

An investigation on YouTube and Brand Partnerships

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A case study of Zoella (Zoe Sugg)

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Abstract

YouTube and YouTube personalities are becoming the medium of choice for advertising and marketing campaigns, due to the fact this platform and new age celebrities have such a huge devoted base of followers. This means there is great opportunity for brands to partner with individual YouTubers who fit and live their brands.

The research aimed to identify how an individual can successfully use YouTube to enable a brand to partner with them. In order to determine this, a formula needed to be constructed in order to understand what creates a successful personal brand.

As online personalities are seen to be a fairly new phenomenon, there is a gap in literature explaining the success behind these individuals YouTube channels, personal brands and other merchandise and products they produce.

Through an in-depth analysis of female fashion and beauty YouTuber, Zoe Sugg and her YouTube channel Zoella, the essential tools needed to build and create a successful personal brand were identified.

YouTubers are ultimately seen by their viewers as a friend as opposed to a celebrity. They are perceived to be an individual they can trust and relate to on a personal level. Thus making them accessible and relevant to online viewers and uses today.

Therefore through research it was discovered that the most important elements needed to create a successful personal brand are based on authenticity and transparency of the individual behind the personal brand itself.

Chapter 1: Research Overview

New media and new media personalities are revolutionising the way we see and interact with brands today. New media is content available on-demand through the internet, accessible on any digital device and usually contains interactive user feedback and creative participation (Vogt, 2015).

YouTube is the largest user-driven video content provider in the world as well as home to an array of new online personalities. One of the main reasons for YouTube's success is the user-to-user social experience it offers. YouTube allows for a more intimate and connected relationship between viewers and YouTube Content Creators. This is a huge difference compared to the conventional way of viewing media and thus revolutionising the way in which we consume media today (Wattenhofer et al, 2012).

Over the past two years there has been an immense growth in YouTube viewers which has led to many brands resorting to using YouTube as an advertising and marketing platform to capitalise on the vast amount of viewers.

YouTube now offers a select number of YouTubers partnership opportunities as well as a share in the advertisement revenue, causing a shift in the way content is created and communicated to the viewers. As advertising earnings have increased substantially, many of these individuals no longer have to work traditional jobs as their YouTube advertising and partnership earnings are sufficient enough to earn a living (Wattenhofer et al, 2012).

Through this research I intend to investigate how an individual can successfully use YouTube to enable a brand to partner with them. The aim of this study is to understand how an individual is able to become a successful YouTube Content Creator and thus work and collaborate with a number of different brands.

I find YouTube to be a fascinating and unexplored new form of media. It is a media form that is continuously evolving and offers many avenues to explore. I aspire to one-day work as a brand consultant for YouTube Content Creators as many of these individuals do not have branding experience. A successful and authentic identity is essential for every brand in order to be recognised and accepted by customers and consumers.

In my opinion, one of the most interesting aspects of branding is Personal Branding and therefore, due to the fact that all YouTubers need to successfully brand their identity, it would be an excellent field for me to enter into. I have been an avid YouTube viewer for over four years and am subscribed to a number of different types of channels. I myself would rather be behind the camera focusing on building each YouTuber's brand through creative brand strategies enabling the message and purpose to be the most important aspect rather than actually hosting my own channel.

Through specialising in Multimedia Design in my undergraduate programme, I understand the technical aspects of creating videos as well as the design aspects of creating a personal brand. In addition, I am currently specialising in Strategic Brand Communications which will provide me with the necessary tools to not only be able to creatively conceptualise the brand but I will also be able to strategically build the brand persona.

Through my research I hope to gain a greater understanding of what not only builds and creates a successful personal brand but which elements ensures the brand longevity and desirability to potential external partners as well as viewers. I hope to gain insights that will enable me to create strategies for new YouTubers or YouTubers who wish to expand and grow their channel.

In order to establish how YouTubers achieve success and partnerships with brands, I will be investigating and analysing 25 year old British fashion and beauty YouTuber, Zoe Sugg. Her YouTube channel Zoella, has grown significantly over the last three years which has lead to a number of brands pursuing collaborations and partnerships with her.

This therefore lead me to question what factors have caused the YouTube channel, Zoella to grow so rapidly within the last three years?

In this paper I will discuss several key concepts and themes in attempt to establish and understand what makes a YouTuber successful enough for well-established brands to partner with them.

I also have three main research questions I need to address. These include: Does the authenticity of a personal brand lead to a successful YouTube channel? Is the growth of an individual's YouTube channel relative to the consistency of their personal brand identity? And does the number of views and subscribers of a YouTube channels effect the likelihood of brand partnerships?

A personal brand does not exist in isolation. It is influenced by a number of different factors. The most important factors include how the personal brand wishes others to perceive them and the way in which they want to be position themselves in the market space (YouTube). In order to allow viewers to understand who you are, the individual needs to build a strong brand identity. Once all these elements are correctly formulated, the personal brand should eventually venture into partnerships with other brands.

How a personal brand is constructed and how a successful brand identity is fashioned effectively depends on a clear understanding of concepts of individuality and identity.

Personal Branding is essential for a YouTuber as their identity and brand are the basis for the success of their YouTube channel. Only through fully understanding the concept of *Identity and Individuality* can one establish how these affect a YouTuber's personal brand. To ensure success and popularity, the brand needs to reflect who they are as an individual to their viewers. Through exploring this theme, it will enable a greater understanding into YouTuber Zoella's successful and popular brand image.

When it comes to establishing a successful brand it is imperative to build an authentic brand identity. A brand identity is a set of brand associations that imply a promise to the brand's customers (Aaker. & Joachimsthaler, 2000).

Through assimilating several brand strategy principles in exploring the theme, *Building Brand Identity* we can identify the influences from the previous themes. The identity of a brand needs to be accurate before it can be expanded on, making it essential in understanding how Sugg has successfully built her brand online.

Brand Endorsements and Partnerships is the next area of focus. This theme links specifically to my research question. Partnerships between YouTubers and brands are still a fairly new practice and not widely understood. There is much speculation and skepticism around the ethics and ways in which YouTubers are remunerated to distribute and talk about certain products and services. As this is a new and growing market understanding the ways in which partnerships between brands and YouTubers transpire will be essential to this study.

YouTube as a whole has changed considerably over the past few years. It was previously seen to be a site that offered only comical entertainment. However, with the 'online revolution' and Internet accessibility on the rise, it has become a very important contact point for online personalities to express themselves. There is content available for every individual.

One of the key differences is that, unlike traditional media, YouTube viewers can choose what they wish to view at any time. This therefore makes online content very attractive as it offers viewers the chance to access any content they desire at a time that is convenient to them.

In order to demonstrate the effectiveness of the above mentioned themes and how these, if managed properly, will ensure online success as well as forging brand partnerships I will critically investigate and analyse Sugg's successful fashion and beauty YouTube channel. Zoella, which is Sugg's online name, is a very successful fashion and beauty YouTuber. She currently has over 9 million subscribers on her main YouTube channel. She has partnered with a number of different brands over recent years. Her online identity has not changed since she moved from only blogging to creating YouTube videos. I intend to discover and understand why she has become so successful and whether there is a common pattern that has led to her achieving such significant success.

To ensure the focus of the research I will only examine YouTube from the viewer/ audience's perspective and not how it is maintained and run. The focus of the study is aimed at how YouTubers are successful through viewership, brand endorsements and partnerships and therefore it is unnecessary to unpack the back-end functioning of the site. Furthermore, I will only offer a short summary of Zoella's brand endorsements and partners and will not provide in-depth studies of each brand.

Sugg has more than one YouTube channel. Her second channel is purely a space for her to upload daily vlogs. Vlogs include videos of the YouTubers daily life and are usually filmed on their cellular phone or a small hand held camera. These consist of the YouTuber holding the camera up in front of their face and speaking about or showing the viewer what is occurring during their day. These videos are not made using professional cameras, equipment or lighting.

These videos offer the viewer the opportunity to see Sugg in her everyday life. I believe this channel is not essential to the study, as most of Sugg's brand partners require content on her main channel as this has the largest group of subscribers and is created in a far more professional manner.

As YouTube and the content it offers is online data, the information found on this platform is ever changing. Therefore the online data used throughout this study will be analysed up until 15 October 2015.

I will be approaching this study through mixed method research. Mixed method "integrates quantitative and qualitative research within a single project" (Bryman & Bell: 2011:56).

A mixed method approach is essential to this nature of study as personal opinions and human emotion need to be taken into consideration, as well as critically analysing data based on facts and figures. The most popular videos and content Sugg creates are important however the emotion and feeling behind this is what drives viewers to watch and connect with her.

My research methods will include ethnography, case study and grounded theory research. I will be using two data collection methods, field research which will consist of focus groups and in-depth interviews as well as unobtrusive research through content analysis both qualitatively and quantitatively. My accessible sample will include females aged between 16 and 25.

The ethical issues that could arise during this paper is the fact that I am very interested in the YouTube community and have been exposed to the way it operates for some time now. I have a good understanding of the relationship YouTubers have with their viewers. I have also noticed the shift that has occurred with regards to how YouTubers now have to specify with which brands they are working with in a far more direct manner than they were previously required to.

Due to my focused involvement within this media space it could potentially lead to me becoming more subjective over the YouTuber I am investigating. I have been watching Sugg's channel for over four years and have seen her progress, improve and mature as an individual during that time. I therefore have to remain objective throughout the entire research paper with regards to the topic I am investigating.

I intend to do this by not watching her current content as regularly as I used to. This will allow me to look at her current content through fresh eyes and feel as though I am rediscovering her channel. Before I begin my research process I will not watch any of her YouTube content for 6 months.

In order to establish how an individual can successfully use YouTube to enable brand partnerships and endorsements I will conduct research based on individuality, identity, personal branding, building brand identity and brand endorsements and partnerships.

I believe these elements are what allow for a personal brand to be successful and continue to grow. As a personal brand is a reflection of an individual it is essential that they don't allow for their brand to become stagnant but rather that their personal brand grows and changes at the same pace that they do.

In addition I will also be analysing YouTube as a contact point and unpack successful YouTuber Zoella as a case study.

Chapter two will offer a broad overview of existing literature and sources, which have been pivotal in the formulation, and direction of the study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

In an attempt to determine how an individual can successfully enable brand partnerships through the use of YouTube; I will be investigating six themes that will assist in unpacking my research question. I will introduce these themes in succession, while scaffolding onto the previous theme, in order to understand the creation of a successful personal brand and how this enables partnerships with brands that share the same message, values and purpose of the personal brand. The insights and understanding gained from these concepts will be applied through a case study based on one YouTuber in particular.

To establish how one can form a personal brand, I will firstly investigate the concepts of individuality and identity. Understanding these concepts will identify the necessary strategies and actions needed to build and create a successful personal brand.

Furthermore I will be looking at the brand's need to align their core promise and values to possible partners. Thus requiring an understanding of brand building, brand identity and the importance of these in ensuring any form of partnership.

In addition, I will introduce YouTube as a contact point, dissect and analyse why it has been so successful in allowing individuals to brand themselves and create content. Finally, I will provide an overview and background about Zoella (Zoe Sugg) and how she has cultivated and expanded her YouTube channel, audience, brand extensions and partnerships.

With a very distinctive brand identity, Zoella is a globally recognised YouTube Content Creator who has recently expanded her brand in several ways including partnering with a number of brands on a regular basis.

Individuality and Identity

Individuality can be defined as *“the quality or character of a particular person or thing that distinguishes them from others of the same kind, especially when strongly marked”* (Oxford Dictionary of English). Gaining a better understanding of the concept of individuality is pivotal with regards to the research needed within the field of study.

YouTube hosts thousands of different individuals, in particular female YouTubers, who all have created their own personal identities for their YouTube channel. In my opinion, female YouTubers focus far more on aesthetic elements, such as the channel identity, logo and video editing effects whereas, male YouTubers have a more relaxed and less edited style of video content. In addition, female YouTubers tend to include more creative elements that link to their brand identity as opposed to male YouTubers.

It is however important to establish why and how some of the content creators succeed where others fail to grow. As much as a YouTuber would like to appeal to a number of different audiences, they still need to remain true to themselves and show how they are different from others. Therefore it is essential to display their brand's authenticity and not a replica of other similar online personalities.

As a result of millennial consumers (mainly in the 16 – 25 year old bracket), not conforming to the norm, but rather choosing to express their personal identity and authenticity, this has made them much less receptive to generic advertising campaigns, traditional products and existing online content. Authenticity therefore has become an essential element in branding, encouraging the average YouTube viewer to identify and connect with YouTubers they can relate to. These individuals primarily draw their inspiration from online “personalities”, such as Bloggers and YouTubers, on what is current, trendy and how they can apply this to their own individual identity (Mail Online, 2014).

Millennials/ Generation Y are individuals born between the early 1980s to the early 2000s. They are radically individualistic, perhaps even narcissistic and deeply suspicious of traditional structures, but at the same time are driven to change the world for the better (Mail Online, 2014).

“Brands are now creating value not just by the products or services they represent, but by the meanings they generate. This meaning is being adopted by consumers to express who they are and what they stand for” (Mihalcea, 2008).

The above quote illustrates the millennial's mindset on how they perceive and view brands and further demonstrates how they create connections with brands which they believe enables them to forge their own identity.

As millennials are anti-traditional structures and extremely self-focused, YouTubers are therefore seen to be very attractive to these individuals as the content which is produced is not only relevant to their lives but fits into the lifestyle they are living - mobile, on-the-go and non-traditional media forms (Mihalcea, 2008).

Due to the fact that 55% of millennials watch video content several times a day on a number of different devices, YouTube has become the most powerful millennial marketing platform globally (Hoffmann, 2014).

Therefore the online personality needs to show consistently how they create an identity that is authentic to them. As this allows for viewers to find the YouTuber they can relate to, identify with or find to be inspirational (Lang, 2015).

Identity is a tangible form of individuality as it is the way in which we actively express ourselves to the world and those around us. If an individual represents what is seen to be an authentic identity then like-minded individuals will be able to identify and connect with them. Similarly, this is true for brands as well; if your brand identity is not authentic then individuals will not be willing to buy into the product or service (Aaker. & Joachimsthaler, 2000).

In other words, identity can be defined as “the distinguishing character or personality of an individual” human being that therefore sets them apart from others. Due to each of us having had different experiences in life, these have affected the way in which our thought process, emotions and opinions are constructed in our own individual way. Therefore, making everyone unique and an individual (Merriam Webster, 2015).

Akane Kanai in her article *WhatShouldWeCallMe? Self-Branding, Individuality and Belonging in Youthful Femininities on Tumblr* (2015) suggests that authenticity, individuality and identity are important aspects of self-branding. Furthermore, she also believes that branding oneself in the virtual space has become a pivotal step in ensuring success.

Authenticity is defined as “*the quality of being considered consistently true to oneself, in a way that is socially legitimated*” (Banet-Weiser & Keller, 2012).

Authenticity can be further extended for online personalities as this is essential for the success of the channel. The demand for authenticity is manifested through two poles of authenticity: authentic individuality and authentic belonging. This means that virtual identities need to be correctly crafted in order to ensure that the viewer is able to see an individual's true self completely in order for them to be able to understand and connect with them on a deeper level (Banter-Wesier & Keller, 2012).

As much as there is an inherent drive for an individual to be unique within society, there is also the need to belong, to fit in and be accepted by others. As a consequence of this binary contradiction it makes no difference which platform you choose to expose yourself on, you will still be open to criticism.

"In what Banet-Weiser calls "the authentic self-brand", one sets up a simultaneous relationship to oneself, and a relationship between oneself and one's audience. This double relationship is one of "innovation, production, and consumption [of the self], charged with ideally producing a unique, 'authentic' self" (Kanai, 2015).

The authentic self-brand has many factors that need to be considered. The relationship with oneself and one's audience is something that needs to be carefully cultivated and ensured that is one that is positive as the YouTube viewer holds far more power than the YouTube ever will.

Personal Branding

According to Blaise James, Global Brand Strategist at Gallup, creating an identity through self-branding is an essential tool needed in the business world today. In the article *The Value of Personal Branding*, James introduces and discusses four steps in how to unpack one's purpose in order to create and sustain a streamlined brand identity. The most important point is to *"articulate your purpose, point of view and principles"* (James, 2009).

The article therefore suggests that establishing one's purpose is needed so a strategic analysis of the self can be performed to correctly create an authentic brand identity. Therefore, *"The point of view tells us the why, the purpose tells us the what, and the principles are the how. They're how you achieve your purpose"* (James 2009).

Building Brand Identity

Building brand identity and equity is an integral part of branding as a whole. To establish how YouTubers create brand loyalty with their viewers, an in-depth investigation into branding and building brand loyalty needs to be conducted. I therefore wanted to take a deeper look at branding and the way in which YouTubers in particular, use it to create brand loyalty with their viewers.

The key points, derived from *Building brand identity in competitive markets: a conceptual model* by Bhimrao M. Ghodeswar, is that brand identity needs to focus on points of differentiation that offer sustainable competitive advantage and therefore allows for the brand to break through the clutter. Furthermore emphasising the need for the brand to completely understand the customer (Ghodeswar, 2008).

Understanding the audience is essential to the success of a YouTube channel. By understanding their needs and wants, it allows for the YouTuber to not only create content that they will enjoy but also allow for the viewer to see that their requests are being answered. This is essentially understanding consumer behaviour (Ghodeswar, 2008).

YouTubers are permanently engaging with their audience either virtually - through comments, video responses or social media accounts or physically such as meet ups and conferences. In the YouTube world the “customer” is the number one priority.

The *Personal Brand Revolution* by Shannon Smith, published in The American Business Journal, highlights how essential it is today to reflect an image that is both professional and authentic to you. In all forms of branding the main reason individuals choose to buy into the brand is because they can identify with it (Smith, 2013).

The first point of contact with any individual is the way you present yourself/ brand to your audience. In the YouTube world the way in which the YouTuber dresses, acts and the environment they are situated in, is essential to whether or not a potential viewer will continue to watch the content or even subscribe to the channel. The next phase is the way in which the YouTuber communicates to their audience as well as the content they cover. Therefore the original attraction is through the YouTuber’s style. The way in which a YouTuber retains their audience is through the substance of content offered and how frequently it is available to them (Smith, 2013).

This article further reinforced how important both identity and branding is in terms of the success of a personal brand.

The final article I analysed with regard to Personal Branding was *The Definitive Guide to Building Your Personal Brand* by Jayson DeMers. This article looked at Personal Branding from the perspective that companies are great at communicating their company's brand yet employees fail to communicate and create their own individual personal brands. This therefore means that most individuals are purely defined by the brands they work for or by their job title, instead of who they are as an individual. For example a business leader or CEO of a brand needs to link cohesively to the brand he represents. It is essential for the customers and employees to have a perfect understanding of the brand's purpose as well as their own unique purpose and differentiating factor (DeMers, 2013).

All three articles correspond on one common aspect. They believe that an individual needs to establish their personal brand correctly before they can commit themselves to other products or services. This is still a fairly new concept in the branding world but is something YouTubers have been doing for years.

If you were to investigate a mega brand such as Oprah, it would be found that she created her own personal brand before she used it in any product form. What sets Oprah apart from other personal brands is her empathy, which is the cornerstone of her personal brand. Her ability to connect with people and show that she understands them is what has helped enable her personal brand to be so successful (Ettus, 2011).

In Sugg's case she has cultivated her brand image and identity for years, which has not changed since she entered the online space. Only recently has she created her own product range, Zoella Beauty in which her virtual identity is used to sell the product.

She too has used a similar look and feel for her fiction novel, *Girl Online*. Further demonstrating that one of the reasons for Sugg's success is the fact that she has created her own brand (Zoella) first before attaching any product to it.

Brand Endorsements and Partnerships

Brand endorsements and partnerships are in no way a new concept in the marketing world. The traditional form of brand endorsements and partnerships offers celebrities or well-known personalities the opportunity to work with a particular brand. This was usually portrayed through television commercials or print advertisements.

The current shift is from endorsements to partnerships as partnerships create an authentic story that lasts longer than a traditional campaign. The marketing of the products is done with a far more integrated approach. This is conducted through the celebrities' content plans and projects they are working on as well as through traditional advertising of the brand. Instead of the conventional celebrity, brands are looking for influencers who can deliver on their brand message (Salup, 2014).

Marni Salup (2014) defines influencers as *"experts or personalities with a more narrow reach and a deeper impact."* This links to the way in which viewers of YouTubers perceive them to be. Viewers do not see YouTubers as celebrities they can in no way connect with, but rather as individuals who offer them insights and opinions on the products and services they come into contact with on a daily basis (Salup, 2014).

The article *Bigger Is Not Always Better: The Value Of Longtail YouTubers* written by Agnes Kozera emphasised valid points relating to the research. This article highlights the fact that many brands are now working with YouTube Content Creators however which type of YouTube is the most effective to use for marketing purposes? Partnering with YouTubers with larger subscriptions is of course seen to be a powerful and influential force. Yet in many instances, partnering with long tail channels that have subscriber counts between 10K - 200K, can prove more fruitful as well as save the brand money (Kozera, 2014).

A large number of subscribers does not guarantee high engagement or increase in purchase intent in many cases, as many of these individuals are not watching the content the YouTuber creates on a regularly basis. A large number of subscribers is however a great way to increase brand awareness by aligning your product with a reputable name. However, if the brand is looking to convert viewers into customers, the smaller channel is likely to have a quicker and higher conversion rate. The main reason being that the smaller channels usually possesses a niche market that they communicate to (Kozera, 2014).

Therefore, when choosing YouTubers to work with, the emphasis should not be on the number of subscribers, but rather on brand relevance in relation to the content the YouTuber creates (Kozera, 2014).

These were some very influential factors I found during my research as very often the brands that large YouTubers partner with are usually communicated in either a very subtle or very blatant manner. Whereas with smaller YouTubers they usually are much more concerned with the product and seem to offer very in-depth analysis of the brand they are working with.

YouTube as a Contact Point

The YouTube Creator Playbook is a guide designed by Google and YouTube to give YouTubers the tools they need to make their channels authentic and sustainable. It offers recommendations and explanations as to how to create a successful and trustworthy channel. This is a very important tool for any user of YouTube as it provides them with a means to ensure their channel can reach its full potential (Google & YouTube, 2014).

As this is a guide and a framework for new YouTubers and existing ones too, I believe this can be used as a source in my overall research and methodology.

The case study, *Understanding the Characteristics of Internet Short Video Sharing: YouTube as a Case Study* written by Xu Cheng, Cameron Dale and Jiangchuan Liu, investigated the significant growth in YouTube as an online sharing site.

One of the causes of the immense growth of YouTube is believed to be due to YouTube having changed the way content is distributed. It has created a new space for popular culture to be shared in a way that previously did not exist (Cheng et al. 2007).

Another point I found particularly important in this case study was that the authors highlighted that YouTube has established a new form of social networking. The authors believe that this is the key driving force toward the success of YouTube and similar sites. It also offers a small-world network to be formed as viewers can chose the content they wish to watch and are recommended similar content to view too. As much as YouTube is a community as a whole it also offers a multitude of smaller individual communities that anyone can chose to be a part of.

The final article relating to YouTube as a contact point is *What can the world's biggest YouTubers teach business leaders* by Marc Forster-Pert. This article highlights the shift in the place in which new age stars (online personalities) are emerging from. It is no longer television or film but rather YouTube, the popularity mainly due to the fact that they have such huge fan bases and are tapping into a market previously misunderstood or unused by traditional brands (Forster-Pert, 2015).

This article highlights the five key aspects each successful YouTuber uses. The most important point I believe was “to be authentic and unique”. As most YouTubers began their channels some time ago they purely used YouTube as a creative space to talk about their own passions. They were not looking for a gap in the market but rather sharing their own beliefs and feelings on their own interests (Foster-Pert, 2015).

An interesting point highlighted was that most successful YouTubers have been making videos for over five years. For many years they only had a small audience who followed their content. Only recently has there been significant growth for their channels. This is due to the new interest in the YouTube space and the way in which it operates (Foster-Pert, 2015).

Another key difference between the way YouTubers operate as opposed to traditional businesses, is that YouTubers work with their competition. They appear in other creators' videos and promote each other's content regularly. This has lead to the “YouTube community” which allows for continual growth due to each YouTuber constantly marketing each others' content and working alongside one another (Foster-Pert, 2015).

YouTubers are also different to traditional brands due to the fact that they are constantly engaging with their followers whether that is virtually or personally. This is one of the most important tools YouTubers use to grow and maintain their following. Due to constant interaction with their followers it therefore allows them to be able to relate to their subscribers' needs and wants (Foster-Pert, 2015).

The key to any YouTubers success will always be the content they create. The viewer is there to view the content created by the YouTuber and this is what will keep them watching and remain loyal to the specific channel (Foster-Pert, 2015).

Zoella Identity Analysis

Zoe Sugg is a 25 year old British YouTuber and Blogger. She created her blog in 2009 and used it purely as a creative outlet due to her not being completely satisfied at her current day job. Sugg's blog offered her a space where she could creatively express herself through photography and writing. Her blog posts included reviews on beauty products she had purchased at her local Boots or Super-drug, experiences at local restaurants and general things she was interested in (Sugg, 2014).

Sugg was very much interested in YouTube at this time as she found it to be a space where she could be selective over what she watched. She also found that YouTube allowed the viewer to really get a sense of who the person was behind the camera. She found it to be far more personal than traditional forms of media, such as television. By 2009 she had 1000 followers on her blog and decided to venture into YouTube at her blog readers request. This allowed her to have an instant small group of followers on her YouTube channel, as her followers from her blog moved to YouTube to see the new content she was creating (Sugg, 2014).

By 2012 her earnings from YouTube advertising far outweighed what she was earning at her day job at New Look. She then decided to put all her time and energy into her YouTube channel and quit her day job. By April 2013 she had a million subscribers and after that her channel continued to grow rapidly. By April of 2014 she had over 5 million subscribers (Sheffield, 2014).

Currently Zoella has over 9 million subscribers (15 October 2015), which is constantly growing everyday. She has extended her brand through her own beauty range, Zoella Beauty that can be bought online and in stores in the United Kingdom. It consists of bath and beauty products and packaged with the same look and feel as her YouTube channel and blog.

In addition she has written a fictional novel entitled *Girl Online*, which was published by Penguin Books. *Girl Online* is a Romance/ Drama novel, which follows the life of a sixteen-year-old girl who starts blogging about her problems. She meets a young musician who she falls in love with, resulting in her blog going viral.

Girl Online sold 78,000 copies in its first week therefore eclipsing the debuts of JK Rowling and EL James. Every venture Sugg is a part of, she always ensures that the product or service she is offering or affiliated with is accessible to all her viewers worldwide (Sheffield, 2014).

So what has made her become such a sensation in the YouTube world? It is connected to the type of individual she is. She creates intimate videos that not only talk about beauty and fashion but she offers life advice too. Sugg is very open and honest with her audience in all aspects of her life (Ellis-Petersen, 2014).

Her viewers see her as a friend as she is very accessible to them. She possesses a very girl-next-door quality. She is a wholesome individual who shows the world that being yourself and being a good person are very admirable qualities to possess (Ellis-Petersen, 2014).

These qualities she possesses have assisted her in creating a brand that is both credible and trusted by others. She shows her viewers transparency as well as putting the "customer" first. Her viewers are her number one priority. Not only does Sugg respond to comments but she also creates content her audience requests her to. She even answers fans' questions in Q&A videos. This again reinforces the fact that she is just like a friend. Not only does she tell her viewers about her life but she also shows them what she has bought, informs them of her beauty secrets and lets them feel like she understands their problems because she is going through the same things too (Ellis-Petersen, 2014).

One of the most important aspects of her success is that she started by creating content for herself - she didn't do it for fame and success. *"If you're having fun, being yourself and filming something that you would watch yourself, it becomes contagious for other people to watch too."* She therefore is very much consumer centred, however she still allows her own personality, values and beliefs to come through in all that she does (Sugg, 2014).

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

To establish how an individual successfully uses YouTube to enable brand endorsements and partnerships I approached this study through traditional and non-traditional forms of data collection, predominantly using content analysis form of data collection.

As the field of study is very current and ever evolving, and sources of information are rapidly changing and updating I believe that this approach would be the most appropriate in achieving the desired outcomes.

The research was gathered through a mixed method approach. A mixed method approach integrates both qualitative and quantitative research. Even though I am using a mixed method approach the majority of my research however will be done qualitatively.

Qualitative research can be defined as to *“view social reality as both constantly shifting and emergent, as interpreted by individuals”* (Bryman & Bell: 2011:31). Qualitative research is essential for the purposes of the study, as I needed to establish a solid understanding of why individuals act and react in certain ways. Once I had established an understanding of behavioural patterns I was be able to analyse Zoella’s viewers and how they have attributed to her success.

Quantitative research can be defined as to *“embody a view of social reality as an external, objective reality”* (Bryman & Bell: 2011:31).

The only form of quantitative research I performed was content analysis. This was conducted through distance unobtrusive research in the form of counting the number of views the video has received, the year in which these videos were uploaded and what type of content was the most popular. This helped establish which videos viewers are most receptive to and possible therefore lead to reasons why Zoella’s videos have become so popular and widely viewed.

My qualitative research approach included ethnographical, phenomenological and case study research methods.

Ethnography allows the researcher to be immersed in and observe social settings for an extended period of time (Bryman & Bell: 2011:377).

In order to understand Zoella's audience, I used an ethnographic research method. As this is a virtual space being explored a viewer profile needed to be created in order to determine Zoella's typical viewer.

A potential brand partner would want to be aware of the type of products Zoella endorses, which would have to be beneficial and relevant to their needs and wants. Furthermore it was beneficial to establish whether Zoella's current brand partners are targeting and communicating to the same audience.

A phenomenological research method is one that is concerned with the question of how individuals make sense of the world around them (Bryman & Bell: 2011:381).

This is necessary in terms of gaining insight into why individuals react and interact with certain data and content they are exposed to. This research method will allow me to gather opinions and reasonings that is required to back up my own opinion and understanding of what I believe the answer is to my research problem.

Field research requires research to be conducted in the setting of human experience through both observation and participation of the researcher (van Wyk, 2015).

Field research allowed me to understand individual views and perceptions about YouTube as a whole; the perception around new age celebrities (YouTubers) and whether those interviewed believe an individual such as Sugg is credible and trustworthy.

A focus group can be explained as a form of group interview with several participants who are questioned on a particular fairly tightly defined topic (Bryman & Bell: 2011:377).

I conducted a focus group with 6 individuals in the group. I gathered individual opinions on the content Zoella creates and reactions to her persona, as well as the overall look and feel of her videos and channel.

I conducted semi-structured interviews within this focus group as this allowed for me to not only follow a guide of questions but also to ask additional questions based on the responses I received. I prepared a number of structured questions, however also allowed for the interviewees to elaborate and give me additional insights. This was required as the viewers' opinions and outlook are very important with regards to the research (Bryman & Bell: 2011:31).

Through the use of a case study research method I conducted in-depth research and comprehensively analysed a single example. I used an unobtrusive data collection method through content analysis in a qualitative manner. This included analysing texts in the form of YouTube videos as well as the look and feel of Zoella's channel art.

I used Zoella's Top 25 Most Viewed Videos as of 11 October 2015. This included firstly categorising the videos into different types of video genre namely - Personal, Collaborations and Challenges, Beauty Videos and How To Videos. The year each of these videos was uploaded was also analysed as well as whether or not the video was a collaboration with another YouTuber or not.

In addition, I also assessed all of the social media websites Zoella uses to promote her YouTube channel in order to determine whether she is cohesively conveying her brand image across all media platforms. A cohesive brand image is essential in brand building and in ensuring that her personal brand is seen to be credible by all possible viewers and potential brand partners (Smith, 2013).

My sampling population consisted of females aged between 16 and 25 years of age. This is the age bracket of individuals who are currently watching and interacting with Zoella's YouTube content the most frequently. As YouTube is a site that can be viewed globally this does mean that my targeted sample will consist of females from the ages of 16 to 25 worldwide.

However, analysing this vast group of individuals is impossible to conduct; therefore I targeted a much smaller accessible sample group. My accessible sample group consisted of South African females aged between 16 and 25 years old. These individuals all needed to be either still be studying or working, Internet savvy and perceived to have their own unique style and identity. They all viewed social media sites daily and were very brand conscious. I needed to look at these individuals as they embody the characteristics of the viewers of Zoella (Sugg, 2014).

As I am conducting this study with a qualitative focused research method I drew on two non-probability sampling methods.

Since I have established a very specific audience, I used purposive sampling, as I needed to speak to and research individuals who are familiar with social media sites, especially YouTube. I needed to ensure that the individuals questioned meet my sample population characteristics otherwise my findings would have been irrelevant.

Based on the specific audience parameters I drew on a convenience sampling, as I myself fall in to the 16 - 25 year age bracket as well as possess the characteristics of my sample population. A number of the female students at Vega School of Brand Leadership possessed similar characteristics and fell into the specific audience parameters.

In terms of keeping my research process ethically correct I ensured that all participants selected to be interviewed engaged voluntarily and understood their role in the research process. I also ensured that none of my questions or requests for my participants were in any way an invasion of their privacy or against their beliefs. I also was completely objective throughout my research process so that I did not influence my findings.

Through employing a mixed method approach I was able to gather substantial and credible information, which assisted me in gaining core insights that led to establishing how YouTubers become popular and successful enough to partner with brands.

In the following chapter I will be analysing the gathered data and present the findings.

Chapter 4: Data Analysis & Findings

To establish how an individual successfully uses YouTube to enable brand endorsements and partnerships I used 5 forms of data collection methods.

These included:

1. A viewer profile of Zoella's YouTube channel as well as the brands she is currently working with and possibly partnered with.
2. A Focus Group which consisted of 6 individuals. The individuals were given a brief background as to who Zoe is as well as exposed to one of her videos as well as her channel art and personal brand. Once the group had an understanding of who Zoella was as well as the content she creates they were asked a number of questions.
3. Content Analysis of Zoella's YouTube Channel was conducted by analysing the 25 Most Viewed Videos as of 11 October 2015.
4. The Channel Art of Zoella's YouTube channel was analysed. As there has been a relaunch of her blog this too was analysed as eventually this same look and feel will appear on the YouTube channel.
5. Finally analyses of all of Zoella's Social Media Platforms relating to her YouTube Channel were assessed. This included her YouTube Channel, Blog, Twitter Account, Instagram Account and Facebook Page.

1. Zoella Viewer Profile

(Information obtained on 28/9/2015)

As YouTube is an online platform this therefore means that individuals anywhere in the world are able to access the content found on this website. This therefore means that Zoella has a fan base that consists of predominately females from around the world.

There are a number of female dominated YouTube categories. Currently these categories are in no way against general stereotypes. Male watchers are more interested in Gaming focused videos whereas female viewers are watching Beauty and Fashion related videos. The content created around Makeup and Cosmetics has a female viewership of 89.31% (Demographics of YouTube, 2014).

In terms of age of viewers, tweens, teens and millennials form the vast majority of those watching YouTube content online. Cosmetics (beauty tips, tutorials, how to and style) is seen to be the top topic for US females between the ages of 18-34 (Blattberg, 2015).

Primary research did however indicate that a YouTuber such as Zoella will also have a much younger audience base too. This will include tween and teen girls around the world.

Therefore the typical viewer of Sugg's content includes predominately females between the ages of 11-25. These females can be found in any country in the world due to YouTube being an online platform.

However all of these individuals have a few things in common. These females are interested in fashion and beauty and thus are interested in watching content related to these areas of interest. They also enjoy watching other content, yet they will stay very loyal to certain YouTubers who they believe they can relate to on a personal level. This therefore means that they take these YouTubers opinions and views into account, as they trust these individuals immensely. These females are looking for quality content that speaks about quality products that pertain to their lives.

Current Brand Partners

(Information obtained on 28/9/2015)

There is little information around the brands in which Zoella collaborates with in her YouTube videos. Sugg also does not film many videos that seem to be paid for advertisements as there is no reference in the video description, which now is a mandatory requirement (Paid Product Placements and Endorsements, 2015).

Sugg is currently partnering far more with brands that do not influence her YouTube channel but rather support the content she has already produced. She is also in a position where sponsors and advertisers are competing to appear on her channel (Hatton, 2015).

She is currently working with three brands in order to distribute her Zoella Beauty range of products. These three brands include, Feel Unique which is an online store, and therefore enables her international viewers to purchase her products. As well as two beauty and health related stores, these include Superdrug and Boots, which are both United Kingdom based companies (Hatton, 2015).

In terms of her fictional novel *Girl Online*, Zoella is currently partnered with Penguin Books for a two-book-deal. Her second fictional novel *Girl Online - On Tour* is set to be released in October 2015. (Hatton, 2015).

2. Focus Group

(Information obtained on 23/9/2015)

See Appendix A for full focus group transcript.

The focus group conducted was done so with 6 females aged between 20 and 25 years of age. The participants were questioned on YouTube as a whole as well as YouTubers and in particular, Zoella.

These are the most important findings and insights I gained during this data collection method.

Despite the fact that YouTubers are seen to be new age celebrities, they are still appear to be far more transparent with their viewers as they showcase their personal lives online. This therefore means as a consumer you are far more willing to trust their opinion on a product or service over a traditional celebrity who endorses a brand.

A YouTuber is seen to be a friend or even confidant that subscribers can rely on for support, inspiration and entertainment.

YouTube was seen to be a platform that can only grow in popularity in the future, due to the continuous rise in access to online material as well as the shift in the way in which the world is consuming YouTube in their everyday lives. However with regards to the South African market, YouTube is still not seen to be a social and sharing platform but rather a source of information or entertainment. The South African market uses YouTube to educate themselves by watching tutorials or educational videos. YouTube is also mainly used by South Africans to view entertaining and comical content.

In terms of the personal brand Zoella, the participants saw her to be very at ease with the camera and very comfortable in her own skin. They found her to be both comical and informative. However, the most important way in which the viewed Sugg was that she is an authentic and natural individual. This therefore caused the participants to feel as though they could easily engage with her. She was also seen to be trustworthy, especially if a viewer/subscriber has been watching her content for a significant amount of time.

The potential growth of Sugg was seen to be subject to how much she opens herself up to her viewers. This therefore means Sugg needs to continue allowing her viewers to see her personal life as well as her own unique personality.

3. Content Analysis

(Information obtained on 11/10/2015)

Content Analysis is a method for summarising any form of content by counting various aspects of the content. This therefore enables a more objective evaluation as apposed to comparing content based on an individuals own opinion (Content Analysis, 2012).

Use of Content Analysis by Purpose, Communication, Element and Question			
<i>Purpose</i>	<i>Element</i>	<i>Question</i>	<i>Use</i>
Describe & make inferences about the characteristics of communications	Channel	How?	• Analyse techniques of persuasion • Analyse style
(An Overview of Content Analysis, 2015).			

By analysing Zoella's 25 Most Viewed Videos I was able to ascertain which content is the most popular, most viewed and the type of content that is most likely to always achieve a high number of views.

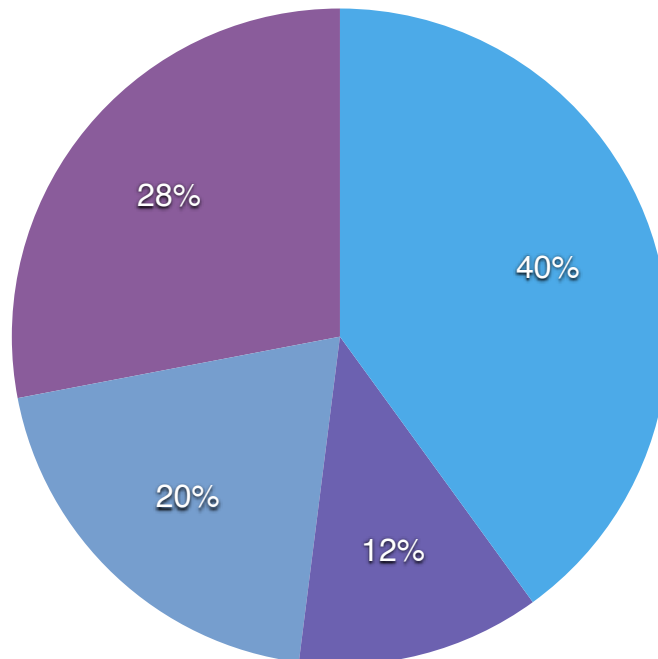
Before I begin the analysis I firstly want to comment on the fact that Sugg names her videos in a very systematic and relevant manner. Giving videos titles is one of the most important tasks a YouTuber needs to do, as the title and thumbnail for the video is the viewers first interaction with the content. Sugg's titles are relevant to the content, concise and always formatted in the same manner as if she has produced a similar type of content before. I believe this has contributed towards the success of her channel as viewers can easily understand what the video is about, as well immediately know Sugg is the creator due to her using ' | Zoella ' after every title.

Zoella's 25 Most Viewed YouTube Videos				
	<i>Title</i>	<i>Year Uploaded</i>	<i>Collab</i>	<i>Views</i>
1	7 Second Challenge with Miranda Sings Zoella	2014	Yes	14,694,770
2	How Well Do We Know Each Other? Zoella	2014	Yes	13,603,615
3	How To: My Quick and Easy Hairstyles Zoella	2014	No	10,783,757
4	Draw My Life Zoella	2013	No	10,325,043
5	Vlogging at 11 Years Old Zoella	2014	No	9,536,526
6	"Most Likely To" Sibling Edition Zoella	2014	Yes	9,094,011
7	The Boyfriend Tag Zoella	2013	Yes	8,599,732
8	My Everyday Makeup Routine Zoella	2013	No	8,603,946
9	Not My Arms Challenge With My Brother Zoella	2013	Yes	8,210,955
10	Best Friend VS Boyfriend Zoella	2015	Yes	7,682,341
11	My First Time Zoella	2013	No	7,166,738
12	My Brother Does My Makeup Zoella	2013	Yes	7,034,176
13	How To: Messy Bun Zoella	2014	No	6,971,799
14	The Break Up Tag Zoella	2014	Yes	6,543,074
15	My Brother Does My Makeup Zoella	2012	Yes	6,005,706
16	50 Facts About Me Zoella	2013	No	5,923,679
17	The Yoga Challenge with Caspar Lee Zoella	2015	Yes	5,774,967
18	Accent Challenge with Marcus Butler Zoella	2013	Yes	5,684,964
19	"Stuff Your Mouth" with Thatcher Joe Zoella	2015	Yes	5,556,600
20	Halloween Cupcakes with PointlessBlog Zoella	2013	Yes	5,542,273
21	How To: Quick and Easy Hair Styles Zoella	2014	No	5,042,568
22	British Slang with Joey Graceffa Zoella	2013	Yes	5,031,501
23	PointlessBlog Does My Makeup (Badly) Zoella	2012	Yes	5,027,204
24	The Suggs Christmas Past Zoella	2013	Yes	5,004,302
25	My Makeup Collection and Storage Zoella	2014	No	4,965,572
(Zoella Most Viewed Video Stats, 2015).				

Diag. 1 Cara Keightley (2015). Zoella's 25 Most Viewed YouTube Videos

Categories of Zoella's Most Popular Content

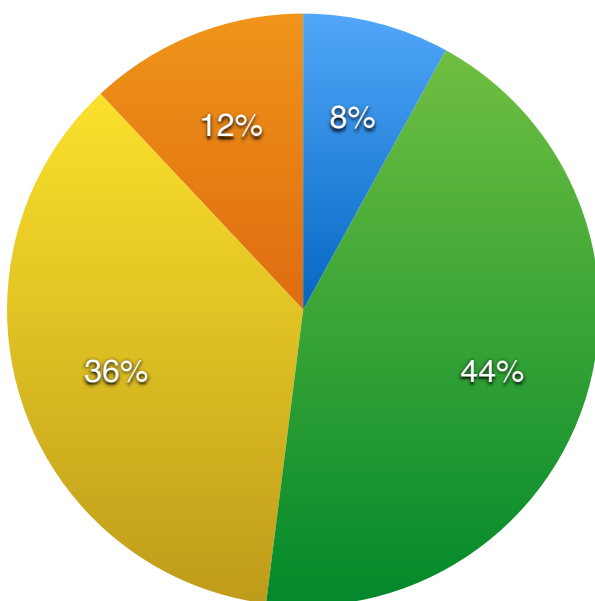
● Personal ● How To ● Beauty ● Challenges/Collabs



Diag. 2 Cara Keightley (2015).
Categories of Zoella's Most Popular Content

Years of Upload

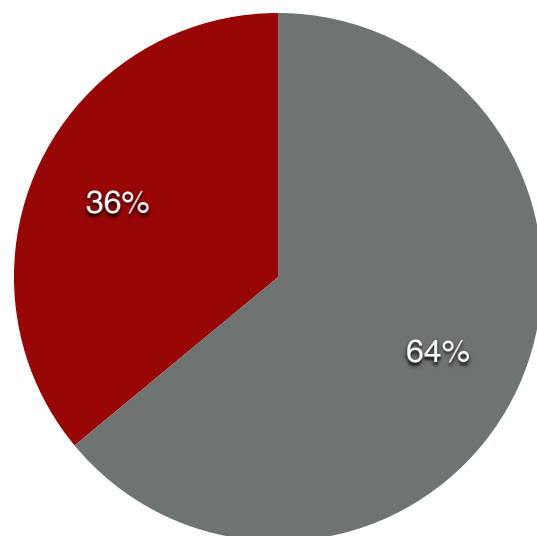
● 2012 ● 2013 ● 2014 ● 2015



Diag. 3 Cara Keightley (2015).
Years of Upload

Collaborations with other YouTubers

● Yes ● No



Diag. 4 Cara Keightley (2015).
Collaborations with other YouTubers

The most important insight I found during my analysis process was the fact that Zoella's fashion and beauty videos rank very low on her 25 Most Viewed Videos of all time. Content unrelated to her opinion on fashion and beauty is ultimately more popular than her discussing products or services. I believe this is due to the fact that fashion and beauty videos are becoming very generic. There is immense clutter in terms of the individuals who create this content, as there are so many females trying to break through in what is a very saturated market.

I was interested to find that her most viewed video was a collaboration with a YouTuber called *Miranda Sings*. *Miranda Sings*, is a comedian in terms of the genre of content she creates for YouTube. Her content is not something I personally don't find appealing but clearly in the YouTube space this collaboration of YouTubers was something that viewers received very well.

I was interested to find that the majority of the videos found on her 25 Most Viewed Videos list included *Personal* videos, making up 40%. Majority of these videos only included Sugg herself, this indicates that YouTube viewers and subscribers are very interested in who the individual is that they are watching. They want to invest in who they are as an individual, not just watch fashion and beauty related videos.

The only *Personal* content that was with another YouTuber that was seen to be very popular was anything related to Sugg's personal love life or her brother Joe. She is currently dating a YouTuber, Alfie Deyes and for a large amount of time fans and subscribers were desperate to know if this was true. The reason for the popularity when filming with her brother is due to the fact that Joe is a very comical YouTuber. He brings a different energy to Sugg's videos.

I also did not expect for 28% of her Most Viewed Videos to be collaborations with other YouTubers. I was aware of the fact that collaborating with other YouTubers helps grow each YouTubers channel in popularity (due to two sets of fans viewing the same content), however I didn't think this would be so popular. Most of these videos include two popular YouTubers doing some sort of a challenge. These videos are usually very humorous and offers viewers a side of the YouTuber that they usually aren't always exposed to.

In terms of fashion and beauty focused videos, no fashion related videos feature on this list. This therefore further proves that generic videos such as Hauls, What's in my handbag?, Look books and any other fashion related videos are not gaining a huge number of views or interest from viewers or subscribers.

Beauty related videos did however appear extensively on this list, either through How To's or personal recommendations made by Sugg, or through more humorous videos such as, *My Brother Does my Makeup*. The third most popular video is entitled *How To: My Quick and Easy Hairstyles*. This indicates that viewers are most concerned with the YouTuber's personal appearance instead of the actual products or services they use.

Viewers want to see the YouTuber's own personal style and an explanation as to how they achieve a certain look, as well as how they actually use the products or services. This also proves that viewers want to see products and services being used. This indicates that should a YouTuber be trying to push or sell a certain brand the best way in order to get their viewers to buy into the product would be if the viewer is able to see how it can either benefit them or add value to their lives through demonstration.

The most important finding is that YouTube viewers ultimately want to be entertained. As the most popular content included more humorous (challenges) and personal videos made by YouTube Content Creators instead of beauty or fashion focused videos.

4. Channel Art Analysis

(Information obtained on 26/9/2015)



Fig. 1 Zoe Sugg (2015). Zoella - YouTube Channel and Channel Art



Fig. 2 Zoe Sugg (2015). Zoella - Original Blog Design and Brand Identity

Audience

The *audience* consists of who is being targeted by the author, designer, or creator.

Zoella's audience consists of predominately females aged between 12 to 35 years of age. These females are interested in Zoella's opinions on fashion and beauty products and services (Breaking Down an Image, 2015).

Purpose

Purpose refers to the overall goal for creating an image.

The purpose of Zoella's brand identity/channel art is to give her personal brand an identity. This allows for her viewers to have a visual reference to who she is and what type of individual she is. As she hasn't changed her brand image since the conception of her channel and blog it has allowed for her viewers to have a solid idea of her brand image/frame of reference, whereas many other YouTubers are constantly changing the look and feel of their brand identity (Breaking Down an Image, 2015).

Arrangement

Arrangement refers to the placement of images, graphics, and text in an image. There are two key elements of arrangement—location and scale. *Location* refers to where a text or image is placed, whereas *scale* refers to the relative size of the visual components (Breaking Down an Image, 2015)

Zoella's brand identity is highlighted by the name of her brand - Zoella, which is the biggest focus on both her YouTube channel art and her blog design. An image of herself is used on both channels in order to give her brand a persona and because her brand is a personal brand.

Typography (Font Type & Font Size)

Typography refers to the *font size* and *font type* choices that are made in a visual composition. Zoella's font style has a hand written, doodle type of look to it. The font isn't very structured and is quite feminine in its appearance. Her brand name is very large which draws the most amount of focus out of the entire visual. The "body copy" which describes what she does is much smaller yet still in the same font as the brand name (Breaking Down an Image, 2015).

Colour

Colours can have different meanings (*connotations*) that implicitly portray a message.

Yellow, Pink, Orange and Green are the four main colours found throughout her visual identity. These four colours are used in very light, pastel versions of themselves. These colours also compliment the image of herself and tie in well with the colour of the font. These colours are seen to be very feminine and appear to be in a watercolour state on the image (Breaking Down an Image, 2015).

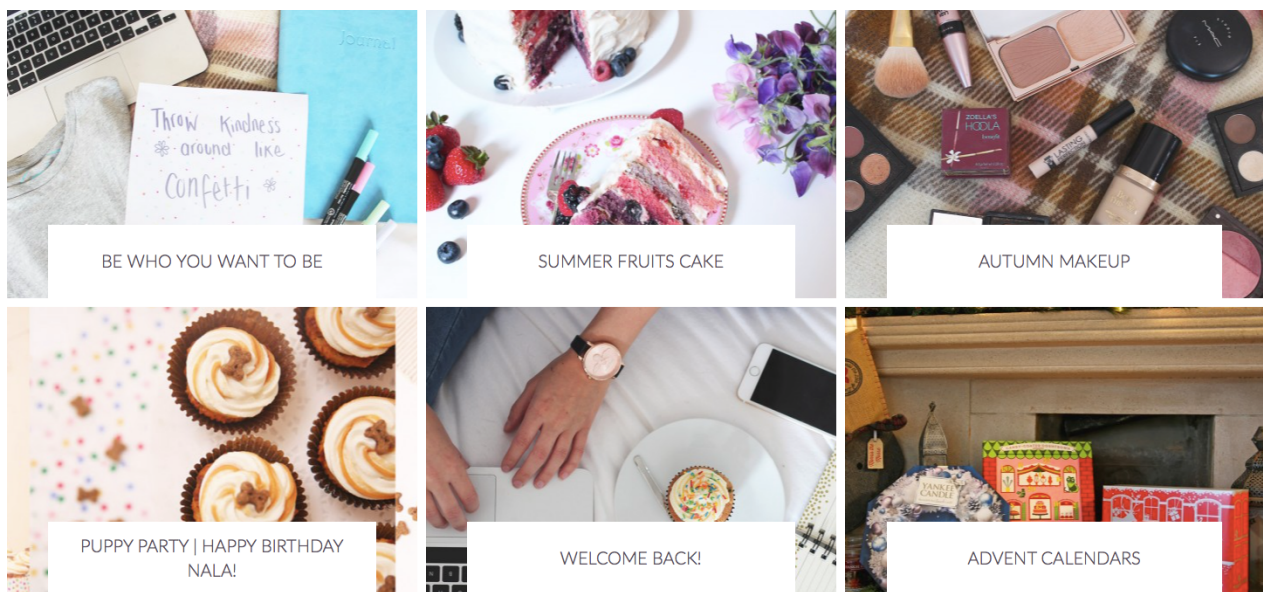
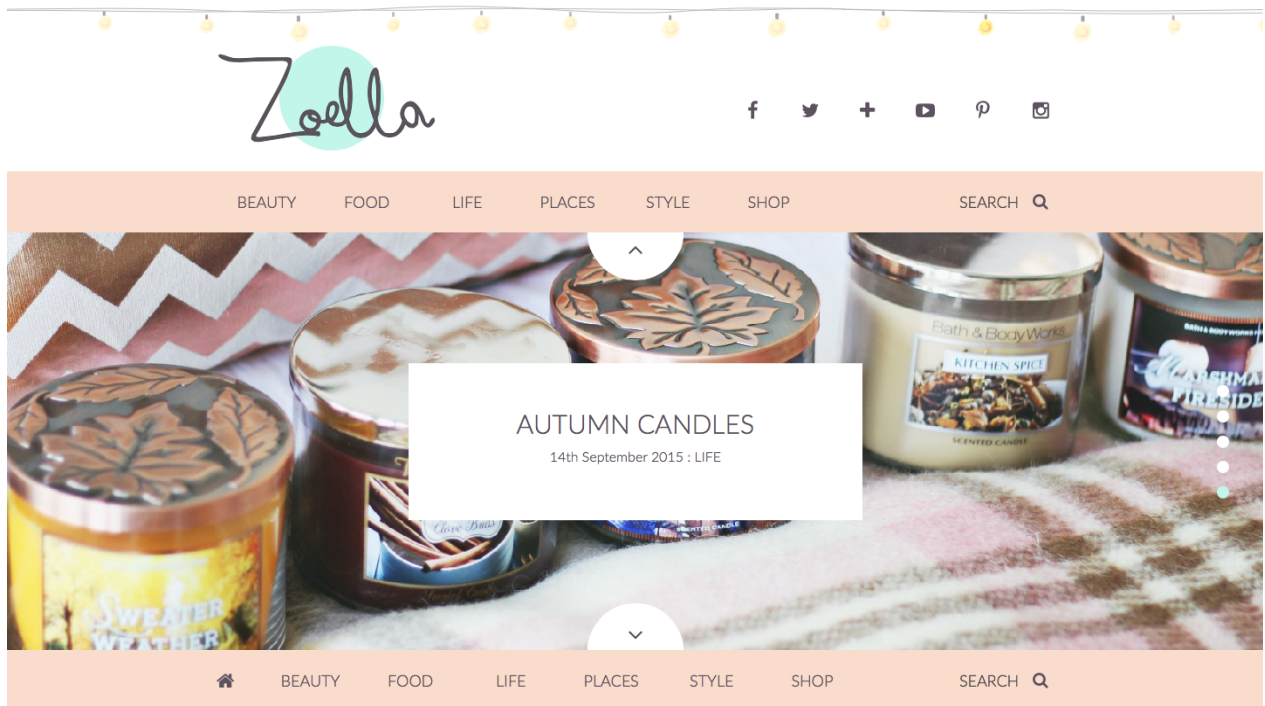


Fig. 3 Zoe Sugg (2015). Zoella - New Updated Blog Look and Feel

Sugg has recently relaunched her blog. This is the first time she has officially relaunched and rebranded her blog since its conception in 2009. She has not currently changed her YouTube channel art. The new look and feel of the blog highlights the posts and content far more than emphasising the Zoella brand, which was what the blog previously did.

Audience

The *audience* consists of who is being targeted by the author, designer, or creator.

Zoella's audience consists of predominately females aged between 12 to 35 years of age. These females are interested in Zoella's opinions on fashion and beauty products and services (Breaking Down an Image, 2015).

Purpose

Purpose refers to the overall goal for creating an image.

Her new blog's appearance looks far more like a website. The landing page now consists of a multitude of different posts and links, whereas before it had the traditional blog structure. This is the type of look and feel other beauty and fashion bloggers have done with their blogs/website (Breaking Down an Image, 2015).

Arrangement

Arrangement refers to the placement of images, graphics, and text in an image. There are two key elements of arrangement—location and scale. *Location* refers to where a text or image is placed, whereas *scale* refers to the relative size of the visual components (Breaking Down an Image, 2015).

The name Zoella, has become the focus of her blog. An image of herself is no longer present on the landing page, I believe this is due to the fact that she is such a well known personal brand that her face does not necessarily need to be in the logo anymore.

Colour

Colours can have different meanings (*connotations*) that implicitly portray a message. Colours can also enhance or detract from an image's readability depending on the level of contrast used (Breaking Down an Image, 2015).

A similar colour palette is seen through this new look and feel (Pink, Yellow and Orange), however the green has been replaced with Blue. I believe this look and feel is far more up to date as the watercolour effect is slowing being replaced with a more clean design look.

5. Social Media Analysis

(Information obtained on 26/9/2015)

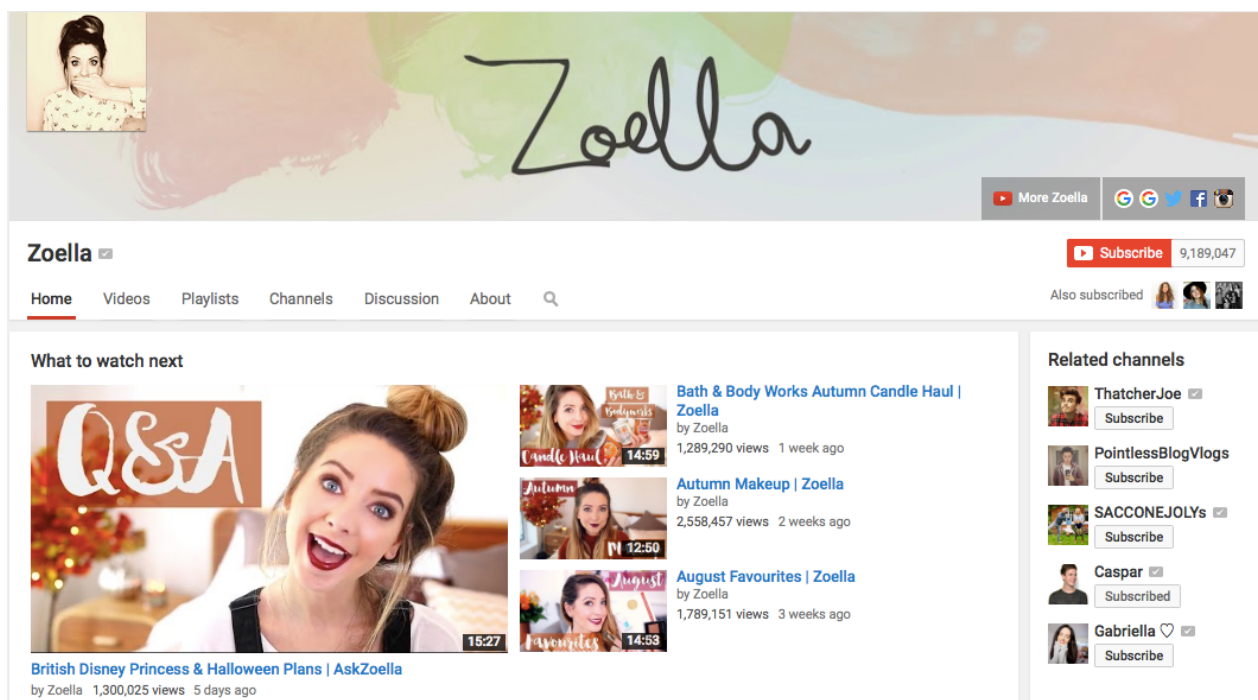


Fig. 4 Zoe Sugg (2015). Zoella YouTube Channel Art

YouTube Channel (Zoella)

- Includes all her YouTube videos created for her main channel
- The social media platform that has the most subscribers/fans/followers
- Most successful and most used platform

No. of Subscribers - 9.2M

No. of Videos - 220

Total No. of Views - 553.6M

Avg. No. Views per Video - 2.5M

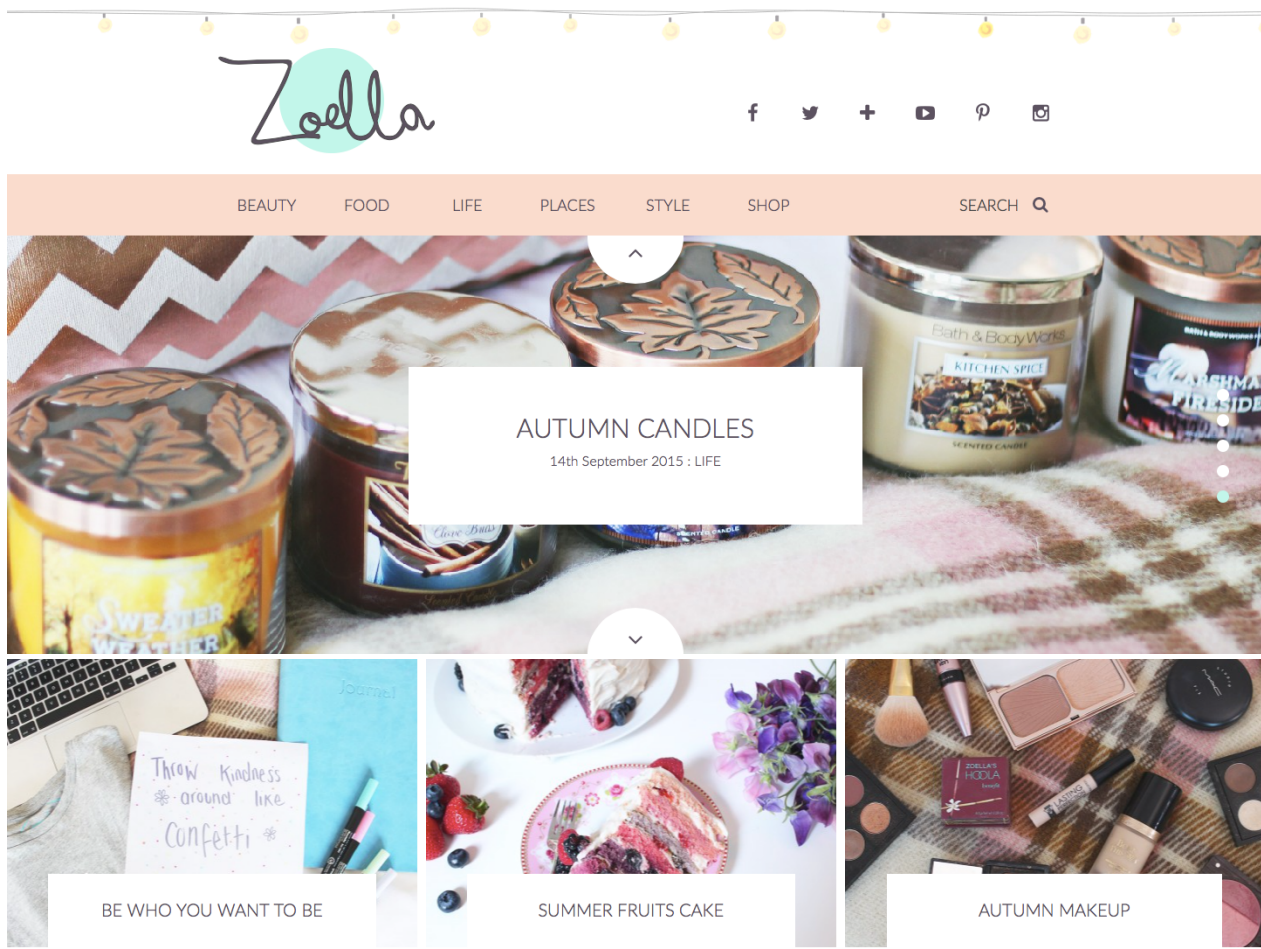


Fig. 5 Zoe Sugg (2015). Zoella - New Updated Blog Look and Feel

Blog

- Recently gone under a revamp and relaunch (1st relaunch since the blogs conception)
- Since 2009 the blog has had the same look and feel which was reflected in her YouTube channel and initial line of Zoella Beauty products
- The new look and feel appears to be more like a website as opposed to a traditional blog (landing page only consisting of the most recent post)
- Very professional and easy to navigate, consists of a number of different pages
- Offers links to all of Zoella's social media channels
- Each post allows viewers to share via social media or comment directly on post



Fig. 6 Zoe Sugg (2015). Zoella's Twitter Account

Twitter

- Promotes blog posts and YouTube videos
- Sugg also retweets articles about herself or fans tweets and pictures (this allows for viewers to feel as though they are being noticed and included)
- Still very personal and mainly used as a tool to communicate with her followers
- Sugg tweets daily and most often more than 1 tweet a day

No. of Followers - 3.77M

No. of Posts - 35.7K

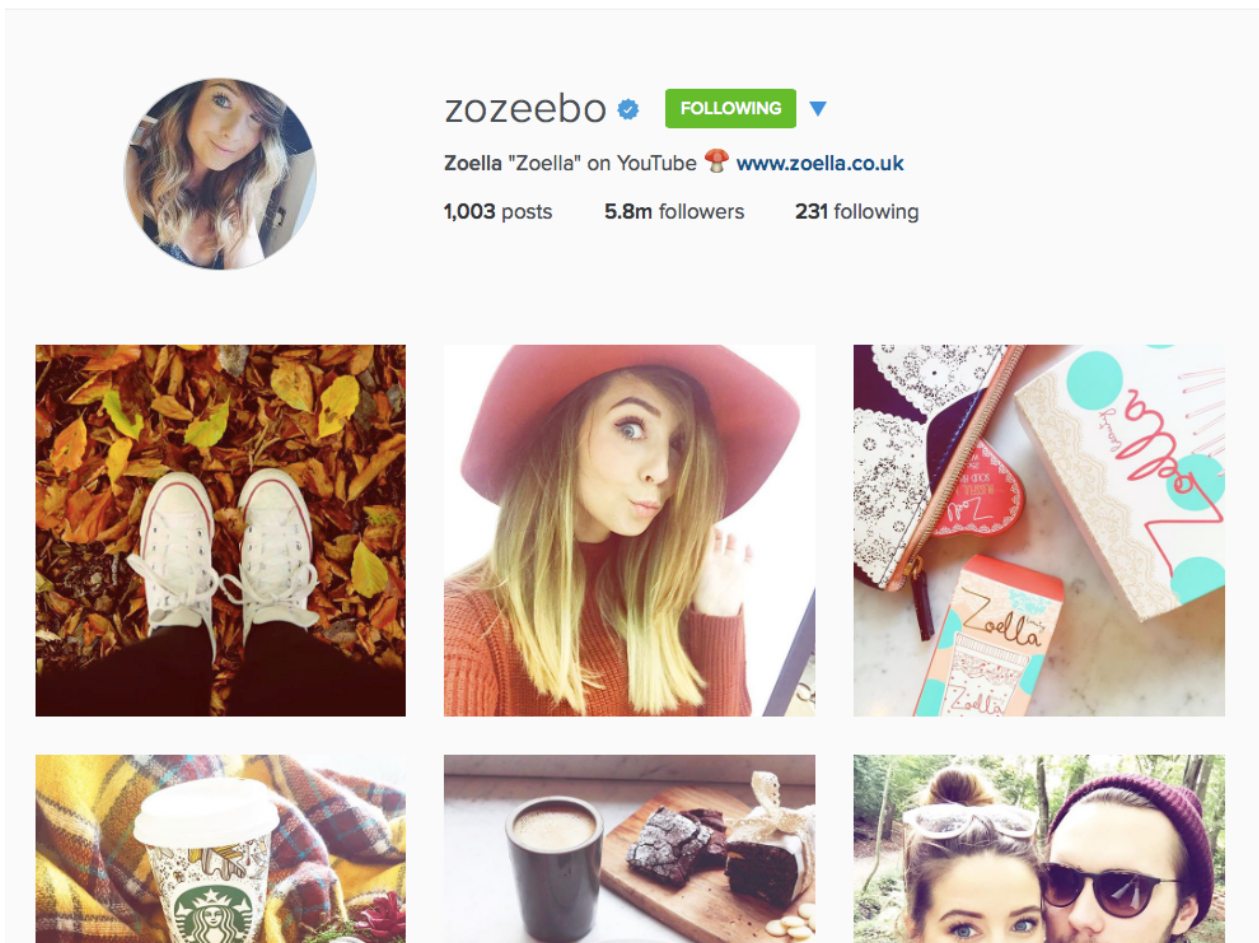


Fig. 7 Zoe Sugg (2015). Zoella's Instagram Account

Instagram

- Incredibly personal photos and therefore very personal platform
- Consists of high quality photos that are well photographed (lighting, angles, shots)
- This social media platform no longer promotes her YouTube videos or blog posts
- Yet it does promote her product line (Zoella Beauty) and her books (Girl Online).
- Sugg uploads photos to Instagram weekly

Instagram is used to promote Zoella's own personal products however in a very subtle manner. This is done so by making every photo a work of art. Each photo she uploads is constructed to look like a well thought out and visually appealing photograph.

No. of Followers - 5.8M

No. of Posts - 1003

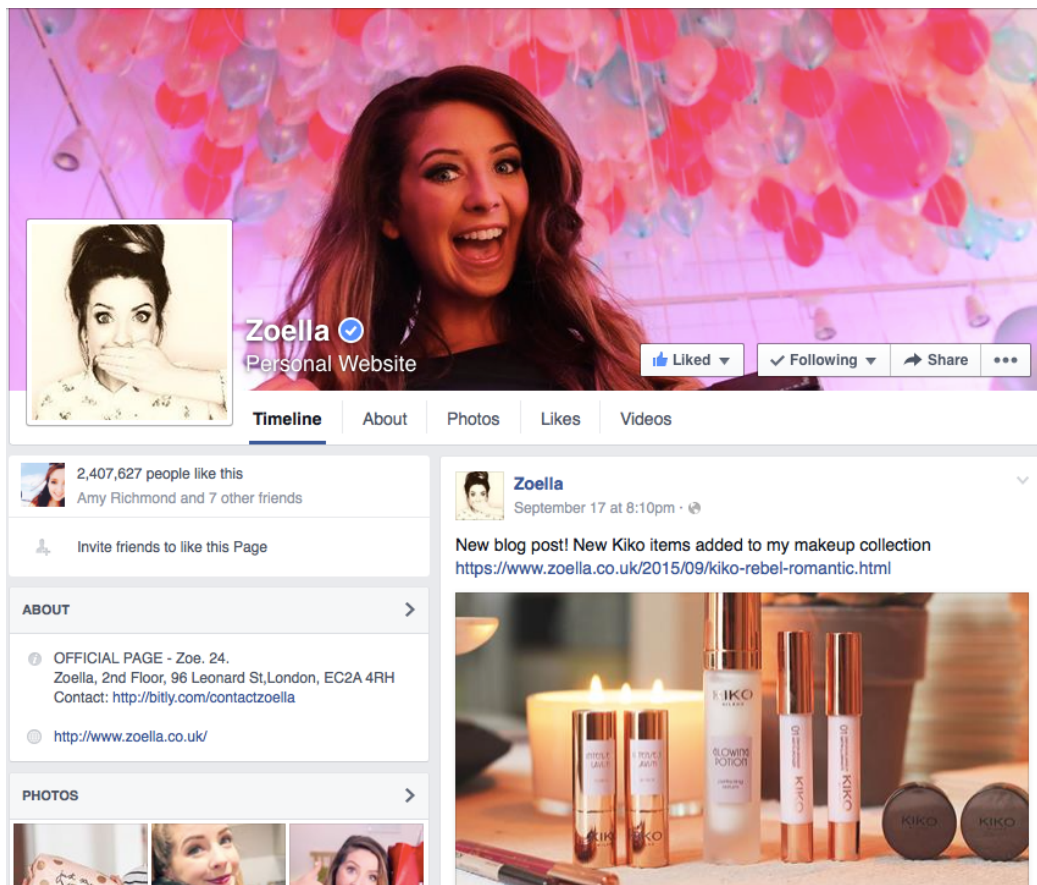


Fig. 8 Zoe Sugg (2015). Zoella's Facebook Page

Facebook

- Promotes latest blog posts and YouTube videos
- Very Personal Brand (Zoella not Zoe Sugg) focused
- Does not include personal photos like Instagram
- Used to speak to her audience in a text and photo manner that can reach a bulk of her audience
- Used to remind her audience of who she is and to encourage fans to view her latest content

No. of Page Likes - 2,5 M

Type of Posts - Video, Photo, Text, Links

Through analysing Zoella's social media channels I was able to discover which channels are used to support and promote her YouTube channel. I was able to see which channels are used to allow her fans to have the chance to know her more personally as well as to be aware of what her latest plans are (such a magazine shoots or different media spots she will be featured in) as well as new products she may be launching.

Each social media platform is used in a different manner in order to communicate to her fans/followers or subscribers. This is necessary in the fact that some individuals will come in contact with every single one of Zoella's social media platforms in a single day. If every platform consisted of the same content viewers would not be as engaged with the Zoella brand as the content wouldn't be seen to be new or interesting.

As the content is different across all platforms it allows for fans to understand and know Zoe in a number of ways, as a friend (due to the personal content she uploads online about herself), as a brand (Zoella Beauty), as an author (the fictional novel Girl Online she wrote) and as a blogger/YouTuber.

Chapter 5: Conclusions & Recommendations

Through the analysis of Zoella, created by Zoe Sugg, I was able to establish how an individual can successfully use YouTube to enable brand partnerships. By dissecting and analysing the Zoella brand I was able to determine that authenticity and transparency are the most important factors that a personal brand needs be founded on. If these two elements are overlooked the personal brand will not be seen to be trusted or credible by those interacting with the brand.

Zoella's success is the result of a number of different elements that have helped her become a credible and authentic personal brand. Firstly her YouTube channel has always consisted of content that she herself would find appealing to watch. Her channel was never created in order to make money or partner with brands (as this phenomenon didn't exist when she started her channel), it was created to be a space where she could channel and express her personal creativity. This therefore allowed her to be herself and create intimate content that reflected her identity.

As time progressed she became more confident and thus more open and honest with her viewers revealing more of her personal life, including the happy times alongside the hardships she's faced too. By revealing her everyday life through interacting with her viewers, she has positioned herself as their equal contradicting the general notion and belief that celebrities lead 'perfect lives'.

By Zoe attending many YouTube conventions around the world provided her the platform to network and collaborate with other YouTubers, as well as interact with and meet her subscribers in person.

By keeping a consistent brand image and identity has allowed viewers to always have a visual reference to her brand and know that it isn't going to disappear or change unexpectedly. Thus once she released her own line of products and a novel the same brand identity could be reflected and recognised by her viewers. Unlike other YouTubers who are producing significantly more videos in collaboration with brands through showcasing products and receiving remuneration, Sugg chooses to partner with brands who are seen to be external from her channel, such as Penguin Books, Superdrug and Boots.

The main factor for Sugg's immense success is ultimately her personality - who she is an individual. Her open and honest approach has allowed her to surpass the status of just being a YouTuber or online celebrity but rather as a friend who viewers can always trust. As Sugg's viewers see her to be a trustworthy individual their loyalty will increase their willingness to adopt a brand endorsed by her as well as make purchase decisions based on her opinions.

In conclusion, I have determined that the formula to be a successful YouTube Content Creator is highly dependent on how authentic and transparent the personal brand is perceived to be. By revealing the individual behind the YouTuber will allow the viewers to feel as though they have a deeper connection with the content creator.

Once the personal brand is established, it is essential to collaborate with other YouTubers in order to help grow the audience base. By working with other YouTubers who create similar content it will allow for a like-minded audience to interact with the personal brand. All these elements will attract brand partnerships, as the YouTuber is perceived (by the target audience) as trusted, credible and relatable.

It is in the best interest of both the YouTuber as well as the partner brands to ensure that both parties' brand values and visions align. Furthermore, in order to retain and grow loyal viewership, YouTubers need to selectively partner with brands that are a true reflection of their individuality and channel authenticity. By losing sight of how essential authenticity and transparency is, will lead to channels losing viewers and subscribers and ultimately dissolve partnerships between YouTubers and brands.

Appendix

Appendix A:

Focus Group

(Information obtained on 23/9/2015)

Group included 6 female individuals between the ages of 20 - 25.

Alison Cordeiro , Danielle Courtney, Angelique Farinha,

Zoe Hayden, Jessica van Wyk and Tynielle Wilton

1. What is the first thing that comes to mind when you think of the website YouTube?

Music Videos, Entertainment, Funny/Comical Videos. A place to watch documentaries, such as TED X.

2. Would you use YouTube to look at make up tutorials or fashion videos to get inspiration for yourself? Why? (Made by YouTube Content Creators)

Yes, for hair and makeup tutorials as you need to watch an individual create the look, as this is something that cannot be achieved in a single photograph. The videos must have a decent amount of views otherwise it isn't seen to be credible or a well done tutorial. The tutorial needs to be informative and to the point, if it is over 10 minutes in length the individual will look for a shorter video.

3. Do you believe that YouTubers could be considered new age celebrities due to the high amount of subscribers they have on their channels as well as the amount of views their videos receive?

Yes. They are different to traditional celebrities as they are willing to be transparent and completely show their lives to their viewers. If they talk about a certain product or service you as the viewer generally has a reference to the type of items the purchase, this therefore means you as a viewer will pick up if they are promoting a brand that doesn't fit their personality. They are seen to be more trustworthy as apposed to traditional celebrities.

A YouTuber relies on their personal brand therefore if they in some way present new products or brands that do not fit this personality their viewers will begin to distrust their opinion. YouTubers are more realistic individuals as the way in which they showcase their lives online is seen to be attainable by the average individual. A YouTuber is seen to be like a friend or someone you know well (a normal individual) and can relate to whereas a traditional celebrity is seen to be in a different league in comparison to the everyday individual.

4. Do you believe that YouTube offers career opportunities that could be sustainable or do you simply see YouTube as a passing fad?

The participants in the focus group saw YouTube to be a platform that could only grow more in the future. YouTubers will either therefore have to grow with their current audience and produce content that would then be applicable to their older viewers lives. However they were not sure if it would be sustainable for an older market, this would probably only occur if current millennial YouTubers continued to alter their content based on their age as well as their original viewers then older age. This is mainly due to the fact that currently avid YouTube viewers are below the age of 25.

The current older generation (over 40 years of age) is perceived to purely use YouTube to look at things such as cooking tutorials and more information based videos.

With the growth of technology and the fact that more and more individuals are gaining access to the internet and social media platforms this could also be a factor in ensuring YouTube to grow as a platform.

It could potentially become like a Facebook. Millennials aren't using Facebook as their primary social media platform, however older individuals (over 40 years of age) are using Facebook far more to share photos and connect with other individuals. This therefore means YouTube could potentially gain popularity from an older audience in a few years time.

The South African market is however very far behind in terms of understanding and watching YouTubers and the videos they create. This is partly due to access to internet as well as price of access as videos use a large amount of data to be viewed. Free WiFi is not easily available and this therefore discourages South Africans from viewing content that will cost them money.

South Africans currently use YouTube to learn or to laugh. We use it currently as an information source rather than a social tool, overseas however the social aspect of YouTube is far greater. It is mainly used by our market to look up design tutorials as well as information on areas of study. Therefore in our market it can seen to be an education tool.

YouTube has a time and a place. We either use it to learn or watch something comical. Instagram, Twitter and Pinterest are used in our everyday lives whereas YouTube is not a platform used by South Africans on an everyday basis.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ckiQV_0RXyU - Video shown to focus group

1. What do you think of Zoella as an individual? (trustworthy, honest etc.)

Very comfortable with herself and talking to a camera. She talks to her audience as if they are there right in front of her. Very confident, funny, authentic, natural and not putting on an act. She makes it very easy for her viewer to want to engage with her. In a way as the viewer you would be willing to answer her as she speaks due to the fact that her videos are so personal and make you as the viewer feel as though you are sitting in her bedroom with her. You laugh along with her at her funny comments and quirky moments and therefore interact with her in a natural way. You want to engage with her and you feel as though she really is talking to you.

Due to this one of the focus group participants believed that if she was in a store shopping and say a product Zoe had discussed she would be likely to remember her video and possibly purchase it, due to the way in which she had spoken about it. She is very memorable and very personal.

In the particular video of Zoella's that was shown to the focus group she mentioned the fact that she was an organ donor and encouraged her viewers to register. This pleased one of the participants greatly as she said its incredible to think that 3,5 million people have seen this. Therefore the fact that she can create such a huge impact and speak to so many people, it would excellent if she uses this "power" for good things. YouTube therefore is a very powerful platform for getting messages out and encouraging people to do good things.

She is very trustworthy as the way in which she discussed the products was very natural and not seen to be forced.

2. After watching the content Zoella (Zoe Sugg) creates would you trust her opinion on certain products or services?

Yes. The participants believed they would trust her more with makeup items over fashion items. This is due to the fact that we all have our own personal styles, however when it comes to makeup we all use the same tools however we create looks that reflect our personality.

You would have to have watched her videos for sometime and have a deep understanding of the types brands and products she loves. Therefore as a viewer you trust is the most important element between YouTuber and viewer.

The participants said they would not necessarily purchase an item purely based on the fact that Zoella had included it in a video but they would trust her in terms of her opinion and review of the brands or products. Therefore she does not cause for an immediate purchase of a product but rather sparks an interest in a certain brand or product. She therefore helps to position and create a perception of the brand in the eyes of her viewer. Therefore it is seen to be more of a word of mouth approach and thus lead to a more organic purchasing decision.

3.a What do you think of her overall video look and feel? (lighting etc)

Very playful. The lighting is very professional, the video is in focus as well as of a high quality. Even though the video is very casual and has a very relaxed look and feel therefore making it easy and pleasant to view.

Sometimes she does however babble quite a lot and give the viewer unnecessary information. The participants also believed that her target is quite a bit younger the average of the participants in the focus group (therefore under the age of 20 more focused at teenagers and tweens).

3.b And what do you think of her personal brand identity?

Great that she has been consistent and kept the same look and feel since she began her blog and YouTube channel. It links very well to her personality. It also is good that she has used this look and feel across her other social media platforms as well the products she now sells (Zoella Beauty range and Girl Online novel).

4. Do you believe an individual such as Zoe will continue to grow in popularity?

Yes. It will grow depending on how new viewers come into contact with her. On YouTube this is quite difficult as unless the title and thumbnail of the video are aesthetically pleasing to the viewer they will not click or interact with her content. This therefore means her loyal viewers would have to tell their friends about her and therefore encourage them to subscribe to her channel and watch her videos.

Collaborations with other YouTubers would also lead to her audience growing as there would be two groups of subscribers who are now coming into contact with a 'new' YouTuber.

Her growth will be subject to how much she opens herself up. As she used to quite reserved and shy whereas now she is very bubbly, outgoing and very comfortable in her own skin.

5. Do you believe that smaller YouTubers are becoming more credible than larger YouTubers due to the fact that brand deals are now occurring?

If the individual relates more to you as an individual then yes. Also due to the fact that smaller YouTubers will not be apart of as many or if any brand deals. This therefore means they would be giving honest reviews on products and brands they had purchased themselves. It however would ultimately depend on what the YouTuber has associated themselves with. If they begin to include products and brands that do not fit their identity and personal brand, viewers would become very sceptical around the authenticity of the opinions and reviews of this items. The content they create is the most important thing.

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Diagram List

Diag. 1 Cara Keightley 2015. Zoella's 25 Most Viewed YouTube Videos (Online). Available: <http://vidstatsx.com/zoella280390/videos-most-viewed> (2015, October 11).

Diag. 2 Cara Keightley (2015). Categories of Zoella's Most Popular Content

Diag. 3 Cara Keightley (2015). Years of Upload

Diag. 4 Cara Keightley (2015). Collaborations with other YouTubers

Figure List

Fig. 1 Zoe Sugg (2015). Zoella - YouTube Channel and Channel Art. (Online). Available: <https://www.youtube.com/user/zoella280390/videos> (2015, September 26).

Fig. 2 Zoe Sugg (2015). Zoella - Original Blog Design and Brand Identity. (Online). Available: <https://www.zoella.co.uk> (2015, September 26).

Fig. 3 Zoe Sugg (2015). Zoella - New Updated Blog Look and Feel (Online). Available: <https://www.zoella.co.uk> (2015, September 26).

Fig. 4 Zoe Sugg (2015). Zoella - YouTube Channel and Channel Art. (Online). Available: <https://www.youtube.com/user/zoella280390/videos> (2015, September 26).

Fig. 5 Zoe Sugg (2015). Zoella - New Updated Blog Look and Feel (Online). Available: <https://www.zoella.co.uk> (2015, September 26).

Fig. 6 Zoe Sugg (2015). Zoella's Twitter Account. (Online). Available: https://twitter.com/ZozeeBo?ref_src=twsrc%5Egoogle%7Ctwcamp%5Eserp%7Ctwgr%5Eauthor (2015, September 26).

Fig. 7 Zoe Sugg (2015). Zoella's Instagram Account. (Online). Available: <https://instagram.com/zozeebo/> (2015, September 26).

Fig. 8 Zoe Sugg (2015). Zoella's Facebook Page. (Online). Available: <https://www.facebook.com/zoe.zoella> (2015, September 26).