Vlogging Careers: Everyday Expertise, Collaboration and Authenticity

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Introduction

The rise in 'entrepreneurial vlogging' has attracted widespread attention in the global media, with articles emerging about the superstar vloggers who are earning a lot of money for pursuing their professed passions. The phenomenon of vlogging is positioned as something that 'anyone' can do, with YouTube appearing to offer the opportunity to combine freedom of creative expression with the possibility of making a living. The idea that anyone can vlog and make a career out of it is pervasive, yet only a few manage to do so.

For those who are successful, there follows hostility from some critics (Bish, 2014) and stories of failure. Some of the most popular vloggers attract a great deal of criticism for attention-seeking when seemingly doing little more than sitting in front of the camera and talking. Critique

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that focuses on the celebrity, however, tends to obscure the additional labour that is involved alongside the creation of video content. The effort in designing, creating and sharing that goes into these videos is little acknowledged. These complementary activities and the specialist subject knowledge that is often in evidence highlight the expertise required by vloggers. To examine vlogging's status as part of the 'new normal' of cultural work, we show how signalling expertise is a key aspect of vloggers' online self-presentation as they build their cultural work career.

This chapter is organised into two main parts. In part one, we reference a range of media sources to examine the increasing public visibility of vlogging as a cultural work career. Of particular note is the curiosity around vlogging as a commercially viable undertaking and the how-to guidance materials that have emerged to steer would-be YouTube entrepreneurs onto a successful path. The notion of career paths is particularly relevant to our discussion of the 'new normal' and the ways in which vlogging can be understood both as a stepping stone towards established careers in media, journalism, fashion and so on, and as a distinctive occupation in its own right. In bringing together a mixture of 'how-to' materials and more general journalistic coverage, we consider how 'starting up' and 'sustaining' oneself as a vlogger are explored. Having considered some of the broader stories of the successes and failures of vlogging and questions of career-building, part two examines the importance of expertise for vlogging careers.

In part two, we specifically focus on how expertise is signalled by four prominent vloggers from around the world: UK, Ireland and Korea. The vloggers were involved in gaming, fashion, make-up and comedy. These areas were chosen because they require a degree of knowledge and skill on behalf of the vlogger, and we wanted to analyse how such forms of expertise were presented. We analysed the social media presence of each vlogger to address how signalling-expertise strategies may be tailored to suit multiple platforms and multiple audiences. Our discussion for this chapter focuses on two themes from our analysis. The first is the ways in which associations with other vloggers formed an important part of how they signalled their expertise and helped to attract more fans. The second is the ways in which expertise is signalled in the staging of authentic vlogging identities and locations. Beyond the more obvious work involved

in creating and uploading a video, our analysis highlights the extensive range of other activities and undertakings that help to signal expertise as vloggers negotiate their 'career'.

Part one: Constructing careers?

In examining media coverage of entrepreneurship, Taylor (2015) notes the wide range of representations and suggests that journalistic reporting and editing is one of the ways in which understandings of entrepreneurship are constructed. Likewise, we are interested in the ways in which vlogging as a potential career is afforded visibility through how-to guides and journalistic accounts of vloggers. When it comes to career opportunities and pathways, how-to guides proliferate in various forms and styles. As Ashton and Conor (2016) have explored, how-to guides provide resources through which sources of information, often industry 'professionals' and 'experts', establish themselves as authorities in guiding aspirants in the ways of a particular role or sector. This chapter builds on previous cultural work research looking at screenwriting (Conor, 2014) and film and television production (Ashton, 2014) to explore how-to guidance for aspiring YouTubers. In relation to the new normal, exploring public accounts of vlogging can help to investigate the ways in which vlogging is woven into established career occupations and careers, and the ways in which it is positioned as a 'job' in its own right.

How to understand vlogging as a career

Creative Skillset (n.d.), a UK organisation that works with industry to 'develop skills and talent, from classroom to boardroom', created an entry for vlogging in its job role directory that gives the 'lowdown' for the role:

Communicating an idea, thought or story to a wide online audience
Regularly posting content for new and existing subscribers and followers
Generating revenue either by working for a company, utilising advert space, or by product placement

The creation of a job role for vlogging shows the growth in significance and visibility of vlogging. The job role overview also provides guidance on how vlogging can be both a stepping-stone career and a standalone career. In relation to the former, the Creative Skillset job role overview notes how many vloggers 'expand elsewhere', including into social media positions, based on the associated skills, and TV and radio presenting, based on personality and performance (see also Singh Chawla's 2014 conversation with vlogger Alfie Deyes).

Referring to vlogging as a career in its own right, Creative Skillset (n.d.) notes how vloggers operating as freelancers can make careers through a number of activities, including establishing relationships with brands and advertising. The growth in freelance cultural work careers has been well documented across academic scholarship (Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2011), policy reviews (Oakley, 2009) and industry reports (Tambling, 2015). Of specific relevance for vlogging is recent research that has focused on the emergence of entrepreneurship in relation to digital media platforms, such as Burgess and Green's (2009) research on YouTube and Luckman's (2015) research on Etsy, the online design craft marketplace. Vlogging has been associated primarily with celebratory discourses around freedom, following a passion as a dream job, and being your own boss (Solon, 2016). In turn, issues around maintaining a secure and sustainable income that have been examined in relation to freelance cultural work more widely (Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2011; Oakley, 2009) also feature in some discussions of vlogging (Dunn, 2015). With some vloggers, however, it is more appropriate to see an overlap between freelance vlogging and vloggers working in more established media occupations. Rather than offering a linear path from one into the other, these activities can mutually reinforce each other. This overall approach also helps for better identifying and understanding the entrepreneurial ethos and activities that existing studies of YouTube have examined (Burgess & Green, 2009).

The entrepreneurial ethos is explicitly addressed in the Creative Skillset 'lowdown' when it brings together the communication and posting of ideas with generating revenue. The YouTube Creator Academy (n.d.), a place to 'learn tips from savvy creators as they showcase their secrets and best practices', also brings together courses and videos on production

practices and content creation with advice on growing an audience and making money. Alongside the official YouTube offering that includes courses, lessons and quizzes, there are similarly themed videos from YouTubers. Another useful way to identify major areas of interest and entrepreneurial guidance for career vlogging comes with *YouTube channels for dummies* (Ciampa & Moore, 2015), part of the well-known series of instructional books. This book is structured around the following themes: getting started, making videos, growing audiences and serious business. These themes are also picked up in a further source of guidance we reviewed—the Vlog Nation website. Specifically, this website uses the menu headings: 'Starting a vlog', 'How to vlog', 'Get more views' and 'Earn money'. These guidance themes provide instructive ways to organise a closer analysis of how vlogging is understood and constructed as a cultural work career.

Starting up as a vlogger

Unsurprisingly, on YouTube itself, there are many videos on vlogging and how to start and develop a channel. Honor's *How to make your first YouTube video* is one of many similarly titled and themed videos (at the time of writing in November 2016, a search within YouTube for 'how to vlog' returns 42,300,000 results). In this video, there is the often stated and widely circulated view that personal interests and passion are essential: 'When you make a YouTube channel it shouldn't be about how many subscribers you can get or how popular you can get. It's about doing something you love because you love it.' This approach resonates with that set out within the YouTube (n.d.) Creator Academy videos, which emphasise passion and building relationships with audiences before any consideration of monetisation. With vlogging, the passionate investment and love of creating and sharing content on a particular topic is often held to be the starting point above and beyond making money (Postigo, 2016). The 'do what you love' mantra is in clear evidence in the advice to those setting up as YouTube vloggers. As Tokumitsu (cited in Lam, 2015) notes as part of the critique associated with her book, *Do what you love and other lies about success and happiness*, there is a 'pantheon of super

successful blissful workers who are held up as these cultural ideals, and there is this kind of lifestyle peddling that goes along with it, the imagery of which is saturating our visual landscape more than ever.' To this visual landscape, we could add the stories of the vloggers who 'own the world of YouTube' (Samuelson, 2014) are 'changing the face of youth culture' (Singh Chawla, 2014), and are vlogging their way 'to a million pounds' (Solon, 2016). The lifestyles associated with prominent vloggers do not fit a particular formula, and there can be significant differences across, for example, fashion and videogaming. Nevertheless, passion remains a recurring theme in how-to guidance materials.

A common approach with how-to materials is to help encourage and facilitate by stressing accessibility and providing suggestions that would lower barriers to participation. As our analysis in part two reveals, however, there are significant further levels of expertise in operation as vlogging is pursued as a career. While it is important to show passion, as suggested in how-to materials, the expertise to construct a public performance and profile is a different matter.

A further aspect of guidance concerns the set-up costs and the resource implications of vlogging. The most celebratory accounts of YouTube and participatory cultures emphasise democratisation and the equal availability of opportunities for creating content. Vlogging connects with wider accounts of participation and creativity, in which the tools and technologies are readily available for many to pursue their own creative and political agendas (Shirky, 2008). However, as Burgess (2012) notes in examining the YouTube Creator Hub, the larger host for the YouTube Creator Academy, the range of tips and suggestions are orientated towards professionalising content. Burgess (2012, p. 55) goes on to suggest that 'this initiative can be seen as an attempt on behalf of YouTube to reduce the ratio of non-monetisable to monetisable amateur content.'

Similarly, other commentators, such as Jenkins and Carpentier (2013), have addressed tensions around participatory promises and potentials. While the sentiment that vlogging is available to all was clearly evident, the analysis we undertook also connected with these cautionary accounts of challenges to access and participation. For example, Dennis (2015) provides a list of required equipment, noting that 'DSLR cameras and lenses can cost upwards of $800, and then you need lighting equipment,

tripods, and microphones', and summarising by reflecting, 'it takes quite a lot of dedication for these vloggers to do what they do.' Having reviewed their start-up costs, Lennard (2015) adds that, 'unlike most jobs, working on YouTube is something you have to pay to do for a long time before anybody will pay you back.' Again, there are some strong parallels with extant research examining cultural work, in which essential risks and choices in cultivating employment opportunities operate at the individual level (Gill, 2010). The examination of expertise in part two critically addresses the requirements and pressures of vlogging. The comments on set-up costs also lead to a similar set of concerns around the viability of maintaining a sustainable YouTube channel.

Sustaining vlogging practices

The how-to materials we reviewed focused mainly on the low-level requirements for getting going as a vlogger. There is, however, a range of further considerations in growing and sustaining a vlogging profile. The how-to materials produced by YouTube and Vlog Nation emphasis that a vlogger's growth is associated with building audiences and the consistent creation of new materials. For videogame commentator Destructnatr (2015), sustainability and growth are the major considerations driving his decision to post an eye-catching video to save viewers from making a mistake of setting up a YouTube channel. With a provocatively titled twist on the how-to genre, *Why you shouldn't start a YouTube channel*, Destructnatr laments the saturation of the field and the near impossible task of standing out in a way that can generate significant subscriptions. As highlighted by Marwick's (2016) discussion of YouTuber creator Amanda Sings, there are different strategies and scales for connecting with audiences and the kinds of how-to materials we reviewed might be an irrelevance for some (successful) vloggers. Nevertheless, by highlighting oversupply, Destructnatr's approach marks an interesting contrast to that of Honor (2014) and others, who suggest that passion and personally purposeful content will be enough. Destructnatr attributes his success to timely membership of a specific videogaming clan, and makes the claim that, from 2015, YouTube has reached a scale where the challenges for

starting a new channel and generating significant subscriptions, presumably in relation to videogaming, are too great. Destructnatr also signals the effort required in creating videos.

These comments are echoed by those from other commentators, which highlight the relentless production schedule and constant pressure on creating content. In reflecting on her channel, *Just between us*, Dunn (2015) outlines the commitments involved: 'when we're not producing and starring in a comedy sketch and advice show, we're writing the episodes, dealing with business contracts and deals, and running our company Gallison, LLC.' Similar accounts come in Harvey's (2013) interview with vloggers, in which Anna Gardner (*Vivianna does makeup*) recounts a 7 a.m.–6 p.m. working day. Harvey outlines how vlogger Lily Pebbles 'spends her days tweeting, recording vlogs, writing blogs, researching beauty products, chatting with followers and negotiating contracts'. From these accounts, we can see that the viability of a successful YouTube channel is closely connected with understanding and expertise that extends well beyond making the video. As our later analysis through the signalling-expertise framework shows, the cultivation and maintenance of a social media profile is intricately enmeshed with creating content on YouTube.

For other commentators, the issue of survival and sustainability loom much larger than questions of 'where next?' While it is the high-profile vloggers that might attract attention, an important part of understanding vlogging, and cultural work more generally, is to ask questions of feasibility and sustainability. This is something Heritage (2017) takes aim at in his satirical career guide, noting the salary for starters as 'nothing', the salary for experienced as 'almost nothing', and for highly experienced as 'hundreds of thousands of pounds a month'. For this final salary range, Heritage adds: 'note: you will never reach this stage.' For Dunn (2015), this issue of income and sustainability is most pressing for 'moderately successful YouTubers' and 'mid-level web personalities', where 'the disconnect between internet fame and financial security is hard to comprehend for both creators and fans.' Specifically, Dunn identifies a tension in which 'many famous social media stars are too visible to have "real" jobs, but too broke not to.' Again, there are strong parallels with extant research on cultural work and multiple job-holding (Ashton, 2015; Throsby & Zednik, 2011). Earlier, we argued

that vloggers' entrepreneurial approach is evident in how vloggers can overlap YouTube vlogging with TV presenting and more established media roles (Singh Chawla, 2014). To this, we should add that vlogging portfolio working and multiple-job-holding extend into *other* forms of employment, such as retail and service industry work (see Dunn, 2015, for example). Alongside the coverage that focuses on the novelty of 'bedroom millionaires' and (micro)celebrity heroes for teenagers, there is pointed discussion of bloggers' working routines, conditions and challenges (see Duffy, 2015; Duffy & Hund, 2015; Graefer, 2016). The 'always on' nature of vlogging, the raft of skills demands and the need to develop expertise in a range of areas also highlight the strong parallels with ways of working common to established forms of cultural work.

The how-to guidance and journalistic coverage position vlogging as a viable career that anyone can do, provided they have passion for their subject and are able to put that across on camera. Such coverage suggests low barriers to entry and the potential for widening participation in cultural production, yet it obscures the need for expensive equipment, the time required to invest in creating and promoting videos, and thus the various forms of expertise required beyond talking in front of the camera. This can include using social media for promotion and self-branding, and the technical skills to operate camera equipment and editing software. In our consideration of vlogging as part of a 'new normal' of cultural work, these practices require further critical attention.

Part two: Expertise, self-branding and micro-celebrity

In their exploration of cultural production and participation in digital environments, Cruz and Thornham (2015, p. 315) argue that discourses around expertise and the digital 'seem to conflate ideas of participation with literacy, content with engagement, novelty with innovation and ubiquity with meaning'. The authors take issue with discourses of participation in the social media age as equating to expertise—in other words, anyone who is able to participate in cultural production online can be perceived as an expert. The signalling-expertise analysis we use in this

research demonstrates how vlogging requires much more than the passion and knowledge of the subject that is suggested in the how-to guidance. The expertise involved goes far beyond mere participation. Additional and varied skills are required in creating the content, tailoring it for promotion on social media, and using social media to foster relationships with audiences and potential collaborators. These practices are crucial for building an online following and gaining visibility as a vlogger.

What is expertise? It is a term often used and yet taken for granted in accounts of cultural work (Patel, 2017), and defining expertise itself is an area of contention. However, we will approach it by drawing out commonalities across definitions. One common feature is the possession of knowledge and/or skill in a specialist area (see Prince, 2010; Schudson, 2006), and the second is recognition and endorsement of that knowledge or skill from others of a higher status within the same sector or industry (Cruz & Thornham, 2015; Prince, 2010; Turner, 2001). Bassett, Fotopoulou, and Howland (2015, p. 28) provide a useful definition that acknowledges both knowledge and skill, and social context. They suggest that:

> building expertise in a particular area demands particular kinds of cognitive activity and work. However, this process is also always contextualised within social contexts, which not only tend to define what constitutes the cut-off level … but that also temper or condition how expertise is acquired.

This definition informs our own understanding of expertise as the possession of specialised knowledge and skill that is recognised by others as legitimate, and mobilised, accumulated and signalled within a particular social context (Patel, 2016).

The relationship between expertise and cultural careers is explored by Candace Jones (2002), who proposes that the project-based nature of work in the cultural industries means that signalling expertise is important because projects need to be matched to the right people. The process of signalling by the cultural worker conveys information to others about their competencies, skills, relevant relationships, individual context and prior projects. Jones devised a signalling-expertise framework to characterise expertise signals, and we use an adapted version of this framework (Patel, 2017) as a methodological tool. According to Jones (2002, p. 223),

the final product is the most important form of expertise signal, and 'the market niche in which one gains experience then showcases specific skill sets and shapes one's opportunity structure. Thus, initial experiences constrict or open up opportunities for work in different niches.'

The signalling-expertise framework can provide a nuanced analysis of social media performance which considers not only how expertise is signalled but cross-platform strategies, and the individual context behind online signals. Social media platforms are central to the work of the vloggers in this research, not only for distributing their work but for self-presentation and interacting with others, particularly fellow vloggers and fans. The popularity of social media has led to a growing body of research into self-presentation and much of this centres on ideas of self-branding and micro-celebrity (see Duffy & Hund, 2015; Gandini, 2015; Hearn, 2008; Jerslev, 2016; Khamis, Ang, & Welling, 2016; Marwick, 2013; Senft, 2008). The two ideas are interlinked; self-branding is 'the strategic creation of identity to be promoted and sold to others' (Marwick, 2013, p. 166) and micro-celebrity is associated with 'the presentation of oneself as a celebrity regardless of who is paying attention' (Marwick, 2013, p. 114).

Micro-celebrity is not only about promoting one's own image, it also involves what Jerslev (2016, p. 5238) describes as 'permanent updating', where social media celebrities, particularly vloggers, are expected to continuously upload 'performances of a private self; it is about access, immediacy and instantaneity'. As well as posting and updating, there is also an expectation that the micro-celebrity will interact with followers. In reflecting on the cultivation of micro-celebrity, Senft (2013, p. 349) suggests that the curating and circulating of pictures, videos and status updates 'in a professional venue would be a concerted audience-segmentation strategy'. As we show through the following analysis, vloggers' interactions with audiences operate in a natural and everyday conversational manner while forming part of a carefully considered communication strategy. Nancy Baym (2015, p. 16) examines relationships with audiences in terms of relational labour—'regular, ongoing communication with audiences over time to build social relationships that foster paid work'—and argues that this relational labour is an important part of cultural work. As well as creating their videos, vloggers must also maintain the rest of their social media presence, taking into

account different platform strategies (Marwick, 2015; van Dijck, 2013) and their 'imagined audience' (Marwick & Boyd, 2011), which may differ across platforms. The adapted version of the signalling-expertise framework we use can help us understand these cross-platform strategies and how they relate to vloggers' expertise signals online. The framework consists of three elements: institutional context (the context of the user, the user's background and career trajectory), signalling content (the style of social media text and images, exhibiting the requisite skills and career-relevant connections on social media) and signalling strategies (using affordances such as retweets to enhance status, type of relationships pursued on social media and strategic approaches to impression management on social media).

The framework was used to analyse samples of social media posts by four prominent vloggers: UK-based fashion commentator Tanya Burr, UK-based comedian Danisnotonfire, Korean-based beauty reviewer Lia Yoo and Ireland-based game reviewer Jacksepticeye. Each element of the signalling-expertise framework was considered for the post sampled, which included one of their YouTube videos and samples from one or two of the social media accounts that they used most frequently (most often Twitter). The common themes emerging from both the exploration of materials about vlogging and the signalling-expertise analysis of vloggers' social media posts reveal a set of tensions at the heart of this new normal of cultural work. In the following sections, we focus on the ways in which associations with other vloggers formed an important part of how vloggers signalled their expertise by facilitating greater recognition, and the ways in which expertise is signalled in the staging of authentic vlogging identities and locations.

Collaborations, associations and networks

From our analysis of four vloggers, the relational aspects of signalling-expertise were prominent. In an area dominated by micro-celebrity and individualistic 'attention-seeking', we found that associations and networks can form an important part of how vloggers signal expertise. One way that this appeared was that all of the vloggers teamed up with other

vloggers in some way for their videos. For example, Tanya Burr, a fashion commentator, created a video with arguably the UK's most famous vlogger, Zoella, generating a positive reaction from fans of both, as demonstrated in this retweet by Tanya:

Tanya Burr Retweeted

> Maddy 22 Aug 2016
> @TanyaBurr @Zoella Tanya and Zoe's videos together always make me so happy. Please do more soon. #TanElla

The partnership even has its own hashtag, '#TanElla', adopted by fans. At the time of writing, Tanya has around 3.5 million YouTube subscribers. Zoella has over 11 million subscribers of her channel and is, in comparison, hugely successful. By creating a video with Zoella and promoting it on Twitter, Tanya can try and attract more views and potential subscribers from existing fans of Zoella, and vice versa. The two vloggers comment on similar topics and are seemingly in competition with each other, but instead they collaborate so they can benefit from each other's following through a joint performance of expertise in the areas of fashion and beauty.

Some scholars argue that social media platforms are structured to encourage self-promotion and micro-celebrity practices that focus on the individual (Marwick, 2013; Williamson, 2016). While we do not disagree with this, our research indicated that the platforms can also facilitate or present examples of collaboration for the benefit of all parties involved. Grünewald, Haupt, and Bernardo (2014) argue that YouTube is the site for a 'post-industrial media economy' that 'involves cooperation of YouTubers, cultural references between YouTubers, parodies and other types of cultural intertextuality that they call "cross-promotion"'. This, they argue, is backed up by social bonds, friendships and networks that are crucial for the careers of vloggers. This was in evidence among all of vloggers in our research. For example, comedy vlogger Danisnotonfire often creates videos with his collaborator, Phil, who he also tours with. Beauty reviewer Lia Yoo also features other vloggers in her videos, and Jacksepticeye appears to have remix videos made for him by a fan/friend.

Interaction with fans and audiences was also evident from the signalling-expertise analysis. Sometimes vloggers would reply to comments directly on Instagram, as Lia Yoo often did. Most replied to Tweets from fans, too, either directly or by quoting the Tweet first and replying, as in this Tweet by Tanya Burr:

Tanya Burr @TanyaBurr 22 Aug 2016
Yay! Tweet me photos of what you bake—I'd love to see! #TanyaBakes

Leah
Went out and brought @TanyaBurr's #TanyaBakes today so excited to see what things I can make this week!

Tanya is cultivating her relationship with her fans by showing that she reads their Tweets and takes the time to reply to them, and the practice of quoting the Tweet rather than replying directly means it appears on Tanya's own Twitter profile and not in the 'replies' column, which is separate. In the particular example above, Tanya is also encouraging further interaction from her fans by asking them to Tweet photos of what they bake from her book. This direct engagement with fans contributes to a sense of authenticity, in that Tanya appears approachable and willing to interact with her audience. Marwick (2015) argues that audience interaction is key for micro-celebrities, as a means for them to position themselves as 'authentic' in opposition to mainstream celebrities or, in the case of fashion vloggers, luxury brands. Behind these interactions is a great deal of relational labour (Baym, 2015), where the cultivation of relationships and audience interaction online are key to the vloggers' success. As Baym (2015, p. 16) states, 'the shift to media that enable continuous interaction, higher expectations of engagement, and greater importance of such connections in shaping economic fortunes calls for new skills and expertise in fostering connections and managing boundaries'. Our signalling-expertise analysis shows that expertise in fostering connections extends to audiences and to other vloggers.

Deuze and Lewis (2013, p. 169) argue that 'as individuals in the workforce increasingly either choose to or are forced to build their own support structures, they must do so within the context of a peer group and

some kind of organization.' Though vlogs may appear to be the work of individuals, many of the more prominent vloggers rely on collaborations and networks in order to sustain their success. As Mayer and Horner (2016, p. 246) suggest, 'the act of making/crafting a product … catalyzes connections and helps to build affinity groups'. For vloggers, these networks include their audiences, who must be replied to, acknowledged and publicly appreciated. Our analysis demonstrates how important relationships and collaborations are for vloggers signalling their expertise. These relationships and collaborations also contribute to a sense of authenticity that vloggers establish with audiences. Reflecting on a survey conducted for *Variety* magazine, celebrity brand strategist Jeetendr Sehdev addresses how 'teens enjoy an intimate and authentic experience with YouTube celebrities' and refers to 'unvarnished individualism' (see Ault, 2014). Part of this is the 'real-world' relationships that vloggers show off with fellow vloggers. As the following section addresses, these relationships and collaborations form part of the context by which vloggers signal their expertise. An equally important aspect is the presentation of authenticity in a strategy for signalling expertise that allows vloggers to appear accessible to their audiences.

Staging authenticity

In her reflections on vlogging, Dunn (2015) addresses 'the huge amount of emotional labor inherent in being an online personality'. Part of this involves the strategic deployment of authenticity. Dunn goes on to add: 'Authenticity is valued, but in small doses: YouTubers are allowed to have struggled in the past tense, because overcoming makes us brave and relatable. But we can't be struggling now or we're labelled "whiners"'. The success of vloggers in establishing rapport with followers and building a subscription base can be in large measure attributed to authenticity (Ault, 2014).

The authenticity of bedroom spaces (which are the common setting for vlogs) as the locus for everyday forms of sociality and intimacy with audiences is nuanced and sometimes contradicted by the presence of camera equipment. As the analysis of how-to materials and media coverage alluded to and our signalling-expertise analysis shows more explicitly,

vloggers often employ sophisticated production equipment to create their videos. For example, videogame commentator Jacksepticeye appears to use large headphones and microphone to record his commentary. Danisnotonfire's videos are situated in his bedroom, yet there is sophistication in the editing of the video and, in particular, the re-staging of the events and incidents that happen to him (which is important for the comic element of his videos).

These findings resonate with Burgess and Green's (2009, p. 24) suggestion that 'productive play, media consumption, and cultural performance have always been part of the repertoire of these semi-private spaces of cultural participation'. With vloggers, the bedroom is not just a low-cost, convenient site for making videos. It is a specific space for cultural production and performance. The importance of the visibility of the home is a key element in Susan Luckman's (2015) research on women's micro-entrepreneurial homeworking. Focusing on Etsy, Luckman examines how the home both operates as workplace and features in the online public presence of craft producers. Luckman (2015, p. 148) argues that 'the public performance of the craft producer's personal identity as part and parcel of the consumer value of their products … has become an essential part of the home-based maker's online marketing identity'. Our signalling-expertise analysis highlights that the bedroom/home operates for many vloggers as a domestic on-screen set and as a place of work.

There can, however, be significant tensions between the staged authenticity that is presented on camera and on social media, compared to everyday working realities. As the account from Dunn reveals, authenticity is welcomed in relation to ordinary lives, but a detailed account of the production contexts and a fuller picture of working and vlogging lives is not entertained. Dunn addresses this as follows: 'a picture of me out to brunch in Los Feliz will get more likes than a video of me searching for quarters in my car'. Here, Dunn reflects on her expertise in choosing what to communicate and share to her audience. Similarly, through her analysis of UK YouTuber Zoella, Jerslev (2016) suggests that playing down expertise in their subject area is another way for vloggers to perform authenticity. She identifies that, in her vlogs, Zoella gives off a sense of spontaneity by appearing to forget brand names and stumbling over

her words. Jerslev identifies this as a way for Zoella to attach authenticity to situations where brand names are usually repeated. Though she is playing down her expertise in brand names, Zoella demonstrates an awareness of her audience and what they will relate to. Such a strategy is also exercised by Tanya Burr in our analysis, who avoids mentioning brand names herself, but instead acknowledges them in the YouTube video description.

The presentation of authenticity is an expertise signalling strategy designed to appeal to audiences and thus increase online exposure, as highlighted by Dunn (2015) and Jerslev (2016). The expertise is in the strategy—vloggers must consciously choose, edit and then create their content with their audience in mind. Milly Williamson (2016, p. 153) argues that the 'technology of freedom' offered by social media and the Internet is in fact a 'technology of self-promotion and celebrity', where celebrity culture has contributed to the construction of hierarchy in the cultural industries. Creating content and managing social media channels take time and effort for vloggers, and as Williamson argues, although social media platforms are positioned as offering everyone the chance to express themselves and connect with others, the promise and the reality are deeply contradictory. The signalling-expertise analysis reveals that the vloggers in our research are currently relatively successful at what they do. However, what they do not talk about are the struggles they have gone through. One vlogger who did is Zoella, who posted a video of herself breaking down in tears, explaining how her rise to fame and the pressures of what she does has become too much for her (Jerslev, 2016). Zoella's status as the UK's most famous vlogger means that, while she opens herself up to further scrutiny through her admission of vulnerability, she is also performing authenticity and gaining sympathy and support from her audience; something which appears to be spontaneous can be understood as part of a signalling strategy. The examples we have presented in this chapter show how for vloggers, signalling expertise is much more than the communication of knowledge or deployment of skill; it requires an ability to engage others (the audience) by staging a relatable authenticity. Sometimes, that authenticity is based in the very real struggles vloggers face.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined vlogging as a form of new normal in cultural work, using the analytical lens of expertise. For vloggers, the demands can be constant. The process of creating their videos, maintaining social media profiles and multiple job-holding are aspects of vlogging production that are obscured by the how-to guidance, which often positions vlogging as a viable career with low barriers to entry, with passion the main requirement for participation. Such guides promote an entrepreneurial ethos and while they allude to the diversity of skills and level of time and economic investment required, the full extent and challenges of expertise are only touched upon.

Our analysis reveals the multiple processes that occur around a seemingly 'polished' final video, particularly vloggers' strategies to engage their audience by interacting with fans and collaborators, and the skills required to stage a relatable authenticity. We argue that vloggers possess a certain amount of expertise in their area, which is crucial to their success. Focusing only on the videos and performance, as Bish (2014) does in lamenting vloggers' poor training in the art form of entertainment, overlooks the extensive and diverse skills and demands associated with vlogging, which are glossed over in associated career guidance.

In addition, there remain concerns around access to the right equipment and having the money and connections to 'make it' as a vlogger, which, for most, will not become a reality. The critical perspectives of vloggers such as Dunn (2015) and Lennard (2015) open up revealing comparisons with debates on cultural work more widely, as Lennard (2015) suggests in commenting that 'no-one should be fooled by the idea that YouTube is somehow different to the more traditional media industries'. Highlighting cultural work continuities invites a line of comparison around wider production cultures and industry contexts. For example, a number of the vloggers in our study were managed by agencies. Connecting with existing research on what Burgess (2012) describes as 'new commercial cultural intermediaries' (see also Lobato, 2016), future research could explore the role such agents have in vloggers' online performances, in particular, the reinforcement of conventional vlogging tropes such as the narrative conventions in videos and the common setting of the home or bedroom.

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