

Amidst the newly sprung social media and file sharing websites in our modern world, the video-sharing community YouTube is perhaps one of the most prominent and widely used, commanding a daily traffic value estimating about 20% of the entire Internet community. (Courtois et. al, 2011) As reported on YouTube's own press page, viewership statistics describe about 100 hours of video uploads per minute and over 6 billion hours of video watched per month. (YouTube, 2014) Succinctly defined by Duffy, "YouTube is a popular video sharing website where users can upload, view and share video clips." (Duffy, 2008) Launched in 2005 and sold to Google for 1.65 million dollars just one year later, YouTube is now a household name, available to anyone who has a computer, Internet access, and some kind of video recording equipment. (Burgess et. al, 2009) The influence of YouTube videos in our everyday lives is apparent – countless videos uploaded on YouTube are widely circulated in many environments and contexts such as blogs, businesses and homes. (Burgess et. al, 2009) The nature of YouTube as a social sharing site allows for almost anyone to produce and upload their own video whether it be motivated by personal or professional reasons or just an interest in joining this large online video community, whether as a viewer or a video uploader. (Burgess et. al, 2009) YouTube uploaders could be anyone from an amateur video maker to a government body's advertising department or any kind of conventional media body. (Burgess et. al, 2009) The directorship of YouTube videos is not limited merely to professional video makers. That being said, it is no wonder that YouTube is so widely accepted by the Internet community that greatly welcomes the notion of user-generated media. (Courtois et. al, 2011)

YouTube affords its users a great number of categories to indulge in and explore, and these include personalised lists of videos – the "Recommended for you" list that YouTube generates based on the kinds of videos each user often watches – as well as more generic categories such as "Comedy", "Automotives", "Music" and "Cooking and Health". (YouTube, 2014) This paper will be focussing specifically on the "Beauty and Fashion" category of YouTube videos because the motive of such videos is typically centred on communication with other people by means of sharing one's ideas with the viewers of the video.

Being such a modern channel of communication in our modern society, there is abundant academic literature surrounding YouTube. There are even papers focussing on these beauty gurus and their videos, as well as the strong outreach power they possess as

online personalities that teenage adolescents do often admire and look to for inspiration. (Courtois et. al. 2011) Researcher Stephanie Chang noted that due to the vast number of subscribers that most of these beauty gurus have, “with each blog produced, these... women are guaranteed to reach out to a considerable amount of virtual participants, which arguably positions these women as noteworthy cultural producers.” (Chang, 2014) Despite this, not everyone agrees with the existence of such beauty gurus that can have such a strong grip on adolescent girls, citing such videos as encouraging materialism from a very young age. (Keats, 2012) Beauty bloggers not only communicate with their viewers through their videos alone, but support their channels with their other varied forms of social media such as Twitter, Facebook and Instagram, as well as the comments section of YouTube videos. (Keats, 2012)

Beauty and fashion are undisputedly one of the largest and oldest topics in the female world. (Keats, 2012) Often, one might hear women complimenting each other on their dressing, hairstyle or handbag. (Keats, 2012) Thanks to the wide reach of the Internet, women everywhere can access a new medium through which to explore and compare fashion and beauty. (Keats, 2012) YouTube Beauty and Fashion Channels provide this opportunity for women to connect with and get ideas from people all over the world who upload such beauty videos to air their views and ideas. These video makers are more commonly known as YouTube beauty gurus or beauty bloggers.

Each beauty guru’s video might take on a different artistic angle, highlight a different product or display a different makeup look or fashion style, but these different videos typically fall under a large number of conventional types of videos that one would expect to see on a beauty channel. (Chang, 2014) Some videos are broad or theme specific fashion or makeup looks that are usually how-to videos, while others cater to sharing more about one’s lifestyle habits such as “my morning routine” and “my night routine” type videos. Additionally, common types of videos include “haul” videos in which beauty gurus showcase some of their latest fashion, beauty or miscellaneous buys, “monthly favourites” videos where the bloggers talk about some of their favourite items of the month in different categories ranging from hair, nails and skin to music and television shows and “what is in my bag” videos in which the blogger literally empties the contents of her school bag or handbag and talks about what she keeps or finds in there. The long list of video categories goes on and on and still new types of videos spring up from time to time and are shared over the YouTube beauty community.

Another thing to note is that different beauty gurus tend to direct the themes of their videos towards particular audiences. (Keats, 2012) For example, well-loved YouTuber Bethany Mota, or Macbarbie07 on YouTube turns 18 years old this year, and has fans both older and much younger than herself. Her videos tend toward a relatively more adolescent crowd, with some of her most popular videos being “Running Late for School – Quick Hair fixes, makeup and outfit ideas!”, “Healthy Back to School Lunches + After School Snacks”, and “Look cute after PE/GYM: My after workout essentials!”. (YouTube 2014)

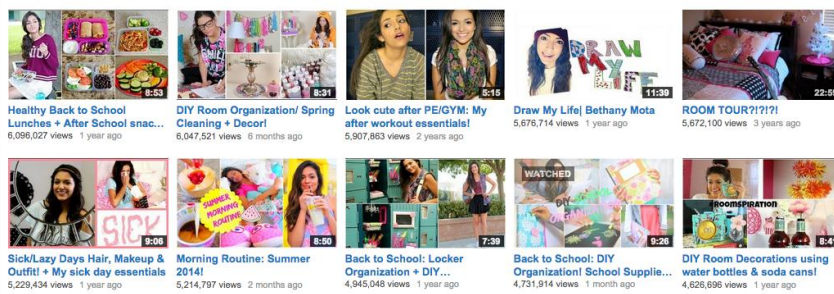


Fig. 1: Screenshot - Uploads on Bethany Mota's channel sorted by "Most Popular"

In contrast, sorority girl Tiffany Ma (MissTiffanyMa) from the University of California, Los Angeles posts videos targeted at connecting with other college girls like herself. Some of the most popular videos on her channel include “College 101: Shopping for your Dorm Room”, “Sorority Rush Advice: What to Wear, Parties, Greek Life” and “My Dorm Room Tour: Back To School 2014!” (YouTube, 2014) One of the featured playlists on her channel is made up solely of college advice and how-to videos. (YouTube 2014)

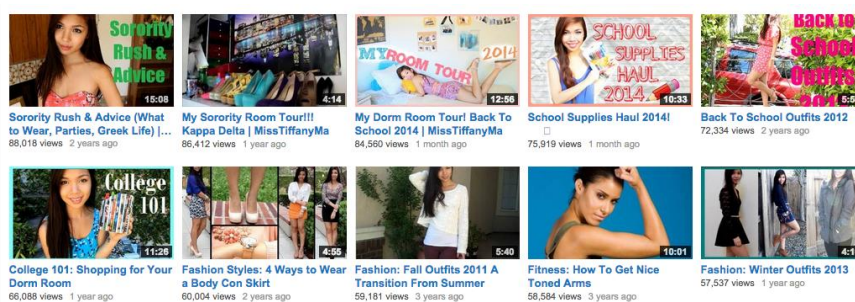


Fig. 2: Screenshot – Uploads on Tiffany Ma's channel sorted by "Most Popular"

In this way, YouTubers often tailor their channel to suit their audience demographics by posting videos that their subscribers can most relate to, so that communication can be made effectively with people whom would best appreciate it.

Popularity on YouTube is measured in a number of ways, including number of channel Subscribers, “Likes” or “Thumbs Up” that act as video ratings and view

counts. (Chatzopoulou et. al, 2010) These are important forms of feedback that showcase affirmation or dislike for the online persona that the blogger has created through her videos. (Courtois et. al, 2011) Beauty gurus often encourage their viewers to “Subscribe to my channel and give this video a thumbs up if you enjoyed it!” - this sort of statement is usually either pronounced at some point in the video, or typed out as part of the video description. For example, randomly clicking on the video “Summer Pool Party – Makeup+Hair, Outfit and DIY Ideas!” by YouTuber Alisha Marie allows one to observe that she encourages her viewers to “like” her video not once, but twice in her description box, using the lines “LET’S GET THIS VID TO 20,000 LIKES!!!” and “Please do me a huge favor and give this video a thumbs up if you liked it!” (YouTube, 2014) She also mentions this in the actual video, telling her viewers “I feel like you guys are really going to like it (the video), let me know if you do in the comments or you can just like this video!” (Youtube, 2014) In this way, the verbal communication through the beauty video is met with non-verbal indication of approval or disapproval by means of these rating tools on YouTube.

The numbers of subscribers on each YouTube channel also act as indicators of popularity for many YouTube video producers. (Duffy, 2008) Beauty gurus are no exception and often make it a point to acknowledge or celebrate certain milestones in their YouTube career when they hit a certain number of subscribers by rewarding their subscribers or just taking the time to thank them. An example of this is the very recent video “600K SUBSCRIBER GIVEAWAY! Macbook Air + iPad Air + iPad Mini” by YouTube user Rachel Levin or Rclbeauty101 uploaded on YouTube on September 7<sup>th</sup> 2014, in which she thanks her subscribers for their support for her videos and proffers a giveaway contest to celebrate the milestone. (YouTube, 2014) Subscription milestones are also sometimes acknowledged within the video itself. An example can be found in Meghan Rienk’s YouTube video “August Favorites: Makeup, Books, Jewelry & 1 MILLION Subscribers!” in which she mentions that one of her favourite necklaces of the month was to commemorate her YouTube channel hitting a million subscribers. (YouTube, 2014) Some of the most popular beauty bloggers on YouTube as measured by the number of subscribers includes Bethany Mota (or Macbarbie07), who at the age of 19 already has a whopping total of 7,159,302 subscribers as of 4 September 2014, and big time beauty blogger Michelle Phan who follows behind with a total of 6,923,712 subscribers as of 4 September 2014. (YouTube, 2014) By acknowledging their subscribers and taking the time in a video to thank them, beauty bloggers establish a

closer relationship with their audience because there are numerous attempts to reach out to their subscribers and to let them know that even though they might not be able to meet them all in person they still appreciate their support. (Courtois et. al, 2011)

Since these beauty gurus use their YouTube videos as their main form of communication with their viewers (supported by their social media accounts), one would think that this mode of communication would be more akin to conventional spoken communication rather than conventional text based communication as it involves directly addressing the viewer using speech. This paper will now discuss the similarities and differences between YouTube beauty videos and conventional speech and text using David Crystal's basis for comparison between speech and text.

The first comparison brought up by Crystal between speech and text is the nature of speech being time bound, and text being space bound. (Crystal, 2004) Time bound refers to the characteristic of speech being "dynamic, transient" and therefore only existent at the point of speaking. (Crystal, 2004) In contrast, text being space bound refers to it being permanently available for any wide audience to pick up and read at any point in time because the writer does not know who could pick up his words and have a read. (Crystal, 2004) Comprising mainly of spoken word means that videos are expected to be speech bound in nature. However, the nature of YouTube and the internet means that videos that beauty gurus post online in which they sit in front of their camera and speak to their audience can be watched over and over again by different people at different points in time – these videos are space bound like text based communication. As long as the video is not removed and it remains unrestricted, one would still be able to access a video that might have been posted 3 to 4 years ago if they so wished to watch it. Additionally, being on the internet means that these videos are widely available to as many people that wish to watch it and not just the one person that is being spoken to at any time – many people could be watching the same video simultaneously. The viewer could also choose to re-access the content of the video again at a later date. The content of the video remains in its online space for whenever one wishes to watch it, behaving similarly to a conventional text based communication.

When it comes to spontaneity, YouTube beauty videos also behave more like text-like communication and are relatively deliberate in nature because they are scheduled and planned by the beauty blogger before they are filmed, edited and uploaded. Crystal notes this distinguishing factor between speech-like communication that is often spontaneous, and text-like communication that is often contrived. (Crystal, 2004) Between production of a video (including the filming and editing of a video) and the reception of the same video

when it has been posted online, there tends to be a time lag because these videos are typically not live broadcasts. Similarly, text-like communication through publications undergoes a time lag for the publishing and shelving processes and is therefore less spontaneous than speech. This is another way in which YouTube beauty videos show likeness to text-like communication instead of speech-like communication because of the need to process and edit the video before the audience watches it.

In some ways, YouTube beauty videos possess speech-like characteristics rather than text-like.

YouTube beauty videos tend to be more speech-like rather than text-like when it comes to the use of prosody in communication. The use of prosody in speech is another distinction between speech and text as noted by Crystal. (Crystal, 2004) Speech-like communication is relatively prosodically rich and instances of pitch, speed and tones are difficult to recreate in writing. (Crystal, 2004) Text-like communication on the other hand is more likely to possess characteristics of writing such as capitalization of alphabets and punctuation. (Crystal, 2004) The best way to imitate prosody in writing would probably be features like exclamation marks and italicised fonts but it is in no way equivalent to the richness of prosody in speech. (Crystal, 2004) Composed mainly of speech, YouTube beauty videos are also rich in prosody and bloggers often convey their excitement in the video by speaking loudly, or fast, or in a bright and exhilarated tone. Although written descriptions almost always accompany every video, these are usually shorter passages that typically do not follow any strict rules of conventional writing as a result, and are not the focus of this paper. The prosodic cues used in the actual beauty videos are very rich and difficult to imitate with text based communication.

Along with being prosodically rich, YouTube beauty videos also are likely to contain plenty of non-verbal cues like one's facial expression and gestures or body language in order to facilitate meaning in addition to what is spoken. This is characteristic of most speech-like communication as well (Crystal, 2004) Additionally, YouTube beauty gurus often talk about the products or outfits that they are showcasing in a video using deictic expressions, another characteristic of speech-like communication. This is very common in most "show-and-tell" type beauty videos. For example, beauty guru Ingrid Nilsen (known as Missglamorazzi on YouTube) uses the following phrases in her "My Desk Essentials + Organization!" video: "I'm going to be showing you guys my desk area right here..." and "I have a little stand here for my phone..." (YouTube, 2014) She makes spatial deictic references to an area of the room or an item that she is gesturing to and the viewers know

what she is talking about because they are able to see the items for themselves. In text-like communication however, readers have no visual context available to them to aid in the interpretation of information that they are reading. (Crystal, 2004) As a result, forms of text-like communication tend to avoid overuse of deictic expressions where the meaning might be ambiguous so as to clarify any misinterpretations the reader might have. (Crystal, 2004) Beauty videos are therefore more speech-like than text-like in this aspect.

Crystal also mentions the characteristic use of “contracted forms...Lengthy coordinate sentences...nonsense vocabulary...obscenity and slang, some of which does not appear in writing, or occurs only as graphic euphemism.” in spoken communication. (Crystal, 2004) In contrast, text-like communication is likely to have its own set of characteristic forms that appear in written text according to the kind of document being written. (Crystal, 2004) YouTube beauty videos are relatively informal in nature, and as a result often contain very casual utterances or long sentences without following any fixed structure – the presentation of the content of the video is largely dependent on the personality and charisma of the speaker. Beauty gurus try to appear more approachable and friendly to their audience in addition to creating a relaxed social setting in which ideas can be shared. (Keats, 2012) In this vein YouTube beauty videos are a lot more like speech than text.

Having examined the ways in which YouTube beauty videos act more like conventional speech-like and text-like communication, there are ways in which YouTube beauty videos tend to fall between the two.

YouTube beauty videos fall in between conventional speech and text when it comes to the ability of the producer to revise the content of the videos. Crystal’s distinctions between speech and text in this aspect describes speech as being subject to revision in the speaker’s mind before the utterance is spoken and cannot be retracted once spoken, and describes errors or corrections made in a piece text as hidden from the reader because the writer would have had the chance to edit everything before choosing to publish his words. (Crystal, 2004) YouTube beauty videos being made primarily out of speech would equate to inability to retract any errors or statements made. However, each video undergoes an editing process by the beauty blogger before it is uploaded, meaning that the transparency of any errors in the video would be adjusted according to the personal preference of the beauty blogger. She can choose which parts of her video to cut out, or which errors to leave in the video to add a touch of humour and personality to her videos. Many beauty gurus choose to edit their videos to incorporate a short “bloop reel” in their videos for those reasons, but once the edits are made and the video is uploaded, it can no longer be revised. To counter

this, beauty bloggers sometimes use the description box to apologize for any unintentional errors that might have been left out of the editing process, or any additional information about things they might have shown in the video that they might want their viewers to have access to. In this way, videos are speech like during production when errors are made, but move to behave like text like communication once the video has been uploaded and published because errors would cease to be easily revised.

Most beauty bloggers make use of their videos not just to share their new finds and fashion ideas with other like-minded people, but also to surround themselves with a community of people who are interested in hearing what they have to say. (Keats, 2012) In this way, beauty videos fulfil a social function. This meets Crystal's definition of socialness in speech whereby he describes speech-like communication to be "good at expressing social relationships, and personal opinions and attitudes, due to the vast range of nuances which can be expressed by the prosody and accompanying non-verbal features." (Crystal, 2004) Beauty videos are a platform for bloggers to do express not only their opinion of latest trends and products, and also allow them to show their gratitude and appreciation towards their supporters. Additionally, sometimes beauty bloggers record advertorial videos or provide little fun facts in their videos, like Ingrid Nilsen does in her video "I woke up late!! Quick makeup, hair, outfit + breakfast!" where she punctuates her videos with little "Did You Know?" pop-ups. (YouTube, 2014) The beauty blogger can make a choice about how much she would like her video to be socially purposed or factual depending on the type of video she is filming, and the video appears more like speech-like or text-like communication according to the choice that she makes.

Having looked at all the different ways in which speech and text differ, and applying these distinctions to YouTube beauty videos, this paper concludes that this specific kind of YouTube videos are more akin to speech-like communication than text-like communication, though it must be said that there is more to communication between beauty gurus and their audiences than videos alone. Viewers of such videos can also interact with these bloggers by means of leaving them comments on the video, or interacting with them through the bloggers' social media accounts, the details of which are usually given out in the description box of the video so that fans have a way of contacting their favourite beauty gurus. (Keats, 2012) However, for the most part the very content and nature of the videos are found to be relatively speech-like in nature because of the availability of rich prosodic cues and informal language, and the social aspect of such videos with an aim to reach out to like-minded people and share opinions.



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