

THE SHIFT FROM TRADITIONAL TO ONLINE ADVERTISING. INFLUENCERS' ROLE IN ADVERTISING

C. I. TARBĂ¹ V. BĂTRÂNU-PINŢEA² C. COMAN¹

Abstract: *The rapid evolution of digital technology and social media has transformed traditional advertising into a dynamic, interactive, and influencer-driven industry. Through a qualitative content analysis of three popular beauty YouTubers—Zoella, Tanya Burr, and SprinkleofGlitter—this research examines how influencers use persuasive communication strategies to build personal brands and engage audiences. This research highlights how useful this type of marketing is while also raising awareness regarding the manipulation that is taking place.*

Key words: *advertising, beauty vloggers, influencer branding, consumer engagement, brand-influencer collaboration.*

1. Introduction

In the last 20 years, communication has reached a new level of development, thanks to the latest technologies and virtual methods of socializing. While in the past we could discuss about the industrial revolution that reinvented the global industry, today we are witnessing a new revolution: the social media revolution.

Communication has surpassed the limits previously known, becoming multidimensional and creating a virtual world that overlaps with the real one.

But what is social media? Andreas Kaplan and Michael Haenlein define social media in their article as: “A group of online applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 and allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content” (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2012, p. 101).

Thus, social media promotes online communication through specific channels that facilitate social interaction, provide easily accessible information, and enable the exchange of texts, photographs, audio, and video materials shared from one user to another.

An essential concept of virtual socialization is "word of mouth", or the world of information passed from person to person. The purpose is to build personal or

¹ Transilvania University of Braşov, Romania

² Transilvania University of Braşov, Romania, vlad.batranu@unitbv.ro - corresponding author

professional relationships. People engage in conversations, make recommendations, and generate information through free platforms (blogs, forums, social networks, video and audio content platforms).

Some trends in social media allow users to live in a world where real-life information and virtual content intertwine. These trends cover everything from traditional views to very modern ones.

In recent years, an increasing number of celebrities, businesses, and everyday people have begun using social media platforms. These platforms have, for the first time, enabled direct communication between public figures and their fans. According to researchers, social media has become an impactful tool for promotion and growth.

One social media platform that has evolved rapidly and broken barriers to become, perhaps the most popular is YouTube — a content-sharing platform where consumers, celebrities, and brands can upload videos to their own “channels”. Initially, YouTube personalities (vloggers) used the platform primarily to gain online views. However, over time, YouTube has transformed into a genuine brand, a marketplace for products categorised by their content.

Today, more and more vloggers are launching their own YouTube channels to promote various brands, including food, beauty, cars, culture, and languages from different countries. In a short time, YouTube has become the most significant marketing tool for users, businesses, and celebrities, enabling product promotion and communication with fans.

2. Literature Review

User-Generated Content (UGC) remains one of the most popular and effective forms of content marketing in 2022. During the early part of 2020, many brands could not produce as much content and turned to alternatives like UGC, which builds brand trust and customer loyalty. On Facebook, analyses show that videos uploaded by users, not brands, often receive significantly more views (Digiday, 2021). It has been found that 93% of marketers believe that UGC sells better than brand-created content.

As online shopping increases, so does the need for customers to ask questions. Recent statistics show the chatbot market is set to grow from \$2.6 billion in 2019 to \$9.4 billion by 2024 (Business Insider).

Small businesses have been hit hardest by the economic challenges brought on by the pandemic. In response, Facebook announced in 2020 that it would provide financial support through \$100 million in grants to 30,000 businesses worldwide to help during this tough time (Hutchinson, 2021). With predictions suggesting 2022 will also be challenging, Facebook is expected to continue its support for affected businesses.

Content quality is considered a crucial factor for success in blogging. Some bloggers can earn up to \$50,000 from traffic on their site and product promotion. Most of their strategies stand on free downloads, call to actions and email subscribers (Byers, 2020). Furthermore, let us determine the difference between vloggers and influencers. Influencers are more like trendsetters who use social media to influence what people buy or think, to nurture a potential action that can be taken. Bloggers and vloggers are more like online storytellers.

It has been found that vloggers often receive discounts or free items/experiences from brands in exchange for promoting products. There are mixed results from this study. Some believe that these discounts are welcomed and encourage users to buy, on the other hand, some might say that the product does not have value anymore (Yin et al., 2024).

Another study from 2020 suggests that beauty vloggers who are seen as authentic and close to their fans are influencing them more. Therefore, users develop a sense of bonding with their favourite influencer and trust them more. Advertisements becoming more efficient (Ladhari et al., 2020).

Social media influencers grew up with their fans from multiple perspectives. When the millennial generation lost its place and Generation Z took over, so did the internet trends. Considering this fact, the precedent marketing strategies used might not be as effective now in this context (Ong et al., 2024).

Because influencers became more and more useful, brands are showing an increasing appetite for using them as marketing campaigns (Syed et al., 2023). Like we have said before, influencers are developing a bond with their fans. These fans are now easier to manipulate into buying things that they do not need, and brands are taking advantage of this fact.

Even though it is profitable for the vlogger to collaborate with a brand, consumers tend to dislike this approach because it is not appropriate and lowers the value of authenticity (Huang, 2024).

After the Covid-19 pandemic, people started using and spending their time and money on online platforms. Because there were not many physical opportunities, the education sector moved online. Many individuals started learning things online, especially on YouTube and on Tiktok (Gil-Cordero et al., 2023). The effects are yet to be identified.

Selling products is not the only thing influencers are supposed to do. During the pandemic, some influencers and organizations started posting medical education content to promote the vaccines. Some used influencers to raise funds for diverse cases. (Duffett et al., 2024)

Because the internet is a vast ground there is content suitable for everyone from toddlers to elders, poor to rich, culture to culture. Each having their own linguistic style (Munaro et al., 2024). This allows for a better positioning in the industry following and creating niche content for profit.

The probability of watching online videos is correlated to sociodemographic factors. Individuals with a higher education are less likely to watch health related YouTube videos. Some respondents argued that they are watching online videos because they do not feel comfortable enough at the doctor's office or the time is limited (Langford et al., 2019), thus the social community can provide the comfort needed and without being judged.

3. Methodology

To answer the main research question on how beauty YouTubers use persuasive communication strategies on YouTube to help build their personal brands, this study employs qualitative content analysis. According to Lim (2024), qualitative research

“stands out for its unique ability to capture the richness of social phenomena involving human experiences and perspectives.” It is reacting fast to real world issues and social changes. The content of three successful beauty YouTubers channels is analysed, after the Covid-19 pandemic ended, 2023.

The YouTube videos of these three popular beauty creators serves as the unit of analysis. The selection of the creators is guided by the study’s objectives. The top three beauty YouTubers were chosen based on their subscriber count, each having over one million subscribers. These creators are: Zoe Sugg, known on YouTube as Zoella, Tanya Burr, with her channel TanyaBurr, and Louise Pentland, using the YouTube username SprinkleofGlitter.

All selected videos were published within the three months leading up to the beauty vlogger reaching one million subscribers. This timeframe ensures the analysis captures videos during a period when branding strategies had already been effectively implemented and showcased, videos that contributed significantly to reaching the subscriber milestone.

It is important to note that, due to this three-month interval, the volume of videos per beauty vlogger may vary slightly. A total of 46 videos will be analysed. All videos were created in 2013. Only videos from the main YouTube channels of these beauty vloggers will be analysed to focus on planned and strategic content. While secondary channels often host unscripted and unedited vlogs that might support brand identity and fan engagement, this study examines only primary channel videos for a clearer understanding of deliberate branding strategies.

Qualitative content analysis can be conducted in various ways. This research employs thematic analysis, defined as a method for subjective interpretation of textual data through systematic coding and identification of themes and patterns (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p. 1278).

Additionally, findings regarding social media branding will be considered during the coding process.

The following aspects are noted:

Video settings: the context of the video, which offers insights into the YouTuber's brand image.

Non-verbal cues: facial expressions and tone of voice, useful for contextualising verbal text and reflecting the personal image of the brand.

Appearance of the beauty vlogger: including the results of their makeup tutorials. This aspect is tied to source characteristics such as credibility and social attractiveness.

Three key themes associated with the communication strategies used by beauty vloggers were analysed: fan engagement, online opinion leadership, and promotion.

The first key aspect analysed is fan engagement, mainly focusing on how popular beauty vloggers use YouTube to connect with their fans. Regarding customer engagement strategies by beauty vloggers, involving their fans appears to be a more appropriate term. All three vloggers rely heavily on strategies to engage their fans, as this is a way to maintain personal dialogue between the vlogger and their audience. Indeed, these two-way interactive communications between vloggers and viewers can be observed in almost every video clip, referencing this phenomenon as a crucial success

factor in building relationships through the engagement practices of beauty vloggers. Fan involvement is the cornerstone of building and sustaining relationships.

4. Result Analysis

When considering the total number of fans that the three selected beauty vloggers have, it is anticipated that they will implement strategies to engage their audience. Three strategies for fan engagement were identified: applying a direct and personal approach, expressing gratitude, and fostering a high level of interactivity. These three findings will be discussed in detail below.

When it comes to non-verbal cues, all the vloggers analysed adopt a highly personal approach in connecting with their fans. This connection is the first significant aspect of fan engagement, as it allows for the creation of an emotional bond between the fan and the vlogger. The three beauty vloggers are aware of the importance of emotional connections, with their communication style appearing to treat fans as friends and as people who hold significant value to them. Beauty vloggers use the same informal, personal style when addressing their viewers. Across all three videos by the three beauty vloggers, this style of addressing fans is implemented throughout their content. However, it is most noticeable at the beginning of the video, during the greeting, and at the end, when saying goodbye.

Considering the video settings, this personal approach is also evident in the way vloggers directly ask questions to their fans. Directly soliciting questions about the video's content is highly valuable in fostering a higher level of interactivity. However, this is not the only way beauty vloggers engage their audience. In their short videos, they often ask seemingly trivial questions. The questions they pose create the impression that the beauty vlogger is speaking directly to the viewer. Fans become part of the conversation, highlighting the bidirectional communication capabilities of YouTube as a visual social medium, in contrast to text-based platforms.

Fans establish a reciprocal emotional connection with the vlogger, which is an important characteristic of the cycle of fan involvement. All three vloggers frequently express their feelings towards their fans.

We noticed that vloggers not only respect the opinions of their audience but also take into account their desires. As seen in the case of Tanya Burr, suggestions for content are considered in response to viewers requests. In fact, the style of videos often starts with the statement that this specific type of video has been highly requested. This level of engagement with the audience is crucial for gaining fan commitment.

Often, the connection between YouTubers and their fans becomes stronger, because the level of satisfaction is high, and viewers feel more connected. Alongside this interaction, there is a strategy for fostering engagement: encouraging fans to comment, as vloggers of beauty content often ask for viewers opinions about their favourite products. This form of interaction is frequently used in popular videos, where vloggers speak about their favourite products or routines.

Beauty vloggers show their expertise in two different ways. Firstly, after analysing their video content, expertise is found in non-verbal aspects of communication. It is

strongly linked to attractiveness, and the presence of a beauty vlogger offers the audience a preferred view of expertise. One example of this can be seen in images from before and after a makeup tutorial, where they show the makeup session transformation. This specific content shows the viewer how good beauty vloggers are at applying makeup.

Tanya Burr, the beauty vlogger who still shares many makeup tutorials, often concludes her videos with before-and-after photos. During this time, these images, which highlight her attractiveness, can also be seen as showcasing her expertise.

Furthermore, expertise can be found in recommendations from others. Recommendation from others is a strategy regularly used by all beauty vloggers. There are two ways this is done: sending it to “others” generally or sending it to other YouTubers. Comments on these recommendations usually say things like “I saw someone wearing this” or “The whole world is trying to make this happen”. When beauty vloggers refer to “others” generally, they show they are in touch with trends in beauty and fashion and thus have expertise in this area, which is important for their credibility.

Firstly, a useful form of promotion for beauty vloggers is self-promotion. At the same time, there are other communication methods, such as promoting products or self-promotion in a subtle way, which are more evident through clear methods.

With all of this, the brand image of a beauty vlogger and their social status as an online opinion leader remain relevant, with their personal preferences still important for self-promotion. After analysing data, for all beauty vloggers, self-promotion is a key part of every video.

In the first case, they request viewers to ‘thumbs up’ the video as a sign of approval on YouTube, if they liked it. In the second case, they encourage followers to subscribe to their YouTube channel if they have not done so already.

Collaborations are typically seen in videos where a beauty blogger collaborates with another YouTuber to create a content video. In these collaborations, two videos are generally made, one for each YouTuber's channel. These collaborations represent a method of advanced promotion: promoting another during a time when they themselves are also being promoted. These three beauty vloggers benefit from this strategy.

Two videos are made, and they are linked with each video creating a reciprocal relationship for the audience, as this means the necessary information for one video is provided by the other. More than that, the public is directly encouraged to explore the other channel and subscribe in the process.

Collaborations are often recognised as part of the so-called “label” already in existence. This means the content of the video is not originally planned, but it is popular within the YouTube community. Popular videos with such content are often viewed by many and recommended by viewers who follow similar tags created by different YouTubers. Based on these popular tags, this approach offers the possibility of expanding existing audiences.

Collaborations represent a way to strengthen the characteristic features of the brand, such as authority, credibility, and attractiveness, without the need for promotional

dialogue, as with product placement. Despite all of this, they are still heavily linked to self-promotion, which means they are part of the overall strategy of building a personal brand on YouTube.

5. Conclusions

Analysing the findings of this study, it is clear that executing fan engagement represents an ideal strategy, as demonstrated through the comparison of data with the cycle of fan involvement and the establishment of an online opinion leader role, which aligns with the branding of a regular celebrity on YouTube.

In this process, robust persuasive communication strategies are essential, as they help in selling the brand to its audience and achieving success in product placement. To achieve this, beauty vloggers focus on peripheral communication strategies, emphasising their credibility and social appeal.

Due to the high levels of client engagement, the status of a regular celebrity, and the clear branding imagery, fans appear to have substantial trust in beauty vloggers, enabling them to employ peripheral communication strategies effectively.

It is interesting to note that the focus has not been on central communication messages. Information about beauty products, while relevant, pales in importance compared to their social status within the YouTube community, trustworthiness, and physical appeal. These elements are paramount in attracting viewers to beauty vlogs and, ultimately, in securing subscribers for their channels, thereby contributing to the creation of a YouTube brand.

Future research could explore the contrasting impact of Instagram and YouTube on personal branding strategies, comparing how each platform shapes content creation, audience engagement, and monetisation approaches. Instagram's emphasis on visuals and Stories fosters aesthetic-driven branding, while YouTube's long-form video format enables deeper educational or narrative content.

References

- Byers, K., (2020, May 28). *Data from Our Study of 1,117 Bloggers (Income, Tactics & More)*. Growth Badger. <https://growthbadger.com/blog-statistics/>
- Duffett, R. G., & Thomas, S. (2024). Health nonprofit organizations use of social media communication and marketing during Covid-19: A qualitative technology acceptance model viewpoint. *Social Sciences & Humanities Open*, 10, 101042.
- Gil-Cordero, E., Rodriguez-Rad, C., Ledesma-Chaves, P., & del Río-Vázquez, M. E. S. (2023). Analysis of factors affecting the effectiveness of face-to-face marketing learning via TikTok, YouTube and video conferencing. *Heliyon*, 9(7).
- Huang, Z. J., Fedeli, G., & Cheng, M. (2024). Trouble in paradise? Collaboration behavior and ethics of micro-influencers in the hospitality industry. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management*, 59, 25-35.
- Hutchinson, A. (2021, September 14). *Facebook Announces New Support Initiatives for SMBs to Help Them Manage Through the Pandemic*. Social Media Today.

- <https://www.socialmediatoday.com/news/facebook-announces-new-support-initiatives-for-smbs-to-help-them-manage-thr/606573/>
- Hartmann, T., Klimmt, C. (2005). *Ursachen und Effekte Parasozialer Interaktionen im Rezeptionsprozess* [Causes and effects of parasocial interaction]. *Zeitschrift für Medienpsychologie*, 17(3), 88–98.
- Kaplan, A.M., Haenlein, M. (2012). *Social media: back to the roots and back to the future*, ESCP Europe, Paris, France, <http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.460.7601&rep=rep1&type=pdf>
- Ladhari, R., Massa, E., & Skandrani, H. (2020). YouTube vloggers' popularity and influence: The roles of homophily, emotional attachment, and expertise. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 54, 102027.
- Langford, A., & Loeb, S. (2019). Perceived patient-provider communication quality and sociodemographic factors associated with watching health-related videos on YouTube: a cross-sectional analysis. *Journal of medical Internet research*, 21(5), e13512.
- Lee, A. (2021, September 17). With user-generated content on the rise, platforms are emerging to support this new type of creator. *Digiday*. <https://digiday.com/marketing/with-user-generated-content-on-the-rise-platforms-are-emerging-to-support-this-new-type-of-creator/>
- Lim, W. M. (2024). What Is Qualitative Research? An Overview and Guidelines. *Australasian Marketing Journal*, 0(0). <https://doi.org/10.1177/14413582241264619>
- Munaro, A. C., Barcelos, R. H., Maffezzolli, E. C. F., Rodrigues, J. P. S., & Paraiso, E. C. (2024). Does your style engage? Linguistic styles of influencers and digital consumer engagement on YouTube. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 156, 108217.
- Ong, Y. X., Sun, T., & Ito, N. (2024). Understanding followers' processing and perceptions of social media influencer destination marketing: Differences between# Millennials and# GenZs. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management*, 60, 194-207.
- Press Release PR Newswire, (2019, December 12). Global Chatbot Market Anticipated to Reach \$9.4 Billion by 2024 - Robust Opportunities to Arise in Retail & eCommerce. *Business Insider*. <https://markets.businessinsider.com/news/stocks/global-chatbot-market-anticipated-to-reach-9-4-billion-by-2024-robust-opportunities-to-arise-in-retail-e-commerce-1028759508>
- Syed, T. A., Mehmood, F., & Qaiser, T. (2023). Brand–SMI collaboration in influencer marketing campaigns: A transaction cost economics perspective. *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, 192, 122580.
- Yin, J., Chen, H., & Ni, Y. (2024). Vloggers and consumer choices in the hotel and hospitality sector: The double-edged sword of discounts. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management*, 58, 333-344.