

Reconciling authenticity and commerciality?

A descriptive study of the relationship of trust between beauty and style vlogger

Hello October and her community.

hello october

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Abstract

This thesis aims to gain an understanding about the way the contradictory authentic and commercial are reconciled in YouTube's social space, by looking at how a relationship of trust is being created between entrepreneurial vlogger Susannah Bonaldi and the community on her YouTube channel HelloOctoberxo. Authenticity is an ideal within Western Culture and people engage in authentication practices every day, trying to determine the genuine and real. These practices are also occurring on YouTube, where amateur and professional and commercial and non-commercial converge, such as in the professionalization of amateur production. Vloggers have become YouTube stars, or micro-celebrities, monetizing their audience and content. They establish a para-social relationship with their viewers, appropriating intimacies to give a sense of intimacy. This sense of intimacy is needed to build a relationship of trust between a micro-celebrity and his community, a relationship that is important when one tries to reconcile the authentic and commercial.

It is proposed that in order for this relationship of trust to be created, a palpable sense of truthful self-expression, responsiveness and connection to the audience, and an honest engagement with brands and commodity goods is needed from the micro-celebrity. Using this theory as its framework and building upon theories of para-social relationship and strategic intimacies, this study has conducted a qualitative content analysis of ten videos posted on HelloOctoberxo, their titles, description boxes and the comment section beneath each video. The results show that Bonaldi mostly uses self-expression and the extension of honesty and transparency in order to sustain a relationship of trust with her community, both in sponsored and non-sponsored videos. A responsiveness to the audience is also featured in the videos, but a frequent and extensive interaction within the comment section is less visible. Using the proposed theory of what a relationship of trust entails as a framework, this study can be used to build upon and look at other entrepreneurial vloggers, gaining a greater understanding about YouTube's culture and the reconciliation of the authentic and commercial.

Keywords | Vlog, YouTube, authenticity, commerciality, relationship of trust, sense of intimacy, para-social relationship, micro-celebrity.

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Introduction

In June 2006, a young girl named Bree started posting video blogs (vlogs) as LonelyGirl15 on YouTube. Sharing seemingly heartfelt personal stories about problems with her parents and her relationship with friend and vlogger Daniel, she instantly became a media sensation. When these vlogs turned out to be a professional production, the YouTube community was angry (Burgess & Green, 2009b; Creeber, 2011; Duplantier, 2016; Strangelove, 2010). Using the values of authentic self-expression on YouTube to sell a manufactured story, Lonelygirl15 violated the ideology of authenticity, breached the amateur and professional dichotomy, and opened up the possibility of inauthentic authenticity (Burgess & Green, 2009b, p. 29; Duplantier, 2016, p. 114). As YouTube matured, the entrepreneurial vlogger emerged, continuing to breach the amateur and professional dichotomy. These vloggers, known as YouTube stars (Burgess & Green, 2009a) and micro-celebrities (Marwick, 2016), monetize their community and earn revenue through advertisements. Commercial content is converging in their vlogs, an amateur production seen as an 'expression of the self' (Christian, 2009, section 1, para. 2).

A similar development has taken place on weblogs, the vlog's antecedent. Research concerning authenticity and sponsored content on weblogs has shown the audience may find a blogger to be less honest and authentic due to commercialization of content, though there might be a way to reconcile the authentic and commercial (Hunter, 2015; Marwick, 2013). As will be discussed later on in this thesis, it is the relationship of trust between micro-celebrities and their audience that is of importance when authenticity is concerned, even more so when commerciality is involved and amateur and professional converge (Marwick, 2013; Hunter, 2015). Building upon studies of Hunter (2015), Morrison (2011) and Marwick (2013), this thesis proposes that a relationship of trust between a micro-celebrity and his community is created through truthful self-expression, responsiveness and a connection to the audience, and an honest engagement with brands and commodity goods.

Despite the popularity of beauty vloggers, few studies are focused on how these vloggers aim to reconcile the authentic and commercial, or how they try to sustain an authentic relationship with their community within the commercial context of their environment. This thesis is a start to fill that gap, by focussing on the relationship of trust between beauty and style vlogger Susannah Bonaldi and the community on her YouTube channel HelloOctoberxo. Bonaldi is a micro-celebrity who started as a so-called amateur and transitioned into an entrepreneurial vlogger. In December 2014, she addressed the subject of sponsored content in a blogpost on her weblog, after receiving negative comments on a sponsored YouTube-video. It is already visible she tries to reconcile the authentic and commercial, stating she is always 'very transparent' about sponsoring, her opinions are always honest and sponsoring does not change her (Bonaldi, 2014, para. 4-5). This makes Bonaldi's YouTube channel an interesting case for further research. Using the theory of a relationship of trust as a framework and building upon theories of para-social relationship (Horton & Wohl, 1956), micro-celebrity (Marwick, 2016) and the creation of intimacy, this thesis will answer the question: how does beauty and style vlogger Susannah Bonaldi sustain a relationship of trust with the community on her YouTube channel HelloOctoberxo, despite the commercial entitlement?

It will do so by asking the following subquestions:

Q 1: In what way is a sense of intimacy created in the videos and comments posted by Bonaldi?

Q 2: How does Bonaldi communicate an honest and transparent engagement with commodity goods and brands on her channel?

Q 3: How does the audience perceive and conceive of the authenticity concerning Bonaldi, the content of these videos and her comments?

As will be discussed, authenticity is of great importance to society, and believed to be YouTube's core value. How micro-celebrities reconcile it with the contradictory commerciality in a social space as YouTube, is a question worth asking. Firstly, because social media such as the platform are deemed a core part in the mediatization of communication, becoming a 'site of social action that is central to society as a whole' and being normalized as a stage for authentication practices and negotiating authenticities (Androutsopoulos, 2015, p. 75). Secondly, the YouTube stars generated by the vlogs can be seen as influencers with a persuasive power (Abidin, 2015, section 4, para. 3; Freberg, Graham, McCaughey & Freberg, 2010, p. 90). Seeing how they use authenticity to monetize their audience, sometimes with sponsored content difficult to distinguish from the non-sponsored, an understanding of how they create a relationship of trust is needed (Ford, 2014; Green, 2015).

This thesis consists of four chapters. The first chapter starts by discussing different visions of authenticity, authentication practices and its importance to society. Together with the following discussion of YouTube's history, its ideologies and the developments blurring the amateur and professional, this provides a framework that helps understand the quest for authenticity on YouTube and the need for YouTubers to appear authentic. The theories of para-social relationship, micro-celebrities and the creation of intimacy discussed next, add to an understanding about the entrepreneurial vlogger and his relationship with the community. The theories will be used during the research to help break down and analyse how a relationship of trust is being created on HelloOctoberxo. The chapter will conclude by expanding on what this relationship of trust entails, discussing the studies of Hunter (2015) and Marwick (2013) concerning weblogs, authenticity and commerciality. Together with Morrison's (2011) definition of the relationship of trust, these studies provide this thesis with the framework needed for the analysis that will help answer the main question. The second chapter will elaborate on how the analysis has been conducted, expands on the used method of qualitative content analysis and breaks down how the framework is used. The following third chapter will first introduce Bonaldi and explain how she monetizes her channel, after which the results from the analysis are discussed in seven sections. The final chapter will reflect on the insight generated through this research, present the concluding answer and conclude with suggestions for future research.

The importance of authenticity and intimacy

This chapter starts with an introduction of the concept of authenticity, explaining its importance to society and establishing how authenticity is understood within this thesis. Next, a brief overview of YouTube's history and its development is given, explaining the tension between commercial and non-commercial and the ideology of authenticity that surrounds YouTube and amateur production. Following, theories about micro-celebrities, para-social relationships and the creation of a sense of intimacy will be discussed. The chapter concludes with a discussion of research into authenticity and commerciality on weblogs, expanding on the relationship of trust.

Authenticity and its everyday dimensions

As authenticity is conceptualized by different disciplines in many different ways, coming to a clear description of what it entails seems to be difficult (Franzese, 2009, p. 87). According to Trilling (1972), authenticity is spoken of so easily and in so many different connections, it might as well resist efforts of definition (p. 11). In *Sincerity and Authenticity* (1972), Trilling relates sincerity and authenticity to each other. He describes how both concepts have emerged and authenticity has replaced sincerity as the ideal in Western culture. Sincerity refers to 'a congruence between avowal and actual feeling' and 'the absence of dissimulation or feigning or pretence' (pp. 2, 13). It is about communicating without being deceiving or misleading (p. 58). Authenticity on the other hand, suggests a 'more strenuous moral experience than sincerity does, a more exigent concept of the self and of what being true to it consists in...' (p. 11). Although Trilling does not give a straightforward description, his work suggests authenticity is about staying true to oneself. It is not just about meaning what you say, but about being one's own and expressing one's true inner self (pp. 124, 161).

Reading Trilling's words, authenticity seems to be something inherent to a person or object, something that cannot be manufactured, but that you simply are or are not. Authenticity is typically considered this way, however, Gubrium and Holstein (2009) note a growing attention to its everyday dimensions, such as its social construction (p. 122-123). Vannini and Williams (2009) for example, argue that the definition of what authenticity constitutes changes as culture changes (p. 2). They describe authenticity as 'some sort of ideal' which is highly valued and might be used as a marker of status, or method of social control. It is not so much a state of being, but 'a set of qualities that people in a particular time and place have come to agree represent an ideal or exemplar' (p. 3). Franzese (2009) explains that when it comes to the self, authenticity is an individual's subjective sense that their behaviour, appearance and self reflects their core being, that one is living life honestly and with integrity (pp. 87, 90). The desire for authenticity and integrity can be a motivator for certain behaviour, but the exercise of it depends on social situations, as people engage in normative and socially expected impression management behaviours (pp. 98-99). For example, people tend to be less committed to their authenticity in the workplace and are willing to engage in impression management when needed, such as for keeping their job (p. 98). As will be discussed later on in this thesis, entrepreneurs on YouTube and other social media are argued to engage in such impression management behaviour and to being less committed to their authenticity.

Gubrium and Holstein (2009) describe authenticity as 'socially ubiquitous', an everyday practice where genuine persons are identified in everyday life and individuals make and respond to authenticity claims and get together in order to determine such things as the genuine, unreliable or truthful (pp. 124, 132). This is judged by 'situationally distinct practices, expectations and standards' (p. 122). Standards, generalized criteria and codes are not fixed, and the assessment of authenticity centres around the question asking what is genuine or real enough for the particular circumstances it arises in (pp. 135-136). As mentioned in the introduction, YouTube is becoming normalized as a place for such authentication practices (Androutsopoulos, 2015, p. 75). Communities build around shared interests negotiate and contest the social norms of participation on YouTube, constantly monitoring other people's behaviour, making judgements about the qualities of the performance they see and asking questions about its sincerity and the genuine (Burgess & Green, 2009b, p. 21; Strangelove, 2010, p. 5, 120, 121; Tolson, 2010, p. 277).

When a shift in social-cultural circumstances takes place, the awareness and reflexivity regarding authenticity are heightened (Leppänen et al., 2015, p. 1). Surrounded by the mass production of artefacts and living in a world where experiences and authenticity are being commodified and virtualized, consumers increasingly value authenticity and question its plausibility, aware of the possible fakery (Gilmore & Pine, 2007, pp. 10-36; Rose & Wood, 2005, p. 286; Vannini & Williams, 2009, p. 2 Strangelove, 2010, p. 31). On YouTube, viewers struggle with the possibility of inauthentic authenticity that is part of YouTube's culture (Burgess & Green, 2009b, p. 29). Burgess and Green (2009b) argue subsequent vloggers build identities around a similar ambiguity about their authenticity and viewers engage in activities trying to figure out how much of a YouTuber's act is real (p. 29). They persist in a quest for authenticity and demand high levels of it from YouTubers (Duplantier, 2016 p. 17; Strangelove, 2010, p. 64). How this quest and struggle came about, will be discussed in the next section, introducing YouTube and its ideology.

YouTube: history, stars and inauthentic authenticity

YouTube launched in 2005, was acquired by Google in 2006 and has since become a part of the everyday life and actions of many people (Burgess, 2013, p. 53; Burgess & Green, 2009b, p. 8; Strangelove, 2010, pp. 4, 6). Burgess and Green (2009b) describe YouTube as a mediated cultural system (p. 7). It is a broadcast platform and media archive, as well as a social network, with *participatory culture* as its core business (Burgess & Green 2009b, pp. 5-6). Users engage in what they see by responding with written and recorded comments, making them both producer and consumer (Burgess & Green, 2009b; Strangelove, 2010, pp. 14, 158). Part of the DIY ideology of participatory culture is a residual desire for contemporary folk culture, the 'culture of the people' which is authentic, homegrown and distinct from high and commercial culture, say Burgess and Green (2009b, p. 12). YouTube is seen as a place for public self-expression and often assumed to be created for amateur creativity and thriving on user-generated content (Burgess & Green, 2009b, pp. 4, 51). According to Burgess and Green (2009a) the "real" original YouTube is thought of as a grassroots media platform, driven by social or non-market motivations (p. 90). Meanwhile, Strangelove (2010) describes the website as a visual representation of the mundane, uncensored and unsponsored (p. 6).

A similar ideology is found within the discourse surrounding YouTube's amateur videographers. In most discussions, amateurs are represented as individualistic and ordinary producers, motivated by a desire for personal expression or community (Burgess & Green 2009b, p. 29; Burgess & Green, 2009a, p. 90). It is said that amateur content provides an alternative to commercially driven content produced by professionals, and their videos are perceived as more "real" than television (Strangelove, 2010, pp. 8, 65, 75). The vlog this thesis is focused on, is the dominating form of user generated content on YouTube (Burgess & Green, 2009a, p. 94; Burgess & Green, 2009b, p. 53). With their conversational character, vlogs are seen as an 'expression of the self', with people sharing their personal stories, experiences, interesting anomalies or expressing opinions or skills (Burgess & Green 2009b, p. 4; Christian, 2009, section 1, para. 2; Duplantier, 2016, p. 113).

With Google's acquisition in 2006, YouTube has gradually become commercially based, says Van Dijck (2013, p. 155). Users see this entry of commercial media players as a corporate takeover (Burgess & Green, 2009a, p. 90). Burgess and Green (2009b) however, argue the platform was 'first and foremost' a commercial enterprise and is as much that, as a place designed for ordinary citizens to participate culturally (pp. 75-76). YouTube is a dichotomy between user-created and traditional media content (Burgess & Green 2009b, p. 42). However, as it scaled up as a platform and company, its business model co-evolved and the boundaries between amateur and professional media shifted and blurred (Burgess, 2013, p. 53). Production and consumption, commercial and non-commercial, and amateur and professional interact and converge in new ways, representing an interrelationship between user-generated and commercially produced content (Burgess & Green 2009a, p.90; Burgess, 2013, p. 53; Strangelove, 2010, p. 7).

As YouTube matured as a commercial platform, a professionalization and formalization of amateur media production has also been developing (Burgess, 2013, p. 54). User-generated content attracted the interest of advertisers, opening up the possibility for amateur content to be commercialized (Burgess & Green, 2009b, pp. 23-24; Marwick, 2016, p. 338; Van Dijck, 2013, p. 155). Amateurs who might have started posting videos as a hobby or as a way to get into contact with others, are becoming YouTube stars, monetizing their community and make a living via advertising revenue (Burgess & Green, 2009b, pp. 23-24; Lagor, 2015, p. 228). Their success is part of the perception that YouTube is changing into a more mainstream, commercial space (Burgess & Green, 2009a, p. 98). Their vlogs are no longer purely amateur productions, as they are used in an entrepreneurial way (Burgess & Green, 2009a, p. 96). In order to gain a better understanding about these entrepreneurial vloggers and how they build a relationship with their viewers, the next paragraph will discuss the micro-celebrity, para-social relationship and use of strategic intimacies. The strategies discussed will later be used to analyze how a relationship of trust is created on HelloOctoberxo.

As seen on television: celebrities, para-social relationship and intimate aesthetics

Marwick (2016) describes the YouTube stars as *micro-celebrities*, a phenomenon enabled by and native to social media (p. 337). Micro-celebrity is a set of practices drawn from celebrity culture that "regular people" use in daily life in order to boost their popularity and attention within a network (pp. 337-338). It constitutes a self-presentation technique that typically involves 'self-conscious, carefully

constructed personas', strategically shared information, and the use of strategic intimacy to appeal to followers (pp. 334, 337). Similar to mainstream celebrities, micro-celebrities are able to establish a *para-social relationship*, which is an apparent face-to-face interaction between media characters and their audience (Horton & Wohl, 1956, section 1, para. 1). The phenomenon originally relates to television. Chen (2014) explains: 'when a viewer experiences mediated characters, he or she forms impressions, makes judgments about their personality, and develops beliefs about them' (p. 5). Just as with interpersonal communication, para-social communication can lead to relationships and a feeling of intimacy (Chen, 2014; Horton & Wohl, 1956). A feeling which is important in order for a micro-celebrity to build trust and be perceived as authentic, as will be discussed in the last section.

Micro-celebrities use online tools to establish, foster and maintain a para-social relationship and enact feelings of intimacy with their audience (Marwick, 2016; Abidin, 2015; Chen, 2014). Yet before discussing how they do this, Horton and Wohl's (1956) proposed strategies for creating an 'illusion' of intimacy need attention. YouTube videos are interwoven into modes of representation as seen on television and can reconstruct television's intimate screen (Creeber, 2011, p. 597; Strangelove, 2010, p. 172). As this thesis will analyze videos from Bonaldi, the strategies will be used to establish how a sense of intimacy is created. The first strategy is to duplicate the 'gestures, conversational style, and milieu of an informal face-to-face gathering' (section 3, para. 2). The character tries to maintain a flow of small talk and gains the impression that what happens has a momentum of its own. Secondly, he often faces the audience, directly addressing them and talking as if having a personal and private conversation (section 1, para. 2). Not keeping the private life an absolute secret and treating the rest of the cast as close intimates, are also helpful when creating a sense of intimacy (section 2, para. 3-5; section 9, para. 2). Creeber (2011) already describes other characteristics from television's intimate screen used in YouTube videos, like the extensive use of close-up on the face and the use of everyday settings, such as the personal space of the bedroom (pp. 597, 601-603).

Social media allow for more than one-sided communication (Marwick, 2016). According to Marwick (2016), micro-celebrities extend the para-social interaction to network webs of actual interaction, such as by replying in a comment section (p. 345). They know their audience, respond to them and have a direct interaction which often reveals intimate details of their lives (pp. 344, 346). This interaction is crucial to keep one's popularity, argues Marwick (p. 345). Abidin's (2015) study on micro-celebrities of the lifestyle genre in Singapore, whom she calls influencers, describes how they appropriate and mobilize intimacies to give the impression of an intimate exchange (section 1, para. 2; section 4, para. 3). Firstly, posts are more amateur and raw than well edited professional productions, and allow for an immediate interactivity and response from the audience (section 7, para. 2). The audience is often invited to interact with the influencer, asked to give feedback in order to improve content, or asked for input concerning the curation of content (section 7, para. 2). Second is the documentation of trivial and mundane aspects of everyday life and behind the scenes revelations, portraying ordinary and relatable everyday life (section 7, para. 1). Meanwhile, the pace, quantity and wide circulation of posts adds to the impression that they are constantly sharing some of their personal lives (section 7, para. 2).

One of the key attributes of these micro-celebrities is that they are authentic. Despite the constructed personas and strategic interaction, people presume there is little difference between their perceived and actual persona (Horton & Wohl, 1956, section 9, para. 1; Marwick, 2016, pp. 344-345). The studies of Hunter (2015) and Marwick (2013) that will be discussed next, show the importance of this trust in the authenticity of a micro-celebrity when non-commercial and commercial converge.

The importance of a relationship of trust

In her paper, Hunter (2015) describes how the monetizing of so called mommy blogs is causing an online backlash in its community of readers, and is threatening the foundation of authenticity upon which it is founded (p. 1). Hunter analysed comments concerning the commercialisation on a forum where members critique and criticize bloggers. The comments revealed that much of the attraction of a blogger comes from her honest accounts, the candor in which she discusses her life and the seemingly intimate disclosure (p. 2). It is mainly this revealing of intimate details that gives the sense of a blogger being authentic. Hunter's paper indicates the importance of a relationship of trust between bloggers and their audience, which is provided through 'mutual self-disclosure, reciprocal reading and commenting' (Morrison, 2011, p. 44). Sponsored content might threaten that relationship (Hunter, 2015, p. 2). A common feeling is that sponsored content is deceptive and has bloggers pull back from telling authentic stories, omitting the messy and honest details of daily life in order to be more appealing to a larger public (pp. 4, 6). The readers feel as if it is more about selling a product than sharing honest and authentic accounts of life, which is what made the blog appealing in the first place and is part of the relationship of trust that makes the readers feel connected (p. 4). In order to keep their audience, bloggers must maintain a sense of authenticity and intimacy, even if a blog has turned into a job (p. 7).

Marwick (2013) analysed fashion bloggers and their conceptions of authenticity, looking at their self-presentation techniques and asking how they conceptualize and evaluate the realness of themselves and other bloggers. Her study focusses on the reconciliation of authenticity and commerciality. In spite of these concepts being contradictory, authenticity is significantly present in spaces where commercial things such as entrepreneurship take place, she argues. These fashion bloggers have a close resemblance to beauty vloggers such as Bonaldi, as they both share personal experiences about commodity goods, a sphere in which sincerity and outspokenness are very much valued by the audience (p. 7). Her study concludes that authenticity means three things to these bloggers. Firstly, it means a *palpable sense of truthful self-expression*, which involves revealing something about the blogger's true inner self and giving a glimpse into their life (pp. 1, 4). This honest reveal of personal information increases the likelihood of a personal relationship between reader and blogger. Second is the *connection and responsiveness to the audience*, which involves the extension of honesty and transparency in relationship with readers. Having genuine and frequent interactions is important for the establishment of authenticity. Bloggers who don't engage as much, are considered less real (p. 5). Third is an *honest engagement with commodity goods and brands*, which involves expressing personal style and experience in spite of sponsors, trends or free goods. Honesty and personal preference must not be overshadowed by the engagement (pp. 5-6). These ideas are also

evident in Hunter's (2015) analysis and can be linked to the proposed relationship of trust. Therefore, this thesis will conceptualize these three notions of authenticity as what is needed in order to establish a relationship of trust between micro-celebrities and their community. This will be used as a framework for the analysis of this thesis to build upon.

Methodological framework

To find out in what way a relationship of trust is being created between Bonaldi and the community on her YouTube channel HelloOctoberxo, a qualitative content analysis will be conducted, looking at ten videos posted on HelloOctoberxo, their titles, description boxes and the comment section beneath each video. Flick (2009) argues qualitative research is of specific relevance when the study of social relations is concerned (p. 12). Due to the pluralization of life worlds, 'locally, temporally, and situationally limited narratives are now required' and the analysis of concrete cases can be attained with qualitative research (pp. 12, 21). Qualitative content analysis allows us to interpret textual material from a variety of sources and interpret different kinds of patterns (p. 323). As this thesis will look at both the textual, verbal and visual of different parts of Bonaldi's YouTube channel, the qualitative content analysis is opted most suitable.

The framework for this analysis is composed of the three ideas of authenticity proposed by Marwick (2013): a palpable sense of truthful self-expression, a responsiveness and connection to the audience and an honest engagement with the commodity goods and brands. All are needed to build a relationship of trust between a micro-celebrity and his community. In order to answer the main question, the analysis will focus on three subquestions build upon theories of Marwick (2016), Horton and Wohl (1956), Creeber (2011), Abidin (2015), Marwick (2013) and Hunter (2015):

Q 1: In what way is a sense of intimacy created in the videos and comments posted by Bonaldi?

Q 2: How does Bonaldi communicate an honest and transparent engagement with commodity goods and brands on her channel?

Q 3: How does the audience perceive and conceive of the authenticity concerning Bonaldi, the content of these videos and her comments?

Due to the limited available time, it was opted to analyze ten videos, their titles, description boxes and comment sections. The corpus contains of five sponsored and five non-sponsored videos that have been posted between December 2014 and September 2016, when this research started. It is around December 2014 Bonaldi started to focus on YouTube fulltime and her first video with the word ad in its title was posted, making it a suitable starting point. This also gives the opportunity to reflect on any noticeable differences between older and newer videos. As Bonaldi creates sponsored and non-sponsored videos, both are part of the corpus, in order to see if there are any differences between the two concerning the subquestions. It was chosen to gather different sorts of videos with different subjects, such as a sponsored make-up tutorial, a non-sponsored video showing product launches, a vlog and a shopping haul. Not only because these videos might employ different strategies to create a

sense of intimacy, but also to have a corpus that reflects the many different videos posted on HelloOctoberxo, in spite of its smallness.

First, to analyze the videos, a coding scheme has been created using Horton and Wohl's (1956) theory of para-social relationships and the articles of Creeber (2011), Abidin (2015), Marwick (2015; 2013) and Hunter (2015). Their overlapping theories about the creation of intimacy provide the lens to see in what way Bonaldi creates a sense of intimacy in her videos. This coding scheme can be found in the appendix. Each video has been watched three times. The first time documenting immediate noticeable signs of intimacy and looking for anything missing within the coding scheme. The second time visual aspects such as editing, setting and use of close-ups were analyzed, and the final viewing focused on dialogue, looking for signs such as responsiveness, small talk and intimate revealing. Within this dialogue, the analysis also looked for signs of Bonaldi communicating an honest engagement with brands, such as by emphasizing that her personal experience is sincere and honest, no matter the engagement. Secondly, as the description box and video titles are other places for Bonaldi to communicate with her audience, these have also been analyzed. Here looking for transparency about sponsorships or other engagements with brands, and again, looking for Bonaldi emphasizing her personal experiences are sincere and honest, despite any form of engagement.

Thirdly, a total of 1543 comments of the ten analyzed videos have been read and analyzed, gathered with The YouTube Data Tool of the Digital Methods Initiative¹. For unknown reasons, fourteen comments could not be retrieved by the tool, and are therefore missing from the corpus. Part of the analysis focused on how Bonaldi engages with her community in the comment section, when she responds, what she responds to and what is said, looking for an intimate exchange and transparency and honesty concerning engagements with brands. As it is the community who the relationship of trust is created with, their response is also an important object of research. Looking at the sentiment in their comments can show their attitude towards Bonaldi and her content (Thelwall, 2014, p. 87). Although the downside is it leaves it to the researcher to interpret the meanings of these comments, according to Thelwall (2014) the benefit is that there is no interference of an interviewer. The audience gives their opinion voluntarily, meaning they are free to express themselves in the way they like (p. 75). Comments from the community have been analyzed looking at how viewers perceive the authenticity of Bonaldi and her content when the palpable sense of truthful self-expression, responsiveness and connection and honest engagement with brands is concerned. It is important to keep in mind that it is possible comments have been removed by Bonaldi or people themselves. Furthermore, the community surrounding HelloOctoberxo is bigger than those who comment, seeing how the majority of YouTube users never leave comments (Van Dijck, 2013, p. 152). Therefore, this research does not give insight into the sentiment of Bonaldi's whole community, but only of those who comment.

Concluding, Marwick's (2013) three ideas of authenticity will be used as a framework to analyze in what way relationship of trust is being created by Bonaldi. Both the palpable sense of truthful self-expression and the responsiveness and connection to the audience are analyzed by looking at the way Bonaldi creates a sense of intimacy in her videos and comments. These two ideas

¹ <https://tools.digitalmethods.net/netvizz/youtube/>

of authenticity will also be covered when analyzing comments from the audience concerning Bonaldi's authenticity, as will the idea of an honest engagement with brands and commodity goods. This third idea of authenticity will also be analyzed by looking at the way Bonaldi communicates and honest and transparent engagement with commodity goods and brands within the videos, their titles, description boxes and her comments.

Analysis

Before starting the analysis, Susannah Bonaldi should be introduced. Bonaldi is an English 25-year-old blogger and vlogger. She started her YouTube channel and weblog Hello October in 2011, sharing her experiences with beauty, style and traveling. In 2014, Bonaldi quit her job in marketing and turned her blog and YouTube channel into a fulltime career. Starting this research, her channel consisted of 356,080 subscribers, 391 videos and a total of 24,255,346 views. YouTube is her main job, providing the biggest part of income (Kenyon, 2016). One of the ways Bonaldi generates income, is by working together with brands to create sponsored content (Kenyon, 2016). She also receives free products, PR samples and posts affiliate links in description boxes, receiving a percentage of the purchases made through those links ("Disclaimer", n.d.). Bonaldi is managed by James Grant Group, which helps on-screen talent managing their career. Whether she is also part of the YouTube partner program, sharing revenue from advertisements with YouTube, is unclear.

The first two sections of the analysis will focus on general observations made of the visual and verbal in Bonaldi's videos. The following three sections elaborate on three videos standing out from the corpus, discussing the videos themselves as well as the interaction taking place in their comment sections. The final two sections will expand on Bonaldi communicating honesty and transparency, her engagement in the comment section, and the audience's perception of Bonaldi's authenticity, but only discussing what has not been touched upon earlier in the analysis. It was opted not to discuss each subquestion separately, in order to keep a flow when discussing the results of the analysis and to refrain from repetition. For ethical reasons and in order to keep their privacy, names of people commenting will not be named within this research.

The visual: basics and messy details

This first section of the analysis will focus on how a sense of intimacy is created with the visual in Bonaldi's videos. Showcasing some of Horton and Wohl's (1956) intimate strategies and characteristics of television's intimate screen, each video is a shot of Bonaldi in full close-up, looking and talking straight into the camera, directly addressing the audience. Sometimes viewers see Bonaldi from her chest to her head, other times the camera comes in even closer, only leaving a bit of the background visible. Most of the videos are shot in her bedroom with the vlogger sitting in front or on the foot of her bed, filming in what Creeber (2011) calls a *personal space* and *everyday setting*. It is a small part of personal space that is shared, as only part of the bed's headboard, some pillows and a nightstand are visible. Two videos show other parts of Bonaldi's home as well, containing footage of her bathroom, kitchen, a dresser and what looks like her office. Everything seems to be filmed by Bonaldi herself, sitting in front of a camera on a tripod or other standard. This setup can contribute to

the feeling that the person watching is alone with the YouTuber, replicating the milieu of a private *face-to-face gathering* (Horton & Wohl, 1956). One video also contains footage shot by someone else, however what this means for the sense of intimacy in that video will be discussed later on in this analysis.

All videos display Bonaldi's editing skills, shown by cuts, voice overs, fast-forwarding, background music and the addition of text. Except for two make-up routines where the YouTuber is on screen the whole time and talking "live", the close-ups of Bonaldi are alternated with shots featuring products or other things mentioned. A shopping haul features shots of Bonaldi wearing the clothes she has bought and in most tutorials, launches or routines, Bonaldi edits in close-ups of the products she mentions. However, on the whole it is Bonaldi who is featured on screen and in most cases her voice has been edited on top of footage featuring other things, remaining the flow of her conversation with the audience and adding to a feeling of the video having *a momentum of its own* (Horton & Wohl, 1956). This conversational flow is also reinforced whenever Bonaldi does not look into the camera, but at her viewfinder or mirror in order to apply make-up, when her eyes just wonder to the side of the camera or focus on a product. Even without intimate eye contact, the vlogger continues to address her viewer directly, telling what she is doing and engaging in small talk. Her gestures are also part of this *conversational style* (Horton & Wohl, 1956). She often uses her hands to express herself when talking, sometimes swinging around the product she is holding. Other times she is just playing with the products in her hands, as if to keep them occupied. Bonaldi is not presenting, she is just talking.

Despite the possibility, Bonaldi does not edit out every mistake. Nor does she abstain from pointing out the less glamorous or perfect, such as her spotty face or that she may have put on more concealer than she 'originally had in mind'. *Honest and messy details* (Hunter, 2015) are shown, as well as the *amateur and raw* (Abidin, 2015), though not in every video and in some more than others. Viewers see and hear Bonaldi mumble, trip on words or mispronouncing them, having trouble remembering names of products, or comment on something she hears herself say. In her sponsored pink lip and cheeks tutorial, Bonaldi stabs herself in the eye with her mascara and cuts to footage where she is catching her breath, clearly in pain and blinking away tears. She does not only leave it in for her viewer's general amusement, but also 'to keep it real with you guys, as this stuff really does happen to me' (Bonaldi, 2016, March 22). Meanwhile, Bonaldi ends another video telling she was not in filming mode, summarizing everything that went wrong. She also shares this throughout the video when telling she is giving up on her eyebrows because 'they are looking an absolute mess', or by sharing her annoyance that one eye has gone better than the other which she 'literally' cannot do anything about (Bonaldi, 2015, March 8). Bonaldi discloses personal and *relatable everyday life* events and gives a *behind the scenes revelation* (Abidin, 2015) by pointing out flaws and showing the messy, which might add to a feeling that personal and honest accounts of life are shared (Hunter, 2015).

An ongoing conversation

Another intimate strategic featuring in Bonaldi's videos is the use of *small talk* (Horton & Wohl, 1956). Bonaldi engages in small talk throughout almost every video, sometimes referring to ordinary,

relatable and mundane events and other times revealing more personal information (Abidin, 2015; Horton & Wohl, 1956; Hunter, 2015; Marwick, 2013). Bonaldi interrupts a tutorial to tell she picked up a new beauty blender since her dog chewed the last one into shreds, informs those watching her May favourites video that a brush was given by friend Alex, declares her love for Christmas pudding during a shopping haul and tells that the bag she is showing is going to be used when traveling between her and her boyfriend's parents at Christmas. These *self-expressions* (Marwick, 2013) all uncover something about the vlogger's life or herself, adding to the idea of *interpersonal communication* and a *private conversation* (Horton & Wohl, 1956). This is reinforced by utterances like 'you guys know I love my mascara', 'can you tell I have switched the order...?' and 'we have talked about that'. It is as if Bonaldi is removing the screen between her and her audience, and there is a relationship with shared memories and conversations, just as friends have.

This sense of intimacy is also maintained by Bonaldi expressing a *connection and responsiveness to the audience* (Marwick, 2016) and *invitation for interaction and feedback* (Abidin, 2015). Sometimes the YouTuber refers and responds directly to comments from her community, for example by stating 'you guys always tell me to tightline my waterline' (Bonaldi, 2016, February 9). Other times no comments are mentioned, such as when Bonaldi states a make-up routine might be the look for those who do not like it when she wears liquid eyeliner, only indicating some have said something and she has taken their opinion into consideration. This consideration is also visible when Bonaldi shows an affordable drugstore dupe for those who cannot afford the high-end product from an everyday make-up routine. Showing the *honesty and transparency* (Hunter, 2015; Marwick, 2013) that is part of the responsiveness, Bonaldi explains she will use the high-end product in her video, as it is her favourite and she wants the routine to accurately represent her daily look.

Honesty, transparency and responsiveness are also displayed in a non-sponsored shopping haul video. The YouTuber discloses some items were sent to her, explaining she wants to be transparent as there has been a lot of talk about sponsoring in the comments. Bonaldi ends the video asking her viewers to share what they think of the items, telling them she is interested to hear their thoughts and 'genuinely' wants to know, especially concerning the clothing she is not sure about keeping. Bonaldi asks for an opinion, just as one would do with friends when in doubt. There are more videos where Bonaldi directly asks her audience for feedback to improve content, or input for future content (Abidin, 2015), which might add to an idea of mutual interaction (Marwick, 2015).

The vlog: sharing the everyday and an intimate reveal

After these general observations, the next three sections of this analysis will further discuss three striking videos from the corpus, along with the interaction taking place in their comment section. The discussion starts off with the vlog, a video with an intimate reveal distinct from the other analysed videos. There are videos on HelloOctoberxo which mainly focus on sharing personal details or mundane and everyday aspects of Bonaldi's life. The vlogger posts Q&A's where she answers personal questions, videos showing birthday and Christmas presents, or what she eats in a day. A more circumstantial part of the personal videos are titled vlogs, in which Bonaldi takes her audience along with her in her everyday life, differing them from videos with subjects such as reviews and

routines. Vlogs are not created to talk about commodity products, but to give a *glimpse of her life* (Abidin, 2015), both the ordinary and personal. On July 6th, 2016, Bonaldi posted a monthly vlog titled *Sick in Paris & PO Box Opening | June Vlog | Hello October*, in which she tells what the month of June looked like for her, showing snippets of vlog footage filmed throughout that time. While Bonaldi talks her audience through the footage, she maintains a *constant flow of small talk* (Horton & Wohl, 1956) and addresses her audience as if telling a friend what she has been up to lately. This conversational style is reinforced by the intimate setting. The YouTuber is not in front of her bed, but sitting on it, under a blanket and filming a full close-up of her face. Both this and all other footage is filmed with the camera in her hand, making it seem more *raw and amateur* (Abidin, 2015) than other videos. Some vlog footage has Bonaldi talking “live”, while in other shots it seems as if Bonaldi has kept the audio from her conversation in bed and edited the footage on top of it. Again, reinforcing the conversational style.

Most of the vlog material shows Bonaldi doing activities and having conversations with friend and fellow YouTuber Alex. Though not the same as cast members in a TV show, viewers see Bonaldi treating another micro-celebrity as an intimate, another way to create a sense of intimacy (Horton & Wohl, 1956). The video also displays what Abidin (2015) calls the *documentation of trivial and mundane aspects of life*, and gives a behind the scenes of Bonaldi’s working life. The vlogger talks about things such as her broken laptop, going kitchen shopping, a trip with Alex and the products she has received in her P.O. box. Viewers see shots of Bonaldi’s surroundings, a running bath, her dog, Bonaldi and Alex sitting in the yard, grabbing a coffee, going to a lunch meeting, chatting and eating their food, working behind their laptops in their management’s office, trying on wigs at an event and enjoying a weekend in the spa. This gives viewers a glimpse of what the YouTuber’s life looked like in June, and can be seen as a way for Bonaldi to show parts of her private life, not keeping it an absolute secret (Horton & Wohl, 1956).

There is more, however, as Bonaldi also entrusts her audience with some intimate information and details about a health-related issue in her life she finds ‘difficult to talk about’, and even has had trouble with sharing with friends and family. Without getting into too much detail, Bonaldi explains she got unwell during a trip to Paris and had to return home. The vlogger is clearly struggling, as her eyes well up with tears and she turns her face away. Bonaldi explains she has been suffering from anxiety concerning that day and getting unwell again, resulting in becoming breathless, hearing her heartbeat in her ears and losing feeling in her arms. She continues to clarify she is going through some ‘boring medical stuff’ and has had to take a step back to prevent herself from getting too stressed, a necessary step as ‘they do not know what is going on in my body’. Even though Bonaldi does not share every detail, the emotions and intimate details she does reveal, reinforce the idea of a *private conversation* and *informal face-to-face gathering* (Horton & Wohl, 1956). Bonaldi ends her story addressing comments questioning what has happened to her schedule. She explains to her viewers this is the reason she has not been posting as usual and apologizes for it, showing responsiveness to the audience and indicating the importance of *the pace and quantity* of her posts (Abidin, 2015).

Bonaldi entrusting her community with these health problems, is received positively in the comment section. People share their appreciation for the vlogger sharing this with them, telling it felt

personal or it shows strength to admit this. Showing signs of *mutual self-disclosure* (Morrison, 2010), some share their own experience with anxiety and the feeling that they can relate to her, telling her she is not alone. Others express their emotional reaction to Bonaldi's story, such as a woman admitting she nearly willed up herself seeing Bonaldi so sad, or a viewer telling it makes her feel less alone to see someone else going through something similar. Multiple people comment they are sad because of Bonaldi's clear anxiety or the sight of her being so worried. This gives the idea they feel a *palpable sense of truthful self-expression* displayed in the video (Marwick, 2013). This also visible when seemingly wanting to lift up Bonaldi's spirits, one viewer comments 'You are so lovely, wonderful, kind, genuine, and your videos are impeccable', whilst other comments describe the YouTuber as a sweet person or having a true hart.

The personal ad

The second noteworthy video from the corpus is a sponsored video somewhat similar to the vlog. The video, titled *MY DAILY ROUTINE: Things That Make The Difference | Hello October | AD*, also reveals more personal details and gives a glimpse into Bonaldi's everyday life. Referring to her stress, anxiety and the regular bad day, Bonaldi talks about five steps she has recently added to her daily routine that help her having a better day. When the YouTuber explains one of these steps is to stick to her skincare routine, products from Clinique are shown, the brand sponsoring the video. Aside from some shots in the introduction, Clinique does not appear in the rest of the video. Bonaldi's health problems however, are mentioned a couple of times, for example when she explains that writing down positive thoughts has become part of her routine after a period of feeling 'very very down and just quite sad a lot'. Despite the sponsoring, the vlogger does not abstain from mentioning her health problems and sharing this honest account of her life (Hunter, 2015; Marwick, 2013). Bonaldi engages in self-disclosure and gives some insight into her life, through sharing the things she incorporates throughout her day. Similar to the vlog, Bonaldi talks her audience through her routine, editing footage on top of her voice. They see her walking her dog, washing her face, making coffee and sitting on her bed writing in a notebook. However, this footage shows Bonaldi being filmed by someone else, which gives the impression that the footage is not so much an actual documentation of these mundane aspects, but an enactment of what Bonaldi's everyday life looks like. This removes some of the rawness (Abidin, 2015) and might give the video a more edited feel, taking away some of the sense of intimacy. This might be made up when she directly invites interaction, telling her viewers to feel free to leave their tips for a better day, as she would love to read them and they might help someone else.

The invitation is picked up by the audience, as there are several people who share their tips in the comments, some in general, others directing them at Bonaldi by replying to her, telling what worked for their anxiety. Some say they will try the tips, thankful for the 'helpful' advice. Bonaldi responds to the audience and their suggestions, replying directly to comments and complementing ideas, encouraging people who want to try some of her tips, or just agreeing with comments. This supports her message that she would love to read the tips, whilst also showing signs of reciprocal reading and a *mutual growing interaction* (Marwick, 2016). One viewer thanks Bonaldi for sharing some 'quite personal stuff' and someone else is happy to see Bonaldi happier and more positive, an

indication that they feel a *palpable sense of truthful self-expression* (Marwick, 2016). The sponsorship is mentioned by the community, although most of the debate is about whether or not the incorporation of skincare in a video about wellness is superficial. One person seems to be questioning Bonaldi's motivation for creating the video, commenting she thinks Clinique contacted Bonaldi, which resulted in her creating the video around the products. Though it is better than the whole video being an ad, 'this is still an ad'. Using Hunter's (2015) words, she seems to think the video is more about selling a product than sharing honest accounts of Bonaldi's daily life.

The scripted ad

Another sponsored video stands out for a very different reason. The 1 minute and 26 seconds video, titled *Maxfactor Creme Puff Blush Mini Tutorial | Hello October AD*, is not only the shortest, but also the one employing the least strategies needed to create a sense of intimacy. Again, Bonaldi is in her bedroom, in full-close up and talking straight into the camera. However, other than by looking directly at them, viewers do not get addressed directly, there is no small talk and there are no signs of a personal conversation. She starts off with 'hi everyone', and then gets straight into providing information about the blush and a tutorial showing how to apply it. The video ends abruptly without any words of goodbye. The lack of conversation and small talk does not go unnoticed. Viewers comment how the video feels scripted, over rehearsed, does not look or feel natural, sounds out of style and lacks Bonaldi's usual cheerfulness. The comments refer to Bonaldi's honest engagement with the brand and the expression of her personal style and experience (Marwick, 2013). The community seems to be feeling as if Bonaldi does not express herself personally. One viewer comments '...I usually look into the products you recommend but with this one I'm just not sure if you actually like it or not...'. However, there are also comments defending Bonaldi or appreciating the video. Some find it informative, say Bonaldi did a good job or propose what she could do differently in the future. One viewer expresses her understanding that these sort of sponsored videos are less personal sometimes than those not sponsored, whilst someone else says Bonaldi has the 'same calm voice and actions' as in other videos, feeling as if Bonaldi is being herself in spite of staying within the guidelines of the sponsorship.

Bonaldi responds to these remarks in the comment section, letting her audience know she has been reading their comments and explaining why the video is made the way it is. She thanks her viewers for their feedback and explains that she loves Maxfactor products and enjoys working with the brand. Here, Bonaldi defends her personal experience and engagement to Maxfactor. She sends the message that she likes their products, despite the sponsorship. Bonaldi continues disclosing information about the engagement by clarifying 'they asked for an application video that was around 90 seconds in length', showing an *extension of honesty and transparency in relationship with her readers* (Marwick, 2013). In another comment directed to one viewer, Bonaldi explains she would have loved to show the whole collection of blushes, only could not do so due to the time. This does not only show the same transparency, but also that in this case, her personal preference did get overshadowed by the engagement. Bonaldi ends her comment by telling she has taken all the feedback on board and 'will do my best to tweak the brief for the second video I'm working on...'. Again, Bonaldi shows a

responsiveness to her audience, showcasing that what they mention matters and is taken into consideration.

Communicating honesty and transparency

Though it has been touched upon in this analysis, this section will elaborate on how Bonaldi communicates honesty and transparency on her channel, concerning her engagement with commodity goods and brands. The vlogger uses videos, their title, description box and comment section to do so. The sponsoring of content is disclosed by putting the word AD in the title and stating the sponsorship or product placement with a text in the video and description box. Sometimes it is addressed in the video. Most description boxes contain a disclaimer in which Bonaldi also states when content is not sponsored and refers to a blogpost link in which the vlogger explains what sponsored content, PR samples and affiliated links entail. Some description boxes share a text saying 'I only recommend products or services I use personally and believe will be good for my viewers', sending the message that Bonaldi's personal preference and honesty are not overshadowed by engagement with brands. This is also visible in a make-up tutorial sponsored by L'Oréal. Bonaldi explains she will both show some recently released products and run her audience through some of her old L'Oréal favourites. Telling them 'you will recognize these products cause I use them all the time' reinforces the idea she likes the brand in spite of the sponsorship and that the experiences in the video are honest accounts (Hunter, 2015, Marwick, 2013). Bonaldi recalls on the memory of her audience more often by referring to other times she has already shared personal experiences with products from brands. This transparency about experiences is also featured in non-sponsored videos. In a video showing new launched products she has loved recently, Bonaldi explains she will show the products in the order of what she used the most to what is new, disclosing that with those products she has less experience and more testing is needed.

Bonaldi also uses the comment section to communicate about sponsorship, her engagement with brands and how content is created. One viewer questions if Bonaldi actually likes a product as much as she is saying in her non-sponsored May favourites video, commenting 'the camomile oil is your favourite and its full... yeah sure'. Bonaldi responds to the viewer, disclosing she has used the oil three weeks and you only need small pumps, whilst also explaining that she has bought the product herself. Another viewer comments on the video about new beauty launches, saying she feels as if Bonaldi is changing and just raving about products that were sent to her, instead of what she paid for. This leads Bonaldi to clarify that this particular video is about press samples as it is about new launches, but she cut down heavily on samples received to only show her favourite picks. As shown within the discussion of the three videos, Bonaldi does not only respond to comments or questions concerning her honesty. Though not excessively and not beneath every video, comment sections show her engaging with her audience in different ways. Mainly by thanking people for their feedback, occasionally by agreeing with them or asking people with negative feedback what they would like to see different, other times by answering questions asked, though a considerable amount remains unanswered. However, the intimate exchange between fellow YouTuber Alex is continued in the comment section below the videos, with Alex leaving comments such as her needing a

product Bonaldi uses and the YouTuber responding 'I'm feeling a Space NK trip on Thursday?' In a way, the viewers get to see a conversation between two friends and a glimpse of the YouTuber's personal life.

The community: perceiving authenticity

Concluding this analysis, this section will expand a bit more on the audiences' perception of authenticity concerning Bonaldi and her content. The perceptions have already been discussed within the discussion of the three noticeable videos, but some other videos also display comments concerning Bonaldi's authenticity. A discussion beneath the sponsored video with a complete L'Oréal make-up look shows how the audience thinks a truthful personal experience is important. Where one person feels she is being lied to because the vlogger only uses one brand, another person feels as if Bonaldi is not honest because she cannot see the tightlining described by Bonaldi. Someone else shares she does not know how she feels about sponsored videos with products Bonaldi has never tried before, while the person who commented on all products being brand new, suggests using more often used products would give the video a more genuine feel. A minimal summer make-up routine, featuring one sponsored product and a considerable higher amount of small talk and personal revealing, shows multiple people commenting positively about Bonaldi integrating sponsored content into her channel. Some say it is subtle and they can hardly tell it is an ad, liking that it does not feel as if products are pushed on them. One person compliments the videos 'always remain very down to earth and very you', while another viewer states 'I like how your advertised videos are getting more personal and fun as well as professional.... before it didn't feel like you were being yourself in ads'. Meanwhile, the pink lip and cheeks tutorial where Bonaldi shared the honest detail of stabbing herself in the eye is applauded for its realness. One viewer comments the way Bonaldi edits her videos is authentic, someone else tells she felt Bonaldi's pain but is glad she is keeping it real, while another viewer even loves that the YouTuber showed the mishap, agreeing this is 'definitely keeping it real, so well done'. More people comment they could feel the pain, finding it relatable and sharing their own experiences of the same event happening to them.

In some occasions it is questioned if the experiences Bonaldi shares in her non-sponsored videos are honest. The viewer questioning Bonaldi's love for the camomile oil seems to doubt that the content really is not sponsored. When she gets a respond asking her why Bonaldi would lie about being sponsored and saying there is no need for scepticism, she replies 'do you really think she isn't sponsored... people are so innocent!'. Even though vloggers are obligated to disclose if something is sponsored, this viewer does not seem to believe they always do. Meanwhile someone else starts a small discussion when questioning how it is possible that Bonaldi is 'absolutely in love' with everything she shows in a video containing newly launched beauty products. One viewer defends Bonaldi saying it is because the video is about all the things she loves, whilst someone else thinks nowadays every YouTuber uses that utterance for everything. In her opinion, new YouTubers are more honest than the older ones.

Conclusion

This thesis has analysed the way Bonaldi creates a relationship of trust with her community, by looking at the palpable sense of truthful self-expression, responsiveness and connection to the audience, and an honest engagement with brands and commodity goods. Trying to sustain this relationship of trust, despite the commercial entitlement, Bonaldi mostly leans on self-expression and giving insight into her everyday life, as well as the extension of honesty and transparency. In both the sponsored and non-sponsored videos, Bonaldi shares information about herself or her life through her extensive use of small talk or sharing her personal experiences with products. The vlog is an exceptional example of self-expression, as it is both centred on giving an insight into her life and has Bonaldi revealing intimate details about her health problems. Honesty and transparency is another key feature on HelloOctoberxo. The vlogger is not afraid to show the messy details, mistakes and amateur in her videos. She uses the videos, their titles and description boxes to clearly disclose sponsored content, shares details about her engagement with brands and goods or how a video came about, and uses different ways to emphasize that her experiences are personal and not influenced by the brands and sponsorships.

Where a direct and frequent interaction within the comment section is concerned, the responsiveness and connection to the audience seems to be the least employed in order to sustain a relationship of trust. Bonaldi does address her viewers directly in both sponsored and non-sponsored videos, asks for feedback or input, refers to comments or invites the audience to interact with her, but the comment sections are not the site of an extensive, frequent mutual interaction. That is not to say the vlogger is completely absent within the comments, as the analysis does show her responding and engaging in discussions, mostly visible in the personal and the scripted ad. Yet, a significant amount of questions from viewers remain unanswered, two videos have only one or two comments from Bonaldi and two other videos do not show Bonaldi engaging at all. One of them being the shopping haul in which Bonaldi specifically asks her viewers for their opinion and advice. Bonaldi seems to lean more on the illusion of a conversation, just as with the one-sided communication in the original para-social relationship, than engaging in actual frequent interactions. However, it must be remembered there are more videos on Bonaldi's channel, which comment sections might show more of this interaction. Furthermore, it is possible a direct and frequent interaction is more apparent on the other social media Bonaldi uses. Future research could focus on these channels in order to establish this.

The community does take up on invitations of interaction from the videos and respond with comments showing mutual self-disclosure or giving opinions and feedback when asked. Intimate details such as shared in the vlog and sponsored video concerning Bonaldi's daily routine, or the addition of messy details, are positively received by the community. Looking at the comments, they seem to add to the 'realness' of the vlogger, showing her personality. The sponsored video that did not contain any self-expression, was thought of most as an 'ad'. However, when it concerns free goods and sponsored content, viewers do seem to be more uncertain if they can trust the personal experiences shared by Bonaldi, even if she is open about the engagement. It should be noted here that from the 1543 comments of the analysed videos, a small share regards comments about how

viewers perceive and conceive of the authenticity concerning Bonaldi, her comments and content. As within this case study these comments take up a smaller part of the analysis, the comments that do concern authenticity have been sufficient enough to give some insight. However, in order to get a more substantial insight into the communities' sentiment, more videos and comment sections should be analyzed.

Though not large in its size or arguing to be representative of Bonaldi's whole YouTube channel, this research does add to an understanding about YouTube's culture. Touching upon the reconciliation of authenticity and commerciality, giving some insight into practices of authenticity taking place when commerciality is concerned, it can be used to build further upon and look at different vloggers on YouTube. As Bonaldi is also visible on Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and Snapchat, future research might focus on these social media channels to see how they are employed in order to sustain the relationship of trust and the perceived intimacy that is part of it. Future research might take it even further and look at the way this relationship is build offline, during meetings and other events where Bonaldi and her community actually come face-to-face. Continuing, other studies could focus on interviewing Bonaldi, in order to find out how she herself says to be building a relationship of trust, or tries to reconcile authenticity and commerciality on her channel. Lastly, interviews with members from the community could provide more insight into how the community experiences this relationship of trust, the disclosure of intimacy and how Bonaldi's authenticity is perceived.

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Appendix

Coding scheme analysis video HelloOctoberxo

Visual

Close up / facing spectator / talking into camera (*milieu face-to-face gathering / intimate screen*)

Non close up shots (*milieu face-to-face gathering / intimate screen*)

Filming herself (*raw and amateur / milieu face-to-face gathering / private conversation*)

Filming by someone else (*raw and amateur / milieu face-to-face gathering / private conversation*)

Other people in front of the camera (*milieu face-to-face gathering / private life / private conversation*)

Indoor setting (*everyday or mundane setting / personal space*)

Outdoor setting (*everyday or mundane setting / personal space*)

Display of product (*milieu face-to-face gathering / intimate screen*)

Editorial cuts (*raw and amateur / conversational style*)

Behind the scene editing (*amateur and raw / curating life / transparency and honesty*)

Leaving in flaws and mistakes, emphasizing less perfect (*amateur and raw / honesty and transparency / admit messy and honest details / behind the scenes*)

Gestures (*conversational style / milieu face- to-face gathering*)

Verbal

Leaving in flaws and mistakes, emphasizing less perfect (*amateur and raw / honesty and transparency / admit messy and honest details / behind the scenes*)

Mentioning sponsorship (*honesty and transparency / engagement brand*)

Talking about personal interests / background / personal information (*personal and private conversation / milieu face-to-face gathering / self-expression / revealing intimate details*)

Responding to audience (*directly addressing audience / conversational style / connection and response audience*)

Asking response from audience (*directly addressing audience / conversational style / connection and response audience / inviting interaction*)

Documenting or sharing trivial and mundane aspects of everyday life (*glimpse into life / revealing intimate details / conversational style / personal and private conversation*)

(flow of) small talk (*conversational style / milieu face-to-face gathering*)

Directly addressing audience when speaking (*personal and private conversation / milieu face-to-face gathering*)

Greeting (*conversational style*)

Expressing personal experience / style / preference (*honest engagement brands and goods*)

Plagiarism rules awareness statement



Faculty of Humanities
Version September 2014

PLAGIARISM RULES AWARENESS STATEMENT

Fraud and Plagiarism

Scientific integrity is the foundation of academic life. Utrecht University considers any form of scientific deception to be an extremely serious infraction. Utrecht University therefore expects every student to be aware of, and to abide by, the norms and values regarding scientific integrity.

The most important forms of deception that affect this integrity are fraud and plagiarism. Plagiarism is the copying of another person's work without proper acknowledgement, and it is a form of fraud. The following is a detailed explanation of what is considered to be fraud and plagiarism, with a few concrete examples. Please note that this is not a comprehensive list!

If fraud or plagiarism is detected, the study programme's Examination Committee may decide to impose sanctions. The most serious sanction that the committee can impose is to submit a request to the Executive Board of the University to expel the student from the study programme.

Plagiarism

Plagiarism is the copying of another person's documents, ideas or lines of thought and presenting it as one's own work. You must always accurately indicate from whom you obtained ideas and insights, and you must constantly be aware of the difference between citing, paraphrasing and plagiarising. Students and staff must be very careful in citing sources; this concerns not only printed sources, but also information obtained from the Internet.

The following issues will always be considered to be plagiarism:

- cutting and pasting text from digital sources, such as an encyclopaedia or digital periodicals, without quotation marks and footnotes;
- cutting and pasting text from the Internet without quotation marks and footnotes;
- copying printed materials, such as books, magazines or encyclopaedias, without quotation marks or footnotes;
- including a translation of one of the sources named above without quotation marks or footnotes;
- paraphrasing (parts of) the texts listed above without proper references: paraphrasing must be marked as such, by expressly mentioning the original author in the text or in a footnote, so that you do not give the impression that it is your own idea;
- copying sound, video or test materials from others without references, and presenting it as one's own work;
- submitting work done previously by the student without reference to the original paper, and presenting it as original work done in the context of the course, without the express permission of the course lecturer;
- copying the work of another student and presenting it as one's own work. If this is done with the consent of the other student, then he or she is also complicit in the plagiarism;
- when one of the authors of a group paper commits plagiarism, then the other co-authors are also complicit in plagiarism if they could or should have known that the person was committing plagiarism;
- submitting papers acquired from a commercial institution, such as an Internet site with summaries or papers, that were written by another person, whether or not that other person received payment for the work.

The rules for plagiarism also apply to rough drafts of papers or (parts of) theses sent to a lecturer for feedback, to the extent that submitting rough drafts for feedback is mentioned in the course handbook or the thesis regulations.

The Education and Examination Regulations (Article 5.15) describe the formal procedure in case of suspicion of fraud and/or plagiarism, and the sanctions that can be imposed.

Ignorance of these rules is not an excuse. Each individual is responsible for their own behaviour. Utrecht University assumes that each student or staff member knows what fraud and plagiarism



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entail. For its part, Utrecht University works to ensure that students are informed of the principles of scientific practice, which are taught as early as possible in the curriculum, and that students are informed of the institution's criteria for fraud and plagiarism, so that every student knows which norms they must abide by.

I hereby declare that I have read and understood the above.	
Name:	mag de Bruyn
Student number:	4221050
Date and signature:	28-10-2016 mk de Bruyn

Submit this form to your supervisor when you begin writing your Bachelor's final paper or your Master's thesis.

Failure to submit or sign this form does not mean that no sanctions can be imposed if it appears that plagiarism has been committed in the paper.