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**The Rise of the Cybercelebrity: Understanding celebrity
production and the construction of authenticity on YouTube
using YouTube Gamer Mini Ladd**

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Abstract

YouTube is the largest and most popular video-sharing platform on the Internet today with around 1.8 billion registered users engaging with it every month (Gilbert, 2018). It reaches more 18-49 year olds than any U.S. cable television network and the average viewing session has increased to more than 40 minutes (YouTube, nd,a). YouTube's steady domination of the video-sharing market has given creators from all backgrounds the opportunity to earn revenue from the videos they upload. Using YouTube Gamer Mini Ladd as a case study for analysis, this thesis evaluates how the construction of a strong brand image founded on a consistent performance of personal authenticity affects parasocial relationships (Giles, 2002; Rojek, 2016) created with fans. This thesis debates how well-known YouTubers are redefining current definitions of celebrity by re-introducing the term 'cybercelebrity' (see Edwards and Jeffreys, 2010) to specifically describe anyone who is "Internet famous" (Tanz, 2008). It also outlines branding elements and monetisation strategies used by cybercelebrities in order to form a career on YouTube. Analysis of an audience's response to the presence of paid sponsorships and product endorsements in videos forms a vital part of the discussion as it examines whether the audience's perception of a cybercelebrity's personal authenticity is affected.

Keywords: celebrity studies, authenticity, YouTube, branding, cybercelebrity, Mini Ladd

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Chapter One: Introduction

YouTube is the largest and most popular video-sharing platform on the Internet today with around 1.8 billion registered users engaging with it every month (Gilbert, 2018). It reaches more 18-49 year olds than any U.S. cable television network and the average viewing session has increased to more than 40 minutes (YouTube, nd,a). YouTube's steady domination of the video-sharing market has given creators from all backgrounds the opportunity to earn revenue from the videos they upload. Using YouTube Gamer Mini Ladd as a case study for analysis, this thesis evaluates how the construction of a strong brand image founded on a consistent performance of personal authenticity affects parasocial relationships (Giles, 2002; Rojek, 2016) created with fans. This thesis debates how well-known YouTubers are redefining current definitions of celebrity by re-introducing the term 'cybercelebrity' (see Edwards and Jeffreys, 2010) to specifically describe anyone who is "Internet famous" (Tanz, 2008). It also outlines branding elements and monetisation strategies used by cybercelebrities in order to form a career on YouTube. Analysis of an audience's response to the presence of paid sponsorships and product endorsements in videos forms a vital part of the discussion as it examines whether the audience's perception of a cybercelebrity's personal authenticity is affected.

Firstly, it is useful to understand how YouTube functions in the contemporary context of this thesis. After launching in May 2005, YouTube was bought by Google in 2006 for a staggering \$1.65 billion in shares (BBC, 2006). Aside from the main website, YouTube has three main subsidiary platforms that offer more focused experiences for different audiences: YouTube Music, YouTube Kids and YouTube Gaming as well as monthly subscription service YouTube Red (Popper, 2015). Whilst YouTube Music and YouTube Kids have significant importance to the YouTube brand, this thesis focuses primarily on the dominance of YouTube Gaming as Mini Ladd, the case study for

this thesis, runs a gaming-centric channel. Likewise, the popularity of gaming videos are forcing some games developers to adapt their marketing strategies to include sponsorship deals with YouTube Gamers. Even though gaming videos have existed on YouTube for almost a decade, the YouTube Gaming subsidiary platform wasn't introduced until June 2015. YouTube Gaming is

a brand new app and website to keep you connected to the games, players, and culture that matter to you, with videos, live streams, and the biggest community of gamers on the web – all in one place. (Joyce, 2015)

The service offers audiences “a more obviously gaming-focused version of the standard interface” (Robertson, 2015) where users can flick through current live streams or segment their viewing by searching for videos featuring a specific game or channel. One central debate in the discussion of YouTube Gaming is its competition with rival streaming service Twitch.

To non-gamers, the appeal of Twitch is curious. Why, the line of inquiry goes, would you want to watch others game when you can game yourself? It's a question that Twitch's co-founder and CEO Emmett Shear, a 31-year-old Yale computer science graduate, answers comfortably: “What it comes down to is people enjoy watching anyone doing something at the highest level of skill or with great savoir-faire, and that's what Twitch is for video games. It's this chance to watch these people who are really great at it do it.” (Williams, 2015)

Twitch market themselves as the “leading live video platform and gaming community” (Twitch, 2014a) and have around 100 million viewers per month (Twitch, 2014b). Bought by Amazon in 2014 for \$970m (Gittleston, 2014) the site's main focus is on broadcasting live gaming content. From a single user broadcasting a personal gaming session, to massive eSports championships that bring in huge audience figures and sponsorship deals from companies like Red Bull, Logitech and Razer (*eSports Group*, 2016), there is certainly a high demand for live and edited gaming content. For the most part, “YouTube and Twitch have not been in direct competition: YouTube's gaming focus was on videos shot, edited and uploaded to its service, while Twitch's was on live streams of gameplay and chat” (Dredge, 2015). However, both companies now offer upload and live stream services, giving content creators the option to focus on one platform or split their time (and potentially their audience) between the two. This competition became highly contested

during 2017 when some YouTubers focused more on Twitch uploads after the 'Adpocalypse', where many brands boycotted YouTube after some adverts appeared on videos that had racist, sexual or violent themes (Weiss, 2017; Liedtke, 2017; see Chapter Three for further discussion on the 'Adpocalypse'). As a result, YouTube implemented a new manual review system meaning "ads will only run on videos that have been verified to meet our ad-friendly guidelines" (Hern, 2018). Those that do not are demonetised and all advertising revenue is taken away from the channel that uploaded the video. Despite these issues, YouTube Gaming still remains an incredibly popular subculture on YouTube and attracts large audiences of all ages.

The case study for this thesis revolves around one YouTube Gaming channel. Craig Thompson, known as Mini Ladd on YouTube and Twitch, is a 23 year-old YouTuber from Northern Ireland who has created comedy gaming videos since 2011. Known for his upbeat, friendly, funny and laddish personality, Mini Ladd has a dedicated and loyal fan base of over 5.1 million subscribers. He predominately posts solo and collaborative gaming videos that range from mass-marketed games like *Mario Kart 8* (Nintendo, 2014), independently produced PC games like *Golf With Your Friends* (Blacklight Interactive, 2016) to online versions of card games including *Cards Against Humanity* (Cards Against Humanity LLC, 2011) and *Uno* (Ubisoft, 2016). His channel also encompasses vlogs (video blogs) and a '#AskMini' Q&A series. He is known for having a high appreciation of his fans and regularly interacts with them in videos and during live streams, in the comments section of videos, on social media and in person at gaming conventions. As a case study, Mini Ladd's channel epitomises two characteristics of gaming culture – humour and communication – and his assuredly confident sense of his own personal authenticity allows for a stronger analysis of the relationship between the construction and perception of authenticity as well as the development of a consistent brand image. Using the YouTube Gaming subculture as the basis of this research, Chapter Two highlights the main theoretical frameworks that help position this thesis within the broader areas of celebrity studies, authenticity and branding. After demonstrating some of the



Figure 1: Craig Thompson, known as Mini Ladd on YouTube

ways YouTube has been analysed in previous academic research, the chapter first outlines how the term 'YouTuber' is used throughout the thesis and shows how use of the term has changed since its inception (Snickars and Vonderau, 2009). The discussion then showcases how definitions of celebrity are developing and highlights how mainstream celebrities (Dyer, 1979; Turner, 2010), subcultural celebrities (Hills, 2003; Bonner, 2003; Hills and Williams, 2005) and micro-celebrities (Gamson, 2011; Marwick, 2013; Marwick and boyd, 2011; Senft, 2013) further fracture celebrity studies and make it harder to categorise the position of YouTubers. As discussed in Chapter Two, although micro-celebrity is the closest term that currently exists to define the position of YouTubers within celebrity studies, micro-celebrity primarily refers to people whose audience is micro in scope (Gamson, 2011) and could be applied to a whole range of television, online or localised celebrities. Therefore, this thesis re-introduces the term cybercelebrity (see also Edwards and Jeffreys, 2010) to describe any celebrity that has gathered and built their fame solely through the Internet and can be applied to well-known influencers across social media platforms.

Arguments surrounding authenticity follow the discussion of celebrity definitions and this thesis works on the assumption that authenticity is a construct and "not an absolute or intrinsic characteristic of a text or exchange" (Gilpin *et al.*, 2010, p.259), since a constant *re*-presentation of persona (Stern, 2008) occurs every time a cybercelebrity appears online. Likewise, a large part

of a cybercelebrity's presentation of authenticity revolves around the way they brand their personality. A lot of news articles that speculate on the amount of money larger YouTubers make through YouTube usually treat them with a mixture of shock, envy and confusion (Schallhorn, 2018). As such, an integral part of the discussion surrounding cybercelebrity branding focuses on whether YouTubers can be considered as amateur-producers or professionals (Jenkins, 2006a) before discussing the importance of fan-labour and user-generated content in the production of YouTube videos. This is a contested subject as it can be hard to distinguish where a cybercelebrity's fan appreciation of a game overlaps with the need to use another's content to create an original video. Two distinct parts of this argument look at the presence of paid sponsorships in videos and discuss theories of co-branding strategies (Seno and Lukas, 2007; Halonen-Knight and Hurmerinta, 2010) that simultaneously boost both the company's product and the cybercelebrity's brand with an exchange of equity. This is inevitably complicated as many YouTubers include a video game in their videos for free (meaning they were not paid by the publishing company to feature that game in their video, although this is fairly standard practice within YouTube Gaming) in order to generate content they can monetise. The final part of Chapter Two explains contemporary contentions between YouTube and YouTubers as a result of the 'Adpocalypse' and the subsequent demonetisation scandal and highlights some of the difficulties of trying to make a career on YouTube.

The theories discussed in Chapter Two help formulate the three main research questions of this thesis (as outlined below). Chapter Three demonstrates how the data was collected, how the samples were gathered and details the categorisation process of the discourse analysis. It describes the improvements made to the discourse analysis sheet, coding guidelines and data categorisation as a result of the initial findings from the pilot study. It explains how a discourse analysis was the most rigorous method to use, as it enabled a closer examination of the words and phrases used in Mini Ladd's videos that promote a performance of authenticity, as well as understanding the response from his audience through the comments gathered on each video in

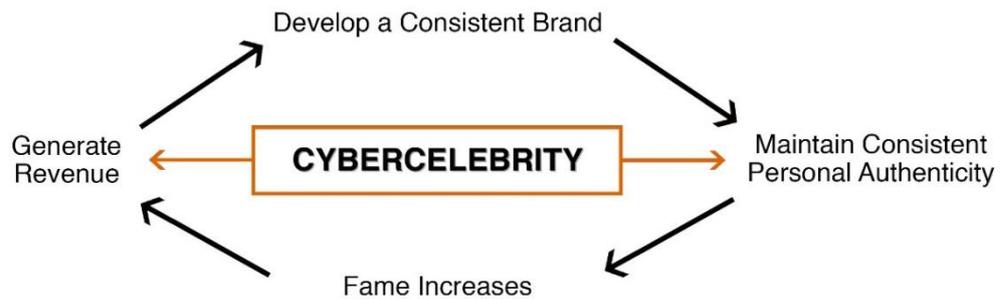


Figure 2: Diagram depicting the cyclical development of a cybercelebrity's brand.

the two samples. As mentioned earlier, the three main themes of this thesis are celebrity, authenticity and branding, which, when applied to a mediated persona, tend to influence one another in order for the cybercelebrity to create a comprehensive and recognisable brand that audiences can trust. As such, the three main research questions for this thesis deal with aspects of all these themes.

Celebrity

My first research question is,

Research Question 1: How is cybercelebrity constructed?

To do this, the thesis argues that the format presented in Figure 2 is true for all cybercelebrities. A cybercelebrity must first create a consistent brand image through content style, username and logo as well as maintaining a consistent upload schedule. Through this brand image, they must then promote a confident sense of personal authenticity through their constructed and mediated personality. By achieving these two things, a cybercelebrity can then build a loyal fan base which produces a steady growth of fame within the community. Finally, their increased level of fame can generate revenue, allowing the cybercelebrity to financially profit from their content. This financial profit and commercial success can then help the cybercelebrity reinvest in their own brand to continue the cycle. As well as outlining the key elements that form the construction of a

YouTube's brand, Chapter Four showcases the different ways a cybercelebrity can financially profit from their labour. The findings of this chapter are formed from a participant observation from my own knowledge of the YouTube, Twitch and gaming communities and offers original observations surrounding the construction and maintenance of cybercelebrity.

Authenticity

Chapter Five primarily examines how fans respond to a performance of authenticity and how this affects their relationship with, and perception of, Mini Ladd's personal authenticity.

Research Question 2: How do cybercelebrities establish and maintain personal authenticity with their fans?

This question looks in detail at how Mini Ladd promotes his sense of personal authenticity, in particular using a discourse analysis to look at the words and phrases he uses in his videos that audiences may interpret as a display of authenticity. This question works on the understanding that a true display of authenticity cannot fully be achieved, due to the notion that authenticity is constructed no matter how honest and genuine the cybercelebrity appears to be (McCormack, 2011). Issues of the presentation of authenticity are also explored in Chapter Six, whereby the presence of a paid sponsorship may affect the audience's perception on the genuineness of Mini Ladd's comments regarding the product he is being paid to feature in a video.

Branding

Using a discourse analysis, Chapter Six investigates how the presence of a clear, paid sponsorship deal with an external company within a video affects or doesn't affect the audience's perception of Mini Ladd's performance of personal authenticity.

Research Question 3: How do cybercelebrities balance the need to generate revenue whilst maintaining personal authenticity so that their fans remain loyal?

This question addresses the link between ‘Generate Revenue’ and ‘Maintain Consistent Personal Authenticity’ in Figure 2 by examining the connection between the need of a cybercelebrity to maintain a consistent personal authenticity for their audience whilst balancing the need to generate revenue. Aspects of branding are also explored in Chapter Four, by examining how a cybercelebrity’s brand image is constructed.

Conclusion

This chapter has provided an overview of the different theoretical frameworks that are drawn on throughout this thesis as well as explaining the three main research questions that are used to form the basis of the analysis. This thesis offers an important contribution to the theoretical fields of celebrity studies, branding and authenticity as it combines all three areas to demonstrate how cybercelebrities are powerful influencers among younger audiences, as well as changing the framework within which celebrity is defined. Although many studies have been conducted around the different uses of YouTube as a platform and the relationships YouTubers have with their audiences, this thesis provides an original contribution by underpinning the construction of a cybercelebrity’s brand that is not prominent within current academic research. The next chapter discusses the relevant arguments that fall within the celebrity, authenticity and branding research fields that demonstrate the relevance of this thesis to develop discussions in these areas.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

As outlined in Chapter One, this chapter focuses on the key theoretical perspectives surrounding celebrity, authenticity and branding. It starts with an overview of how YouTube has been explored by academics in the past before outlining how the relatively recent concept of 'being a YouTuber' fits into evolving definitions of celebrity and proposes a new definition for the term cybercelebrity. The chapter also considers how a cybercelebrity's performance of authenticity, although constructed, is displayed in their online space to increase their personal branding, which helps form the basis of the methodological approach to this research. Finally, the chapter introduces arguments and contentions surrounding advertising revenue and paid sponsorships on YouTube that may affect a cybercelebrity's ability to generate revenue.

2.1 YouTube in Academia

The YouTube platform has seen a lot of changes over its fourteen year existence and, with its continuous growth, provides academics with a vast amount of material to explore various cultural changes. Academics in the past have focused on its social networking capabilities (Burgess and Green, 2009; Snickars and Vonderau, 2009; Hodkinson, 2011; Lange, 2008), the ever growing transitory screen and music culture onto YouTube (Grainge, 2011; Vernallis, 2013), important changes to video production methods (Keen, 2008; Müller, 2009) as well as its institutionalisation (Andrejevic, 2009; Kim, 2012). Studies have also explored the rise of the YouTuber (Gamson, 2011; Johansen and Rivoallan, 2015), issues of self-presentation, self-branding and online identity (Chen, 2016; Khamis *et al.*, 2016; Lovelock, 2017; Smith, 2017) and more recently the analysis of public opinion from particular political events (Williams, 2017 on Brexit; Baxter and Marcella,

2017 on the Scottish Referendum). In 2018, a special edition of *Convergence* focused on four themes that arise from using YouTube as a point of research: participatory culture and user-generated content (UGC); YouTube as a hybrid commercial space; vlogging and the YouTube celebrity; and the 'mystery' of the YouTube algorithm (Arthurs *et al.*, 2018). The section on YouTube celebrities in part uses Marwick's (2013) definition of 'micro-celebrities', "whose celebrity status is established through recognition by a niche group of people online" (Arthurs *et al.*, 2018, p.8) and who must create an 'authentic' brand that combines their mediated personality with a form of entrepreneurial labour (Banet-Weiser, 2012). However, as I argue later in this chapter, whilst micro-celebrity does apply to the majority of YouTubers who have a smaller audience, the applications of the definition aren't purely confined to online spaces.

When looking specifically at the YouTube Gaming subculture, it is still a relatively unexplored area of study despite its huge popularity. One key study is Sjöblom and Hamari's (2017) article that examines why people choose to watch Twitch streams using the Uses and Gratifications theoretical perspective (Katz, Blumler & Gurevitch, 1973). The study argues that "the user seeks out their media of choice, as an active audience, rather than the media seeking out the user" (2017, p.986). This perspective has many applications to YouTube content viewing in the sense that a user has to actively search to find a channel or genre of video they like. However, it could be argued that once a user has subscribed to a channel, any new videos that are uploaded are automatically added to the user's subscription box, meaning they are no longer actively searching for new videos. Another discussion of YouTube and gaming surrounds performances of masculinity (see Potts, 2015; Morris and Anderson, 2015; Maloney *et al.*, 2017) and queer discourse (see Hamad, 2016 for discussion on contemporary celebrity culture), which looks at the interactions between heterosexual males who use a discourse of homosexual innuendo. These articles introduce issues of authenticity through the conflicting performances of masculinity that some YouTubers present in solo videos compared to videos recorded with a group of male friends who use 'superiority humor' (see Berger, 1995; Ferguson and Ford, 2008) to show they are better

or funnier than others in the group. In particular, Healey's article, focusing on *Call of Duty: Black Ops* players, notes that many gaming spaces "become 'proving grounds' for boys' masculinities in which they perform, co-construct and counter-construct a range of masculine identities" (2016 [Online]). Therefore, it becomes more likely that they also co- and counter-construct their performances of authenticity both within their personal gaming spaces and within a more public online space. Likewise, Postigo's (2016) article uses UGC to study the relationship between gameplay, video monetization and community, specifically looking at YouTube's advertising-based business model through a participant observation that followed the lifecycle of two First Person Shooter games: *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2* and *Call of Duty: Black Ops*.

They [gaming videos] are not only performances of expertise or gaming prowess, but they also serve as performances of identity, community conflicts and allegiances, community values, economy, and creativity. (Postigo, 2016, p.333)

However, Postigo's article fails to take into account the many diverse methods that YouTubers use to generate revenue through their content. Alternatively, Newman's article focuses on an exploration of the 'celebrity videogame player', where he argues that YouTube has harnessed "the emergence of a breed of player whose notoriety is not necessarily linked to the extremity of their gaming expertise" (2016, p.285) but more on the personality of the person playing the game. This idea directly feeds into this thesis and will be discussed further in Chapter Four and Chapter Five. The next three sections of this chapter consider the main theoretical fields of celebrity studies, authenticity and branding and explores how this research fits into continuing discourses of Internet media. While there is an extensive base of academic research focusing on YouTube, this thesis uses elements of celebrity production to examine how celebrity status is being created for those who post content online. Likewise, by using YouTube Gaming, it positions the research within an area of YouTube that has not had a lot of academic interest, despite its incredibly popular audience base.

2.2 Celebrity

Snickars and Vonderau suggest that YouTube became “the very epitome of digital culture [...] by allowing “you” to post a video which might incidentally change the course of history” (2009, p.11). Whilst this statement is still true of YouTube and its standing as a cultural phenomenon has increased tenfold since their book was published, it could be argued that it is much harder for “you”, the average Joe, to compete against the most popular YouTubers who are at the forefront of media attention. The concept of a YouTuber is a fairly recent phenomenon that is a universally accepted term among fans and the media to refer to popular content creators that have a loyal and often large audience base. Snickars and Vonderau (2009) originally refer to YouTubers as the users of YouTube, meaning anyone who accessed the site and watched videos was a YouTuber. However, for the purposes of this research, the term YouTuber will be used in reference to “content creators with viewers watching their videos and subscribing to their channels on a regular basis” (Johansen and Rivoallan, 2015, p.10). It is useful here to note how the definition has shifted from user to creator. Being a YouTuber is no longer about passively consuming content; they now have to put something back into the site to be acknowledged as an active participant (Jenkins, 1992; 2006b). While we can argue that, to certain audiences, these content creators are extremely well-known, we have to consider how we can define YouTubers within the parameters of celebrity studies. On one hand, it seems slightly redundant that we still have to define what it means to be a ‘celebrity’. The Oxford English Dictionary provides a very basic definition: to be a celebrity simply means to be a famous person, especially from the entertainment or sporting industries. But considering how fragmented audiences have become, this definition feels too broad to cover the different types of celebrity that prevail in today’s media culture. Traditionally, stardom and celebrity studies have argued that a celebrity is someone who is known almost universally within any given culture. Dyer observes that

...in the early period, stars were gods and goddesses, heroes, models – embodiments of the *ideal* ways of behaving. In the later period, however, stars are identification figures, people like you and me – embodiments of *typical* ways of behaving. (Dyer, 1979, p.24, Dyer's original emphasis)

This shift in the definition is particularly interesting when considering how YouTube is redefining the boundaries of celebrity. The idea that stars now represent the more 'normal' ways of behaving reinforces the ideology that audiences view YouTubers as more accessible and therefore easier to connect to on a more personal level. This idea is supported by Gilpin *et al.* who suggest that "‘Ordinary people’ are generally perceived as representing a greater authenticity, particularly in public discourse, since most audience members find them more accessible than faceless institutions or elite political actors" (2010, p.259). The reduction of barriers to communication in the age of social media allows for a more open dialogue between cybercelebrity and fan, and positions YouTubers within a growing discourse around what it means to be a celebrity in the modern era.

Alternatively, Turner's criticisms of celebrity studies highlights how many academics primarily focus on the representation of celebrities rather than "understanding the industrial production, as well as audience consumption, of celebrity" (2010, p.19). This observation is particularly revealing when considering the construction of a YouTuber. Unlike traditional mainstream celebrities, where a celebrity persona is created and maintained through a complex system of media representation, advertising relationships, interviews, agencies and 'media training' – where celebrities are taught how to speak effectively, look comfortable and how to answer questions from journalists (Media Training Worldwide, 2017) – a YouTuber's celebrity status is generally created through their own efforts and they must negotiate this 'industrial production' by themselves. Feasey notes that "Extant literature on film stars and celebrity figures tends to rank and classify personalities based on skill, talent, and public curiosity" (2017, p.284). This is demonstrated through a survey conducted by Variety magazine in 2014 where they asked 1,500 13-17 year olds in America to rank a variety of YouTube and mainstream celebrities "in terms of

approachability, authenticity and other criteria [considering] aspects of their overall influence” (Ault, 2014). The survey found that,

teens enjoy an intimate and authentic experience with YouTube celebrities, who aren’t subject to image strategies carefully orchestrated by PR pros. Teens also say they appreciate YouTube stars’ more candid sense of humour, lack of filter and risk-taking spirit, behaviours often curbed by Hollywood handlers. (Ault, 2014)

However, this ‘risk-taking spirit’ means some YouTubers make horrendous choices that give their channel, and sometimes their audience, a bad reputation. For example, Logan Paul migrated to YouTube after the collapse of Vine, a social media app that allowed users to post videos lasting only six seconds. He gathered media attention in January 2018 when he uploaded a video to YouTube after his trip to Japan that showed an uncensored dead body hanging from a tree in the Aokigahara Forest, more commonly known as the ‘Japanese Suicide Forest’ (Wright, 2018). The video was viewed more than six million times before it was deleted. As most of his 18 million subscribers are between the ages of 11-25, this type of content not only breaks many of YouTube’s content guidelines but demonstrates a lack of responsibility towards the welfare of his audience as well as a complete lack of respect for the victim. As a result, his channel was removed from the Google Preferred advertising programme, which claims that advertisers can access “the top 5 per cent of content on YouTube” (Griffin, 2017), and YouTube put their forthcoming original YouTube Red shows with him on hold (Wright, 2018). Launched in 2015, “YouTube Red is a paid membership that gives you an enhanced, uninterrupted experience across YouTube, YouTube Music and YouTube Gaming” (YouTube, nd,b) and is currently available in the USA, Australia, Mexico, Korea and New Zealand. Users pay \$9.99 per month and benefits include advert-free videos, the ability to save videos and songs offline, ‘background play’ which keeps audio playing when the mobile screen is turned off, a free Google Play Music subscription and access to exclusive content featuring popular YouTubers (YouTube, nd,b). The Logan Paul incident highlights just one of the pitfalls of self-representation and demonstrates the difficulties of being

a modern day independent cybercelebrity. Speaking to Casey Neistat, a popular YouTuber, seven months after the Suicide Forest incident, Logan Paul commented,

I got so caught up with [*long pause*] my actions being validated, by millions of people, I forgot to be a human being in that situation, and instead decided to be a content creator. And that's where I messed up. (CaseyNeistat, 2018)

The distinction that there is a difference between being a 'human being' and being a 'content creator' displays many issues with branding a personality. Whilst cybercelebrities strive to present an authentic and in many cases 'real' persona on screen, this comment gives the impression that being a 'content creator' is a state of being which is fuelled only by statistics and views over a responsibility to the welfare of their audience. Of course, this cannot be applied to all cybercelebrities, but it does call into question whether cybercelebrities should be viewed as actors or characters, rather than supposedly authentic figures, an idea which is discussed later in this section. Ellcessor states that "low-cost image and video tools, video sharing sites, and social networking sites (SNS) are as available to celebrities as they are to anyone else, and thus [...] are available for use in shaping a celebrity persona" (2012, p.59). Whilst Ellcessor argues that SNS are used to further shape a celebrity persona that already exists in traditional media, these sites are now creating celebrities in their own right and ultimately challenging the notion of what it means to be a celebrity. Therefore, it is useful to explore the differences between a subcultural celebrity, a personality and a micro-celebrity to see if those definitions can be applied to YouTubers.

Thornton describes a subculture as "groups of people that have something in common with each other ... which distinguishes them in a significant way from members of other social groups" (1997, p.1). Therefore, subcultural celebrities can be defined as "mediated figures who are treated as famous only by and for their fan audiences" (Hills, 2003, p.61). This gives the impression that subcultural celebrities tend to have smaller audiences or a lower 'recognition index' (Bonner, 2003, p.83) than mainstream celebrities. However, the applications of this theory do not seem to fit within the context of YouTubers. Although PewDiePie has 68 million subscribers to date, giving

him an incredibly large audience, it can still be argued that not everyone who uses YouTube to upload or watch videos knows who PewDiePie is. This is exemplified when “Even Ms. Wojcicki [CEO of YouTube] hadn’t heard of [PewDiePie] before joining YouTube” (Winkler, 2015), despite the fact that he had 35 million subscribers at the time she was made CEO. This gives the impression that even the most popular YouTubers seem to exist inside of a YouTube bubble; audiences of the YouTuber in question are active participants and most everyone else are oblivious, until they are recommended through word of mouth or a news story brings them to the forefront of mainstream journalism (see Winkler, Nicas and Fritz, 2017). For example, Colleen Ballinger saw drastically increased awareness of her channel after Netflix commissioned original series *Haters Back Off* (2016-2017) based on her YouTube character Miranda Sings, a tone-deaf and socially awkward singer who posts covers of popular songs to YouTube. The channel has 9.7 million subscribers and *Haters Back Off* (2016-2017) was the first – and so far only – scripted series to be picked up by Netflix that features a YouTube cybercelebrity as its star (Variety, 2017). The move from YouTube to Netflix demonstrates a convergence culture, which Jenkins describes as,

... the flow of content across multiple media platforms, the cooperation between multiple media industries, and the migratory behaviour of media audiences who will go almost anywhere in search of the kinds of entertainment experiences they want.
(2006a, p.2)

The fact that the show focuses on the backstory of Miranda and how she gathered her fame on YouTube by parodying the real process that Colleen Ballinger used to build the Miranda Sings channel is extremely Meta (a colloquial term given to a piece of self-referential or self-aware content). As Netflix is an online streaming service that premieres films and television shows as well as commissioning a vast array of popular original content, *Haters Back Off* is well positioned to hit its target demographic and potentially bring new audiences across from YouTube. This further demonstrates the importance of studying cybercelebrity’s influence on audiences and the wider media, as the move to mainstream outlets could help people distinguish between someone who is playing a character, versus someone who is attempting to portray a more authentic

personality, as these two elements are sometimes blurred or, at least in part, constructed. Some studies of subcultural celebrity examine the reading of actor vs character (Hills and Williams, 2005; Ellcessor, 2012) and how fans of the fictional character also declare themselves as fans of the actor. This leads to a merging of two personalities that can influence the perception of the other. For example, some YouTube Gamers only use their gaming avatars when making videos and never reveal their faces. It could be argued that by protecting their identity, they feel free to act in a different or exaggerated way that varies from their off-camera personality as they are able to make a clearer distinction between their private and public personas. This is particularly evident through YouTuber H2ODelirious (11 million subscribers) who has notoriously never revealed his true name or shown his face on camera to the point where most of the people he collaborates with do not know what he looks like.

Alternatively, Fiske notes that “television personalities merge into their characters or are submerged by them” (1991, p.150), although this distinction cannot truly be applied to YouTubers. Even though they may be exaggerating some elements of their personality whilst on camera, they are mainly portraying themselves as ‘real people’. Therefore it could be argued that fans may be more dedicated to a YouTuber’s personality because there is little to no distinction between actor and character to divide their attention. Sjöblom and Hamari’s study on why people watch Twitch streams argues this point further saying, “video game streaming services take these participatory aspects one step further as the interaction is taking place in real time” (2017, p.985). Two theories that particularly highlight this are Thompson’s “non-reciprocal intimacy at a distance” (1995, p.219), and ‘parasocial interaction’ (Giles, 2002; Rojek, 2016) where a fan’s perception of ‘intimacy’ is bilateral, false and constructed so that fans have “no meaningful interaction with said celebrity” (Hills and Williams, 2005, p.348). For example, Felix Kjellberg insists that there is a difference between himself and his YouTube personality PewDiePie:

Felix: I remember how awkward and painful this used to be for me, compared to this fucking video. [Video plays of PewDiePie walking along Brighton seafront in a Virtual Reality headset and full-body nude-coloured morph suit.]

PewDiePie: “There’s a car level coming up [Jeans on the bonnet of a car with two woman sat inside] How you ladies doing?”

Felix: I think, I think it’s ‘cuz there’s a difference between me and PewDiePie and unless I am into the PewDiePie character I just can’t do certain things. Like, it’s like err, stupid, stupid fucking err comparison but like, you put on your Superman suit or whatever, alright. It’s different. So a lot of people are like “Oh, well you say you’re awkward but you go outside and you do all these things like, how could you do that?” It’s different. It’s different. You enter a character, it’s like a, I’m like an actor [emphasis on end of actor in a posh accent]. (PewDiePie, 2017)

By differentiating himself from ‘PewDiePie’, some audiences may question whether he is being authentic if the person they meet at an offline space, such as in the street or at an organised convention, displays an altered personality to the person they have come to recognise online. However, Hills and Williams note that “The ‘persona’ that fans encounter at conventions [...] is thus a hybridized actor/character performance of identity” (2005, p.352). Even though a YouTuber’s presence in their videos may reflect a lack of authenticity and a stronger performance of character, it could be argued they demonstrate a more honest sense of self towards their fans at meet-ups and conventions. They are not coming from a place of constructed mediation that is created in an edited video. Many YouTubers are also self-represented so have authority over the way they present themselves to their fans and the wider public sphere. James Bennett’s study of television personalities contains useful parallels to the perception of YouTubers as personalities. He states that “personalities must appear to be ‘just-as-they-are’, to be ordinary, authentic and to come intimately into the viewer’s home without the appearance of performance” (Bennett, 2011, p1). Bennett argues that personalities have been understood in academic research as a “contradistinction to stars: ordinary rather than extraordinary, an authentic rather than an unattainable image” (2011, p.1). This idea is particularly relevant to the study of YouTubers because many of its biggest channels and personalities were created by users who generated their own level of fame by planning, recording and editing videos themselves. It gives audiences of YouTubers a sense that ‘you can do it too’ as Gamson notes,

The Internet drastically widens the pool of potential celebrities by lowering the entry barriers – a computer and a bit of moxie, and you’ve got a shot – and bypassing the tightly controlled publicity system and the tightly controlling middle people of Hollywood (2011, p.1065).

Whilst the term subcultural celebrity is useful for examining celebrities that have a smaller level of fame, particularly in cult television or movies, a more useful term for describing people who are “Internet famous” (Tanz, 2008) is micro-celebrity (see Gamson, 2011; Khamis *et al.*, 2016; Marwick, 2013; Marwick and boyd, 2011; Senft, 2013). Micro-celebrity in itself suggests someone who creates content for an audience that is micro in scope (Gamson, 2011) and predominantly applies to an “Internet-enabled visibility” (Marwick, 2013, p.114). This idea is particularly relevant when considering the presence of YouTubers at gaming conventions like Insomnia Gaming Festival, the UK’s largest gaming convention. A large appeal for fans to attend an Insomnia event is placed on the attendance of YouTube and Twitch stars as ‘Special Guests’ and many of the announcements in the lead up to each event publicise who will be in attendance. Throughout the weekend convention, the special guests partake in a number of talks and shows, gameplay sessions and meet-and-greets with fans. For example, at Insomnia61 a relatively large amount of the exhibition floor was taken up with booths where fans could meet YouTubers and Twitch streamers. The largest booth by far was a combined booth for TheSyndicateProject, Mini Ladd and Terroriser. Each YouTuber would remain at the booth for approximately 6 hours each day to greet fans, with some waiting upwards of 2 hours for that coveted moment. However, as previously established, some of the biggest YouTubers have large audiences that are not just contained to YouTube with some now gathering attention from mainstream media outlets or appearing in television programmes (e.g. Joe Sugg as a contestant on *Strictly Come Dancing* in 2018). This situates this research in a more complex position because even though micro-celebrity has generally been used to describe those who are famous on the Internet (Senft, 2013), it does not definitively refer to Internet celebrities. It could just as easily describe someone who has a small level of fame from a television show or movie, but does not yet have the same cult status

as a subcultural celebrity. Likewise, how does this definition change once a YouTuber gathers a larger audience? This opens up the possibility of introducing a new term for YouTubers who fall into this uncertain category, particularly those whose presence has crossed in to other media outlets. Therefore, this research suggests the term 'cybercelebrity' is more useful for describing someone who has gathered their fame through Internet-means. The two-word term 'cyber celebrity' has been used loosely in a number of previous academic articles, particularly those that examine the rise of internet celebrities in China. For example, Edwards and Jeffreys suggest that

China's new cyber-celebrity figures represent rising individualism and resistance to an all-controlling state, primarily through their seeming defiance of media censorship and former restrictions on public expressions of sexuality (2010, p.13).

However, most only use the phrase once or twice per article and never give a full definition of their use of the term, but rather hint at the idea that it refers to someone who is famous within a cyber-sphere without explicitly saying so (see Lau, 2015; Simpson, 2017; Titton, 2017). Even though this thesis isn't the first to use the term, it does provide a deeper understanding of the way a cybercelebrity persona is constructed, as well as explaining the ways they are able to monetise their personality to build an audience.

2.3 Authenticity

So far, this chapter has briefly touched on stars and celebrities appearing as authentic (Bennett, 2011), but what does this 'authenticity' really mean, and why is it so important that YouTubers present themselves as such? McCormack defines authenticity as "the presentation of a 'truthful' and 'honest' self'" (2011, p.93), which helps audiences connect with a celebrity on a more intimate level. Tolson examines singer Geri Haliwell's "attempts to reconstruct her celebrity image following her departure from the Spice Girls" (2001, p.443). He identifies that there is a strange paradox that a projection of a constructed public image can simultaneously act as a way of 'being

yourself'. However, one can argue that authenticity can never truly be authentic. Gilpin *et al.* advocate that "Most scholars agree that authenticity is not an absolute or intrinsic characteristic of a text or exchange: it is dependent on subjective evaluation by participants or observers" (2010, p.259; see also Peterson, 2005). Likewise, Atkinson and Silverman state that "The authenticity of the life, therefore, is warranted by pastiche, forgery, and imaginative reconstruction" (1997, p.320). The phrase 'imaginative reconstruction' used here seems to encapsulate the process of creating a mediated personality online. Cybercelebrities are tasked with refining their online persona in order to promote a realistic character that audiences can connect to. In doing so, they take elements of their most idealistic personality to showcase different thoughts, feelings and opinions and continually construct and reconstruct their brand image every time they appear in front of a camera. As such, this thesis argues that whilst cybercelebrities can never showcase a completely 'true' authentic persona, certain behaviours, words or mannerisms can be interpreted by audiences as a performance of authenticity. This will be explored further in Chapter Five through the analysis of Mini Ladd's videos to determine how his performance of authenticity creates a stronger connection with his viewers. As highlighted earlier with Felix Kjellberg's self-proclaimed dual identity between 'Felix' and 'PewDiePie' (who is a very outspoken character), it has led some people to criticise him for acting differently when they meet him in person, as this quote from a fan who met him at a convention demonstrates:

[Voiceover from a PewDiePie fan] Umm but anyways, so the thing about PewDiePie was he was incredibly awkward [...] I don't know if he was just tired or what but I guess I just had this impression by his videos that he was a really funny, like, really crazy person in real [life]. (PewDiePie, 2017)

This quote demonstrates the fan's disappointment that he is not meeting the person he has connected to through his videos and gives the impression that a lack of perceived authenticity could damage the relationship between fan and YouTuber. For example, Hills and Williams state:

The fan who meets or sees [the YouTuber] in person often seems to be left with a positive impression that they are eager to convey to fellow fans, their experience of

having met him also being worthy of sharing in the fan culture as a marker of status or 'fan cultural capital' (2005, p.352).

The importance of fans sharing positive meeting experiences with other fans helps to cultivate an overall positive and trusted brand image for the YouTuber. Having external validation from other fans that they are as nice or as funny in real life as they are on camera may add to another fan's belief that the YouTuber is authentic. Similarly, Morris and Anderson suggest that "authenticity is defined according to a performer's perceived level of talent and effort, or sincerity, which influences their popularity among young audiences" (2015, p.1205). This links to Tolson's (2010) argument that YouTube offers younger audiences a medium through which celebrity status is not only present but more achievable, but he also notes that traditional 'old media' struggles to disassociate itself with inauthenticity because of their inherent institutionalisation. Many 'live' shows take place in a constructed studio with a live audience, all of which is absent from vlogs which allow people to speak in their own voice, from their own homes. Whilst this idea seems simple enough – the more effort a performer puts into their craft, the more authentic they are perceived to be – this is complicated when considering the construction of YouTube gaming videos. The more cuts and effects that are added to the video, the less like the original raw recording session it becomes, despite its potentially higher entertainment value. This can be exemplified through a Let's Play of BAFTA award-winning videogame *That Dragon, Cancer* (Numinous Games, 2016) that Mini Ladd uploaded in April 2016 (Mini Ladd, 2016d). The game was created by Ryan Green who wanted to tell the story of his son Joel's battle with cancer and developed the videogame whilst Joel was going through treatment. Mini Ladd's usual mediated personality is extremely upbeat; he is 'one of the lads'. But during this mostly unedited Let's Play he appeared emotional and revealed a more sensitive side of himself by opening up about his private life. This contradiction to his usual performance of toxic masculinity (Elliott, 2018; Salter and Blodgett, 2017) suggests an attempt to show his audience that he is, in fact, not insecure about showing his emotions, something that can be eschewed by a particularly hegemonic masculine group. This arguably creates a more trusting bond with his audience as they may feel

like they know him better, reinforcing the theory that fans experience 'parasocial relationships' (Giles, 2002; Rojeck, 2016).

Alternatively, authenticity can be demonstrated through live streaming where there is an increased sense of liveness, which Lury defines as a "temporal simultaneity with the audience [...] The time of production, transmission and reception are one and the same" (2005, p.98). The viewer gets a more behind-the-scenes look at how recording sessions form the content for an edited video and fans are able to get live connections to the broadcaster through the chat section. The broadcaster forms a mini-community within the stream where viewers can interact with each other and the broadcaster in real time and occasionally their opinions can alter the decisions that are made during the stream. This links to Donath and boyd's argument that social media spaces are "on-line environments in which people create a self-descriptive profile and then ... [create] a network of personal connections ... [T]heir network of connections is displayed as an integral price of their self-presentation" (2004, p.72). Whilst this idea argues that the basis of persona studies considers how "communicators must consciously *re-present* themselves online" (Stern, 2008, p.106), it may lead some users to question how that persona is being constructed off-camera. In order to understand this in more depth, we must consider the elements cybercelebrities employ when deciding how to brand their personality and their channel.

2.4 Branding

When thinking about how YouTubers brand their channel, the first consideration to make is whether to call them amateur-producers or professionals. Jenkins suggests that,

Amateur filmmakers are producing commercial- or near-commercial-quality content on miniscule budgets. They remain amateur in the sense that they do not earn their revenue through their work [...] but they are duplicating special effects that had cost a small fortune to generate only a decade earlier. (2006a, p.144)

From this description, it makes sense to describe YouTubers as amateur-producers because many have not had professional training and started recording and editing videos at home with little or no cost towards the production. However, through YouTube's Partner Programme, many YouTubers are able to monetize their videos and earn money from the ad revenue generated on each video. Because of this, it is no secret that YouTubers are able to make vast amounts of money from the content they produce and in particular, PewDiePie's salary is regularly speculated about in online news articles. One video in particular addressed this topic after Swedish newspaper Expressen reported that he earned approximately \$7 million in 2014 (BBC, 2015).

PewDiePie: Money is a topic that I have purposely tried to avoid, for the five years that I've been making videos because I just ... I just feel like it's not important to anyone. And, I just want to make entertaining videos. Don't get me wrong though, I don't hate money [*laughs*]. (PewDiePie, 2015).

Despite these speculations, once a YouTuber gets to a certain level of fame, it is important for them to develop a brand for their channel. By developing a consistent brand, YouTubers become more approachable to advertisers or companies who wish to work with them. Their audience also has a clear understanding of who they are, what they represent and the type of content they produce. In contrast to Jenkins' definition, this suggests YouTubers are "entrepreneurial vlogger[s]" (Burgess, 2013, p.54) and blurs the distinction between what amateur and professional are on YouTube. This blurring isn't just confined to subcultural celebrities and online platforms, as Feasey notes about celebrity gossip magazines and their representations of female stars:

... the fact that they rarely distinguish between an A-list Hollywood actress, a critically successful singer, a popular socialite or a reality television contestant tends to reduce female celebrity to a personality contest and relegate contemporary stardom to a debate over appearance and attractiveness (Feasey, 2012 [Online]).

Therefore, this makes the cybercelebrity's commitment to construct a more authentic personality all the more important to ensure they are presented favourably in external communications. As

such, we must consider how concepts of media labour, user-generated content (UGC) and ‘free labour’ frame the YouTuber’s role on the site.

On media labour, Hesmondhalgh suggests that careers in the creative industries tend to promote a “boundary-less career” model, where producers “move between various employers to work on different projects, and [draw] validation from networks outside the organisation in which [they] work” (2013, p.253). It could be argued that each video a YouTuber makes contributes as a ‘different project’ as it is likely they are working within different parameters on each video. Once one video is uploaded, the YouTuber gets validation from their audience and moves onto the next. Quiggin argues that a particularly distinctive feature of social networking sites like Twitter, Facebook and YouTube is the predominance of UGC or amateur content, which “co-exist with a large variety of sites presenting professionally produced content” (2013, p.28). This gives the impression that professional and amateur content is easy to distinguish between, but where does the line between amateur and professional lie? For example, the production value on car manufacturer Honda’s channel is remarkably higher than many vloggers would have and can generally be considered professional content. However, Honda only have 90,000 subscribers despite having nearly 1,000 videos on their channel (HondaVideo, 2018). Compared to PewDiePie’s 68 million subscribers, this contradicts the findings of Kruitbosch and Nack’s (2008) study where they found that the most viewed videos on YouTube tended to be professionally produced (see Smith *et al.*, 2012). This shows how much YouTube has changed in the past nine years if ‘amateur’ content from cybercelebrities is more popular than professional adverts, trailers and promotional material. This idea is also signalled by Casey Neistat (10.5 million subscribers) who says “gear doesn’t matter” when it comes to making videos:

Casey Neistat: If all it took to be good was to have the right equipment, the people who had the most money would always win. This is a movie called *Pan*, it premiered this weekend [shows headline “Box Office: ‘Pan’ Bombs Harder Than ‘John Carter’ With £15.5M Weekend, ‘Steve Jobs’ Snags 521k” (Mendelson, 2015)]. Now, if all it took to make good stuff was to have the right equipment, trust me, whoever made that movie

with their \$155 million dollar budget had *WAY* better cameras than you could ever afford. (CaseyNeistat, 2015)

Banks and Deuze define UGC as “the phenomenon of consumers increasingly participating in the process of making and circulating media content and experiences” (2009, p.419) and is an “important means through which consumers express themselves and communicate with others online” (Smith *et al.*, 2012, p.102). One important observation is that many academic articles surrounding UGC and ‘free labour’ focus on fans creating or sharing content that promotes the original object of fandom (Baym, 2009; Milner, 2009). For example, traditional forms of ‘fan-content’ include fan-fiction, filks (fan-made songs), cosplay, fan art, spin-off productions such as mini-musicals and filmed sketches (see Abercrombie and Longhurst, 1998; Dhaenens *et al.*, 2008; Hills, 2008; Sandvoss, 2005; Watson, 2010). Likewise, every time someone mentions a brand, TV programme, artist, game or musician online, they are effectively marketing that object for free (Andéhn *et al.*, 2014; Smith *et al.*, 2012; Hesmondhalgh, 2013). However, there is not a great deal of discussion around how this ‘fan-content’ changes once its creator starts profiting financially from it. Every time a YouTube Gamer features a game on their channel without being paid to do so, they are providing a huge amount of free marketing for that game. This links to Banks and Deuze’s work on co-creative labour which notes *Time Magazine’s* decision to name ‘You’ the person of the year in December 2006:

But this creative participation was not figured as simply play, consumption or entertainment. The *Time* article noted that these activities position creative consumers as ‘working for nothing and beating the pros at their own game’ (Grossman, 2006). (2011, p.420)

This idea of ‘beating the pros at their own game’ is useful to consider within the context of YouTube Gamers because they are taking the original content of a game and transforming it into a new piece of content by adding their own editing style, personality and commentary. For example, ahead of the release of *Assassin’s Creed Syndicate* in 2015, Ubisoft posted a gameplay walkthrough video of pre-alpha footage with commentary from creative director Marc-Alexis Côté (Ubisoft, 2015). The video provided audiences with a first-look at the game design and its features

and has around 500,000 views. However, a Let's Play video of the same game by H2ODelirious in October 2015 has just over 3 million views (H2ODelirious, 2015). Even though *Assassin's Creed* is a well-established gaming franchise, this demonstrates how YouTube Gamers are arguably providing increased awareness of the game than the actual company making it. Even audience members who do not identify as being 'a gamer' may still watch the video to experience the gameplay. From this discussion, it is clear that YouTubers can be both amateur-producers and professionals. However, for the purpose of this thesis YouTubers will be defined as professional in nature, due to the amount of money they make from the videos they produce, the production value of each video and the regularity with which they upload.

2.5 Paid Sponsorships

Perhaps the most prominent and arguably controversial area of the YouTube Finance Model surrounds paid sponsorship. Before looking into how paid sponsorship works on YouTube within the context of cybercelebrity branding, we must first consider how wider theories of mainstream celebrity branding frame this area. Ambroise *et al.* state "because celebrities have become their own brands, existing models for explaining celebrity endorsement strategies appear incomplete" (2014, p.276). The study focuses on mainstream celebrity endorsement, specifically on George Clooney's endorsement for Nespresso in Europe. They argue that celebrity endorsement is a reciprocal process, whereby both company and celebrity benefit financially to create a 'co-branding' strategy (see also Seno and Lukas, 2007; Halonen-Knight and Hurmerinta, 2010). If there are incomplete endorsement strategies for mainstream celebrity co-branding, how does this affect the notion of cybercelebrity co-branding? Ambroise *et al.* (2014), Halonen-Knight and Hurmerinta (2010) and Till (1998) all refer to co-branding within the enclosure of paid endorsements that help boost both the company's product and the celebrity's brand with an exchange of equity. However, many YouTube Gamers feature games within their videos for free,

meaning developers are gaining increased exposure without having to pay for it. This notion is complicated further with PewDiePie when he features the games that he has developed in his videos: *PewDiePie: Legend of the Brofist* (Outerminds Inc, 2015), *PewDiePie's Tuber Simulator* (Outerminds Incs, 2016) and *Animal Super Squad* (DoubleMoose Games, 2017). Whilst he is still displaying a co-branding endorsement strategy between his own brand and that of the game developer's brand, it is not as straightforward because PewDiePie has increased involvement with future developments and sales. As a result, his involvement with *PewDiePie's Tuber Simulator* (Outerminds Inc, 2016) helped it secure one million downloads in just 24 hours (Spangler, 2016b). This shows a significant change in video games marketing, which appears to be moving further away from written journalistic reviews and more towards visual demonstrations and audio commentary of gameplay. Malm notes that

Using product placement in live streams will display brands and products to the live audience and since a large portion of these streams are recorded and posted online the placements will also be visible in videos, this will drastically increase the exposure time of the promotions. (2015, p.3)

An important element of creating a sustainable and successful brand is ensuring consumer trust. Aaker (1991) suggests that brand loyalty can be measured by the attachment that a customer displays for a certain brand, which can bring a company repeat purchases and recommendations of products to friends and family. Where early research on brand loyalty focused mostly on consumer behaviour, later researchers suggested brand loyalty has two components: brand loyal behaviour and brand loyal attitudes. Lau and Lee suggest, "The attitude behind the purchase is important because it drives behaviour" (1999, p.341) and this concept can be applied to a viewer's loyalty to the cybercelebrity. In order for an audience member to continue watching the YouTuber's videos, the viewer must be able to trust that the channel will continue to produce entertaining content. This idea links back to discussions of authenticity because audiences are more likely to trust a YouTuber's brand image if they feel they are promoting a "truthful" and

‘honest’ self” (McCormack, 2011, p.93). This is evident through Mini Ladd’s opening statement of the sponsored *PWND* (Skydance Interactive, 2017) gameplay video:

Mini Ladd [Voiceover]: Thank you guys over at *PWND* for sponsoring this video. The game itself is a hell of a lot of fun because it’s like, it’s an original concept which is something that you don’t really come about much nowadays. It’s an original concept with a nice little twist on your regular FPS [First Person Shooter] where you basically have to go around and just finish the job, so you can kill people no problem but then to go over and finish the job, aka PWINING people, it’s satisfying. It’s a lot of fun. So go check them out - really good people, really good game. (Mini Ladd, 2017p)

This description at the beginning of the video not only provides a brief description of the game but it also shows Mini Ladd’s bias towards the game. Whether he genuinely enjoys playing the game or not, the fact that he is sponsored by the company suggests that he is more inclined to say positive things about them, an idea that is explored further in Chapter Six. Comparatively, some YouTubers openly make fun of the presence of sponsorships in videos. This is demonstrated when YouTuber SMii7Y was sponsored by energy drink manufacturers GFuel and his sponsorship deal was mocked by other YouTubers during a *Cards Against Humanity* gameplay session (see Figure 3), further demonstrating the prominent use of ‘superiority humour’ (see Berger, 1995; Ferguson and Ford, 2008) as a way to “symbolically express, and perhaps to attempt to justify, hierarchical relationships based on caustic beliefs and attitudes of racial, ethnic, or gender superiority” (Murphy, 2017, p.110). Whilst this arguably lessens the impact of the sponsorship, four additional channels are providing free marketing for the sponsorship deal. This provides a unique balance of YouTubers not wanting to appear reliant on brand sponsorships to increase their income, but also demonstrating the importance of sponsorships to help them continue making content on YouTube. As this chapter has already argued, well-known YouTubers can be considered professionals due to the fact that most are able to earn enough revenue through their videos to support their lifestyle. However, additional income is sometimes needed if advertising revenue is low. More recently, “brands look for people, regardless of follower size, that have a highly engaged audience” (Robehmed, 2016) so they can ensure their target audience will interact

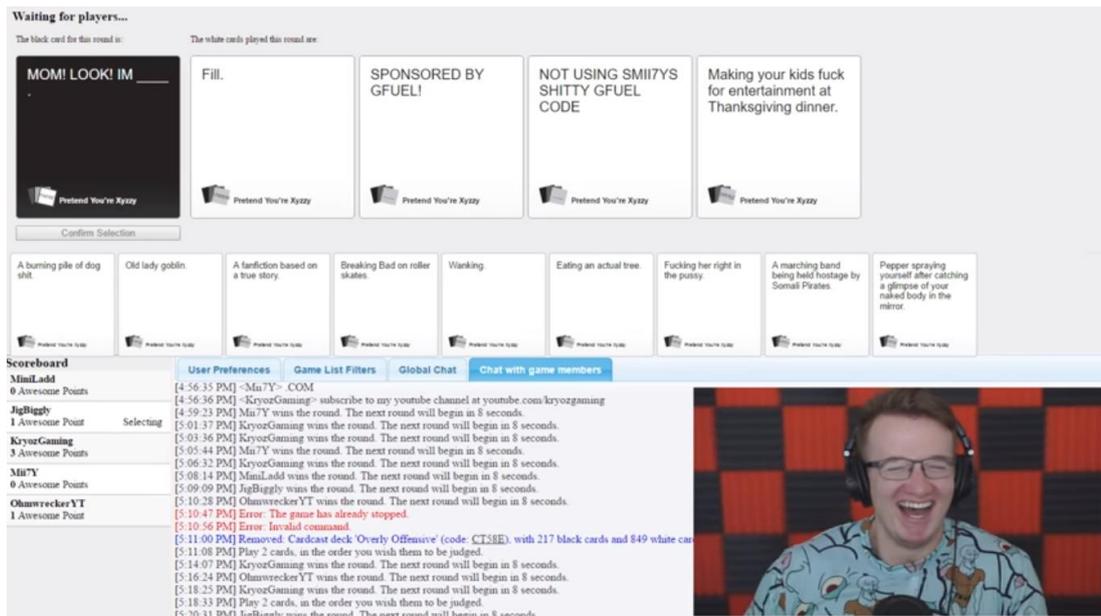


Figure 3: Public mockery of a sponsorship deal (Mini Ladd, 2017o)

with their products. This is known as Influencer Marketing, and Pophal suggests “There are (at least) two ways to generate impact from influencers – paying them to talk about or link to your brand or gaining their support organically” (Pophal, 2016, p.20). For example, Kim Kardashian is famous for lending her personal brand image to a variety of beauty, diet and exercise products, but for a very high fee (Robehmed, 2016). However, cybercelebrity branding by nature means that huge game manufacturers like Ubisoft are approaching YouTubers who are only known within a select audience base. Whilst the cost to these publishers is arguably a lot smaller than other advertising strategies, it reinforces the shift from the traditional free-review-copy exclusives given to newspapers and gaming magazines and shows a growing demand for paid review work. Milner suggests that,

As these active audiences become more prevalent, producers of media texts (the organizations that create, develop, and manage a media text) are fast recognizing the value of courting niche groups of productive consumers (2011, p.492).

And it’s moving beyond game developers paying gamers to play their games. In May 2016 PewDiePie released spoof video ‘My New Car’ (Deleted Videos – DV, 2016), where he mocked other YouTubers that post bragging videos about expensive cars they have bought with their ‘YouTube money’. The video showed him ‘showing off’ a rusty Nissan Micra and the video went

viral, amassing more than 6 million views in less than 48 hours (General, 2016). As a result, Nissan approached PewDiePie later in 2016 to create “an audacious, full of humour and authentic story presenting the new Nissan Micra in an offbeat way” (Shorty Awards, 2016). Within 48 hours, the resulting video ‘MY NEW CAR II’ gathered more than 7 million views (300% more than Nissan had expected) and increased Nissan Micra’s website traffic by more than 27 times in the UK (Shorty Awards, 2016). However, both of these videos have been removed from PewDiePie’s channel, but it is unknown whether Nissan requested the removal because of his controversial appearances in the media and they have reportedly said they will not work with him again in any other future collaborations (Maheshwari, 2017). This partnership reinforces the risk that companies make when collaborating with a cybercelebrity as there is ultimately less control from the brand about how the cybercelebrity decides to promote their product and highlights a higher risk factor for advertisers creating co-branding strategies with online personalities.

2.6 Advertising Revenue

Finally, one of the most prominent ways a cybercelebrity makes money on YouTube is through adverts placed directly before or during their videos. However, there can be major consequences for channels that do not stick to YouTube’s advertiser-friendly content guidelines. PewDiePie made mainstream headlines in February 2017 when the Wall Street Journal posted an online article claiming that some of his videos contained anti-Semitic messages (Griffin, 2017). As a consequence, PewDiePie’s channel was removed from the ‘Google Preferred’ programme, the second series of his live action house-of-horror style YouTube Red show *Scare PewDiePie* (2016; PewDiePie, 2016a) was cancelled and it had an extremely negative effect on his overall brand image. Whilst he still retained his large subscriber base and the majority of his audience maintained that it was ‘just a joke’ – although a poorly judged one – he now has a bad reputation for pushing the boundaries too far and his channel is constantly under media scrutiny. As his

channel is also the largest on the platform, he sets a precedent for other users and has an obligation to act responsibly. Unfortunately, it appears he did not learn from his mistakes and made headlines again in September 2017 when he called another player the “N-word” during a live stream (Ramanan, 2017). These two incidents may have been extremely harmful to his brand image but the majority of his audience have continued to support his channel. Most of the bad language is now removed in order to regain some favour with advertisers, but he continues to struggle to earn advertising revenue and conversations of demonetisation are frequent.

The YouTube advertising industry experienced extremely turbulent times when as many as 250 major brands pulled or suspended their advertising from the platform indefinitely due to some adverts running against a series of videos containing controversial, violent or sexual content (Weiss, 2017; Liedtke, 2017). This then became known as the ‘Adpocalypse’ and many of the biggest YouTube channels started haemorrhaging advertising revenue. In a video posted on 24 April 2017, comedy commentary channel h3h3Productions revealed that only one of their most recent eight videos had been monetised (h3h3Productions, 2017) which influenced their decision to reduce output on their main YouTube channel and move their weekly podcast from YouTube to Twitch. Likewise, in order to recoup lost income many of their videos on YouTube are now sponsored. Even though the controversial videos that the adverts ran on were very small in comparison to the rest of the platform, it had major repercussions for other YouTubers and some advertisers boycotted YouTube for a short time. Regardless of how the YouTube advertising system is viewed by both advertisers and content creators alike, it is still an incredibly important and valued part of a YouTuber’s revenue stream:

The system makes clear the importance of UGC as a revenue stream. It frames gameplay commentary videos so that viewers and commentators are not ignorant of the value extraction system. Commentators talk about the system, they tell their subscribers about it, and show off the things they have been able to buy or experience because of it. The system gives life to a narrative of entrepreneurship among many commentators. (Postigo, 2016, p.339)

Conclusion

This Literature Review has provided an in-depth discussion around celebrity studies, celebrity branding and authenticity to determine how YouTubers fit within these research areas. It is clear that there is room for inclusion for a term to describe celebrities that have gathered vast amounts of fame through the Internet. As a result, these cybercelebrities are extremely influential towards a company's decisions to market their products more online to ensure they reach their target audience. Likewise, the analysis of the importance of a positive performance of authenticity is a key way to attract and retain audiences that prefer a more 'candid' and less obviously produced mediated persona (Ault, 2014) and demonstrates that this research is an important addition to the field of celebrity studies. Likewise, as Turner (2010) suggests that not enough research into celebrity studies focuses on celebrity production, this thesis readdresses that balance by exploring the key elements that form a cybercelebrity's brand in order for them to earn revenue from their content. The next chapter outlines the main methodological approaches that are used to explore how discussions of authenticity and branding are dominant on Mini Ladd's channel in order to answer the three research questions outlined in Chapter One.

Chapter Three: Methodology

This chapter outlines the main methodological approaches used to answer the research questions introduced in Chapter One. It describes sampling methods, the coding and categorisation of the videos and analysis process, discusses some of the initial findings presented from the pilot study as well as describing any changes made.

Participant Observation

Before launching into the analysis of Mini Ladd's videos, it was evident that some groundwork needed to be done to provide a broader context for this research. When researching YouTubers and branding, there appeared to be no definitive guideline for the way a cybercelebrity constructs their brand or subsequently generates an income. Therefore, Chapter Four sets out my definition of a cybercelebrity and demonstrates the different measures needed in order to create a consistent overall brand. Likewise, Chapter Four provides a guideline of the "range of monetisation strategies and business models" (Burgess, 2013, p.53) that help a cybercelebrity generate revenue. Because there is little academic research on this topic, this explanation is part of a participant observation primarily formed of my own knowledge and experience of the YouTube community. A secondary aim was to obtain an interview with Mini Ladd in order to see whether the framework outlined in this chapter was an honest representation of this process. This would have provided "a potentially much richer and more sensitive type of data" (Hanson *et al.*, 1998, p.257-258) from the perspective of a cybercelebrity. However, despite multiple emails and attempts to contact Mini Ladd no response was given and therefore this method was abandoned. However, a negative result from this research method should not be taken as a failure

in itself. In many academic studies negative findings or failings in the research methods are often not included as they may reflect badly on the researcher. However, Goodchild van Hilten argues that negative results are useful for other researchers as they “add to our knowledge and function as a collaboration tool” (2015 [Online]) and allow other researchers to learn from errors and problems that were faced in similar studies. The lack of access to Mini Ladd also showcases the challenge of researching celebrities at all levels and an intimate account from the celebrity’s perspective can be hard to obtain.

Discourse Analysis

In order to answer research questions two and three, a discourse analysis was employed.

CDA [Critical Discourse Analysis] see discourse – language use in speech and writing – as a form of ‘social practice’. Describing discourse as social practice implies a dialectical relationship between a particular discursive event and the situation(s), institution(s) and social structure(s), which frame it” (Fairclough and Wodak, 1997, p.258)

Furthermore, Bainbridge suggests that discourse analysis can help understand “why certain media texts are successful or subversive or popular” (2011, p.224). This is particularly useful when considering YouTube Gaming videos as this approach exhibits why audiences connect to this subculture. Mattock *et al.* describe the archival process of YouTube as akin to “the institutional practices of natural history museums and archives” (2018, online) which they suggest is a form of ‘digital squirreling’. Whilst videos uploaded to the platform are easy to access, their permanence is not secured and a channel may decide to take a video down from public viewing at any moment. This demonstrates an unpredictability for this type of research and shows timely analysis must be done to avoid disruption to the data collection. Aside from noting the basic statistical details of the videos (number of likes, views, comments etc.), a number of key aspects were crucial to include in the discourse analysis sheet and coding guidelines (see Appendix B for final versions). As fan response was a crucial part of the analysis, it was necessary to include a representation

from the comments section on each video to surmise how the audience responded to Mini Ladd's presentation of authenticity as well as the presence of a sponsorship within a video. Likewise, picking out significant quotes from the videos would allow a deeper investigation into the way Mini Ladd chooses to present himself verbally and physically to his audience in order to create a strong brand image. The different ways Mini Ladd interacts with his audience were also important to consider. As many of the videos included in the sample were Q&A's, many direct interactions with fans would be present within the video itself and as such, could increase interactions with fans who are looking for a deeper parasocial relationship with Mini Ladd. Likewise, the way a sponsorship is featured, in terms of the way it is described verbally and how long it is explicitly promoted at the beginning or end of a video (excluding gameplay time, if a video game is involved) would be crucial to understand whether audiences respond positively or negatively to the presence of a sponsorship. After deciding which areas were most important to research, the pilot study revealed a number of areas that needed to be improved.

3.1 Pilot Study

This section discusses the results of the pilot study, the problems encountered and any subsequent changes made to both the discourse analysis sheet and coding guidelines. The pilot study was conducted using two non-random sampled videos, one #AskMini Q&A video from 2015 (Mini Ladd, 2015h) and one sponsored gameplay video from 2016 (Mini Ladd, 2016f) plus the top twenty comment threads from each video. A conscious decision was made throughout this thesis to include the original usernames of the people who posted comments, rather than anonymising them, due to the public nature in which the comments were posted. Van den Hoonaard and Van den Hoonaard argue that people who post "publically available nonintrusive materials" online, should accept that "issues of privacy, confidentiality and anonymity have no currency" (2013, p.63). Saunders *et al.* also argue that there is a sense of "contemporary apathy towards privacy"

(2015, p.127) in online spaces, citing Senft's (2013) use of micro-celebrity to refer to the culture of people who "overtly publicize themselves online" (2015, p.127). As some of the comments included in this thesis mention some sexual or racial themes, one must consider the implications for further promoting these comments to a different, unintended audience. However, as the comments in these samples are ranked by popularity through the 'Top Comments' feature on YouTube and are taken verbatim from the original page they were posted to, it would be easy for someone reading this thesis to identify the user by the content of the comment that was posted, even if the username had been anonymised. Likewise, Mini Ladd's performance of laddish masculinity is highly apparent in his videos and brand image and as such, this inevitably seeps into his audience's behaviour online, particularly for those users who are attempting to engage directly with him. Therefore, all user names in this thesis have not been anonymised due to the fact that the users are posting with an acceptance of publicness. When considering the television sit-com in relation to YouTube, some parallels can be drawn with their use of comedy. For example, Neale and Krutnik argue:

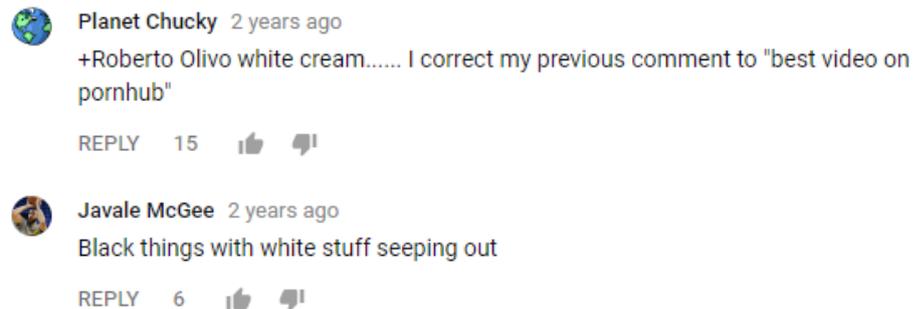
Television is "allowed into" the home, and it precisely makes itself "at home", addressing itself in intimate terms to "You, the viewer". Both the sit-com and television in general are concerned with reaffirming cultural identity, and with demarcating an "inside", a community of interests and values, and localizing contrary or oppositional values as an "outside" (1990, p.242).

This description can easily be applied to YouTube, especially as there is arguably a more distinct, direct engagement with "You, the viewer" that may make some viewers more likely to engage with others in the community to simulate the type of humour they have witnessed in the videos. One problem with the discourse analysis sheet applied to the categorisation of the comments, as it was hard to split them into a positive, negative or neutral reaction to the video, particularly when comments attempted to display humour. For example, Planet Chucky's comment refers to a challenge where Mini Ladd tried to fit as many Oreo biscuits into his mouth at one time.



(Mini Ladd, 2015h)

Whilst this comment conveys some level of positive engagement, the comment also has blatant racial and sexual connotations, which were echoed in the replies:



(Mini Ladd, 2015h)

This makes it more difficult to categorise the comments accurately; they are neither positive nor negative about the video but were significant enough for other users to engage with them. Only three out of the 49 replies to this comment expressed their distaste at the content:



(Mini Ladd, 2015h)

NiceGuyWillis suggests the original comment should be Flagged, meaning a tag is made against an inappropriate comment and requests it is taken down. However, as the comment hasn't been taken down, this implies that the user did not flag it in case there was backlash from the portion of the community that found it amusing. Likewise, some may argue that they were only reflecting the style of conversation that Mini Ladd includes in his videos:

Mini Ladd: And I can't remember who actually told him but he was like, "Ah James, you know what you should do? Try and see if you can fit that whole banana down your throat". He didn't even think about deep throating or anything like that he just went fucking in he was like [*laughs and 'gags' whilst miming pushing a banana down his throat*]. He just went balls deep with this banana [*laughs*]. Everyone was cracking up

because he was just shoving this banana down his throat. Pretty big banana too. (Mini Ladd, 2015h)

[Both are talking gibberish to simulate the language from the computer game The Sims]

Terroriser: Volkswagen aa Toshiba

Mini Ladd: No that's how you speak Japanese

Terroriser: Oh okay sorry I forgot

Mini Ladd: You just name off brands. *[in a Japanese accent]* Toshiba, Mitsubishi, Suzuki

Terroriser: Ahh. Mitsubishi, Nintendo, Yamaha

Mini Ladd: *[laughs]* There you go. It's not racist because it was in Scary Movie

Terroriser: It's not racist if someone said it before us. We're quoting

Mini Ladd: We're quoting exactly (Mini Ladd, 2016f)

This raises questions about celebrity responsibility, censorship and authenticity on YouTube. Should Mini Ladd include comments and jokes that would normally occur between his friends or should he censor his behaviour in order to be a positive role model for the platform? Equally, how can these tensions be captured by the researcher? As a result the categorisation criteria changed and the comments were split into the following categories:

1. Personal Authenticity

- a. Positive comments regarding Mini Ladd or in response to the video (including questions and requests)
- b. Negative comments regarding Mini Ladd or in response to the video

2. Community

- a. Positive comments about or in response to other users
- b. Negative comments about or in response to other users

3. Miscellaneous Topics of Conversation

4. Sexual, Racial or Inappropriate Content

5. Comments with Neutral or No Effect

6. Sponsorships

- a. Positive reaction to the sponsorship
- b. Negative reaction to the sponsorship

Changes made to the discourse analysis sheet included expanding the sponsorship information in order to provide more detail during data collection (see Appendix B). This was also applied to the 'Questions Asked' section whereby the questions could be separated into categories. The 'Format of Video' section was originally split into Gameplay and Non-Gameplay but were eventually combined for greater ease. This was particularly useful when analysing the sponsorships as it did not make a difference whether it was a gameplay or non-gameplay video – the main purpose of

this section is to determine the viewer's response to the presence of a sponsorship. Having the 'Mannerisms' section was a useful addition because videos are such a visual medium and ultimately add colour to the significant quotes taken from the videos themselves. Any significant mannerisms could be inserted directly into the text in between square brackets to provide a clearer picture of Mini Ladd's performance of personal authenticity.

3.2 Pilot Study Results

Mini Ladd presents himself in a very relaxed manner, talking openly to the camera and interacting with his collective audience addressing them as 'lads' and 'you guys'. His natural, relaxed personality as well as an openness of his life and gratitude towards his fans allows audiences to connect more strongly to him, reinforcing 'parasocial interactions' (Giles, 2002, Rojek, 2016):

Mini Ladd: So like I have so many things I have to thank for you guys. I'm not going to do it now, I'm coming up to 2 million subscribers and there's just so many things I want to say because you guys have literally changed my life because of this. (Mini Ladd, 2015h)

Over the two videos a total of 286 comments were analysed using the sorting method 'Top Comments' which displays the most popular comments over the video's lifetime. From Table 1 (see Appendix A) it is clear that a community aspect is prevalent with 75 comments conversing with other users, both in a positive or negative way. While there were more positive responses, the majority of these were one-word comments of agreement such as 'yep', 'haha' or 'lol'. Some of the negative comments were more clearly directed at other users:



(Mini Ladd, 2016f)

If these comments are looked at on the understanding that they are just 'banter' with other users, they would not necessarily be classed as negative. But as the original intention of the comment is

unknown, this makes it harder to categorise and we have to extrapolate its meaning. Alternatively, the majority of comments analysed were perceived to have little or no relation to anything presented in the main video. This is a useful finding as it suggests that users are not necessarily looking for direct communication from Mini Ladd but are searching for validation from the community. When considering YouTube's place in the cultural sphere some viewers used the comment section to discuss their own programme viewing habits:

 **Terrence Smith** 2 years ago
Does anyone else only watch 1 or 2 shows on actual tv and then just watches live streams or YouTube instead of a bunch of TV . Like for me I watch 2 shows then the rest of the time I'm on the internet

REPLY 118  

 **JuJu** 2 years ago
+Miracle Of the Giants Yeah, to be honest you might as well not pay for tv when you have the internet considering you have hulu plus netflix, etc, etc.

REPLY  

 **Tkhan0** 2 years ago
Theres only so many tv shows ive ever even liked and most of them are so old they can only be found on the internet at this point. Only thing I'm actually looking forward for on tv is Sherlock. I'm the type of person who when bored will probably watch the playthrough of like some rpg*game or visual novel just for the plot. And then these videos on the side. And that is how I spend most of my weeks.

Show less

REPLY  

*[role playing game]

(Mini Ladd, 2015h)

This discussion highlights a clear shift from television watching to a stronger internet viewing habit and therefore demonstrates how YouTube relies on YouTubers to create quality content to increase overall watch time. The only thing that is not known here are the ages of these users, which would suggest whether this is a generational shift or a broader cultural shift. Likewise, some users discussed the definition of a YouTuber:

 **Jinxed Gamer** 2 years ago
How to be a youtuber
Step one. Get a youtube account.

Thats it.
Show less

REPLY 157  



Faiyaz Murshed 2 years ago

+Jinxed Gamer You have to make videos tho, unless you think, having a YouTube account does it all...

REPLY  



Jumbo Jimbo 2 years ago

+Faiyaz Murshed No, just having an account makes you a YouTuber technically.

REPLY  



Faiyaz Murshed 2 years ago

+Jmack16 Well, this diminishes the significance of the word "YouTuber" greatly lol

REPLY  



Jinxed Gamer 2 years ago

+Faiyaz Murshed

1. Get an account
2. Make a video
3. Comment on a video, and get at least one like on it
3. Give your meat a good ol rub (if female, skip to step 4)
4. State your opinion about a video and or person, thus causing a flame war (if you cant come up with an opinion, just say youre a brony)
5. Get at least one subscriber.
6. HOODINI.
7. Repeat steps 2-5 until you die.

Show less

REPLY 8  

(Mini Ladd, 2015h)

These comments show there is a clear interest in the way that YouTubers establish themselves. Jinxed Gamer and Jumbo Jimbo suggest that simply owning a YouTube account makes the user a YouTuber, whereas Faiyaz Murshed argues that work has to be put into the channel in order to earn the status of YouTuber. This links back to Snickars and Vonderau's (2009) original use of the term YouTuber as being someone who uses YouTube to watch videos rather than creating videos and highlights how there is still a contention from viewers about how the term should be used. Likewise, the final comment from Jinxed Gamer demonstrates how audiences are concerned with

the production of a cybercelebrity, particularly if the YouTuber mantle is more accessible to the average user (Ault, 2014), and contains a multitude of references. Not only do they promote the community aspect of YouTube, even if the user only comments for attention by ‘causing a flame war’, it also references an ongoing joke from VanossGaming (“What do you call a magic owl? Hoo-dini!”, 2015) that has become a symbol of his channel and contains inappropriate content by suggesting the user masturbates during the process. The most interesting part about this comment is that the user is suggesting that females do not masturbate, which raises issues within the wider context of online gaming communities that suggest females do not or should not participate within practices that are traditionally associated with male, laddish behaviour. This shows how Mini Ladd’s performance of contemporary laddism (Phipps and Young, 2015) and a toxic masculinity associated with traditional “masculine characteristics such as violence, physical strength, suppression of emotion and devaluation of women” (Elliott, 2018, p.18; see also Chapter 4 in Salter and Blodgett, 2017 for toxic geek masculinity in gaming) is embedded and re-performed through his audience in the, sometimes sexist, comments they make publically and suggests why there may be fewer popular female gamers than male gamers across YouTube and Twitch.

The majority of comments responded negatively to the sponsored video, displaying their embarrassment at the way Mini Ladd was playing the featured game, World of Warships (Wargaming, 2015):

- 
- The image shows a screenshot of two YouTube comments. The first comment is from user 'aethertech' posted 1 year ago, with the text 'cringe...'. Below the text, it says 'Well, that may explain the over-abundance of potatoes on WOWS these last few weeks...'. There are 41 replies, and a 'View all 3 replies' link is visible. The second comment is from user 'Kyle Falkenberg' posted 1 year ago, with the text 'being a World of Warships veteran... I cringed so hard at this...'. There are 13 replies.
-  **aethertech** 1 year ago
cringe...
- Well, that may explain the over-abundance of potatoes on WOWS these last few weeks...
- REPLY 41  
- View all 3 replies 
-  **Kyle Falkenberg** 1 year ago
being a World of Warships veteran... I cringed so hard at this...
- REPLY 13  

B Blackwell Markman 1 year ago
Kyle Falkenberg IKR? I mean, some things I can understand a n00b like him not getting– running into an island doesn't damage your ship, you shouldn't press R for one fire, shift zooms, use AP on broadside ships, etc. But then there's stuff like "It's his fault for running into my torpedoes" when it was 98.2% Mini's fault. Or the fact that he never or almost never lead his target, shooting at a 9km-out CL and aiming at the ship itself ain't gonna work, fam. And then there were those torps he launched right before sinking in his Molotov. Where the hell were those even supposed to go? But hey, maybe he'll get a bit better and make another video, one where he actually plays World of Warships and not "world of warships," you know?
Show less
REPLY 1  

(Mini Ladd, 2016f)

As the sponsorship deal included perks for new players, aethertech suggests this brought many new and inexperienced players to the game, diminishing the enjoyment for others. Although this suggests the sponsorship deal was successful in bringing in new players, regular users imply that Mini Ladd may be giving the game a bad portrayal by playing it incorrectly. This demonstrates some users don't understand Mini Ladd's entertainment-over-serious-gameplay brand image and shows the contention between creating original content and balancing sponsorships. These pilot study results helped to inform sampling decisions to answer Research Questions Two and Three.

3.3 Final Samples

The final samples and video statistics for Research Questions Two and Three can be seen in Table 2 (see Appendix A) and help provide quantitative rigour that support the qualitative data towards the popularity of the videos being analysed. Sample 1 was used to answer Research Question Two regarding authenticity and Sample 2 was used to answer Research Question Three regarding sponsorships. Only the top 15 comment threads were used for analysis in the final samples as there were an abundance of replies to many comments, particularly in videos where Mini Ladd or other YouTubers had posted a comment, and therefore the comment sample had to be contained to a more manageable amount. Because of the way that the 'Top Comments' algorithm formats

the comments on each video by putting the most engaged with comments at the top of the page, it is important to note that the comments for both samples were collected for analysis on Tuesday 13 February 2018 and any subsequent changes to the popularity of comments after this date can be disregarded. Likewise, the way YouTube format the dates on their comments relates closely to the day one visits the webpage. Instead of writing the specific date the comment was made, YouTube will show that the comment was posted '2 days ago', '3 months ago', '1 year ago' and so forth. Therefore all comments that feature in Chapter Five and Chapter Six refer to the time period before the comment was taken for analysis on Tuesday 13 February 2018. Videos used in Sample 1 were chosen at random to ensure no researcher bias from Mini Ladd's 'Vlogs!' playlist and consisted of 15 videos spanning from 22 July 2014 to 30 June 2017. As Mini Ladd's channel is a mixture of vlogs and gaming content, this playlist was chosen as more interaction between Mini Ladd and his viewers are present in the Vlogs than in his gaming videos and contain a more conversationalist style. The sample consisted of nine #AskMini Q&A's and six vlogs.

A non-random sampling method was used to pick videos for Sample 2 that clearly had a sponsorship attached to them. Tongco notes that, "Despite its inherent bias, purposive sampling can provide reliable and robust data" (2007, p.154) and therefore allows for a deeper analysis into the effects sponsored videos may have on fans. This sample included ten videos, eight gameplay videos and two vlogs. The videos were taken from a 30 day timeframe between 13 October 2017 and 12 November 2017. In this period 21 videos were uploaded, 10 of which contained a sponsorship. As Mini Ladd only occasionally uploads sponsored videos, this was a particularly high volume of sponsorships that may have a heightened effect on the audience's response.

Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the methodological approaches this research has used as well as discussing the results shown and the changes made as a result of the pilot study. The next chapters will explore the findings from the main research, first providing a framework for the different ways cybercelebrities construct a brand on YouTube, secondly analysing Mini Ladd's performed sense of authenticity and the effect this has on his viewers and thirdly, considering the implications of maintaining a sense of personal authenticity whilst balancing the need to generate revenue through YouTube. The results from Chapter Four in particular showcase the multiple methods that YouTubers use to generate revenue on YouTube, which are referenced throughout the remainder of this thesis.

Chapter Four: Constructing a Cybercelebrity's Brand – Financing a Career on YouTube

This chapter proposes an original contribution to the field of celebrity studies by primarily answering the first research question, how is cybercelebrity constructed? It considers the different elements that form a YouTuber's brand and provides a comprehensive overview of the "range of monetisation strategies and business models" (Burgess, 2013, p.53) that help YouTubers generate revenue. In order to properly examine the role of cybercelebrities in relation to an authentic portrayal of personality, it is vital to understand how a cybercelebrity's brand functions, particularly when many of the most popular YouTubers are attracting increased attention from mainstream journalism. Dredge notes that the appeal of YouTubers "can seem baffling to people outside their main viewing demographic: smartphone-toting 'millennials' who spend as much time (if not more) watching shortform video online as they do traditional TV shows" (2016 [Online]). Nevertheless the appeal of cybercelebrities is huge, to the point where more 13-17 year olds in America rated YouTubers as more influential, "engaging, extraordinary and relatable than mainstream stars" (Ault, 2014). This links to Jerslev's (2016) generalised analysis of the spatial relationships between cybercelebrities and their audiences.

[Jerslev] contrasts the distance, scarcity and privacy cultivated by old-style media celebrity with the proximity, accessibility and immediacy of YouTubers whose high level of interaction sustains their followers' loyalty. (Arthurs *et al.*, 2018).

Therefore in order to further understand the appeal of cybercelebrities, this chapter demonstrates how key elements of their brand shapes a more rounded personality for audiences to engage with. By drawing together the ways that YouTubers can monetise their labour in order to generate an income, it provides a cohesive framework within which the rest of this thesis resides. Since researching branding, it has been hard to find a definitive set of characteristics that define what constitutes a YouTuber's brand. Chen's (2013) study of personal branding describes

the process that YouTubers make within themselves when developing their brand: Extract - identifying their key attributes; Express - constructing a compelling “personal brand statement’ around an attribute set” (p.340); and Exude – creating a strategy bespoke to them “for making their brand visible to the outside world” (p.340) – meaning any viewer that watches their video who is not involved in any aspect of the creation of the video or personal brand that can help “differentiate a personal brand from its competitors” (p.334). However, this doesn’t explain how an audience member would view their brand externally. From my own knowledge and extensive participation within the YouTube and YouTube Gaming communities, I have been able to observe conversations surrounding monetisation and branding from YouTubers that has contributed towards a greater understanding about the way a cybercelebrity constructs a brand image. Therefore, I suggest that a cybercelebrity’s brand is made up of four key elements:

- **Their YouTube Channel** including the genre of videos they produce, their username and logo and any associated merchandising
- **Their Personality** including their physical appearance in videos (or lack of), and in the case of YouTube Gamers, their gaming avatar(s) and their online persona
- **Their Social Media Profiles** including their ‘behind-the-scenes’ personas and the way they interact with other cybercelebrities and fans
- **Their Associated Companies** including endorsements, product features, sponsorships or Multi-Channel Network representation (“third-party service providers that affiliate with multiple YouTube channels to offer services that may include audience development, content programming, creator collaborations, digital rights management, monetisation and/or sales” YouTube Help, 2018b)

Whilst this set of brand characteristics is clearly recognisable in a well-established YouTube channel, it is arguable that a cybercelebrity does not set up a YouTube channel with a fully formed brand strategy in mind. A consistently recognised brand is only formed by promoting a consistent image, making videos in a similar style or keeping a regular upload schedule:

Mini Ladd: ... but my tips [for being a successful YouTuber are] consistency. I know it sounds really, really dumb – put it this way. You could make new videos every single day for three years and you’ll gain a little bit more subs and a little bit more views over time BUT, after three years you’ll say to yourself “*ohh I’m going to take a week break or whatever*”. It could have been in that week that you would have had an amazing idea

that would have went viral, and would have taken your career to the next level; but you weren't there for it. And that's why I say consistency. (Mini Ladd, 2017n)

Mini Ladd uses the term consistency to refer to the amount of videos his audience receive in their subscription boxes, in order to reinforce his continued presence in their daily viewing habits. However, this description can also be applied to maintaining a consistent performance of personal authenticity. If a YouTuber portrays a 'genuine' personality then their audience are more likely to connect to them on an emotional level, reinforcing 'parasocial interactions' (Giles, 2002; Rojek, 2016), where the audience believe they are more intimate with a celebrity than they actually are. As Mini Ladd demonstrated in the above quote, consistency can lead to a steady rise in fame and subsequently a more loyal fan base, meaning more revenue is generated from the larger view counts. There currently does not appear to be a concise model available that dictates the ways cybercelebrities are able to earn money from their content. As such, from my own participant observation of the YouTube and Twitch communities, I have found that there are six main methods through which cybercelebrities can monetise their online content: Advertising, Merchandising, Paid Sponsorships, Appearances, Monthly Subscriptions and Fan Funding. Whilst most of these methods are fairly easy to understand, the section on Fan Funding discusses the ethical considerations that determine the validity of accepting money from fan donations.

4.1 Advertising (Ad Revenue)

Ad Revenue is a consistent source of income for YouTubers. However, there are no guarantees about how much each video will make as view counts vary between videos and different types of adverts generate varying revenue. YouTubers participating in the Partner Programme can sign up to Google AdSense, a "free, simple way to make money online by placing ads on your website" (Google, 2017). Once signed up, YouTubers take 55% of all ad revenue generated on videos and YouTube take the remaining 45%. Channels that have "high traffic, far reach and a unique,

targeted demographic” (YouTube, 2017) are more attractive for advertisers and tend to have a higher volume of adverts placed on their videos. Like YouTube, Twitch also offers streamers the chance to earn Ad Revenue on their live streams or archive videos. Broadcasters (the users who host a stream) must first become a Twitch Partner, which allows them to earn a percentage from the ad revenue and monthly subscriber revenue (see Monthly Subscriptions). This generally starts out on a 50/50 split but can scale up to 60/40 in favour of the broadcaster (Aaron, 2015). Unlike YouTube, “the streamer decides when they run advertisements, giving them more control over their revenue and brand” (Aaron, 2015).

4.2 Merchandising

Branded merchandise usually features a cybercelebrity’s logo or specially commissioned artwork on a variety of products that fans can buy online or at conventions. Merchandising is also a good way to reinforce a consistent brand image. Mini Ladd announced on 15 August 2016 that he was rebranding his channel, which included a “brand new logo, brand new channel art, and which I think is epic, is, brand new merch store” (Mini Ladd, 2016e). With this came a run of limited edition t-shirts with his new logo printed in orange instead of the standard black and white. Fans were only able to buy the t-shirt for six days and it came with a personalised handwritten message from Mini Ladd. The subsequent promotion generated around 3,000 sales, equating to roughly \$90,000 in income. Since the rebrand, Mini Ladd has been consistent in promoting the new logo on any new products and also includes it as a watermark at the bottom of all of his videos to help copyright them and to continually associate his channel and personality with that logo.

4.3 Paid Sponsorships

One of the most prominent and arguably controversial areas of a cybercelebrity's revenue stream surrounds paid sponsorships. Paid endorsements, or 'Pay-for-Play' (Spangler, 2016a) is an increasingly integral part of gaming advertising. For example, when Ubisoft released *Far Cry Primal* (Ubisoft Montreal, 2016), an open-world sandbox game set in the Stone Age era (Boxer, 2016), many YouTube Gamers including VanossGaming, H20Delirious, Daithi De Nogla and I AM WILDCAT were sent a copy of the game to play approximately one week before general release. This demonstrates a direct challenge to traditional gaming advertising (such as television adverts, static or video online adverts and written reviews) as the developers can guarantee the game will be seen by their target audience. The controversy of paid sponsorship developed when some YouTubers weren't disclaiming when they had been paid to feature a product in their videos. YouTube's policy requires all YouTubers to visibly disclose any paid promotions or endorsements by adding a "text overlay for the first few seconds when a viewer watches the video" and to verbally inform the audience which company is sponsoring the video (YouTube Help, 2016). YouTube Gamer Tom Casey (TheSyndicateProject) was paid \$30,000 for two videos to secretly promote the Xbox One console and "to say nice things about the Xbox One, but not 'anything negative or disparaging about Machinima, Xbox One, or any of its games'" (GameCentral, 2015). When scandals such as this get mainstream media attention, some viewers may start to distrust the integrity of the cybercelebrity's character, reinforcing Martin's (2014) argument that a degree of self-interest could have a negative influence on the trustworthiness and perception of authenticity of the person promoting the product.

Carrie Hope Fletcher: The problem with YouTube is that it just feels a bit more personal because the YouTuber is sharing themselves; they are the product that the audience is buying into. So when they exploit an audience and get found out, it's crushing, it's really hurtful because it feels personal. (Carrie Hope Fletcher, 2017)

This quote links back to parasocial relationships (Giles, 2002; Rojek, 2016), as it demonstrates that audiences do connect more strongly to cybercelebrities than the cybercelebrity has towards their collective audience. This further explains why younger audiences connect to YouTubers more than mainstream celebrities as their more candid performance invites audiences to view their status as more attainable (Ault, 2014). Likewise, it shows that cybercelebrities do have a responsibility towards the welfare of their audiences and any performance of character or authenticity can be highly influential towards a fan's purchasing or lifestyle choices (Dredge, 2016).

4.4 Appearances

Like mainstream celebrities, YouTubers can make appearances at conventions and get paid for it. YouTubers can either be paid an upfront fee for the whole event or paid per interaction with a fan; but as Tait notes, "is \$80 a fair price to pay for a selfie and a hug?" (2014, online). However, One problem with this area is that it is very hard to find concrete evidence that YouTubers get paid for making appearances, as most never disclose the amount of money they may earn from them (Townsend, 2017).

4.5 Monthly Subscriptions

On 21 June 2018, YouTube announced their membership programme where viewers

pay a monthly recurring fee of \$4.99 to get unique badges, new emoji, Members-only posts in the Community tab, and access to unique custom perks offered by creators, such as exclusive livestreams, extra videos, or shout-outs" (YouTube Official Blog, 2018).

Likewise, partnered broadcasters on Twitch were given the opportunity to earn revenue from monthly subscriptions from 2011 (Farrow, 2015). Viewers also pay \$4.99 per month to support the broadcaster and gain access to subscriber only perks. For example, some of the perks Mini

Ladd offers his subscribers are “A Shoutout From Me [...] Subscriber Only Open Lobbies [...] Subscriber Only Giveaways [...] I Will Love You Forever <3” (Mini Ladd, nd). Unlike YouTube, Twitch does not display the number of subscribers a broadcaster has, however, most channels include some kind of on screen pop-up with the username and an avatar when a user subscribes during a live stream. The broadcaster keeps 50% of all subscription revenue, but like advertising, can negotiate to keep up to 60% once they reach a certain level of popularity.

4.6 Fan Funding

Up until February 2017, YouTube’s Fan Funding “allow[ed] fans to support the channels that they love by making voluntary payments using Google Payments” (YouTube Help, 2017) with no limit on the amount they could donate. But ethical considerations must be made here. The main argument for allowing Fan Funding is that fans are making voluntary payments. However, YouTubers were encouraged to create a custom video or message that fans received after they made a donation – “A thank you video is a great way to engage your fans and show your appreciation for their support” (YouTube Help, 2017). This leads to speculation that the sense of connection and validation from the YouTuber after payment may encourage them to donate a higher amount. Unlike crowdfunding which uses a specific project to garner financial support (see Belleflamme *et al.*, 2014; Mollick, 2014), YouTubers do not have to specify how they are going to use the money that is donated from fans. This could be construed as misleading and may be seen by some as fan exploitation (Galuszka and Brzozowska, 2017). YouTube updated the Fan Funding model in March 2017 and replaced it with Super Chat which allows YouTubers to monetize the chat tool during livestreams.

Super Chat is like paying for that front-row seat in the digital age; it lets any fan watching a live stream stand out from the crowd and get a creator’s attention by purchasing chat messages that are highlighted in bright colors and stay pinned to the top of the chat window for up to five hours (YouTube Creator Blog, 2017).

Super Chat is very similar to Twitch's Tips model and leads us to question whether YouTube created Super Chat to keep YouTubers streaming on their platform rather than moving to Twitch. As Farrow notes, "Of the three, tips and donations are the most difficult one to measure from stream stats since they're sporadic and only announced during the stream" (2015, online). But the same ethical considerations from Fan Funding apply. Even though fans are donating voluntarily, a user's donation amount, username and message is displayed on screen and occasionally read out by a computer generated voice. For Mini Ladd, his Twitch channel only reads out tips that have a donation amount of \$10 or above but all tips over \$3 are displayed on screen. This could influence fans to donate a higher amount to ensure they are noticed by their favourite broadcaster. However, it is very hard for YouTubers to stop users trolling the chat by posting unwanted messages. Whilst Twitch streamers are able to assign external moderators to remove unwanted comments, it is not clear whether YouTube offers a similar model.

Conclusion

This chapter has provided an overview of the different ways that YouTubers can earn revenue through YouTube and Twitch and explored some of the ethical considerations of relying on fan funding to earn revenue. This findings chapter has been constructed through the researcher's own participant observation and experience of the YouTube community and as such provides a contribution to the field of celebrity studies by redefining the ways YouTubers can be viewed as cybercelebrities. By distinguishing social media influencers and stars in their own celebrity category, it allows developing discussions of the construction of celebrity to take place. This is particularly relevant when considering the impact of the 'Adpocalypse' where many advertising brands boycotted YouTube after some adverts appeared on videos that contained racial, sexual or violent themes (Weiss, 2017; Liedtke, 2017). This prompted YouTube to implement a manual review system to ensure videos meet their ad-friendly guidelines (Hern, 2018) by taking away

advertising revenue from the videos that do not. Using the framework provided in this chapter, the next two chapters discuss the results gathered from the discourse analysis in order to answer Research Questions Two and Three. The chapters analyse the aspects of Mini Ladd's mediated personality presented within the videos that fans may interpret as a performance of personal authenticity as well as examining how paid sponsorship deals affect a viewer's relationship with Mini Ladd.

Chapter Five: Performing Authenticity – Perceptions, Audience Engagement and Being a ‘Ladd’

This chapter primarily answers the second research question, how do cybercelebrities maintain personal authenticity with their fans? It analyses key words and phrases that Mini Ladd uses throughout his videos to demonstrate his performance of authenticity as part of a wider brand image and examines how Mini Ladd uses collective and direct engagement to interact with his viewers. This includes a discussion surrounding the types of questions Mini Ladd chooses to answer in his ‘#AskMini’ Q&A series of videos to enhance his sense of personal authenticity and promote a consistent brand image. Table 3 (see Appendix A) showcases the results of the 3,004 comments that were taken from sample one on Tuesday 13 February 2018 in order to explore how audiences utilise the comments section to interact with themes present within the video as well as attempts to build conversations with other users.

5.1 Collective Engagement

As outlined in Chapter Three, this sample includes 15 videos taken from Mini Ladd’s ‘Vlogs!’ playlist, which consist of day-in-the-life vlogs, an #AskMini Q&A series and any other videos that do not include gameplay footage as the main focus of the video. The videos in the sample span a timeframe of almost three years from 22 July 2014 to 30 June 2017. One consistent element of Mini Ladd’s videos is his introduction; ‘Alright what’s going on lads it’s Mini here’. This immediately promotes an easy-going attitude with the audience and reinforces the collective community of ‘Ladds’ that form Mini Ladd’s fan base. Traditionally, YouTube could be viewed as a series of individual one-to-one experiences between YouTuber and viewer, whereby the viewer

is seeking a simulated face-to-face interaction with the personalities in the video to be educated or entertained. Therefore the more a YouTuber can present “a ‘truthful’ and ‘honest’ self” (McCormack, 2011, p.93), the more an audience can connect positively to them. However, as demonstrated from Table 3 (see Appendix A), over a third of the comments analysed showed a positive or negative interaction with another user. This is a significant finding as it shows that many users are eager to have conversations with other users rather than seeking direct engagement from Mini Ladd. This is echoed in Pearson’s argument that “real fan communities can only grow from the grassroots” (2010, p.92) in spaces that have had no real corporate involvement. This can be shown through comments from users who boast about the length of time they have been watching Mini Ladd’s videos:

-  **SieraGulfOne** 2 years ago
+Mini Ladd its been one helluva journey so far, but keep up the great work man!
your ladds are here to stay every step of the way :)
  [REPLY](#)

-  **Alpha** 2 years ago
+Mini Ladd craig you are amazing its been 3 years now i think since ive been
watching you and honestly you are my favourite youtuber this video made me cry
much love from brazil keep doing what your doing
  [REPLY](#)

-  **Aidan Kilpatrck** 2 years ago
+Mini Ladd wow seeing some of these dates really makes me see hoe fast time
goes and how long ive been hear i remember seeing that trolling video on my
feed and now we are here congrats man great vid.
  [REPLY](#)

(Mini Ladd, 2015g)

This sense of a grassroots community is particularly prevalent on YouTube as many channels did not start with corporate backing, having to source subscribers and viewers through traditional word-of-mouth outlets. However, some YouTubers, including Mini Ladd, are now represented by a Multi-Channel Network, which are

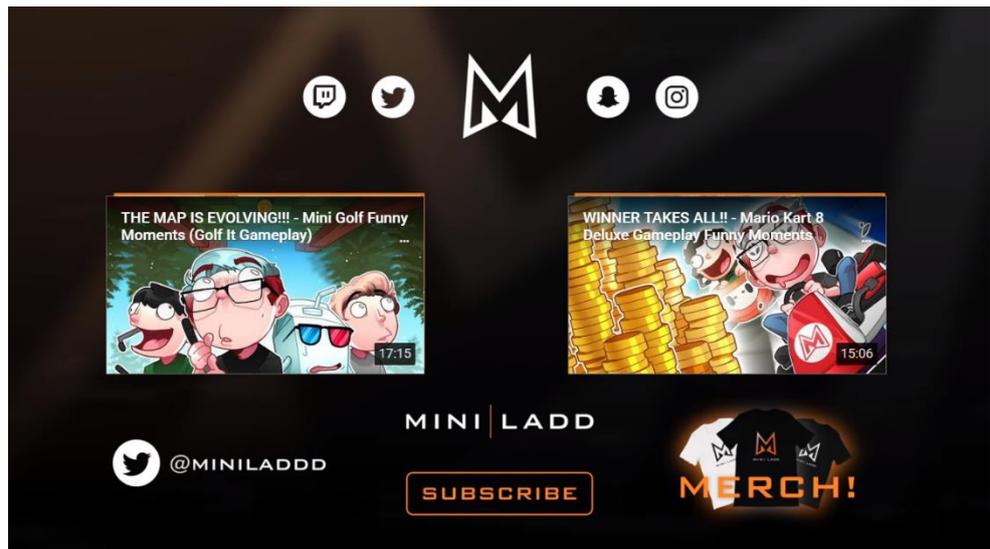


Figure 4: Mini Ladd's End Screen

... third-party service providers that affiliate with multiple YouTube channels to offer services that may include audience development, content programming, creator collaborations, digital rights management, monetisation and/or sales (YouTube Help, 2018b).

If a fan feels they have supported their chosen channel before network involvement was put in place, they may attempt to display an increased sense of knowledge about Mini Ladd or the channel's history to show they are a better or more loyal fan than other users. This links to Thornton's theory of subcultural capital, in which she argues that subcultures "differentiate amongst themselves and in so doing create hierarchies of participation, knowledge and taste" (1997, p.i; see also Bourdieu, 1984 on cultural capital and distinctions of taste). By fans demonstrating they have a higher knowledge of the cybercelebrity, they are subconsciously creating a system of fandom hierarchies (MacDonald, 2008) that categorise the audience to include those that are deemed more knowledgeable, engaged or have a stronger sense of loyalty, and excludes or demeans those that do not. This, in turn, can lead some viewers to believe they have a stronger parasocial relationship with Mini Ladd than others in the community. The idea of parasocial relationships stems from cultural studies from the 1950's in which audiences created a sense of 'presumed intimacy' with media figures and argued:

The ordinariness and apparent authenticity of media figurers [sic] were components of a newly emerging performative economy in which relationships of communication over the airwaves produced emotional identification between audiences and performers. (Rojek, 2016, p.16)

It could be argued that this 'emotional identification' is amplified with cybercelebrities and their audiences because of the prominent use of face cams, particularly within those gaming channels that chose to include one alongside gameplay content, as it places more emphasis on the fact that the cybercelebrity's personality, performance and commentary is what is being 'bought' by consumers and differentiates their video from a different channel's that includes the same game.

As well as having a consistent introduction that addresses his collective audience, the outro is just as important to encourage repeat interactions. For the majority of his videos, Mini Ladd closes with "Like, subscribe and all that stuff and I'll talk to you [lads/guys] in the next one", followed by an end screen featuring links to his social media pages and two of his previous videos (see Figure 4). When accompanied with the intro, this bracketed interaction with his collective audience creates a framework within which to present a consistent brand image. For example, in 2015 Mini Ladd achieved a milestone 2 million subscribers and celebrated by reacting to old videos that "kinda like, define my channel in a way and we're gonna do like the story of Mini Ladd from back when I started it four and a half years ago to the present day" (Mini Ladd, 2015g). During the video he highlighted two branding aspects that remained constant to demonstrate his performance of personal authenticity had remained intact, even though his celebrity status had increased:

Mini Ladd: [*pointing at computer screen*] Also look I still have the same logo from 337 subs. Same logo. I've had it the whole time. [...]

[clip from 2013]: "And like, subscribe, all that stuff and I will see you guys later"

Mini Ladd: See, I've had the outro for that long as well. (Mini Ladd, 2015g)

As well as encouraging viewers to like the video and subscribe to his channel, Mini Ladd has also encouraged further, more specific interaction from his viewers. During one #AskMini video from March 2017, he received the request on Twitter:



Figure 5: Increased interaction within a video (Mini Ladd, 2017b)



Mini Ladd: So if you look over here, there’s the kitchen, bedroom’s in there, that’s living room, that’s the office in there and there’s a bathroom in there. [*camera pans back to Mini Ladd who is cross eyed and has a goofy smile*] It’s very nice [*Seinfeld theme song plays, credits roll with ‘IF YOU’RE READING THIS PUT ‘WOW SICK MEME’ IN THE COMMENTS’ placed in the middle; see Figure 5*] (Mini Ladd, 2017b)

This prompted 70 out of 132 comments on this video to include ‘WowSickMeme’ or derivations of the phrase. By including messages in this format, it is encouraging active participants (Jenkins, 1992; 2006b) to demonstrate their status position within the fandom hierarchy whereby fans are subconsciously ranked within the community by the “amount of fan participation” (MacDonald, 2008, p.137) they have. Aside from referring to his collective audience, Mini Ladd also interacts with his fans individually, particularly through the #AskMini videos where viewers can ask him questions or propose challenges. This has become one of his most popular series and regularly brings in between 500,000 – 2 million views per video. For some users inclusion in a video gives them a sense of recognition and joy:



(Mini Ladd, 2015e)

However, one user displayed feelings of upset when Mini Ladd announced a change in his question selection for the next video:

-  **Drummer King** 2 years ago
God damn it mini, it took me 2 years to convince my folks that I need to get Twitter so I could do the ask mini tweets and Se one of my tweets in your videos and now you are gunna change it to Facebook which I don't have and am never allowed to get.GO BACK TO TWITTER MINNI. I went to be in your video. You have ruined me now. 😞😞😞😞
- 👍 120 🗨️
-  **Mini Ladd** ✓ 2 years ago
+Drummer King It wont be for all future AskMinis, i'll just be using only Facebook questions for the next one and then from then onwards, ill be taking questions from both.
- 👍 24 🗨️
-  **Drummer King** 2 years ago
+Mini Ladd ok well it doesn't bother me anymore because you actually replied to me! MY WHOLE LIFE IS COMPLETE NOW. OMFG. YOU ACULLY REPLIED TO ME. HOLY SHIT. this is the best day ever. Thanks so much +Mini Ladd
- 👍 3 🗨️

(Mini Ladd, 2015a)

Drummer King's initial disappointment at losing his chance to be included in the video is immediately quashed once Mini Ladd provides him with a direct response. This heightened response to celebrity recognition reinforces the frenzied fan stereotypes that have plagued cultural industries for over a century (see Barbas, 2001 on the cult of the celebrity). Instead of receiving admiration from other fans, Drummer King was mocked for not having a Facebook account, which suggests that in an age of increased social media activity, celebrity recognition over social media is not as well-respected throughout the fan community in comparison to face-to-face experiences.

-  **iiSprinkz** 2 years ago
Who the hell has to ask their folks to use a app...
- 👍 3 🗨️
-  **Spark** 2 years ago
+iiSprinkz I know right? WTF
- 👍 🗨️

(Mini Ladd, 2015a)

5.2 Direct Engagement

Across the sample, 100 questions from viewers were included over nine #AskMini videos. During analysis, these were categorised into four areas (see Appendix A, Table 4 for full results):

- **Personal requests** – Questions from viewers asking Mini Ladd to share details of his home, relationship or family life
- **Dares, challenges or comedy sketches** – Requests to do certain challenges or dares (for example, eating hot chili sauce) or to perform other scenes for comedic effect
- **Questions about YouTube, career or work** – Questions that refer to the process of making videos on YouTube, a career in YouTube or any other aspect of a YouTuber's working life
- **Other** – Any other questions that do not fit in to the above three categories

A significant proportion of the questions included pertained to aspects of Mini Ladd's romantic relationships, childhood and home life. For example, user Diana asked on Twitter "@MiniLadd what are you most excited for now that you're back in LA? #AskMini" (Mini Ladd, 2016c) when Mini Ladd moved back to California in 2016 after he had been living with his parents in Northern Ireland. Whilst this question doesn't seem very probing, Mini Ladd's response allowed fans to see more of his home than had previously been shown in videos:

Mini Ladd: Now that I'm back over here I'm able to live a normal sleep schedule. *[dramatic music builds as black bars slide in top and bottom of screen]* And also I have a load of friends out here so I'm able to go out, hang out with them enjoy myself and also I can do shit like this *[Scene cuts to Mini Ladd on his sofa, drinking a beer, watching Game of Thrones]*. I mean, I could do other things as well but ... that's really about it *[laughs]* (Mini Ladd, 2016c)

This response provides fans the opportunity to fantasize what Mini Ladd's life is like outside of YouTube. As Wohlfeil and Whelan argue,

In allowing the consumer to immerse oneself into exciting narrative worlds, where one could experience a different self and engage with fictional characters like real friends, the narrative transportation process provides the consumer with a temporary means of escape (2012, p.512)

As the 'fictional characters' we are engaging with here are mediated personas masquerading as 'real' people, this allows for a comparison to 'parasocial interaction' (Giles, 2002; Rojek, 2016) and further reinforces the perception that a viewer can engage with a cybercelebrity in a more

meaningful way. Likewise, it is useful to remember that Mini Ladd chooses which questions to include in these videos. By choosing questions that reveal certain aspects of his private life, he is inviting fans behind-the-scenes and willingly sharing information that fans can utilise.

5.3 Being a ‘Lad’

A large part of Mini Ladd’s constructed personality revolves around laddish culture, particularly surrounding humour. Theories of masculinity largely originate from Connell’s (1995) work around ‘hegemonic masculinity’ that described the so called ‘ideal’ male; successful, strong, white, heterosexual males who “dominate the moral, cultural and financial landscape” (Feasey, 2008, p.2). Comparatively, Phipps and Young suggest that “contemporary laddism is seen as young, hedonistic and largely centred on homosocial bonding. This often consists of ‘having a laugh’, objectifying women and espousing politically incorrect views” (2015, p.461). This definition of lad culture can equally be applied as a description of Mini Ladd’s channel, where ‘having a laugh’ and entertaining audiences are top priorities. However, Feasey notes that whilst

television sitcoms treat male friendship as facile and superficial [...] heterosexual men do seem to value such friendships, to the point where they will prioritise homosociality and homosocial bonding, with male friendships taking priority over male-female relations” (Feasey, 2008, p.24).

This idea is demonstrated through the high amount of male ‘friends’ that Mini Ladd plays with in his videos, and female gamer ‘friends’ are distinctly lacking, despite the fact that his girlfriend, SuniDey, is a Twitch streamer herself. It is unsure why there is a lack, as Mini Ladd has never explicitly said he is against playing with female gamers, but only further promotes the performance of toxic masculinity (Elliott, 2018; Hader, 2016) and male homosocial bonding (Feasey, 2008), and promotes the idea that females are not as welcome in areas traditionally dominated by masculine energy (see Chapter Three and Chapter Seven for further discussion). By promoting seemingly authentic friendship groups online, it allows audiences to believe that they

too could be part of that group. Therefore if cybercelebrities use a particular brand of humour, including jokes with racial connotations or particular views on women, these could filter down into the audience, become a part of the cybercelebrity's brand, and therefore a crucial part of their construction of authenticity. Walker and Goodson describe the relevance of interpersonal relationships when it comes to the performance of humour:

The nature of humour is complex because it resides not only in the logic and content of what is said, but in the performance of the teller, in the relationships between the teller and the audience, and in the immediate context of the instance (1977, p.212).

As Mini Ladd attempts to create simulated friendships with his audience, Mini Ladd's performance of humour may be better received with an audience that is more open and willing to embrace a lad culture, particularly when the intro and outro of his videos refer to the audience as 'Ladds'. This can be demonstrated through three examples in this sample; '*THE ROAST OF MINI LADD!!*' (Mini Ladd, 2016b), the prevalence of dares and challenges in his #AskMini videos and '*The Florida Roadtrip*' (Mini Ladd, 2017c).

'*THE ROAST OF MINI LADD!!*' is a video in which Mini Ladd invited his audience to provide insults masquerading as jokes that pick on one aspect of his character, behaviour or appearance. The video format was popularised by Comedy Central's US television series *Comedy Central Roasts*, where professional comedians are given "the chance to work out their nastiest material [...] about finding the best way to sell the meanest jokes about the most untouchable subjects" (Sims, 2015). In 2016 many YouTubers decided to take on the Roast Me challenge after the Reddit thread 'r/RoastMe' went viral (Ridgway, nd). At the start of the video Mini Ladd says,

Mini Ladd: I told you guys on Twitter just be as savage as you want. Anything you hear in this video, it's all a joke okay? Everything you hear in this video will be a joke. My God it's a roast, this is what people do. (Mini Ladd, 2016b)

This opening statement demonstrates that Mini Ladd has a self-deprecating humour which some fans may feel is crucial to his performance of authenticity to make it seem as if they are conversing with a friend. The video contained mentions from 30 users on Twitter who each tried to insult



Figure 6: Humorous relationships between Mini Ladd and his audience that reinforce his laddish brand image (Mini Ladd, 2016b)

Mini Ladd in the meanest way possible. One example from user Sky said “@MiniLadd Hey, I like your profile picture, it’s a shame you changed your mind #MiniLaddRoast” (Mini Ladd, 2016b, see Figure 6) accompanied with Mini Ladd’s profile picture of him standing at the top of the Burj Khalifa, implying that he should have committed suicide. Not only does this offer fans the opportunity to impress Mini Ladd with their creativity, it also allows for a different fan-celebrity relationship. Instead of giving praise in exchange for recognition and conversation, Mini Ladd appears more down-to-earth by showcasing humour at the expense of himself:

Mini Ladd: But again thank you all so much for your support recently guys, it’s been honestly insane and I like to be able to have a bit of fun and mess around like that. I don’t take anything seriously so thank you all again. (Mini Ladd, 2016b)

As well as allowing his viewers to humorously insult him, Mini Ladd also includes requests from his audience to do, usually food related, dares or challenges. These involve eating a large amount of a certain food or condiment that is not usually eaten alone; ketchup, mayonnaise, cinnamon and Vegemite being among his most popular. These challenges seem to be accepted in order to showcase a tough demeanour and to demonstrate he is not averse to making himself look foolish on camera. The result can be uncomfortable to watch and usually result in Mini Ladd gagging whilst trying to swallow the substance. The inclusion of these challenges demonstrate a performance of ‘buffoonish masculinity’, which Balcerzak (2013) argues is ambiguous in its

motives, and uses self-deprecating performances that defy or mock power structures usually prominent in hegemonic maleness. Comparatively, Mini Ladd also includes them in the title of his videos in order to draw in more views by clickbaiting the audience.

Clickbaiting is the intentional act of over-promising or otherwise misrepresenting – in a headline, on social media, in an image, or some combination – what you’re going to find when you read a story on the web (Escher and Ha, 2016).

Clickbaiting has become common practice across the Internet as an attempt to gather more page visits than normal by using certain phrases or imagery that encourage users into visiting the page or video. When considering these challenges in relation to a performance of authenticity, they can be argued two ways. For some viewers, the inclusion of challenges demonstrates Mini Ladd’s brand commitment to entertain and reinforces the lad stereotype centred on humour (Phipps and Young, 2015). It also shows the personal effort that Mini Ladd may undertake in order to improve his popularity among his key demographic (Morris and Anderson, 2015). This is particularly important as many gaming spaces “become ‘proving grounds’ for boys’ masculinities in which they perform, co-construct and counter-construct a range of masculine identities” (Healey, 2016). However, others may view the challenges as over-the-top and just a cheap, easy attempt to garner higher view counts. As Mini Ladd’s channel is primarily a gaming channel, the challenges remain consistent with his mediated high-energy personality but also suggest a touch of insecurity at the need to constantly remain upbeat and promote a constant laddish brand image. Rojek echoes this sentiment by claiming that “celebrities are perhaps among the most insecure people in our midst” because “there is an inherent tension between being and society, for we can never be entirely comfortable in a world where the satisfaction of our desires depends on others” (2001, p.95).

Another example of laddish behaviour can be shown in *‘The Florida Roadtrip’* vlog where Mini Ladd visited YouTube Gamer and friend BasicallyIDoWrk. The first thing to note about this video is that within the first minute an uncensored penis appears on screen after “the topic of big shlong has come up in conversation so I’m showing them the guy with the world’s biggest dick” (Mini

Ladd, 2017c). As a consequence the video was age restricted, meaning that it is “not visible to users who are logged out, are under 18 years of age or have Restricted Mode enabled” (YouTube Help, 2018a). As Mini Ladd is a well-established YouTuber, it could be argued that this breach of YouTube’s community guidelines that alienated a portion of his younger audience demonstrates a need to perform a stronger, more masculine personality in order to impress his friends (see Berger, 1995; Ferguson and Ford, 2008). As part of the video the group visit the Universal Studios theme park. Whilst there, BasicallyIDoWrk points out that an airbrush kiosk on CityWalk is selling unlicensed merchandise featuring logos from other YouTube Gamers:

BasicallyIDoWrk: They sell Jacksepticeye hats, Sidemen hats, Vanoss hats

Mini Ladd: Really? [*laughs*]

BasicallyIDoWrk: Ali A hats

Mini Ladd: That’s a-

BasicallyIDoWrk: It’s right up here

Mini Ladd: No that’s [*stutters*] you’re not even shitting me are you

BasicallyIDoWrk: I’m dead serious

[...]

Mini Ladd: [*walking past the kiosk*] Oh you’re not even fucking kidding [*laughing*]. Oh my God. That is so bad. They’re stealing Evan and Jack’s stuff. (Mini Ladd, 2017c)

As branded merchandise is a large part of a YouTuber’s revenue, it is understandable that unlicensed merchandise would be more detrimental to them than it would be to a larger corporation. However, it demonstrates how influential YouTubers are becoming if mainstream outlets are using their logo to generate sales. This further proves the importance of this research as it shows how YouTubers are being recognised as celebrated personalities in their own right. Likewise, the conversations between the YouTubers in this video include a large amount of references to YouTube including issues with copyright, sponsorship contentions and the controversy surrounding the ‘Spiderman/Elsa’ videos that were targeted at children but contained sexually implied content:

[*Inside the Spiderman ride*] **Mini Ladd:** [*shouting*] Marcel. Are we getting a copyright strike? THIS IS ALL COPYRIGHT! FUCK! That’s the scary part!”



Benny Gallego-Hammadieh 1 year ago

I counted 8 potential copyrights, how about you guys?

43  REPLY

Mini Ladd: I feel like it's got to the point in YouTube where we need to make a point that this video is not sponsored by Taco Bell

Smii7y: But it can be

Mini Ladd: But it can be for the simple price of email us today [*laughs*]

Mini Ladd: [*gasps whilst pointing to an Elsa costume*] Yo. Do you wanna dress up like Elsa and get like 100 million views? (Mini Ladd, 2017c)

It is unclear why so much of the video is taken up with these conversations as the video was advertised as a vlog. However, their inclusion highlights many issues that surround a career on YouTube and allows audiences to take part in the discussions that affect many YouTubers. At the end of the video Mini Ladd and BasicallyIDoWrk make a comment that they are not good vloggers:

BasicallyIDoWrk: We're not good at this vlogging thing

Mini Ladd: We're trying

BasicallyIDoWrk: We're trying our best

Mini Ladd: We really are (Mini Ladd, 2017c)

This comment links back to the debate about whether YouTubers are amateur-producers or professionals (Jenkins, 2006a). The insistence that "we're not good at this" suggests self-doubt on the part of the cybercelebrity despite the fact that the video achieved around 530,000 views at the time of analysis. This again calls into question what constitutes being a professional YouTuber; whereas being paid is the traditional marker of a professional, it appears that quality content for the viewers is more important to the cybercelebrity than financial compensation as a marker of professionalism.

5.4 "I wanna be there for you" – Parasocial Friendships

If being 'a lad' is a key part of Mini Ladd's brand image, it would seem counterintuitive for him to offer his viewers an opposite personality. But a large amount of his appeal for some viewers is the



Figure 7: Additional mannerisms that promote a more trustworthy performance of authenticity (Mini Ladd, 2016a)

fact that Mini Ladd also chooses to present himself as a friend and adviser to his audience. In one video simply entitled 'Motivation', Mini Ladd describes the things that keep him motivated to keep making videos as well as describing some of the struggles and bullying he endured when he first started his channel. A key quote from this video surrounds his relationship with his audience.

Mini Ladd: As much as I love entertaining you, I also want you to be able to take stuff away from my videos and incorporate it into your own life. And with that I just want you to be happy. [...] Everything that I've told you in the video so far, it means something to me [*places hand on heart*] like this is what I love doing and I want to be able to help you [...] I want you guys to see me as a friend rather than like this oh YouTuber guy. You know. I'm your friend more than anything else. I wanna be there for you. (Mini Ladd, 2016a, see Figure 7)

The idea that Mini Ladd views his audience more as friends than as a faceless mass gives the impression that he has a genuine personality and audiences are more likely to believe that he is authentic. Likewise, "Eye-contact plays a role in perceived trust" (Bohannon *et al.*, 2013, p.179) and it could be argued that this is intensified through YouTube videos as Mini Ladd's directional gaze into the camera allows viewers to make direct eye contact with him and therefore place a higher level of trust in the things he is saying. This draws some parallels to early Hollywood cinema's use of close-ups to create points of attention:

its principal motive is again pure exhibitionism [...] the enlargement is not a device expressive of narrative tension; it is in itself an attraction and the point of the film. [...] the cinema of attractions directly solicits spectator attention, inciting visual curiosity, and supplying pleasure through an exciting spectacle. (Dobson *et al.*, 2018, p.20)

In this case, it is the reaction of the cybercelebrity that can be of visual curiosity to the audience. Although the nature of vlogging highly relies on audiences' interest in the visual personality and characteristics of the cybercelebrity, it is the sense of exhibitionism of their own personality that prevails. Instead of, as in Hollywood cinema, audiences pay to see people who have a high degree of talent in their field, cybercelebrities present a degree of ordinariness and sometimes, inexperience that allows for easier comparison between cybercelebrity and viewer.



Joloaura 2 years ago

+Mini Ladd Thank you so much for your motivating words! This video encourages me to step out of my comfort zone so that I could do what I love doing. This might sound weird, but if I ever got the chance to meet you, the first thing I would do is hug you!



REPLY



GoreGibsonGaming 2 years ago

This is truly amazing man, thanks for making this video. I remember when i first started out and you had 20k, you were such a cool and humble person and you still are to this day. 20k-3million and you're still the same awesome dude i met years back. Honestly when people ask who my YouTube inspiration is, i say you. You have shown me that if you work hard enough and stay motivated, you can achieve your dreams. So thank you for your constant motivation and for this video. Keep doing you man (:
Show less



2



REPLY

(Mini Ladd, 2016a)

These two comments in particular demonstrate how highly audiences rate YouTubers who appear genuine and supportive on camera, as well as providing entertaining content. Similarly, consistency is proven to be an important indicator of the performance of authenticity. This down-to-earth persona in the face of increased celebrification and attention allows audiences to connect to a defined personality; they can trust that the person they support will remain honest and humble. An important point to note is that this is a solo video, meaning that only Mini Ladd appears in the video and leads us to question whether Mini Ladd's performance of masculinity and male bravado is indeed enhanced in videos recorded with his male friends. This demonstrates

a toxic masculinity may be in place, which Kupers suggests incorporates traditional elements of hegemonic masculinity but also involves the “need to aggressively compete and dominate others” (2005, p.713). Likewise, Parent *et al.*'s article into the link between social media use and depression suggests that “negative interactions constitute a form of affect-based attention, and may promote the occurrence of depressive symptoms” (2018, p.2) and therefore gives the impression that Mini Ladd may only feel comfortable expressing these sentiments when he is, figuratively, by himself. It further shows how important YouTubers have become in cultural studies in promoting this increased sense of connection between celebrity and audience. However, when this idea is put into practice it simply cannot be replicated. At the time of writing Mini Ladd has 5.1 million subscribers, making it virtually impossible to connect to each member of his audience on an intimate level. This calls into question how beneficial it really is to promote a false sense of intimacy with an online audience. As demonstrated earlier, user Drummer King posted a negative comment when the opportunity to get a direct response was taken away. This gives the impression that the sharing nature of YouTube promotes stronger one-sided relationships where fans are able to know a lot more personal information about the cybercelebrity than the cybercelebrity can know about the fan.

5.5 A Brief Note on Sponsorships

Although the next chapter deals more specifically with videos containing sponsorships, it is useful to note that two of the videos in this sample also include a reference to a sponsorship, though not necessarily as the main focus of the video. The first one is in a video from 2014 when Mini Ladd details the various components that form his gaming setup including computer, gaming console, microphone specifications and recording software (Mini Ladd, 2014a). As part of the tour Mini Ladd picks up a customised Xbox controller that has his signature and channel colours as the main feature.

Mini Ladd: ... my controller sponsor link is always in the description of every video. This is umm a, one I got made for me a few years ago. [...] Got a signature on the back and everything and I love it. It err, hasn't broke, it's, good finish, it's managed to keep its colour after all this time and it's perfect. (Mini Ladd, 2014a)

The second video may not technically be classed as sponsored but it includes a mention to a summer camp hosted by Camp17 in August 2017 that, we assume, Mini Ladd was paid to be a part of. The main thing to note is that the summer camp is targeted at 11-17 year olds, yet when promoting the camp during an #AskMini video, his language could be deemed inappropriate:

Mini Ladd: Fuck yeah I am! [...] But, if you guys haven't signed up for Camp17 where me, Brian (Terroriser) and Marcel (BasicallyIDoWrk) are gonna be camp councillors for a full week, where we get to like play video games and go canoeing and random other shit. Have a look at the website, click the link in the description. [...] So if you're looking for a summer camp at all, fucking come to ours! (Mini Ladd, 2017a)

Both sponsorship deals differ from those presented in the following chapter, one involves the sale of branded Xbox controllers through a third party website and the other involves a paid appearance. Not only does it demonstrate an ingrained demand for branded merchandise, it also shows how his increased celebrity status has given him greater opportunities to interact with his fans face-to-face at other offline spaces.

Conclusion

This analysis has identified many aspects of a YouTuber's personality that help to strengthen their performance and perception of authenticity from the viewpoint of the audience. As with any study that focuses on authenticity, we must take it on the assumption that authenticity is a construct and 'true' authenticity can never be achieved. This argument has been demonstrated throughout this chapter by analysing the ways Mini Ladd's online persona shapes the way his fans view him. Overall it appears Mini Ladd has two defining characteristics that form his character, being a lad and being a friend. By addressing his collective audience as 'Ladds' at the start and end of every video both of these characteristics are reinforced. This consistency in brand image and

video style also prove to be a key part in promoting a secure sense of personal authenticity as fans are able to learn his habits and trust that he will remain honest in his portrayal of himself. This then allows fans the opportunity to connect with Mini Ladd on a more one-to-one basis and further develops a bond between fan and YouTuber. The next chapter will analyse the results presented from the second sample and examine the impact that sponsorship deals and paid endorsements have on the relationship between Mini Ladd and his viewers and in turn, whether this affects his presentation of authenticity.

Chapter Six: “This video is sponsored by...” – How Audiences Respond to Sponsored Videos on YouTube

This chapter primarily answers my third research question, how do cybercelebrities balance the need to generate revenue whilst maintaining personal authenticity so that their fans remain loyal? It discusses the presentation of the sponsorships themselves and Mini Ladd’s affected authenticity through the removal of a face cam. It also analyses the overall response from viewers and examines conversations around demonetisation on YouTube and whether this has had an effect on the frequency of sponsorships. Table 5 (see Appendix A) showcases the results of the 1,287 comments that were taken from sample two on Tuesday 13 February 2018 in order to explore how audiences utilise the comments section to interact with themes present within the video as well as attempts to build conversations with other users. This chapter particularly focuses on the ‘Sponsorships’ topic in order to examine whether audiences respond positively or negatively to the presence of a paid sponsorship within a video. As outlined in Chapter Three, between 13 October and 12 November 2017, 21 videos were uploaded to Mini Ladd’s channel, 10 of which had a sponsorship attached to them and a fact that did not go unnoticed by some viewers.



(Mini Ladd, 2017d)

This comment alludes to the idea that Mini Ladd is not earning enough money through the advertising revenue on his videos so has to earn money elsewhere to compensate for the loss of income. However, this may not be the case. A crucial observation shows the total view count for the sponsored videos is a lot lower than the other videos uploaded within the 30 day timeframe.

View counts for videos uploaded between 13 October and 12 November 2017

- 10 videos with sponsorship: 3,856,336 views
- 11 videos without sponsorship: 11,339,078 views

This would initially suggest that Mini Ladd's advertising revenue is stable; all of his videos are monetised (unless demonetised by YouTube) and many channels earn an average of \$2 - \$4 per thousand views (Rivera, 2017), giving him an estimated \$45,500 of advertising revenue from those 21 videos alone, of which Mini Ladd would take 55%. Although we will never have access to these figures so cannot be entirely sure, it is important to consider these figures alongside the presence of so many sponsorships as this will dramatically increase Mini Ladd's estimated income for the 30 day timeframe. Disclosure of payment is a crucial part of YouTube's sponsorship regulations, as "it is important to understand if this disclosure of payment will influence [the] endorsements' effectiveness" (Chapple and Cownie, 2017, p.111). YouTube only count a view as someone who watches the video for a "full 30 seconds" (Parsons, 2017). Considering the view counts above, this gives the impression that many viewers stopped watching the video when they found out it has been sponsored. This is demonstrated by the fact that Mini Ladd spent between 30-50 seconds on average promoting the product at the start of each video with a clear 'THIS VIDEO IS SPONSORED BY [COMPANY]' text overlay displayed at the bottom of the screen for the first 7-9 seconds. Some viewers regarded this increased sponsorship activity as a sign that Mini Ladd was 'selling out', as Bridson *et al.* argue "Consumers accuse artists of selling out when the aspects of authenticity, such as truth, integrity, sincerity and "realness" of an individual's motives, are contested" (2017, p.1652).



Chill Panda Games 4 months ago

GUYS MINI IS SELLING OUT BECAUSE YOUTUBE PAYS LIKE A MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHER!!!

REPLY



Илья Дитковский 4 months ago

Chill Panda Games he isn't selling out, he simply has no choice. He has rent to pay and YouTube doesn't pay shit.

REPLY 14



Gavin Ramsey 2 months ago

Chill Panda Games if you got paid to play a game you would do it, it isnt selling out

REPLY  

(Mini Ladd, 2017)

The first comment in particular is quite peculiar. Chill Panda Games is, perhaps sarcastically, suggesting that Mini Ladd is selling out by having a high number of sponsored videos on his channel but then contradicts this by suggesting YouTube does not pay a good salary. These sentiments are echoed in the two replies but propose that ‘he has no choice’. These comments show that engaged viewers have a distinct awareness of the politics and issues surrounding YouTube’s turbulent advertising upheaval, but it is important to note how these comments are not overly positive towards the presence of a sponsorship. They promote a simultaneous sense of tolerance and understanding rather than enthusiasm towards the videos.

Throughout the ten videos a total of 10 minutes and 46 seconds was devoted to specifically promoting the product featured. The products included one video for Lovesac, a giant beanbag company, three videos for videogame *South Park: The Fractured but Whole* (Ubisoft, 2017) – two of which were uploaded on the same day, two for videogame *Assassins Creed Origins* (Ubisoft, 2017), two videos for mobile game *Lineage 2: Revolution* (Netmarble, 2017), one video for computer game *Warframe* (Digital Extremes, 2014), and one vlog for technology company Razor to promote their new mobile phone. One of the Advertising Standards Authority sponsorship disclosure regulations state that,

If the content is controlled by the marketer, not the vlogger, **and** is written in exchange for payment (which could be a monetary payment or free items) then it is an advertisement feature and must be labelled as such (rule 2.4)” (CAP, 2015).

When applied to the *South Park: The Fractured but Whole* (Ubisoft, 2017) and the *Lineage 2: Revolution* (Netmarble, 2017) videos, it is clear that the sponsorship segments at the beginning of the videos have been scripted as Mini Ladd’s description of the product is almost identical across the multiple videos:

Mini Ladd [Voiceover]: Alright what's going on lads it's Mini here and welcome to this *Lineage 2: Revolution* game play. And just before this video starts I do want to say this video is sponsored by Netmarble. And the cool thing is if you guys do like what you see, there will be a link in the description where you can go, click in for a free giveaway where you get a starter pack which is full of gems and armour and other cool stuff. And even if you want to reserve your name you can get an exclusive title with that. So in this video myself, Ohmwrecker and Captain Sparklez, Jordan, we did like, we did PVP [Player vs Player] we tried some dungeons out, there is a hell of a lot to do in this game and the one thing that kind of blew my mind off the bat is the fact that this is a full-fledged MMORPG [Mass Multiplayer Online Role Playing Game] to the point where it looks amazing and it runs amazing. (Mini Ladd, 2017d; Mini Ladd 2017l)

Whilst the company will want their product presented in a favourable fashion, this inevitably affects some of the personal authenticity displayed through Mini Ladd's enthusiasm of the game. Martin (2014) found that a degree of self-interest could have a negative influence on the trustworthiness and authenticity of the person promoting the product, which will inevitably be the case when the person is receiving payment in exchange for promotion. This is reflected in some of the comments left on the video:

 **Moist POTATO** 3 months ago
TheDarkSkullOfficial he acts like he didn't get paid to do it
REPLY 1  

(Mini Ladd, 2017d)

 **ThatMexican** 4 months ago
It's almost like he's getting paid to say that
REPLY 13  

(Mini Ladd, 2017l)

In an attempt to show that Mini Ladd genuinely enjoys the game that is being promoted, even if that enjoyment is genuine, it seems that some will always view this as a part of the sponsorship contract; there is a slim chance Mini Ladd would say bad things about a product that he is being paid to promote. This therefore reduces the impact of the sponsorship and may explain why a large majority of his audience do not watch his sponsored videos. Whilst this notion certainly applies to the sections of the video Mini Ladd spends explicitly promoting a product, this is complicated when analysing the main body of the video. It could be argued that there is less

control from the company itself as Mini Ladd and any friends he is collaborating with dictate the direction of the video within the parameters of playing the game. This can be shown first through the *Warframe* (Digital Extremes, 2014) video and secondly, the video sponsored by Lovesac.

The computer game *Warframe* (Digital Extremes, 2014) has been available to play since 2014 and Mini Ladd, along with YouTube Gamers VanossGaming, Terroriser and Ohmwrecker were paid to promote a new update for the game that included fishing and mining activities. Whilst these updated elements do feature in the video, as well as demonstrations of 'bounty' challenges that involve the users protecting an object from an enemy force, it could be argued that this is not the main focus of the video. At the start of the video VanossGaming, Terroriser and Ohmwrecker have customised their character models to wear a pumpkin mask, a limited edition item that is available in the store ahead of Halloween. As it becomes clear that Mini Ladd has not played the game ahead of his sponsored video, the others pretend they spent a long time fishing in order to earn enough credit to purchase the mask:

Terroriser: How many fish was it Evan? That we had to catch?

Vanoss: Uhh I think like, like 50 fish

Terroriser: Was it 50? Yeah. Yeah to get the pumpkin thing we had to catch like, we spent ages

Mini Ladd: Jesus

Ohmwrecker: Yeah Mini 50- uhh I would say do at least 50

Terroriser: He's caught so many now, he's like a fucking fish pro (Mini Ladd, 2017k)

Eventually, it is made clear to Mini Ladd and the viewers that the rest of the group were teasing him and he had access to the mask from the start:

Mini Ladd: I'm gonna, I'm gonna go fishing coz I, I'm a while to go

Vanoss: Why do you need to go fishing?

Ohmwrecker: He wants to get the helmet

Mini Ladd: You said I need to get 50 fish

Terroriser: All right [*resigned tone of voice*]

Vanoss: For what? Oh for the mask?

Mini Ladd: Yeah

Terroriser: Am I scaring off the fishes? [*playful tone of voice*]

Vanoss: Mini, Mini, Mini. I just realised something.

Mini Ladd: What?

Vanoss: I just realised something. Umm, you don't have to catch 50 fish to get the pumpkin.

Mini Ladd: What- ... Are- ... But- ... EVAN! How many fish do I need?

Terroriser: Err...

Vanoss: I forgot I got it mixed up. You don't have to catch any fish, you could just actually just get it from the store [*Terroriser and Ohmwrecker start laughing*]

Mini Ladd: THIS-you guys are all in on this

Ohmwrecker: Yeah

Mini Ladd: You guys said you have to do this thing!

Vanoss: We just we just all forgot! We just all forgot! (Mini Ladd, 2017k)

The video is recorded in the group's usual style with lots of commentary about the mission they are undertaking combined with humorous comments about each other's gameplay choices and does not betray the obvious control and presence of a sponsoring company. These exchanges not only highlight Mini Ladd's ineptitude for the game, but also encourage the other YouTube Gamers to exploit this for humour. On one hand, it could be argued that this is a clever concept for showing off the different features of the update they are being paid to promote. However, it also demonstrates the favours the company are giving to Mini Ladd by gifting him a high level character and enough points in order for him to play the game effectively. This inevitably takes away any aspect of 'grinding' and hard work that goes into building up the skill level of the character that all other users would need in order to progress throughout the game. As one comment notes,



A Nigga Named Negan 3 months ago

Warframe & Destiny, my favorite "Grind for the rest of your life" games.

REPLY  

(Mini Ladd, 2017k)

This gives the impression that some gamers take pride in the amount of time they invest into a certain game in order to improve their knowledge of the game as well as demonstrating a level of commitment and perseverance to improve their character's skill level over a period of time. By having YouTubers bypass this system it gives a false representation of the real play-through time. This therefore calls into question how much 'control' the marketers really have over the video they are sponsoring (CAP, 2015). It also further demonstrates the issues for some users who already play the game when they see the game being played badly or incorrectly:



Jason Williams 3 months ago

You need to use your Warframe abilities more

REPLY 89



Geeky 3 months ago

He's new. He uses exalibur, has 2k plat and MK1 weapons xD So I doubt he knows he should be using his abilities more

REPLY 5



Im Pyro 3 months ago

I guarantee that about 1 percent of the people^{*} actually play this game and understand it.

If ya do, then you should know what a forma is. (Keeping it simple)

Show less

REPLY 276

*[watching this video]

(Mini Ladd, 2017k)

Of all the comments analysed, very few were positive about the presence of a sponsorship for *Warframe* (Digital Extremes, 2014) aside from the ones below. This further suggests a more universal indifference by audiences to sponsorships by gaming companies and gives the impression that many audiences watch Mini Ladd's videos to be solely entertained, inspired or motivated.



Electronic_Sonic 3 months ago (edited)

This game is my favorite! You are finally playing it! Everybody watching should totally get this game.

Quick Tip: Hold the bow back longer for more damage.

REPLY



Chris D 3 months ago

A game where you can succeed through time and not spending a single dime!

REPLY 153

(Mini Ladd, 2017k)

In contrast, the sponsorship for Lovesac is the only video in the sample where the whole video does not revolve around promoting the product. A Lovesac is a giant beanbag that became popular across the Internet for being incredibly soft and comfortable; "Sitting on a Sac is pure, unadulterated, unfiltered, straight-up bliss" (Lovesac, 2017) and the beanbags range from \$350-\$1,300 per Sac. This sponsorship has been inserted into a normal 'Mini Thoughts' video, where

Mini Ladd talks about some of the random thoughts that pop into his head. This video is a direct example where the company sponsoring the video do not have ultimate control over the content as the product is only featured for 1 minute 33 seconds. The conditions of this sponsorship also differ, as Mini Ladd has been sent two free Lovesacs by the company which have a retail value of \$2,600. This is one of the only videos where we can estimate the relevant payment value of a sponsored video, and leads us to question how much the other companies were paying Mini Ladd. As Mini Ladd has featured Lovesacs on his channel before, as well as on his social media pages (particularly on Snapchat), this gives the impression that audiences are able to trust his favourable opinions about the product more than they would with a product that is only featured on his channel when he is being paid to promote it as they have seen him mention it before.

One consistent aspect of Mini Ladd's videos is that a face cam is present during his gameplay videos. A face cam can be described as a separate camera that shows the cybercelebrity's facial reactions in real time alongside the main gameplay action, usually sitting in one corner of the video. Whilst not all YouTube Gamers choose to include a face cam (H20Delirious has famously never shown his face on camera), Mini Ladd has expressed in multiple videos his desire to connect more with his audience on a personal level. This level of simulated face-to-face interaction reinforces the nature of parasocial interactions (Giles, 2002; Rojek, 2016) and allows audiences to feel a greater relationship with the cybercelebrity, which ultimately influences "their popularity among young audiences" (Morris and Anderson, 2015, p.1205). When considering the impact of sponsorships with lifestyle vloggers, Chapple and Cownie suggest that YouTube

creates a digital face-to-face experience, where the viewer is spoken to and given the opportunity to interact, such as being asked by the vlogger to leave comments. Thus, online platforms can both increase trust formation, through PSI [parasocial interaction], and also present barriers to trust through uncertainty (2017, p.117)

This gives the impression that sponsorships that are associated with the physical face of a personality, rather than a voiceover, may have more success than those that do not as it may alter the amount of trust the user places in the YouTuber's opinion of the product. This idea is prevalent

among much of Goffman's studies of the way people present themselves through their verbal and nonverbal communication skills in order to achieve a sense of 'self' (see Goffman, 1959 and 1967). However, in this sample only four out of ten videos have a face cam attached to it, two vlogs and the two videos for *Lineage 2: Revolution* (Netmarble, 2017). Biel *et al.* argue "there is initial evidence that some audio, visual, and multimodal nonverbal cues extracted from conversational vlogs are significantly correlated with the level of attention that videos receive" (2011, p.446). This idea is reinforced through the increased view counts of the two vlogs compared to the gameplay videos; the Mini Thoughts video has the most views in the sample at 538,045 and the London Razor promotional vlog in third place with 471,269 views. When compared to the lowest viewed video in the sample, an *Assassins Creed* video with 239,871 views, both vlogs have over double this amount. Even though Mini Ladd's channel is primarily a gaming channel, this is an interesting distinction as it shows that users clearly enjoy videos that have a face cam attached to them in order to feel like they are experiencing a more intimate, face-to-face interaction with Mini Ladd (Biel and Gatica-Perez, 2010). Whereas many arguments surrounding authenticity focus on "the presentation of a 'truthful' and 'honest' self" (McCormack, 2011, p.93), many would believe that the presence of a face cam would allow a more honest representation of the self; the audience is seeing in (mostly) real time the full verbal and nonverbal communication skills being used to show a certain personality. This again, links back to Hollywood cinema's use of the close-up (Dobson *et al.*, 2018) as a way to draw the audience's attention to the object that the filmmakers want them to focus on most. However, one user was glad that there was no face cam:



Daniel Migotto 4 months ago

I actually like the no face cam. It's makes the experience more engaging and somehow makes your commentary sound better and funnier! But I'll watch no matter what

REPLY 22  

(Mini Ladd, 2017h)

By suggesting that having no face cam makes the experience more engaging suggests that the presence of a face cam could be a distraction and the video becomes more about Mini Ladd's

presentation of personal authenticity rather than the game he is playing. In this sense, the game being played is merely a tool for self-expression rather than the catalyst for entertainment.

6.1 Demonetisation Discussion

As outlined in Chapter Four, gaining sponsorships are only one way that YouTubers can earn revenue. The most prominent aspect of YouTube revenue streams revolves around adverts that are played before, during or after a video called pre-rolls, mid-rolls and post-rolls (YouTube Help, 2016). New guidelines were put into place by YouTube after the 'Adpocalypse', when many advertisers boycotted the platform fearing they would be shown ahead of videos that contained predominately racist or sexual content. Many creators lost vast amounts of advertising revenue during this process and many are still struggling to regain the level of income they had previously received (Leidtke, 2017). One problem with the new system is that many videos now receive a yellow dollar sign (see Figure 8) that indicate the video has breached YouTube's 'ad-friendly guidelines' and has been demonetised (Hern, 2018). However, they generally do not detail which guideline has been breached and often leave many YouTubers feeling confused and annoyed.



Figure 8: YouTube's Demonetisation symbol

As a result this discourse is incredibly prominent on many YouTube channels, most notably with PewDiePie who now censors his bad language and regularly edits and re-uploads his videos if they have been demonetised. Therefore it is not surprising that conversations around demonetisation crop up in the comments section of videos, with many users attempting to make a joke of the situation. This was especially apparent during one of the *South Park: The Fractured but Whole* (Ubisoft, 2017) sponsored videos. *South Park* is a popular adult cartoon series whose humour

“relies heavily on spectacle. It derives many of its laughs from fart jokes, racial slurs, talking turds, a kid in a Hitler costume at Halloween, and a child who shows his love for his girlfriend by vomiting” (Halsall, 2008, p.23). The videogame is no less indecent, with scenes of gay priests taking advantage of a child in a dark closet whilst whipping themselves with rosary ‘anal’ beads, young girls working at a ‘Raisins’ restaurant (instead of ‘Hooters’), and young boys giving lap dances to men whilst investigating the disappearance of a missing cat. The issue arose within this video when the boys entered a strip club and images of bare chested women appeared on screen uncensored.



Caitlin LovesVideoGames 4 months ago

I JUST REALIZED THERE IS NO TITTY BLURRAGE

REPLY 80



gameboyreed4909 4 months ago

Caitlin LovesVideoGames because Ubisoft don't give a damn about censorship. Obsidian may make a smoother game, but with Ubisoft you can get away with a lot more crude and racists jokes.

REPLY 4



Matthew Miller 4 months ago (edited)

Yeah, but Mini will probably get demonetized by YouTube.

REPLY 4



Blue Loneliness 4 months ago

Matthew Miller Yeah, but he's getting paid by Ubisoft to make this video anyways so I don't think he cares.

REPLY 8



XtremeGamer719 4 months ago

He was gonna get demonetized anyways. Everyone is gonna get demonetized anyways.



Delta 4 months ago

There's goes your ad rev Craig

REPLY 11

(Mini Ladd, 2017h)

These comments clearly demonstrate that audiences are aware of changes to YouTube’s policy and have a greater understanding about the difficulties of earning money on YouTube, particularly within cultures that have a crude and sometimes inappropriate sense of humour. However, whilst these comments are pointing out the fact that Mini Ladd will get demonetised for this video, they

are insinuating that he will not care about this, as he is earning money elsewhere for the video. This may create a tension for some viewers as it suggests a level of uncaring on the part of the cybercelebrity. This reinforces that Mini Ladd's performance of personal authenticity is lowered in the eyes of his audience as some believe the lack of integrity creates a far less enjoyable video.

Conclusion

When considering the original research question for this chapter (how do cybercelebrities balance the need to generate revenue whilst maintaining personal authenticity so that their fans remain loyal?), it would appear that this is a highly difficult thing to achieve. With any sponsorship deal, by allowing another company to encroach on the channel and assert a level of control on the content of the video (CAP, 2015), many fans inevitably have the view that this diminishes the cybercelebrity's performance of personal authenticity, as they are risking displaying ideals or scenarios that differ from the channel's normal behaviour (Bridson *et al.*, 2017). However, it gives the cybercelebrity an opportunity to attract a different source of revenue that may help their channel and income remain steady through the turbulent 'Adpocalypse' and subsequent demonetisation issues, where videos go through a manual review system to make sure they meet YouTube's 'ad-friendly guidelines' (Hern, 2018). It is clear that the frequency of sponsorships within the 30 day timeframe of this sample may have had an altered effect on the viewer's reaction to the sponsorship deals themselves and therefore these findings cannot speak for one-off sporadic sponsorships. Likewise, issues and discussions around demonetisation indicate that audiences are engaged with the elements that are affecting production and consumption of YouTube videos and, for some part, offer a level of support and understanding of the cybercelebrity's need to sacrifice some of their personal authenticity in order to ensure the channel's overall success. The final chapter will draw together the discussion from the entire

thesis and offer observations towards the state of cybercelebrity within the media landscape going forward.

Chapter Seven: Conclusion

This thesis has presented a significant contribution to the field of celebrity studies by re-introducing the term cybercelebrity to define anyone who has generated a substantial amount of fame through the Internet (see also Edwards and Jeffreys, 2010). Whilst many theories surrounding stars (Dyer, 1979), subcultural celebrities (Hills, 2003; Hills and Williams, 2005; Ellcessor, 2012), micro-celebrities (Gamson, 2011; Marwick, 2013; Marwick and boyd, 2011; Senft, 2013) and personalities (Fiske, 1991) do propose definitions of celebrity that can be applied to YouTubers, it was clear that there was no succinct category that focused purely on people who had generated their fame online. Therefore, cybercelebrity was the best and most accurate term through which to analyse Mini Ladd's position on YouTube, the relationships with his audience, their perception of his level of authenticity and the unique revenue generating methods employed to earn income. Though many arguments could be made against this term due to the fact that some YouTubers have extended their transmediality into presenting, television and film, music or publishing (Robinson, 2015), cybercelebrity focuses solely on the "Internet famous" (Tanz, 2008) and confines their level of fame within the boundaries of the online mediated persona. Although this thesis has focused specifically on YouTube as a platform for celebrity production, the construction of cybercelebrity spans multiple online platforms and further research would be able to distinguish how different platforms support their content creators. Focusing on the findings presented in this thesis, this concluding chapter evaluates how effectively the research questions have been answered within the three main themes of celebrity, authenticity and branding.

By categorising YouTubers as professionals over amateur-producers (Jenkins, 2006a), discussions surrounding authenticity and branding could be more easily applied. Likewise, there are broader consequences for cybercelebrities that present a less authentic persona or make decisions that

lower the opinion of the platform as a whole (Wright, 2018) as there could be a higher financial risk for the company they are representing. A further examination of the distinction between amateur-producer and professional (Jenkins, 2006a) would allow a closer inspection of the role of YouTubers within celebrity studies and may be able to pinpoint the moment where someone goes from unknown to celebrity to showcase favourable qualities that help promote success and fame. It would also allow for the incorporation of Instagram, Twitter and Facebook celebrities into the argument to determine how different social media platforms promote and support these personalities to develop the profile of the platform as a whole.

Similarly, the generally positive response from Mini Ladd's audience towards his construction of personal authenticity highlights the importance of studying cybercelebrities as they help provide an insight into the appeal of supporting content creators who are predominantly self-made. This is heightened within the YouTube Gaming community, as opposed to the Beauty and Lifestyle community for example, as there exists a different dynamic between cybercelebrities and audiences that is based more on entertainment. Whilst many Beauty and Lifestyle channels offer more recommendations of hair and make-up products combined with styling tutorials to educate their viewers about the best techniques (Lancaster, 2018), gaming channels offer a higher entertainment value, predominately through its use of comedy in particular relation to the male bravado and 'buffoonish masculinity' (Balcerzak, 2013) and the use of insult and offence (Murphy, 2017) in group situations. Although this thesis primarily focused on a YouTube channel centred on a laddish, masculine performance of identity, the discussion needs to address the lack of female gaming influence on his channel, despite his girlfriend, SuniDey, being a female Twitch streamer herself. Fortnite streamer Ninja recently received some backlash from the gaming community when he announced that "out of respect for his wife" (McInnis, 2018) – also a Twitch streamer – he has to be mindful of who he plays with to avoid viewers speculating and spreading rumours that he is cheating on his wife. Whilst some understand this decision to 'protect' his wife and relationship from speculation, female Twitch streamer Rage Darling says that he's "indirectly

reinforcing the stereotype that a lot of female gamers are Twitch thots [... who is] someone, particularly female, that uses her sexual identity to get more views or more money” (McInnis, 2018). This perpetuates the issue that female streamers are not to be taken seriously within the gaming community, even if they are talented or entertaining, and draws comparisons with the Classic Hollywood ‘boys club’ of comedians that often excludes female performers (Balcerzak, 2013). As YouTube Gaming (Joyce, 2015) is the main subsidiary platform examined, it provides a different and somewhat unexplored perspective from which conclusions of the construction of cybercelebrity and their relationship with audiences can be drawn. By including Twitch, a predominately gaming focused live-streaming service (Twitch, 2014a) into the finance model presented in Chapter Four, it demonstrates how substantial amounts of money can be made through playing videogames as well as explaining the appeal of watching others play videogames (Williams, 2015).

Presenting a strong brand image combined with a confident and consistent sense of personal authenticity allows cybercelebrities to develop stronger relationships with their fans and maintain a loyal audience, as demonstrated in Chapter Five. The use of a discourse analysis to dissect the aural and visual cues that depict the presentation of authenticity presented a chance to closer inspect the words and phrases used, rather than the amount of times they were said. Likewise, the combination of associated mannerisms proffered the opportunity to inspect whether audiences interpreted the words as sincere and therefore more authentic. It is clear that both collective and direct engagement with fans is a key element to achieve a greater sense of loyalty from an audience. By referring to a collective audience, particularly one that is associated with a fandom name, it creates a distinct sense of community and extends the cybercelebrity’s brand outside the brand characteristics outlined in Chapter Four. In the case of Mini Ladd, the association with lad culture (Phipps and Young, 2015) positions his channel within a community of humour, friendship and more often than not a fair amount of crude jokes. In some cases, it could be argued that the culture of insult-related, superiority humour (Berger, 1995; Ferguson

and Ford, 2008; Murphy, 2017) prevails into the community as a way to attract attention from the cybercelebrity and as a way to reinforce hierarchies within the fandom (MacDonald, 2008). This is demonstrated by the higher amount of negative comments found within the sample that were directed at other users shown in Chapter Five. As demonstrated in Chapter Three, written comments are very hard to interpret when humour is involved, especially considering the insult-heavy nature of jokes that is inherent to the lad culture. As humour is such an important part of Mini Ladd's brand image as well as a key indicator of his performance of personal authenticity, this gives the impression that a relaxed and friendly state of being allows audiences to develop deeper bonds with the cybercelebrity. However, these bonds can only ever develop a 'parasocial interaction' (Giles, 2002; Rojek, 2016) whereby the fan creates a stronger one-sided relationship with the cybercelebrity. This further proves the significance of YouTubers within cultural and celebrity studies as they are changing the ways that fans are able to interact with their idols, especially with people who upload videos and interact with their audiences on a regular basis. Alternatively, being a role model to motivate others also appears to be a significantly appealing factor for some audiences. The promotion of a potential reciprocal friendship can place a higher level of trust (Bohannon *et al.*, 2013) within the audience and demonstrates a likeable and believable mediated persona. But future studies of cybercelebrities must consider that all personas, however genuine they appear to be, are a *performance* of authenticity and thus cannot truly demonstrate a fully "honest self" (McCormack, 2011). Since the completion of this study, Mini Ladd created a second channel called 'Craig Thompson' (429k subscribers) because

we realised the [Mini Ladd] channel is exactly split between gaming and lifestyle content [...] the Mini Ladd channel will remain gaming [...] But, everything lifestyle that I've done will go over to the Craig Thompson channel. [...] Because what I've realised is, reading the comments section, is half of you are here for gaming, and half of you are here for lifestyle. So now, I'm able to do a lot more with both, now that I've split them up. (Mini Ladd, 2018)

This move has significant ramifications for the Mini Ladd brand image because further questions surrounding an authentic performance of personality are raised, and a further investigation into

the actor vs character (Hills and Williams, 2005; Ellcessor, 2012) debate can be applied. By applying his real name to the lifestyle channel, it suggests that the Mini Ladd persona becomes more of an exaggerated performance fully engrained in the gaming community because it is not balanced by the calmer and sometimes more sensitive performance of being the audience's 'friend'. Similarly, Mini Ladd's audience is now also split, and therefore the comments sections on each channel will probably feature different styles of conversation than are seen in this thesis.

As argued in Chapter Four, it was important to develop an original set of brand characteristics that help define a cybercelebrity's brand as a whole. In particular, this demonstrated how a cybercelebrity differs from a micro-celebrity (Gamson, 2011; Marwick, 2013; Marwick and boyd, 2011; Senft, 2013) or a subcultural celebrity (Hills, 2003; Hills and Williams, 2005; Ellcessor, 2012) by focusing on the social media aspects of branding that are particular to YouTube. As such, this thesis addressed Turner's criticisms of celebrity studies by focusing on "understanding the industrial production, as well as audience consumption, of celebrity" (2010, p.19). Importantly, the original findings of this chapter were compiled using a participant observation based on my own extensive knowledge of YouTube as a platform. Combined with research into the way YouTube and Twitch support their content creators financially, this chapter provided a secure foundation from which cybercelebrity representation could be understood and showed potential challenges that face the development of a career on YouTube. This was especially useful when considering the different methods that cybercelebrities use to generate revenue through their content. The multi-method approach, though not exclusive to cybercelebrity production, is more readily employed and discussed with audiences. The openness through which money is talked about on YouTube allows audiences to gain a better understanding of cybercelebrity construction and therefore promotes a stronger trust between cybercelebrities and audiences. This supports the claim that more 13-17 year olds "enjoy an intimate and authentic experience with YouTube celebrities, who aren't subject to image strategies carefully orchestrated by PR pros" (Ault, 2014) and therefore makes cybercelebrities more influential than many mainstream celebrities.

However, the inclusion of paid sponsorships and product endorsements to help generate revenue on YouTube has demonstrated a clear contention between the need to earn money and the desire to entertain and retain audiences. As demonstrated in Chapter Six the combined view count on the sponsored videos was significantly lower than the non-sponsored videos in the sample. Whilst this goes some way to show that viewers are not as interested in sponsored videos, it does highlight that frequency, tolerance and game played have a large part in determining the audience's reaction to it. It would therefore be wrong to suggest that cybercelebrities should not agree on co-branding strategies (Ambroise *et al.*, 2014; Seno and Lukas, 2007) as they play a vital part in developing marketing strategies in order to promote products to a specific target audience. However, it does show that care, attention and consideration needs to be given towards audiences so that they do not perceive increased sponsorship activity as a way of a cybercelebrity 'selling out' (Bridson *et al.*, 2017).

However, celebrity sponsorship and co-branding strategies can go both ways. In November 2017, Mini Ladd announced a huge sponsorship deal with Derry Rugby Club in Northern Ireland in which he gifted the club a "significant funding package" (Flood, 2017) speculated to be in the region of £400,000 over a ten year period. After playing rugby as a teenager and almost making a professional career in the sport before having to retire due to a back injury, the sponsorship comes as "his way of giving back to a club which meant a lot to him in his formative years" (Flood, 2017). As a result of the sponsorship deal, the club renamed their stadium to the 'Craig Thompson Stadium' in honour of his contribution (Ferry, 2017) and Mini Ladd's logo is now used on the player's rugby kit as well as across the stadium site. Likewise, in June 2016 Mini Ladd showed his generosity by holding a 24-hour live stream on his Twitch channel to raise money for charity which was shared equally between McMillan Cancer Support and a counselling service based in his home town (*Derry Journal*, 2016). In the 24-hours, the stream raised \$53,000 with Mini Ladd's audience donating \$43,000 and the remaining \$10,000 coming from a personal donation from Mini Ladd. This huge financial investment in another company as well as his personal donation to charity

further proves the importance of studying cybercelebrities as significantly powerful influencers as they are able to use their status to promote causes that are important to them. Whilst the same can also be said of mainstream celebrities, the development and success of Mini Ladd's channel can largely be attributed to his sole effort of recording, editing, uploading and promoting his own videos, particularly as his Multi-Channel Network sponsorship (YouTube Help, 2018b) did not come into effect until he had been on the platform for five years. This move from sponsored cybercelebrity to business sponsor also demonstrates potential career development and elevates the social standing of cybercelebrities. Instead of someone who is looking to purely make money from posting content online, this sense of giving something back and promoting a more genuine, caring and therefore 'authentic' personality, allows audiences to view cybercelebrities as more 'ordinary people' (Gilpin *et al.*, 2010).

Throughout the process of this research, many elements have challenged YouTube's cultural standing amongst both YouTubers and audiences through the advertisers boycott known as the 'Adpocalypse' and subsequent demonetisation issues. As many creators are struggling to regain the levels of income they once earned from their videos, YouTube's often insufficient explanations about their new manual review system that determines whether a video meets their "ad-friendly guidelines" (Hern, 2018) has created a lot of tension between YouTube and cybercelebrities that cannot fully be explained within the constraints of this thesis. Further investigations into the advertising breakdown of YouTube would allow a more comprehensive review of the greater shift towards the increased inclusion of paid sponsorships as well as the increased promotion of branded merchandise within videos. Whilst sourcing a personal income from fans is an established practice amongst YouTubers and Twitch broadcasters, ethical issues still remain and further investigation into the practicalities of these models could be done with additional research. Rather than a fan or consumer handing money over to purchase a certain product through the sale of merchandising, audiences here are essentially paying to develop a brand, as articulated by Carrie Hope Fletcher (653k subscribers), musical theatre star and vlogger:

People need money in order to live and if someone's career is YouTube [*shrugs shoulders*] that's just running a business. But as long as a balance remains between how much you care for your audience as individuals and how much integrity you have, versus needing to make money in order to live, as long as there's a balance, everything's okay. (Carrie Hope Fletcher, 2017)

The entertainment value of the cybercelebrity themselves is what is being bought and invested into by audiences and questions still remain whether this method really promotes healthy relationships between cybercelebrities and fans. If fans who are shown as being 'Top Donors' are constantly promoted to the entire audience then it creates the perception that being a 'better' and more supportive fan equates to a higher monetary value and therefore fandom hierarchies (MacDonald, 2008) and subcultural capital (Thornton, 1995) naturally occur. This contention further illustrates problems within the branding and revenue sides of cybercelebrities and allows further research to be done in this area.

In summary, this thesis has demonstrated how important definitions can be in order to develop existing ideas in the field of celebrity studies. This chapter has suggested many areas in which this research could be developed outside the constraints of this thesis in order to gain a deeper understanding of how cybercelebrities are redefining the cultural landscape within which they reside. YouTube as a platform is continuing to grow faster than any other video-streaming service on the Internet today and its attraction for content creators looking to develop a creative career as well as for audiences looking for bespoke entertainment demonstrates a clear shift towards non-linear viewing habits and platforms, particularly within a younger demographic. Using Mini Ladd's channel as a case study has proven that a well-rounded brand image and performance of authenticity helps audiences develop deeper connections with a cybercelebrity and that for the most part, audiences ultimately just want to be entertained. However, this thesis is the beginning of research into the construction of cybercelebrities and as YouTube continues to dominate the world of cybercelebrities, there is no doubt that the ideas presented in this thesis will continue to develop discussions around the nature of celebrity.

APPENDIX A

Topic	Category	No.
Personal Authenticity	Positive comments regarding Mini Ladd or in response to the video (including questions and requests)	28
	Negative comments regarding Mini Ladd or in response to the video	10
Community	Positive comments about or in response to other users	43
	Negative comments about or in response to other users	32
	Miscellaneous Topics of Conversation	45
	Sexual, Racial or Inappropriate Content	30
	Comments with Neutral or No effect	75
Sponsorships	Positive reaction to the sponsorship	6
	Negative reaction to the sponsorship	17
Total		286

Table 1: Comment categorisation results for pilot study

Category	Sample 1 = 15 videos	Sample 2 = 10 videos
Length of videos	2 hours, 36 minutes, 51 seconds	2 hours, 58 minutes, 39 seconds
Total No. of views	17,763,466	3,856,336
Total No. of Likes	608,000	129,000
Total No. of Dislikes	3,952	2,622
Total No. of Comments in Sample	3,116	1,205
Genre of Video	9 – AskMini 6 – Vlog	8 – Gameplay 2 – Vlogs

Table 2: Video sample statistics

Topic	Category	No.
Personal Authenticity	Positive comments regarding Mini Ladd or in response to the video (including questions or requests)	378
	Negative comments regarding Mini Ladd or in response to the video	139
Community	Positive comments about or in response to other users	750
	Negative comments about or in response to other users	429
	Miscellaneous Topics of Conversation	384
	Sexual, Racial or Inappropriate Content	123
	Comments with Neutral or No Effect	797
Sponsorships	Positive reaction to the sponsorship	4
	Negative reaction to the sponsorship	0
Total		3,004

Table 3: Comment categorisation results for sample one

Types of Questions Asked		Total
#AskMini	Personal Requests	28
	Dares, Challenges or Comedy Sketches	20
	Questions about YouTube, career or work	19
	Other	33
Total		100

Table 4: Types of Questions Asked across the nine #AskMini videos in Sample 1

Topic	Category	No.
Personal Authenticity	Positive comments regarding Mini Ladd or in response to the video (including questions or requests)	74
	Negative comments regarding Mini Ladd or in response to the video	145
Community	Positive comments about or in response to other users	190
	Negative comments about or in response to other users	160
	Miscellaneous Topics of Conversation	230
	Sexual, Racial or Inappropriate Content	99
	Comments with Neutral or No Effect	294
Sponsorships	Positive reaction to the sponsorship	31
	Negative reaction to the sponsorship	64
Total		1,287

Table 5: Comment categorisation results for Sample 2

APPENDIX B

Discourse Analysis Sheet

Basic Details	
Title of Video	
Date Published	
Length of Video	
URL	
Total No. of Views	
Total No. of Comments	
Total No. of Likes	
Total No. of Dislikes	
Format of Video	
Genre of Video	
Game Featured	Name of Game: Name of Developer: Release Date:
No. of people in video	
Face Cam included	
Sponsorship	
YES / NO	
Product featured	
Company sponsoring the video	
Developer and Publisher (of game)	
Time promoting sponsorship	X:XX at the beginning, X:XX at the end Total time: X:XX
Perks for viewers	
Presentation in video	
Description box presentation	
Displays of Personal Authenticity	
Direct Engagement	
Questions Asked	Time Stamp
Personal Requests:	
Dares, challenges or comedy sketches:	

Question about YouTube, career or work:		
Other:		
Collective Engagement		
Significant quotes [Mannerisms]		Time Stamp
Additional Comments		
Audience Response - Comments		
Total number of Comments:		
First Comment in Thread	Replies in the Thread	

Discourse Analysis Coding Guidelines

Basic Details – This section refers to the basic details of the video that help to identify the video and note the numerical public response to the video

Title of Video – The title given to the video by the YouTuber

Date Published – The original date that the video was published by the YouTuber written as day, month and year

Length of Video – The total running time of the video written in hours, minutes and seconds

URL – The URL of the video for future reference

Total No. of Views – The total number of views the video has received at the time of analysis

Total No. of Comments – The total number of comments on the video at the time of analysis. The researcher in this instance will only analyse the top fifteen comment threads but this gives a wider perspective on the audience engagement with the video

Total No. of Likes – The total number of likes on the video at the time of analysis

Total No. of Dislikes – The total number of dislikes on the video at the time of analysis

Format of Video – This section highlights more specific formatting of the chosen video as outlined below that may affect a viewer's reaction to Mini Ladd's display of personal authenticity

Genre of Video – Referring to the type of video being analysed. This can include:

- **Gameplay** – Videos that include any form of recorded gameplay as the main focus of the video
- **#AskMini** – A question and answer style video whereby Mini Ladd takes questions from his viewers on social media on a variety of topics, along with requests to do funny skits or sketches. The video is usually conducted alone but Mini Ladd is sometimes joined by other people
- **Thoughts with Mini / Mini Thoughts** – This is a conversational style video where Mini Ladd shares a random collection of thoughts that he has had or other personal stories or experiences
- **Vlog** – Referring to a video blog, this style of video is usually conducted as a 'day in the life', showing the viewers what Mini Ladd did over a certain period of time

Game Featured – The name of the game being played in the video, plus the name of the developer and the original release date of the game

No. of people in video – This refers to the number of people featured in the video (including Mini Ladd) and their YouTube usernames or real names (if relevant)

Face Cam included – Whether Mini Ladd has included a webcam that shows his facial reactions to the situations presented during the course of the video. A Yes or No answer to be provided

Sponsorship – A Yes or No answer to be provided. If No, no further action to be taken. If Yes, the following shall be noted:

- **Product featured** – The product that the sponsorship revolves around, whether a videogame, service or other product
- **Company sponsoring the video** – The company that has sponsored Mini Ladd to feature their product in his video
- **Developer and Publisher (of game)** – The names of both the developers and publishers of the videogame, if the videogame is the product being featured as part of the sponsorship. If a videogame is not being featured, then N/A to be written
- **Time promoting sponsorship** – This details the amount of time that Mini Ladd spends talking about the product at the beginning and end of the video. This does not include any time playing the game itself as this forms part of the total time of the video
- **Perks for viewers** – Any items that are offered to the viewer by the company for free or at a discounted price as a perk of buying or downloading the product as an integral part of the sponsorship. This could include a discount code for money off the product, an early access release code for viewers to play the game earlier than the general release date or any other additional gifts the viewer automatically gets for signing up to the game or service. If no perks are offered then write 'NONE'
- **Presentation in video** – A verbatim transcript of the verbal description Mini Ladd gives the viewers about the product at the beginning and end of the video. This also includes any textual overlays over the video itself
- **Description box presentation** – A visual screenshot of the way the product has been featured in the description box underneath the video

Displays of Personal Authenticity – This section documents the different ways that Mini Ladd may express his own sense of personal authenticity to his fans and how he does this

Direct Engagement – When Mini Ladd chooses to interact with a single viewer directly. In the case of the #AskMini videos, this includes engagement in the form of answering a question from a specific user whether in the video or within the comments section itself. In a broader sense, this could also include any face-to-face meetings with fans included in vlogs (such as in conventions, during meet-and-greet sessions or if a fan approaches him in person outside of a convention setting). If the interaction is not a direct question (see below), a short description of the interaction is to be provided

Questions Asked – Details the full list of questions asked during the video, particularly referring to questions asked by viewers during an #AskMini video. The questions will be broken down into the following categories:

- **Personal requests** – Questions from viewers asking Mini Ladd to share details of his home, relationship or family life
- **Dares, challenges or comedy sketches** – Requests to do certain challenges or dares (for example, eating hot chili sauce) or to perform other scenes for comedic effect
- **Questions about YouTube, career or work** – Any question that refers to the process of making videos on YouTube, a career in YouTube or any other aspect of a YouTuber's working life.
- **Other** – Any other questions that do not fit in to the above categories

Time Stamp – The specific time within the video that the question is asked

Collective Engagement – The amount of times Mini Ladd refers to his audience as a collective, for example 'Hey Ladds' / 'you guys' etc

Significant quotes – Includes specific quotes that relate to his expression of personal authenticity or anything that could be perceived as such. These will be analysed after collection to determine if any deeper meaning can be drawn from them

[Mannerisms] – This depicts the physical way Mini Ladd may display his authenticity including facial expressions or hand gestures that equate to humility, friendliness, humour or likeability (in the sense that these characteristics are the ones he bases his authenticity on). This may also include tone of voice or enthusiasm if appropriate. This has been included in conjunction with the significant quotes as his mannerisms may alter the way the quotes are interpreted (sarcasm being one example) and will be written within the main body of the quote within square brackets

Time Stamp – Relates to the start time in the video that the quote was spoken

Additional Comments – Any other comments about the video that do not fit into any of the above categories

Audience Response – Comments – This section relates to the comments section of the video being analysed. The top fifteen comment threads are taken from each video along with all of the replies from each thread. The comments will be broken down into different categories during the analysis process instead of during the data collection. This is to ensure that the researcher has a record of the exact reply format to refer back to for future reference in order to read the conversations as they were originally intended to be viewed

Total number of Comments – The total number of comments that have been taken from the top fifteen comment threads including all of the comments within the replies to the top comment

First Comment in Thread – The first comment that is displayed when no replies are displayed

Replies in Thread – Any comments that have been written in reply to the top comment. If no replies present, this section remains blank

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YouTube Videos

Below is a list of all the YouTube videos referenced throughout this thesis including all the videos that are included in both of the samples. They are listed first by date and then alphabetically by video title.

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