Lueck, 2015). A sense of connectedness, availability and accessibility, together with a sense of unpretentious equality cultivate trustworthiness (Garcia-Rapp, 2017, p. 124). These registers of intimacy help vloggers reconcile the authentic with the commercial in order to maintain and attract loyal audience members as well as simultaneously sell commodities. Constructing emotional attachment through registers of intimacy is important for vloggers to develop trust with their audiences if they want to be able to sell products to maintain their self-brand.

Registers of Originality, Uniqueness, and the Ordinary Expert

Authenticity is also related to a sense of originality. Moulard, Garrity, and Rice (2015) find individuals positively attribute authenticity to a celebrity if they are rare, and thus, original. Enli (2015) asserts that authenticity is an evaluative term and something that is seen as "original," "genuine," or "real" is considered to be positive in most contexts. The author also notes that the term original is often used in promotional contexts, demonstrating just how powerful and appreciated this dimension is in constructing a sense of authenticity.

While certain types of beauty videos may be similar across the board, such as monthly favourites, makeup challenges, beauty/fashion hauls, and more (Hou, 2018), beauty vloggers must still distinguish themselves from the other vloggers taking part in these practices. Hou (2018) finds that beauty vloggers need to be innovative when engaging with the practices of video content, but that here needs to be a balance between innovation and engaging with the specific content creation norms of the beauty community. For example, Hou (2018) explains that while beauty guru Tati Westbrook still engages with various video norms within the beauty community, such as the aforementioned examples, she offers a unique persona against the backdrop of more homogenous beauty YouTubers. Tati tends to upload her videos in a series-type form, curating a specific type of video for almost every day of the week (Madness Monday, Tip Tuesday, etc.). She is also older than most beauty YouTubers and uploads quite frequently

(Hou, 2018). Thus, while Tati still creates beauty content that other beauty vloggers might also engage in, she balances this with her own uniqueness through her content.

Success in the beauty community on YouTube is also largely determined by a level of expertise necessitated by pedagogical tutorial videos (Garcia-Rapp, 2017). Garcia-Rapp (2017) asserts that this role is most relevant for beauty vloggers than for any other YouTube community. Beauty vloggers need to be knowledgeable about a wide range of products as well as various techniques for the application of makeup. However, this expert role is often deflected as Hou (2018) notes that many will say "this is how I do it" or "you look beautiful in your own ways" (p. 9). In "slice of life" content that invites the viewer, to use Goffmanian terms, into the backstage, vloggers should also not only promote a good product but a context-specific product that would actually be used in that setting (Hou, 2018). For example, a beauty vlogger should use and promote skincare in a "get ready with me morning routine" type video and not, say, clothing items for a night out.

Trusting the Sponsorship

While there exist a host of dynamic videos within the beauty community on YouTube, sponsored content is particularly fruitful to ponder exactly how these vloggers negotiate their constructed authenticity with explicit commercial motives. While vloggers may implicitly advertise for brands or promote them through un-paid in-depth product reviews, product hauls, tutorials, and so on, explicitly working with brands to promote and advertise products is a different story. Studies concerned with the sponsored content of written blogs find that paid promotional posts raise questions pertaining to the trust, integrity, and credibility of the blogger (Marwick 2013; Rettberg, 2014; Hunter, 2015; Duffy, 2017). Indeed, Duffy (2017) asserts that the commercial relationships between fashion bloggers and brands threaten the ideals of authenticity and trust that constitute these types of blogs. Thus, bloggers must present themselves authentically or else they risk being labeled as sell-outs. In her study on mommy blogs, Hunter (2015) finds sponsored posts are often perceived as deceptive and inauthentic, especially when bloggers fail to reveal that the post is backed by a commercial firm. Many of Hunter's (2015) interviewees expressed their negative sentiments towards this type of content, believing that the authenticity and intimacy of the blogger is damaged once they become commercialized. Their blog posts are seen as crafted and calculated for companies and fail to reflect honest and authentic stories of the blogger herself. Thus, there is a community-specific expectation that

illuminates the challenging contradiction that entrepreneurial bloggers must uphold; while blogging is their job, they must still maintain a sense of authenticity and intimacy with their audiences. Thompson and Malaviya (2013) agree that consumers may be more skeptical of consumer-generated ads as they perceive there may be an underlying ulterior motive from the sponsor firm, which may influence consumers to believe the content is merely a tactic to fabricate trustworthiness to achieve persuasion. Colliander and Erlandsson (2015) also find objectivity may be jeopardized when advertisers are introduced on blogs, especially when the sponsored content is not revealed. Specifically, the parasocial interaction expressed by the blogger is threatened as the friendship from the audience is broken due to a lack of trust. Thus, the authors suggest a transparent disclaimer of sponsorship may increase trust and Hunter (2015) also asserts bloggers should disclose right at the top of the post that the post is sponsored.

Though some studies find sponsorship disclosure may actually lead to unfavourable sentiments towards both the blogger and brand in question, including increased skepticism and reduction in blog loyalty and blogger trust (Boerman et al., 2017; Gerrath and Usrey, 2016; Yann et al., 2013; Kim and Song, 2018; Josefsson, Rougie, and Verboom, n.d.; Brady, n.d.), other scholars find quite the opposite to occur and believe these bloggers may actually remedy the negative attitudes by disclosing the sponsorship. In their study on sponsored recommendation blog posts, Lu, Chang and Chang (2014) found disclosing sponsorships did not harm the consumer's relationship with the blogger or affect their credibility; the authors theorize this may be due to honestly disclosing the sponsorship, which combats the perception of misleading or cheating the audience. Transparently disclosing sponsorship may elicit more positive responses from audiences, increasing the vlogger's credibility and positively influencing the acceptance of the message (Chappell and Cownie, 2017). In Marwick's (2013) study, interviewees expressed that bloggers should engage with brands honestly, favouring honest reviews and personal preference of products; sincerity and outspokenness is highly valued by audiences within the commodified space of the blog or vlog. Hwang and Jeong (2015) agree, contending that honestly expressing that the opinions are the blogger's regardless of paid endorsement positively affects consumers' responses as they perceive the content is honest and unbiased. In her extensive research on British beauty vlogger Bubz Beauty, Garcia-Rapp (2017) emphasizes that these vloggers actually must disclose paid promotions to avoid being seen as dishonest, which demonstrates the vlogger's conscious knowledge of the community-specific expectations that

values the maintenance of a trustworthy persona. Further, balanced reviews, featuring both positive and negative sentiments towards products, may also be positive for parasocial interaction and the perceived trustworthiness and expertise of the blogger (Ballantine and Au Yeung, 2015). Ballantine and Au Yeung (2015) assert that this is because reviews lead consumers to perceive the blogger is expressing independent thought as opposed to being directly influenced by the firm.

On top of honestly and openly disclosing sponsorships, bloggers and vloggers should engage with brands that they would actually use or endorse and regardless of the sponsor, bloggers should continue to express their personal style (Duffy, 2017; Marwick, 2013). By working with brands that they personally advocate, bloggers may reconcile negative sentiments and reaffirm that they are not doing it (blogging or vlogging) just for the money (Duffy, 2017). Duffy (2017) dubs this "passion-payout selection" (p. 175)—in reconciling the contradiction between authenticity and paid promotions, bloggers continue to promote the products they love, justifying the sponsorship. The author asserts that passion-payout solutions works to prevent negative sentiments that bloggers are in it only for the money or selling out. Thus, an authentic blogger should focus on what she likes rather than what she thinks will enable her to become more popular (Marwick, 2013). The challenge is to engage with brands, but not cross any boundaries that could lead to perceived sentiments of inauthenticity.

While it is useful for the blogger or vlogger to disclose sponsorships, YouTube actually requires vloggers to disclose paid promotional content and endorsements. Vloggers must notify YouTube by checking a "video contains paid promotion" box (YouTube Help, n.d.b). There is a feature that vlogger's may include that runs a 10-second text reading "Includes paid promotion," which viewers see when they begin a video. While this short clip coincides with Colliander and Erlandsson's (2015) and Hunter's (2015) suggestions, it is not a requirement. Ultimately, YouTube asserts that the ways in which this content is disclosed is up to the vloggers' home country's laws surrounding brand partnerships as well as the brands' own rules regarding this type of content (YouTube Help, n.d.b). Thus, the ways in which vloggers choose to disclose their sponsorship are quite open-ended; YouTubers can place their disclaimer anywhere in the title, in the description box of the video or within the video somehow. Regardless, FTC's Endorsements Guidelines require a clear and conspicuous disclosure of paid promotional content and if bloggers and vloggers do not comply, they may risk being in breach of the guidelines (Federal

Trade Commission, n.d.). Mary Engle, the associate director for Advertising Practices at the FTC, suggests that vloggers should disclose the endorsement within the video content as well as verbally mention it and not only place it in the description box, since consumers might not see it clearly (Rose, 2014). At the core of the FTC guidelines is the tenet of truth-in-advertising in favour of supporting and not misleading audiences; endorsements must be honest and not misleading for the consumer. The FTC is not concerned with simple product placements, but is instead concerned with individuals giving their own personal opinions about the product while being compensated (Federal Trade Commission, n.d.). Thus, the requirement of disclosing sponsorships by both YouTube and the FTC has consequently come to constitute this act as a norm of the YouTube community. With the transparent disclosure of paid promotions, I contend it is imperative for vloggers to maintain trust through the performance of their authenticity, or else they may risk being perceived as inauthentic and untrustworthy, jeopardizing their influence for both audiences and brands.

Thus, in order to maintain a sense of authenticity within sponsored content and earn the audience's trust that the YouTuber is not selling out in favour of commercial interests, based on the literature review, I argue that vloggers must continue to ascribe to the aforementioned registers of authenticity as well as openly and honestly disclose sponsored content, work with brands that they like and use, and create content that reflects their unique personal style. I analyze three different genres utilized in Jenn Im's sponsored content and the comments posted by her audiences relating to her sponsorship involvement.

Jenn Im's Performance of Authenticity within Sponsored Content

Introducing Jenn Im

Jenn Im is a 27-year-old Korean-American beauty, fashion, and lifestyle vlogger based out of Los Angeles, California. From the time of this research paper, she has amassed 2.1 million subscribers and over 200 million views on all her videos as a whole. In 2017, her reputation earned her a place on the Forbes Top Influencers-Fashion list (Forbes, n.d.). Currently, Jenn is signed with lifestyle network Kin Community (Kin Community, n.d.), managed by Rare Collective, and represented by United Talent Agency (Weiss, 2016). Like most amateur vloggers, Jenn did not start off as a social media star. Jenn first started the channel in 2010 with her friend Sarah and together they created content around fashion hauls, tips, outfit ideas, DIY projects, and even some makeup features, even while they lived in different cities in California.

In 2011, Sarah decided to depart from the channel due to the difficulty of collaborating at a distance on the channel. Jenn stuck it out through her schooling and continued to post fashion, beauty, and lifestyle videos, increasing her audience and somewhere along the lines developed an influential self-brand. A host of dynamic brands have collaborated with her, including affordable online makeup brand Colourpop, Levi's, Smartwater, Calvin Klein, Target, NBC Olympics, just to name a few (Rare Collective Inc., n.d.).

Like other social media stars, Jenn Im is an ordinary authentic amateur vlogger who transformed into an influential self-brand. Not only does Jenn herself represents a commodity to be bought and sold by others, but her recent clothing line puts this to work. In 2017, Jenn launched her very own clothing brand called Eggie, which phonetically translates to "baby" in Korean. On many of her clothing pieces, Jenn utilizes Korean words and symbols that are meaningful to her, ensuring that her subjectivity is not separated from her consumers in the process of commodification, which works to assert her authenticity. For example, Jenn expressed in an interview that a top and skirt from her fashion line feature a Korean melon. She also has a floral jumpsuit that is specifically designed with the Korean national flower, stating, "I just love this flower so much. It's so fragrant" (Feitelberg, 2017). Thus, Jenn reinforces her unique authentic self through her commercial products, negotiating the authentic with the inauthentic. Overall, Jenn's authentic self-brand is summarized in the bio of her Rare Global profile page, which states

> with her polished yet accessible style, she empowers subscribers to dress with confidence while staying true to themselves. Known for her rich, striking visual and easy charm, Jenn is one of the most sought-after content collaborators for major brands and publications…Jenn's ability to connect with audiences and invite them into her universe (whether doing makeup in her bedroom or adventuring in Dubai) has garnered her avid superfans all over the world—and more every day (Rare Collective Inc., n.d.).

This bio transparently casts Jenn as a powerful self-branded micro-celebrity. Jenn is described as someone who maintains a sense of authenticity and realness, even behind her more constructed outfit styles. She is able to easily parasocially interact and be intimate with her audience, which helps maintain current viewers and attract new ones. Her use of strategic intimacy (Marwick, 2016) through her video content has attracted not just subscribers, but "superfans." These characteristics work to bolster her self-branded image (Duffy, 2017), which

is attractive to major brands. This paragraph perfectly encapsulates the assertions made by the aforementioned scholars in this paper who argue that these performances of the self work to render vloggers authentic and trustworthy. I further discuss Jenn's construction of authenticity more closely through the analysis of her sponsored content in the following section.

While many vloggers collaborate with brands to create sponsored content, Jenn's own vlogging content has become increasingly sponsored, and considering she posts only one to two times a week, it seems quite high in comparison with her non-sponsored content. The aforementioned analyses on bloggers and sponsorships find influencers must be careful when working with brands as they may negatively be seen as sellouts for doing so. Thus, the next section's analysis aims to explore how Jenn negotiates her authentic self with her transparent commercial ventures and whether or not her audience is supportive or bothered by her commercial activities.

Jenn Im's Negotiation of the Authentic and Commercial in Sponsored Content

In this section, I explore how Jenn negotiates the performance of authenticity within sponsored content through analyzing three different examples of community-specific content types: the makeup tutorial, GRWM (get ready with me), and the "slice of life" daily vlog. I chose the first two videos based on popularity metrics and the last one based on the informative and valuable comments on the post that I discovered while watching the video myself. The videos are from 2013, 2016 and 2017. I will begin each analysis with a brief description of how Jenn performs a sense of authenticity through her frontstage that works to establish a connection with her audience and how the sponsorship is disclosed both literally (description box, "Paid promotion" disclosure feature, verbal disclosure) and reflexively (does Jenn express that she uses or likes the product already?). After each analysis, I will highlight audience sentiments and draw inferences to the aforementioned literature regarding whether or not Jenn is successful at negotiating her authentic self with the inauthentic commercial. For purposes of this paper, I focus on comments that are specifically related to her involvement with the sponsorship, recognizing that there exist a host of valuable comments that relate to the general sentiments about her authentic performance.

Because I am using data that involves content from humans, it is worthwhile to briefly discuss the ethics surrounding the use of this data. The content I am using in my textual analysis is public and occurs on an open online platform—it does not require password membership to

view the content (Beninger, 2017). Thus, I do not need to obtain informed consent from the parties involved in my research. Beninger (2017) asserts that online ethical considerations should be context-specific and case-by-case and be guided by ethical guidelines. In the case of YouTube, I am simply drawing from data that is already established on the platform and I am aware that my analysis is rather subjective—there are numerous potential readings and understandings that others may draw from the same data. While anonymity can never fully be established, since data always has the potential to be traced back to the user (Beninger, 2017), I am choosing to omit the usernames of commenters out of respect for those who do not wish to be associated with the research. Following Garcia-Rapp's (2017) study, I also choose to include any grammatical errors to "depict online community trends and individual writing style" (p. 122).

The Makeup Tutorial: Sponsored by Smashbox Cosmetics

This makeup tutorial titled "Fall Bombshell Makeup "is in a typical tutorial style, with Jenn facing the camera and applying products as she describes and demonstrates how she achieves this look. Jenn opts for a voice-over, but remains facing and looking straight into the camera, creating "co-presence" (Tolson, 2010) with the viewer. She zooms into the details of her eyes when she applies eye makeup, drawing the viewer close. From the beginning of the video, Jenn engages in parasocial interaction in various ways. She immediately greets and addresses her audience or "fans," calling the group "Jems," alluding to a developed close friendship and connection with her viewers. She also affirms her ordinariness through spontaneous bursts of dialogue, such as when she applies a sparkly eyeshadow and remarks "ouuuu sparkly" (Im, 2016). At the end of the video, she addresses the audience directly one last time, remarking "Alright guys" and encourages them to try out the makeup and tweet or Instagram their looks to her, emphasizing that she would "love love" to see how the look turned out on them (Im, 2016). She also thanks both Smashbox Cosmetics for sponsoring the video and her audience for watching.

In terms of the sponsorship itself, Jenn transparently discloses the endorsement within the first five seconds of her video, remarking that she has "partnered" with Smashbox Cosmetics to endorse their Studio Skin foundation and matching concealer. She also mentions the "partnership" at the top of the description box and at the bottom. While she uses the Smashbox products, she describes their properties and states that the foundation has been her personal "go-to" foundation lately. While Jenn promotes the products, she still keeps it personal. She does not

only use Smashbox products in the video; she uses other brands as well. Thus, Jenn openly and honestly discloses her sponsorship. What is interesting to note is that she calls the sponsorship a partner(ship). I infer that her carefulness in using the term illuminates the more negative connotation associated with "sponsorship." In sponsored content, YouTubers often follow directives for their content based on what the brand wants from the content, which illuminates the power relations between the vlogger and the brand (Duffy, 2017). Thus, being a "partner" sounds more like a collaborative relationship than a more controlling relationship on the part of the brand.

I analyzed 19 comments that related to audience sentiments toward the sponsorship. Overall, the audience is rather positive of this video. One viewer remarks "I love how balanced your usual video style with the sponsored content. It felt genuine and I really appreciate that :)." This comment confirms Marwick's (2013) and Duffy's (2013) argument that bloggers should keep their commercial content personalized. For the viewer, utilizing her non-sponsored video aesthetics with the sponsored product affirmed Jenn's genuineness. Another viewer appreciated that Jenn used other products alongside the sponsor-sent Smashbox products. One likes that she was upfront about the sponsorship straight from the beginning and that she keeps it "real/interesting" throughout. On the other end, some viewers were not too keen with the sponsorships. Another commenter writes, "You don't even make makeup videos anymore unless they're sponsored smfh." This viewer is seemingly frustrated with the fact that Jenn's content is becoming increasingly commercial. In this comment, other audience members come to Jenn's defense, one stating, "lol even if it is sponsored she still puts effort into the look" and one alludes to the community-specific norm of the nature of the shift in content motives, stating "because this is her job." One user reconciles Jenn's sponsorships, demonstrating Marwick's (2013) and Duffy's (2017) assertions that the blogger should be using products they love. The user states, "she mentioned in her vlogs that if a company she likes reaches out to her then why wouldn't she take that opportunity to make a video with a brand she likes while making some money." Another viewer writes, "i like when jenn does sponsored videos, theyre still pretty discrete," suggesting the fine line/boundary.

Interestingly, one viewer commented on the disclosure of her sponsorships, stating "More people wouldn't mind sponsored videos if you just put it in the title," echoing the FTC's guidelines that suggest vloggers conspicuously place the disclosure where audiences can easily

see it. Indeed, Jenn, opts to put her sponsorship disclosure right at the end of the description box, which viewers may or may not choose to scroll to. For this particular viewer, not including the sponsorship upfront in the title may be misleading and cause negative sentiments from the audience. One viewer is also skeptical of Jenn's performance, stating that she believes the voiceover to be a tactic to shift the audience's attention away from the fact that it is a sponsored video. Another viewer echoes this sentiment, expressing how the video seemed scripted. The viewers do not elaborate on why or how, but the comment suggests the skepticism audiences may develop from performances within sponsored content, jeopardizing trust.

The GRWM: Sponsored by TOMS

GRWM's (Get Ready With Me's) are in themselves highly intimate videos that invite the audience to see a particular detailed routine of how the vlogger would get ready on a particular day. In the chosen GRWM for Jenn Im, she opts to demonstrate her morning routine right from when she wakes up. While the video is carefully curated through editing features (not to mention it is unclear whether or not she *did* actually just wake up), she shows her just getting up, as if her alarm had just gone off. While Jenn does not address her audience as directly as in the previous analysis, she still creates an intimate connection through the display of her frontstage; she shows rooms in her home, her makeup-free face, she sports comfy clothing, and moves the audience through the personal details of her morning, including feeding her cat, making a breakfast smoothie, brushing her teeth, and finally demonstrating a quick makeup routine and hair tutorial. She affirms her ordinariness through the mundane showcase of her life, but also through the Garcia-Rapp's (2017) assertions regarding the humble embracement of expertise; while filling in her eyebrows, Jenn explains to the audience that she does not have a particular way she does her eyebrows and that they turn out different each time she fills them in. She also shares personal details of her life that others might relate to, such as her remark that she is a "night showerer." Like the previous analysis, she opts for a voice over, but still makes sure to directly look and face the camera when she is in the frame and directly addresses the audience during her tutorial. She also includes friendly small talk with spontaneous bursts of dialogue, such as when she exclaims "aww yeah!"

Jenn finally mentions the sponsorship a little over four minutes into the video, although the sponsorship is disclosed in a disclosure box in the video as well as at the bottom of the video's description box. However, in the actual content of the video, while she mentions TOMS,

she does not honestly and openly disclose it as a sponsorship. She personalizes her experience with the shoes, expressing that she feels good wearing TOMS shoes because of their One for One mission in which the company donates a pair of shoes to someone in need for every pair of shoes bought.

Thirty-one comments were analyzed regarding the sponsorship. For this video, many of the comments demonstrated mixed feelings towards Jenn's involvement with TOMS. Some expressed they did not have a problem with her involvement with sponsors because they believe she would not promote a product or service she did not like. One user specifically comments on the trust she feels about Jenn, stating, "whenever Jenn does sponsored videos, I don't find myself bothered by them like other YouTubers. Maybe that's just a reflection of trust or maybe it's just a weird coincidence. Love you Jenn!" Another comments on Jenn's honest disclosure of paid promotions, explaining "she does a really great job of being honest about it without going over the top." Other users appreciate that she does not push the products on the audience and that the sponsorship is discrete, as one describes, "like they are just part of the video, not the video itself."

Not all users were positive. One user sarcastically states, "of course, another sponsored video" and another user questions, "you couldn't do a get ready with me that wasn't sponsored?" while a couple others comment negatively on the subtleness of the sponsor, with one stating, "Ah, TOMS sponsored video. No wonder the strategic product placement :)." Her trust is questioned by another user who expresses, "you do so many sponsored videos, I don't know what you say is actually true." One viewer commented on how the endorsement seemed very fake and out of place in a morning routine video, echoing Hou's (2018) assertion that the sponsored product in the respective video should be contextualized; In Jenn Im's case, TOMS shoes did not appear suitable to some viewers for a morning routine.

Some viewers were okay with sponsorships, but just not okay that Jenn teamed up with a company that they believe is unethical. Sponsoring with TOMS was concerning for one user, who expressed that she just wants to make sure subscribers are not deceived and ensure they watch videos to simply "get ideas and inspiration from youtubers' honest opinions and stuff and they don't want them to be influenced under the pressure of sponsorship etc." Another hopes Jenn genuinely believed in TOMS and that that is the reason why she decided to support the company. Thus, some viewers are skeptical of Jenn's motives for partnering with the specific

brand, which may jeopardize the perception of her authenticity. However, one viewer reconciles her inauthenticity, expressing, "if you've been watching her videos for a while, you'd know she wouldn't do a sponsored video is she wasn't convinced of the product. She's not the kind of person…she's one of the very few people whose opinion is solid, trustworthy, and reliable. And people like and enjoy her videos no matter what because she's just Jenn :)" Thus, regardless of the type of video Jenn produces, this user trusts Jenn and believes she is reliable because she only uses products that she believes in and individuals will enjoy her content no matter what because of her personality ("she's just Jenn").

The Slice of Life Daily Vlog: Sponsored by Google Assistant

While the aforementioned videos were chosen based on popularity metrics, I chose Jenn's slice of life video "The Perfect Date" based on the video itself and the subsequent audience comments that reveal valuable information about the contextualized performative nature of this sponsorship. In the slice of life video, vloggers welcome the audience into their backstage through the documentation of the more mundane aspects of their daily routines and practices (Hou, 2018) and sharing small or even large aspects of their daily life and inviting the audience to see their private life away from their more scripted content (Horton and Wohl, 1956). In this particular slice of life video by Jenn, the vlogger takes her audience with her as she plans for a picnic with her fiancé, Ben. Immediately at the start of the video, Jenn greets her audience, enthusiastically remarking, "He everyone!" and simultaneously waves with both hands. She explains that today, she is planning the "perfect date" all thanks to Google Assistant. Thus, she openly and honestly discloses her sponsorship verbally, including a text within the video reading "Sponsored by Google Assistant," a small image of the Google Assistant logo, and the disclosure at the top and bottom of the description box. Like the previous videos, Jenn verbally dubs her involvement with the brand as "team[ing] up." She follows her disclosure immediately, assuring her audience that the content of the vlog might be something she and her fiancé would have done regardless of the sponsorship, stating that the couple "just love[s] going on picnics." She includes that she is going to use Google Assistant to plan their day. After she decides on which grocery store she wants to go to, she engages in a flow of small talk (Horton and Wohl, 1956), chatting with her audience about what she thinks she will make for the picnic, maintaining a sense of "sociability, easy affability, friendship, and close contact" (Horton and Wohl, 1956, para. 13) with her audience. While she constructs a sense of intimacy for the

viewer, she simultaneously includes shots of her using the commercial product of interest, the Google Assistant, to help her grocery shop and even set a timer while she is cooking at home. After all the planning is complete, Jenn and Ben head to their favourite park in Los Angeles to eat, hangout, and of course rely on Google Assistant to help the couple take a selfie. Jenn wraps up the video by sitting in front of the camera and speaking directly to the audience, expressing that she will see them in the next video; of course, she will not literally "see" her audience, but by saying so, she maintains a sense of face-to-face exchange with the viewer.

A total of 46 comments relating to the sponsorship were studied. For this part of the analysis, I discuss the responses of the audience and include a few standout comments that encapsulate the overall sentiment related to Jenn's sponsorship. Like the other videos, the audience seems to be divided on how they feel about the sponsorship. One user comments on how they appreciate Jenn's open and honest disclosure of the sponsorship. From a more positive perspective, some viewers expressed how Jenn remained creative and unique with her sponsorship and highlight her ability to seamlessly, naturally, and tastefully tie in the sponsorship within the "storyline" of her video. This sentiment echoes back to Hou's (2018) insight about beauty vloggers that they must maintain a balance between following the community-specific norms of video content, yet also be innovative and create content that is distinguishable from other vloggers in the community. One user asserts that this makes it "a good sponsored/ad video." For another, Jenn maintains her authenticity as the user feels her sponsored content is "always so real and down to earth." One comment that stood out relates to Garcia-Rapp (2017)'s assertion that self-promotion and fame may be legitimized by the community itself as they positively interpret the fame being well-deserved. Thus, it is okay to be monetized or earn money from commercial ventures as long as beauty vloggers remain authentic (Garcia-Rapp, 2017). One commenter congratulates Jenn on her partnership with Google Assistant and comments on how natural Jenn's sponsored content is because it does not feel that the vlogger is "shoving a product down my throat." The user asserts Jenn's personality is the reason why she watches her and that it is not lost in her sponsorships. She remains genuine, even while working with brands. Another user states, "I know this video is sponsored but there's something about your videos that always seem authentic. You've stayed true to yourself and that's what i admire a lot." What stands out to me about this comment is that they not only affirm Jenn's authentic self, but more importantly they suggest that whether Jenn is actually acting in accordance with her

inner self or not, what matters is that her performance of authenticity simply *seems* authentic and gives the impression that she is being true to herself, which is admirable.

Of course, not all comments were positive. While many commented on their general disappointment in Jenn for producing sponsored content, some were more specific with their qualms. A few viewers made comments regarding the scripted feeling of the video, rendering her performance too professional, awkward and forced. One user expressed that she felt Jenn's genuineness is lost when she makes sponsored videos and while she is not necessarily anti-sponsorships, she would like less "pre planned dialogue and more casual convo." Thus, for this user, Jenn was not successful in administering parasocial interaction and failed to keep a balance of being authentic within sponsored content. Some users also do not feel that Jenn actually uses Google smartphones, with one user stating, "while I think the ad was done very tastefully – I'm 100% sure you have an iPhone, so I really don't think it's [Google Assistant] something you use often :/." To counter, another viewer replies, "Maybe, but she probably still thinks it's a great and useful phone (I don't think she'd agree to sponsor it if she didn't)" and expresses that Jenn may be presenting a different alternative for a range of viewers. Interestingly, Jenn replies in this thread, "I do use an iPhone, but honestly loved by experienced with the Pixel. They're both quality phones and I like to give my viewers options (: ." While one user believes Jenn may not be acting in accordance with herself, the other trusts that Jenn would not endorse a product she would not genuinely like or use, and Jenn affirms her honest engagement with the product by stating her personal experience with the Pixel.

Discussion

This paper aimed to answer the question: how do YouTubers push a promotional agenda without breaching YouTube's authenticity ideology and how do audiences make sense of their performance of the self? I sought to answer this question by analyzing three of Jenn Im's sponsored videos as case studies. In line with previous research, Jenn Im performs mediated authenticity through various communicative practices in her videos. She engages in parasocial interaction to create co-presence with her audience by directly addressing them as "you" or stating that she will "see" them in the next video to maintain a sense of face-to-face exchange with the viewer. She often gazes straight into the camera, drawing the viewer closer by zooming in when she puts makeup on her eyes. She also engages in casual small talk, such as revealing intimate details of her life by taking the viewer along with her through a mundane slice of life

daily vlog or when she shows how she gets ready in the morning. Jenn often elicits spontaneous bursts of dialogue throughout her videos, which works to elicit a sense of ordinariness and spontaneity. Together, these registers of authenticity work to build and maintain her authentic self and also create an emotional attachment with her audience.

What was most revealing about this research emerged from the audience comments in Jenn's sponsored videos. There exists a tension amongst the audience in their engagement with this kind of content. Regardless of the type of beauty video, Jenn's audience appears to be fragmented in terms of their attitude of trust toward her performance of authenticity. For some users, Jenn Im reconciled her commercial engagement through the aforementioned registers of authenticity, such as intimacy, ordinariness, and originality. They felt that the products she promoted were something she would use regardless of the sponsorship, supporting a brand she is already an avid fan of, and that she still remains "true to herself," "real," and "down to earth" despite her overt partnership with brands. Many also felt that she incorporated the product into the video in an original and unique way, which makes it "a good sponsored/ad video." Other users were not so convinced of Jenn's performance and were rather skeptical of her motives. For these users, Jenn's genuineness was tarnished due to her over involvement with brands and some plainly did not appreciate the more professional quality to the sponsored videos. Some also just did not appreciate her engagement with sponsorships, period. Regardless of whether or not Jenn Im is actually acting in accordance with her non-digital self, what matters most is that her performance of the self and her engagement with commercial products at the very least *seems* authentic to her audience.

What the audience comments reveal is that while the vlogger herself or himself has the subjective power to perform registers of authenticity and edit themselves accordingly in their videos, audiences, too, have the power to contribute to and define the expectations of authenticity within participatory sites like YouTube. They have the power to affirm or deny the performance and are not simply passive observers of the performances set before them. Thus, while authenticity is certainly a trait that has the propensity to be performed in both offline and online spaces, the audience's overt judgments of the performance further disrupts and complicates understandings of what it means to be authentic in growing commercial sites like YouTube. The question is no longer "how do vloggers perform authenticity" but "what constitutes as an authentic vlogger and who is involved in this constitution?"

Conclusion, Limitations, and Future Research

This paper extends and builds on research related to the growing commercial nature of YouTube vlogs and how amateur-turned-professional users negotiate the authentic performance of the self with the inauthentic commercial. Analyzing growing beauty, lifestyle, and fashion vlogger Jenn Im's sponsored content illuminates the challenge beauty vloggers face in maintaining the authenticity that established their star status on platform, while working in tandem with brands that are perceived to be more inauthentic in order to maintain favourable relationships with their audience. As Duffy (2017) asserts, the tension between "being real" and "selling out" continues to be a key topic for beauty and fashion bloggers. This paper demonstrates how authenticity continues to be reworked, redefined, and contested, especially as individuals continue to interact with and within various virtual communities and as these digital spaces increasingly become environments for commercial activities. It also attempts to situate authenticity posteriori, as Vannini and Williams (2009) contend that it is important to bring attention to the ways in which ordinary individuals conceptualize their own subjective understandings of authenticity. In participatory cultures like YouTube, the vlogger is not the only agent who comes to constitute the practices of authenticity—the audience also helps to shape and define the various expectations and norms surrounding the performance of authenticity in these spaces. Thus, a YouTube vlogger may perform an authentic self within commercial content, but the community also has the power to define the contours of authenticity in these spaces and trust or be skeptical of the performance before them.

Given the scope of this research project, there are a host of limitations and opportunities for future research. Firstly, I chose a mere three videos and select comments from only one beauty vlogger in only one vlogging community on YouTube. Thus, my data is not representative of all YouTube vloggers, nor is it also of Jenn Im's entire YouTube channel or the beauty community at large; however, it does add to the growing research in this area. Jenn Im also has a large Instagram and Twitter following that were not taken into account. How she performs authenticity in sponsored content in these spaces and how other social media apps work to reinforce her authentic self would be worthwhile to explore. It is also important to note that my research's focus favoured a more sociological analysis of the practices of beauty vlogging and did not even scratch the surface of beauty vlogging as a form of gendered labour and the political economic implications tied to the practice. Scholars should continue to study and

monitor the ever-evolving social networking site YouTube and the beauty community to see how the expectations of performances of authenticity may change over time, as the relationships with commercial entities grow. It would also be worthwhile to explore audience motivations for overtly commenting on the performances of vloggers' authenticity. Finally, and arguably most importantly, future research should strive to interview vloggers and audiences and offer more agency to their experiences. As Kennedy (2014) asserts, individuals must go beyond simply acknowledging the producers of online selves and consider how these individuals feel about their own online subjectivity. Hearing first-hand from vloggers would provide more insight into how they feel about their engagement with brands and whether or not they are attentive to audience concerns. Interviewing viewers would greatly add to the contextualization of their online sentiments. Ultimately, we will never truly know whether or not vloggers are acting in accordance with their offline "true selves" and as consumers of this content, we need to continue to meditate on our experiences with these personas and their promotional agendas.

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