

THESIS

EXPLORING HAUL VIDEOS ON YOUTUBE:
A COLLECTIVE CASE STUDY APPROACH

Submitted by

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ABSTRACT

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The present study is devoted to the exploration of haul videos on YouTube. As a phenomenon that has exploded within the last several years, these videos are ripe with data to be analyzed from numerous standpoints. The circuit of culture, a framework from the school of cultural studies, was used to guide this research. Three case studies were carried out for this project. Each case included a semi-structured online interview with a hauler (i.e. a producer of haul videos), as well as an examination of one haul video posted by each hauler and an analysis of 100 comments posted to each selected video. Constant comparison processes were used to analyze data sources from each.

After engaging in an extensive investigation of the haul video phenomenon, I propose that three major themes exist, each of which relates to the circuit of culture. First, the concept of community is present within the fashion and beauty domain on YouTube. Second, production and consumption emerge as key moments that not only relate to the theoretical framework, they are interrelated and assist haul video producers and consumers (viewers) in creating meaning. Thirdly, the concept of identity is present in that producers and consumers alike engage in identity exploration and construction through their creation and consumption of haul videos. This research indicates that the hauling community on YouTube facilitates a shared sphere of meaning exchange, through which producers and viewers are able to consume, produce and decipher messages, virtually socialize, and engage in identity construction.

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INTRODUCTION

Fashion and beauty are two popular topics among many adolescent girls and women, and arguably have been for thousands of years in some cultures. Oftentimes, conversations are started by one woman complimenting another on her hairstyle or handbag. Today, women of multiple demographics have a new way to compare fashion and beauty. The Internet, YouTube specifically, is increasingly used as a medium through which many women post videos that “show and tell” their most recent fashion and beauty product purchases. This phenomenon, most commonly known as “hauling,” takes place on YouTube, and has exploded on an international scale. It can be argued that this popular video-sharing site is facilitating the establishment of virtual rapport and friendship through the posting of haul videos.

What has now become a popular vernacular term in the YouTube fashion and beauty culture has origins that can be traced to the nautical realm. In 1776, the term haul meant “something gained...perhaps on the notion of ‘drawing’ a profit or of the catch from hauling fishing nets” (Online Etymology Dictionary, 2011). Similarly, the word haul meant “...to trim the sails to sail closer to the wind (The Free Dictionary.com, 2011). According to Dictionary.com haul means “to pull or draw with force; move by drawing; drag; to cart or to transport; carry” (Dictionary.com, 2011). One thing is certain—there are thousands of young girls and women pulling, dragging, carting and carrying loads of fashion and beauty products back to their bedroom (or other preferred filming locale) to produce what has become known as a haul video.

“You might think nobody would want to watch an excitable teen, armed with shopping bags, discussing her wares – but you would be wrong. Jot the word ‘haul’ into YouTube

and more than 50,000 videos will pop up, some of which have been viewed millions of times” (Stocks, 2011, n.p.).

Within the fashion and beauty community on YouTube there is a population of vloggers (video loggers) who fall in the age range of mid to late twenties. Some of their haul videos are relatively short and include the hauler briefly displaying her (or his) purchases, while others are more detailed and may feature an elaborate description of a sequined dress or a new brand of lipstick. “Beyond the written word, online video platforms, digital photography and social networks have revolutionized the relationship between consumers and brands. Now anyone can be a critic” (Murray, 2011).

What began as a trend primarily among high school and college-aged girls has now trickled into the pre-adolescent arena. Girls as young as 12 are posting hauls hoping to garner the same type of virtual popularity as some of the most widely followed haulers. “Originally the domain of girls in their late teens and early 20s, hauling is appealing to an ever-younger audience – girls on the cusp of adolescence who want to ape the older teens they see on screen” (Stocks, 2011).

YouTube: Some Background

YouTube was founded in February 2005 and has since become one of the most popular video sharing sites. In November 2006, YouTube was purchased by Google Inc., but remains an independent subsidiary. The site offers users an online environment in which they can “...connect, inform, and inspire others across the globe” (YouTube, 2010). Users can post original content and have it linked to their personal websites, mobile devices, blogs, and other forms of social media. “YouTube began as a personal video sharing service, and has quickly grown into the world’s leading video community on the Internet” (YouTube, 2010). Users range

between ages 18-55, are equal parts male and female, and cross all geographies. Further, YouTube reports that 51% of its users visit the site weekly or more frequently, and 52% of 18-34 year-olds regularly exchange videos with friends and colleagues. “As more people capture special moments on video, YouTube is empowering them to share their experiences, talents and expertise with the world” (YouTube, 2010).

This dynamic video-sharing site has been studied in fields including health and drug communication (Freeman & Chapman, 2007; Keelan, Pavri-Garcia, Tomlinson & Wilson, 2007; Lange, Daniel, Homer, Reed & Clapp, 2010; Steinberg et al., 2010), social networking (Donath & Boyd, 2004; Guosong, 2009, Lange, 2007a, 2007b, Mislove, Marcon, Gummadi, Druschel & Bhattacharjee, 2007), computer science and technology (Capra et al., 2008, Zink, Suh, Gu & Kurose, 2009), and visual communication (Adami, 2009). Guosong (2009) explored YouTube as a form of user-generated media (UGM) by applying the uses and gratifications theory to his study. He proposed a three-part analytical model to explain the primary reasons for how and why people interact with UGM; Guosong claims that the three central motives are consuming, participating, and producing. Consuming UGM, in the case of this study, could involve watching a haul video, and/or reading the comments posted to it, but not participating. Participating involves user-to-user contact (such as ranking a video or blog, adding to a playlist, sharing with virtual friends, or posting a comment), but not the act of producing one’s own content; whereas producing requires the “...creation and publication of one’s personal contents such as texts, images, audio, and video” (Guosong, 2009, p. 9).

Hauling on YouTube: What’s going on behind the Screen?

Blair Fowler (screen name juicystar07), is a teenager who has achieved international recognition (as well as YouTube celebrity status) for her haul videos and is quite possibly one of

the most popular vloggers on YouTube. Her videos have accumulated more than 61 million views (Smith, 2010).

She's made herself into a character, always impeccably dressed and perfectly coiffed – but she's always able to also project an image of friendliness and authenticity, appearing both aspirational and relatable to her core audience, who ask for her advice and celebrate her purchases as if they both know her and want to be her. In many ways, she's like the prettiest girl at your high school, who also happens to be the class sweetheart (Smith, 2010).

Juicystar07 can post a video and it will garner more than 300,000 views in several days. Not only is she loved by the majority of her followers, but she is "...a marketer's dream come true" (Smith, 2010). "In a flash, they've become the favorite medium of expression for attention-seeking shopaholics between the ages of tween and twentysomething, yet they're already changing faster than the models in a Milan fashion show" (Wells, 2010). According to Shishir Mehrota, director of product management at YouTube, some of the current haul videos are racking up views comparable to major cable channels (as cited in Noll, 2010). Marisa Meltzer, a freelance writer for *Slate* magazine, claims that juicystar07 may be more influential to her followers than the editors who piece together the pages of *Teen Vogue*. "To the average teen, her seal of approval might carry even more weight than Anna Wintour's" (Meltzer, 2010).

According to Alex Murray of *BBC News Magazine*, "...bloggers have been chipping away at the mainstream media as more and more people want to hear about fashion from people who apply it to everyday life." She notes that "The hierarchical fashion landscape changed beyond all recognition with the advent of digital media" (Murray, 2011). Given that fashion magazines are understood as authoritative sources of what is fashionable, it is worthwhile to note

that they too have taken notice of the hauling trend and now utilize vloggers within their digital platforms. For example, *Seventeen* latched on to some of YouTube's most popular haulers and beauty gurus, and has set up a section on their website titled "Beauty Smarties." Here, visitors can watch videos posted by some of the style savvy girls of YouTube. "These girls love makeup so much, they want to share it with the world! They teach millions how to create cool looks on YouTube, but they're saving their best tricks just for you. Watch their how-to videos now!" (Seventeen.com, 2011).

What may be appealing about receiving fashion and beauty advice from haulers is the fact that they can take trendy, sophisticated clothing or beauty ideas and put a more approachable or down-to-earth spin on them. "For many people fashion is an inhospitable, impenetrable and intimidating world. But bloggers have helped break down that perception of fashion as something that you had to be an insider to understand" (Murray, 2011). It appears that many of the young women who follow the fashion and beauty channels on YouTube take the style advice quite seriously. For example, in a joint video, the Fowler sisters, Elle (screen name AllThatGlitters21) and Blair, reviewed a watch they purchased from Guess, and after only 24 hours of posting the review, the vendor sold out in every color and their Web site crashed as a result of the surge in online orders (Noll, 2010). According to Kit Yarrow, a consumer psychologist, "Haul videos are the perfect marriage of two of Generation Y's favorite things: technology and shopping. It's a vicarious pleasure. You don't have to spend the money and you still get the thrill; it's a bit like pornography" (as cited in Noll, 2010). Nonetheless, as will be discussed in more detail later in the study, this phenomenon has been met with criticism for its encouragement of consumptive practices among young girls and women. Engaging in this type

of behavior at an early age has the potential to provoke emotional, relational, and undoubtedly financial hardships down the road.

Moreover, the Fowlers have also been invited to several New York Fashion Week events, and were asked to blog for *Marie Claire*, providing their insight on runway fashion trends (Marie Claire, 2010). The sisters also partnered with Forever 21, a popular juniors clothing store, to launch the “Haul of Fame Contest.” They worked with the company to encourage patrons of the store to go on a shopping spree and then create their own haul video:

Show off a haul of your latest Forever 21 shopping spree, or do a haul of your favorite Forever 21 pieces from your closet. No matter how you do it, we want to know what your favorite trends are for fall and which items you can’t wait to wear. Upload your video to YouTube and enter your link to win here (Elle & Blair + Forever 21, 2010).

The Fowler sisters have created a name for themselves in the fashion world and have been sought by major magazine publishers and clothing companies to help promote their brand and offer their take on style and beauty trends. While they are one example of haulers who attained high recognition for their videos, other young women including Macbarbie07, meganheartsmakeup, and missglamorazzi have also been featured in *Seventeen* magazine’s “Beauty Smarties” forum among other traditional and digital platforms devoted to fashion and beauty. This arguably provides evidence for the fact that while magazines may still be considered the top source for fashion and beauty trends, the phenomenon of hauling is changing the landscape for how teenagers and young women obtain fashion and beauty information.

In addition to posting haul videos, many vloggers post tutorial videos about how to achieve a particular hair or makeup look, videos showcasing their favorite products per month, their “outfit of the day, (OOTD)” or “what’s in my purse.” Some have separate YouTube

channels that are devoted to different topics (i.e. one for beauty and fashion, another for personal or daily issues). Further, the vloggers utilize numerous forms of social media to maintain contact with their followers. Many use Twitter, Facebook and personal blog pages to ask questions of their followers and receive video requests.

Juicystar07, for example, notes that her followers on Twitter have the most influence in regard to what videos she creates because Twitter is where she obtains the majority of her ideas (Forever 21 haul). Similarly, TheCurrentCustom (another fashion vlogger) uses Twitter and a blog to converse with her viewers and sell products (i.e. clothing and jewelry) that she mentions in her videos (TheCurrentCustom, 2009). In the same way, Euchante, a 19-year-old hauler pursuing a marketing degree, also employs Twitter and a fashion blog to maintain contact with her viewers. She explains that she enjoys using Twitter because it offers a more intimate platform for her to connect with her viewers and learn what type of video requests they have (Euchante, personal communication, August 29, 2011).

Criticisms

Jill Chivers, a self-confessed and self-reformed shopaholic from Australia, describes the haul video phenomenon as “a modern day nightmare.” She says that women have always felt a need to compete with one another and the desire to look good. Chivers claims that while this competitive behavior is not new, the avenues to express it are. She cites the Internet and disposable income as the two main culprits. Some young women either earn or have access to a large amount of discretionary income through their parents, allowing them to participate in excessive consumption at high levels. “That I think is quite scary,” states Chivers. She believes that girls today are instilled with a “feeling of want” at a very young age, which contributes to their urge to consume; ultimately trickling into their adolescence and womanhood. Relating

over-consumption to the hauling phenomenon, she states: “Compulsive buying doesn’t always lead into hauling, but I think hauling almost always has a connection to compulsive buying (J. Chivers, personal communication, October 19, 2011).

Moreover, the haul video trend has also been met with criticism by Dr. April Lane Benson, American psychologist and author of *To Buy or Not to Buy: Why We Overshop and How to Stop*. As cited in Stocks (2011), Benson states that in the U.S., girls as young as eight or nine partake in hauling. “The concern is that it puts an emphasis on shopping and spending that it takes time and money away from pursuits that are ultimately more meaningful for young girls” (A.L. Benson, personal communication, September 30, 2011). In a similar vein, Chivers notes that she is frightened by the amount of spending occurring among young women today, explaining that excessive consumption can damage a person financially, emotionally and relationally. In regard to the financial: “You can end up spending all of your disposable income so that you have nothing left for any other truly life-enriching activities. Because life is not found in a mall; quite frankly, it just isn’t.” On an emotional level, hauling can aid in sustaining a level of dissatisfaction as the feeling of want is never satiated. For haulers, this could be illustrated by always wanting to buy more to showcase in their videos. “Relationships change and are often fractured when our major recreational activity is shopping,” states Chivers. This occurs when a person would rather shop than spend time with a significant other, friend or family member (J. Chivers, personal communication, October 19, 2011).

Benson claims that there is something “intrinsically materialistic” about hauling. Materialism can be defined as “...selfish preoccupation with goods and money...” (Williams, 1976, p. 167). Taking the term intrinsic and combining it with the concept of materialism, it could be argued that participating in hauling puts a natural or innate focus on materialistic habits.

In other words, the practice of buying for the production of videos becomes normalized, and not contested by others who engage in similar behavior. Benson also notes that those who value extrinsic qualities, including physical appearance and possessions, are more apt to exhibit low self-esteem (as cited in Stocks, 2011). Nonetheless, some girls who post hauls revel in the positive feedback they receive from their viewers and ignore the occasional hurtful comments. She spoke with a 17-year-old college student named Rosie Howe, who explained that posting on YouTube helped her shed her shy disposition. "It gives you such confidence when you know people like what you're doing, and the community is so friendly," (as cited in Stocks, 2011). In the same way, haulers EGheartsSSC and Euchante both explain that posting on YouTube has made them less concerned with what others think of her and more confident in their daily lives (EGheartsSSC, personal communication, September 13, 2011; Euchante, personal communication, August 29, 2011).

"Hating" on YouTube

Though haul videos have become an increasingly popular trend, it should be noted that not all viewers find them useful or enjoyable to watch. "Hater" comments are frequently posted by viewers who may deem the videos offensive, given the excessive consumption many of the haulers engage in or the elaborate amount of time and detail some devote to producing their videos. Generally, hater comments criticize the hauler for their appearance or something they did or said during the video. In some cases, the hauler will respond to the perturbed viewer or otherwise remove the comment from their page. Other times, fellow viewers who disagree with the negative comment(s) and are in support of the hauler, will respond with a pointed remark, attempting to back up the hauler for their statements or actions in the videos. Additionally, the hauler may be attacked for her appearance, as some commenters post about one's weight,

complexion or clothing choice. While male haulers do exist, the majority of fashion and beauty haulers on YouTube are arguably identifiable as female. A future study could examine male haulers and the extent to which they encounter negative or hurtful comments. Lange (2007a) explored the act of hating on YouTube by conducting ethnographic interviews with YouTube vloggers and posits that not everyone who participates on YouTube has the same feelings about what is hateful or inappropriate virtual behavior (p. 1).

Despite the pain that hating causes for some people in the YouTube community, participants are often wary of implementing corrective mechanisms because they may complicate free speech and limit access to desired critical feedback. For many YouTube participants, certain regulatory mechanisms for ensuring cordial video reception and commentary are not perceived as effective or universally desired (Lange, 2007a, p. 1).

Further, Lange (2007a) found that many of her participants differentiate hating behavior from “constructive criticism,” describing the latter as “...sincere attempts to improve a filmmaker’s ability” (p. 20). The act of hating as it applies to the haul video phenomenon will be discussed in more detail later in this study, as research participants were asked to describe their experiences with it.

Pushing a Product, Brand or Mentality: Selling Out?

Whether or not girls who post haul videos have low or high self-esteem, it is fair to say that on screen, many of them exude enough confidence and fashion sense that corporations including JC Penney, American Eagle, and Urban Outfitters have decided to utilize haulers to promote their fashion labels (Dishman, 2010; Horowitz, 2010). As previously mentioned, some of the most innovative vloggers who gained fame through YouTube are being paid to post reviews of product launches, fashion lines, and in essence, promote a specific brand. Dishman

(2010) notes that when vloggers are compensated for their haul with a gift card or shopping spree at the store for which they did the haul “...the whole, fresh, thoroughly user-generated shine gets tarnished” (Dishman, 2010). Noll (2010) explains that the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) requires haulers to disclose if they are being paid to review a product. “Elle and Blair advise viewers to treat haul videos in general like any other commercial. They admit it is impossible to tell which paid pitchmen actually believe in the products they’re working to get you to buy” (Callaway, 2010).

Wells (2010) explained that there is a handful of vloggers who have cashed in on the benefits of hauling. “...Aside from receiving free products to review from a bevy of beauty and fashion companies, haulers with lots of viewers often earn a cut of their channels' ad revenue from YouTube.” Wells (2010) mentioned 14-year-old hauler named Bethany Mota (screen name macbarbie07) who was invited (along with a group of other haulers) to go on a \$1,000 shopping spree courtesy of JCPenney. The company then used the hauls to promote their back-to-school advertising campaign.

It is worth mentioning that not all haulers post videos that feature brand new, expensive, high fashion clothing and cosmetics. Thrift and vintage hauling is another genre on YouTube. Some of the more cost-conscious women who utilize YouTube for sharing their fashion and beauty sense post hauls from Goodwill, thrift stores and garage sales. Additionally, there is a large number of plus-size vloggers who post hauls featuring purchases from retailers who specialize in clothing for larger body types. It appears that plus size vloggers generate a following from women who are dealing with body image issues and looking for an outlet to bond with women having similar experiences. For instance, PlusSizePrototype, ThicknLuscious, and UglyFaceOfBeauty are the screen names of several women who post vlogs about embracing

one's body type and being confident with one's appearance. They also post hauls hoping to inspire girls who may not have the stereotypical perfect body to enjoy fashion and beauty and not feel self-conscious about their choices in clothing.

I want to inspire people. I especially want to inspire young girls. Girls who think they're never good enough. Girls who compare themselves to the girls in the magazines. I want to help girls understand that before other people love them, they must learn to love themselves. With my help, I want girls to look in the mirror and like what they see. It doesn't matter what shape or what colour you are. You were put on this earth for a reason, and that reason is because you are special (UglyFaceOfBeauty, "About me," 2011).

The above is a section of UglyFaceOfBeauty's "About Me" taken from her profile page on YouTube. Similarly, ThicknLuscious includes the following on her profile page:

Plus sized women are so underrated and constantly critiqued about what they should and shouldn't wear!! You can be sexy at any size! You don't have to be stick skinny to look good or feel great! Thick is in and I'm here to represent all the fine gorditas out there! (ThicknLuscious, 2011).

Another genre appears to be one of "debate/discussion," in which some vloggers will take a controversial issue and post a vlog that invites others to join in conversation about a particular topic. For example, AFRICANEXPORT, a vlogger on YouTube posts vlogs about issues concerning race, single parenthood, relationships, embracing one's ethnicity, and other social issues. She is also an active thrift hauler and frequently posts videos about how to be frugal yet fashionable.

Thus, there is a wide variety of genres or styles of vlogging that take place on YouTube. Hauling fits inside the realm of the virtual fashion and beauty community, as do some of the above examples. Returning back to YouTube celebrity, juicystar07, Smith (2010) offers valuable insight:

It would be easy, I suppose, to brush her aside as just another internet fad or a spoiled teenager with too much time on her hands – but she arguably represents the future of marketing, the future of teen beauty blogging, and perhaps even her entire generation’s ability to effortlessly create a personal brand without coming across as overbearing or transparent...

While the present study analyzes the trend of haul videos specifically, future research could analyze other types of vlogging on YouTube, as well as the trend of virtual marketing through teenage YouTubers.

Is the Haul Video Producer a Market Maven?

The idea of market mavenism is frequently discussed in marketing literature and is a relevant concept to explore when investigating the phenomenon of hauling. After studying the haul video phenomenon and interviewing three haul vloggers, it can be argued that at least some vloggers possess qualities of a market maven. Market mavens can be defined as “individuals who have information about many kinds of products, places to shop, and other facets of markets, and initiate discussions with consumers and respond to requests from consumers for market information” (Feick & Price, 1987, p. 85). The three participants in this study, for example, have an abundance of information about a wide range of fashion and beauty products, which is the basis of the content featured in the typical haul video. Arguably, haulers are well-versed in the

markets of fashion and beauty. They are excellent word-of-mouth marketers, as they often promote certain brands, stores and/or products. Bowman and Willis (2003) noted that mavens are “aggressive collectors of information but are socially motivated to share it as well” (p. 40).

Considering haulers likely devote more of their time to shopping than the average consumer, it is not surprising that they are up-to-date on fashion and beauty trends and excited to share such information with their viewers on YouTube. The market maven is a consumer who pays attention to marketing and advertising and is eager to share information with others (Chelminski & Coulter, 2007). Individuals who exhibit high consumer self-confidence are more apt to talk about their marketplace knowledge with others (Bearden, Hardesty, & Rose, 2001), which is certainly evidenced in the producers of haul videos.

Given the diverse range of products consumers have to choose from in today’s marketplace and the novel ways in which the Internet facilitates communication, Geissler and Edison (2005) posit that market mavens’ significance may be on the rise (p. 74). As previously discussed, hauler’s ability to be successful word-of-mouth marketers is likely well-received by their viewers because their word may be taken as more credible and trustworthy, compared to corporately-produced advertisements. Further, word-of-mouth marketing via haulers may be especially important in today’s postmodern marketplace where consumers are bombarded with countless beauty product and clothing options.

The Internet offers yet another outlet for market mavens to communicate with other consumers. Blogs, Facebook, Twitter, and E-mail, as well as virtual forums and bulletin boards are avenues that mavens can use to talk with consumers. Haul videos provide mavens with a more visual and interactive route to take for conversing with interested consumers. “The Internet and the WWW provide a relatively new way for mavens to communicate with many other

consumers, effectively extending their range of influence” (Geissler & Edison, 2005). This notion is also reinforced by Bowman and Willis (2003) in their affirmation that participatory cultures (e.g. YouTube) provide an outlet for mavens to exchange information (p. 40). Thus, this research indicates that many of the individuals who create haul videos could be appropriately termed a market maven.

On a personal level, I find the trend of hauling fascinating, in part because of my love for fashion and beauty, but also because I view the videos as a deviation from the traditional glossy pages of a fashion magazine. I think haul videos, as well as the fashion and beauty-related tutorials on YouTube, are simulated display of what one would find when paging through one of today’s traditional fashion magazines, but more unique in that they are generally created by young women recording video in their bedrooms, bathrooms, dorm rooms, or even automobiles. Not only are haul videos more interactive than the text heavy pages in *Vogue*, but I would argue that the homemade and friendly vibe given off by many of the vloggers is more appealing to many viewers. The fashion and beauty community on YouTube offers an environment through which women who share a passion for makeup, accessories and clothing can bond and establish friendships that may take both the virtual and non-virtual form.

I first became aware of haul videos when I was writing a paper for my virtual research methods class during the spring of 2010. While doing research on *Glamour.com*, I came across an article about the haul video trend. Immediately interested, I started watching some of the haul videos that were linked to the article. I decided to change the topic of my paper, and focus on this newfound web phenomenon known as hauling. I shared my findings with my class, and all of my peers thought the topic was extremely interesting and thesis topic material. Feeling very inspired,

I decided to make the analysis of haul videos the focus for a paper in my apparel merchandising class that same semester. After receiving a high grade on the paper, I was further inspired to submit an abstract to the Fall 2010 “Fashion in Fiction” conference, to which I was accepted to present. In October 2010 I travelled to Drexel University to present my research about haul videos. After sharing my findings I received very positive feedback and was again encouraged to continue exploring this phenomenon. It is these experiences that solidified my decision to make the analysis of the haul video phenomenon the focus of my master’s thesis. Lastly, I was accepted to the Hawaii International University Conference on Arts and Humanities, where in January 2012 I presented my master’s thesis research.

Furthermore, as a communication and women’s studies scholar, I believe exploring the trend of hauling on YouTube is important for numerous reasons. To my knowledge, there is no published literature concerning hauling, and therefore, this study is of value because it can serve as a building block for future research in this area. There is a large body of literature devoted to the study of fashion magazines and their impact on women, but there is a gap in the literature examining the phenomenon of hauling on YouTube. I believe it is worthwhile to begin studying this trend and the effect it may have on the young girls and women who participate in hauling. The analysis of virtual socializing and marketing is useful because it can help one to understand what this phenomenon involves, where it might go in the future, and what it means for many of the consumption-driven girls and women who partake in hauling.

It is also worth mentioning that I am aware of the many criticisms of this phenomenon. I have briefly discussed some of them in this chapter and will address them throughout the study. Many of these criticisms, however, have been made by social commentators and researchers who have not spent the amount of time I have watching haul videos on a daily basis, carefully

examining comments posted to the videos and observing some of the underlying themes. Given that I have spent more than a year observing this phenomenon, written numerous academic papers on this subject, and conducted interviews with three haulers, my opinions and findings are based on solid substantiation. I wanted to take my interest in this web phenomenon to the next level and determine if there is evidence supporting the criticisms, or if these conclusions are based on flimsy evidence and inadequate observation. This is in part what motivated me to write my thesis on the exploration of this web sensation.

Given that I am studying a form of popular culture, arguably a cultural artifact, I would like to mention Finnegan's (1997) notion of "the self as story" (p. 69), as this comes from a cultural studies background and focuses on the moment of identity.

The idea as 'self as story' both overlaps and contrasts with other models of identity. It also extends the idea of 'culture' and 'media' beyond the organizational structures of, say, the culture industries, broadcasting or the published media, into the everyday modes in which we express and construct our lives in personal terms, telling our own stories. It makes the assumption that it is valuable to look not just at the products of professionals and specialists but also the practices of ordinary people in their everyday lives (see Finnegan, 1997, p. 69).

I propose that there are thousands of girls and women producing virtual versions of the "self as story" through the vlogs and haul videos present on YouTube. I believe that these videos constitute "everyday modes in which we express and construct our lives in personal terms..." and are rich with detail that can be analyzed by employing the circuit of culture (the theoretical framework used to guide this research). Moreover, the phenomenon of hauling on YouTube is

something I find captivating on both a personal and academic level. Lofland and Lofland (1995) discussed “starting where you are” in regard to one’s research focus, and the value in studying a topic that is of high personal interest.

Starting where you are provides the necessary meaningful linkages between the personal and the emotional on the one hand, and the stringent intellectual operations to come on the other. Without a foundation in personal sentiment, all the rest easily becomes so much ritualistic hollow cant [Sic]...Unless you are emotionally engaged in your work, the inevitable boredom, confusion, and frustration of rigorous scholarship will endanger even the completion—not to speak of the quality—of the project (p. 15).

As an aspiring academic who is hoping to eventually earn my Ph.D. and obtain a professorship in the field(s) of mass communication and/or Women’s Studies, I agree full-heartedly with Lofland and Lofland (1995) in that selecting a research area in which one finds inspiration and excitement is of utmost importance. Therefore, I am “starting where I am” in doing exploratory, interpretive research concerning the phenomenon of hauling on YouTube.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Circuit of Culture

Overview

The circuit of culture is a model that was proposed by du Gay, Hall, Janes, Mackay and Negus (1997) while completing a case study of the Sony Walkman. Though the Walkman is no longer a new, innovative piece of technology, the circuit of culture could be applied to a wide variety of cultural products ranging from the Apple iPad to Mattel Inc. Barbie dolls. du Gay et al. (1997) argue that the circuit features five distinct levels that, when taken together, can be useful in helping us to better understand the study of any cultural artifact. These five elements are: representation, identity, production, consumption, and regulation. According to du Gay et al. (1997), "...any analysis of a cultural text or artifact must pass [through] if it is to be adequately studied..." (p. 3).

Most often, this theoretical framework is used in cultural and media studies (see Barker, 2000; du Gay et al., 1997; Goggin, 2006; Hall, 1997; Johnson, 1986; Julier, 2000; Scherer & Jackson, 2008; Soar, 2000; Taylor, Demont-Heinrich, Broadfoot, Dodge, & Jian, 2002). Cultural studies is "...an interdisciplinary or post-disciplinary field of inquiry which explores the production and inclusion of maps and meaning. A discursive formation, or regulated way of speaking, concerned with issues of power in the signifying practices of human formations" (Barker, 2000, p. 383). Within the realm of cultural studies, much emphasis is put on language, and the way it shapes our culture through the meaning-making process. Barker (2000) notes that there is a language-game in the field of cultural studies. He offers the following definition for the term language-game:

By which the meaning of words are located in their usage in a complex network of relationships between words and not from some essential characteristic or referent.

Meaning is contextual and relational. It depends on the relationships between words which have family resemblances and on specific utterances in the context of pragmatic narratives (Barker, 2000, p. 386).

For instance, in the virtual world of hauling on YouTube, many of the haulers use the term collective to indicate that they are doing a haul from a number of stores and a series of shopping trips (i.e. not just one trip to the mall). So in this context, the meaning of the term collective is generally understood by viewers and haulers alike to mean a collection of items purchased over a given course of time; whereas in other contexts, the word collective may refer to a group effort.

Furthermore, the concept of articulation is used to explain how the circuit works. “By articulation is meant a temporary unity of all discursive elements which do not have to ‘go together.’ An articulation is the form of the connection that can make a unity of two different elements, under certain conditions. Articulation suggests both expressing/representing and a joining together” (Barker, 2000, p. 53). When following this theoretical framework, “...meaning is produced and embedded at each level of the circuit whose meaningful work is necessary, but not sufficient for or determining of, the next moment in the circuit” (Barker, 2000, p. 53). Therefore, certain ideas, understandings, and meanings are produced, or articulated, at different moments within the circuit. Curtin and Gaither (2005) explain articulation as the points at which the levels on the circuit overlap and through this “...meanings are contested and renegotiated” (p. 98). As cited in Curtin and Gaither (2005, p. 98), Grossberg (1986) offers the following definition:

Articulation refers to the complex set of historical practices by which we struggle to produce identity or structural unity out of, on top of, complexity, difference,

contradiction. It signals the absence of guarantees, the inability to know in advance the historical significance of particular practices (p. 154).

As will be demonstrated, the concept of articulation is important because it helps us understand that thinking in terms of a process of production and consumption is helpful, but does not explain everything. du Gay et al. (1997), and others who have used the circuit of culture to explain cultural phenomena, highlight the fact that these moments often overlap. In other words, production and consumption are happening at once; they are codependent (see Figure 1.) When thinking about this in regard to hauling, consider that haulers are both consuming a message(s) and producing a message(s). The notion of articulation accounts for this simultaneous, fused or integrated movement.

When thinking about the circuit of culture and its relation to the hauling phenomenon, it is important to realize that the creation of the videos require the production and consumption of fashion and beauty products, and in essence, the continued cycle of women adopting the standard gender and body ideals put forth by contemporary fashion and beauty brands.

It is worth noting that "...while each of the moments, in articulation, is necessary to the circuit as a whole, no one moment can fully guarantee the next moment with which it is articulated" (Hall, 1980, p. 129). Therefore, one can move from the moment of production to regulation or identity to consumption, for example. There is no set path the circuit has to follow. All of the moments are interrelated and the order in which they are articulated cannot be predicted. Acosta-Alzuru and Kreshel (2002) employed the circuit of culture to study Pleasant Company's line of children's toy dolls, American Girl (AG). In 1998, Pleasant Company was purchased by Mattel Inc., though the American Girl collection remained a singular entity that was headed by the original founder, Pleasant T. Rowland (pp. 140-141). The authors sought to

understand how meaning was created through the consumption of AG dolls and other AG branded items, and were primarily concerned with moments of representation, identity and consumption. They claim that owning an AG doll places the owner in a collective sphere of meaning exchange which facilitates an understanding and sense-making of the world (p. 143). Further, the researchers note that the examination of how such meanings are "...produced, modified, and consumed" on a daily basis will contribute to their knowledge of the toys as a cultural artifact and how they play a role in the formation of cultural social norms and shared meanings (p. 143).

In a similar light, the investigation of haul videos as a cultural artifact will assist in understanding how they exist as a mechanism through which meanings are consumed, produced and mediated by both the haulers and viewers. Haulers and viewers alike are users of merchandise produced at the corporate level, and the viewers are consumers of the videos created by the haulers. Therefore, meanings are being produced and consumed throughout these processes. As will be discussed in more detail later in the study, there are certain norms and practices present in the fashion and beauty communities on YouTube, which have arguably been put in place through the exchange of language (both visual and spoken) and consumption of the videos. "Through an active manipulation of symbols, individuals can strive to construct an identity that enables them to organize a personal sense of existence and to invest it with meaning" (Kaiser et al., 1991, p. 173). The quote from Kaiser, Nagasawa and Hutton (1991) is relevant to hauling on YouTube in that haulers use clothing and beauty products (symbols) to help them construct a sense of identity. The idea of a "collective sphere of meaning exchange" (Acosta-Alzuru & Kreshel, 2002) is also existent here in that haulers are engaged in a meaning-making process through the consumption of material goods and production of their videos.

Consumers of haul videos and creators of haul videos are receiving messages from the producers (corporate level), and arguably engaged in decoding what such messages mean. Again, the notion of articulation comes into play in that hauling can be viewed as an integrated process.

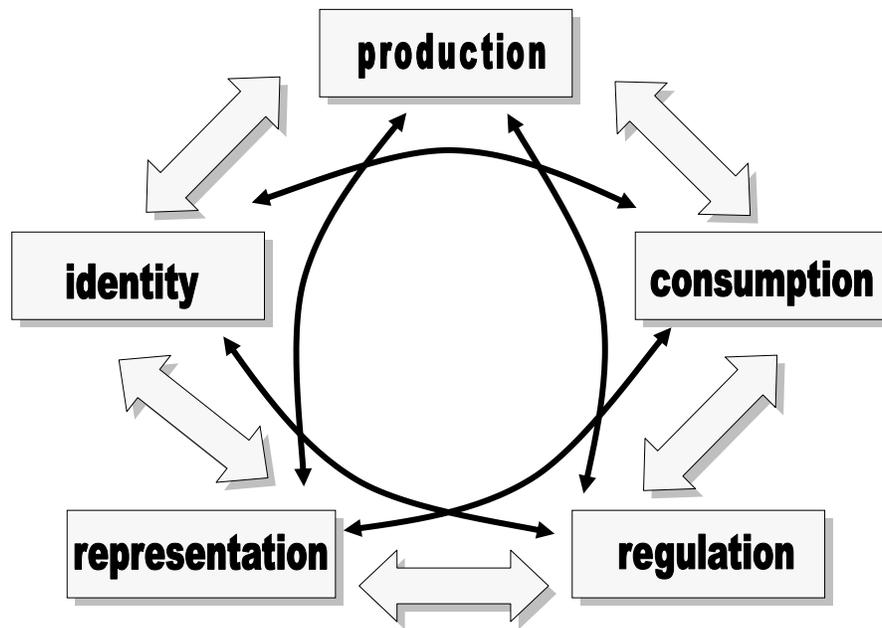


Figure 1. Circuit of Culture (du Gay et al., 1997).

The following sections will describe the moments of representation, identity, production, and consumption. Additionally, Stuart Hall’s encoding/decoding model was utilized to further understand the phenomenon of hauling. Although the notion of regulation is an important moment that comprises the circuit, it will not be discussed at length in this paper.

Representation

du Gay (1997) suggests that representation is known as “...the practice of constructing meaning through the use of signs and language” (p. 24). Hall (1997) notes that “Representation

means using language to say something meaningful about, or to represent, the world meaningfully, to other people (p. 15).

Representation is the production of the meaning of concepts in our minds through language. It is the link between concepts and language which enables us to *refer* to either ‘the real’ world of objects, people or events, or indeed to imaginary worlds of fictional objects, people and events (Hall, 1997, p. 17).

In brief, the visual signs and language that exist in any culture aid in creating representations. For example, Taylor et al. (2002) explored the concept of representation by applying it to their study of the virtual music-sharing site Napster, a site designed to facilitate “swapping” music files (as cited in Taylor et al., 2002). “Media coverage employed this term [swapping] to capture the free and direct exchange of files between users. In doing so, commentators invoked a residual image of public, face-to-face interaction (e.g., the “swap meet”) to assimilate the phenomenon of cyberculture” (p. 613). They highlight a handful of ways in which the phenomenon of Napster established its meaning by applying du Gay et al.’s (1997) approach to understanding representation. For one, several elements of Napster were associated with the more free-spirited, postmodern, college-age users of the site. “...Napster differed fundamentally from traditional music systems (e.g. broadcast radio) and commodity forms (e.g., the CD). Napster’s peer-to-peer exchange format violated the music industry’s traditional model of centralized distribution” (p. 613). Connotations including “...aggression, informality, leisure, energy, and rebellion against established forms of authority” came to be associated with Napster (Taylor et al., 2002, p. 613)—which also contributed to its connection to a younger audience of users. Thus, the manner in which Napster was represented influenced its meaning as it generated a reputation characterized by hostile, aggressive or rebellious undertones.

Scherer and Jackson (2008) utilized the circuit of culture to study the commercial titled *Black* launched in 1999 by the athletic brand adidas, to promote the All Blacks rugby team. They focused on the levels of production, representation and consumption. The advertisement “...articulated the adidas brand with Māori imagery intertwined with images from an international rugby match constructed around the commercial’s focal point: the All Blacks traditional prematch performance of the Ka Mate haka” (p. 508) The Ka Mate haka is a traditional dance performed in Māori culture. Although this commercial was targeted toward viewers worldwide and highly regarded in the advertising industry, it was met with criticism by some interest groups who were concerned with the “...(mis)appropriation and commodification of Māori culture in relation to an array of intellectual property issues pertaining to debates over who owns the Ka Mate haka” (p. 508). The following statement is helpful in that it serves to illustrate the interrelatedness of the moments in the circuit of culture. The production of the commercial was flawed in its use of stereotypical content (i.e. representations), which impacted the way it was consumed by viewers.

Thus, despite investing an enormous amount of time and energy in the details and processes of production, including consultation with some Māori over the use of indigenous cultural imagery, the producers quickly discovered that there were no guarantees with respect to how the commercial’s representations were decoded and articulated to real social practices, lived realities, and local power relations (Scherer & Jackson, 2008, p. 508).

Though one could argue that the creators of this commercial engaged in thorough decision-making processes when producing this ad, it is evident that they publicized banal images of Māori culture to an audience made up primarily of non-Māori viewers. It is unlikely

that a non-Māori viewer would realize that the commercial reinforced stereotypes of the Māori as savage, “...primitive athletes, genetically advantaged to participate in physical activities as opposed to intellectual ones” (as cited in Scherer & Jackson, 2008, p. 516; see Hokowhitu, 2004). The authors summarize their discussion of representation with the following statement:

By appropriating and fabricating stereotypical images and mythology of Māori culture, adidas, the NZRU, and Saatchi & Saatchi controlled, contained, and globally showcased the exotic black Other like an exhibitionary colonial museum for commercial profit.

Although some Māori were consulted during the creative process, and this undoubtedly legitimized the use of Māori culture for the cultural intermediaries, the commercials representations are ultimately owned and controlled by non-Māori for global commercial purposes (Scherer & Jackson, 2008, p. 518).

This example demonstrates that one moment in the circuit, even an often powerful moment such as representation, cannot always completely determine meaning. In other words, moments such as identity and consumption play a role. The producer of the commercial may think they are representing a particular group (i.e. Māori culture) in a favorable manner. Nonetheless, a viewer may encode the message in an oppositional way if aspect(s) of their identity clash with what they are consuming. When a message is disseminated, it is free moving, open to multiple interpretations that are receiver dependent. The representation is consumed, and arguably, aspects of a receiver’s identity will impact how they internalize a message (which relates to Hall’s (1980) preferred, negotiated, or oppositional reading).

Identity

Identity is multifaceted and ever-evolving. It is a complex and intertwined system that works in conjunction with the other moments on the circuit. Barker (2000) describes identity as:

“A temporary stabilization of meaning, a becoming rather than a fixed entity. The suturing or stitching together of the discursive ‘outside’ with the ‘internal’ processes of subjectivity. Points of temporary attachment to the subject positions which discursive practices construct for us” (p. 386). Here it is important to realize that identity is fluid; it can change based on external factors and shifts in history. “Identities are discursive categories produced at the intersection of certain attributes, capacities, and forms of conduct at specific historical moments” (Taylor et al., 2002, p. 615). Davis (1992) explains identity as it relates to fashion:

Prodded by social and technological change, the biological decrements of the life cycle, visions of utopia, and occasions of disaster, our identities are forever in ferment, giving rise to numerous strains, paradoxes, ambivalences, and contradictions within ourselves. It is upon these collectively experienced, sometimes historically recurrent, identity instabilities that fashion feeds (p. 17).

In other words, the environments we inhabit are constantly influencing and helping to determine who we think we are as individuals and the fashions we utilize. Before women entered the workforce, they donned homemaker accessories such as an apron, headscarf, a blouse and skirt as they reared children and took care of household duties. During World War II, it was more commonplace to see many women dressed in masculine garb given the demands of their physical labor. Today, it is typical for women to utilize business apparel as many occupy positions in the corporate world. Therefore, daily activities and responsibilities can dictate one’s fashion choices and ultimately help to shape identity.

Where do the meanings that inform our identities originate? Scholars have argued that identities are constructed from attributes including nationality, ethnicity, social class, community, religion, gender and sexuality (Sarup, 1996; Woodward, 1997), as well as the

influences invoked by the reciprocal relationship between self and culture (Kaiser, 1990). When conflicts in identity occur, however, a person may end up with the sense of only a partial or divided understanding of who they are. Kaiser et al. (1991) note that "...appearance management is an active process of identity expression, bringing to the surface and embodying meanings that are not easily conveyed in words" (p. 171).

"Dress, then, comes easily to serve as kind of a visual metaphor for identity..." (Davis, 1992, p. 25). Davis (1992) explains that the "business of fashion" is based in part on recreating particular styles of dress (p.28). He describes the 1970s when women forewent their homemaker roles and began to step into the workforce. What was at the time considered masculine attire (i.e. suit jackets and dress pants) underwent a transition as silk blouses, bow ties and ruffled collars were incorporated to signal a more feminine look (pp. 27-28). In essence, women began creating new identities for themselves that were not centered on the expectations of being a wife and/or mother. One could argue that the traditional business suit carries with it a masculine identity, and therefore, when a woman wears a feminized version of one, she is going against traditional dress norms. "In all societies clothes serve to communicate more or less standardized meanings about their wearers, but not all societies subject wearers to the periodic alterations of meanings effected by fashion" (Davis, 1992, p. 27).

While appearance and dress play a large role in the construction of identity of the individual, it is also valuable to explore this concept as it perhaps more abstractly exists in the corporate world. In their study of Napster, Taylor et al. (2002) argue that the company's identity was confronted in numerous ways, and that in contrast to the identity of the Sony Walkman, Napster's is "more fragile and ambivalent" (p. 615). They explain that it was associated with young, tech-oriented, college students, though the users consisted of a wide array of individuals.

The face of Shawn Fanning, co-creator of Napster, came to be associated with the company in both positive and negative ways. While heralded for his technological brilliance, he was also viewed in a criminal light given that the company was the first to underwrite copyright music. To reconstruct its identity, Napster restructured and began charging for music. Originally known for its “anti-corporate identity,” that helped to activate its user-base, the company changed its way of doing business, which contributed to the company’s rejection from many users who felt let down (pp. 616-617).

Thus, identity exists in many forms. It can be thought of in the human sense—meaning, what makes us who we are? Our character, such as our ethical, moral, or behavioral patterns certainly pertains, as do our tastes in fashion, music, food, religion, and other cultural influences. As has been previously mentioned, our identities are constantly in flux. Who we are at age 25, is certainly not who we are at age 15. Moreover, as demonstrated by the example of Napster, identity can also be understood from a corporate or business standpoint.

Production

Production refers to attempting to create a given object or idea a meaning, which will ultimately be consumed by some entity. A product, such as the iPad, or a cashmere sweater, may be produced for the masses, but at the same time, be marketed toward a niche consumer group. When exploring the moment of production in the realm of haul videos, one could argue that it is explained in several ways. First, the artifact, such as a necklace from the trendy clothing store Forever 21 is produced at the corporate level. It can be argued that items, such as a T-shirt or accessory created at this level, have an intended meaning—the producer is sending a particular message to the consumer, hoping that they embrace the preferred meaning.

The idea of preferred meaning comes from Hall (1980), and will be explored in more detail later in this chapter. The representation is then purchased by the hauler (consumed), likely because some aspect of the hauler's identity is attracted to the piece of jewelry. Next the hauler will produce a YouTube video in which she showcases her new necklace and explains what she might wear it with, arguably engaging in identity construction and self-expression. Thus, while representing Forever 21 by wearing a piece of their jewelry, and possibly taking on one of the identities put forth by the company, the hauler engaged in both consumption and production, while incorporating identity and representation in the process. Keep in mind that this does not happen in a vacuum. The vloggers exist within a lived context. They engage in a cultural identity construction by creating a particular look, given the demands of age, gender, race and other phenomena.

Consequently, when discussing production and its place in the circuit of culture framework, du Gay (1997) states that the moments of consumption, representation and identity must be brought into the conversation as well (p. 10). In their case study of the Sony Walkman, du Gay et al. (1997) explains that the Walkman was produced as a technological device geared toward the "bright, young, market-oriented consumer who wants to consume in a global market and to express individual choice" which was facilitated through "new styles of production" (p. 31).

Similarly, Braham (1997) discusses the concept of production in the context of the fashion world:

It is perhaps only to be expected that in cultural studies fashion is treated as a cultural subject, in which most emphasis is on fashion as a badge or a means of identity. Yet

fashion, as well as being a matter of creation, consumption, and identity, is also a matter of production, distribution and retailing (p. 121).

du Gay's (1997) point can be summed up when one thinks of production as it relates to the popular clothing retailer, Express. On its website, the company features an "About Express" page, which includes the following:

Express is the must-have sexy, sophisticated fashion brand for work, the weekend, or going out. It's what's new and what's now for young fashion-forward women and men...

We aren't inventors – there are so few of those in the world of fashion today. Nor are we imitators—that is far too easy. At Express, we are innovators. We find inspiration and trends from all over the world and interpret them in a way that is uniquely Express. And we have become the preferred destination for the latest trends, essential styles, and must-have key items (About Express, 2011).

The above statements help to illustrate moments of production, as well as identity and representation. Arguably, the brand is attempting to explain who its key consumer is—a young, sexy, sophisticated, and fashion conscious individual. These terms may resonate with one's identity, and inspire someone to consume Express clothing because they may think that by doing so they will represent the type of individual Express is producing, and also allow them to engage in creating the identity they are striving for. Once again, it is worth noting that all of this takes place within the complexity of a lived experience—the consumption and production of what it means to be young, male or female, white, black, Latino(a), and etc. comes into play. Arguably, a hauler will consume, produce, represent and identify with such social structural categories.

Further, as many retailers today provide consumers with the option of online shopping, Express not only offers its customers a website to fulfill consumption purposes, but also an online venue titled "EXPLife." On this page, below the EXPLife wording is the phrase: "Where fashion is social and style is life." Here, viewers are provided with news stories about where Express clothing has been featured (i.e. in magazines), updates about upcoming Express events,

videos of Express fashion shows, promotions about following Express on Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter, among other types of interactive links. This again helps to illustrate the fact that Express is attempting to produce not only clothing, but a virtual presence, that may resound with new or returning consumers. Again, some of the verbiage or interactive links on this site may influence one's identity and entice them to shop at this store because they think they will represent the sexy, sophisticated, and trendy Express individual.

Haul videos are primarily devoted to sharing one's fashion or beauty purchases, as well as one's opinions on current styles or trends. Given that the circuit of culture originated in cultural studies, and in this school of thought fashion is viewed as a cultural subject, the above quotation from Braham (1997) reinforces the idea that the circuit of culture is useful when analyzing fashion and its related artifacts (i.e. fashion magazine and newspaper sections, fashion advertisements and promotional materials, and more recently haul videos). Braham (1997) highlights the fact that fashion has cultural and economic facets, both of which are key to his interpretations and the understanding of cultural economy (p. 121). He maps out the relationship between production and consumption of fashion by offering two stories. Put briefly, the first talks about a British retailer and the requirements they set forth for their blue jean supplier. Even though the trend (at the time) was faded blue jeans, the retailer decided to maintain their non-faded jeans, a judgment that was later looked down upon by the company because it compromised their position in the fashion market (p. 123). The second story "...concerns a variant of a common nightmare that is said to haunt store buyers."

...the buyer is in a hall which somehow combines elements of all the ready-to-wear collections held each year in Paris, Milan, New York and London. She is surrounded by jostling characters from the fashion circus who are holding out hundreds of dresses for

her to inspect, and at the same time, waving order sheets in front of her face. Unable to resist such pressure she signs innumerable cheques and buys millions and millions of dollars worth of clothes (pp. 123-124).

Next, the story shifts to the beginning of the upcoming season. An entire week passes and the store receives no business. The millions of dollars the buyer spent on couture fashion have been wasted; she is told that she inaccurately read the taste of consumers and to send the clothing back (as cited in Braham (1997), adapted from Coleridge, 1988, p. 270). Though each story focuses on a different level of fashion—jeans that once began as the basic work wear and exclusive dresses sold by major designers—both illustrate the fact that fashion is a volatile business. Moreover, the stories highlight the idea that the producer intended one meaning (i.e. the preferred reading) but the consumer interpreted another (i.e. negotiated or oppositional).

Preferred, negotiated, and oppositional readings come from Stuart Hall (1980) and his encoding/decoding model. Briefly, a preferred reading occurs when a consumer takes a message from a producer and reads or interprets it exactly as the creator intended. A negotiated reading occurs when a consumer internalizes or accepts part of a message, but not all of it (i.e. their own philosophies may interfere with the intended meaning). Thirdly, an oppositional reading takes place when a consumer refutes or rejects the proposed meaning. While Hall's (1980) model is commonly utilized in the realm of communication (i.e. messages transmitted via television, newspaper, or magazine), it is also applicable to the world of fashion. Fashion designers put forth a certain message or ideology through their brand (consider the Express example), which is then received by consumers. The question is how that message is received by the consumer. Do they internalize all of it and adopt the representation being put forth (i.e., a preferred reading)? Do they accept some of the message but represent the brand by putting a new spin on their garment

(i.e. a negotiated reading)? Or do they reject it completely by not buying anything and possibly trash-talking the brand with their peers (i.e. an oppositional reading)?

Braham (1997) asks: "...how does something become a fashion item and what is fashionable about it? Who shapes and influences fashion?" He asks if it is the up market designers or those at "street level" who create fashion. "And if there are different fashion 'worlds,' what is the relationship between them?" He goes on to explain that answers to such questions are what constitute the pages of fashion magazines and newspapers (p. 126). Thus, while fashion is manufactured in the physical form (i.e. the actual garments), it is also produced through the editorial content in fashion periodicals and more recently, haul videos. "If the extensive coverage of fashion in newspapers and magazines invariably makes fashion seem exciting, it is also likely to be fairly superficial" (Braham, 1997, p. 127). Can his statement be applied then to haul videos? Do the haulers produce superficial content?

Scherer and Jackson (2008) explain that the producers of the Black commercial (which included the New Zealand Rugby Union [NZRU], adidas, and advertising agency Saatchi & Saatchi, Wellington) worked together to create the commercial. The producers agreed on the fact that the Ka Mate haka was thought of as a "generic part" of the All Blacks "identity" and they had no reservations about using it in the commercial (pp. 512-513).

These dominant cultural understandings, incidentally, justify the commercial exploitation of the Ka Mate *haka* and indigenous culture: i.e., if all New Zealanders own the Ka Mate *haka* as a "historical" national signifier, or if it is a generic part of the All Blacks brand, it can be pillaged for commercial purposes and the financial advancement of the NZRU and corporations like adidas (Scherer & Jackson, 2008, p. 513).

The commercial was purposefully filmed at night to exaggerate the prehistoric vibe the agency was aiming for (p. 513). Although the producers "...went to great lengths to consult and involve some Māori in relation to the commercial's production..." (p. 514) it is worth noting that the second sequence of the commercial featured content that is viewed as extremely culturally sensitive to New Zealanders in general, and to local Māori people, specifically (p. 514).

To further explain the idea of production, retailers Forever 21 and JC Penney were scrutinized for sexist T-shirts they produced that promoted the stereotype that women are incapable of doing math and unintelligent. Forever 21 created a shirt that read: "Allergic to Algebra," while JC Penney sold one reading "I'm too pretty to do homework, so my brother has to do it for me" (Stop JC Penney, 2011). Forever 21 also manufactured several other shirts promoting anti-education messages. One shirt read: "Skool sucks," another featured a list on the front that read: "A+=amazing, B=brilliant, C=cool, D=delightful, F=fabulous." And to accompany this shirt on the brand's website was the tagline "F doesn't always mean fail!." Further, another shirt contained the message "I heart school" on the front and the message "not..." on the back (Ng, 2011).

After receiving backlash from customers, blogs and popular press, both companies removed the shirts from their websites and shelves and offered public apologies. However, damage was still done given that both retailers produced clothing that disseminated negative stereotypes about women.

...because popular culture is so powerful, many women and girls will conform to negative stereotypes of what a woman is supposed to achieve if they are continually reinforced. Stores like JC Penney and Forever 21 help shape that culture through the clothing they sell (Stop JC Penney, 2011).

To summarize, production exists in numerous forms. It exists in the fashion world through the production of clothing, such as offensive T-shirts created by JC Penney and Forever 21. It is present in the virtual domain where vloggers engage in producing haul videos. It is also alive in the advertising and marketing arenas, as illustrated in the example of the Black commercial. In many cases, the act of production includes the promotion of one or more messages that push a certain ideology on consumers. Fortunately, as is evidenced by the backlash JC Penney and Forever 21 received for their sexist clothing, some forms of production are not well-received by all consumers. When a T-shirt (i.e. one from Forever 21) is produced with an intended meaning, there is no guarantee that it will be received (consumed) as predicted by the creator. As is illustrated by Hall's (1980) encoding/decoding model, production does not secure meaning at the point of reception; the ideology of a consumer undoubtedly comes into play when a message is decoded.

Consumption

Consumption refers to the act of acquiring, understanding or using a given object, material, idea, or tangible product. An individual can be a consumer in that they purchase fashion and beauty products, as in the case of the hauling (purchasing). At the same time, an individual also can be a consumer of haul videos by sitting in front of a computer screen and absorbing the video content. A person can consume music through the radio or an iPod, knowledge from written sources such as books or magazines, and messages from the mass media by watching television. In a sense, a college student can be considered a consumer, because when they attend a lecture, they are essentially interpreting (if they choose to pay attention) the information transmitted from their instructor. According to Mackay (1997) "...consumption is the articulation of a sense of identity." He states:

Our identity is made up by our consumption of goods – and their consumption and display constitutes our expression of taste. So display – to ourselves and to others – is largely for symbolic significance, indicating our membership of a particular culture (p. 4).

Mackay's (1997) explanation sheds light on the fact that both consumption and identity play a role in the construction of status symbols, and in more broad terms, classism. In the case of the haul video phenomenon, one could argue that at least some of the producers are making public that they belong to a certain social class and particular culture(s), by purchasing particular brands of clothing and beauty products. To further clarify the concept of consumption, Julier (2000) offers the following description:

Consuming entails the using or using-up of something. It may involve the pleasures or un-pleasures of having an artifact or it can be concerned with the acts prior to ownership: gathering product information, browsing, shopping and acquisition. Looking, listening, smelling or touching are also acts of consuming (p. 48).

In order for something to be consumed, however, it must first be produced. du Gay (1997) discussed the culture of production, noting that this "...is an integral part of the company way of life that informs intra-organizational decisions and activities (such as staff recruitment policies, departmental organizational arrangements, and general management strategies)" (p. 43). According to Barker (2000), "...meanings produced at the level of production are available to be worked on at the level of consumption but do not determine them" (p. 54). Acosta-Alzuru and Kreshel (2002) cite Bourdieu (1984) and his claim "...that consumption is both a symbolic and economic activity" (p. 145). Further, they mention that some theorists view consumption as a productive process during which meaning can be conceived (p. 145). du Gay et al. (1997)

explains the process of consumption through their case study of the Sony Walkman. When it was first released for consumer use, it was regarded simply "...as a device for individual listening" (p. 59). It developed its identity through the processes of production and consumption.

"Consumer processes were crucial to the introduction, modification and subsequent redevelopment and marketing of this product" (du Gay et al., 1997, p. 59).

"In postmodern accounts, cultural consumption is seen as being the very material act of which we construct our identities: we become what we consume" (Mackay, 1997, p. 2). Dittmar (2004) examined the links between identity and material goods, and the prospective negative consequences that can occur from engaging in a materialistic lifestyle that promotes excessive consumption (p. 206). "But as signs of social identity, material goods signify group affiliations and social standing, including sex-role identification, socioeconomic status or belonging to a subculture" (Dittmar, 2004, p. 206).

The possessions symbolize their life experiences and relationships, and thus the historical continuity of self. Yet there seems to be a 'dark side' of aspiring to material goods, where materialistic values can be harmful to an individual's well-being (Dittmar, 2004, p. 208).

The above quotation is applicable to the phenomenon of hauling. Considering the producers of haul videos (at least a large number of them) engage in excessive consumption of fashion and beauty items, it appears they place a high value on material goods. Many haulers purchase mass amounts of cosmetics, jewelry, handbags, clothing and footwear to showcase in their videos. While consuming fashion and beauty items can be enjoyable and potentially boost one's self esteem, doing so in excess can lead to emotional, relational and financial setbacks. "...when materialistic values are important or central – to a person, they lead to a strong commitment to identity construction through material goods" (Dittmar, 2004, p. 208). Further, to

stay current in the hauling community on YouTube, a hauler must consistently engage in consumptive practices if they want their videos to generate views and maintain popularity among their fellow vloggers. One could argue that hauling on YouTube fosters somewhat of a competitive environment—if you don't shop, your viewership drops. Therefore, hauling essentially requires the vlogger to keep spending, regardless of their material needs and financial well-being.

Dittmar (2004) explained that materialistic values are characterized by three main beliefs: "...material goods are: a central life goal; the main route to identity, success and happiness; and the yardstick for evaluating self and others" (p. 208). When one examines the amount of time and effort many of the haulers devote not only to their shopping expeditions, but also to creating and posting the videos, it becomes apparent that many of them hold materialistic values that could be damaging to their identity construction. Consuming items to produce haul videos takes time away from enjoying nature, socializing with friends and family, and growing intellectually and academically. Moreover, hauling can be a drain to the hauler (or their family's) bank account. While there may be some positive aspects to the hauling phenomenon, it is worth noting that this trend is popular among adolescents and young women who could develop addictive shopping tendencies that could carry over into their adult life. Hauling on YouTube does facilitate virtual bonding and a sense of community, however, it may also encourage young women to evaluate themselves and others based on what they have and how much they can buy.

Encoding and Decoding

Scholars have explained consumption as an often complex process. But what exactly might that process look like? As was previously mentioned, Stuart Hall (1980) attempted to represent the process of consumption with his metaphor for this experience he called

encoding/decoding. In brief, an artifact is encrypted with a message or meaning (as created by its producer) and then deciphered by the person interacting with that artifact (the reader). Mackay (1997) explained this process in reading technology as text. “Technologies, like other texts, are encoded – in a physical sense in their design, and symbolically in their styling and marketing – and are decoded – that is, read by their consumers” (p. 269).

The circuit of culture encourages a symmetrical analysis of the areas of production and consumption, and an understanding that there are not one-way connections between the two. Rather, an interrelated and multifaceted system is in place. Mackay (1997) claims that “...a cultural studies approach alerts us to the symbolic (as opposed to simply functional) significance of technologies” (p. 269). In other words, the ways in which a product is represented, a message decoded, or an identity put forth is reliant on a symbolic system. The circuit of culture illustrates how everything is interrelated in often extremely complex ways, making prediction very difficult.

Hall (1980) described this process as related to the production of a broadcasted message: The institution-societal relations of production must pass under the discursive rules of language for its product to be realized. This initiates a further differentiated moment, in which the formal rules of discourse and language are in dominance. Before this message can have an ‘effect’ (however defined), satisfy a ‘need’ or be put to a ‘use’, it must first be appropriated as meaningful discourse and be meaningfully decoded. It is this set of decoded meanings that ‘have an effect’, influence, entertain, instruct or persuade, with very complex perceptual, cognitive, emotional, ideological or behavioural consequences (p. 109).

Turner (2003) discusses encoding/decoding, promoting the idea that audiences are not passive dupes and that their reception of messages is influenced by factors including race, religion and socio-economic status. “So there is bound to be a lack of fit between aspects of the production and reception processes – between the producer’s and the audience’s interpretation of the message – that will produce misunderstandings or ‘distortions.’” He claims that both the construction and reception of a message are “...an active, interpretive and social event...” (p. 73).

Further, when a message is decoded the receiver may take one (or a combination) of three readings. They may take the preferred reading, which Hall (1980) also refers to as the “dominant” meaning. “The domains of ‘preferred meanings’ have the whole social order embedded in them as a set of meanings, practices and beliefs...” (p. 134). In this sense, the reader does not oppose any of what is being communicated; they would not dispute the claims made in an advertisement or the promises made in a political campaign. Secondly, a recipient might embrace a “negotiated” meaning of a given message. They may believe or agree with some of what is being transmitted, but not in full. Hall explained the negotiated meaning as follows:

Decoding within the negotiated version contains a mixture of adaptive and oppositional elements: it acknowledges the legitimacy of the hegemonic definitions to make grand significations (abstract), while at a more restricted, situational (situated) level, it makes its own ground rules – it operates with exceptions to the rule (p. 137).

Lastly, a reader might choose to take an oppositional reading. In this case, they would be completely opposed to a given message. “...it is possible for a viewer perfectly to understand both the literal and the connotative inflection given by a discourse but to decode the message in a

globally contrary way” (Hall, 1980, pp. 137-138). Consider for instance, the viewer who “...listens to a debate on the need to limit wages but ‘reads’ every mention of the ‘national interest’ as a ‘class interest’” (p. 138). In a similar light, Mackay (1997) made the claim that “...despite the work of cultural intermediaries in design, advertising and marketing, there is space for creative (albeit circumscribed) consumption, resistance and transformation” (p. 271). Thus, consumers are not passive fools who believe in or embrace every message they are confronted with. Hall (1980) reinforces this with his metaphor of preferred, oppositional, and negotiated meanings. This viewpoint will be applied to the phenomenon of hauling later in the study.

Regulation

Though the moment of regulation will not be explored in depth for this study, it is worth briefly describing how it is understood in regard to the circuit of culture. The term regulation can mean a wide variety of things when described in a particular context. According to Thompson (1997), regulation is a “dynamic process” and it does not routinely reproduce the status quo (p. 3). He uses the topic of sexuality as an example to explain the moment of regulation. He says that two key reasons for sexuality being a central domain for social regulation in modern society include the fact that the family plays a crucial role in the “...reproduction of society and social order...” and that sexuality is fundamental when establishing one’s identity (p. 5).

In their study of Napster, Taylor et al. (2002) explored the moment of regulation and claim that the music-sharing site was put under serious legal regulation (p. 622). They claim that Napster’s regulation was controlled by the “logic of capital.” “One example involved the recording industry’s decision in 1999 to sue Napster itself, and not its individual users” (p. 622).

du Gay et al.'s (1997) study of the Sony Walkman for which they utilized the circuit of culture model. In referencing their study, Thompson (1997) offers the following statement to illustrate how regulation is intertwined with the other moments of the circuit: "A cultural artifact like the Walkman has an impact upon the regulation of social life through the ways in which it is represented, the identities associated with it, and the articulation of its production and consumption" (p. 2).

When thinking about regulation as it exists in the virtual realm, a helpful way to consider this would be to look at the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) and its institution of rules that haulers must follow when posting their videos. For example, they have to disclose whether or not they were compensated for any of the products they showed (i.e. if the video was sponsored). Further, regulation can be both formal and informal. It can be formal, as illustrated by the FTC example. An informal case is the enactment of social normal on social networking sites such as Facebook or YouTube. Arguably, users eventually learn what is considered appropriate and inappropriate behavior, which is in a sense a form of regulation. Another instance is the hating that takes place on YouTube. When haulers regulate their comments (i.e. by having negative or crude remarks automatically removed) this is a form of regulation at the micro-level. This will be explored more in depth later in the study.

Summary

The circuit of culture can be used as a model to help one understand how meaning is negotiated in human experience. Given that my aim is to learn what the phenomenon of hauling is about and what it means to those who participate, the circuit of culture provides a practical framework, as meaning can be cultivated at any given moment. "The circuit emphasizes the relationship between culture and meaning" (Acosta-Alzuru & Kreshel, 2002, p. 142).

Girls who own AG dolls share a web of meanings that help them interpret and make sense of the world. The study of how these meanings are produced, modified, and consumed in everyday life will facilitate our understanding of the dolls as cultural artifacts and of some of the shared meanings and social practices that constitute our culture (Acosta-Alzuru & Kreshel, 2002, p. 143).

The above statement illustrates how I applied the circuit of culture in my examination of the haul video phenomenon. Just as AG dolls may be used as a mechanism to help young girls understand their world, I argue that a haul video can be considered a cultural artifact, and that the videos (along with comments posted to them) may assist young girls and women to decode messages and participate in their dynamic social realms.

Turner (2003), drawing on du Gay et al. (2007), cites the following as questions that should be asked when analyzing a "...cultural artefact, product or practice:"

1. "How is it represented?"
2. What identities are associated with it?
3. How is it produced and consumed?
4. What mechanisms regulate its distribution and use?" (p. 3)

These questions will aid in guiding this research project, as I am considering the haul videos to be a cultural artifact.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

RQ1: Based upon three case studies of haul vloggers, what can we say about how the practice of hauling on YouTube plays a role in the construction of contemporary meaning and identity? Specifically, how does theory commonly associated with the cultural studies concept known as the 'circuit of culture' help explain this meaningful practice?

RQ2: What does the relatively recent phenomenon of haul vlogging indicate about the state of new media, fashion, and identity in contemporary Western culture?

METHOD

Drawing again from Lofland and Lofland (1995), “starting where you are” is a sound and preferable approach when selecting a topic of research interest. As mentioned earlier, I was inspired to study haul videos upon my first viewing of one. After immersing myself in the haul video phenomenon for more than a year and writing several papers devoted to the exploration of this trend, I feel justified in qualifying myself as a credible research tool for data collection (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). For this project, I completed three case studies for which I interviewed three different haulers, analyzed one video posted by each hauler, and 100 comments posted to each of the three selected videos. While conducting three case studies is hardly enough to discern anything generalizable, the cases serve as a starting point for understanding this blossoming virtual sensation. Guba and Lincoln (1981) point out that “The naturalistic inquirer is constantly searching for that which is unique, atypical, different, idiographic, individualistic,” (p. 129). I believe that my research focus aligns well with this statement because studying the “unique” and “individualistic” may facilitate a deeper understanding of what this trend means in a more broad and cultural sense.

The nature of my qualitative research lends itself to the “self-as-instrument” (Rew, Bechtel & Sapp, 1993) notion, in that data collection is primarily dependent on the researcher, as was the case with my inquiries (interviews, videos and comments). Guba and Lincoln (1981) also draw on this idea, noting that: “One of the most difficult concepts involved in naturalistic inquiry is that of the inquirer as instrument. He is at one and the same time instrument administrator, data collector, data analyst, and data interpreter” (p. 128). Lindlof and Taylor (2002) explain that the naturalistic inquirer is concerned with observing subjects in their natural environments, which in the case of this study, is the surveillance of haulers producing haul

videos on YouTube. “Natural settings are the customary arenas of activity for those being studied (e.g. shopping malls for teens engaged in “hanging out”)” (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 15). In the past the natural setting may have been associated with reality and considered more real and authentic, while the online setting was viewed as unreal and less authentic. Increasingly, however, online environments are being recognized as naturalistic settings capable of great meaning production.

Case Studies

According to Wimmer and Dominick (2006), “Case studies are conducted when a researcher needs to understand or explain a phenomenon” (pp. 136-137). In their definition, they explain that “a case study uses as many data sources as possible to systematically investigate individuals, groups, organizations, or events” (p. 137). Thus, interviews, videos and comments posted to them were used as data sources for examination. Given the newness of hauling on YouTube, the case study approach offers numerous advantages for introducing the scholarly examination of this phenomenon. “The case study method is most valuable when the researcher wants to obtain a wealth of information about the research topic. Case studies provide tremendous detail” (Wimmer & Dominick, 2006, p. 137).

Stake (2005) suggests that a case study is both a technique of inquiry about a particular case and the result of that inquiry (p. 444). He also explains that there are three types of case studies, which he refers to as intrinsic, instrumental, and collective or multiple. An intrinsic case study is conducted if the researcher’s goal is to learn as much as possible about one particular case, not to understand a general trend or to create theory. Stake (2005) indicates that this type of case study is undertaken because of interest in a particular “child, clinic, conference, or curriculum” (p. 445). An instrumental case study, on the other hand, seeks to “redraw a

generalization” or provide a deeper understanding of a given issue. Stake (2005) states that with instrumental case studies, “the case is still looked at in depth, it’s scrutinized and its ordinary activities detailed, but all this helps us pursue the external interest” (p. 445). For purposes of this study, the collective case study approach was employed. In describing the collective case study, Stake (2005) notes:

Individual cases in the collection may or may not be known in advance to manifest some common characteristic. They may be similar or dissimilar, with redundancy and variety, each important. They are chosen because it is believed that understanding them will lead to better understanding and perhaps better theorizing about still a larger collection of cases (p. 446).

Thus, individual case studies were conducted for three different haulers, with the goal that the end product would enable a comparative analysis and serve as a starting point for this new research topic. Wimmer and Dominick (2006) point out that using the case study technique allows the researcher to integrate “...a wide spectrum of evidence” such as “documents, historical artifacts, systematic interviews, direct observations, and even traditional surveys” (p. 137). They posit that the more sources of data included in a case, “...the more likely it is that the study will be valid” (p. 138). Their viewpoints illustrate my rationale for employing a threefold data sample: an interview with each hauler, analysis of one haul video (per interviewee), and analysis of 100 comments posted to each haul video. Lindlof and Taylor (2002) reinforce my logic, noting that “Triangulation involves the comparison of two or more forms of evidence with respect to an object of research interest” (p. 240).

When conducting case studies, Stake (2005) indicates that the researcher may go as far as to create a contract with the phenomenon under study (p. 449). Given that a single case is a dense

and complex set of material ripe for dissection, the researcher will be well-served to create a set of guidelines or boundaries they will adhere to when studying a case. It is illogical to assume that all aspects of a case can be studied; therefore, setting limits before the study is underway will prevent the researcher from becoming overwhelmed while in the midst of his or her work. Limits for this study were set in that I analyzed a sample of 100 comments posted to one select video from each interviewee. Given that there are hundreds to thousands of comments posted to haul videos, I had to limit the number I would analyze.

Some qualitative researchers are critical of case study research because of its focus on the unique or distinctive cases because the findings are not generalizable (Stake, 2003, p. 140). “The search for particularity competes with the search for generalizability. What all should be said about a single case is quite different from what should be said about all cases” (Stake, p. 140). Regardless of the value in studying the particular or the generalizable, I argue that because scholarship devoted to studying virtual worlds is an emerging field, my study is of value because it serves as a starting point that will contribute to a larger body of knowledge. As noted, there is no published literature (to my knowledge) that analyzes haul videos specifically; therefore, my thesis may help to pave the way for future researchers with similar scholarly interests.

Sample Discussion

To recruit interview participants, I began by making a list of haulers I thought could serve as solid interviewees. My list consisted of haulers I had been following for at least one year; and included women who posted haul videos regularly (at least once a month). I reviewed each haulers’ profile page on their YouTube channel, and contacted them via email or through the YouTube messaging system (or both), depending on what they listed for contact information. I sent two to three emails to approximately 35 haulers trying to recruit participants during the

course of one month. I was originally drawn to some of the more popular vloggers who have hundreds of thousands of followers and have become somewhat “famous” from their videos (i.e. mentioned in popular press articles). The Fowler sisters (as mentioned earlier) were on my original list, as well as a handful of vloggers who are still in high school or their early college years. I felt these women would function as sound research subjects given their younger age bracket and excessive consumptive practices. I also contacted several women in their mid-to late twenties (two of whom are married) because I wanted to talk to women closer to my age. These women post hauls bi-monthly (if not more frequently) and often feature expensive items from brands and retailers including Neiman Marcus, Saks Fifth Avenue, Prada, Dior and Christian Louboutin. I thought it would be interesting and worthwhile to talk to married women who purchase expensive products at such a frequent rate. Further, I contacted numerous women who reside in the United Kingdom, as I thought talking to at least one international hauler would be beneficial and potentially offer a slightly different perspective about this phenomenon (as it is popular on an international scale).

Unfortunately, I was unable to secure an interview with any vlogger from my original list. My prediction was that I would have been flooded with email responses from vloggers saying they would love to participate because my study sounded interesting and they were flattered I had contacted them. A few haulers did respond to my initial inquiry and said they were too busy with educational or occupational demands to participate. Additionally, I believe some haulers were a bit paranoid or guarded about contributing, and may have held an elitist attitude. With this unforeseen difficulty in the recruiting process, I started using Twitter as another source to locate haulers. As will be later discussed in more detail, many haulers utilize Twitter (and other forms of social media) to promote their YouTube channel. Knowing this, I started

searching for fashion and beauty gurus on Twitter. I did not engage in the actual recruiting process via Twitter, rather, I used it as a secondary source to locate potential recruits, and navigated to their YouTube channel page from Twitter (as these social networking sites are often linked to one another). After discovering a handful of beauty and fashion gurus on Twitter, and exploring their YouTube channel pages, I made another list of potential recruits. Over the course of several weeks, I sent another surge of emails to my list of newfound contacts. This time I had better luck. In sum, I selected my three participants based on convenience. Therefore, a convenience (also known as availability) sample was utilized in that I interviewed three women who were available and willing to participate in my study. Wimmer and Dominick (2006) point out that the convenience sample technique has been criticized because it does not “represent the population and therefore have no external validity” (p. 91). Nonetheless, they also mention that “Proponents of using available samples claim that if a phenomenon, characteristic, or trait does exist, then it should exist in any sample” (p. 91). Given that this study explores a new area of research and my goal is to generate a preliminary understanding of what this virtual phenomenon is about, using a convenience sample was a logical and effective choice in my situation.

The research subjects interviewed for this study include Euchante, a 19-year-old marketing student; EGheartsSSC, a 21-year-old psychology student at the University of California at Santa Barbara; and Jess, a 26-year-old nurse from the United Kingdom. Both Euchante and EGheartsSSC were found through Twitter and recruited after exploring their channel pages and haul videos on YouTube.

Measurement and Data Collection

The case study researcher must be strategic in his or her selection of case(s) and should use good judgment when choosing who and what exactly will be studied. As noted by Stake

(2003), the case is singular but included in it are subsections, dimensions, and domains (p. 449). Therefore, the researcher needs to draw limits and establish boundaries regarding what elements will be studied and what will be excluded from the study. Additionally, Stake (2003) says that the selection of “key issues” is critical; “issues are chosen partly in terms of what can be learned within the opportunities for the study. They will be chosen differently depending on the purpose of the study, and differently by different researchers” (p. 448). He also notes that a case is a multifaceted unit placed in a locale of circumstances and implanted in numerous settings or backgrounds, highlighting the fact that historical, physical, cultural, social, economic, political, ethical and aesthetic contexts may all be of interest in a given study (p. 449).

Interviewing

For this project, each case study included a semi-structured interview with the selected hauler. “At its best, the qualitative interview is an event in which one person (the interviewer) encourages others to freely articulate their interests and experience” (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 170). These authors note that this method has established itself in communication and other social sciences because of “...its ability to travel deeply and broadly into subjective realities” (p. 170). My aim was to conduct virtual interviews because they allow for face-to-face chat to take place, and may help to foster a more intimate conversation between the interviewer and the research subject (see Kazmer & Xie, 2008; Joinson in Hine (2005); Walther, 1996).

Kazmer and Xie (2008) discuss the concept of “contextual naturalness” (see Mann & Stewart, 2002), explaining that if one is doing research about an Internet-based activity (i.e. hauling) it is beneficial to conduct the interview in that same environment (i.e. through an Internet-based forum such as Skype). “If contextual naturalness is important, it implies that a research interview about an activity should take place in the same setting in which participants

normally engage in that activity” (p. 259). Contextual naturalness illustrates the value in conducting my interviews in a virtual setting. Kazmer and Xie (2008) explain that an interviewee may feel more at home if they are interacting in a domain that feels natural to them (p. 259).

Walther, Van Der Heide, Hamel and Shulman (2009) studied presentation of the self on Facebook and note that “...regardless of whether their suspicions about others’ distorted self-presentations are well or poorly founded, CMC users have concerns about the reliability of online self-presentations” (p. 231). Consequently, if users themselves have doubts about the trustworthiness of peoples’ profile or personal details entered in an online environment, concern among researchers is understandable. The validity of online data collection, specifically through interviewing, may pose a threat or be viewed skeptically by some researchers. Taylor (1999) sheds light on the issue of online interviewees and their tendency to share basic aspects of their offline life during an online interview (p. 7). She states, “When handling the subjective side of user experience, validity questions may be equally unverifiable off-line” (p. 8). She argues that traditional face-to-face interviews, as well as those conducted via computer-mediated-communication (CMC), will present varying degrees of authenticity (p. 8). Therefore, a researcher should not think that employing traditional interviews will provide them with more truthful, valid data. This again reinforces my reasoning for conducting online interviews.

In their discussion about the purposes of qualitative interviewing, Lindlof and Taylor (2002) state that interviewing is beneficial in that it helps the researcher to learn the “...social actor’s experience and perspective” (p. 173). The following statement fits well with the aim of my interviews with the haulers:

Social actors also produce explanations of their behavior. They explain how they apply what they know in certain areas of their lives, how they negotiate certain issues, how they

moved from one stage of their lives to another, how they interpret certain texts, and so on. The interviewer's goal is to draw out the individual, interpersonal, or cultural logics that people employ in their communicative performances (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 174).

In regard to their study of online communication and its impact on the well-being of adolescents, Valkenburg and Peter (2007) note "There is consistent research evidence that both adolescents and adults report sensitive behaviors more easily in computer-mediated interviewing modes than in non-computer-mediated modes..." (n.p.). Though these researchers are referring specifically to subjects' tendency to disclose sensitive or personal information, it is important to note that they are more likely to do so in a computer-mediated environment, in comparison to a traditional interview setting. Because subjects may be more comfortable providing intimate details about themselves (i.e. quirky personality traits, physical health, sexual experiences, or materialistic tendencies) through digital interviews or chats, the researcher may end up with more rich and valid data. Joinson reiterates this, stating that in a research environment "...people also disclose more about themselves online compared to in offline equivalents, and that much of that disclosure is more candid" (in Hine, 2005, p. 25). Thus, one should not warrant an offline interview as more legitimate than one accomplished through a virtual platform, such as Skype or a chat room.

Constant Comparison: Analyzing the Interviews, Haul Videos and Comments

For this study, I analyzed one haul video and 100 comments posted to that video for each hauler I interviewed. In addition to examining these secondary data forms, I spent a great deal of time evaluating and interpreting interview transcripts. The analyses of the transcripts, videos and the comments were carried out using constant comparison, a method first put forth by Glaser and

Straus (1967) and later sharpened by Lincoln and Guba (1985) (as cited in Wimmer & Dominick, 2006). This method usually employs the following steps:

1. “Comparative assignment of incidents to categories
2. Elaboration and refinement of categories
3. Searching for relationships and themes among categories
4. Simplifying and integrating data into a coherent theoretical structure” (Wimmer & Dominick, 2006, p. 117).

When engaging in constant comparison, the researcher generally takes an inductive approach and is looking for themes or patterns to emerge as they examine his or her data. This method requires the data to be broken down into units of analysis, which in my case was words or sentences from the interview transcripts and comments I collected, in addition to verbal statements made during the videos. Lindlof and Taylor (2002) describe the coding process as one that necessitates the researcher to delineate each category’s “core properties” by revisiting the data numerous times (p. 219). “The total number of categories also begins to level out as most incidents are accounted for (although some may be uncategorizable for different reasons or simply stay uncoded due to their lack of relevance)” (p. 219). Eventually, the researcher will end up with their final list of categories from which they can begin to interpret their findings.

Interviews with Haulers

As was described earlier, three semi-structured virtual interviews were conducted with the aforementioned participants. The interviews ranged in length from approximately forty minutes to one hour and twelve minutes. One of my interviews was conducted by using the Google “g-video” function (provided through Gmail); and two were conducted using Skype (a free online video calling service). Jess, (a participant) did not have Skype downloaded to her computer and was more familiar and comfortable with using Gmail. Therefore, the g-video function was used to carry out her interview. Unfortunately, when I conducted the interviews I

encountered a problem with my video connection and my interviewees were unable to see me. Nonetheless, I engaged in three video-chat interviews and was able to see each hauler for the entire exchange. Once interviews were complete, the video recordings were transcribed verbatim, with every word recorded, and transcripts created for each case.

Haul Videos

Drawing on the idea of “self as research instrument” (Rew et al., 1993), I served as the primary apparatus for data collection and chose the three videos to analyze after a detailed examination of at least five hauls posted to each participant’s channel. To make my selection, I watched hauls produced by each vlogger, looking for examples that fit with my theoretical purpose. To be specific, I was searching for videos that richly illustrated diverse moments in the circuit of culture (i.e. the articulation of identity, representation, consumption and production). Each video had to be at least seven minutes in length (they generally range from 6 to 20 minutes) and feature the hauler showcasing a variety of items (beauty, clothing, etc.). I was looking for videos in which the hauler provided a thorough description of what they purchased and a rationale. Further, I was eager to select videos that included the vlogger mentioning their use of other forms of social media, such as Twitter, as many vloggers use this social-networking site (SNS) to promote their YouTube videos.

Table I: Videos Analyzed ⁱ

Research Subject	Video Title	Length	Views
Euchante	“Just A Little Haul: Makeup, A&F, Shoes!”	7:44	34,698
EGheartsSSC	“Haul! Drugstore, Forever21, Lush”	9:48	26,175
Jess	“April’s Chit Chat & Haul from H&M, Primark & new skin care products”	8:47	1,181

Comments Posted to Haul Videos

To gather the comments for my analysis, I uploaded the selected videos and copied and pasted the 100 most recently posted comments into a Microsoft Word document. I collected comments for Euchante and EGheartsSSC on October 9, 2011 and comments for Jess on October 19, 2011. Thus, I pulled the first 100 comments posted to each video on these particular days. The only issue I ran into was that the video I chose to analyze for Jess did not have 100 comments posted to it. Therefore, I had to collect comments from a total of five different haul videos for this participant (in order to reach 100 comments total).

Analyses

The qualitative method known as constant comparison was utilized to analyze the interview transcripts, videos and comments. I began analyzing all three data sources by doing a preliminary sweep or reading of the texts and taking notes in the margins as patterns emerged. As explained by Lindlof and Taylor (2002), this method requires the researcher to revisit their data numerous times to allow “core properties” to come forth (p. 219). To aid in this process I used a variety of colored highlighters to color code the data as I began linking ideas and phrases together to establish the major themes. After reviewing each data source three different times and performing constant comparison, I developed a final list of major themes and sub-themes I thought fit together appropriately. Given the qualitative nature of my research, I realize that another researcher could take a very different approach in analyzing the same data and have results that conflict with my own.

Lindlof and Taylor (2002) discuss the concepts of reliability and validity as they exist in qualitative research. They explain that qualitative researchers strive to “produce and demonstrate credible data” (p. 240). Conducting qualitative research involving human subjects and

phenomena is difficult when trying to prove reliability and validity. "...because the qualitative researcher operates as a reflexive agent in the field—not only studying the action of others but also studying his or her own responses to other's action—it is doubtful that the conventional notion of internal validity holds much relevance for this researcher" (p. 240). Lindlof and Taylor posit that a qualitative researcher's goal is to be certain (for themselves and for their readers) that they have reached a right interpretation. "An indefinite number of interpretations could be constructed from any researcher experience, but usually the ones that researchers choose to develop are those that they find most plausible, insightful, and/or useful" (p. 240). I am aware that multiple interpretations can be realized when analyzing the haul video phenomenon. Nonetheless, I am confident that I have constructed my interpretations based on credible and trustworthy data.

Summary

Rew et al. (1993) note that the qualitative researcher can benefit by employing "authenticity" in their work and explain this idea as follows: "Genuinely caring about the informant's experience reflects the researcher's authenticity and influences data analysis and interpretation" (p. 300). I believe that my personal interest in the phenomenon of haul videos and their encompassment of fashion and beauty trends facilitated authentic interviews and assisted me in accurately analyzing and interpreting the accompanying data sources (i.e. haul videos and comments posted to them).

To conclude, I find the following quote not only relevant to the focus of my study, but also helpful to those wanting to engage in qualitative online research:

At the end of the day, qualitative internet research is like the qualitative research into any other area of mediated social life. It involves looking at people, their hustle and bustle,

their conversations, and their artifacts and texts produced in and through different media. It requires careful planning, ethical choices, and imaginative decision making (Bakardjieva, 2009, p. 59).

COMMUNITY

When one thinks of the concept of community what comes to mind? The neighborhood setting with block parties, camaraderie among neighborhood kids, dog walking and white picket fences? Or community as it is present in the civic sense? Fort Collins, Colorado, for example, boasts a thriving community as it is home to Colorado State University, a vibrant downtown, abundant outdoor activities, and the beautiful Cache la Poudre River. But what about community as it exists in the virtual world of hauling on YouTube? What does this look like? This chapter is devoted to describing how the concept of community is present on YouTube in general, and how having a sense of community impacts the three haulers interviewed for this study.

According to Dictionary.com, the term community refers to “a social, religious, occupational, or other group sharing common characteristics or interests and perceived or perceiving itself as distinct in some respect from the larger society within which it exists” (Dictionary.com, 2011). While the concept of community is most commonly thought of in the non-virtual sense, the examination of virtual worlds and the interaction they facilitate is increasingly popular in scholarly pursuits (see Adami, 2009; Donath & Boyd, 2004; Jin, 2009; Lange, 2007; Schofield Clark in Jones, 1998; Taylor, 1999; Walther et al., 2009; Williams, 2006).

What makes a virtual community different from community as it is understood in the traditional sense? One might argue that it is difficult for an online domain to constitute a community when face-to-face communication does not take place. “They [sociologists] realized that communities do not have to be solidary groups of densely knit neighbors but could also exist as social networks of kin, friends, and workmates who do not necessarily live in the same neighborhoods” (Wellman & Gulia, 1999, p. 169). This quote reinforces the idea that community can exist in the non-corporeal world. Further, this study indicates that the concept of community

is present within the hauling phenomenon on YouTube. Each interview participant used the term community or family when talking about their experiences with hauling. Additionally, verbal statements made in the select haul videos and comments under analysis reinforce the notion of community being present. For example, Jess notes that participating in YouTube lets her discuss her interests in fashion and beauty with similar individuals. “I think having a YouTube family lets you share your main interests as a girl...And I think having a YouTube family really helps me to talk about what I like because outside of my YouTube world, my friends aren’t as girly as me.” Similarly, EGheartsSSC views YouTube as a virtual community. “It’s just a good positive community I guess. I mean not all of it is positive. But I think most gurus are like girls that younger girls can look up to.” Certainly, these quotes highlight the notion of community as it may exist on YouTube. But what does community really mean or look like in this virtual space? Investigating that will be the focus of much of this chapter.

As previously mentioned, communities often are different from the larger society or entity to which they belong. Lange (2007b) provides insight about video consumption on YouTube, which helps to illustrate the idea that haulers generally produce their videos for an intended audience with mutual interests. “Not all videos target general consumption. Some reaffirm pre-existing social networks by including material intended to appeal to shared affinities between the senders and certain receivers” (n.p.). I believe that haulers primarily produce their videos for a particular audience (i.e. their community), which is separate from the larger YouTube sphere. Haulers on YouTube engage in this virtual world in part because of the social and informational gratification they receive. There is evidence that haulers share a common interest in fashion and beauty, which arguably makes them “distinct” from the “larger society” (YouTube) in which they operate. For example, there are many genres of videos that exist on

YouTube including music videos, informational or “how to” videos, educational videos and parody videos, among many others. I will argue and provide evidence for the idea that the hauling environment is unique from the larger YouTube society, and therefore, can be considered a community. It is also worth returning to the concept of market mavenism. Arguably, market mavenism is linked closely to notion of community. To be specific, the hauling community offers mavens a forum through which they can share their knowledge of the marketplace in a social and enjoyable fashion. Market mavens can be defined as “individuals who have information about many kinds of products, places to shop, and other facets of markets, and initiate discussions with consumers and respond to requests from consumers for market information” (Feick & Price, 1987, p. 85). In line with this quote from Feick and Price, haulers initiate discussions and respond to consumer’s requests for marketplace information through their participation on YouTube.

A sub-concept within the concept of community is interaction. According to Charon (1985), “It is through interaction that people are able to share with each other whatever is necessary for social organization” (p. 149). Further, he explains that interaction is tied to “...social objects, symbols, language, perspectives, self, mind, and role taking.” “In each case a two-way relationship is established. Interaction leads to each one of these concepts, and in turn, each one is a necessary ingredient for human interaction (pp. 146-147). Interaction takes place in almost every activity in which haulers and commenters partake. For instance, when a viewer comments on a hauler’s video, they are interacting. When a hauler solicits information from her viewers, she is interacting (i.e. by posing a question or asking for viewer’s opinions). There is undoubtedly reciprocal action occurring between the haulers and commenters. Arguably, the haulers may be affecting or influencing the actions of their viewers in terms of what fashion or

beauty products they choose to consume (as a result of watching haul videos). The notion of a hauler having the ability to influence or persuade a viewer to buy a certain product (i.e. internalize a given message by taking the preferred reading) relates to Hall's encoding/decoding, which will be explored further in this chapter. Additionally, commenters reciprocate information exchange with the hauler by offering product or brand suggestions (by posting a comment in response to information solicitation on behalf of the vlogger), which again relates to Hall's encoding/decoding.

The following is a list of sub-themes I have discovered through my examination of each data source. I argue that some form of interaction is present in each sub-theme, and that each falls under the broader concept of community. I will first offer a description of each sub-theme and follow this with examples that illustrate interaction and reinforce the notion of community.

- **Information Solicitation:** This occurs when the hauler requests information from her viewers. For example, in her "Haul! Drugstore, Forever21, Lush" video, EGheartsSSC asked her viewers what the background behind the Madden Girl shoe brand is. She said, "Is Madden Girl associated with Steve Madden? I don't know? It seems like it would be. Maybe it's like the cheaper version of Steve Madden. I don't know. Let me know you guys, if you know." This illustrates the hauler's asking for information from her viewers. Another example of this is provided in Euchante's video, "Just A Little Haul: Makeup, A&F, SHOES!," during which she asks her viewers to leave her information about what type of liquid foundation she should try. She explains that she has breakout prone skin, and is looking for a new foundation to try. Again, this highlights the hauler's soliciting information from her viewers; and as will be discussed further in this chapter, Euchante's information request generates a dialogue with her commenters, as they leave her responses about foundations she could try.
- **Addressing Hateful Comments and Backlash for Hauling:** It can be argued that haul videos promote materialistic habits and excessive consumption. This is not lost on those who view their videos. Therefore, haulers do not always receive positive feedback when they post a video showing items they bought (i.e. as some viewers may disagree with spending money on certain products or think that hauling is a waste of time). Additionally, viewers may make attacks on the hauler because of their appearance or something they said during one of their videos. Thus, vloggers have to be prepared for criticism and learn to deal with hateful behaviors that exist on YouTube. This section will provide examples of hate on YouTube and discuss how the three participants in this study cope with negative feedback. This sub-theme falls into the larger theme of community in

that haulers on YouTube encounter negative responses about their videos and part of being an active participant in such an environment requires expecting backlash from other users and learning ways to cope.

- **Questions and Requests for the Hauler:** One of the most common comments that viewers leave for haulers is a question regarding an item they showed in their haul (i.e. where it can be purchased, if it comes in different colors, if it was on sale.) For example, numerous viewers of EGheartsSSC's haul video left her comments asking where she bought the Alice in Wonderland T-shirt she is wearing during the video. Additionally, viewers sometimes leave remarks questioning the hauler about how they have money to buy mass amounts of clothing or beauty products. Another frequent comment consists of video requests. Here, a commenter may ask the vlogger to do a video about how to apply bronzer, how to create a certain look with makeup, or to do a review on a certain beauty product.
- **Virtual Socializing:** There is strong evidence to support the fact that participating in the fashion and beauty community on YouTube facilitates virtual socializing. Analyses of interview transcripts, haul videos, and comments posted to haul videos indicate that both haulers and viewers participate in this community to bond with others who share similar interests. For instance, one viewer posted the comment, "...i love watching your videos because i feel like we're really chattginnngngng!!" to one of Jess's haul videos. This commenter's using a more creative form of the word chat, which could be viewed as a form of word play in online communication. Further, each interviewee disclosed that they enjoy producing haul videos because it is fun and they like sharing their opinions about fashion and beauty with other individuals who have mutual interests. Lastly, it appears that this type of virtual socializing can lead to friendships in the offline world. Both Euchante and EGheartsSSC explain that connections they have made through their YouTube and Twitter accounts have led them to establish non-virtual friendships.
- **Utilizing Social Networking Sites:** To stay connected with viewers and promote their YouTube channels, vloggers often utilize social networking sites such as Twitter, Facebook and/or a blog. Each interview participant was asked about their rationale for using SNS and their responses will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter. Additionally, several key moments were found in the analyses of the videos and comments, which also illustrate the vloggers use of SNS. Again, this sub-theme helps to reinforce the fact that interaction is taking place and that YouTube facilitates a community that spans numerous virtual platforms (i.e. Twitter, Facebook, blog).

Information Solicitation

This research indicates that haulers and commenters alike participate in hauling in part to satisfy informational and entertainment needs. The fashion and beauty community on YouTube provides participants with an open forum to discuss the latest trends in makeup, what stores are having the best sales, or how to dress for a certain occasion. While analyzing comments and

videos, a theme I have titled information solicitation emerged. In brief, this takes place when the hauler requests information from her viewers. For instance, in her video titled “Haul! Drugstore, Forever21, Lush,” EGheartsSSC asks her viewers if they know anything about the shoe brand Madden Girl, because she is wondering if it is associated with the popular shoe brand Steve Madden. She purchased a pair of Madden Girl boots (which she shows in the video), and is curious about where the brand originated. Out of the 100 comments that were analyzed, 15 of them were responses to EGheartsSSC’s question about Madden Girl footwear. This interaction illustrates a dialogue taking place between the hauler and viewers, as well as the act of information sharing. Here are several examples of responses:

“Madden Girl is associated with Steve Madden. It’s more for teenagers/young adults and I’m pretty sure it’s a little cheaper 😊” (from MaggiePooPoo)

“steve madden is the womens shoes and madden girl is also part of steve madden but it’s the juniors! (:” (from glitzygirl89)

“madden girl is associated with steve madden. They sell like less adult heels and other types of shoes aimed more for teens. However your boots are very adult and definitely adorable 😊 (from crazykatie3400)

Another illustration of information solicitation is present in Euchante’s haul video titled “Just A Little Haul: Makeup, A&F, SHOES!” She asks her viewers for liquid foundation recommendations, specifically for someone who has breakout prone skin. She mentions that she tried using NARS liquid foundation, but it was a bad decision because it caused her skin to breakout. Here, Euchante is offering her opinion about a particular product (the NARS foundation), while also requesting information from her viewers. She receives responses to both of these statements. Below are a few examples that were chosen because they exemplify the exchange and discussion of product information per request of the hauler:

“Hi i would recommend trying out the liquid foundation from Tarte, laura mercier will probably make u breakout as i break out easily” (from tutu54).

“Bare minerals matte is great and never breaks me out and is good for the skin! Regular bare mineral breaks me out though...I am JUST like you. You don't have to buy expensive brands for makeup...rimmel lasting finish and stay matte worked well for me, even l'oreal true match (but could not get a really good shade).” (from kendrajane)

“Youngblood range of make up as a whole is perfect for break out prone skin / sensitive skin. it's a mineral range and amazing quality! I'm a beauty therapist and make up artist and definately recommend it.” (from tallulahbelle).

“i agree with several of the people below, clinique acne solutions. AMAZING, never changing foundations ☺ it fights acne while wearing makeup, no joke. great product, you should try it. and it has amazing coverage too, without looking too cakey. and you can change up the coverage by the way you apply it of course, its super buildable.” (from emmadearxoxo)

Forty-six of the 100 comments that were analyzed are responses to Euchante's request for foundation recommendations. This reinforces the notion that information exchange and dialogue is taking place between the haulers and viewers, thus creating a sense of community.

EGheartsSSC engages in two other forms of information solicitation, but these seem to be a bit more subtle than the aforementioned example about the Madden Girl brand. First, when she is showing her new boots she says “Aren't they sooooo cute you guys? Scored!” Here, she is fishing for responses from her viewers about whether or not they like her boots. Secondly, when she is showing her purchases from Forever 21 she says, “You guys are going to be so proud of me because I only got two things. And they were like good priced things. So pat myself on the back for not spending so much money.” While this is not a direct request for information, I would argue that she is looking for feedback regarding her consumptive practices. She is acknowledging that she did not go crazy and spend a ton of money, and for that, her viewers should be proud.

Addressing Hate and Backlash for Hauling

Each hauler was asked questions regarding their experiences with receiving negative comments from viewers. While a hauler can choose whether or not they respond to a negative or hateful remark, they have less choice when it comes to actually reading it. Jess explains her experience dealing with negativity on YouTube in the following segment. She is making reference to the one instance in which she did receive a negative (or oppositional) response to one of her videos.

It was on my most popular video, one of the first ones I posted. It was called something like “how to make your eyes bigger” or something like that. And then there was this girl who posted a comment it was something like “oh sweepee you’ll always have small eyes” or something like that. And I didn’t know what to say to it because in a way I felt like she was patronizing me, but not. And then I just messaged her back and said okay thanks. And then that was it. Obviously other people who had seen were continuing with the argument, but I was like not going to. She said what she wanted to say and I said what I wanted to say. I’m not going to start an argument on my channel because it makes me look bad. And I’m not really the type of person to do that anyway.

This statement illustrates a vlogger choosing to handle an oppositional comment in a polite and mature manner. Additionally, it overlaps with the broader theme of character in that Jess says she would not start an argument on her channel because it could negatively impact her reputation on YouTube. As is discussed in more detail in the character chapter, the term refers to one’s “moral or ethical quality” as well as “reputation” (Dictionary.com, 2011).

Lange (2007a) explored hating behaviors on YouTube by conducting a nine month ethnographic investigation, for which she interviewed 41 YouTube participants ranging in age from teenager to early twenties. She explains that several of her interviewees shared sentiments that “...posting on YouTube requires a certain amount of maturity to handle the criticism and feedback that will likely result by publicly posting one’s work.” Thus, because haulers are choosing to put their consumptive and productive practices in public view, it could be argued that they should be prepared for antagonistic responses (both online and off).

Although Jess has not encountered a great deal of hate as a hauler on YouTube, Euchante has experienced hate as a result of her channel on YouTube. She talks about how one of her followers introduced her to guru hate websites:

Actually, one of my viewers said “Hey someone posted this about you, is it true?” and she gave me a link to the website. So I went to the site and people [were] posting all of my personal information, like my address, my school, and the exact link to my private Facebook page. So even if I disabled the search, so you can’t search me by my real name, people were still clicking that personal Facebook, trying to add my friends, add my family. It was just really really scary.

Though she has dealt with hate and virtual privacy invasion, Euchante says that she has gained confidence through some of these experiences and is now more equipped to deal with backlash when situations arise. “I’ve been exposed to so much hate on YouTube. I guess within my first year I experienced a lot of hate, and it’s taken me up until now to really sort of brush that stuff off. But um, I just wanted to stop videos for a long time. And that’s why it’s really about my viewers now because I wouldn’t still be going if it wasn’t for them.” She shared a story about negative feedback she received from fellow high school classmates during her senior year:

I was going to a new school. So I had been there my second semester of my junior year. I moved halfway through my junior year. So this happened during my first semester of my senior year. And what happened was, I did my back to school video, my back to school fashion video, and it was featured on YouTube’s homepage. Well, some boys from the soccer team at my school were on YouTube, and they saw it, and they watched it and shared it with the entire soccer team. And this was a really conservative southern school. I had like 30 kids in my grade. And everyone thought it was so weird. And the next day I got to school and everyone was just looking at me, like giving me these weird looks. No one said anything at first. But then when I got into class and whenever I would answer a question, the guys would be like “oh well, she’s a guru, so she knows everything.” And then in the hallways, some of the guys were like “oh my gosh, what’s in my purse, like who cares?” And then my boyfriend at the time, one of his best friends came up to him and was like “yeah, we all think it’s so weird what she’s doing. We don’t agree with it, we don’t think it’s right for someone to be doing all that on the Internet.”

Euchante says that this experience hurt her. “It was really all of the guys. I think it was really more of a southern conservative thing, where [trails off]...it was a mixture of jealousy.”

She explains that dealing with hate comments has been a process, and she has learned to not let the negativity bother her as much as it did in her early days of producing videos. She says that negative comments are a lot more crafty and evil as compared to many of the generic positive comments she receives.

The hate comments I personally get are really, sometimes really thought out. Like really detailed. So I wouldn't say I get generic hate comments. And so that's why I think the hate bothers so many people, and why it bothered me so much. Because the positive comments are like 'thank you for posting this,' 'you're so pretty,' over and over again. Then you get this hate comment which is just like really detailed about whatever you did in the video. So it's kind of weird and a little disturbing. That's why I really regulate that. Cuz it's just negativity that doesn't need to be there. But I really don't get that many hate comments, because I try to be open with my viewers and keep it real.

By the same token, EGheartsSSC has also received hurtful comments. "I've gotten pretty much everything, from physical hate comments about how I look. And I've gotten comments about how I talk. That's probably the main one I get. 'Your voice is annoying.' If I say certain words too much I get comments about that. And let's see...I get comments if I do like some sort of sponsored video, I'll get comments from people calling me a sellout and just like rude stuff about sponsored videos." Another topic that generates hate comments is the frequency at which she posts haul videos; if she posts frequently, she is likely to receive flack about her consumptive practices.

Lange (2007a) notes that her interviewees believe:

...just as it takes a certain level of experience and maturity to comment in socially appropriate ways, so too does it take a certain level of maturity to accept criticism, even if it is negative, and to ignore hateful comments from 'jerks' (p. 11).

The three haulers interviewed for this study indicated that in their earlier days of posting videos, they were more easily upset by hateful comments. Over time, however, they said that they

learned to disregard the negativity. The sentiments of Euchante and EGheartsSSC, specifically, seem to resonate with above findings from Lange (2007a).

While one could argue what exactly constitutes a negative or hateful comment, I propose that it is any type of comment that questions, criticizes or attacks the hauler for something they showed, said or did during their video. Any comment that questions the vlogger about the amount of money they spent or number of items they purchased falls into this category; as does any negative remark about the hauler's appearance or character.

“...i was wondering how many of these gurus donate to a charity...it would be nice for a change to hear something good ur doing” (from libby29)

“A little shopping is a MAJOR UNDERSTATEMENT!” (from PopPrincess87)

Sometimes commenters engage in arguing or conversing with one another as a result of one comment. Below is an example of a brief dialogue between two commenters:

“WHERE DO YOU GET ALL THIS MONEY?” (from BreGal282)

@BreGal282 “she has her own boutique, and website. i think it's euchante.com but im not sure” (from 007toinfinity)

Although the above does not necessarily illustrate hateful discourse, it does shed light on the fact that virtual bickering takes place in this domain. Further, Euchante disclosed that she regulates her comments because she does not want a lot of negativity on her channel. She said that a lot of haulers regulate their comments; therefore, it is possible that more hateful comments were posted to the select videos but removed prior to data collection.

Scholars and others often take a synchronic and universal view of hating and flaming behaviors. In other words, hating is examined as if it were perceived the same way by all parties at every point in time. But such hating behaviors may not be perceived the same

way by everyone, nor may the same individual maintain his or her original attitude toward haters or toward policies to deal with haters over time (Lange, 2007a, p. 19).

The above statement is helpful to consider for numerous reasons. The examination of hating behaviors for this study consisted of talking to only three haulers about their experiences in brief; though it should be noted that they did express a change in attitude over time (i.e. a progressive gain in confidence through dealing with hate). Nonetheless, a larger sample may have provided different results, given that people often have conflicting views concerning what constitutes hate. Further, talking to haulers over an extended period of time may have shown a shift in attitude toward hate on YouTube.

Questions and Requests for the Hauler

As has been briefly discussed, haulers receive a large number of questions or requests from their viewers. These range from inquiries about the vlogger's occupational or educational status to what color of nail polish they are wearing in a video. Jess explains that the majority of questions she receives are viewers asking where she purchased something from, if an item is available internationally, why she chose to buy a particular garment, such as a dress, and how she might style something. Euchante notes that she receives a lot of requests from girls who have "real problems." "You know it's not 'what should I wear with a black skirt?' The questions I get asked the most are long paragraphs of 'I like this boy but he doesn't like me, I don't know what to do.'" She explains that she is sought for information about dealing with relational and lifestyle issues more than she is for her opinions about fashion and beauty. She says that hauling led her into producing advice videos. "...I feel like so many girls look up to me from more than a hauling point of view...I never would have thought in a million years that people would want to

know my advice on stuff on other than fashion and beauty.” This statement also relates to the theme of production, and will be explored in that chapter as well.

Given that many vloggers are viewed as beauty and fashion experts, it may come as no surprise that viewers often request certain videos. For instance, in addition to posting haul videos, some vloggers produce tutorials on how to apply makeup, style hair, or put together an outfit. Below are several responses that illustrate the idea of requests for the hauler:

“Tell us what nail polish u r wearing each time!” (from sandlegirl29)

“can you make a video on how to walk in high heels? :D” (from violetvixen)

“can you do a foundation routine?” (from omgloveStars)

“hey girl! love your eye makeup here! You should do a tut :]” (from oMsCleo)

These comments help to again illustrate the idea of community at work. Information give-and-take is present, as in the form of video requests from haulers. According to Wellman and Gulia (1999):

Virtual communities may resemble real-life communities in the sense that support is available, often in specialized relationships. But Net members are distinctive in providing information, support, companionship, and a sense of belonging to persons they hardly know offline or who are total strangers (p. 175).

Moreover, viewers frequently post comments that ask a question of the hauler. Many of these questions pertain to something displayed during the video or concern the hauler’s appearance. Consider the following comments: “how tall are you? And how tall do those patent leather heels make you?” (from bstmguy). This is in response to Euchante’s haul during which she shows two pairs of patent leather pumps she bought (which is what the commenter is referring to).

TessaDoll said, “Love your nail polish! (= What color is it?,” and becca4janey said, “Does that

NARS foundation have the same ingredients as the MAC foundations?” also in regard to Euchante’s video.

EGheartsSSC received several questions about where she purchased the Alice in Wonderland T-shirt she wore during her haul video, as well as inquiries about her hair color and what drugstore she purchased the bronzer she shared. Similarly, Jess received questions including:

“I don’t know of the caviar skincare range, where do you buy that from? x” (from misslulu)

“Where is the top you are wearing from?” (from saxtroby11)

“ooh, where is Forever 21 in the UK?” (from maykroes)

“...just wondering...your crop top from H&M. What do you wear it with?” (from LiveLaughLove)

While the aforementioned examples of questions and requests for the haulers are only a select handful from the thousands that exist on YouTube, I believe they are representative of the larger picture. If another researcher were to collect comments from a different grouping of haul videos, I predict they would find the same type of messages. I have been studying haul videos and comments posted to them for more than a year, and I am confident that these sorts of statements are common. Nonetheless, my research results do not allow me to generalize to the world—I can only generalize with respect to my sample. Lindlof and Taylor (2002) reinforce this: “...because qualitative researchers study individual cases that are historically and culturally situated, research claims cannot readily generalize to the entire universe of similar scenes” (p. 240). A future study with a larger sample of interviewees, videos and comments posted to them would be beneficial in determining if the findings from my three cases are common with respect to other participants in this phenomenon.

Additionally, viewers often ask haulers questions about where items such as their furniture or decorative pieces (that can be seen in the video) are from. For instance, UrbanSplendor99 said “I really like your bed! where is it from? please respond! ☺” to EGheartsSSC. It appears that some vloggers are sought after for their style sense when it comes to bedroom organization and decoration tips. “are you still going to do a tour of your apartment?” (from LilacLover77). EGheartsSSC explains that she used to respond to every single comment she received from her viewers. “But now it’s a little bit harder so I’ll basically just go through and if it’s a specific question I can answer it. I don’t know, I’ll go through and answer like every three comments or whatever.” She says she tries to respond as much as possible.

It is a general norm of community that whatever is given ought to be repaid, if only to ensure that more is available when needed. Repayment of support and social resources might be in the form of exchanges of the same kind of aid, reciprocating in other ways, or helping a mutual friend in the network (Wellman & Gulia, 1999, p. 177).

As has been discussed, there is evidence that information exchange (a form of reciprocity) is taking place on YouTube, which exemplifies elements of a virtual community in action. Viewers watch videos and make requests for haulers to do makeup tutorials and fashion videos, while haulers solicit information from their viewers both during their videos and through social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter.

Virtual Socializing

To engage in social interaction, people often meet for coffee at a local venue, go out for dinner, or to see a concert or a movie. This is what may come to mind when one thinks about socializing in the non-virtual world. But with the increasing popularity of social networking

sites, it is apparent that social interaction can take a virtual form as well. Describing how vloggers interact both on YouTube and other social sites will be the focus of this section.

...it's kind of like I have like a YouTube family and all of us being girls, we love makeup, we all love clothes. But all of us, we don't like the same thing all the time. Some of us like clothes more than makeup. Some of us like skincare more than makeup or clothes, and I think having a YouTube family lets you share your main interests as a girl. And I think having a YouTube family really helps me to talk about what I like because outside of my YouTube world, my friends aren't as girly as me. They don't understand the whole YouTube thing. They don't understand why people make videos. And I think having that network on YouTube lets me elaborate on what I am really interested in...

Interestingly, Jess refers to YouTube as a family and a "thing," which I interpret as reinforcing the idea of community being present. The following excerpt from Euchante points to evidence of similar themes. She uses the term community, and talks about how she feels comfortable because she is interacting with people who have mutual interests.

It's interesting because on the Internet you reach thousands and thousands and thousands of people, versus in real life you meet people on a one to one basis, which on one hand that's better because you can get closer to them. But on the other hand, it's finding those things you have in common with those people versus on the Internet it takes you a second to know whether you have something in common with someone. But in real life, it's a lot harder. So I just feel like when I put up a video I have so much positive feedback and so many people who relate to me. I just feel like it's this community where I just...I don't know...like, I feel like there's a bunch of mutual interests. More than what I've found in real life, you know? So when I first started posting, um, you know I had girlfriends who I'd go shopping with and stuff, but um I guess it was just the whole you know being really really into it [referring to shopping for hauls]. You know, I still haven't met girlfriends in real life who are you know that into shopping and makeup and who ic an actually like hang out with and not fight with or anything, you know? So um it's just sort of like, I don't know how to describe it, it's a...I don't want to say it's a fake reality. But it's just a really positive reality. You know yes, there's negativity. But when it's positive, um it's really nice, you know? You can go on the Internet and talk about shopping and makeup and have like so much positive response to that. Versus I can call up my best girlfriend right now and talk to her about that but it's just not the same, you know?

She also alludes to the fact that socializing through YouTube with other women who have a passion for fashion offers a less drama-filled form of friendship. "...you know there's not going to be any added drama with that. You know it's really just purely for whatever you're

talking about. Whether it's the fashion or the makeup—it's about that. You know it doesn't go any further than that because it's just a video...It's nothing live real time, you know?"

EGheartsSSC expressed similar sentiments concerning YouTube as arena to socialize and establish friendship—both online and off. She references a video she made to address some of the hateful comments and backlash she was receiving on her channel; noting that one of her viewers wrote her a nice message in response to the video. EGheartsSSC responded to the message and after conversing with her follower, they found out that they lived pretty close to one another. “So we actually ended up meeting up and like hanging out...and she actually moved to Santa Barbara, so now we hang out like every day pretty much. And she's like one of my best friends now.” Further, EGheartsSSC talks about bonding with fellow beauty gurus and haulers at an event called IMATS, which stands for International Makeup Artist Trade Show. This event is held in cosmopolitan cities including Toronto, London, and Los Angeles, six times per year (About Imats, 2011). She says that meeting some of the gurus she follows on YouTube was a great experience. Additionally, when she took a trip to London, EGheartsSSC met one of her subscribers for dinner, which she also describes as a wonderful opportunity.

I mean I consider some of my YouTube friends like better friends even than people in real life. I mean it's great. And like I said, going to IMATS...sometimes you would think 'oh you're friends with them online but in real life you might even get along with these people.' But actually when I met some of these fellow gurus and even viewers, it was just like best friends almost, so it was really cool. And I wish I could have all of those friends in real life.

It is worth noting that both EGheartsSSC and Euchante expressed a desire to have their YouTube friends as companions in their offline world. Further, both participants mentioned that on YouTube, they feel an ability to connect and relate to women who engage in similar consumptive activities. It appears that commenters may also experience a feeling of connection or capacity to relate to the hauler: “You are seriously so relate-able everything from where you shop to how

you wait for the best bargains. Definitely one of my favorite gurus! ☺” (shenae34 in response to Euchante’s video). While the idea of having closer or better friendships with friends online may be viewed critically by some, it is important to point out that bonding in the virtual domain may convert into friendship outside of YouTube. A future project could explore the benefits and disadvantages of online friending practices and how those translate in the offline world.

In her haul video, EGheartsSSC made a comment about embracing one’s size and that haulers don’t always need to comment on the fact that they wear a size extra small or small (as some vloggers like to publicize their tiny size). She explains that the blue sweater she bought from Forever 21 is a size large, and it doesn’t matter what size you wear. “Who cares what size you are, embrace it. If you’re XXL embrace it. Who cares. So yeah, I got size large, that’s what fits me. I think it’s nice.” The comments she made about embracing one’s size generated a great deal about feedback from commenters:

“haha, I had to laugh so hard about your XXS comment! you’re so right with that and ‘embrace your size’. honestly, who cares? people should stop being so obsessed with sizes and finally put an end to being so damn superficial all the time.” (from shatteredaugust).

“i couldn’t agree with u more. I love that you said embrace ur size. u r such a great example of what girls should be. all girls should be proud of who they r. never let anyone make u feel like u r less.” (from strawberry11rae).

“WHen you were talking about sizes you seemed so real, thats what beauty gurus should be like <3.” (from natashakiss).

Lange (2007b) conducted semi-structured ethnographic interviews to explore the public/private distinction and socializing on YouTube. The following quote reinforces the idea of virtual bonding via YouTube and why a participant may post a comment:

Several interviewees reported that an intelligent comment on their video usually prompted them to examine the commenter’s work. In an environment where friending practices can become liberal, in that some participants routinely automatically accept

friendship links, participants often post comments to increase their social visibility and connection to a video maker (Lange, 2007b, n.p.).

The above comments help to exemplify virtual interaction taking place. And as noted by Lange (2007b), it is possible that commenters are posting in hopes to increase their social status on YouTube and to establish closer ties with the video producer.

EGheartsSSC believes that the fashion and beauty discussions on YouTube offer a “...good positive community.” “I just think it’s a good outlet for girls. I mean not all of it is positive. But I think most gurus are like girls that younger girls can look up to. So I really like that aspect.” The following comments reinforce the idea of gurus serving as positive role models:

Euchante, you’re my absolute favorite guru on youtube! you’re funny, you have a great sense of style and you’re very down to earth. i just wanted to let you know that i think you’re a fantastic role model, and i’m so happy every time you have a new video :) xoxo, zoë (from trinaforlife in response to EGheartsSSC).

I love you! You are so not like dumb blonde like all the other gurus on utube! U r just so down to earth and confident and are a big role model for me! Keep working hard! (from Lively34 in response to EGheartsSSC).

Just as haulers feel a sense of community; my research indicates that commenters also feel kinship as they participate in this phenomenon. “...I love watching your videos because i feel like we’re really chattginnngngngng!!!” said joseline5334 in response to Jess’s April haul video. To that same video, oMsALE9 commented: “...I miss you!!! :[I love your eye makeup look here! <3” to which Jess responded: “hahaha my make up was actually from a photoshoot I had!! Thank you!!! I miss you too!! Hope we catch up soon girl! x.” While it is unknown how close of a friendship Jess has with this particular viewer, the dialogue is indicative of the fact that interaction is taking place virtually (and possibly non-virtually) and that bonding has occurred.

Consider the following exchange between Jess and her viewer:

“I am really into taking multi-vitamins and I take the H&B’s hair, skin and nails tablets. I will have to look into the Acai Berries next time im there. Loved your haul. x (from missSueSue)

“@missSue thanks for watching Sue Sue!! Dont worry, we will go shopping in 2 weeks time hehe! I have tried those tablets you’re talking about, I dont take them anymore because I always forget to take tablets lol!! xx (from Jess).

This provides another example of virtual friending taking place, in addition to future non-virtual interaction (as Jess is making plans to go shopping with this viewer). According to Wellman and Gulia (1999), the Internet has the ability to sustain “...strong, supportive community ties...” (p. 185). As has been, and will continue to be illustrated, this research points to the fashion and beauty community on YouTube being a supportive network for many of its participants.

Certainly, negativity does exist, as is seen in hating behaviors. Nonetheless, there is evidence that supportive community connections are being established. “Online relationships are based more on shared interests and less on shared social characteristics” (Wellman & Gulia, 1999, pp. 185-186). This quote resonates with much of what has been disclosed by interview participants—they enjoy producing videos on YouTube in part because of the ability they have to bond with others who share their same interests.

Utilizing Social Networking Sites

Jess explains that she employs Twitter, Facebook, and Blog TV as a way to stay in contact with her viewers. “It’s a good way for me to promote my videos if anyone was to follow my channel. So because I know a lot of people who were not subscribed to my channel, if I posted a link (to a YouTube video) up on Twitter they could view the video there. And, with Twitter, it’s kind of like you can communicate with people who are in the YouTube community as well. You can see their latest video, you could reply back to their tweet as well.” Jess uses BlogTV (available through YouTube) as another outlet to talk with her viewers. Additionally, she has a fan page, where people can post comments and send her private messages, in

conjunction with her Facebook account through which she receives frequent messages from her followers.

In the same way, both Euchante and EGheartsSSC utilize Twitter to stay in touch with their viewers. “Twitter is like my main way of connecting with people,” says Euchante. She explains that Twitter is helpful because she can receive instant updates on her cell phone:

...it’s not like YouTube where the second I put up a video I get hundreds of comments. On Twitter it’s a bit more controlled, a bit more personal. And you know people will tweet me and I can go on and quickly respond to those. I will post updates and then people will respond to that. They can send me a direct message and we can talk there. It’s just a bit more intimate than posting a comment on YouTube or posting on my Facebook wall.

Both of these vloggers like to use Twitter as a forum to see what type of videos their viewers want to see. “It’s almost like instant messaging. So if I didn’t have Twitter I would have to post a whole ‘nother video on that [YouTube].”

Because Euchante has generated a large following on Twitter (of viewers who subscribe to her YouTube channel) she can tweet about what she should post on YouTube and receive feedback. “I can get sort of a broad idea of what everyone would like, you know.” Additionally, Twitter led Euchante to establish a friendship with one of her followers from France. This again illustrates the idea that virtual socializing can lead to offline friendships. It is also worth mentioning that Euchante maintains a blog on which she posts pictures of her recent purchases or fashion ensembles, as another way to stay connected with her viewers.

Furthermore, EGheartsSSC also uses a blog to stay connected with her followers and take video requests. “I’ll do like polls on my blog asking people what they want to see. Because it’s hard to think of ideas consistently. Sometimes I’ll get ideas from my viewers. I really like just taking requests so I do base a lot of it on what people say.” As an active Twitter user, she also uses the medium to answer viewer’s questions and generate video ideas.

...I don't tweet a lot but I like reading other people's stuff. And then I'll just write random things. Like I'll ask people for advice basically. That's how I mainly use my Twitter. 'So do you guys like these pair of shoes?' I posted something like that yesterday. And they'll all write back. Or 'ohhh would you guys rather see this video or this video?' Just kind of input from people. And I'll also answer people's question and stuff if anybody asks me stuff.

The above statements help to exemplify interaction taking place—there is reciprocity and influence at work. The analyses of interview transcripts and video indicate that these three haulers utilize Twitter and other SNS to interact and stay connected with their viewers. At the end of her haul video, EGheartsSSC says “If you follow me on Twitter, you know that I have more stuff coming.” Similarly, celebrity hauler juicystar07, and TheCurrentCustom (another YouTube vlogger) both explain in one of their haul videos that if viewers have requests or questions, they should contact them via Twitter. It is worth mentioning that many vloggers (who were not interviewed for this study) use Twitter and other SNS for the same purposes.

Baym (1998) provides the following statement, which resonates with many of my findings:

...participants in CMC develop forms of expression that enable them to communicate social information and to create and codify group-specific meanings, socially negotiate group-specific identities, form relationships that span from the playfully antagonistic to the deeply romantic and that move between the network and face-to-face interaction, and create norms that serve to organize interaction and to maintain desirable social climates (p. 62).

This research provides strong evidence that community exists in the realm of beauty and fashion videos on YouTube. As noted, each interviewee used the term community or family when referring to their participation with the medium. Further, friending on YouTube has the potential to turn into real-life relationships as well. It is also apparent that certain norms and group-

specific meanings are present. Lastly, Baym mentions the concept of identity as it may exist for someone engaged in an online community, and that will be the focus of a later chapter.

PRODUCTION AND CONSUMPTION

There is something a bit addicting, inspiring and intriguing about producing and consuming haul videos on YouTube. This chapter is devoted to explaining how the moments of production and consumption exist in the hauling environment. It is broken into three sections that address moments of consumption, production and elements of their interrelatedness, each of which contains a discussion of the sub-themes that emerged throughout constant comparison analyses. To begin, it is worth including each interviewee's story about how they first became involved in producing videos on YouTube.

Jess explains that she first began posting videos in January 2010, and was prompted to do so in part because of the nice people she met through the site. "I was just bored and I don't really watch much TV and I just stayed on YouTube...I just found some really really nice people on YouTube and then I just decided to do some videos with some friends and that's how it all started." Both Euchante and EGheartsSSC were inspired to participate in this trend after watching videos posted by other vloggers.

[Emily]: What prompted you to join the fashion and beauty community on YouTube and start posting the videos?

[Euchante]: Well actually I was just playing on the internet one day and I was downstairs, my dad was working, I was sitting there and I honestly forgot how I came across beauty videos...but I researched for a review or a tutorial or something, and all of these videos came up right away. And I was sitting there watching these all day. And my dad was like what are you watching over there? I showed him and he was like 'you know what? You'd be great at that, you should do it.' So the next day, I pulled out my camera and I filmed a tutorial. And then that weekend, I went to MAC, which is you know a nice cosmetics store. I bought my first MAC pieces and then I did a haul video on that. So that's pretty much how it started.

In the same way, EGheartsSSC explains that she first became interested in producing videos after watching a review video from celebrity vlogger AllThatGlitters21 (juicystar07's older sister).

[Emily]: What prompted you to join the fashion and beauty community on YouTube?

[EGheartsSSC]: ...I was working actually, and I was looking up a review of the Clinique Super Fit foundation...and I just Google searched like Clinique Super Fit foundation and then Elle (AllThatGlitters) her video came up and so I saw her video and I was like oh my gosh this is like so cool you know because it's not just like a written review because you can actually see the person you know, who's talking about it. So I thought that was really cool and I just started watching her. And I also found Lollipop26, which is just like this really cool British guru I guess.

The above excerpts illustrate the interrelatedness of production and consumption. First, Euchante and EGheartsSSC were both searching for reviews of cosmetics (likely because they were interested in purchasing them), and after consuming such videos, both were inspired to engage in the same practice and become producers themselves. As mentioned by Euchante, after watching beauty videos, she purchased MAC products so she could be the producer of her own video. EGheartsSSC explains that after seeing other vloggers' hauls, she wanted to make them too. "...I don't wanna say I was copying people necessarily, but I saw other people doing it so I also wanted to do it."

The concepts and connectedness of production and consumption will be examined in greater detail throughout this chapter. On a personal level, I can attest to the fact that after watching several haul videos I was immediately fascinated and felt a sense of relatedness to haulers. For one, I admittedly spend too much money and time shopping. I love to buy clothing, accessories and beauty products. When I stumbled across haul videos I immediately thought "Wow, I can't believe there are girls who post videos about MAC makeup, and they're just as obsessed with it as I am." I was dumbfounded (but also excited) that other women (in my age group) are as interested in fashion, beauty and current trends, as I am. Thinking back, I probably spent at least two hours watching haul videos after seeing my first one. As noted, they are somewhat inspiring and addicting. In the same regard, Euchante describes that after coming across these videos she watched them all day. Given that there are hundreds of thousands of haul

videos posted on YouTube, this may be evidence that there is a semi-addictive element to this phenomenon.

The following is a list of sub-themes I have discovered through my examination of each data source. I will first offer a description and examples of each sub-theme, which will be revisited in greater depth later in the chapter.

- **Hauling as a Hobby: It's Fun, Enjoyable, and a Form of Appearance Management**
Each interviewee used the word hobby or pastime on one or more occasions during their interview when talking about the production of haul videos. Further, each hauler described her participation with this phenomenon as fun and enjoyable. Therefore, there is evidence that hauling on YouTube offers its participants a gratifying opportunity through which they can engage with others who share similar interests. Further, the concept of appearance management emerged. In brief, appearance management involves any activity one may take part in which they think about or make decisions pertaining to the way they look (Kaiser, 1990, p. 5). This research indicates that haulers and commenters alike are partaking in appearance management through the consumption and production of haul videos.
- **Vlogging on YouTube as an Avenue: Sharing, Teaching, Influencing, Inspiring**
After talking with three haulers about their motivations for producing (and consuming) haul videos, it is apparent that they provide the vlogger with an avenue to share, teach, influence and/or inspire; and sometimes, these actions are reciprocal (meaning, haulers consume videos for these same reasons). During interviews, the terms share, teach, influence or inspire were used repeatedly. It appears that interviewees like producing videos in part because it allows them to share their fashion and beauty sense, teach viewers "how to" information (i.e. through tutorial videos), and possibly influence or inspire viewers to experiment with new trends, colors or products. Additionally, comments left by viewers reinforce that this is in fact taking place. For instance, commenters will often leave questions for the vlogger, asking their opinion about a particular trend or product, in addition to making video requests (i.e. for the hauler to do a review or tutorial). This will be illustrated through the examination of interview excerpts and comments in more detail in this section of the chapter.
- **The Acts of Consuming and Producing**
As has been previously mentioned, the acts of consumption and production are closely intertwined. One cannot exist without the other. This section will explain how haulers engage in consumption for the production of their videos. Specifically, it will feature a description of how haulers justify or rationalize their consumptive practices, as well as highlight several examples of how the concept of consumption is received by viewers (i.e. through comments). Further, it will discuss the processes and implications involved in producing videos. According to Jill Chivers, "Compulsive buying doesn't always lead into hauling, but I think hauling almost always has a connection to compulsive buying"

(J. Chivers, personal communication, October 19, 2011). This quote helps to display the connection between the consumption and production of haul videos, and the fact that engaging in either activity may contribute to compulsive buying. This is an idea that will be explored more thoroughly within this section.

Hauling as a Hobby: It's Fun, Enjoyable, and a Form of Appearance Management

Each interviewee was asked to explain why they produce and consume haul videos.

Throughout each interview the word hobby or pastime was mentioned on numerous occasions, and it became apparent that hauling serves as a gratifying outlet for vloggers to channel and share their passion for fashion and beauty.

[Emily]: What prompted you to join the fashion and beauty community on YouTube and start creating the videos?

[Jess]: I think it was more because I like to share and it was more like a hobby that I really wanted to have.

[Emily]: What would you say your primary motivations for creating haul videos are? What drives you to create them?

[Jess]: Umm, I think it's more like self-advertisement, um because it's like the truth about price and quality and my personal favorites. And I just really like to share that with people who live thousands and thousands of miles away from me. So like my YouTube family I would call it. And it's just like sharing the latest trends, or what I believe are the latest trends for me.

Euchante explains that her experience with posting hauls began more as something for “self-gratification.” “...I didn't really think anyone would watch it. It was more this is a fun pastime and it gives me something to do.” After generating substantial viewership and positive feedback from her videos, however, Euchante says that now she continues to post for her viewers. “...it's really about my viewers now because I wouldn't still be going if it wasn't for them.” Further, she says that the popularity and opportunities she has gained through vlogging on YouTube have not gone to her head. When she meets someone new or is in a situation that may require her to disclose that she is a hauler, she does not brag about hauling or act as if she deserves special treatment. “I just make it sound like it's a hobby that I do in my free time and stuff. Which it is.”

Moreover, EGheartsSSC notes that she thought hauling would be fun and started doing videos "...as an experiment, like just to see what would happen." She says that when she began posting (in 2008) it was still a newer trend. She was asked to explain what her primary motivations for posting hauls are (both when she first began and at the current time). She shares the following:

Well back then it was just cuz you know I saw other people doing it. so I was kind of just...I don't know, I don't wanna say I was copying people necessarily, but I saw other people doing it so I also wanted to do it. But now since I've been doing it for so long it's more of...[trails off] I don't know it's just fun to show people things that I got. I also think it's helpful too, like if I got certain deals, or I mean that's why I like watching them. Just to get ideas and stuff. And to give other people ideas. And it's also just become kind of a habit; like whenever I buy something it's like 'oh I have to make a haul video,' you know? Like it's just a habit now.

Thus, hauling has become a habit for EGheartsSSC—one she really enjoys. "...it's just so fun, I have a lot of fun doing it..." In addition to producing haul videos, some vloggers, including EGheartsSSC and Jess, enjoy consuming these videos because they provide information about the fashion and beauty market. EGheartsSSC says that she has a large list of vloggers she subscribes to; sometimes she will consistently follow several haulers, whereas other times she will type "Forever 21 haul" into the YouTube search bar and watch whoever pops up.

[Emily]: Can you tell me a little bit more about what it is that's so interesting for you to watch other people's hauls?

[EGheartsSSC]: I feel like it's kind of like reality TV in a way. Where like you kind of have like a look into someone else's life. Like that's how I kind of see it. I just love watching other people, different people you know what I mean. Just like, I don't know it's just like really interesting. So that's a reason. And another reason is I love like clothes and makeup obviously. And so I like getting ideas of what someone else might have purchased. Or like I said, just to relax. It's relaxing for me to watch a haul video or any video.

Returning to the idea of hauling as a pastime, Jess notes, "I just see YouTube as something like a hobby of mine, and it's something I can always come home to and you know share, discuss, watch other people's videos." In conjunction with EGheartsSSC, Jess enjoys

watching hauls to see what other people are buying and know the current trends. Here again is the idea of community being present, in that information exchange and reciprocation is taking place. In addition to community being present, so too is the notion of producing the self. “An ideology of personalization pervades fashion media sources, in which one detects a breakdown of conventional rules and a promotion of do-it-yourself style” (Kaiser et al., 1991, p. 173). I propose that the aforementioned quote is applicable to the hauling trend. Not only are haulers engaging in producing a version of the self they want to share with others, they are offering a more personalized form of fashion and beauty advice to their viewers. This provides viewers with an alternate source for such information (as opposed to the traditional fashion magazine, for example). How the messages from the haulers are received by viewers brings into play Hall’s (1980) encoding/decoding model, in that what a hauler might claim is fashionable or trendy, could be met with opposition from a viewer.

The theme of appearance management is closely related to the haul video phenomenon and has emerged through the process of constant comparison. In a sense, haulers engage in producing the self through consumption of material items (which as evidenced in the above excerpts, they find enjoyable). According to Kaiser (1990), appearance management:

“Encompasses all attention, decisions and acts related to one’s personal appearance (that is, the process of thinking about and actually carrying out activities pertaining to the way one looks). Appearance management encompasses what we do to and for our bodies visually, as well as how we plan and organize these actions (for example, making decisions about attire to buy and wear and assessing the personal and social implications of such decisions) (p. 5).

The above quote provides evidence that hauling is essentially a form of appearance management in that the presentation and discussion of one's fashion or beauty purchases is an act "related to one's personal appearance." Moreover, a hauler will oftentimes spend time rationalizing her purchases, talking about how they plan to use what they bought, and what potential social consequences for wearing a given item might be. Therefore, I propose that the phenomenon of hauling can be considered a form of appearance management.

Further, remarks made during haul videos as well as comments reinforce the idea that appearance management is taking place. Consider the following comments posted to Jess's haul video:

"eek. thanks for this! Just wondering.. your crop top from H&M. what do you wear it with? (from laughoutloud3).

To this comment, Jess provides the following response:

"...well you can wear a vest top/spaghetti top under it, or wear it with high waist tight skirt or high waist jeans. depends on the colours you are wearing too. x"

Similarly, many of the responses to Euchante's information solicitation regarding a foundation recommendation illustrate the concept of appearance management at work:

"Try Revlon colorstay. It's super inexpensive, so you won't even feel like you've wasted anything if it doesn't work. But I love it; it's one of the best. Great coverage and it does not break me out at all! :D" (from gymgyrl).

"I am VERY breakout prone! LM Silk Cream broke me out bad! I LOVE Chanel Pro Lumier and also MUFE. Neither break me out. I prefer the Pro Lumiere in winter b/c it is more moisturizing and the MUFE for summer because it is more matte. Laura Mercier Moisturizing foundation and Oil Free TM are pretty good too, but love the Chanel and MUFE!" (from daydreamerlove22).

In addition to comments posted to YouTube videos, many of the remarks made by vloggers during their haul videos can be considered a form of appearance management as well. In her haul, EGheartsSSC shows her new Wet'n'Wild blush in the color "mellow wine." She

explains that she bought this color because she wanted a darker shade for the fall season. Later in the video she displays her new cobalt blue sweater from Forever 21 and talks about how this particular color is supposed to complement redheads. Here again are examples of appearance management in that the vlogger is talking about her appearance and a decision she made to enhance it (i.e. purchasing the sweater and blush). Similarly, in her haul video Euchante shares her purchases from Abercrombie & Fitch. She shows two pairs of sweatpants she bought and says she loves them because “they have the perfect butt fleece” (meaning, they make her butt look nice). She explains that she is very into dressing more casually for her college classes—by wearing a T-shirt and sweatpants. She says the pants were originally \$50, but she found them on sale for \$30 per pair. She concludes her discussion of this purchase by saying she hopes they go on sale again because she would like to get a few more pairs.

Lastly, Jess engages in appearance management in her haul video by talking about two dresses she purchased from H&M. She shows a fancy black maxi dress she bought with the original intention of wearing it to a wedding. But, after thinking about it, she decided that wearing black to a wedding wasn’t a good idea so she may wear this for her birthday. She then shows a sheer nude dress that features elaborate sequin and gem detailing and a ribbon wrap-around belt. Jess explains that she will probably wear this with sandals or heels and a clutch bag, possibly to a wedding. She describes this piece as “very smart.” In this same video, she shows several hair products she purchased and explains that one of the hair sprays is great for creating a “poofy” updo bun (touching her hair to illustrate the type of hairdo she is referring to). She highly recommends the spray for anyone wanting to boost and hold their hair. Here again are several cases of appearance management in play. The hauler is actively thinking about their appearance by discussing future plans in regard to how they might wear an article of clothing.

When Jess mentions that she doesn't know if wearing a black dress to a wedding would be appropriate, she is "assessing the personal and social implications" of her appearance (Kaiser, 1990, p. 5).

Thus, there is evidence that hauling on YouTube can be considered a virtual display of appearance management, which could translate into offline appearance management as consumers of the videos may be prompted to go shopping to purchase items they liked as seen in a haul. Moreover, each interviewee described hauling as a fun or enjoyable hobby. Presumably, other vloggers participate in this phenomenon for similar reasons. According to Kaiser et al. (1991), "Appearance management is an active process of identity expression, bringing to the surface and embodying meanings that are not easily conveyed in words" (p. 171). In the realm of haul videos, appearance management is often conveyed in the form of words considering that haulers are talking to their viewers about fashion and beauty purchases. At the same time, haulers are engaging in identity expression by sharing with viewers how they might take a particular garment and wear it in a way that was not originally intended by the manufacturer. This could potentially take the form of an oppositional or negotiated meaning as proposed by Hall (1980). I believe there are two forms of production taking place within the phenomenon of hauling: not only is the hauler engaging in producing the self they want others to view, they are also producing a video that may impact the production of self in those who consume the video. As cited in Kaiser et al. (1991), "It is no longer a question of 'being' oneself but of 'producing' oneself" (Baudrillard, 1975, p. 19).

Vlogging on YouTube as an Avenue: Sharing, Teaching, Influencing, Inspiring

Throughout the analyses of interview transcripts, videos and comments, it became apparent that haulers produce videos in part because doing so allows them to share, teach,

influence and/or inspire their viewers. These terms were used repeatedly by each interviewee when discussing why they create videos. After studying the phenomenon of hauling for more than one year, it is evident that many vloggers are referred to as gurus, and regarded as experts or authority sources in the realm of fashion and beauty (in the online arena). For example, consider celebrity vlogger juicystar07, or the fact that *Seventeen* magazine features vloggers on their “Beauty Smarties” page. In fact, EGheartsSSC was contacted by *Seventeen* to help promote their contest titled “Pretty Amazing,” for which they were searching for a cover model for an upcoming issue (EGheartsSSC, March 29, 2011). In essence, *Seventeen* utilized EGheartsSSC to promote their contest given her popularity in the fashion and beauty community on YouTube. This is a display of her ability to influence and inspire her viewers. Therefore, it makes sense that a pattern of sharing, teaching, influencing or inspiring emerged from the data. Consider the following excerpts from my interview with Jess. Our discussion centered on her explaining what types of videos she enjoys producing and why:

Yeah, um I like doing the tutorials because it’s like a way to teach and I really enjoy that. And I like the idea of watching people when they make the tutorials, you know how you can zoom in on the eyes and you can see how they apply the colors and where they apply it. I think that’s really important because obviously everyone has different eye shapes and things, and as I’m doing it, I can like give tips on how to make the colors pop, what products work well on my skin. And also with the tutorial, it’s kind of like um in depth because you can see the before and after of the video.

But I enjoy making product review videos because you just ramble on about the products. And it’s more about what I buy; for my own opinion, why I like it, why I don’t like it. Wat points I don’t like about it as well. And I can give some recommendations to people out there who probably have like oily skin, dry skin, people who live in colder parts of the world, people who live in humid weathers. I really enjoy that.

During this conversation, I asked her what type of video she thinks her viewers enjoy seeing the most:

Um, I would say product reviews on products that they have never heard or seen before. So, for instance, my skin peel gels from Korea and Japan. Not a lot of people who are Asian-cultured today would know about it. And even if they are, they don’t follow the

whole makeup/beauty trends. I think they really enjoy watching that, because it's quite fascinating, it's something they've never really imagined. But yeah, it works on my skin, and then I show how it could work on their skin. so I think those kinds of videos are really popular in my channel.

What emerges here is an illustration of a “give and take” pattern. The vlogger enjoys sharing opinions and teaching her viewers, and as illustrated by some of the aforementioned examples, many video consumers are receptive to this information (i.e. as evidenced in the video request theme). The comments below illustrate a dialogue taking place and exemplify a “give and take” pattern:

“hey girl! love your eye makeup here! you should do a tut :)” (from oMsCleo).
“@ oMsCleo hey, Thanks girl, yeah I will do a tutorial hehe... It's rather sparkly upclose!! xx” (from Jess)

Of the three haulers studied, Jess appears to respond to her viewers the most. In fact, neither Euchante nor EGheartsSSC posted any response comments to the 100 that were analyzed. This is not to say, however, that these vloggers do not ever respond. Below are several examples of a vlogger being sought for their insight regarding beauty or health:

“can you do a foundation routine?” (from omgloveStars)

“...and you will have to tell us if the nyc cheekable thing is worthwhile” (from freckleflower)

“Please can you make a video of HOW do you stay in shape” (from shellbelle456)

“Could you do a review on the garnier (not sure how to spell that haha) moisturizer.” (from KCK9087)

“Tell us what nail polish u r wearing each time!” (from sandlegirl29)

While talking with Jess about the production of her videos, she mentioned that in addition to hauls, she enjoys producing “Outfit of the Day” (OOTD) videos, which she describes below:

It's just about sharing like how I wear my clothes, um it's kind of like a haul video, you know. Like virtual shopping, isn't it? I want people to see how I match my things; how I wear my things. And just sharing things like what my favorites are as well.

Further, she says that she enjoys producing this type of video because:

...it's just short and simple. It's just a matter of showing a mirror reflection of what I'm wearing, what colors I'm using, why I'm using these colors...

Additionally, the analysis of Jess's interview reinforces the presence of the notion of inspiration.

“So it's questions like, ‘regarding this video you posted on this day, why did you choose these dresses?’ ‘I didn't think that color would suit me but you've inspired me to get this dress and try it on and things like that.’” This again helps to highlight the “give and take” pattern, as well as the themes of sharing and inspiring.

Correspondingly, Euchante explains that she finds great satisfaction in producing her videos because she knows that she is helping people. Throughout the interview, she frequently used the term “help” when describing the production and consumption of her videos.

[Emily]: What would you say are your primary motivations for creating haul videos?
[Euchante]: To help people. Absolutely. It's really not about me anymore. When I first started haul videos or making any videos on YouTube, it was really just you know me going out shopping for me to put my videos up. But now it is absolutely all about my viewers. I've been doing this for three years, and it just means so much when people say ‘you know thank you so much for helping me.’ Or even you know just watching someone's video and it just makes you feel better or smile. And when someone tells me that they had an awful day and they watched my haul video and it made them so happy. That's why I make the videos now. You know I try to make them entertaining, I try to make them helpful. Not just ‘show you this show you this show you this.’ But you know try and say why I picked out the certain piece, what it would look good with, what stores I bought it at. I give prices. A lot of gurus I know don't give prices. But I feel like that really helps because people tell me that. So it's definitely just all about helping people. It's such a rewarding experience. It goes so much further for me than just ‘here's what I bought.’ You know I really feel like it reaches out to people. And I know it might not reach out to everyone, but for those viewers who it just makes them happier...it means the world to me, it really does.

“Processes of production are themselves cultural phenomena in that they are assemblages of meaningful practices that construct certain ways for people to conceive of and conduct themselves in an organizational context” (du Gay, 1997, p. 7). This quote reinforces my stance that haul videos are in essence a form of production as well as cultural phenomena that showcase haulers engaging in meaningful practices that may assist or impact viewers when engaging in identity construction and consumption. This is illustrated by the presentation of a vlogger’s material purchases and the responses generated (i.e. comments) from this display. Further, the excerpt from Euchante showcases the complexities involved in producing haul videos. Euchante talks about how she tries to be helpful and entertaining in the production of her video, and in this process she is filtering messages she has received while advising her viewers. As a hauler, she takes in messages (i.e. from retailers or media sources) and is tabulating the messages she receives along the way. She then sends a message back to her viewers (producing). Again, this can be related to Hall’s (1980), preferred, negotiated, or oppositional meanings. She is also dealing with identity issues, both hers and those she imagines of her audience members.

The Acts of Consuming and Producing

While discussing the important patterns and meanings that have emerged throughout the constant comparison process, it is also worthwhile to talk about the actual consumption and production procedures that haulers engage in. For instance, interviewees disclosed when and why they partake in consumption as it relates to the haul video production practice (i.e. without shopping, they would have nothing to feature in their videos). Each interviewee was asked questions regarding how often they post haul videos and to discuss what factors motivate their production.

[Emily]: How often would you say you post videos?

[Euchante]: You know, it really depends. Life a lot of times prevents me. Like right now, I'm in the process of moving. So I haven't put up a video in a while. But normally, I try to get up at least 10 videos a month, um and out of those I want to say about four are going to be hauls. So basically, whenever I go shopping, I know that will be a haul video.

She then explains that she is always hunting for sales and knowing that she is going to do a haul assists in her shopping endeavors.

[Emily]: So you're more motivated to shop based on what you're going to do a haul about?

[Euchante]: Absolutely, and you know I know a holiday is coming around, I definitely will try and plan and do a haul like back to school, or then you know around Christmas time or Labor Day weekend, times when I know people are out looking for those type of videos, looking for ideas on what to shop for. I will try to get ahead of the game and shop before then so I can put my video up at that time.

The conversation continues, and Euchante mentions that staying "ahead of the times" (in terms of posting videos) generates viewership. She says:

...the problem with YouTube is you really have to be unique with what it is you put out. Because people get bored really easily. If there's too much oversaturation of a specific video, like back to school, for instance. Right now, I haven't put up a back to school video. I feel like it's too late now. If I put up a back to school video not as many people would watch it, as if I put it up before school because there's been so many videos. So you really have to be 'before the times' not even 'with the times.' If you're the last person putting up your back to school video, um, you just don't get that much attention with that. You know, you want to be the first one.

The above excerpts highlight some of the thought processes and decisions that go into the act of producing videos on YouTube. As with publishing a magazine or doing a radio broadcast, timing, content, and target audience are all factors taken into consideration. As previously noted, hauling demands consumption. If a hauler doesn't stay up to date with new product launches or fashion trends, it is likely that their viewership will plummet. Unfortunately, it can be argued that hauling facilitates somewhat of a competitive form of consumption. Haulers must keep spending if they want to maintain their popularity in the YouTube community. Though the social interaction and gratification that can be facilitated through this site is often healthy (in the

opinion of the haulers interviewed), I believe that the competitive form of consumption it promotes is not. Chivers shares the same feelings in her belief that women have always felt a need to compete with one another and the desire to outdo their female counterparts in regard to appearance. She says that while this competitive behavior is not new, the routes to express it are (i.e. via hauling) (J. Chivers, personal communication, October 19, 2011).

EGheartsSSC explains that she generally does not go out shopping with the intention of buying specific items for a haul. She notes that if she was going to produce a tutorial or review of some sort, she may be motivated to buy particular products. “But usually I’ll just go shopping and then whatever I get just ends up in the haul.”

[Emily]: So how often would you say you post a haul?

[EGheartsSSC]: Oh no, haha [laughs]. That’s actually another comment I sometimes get hate for. Because I actually have been posting a lot lately. Um, I don’t know... I post one...oh gosh. A lot. At least once a month, definitely once a month, at least. But sometimes it’ll be like twice a month probably. I don’t know I always have haul videos, but they’re pretty consistent.

Jess says that because she is primarily posting haul videos for personal gratification, she will post once a month, generally. While some vloggers post lengthy videos that can drag on and be a bit too elaborate, Jess prefers to be more concise and to the point. “It’s quite off putting, you know when you see a video that has a 20 minute timeline, it really puts me off. So I would rather make short and simple videos; just get straight to the point.” She believes that all one really needs to share in their video is what colors a particular item might be, where it was purchased from, and the price if need be.

In regard to video content, Euchante explains that she has learned to be a lot more cautious in terms of what personal information she discloses. When she first began vlogging, she made the mistake of sharing with viewers that she had relocated to a new city. Including this information allowed viewers to learn more about her personal information (i.e. by adding her to

Facebook, finding her home address, etc.), which she describes as a scary experience. She has since become much more careful in what type of personal information she reveals.

Further, Euchante is one vlogger who has begun producing advice videos, in which she provides viewers with advice on relationships and daily issues. She says that these are her most requested videos, but also difficult to make because she has to put a lot of thought and feeling into them.

...and those are some pretty deep videos because you're sharing your personal opinion and giving real advice to thousands of people and um, anyone can see those videos. So I've stated my opinion on some deep things and given advice on stuff. So that is a risk I take on those, but it is definitely my most requested video...I made a video on 'What to do when people are mean to you,' and that has gotten so many views. More views than most of my beauty videos.

While posting personally identifying information can be harmful, producing advice videos may assist viewers in forming a sense of kinship with a vlogger. It appears that Euchante is aware of the fact that by creating such videos, she (and other vloggers who produce advice videos) is exposing herself on numerous levels:

...not only do gurus put themselves out there...you know that privacy level to that extent just of doing fashion and beauty, but then you're giving up so much more privacy by giving your real...I don't know it makes you feel vulnerable, it really does. When you're actually talking about meaningful stuff. But it definitely helps a lot of people I feel.

Lange (2007a, 2007b) has studied behavior and social practices as portrayed on YouTube.

On YouTube, people have different expectations about what information can be shared or what constitutes sensitive information. One useful lens for understanding differences in expectations about identity and content sharing within social networks is the concept of fractalization of the public and private (Lange, 2007b, n.p.).

She describes "publicly private" as video-making in which the producer shares identity information, relevant content, and "technical access to videos" (Lange, 2007b, n.p.) She notes

that such videos are created to entice viewers and to be easily accessible (n.p.). In comparison, she explains “privately public” as “...making connections with many other people, while being relatively private with regard to sharing identity information” (n.p.). Lange says users in this group “...conceal certain aspects of their identity, while expanding their friend and subscriber base and making videos with widely accessible content” (n.p.).

I believe Euchante falls into the privately public category in that she posts videos dealing with relationship and lifestyle issues, while sharing some deep and personal information. At the same time, however, she retains some anonymity in that she does not give out identifying information that would allow viewers to find her location. Interestingly, EGheartsSSC’s screen name contains her first and last initials, as well as the initials of her home town. “I usually just don’t tell people because I want to keep that a secret. But I made the screen name in high school...yeah I didn’t even know it was gonna be on YouTube pretty much.”

In addition to finding informational and social gratification through producing videos, some haulers are receiving financial gratification. Both Euchante and EGheartsSSC make money through their videos. “You know I do make money from my videos so it is technically a job too,” says Euchante. EGheartsSSC explains that her revenue is based on the number of views her channel receives every month. She also receives offers from companies to do paid reviews of products. “I haven’t really done too many of those. The crazy thing is a lot of companies send emails to me, like so many. I’m not really interested so much in doing those just because it comes with a lot of hate and I’m just over it you know what I mean?” As previously mentioned, posting sponsored videos can generate hate from viewers because they may consider the vlogger a sell out or phony. In regard to the financial gratification of producing videos, EGheartsSSC says, “...I mean it’s good money. I think personally. But it’s nothing you could like live off of

and raise a family off of you know.” Euchante has similar feelings when it comes to posting sponsored videos. She says she doesn’t work with companies very often, and when she does, she discloses this verbally to her viewers because she wants them to know she is honest. “...if a company that I really feel my subscribers could benefit from I would absolutely do a haul from their store. But I just really haven’t had that company contact me...It’s just that for right now no one has sparked my fancy and I don’t feel like I have to do a haul video from that company or anything.”

This research indicates that producing the self in a virtual manner can take many forms and span numerous fronts. For instance, producing videos on YouTube encompasses making decisions about how often and what to post as well as how much information one should share. Creating videos also requires the hauler to consider the implications of their work, and how it may be received by viewers. While hauling may be a venture that can cause stress for the hauler due to hateful feedback, the interviewees appear to have a positive attitude about the phenomenon and enthusiasm to continue with their participation.

As has been mentioned, production of haul videos could not take place without the act of consumption. Thus, to reiterate, this sheds light on the articulation, or interrelatedness, of these two moments on the circuit. According to Mackay (1997), the moment of identity is also at work when participating in consumption and production. “In postmodern accounts, cultural consumption is seen as being the very material act of which we construct our identities: we become what we consume” (p. 2). This quote highlights several important facets of the concept of consumption, one being that identity (and arguably character) is closely intertwined. When talking with EGheartsSSC about what motivates her purchases, she said that sometimes she will shop at a drugstore and purchase cheaper cosmetics. The excerpt below exemplifies the

interrelatedness of consumption, production and identity. I believe it also shows some of her character, in that she is concerned about her reputation as a hauler and does not want to be known as someone who only buys expensive products.

Sometimes I feel bad though because I feel guilty showing things that I think maybe other people might feel bad about because they can't afford to buy all this stuff. Like that's kind of conflicting with me sometimes because I don't want to make anybody feel bad you know about themselves. So I sometimes I have issues with that. And so when you actually asked me about if I ever go out intentionally to buy things [trails off]... Sometimes I will intentionally um buy like cheaper drugstore products to show that you don't need to spend hundreds and hundreds of dollars on things.

While analyzing haul videos, I noticed that oftentimes, haulers will make what I refer to as “justificatory statements” regarding their purchases (meaning, the hauler rationalizes or vindicates their purchase(s)). The excerpt from EGheartsSSC about her rationale for purchasing drugstore products also exemplifies the notion of a vlogger defending or justifying her consumptive practices. In her haul, EGheartsSSC shows a bottle of Jesse’s Girl nail polish in the color “Julie G.” She explains that she bought this particular color to support the YouTube beauty community (which judging by her statements it appears that Julie G is a YouTube guru who has gained fame through the site and now has her own nail polish color with the brand Jesse’s Girl). Thus, because she is a hauler and part of this community, why wouldn’t she purchase Julie G.’s polish to support her? Whether she needed the polish or not, she is justified in buying it given that she is promoting a fellow vlogger.

What is also interesting about this segment of the video is that EGheartsSSC spends very little time talking about Julie G, implying that the majority of her viewers would know what she is referring to. Here again is another example of the overarching theme of community. Another way to view the hauling environment on YouTube is to consider it a culture in itself. There are certain norms and regulatory practices in place that are seen as positive or negative (depending

on the participant) in addition to certain jargon that is used. The fact that EGheartsSSC spent minimal time explaining the background of the Julie G. nail polish is indicative of culture at work. One could even view the world of hauling as a sub-culture in the larger world of YouTube. Williams (1976) defines sub-culture as "...the culture of a distinguishable smaller group..." (p. 82).

In their study of the American Girl doll, Acosta-Alzuru & Kreshel (2002) discuss the ways in which meaning can be transferred or shared." These authors wanted to understand how meaning was created and exchanged through the consumption of the AG dolls (and other AG branded products). My goal is to understand how meaning is created and exchanged through the participation with and consumption of haul videos. The example from EGheartsSSC helps to illustrate that a shared sense of understanding and meaning exists within this community. She did not spend time explaining who Julie G. is or elaborate on her importance in the YouTube world. It appears that she assumed her viewers knew what she meant. Here is an example of "cultural social norms and shared meanings" (Acosta-Alzuru & Kreshel, 2002, p. 143) in action.

In my analysis of Euchante's haul video, I came across numerous "justificatory statements" as well. When talking about her sweat pant purchase from Abercrombie & Fitch, she notes that she bought two pairs because they were on sale for \$30 each, instead of the regular \$50. In fact, Euchante explains that she loves them so much she hopes they go on sale even more so she can buy them in more colors. She also rationalizes her purchase of a pair of leopard print wedges from the store White House Black Market.

I went in there like a couple months ago and I saw these shoes. And I have never seen shoes like this. Like I had to have these. I'm not a big shoe person, I'm all about the bags. But these shoes...ohhh my gosh, look at that. They're leopard wedges and then they have a little ankle strap. Okay so these were \$98, and then I went in like whatever, whenever I bought these. This was like a month ago. Um I went in there and I saw that they were on sale and had two pairs left and one in my size. I wear an 8.5 and if you wear an 8.5 you

know that's like the first size to go. So it was meant to be. So these were originally \$100, I bought them for \$50, and I love them, and they're so comfortable and I love them!

The above statement from Euchante's video illustrates the vlogger engaging in consumption and the act of justifying her purchases. The shoes were half price, which is why she "had" to buy them. In addition to her wedges, Euchante also displays two pairs of patent leather pumps she bought for half price at Marshall's. Here is another section from her video that highlights a vlogger justifying her purchase:

So a couple months ago I went into Marshall's and saw these [animatedly shows her nude pumps]. These nice little ones right here, and they weren't on sale or anything. I think they were \$49.99. and I went in again, a couple months later, and they were on sale for \$19, originally \$100. Guess shoes are all like \$100 or \$98, right...I don't know whatever. They have like a standard. They were an amazing deal. But they also had black ones [excitedly pulls up the black ones to show]. I couldn't just get one. that's like such a good deal, are you serious. I like them. They make me happy.

As previously mentioned, both Dr. Leslie Benson and Jill Chivers have major criticisms of the hauling phenomenon. Undoubtedly, the above examples would be met with disapproval from these two women. In one haul video alone, Euchante shares three pairs of shoes (two of which are the same style in different colors), which total roughly \$100 for all three. According to Chivers, girls are instilled with a "feeling of want" at a very young age. She says that staying up to date with fashion is incredibly difficult given how fast it changes. "On a psychological level that is really dangerous. To have this feeling that you're never on top of it, you're never on trend. You've never really got it together. And you have to keep out there hunting and chasing. That's dangerous on many levels" (J. Chivers, personal communication, October 19, 2011).

Similarly, Benson believes that hauling emphasizes consumption and diminishes the amount of time young girls and women could be spending on more meaningful pursuits (A.L. Benson, personal communication, September 30, 2011). While I believe there are some beneficial aspects to participating in hauling, I agree with Benson and Chivers in that the

phenomenon appears to foster a sense of competitive consumption, one that can never be satiated as long as one is producing videos. Further, viewers of haul videos may think hauling is a cool and exciting venture, and be encouraged to engage in similar consumptive practices. This, I believe, could become unhealthy; because as explained by Chivers, hauling may facilitate compulsive buying.

Jess begins her haul video by displaying her recent purchase from Estee Lauder—the Advanced Night Repair serum. She says she had wanted this for a long time but couldn't justify paying such a high price for it. Ironically, after she explains all of this, she has text flash across the screen that reads “but I can now LOL – don't ask!” So here she is referencing the fact that she did end up paying a high price for it in the end. Later in the video, she shares a caviar moisture cream set that she has also been wanting for a long time, but again, hadn't purchased because of the high cost. After this explanation, she again flashes text across the screen that reads, “I still can't justify it now to be honest LOL!!!” This is interesting because in a way, Jess appears to be looking for feedback from her viewers regarding her purchases. It is possible that she included the text in her video (which illustrates the act of production) because she wanted her viewers to confirm that her purchases were justified. When she shows the Estee Lauder serum, she says that it has won a lot of awards for being the best serum (i.e. justification) and that she will do a review on it. This illustrates another facet of production and consumption—promoting what is successful as a product in the market.

As has been discussed in the community chapter, haulers receive comments either supporting or criticizing their consumptive practices. Consider the following examples:

“WHERE DO YOU GET ALL THIS MONEY?!” (from BreGal282)

@BreGal282 “she has her own boutique, and website. i think it's euchante.com but im not sure” (from 007toinfinity)

“i love how you wait for sales => i hate when i buy something normal price then like 2 weeks later they are on sale..- lucky u go into stores the right times...you were soooo sounded like a shoe person by 6:50 ←----totally.” (from windycitychic).

“the lipsticks all look the same lol i was wondering how many of these gurus donate to a charity...it would be nice for a change to hear something good ur doing.” (from libby29).

“A little shopping is a MAJOR UNDERSTATEMENT!” (from PopPrincess87)

Such comments are often in reference to the item, quantity, or cost of what the hauler shared.

However, as illustrated by windycitychic, sometimes the fact that the hauler bought sale items is positively regarded.

The examination of the haul video phenomenon illustrates the interrelatedness of production and consumption, and the fact that identity can be articulated through participation in both activities. I believe that the complex activities (i.e. production, consumption, representation and identity) taking place in the hauling phenomenon on YouTube (the fashion and beauty community specifically) are facilitating of a collective sphere of meaning exchange, an idea put forth by Acosta-Alzuru and Kreshel (2002). By engaging in this virtual community, participants can produce and consume videos (which bring in the notion of representation), while exploring or constructing certain aspects of their identity. Further, certain regulatory practices are also in place within this environment. Informal regulation takes the form of virtual etiquette or hauler protocol, while formal regulation is seen through the rules that the FTC enforced with regard to sponsored videos. Thus, when examining haul videos with the circuit of culture as a theoretical framework, it becomes apparent that all five moments are simultaneously at work, arguably facilitating meaning-making among haulers and viewers.

IDENTITY

An identity is the organized set of characteristics an individual perceives as representing or defining the self in a given social situation...Identity can also pertain to qualities that people perceive the self to have in a context. For example, one might feel creative or original at a Halloween party or fashion-conscious when interacting (and comparing oneself) with friends who do not emphasize fashion.

Kaiser, 1990, p. 186

The goal of this chapter is to illustrate how the concept of identity is present in the multi-faceted environment of hauling on YouTube. As has been previously discussed, identity is not stagnant. It is ever-changing and frequently context dependent. When haulers engage in their YouTube world, it is possible they stimulate the part of their sense of identity that resonates more with people who share their same interests in beauty and fashion. As explained by Kaiser (1990), one's identity can shift or be muted depending on the social setting one might be in. As has been described throughout this study, the fashion and beauty environment on YouTube boasts a thriving community, one that allows its participants to talk about and display different forms of appearance, self-expression, and other aspects of the self. This chapter is divided into three sections that discuss the emergent sub-themes from the constant comparison of interview transcripts, videos and comments.

The presence of appearance and self-expression as it exists within this phenomenon is described and illustrated with examples. This is enhanced by a discussion of Stone's (1962) "programs and reviews" notion and how this is taking place on YouTube. This chapter also offers perspectives concerning the dichotomy of the virtual and non-virtual self and how participating in YouTube has facilitated a reported gain in confidence for each hauler. The notion of character and how that appears via YouTube is examined. Additionally, Hall's (1980)

encoding/decoding model is woven throughout the chapter, as I highlight specific examples that illustrate the concepts of preferred, negotiated, and oppositional readings.

Identity is an extremely important construct, and a logical one to devote a chapter to given that it is one of the moments in the circuit of culture. However, there are certainly aspects of identity that have not been discussed as they relate to the hauling phenomenon. Given the relative newness of the Internet and this web sensation and the multitude of data one could analyze, this chapter provides a stepping stone for future research in this area.

- **Appearance, Self-Expression and Reviews**

As has been discussed in earlier chapters, hauling offers participants an outlet to virtually engage in and discuss appearance management behaviors. According to Kaiser (1990) appearance is, “The total, composite image created by the human body...a visual context that includes clothing as well as the body” (p. 4). Thus, a great deal of the content and discourse surrounding the haul phenomenon centers on appearance and appearance management (which can also constitute a form of self-expression). Moreover, haulers receive reviews (positive or negative remarks from viewers) regarding their appearance. The examination of such reviews is part of the focus of this section as well.

- **Character**

Character can be understood as the collective traits that make an individual who they are in terms of how they are perceived by others and what personality elements make them unique. This can be elicited in the form of actions they may or may not take, as well as in decisions regarding their taste. Examples of character will be provided throughout this section. The main idea here is to realize that the hauler displays elements of their character through what they broadcast on YouTube as well as in what they do and do not participate in regarding comments posted to their channel (for example). Further, there is evidence that viewers of haul videos notice certain aspects of character coming through in what the hauler may say or do in their video. Lastly, there is evidence that facets of one’s character appear through their YouTube profile page (as will be illustrated by discussing Euchante’s channel). While this is not the major focus of this section, it is worth mentioning.

- **Virtual and Non-Virtual Identities: Complexities and Confidence Gained**

This portion of the chapter explores the distinctions between virtual and non-virtual identity, and how such divisions impact the interviewees as they negotiate between the online and offline world. It explores some of the complexities that accompany participating in the vlogging environment on YouTube, including competitive consumption, creativity, and jealousy. Further, each interviewee disclosed that their participation in YouTube in general, but production of haul videos specifically, facilitated a gain in confidence when occupying their non-virtual spaces. The inquiry of such experiences is the focus of this section.

Appearance, Self-Expression and Reviews

Appearance has a major impact on one's identity because appearance is malleable—if one wants a different hair color or style, she can go to a hair salon and walk out with a new look. If one wants to dress like a punk rocker, she can go to the store and purchase the appropriate clothing to fit this type of style. One can go even further, and adorn her body with permanent decoration by getting tattoos. Thus, when a person wants to project a particular image, they are likely to engage in appearance modification behaviors. Appearance is defined as: “The total, composite image created by the human body and any modifications, embellishments, or coverings of the body that are visually perceived; a visual context that includes clothing as well as the body” (Kaiser, 1990, p. 4). As discussed in the production and consumption chapter, appearance management is one of the emergent themes that exists in the hauling phenomenon.

While haul videos do not necessarily showcase the hauler actually engaging in the *act of* appearance modification, they certainly contain numerous elements that relate to the concept of appearance. Therefore, appearance and self-expression has emerged as a sub-theme, underneath the broader construct of identity. The discussion of key moments that illustrate this sub-theme will be the focus of this section.

After talking in-depth with three interviewees about their experiences as a hauler, it is apparent that the notion of appearance and self-expression play a role in their motivation for producing haul videos. For example, if a hauler were unconcerned with her appearance, it is likely she would not spend money buying trendy clothing or makeup. Jess indicates that her incentive for watching and producing haul videos stems from her interest in learning of and sharing the latest trends in fashion. She states:

I like to share the latest trends, see how people wear their clothes, accessorize, and express themselves; looking for bargains and just seeing what's available out there. [She

likes to see] how companies can copy trends as well, so there's a lot of like new fashion on catwalks and I love seeing how companies like to copy the latest trends. And the way I see it [haul videos] is kind of like the personal, real truth, the quality of things you can buy out there. And I do it because I like the trends, and it shows that I'm becoming trusted in my taste and more influential when people watch my videos as well.

Further, EGheartsSSC explains that she loves to watch and post haul videos because she finds it enjoyable. "...I love clothes and makeup obviously. And so I like getting ideas of what someone else might have purchased." When asked her favorite type of video to post she responded: "Fashion videos are definitely some of my favorite videos. Like showing outfits and stuff like that." Putting together an outfit is a form of self-expression and when shown in a YouTube video, this may inspire other viewers to engage in similar activities. She says she enjoys producing fashion videos because "...it gives me ideas also when I have to go through my closet and like pick things out. I don't know it's just fun and I like fashion and trying things on and putting things together." While a fashion video is not the same as a haul video, it illustrates themes of self-expression and appearance management behaviors.

Given that haulers have great interest in consuming fashion and beauty products, it may come as no surprise that many of them (and those interviewed for this study specifically) have good taste and a keen sense of style. This is in part what helps them generate viewership. The following remarks are indicators that commenters are receptive to and arguably favor some of the fashion and beauty choices haulers showcase during their videos:

"Omg im literally clawing at the screen. I WANT those shoes!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!" (from purplepenguin77)

"Euchante!! Those wedges from WHBM.. didn't you show those in a video on your other channel?? I think it was back in September.. awww I'm so happy you got those for yourself!" (from zazalicious)

"I love the wedges!" (from coffeelover208)

“I love the body shop double face base too! => nice haul hun. I so want to check out the forever 21 in the uk, I’m currently online looking thanks to you.” (from Ezmerelda86)

“super cute haul ☺ is the white bag available in US or online? I want one!! its gorgeous.” (from xoxoSarahxoxo)

“Love the nude sandals! I’ve been looking for a good powder you make me want to try the Body Shop one! which other powders have you tried?” (from stormy29)

Further, I propose that some commenters are taking a preferred meaning when they leave comments indicating that they may go and purchase the same purse or facial moisturizer because the hauler gave it a good review. The following comments illustrate the commenter planning to purchase an item based on what they saw in the hauler’s video:

“I am going to my White house Black Market and finding those wedges!! They are so hot!!!” (from doodlemary)

“dang girl that is some hauullagee :D that animal print dress is gorgeous! I have to go to H&M to see if they have it hereeee super cute!!!!” (from jessarae499)

Although the producer’s intention may not be for her viewer’s to take a preferred meaning (as she may simply be showing her purchases for informational or entertainment purposes), the above comments illustrate that haulers can influence a viewer’s actions (in terms of consumption). To review, a preferred reading occurs when a consumer takes a message from a producer and reads it exactly as the creator intended.

The comments also help to exemplify the notion of one’s appearance being consumed. Meaning, the consumption of beauty and fashion items can occur to help one to produce their desired appearance in order to help them to put forth or enliven a certain sense of identity. Thus, this reinforces the interrelatedness of the moments in the circuit of culture and the fact that identity is often expressed through both consumption and production. “Consumption is the articulation of a sense of identity. Our identity is made up by our consumption of goods – and their consumption and display constitutes our expression of taste. So display – to ourselves and

to others – is largely for symbolic significance, indicating our membership of a particular culture” (Mackay, 1997, p. 4).

As has been discussed, vloggers frequently receive comments about how they appear on screen. Commenters often post remarks about the hauler’s hair color or style, facial structure or complexion, makeup, or clothing choice(s) in a particular video. A small sample of such comments is provided below:

“cute shirt ur wearing!!” (from miskhaki2002)

“i like the bronze look!!” (from lauralee28)

“this may be a weird comment but your earrings look so cute with your hair and shirt haha i love them” (from strawberrycustard)

“You have a very nice arch in your eyebrows!” (from beiberlover21)

“Awesome intro!! I miss you!!! :[I love your eye makeup look here! <3” (from MissCleo)

“you are sooo pretty” (from ms.madi)

“omj! is it possible? Did Euchante get evn prettier? Apparently she did ;)” (from susie67)

“@ susie67 I was just thinking the same thing!” (from shuxiegirl)

As can be deduced, some comments are rather specific while some are more general.

Nonetheless, this is indicative of the fact that commenters engage in offering reviews about the hauler’s appearance. The last comments between susie67 and shuxiegirl also illustrate a dialogue taking place.

Gregory Stone (1962) is credited as one of the seminal thinkers in the realm of appearance and the self. He proposed the idea of “programs” and “reviews” as responses given about one’s appearance. He describes programs as “...responses made about the wearer by the wearer...” and a review as “...responses made about the wearer of clothes by others who, we

shall say, review his clothing” (in Roach-Higgins, 1995, p. 221). The following quotation may be useful when considering remarks made by the hauler (about their appearance) and comments posted by viewers (about the hauler’s appearance).

When programs and reviews tend to coincide, the self of the one who appears (the one whose clothing has elicited such responses) is validated or established; when such responses tend toward disparity, the self of the one who appears is challenged, and conduct may be expected to move in the direction of some redefinition of the challenged self. Challenges and validations of the self, therefore, may be regarded as aroused by personal appearance (Stone, 1962, pp. 221-222, in Roach-Higgins, 1995).

In other words, when commenters provide a hauler with positive feedback about her appearance, it is possible that the producer feels reassured or confident about the self. The opposite may be true if they receive negative feedback about their appearance (or choices in fashion purchases, for instance).

As cited in Kaiser (1990), appearance and dress are closely related to “wearable art,” which is defined by Stabb (1985) as:

Use of clothing as a medium for artistic communication, to reflect the uniqueness and personal creativity of the artist and designer; a strong movement in the United States growing out of the attitude of the 1960s that rejected anonymous mass production (p. 4).

In her haul video, EGheartsSSC displays a cobalt blue sweater she purchased from Forever 21. She says that she was watching “What not to Wear,” (a popular television show focused on helping the non-fashionable dress fashionably), and one of the lead stylists noted that redheads should wear cobalt blue because it complements their attributes. Therefore, EGheartsSSC was inspired to buy an article of clothing in this particular color. This illustrates two things: the

hauler is taking the preferred reading from this stylist (i.e. to wear this color) as well as engaging in consumption to enhance her appearance. Additionally, after showing this sweater in her video, she receives positive feedback from numerous viewers who arguably are taking the preferred reading as well—redheads look good in cobalt blue. Below are several comments to highlight this:

“I love ur hair and makeup and ur earrings. And u def should get more of that blue, bcuz it srsly will make u look so pretty with ur hair color and stuff. I had a teacher last yr who has the same color hair as u, and she wore that color all the time and it looked AMAZING. (from iheartclouds).

“we gingers always look great in bright blue :D” (from gingerkisses)

“THAT COLOR LOOKS AMAZING ON YOU with your hair !! (:” (iluvtrends)

“indeed this colour looks amazing on you!!!!<333” (from abbypants)

The aforementioned comments are examples of positive reviews. The commenters are in favor of, or validating, the hauler’s appearance or fashion sense. The comments analyzed for this study did not yield any examples that could be considered a negative review. However, such a review may read something like: “The color of your sweater does not suit your eye color and I cannot believe you would buy something so ugly!” or “Your makeup looks absolutely horrible in this video. Did you not look in the mirror before you began filming?” Though these remarks are hypothetical, they do illustrate what a negative review might sound like. Moreover, the concept of a program in the realm of haul videos could take the form of the producer making a remark about her appearance, and then having commenters make positive or negative reviews about whatever she said.

In her video, EGheartsSSC begins by referencing the Alice in Wonderland T-shirt she is wearing for “T-shirt Tuesday.” She does not spend time explaining what T-shirt Tuesday is, and

it is thus implied that her followers know what she is talking about (which is also illustrative of the community theme). She says:

Hi guys! Happy T-shirt Tuesday...Yay! I decided I couldn't do 'tangled hair Tuesday,' this Tuesday because I did my workouts and got sweaty and my hair was greasy and so I was like I need to take a shower. So I didn't do 'tangled hair Tuesday.' But I did do T-shirt Tuesday and I'm wearing my Alice in Wonderland T-shirt um, cuz Alice in Wonderland is my favorite [very exaggerated] movie of all time. Literally, my favorite movie. Anyways, today I have a collective haul.

For wearing her Alice in Wonderland shirt, EGheartsSSC receives numerous positive reviews:

“cute shirt ur wearing!” (from wasaki2010)

“Where did u get the alice in wonderland shirt from?” (from gagachic)

“YAY! i'm in a t-shirt today & i'd completely forgotten!...” (from bluelagoon)

“where do u get alice in wonderland t-shirt? thanks ☺” (from Lolabronza2034)

“@ Lolabronza 2034 urban outfitters” (from fuchsiafixation)

Not only do these comments illustrate positive reviews taking place, the last two also exemplify dialogue happening between commenters. It is also worth mentioning that EGheartsSSC's use of the term collective highlights the presence of community in that participants understand what the word collective refers to in this particular context (i.e. here it means purchases that have been amassed over a given period of time).

Character

After talking with three haulers about their experiences producing YouTube videos, the notion of character emerged. Elements of character surfaced through the analyses of interview transcripts and comments. The term character is defined as “the combination of traits and qualities distinguishing the individual nature of a person or thing.” It also refers to one's “moral or ethical quality,” as well as “reputation” (Dictionary.com, 2011). Thus, just as one has a reputation in his or her non-virtual settings, the same is often true for the virtual environments he

or she occupies. Haulers on YouTube are a perfect example. Consider the following remarks from Euchante:

I definitely have to be more cautious about what I'm doing. You know I'm just more cautious...I don't want to be seen doing anything bad. I don't know...I just, I try to maintain a good image now...I never would have expected it to have this much of an impact on my personal life outside of YouTube. It's definitely not something that when you turn off your computer it goes away. It definitely stays with you.

This excerpt illustrates the fact that because of her presence on YouTube, Euchante is conscious of her reputation in the offline world. As noted, she does not want to be seen doing anything offline that could negatively impact her reputation online.

The following story overlaps with themes of production and consumption and is included in that chapter as well. However, it brings forth the concept of character, in that EGheartsSSC does not want to have the reputation of being a lavish hauler who only buys the most expensive beauty products. Therefore, she explains she will shop at drugstores and post hauls that may appeal to a wider audience:

Sometimes I feel bad though because I feel guilty showing things that I think maybe other people might feel bad about because they can't afford to buy all this stuff. Like that's kind of conflicting with me sometimes because I don't want to make anybody feel bad you know about themselves. So I sometimes I have issues with that. And so when you actually asked me about if I ever go out intentionally to buy things [trails off]... Sometimes I will intentionally um buy like cheaper drugstore products to show that you don't need to spend hundreds and hundreds of dollars on things.

Moreover, Jess talks about how she chose to avoid engaging in a discussion with a commenter who left her an oppositional comment (regarding her appearance) in response to one of her videos. She explains that she did not want negativity on her channel, nor did she want to start a conflict, so she opted to avoid conversation. "I'm not going to start an argument on my channel because it makes me look bad. And I'm not really the type of person to do that anyway." Here is a quotation that elicits Jess's character in that she prefers to avoid confrontation to protect her

online reputation. This example is not to illustrate that any oppositional or negative remarks left for a hauler will be ignored. It is meant to explain that depending on the individual, a hauler may avoid engaging in quarrels with viewers because they are more inclined to converse with positive commenters and preserve their reputation. This is a concept that should be explored more in depth in a future study.

Additionally, the idea of character can be seen in the way some vloggers organize their YouTube channel. While this will not be discussed in detail, it is worth mentioning that elements of character are seen in the way Euchante formats her YouTube profile page. At the beginning of each of her videos, she has a pink background that flashes across the screen with the word “Euchante” appearing in unison with a charm-like sound, as her YouTube name comes across the screen, a tiny flower appears next to her name as well. This introductory segment lasts roughly four seconds and serves as a sort of a signature opening for the vlogger. Moreover, at the end of each of her videos, Euchante says “stay glamorous,” as a wrap-up statement. When asked why she includes this, she explained that she was first inspired to create a unique ending for her videos after watching *juicystar07* (aforementioned celebrity vlogger).

[Emily]: Could you talk a little bit about why you say that [stay glamorous] or where that developed?

[Euchante]: Okay that was actually inspired by *juicystar07*... So she started doing this [makes waving gesture] and that became like her staple. So I was like I really need to have a slogan or something I can do at the end of my videos where I don't know. Just to have that sort of unique aspect. So I brainstormed and you know I always loved the word 'glamorous,' I like certain words. So what can I say? And I just came up with 'stay glamorous.'

Arguably, there is a princess-like, girly appeal to all of this, as the primary color scheme on her channel are shades of pink, and the sound she uses is one that might be heard in a movie such as *Cinderella*. One could interpret Euchante's channel page design as her consumption of the feminine ideal. Further, she is perhaps producing or reinforcing elements of the feminine ideal

through her videos. What the above explanations serve to illustrate is that the notion of character is present in the actual design of a vlogger's YouTube channel as well.

While it is worthwhile to examine how character comes forth through the words of the haulers, it is also important to investigate how haulers are regarded by their viewers. It appears that some viewers are perceptive to the notion of character, as evidenced by some of their remarks. Earlier in this chapter, I mention EGheartsSSC's haul video in which she shares a cobalt blue sweater she bought from Forever 21. When showing her purchase, she notes it is a size large, and tells her viewers they should embrace their size whether they are a small or double XL. "Whatever, who cares, who cares what size you are. Embrace it!" She talks about how she does not like when other gurus disclose that they normally wear an XXS, but had to buy an XS because the store was sold out. She thinks this is annoying, and while talking about it, she gives her viewers an impression of other gurus talking about how they wear a small size. This segment of her video generates a great deal of feedback (shown below) and is illustrative of the vlogger receiving positive character reviews:

I love you! You are so not like dumb blonde like all the other gurus on utube! U r just so down to earth and confident and are a big role model for me! Keep working hard! (from Lively34)

"When you were talking about sizes you seemed so real, that's what beauty gurus should be like <3" (from natayahearts)

"I've always been insecure about what size I am. And thank you... Thats so cool that you're a guru and you don't care about that!" (from -888)

"I love that you're skinny and wear a large shirt. also love that you want everyone to embrace their size. you're one of my all time fave gurus :]" (from SueySparkles)

"I love you !!!!!best guru on YouTube !! (from tabbster870)

"I love the way u embrace ur read hair ☺ i have so much respect for you about the whole xxs thing ☺ I Love you -3 ur now my fav beauty guru ☺" (from ImSmilingForLife)

“i have so much more respect for you now since you said about the xxs thing <3” (from kalibug)

“I know what u mean when the girls say obj yeah I’m a xsmall and blah blah blah but I love how u embrace yourself” (from xosarah9xo)

Similarly, Euchante receives several comments about her character in particular and channel in general.

“you are actually one of the funniest people on youtube. ‘they do make your tushie look quite nice!’” (from pinkadoodle)

The above comment is in reference to a remark she made while showing her Abercrombie & Fitch sweatpants. In a somewhat comical tone of voice she says “And they do make your tushie look quite nice, I must say” (in reference to the sweatpants). This added a bit of entertainment value to her video and was well-received by some of her viewers. Moreover, the comments below illustrate commenters leaving positive character reviews for Euchante:

“You are seriously so relate-able everything from where you shop to how you wait for the best bargains. Definitely one of my favorite gurus! ☺” (from shenae34)

“hey i love ure videos, u r amazing” (from mizzgurlz)

Euchante, you’re my absolute favorite guru on youtube! you’re funny, you have a great sense of style and you’re very down to earth. i just wanted to let you know that i think you’re a fantastic role model, and i’m so happy every time you have a new video :) xoxo” (from trinaforlife in response to EGheartsSSC).

“Awesoommme haulll! Hahaa, &iloveyoou! Hah” (from lovin’myhorses)

The aforementioned excerpts and comments highlight the fact that character is present in numerous facets of YouTube. Though this trend has been widely criticized for its ability to promote materialistic habits among young women, it is important to realize that some haulers are positively regarded as role models (though the benefits of this are disputable), among viewers. While I am not in favor of pushing excessive consumption practices among the youth, I do think the reinforcement of positive body image (i.e. as seen with EGheartsSSC’s remarks about

embracing one's size) is a positive side to this phenomenon. A future study could further examine how character is seen through the design of YouTube profile pages, as well as how it exists in comments posted to videos. Additionally, the analysis of "plus size" vloggers and their videos could provide useful insight and possibly offer new perspectives on whether or not this trend is as negative as it has been portrayed to be by social commentators.

Virtual and Non-Virtual Identities: Complexities and Confidence Gained

Our participation in the so-called 'community' of the Internet is hyped on the promise that it will soon enable us to assume cyber-identities different in every respect from our own – replacing the need for anything so messy and physically constrained as actual interaction. Meanwhile, culture reaches deep into the mechanics of identity formation itself (Hall, p. 215, in Thompson, 1997).

Although the above quotation may have some relevance in that participation in virtual territories may distract users from spending time with people in the real world, it is also true that engaging in online environments can foster relationships that span both virtual and non-virtual space.

While Hall's remarks put a negative spin on the term community as it happens virtually, this study indicates that virtual communities exist in a positive sense and that they help haulers to establish friendships both online and off. Considering that Hall's sentiments were published in 1997, at the time, people were celebrating the potential of online communication, but also concerned about its implications. As we see today, most humans have adapted to it, as they do with all forms of new media.

In regard to the creation of cyber-identities, Benson explains that many people feel far away from the person they would like to be seen as. She refers to this as the "self-discrepancy gap." "Some of the haulers are trying to close that gap and go beyond where they see themselves

at the present” (A.L. Benson, personal communication, September 30, 2011). It is possible that some of the young women producing haul videos are trying to broadcast a version of “the woman I want to be” (Guy & Banim, 2000). Guy and Banim (2000) conducted qualitative research to understand women’s clothing use and its relationship to identity. They explain “the woman I want to be” as “...physically realized as the woman I feel I am when I look good.”

Consider this in relation to the phenomenon of hauling. Are haulers buying clothes to make themselves feel good, hoping their purchases are well-received by viewers? Guy and Banim (2000) describe “the woman I want to be” as “...someone who is projecting aspects of herself through clothing that suits/enhances her and who believes her image is being favourably received by others” (p. 318). In regard to haulers, they may purchase mass amounts of clothing and makeup products and broadcast it on YouTube because they are striving to be a more fashionable or sophisticated individual than they feel they actually are. Although this research does not confirm whether or not the interviewees are striving to be “the woman I want to be” (Guy & Banim, 2000), it does pose an interesting question that could be the focus of future research in this area.

Of the three haulers interviewed, Euchante shared the most in regard to her sense of identity as it exists in online and offline domains. Therefore, much of this section will feature excerpts from her interview. “...I really have two identities, I would say. I have Euchante, and I go by that. That is what I like to be addressed by on YouTube and on Twitter. That is my brand...and then I have my real name that I go by in real life.” When asked to explain the creation of her screen name, Euchante told the following story:

Okay, we are going back to when I was eight years old...this was back when I really wanted to be a fashion designer. So I talked with my dad and was like I’m going to start my own fashion company. And he’s like okay well you need to come up with a name for it. So I loved the name euphoria; I just loved the word euphoria and I wanted that to be

my name and my dad was like ‘well, there probably are a lot of companies that are already named that.’ And so he actually said well what about the French word *enchanté*? Which means like if you were greeting someone, you introduce yourself and say ‘aww, charmed.’ It’s like a really sophisticated way to say ‘oh, nice to meet you.’ So we actually combined the two words *euphoria* and *enchanté* to get *Euchante*.

After telling this story, I asked *Euchante* if she had carried this name with her through her adolescence and why she chose it for her YouTube screen name. She responded:

Yeah it’s just been, it’s just been everything really you know. I think that will stick with me forever. Whatever I end up doing I will incorporate that somehow. You know it’s to a point now where it’s weird when people call me by my real name. Because I’m just so used to being called *Euchante*. Everything I do just revolves around that. So um yeah...sort of like becoming that in real life, you know. I try to keep it separate but yeah.

The conversation regarding the distinction between online and offline identity continued, during which *Euchante* talked about her two identities competing.

...for the longest time you know I really tried to keep that [*Euchante* identity] separate. But it’s just the two worlds are being forced together. So the only way to go from here is for me to move my identity more over to that *Euchante* character all the time. And I do now. And I’m more conscious of do I need to hang out with these people? What if one of my viewers sees me? So I mean it’s led me into a better direction, it’s been all positive. But I definitely have been moving over to that side.

Therefore, to summarize, it is evident that *Euchante*’s online character influences who she is in the offline worlds she occupies. While it may be more commonplace to think about how ones’ offline identity could impact their online persona, what is happening with *Euchante* is that she is making sure to behave appropriately offline, so that her virtual reputation is not at stake.

In comparison, Jess explains that her participation in YouTube does not have an impact on who she is in her everyday life. “...I’ve always been a shopper and I’ve always been who I am on YouTube, if that makes sense. I’m not a different person on YouTube than I am in real life.”

[Emily] Do you ever feel that you have to act a certain way on YouTube or present yourself in a certain light?

[Jess] Um, sometimes I do because I'm quite ditzy. So I always do things...like I drop things and I say the wrong thing. And I feel as though on YouTube...I have to really be careful with what I do because I don't want people to think like 'oh my gosh, I'm not watching this girl because she is like this and that.' So anyways I do edit sometimes and I don't sometimes. I just record then I just you know upload the video on YouTube and not really be bothered about what people think. Because after all, the whole channel is all about me, so I kind of feel as though people should accept the way I am from my videos.

Further, Jess says that she wants her viewers to see "a little part" of her through her videos;

"...kind of like sharing what I'm like outside of YouTube as well."

EGheartsSSC explains that interacting with people online is a lot easier than it is in real life. "I just think it's easier to approach people online...Cuz I'm not very outgoing in real life. Like I don't approach people that often, so it's easier to just like approach people online for me." Additionally, she says that she tries to be a role model for her viewers, and it can thus be inferred that she cares about her reputation both online and off. "When I meet my subscribers in real life it really like opens my eyes to who's watching me and how maybe young some of them are. It makes an impact on how my actions might affect someone else..."

This research indicates that haulers (Euchante and EGheartsSSC specifically) strive to set a positive example for their viewers (as they both disclosed they strive to be role models). This means that both online and off they are concerned with their reputation and how behaving in an inappropriate manner might affect their viewership. Similarly, Jess explained that she did not want to engage in conflict with a commenter in fear it could affect her channel negatively (this is also illustrative of her character having an impact). It seems there is almost a sense of hauler etiquette or protocol at work. The idea of hauler etiquette or protocol relates to the concept of regulation. As was previously mentioned, this can be viewed as an informal institution of

regulatory practice. Because the examination of regulation was of this not a major focus for this study, this provides an interesting topic for further analysis in the future.

Gaining Confidence through YouTube

Each interviewee disclosed that they experienced a gain in confidence through producing videos on YouTube. All three haulers referred to having a heightened sense of self-confidence in their offline world and attributed it to their presence on YouTube. Specifically, Euchante and EGheartsSSC both talked about how dealing with hate on YouTube has helped them become stronger as individuals. Referring to her experience with hate comments, EGheartsSSC shared the following:

...I don't even care anymore you know what I mean [referring to negative comments or feedback]. I think it has to do more with like myself. Like when it bothered me before I guess I didn't really have the self-confidence that I do now. So now I'm just kinda like I don't even care what some random person says about me, you know?

[Emily]: Do you think that the gain in self-confidence has to do with posting the videos on YouTube? Why now do you feel more confident?

[EGheartsSSC]: Yeah I actually do. I don't know it's really weird. I think like a lot of things like in terms of public speaking, which is weird because it's not...[trails off]...like it is public but it's not really you know what I mean. I don't know like my speaking ability I guess to people has gotten better, and just my ability to communicate with people has improved. I mean it could have improved just with age, but I feel like YouTube has definitely helped me be like stronger in terms of like the hate and stuff and just communicating with others.

The conversation about the gain in confidence continued and shifted to discussing the online/offline distinction, and how this relates to producing videos:

...I feel like I don't need so much acceptance from like people. I don't know how to say it. Like if someone doesn't like me in real life, I won't be so upset about it just because I'm like I know...I don't know how to say this...I know that people like I'm not a bad person because I have people who watch me. So I don't get emotional in real life when someone doesn't like me. I guess is what I'm trying to say.

Euchante shares similar feelings about a gain in confidence:

I feel like I have such a wide following [on YouTube] now that it's like okay if one person in real life doesn't like what I want...I have over 70,000 people on the Internet who like what I do so I just try and focus more on that. But um it's made me more confident I guess in my skills like marketing-wise or just being able to relate to people. I feel like I can have a conversation with pretty much anyone now and I feel really comfortable. So yes it's made me more confident...

She also talks about how dealing with the negativity has made her a stronger individual. She says that when she first started producing, she wasn't prepared for backlash. But over time, she has learned to cope with the hate:

...I'm more confident in what I do. I've been doing it for so long now. I've experienced so much of that negativity um that I don't really think it could get any worse. And, you know, I just don't pay attention to that because those people just aren't worth it, you know? I'm much happier now.

By the same token, Jess talks about her concerns regarding hate on YouTube. She explains that she has only dealt with one negative comment (discussed in more detail in the Community chapter), but that she still has apprehension about receiving negative feedback.

Even now I get really nervous because I see a lot of negative comments in a lot of my YouTube friends videos. And I always think 'oh my gosh this is going to be me one day, I don't know how to deal with it.' But then you just get over it. You kind of just think you know what, YouTube is a community. You can't please everyone. People either love you or hate you. Yeah, I still get that feeling every now and again.

Moreover, both Euchante and EGheartsSSC confirmed that the friendships they have established through YouTube (i.e. virtual friendships) give them confidence as they participate in their offline worlds. Interestingly, EGheartsSSC cites YouTube as a mechanism that has inspired and enabled her to experiment with newfound interests and helped her to become more motivated as an individual.

Consider the following remarks:

[Emily]: Do you feel like you've changed in terms of who you are as a person through your YouTube videos?

[EGheartsSSC]: Um, I think I'm definitely more like driven, like to see how far I've come on this like and what opportunities have come from it and certain things like that. It

makes me realize that I can do a lot of different things in life. Like I don't need to do just one thing, you know. Like a lot of different things make me happy. So like psychology...like all of high school, well until I started making videos, I was like I'm just gonna go straight into psychology, like this is the plan. And then once I started doing YouTube videos, I was like you know I can try out different things and explore different things that I like to do. And it's been like really fun, you know. Just trying out new things. So I think that's how it's changed me. I've been more driven and just like more...[trails off] I believe in myself more that I can do stuff, you know?

As has been discussed, the hauling phenomenon has been met with major criticism for its encouragement and public display of excessive consumption among other aspects. What has not adequately been discussed, however, are stories such as these told by EGheartsSSC. This excerpt again illustrates an increase in self-confidence through the production of videos on YouTube. Similarly, Euchante talks about how she will incorporate her role as a hauler on YouTube into some of her business and marketing classes. She explains that her major course project in a business class is to create a business plan:

...I will absolutely be using YouTube to sort of go along that line and talk about it and what not...I feel like people can relate to that on a business level. So um I just love the business aspect and the marketing aspect. I'm excited that I have real material that I can use in my studies.

This excerpt again highlights the idea that not every single aspect of producing haul videos is negative. While the phenomenon may yield a stigma that promotes compulsive buying, it is stories like these that exemplify that there may be some beneficial components as well.

Hauling: Competitive Consumption or Channeling Creativity?

Chivers claims that for a very long time, women have felt the need to be competitive and look better than their female counterparts (J. Chivers, personal communication, October 19, 2011). Benson states that “studies show that when young women look at magazines, they compare themselves to what they see. The same thing could be going on with hauling” (A.L. Benson, personal communication, September 30, 2011). Interestingly, Euchante provides some

insight that highlights the idea of competition and jealousy as it exists in the world of hauling. During the interview, she was asked to discuss if she follows the channels of any other haulers (as this is common among many vloggers). She says that she does not watch other hauler's videos:

I mean I've watched so many people's videos that now I rarely watch anyone else's videos. Um, a weird thing happened to me when I really really started to get into it. Um, the summer before my senior year. [This] is when I really started to get jealous of the other channels. And it really sort of, I don't know. It was weird and I didn't like it. So I really try not to compare myself to other channels now. I'm really thankful for all of my viewers and what not. So um, it's hard. I didn't really want to make it a competition, I've just been brought up to be very competitive. Um, so I really try not to watch too many hauls now.

She claims that not a lot of haulers shop at the types of stores she likes or has the same type of style, which is partially why she chooses not to watch other channels. I asked her if she follows a celebrity hauler known as *meganheartsmakeup*, who has been featured in *Seventeen* magazine, a music video and other forms of pop culture as a result of her popularity gained through YouTube. Euchante explains that *meganheartsmakeup* is one of the haulers who triggered feelings of jealousy:

...when I first started watching her, she was one that um I started to get really competitive with because she got so many subscribers so fast and what not. So that was hard. But she's such a sweet girl. It's just you know, when you're the one making videos it's hard not to get jealous of other girls' channels and what not.

In comparison, both Jess and EGheartsSSC state that they enjoy watching other hauls because it gives them inspiration, fashion and beauty insight, and they find enjoyment in watching. I asked EGheartsSSC how much time she spends watching haul videos. "So much time," she said (in a very animated tone). "I watch haul videos every single day. It's my relaxing thing, you know. Some people exercise, some people read a book. I like watching YouTube videos...I watch a lot at night. I will watch like maybe two hours a day probably, which is a lot."

Jess says that she views her participation in YouTube as a hobby. "...it's something I can always come home to and you know share, discuss, watch other people's videos...Just looking at the latest trends really and just looking at people's ideas." Thus, it appears that information and inspiration sharing is one of the primary reasons vloggers engage in YouTube. Certainly, as has been illustrated by Euchante, feelings of competition and jealousy can be triggered through watching and comparing oneself to other vloggers.

Wolf (1991) asks why women care so much about the messages presented in consumer magazines. She believes the following:

"They care because, though the magazines are trivialized, they represent something very important: women's mass culture. A woman's magazine is not just a magazine. The relationship between the woman reader and her magazine is so different from that between a man and his that they aren't in the same category: A man reading *Popular Mechanics* or *Newsweek* is browsing through just one perspective among countless others of male-oriented culture, which is everywhere. A woman reading *Glamour* is holding women-oriented mass culture between her two hands" (p. 70).

In regard to Wolf's statement, my question is this: why do young girls and women today consume and produce haul videos? Throughout this study, haul videos have been referred to as a form of popular culture and equated with women's fashion magazines. According to Wolf (1991), "...women's magazines are the only products of popular culture that (unlike romances) change with women's reality, are mostly written by women for women about women's issues, and take women's concerns seriously" (p. 71). Can the same be said of haul videos? While they have been criticized for their promotion of excessive consumption and potential to facilitate identity construction through material objects, one cannot dispute that they are a form of popular

culture, produced primarily by and for women. As was mentioned by all three of the haulers I interviewed, they enjoy producing videos because of the large amount of positive feedback they receive from their viewers. Given the hundreds of thousands of haul videos, as well as fashion related vlogs on YouTube, there is substantial evidence that the practice of virtually sharing and discussing women's interests and issues is a booming trend among the adolescents and young women who participate. There is evidence that producing hauls (and other types of videos) allows vloggers to tap into their creative side by expressing their fashion and beauty tastes and talking about issues they deem important.

It could be argued that vlogs are a virtual display of the pages found in a traditional fashion magazine. Based on this research, I believe a key difference is that these videos are not created by what we would normally think of as professionals. Therefore, this may be an indication that some girls and young women prefer the advice from non-professional sources (i.e. magazine editors), as either a substitute or supplement to whatever they normally turn to for advice concerning fashion, beauty and the like. A future study could explore more of why consumers are using haul videos as a source for such information.

CONCLUSION

Summary

The purpose of this project was to explore the haul video phenomenon on YouTube and how participating in this trend impacts women. Specifically, three female haulers were interviewed about their experiences with producing haul videos in hopes of learning what this practice means to these women in particular. Further, a detailed analysis of three haul videos (one produced by each interviewee) and an examination of 100 comments posted to the three select videos were carried out using constant comparison. This research is interpretive in nature, therefore, no generalizable findings can be offered. Nonetheless, this study provides others with similar research interests a starting point, as there is currently (to my knowledge) no scholarly work concerning haul videos.

Limitations

While this project offers useful insight about this budding trend, no study exists without limitations. Acosta-Alzuru and Kreshel (2002) offer the following statement, highlighting some of the limitations that accompany qualitative research such as this:

It is important to acknowledge the difficulties inherent to the presentation of findings in interpretive research. Although it is impossible to share with readers all the knowledge generated by the study, it is important to quote sufficient evidence to support the researcher's interpretations (p. 150).

The findings of this study are not generalizable as they are based on a small sample size and an exploratory approach. Throughout the constant comparison process I had to make challenging decisions regarding what word or phrase fit within a certain theme, what themes fit together and could be grouped into a larger, more overarching category, as well as to select certain wordage to

represent my major themes. Undoubtedly, another researcher may have opted to assign words or phrases to different themes and taken an alternate route in the categorization process.

Nonetheless, my goal was to present key moments in the data that relate to the circuit of culture and help to explain what this phenomenon means, as this is a new research area.

The interview participants in this study included three women ranging in age from 19 to 26 years old. Two participants reside in the United States and are pursuing undergraduate degrees, while the other resides in the United Kingdom and holds the occupation of a nurse. Talking with women of other demographics may have yielded different results, depending on their age, educational, and occupational status. Additionally, conducting a larger number of in-depth interviews would be helpful in that talking to more haulers could provide a more detailed picture regarding this phenomenon, and possibly more generalizable findings.

Moreover, it should be noted that males also participate in hauling. A future project could explore hauling as it exists in the male arena (though this is not as popular among men). Including a wider range of male dominant topics such as gaming, hunting, or auto repair, for instance, would undoubtedly increase the potential number of male vloggers. Given that the present study featured interviews solely with women, interviewing men would presumably deliver different results. It should also be mentioned that this study did not analyze a large number of comments. A future project could focus exclusively on analyzing comments to learn more about the themes present in such discourse. Lastly, exploring haul videos through a content analysis may also be beneficial. There is a lot to be learned by simply observing haulers in their natural environment (YouTube) and the practices or norms in place on this site.

Future Research

I believe this research arena is ripe with ideas for future scholarly pursuits. It would be worthwhile to interview commenters of haul videos, because as participants in this trend, they likely have opinions regarding the haulers they watch, consumptive practices, and the virtual presentation of self. Further, some commenters likely partake in hauling as well. A study exploring other genres of hauling (such as thrift or plus-size) would be beneficial in that it may help to further understand what this phenomenon means as it exists in other lives of more mature women.

I believe that women who consider themselves plus-size could offer useful insights about this trend, as could women who choose to be more frugal and creative when it comes to fashion. Furthermore, an analysis of vlog channels that feature debates about current events or issues could also prove fruitful. Another type of video that could be analyzed are those devoted to providing decorative or organizational tips. There are hundreds of vloggers who do bedroom, apartment or house tours, sharing with viewers everything from how they organize their makeup to closet to bathroom drawers.

Implications

“Through an active manipulation of symbols, individuals can strive to construct an identity that enables them to organize a personal sense of existence and to invest it with meaning” (Kaiser et al., 1991, p. 173). The quote from Kaiser et al. is applicable to hauling on YouTube in that haulers use clothing and beauty products (symbols) to help them construct a sense of identity (arguably both online and off). In the virtual world, haulers show their clothing, makeup and accessories to their viewers because doing so allows them to engage in appearance management and self-expressive behaviors—which ultimately translate into their offline world

as well. Haulers, and not only those interviewed for this project, generate virtual popularity for their expertise regarding fashion and beauty trends.

“Can people find community online in the Internet? Can relationships between people who never see, smell, touch, or hear each other be supportive and intimate? (p. 167)” These questions are posed by Wellman and Gulia (1999)—and early indications are that the answer is yes. A key finding this research brings forward is the concept of community as it exists within the hauling phenomenon. As has been discussed, the notion of community has been confirmed to be present on YouTube according to each hauler interviewed. YouTube, as a medium, does allow users to see and hear those they are watching, which may contribute to the ease with which community can be established. Further, haulers are able to interact and bond with girls and women who share similar interests. Interestingly, the virtual socializing that takes place through hauling on YouTube can transfer into non-virtual friendship as well.

According to Dittmar, it is not just excessive consumers who purchase items that they think will boost their self-image (in Benson, 2000, p. 106). An excessive buyer can be understood as an individual who purchases material items (i.e. an expensive designer handbag) to reach an ideal self-image (in both their own opinion and that of others) (in Benson, 2000, p. 107). She says, “Self-image concerns are a particularly important motivation in impulsive and excessive buying” (p. 112). As was mentioned in my interview with Dr. April Lane Benson, the notion of the “self-discrepancy gap” is also discussed by Dittmar. “...excessive buyers typically believe that material goods help them compensate by bringing them closer to their ideal selves” (p. 125). It is possible that what is taking place on YouTube is a virtual display of young women trying to close their self-discrepancy gap and receive positive reinforcement while doing so from their viewers.

Moreover, there is evidence that YouTube (the fashion and beauty community in particular) provides its participants with a collective sphere of meaning exchange. While engaged in this environment, users (both video producers and consumers) can explore and construct aspects of their identity, through the production and consumption of haul videos. The moments of representation and regulation are also intertwined in these activities. Regulation can be seen in the form of informal or formal rules or protocols as they exist in this virtual domain. I believe representation is present when a hauler chooses to represent (or not) a brand or product in a given fashion. In other words, they may take the preferred reading from a retailer, such as Forever 21, and then produce a video that reinforces the original message from that retailer. In this sense, they are representing Forever 21 as the company desired, whereas if they had an oppositional reading to a garment manufactured by this company, they may produce a video in which they provide their viewers with a negotiated or contested meaning from the initial one produced.

The examination of this online video sensation has been strengthened through the employment of the circuit of culture framework. Moments of identity, consumption and production—and their interrelatedness—have been discussed so as to tie this phenomenon back to theory and look at it through a cultural and scholarly lens. Certainly, the levels of consumption and production cannot exist singularly, as is exemplified by the haulers in their consumption of material items with which they use in their production of videos. Moreover, identity is intertwined as we see haulers using fashion and beauty products to construct the image they want to put forth—online and off.

Concluding Thoughts

As an aspiring academic, completing this project was enjoyable and insightful as it allowed me to further explore a phenomenon I have been interested in since spring 2010. Moreover, it taught me that qualitative research is time-consuming and challenging, but can provide some very interesting and rewarding results. My hope is that this research serves as a building block for future scholarly pursuits in this area. I, for one, know that my examination of haul videos is far from over.

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ⁱⁱ Please note that the videos listed in Table I are reported as they appeared on each participant's YouTube channel. Additionally, the number of views recorded for each video was collected on November 2, 2011.

Further, comments were reported verbatim as they appeared on YouTube the day of data collection. No corrections were made to mechanics or grammar in any comment included in this study.