AN EXPLORATORY THEMATIC ANALYSIS ON VIEWERS’ INVOLVEMENT WITH HAUL VIDEO PERSONAES---TAking BETHANY MOTA AS A CASE STUDY

BY

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ABSTRACT
Researchers have long been studying the impact of Word of Mouth (WOM) and User Generated Contents (UGC) on people’s attitude toward products and services, as well as the combination as electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM). The present study focuses on a new form of the eWOM, namely the “haul videos” on YouTube, which can show what individuals bought and how they reviewed the items. As a rather new phenomenon, the most successful haul video maker Bethany Mota’s most watched haul video has been adopted as a case study to explore the audiences’ elaboration state and involvement with both of the content and its creator. Since YouTube provides a large amount of spontaneous comments generated by the viewers as a natural dataset, I pulled the data using coding skills and used the qualitative method of thematic analysis to analyze the themes generated from the comments. It has been found that viewers who have watched Bethany Mota’s haul video showed a low elaboration state and mentioned about themes relevant to the entire audience involvement process with the media persona. As a qualitative exploratory study, certain limitations do exist in its findings. However, the findings might shed light upon future research or possible hypotheses concerning haul videos in the field of communication or marketing research.
CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

INTRODUCTION

As humans have transitioned from passively “receiving” information to proactively “searching for” or even “creating” information, we are now experiencing the information explosion with an infinite abundance. And just as we rejoiced in Web 1.0, which has given us freedom of identity transformation, Web 2.0 has quietly arrived. In 2004, the Facebook went online. In 2005, YouTube registered. If Web 1.0 has given us the right to choose, then Web 2.0 empowers us the rights of production, ranging from daily trivia to product reviews. While the new media platforms have been attracting more and more viewers, they also started to catch advertisers’ eyes. With the development of technologies, the Internet has become a new marketing channel referring to prior consumers’ reviews and recommendations (Fruth & Neacsu, 2014). Especially Web 2.0 technologies such as social media offered such unparalleled platform to enable consumers to publicize their experiences and reviews (Chen et al., 2011).

In particular, on YouTube, there is a new phenomenon called the “haul videos” in which people will show the viewers what they have bought recently, usually clothes, cosmetics, etc. Most of the “haulers” are young females, who will try out the items they bought, and make comments and suggestions to their subscribers, making it a shopping booty video. Such forms of eWOM communication allow consumers to acquire information pertaining to goods and services from people who have experience with relevant products or services (Lee et al., 2006).
More and more researchers have paid attention to the phenomenon of consumer knowledge sharing online (Rafaeli & Raban, 2005; Lee et al., 2006). Although this new media form, haul videos, has attracted both viewers and advertisers, there is still a lack of research on this specific genre. As a communication researcher and practitioner, it is essential to investigate new phenomenon of information sharing in online communities. This exploratory research therefore takes the haul video made by Bethany Mota, the most famous hauler on YouTube, as a case study to explore audience involvement with both of the content and the creator. This study will first take a look at current research about user generated content, electronic word of mouth, studies about YouTube, and then use the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) to ask the question about whether the haul video viewers are in high elaboration likelihood state or low elaboration likelihood state. Furthermore, I will also explore how Bethany portrayed herself in the video, as well as how her audiences involve with content in terms of memory, parasocial interactions, identification, and worship. Methods of Narbs analysis and Thematic analysis will be adopted to utilize the spontaneously generated feedbacks from viewers to discover the themes about Bethany’s haul video.

The objective of this study is to investigate how viewers perceive this specific form of UGC and eWOM in online customer communities and what themes have been generated which can shed light upon future research about haul videos. From a practical aspect, it would be able to help marketers to explore a new possible marketing channel which promotes products and services. From an even broader context, it is worth discovering this new form of collective behavior online, and its informational and social influence.
LITERATURE REVIEW

User Generated Contents

Different from the traditional information generated by the mass media, user generated contents has been produced by the audiences and users. More specifically, UGC is not created based upon professional routines and practices (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Such kind of contents created by the so-called grass roots have brought significant changes to people’s lives. With the easy access to these online platforms and its popularity among Internet users, such content has been a more and more crucial part in daily life.

The UGC is differentiated across different media platforms (Yoo & Gretzel, 2011). There are many different types of UGC, such as Facebook status updates, Tweets from Twitter, YouTube videos, and product reviews (Dhar & Chang, 2009). For these websites, one of the major functions is to promote production of UGC. Production refers to publishing content, such as personal pages, blogs, and YouTube videos (Shao, 2009). Furthermore, as people’s demands for interaction proceeds, UCG also enhances opinion expressions and communication between users. It does not only include production of contents, but also participation in the process (Shao, 2009). For example, users might talk virtually to other users or the producers spontaneously.

It is then not limited to social interactions among people who know each other, but also expands to the outside world for more generic information. Much of the UGC is for family, friends, service providers and customers (Sigala, 2008). Customers are able to recommend products or services to each other, and endorse them online. However, if
customers are dissatisfied, they may speak it out directly in the form of word of mouth (Hirschman, 1970). Thus, brands can benefit from positive UGC about products. However, negative UGC can also harm the brand (Banbauer-Sachse & Mangold, 2011).

Academia has been looking into UGC since its rise to popularity. Many researchers have explored people’s motivations to contribute to UGC, such as Wikipedia contributions (e.g. Yang & Lai, 2010) and online travel reviews (Yoo & Gretzel, 2011). Researchers have proposed that utilitarian, knowledge, ego-defensive and value-expressive can motivate people to produce UGC online (Daugherty et al., 2008).

Other than why people would like to contribute to UGC online, scholars also explored whether such kind of contents have an impact on people’s perceptions, attitudes and actions. For example, Xiang and Gretzel (2010) found that the part social media has played in online travel information search. Vermeulen and Seegers (2009) discussed UGC contents about online hotel reviews’ impact on consumer decision-making. At the same time, researchers have conducted experiment in Korea to prove that negative UGC can decrease people’s shopping intentions (Lee et al., 2008).

Backed by a great number of prior research, scholars have also provided advice for companies in order to maintain their image. Kroenke (2013) suggested that organizations can treat social media and UGC as a social media application provider where they can manage their social media accounts in sites such as Facebook and LinkedIn, as well as a social media sponsor where they can try to support their presence. Along with more and more research proving the influences of UGC on consumers, companies have also paid more attention to such kind of information that can have either
a positive or negative impact on their images and sales. Some companies even post good reviews about themselves and negative comments about their competitors (Dellarocas, 2006).

**Electronic Word of Mouth**

When doing research on UGC, scholars often discuss another closely related term called electronic word of mouth (eWOM). This term originated from WOM, namely word of mouth. Among user generated contents, product reviews have become one of the most popular forms (Sen & Lerman, 2007).

Before Internet was popularized, while people were surrounded by advertisements, especially more and more professionally produced ones, it is easy for them to feel persuaded by ads and uncertain about which products to buy and which brands to trust. Bickart and Schindler (2001) found that product information shared by companies is deemed as less credible. Under such premises, they usually need to seek help form some seemingly objective opinions or reviews. Due to the limitations of social networks, information based on WOW was generally adopted from a small number of people they know such as friends or families.

Although there is only limited amount of information from limited sources, WOM has been found to be helpful in people’s decision-making process. Folkes (1998) suggested that consumers are likely to search for more proofs to confirm the credibility of messages. Consumers will feel more confident about their decision and judgment concerning the product or service compared to those who have not consulted other people (Weiner, 2000). People thus tend to believe in feedback and reviews from sources they
trust. Researchers have proved that WOM can eliminate uncertainty about products or services from information sources by consumers who have prior experiences (Bansal & Voyer, 2000). While WOM can have a big impact on consumers’ perceptions, it can either be positive or negative. Richins (1983) examined consumers’ reactions to dissatisfaction that can also have an impact on repeated purchase behaviors, and suggested that companies should pay more attention to toll-free customer services and store signs to avoid negative WOM.

It is with the development of online communication technologies that eWOM has emerged. eWOM is “any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual, or former customers about a product or company, which is made available to a multitude of people and institutions via the Internet” (Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh & Gremler, 2004, p.39). Electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) communication includes online discussion forums, electronic bulletin board systems, newsgroups, blogs, review sites, and social networking sites (Goldsmith, 2006). They provide consumers with help similar to what existed in earlier times, but more electronically and technologically available. What is different is that for the new social reality online, a greater number of people can review the product or service (Litvin, Goldsmith & Pan, 2008). This enables consumers to express their own opinions, get connected with others who have prior experience, and become more informed about the products or service.

Researchers have conducted experimental studies to test how eWOM can impact consumer’s product choices (Senecal & Nantel, 2004). Etzion and Awad (2007) studied the relationship between number of online reviews and sales, and found that consumers find online reviews to be relevant to product quality. Just like WOM, eWOM can also
produce both positive and negative reviews about products or services, which can work as a double-sword for companies and brands.

**YouTube Studies**

UGC and eWOM are generally created and shared on various online platforms, most of which contain social features. There are various kinds of platforms in social media, such as blogs, SNS (social networking sites), content publishers (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Among them is YouTube. In terms of the various websites all around the world, YouTube has the third largest amounts of viewership following Google and Facebook (Alexa, 2015). Founded in 2005, YouTube is an online platform where people can upload, watch and comment on various kinds of videos worldwide. Other than that, users can also share their personal profiles, set up their own channels and subscribe to other people’s channels in order to connect with friends both in real life and the virtual world.

With the popularity of YouTube videos, researchers have long been paying attention to this new form of media. First, scholars looked into the general features of videos on the site. For instance, researchers have studied the popularity life-cycles of YouTube videos has provided helpful suggestions to better understand UGC systems, site administrations, and content creators with technical and commercial implications (Cha et al., 2007). Burgess and Green (2009) found that the most popular UGC videos such as vlogs, fan videos, live performances, reviews, and comedies. However, Kruitbosch and Nack (2008) analyzed the YouTube videos’ content, recording devices, performers, editing skills and other categorizations to propose that the most popular YouTube videos
are still the professionally made ones. Therefore, some considered that YouTube still works as a social filter for people to share interesting content rather than showcase their own creativity (Kruitbosch & Nack, 2008). What is worth mentioning is that with the popularity of media production technologies, more and more nonprofessional video makers adopted advanced recording devices and editing skills, while some even hired professional team to take care of the video production, especially those with commercial sponsors.

Furthermore, as the most popular video-sharing website worldwide, YouTube has been considered not only as a source for entertainment such as music and video stories, but also as a helpful tool for learning and teaching. For instance, Hoskins (2009) talked about adopting YouTube videos in women’s studies courses. Other scholars have also utilized this website to teach history (Rees, 2008), etc.

Besides discussing about how useful YouTube can be in researchers and scholars’ daily life, academia also did research on other meanings generated by the videos in order to understand more about this new form of media contents created by users. For example, several scholars have explored how YouTube has become an important tool for soldiers. Andeen-Papadopoulos (2009) conducted a content analysis of videos made by coalition soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan. Rugledge (2009) also did a content analysis about Iraqi insurgents’ usage of YouTube as a strategic communication tool.

Health communication is another popular field for studies on YouTube videos. Gooding and Gregory (2011) did a descriptive analysis of the YouTube music therapy videos. Hossler and Conroy (2008) analyzed videos about tanning bed use in terms of
positive, negative and neutral attitudes. Other researchers studied how YouTube was used as an information source to know about H1N1 influenza pandemic (Pandey et al., 2010), and infantile spasms (Fat et al., 2011).

**Elaboration Likelihood Model**

When researching on how audiences perceive information such as user generated contents and YouTube videos, one of the theoretical model that scholars usually adopt is the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM). Petty and Cacioppo (1981, 1986) proposed the Elaboration Likelihood Model to help better understand the effectiveness of persuasive communication. According to ELM, there are two routes of influence, namely the central route and the peripheral route that have an impact on people’s attitude change. If individuals take the central route, they are more critical about arguments that are related to the topic and judge its merits and relevance. When people take the peripheral route, they will make less cognitive effort and pay more attention to cues such as the number of arguments and physical attractiveness (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). This model not only takes the key factor, which is the persuasive information, itself but also the more realistic and individual differences into consideration.

Elaboration likelihood is decided by “elaboration continuum” ranging from high elaboration to low elaboration, which is decided by people’s motivation and ability to elaborate on information (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Petty and Wegener (1999) discussed that individuals in high elaboration likelihood state are likely to be persuaded by argument quality, people in low elaboration state are likely to be influenced by peripheral cues. While the quality of content plays a crucial role in people’s perceptions and attitude,
sometimes it is also a fact that many people do not make decisions that rationally. Many people, especially young people, sometimes do value other affective factors in their decision making process. Based on the realistic scenarios, and the research nature of this study that focuses more on exploring the audiences’ characteristics and their spontaneous reactions, ELM will provide applicable lenses to analyze this case.

Although YouTube haul videos are not technically defined as advertisements, there are also issues of attitude toward the information, which can refer to Attitude toward the Advertisement (Aad). Aad is “a predisposition to respond in a favorable or unfavorable manner to a particular advertising stimulus during a particular exposure occasion” (Solomon, 1992, p. 139). Scholars argue that there are two dimensions in Aad: the first is cognitive dimension and the second is the emotional dimension (Shimp, 1981). This notion to some extent overlaps with what ELM proposes and is insightful to this research as to pay attention to both cognitive and emotional reactions and feedbacks.

ELM is one of the most frequently adopted theories on eWOM studies (Chan and Ngai, 2011). Besides analysis on central route, many researchers have also utilized peripheral cues to explain the persuasion effects. For instance, Park and Young (1986) discussed the function of background music on people’s perceptions and attitude. Duncan and Nelson (1985) explored humor working as a peripheral cue. Andrews and Shimp (1990) discussed source factors. This research also adopts the ELM to set a practical mindset and asks:

RQ1: Do the comment themes in Bethany Mota’s haul video reflect a high elaboration likelihood state or a low elaboration likelihood state?
Audience Involvement

ELM depends on and can be reflected upon the level of audience involvement. After audiences get exposed the information, and intentionally or unintentionally evaluate it, the next step is for them to get involved with the content at different levels either during the exposure or after it. Involvement is a multidimensional concept that has been researched for dozens of years (Salmon, 1986). Involvement is defined as “cognitive, affective, and behavioral participation during, and because of, media exposure” (Rubin & Perse, 1987, p.246). Most researchers focus on psychological and emotional forms of involvement (Nabi & Wirth, 2008). Researchers have used surveys, experiments and other methods to understand audience involvement. Nowadays, due to the help of social media, researchers are able to retrieve the most natural and spontaneous firsthand responses from viewers. This research explores four processes of audience involvement, namely memory, identification, parasocial interactions, and worship.

Memory. When exposed to advertisements or simply just basic information about certain brands, products or services, the first step for audience involvement is to have an impression of it or recall it. Schiffman and Kanuk (2007) argued that consumers make decisions intentionally or unintentionally based on relative memory.

Bettman (1979) conceptualized memory as continuing storage systems with various functions and properties. It usually includes a series of sensory stores, short-term memory, and long-term memory (Atkinson & Shiffrin, 1968). The short-term memory is the center of information processing from sensory stores (Bettman, 1979). As consumers process information, either from advertisements or consumer reviews, it is essential to
understand how well they can recall the product. While it is relatively more difficult to track long-term memory due to too many variables involved throughout the process, many scholars conduct research to test certain effects on consumers’ short-term memory.

When studying consumer’s short-term memory about products or brands, researchers have been using brand awareness. Brand awareness is defined as the ability to recall that a certain brand is part of a product category (Aaker, 1991). Keller (1993) argued that brand awareness can have an impact on decision making. Nysveen and Pedersen (2005) added that brand awareness on the Internet can also influence purchase intentions, and when consumers’ brand awareness is stronger, the perceived risks of purchasing are fewer.

Many researchers have also explored what factors can affect consumers’ memory or product recall at different levels. For instance, brand names that can hint a product benefit are more positively associated with recall of product (Keller, Heckler, & Houston, 1998). Consumers’ involvement in advertisements can play an important role in the product recall and impact on consumers (Loken, 2006). Meyers-Levy (1989) found that, on the contrary, brand names with associated meanings can interfere and harm the name recall. Individual differences have also been found to influence memory and processing of message cues (Lee & Sternthal, 1999). In practice, companies have also spent a great amount of money to reach and influence consumers (Armstrong & Kotler, 2007).

Therefore, I ask:

RQ2: What themes do viewers recall after watching Bethany Mota’s haul video?
**Parasocial interactions (PSI).** PSI was initially developed in order for researchers to better understand the viewer-performer relationships in traditional media. Parasocial experiences are immediate and natural responses generated by TV viewers (Horton & Strauss, 1957). It is “a relationship between viewers and television personalities” (Grant, Guthrie, & Ball-Rokeach, 1991, p.787), and “simulacrum of conversational give and take” (Horton & Wohl, 1956, p.215) between mass media performers and users. Horton and Strauss (1957) proposed that the viewers would feel as if they were having interaction with television performer, although there isn’t any reciprocal exposure situation. While PSI is different from the actual social interactions, Chory-Assad and Yanen (2005) proposed that viewers may consider parasocial interaction as a similar experience in a real social interaction.

On one hand, PSI arouses similar feelings compared to interactions with people face to face. On the other hand, such experience is to some extent virtual and imaginary. It is seen “as immediate, personal, and reciprocal, but these qualities are illusory and are presumably not shared by the speaker” (Horton & Strauss, 1957, p. 580). Researchers criticized PSI as unidirectional and imbalanced. For instance, Rubin and McHugh (1987) called it “one-sided interpersonal relationship that television viewers establish with media characters” (p. 280). Horton and Wohl (1956) also considered it to be “one-sided, nondialectical, controlled by the performer, and not susceptible of mutual development” (p. 215). Whereas, media users are just strangers (Giles, 2002).

Parasocial interaction requires mutual attention, awareness and mindreading between individuals. Therefore, it does not necessarily exist between any media performer and his or her viewers. Such kind of mutual awareness and attention help lead
to automatic mindreading performances (Malle & Hodges, 2005). Malle and Hodges (2005) proposed that in social interactions, people will generate mindreading to understand the other person’s mindset. Automatic mindreading will lead to intuitive feelings about other people being present (Sally, 2000).

Hence, there needs to be immediate sense of mutual awareness and attention in a parasocial experience with TV performers (Goffman, 1983). If TV performers show natural cues that generally result in social interactions, viewers might assume that the performer is aware of them (Goffman, 1963, p.17). Horton and Wohl also stated that “the audience responds with something more than mere running observation; it is, as it were, subtly insinuated into the program’s action and . . . transformed into a group which observes and participates in the show by turns” (p. 215). It is thus equally important to study more about media performers’ different styles of presentations that may also stimulate different levels of experiences of parasocial interactions. Parasocial interactions can be promoted by a media persona’s conversational and stylized behaviors (Rubin, Perse, & Powell, 1985). For user generated contents, especially haul video makers, haulers’ styles will be examined later.

Parasocial interaction provided the theoretical lenses to understand more about interactions between media performers and audiences. Many researchers in the filed of communication studies has adopted PSI to analyze media phenomenon (Giles, 2002). For instance, relevant studies have been conducted that include television performers (Rubin & McHugh, 1987), television talk show hosts (Rubin, Haridakis, & Eyal, 2003), radio show hosts (Rubin & Step, 2000), TV shopping programs’ hosts (Gudelunas, 2006), and
reality-based and fictional television programming (Nabi, Stitt, Halford, & Finnerty, 2006).

Although PSI theories were initially invented for traditional media studies, they can also be used in the so-called new media, as the user generated contents in social media become more and more professional, popular, and influential. For instance, Kassing and Sanderson (2009) analyzed fan postings on Floyd Landis’ Website and discovered fans’ parasocial interactions with the athlete with the help of Internet communication technologies. Curt Schilling’s blog was also examined to find that fans identified and interacted with him such as providing advice (Sanderson, 2008b). A qualitative analysis of tweets on Twitter during the 2009 Giro de Italia have been conducted to examine PSI between media users and personas (Kassing & Sanderson, 2010). Under such background, it is helpful to get a deeper understanding about:

RQ3: Are there themes reflecting parasocial interactions between Bethany Mota and the viewers?

**Identification.** Rosengren and Windahl (1972) argued that individuals can have a parasocial relationship with media personae without identifying with him or her. Similarly, other researchers proposed that when identification takes place, there needs to be parasocial relationships, however, the latter is not sufficient for identification (Brown et al., 2003a). Therefore, when viewers build parasocial relationships with media performers, they can either further identify with them or not. Identification is the higher level of cognitive interactions between two people who don’t necessarily need to know each other.
Kelman, (1961, p.63) considers identification to have the indication of trying to be like or “actually be” that person. Identification has been defined as “one’s material and mental ways of replacing oneself as a person in the groups and movements” or “one’s way of seeing one’s reflection in the social mirror” (Burke, 1973, p.227). When B identifies with A, “A is “substantially one” with a person other than himself” (Burke, 1969, p.21). Harwood (1999) extends identification to also be with either a group or “in-group membership.” When discussing about identification in the context of media exposure, Cohen (2001, p.245) proposed that identification generated from media consumption leads to viewer’s reception and interpretation of the content so that they can feel that they experienced the events themselves.

Once identification takes place, more effects and impact on viewers can follow. For instance, Bandura (1986) proposed in his Social Cognitive Theory that identification can lead to modeling and imitation. At the same time, Wollheim (1974) has differentiated identification from imitation saying that the former is internal while the latter is external. Cohen (2001) considered that identification can decrease self-awareness and self-identity by imagining being or behaving like other people and it has been defined as three dimensions: emotional empathy, cognitive empathy, and internalizing others’ goals. Hoffner (1996) found that children have wishful identification and parasocial interactions with TV characters that so they want to behave in similar ways. Although haul videos stem from a kind of UGC as well as a form of electronic word of mouth rather than the one directional mass media, there can still be identification among the seemingly equal participants. Identification can potentially have an impact on consumers’ cognitions of the other as well as the self so as to influence their purchase behaviors. Therefore, I ask:
RQ 4: Are there themes reflecting identification between Bethany Mota and the viewers?

**Worship.** When media performers get more and more popular, they can become celebrities. While originally most celebrities obtain fame via mass media, nowadays social media can also help users rise to stardom. For example, YouTube promotes the users to become stars on the site and forms a supportive atmosphere for the creation of micro-celebrities (Burgess & Green, 2009). Celebrities also have images, associations, and features just as other brands (Thomson, 2006). Worshiping celebrities has long been a phenomenon in consumer society along with the development of the entertainment industry.

Celebrity worship has been defined by researchers as “an abnormal type of PSR (parasocial relationship), driven by absorption and addictive elements and which potentially has significant clinical sequelae” (Maltby, Houran & McCutcheon, 2003, p.25) and “a form of PSI in which individuals become obsessed with one or more celebrities, similar to erotomanic type of delusion disorder” (McCutcheon, Houran & Maltby, 2003, p.309). Researchers proposed that such kind of worship can be divided into different categories. Low-level worship refers to the “entertainment-social” values, such as following celebrities via media for entertainment and enhances social activities with friends. The medium level of worship, “intense-personal,” talks about the intense feelings that audiences have for the celebrities, including considering them as “soul mate” and being “obsessed by details” of their life. The most intense level worship is the “mild pathological” dimension in which audiences would do almost anything to worship celebrities (Maltby et al., 2005).
Just like parasocial relationships, such kind of worship is also thought to be unidirectional. Fan-celebrity relationships are nonreciprocal and fans always have positive feelings about celebrities (Rojek, 2001). Jenkins (2006, P.17) has argued that “the connotation of excessive worship is still stuck to “fan” in a certain way.” Therefore, fans or followers usually deify celebrities, pay lots of attention to their performances and life trivia and provide them with constant love and appreciation. As consumers’ attention and favorable impressions are also important resources, advertisers have also learned to take advantage of fans’ worship of celebrities. Creswell (2008) found that sales will increase when consumers believe that celebrities might use the endorsed product.

Researchers have also promoted celebrity endorsement. For instance, Pringle (2004) suggested that companies need to connect their brands with celebrities who have fame and credibility in order to protect their position in the market. In recent years, companies have taken a further step to develop special lines in cooperation with celebrities. Some of them use celebrities’ images, names or similar elements in their products, while some even ask celebrities to design sub brands. The closest relationships between celebrities and brands are those products developed and marketed by celebrities themselves (Pringle & Binet, 2005, p.206).

However, as celebrities are also human beings just like their followers, they sometimes do something wrong, which may harm the brand that they advertise. Also, while there are many fans and followers for certain celebrities, there can also be many others who don’t like them or even hate them. There are both advantages and disadvantages for celebrity endorsement (Erdogan, 1999). Therefore, I ask:
RQ 5: Are there themes reflecting worship between Bethany Mota and the viewers?

Additionally, I further ask:

RQ 6: What are other themes reflecting audience involvement between Bethany Mota and the viewers?
CHAPTER TWO

METHODOLOGY

UGC on websites such as YouTube has provided researchers with “unprecedented access to new forms of primary data” (Blythe and Cairns, 2009). Originating from “unboxing videos,” in which people unwrap their hi-tech products and show the audiences what they have bought, the “haul videos” pertain to the products that are more for daily usage, such as clothing, cosmetics, home supplies, school supplies, etc. Most of the haul video makers are young females, as are their audiences.

With millions of views and subscribers, such videos have become a new trend both on YouTube and in the real world. Manufacturers have noticed this phenomenon and built partnerships with the “haulers.” Some of the haulers even participated in reality shows or released their singles. Since the majority of viewers are young people who cannot afford the high-end designer brands, most of the “mentioned-about” brands in haul videos are ones that are inexpensive and more affordable.

Blythe and Cairns (2009) considered YouTube review videos with thousands of comments as providing scholars with sources of easily pulled data. In the top 10 most viewed clothing haul videos, there are 7 of them made by Bethany Mota, including the top three videos. For the 10th anniversary of YouTube, the website selected the most representative persons or videos in history and Bethany was one of them. Bethany Mota can be viewed as the most successful “hauler” enjoys the most followers and viewership. I selected Bethany’s most watched haul video with more than 3 million click rates in the title of “spring/summer clothing haul!” to explore viewers’ involvement with the hauler
and the content. The video’s link is as below:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WUQEpH6MfA8

Text retrieving

Social media and UGC, namely user generated content websites, nowadays play a more and more crucial role in people’s daily lives and the business world. Fans of certain brands, celebrities, or TV programs have shown huge marketing potential compare to other Internet sites (Neff, 2010).

Many researchers have focused on mining data from the self-media to take a closer look at public opinions, and argued that user generated contents on social media can play a crucial role in people’s life (Dumenco, 2010) and can be better utilized in news media (Lowery, 2009). For instance, Ahmad (2010) discussed whether data from Twitter could be a useful tool for journalists. Greer (2010) explored how community newspapers are using self-media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter to deliver the news. Papacharissi and Oliveira (2012) used a computational means to collect, filter and analyze tweets about the 2011 Arab Spring, while Burgess & Bruns (2012) looked at the 2010 federal election campaign in Australia. Finally, Hampp (2009) explored social media’s marketing capabilities, such as in movie marketing.

Jenkins (2006), using media convergence theory, proposed that attention be paid to consumers and fans, with a cultural shift from media being in power to grassroots participation by the people who consume the content in their daily lives. The YouTube haul videos, created by the so-called grassroots users, also enjoy a huge amount of fans, who are future potential customers, with the power to compete with traditional media.
Using YouTube, it is thus relatively easy for researchers to collect more information about YouTube fans and their opinions.

The researcher used the Google APIs (Application Program Interface) explorer to pull the comments data. Since Google already purchased YouTube, and this tool can help explore Google APIs interactively and execute the requests in real time, it can be used to retrieve the authenticated and authorized data posted on YouTube. The list of steps is as below:

1. Go to Google APIs Explorer page.
2. Select “youtube.commentThreads.list” tab on the left side of the page.
3. Fill the “part” blank with snippet and “videoId” blank with the ID of the video from its YouTube link (WUQEpH6MfA8 in this case)
4. Click “Execute” button in the bottom to get the result
5. We can use the “fields” blank to filter the result and accelerate sampling. The field editor would be helpful as we can quickly select the information we need. Click replies and snippet options under item. As we only care about text in comments and replies, we can fill “items(replies/comments/snippet/textDisplay,snippet/topLevelComment/snippet/textDisplay)” to extract text only. Also we need to select nextPageToken so we can go through all comment pages.
6. Record all sampled comments and replies text. Put the nextPageToken result to pageToken blank to sample next comment page. Loop this step until there is no more nextPageToken in the result.
After the function was run with the parameter set, I got the result of full comment thread data structure shown as below:

```
{
  "snippet": {
    "channelId": "UCc6W7efUSkd9YYoxOncITFg",
    "videoId": "WUQEpH7McA8",
    "topLevelComment": {
      "kind": "youtube#comment",
      "etag": "\0KG1mRN7bm3nResDPKHZQZpg5-dowyOlglMu9pD5AT966plgzl5qMQ"",
      "id": "z13ictchswrditan04cg5i4ryutdvfyjo",
      "snippet": {
        "channelId": "UCc6W7efUSkd9YYoxOncITFg",
        "videoId": "WUQEpH7McA8",
        "textDisplay": "SUDDENLY I HAVE A HUGE ADDICTION TO HAULS HELP\uffeff",
        "authorDisplayName": "Trina Brynn",
        "authorProfileImageUrl": "https://lh6.googleusercontent.com/-v5rRRhEhe1g/AAAAAAAAAAA/AAAAAAABU/3cUPpe1ZRFc/photo.jpg?sz=50",
        "authorChannelUrl": "http://www.youtube.com/channel/UCPJi_F1f4OznFTkseHFL2CQ",
        "authorChannelId": {
          "value": "UCPJi_F1f4OznFTkseHFL2CQ"
        },
        "authorGoogleplusProfileUrl": "https://plus.google.com/112562274198132659700",
        "canRate": true,
        "viewerRating": "none",
        "likeCount": 0,
        "publishedAt": "2015-10-13T06:46:36.749Z",
        "updatedAt": "2015-10-13T06:46:36.749Z"
      }},
      "canReply": true,
      "totalReplyCount": 0,
      "isPublic": true
    }
  }
}
```

Only content after “textDisplay” are comments from users which are useful, so other codes and contents have been deleted, with 4116 comments in total.
Random sampling

Due to the large size of the dataset, I used the Random Number Generator to create 400 random numbers out of 4116. I then numbered the comments and pulled 400 comments out of about 4000 comments, as narbs (narrative bits), to conduct a thematic analysis of the comments. When analyzing the result, the serial numbers are also kept for references.

Thematic analysis

While research may require participants to respond either via surveys or to be present in a lab, social media enable researchers to pull data that is spontaneous content concerning individuals’ ideas, attitudes and beliefs. Mitra (2010) proposed that the small narrative bit (narb) can tell tiny story about an individual. It is suggested that researchers can also pull the narbs data and conduct research based on that. We can thus form insights about audiences and consumers by collecting and analyzing narbs relevant to people’s attitude and thoughts. While traditional content analysis was conducted manually, today it can be done by computers. Narbs data collection is an example using computational methods. Myllymaki (2001) called the process of gathering data “scraping.”

This study used a research method called Thematic Analysis to analyze the narbs, namely comments generated by Bethany Mota’s haul video viewers. Braun and Clark (2006, p.82) proposed that a theme is a “patterned response or meaning within a dataset.” Thematic analysis can make sense of unrelated material, analyze information, describe it and later examine it statistically in order to observe individuals, interactions, groups, situations, organizations and cultures (Boyatzis, 1998). Sandelowski (2010) argued that
both of the descriptive and interpretative approaches contain interpretation while the latter has been downplayed in its broader exploration. As one of the interpretative approaches, Thematic Analysis has been adopted in several research areas, such as physical sciences (Swap et al., 2003), medicine (Gabriel et al., 2000), social sciences (Braun and Clark, 2006), and mathematics (Rooney, 1998).

Scholars in the field of communication studies have also adopted thematic analysis to conduct research, especially in the Internet studies and social media research, such as analyzing Greek adolescents’ digital video making and sharing behaviors on YouTube (Triliva, Varvantakis & Dafermos, 2015), examining the themes reflecting the use of YouTube videos and interactive activities on students’ critical thinking (June, Yaacob & Kheng, 2014). Besides video content, researchers also looked into texts, such as pulling data from Twitter to discover how people’s postings and tweets show grief upon Michael Jackson’s death (Sanderson & Cheong, 2010), producing an integrated conceptual framework to understand adolescent experience of psychiatric medication along with grounded theory and narrative methods (Floersch et al., 2010), examining posts on Twitter about NHL to find four themes including “hope for the future, reminders of the past, information and reassurance, and media engagement” (Frederick, Hamrick & Clavio, 2014), and exploring fan reactions to Floyd Landis and the parasocial interactions on floydlandis.com (Kassing & Sanderson, 2009).

Analysis process

This qualitative approach is applicable to explore viewers’ online interaction with the haul video maker, Bethany Mota. By adopting the method of thematic analysis, I conducted analysis in 6 phases shown in Table 1.
More specifically, I first did an initial active reading through the 400 comments and tried to find any possible patterns. Then I reread all the comments so as to have some prior knowledge of the data and initial thoughts. In the second phase, I created some initial codes, which is “the most basic segment, or element, of the raw data or information that can be assessed in a meaningful way regarding the phenomenon” (Boyatzis, 1998:63). Miles and Huberman (1994) considered this process as part of analysis. An example of coding can be found in Table 2.

Table 1. Processes of data analysis in thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006: 87)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>Description of the process</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Familiarizing yourself with your data</td>
<td>Transcribing data (if necessary), reading and re-reading the data, noting down initial ideas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Generating initial codes</td>
<td>Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Searching for themes</td>
<td>Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Reviewing themes</td>
<td>Checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts (Level 1) and the entire data set (Level 2), generating a thematic ‘map’ of the analysis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Defining and naming themes</td>
<td>Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Producing the report</td>
<td>The final opportunity for analysis. Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating back of the analysis to the research question and literature, producing a scholarly report of the analysis.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2. Codes from data extract (Clarke et al., 2006).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data extract</th>
<th>Coded for</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| it’s too much like hard work I mean how much paper have you got to sign to change a flippin’ name no I I mean no I no we we have thought about it ((inaudible)) half heartedly and thought no no I jus- I can’t be bothered, it’s too much like hard work. (Kate F07a) | 1. Talked about with partner  
2. Too much hassle to change name                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |

In phase 3, I analyzed the codes about how different and similar they are, and classified the different codes into possible themes. I also used mind maps to explore “overarching themes and sub-themes within them” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.89-90). In phase 4, based on the judging categories of internal homogeneity and external heterogeneity (Patton, 1990), I revised the themes in order to determine whether there are repetition or neglecting of themes. I also checked if the themes corresponds with the coded extracts, which was level 1 of analysis, and then I checked to see whether it also corresponds with the entire data set, which was level 2 of analysis. A mind map was also drawn at this stage, which can be seen in Figure 1.
In phase 5, I then further refined and defined the themes that have been generated for analysis. It requires researchers to identify the “essence” of each theme’s definition and its scope (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.92). The themes’ definition, indicators and examples can be found in Table 3. In the final phase, I did a write-up of the findings as the results chapter.
Table 3. Inductive Thematic Elements.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Memory</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Theme 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Label</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Definition</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indicators</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Example</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Theme 2 |
| **Label** | Product recall |
| **Definition** | The ability to recall or recollect certain products. |
| **Indicators** | Referencing certain products in the comments. |
| **Example** | “I loved the high wasted striped shorts” (90) |

| Theme 3 |
| **Label** | Discourse recall |
| **Definition** | The ability to recall remarks irrelevant to clothing items. |
| **Indicators** | Quoting or repeating personae’s remarks or keywords. |
| **Example** | “WATER BUGS YAHSSSS GAGA!!!!” (3655) |

Parasocial interactions

<p>| Theme 1 |
| <strong>Label</strong> | Self-disclosure |
| <strong>Definition</strong> | Willingness to reveal personal and private information. |
| <strong>Indicators</strong> | Disclosing one’s personal details, facts or feelings. |
| <strong>Example</strong> | “…both of my parents are out of work…” (3334) |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Label</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Indicators</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Emotional expression</td>
<td>Expressing emotional feelings and affection for others.</td>
<td>Disclosing one’s affective state toward others.</td>
<td>“I love u so muchxxx” (1769)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived intimacy</td>
<td>Perception of familiarity, closeness or friendship.</td>
<td>Expressing amity, attachment, togetherness, or rapport.</td>
<td>“if you come to Canada ill buy u a donut…” (3498)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involvement</td>
<td>Sense of being involved or participating in other’s life.</td>
<td>Referencing details in other’s life to indicate participation.</td>
<td>“Did you move house??” (2653)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived similarities</td>
<td>Perceptions of being similar or equivalent to others.</td>
<td>Expressing likeness, resemblance, sameness or parallel.</td>
<td>“Yaah twinning!” (3224)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Theme 2
Label Role model
Definition Intentions to see others as an example and to intimate.
Indicators Willingness to emulate, follow, or copy one’s behaviors.
Example “My dream is to be as amazing as Bethany one day!” (76)

Worship

Theme 1

Label Intense-personal
Definition Having intense feelings for idols and to adore them.
Indicators Expressing praise, reverence or adoration for others.
Example “…I love you to the moon and back!!!” (3700)

Theme 2

Label Physical attraction
Definition Adoring other’s physical appearance and being attracted.
Indicators Expressing praise, or adoration for other’s appearance.
Example “Omg I can’t get over how gorgeous you are! :)” (1918)

Theme 3

Label Personality
Definition Adoring other’s characteristics or behavior patterns.
Indicators Expressing praise, or adoration for other’s personality.
Example “…I love your personality and style…”(2581)
# Seeking guidance

## Theme 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Label</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Indicators</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clothing</td>
<td>Asking for advice or help about clothing items or styles</td>
<td>Consulting about instructions on fashion style or practice.</td>
<td>“What would you think about 12-14 year olds wearing…” (831)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Theme 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Label</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Indicators</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Beauty and decoration</td>
<td>Asking for advice or help about beauty and decorations.</td>
<td>Consulting about instructions on makeup or DIY.</td>
<td>“can u please do a makeup tutorial…” (2887)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Theme 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Label</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Indicators</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Life and health</td>
<td>Asking for advice or help about life and health</td>
<td>Consulting about instructions on life or health issues.</td>
<td>“if you made another video about healthy eating…” (3567)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Gratitude

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Label</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Indicators</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gratitude</td>
<td>Showing gratitude or thanking others for help or support.</td>
<td>Expressing gratefulness, thankfulness or appreciation.</td>
<td>“…you helped me with my shyness…” (2427)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Label</td>
<td>Cognitive judgment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>--------------------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definition</td>
<td>Ability to make sensible judgment or conclusions.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indicators</td>
<td>Showing processes of cognition, memory and reasoning.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Example</td>
<td>“you have money don’t mean you magically like everything”(1100)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER THREE

RESULTS

Close relationships are often defined as a certain kind of relationships such as family and friends, or ones that are even more affectionate (Berschied, Snyder, & Omoto, 1989b). Such bonds usually exist in daily life with surrounding people, however, virtual close relationships also exist with people who have never been met. People can form and develop close bonds with characters that are not in the real world (Cohen 1997). Whether haul video makers like Bethany Mota, whom viewers rarely get a chance to meet with, can also build such parasocial close relationships is thus worth exploring.

Although this research focuses on viewers’ comments after watching Bethany Mota’s haul video, it is still essential to also look at the video content itself. Issers (2008) considered verbal strategy to be a series of speech acts in order to achieve communicative goals. The way the “haulers” produce the videos can also be considered as a kind of strategy. I am interested in how specific discourse was depicted in Bethany’s haul videos as a reference source in order to provide a context when analyzing the comments. Therefore, I first watched the haul video, transcribed all the texts and did an analysis on it.

Analysis of the Bethany Mota Haul Video

Informal language. Many researchers have studied linguistic variations shown in mass cultural texts, such as TV series (Stamou, 2011), films (Marriott, 1997), and advertising (Bell, 1992). As social media and UGC play a more crucial role in people’s daily life, such content, including haul videos, also tend to play a role that is more and
more similar to mass media in terms of he amount of viewers and production means. Other researchers have proved that the quotative system, namely dialogues, can be helpful to study the change of language (Romaine & Lange 1991; Ferrara & Bell, 1995; Cukor-Avila, 2002). By looking at the user generated haul videos, and it can seen that there is a certain amount of informal or changing language being used. For instance:

“Sup guys. I am doing a spring clothing haul because recently I got a bunch of really cool clothing pieces that I am honestly beyond excitement to wear for the spring time. Because it is officially spring, and I’m really excited about that, and after that, summer, and sun and everything hot.”

“I’m on cloud nine, which I was really thinking of anyone specific other than pizza when I read this.”

“You can put them over skirts, dresses or shorts and they just look super adorbs.”

“And the best part is that these are really inexpensive.”

“And the last thing I got at Free People is this amazing amazing necklace.”

“It’s kind of like a, I wouldn’t say a dark washed, It’s kind of like a medium washed, I guess.”

“I just really really love the look of this dress and I saw them and I was like that’s gorgeous.

“These are the sunglasses that are really weird to take selfies with. Because you take a selfie, everybody is like, I see your hands. And I’m like, yeah, same.”

“And we will chill at the beach and be like, water bugs.”

In the texts, there are a couple of misspelled words and some grammar that can be considered as wrong. “Sup” indicates greetings, which is abbreviated from “what’s up.”
“adorbs” is the brief version of “adorable.” Also, there can be more than one “amazing” and “really” in one sentence to express the narrator’s thoughts. These new phenomenon that were once treated as misused, nowadays are more and more widely used among young people, which bring about changes in the way grammar works. Hook (1991) considered that grammaticalization is accompanied by a growing usage of certain texts.

Besides, there is also a great amount of usage of “like.” “Like” can be traced back to the Old English adjective gelic meaning “having the form of” and the relevant adverb “in the same manner or to the same extent as”, with a diachronic development into focuser and quotative usage (Vandelanotte & Davidse, 2009). In recent years, the use of “like” has been expanded. Guldemann (2002) proposed that “like” firstly serves as a quotative marker, and then as a complementizer. “Be like” can also bring about hypothetical discourse (Romaine & Lange, 1991:259).

Originally, “be like” was used in the first person present tense, whereas now it is used to indicate other persons such as “it” in past tense (Cukor-Avila, 2002). As can be seen in this case, “was like” has been adopted to express a past situation, reaction, remarks, etc. “Be like” serves as an announcement that there will be a partial imitation about what the speaker said (Vandelanotte & Davidse, 2009). “I’m like,” as an “imitation clause,” could be viewed as a “reporting clause” meaning “I said” (Vandelanotte & Davidse, 2009). Such new usage has become a new phenomenon among young people, which aroused attention from the academia.

Some researchers proposed that “be like” are more used by teenagers and people in their early twenties (Blyth et al, 1990:219; Ferrara and Bell, 1995:286; Singler 2001: 267). Young females are also thought to use “be like” more often (Vandelanotte &
Davidse, 2009). Other researchers added, although the use of “be like” has also been considered to have sociological distribution, originated with “young, white, female speakers in the US, especially California,” now it is also widely used among both men and women with different age groups in countries such as UK and Canada (Tagliamonte & Hudson, 1999; Tagliamonte & D’Arcy, 2004; D’Arcy, 2004), Australia (Winter, 2002) and Scotland (Macaulay, 2001).

Ferrara and Bell (1995:278-279) proposed that “be like” can be associated with groups’ collective thoughts and habitual thoughts and speech. It is also considered to correlate with high scores for solidarity and low scores for status values, which indicates that its users are perceived to be more friendly, pleasant, and attractive and to be less educated and intelligent respectively (Dailey-O’Cain, 2000). While users did expand, youth and females are still heavily mentioning about it in daily discourse, which can also be seen in haul videos. Compared with viewers’ perceptions about the haul video maker, Bethany Mota, in the following sections, relevant identification and fondness can be found.

**Self-disclosure.** Researchers define self-disclosure as verbally revealing personal information and verbal information formed (Berg & Derlega, 1987; Cozby, 1973; Derlega et al., 1993; Jourard, 1971). In terms of the setting, haul videos are always shot in bedrooms, one of the most intimate spaces. In terms of the narrations, besides discussing about personal shopping styles and items, there are also detailed personal information and affairs, which can be viewed as self-disclosure. Altman and Taylor (1973) developed social penetration theory proposing that the level of self-disclosure increase along with relationship’s development.
Such disclosure is considered to be important in viewer relationships. It plays a crucial role in relational communication in close relationships (Cozby, 1973; Derlega, Wilson, & Chaikin, 1976; Derlega et al., 1993; Sprecher & Hendrick, 2004). First, self-disclosure can help maintain relationships by establishing “shared meaning system” (Duck, 1994; Sprecher & Hendrick, 2004). Second, Holmes and Rempel (1989) proposed that self-disclosure can help get more knowledge about each other, decrease relational uncertainty, and form the foundation for relational trust. Third, many researchers suggested the link between self-disclosure in relationships and quality of close relationships such as attraction, satisfaction and trust (Cozby, 1973; Derlega et al., 1993; Collins & Miller, 1994; Sprecher & Hendrick, 2004).

It is especially important to pay attention to self-disclosure when studying haul videos, since viewers’ attitude towards the video makers matters in terms of credibility issues and purchasing intentions. Sample texts can be found below:

“Now before some of you guys ask, there’s cartoon on the television because my niece was just here and she was watching cartoons. And it was not me, don’t worry. Actually I do watch cartoons sometimes. No shame.”

“Yes, I have an Olaf finger puppy. Actually not mine. This is Marie’s, and I stole it from her because it’s cute. I don’t know. I am just gonna leave the cartoon on because because lazy.”

“The amount of daisy clothing items that I own at this point is kind of ridiculous.”

“I have this really weird obsession with pineapples and watermelons.”
“It has this eyelet detail and I thought it was gorgeous especially once I start getting a tan, when I start actually going outside. OK. Maybe I won’t be getting a tan this summer.”

“There is the pineapple obsession.”

“Alright, so that is it for my spring clothing haul. I hope you guys enjoyed it. If you like it, then give it a thumbs up. Just a little thumb, a little thumb. Anyway, I love you guys so much thank you so much for watching and I will see you in my next video.”

It can be seen that Bethany Mota discloses self-information frequently and constantly. Researchers proved that self-disclosure can not only build and maintain relationships, but also incite positive perceptions. Collins and Miller (1994) suggested that self-disclosure can help create a disclosure-liking effect. It can be helpful for individuals with appropriate self-disclosure to build a positive impression, since it can be a sign of hoping to be more intimate and promote liking (Altman & Taylor, 1973; Vittengl & Holt, 2000; Worthy, Gary, & Kahn, 1969). From a marketing perspective, building trust, enhancing relationships and promote liking can be critical to consumers’ attitude and purchase behaviors. In the following analysis of the viewer comments, a high degree of trust and liking has been found.

**Social reality as non-advertisements.** At the beginning of the haul video, Bethany was sitting at a bedroom as usual, where viewers can see a bed, drawer, TV, etc. There is a slight background noise with a TV program’s moving pictures still on. She herself said that it was a cartoon watched by her niece, let the audiences not worry about it and then confessed that she did watch some cartoons sometime. Later, she wore a finger puppy and claimed that it was stolen from her niece as well. As in normal
advertisements, such contents related to a family member and personal life will not be shown. She also talks about how she had “obsessions” with pineapples, watermelons, daisies, etc. The way she describes and talks about things around her to the camera is more like talking to a friend face to face.

Mass culture plays a significant role in creating the late modern social reality, those texts help construct the linguistic variation (Coupland, 2009). Nowadays, user generated contents can also help create social reality with a wider variety of audiences. Haul videos, do not just promote products, they appear to be information sharing among customers, which are non-advertisements. As self-disclosure can be treated as creating and developing interpersonal relationship (Derlega et al., 1993), it has also been found to be positively related to trust (Wheeless & Grotz, 1977). Embracing audiences’ trust, these eWOM videos, as non-advertisements, usually create such social reality that certain products are very popular and fashionable. Everyone else is buying them, or the narrator is also buying them, indicating that the viewers can also buy the products.

“And last from Forever 21, I got a bunch of headbands, because I have been really into headbands.”

“I really want to find an oversized denim jacket just because I’ve been seeing them a lot recently and I just love how they look.”

“Next at Urban, I’ve been really into oversized like tshirt dresses, so I found this one which is grey and has a sunflower on it.”

“And I got this really cool dress thing, which some people might not like, but I’ve been seeing a lot recently and I finally caved in and got it.”

“I just hit myself.”
“Oh my god. That was a spider crawling on me. Was a fuzz.”

Although haul videos are made by the so-called “average people” instead of experts, professional companies, or celebrities, they are always heavily edited, with a faster tempo and smoother conversation. However, information about that the narrator sometimes hit her head, or that there was a spider, was never cut. It is as naturally shot and edited as it can be. As discussed before, self-disclosure is one of the most common acts to develop close relationship (Derlega et al., 1993). Bickmore (2003) found that social dialogue such as small talks are helpful to trigger positive responses from users. Based on this close relationship and trust, the narrator frequently used the phrase “have been seeing it a lot,” and “have really been into.” It forms this popular social reality to persuade people to buy it without seeming intentional.

Helpfulness. Last, haul videos are not just about sharing what narrators have bought, but also include fashion tips about what to buy, how to match clothing pieces, and seasonal styles. Therefore, such content can also be helpful. In Bethany Mota’s haul video, she also described the items in details so as to better inform the viewers of their style and fashion elements.

“It is just a very small floral print and has some lace trim at the top.”

“I think it’s gonna be gorgeous with like a white dress in spring time.”

“I also saw this bikini top, and I just thought it was really cute. It will go with a lot of bottoms that I get for the spring and summer time.”

“I don’t know what it is about these, but I really really really really really love them. And yes these are high-waisted as well, because I just like high-waisted shorts. So I got those ones.”
“*I just think it is very bohemian and really really pretty.*”

**Analysis of the Viewer Comments**

After analyzing the haul video’s contents, I also studied the spontaneous comments and feedbacks directly pulled from YouTube comments. By taking a random sampling and using thematic analysis to study the viewer comments, I answered all the research questions:

**RQ1: Do the comment themes in Bethany Mota’s haul video reflect a high elaboration likelihood state or a low elaboration likelihood state?**

**Cognitive judgment**

While the majority of comments are positive filled with love and appreciation posted by the hauler’s fans, there are also negative comments, showing both of the peripheral and central route. However, only one theme reflecting the latter has been found, namely cognitive judgment. For example, the viewer noticed that the hauler showed unbelievable love for too many clothes and products, or pointed out that Bethany was not seen wearing any of her suggested items. Unlike most of the comments that talked about how beautiful she and clothes were, or how funny and happy she looked, some of the viewers induced more cognitive resources to contemplate on the way she promoted things and double-checked whether she actually loved wearing certain items which she has recommended. Some even criticized the contemporary way of life in the business world.

“*Bethany doesn't really wear the clothing pieces you buys in her hauls... I wonder why*” (3310)
“+Jodie Bell When I say ultimate consumer I mean she likes EVERYTHING! Just because you have money doesn’t mean you magically like everything. I mean I can afford harem pants or those pajama pants but I wouldn’t ever buy them because I personally don’t like them. You understand what i’m saying now??” (1100)

“are you mentally retarded?” (111)

“The world is over. This page is one example.” (3670)

As cognitive judgment was the only theme reflecting viewers’ concerns about argument quality to take the central route, it can be seen that the majority of the viewers showed a low elaboration likelihood state when judging the argument quality of the hauler. In this way, they may appear more vulnerable in front the recommended information made by the haul video maker and more easily influenced by the content so that future studies can take a further look at such issues.

**RQ2: What themes do viewers recall after watching Bethany Mota’s haul video?**

After being aware of something, the further step is to recall it later. Being able to bring things up again indicates that the information has successfully been processed and memorized by people’s brains. Consumers usually make purchasing decisions with the help of their brain (Schiffman and Kanuk, 2007). Since individuals usually make decisions based on their prior memory in order to feel more secured about the result and reduce risks, it is of importance to see what the viewers recall about products or services. The researcher looked at what people recalled after watching the video,
compared it with the haul video maker’s narration and discovered three themes, namely brand recall, product recall and discourse recall.

**Memory**

**Brand recall.** The first theme that viewers recall is about brands. In this video, Bethany mainly talked about products from three brands, namely Forever 21, Urban Outfitters, and Pacsun. After talking about the new clothing items and accessories that she has bought, she also asked her audiences which ones were their favorites. The viewers mentioned brands that were both shown and not shown in the video. I counted the times for which people said that they loved it and kept their favorite brands that have been mentioned about more than 5 viewers. They are Forever 21 (N=93), Aeropostale (N=41), PacSun (N=25), H&M (N=20), Urban Outfitters (N=14), American Eagle (N=7), Brandy Melville (N=7), Rue 21 (N=7), Hollister (N=5).
As can be seen, all of the three brands that Bethany has talked about were among the top favorite choices, ranking as number 1, 3 and 5 respectively. Some of the viewers even said that it is because of the hauler that she stepped in a certain store, indicating the effects of her videos. Some of the quotes from the viewers include:

“I swearrr if it weren't for your videos I would've never stepped a foot into urban outfitters”

“Forever 21<3” (2054)

“Forever 21 and Urban Outfitters are my favorite clothing store by far”(1374)

“I would have to say my favorite clothing store is definitely Forever 21!”(3647)

“I liked all the clothes you got from Forever 21, Urban Outfitters, Pacsun, and Free People.”(159)

“Pacsun and Aeropostale love you!”(3463)

It is also worth mentioning that although Bethany didn’t mention about Aeropostale in this video, she did talk about their products in other haul videos. Most importantly, Aeropostale has launched a Bethany Mota line with her designs and featuring her as a model. Casey (2006) argued that companies have launched celebrity-brand lines to attract customers and compete with other brands. Trump Super Premium Vodka has been the most popular celebrity-branded spirit in 2006 (Kiley, 2007). Pringle (2004) proposed that Trump has successfully utilized his skills and reputation for brand extensions in relevant industries. Comments below also showed how viewers are influenced by Bethany from the comments:

“my favorite clothing store is Aeropostale because your clothes r in there and they have AMAZING clothes!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!1”(3537)
“Aeropastle because your clothes are there!! They are amazing and so are you!” (3784)  

“Aeor cuz it has your clothing line” (1820)  

“My favorite clothing store is areopostale because that's where I buy my BETHANY MOTA DESIGNED OUTFITS!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!” (3493)

Aaker and Keller (1990) proposed that it is essential for brands to launch extensions in order to maintain its competitive advantage. Nowadays, launching new lines or cooperating with celebrities and designers has become a new trend. The closest relationships between celebrities and brands are those products developed and marketed by celebrities themselves (Pringle and Binet, 2005, p.206). Aeropostale, with a Bethany Mota line and her featuring catalog photos, therefore ranked as the second most popular brand among the haul video viewers.

Brand is the most valuable asset for companies (Keller, 1993). Positive feelings toward brands are thus crucial for maintaining their values and status. Keller (2007) found that positive reviews on products or services can strongly predict business growth. As discussed before, in Bethany Mota’s haul videos, she talked about how happy she was and how beautiful the items were, which were all positive reviews. After exploring the viewers’ comments, it has been found that among the five most favorable brands, three of them, namely Forever 21, PacSun and Urban Outfitters have been reviewed by the hauler. Besides H&M, the other one that were in the top five brands was Aeropostale which has launched a Bethany Mota line.

**Product recall.** The second theme viewers recall is about products mentioned by Bethany Mota. While directly recalling the brands might consume more cognitive
resources, many viewers could recall some of the recommended products. Some of the key words that she has strongly highlighted, such as the “pineapple obsession,” “mint,” and “pocket,” have also been recalled for many times. Some of the examples could be found below:

“I really liked the sunglasses” (1042)

“I NEED THAT PINEAPPLE HAT. IM SO OBSESED WITH PINEAPPLES ITS KINDA RIDICIOLUS” (714)

“My favorite clothing item would have to be the teal/mintish crop top with the black pocket!” (1258)

“i loved all of it because i just love your fashion sense but my fav has to be the pineapple hat!!” (2032)

“Loved all of the clothes I'm definitely going to have to take a look at those stores more often! I love your videos keep posting you're beautiful ^^^^^^ I say that line too much” (545)

“I loved the floral/ lace trim dress from urban outfitters!” (3529)

**Discourse recall.** Viewers also recall the third theme which is the hauler’s discourse. Besides the specific brand and product, many viewers also mentioned about what Bethany has talked that was irrelevant to any product information. Most of the contents were identical, centering on “water bug,” “sunglasses,” and “pizza.” The viewers found them to be hilarious by stating contents such as “laughed so hard” or typing “XD” to indicate a smiling face. Also, some of them put it that it reflected Bethany’s personality and also considered it to be the reason why they love her.

“everybody's like "i see your hand"and I'm like "yeah same" XD (1432)
“WATER BUGS YAHSSSSS GAGA!!!! (3655)

“"Yeah, Same." This chick has some energy. it's great." (3445)

“"Pizza, shout out to you" This is why I love this girl” (1954)

“I just be chilling at the beach like *puts down glasses* water bugs I laughed so hard bc vine reference” (4084)

“People be like , I can see your arm . Beth - same here” (1261)

“6:53 to 7:04 I was dying” (1985)

RQ3: Are there themes reflecting parasocial interactions between Bethany Mota and the viewers?

With the development of Internet technologies and social media, more and more scholars have started to pay attention to such interactions via other media. As close relationships are usually associated with intimacy, love, and trust (Park, 2007), it remains a question about whether parasocial interactions also depict such themes. From the viewers’ comments, we can see that similar elements to real social interactions appear in online comments, including self-disclosure, emotional expression, perceived intimacy, and involvement.

Parasocial relationships

Self-disclosure. Close relationships provide people with companionship (Rook & Ituarte, 1999), and instrumental and emotional social support (Cutrona & Suhr, 1994, Cunningham & Barbee, 2000). Collins and Miller (1994) considered self-disclosure as an indicator of an intent to establish close relationships with others. By adopting youth discourse and showing more about her personal preferences and life trivia, Bethany has
demonstrated such self-disclosure in the haul video. Correspondingly, the viewers have also shown many details about themselves or their families including their size, financial conditions, parents’ unemployment, etc. From those comments, we can see that the viewers are willing to disclose their personal information that is usually shared among their friends or families.

“If I had anywhere close to the amount of money you have I'd be so happy. Both my parents are out of work and I just wish I could have your clothes. They're all so gorgeous! It would make my life to have your clothes.” (3334)

“My mom and dad saw this vid and now they think your crazy mom still likes you” (1675)

“fav clothing store by far is urban outfitters even though i'm just a little too poor to shop there ..” (773)

“My favorite clothing store is Aeropostale but I can't really fit into some of the clothes cause of my size lol” (460)

“I've been so busy lately and I'm so happy I can watch your videos now again! ” (1414)

**Emotional expression.** Bandura (1986) proposed that individuals can follow the example celebrities simply by imitation instead of building a real friendship with them. Although viewers rarely meet with Bethany Mota, there still appeared emotional expressions about loving her, missing her, feeling happy for her success, etc. They not only used words, but also exclamatory marks, symbols indicating kisses, and abbreviations of kisses and hugs to emphasize their intense emotions toward her.

"Haii beth I just wanted to let u know that I love ur videos and u are so beautiful and u never let people bring u down because u r always so happy ;)” (1111)

“I miss these videos Beth!! Ik your so busy and I’m so happy for you&lt;3” (70)

“i love you bethany but i really miss the \"2013 beth\ you just seemed more yourself. but i still love the way you are right now <3” (926)

“luv you toooo d coooorrreeee BETH xoxoxox can you put more haul videos?”

“I miss Bethany's hauls ......” (142)

“I miss when you posted videos weekly” (10)

**Perceived intimacy.** Friends in real life usually contact each through a variety of means including face-to-face, letters, or media. Technologies have provided people with close connections to others in the virtual world, which also enables individuals to interact with celebrities. It allows “an increasing interactivity with stars, creating a greater sense of the immediacy of connection” (Hayward, 2008, p.266). Media users are usually very active rather than passive in interactions with media personas (Kassing & Sanderson, 2010). With such technological advancement in social media, celebrities’ followers have been found to adopt this means frequently to express themselves and to have further contact. The viewers have also tried to stay in touch with Bethany via phone calls, Snapchat, or by meeting with her in person. Some even offered to buy her food when
meeting her, which indicates a high level of intimacy. There are also a few viewers asking her to do a room tour that is usually shared among good friends.

“Heu beth i lpved your new videos they are amazing. You should do a heybeth episode so that i can send you a letter and my number so that we can talk xoxo” (82)

“What’s your snapchat? :”) (313)

“omg your clothes are soo beautiful love you come to NYC” (2788)

“Bethany can you come to Greece? I want to meet you but I can't come to America :( ILY” (3432)

“forever 21 is my fav plzz come to minnesota!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!111” (1188)

“Aeropostale and if u would come to the crossroads mall in West Virginia that would be amazbeans... I love u and your vids and I hope to see you soon..” (2908)

“If you come to Canada ill buy u a donut and a pizza;)” (3498)

“Roooom tour plzzzz” (2612)

**Involvement.** Originally as a kind of product review video, haul videos are mainly for informational purposes about products and services. However, in Bethany Mota’s video, there is also certain personal information about her niece, a finger puppy of Olaf and so on. Although such information is irrelevant to any actual clothing items, viewers still show interest in them and get involvement in such topics that are supposed to be more private. Other than that, since for some viewers, it is not the first time that they watch her videos, they also notice changes about Mota’s house, hair, etc.

“Your niece is the cutest thing, she's so big. She's going to be really tall” (855)

“When Marin said \"why?\" she sounded so adorable lol” (2753)
“Aww you had 'The Hive' on in the background on the tv :-)” (3037)

“Did you move house??” (2653)

“Did you dye your hair or is it just lighter with the sun???” (998)

“OMG y don't you have a boyfriend” (1509)

“ BETHANY GUESS WHAT FROZEN FEVER IS COMING OUT!!!?” (64)

“Bethnay what is your favorite move right now by the way I love olaf” (3693)

RQ 4: Are there themes reflecting identification between Bethany Mota and the viewers?

Two themes relevant to identification have been discovered. The first is perceived similarities. While Bethany Mota reviews the products that she bought, she usually provides specific details about their features and fashion elements, as well as her obsession with certain elements. After comparing her and the viewers’ discourse, it has been found that her audiences are excited about sharing similarities with her in the fashion elements and items by typing happy faces, exclamatory marks, and calling them twinning which means that they are like twins. Additionally, they also considered her being “typical” and loved her accordingly. What’s more, another theme reflecting identification is seeing her as a role model. Several viewers have called her an inspiration or hoped to become as good as she is. There were also people who had already started their own haul videos.

Identification

Perceived similarities. An audience can identify with characters who “break the fourth wall”, which is looking directly at the camera, and build parasocial relationships (Auter, 1992). Haul video makers like Bethany Mota always looked directly at the
camera as if they were talking to the viewers face to face. When the other is included in
the self, individuals treat resources, behaviors, and traits of the other in a relationship as
their own and their cognitions and motives are influenced by the overlapp (Aron et al.,
1991; Sedikides et al.,1998). It is by this influence that viewers tend to resonate with the
hauler, be more certain about their fashion taste and preferences, and imitate what the
haul video is talking about and indicate stronger purchase intentions.

“your so typical and I love that about you” (3892)

“Omg! I have a watermelon and pineapple obsession too! Me and my friend call
each other pineapple and watermelon!”(16)

“Mint green is my fav color too TWINNING LOL????”(54)

“I totally understand the fruit thing ha I feel the same way when I see anything
with elephants ;p” (3768)

“Bethany! I have the same denim jacket! Yaay twinning!” (3224)

“Bethany! We’re short twinswies!!!!” (425)

Rubin and McHugh (1987) considered parasocial interaction as long-term
identification or parasocial relationship with a performer in media. When talking about
clothes, Bethany Mota also mentions both the item details and her personal feelings
toward them. Her narrative arouses resonance from viewers who perceive similarities
with the video maker. The viewers have shown understanding about their common
thoughts, and excitement about sharing similar preferences and interests with Bethany.
People use many exclamatory marks to show their emotions and some even say that it is
the reason why they loved Mota.
**Role model.** When viewers identify with the media performers, they sometimes imagine themselves being presented. Audience members can “assume the identity, goals, and perspectives of a character” (Cohen, 2001, p.261). They may start “working on one’s identity and reflecting on one’s own personality” (Trepte 2005, p.170). That is when viewers start to consider the performers as role models and try to imitate their characteristics, and behaviors. Bethany Mota’s fans also show such intentions as starting seeing her as an inspiration and also becoming more confident about themselves.

“**omg im trying to do what you do but im no good! but you are the best and are my inspiration I love you so much**” (1483)

“**You are such an inspiration to me**” (99)

“Your style tho! >>>> Love it! You've definitely inspired me to be more myself with my style :) My favorite stores are Forever 21 and Rue 21! Love you, Bathers! :)” (1646)

“**Bethany, you are such an inspiration! xoxo**” (2412)

“**My dream is to be as amzing as Bethany one day! :) Do you wanna make my dream come true? :)**) Only if you want to:)”(76)

Identification is defined as discovering one’s reflection in the social setting, and thereby becoming a group member both mentally and in actual behavior. (Burke, 1973, p.227). It has been considered as indicating a sense of imitating another person (Kelman, 1961, p.63). Since identification can affect individuals’ perceptions about the self and others, it potentially has an impact on their beliefs and behaviors.

**RQ 5: Are there themes reflecting worship between Bethany Mota and the viewers?**
Researchers have defined the “intense-personal” level of worship as involving intense feelings toward celebrities (Maltby et al., 2005). Such a theme has been found in the comments as viewers described how they loved the hauler. Besides, worship of her physical attraction has been discovered. Surprisingly, there are also viewers adoring her personality. From those three themes, we can see that people worship her not only in general but also it extends to appearances or characteristics.

Worship

Intense-personal. Celebrity worship is thought to be identical to worship of God (Maltby et al., 2002). Fans are likely to provide unconditional love for their idol and perceive them as a source of happiness. Researchers have discussed the medium level of worship, “intense-personal,” as regarding the intense feelings that audiences have for their idols such as viewing them as “soul mate” and pay much attention to their information (Maltby et al., 2005). While Bethany has millions of subscribers, won the Teen Choice Award, showed up on Dancing with the Stars, and has her line of clothes, he is already a celebrity, despite the fact that she rose to stardom from a normal teen. Her fans have also show the intense-personal worship for her, expressing strong love for her, and considered watching her as a satisfying experience.

“+Bethany Mota My day is perfect bc u complete my day everyday!” (3091)

“OMG I love love love you outfits, they are so cute. love watching ur videos. an will continue to watch for ever.”(3081)

“Could you pretty please do a april favs vid? I love all your videos and I really love fav videos, especially your ones!!!! Your amazing beth and I love you to the moon and back!!!!!” (3700)
“My favorite store is probably Forever 21!!! I also lobe u! U are like my idol. I
look up to u!” (3801)

Fans usually project a kind of religious and worshipful admiration towards
celebrities, including “the communal nature of devotion, the reverence toward relics, and
the sense of intimacy” (Giles, 2003, p.198). Although Bethany Mota and other haul video
makers are the so-called grass roots, the successful ones have already started to rise to
stardom with millions of fans, advertising contracts and opportunities to show up in the
traditional mass media. From the comments, it has been discovered that there are themes
about worship for her.

**Physical attraction.** Attractive people are considered to be more popular,
smarter and more trustworthy than others (Feingold, 1992). Chaiken (1979) also argued
that attractive people are more likely to affect people’s attitude change. As an important
variable when discussing persuasion, it is also worth discovering whether such content
also exists in viewers’ feedbacks. Since clothing haul videos concern the fashion and
beauty industry, it is not surprising that viewers talk about how beautiful the hauler is,
with interjections indicating their strong emotions and symbols representing smiles and
kisses to the hauler.

“Omg I can't get over how gorgeous you are! :")”(1918)

“Your extremely beautiful! :-)”(3645)

“you ssooooooo beautiful <3” (1705)

“You can wear everything you r sooo beautiful I love you” (428)

“omg y do u have to be so perfect”(251)
**Personality.** While some people worship the hauler as a beauty and fashion guru, some others adore her personality. As the discourse analysis shows, the hauler has portrayed a very easy going, fun, natural, and happy style, which has also been noticed by the viewers. They commented about how they loved the fact that Bethany is always happy and self-confident, sweet, genuine, or that she is a very humorous person. At the same time, they also expressed the love and appreciation for her, some of who were even from Netherlands.

“this is only the second video of yours that I have seen. It's great. I don't normally watch (or like) beauty guru type videos, but I feel like with you I can see that you are a genuine, sweet person. congrats on all that you've accomplished.”(1539)

“Haii beth I just anted to let u know that I love ur videos and u are so beautiful and u never let people bring u down because u r always so happy ;)”(2229)

“Love the way you're Always so happy and not ashamed for what you like. Can i ask you what your real instagram is? I find all of these fake ones.. Love you're videos. True fan! All the way from The Netherlands. Kisses from me”(2195)

“lmfaooo you are so hilarious, I love your personality and style.my favorite stores aeropostale American eagle and forever 21”(2581)

“The mint t-shirt was super cute! I love mint! You're so much fun to watch! :)” (603)

“I hated all of it! just kidding ilysm Bethany...you make a crappy day into a land of unicorns that poop bunnies and shit I dunno but yh... Never ever stop making videos, even when you are 89 and you are in an old peoples home, still vlog and tell all those old
RQ 6: What are other themes about Bethany Mota’s haul videos generated from the viewer’s comments?

Besides the four major themes concerning audience involvement with the performers, two other themes also appeared, namely seeking guidance, and gratitude. In terms of the theme of seeking guidance, there are three areas: clothing, beauty and decoration, and life and health.

Seeking guidance

Clothing. Media users identify with a media persona, become interested in him or her, and respect his or her problem-solving abilities (Auter & Palmgreen, 2000). Under this premise, such experiences will not only affect viewers’ cognitions, but also their actual behaviors. Viewers may thus “seeking guidance from media personae, seeking media personalities as friends, imagining being part of a favorite program’s social world, and desiring to meet media performers” (Rubin, Perse, and Powell, 1985, p. 156-157). Since Bethany is a fashion hauler, many viewers seek informational help that is about clothes or simply ask her to upload more haul videos.

“You should do a beaten suit collection!” (721)

“Do a closet tour! :D So excited to see one :)” (2919)

“Please do a may favourites, my life is basically bethay watching and eating pizza” (1419)

“Do another haul summer video, plis!!” (987)
“What would you think about 13-14 year olds wearing crop tops? Well, I wanted to buy a crop top and wear it with a high waisted skirt or high waisted shorts but, some people think that it is inappropriate so... What do you think?:)” (831)

**Beauty and decoration.** Besides clothing items, viewers also asked for her guidance in relevant areas, the fashion and beauty tips, such as make up tutorial, DIY, etc.

“can u please do a makeup tutorial on the exact makeup look you did in this video??? it's fab and makes your appearance even brighter!!! i need to know how to do it <3 like this if you agree (2887)

“Hi beth can you please do more diys maybe for 4th of July just a suggestion” (921)

“do more DIYS! I just became like OBSESSED with your channel, you're actually why I subscribed to YouTube! lolplease follow me on twitter? :)@tierneyholcombe you're such an inspiration and now like all of your DIYs are going up in my room! Lol” (3251)

**Life and health.** Many researchers argued that trust is most crucial to most close relationships such as family, friends, and lovers, which is also a principal standard to evaluate close relationships (Larzelere & Huston, 1980; Rempel, Homes, & Zanna, 1985). Due to the utter trust in Mota, some people even ask her for help concerning other irrelevant areas, such as school survival tips, healthy eating and exercise tips. At the same time, when seeking support from her, they also expressed love for her by using “xoxo” which means kisses or hugs or the symbol of “<3.”

“Could you make a younger kids video for survival for middle school love u Beth your the best and I hope u have an awesome spring xoxo”(3186)
“Hi Bethany! I'm struggling while trying to ready myself for swim suite season. I would so appreciate it if you made another video about healthy eating and some of your exercise tips if you ever happen to see this! Not only to give some good ideas to people but it would also be a good MOTAvation coming from someone that so many admire! Thanks so much! I love your videos <3xoxo, Karly” (3567)

Holmes and Rempel (1989) called trust in close relationships as “confident expectations of positive outcomes from an intimate partner.” From these themes, we can see that the viewers how a great level of trust in the haul video maker, not only in her specialty but also in many other areas. Researchers have also found that user-generated comments can reduce consumers’ search costs in finding preferable products (Chen, Wu and Yoon, 2004). There are two kinds of cost that customers need to search for to gain helpful information: 1) the physical search costs which require time, and 2) cognitive search costs which require more thinking and contemplation (Johnson, Bellman, and Lohse, 2003). It could help us explain why viewers would ask her for guidance and tips as it could save the costs in time and cognitive resources that people will spend.

Gratitude

After watching her videos, there are also viewers expressing gratitude for her videos and presentations. Most of such thankful messages are for her guidance on fashion styles and clothing shopping. Surprisingly, there was even a viewer talking about how the hauler’s videos have helped her overcome shyness and provided support for her social life.

“i wouldn't be who I am if i didn't watch your videos i would have the ugliest style” (2767)
“Bethany I watched a lot of your video and you helped me with my shyness. A week ago I sang in front of lots of people even though I have stage fright thank you so much keep on making new videos you’re the best bye:) 3” (2427)
CHAPTER FOUR

DISCUSSION

This research involves an exploratory case study of the viewer comments (UGC) concerning a “haul video” produced by Bethany Mota. The purpose of the study was to see what kind of themes emerged from a Thematic Analysis of the content of the viewers’ comments. The following discussion will summarize the findings of this study, which provide an interesting set of reactions to haul videos. Due to the interpretative nature of the form of thematic analysis used, the themes that were found should serve as the outline of a set of hypotheses for future research using methods focused on generalizability.

Findings

When evaluating celebrities’ messages, is it easier for fans to focus more on peripheral cues than to become involved in elaborating on elements of the arguments in the message? In the present exploratory study, I looked into audiences’ involvement in the video content and their interactions with the video maker by looking at user-generated comments from the YouTube haul video made by Bethany Mota through a thematic analysis.

The majority of Bethany Mota’s haul video viewers took the peripheral route instead of the central route in interacting with her in their comments after watching the video, and thus had low elaboration likelihood state. They paid more attention to the hauler’s personality, physical attraction, humor and their perceived similarities, but only a
few viewers focused more on cognitive judgments such as the fact that Mota liked too many items and never actually wore them, which might seem unrealistic.

RQ 2 asked about what themes viewers recalled to find that not only products or brands, but also Bethany’s discourse have been recollected. Most of the top brands mentioned by viewers either were recommended by Mota or are a line designed by her. When recalling products, the viewers adopted specific descriptions that the hauler used. As brand awareness on the Internet can also have an impact on people’s purchasing decisions (Nysveen & Pedersen, 2005), such kind of recall after exposing to the haul video thus worth more attention. Besides, there were also themes about discourse recall, the majority of which was about how funny and hilarious the contents were.

The third research question was about whether themes were present in the viewers’ comments that indicated that they formed a parasocial relationship with the person in the “haul video”. The findings showed that themes about the entire audience involvement process existed in the comments. First, there was self-disclosure as viewers talked about their financial conditions, body sizes, and even parents’ unemployment situations. Second, they expressed emotions when they appeared to be in an interpersonal conversation about how they loved the hauler and missed her. Furthermore, there was a perceived intimacy and involvement with Mota indicating a sense of familiarity and virtual involvement in her life.

As discussed, two themes relevant to identification emerged. The first is perceived similarity. While Bethany Mota reviewed the products that she bought, she usually provided specific details about its features and fashion elements, as well as her
obsession with certain elements. The viewers were found to be excited about sharing similarities with her and identified with her as a role model, calling her an inspiration.

A sense of worship was present in themes of intense-personal, physical attraction and personality. Viewers described how they loved the hauler as their “idols.” There was also a theme of physical attraction where the viewers discussed how beautiful, gorgeous and perfect she was. Surprisingly, there was also the theme related to positive aspects of her personality. The viewers expressed how they loved and admired her because of sweet, hilarious and happy personality.

Finally, there were three other themes dealing with seeking guidance, gratitude and cognitive judgment. As a haul video maker, it is not a surprise that viewers would ask for the hauler’s guidance concerning clothing items, fashion style, and beauty tips, but also life and health. Furthermore, as for the theme of gratitude, viewers mainly expressed their thankfulness to the hauler for her fashion style tips and for her characteristic ways of portraying herself and her communication styles.

**Implications**

Schau and Gilly (2003) proposed that consumers can build their images by showing their possessions, purchased brands, and other kinds of symbols both online and offline. Nowadays, as social media become more and more important as part of people’s life, individuals are likely to share with the Internet users their purchasing behaviors and opinions. This new form of UGC has appeared in forums, review websites and social media, which promoted a new kind of media called haul videos. This kind of video is worth exploring because it is supposed to be different from the advertisements whose
influence people are more and more equipped to avoid. The findings of this study indicate that these forms of UGCs are increasingly evident in haul videos and viewer comments about them.

WOW has been considered credible due to its non-commercial features (Godes and Mayzlin, 2004). Technologies have broken the limitations of ace-to-face WOW by enabling a new form named eWOW. In order to gain more consumer attention and visits, companies are also taking more advantage of the Internet as a tool to comment on products (Chatterjee, 2001). Such a kind of UGC has a low cost and is relatively easy to produce but consumers sometimes may have difficulty distinguishing the authentic UGC from the fake ones.

Researchers have been promoting more knowledge and awareness of such phenomenon. The question has been raised as to how well consumers, especially younger people, are able to evaluate such content and make decisions about purchasing behaviors. Many researchers have examined the impact of certain platforms such as UGCs and eWOMs on potential consumers, in studies on online hotel reviews (Vermeulen & Seegers, 2009), online reviews and sales information on shopping websites (Etzion & Awad, 2007), and reviews from social media (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010).

Researchers have paid attention to UGC and eWOM feedback created by people using online pseudonyms who do not regularly post contents like what mass media do. Haul videos, on the contrary, are provided by people who post regularly, show their personal information and faces in front of the cameras, dress up beautifully, and earn themselves a kind of celebrity status. Yet the haulers still appear to be just a “normal”
person who shares their favorite new items. Therefore, I argue that haul videos are not the normal type of UGC and eWOM due to such features am curious about the relationship between the haulers and viewers, whether there is a celebrity effect, and whether viewers have utilized much cognitive resource to perceive such contents. The findings show that the viewers and the hauler Bethany Mota have formed parasocial relationships, they treated her as a celebrity and rarely take the central route to analyze her argument quality.

While it is unknown whether these findings are atypical, they can raise awareness of new emerging forms of UGC and eWOM and shed light upon further research directions for defining and studying consumer reviews. As social media users become more and more professional, and people seem to be more dependent on acquiring information from those platforms, it might seem that online communities, which provide uncensored information, may also be perceived as a more mainstream way to create stardom. Celebrities, such as YouTube haul video makers, have emerged from UGC and eWOM productions. It thus remains a question as to whether researchers can keep categorizing all the knowledge sharing information about products or services into one layer, or whether theories in other areas such as fandom and celebrity studies should be incorporated.

Furthermore, this research also focused on the audiences’ involvement and interactions with the content creator and the content itself. It has been argued that the relationship between the information sender and receiver is worth exploring, since it is related to closeness and trust. For decades, interpersonal relationships have been studied by academia, since they are considered to influence human behaviors (Berscheid, 1994; Reis, Collins, & Berscheid, 2000). Many researchers have shown that close relationships
between family, friends, and lovers have the strongest impact on human cognition and behavior among the variety of relationships (Aron, Paris, & Aron, 1995; Popovic, 2005). They were also considered to significantly influence each other’s behavior and perception of self (Berscheid & Reis, 1998; Aron et al., 1991).

When talking about close relationships, closeness is regarded as cognitive closeness rather than actual activities of the relationship partners (Park, 2007). However, while the narrator in haul videos is communicating with viewers virtually, the amount and quality of information she discloses affects such cognitive closeness as if they have known each other for a long time. If people are mutually aware of each other in an interaction, there is a tendency that they will adjust their behaviors according to the other person (Goffmann, 1983). Hence, Goffman (1983) proposed that there needs to be an immediate sense of mutual awareness and attention in a parasocial experience with TV performers. Berscheid and Reis (1998) also argued that two people are in a relationship when they interact with each other, and each person’s behavior influences the other one for an additional period of time.

As an exploratory study, this research looked into the spontaneous comments made by the haul video viewers and discovered the themes generated from them in this case study. From the results, it can be seen that the viewers who watched Bethany Mota’s haul video have established a closer relationship with the video maker and showed a great level of trust in them. Parasocial interactions share many similarities with social interactions except that it is unidirectional (Rubin & McHugh, 1987) and illusory (Horton & Strauss, 1957). Originally, researchers discussed how viewers establish such virtual relationships with TV performers (Grant, Guthrie & Ball-Rokeach, 1991, p.787). With
the development of the Internet technologies and social media, more and more scholars have started to pay attention to such interactions via other media. As close relationships are usually associated with intimacy, love, and trust (Park, 2007), it always remains a question about whether parasocial interactions also depict such kind of themes. As discussed, themes pertaining to parasocial interactions have been found when viewers commented after watching Bethany Mota’s haul video on YouTube.

Previously, researches on UGC and eWOM paid more attention to their impact on consumers’ attitude and behavior changes. However, extant research often overlooks the potential relationships and closeness built among consumers and viewers themselves. As parasocial relationships have an impact on trust, cognition and behaviors, such virtual interpersonal relationships might also be considered as an important independent variable or mediating variable for future research.

Since haul videos appear to be more about sharing things as a form of UGC, there is supposed to be less prominent advertising purposes, whose marketing functions remains unknown. By conducting a exploratory thematic analysis, this study explored the spontaneous comments directly made by viewers who watched Bethany Mota’s haul video, and developed a code scheme that captured the components of parasocial interaction between its product reviewer and viewers, which can shed light for future researchers concerning haul videos’ effects and influences on the viewers’ attitude and behaviors.

Limitations and Future Research

Since this study is an exploratory research, the search questions mainly explore how the audience involves themselves in such media and what themes are generated from
their comments in the YouTube haul videos. There are also a couple of limitations that should be taken into consideration. First, as a case study, there are limitations to its generalization. Future studies need to examine a broader dataset involving more haul videos and haul producers. Furthermore, work is needed on ways to compare reviewer comments with specific haul video content.

Second, since this research adopted an interpretative form of thematic analysis to explore the themes generated from reviewer comments, the addition of quantitative data analysis can specifically test haul videos’ effects. With the popularity of haul videos and more resulting haul video audiences, it will be possible to adopt other research formats such as interviews, surveys, and experiments to evaluate its effects on viewers’ purchasing behaviors. Furthermore, there is a lack of knowledge about haulers and their viewers. Content analysis can be conducted to analyze the haulers’ general characteristics such as race, gender, age, communicative styles, and recommended brands. Surveys can be conducted to know more about viewer’s background information such as race, gender and age. With more understanding about the haul videos in general, we can then be able to better evaluate this new media phenomena in terms of its impact on people’s attitude and purchase behaviors.
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