

***Next Influencer* and Its Place in YouTube's Development of Convergence Culture**

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Abstract

AwesomenessTV's Next Influencer is a webseries that is published on YouTube. Despite its place on a popular online video sharing platform, *Next Influencer* is produced by a television production and distribution company. It is also marketed as and closely resembles reality television. Containing the titular competition to become the “next influencer”, the show stars social media influencers with already established followings on TikTok as the competitors. In this case study, two episodes of the program were explored through sequencing and close reading analysis in order to investigate whether the webseries carries some of the key characteristics that are traditionally associated with reality television. The results of the analysis have shown that there are significant similarities between this program and the genre of reality television, specifically in the instances that allow performed authenticity. This study has aimed to explain this similarity through television in transition and as a development of convergence culture as in, different media that borrow aspects from each other. The effects of YouTube’s shift towards a more professional and institutionalized content creation platform are also explored here. Through the analysis of *Next Influencer* and the arguments presented in this thesis, it is hoped to contribute to a broader spectrum of academic topics that include television in transition, the convergence of television and internet, and the current state of YouTube.

Keywords: convergence culture, television in transition, reality television, YouTube, social media

1. Introduction

“Welcome to AwesomenessTV, the destination for Gen Z reality TV shows with your favorite TikTok and digital influencers.”¹

This is how *AwesomenessTV* chooses to introduce themselves on the description page of their YouTube channel to their 8,5 million followers and the world. The youth-oriented channel is a subsidiary of Viacom Inc., the owner of U.S. television channels like CBS, Comedy Central, and Nickelodeon.² *AwesomenessTV* and the ties it has to television are an example of how YouTube is changing. The mentions of television within their name and their description of themselves arguably are examples of the convergence that is happening between YouTube and television which will be discussed in this thesis.

The YouTube channel produces and publishes a reality television web series called *Next Influencer*. *Next Influencer*, which was first published in November 2020 and has 10 episodes in total, follows nine TikTok influencers from different backgrounds who all live in the same mansion together for the show’s purposes. Throughout the reality show, all nine influencers compete for the ultimate goal of becoming the one “Next Influencer” and to this end, they take on various challenges and games in each episode. According to the show’s host Alex Warren, all these games relate to the lifestyle associated with being an internet star and challenge the competitors accordingly. An example of these challenges is called “Duet Me” and can be found on the seventh episode where competitors are expected to create a TikTok and the person with the best TikTok according to the host wins the challenge. The winning competitor of the show is awarded with a chance of starring in their own program in the finale of the show however, at the time of writing the thesis the episode which would have featured the winner of *Next Influencer* has not aired yet.

¹ *AwesomenessTV*, “About,” YouTube,” accessed May 5, 2021, https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCWljxewHIJE3M7U_6_zFNyA/about .

² *ViacomCBS*, “Global Brands,” accessed May 29, 2021, <https://www.viacomcbs.com/brands> .

Along with *AwesomenessTV*'s ties to the traditional television industry due to it being owned by Viacom Inc., the *Next Influencer* is presented in a way which is quite reminiscent of the reality television genre that is more conventionally associated with television than with YouTube. Through the example of reality web series *Next Influencer* on the YouTube channel *AwesomenessTV*, this thesis will explore the convergence of television and YouTube in the multiple possibilities of convergence as discussed by Jenkins and Kavka.

Television has been going through significant changes in the 21st century. Many scholars, such as Elihu Katz and Amanda D. Lotz, have explored this transition through the different ways that television has shifted over the years. One of the ways that television has changed is specifically through the convergence culture, a term that was coined by Henry Jenkins. Considering the speed of change in both these mediums, television and YouTube, it is still relevant to explore individual cases through this lens. With a case study on *Next Influencer*, it is aimed to add a fresh perspective to the arguments of authors that can be summarized as the issue of transition in television at the beginning of the 21st century and convergence culture by exploring an unconventional medium, namely a reality television series that is published on YouTube. This study can help demonstrate that the mediums of television and YouTube are now intertwined with one another to the point that both resemble each other very much in their current state.

The concept of “convergence culture” can be widely described as a focus on how media production and consumption has changed with accordance to technological developments and the effects that these developments create on society. It describes a media environment where consumption and production are unavoidable and every idea about a possible media product gets produced and then consumed.³ Katz refers to changes such as, having many channels which conduct niche broadcasting, affordance of portability, and the integration of the internet while exploring how television has transitioned.⁴ In addition, it is important to note that television has already gone through this transition in the early the 21st century. The effects of these changes

³ Henry Jenkins, “Welcome to Convergence Culture,” Henry Jenkins, accessed May 29, 2021, http://henryjenkins.org/blog/2006/06/welcome_to_convergence_culture.html.

⁴ Elihu Katz, “Introduction: The End of Television?,” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 625 (2009): 7.

and what they mean for television are further discussed in the Theoretical Framework chapter of this thesis.

For this purpose, the main research question in this thesis will be: To what extent can the YouTube reality television webseries *Next Influencer* be explained as a development of convergence culture due to its resemblance to its counterparts from traditional television? Moreover, it is possible to unpack the question further through the following sub-questions: 1.) To what extent can the connections of *AwesomenessTV* to a traditional television company like Viacom Inc. be explained by “convergence culture” and “television in transition”? 2.) Is the existence of performed authenticity within *Next Influencer* the main characteristic that makes this show resemble other examples of reality television? 3.) Can the attempts of *AwesomenessTV* to position themselves among their more traditional counterparts in television be explained by the institutionalization of YouTube?

2. Theoretical Framework

This section covers the main concepts that are essential in exploring the research questions of this thesis: television in transition and convergence culture, topic of institutionalization of YouTube. Additionally, categorizations of the reality television genre are also included in this chapter to establish a basis for research and analysis of the case study.

2.1. Television in Transition and Convergence Culture

The two terms “television in transition” and “convergence culture” are used to discuss the changes television and media went through at the beginning of the twenty-first century. In 2009, Elihu Katz argued that the ways in which television content is produced and distributed would go through such a drastic change that television would be unlike to what it was back then. Katz argues that television would be shifting towards a method of multiple source streaming and addresses multiple niche consumer groups, unlike the then current way of one-way production

which was broader.⁵ Similar to Katz, Amanda D. Lotz argues that the technological development which affords portability and developments in production and distribution methods such as narrowcasting, have also resulted in a cultural shift in the role that television holds in society.⁶ According to her, television no longer offers the same experience it did before its transition, for example, the norm of shared viewings has disappeared due to the changes in screen technologies.⁷

Around the same time as Katz and Lotz's arguments, Henry Jenkins puts forward a specific way that television will be shifting, through the convergence of old and new media, which he defines as different media drawing from each other while both of them are in a changing state.⁸ He thereby particularly emphasizes the role of reality television arguing that it is one of the first successful attempts of convergence on television, with the implementation of audience participation.⁹ In a similar light, *Next Influencer* as a reality television show, can be regarded as an attempt in convergence, even though *Next Influencer* does not offer audience interaction. This argument can be made because the show fits Jenkins' description of the audience being courted over different types of media, considering that the participants of the show are all people with a relatively large following on social media.¹⁰ Additionally, Misha Kavka argues that convergence culture in reality television is not only limited to the audience participation that technology, brings but it is more connected to cultural and economic convergence possibilities.¹¹ Kavka also places internet in the centre of convergence as it has the ability to embrace and repeat content from different media.¹² This also applies to *Next Influencer*, the reality television web series that is being studied here, since it can also be regarded as a type of convergence, which is not purely technological but also cultural and

⁵ Katz, "Introduction: The End of Television?," 7-8.

⁶ Amanda D. Lotz, *The Television Will Be Revolutionized, Second Edition* (New York: New York University Press, 2014), 5-6.

⁷ Lotz, *The Television Will Be Revolutionized*, 7-8.

⁸ Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 4-5.

⁹ Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*, 59.

¹⁰ Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*, 2.

¹¹ Misha Kavka, "Industry convergence shows: Reality TV and the leisure franchise" in *Flow TV: Television in the Age of Media Convergence* ed. Michael Kackman, Marnie Binfield, Matthew Thomas Payne, Allison Perlman, Bryan Sebok (New York: Routledge, 2011) 75.

¹² Kavka, "Industry convergence shows," 76.

economic. This placing of the internet connects convergence culture with *Next Influencer* since YouTube is a part of the internet. As it will be explained in the next section of the theoretical framework of this thesis, the medium of YouTube is in a changing state as it gets more institutionalized, as well as professionalized and this issue is another example of convergence through a way other than technological convergence.

2.2 Institutionalization of YouTube

In arguing that the television is transitioning, it is important to note that a shift of this speed and scale may require a change in how we define television as well. Lotz, for one, argues that the shift in the cultural role of television has also expanded the meaning of “television”.¹³ Similarly, van Dijck believes that over the recent years, television and YouTube have become so dependent on one another that the more traditional descriptions of television need to be expanded in order to fit YouTube in it as well.¹⁴ Moreover, Van Dijck is not the only one to study YouTube in the context of television. In comparing the two media, William Uricchio claims that YouTube has become an alternative to television.¹⁵ While he notes the shortcomings of the medium as not taking advantage of institutionalization like its old media counterpart television, Jin Kim argues that the platform has developed significantly in terms of production and distribution methods, especially since it was bought by Google.¹⁶ Two examples of these developments are the smooth ad breaks embedded within the content and videos with high production values.¹⁷ These developments are explained as the changes that institutionalize YouTube by Kim.¹⁸

In addition to its institutionalization, content creators and influencers that use YouTube as their main platform have professionalized over the past ten years as well. Mingy Hou

¹³ Lotz, *The Television Will Be Revolutionized*, 6.

¹⁴ José van Dijck, “YouTube beyond technology and cultural form” in *After The Break*, ed. Marijke de Valck and Jan Teurlings (Amsterdam University Press, 2013), 153.

¹⁵ William Uricchio, “The future of a Medium Once Known as Television,” ed. Pelle Snickars and Patrick Vonderau, *The YouTube Reader*, Mediehistoriskt Arkiv 12 (Stockholm: National Library of Sweden, 2009), 36.

¹⁶ Jin Kim, “The Institutionalization of YouTube: From User-Generated Content to Professionally Generated Content,” *Media, Culture & Society* 34, no. 1 (January 1, 2012), 56.

¹⁷ Kim, “The Institutionalization of YouTube,” 54-55.

¹⁸ Kim, “The Institutionalization of YouTube,” 54.

suggests that professionalization in content creation was caused by content creators looking for new ways of income, as well as integrating themselves into the more traditional aspects of their niche and this is a direct reason of institutionalization of YouTube.¹⁹

Next Influencer as a case study, also embodies most of the key aspects of the debate surrounding the convergence of YouTube and television, in its similarities to the genre of reality television, as will be analyzed later on in this thesis. Additionally, considering its ties to a television production company such as Viacom Inc., its availability for advertisement placement and its production of content tailored for monetization; the web series is a significant example of the institutionalization and professionalization of YouTube in recent years as well. Through this lens, *Next Influencer* can give insight into both these aspects of cultural debate when studied in this thesis.

2.3 Defining Reality Television

In order to explore the research questions of this thesis, *Next Influencer* is not only compared to television programming in general, but rather specifically the genre of reality television. Given that *AwesomenessTV* markets its product *Next Influencer* as reality television, even though it is published on a video sharing platform, YouTube, an analysis of the similarities between this program and the more traditional instances of the reality television genre is conducted in this case study. Even though reality television itself is very diverse and rather difficult to define, Annette Hill describes it as a relatively loose term that is used for entertainment programs about real people.²⁰ She also adds that the viewing experience is a key point in defining this genre.²¹ According to her, the viewing experience of reality television depends on the assumption that the viewers cannot tell the difference between reality and fiction, therefore, the experience is built on blurring the lines between them.²² This is where authenticity plays an important role for this genre. Creating moments of performed authenticity

¹⁹ Mingyi Hou, "Social Media Celebrity and the Institutionalization of YouTube," *Convergence* 25, no. 3 (June 1, 2019), 534–53.

²⁰ Annette Hill, *Reality TV: Factual Entertainment and Television Audiences*, (London: Taylor & Francis Group, 2005), 2.

²¹ Hill, *Reality TV*, 2.

²² Hill, *Reality TV*, 2-3.

keeps the lines between reality and fiction hazy.²³ While the genre in itself can be very different, as was stated before, Hill also claims that what unites different examples of reality television is that they all afford the audience to decide and perceive for themselves which parts of the content are real and which parts are not, what is scripted and what is not.²⁴ In more technical terms, she also characterizes a number of different techniques that are widely used in reality television, such as unscripted dialog and surveillance footage.²⁵ Hill describes surveillance footage as, “raw footage of people going about their business” and adds that people are usually unaware of being filmed.²⁶ However, it can be argued that since the people who are being filmed know that they are a part of a reality television show, they would at least be aware of the possibility of being filmed constantly. Unlike Hill, who focuses more specifically on the characteristic aspects of reality television, Julie Anne Taddeo and Ken Dvorak explore the historical development of the genre. They emphasise the importance of audience reactions and cultural production, reflecting the cultural and societal gravitations.²⁷ With a different perspective on how to study reality television, they argue that the internet can potentially end reality television or cause it to move to a digital space like YouTube.²⁸

Hou also emphasises authenticity, but more specifically as seen on social media and YouTube. She argues that social media celebrities perform authenticity in order to engage with their audience in a similar fashion to celebrity personas on reality television.²⁹ The celebrity personas included in both reality television and social media perform authenticity as a way to engage with their audience. Hou also addresses how authenticity in reality television is achieved by referring to John Corner’s work, stating that authenticity is created by “content such as high-intensity incidents, anecdotal knowledge (first-person gossipy accounts), and snoopy sociability”.³⁰ These methods of performing authenticity will be used for analysing the case

²³ Hill, *Reality TV*, 42.

²⁴ Hill, *Reality TV*, 55-56.

²⁵ Hill, *Reality TV*, 41.

²⁶ Hill, *Reality TV*, 38.

²⁷ Julie Anne Taddeo, Ken Dvorak, “Introduction,” in *The Tube Has Spoken : Reality TV & History* ed. Julie Anne Taddeo and Ken Dvorak (Lexington : University Press of Kentucky, 2010), 2.

²⁸ Taddeo and Dvorak, *The Tube Has Spoken*, 8.

²⁹ Hou, “Social Media Celebrity and the Institutionalization of YouTube,” 536-37.

³⁰ Hou, “Social Media Celebrity and the Institutionalization of YouTube,” 536.

study. Corner refers to events that are fast paced when he talks about high-intensity incidents, anecdotal knowledge refers to contestants sharing their personal opinions or when they are talking about other contestants, and snooty sociability refers to the moments where the audience can see the contestants doing their routines or their jobs.³¹ He argues that what was described as high-intensity incidents in the past has been expanded in order to fit into a game frame by other reality television shows.³² These three features together constitute a basis for analysis in distinguishing moments of performed authenticity.

Moreover, Hou's work provides a connection between the topics of institutionalization of YouTube and the authenticity that is performed by content creators in order to create an illusion of reality. Corner's explanation when it comes to how authenticity is created makes it more feasible to discuss the existence of authenticity within the *Next Influencer*.

3. Methodology

3.1. Corpus Selection

In order to explore the extent of convergence and resemblance of *Next Influencer* to its counterparts from television, two episodes of the show were selected for analysis. The show consists of a total of ten episodes, all published on the YouTube channel *AwesomenessTV*. The competition episodes were published between November 2020 and January 2021, with the first episode uploaded on 22nd of November 2020.³³ At the time that this thesis has been written, each episode of the show had, on average, over 600,000 views and the most watched episode had 1,650,000 views.³⁴ There are also eight additional videos on *AwesomenessTV*'s YouTube channel that comprise a reunion of competitors and highlight reels of the show. Due to the limited scope of this thesis, the number of episodes that were analysed was restricted to two. After an examination of *Next Influencer* in its entirety, Episode 1 and Episode 5 were selected

³¹ John Corner, "Performing the Real: Documentary Diversions," *Television & New Media* 3, no. 3 (August 1, 2002): 260.

³² Corner, "Performing the Real: Documentary Diversions," 261.

³³ "Playlists: AwesomenessTV's Next Influencer," "AwesomenessTV," YouTube, accessed June 1, 2021, https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLBQgA3Kndk7c5UVTpaoYt-nU-y_iCy6Xv.

³⁴ "Playlists: AwesomenessTV's Next Influencer."

for research. These two episodes have been chosen specifically due to one of them being at the very beginning of the show which works as an introductory episode and the other one being at the middle of the season which is a moment where the participants have developed relations and rivalries amongst each other.

Episode 1 of *Next Influencer*, titled “9 TIKTOK STARS. 1 NEW CREATOR MANSION” on *AwesomenessTV*’s YouTube channel, is the introductory episode of the show.³⁵ This episode features the introductions of the show idea as well as its host and contestants. It also is suitable for this analysis because it includes the characteristics of reality television that Hill and Corner argue as the definitive aspects of reality television. Titled “EXPOSING LIES in TikTok MANSION *CANCELLED” on the YouTube channel of *AwesomenessTV*, Episode 5 features a quarrel between contestants over an accusation of lying.³⁶ The participants Collie and Sabrina realise that a group was formed amongst the other participants in order to get ahead in the competition. Collie and Sabrina accuse the members of this group of lying about the its existence, as well as conspiring against them. Through this episode, it will be explored whether the certain aspects that are distinctive of reality television are present in this episode. With this episode being in the middle of the season, the relations between the participants are more complicated. Therefore, the way that the characteristics of performed authenticity are found within this episode is different compared to the first episode.

Both of these episodes are explored through the research questions of this thesis, and each divided into three themes for thorough examination. Additionally, they are investigated here according to Hill’s techniques in characterizing reality television and the three aspects Corner points out as central to reality television while creating authenticity in order to have a concrete material to examine in the analysis.

³⁵ AwesomenessTV, *AwesomenessTV’s Next Influencer Ep. 1 w/ Alex Warren - 9 TIKTOK STARS. 1 NEW CREATOR MANSION*, 2020,

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QVOzpaPRpio&list=PLBQgA3Kndk7c5UVTpaoYt-nU-y_iCy6Xv&index=1.

³⁶ AwesomenessTV, *AwesomenessTV’s Next Influencer Ep. 5 w/ Alex Warren - EXPOSING LIES in TikTok MANSION *CANCELLED*, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EXEXIGAFKVo&list=PLBQgA3Kndk7c5UVTpaoYt-nU-y_iCy6Xv&index=6.

3.1.1. Sequencing of Episode One

The first episode of the first season titled “9 TIKTOK STARS. 1 NEW CREATOR MANSION” has been separated into six different sequences. These sequences have been dissected while keeping in mind their narrative continuity as well as their setting and the events that take place in them. The first sequence can be isolated as the introduction of the show and its contestants. It starts as the episode starts and goes on until the minute 03:11. This sequence starts with the host explaining the general rules of the competition that takes place in the show and continues with the contestants coming into the house that they will be staying in. They then proceed to introduce themselves to the audience via a shot of them talking by themselves directly into the camera. The second sequence which starts right after the first one goes on until the fifth minute and the 52nd second. This sequence includes the contestants meeting each other and getting familiar with the house. In this sequence, there are some shots where the competitors get together and greet each other in addition to getting familiar with their surroundings. The third sequence is when the contestants meet the host of the show and the host explains some of the rules and the overall format of the show to them. The fourth sequence is the sequence which takes the longest amount of time. This sequence lasts for six minutes, nearly a third of the entire episode and it is the sequence where the contestants take part in a challenge for the first time. The challenge is called “Pool or We are Cool” and it consists of the competitors trying to answer some personal questions about each other and the winner gets to have a private conversation with the host where they can ask for advice about a topic of their choosing. The fifth sequence consists of the participants commenting on their first day in the show and another key part of the show which includes the participants ranking each other from first to last based who they think should be the winner of the show. Finally, the sixth sequence is the last sequence and it only lasts twenty seconds, which includes the ending with logos and add-ons within YouTube as well as a teaser for the next episode.

The sequence that will be analysed more in-depth from this episode is the fourth sequence. This sequence is suitable for an in-depth analysis and a close reading and involves the challenge “Pool or We are Cool”. This sequence having multiple of the characteristics of a reality television examples such as high-intensity moments within it is the main reason behind

this selection. However, certain moments from other sequences will also be examined for a broader understanding.

3.1.2. Sequencing of Episode Five

The fifth episode which is titled “EXPOSING LIES in TikTok MANSION *CANCELLED” is more than three minutes longer than the first episode and as a result, it has been dissected into seven different sequences, rather than six like the first episode. The first sequence can be described as a recap of the previous episodes, in addition to a segment where two of the contestants, Colie and Sabrina, discover that four other contestants have been in a cooperation that they have kept hidden from the rest of the participants. It is revealed that these four contestants have been influencing the competition with their plans. The second sequence of the show consists of the reveal of the rankings that were made in the previous episode of the show. Each participant reacts to their ranking and discusses it with the rest of the group. In this sequence Sabrina and Colie, the two contestants who had discovered the information about a group of participants that cooperate in secret, confront that group about their find. The third sequence of the episode, which is the longest of the episode, includes this episode’s challenge. In this challenge, the contestants are expected to reveal information about themselves or other participants. However, the challenge does not end as it was planned, as it is cancelled halfway through due to the weather conditions. The fourth sequence consists of the participants ranking each other but they have difficulties doing so, since they normally take the results of the challenge into consideration as well. Therefore, the contestants discuss how to rank each other. The fifth sequence is different compared to the other sequences due to its relatively slower pace and it involves only two of the contestants. In this sequence the participants Julian and Sabrina go on a date with each other. In the sixth sequence Jada, who is one of the contestants, chats with the host of the show in order to get some advice about the difficulties of being in *Next Influencer*. In addition, the other contestants have a general conversation in this sequence. The seventh and last sequence is the closing sequence which includes logos of *AwesomenessTV* and *Next Influencer*, in addition to showing a teaser of the next episode.

The sequence which will be focused on in this episode is the fifth sequence of the episode, where two of the contestants go out on a date with each other. This sequence will be analysed due to it consisting characteristics of the reality television genre, such as anecdotal knowledge, snoopy sociability, and surveillance footage. These aspects of the sequence make it more suitable to compare this show to reality television genre examples from the medium of television, which in return makes the research questions more applicable.

3.2. Analysis Method

A close reading analysis of the episodes from *Next Influencer* was conducted to scan the webseries for the characteristics of reality television listed by John Corner. The three characteristics that are key for this analysis are used in order to create performed authenticity.³⁷ Characteristics that create performed authenticity are essential while analysing reality television because authenticity is a definitive aspect of the genre according to Hill.³⁸ As it was mentioned before the three characteristics that create authenticity are; high-intensity incidents, anecdotal knowledge and snoopy sociability.³⁹ The sequences will be analysed to find out if they include these three characteristics in them. It will be discussed how they miss out on or fill these boxes in order to make the analysis clearer. In addition to the characteristics that Corner mentions, the technical aspects of the genre will also be scanned for. Hill describes these features as the usage of surveillance footage and unscripted dialogs.⁴⁰ Even though Hill describes unscripted dialog as a distinctive aspect of the genre, it is not possible to distinguish between unscripted and scripted dialogues without speculating in this case, therefore it will not be a part of this analysis. Hill describes surveillance footage as the unedited footage of people performing their usual tasks and activities without being aware of themselves being filmed.⁴¹ *Next Influencer* will be scanned for these four aspects that are mentioned to determine how it resembles the genre of reality television. Finally, the resemblance between *Next Influencer* and its counterparts from

³⁷ Corner, "Performing the Real: Documentary Diversions," 260.

³⁸ Hill, *Reality TV*, 42.

³⁹ Corner, "Performing the Real: Documentary Diversions," 260.

⁴⁰ Hill, *Reality TV*, 38.

⁴¹ Hill, *Reality TV*, 38.

television will be discussed to answer whether it can be explained as a development of convergence culture or not.

For this undertaking, the episodes were dissected into sequences, a common method in film studies similar to how Raymond Bellour describes as “system of a fragment”.⁴² Bellour is a film studies scholar who is well known for his film analyses. His system is constituted by focusing on a sequence, which is a collection of scenes that are connected by their narrative continuity and then examining smaller sections of this sequence in order to analyse the text.⁴³ Even though television is central in this research, Raymond Williams’ understanding of sequences in the flow of television when mentioning “sequence” will not be referred to. He explores sequences in television by making the distinction that broadcasted content are different from the other forms of content because broadcasted content cannot be taken and read as a specific item.⁴⁴ Other than in classical TV, YouTube content and more specifically episodes of *Next Influencer* can be singled out from other YouTube content and consumed separately, similar to content on streaming platforms like Netflix or Hulu. Therefore, the understanding of sequences according to the film studies scholar will be used rather than the understanding of sequences according to Williams.

⁴² Raymond Bellour, “System of a Fragment (on Birds),” in *The Analysis of Film*, ed. Constance Penley (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1979,) 28.

⁴³ Bellour, “System of a Fragment (on Birds),” 28-29.

⁴⁴ Raymond Williams, “Programming as Sequence or Flow,” in *Media Studies: A Reader*, ed. Paul Marris and Sue Thornham, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Univ. Press, 2000,) 231.

4. Analysis

4.1. Close Reading of Episode One

This section will firstly argue why and how the show *Next Influencer* can be regarded as an example of the reality television genre by focusing on the first episode of the show. In order to do so, a specific sequence from the episode is selected, since analysing the entirety of the show would not be feasible due to time and space limitations. However, the selected sequence is not the only part of the episode which will be discussed. Making the resemblance between *Next Influencer* and other examples of the reality television genre clear will allow us to argue about the research question.

As it was mentioned before this sequence consists of a challenge which is called “Pool or We are Cool”. It can be argued that even the existence of a challenge in order to eliminate or get ahead of other contestants could be regarded as a way that *Next Influencer* resembles reality television. Hill, for example adds how spin-offs of *Big Brother* have included challenges within them and are a feature of reality television.⁴⁵ The challenge has the contestants answering personal questions about the other contestants, if they can correctly answer the question they stay where they are and if they cannot answer the question correctly they have to take step closer to a pool. The last person to be outside the of pool wins the challenge and as the reward they get to ask the host of the show for advice about a topic of their choosing. In addition to the challenge itself, this sequence also includes the winner of the challenge Raul talking to the host, as well as some of the other participants discussing how the challenge took place. It can be argued that this sequence carries in itself all four of the characteristics that were mentioned as the defining characteristics of the genre.

Surveillance footage is the only characteristic out of the four the existence of which in this particular sequence should be discussed further as its existence is not as clear as the other characteristics. Referring back to the quote from Hill, surveillance footage is the unedited footage of people doing what they usually would do where they are also unaware of being filmed.⁴⁶ Between the minutes 13.03 and 13.33 the case for the existence of surveillance footage

⁴⁵ Hill, *Reality TV*, 33.

⁴⁶ Hill, *Reality TV*, 38.

can be made. In those 30 seconds, the participants discuss the results of the challenge and some of the answers given to the questions of the challenge. There are not many cuts in these 30 seconds and the existing cuts only change the camera angle while not interfering with the continuity of events. It can be argued that this segment is an example of a surveillance footage as it shows the contestants “going about their business” and the footage can be considered to be “raw” as Hill suggests.⁴⁷ However, it is difficult to tell in this instance whether the participants were aware of themselves being filmed or not, but the different camera angles suggest that there were multiple cameras around, which makes it more likely for the participants being aware of being filmed. Nevertheless, it can be also argued that the participants in a reality television show are almost always aware of being filmed since they would expect it, given that they are in a reality television program. In addition, the camera angles seem like the cameras were behind most of the contestants, which could also mean that they were unaware of being filmed.

This same segment could also be argued to be an example of snoop sociability as Corner describes it.⁴⁸ Even though this segment does not depict a part of their routines or jobs, it can be argued to be snoop sociability since it fits into the viewing experience that Corner attributes to this feature. He argues that the viewing experience of snoop sociability is, “onlooking and overhearing” which may be related to the events that happened prior to it.⁴⁹ This definition of a viewing experience is a perfect description of this segment therefore snoop sociability can be argued to be present in this segment. Thirdly, the challenge can be described as a high-intensity incident. Although this challenge does not fit into the examples Corner mentions while discussing this characteristic, it does fit into the expansion of it in order to match a game frame.⁵⁰ As the challenge consists of a game with impactful consequences to it within the show, it can be argued that this is a high-intensity incident that was put into a game frame. Lastly, it can be argued that this sequence carries examples of anecdotal knowledge due to the many moments within the sequence, and the episode in general, where the contestants are talking about their own experiences and opinions directly to the camera. To conclude, it can

⁴⁷ Hill, *Reality TV*, 38.

⁴⁸ Corner, “Performing the Real: Documentary Diversions,” 260.

⁴⁹ Corner, “Performing the Real: Documentary Diversions,” 260.

⁵⁰ Corner, “Performing the Real: Documentary Diversions,” 260-261.

be claimed that the first episode of *Next Influencer* has all four of the key characteristics that were described as the definitive aspects of the genre of reality television.

4.2. Close Reading of Episode Five

The fifth sequence of this episode starts at 14.00 in the episode and it lasts until 16.15. The sequence is shorter than the average sequence, which is around three minutes. This sequence does not include all four key aspects of reality television that are used as the definitive aspects of reality television in this analysis. However, this sequence in particular was chosen to be analysed, specifically due to it being more distinctive than all the other sequences in the two episodes this case study is examining. This is the only sequence in which the personal lives of two contestants are shown to the audience in this much detail.

This sequence specifically does not include high-intensity incidents, one of the key characteristics of the genre used to create performed authenticity.⁵¹ However, it does not mean that the full episode itself lacks such an incident. The third sequence in the episode which starts at 04.05 and lasts until 11.30 in the episode and is the longest sequence of the episode. This is the sequence where the challenge is played and as was stated in the close reading of the first episode, the challenge sequences can be considered high-intensity incidents, since the definition for high-intensity incidents had been expanded in order to fit them into a game frame.⁵²

Although, this sequence does not offer any high-intensity incidents, it can be argued that it offers very clear examples of snoopy sociability and anecdotal knowledge. The sequence includes anecdotal knowledge in a similar way to the sequence in the first episode, by having the contestants talk about their own experiences and opinions directly to the camera. In addition to this method, this sequence also achieves moments of anecdotal knowledge in other ways as well. More specifically, the contestants are seen talking to each other to share their own experiences and opinions. The snoopy sociability in this sequence can be argued as one of the moments in all of *Next Influencer* that fits the definition of snoopy sociability the best.

⁵¹ Corner, "Performing the Real: Documentary Diversions," 260.

⁵² Corner, "Performing the Real: Documentary Diversions," 260-261.

Considering that Corner explains snoopiness as a viewing experience which involves overhearing and onlooking, this sequence is arguably where the audience overhears and onlooks at a conversation that is happening in a date, which generally takes place in private outside of reality television.⁵³ When it comes to the surveillance footage that is present in this sequence, the same arguments that were made for the first episode can also be made here. The contestants do not act in a way that implies that they recognize the cameras placed around them and they even turn away from the camera from time to time. In addition, the footage is edited in a way that does not interfere with the continuity of the narrative. Therefore, it can be argued that such scenes constitute a presence of surveillance footage, especially in terms of viewer experience.

To conclude, it can be argued that this sequence is different than the other sequences in the show, due to its level of snoopiness and the way anecdotal knowledge is implemented into the sequence. Although there are no examples of high-intensity incidents in the particular sequence, there are examples of such incidents within the episode. Finally, due to the existence of a number of key characteristics of reality television within both of the episodes that were analysed, it can be argued that *Next Influencer* resembles reality television in many ways, but most specifically in the ways that it creates moments of performed authenticity.

4.3. *Next Influencer* as a Development of Convergence Culture

The previous sections in the analysis showed that an example of reality television, which is a genre of audio-visual content that is most common in the medium of television, can now be found in YouTube. This can be argued to be a development of convergence culture. Jenkins describes convergence as different media industries working together and how audiences will take advantage of different methods in order to consume entertainment. This definition of the term fits the show *Next Influencer* for many reasons. Firstly, the show is published by a YouTube channel with the name of *AwesomenessTV*, whose name implies an intended marketing towards presenting themselves as a product of television and this can be seen as a cooperation between different media industries. Secondly, the claim about the cooperation of

⁵³ Corner, "Performing the Real: Documentary Diversions," 260.

different media industries can be advanced by the fact that *AwesomenessTV* is a subsidiary of a television production and distribution company, Viacom Inc. This connection makes the cooperation clearer, especially in the case of *Next Influencer*. Thirdly, another example for different media working with each other is how the contestants in the show are all people who have a following on social media and more specifically, on TikTok. Finally, Kavka argues that the internet is in the centre of convergence since it affords the content from other media in it. How Kavka places the internet within convergence culture is also relevant for exploring *Next Influencer*'s place within convergence. *Next Influencer* is a show that brings different media within the internet together as well as bringing the internet together with television.

It can also be argued that the institutionalization of YouTube is connected to convergence culture, due to the many aspects of institutionalization that are connected to television. As Kim argues, the definitive aspects of this change in YouTube are smooth ad breaks like in television and changes in distribution and production methods that in turn makes the content more similar to that of television. While this does not necessarily show a cooperation between two different media, it fits into the definition of convergence that refers to media drawing certain qualities from one another. Considering that *Next Influencer* is a product of institutionalization within YouTube and how this institutionalization can be considered as an example of convergence adds to the ways in which *Next Influencer* is a development of convergence culture.

5. Conclusion

This case study on *Next Influencer*, a reality television webseries published on YouTube, has aimed to investigate whether this program can be explained through the development of convergence culture, considering its resemblance to the more traditional examples of reality shows on television. This investigation was carried out through the following aspects; developments of convergence culture, similarities of *Next Influencer* to the genre of reality television, and institutionalization of YouTube. In order to explore the research question and the sub questions of this thesis, two episodes of the program were analysed in this case study.

First, the episodes were dissected into sequences in order to have a specific part of the episode to analyse since if the entire show and the entire episode were analysed this thesis would go over limitations in space and time. The first episode was divided into six sequences and the longer fifth episode was divided into seven sequences in this analysis. While one sequence from each episode was selected for further investigation, the episodes were considered in their entirety. Secondly, a close reading analysis was conducted in order to explore the similarities of this program to other forms of reality television. While doing so, the episodes and the selected sequences were observed through key characteristics of the reality television genre. These characteristics were; surveillance footage, snoopy sociability, high-intensity incidents, and anecdotal knowledge. The analysis has shown that all of these four characteristics were present in the first episode and its sequence that was explored. Additionally, the sequence selected from the fifth episode contained instances of three of the four characteristics. The lacking one, a high-intensity incident was also present elsewhere in the episode. As a result of this analysis, an argument that *Next Influencer* closely resembles its more traditional counterparts in reality television was made.

Finally, following the definition of convergence as different media industries cooperating, it was discussed whether *Next Influencer* is a development of convergence culture. To summarize, the rapid and ongoing institutionalization of YouTube as a platform, has allowed entities like *AwesomenessTV* and their products such as *Next Influencer*, to bring television and internet together. Specifically in the case of *Next Influencer*, a reality television web series following a genre that is more often associated with television is published on YouTube,

produced by a television production and distribution company, and involves social media influencers as contestants. Taking all of the different aspects of *Next Influencer*, it is clear that this program can very well be considered a development of convergence culture. While this thesis focussed on only one program, hopefully *Next Influencer* and this case study can be a part of a larger debate surrounding the current state of television and internet and possibly, their future.

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PLAGIARISM RULES AWARENESS STATEMENT

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