Giorgia Riboni

Discourses of Authenticity on YouTube

From the Personal to the Professional

In copertina:
Realistic mannequin head

Videoimpaginazione: Paola Mignanego
Stampa: Logo

Contents

This book is dedicated
to the loving memory of Sandra Claudi

Tout ce qui est beau et noble est le résultat de la raison et du calcul [...]. La vertu [...] est *artificielle*.

Everything that is beautiful and noble is the product of reason and calculation [...]. Virtue [...] is *artificial*.

Charles Baudelaire
The Painter of Modern Life, 1862

Introduction

This book sets out to investigate the discourse of authenticity on the popular social media platform YouTube and examines how well-known users negotiate their identity and discursively represent themselves as authentic in their videos. It adds to the development of new perspectives on social media communication and intends to offer an approach to issues concerning the complexities of contemporary identity practices. More specifically, the study explores how, within frameworks of generic assumptions and expectations, famous YouTubers construct and maintain an online identity that allows them to distinguish themselves from the multitude of other content creators, thus becoming so successful as to be able to turn YouTube into a full-time job. In this respect, the expression "edited self" has been introduced to refer to the carefully crafted *persona* that famous social media users are able to display to the public and which is the product of "managerialized practices of celebrity construction" (Arturs *et al.* 2018, 7; cf. also Marwick and boyd 2011; Marwick 2013, 2015; Senft 2008). This kind of public self "is constantly worked upon and updated in its on-line form to both maintain its currency and to acknowledge its centrality to the individual's identity" (Marshall 2010, 42): the techniques utilized to achieve "micro-celebrity" (Senft 2013) by editing identity are both self-marketing tools and forms of entrepreneurial labour through which they develop an "authentic" brand (Banet-Weiser 2012). In fact, numerous studies have highlighted that "[t]he creator's distinctivesness – in a massively crowded field – is his or her claim to authenticity" (Cunnigham and Craig 2017, 74).

This volume starts from this assumption and argues that authenticity is a discursive construction[1]; its main goal is therefore to identify the linguistic and rhetorical strategies adopted by famous YouTubers in order to appear "authentic" in the eyes of their viewers. Whereas an

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[1] Cf. chapter 1.

ever-growing body of research has been devoted to the investigation of YouTube communicative practices, especially from the sociological perspective and digital humanist perspective (most notably by Burgess and Green 2009; Snickars and Vonderau 2009), academic work adopting a linguistic approach is still limited in scope [2]. In the same way, whereas the notion of authenticity has always attracted scholarly attention and has been tackled by various disciplines relying on various methodologies, to the best of my knowledge, no volume-length study has yet been carried out on authenticity discourse on the platform. Acknowledging the existence of a gap in the relevant literature, this volume intends to codify the notion of YouTube authenticity providing it with adequate categories. Because of its linguistic focus, the analysis predominantly examines the verbal component of videos; given the semiotic complexity of video communication practices, however, reference to the interplay between different resources will be included when necessary in the following chapters.

The methodological framework adopted for this research is Computer-Mediated Discourse Analysis and, more precisely, Social Media Critical Discourse Studies; in line with the tenets of Discourse Analysis, the latter hinge on a constructivist view of discourse as a social action which both creates and is created by social reality and is arguably a suitable tool to investigate digital performances of the self just like those delivered by YouTube celebrities. In order to explore how authenticity is conveyed on the platform, the volume examines the ways in which YouTubers portray themselves as subjects with a specific (authentic) identity. Among the several scientific approaches to the issue, this study privileges a constructivist perspective which understands identity not as a given but as an activity that YouTubers realize for the benefit of their audiences. Content creators' identity is therefore seen as the product of an ongoing process of discursive construction. Due to the number and the diversity of people posting on the platform, establishing if there exists a common core of features typifying the discursive construction of the "authentic identity" is a research question worth investigating, and represents one of the main objectives of this book.

To pursue this aim, i.e. to verify whether there is a shared set of identity characteristics conventionally adopted by YouTube micro-celebrities, three rather dissimilar groups of users (scientists, Stay-at-Home Mothers, and makeup artists) have been explored. These three YouTube communities have been singled out for analysis because, considered together,

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[2] Exceptions in this regard are the studies conducted by Adami (2008, 2009, 2010), Dynel (2014), Riboni (2017a) and Cavalieri (2018).

they provide a significant – albeit necessarily limited – sample of the platform's population[3]. Drawing on social media discourses that depict Web 2.0 genres as inherently democratic and potentially giving anyone access to virtual global audiences, many categories of users have turned to social media to acquire visibility, with different results. Certain groups, such as scientists, are still rather invisible on YouTube in spite of their reliance on the video-hosting website: their interests probably appear as remote from the everyday life of the general public and only capture the attention of a limited number of Science lovers. Stay–at-Home Mothers have traditionally played a peripheral role within the public sphere and are remarkably more visible on YouTube. They seem able to efficaciously exploit the platform's potential, but whether their success can be turned into a tool to bring about political change besides generating revenue has yet to be established[4]. Lastly, makeup artists belong to one of the most popular and therefore seemingly visible YouTube communities. However, their visibility is marked by a distinctive artificialness, which raises questions about the kind of visibility that they enjoy.

The analysis is thus organized into three thematic sections, each of which investigates selected well-known users of the category under scrutiny. Text selection and sampling are therefore based on a principle of popularity and representativeness, starting from the premise that content produced by micro-celebrities whose videos get huge numbers of views is possibly more likely to affect YouTube discourses in general and YouTube authenticity discourses more specifically.

The second aim of the book is to contribute to the debate as to whether authenticity discourse should be envisaged as following the binary logic which links non-commerciality to authenticity or whether the latter is best conceptualized as a spectrum. Within the context of a commodity culture, equating the commercial with the "inauthentic" may be simplistic (Banet-Weiser 2012) and should be avoided. Contemporary brand culture is characterized by porous borders between the original self and the commodity self and "this blurring is more *expected* and *tolerated*" (*ibid.*, 13; emphasis in the original). YouTube communication appears to be permeated as well as to reproduce this type of culture, and this can be observed in both micro-celebrities' self-branding techniques and in the paid advertisements which are extremely common in user-generated content. Worthy of mention is the widespread practice among famous users of endorsing and incorporating advertising mes-

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[3] Cf. chapter 2.
[4] Cf. chapter 4.

sages in their videos (cf. Wu 2016), which contributes to making it possible for them to turn video-making into a profession.

In order to provide linguistic insights on the issue of whether authenticity on the platform is constructed as combined with or completely removed from commercial values, the volume includes the investigation of YouTubers' identity traits that may be regarded as characteristics of "emergent authenticity" (Cohen 1988). This expression is borrowed from Tourism Studies and is adopted here to refer to those features that may eventually become "authentic" in the eyes of viewers in spite of being produced *ad hoc* and therefore starting off as artificial. Tourism Studies literature relies on this notion to describe the proofs of gradual "authentication" which goods such as craft products undergo when they progressively assume the status of genuine artefacts that are truly representative of a culture, although they were originally created for sale to visitors and tourists (*ibid.*, 379-380). Given the heavily commodified nature of the platform, YouTubers' traits of "emergent authenticity" appear to be especially associated with sponsorships and collaborations with brands. Whereas micro-celebrities' embracing of the marketplace may be considered as an indication of patent inauthenticity, it may be hypothesized that this this sort of sponsorship has become so common in social media platforms that it no longer undermines the authenticity of users' self-representation. Content creators are therefore able to establish genuine relationships with the members of their audience.

A consideration that can be made in this regard is that brands typically enter the picture only after a dialogic relationship has been created between the "authentic" YouTuber and the community which he or she belongs to (Cunnigham and Craig 2017, 74). It is thanks to an intense level of interactivity between micro-celebrities and fan base – i.e. thanks to their "affective" (Papacharissi 2015) and "relational" (Baym 2015) labour – that the former's authenticity claims can be validated: against this backdrop, brands aim to capitalize on the already established connection between the YouTuber and the audience. Consequently, it may be stated that "relations are trilateral among the 'authentic' creator, the fan community [...], and the brand which is seeking to buy into, and leverage, that primary relationship" (Cunnigham and Craig 2017, 73).

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The volume is organized in five chapters.

Chapter 1 introduces the multiple definitions that have been proposed to capture the notion of "authenticity" and outlines the main

reasons why this notion has become so prominent among current marketing strategies and in contemporary brand culture. It describes the entrepreneurial work of popular YouTubers and provides an explanation of the different ways in which they make a profit from their videos (both thanks to YouTube's monetization scheme and from external sources).

Chapter 2 proposes a methodological toolkit for the investigation of YouTubers' "edited self" and the discursive/rhetorical strategies they adopt in order to portray themselves as authentic. The main theoretical framework utilized in the book is computer-mediated discourse analysis (specifically Social Media Critical Discourse Studies) as it arguably represents a suitable tool to investigate the discursive construction of identities and digital performances of the self like those realized by YouTubers in front of their cameras and virtual audiences.

The following chapters explore the concept of authenticity within the YouTube communities previously described. *Chapter 3* is devoted to the analysis of Science videos produced by young scientists and academics who exploit the platform (besides as a means to earn money) to transfer and share information with the lay public [5]. Although they are the least popular micro-celebrities the study takes into account, they play a significant role in that they are representatives of a new Science Participation Model, which portrays general audiences as dynamically involved in Science communication and in the process of knowledge dissemination. Famous YouTube scientists depict themselves as authentic by establishing a discursive distinction between themselves as real and passionate (and implicitly economically disinterested) Science lovers and professional Science communicators who have no emotional involvement with the subject and are therefore portrayed as "inauthentic".

Chapter 4 examines the language strategies adopted by another category of users, that of Stay-at-Home Mums or SAHMs, who have traditionally been considered as passive subjects and have now found an opportunity to make their voices heard through new media platforms such as YouTube. Their videos represent an interesting object of study because the status of this group of users is ambiguous: even though they are self-proclaimed non-working mothers, they can nonetheless be considered as online entrepreneurs. Well-known YouTube SAHMs base their authenticity claims on the assumption that, unlike mainstream

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[5] Riboni (2019) examines the same videos selected for this chapter, but the analysis carried out here is original and cannot be found in any other publications.

media, they can provide a genuine account of what it really means to be a Stay-at-Home Mum.

Chapter 5 analyses the most commercially successful community of practice among those selected for this research, i.e. that of makeup artists[6]. The description of the rhetorical strategies of this specific group of YouTubers is particularly complex: not only do the latter use language in order to appear as genuine and possibly hide or downplay any personality trait that may be perceived as inauthentic, but they also circulate makeup discourse which focuses on possible ways and products that alter people's authentic appearance. The last section of the volume provides a compare-and-contrast approach to the results obtained in the three previous chapters and outlines the main similarities and differences concerning the discursive representation of authenticity across the three YouTube communities of practice selected for this study.

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[6] §§ 5.3, 5.4 and 5.5 are loosely based on Riboni 2017a and 2017b.

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1.
Background

This chapter sets the stage for the book by introducing the main notions around which it is organized and by providing some basic knowledge on youtubing as an emerging profession. It starts with an exploration of the multifaceted relation among authenticity, social media, and self-branding, together with an account of the various ways in which YouTubers generate affiliation and built rapport with their audience, thus successfully promoting themselves. The chapter continues with an elucidation of YouTube's business model and the strategies and tools that allow content creators to generate revenue from their videos. The final sections contain an overview of the history and a definition of the term "authenticity", as well as an explanation of the expression "emergent authenticity". More specifically, the concluding part of the chapter illustrates what "emergent authenticity" means in the field of Tourism Studies, where it originates, and argues that this concept can be repurposed for the categorization of YouTube communication practices.

1.1. Authenticity and self-branding on social media

A salient aspect of late-modern societies is the endless display of the self. Willing or not, we are constantly exposed to the world's gaze and, as a result, we are continually engaged in identity construction practices. Issues regarding identity have certainly not emerged in the current historical period: people have always offered performances of the self for the benefit of others, who become their audience. In the same vein, scholars and thinkers have always been preoccupied with identifying "the real self", a blurry construct difficult to pinpoint because of its mediated nature. However, what has possibly changed over the last

few decades is the degree to which the display of the self has perme-
ated the Western world, the ways in which this seemingly market-free
phenomenon has been increasingly hybridized with marketing and
(self-)branding values, and the technological advancements that have
concurred in producing these effects. Since its very beginning, hegem-
onic Net discourse has portrayed the new electronic *medium* as a tool for
individual self-expression: social media researcher Alice Marwick notes
that one of the earliest webgenres to celebrate the latter, the "e-zine"
(which appeared in the 1990s), was deeply affected by the DYI (Do It
Yourself) culture, which encouraged people to make their own culture
and stop consuming what was already made by others (Marwick 2013a).
The DYI ethos was typical of the punk and zine culture from which
e-zines originated, but the migration of the genre of the printed zine
into the digital sphere progressively eroded some of the principles of the
anti-capitalist philosophy and rhetoric around "selling out":

> The ethic of "doing it yourself", of learning from others without a profit
> motive, of self-expression, and of focusing on obscure interests and sharing
> personal experiences, became part of the creative fabric of Web 2.0 at the
> same time that it was depoliticized. (Marwick 2013a, 41)

The Web 2.0 boom, which dates back to the mid 2000s and represents
another milestone in the history of the Net, took place in the Silicon
Valley area, whose political sensibility "of a decidedly libertarian bent,
espousing self-improvement, meritocracy, and 'work-life balance' left
visible traces in Internet culture" (*ibid.*, 50). As a consequence, social
media discourses seem to have absorbed "a peculiar mix of entrepreneur-
ial capitalism, technological determinism, and digital exceptionalism,
which frames everything from photo-sharing websites to casual gaming
as potential 'game-changers'" which is rooted in Northern Californian
libertarianism (*ibid.*, 5). The outcomes of this ideological stance include
a fierce competition for social benefits by gaining visibility and atten-
tion: to increase their social status, users have to craft a successful online
persona to present to their virtual audience thus efficiently marketing
themselves, not dissimilarly from brands and celebrities (*ibid.*) [1].

Since "[t]he technical mechanisms of social media reflect the values
of where they were produced: a culture dominated by commercial
interest" (*ibid.*), the digital performances of the self realized by content
creators cannot but include a heavily commodified component which

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[1] The importance of the ordinary/celebrity status is commented upon in the
reminder of this paragraph.

may, however, compromise their credibility. In other words, in order to acquire fame, social media users constantly display their self, a process which requires carefully monitoring and is everything but spontaneous; at the same time, they have to make sure that their *persona* appears sincere so as to be able to attract public recognition. The issue of how to obtain this difficult balance calls into question other issues, including that of authenticity, which, in this context, seems to be a key notion.

Authenticity may represent an elusive concept but it is also a crucial value that significantly influences human relations, online as well as offline[2]. Whereas establishing whether authenticity is something that exists within or outside commercial spaces such as YouTube is up for debate and will be investigated in the remainder of the book, there seems to be general agreement on the fact that appearing authentic is of remarkable importance in the "study and practice of strategic or integrated communication and its specialized fields" (Molleda 2009, 90) in the domains of social media, as well as advertising, marketing/branding and self-branding.

As regards social media and more specifically YouTube, a plethora of scholars belonging to different disciplines have highlighted that the authentic is possibly the most sought for value on the platform; according to anthropologist (and YouTube academic celebrity) Michael Wensch, "if you could name a core value on YouTube it's authenticity" (2008; cf. also Young 2007; Kennedy 2019). YouTube scholar Michael Strangelove adds that

> Claims that YouTube offers a more authentic experience abound on the Internet. Although these claims raise a host of largely unsolved epistemological issues about the nature of the 'real', they nonetheless represent significant social facts. (Strangelove 2010, 65)

Communication Studies specialist Brooke Duffy stresses the bond between authenticity and ordinariness (cf. also Tolson 2001; Lagerwey 2017, 118):

> The shifting technologies and economies of media in the early 21st century have ostensibly given rise to a new instantiation of authenticity: the incorporation of 'real' people as agents in the mediated public sphere. [...] Meanwhile, digital technologies have made it possible for ordinary individuals to become cultural producers who participate in – and increasingly create – media and advertising campaigns. (Duffy 2013, 135)

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[2] Cf. § 1.4.

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Maybe paradoxically, though, the construction of authenticity which characterizes the communication practices of ordinary people who become successful on the Internet are rather similar to those featured in celebrity discourse (Marshall 2010). Global Studies expert Theresa Senft coined the expression "micro-celebrity" precisely to refer to those strategies users resort to in order to present themselves as a coherent, commodified packages to online audiences, thus acquiring remarkable popularity and followship (2008). Expanding Senft's inquiry into micro-celebrity techniques, Marwick notes that "even in online environments saturated with celebrity culture and marketing rhetoric [...] authenticity becomes a way for individuals to differentiate themselves not only from each other but from other forms of media" (2013a; cf. also 2013b). It is important to note that both ordinariness (cf. Tolson 2001) and micro-celebrity are something that have to be worked at and performed, not a pre-requisite of the individual. The interplay of these two apparently dichotomous statuses seems strategic in arising interest and attracting attention.

In this context, the strict interrelation between authenticity, online success and (self-)branding strategies should not come as a surprise. Marketing and branding scholarship focuses on the tension between authenticity and inauthenticity (Brown 2001) and identifies the former as an important "selling point" (van Nuenen 2015, 15) as well as a "driver of source credibility" (Tran and Strutton 2014; Chapple and Cownie 2017). Moreover, branding theory dictates "that the basis for contemporary branding is transparency and authenticity, that market-ers should 'never try to trick the consumer'" (Banet-Weiser 2012, 213). As a consequence, brand managers are advised to rely on authenticity because it shapes a unique brand identity and may provide a favourable association (Gundlach and Neville 2011, 486; cf. also Keller 1993). In this regard, Murtola and Fleming observe that

> [a]n important element of this business version of authenticity is the way in which it is structured by a fundamental absence [...] the assumption that all is presently not authentic and that something is missing and needs to be addressed. The same is discernible in the endless range of authentic com-modities available on the market, ready to respond to consumers' cravings for an authentic experience. (Murtola and Fleming 2011, 2)

As previously pointed out, authenticity is crucial not only as far as brand-ing is concerned, but also when it comes to self-branding. Self-branding can be described as an activity involving "the construction of a meta-narrative and meta-image of self through the use of cultural meanings

and images drawn from the narrative and visual codes of the mainstream cultural industries. The function of the branded self is purely rhetorical, its goal is to produce profit" (Hearn 2008, 194). This "persona produced for public consumption" expresses a "self, which continually produces itself for competitive circulation" (Wernick 1991, 192). Against the current backdrop of marketization and commodification, "the self today is an entrepreneurial self, a self that's packaged to be sold" (Deresiewicz 2011). As a consequence, the spreading of self-branding practices on social media is unsurprisingly conspicuous. As Khamis *et al.* write:

> This phenomenon is fuelled by at least three interrelated forces: the extent to which social media proceeds without the gamut of gatekeepers that otherwise determines and limits content flows; audiences increasingly predisposed to 'ordinary' people in the spotlight; and a cultural economy that contours almost everything (including conceptions of the self) along consumerist lines. (Khamis *et al.* 2017, 7)

Self-branding on social media "significantly extends the potential for fame and celebrity" because it enables the person/brand to be "consolidated as audiences/followers, fans embed it within their own individualized media flows through likes, shares and comments" (*ibid.*, 6). This type of practice involves a "particular emphasis on the construction of identity as a product to be consumed by others, and on interaction which treats the audience as an aggregated fan base to be developed and maintained in order to achieve social or economic benefit" (Page 2012, 182). Marwick uses the expression "edited self" to refer to this online identity which has to be both business-friendly and carefully monitored (2013a, 194-197). However, what determines the success of self-branding is the degree to which the individual is able to convey an image of authenticity (Kennedy 2019, 187; cf. also Duffy 2013; Marwick 2013a; McQuarrie *et al.* 2013; Genz 2014). Social media users who become online celebrities appear "to create engagement that feels authentic while still privileging market exchange" (Banet-Weiser 2012, 38).

In spite of the deeply commercial nature of the Net, Web 2.0 discourses have constructed social media as a genuine and credible alternative to corporate broadcasting media for decades. Mainstream media have been heavily criticized because of their vested political and economic interests, while disaffectionate publics have increasingly turned to Internet genres which appear more interactional (and therefore more democratic) as well as more authentic. Within online content, however, an additional discursive distinction is made between user-generated and professionally generated content. Although professionals can rely on

advanced production skills and superior financial resources, what is created and shared by amateurs is generally regarded as more trustworthy and enjoys a comparable popularity. This accounts for the appreciation and concomitant spread of the low-fi aesthetic which dominates user-generated video content on social media platforms. Amateurish YouTube posts (or, to be more exact, posts that aim at coming across as amateurish) are "uncut, coarse-grained, and without any intentional dramatic composition" (Reichert 2014, 104-105) because they have to appear as the product of a spontaneous effort, made by someone with possibly limited funds and technological means. This has led some to contend that "YouTube has created a new visual culture based on the original amateur aesthetics" (Léon and Bourk 2018, 4) which may be considered as "the dominant form of early twenty-first-century videography" (Lister *et al.* 2009, 227). In this respect, Michael Strangelove highlights the development of genres of movies as well as of TV program formats that attempt to mimic the realism of amateur videos:

> Styles of representation are shared by both television and video, and increasingly so. Thus, we cannot simply declare that amateur video has a style, a set of practices, or an aesthetic, that better represents truth and reality than television does. Indeed, within YouTube it is becoming increasingly difficult to distinguish amateur from professional productions. The video industry is getting better at mimicking the amateur mode, while continual improvements in domestic video technology make it easier for amateurs to emulate professional production values. YouTube, television, and film all provide numerous examples of how difficult it can be to distinguish between amateur and commercial modes of video production. (Strangelove 2010, 173)

To conclude, this paragraph has provided insights into the crucial role that authenticity plays in social media discourses, especially with reference to the branding and self-branding domains. Ordinariness and amateurship markers contribute to the online construction of the authentic *persona*, and some of them seem to have been tactically adopted by PGC (Professionally Generated Content) and other media, too. As a result, the distinction between professional and non-professional content is increasingly becoming more difficult to operate.

1.2. AUTHENTICITY IN MEDIATED PUBLIC DISCOURSE: PARASOCIAL FEATURES, HOMOPHILY, AND THE "AUDIENCE DILEMMA"

Scholars in the field of social media (self-)branding affirm that, for authenticity to be used as a strategic self-promotion tool, users not only have to successfully represent themselves as genuine, but they also need to be able to build rapport with their audience which is perceived as authentic. One of the key factors that gives viewers the impression that they are engaged in a genuine relationship with content creators is the conversational quality of their videos. Although the conversationality of mass media discourse has been described as "simulated" (cf. Goffman 1981), it is nonetheless strategically used to make public members feel they are in a "parasocial" relationship with their favourite YouTubers (Horton and Wohl 1956). Parasocial relationships have been studied with regard to media celebrities. One crucial aspect which sets them apart from dialogical relationships is that they lack reciprocity: the media *persona* is in the advantageous position of text producer whereas the members of the audience cannot respond. The interaction is therefore "one-sided, non dialectical, controlled by the performer, and not susceptible of mutual development" (*ibid.*, 215), but fans respond to media figures as if they were personal acquaintances (Giles 2002; Marwick 2015, 139). Popular YouTube personalities, just like celebrities from other media, cultivate parasocial attributes in order to maintain the illusion of a two-way relationship with their public; Ferchaud *et al.* (2018) have investigated the ways in which the parasocial attributes of perceived realism and authenticity affect the creation of parasocial relationships between top YouTubers and their audience and they have found that (once again) authenticity plays a crucial role on the platform, especially with regard to generating followship. Marwick notes that since "[s]ocial media transform the parasocial into the potentially social" due to their technological affordances, which favour interaction, emotional ties between celebrities and fans are increased (2015, 139).

Another element which may strengthen the rapport between audience and famous content creators is homophily. Homophily is "the degree to which people who interact are similar in beliefs, education, social status and the like" (Eyal and Rubin 2003, 80). One's perception of other people has been recognized a key element affecting interaction and, as a consequence, the presence of homophilic feelings increases communicative effectiveness (McCroskey *et al.*, 1975). In their study on YouTubers' popularity and influence, Ladhari *et al.* (2020) investigate the possible connection between being famous on the platform and

being able to evoke a sense of homophily in the audience and conclude that the two are strictly interrelated.

Arguably, one of the most challenging aspects of establishing a relationship and promoting affiliation with a YouTube audience has to do with the type of *medium*. The advent of the Internet has brought about an extension in participation framework which means that "[p]otentially the WWW provides a global audience to anything that is published on it" (Garzone 2007, 20).Whereas this may benefit social media users such as YouTubers, whose posts may, in theory, reach any surfer of the Web [3], the virtually unlimited nature of the public often gives rise to the so-called "audience dilemma". This expression was introduced by Michael Wensch in his 2008 lecture *An Anthropological Introduction to YouTube* (regarded as one of the most foundational scientific works on the platform besides being an extremely popular YouTube video). In his talk, Wensch dubs "audience dilemma" a particular problem experienced by content creators (especially beginners) when they have to address the camera and anticipate the context they will be speaking to, even though this context is uncertain and the possible audience virtually comprised of billions of users (Wesch 2008; cf. also Spyer 2013; Riboni 2017). This difficulty is strictly connected to the type of communication promoted by YouTube, which appears to foster conversational and inter-active participation (Burgess and Green 2009) and for which a number of (sometimes somewhat diverging) definitions have been proposed. Marta Dynel employs the expression "mass-mediated monologues" to refer to the popular video category of vlogs, and contends that, even though the texts delivered by users in front of their cameras are essentially mono-logic, they have to be considered as examples of one-to-many interaction because, differently from self-talk, they are intended to be heard by other people (2014, 41). Michael Boyd is more cautious and prefers the term "self-mediated quasi-interaction" to stress the fact that YouTube's communicative practices can be considered "almost interactional" (2008, 39).

Whatever degree of interactivity one may attribute to YouTube communication, its conversationality (as previously noted) is what confers authenticity to it. This is rather paradoxical, if one considers that in order to achieve this effect, content creators rely on language strategies whose utilization is meant to appear spontaneous but which is carefully monitored instead. Many of these strategies belong to a discursive fea-

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[3] The distinction between those who Goffman identifies as "ratified participants" and those who are simple "bystanders" (1981) does not really apply in the online environment (Garzone 2007, 20).

ture that Norman Fairclough calls "synthetic personalization", "a compensatory tendency [used] to give the impression of treating each of the people 'handled' *en masse* as an individual" (1989, 62). Synthetic personalization has been identified as an increasingly pervasive characteristic of mass media discourse and does not only pertain to the online world. It represents a means to feign solidarity, to allege to relate to each individual member of the audience while collectively addressing the public:

> Synthetic personalization simulates solidarity: it seems that the more 'mass' the media become, and therefore the less in touch with individuals or particular groupings in their audiences, the more media workers and 'personalities' (including politicians) purport to relate to members of their audience as individuals who share large areas of common ground. (*ibid.*, 195)

On YouTube, popular users – including those who have hundreds of thousands (if not millions!) of subscriptions – resort to the rhetorical device of constantly and enthusiastically reminding their viewers of their importance and of their singularity in the eyes of the famous creators (Spyer 2013). On the linguistic level, the elements that give rise to synthetic personalization include "the use of response-demanding utterances (in particular, commands and questions), adjacency pairs (where the first part is absent-but-assumed, while the second part is sequentially implicated), and interpolated remarks" (Patrona 2015, 4). Conversational features and deictic expressions are also utilized in such a way as to simulate face-to-face interaction (Riboni 2017, 196). Finally, pronoun reference is strategic in constructing the viewer as an individual addressee. In this respect, Tolson observes that creators of YouTube makeup tutorials may address a singular you, but in two distinct ways: one which generically indicates anyone who may be interested in the video, and another one which is embedded in conversational direct address and "invite and imagine listener reciprocation, the latter variant being particularly common in young people's conversation today" (2010, 283). He finds that forms such as "you know" – which are representative of this second use of "you" – are typical of what Basil Bernstein defines "sympathetic circularity" (1971), a function of the language which aims at promoting the idea of an "intended complicity" between speaker and addressee. Bernstein singled out a number of structures (such as, for example, "you know", "you see" etc.) that are associated with this function and which serve the purpose of obtaining agreement from the text recipient; "[b]y means of this function, the speaker tries to make this desire overt, and gives the hearer the possibility to intervene and show

his/her agreement/disagreement, or lack of understanding, as the flow of speech proceeds, thus avoiding the non-preferred alternative of being interrupted" (Romero Trillo 2002, 90).

In conclusion, it appears that successful YouTubers who are able to become professionals carefully monitor their performances in front of their cameras and meticulously select the language they use in order to enter into a relationship with their audience. In spite of the simulated-ness of the interaction, viewers tend to emotionally respond to it as they perceive it as authentic. Rather unsurprisingly, only a limited number of users are able to efficiently cope with the audience dilemma and kindle feelings of emotional attachment in the public, but those who do may be able to obtain significant earnings from the platform. In the next paragraph I will explain how.

1.3. YouTubing as a profession

Although drawing sharp distinctions between amateur and professional production may not always be possible and may not be essential to understand YouTube's culture either (Burgess and Green 2009, 57), an explanation of how users generate profits from the platform and turn their video-sharing hobby into a remunerative profession may be neces-sary before moving on to the analysis of their content. Scholars have identified three main ways in which revenue can be obtained by means of the platform: through YouTube's monetization scheme, through the selling of branded merchandise and/or crowdfunding requests, and through endorsement deals and affiliation linking (cf. Kim 2012; Postigo 2014; Wu 2016; Casturà e Di Liddo 2017; Schwemmer and Ziewiecki 2018).

As far as monetization is concerned, it is important to preliminary identify the three main actors involved in it, that is to say audience (who navigates the platform in search for entertaining or informative posts), content creators (who aim at success and economic return) and advertis-ers (who isolate their YouTube's target demographics and orient their campaigns to them; Casturà e Di Liddo 2017, 120-121). YouTube itself obviously participates in this model as the fourth actor which reaps the largest financial reward. As Postigo writes: "The subscriber is the basic currency in this system. Their recruitment and retention translates into revenue for YouTube" (2014, 13). The current monetization scheme was introduced after Google's purchase of the platform as a consequence of

the former's plan to convert YouTube into a profitable product with a business model based on advertising (Schwemmer and Ziewiecki 2018, 2). In practice, YouTube's Partner Program (the name Google decided for this scheme) associates advertising messages to videos or YouTube pages and, "[b]ased on the number of views [...], the ad revenue is split between the service provider (YouTube) and the content provider (copyright owners)" (Kim 2012, 56: cf. also, *inter alii*, Burgess and Green 2009, 56; Wasko and Erickson 2009). In order to cater to a wide range of marketing requirements, the platform offers numerous advertising formats such as display or overlay ads, skippable and non-skippable video ads (that can appear before, during or after the video), bumper ads ("non-skippable video ads of up to 6 seconds that must be watched before your video can be viewed"), and sponsored cards ("content that may be relevant to [the] video, such as products featured in the video. Viewers will see a teaser for the card for a few seconds"; YouTube Help 2020). Access to the Partner Program is not unrestricted: in order to be eligible to apply, users must have reached a threshold of 1,000 subscribers and 4,000 valid public watch hours over the last 12 months (*ibid.*).

Besides the monetization scheme, other YouTube-based earning sources include the sale of branded objects such as stickers, t-shirts, mugs and gadgets. This type of business may not be particularly innovative, but it strengthens the identity of the channel (Casturà e Di Liddo 2017, 126). Crowdfunding is also very widespread on the platform; usually, money generated through this kind of request is employed to finance video production and channel management (*ibid.*).

Endorsement deals represent the most lucrative endeavor of professional YouTubers whose profits typically start with the platform to subsequently include sponsorship contracts with brands. The latter normally enter the picture only after users have acquired a certain popularity and have generated affiliation with their public, thus capitalizing on their labour. Popular creators' fame within their communities confers them the role of opinion leaders and makes them rather suitable to influence the purchasing preferences of their vast audiences of followers (McQuarrie *et al.* 2013; Uzunoğlu and Misci Kip 2014); consequently, they are often paid to incorporate and endorse products in their videos, thus working as digital influencers (cf., *inter alii*, Uzunoğlu and Misci Kip 2014; Khamis *et al.* 2017; Schwemmer and Ziewiecki 2018). Whereas the use of paid promotion was unregulated in the first decade of the platform, in 2015 the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) introduced the obligation for social media influencers to clearly disclose their financial relationship to the products and brands they mention. In particular,

YouTube requires its content creators to check a related setting box when they include endorsement or product placements in their videos (YouTube Help 2020) so that viewers can be protected against deceptive marketing strategies.

YouTube endorsement marketing normally takes three forms: "(1) direct sponsorship where the content creator partners with the sponsor to create videos, (2) affiliated links where the content creator gets a commission resulting from purchases attributable to the content creator, and (3) free product sampling where products are sent to content creators for free to be featured in a video" (Wu 2016, 1). Explicitly sponsored videos are made "with the exclusive purpose to market a brand or product, and the sponsoring company pays the YouTuber a flat fee, a percentage of sales resulting from the video, or a specified amount per number of views on the video" (*ibid.*, 7). Instead, videos contain affiliated links when "the YouTuber is part of a company's affiliate program, where purchases made through a specific URL or coupon code is attributed to the YouTuber, and the YouTuber is compensated with a commission on the sale" (*ibid.*, 9). Affiliate marketing programs may be associated with very famous websites such as Amazon ("Amazon Associates"; https://affiliate-program.amazon.com/) and Ebay ("Ebay Partner Network"; https://partnernetwork.ebay.com/). Finally, free product samples are often sent to content creators for review, with the aim of increasing brand exposure "in hopes of encouraging the YouTuber to feature such products in a video" (*ibid.*, 10). Depending on the kind of agreement existing between the single influencer and the brand, the former may work under the contractual proviso that s/he enjoys the liberty of not mentioning the free samples s/he has been gifted with or of giving them a negative review. Expressing unflattering opinions on goods allows professional users to appear trustworthy and authentic in the eyes of the audience, but does not put them in a favourable light with companies employing digital influencers. As a consequence, they often find themselves "juggling financial interests and viewers' trust" (*ibid.*, 11).

Those YouTubers who are able to efficiently do so and can rely on a vast number of acolytes habitually join forces with the so-called Multi-Channel Networks (MCN). The latter are comparable to traditional management agencies because they perform the role of intermediary between the content creator and the platform and large media corporations: their main activities include "selling advertising, management, repping and promotion, and can thus be considered as a YouTube-specific counterpart to older intermediary professions like ad agencies and

talent agents" (Lobato 2016, 350; cf. also Arthurs *et al.* 2018, 7). At the same time, though, they are also "unlike anything that media industry research has dealt with before" (Lobato 2016, 350), in that they also act as vertical aggregators. This means that they combine their customers' channels and group them according to their main themes and topics, often providing *ad hoc* advertising packages to be used in banners or other monetization tools (Casturà e Di Liddo 2017, 127-128). Their commissions on channels net revenues vary from 20% to 50% (as far as the UK and the USA are concerned; *ibid.*, 128). The presence of multi-channel networks on YouTube is as increasing as it is controversial. As Ramon Lobato maintains: "There is no doubt that the rise of MCNs reflects the deepening commercialization of YouTube and the wider logistics of commodification that are integral to Web 2.0" (2016, 349).

Such commodification process seems so deeply ingrained in the platforms' communicative practices as well as in its technological setup and affordances that it has extended to levels previously not impacted by it, such as phonological/prosodic level (Beck 2015). In an interview with journalist Julie Beck from the newspaper *The Atlantic*, computer-mediated communication scholar Naomi Baron identifies the linguistic components of the "YouTube voice", i.e. a speaking style that emphasizes certain elements in order to attract and keep the audience attention, especially in topical moments: overstressed vowels, epenthetic vowels, long vowels, long consonants, and aspiration. Whereas these strategies are not exclusive to YouTube and may partly be borrowed from "a trend toward informality in TV newscasting" (*ibid.*), recent research has revealed that they may have something to do with users' efforts to be legible to the site's algorithms using the YouTube affordance of auto-generated textual Closed Captions (CC; Bishop 2019). Originally (and officially) developed as a means to help viewers with hearing disabilities, CC appear as textual subtitles on videos[4]. Since they are auto-generated, their accuracy varies depending on clearness of enunciation and presence (or absence) of background noise: a mispronounced word may not be interpreted correctly by the software, which would thus generate a wrong caption. This may end up having a negative impact on the video popularity because CC "is valued as meaningful data and used in increasing accuracy of video searches on the platform; [...] these generated transcripts are also utilized to assign relevancy and visibility to YouTube

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[4] Scholars in the field of critical disabilities studies have been very critical of the high valuation of CC metadata, contending that "platforms have misplaced priorities when it comes to accessibility" (Bishop 2019, 28).

videos" (*ibid.*, 22). In order to adjust their content so as to make it more palatable to the YouTube algorithm, professional YouTubers adopt a number of tactics which also possibly include the elements singled out by Baron to design the "YouTube voice". In her study of beauty vlogs, Bishop dubs "vlogging parlance" the combination of the strategies users rely upon in order to make single words stand out and be correctly processed by the CC software so that their speech can easily become readable (and, as such, picked up by the platform's algorithm):

> Vlogging parlance is broadly defined as the strategic verbal expressions, language choice, speech pace, enunciation, and minimization of background noise by vloggers that are informed by a desire to optimize platform visibility, in part through generating accurate auto-translated CC metadata. (Bishop 2019, 23)

In practice, this means that if viewers use YouTube's searchbox to look for videos containing "smoky eye" makeup tutorials, the platform will retrieve not only "videos titled and tagged with 'smoky eye', but also vlogs that feature beauty YouTubers *repeatedly stating* the words 'smoky eye' *aloud*, *clearly* and in a translatable manner, *and in a CC recognized language*" (*ibid.*, 22; emphasis added). The use of the repetition of "the same words or phrases so often that it sounds unnatural" has been identified as an efficient promotional technique by Google itself, which has defined it as "keyword stuffing". In this context, constructing a credible and authentic *persona* while making oneself algorithmically visible appears (once again) as a rather complicated task, a managing of different if not antithetical objectives.

    In conclusion, the explanation of how YouTube's business model works has highlighted the decisive role authenticity plays as a means to generating revenues. At the same time, the exploration of the different ways in which users can become economically successful has revealed the difficulties of coming across as really authentic and genuine may entail, especially given the "significant degree of pressure for vloggers [...] to optimize their content down to minutia of self-presentations" (*ibid.*, 21). In this perspective, authenticity appears as a very compelling (albeit complex) object of study.

1.4. Authenticity matters

After having stressed the decisive role authenticity plays in social media and self-branding discourses, I now move on to providing an explanation of this notion and an illustration of how it can be applied to this study. As a matter of fact, aiming to offer a description of the discourses of authenticity on YouTube, this book implicitly contributes to the ongoing discussion of what "authenticity" really means. Sarah Banet-Weiser, the author of *Authenticity: The Politics of Ambivalence in a Brand Culture*, highlights that the "definition [of authenticity] has been the subject of passionate debates involving far-reaching thinkers, from Plato to Marx, from Andy Warhol to Lady Gaga" (2012, 10). Numerous labels (often organized in contrasting pairs or triplets) have been proposed to delineate this notion (cf. Beverland and Farrelly 2009): original and staged (Mac-Cannell 1973), symbolic (Culler 1981), emergent (Cohen 1988), existential (Wang 1999), fabricated (Belk and Costa 1998), iconic, indexical, and hypothetical (Grayson and Martinec 2004), legitimate (Kates 2004), sincere (Beverland 2006), approximate and moral (Leigh *et al.* 2006), literal or objective (Beverland *et al.* 2008).

The fact that so many categories have been introduced in the relevant literature suggests that this concept seems to escape definite definitions and is difficult to pinpoint. As a result, critical inquiry into the idea of authenticity appears to provide shared meanings while also opening up problematic questions. As noted by sociolinguist Nikolas Coupland, although "[w]e need confident theory and robust empirical investigations organized in relation to [authenticity], [...] across the literature as a whole there are [...] unreconciled differences of stance and interpretation" (2014, 15). Some even go as far as to contend that authenticity has to be considered as a "conceptual error in earlier research that we can now set aside" or treat it as "a pseudo-concept, one that doesn't stand up to critical scrutiny, or one that somehow reflects badly on its user" (*ibid.*). Having decided to carry out a book-length volume on authenticity (on top of including this word in the title), I cannot but disagree with the last part of this statement. Elusive as this notion may be, research on it should nonetheless be carried out because

> [a]uthenticity matters. It remains a quality of experience that we actively seek out, in most domains of life, material and social. The conditions of late-modernity, where these apply, certainly make this quest more complex, and perhaps ultimately impossible, but we have not stopped monitoring our lives against criteria of 'truthfulness', 'reality', 'consistency', 'coher-

ence' and so on, where I take 'authenticity' to be a superordinate concept. We value authenticity and we tend to be critical of pseudo-authenticity. We dislike people who dissimulate or are 'above themselves'. [...] Sociolinguistics has a role to play in the analysis of how we engage with authenticity. (Coupland 2003, 417)

The question of authenticity acquired topicality in the Enlightenment period and still dominates in the present historical period because it concerns the issue of how the single individual can express his/her genuine self in connection to the rest of society without being "imprisoned in social expectations or lost in a masquerade of parading persona" (Lowney 2009, 34). The tension between socialization and self-discovery was turned into a commercially exploitable resource during the first decades of the twentieth century with the emergence of the consumer culture (Duffy 2013, 135). Consequently, the relation between mass production and authenticity became a relevant topic of investigation. Walter Benjamin depicts such relation as untenable due to the fact that mechanical reproduction of objects deprives them of their *aura*: only the original can therefore be defined as "authentic" ([1936] 1992). Later on, in the Sixties and Seventies of the last century, research on authenticity underwent a significant increase. One of the main philosophers of those decades, Theodor W. Adorno, focuses his attention on the use of the "jargon of authenticity" and contends that distinguishing between "authentic" and "inauthentic" is mainly a linguistic operation; he laments that authenticity's jargon is often employed by members of privileged subcultures not to introduce meaningful distinctions, but rather as a way to signal affiliation ([1964] 1973). Literary critic Lionel Trilling instead observes that the concept of authenticity is central to our contemporary moral life and describes it as the individual's genuine self which can be realized outside cultural and social norms (1972). Studies such as those of Berger and Luckmann, which emphasize the social construction of reality and highlight the fact that discourse assigns ordered meaning to collective human experience (1966), have paved the way for new interpretations of authenticity, which portray the latter as an individually negotiated and socially constructed concept (Cohen 1988). In line with this understanding of authenticity, Andrew Potter maintains that

[a]uthenticity is a way of talking about things in the world, a way of making judgments, staking claims, and expressing preferences about our relationships to one another, to the world, and to things. But those judgments, claims or preferences *don't pick out real properties in the world*. (Potter 2010, 13; emphasis added)

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Whereas the current debate about definitions and categorizations is still very lively, "[t]here is widespread agreement that authenticity is a socially constructed interpretation of the essence of what is observed rather than properties inherent in an object" (Beverland and Farrelly 2009, 839; cf. also Holt 1998; Grayson and Martinec 2004; Thompson *et al.* 2006; Gundlach and Neville 2012). By and large, contemporary research on authenticity concurs that religions, nations, or linguistic communities cannot determine univocal and fixed criteria to designate it, as "our standards and expectations of the Real are constantly evolving, and the construction of the artifice of authenticity depends on the context" (Cobb 2014, 6; cf. also Grazian 2003).

Against this backdrop, sociolinguistics tackles the subject of the many diverse relationships existing between language and authenticity (Thornborrow 2001; van Leuwen 2001; Coupland 2014). Theo van Leuwen stresses that the question scholars should pursue is "not: 'How authentic *is* this?', but 'Who takes this as authentic and who does not?', and 'On the basis of which visible or audible cues are these judgements made?'" (2001, 396). These questions are related to other pivotal issues, namely the issue of authenticity in the domain of personal identity and the issue of authenticity in mediatized discourse. Thornborrow and van Leuwen note that, due to technological developments and the changing media landscape, the concept of authenticity "must be examined more explicitly and more critically" (van Leuwen 2001, 397) because it has come into crisis. The multifacetedness of contemporary identity practices, especially in our heavily mediatized reality, makes the matter of establishing what counts as "authentic" all the more challenging. With special regard to the online dimension, García-Rapp relates that

> [i]dentity, as well as authenticity, is not objective or stable, but rather performative, contextual and shifting. Both concepts are in practice contingent and dynamic, because people conscious and unconsciously 'work on them', modify them and 'learn by doing' in their various social worlds. There are different ways of 'being oneself', according to situational constraints (with family, friends, at work, at a party) and all are 'real' and insofar authentic (Haimson and Hoffmann 2016). Being yourself is a performance which can be cynic or sincere (Goffman 1959), and it is also performed online by regular users (Thomas 2014). (García-Rapp 2017, 131)

She also points out that, in spite of the current intellectual climate which (as mentioned above) depicts identities as context-dependant, hybrid, and socially constructed, Internet discourses presuppose that an online "unique and stable core, a true, discoverable authentic self"

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exists (cf. Tolson 2001). As a consequence, content creators posting on Web platforms such as YouTube typically come under scrutiny by their audiences, who are interested in the "real", "authentic" identity hidden behind the mask of the public persona. Scholarly work on the topic, however, cannot but start from the awareness of the difficulty of providing categorizations for this continuously shifting and multi-layered "authentic" self. The interplay between different identities (one of the main focuses of this analysis) can be strategically turned into a vehicle of authenticity, provided public and private, "genuine" images are organically harmonized and do not come across as counterfeit.

1.5. The notion of "emergent authenticity"

As suggested at the end of the previous paragraph, although Internet and social media discourses may render the notion of authenticity even more problematical than before, a certain tendency to use past categories to describe it still persists. In particular, authenticity continues to be positioned as antithetical to market values as it "often indicates a non- or pre-commercialized space" (Marwick 2013a; cf. also Holt 1998; Potter 2010; Banet-Weiser 2012). This view has possibly gathered momentum from a relatively recent "move of authenticity from the realm of the political to the realm of the economic" (Heller 2014, 136), inherently bound up with the expansion of the commodification process:

> Commodification – or the transformation of a good into a product whose value is determined by the market – is a phenomenon that destroys the artifice of authenticity, even though all cultural products have a market value. (Cobb 2014, 6)

The binary logic that depicts authenticity "in contradistinction to crass excesses of commercial capitalism" (Marwick 2013a) is summed up by Lionel Trilling's statement that "money [...] is the principle of the inauthentic in human existence" (1972, 124). In the current historical phase marked by late neoliberalist hegemonic discourses and widespread consumerism, the contrast between the supposed "inauthenticity" of brand cultures and the alleged "realness" of non-commercial spaces appears remarkably stark.

However, this type of approach to the authentic is not universally accepted; in fact, it presently coexists with modern understandings which do not juxtapose it to marketization and commodification as they

envisage consumer goods as a way of expressing one's true self, of build-ing one's identity, and of indicating one's affiliations (Featherstone 1991; cf. also, *inter alii*, Banet-Weiser 2012; Marwick 2013a). For example, being an "authentic" punk may also involve the purchase of a certain kind of trousers or of old vinyls (Marwick 2013a). According to this second perspective, capitalist features and authenticity are not to be considered as mutually exclusive, but the latter "works in paradoxical tandem with the marketplace" (Cobb 2014, 5). Banet-Weiser contends that "it is more productive to situate brand cultures in terms of their ambivalence, where both economic imperatives and 'authenticity' are expressed and experienced simultaneously" (2012, 5). This latter inter-pretation not only rejects any dualism between authenticity and contem-porary commodity cultures, but it also portrays them as impossible to separate:

> Explaining brand culture as a sophisticated form of corporate appropria-tion, then, keeps intact the idea that corporate culture exists outside – indeed, in opposition to – "authentic" culture. (Banet-Weiser 2012, 8)

According to this viewpoint, authenticity is to be understood not as an absolute quality but rather as a spectrum on which identities and objects are position in accordance with their degree of genuineness.

The analysis carried out in this volume aims at providing further insights into the debate on whether authenticity discourses should be intended as sitting in opposition to commodification and branding discourses or not. Given the significantly promotional nature of Web genres as well as the ongoing "colonization" of social life by discourses associated with marketing and the production of goods (cf. Fairclough 1993), it is possible to hypothesize that social media audiences (or, in the case at hand, YouTube audiences) can find authenticity in online content because they entertain notions which are not in strict contraposition to market values. A possible way of validating this hypothesis may be to apply to YouTube discourses categories that conceptualize authenticity not as a feature that can be either present or absent, but in terms of the degree to which an online *persona* or an object possesses it.

A suitable theoretical framework for the investigation of authen-ticity on YouTube can be found in constructive theories of authentic-ity described in Tourism Studies. There are several reasons why these theories may be a fitting starting point for the development of a model of authenticity in the emerging field of professional youtubing. First of all, they consider of authenticity as a social construction (Cohen 1988), which is one of the main tenets of this volume. Secondly, they do not

hold a binary conception of authenticity but intend it as a continuum, which renders them suitable for the confirmation of the hypothesis that authenticity on YouTube is a scalar quality. More specifically, the (opportunely adjusted) notion of "emergent authenticity" appears to be particularly functional for the examination of YouTube communication practices which, as previously pointed out, are heavily affected by marketing and branding discourses. Scholar Erik Cohen introduced this expression in Tourism Studies to refer to the gradual shift from inauthenticity to authenticity which cultural products may undergo in the course of time:

> Since authenticity is not a primitive given, but negotiable, one has to allow for the possibility of its gradual emergence in the eyes of visitors to the host culture. In other words, a cultural product, or a trait thereof, which is at one point generally judged as contrived or inauthentic may, in the course of time, become generally recognized as authentic, even by experts [...]. (Cohen 1988, 379)

At the end of this process of gradual "authentication" tourists perceive objects and places as authentic and enjoy them as such: "even if the attraction site is not authentic, the tourist experience can be authentic" (Moscardo and Pearce 1986). The notion of "emergent authenticity" first appeared in the relevant literature at the end of the 1980s but it still has currency and is still adopted in contemporary Tourism Studies (cf., *inter alii*, Ivanovic 2014; Gavinelli e Zanolin 2019).

In Cohen's definition the role played by the tourist/decoder's imagination is pivotal and becomes instrumental in establishing the authenticity of a tourist destination or artefact. As indicated by Grayson and Martinec in their influential 2004 paper, "the perception of authenticity can depend on the simultaneous application of imagination and belief" (2004, 310). In the same vein, Belk and Costa utilize the expression "social construction of unreality" to refer to the kind of willing suspension of disbelief that they encountered in their observation of the reenactments of the fur-trade *rendezvous* held in the Rocky Mountain American West (2004, 232). These studies suggest that, in contemporary tourist practices, the distinction between reality and fiction is increasingly losing relevance, as what counts is the perception of the experience as "authentic" rather than its anchorage to actuality (Gavinelli e Zanolin 2019, 130).

Besides imagination, another feature of "emergent authenticity" of particular interest for the purposes of my investigation is the active participation of the tourist/decoder in the authentication process:

> The power to create and consolidate authenticity claims of [...] products does not only reside in encoders, but also in decoders: that is, they are product of an ongoing negotiation of meanings. (Molleda 2009, 90)

These two elements (imagination and active participation of the decoder) make the notion of "emergent authenticity" a ductile tool that can be utilized in other disciplinary domains. It has been adopted, for instance, in research dealing with the Japanese popular music genre of cover songs (Yano 2010), and, as already pointed out, it may be relied upon for the investigation of discourses of authenticity on YouTube. The heavily commodified communication practices which are typical of Internet genres such as the online video have become so widespread and "normalized" that it may be hypothesized that audiences no longer perceive them as inauthentic. For this reason they may be associated with the concept of "emergent authenticity". The analysis carried out in the following chapters aims at demonstrating that this is the case.

Finally, this study will borrow another insight from Tourism Studies, that is to say an alternative take on Erving Goffman's front-back opposition. In *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959), sociologist Goffman introduces the metaphor of the theater to describe human interaction. He maintains that social behavior is akin to a performance taking place in different spaces: front stage, back stage, and offstage (which is not a productive category for this research). Front stage behavior is adopted when the subject is aware that others are watching and thus reflects social and cultural norms and expectations. Front stage behavior is not linked to the identity, but to the *persona* which s/he presents to the audience. Those authenticity theories which envisage socialization as opposed to the expression of the "true self" tend to identify front stage as an inauthentic space. Conversely, when people engage in back stage behavior, they are less inhibited by social norms and act in ways that, although not totally unrelated to front stage performances, reveal a greater degree of freedom: Goffman depicts back stage regions as the intimate settings where people let their guard down and, to the extent it is possible, disclose their genuine, authentic identity. Tourism scholar Dean MacCannell proposes the overcoming of the distinction between front and back on account of the fact that he does not considers the latter to be more truly authentic than the former, but simply "staged" (1973; cf. also Cohen 1988). Just like "[i]t is always possible that what is taken to be entry into a back region is really entry into a front region that has been totally set up in advance for touristic visitation" (MacCannell 1973, 597), it is possible to imagine that the same

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dynamic may be at play in the YouTube videos which are the object of this study. Social media discourses typically stress the predominance of the back/private dimension over the front/public one, but the examination of the data set may indicate that, similarly to tourist destinations, what is portrayed as a back, improvised, authentic, space is instead the product of a careful construction, an instance of what MacCannell refers to as "staged authenticity" (*ibid.*).

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After setting the background to this research and introducing the main notions it hinges upon, in chapter 2 I shall turn to the illustration of analytical framework and the methodological toolkit adopted in the volume.

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2.
Computer-Mediated Discourse Analysis and Communicating Authenticity on YouTube: A Linguistic Perspective

This chapter sets out to illustrate the methodological framework utilized in the analysis of YouTubers' digital performances of the self. Given the *medium* where YouTube communication takes place, it is important to identify analytical categories that both account for the linguistic peculiarities of the electronic environment as well as the notion of "authenticity". Drawing on the assumption that the latter is a social construction, the chapter proposes a discursive approach to explore it. It briefly outlines the history of computer-mediated communication studies and singles out the analytical tools most suitable to carry out the scope and objectives of this investigation. Social Media Critical Discourse Studies (SM-CDS) are identified as the approach that can best serve these purposes, as it is informed by linguistic discussions of Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) and it is comprised of different but interconnected levels of description. The chapter then presents the *ad hoc* methodological toolkit devised for this analysis to finally close with the illustration of the issues and procedures regarding the corpus collection phase.

2.1. Linguistic perspectives on Internet language: the three waves of CMC Studies

The four decades from the 1980s have witnessed the emergence and growth of sociolinguistic research on computer-mediated communication. As noted by Bolander and Locher (2014, 16), the research *foci*

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have been progressively shifting in accord with the development of the medium, as technological changes have brought about new modes of CMC. Androutsopoulos (2006) has retrospectively identified three phases or "waves" characterizing the progress of CMC studies over time. By and large, it appears that CMC scholars have moved from an early interest in the technologically-conditioned elements characterizing Internet language to the growing recognition of the important role played by the interplay of social, cultural and contextual factors in shaping online communication (Herring 2008, 2643).

Scientific work published within the first phase (mid-1980s - mid-1990s) was mainly concerned with the justification and legitimation of its object of enquiry (Georgakopoulou and Spilioti 2016, 5). In this regard, Georgakopoulou (2006, 549) contends that "CMC has had to go through a process of delimiting boundaries, categorizing and typologizing before problematizing". In actual fact linguistic studies of CMC initially consisted of descriptivist accounts dealing with questions and classifications which may now appear as simplistic (Herring *et al.* 2013, 3): much research explored the issue of whether CMC should be treated and analyzed as a separate language variety (for which various terms where coined, one of the most popular being "Netspeak"; cf. Crystal 2001) and what its distinguishing and "unique features" were: studies dealing with emoticons, acronyms, abbreviations were very popular (*ibid.*). As these "unique features" are common across different modes and genres because they are linked to the affordances of the electronic environment, a deterministic approach to Internet language, seen as linguistically uniform, prevailed in the initial stages of CMC research.

Relatedly, much scholarly attention was devoted to the relationship of computed-mediated language to the speech and writing medium, a line of enquiry which has now been largely abandoned because CMC does not seem to fit into either. The means of production are similar in textual CMC and writing, but CMC possesses characteristics of orality along with characteristics of its own (Herring and Androutsopoulos 2015, 128). In line with studies that do not juxtapose speaking and writing but rather see them as situated along a continuum (e.g. Biber 1988), more and more analytical work has relied on the synchronous/asynchronous distinction to provide a description of the Internet language. The examination of the two basic modes of email (asynchronous) and chat (synchronous), which were very popular at the beginning of the 1990s, has possibly contributed to the acknowledgement that there was not one single variety of Internet language and has paved the way for research based on the assumption that language is used differently in different

types of CMC (Herring and Androutsopoulos 2015, 129) and stepping away from "homogenized and simplified conceptions of language use" (Androutsopoulos 2006, 420).

The second wave of CMC research developed in parallel to the growth of Web 2.0 environments. Georgakopoulou and Spilioti (2016, 5) contend that this stage was characterized by more celebratory accounts of CMC and its affordances. Researchers adopted a less naïve stance towards technological determinism to devote attention to Internet discourse patterns, including

> [...] pragmatic phenomena such as politeness [...], violation of relevance, and the performance of speech acts; interactional phenomena such as turn-taking, repairs, and topic establishment, maintenance, and drift [...]; and register phenomena such as gender styles, regional dialects, and in-group language practices characteristic of particular online communities. (Herring 2008, 2642)

This sort of linguistic phenomena requires to be studied through the analysis of language in context; as a consequence, the emergence of these new objects of enquiry led to the increasing awareness that it is the interplay of technological, social, and contextual factors that shapes computer-mediated communication practices (Androutsopoulos 2006, 421). Consequently, during this phase, mainly descriptivist approaches made way for socially relevant research and a new conceptualization of CMC appeared that was theorized within a discourse-focused framework (KhosraviNik 2014, 292).

In keeping with the traditions of discourse analysis, Susan Herring has introduced a new theoretical paradigm, that of Computer-Mediated Discourse Analysis (CMDA; Herring 1996, 2001) [1]. This paradigm, devised for the investigation of digital communication, primarily relies on discourse analytical tools and applies them to the new electronic environment. In her work, Herring calls for a socially and contextually sensitive discourse analysis and highlights the importance of abandoning medium-oriented approaches in favor of user/context-oriented approaches (Androutsopoulos 2006, 421; KhosraviNik 2014, 293). The emphasis on carrying out research that may have a social impact and is problem-oriented is indeed typical of discourse analysis and, more precisely, of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). In actual fact, computer-mediated discourse analysis distinguishes itself from mainstream CMC analytical approaches precisely because of its problem-orientedness and

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[1] Cf. § 2.2.

the priority it gives to contextually situated investigations (cf., *inter alii*, Androutsopoulos and Beißwenger 2008; Thurlow and Mroczek 2011; KhosraviNik 2014). CMDA no longer represents an instance of "Internet Linguistics", often imbued with technological determinism and whose main object of study were "the unique features" of "Netspeak": rather, it relies upon "contextual and particularistic analyses that shed light on how different contextual parameters shape and are evoked in the discourse of various types of CMC" (Georgakopoulou 2003, 2). As a consequence, the aim of CMDA is not so much to isolate characteristics and singularities of new Internet genres *per se*, but to investigate the ways in which language resources are appropriated in the digital environment by users or groups of users in order to carry out specific tasks:

> [...] the question is how these communication technologies are locally appropriated to enact a variety of discourse genres. Characteristic features of "the language of CMC" are now understood *as resources that particular (groups of) users might draw on in the construction of discourse styles in particular contexts*. (Androutsopoulos 2006, 421; emphasis added)

The introduction of the computer-mediated discourse analysis framework has had important repercussions on CMC theory and methodologies (*ibid.*). Within the CMDA paradigm, online communities are considered the social context of computer-mediated language practices; this methodology therefore appears to be suited to investigate language use within groups of social media content creators.

The third wave of CMC studies corresponds to the latest stages of development of the Web 2.0 and the discourse analysis of language resources associated with it. As noted by Page *et al.* (2014, 100), much research on CMDA was carried out before participatory Internet and the spread of Social Network Sites (SNSs) and content-sharing websites, but its methodological tools can arguably be applied to examine discourse in these new digital environments [2]. Web 2.0 discourse is characterized by the presence of "new types of *content*" (e.g. status updates, edits on wikis etc.), "new *contexts*" (e.g. social network sites relying on geographic location), "new *usage patterns*" (e.g. multiauthorship and joint discourse production) – which partially depend on the "new *affordances* made available by new communication technologies" – as well as "*user adaptations* to circumvent the constraints of Web 2.0 environments" (Herring 2013, 6; emphasis in the original).

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[2] That is why CMDA is adopted as the main analytical model of this study; cf. § 2.3.

Although it is now widely recognized that a sharp, clear-cut distinction between Web 1.0 and Web 2.0 does not exist, it can be stated that the degree in participation as well as in media convergence may represent the most significant differences between these two stages (Herring 2010; Androutsopoulos 2011, 281). Both constructs (participation and convergence) are not linguistic in themselves. In fact,

> [...] participation relates to the accessibility of localized, bottom-up production and distribution of online content, while convergence refers to the fusion of formerly distinct technologies and modes of communication in integrated digital environments. (Androutsopoulos 2011, 281)

However, participation and convergence can have crucial effects on online language use, as suggested by the terms "Discourse 2.0" and "Convergent Media Computer-Mediated Discourse" or "CMCMD" (Herring 2013): both definitions are used to indicate discourse in new digital environment but, whereas the former highlights the important changes that have taken place as regards participation frameworks, the latter stresses the shift "from occurrence in stand-alone clients such as emailers and instant messaging programs to juxtaposition with other content, often of an information or entertainment nature, in converged media platforms, where it is typically secondary, by design, to other information or entertainment-related activities" (*ibid.*, 5). Consequently, CMCMD studies show a consistent approach to "digital environments as multi-layered spaces" (Georgakopoulou and Spilioti 2016, 5).

The approach of "Discourse 2.0" focuses instead on the social and participatory Internet. Within the third wave of sociolinguistic research, "critical approaches to discourses and ideologies of digital communication are rapidly becoming focal concerns" (*ibid.*). As Internet language can be used as a lens through which to analyze human behavior, scholars have been increasingly mining users' textual resources to explore otherwise elusive concepts such as collaboration, community, identity etc. etc. (Herring 2008, 2642; cf. also 2004a). Web 2.0 platforms "incorporate user-generated content and social interaction, often alongside or in response to structures and/or (multimedia) content provided by the sites themselves" (Herring 2013, 4): the numerical increase in interactions as well as content sharing which parallels the expansion of this type of websites has led to a shift away from a traditional communication pattern "based on an authority that uni-directionally filters and delivers Internet content to the mass of users" (Yus 2011, 93) and the development of a more user-shaped evolution of electronic discourse (Locher 2014) as well as a networked communication pattern that also allows for

multiauthorship (Androutsopoulos 2011, 281). In addition, the rise of the participatory Web has brought about a new conception of the Internet as an "interpersonal resource rather than solely an information network" (Zappavigna 2012, 2). Likewise, notions of "emergence" and "performativity" have been gaining currency, particularly as a consequence of "an epistemological shift towards social constructivist understandings of language and practice" (Bolander and Locher 2014, 16).

Within this third strand of studies, a new model of theorization and operationalization of research combining principles of CDA with scholarship in social media has emerged, i.e. Social Media Critical Discourse Studies (SM-CDS; KhosraviNik 2014, 2017, 2018; KhosraviNik and Esposito 2018). The main proponent of this approach Majid KhosraviNik, a Digital Media and Discourse Studies scholar who developed his model of systematization of Social Media discourse. Aligning his methodological contribution with the problem-oriented and textually based CMDA tradition, KhosraviNik advocates for the incorporation of "significant interdisciplinary knowledge and conceptualization around nuances of digital practices and techno-discursive intricacies of cyberspace discursive practices" (KhosraviNik and Esposito 2018, 54). Social Media Critical Discourse Studies identify discourse, not technology, as their main object of analysis, as they are "not only interested in what happens in the media *per se* as a closed loop but also in how it may shape and influence the social and political sphere of our life worlds and vice versa" (*ibid.*, 55). Starting from the premise that "meanings are negotiated at the intersection of individuals, culture and media technology [...] digital critical discourse studies would be interested in both micro communicative patterns as well as the macro-discursive regimes which constitute the culture" (*ibid.*). Arguably, the emphasis SM-CDS place on the techno-discursive power of social media representations makes this new theoretical approach suitable for the investigation of YouTube performances of the self like those investigated in this volume [3].

Finally, one last word should be said about the use of the term "computer-mediated communication" itself. In light of the explosion of other new technologies (most notably mobile telephony) and with the evolution towards media integration, alternative definitions have been provided (e.g. "digital media", "new media", "keyboard-to-screen communication"). These new terminological frameworks underline that "communication technologies are increasingly moving beyond

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[3] Cf. § 2.2.

computers" (Herring 2013, 6), therefore the expression "technologically mediated communication" may probably represent a legitimate choice. However, as Scollon and Scollon (2004) contend, all discourse should be regarded as mediated – as an action performed through a medium by social actors – and its mediational means should be analyzed as historically and culturally shaped (Georgakopoulou 2006, 550). This kind of approach provides the advantage of "open[ing] up the scope and contextual enquiry into language choices on CMC allowing us to make connections between single communicative events and larger processes" (*ibid.*). As a result, both Georgakopoulou (2006) and Herring (2013, 7) argue that the adjective "computer-mediated" is still useful, "in that it makes the link to CMC and CMD transparent and is based on established tradition", therefore it will be adopted in the remainder of this volume.

To conclude this section and before illustrating the principal features of CMDA and SM-CDS, it ought to be stressed that the delineation of the specific research toolkit of this volume was made *ex post*, as the research it illustrates, in line with many previous CMDA analyses used in the investigations presented in this volume, "does not take as its point of departure a paradigm, but rather observations about online behaviors as manifested through discourse" (Herring 2004a, 354). In actual fact, preliminary pilot studies have been carried out before the ones described here in order to develop a method from the materials collected and their investigation. This is in line with the operational approach of DA, which is eminently problem-oriented and calls for methodological flexibility and the combined utilization of different analytical tools typical of different theoretical frameworks.

2.2. Computer-Mediated Discourse Analysis and Social Media Critical Discourse Studies

Sociolinguistic research investigating virtual communities typically relies on the analysis of online interaction and draws on the assumption that computer-mediated communication is discoursal in nature (Herring 2004a, 338; Stommel 2008). The question of whether and how interactive language practices are constitutive of online communities has been the object of many analyses in recent years, especially during the second and third waves of CMC studies. Susan Herring (2001, 2002, 2004a, 2004b, 2007, 2010, 2013) and Jannis Androutsopoulos (cf. 2011,

2013a, 2013b, 2014a, 2014b, 2015) represent the main scholars to have explored this line of enquiry, but other authors such as Georgakopoulou and Spilioti (2016), Myers (2010, 2015), Page (2010, 2012, 2014), Puschmann (2010, 2014, 2015), Sergeant and Tagg (2014), Thurlow and Mroczek (2011), Weller *et al.* (2013), and Zappavigna (2011, 2012, 2014a, 2014b, 2015) also deserve to be mentioned in relation to the study of social media communities.

In this volume the analysis of the online behavior of YouTube micro-celebrities is informed by linguistic discussions of CMC; as a matter of fact, here Internet interaction is examined through the lens of language, and observations are grounded in language *use* (Herring 2004a, 341). The theoretical paradigm possibly best suited for this kind of investigation is computer-mediated discourse analysis and, more specifically, its ramification of Social Media Critical Discourse Studies. CMDA and SM-CDS are methods resulting from the process of adapting discourse analytic research traditions to the study of computer-mediated interaction[4]. Herring defines CMDA as "a language-focused specialization within the broader interdisciplinary study of CMC" (2014) whose underlying assumptions are those of discourse analysis, albeit with some differences. The first theoretical premise which CMDA and SM-CDS share with other forms of DA is that "discourse exhibits recurrent patterns" (Herring 2004a, 341): identifying such patterns – which may not be noticeable even to the participants themselves but may be linked to broader phenomena such as ideology, identity and the social construction of knowledge – is one of the analyst's basic goals (Herring 2014). Secondly, CMDA's and SM-CDS's analyses, just like DA's analyses, are socially, culturally and historically situated: they draw on the notion that "discourse involves speaker choices" and such choices are not affected by purely linguistic constraints, but also depend on cognitive (Chafe 1994) and social (Sacks 1984) factors (Herring 2004a, 341). Consequently, the examination of words and expressions selected by the interactants offers valuable insights into both linguistic and non-linguistic phenomena (*ibid.*).

However, differently from traditional DA, CMDA's (as well as SM-CDS's) descriptive and interpretive apparatus contemplates the technological affordances of CMC systems (*ibid.*), without adopting a deterministic stance towards them: CMDA's interest lies not so much in the question of whether technology shapes human communication

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[4] This volume mainly relies on the adaptation of Fairclough's discourse analytical three-dimensional model (1992) to the examination of YouTubers' digital performances of the self. The next section contains a brief illustration of the model.

but rather under what circumstances, in what ways, and to what extent (Herring 2004b, 27). Like any other kind of interaction, computer-mediated discourse shapes and is shaped by the language choices made by the participants as well as their social contexts (Georgakopoulou 2011; Angouri 2016, 330).

In actual fact, by communicating via computer, users are able to accomplish complex activities that are carried out through and by means of discourse, as physical bodies are absent and "language is doing, in the truest performative sense, on the Internet" (Herring 2004a, 338). Drawing on this assumption, CMDA does not limit its investigation to the textual dimension of online interaction, but widens its scope to explore the shared digital practices underlying it as a privileged object of study. Texts and practices cannot be separated by scholars research-ing language and discourse online, as the latter is also a situated social practice (Barton and Lee 2013, 166). Consequently, studying language use under this perspective means examining the ways in which the new media affects knowledge production and dissemination as well as power relations displayed in Internet interaction (Androutsopoulos 2013c, 48).

Although "the greatest challenge in CMDA" may be providing a systematization to theoretically salient notions – such as that of online community – in terms of measurable language behaviours (Herring 2010, 238), discourse as a social practice provides a window into the lin-guistic analysis of Web participatory culture (Androutsopoulos 2013c, 48). In this regard, Herring contends that

> [...] the potential – and power – of CMDA is that it enables questions of broad social and psychological significance, including notions that would otherwise be intractable to empirical analysis, to be investigated with fine-grained empirical rigor. (Herring 2004a, 2)

In her work, the scholar indicates five levels of computer-mediated discourse analysis, which correspond to the four domains of language (structure, meaning, interactional coherence and social practice) and the fifth domain of participation (2004a, 2013). The research paradigms traditionally utilized to explore the language phenomena associated with these domains (Structural/Descriptive Linguistics and Text Analysis, Semantics and Pragmatics, Conversation Analysis and Ethnomethodol-ogy, Interactional Sociolinguistics and CDA respectively) make up the CMDA/SM-CDS methodological toolkit and will be relied upon in the analytical chapters of this volume.

Drawing on the assumption that CMD does not represent a single language variety, Susan Herring advocates for the need to classify com-

puter-mediated language and she describes possible ways of providing a systematization for it. The first kind of categorization of CMD includes discourse types and genres, which often evoke those in offline communication. Moreover, she distinguishes among what she calls different modes such as, for instance, private email, electronic mailing lists, Web forums, blogs etc. etc.: these modes are "socially as well as technologically defined, each having their own unique affordances, histories, and cultures of use" (Herring and Androutsopoulos 2015, 129). Herring's mode classification can be productively applied to describe "prototypical associations of CMD data" such as email, IRC… and also encapsulates cultural information that cannot be retrieved on the sole basis of the component dimensions of the scheme (Herring 2007). However, her mode classification does not provide a good account of new examples of online discourse "which do not evoke prototypical associations except in the minds of users who happen to know the system" (*ibid.*): on those occasions a faceted classification appears to be more suitable. Adapting Dell Hymes's (1974) ethnography communication model, Herring developed a faceted classification scheme starting from the idea that, although "[m]ode- and genre-based analyses provide a convenient shorthand for categorizing CMD types" (*ibid.*), CMD is sensitive to a variety of technical and situational factors, which means that it may vary within and across modes. Her model proposes a list of very specific multiple categories or "facets" that span across the borders of sociotechnical modes and, when combined, make it possible to give a fine-grained description of CMD types. The facets of the scheme are organized in two sets, i.e. situation facets and medium facets, all of which potentially contribute to influencing discourse usage in CMC environments. The former set includes group size, participant characteristics, purpose of communication, topic or theme, norms of social appropriateness, and code or language variety used. Medium facets comprise available channels of communication, synchronicity, one-way versus two-way message transmission, message persistence, message format, and size of message buffer (*ibid.*). The number of facets is not stable, as it evolves in parallel to the development of CMD: for example, the boundary between synchronous and asynchronous computer-mediated discourse is being slowly eroded by social media systems which allow for real-time interaction but also keep a record of the chat that can be retrieved later (Herring and Androutsopoulos 2015, 130). Conversely, new facets concerning social media affordances may be added: friending and linking (including "like" links) are good examples in this regard (*ibid.*), but "technological facets that are especially relevant are media convergence

and multimodality, including use of images and channel choice" (Herring 2013, 21).

Overall, it is possible to say that the development of Web 2.0 has brought about new challenges for CMC scholars but the linguistic paradigm of CMDA arguably remains an adequate tool to deal with them (*ibid.*, 22). More specifically, the new Social Media Critical Discourse Studies approach can be efficiently applied to account for the new techno-discursive architecture of new media platform such as YouTube. As suggested in the next section, a methodological toolkit which combines the main tenets of CMDA and SM-CDS can be successfully utilized for the analysis of authenticity discourses on YouTube.

2.3. An ad hoc methodological toolkit: different traditions of text and (Computer-Mediated) Discourse Analysis

In line with the traditional objectives of linguistics-based discourse analysis, CMDA aims at devising a rigorous methodology which allows to establish empirically grounded associations between actual language realizations and the discursive formations underlying it. Herring's CMDA and its SM-CDS ramification (KhosraviNik 2014, 2017, 2018; KhosraviNik and Esposito 2018) are here combined with Fairclough's model for the examination of communicative events (1992) on grounds of their common emphasis on problem-orientedness and their common tendency to produce contextually situated analyses. As already noted, the SM-CDS approach provides suitable tools to examine the social and participatory Internet, of which YouTube interaction represents an example. Such approach can be integrated with Fairclough's three-dimensional model, which, although developed much before the Web 2.0, may be successfully adapted and applied to computer-mediated communication such as YouTube videos. As a matter of fact, this model envisages communicative events (online or offline) as constituted by three dimensions, which, although simultaneously activated, can be separated so as to obtain a more sound and complete analysis of each discursive event. The level of text, the level of discursive practice and the level of social practice appear in Fairclough's scheme as distinct but interrelated: textual analysis deals with the linguistic articulation of discursive instances and focuses on "vocabulary, grammar, cohesion and text structure" (Fairclough 1992, 75), whereas the "discursive practice" dimension explores "processes of text production, distribution and consumption" (*ibid.*, 78).

Finally, its description of communicative events in terms of social practices advocates for the investigation of their latent discursive formations as well as the institutional and organizational contexts within which the latter emerge and are either upheld or challenged.

Fairclough's model can legitimately be adjusted to the study of YouTube communication practices as it provides an account of their linguistic features, but it also considers them as a tools for dissemination, reproduction and reception of YouTube discourses. Moreover, this model does not neglect to contemplate the role video-sharing performs within the Scientific/Academic, Parenting and Makeup domains. As a consequence, it is expected that Fairclough's approach, duly adapted to the study of computer-mediated discourse and combined with the tools of SM-CDS, produces a theoretically sound linguistic illustration of YouTube discourse as well as delineates its main features as a social and discursive practice.

The latter level of analysis, which is centered on the cognitive macrostructures implicated in the formation of YouTube discourse, starts from the premise that those gate-keeping and discourse-controlling functions which were traditionally carried out by powerful groups of people (e.g. van Dijk's "symbolic élites") are now mainly realized by social media algorithms (Gillespie 2014). This means that it is no longer human beings who decide what becomes topical, mainstream, and therefore "hegemonic", but social media platforms automatically sort and rank content on the basis of what is relevant to the single user (KhosraviNik 2018). Since "[t]he leading core principle for Social Media operation is to increase media consumption" (*ibid.*), algorithms are manipulated so that they produce the largest possible number of interactions on the platforms. This results in individually catered for representations of the world constructed on what is advantageous for the platform's commercial goals; as a consequence, "the dynamic of discursive power, i.e., snowball effect of discourse foci, is unpredictable on Social Media communicative paradigm" (*ibid.*).

Taking this sort of dynamics into account, the analysis of YouTube authenticity discourse is dealt with in the volume through recourse to a combination of the methods of Critical Discourse Analysis and digital scholarship. The investigation of YouTube interaction as a social practice focuses on the creation of users' social identities and CDA is arguably the most suitable means to examine digital performances of the self like those realized by YouTubers in front of their cameras. Moreover, the application of CDA's methodological toolkit may prove strategic in order to illustrate how YouTubers position themselves and their *persona*

with respect to the wider orders of discourses of Science Communication, Parenting, and Makeup.

The discursive practice dimension of YouTube interaction, which is situated between the micro-linguistic level and the macro-discursive/social dimensions, focuses on the "intertextuality among textual practices on (potentially) multi-sites and interconnectedness of Social Media users" and links "the available textual platforms and practices horizontally across the sites, platforms and genres" (KhosraviNik 2017). This level of investigation relies on the use of critical discourse analytical tools (with a special emphasis on the concepts of interdiscursivity and intertextuality; cf. Fairclough 1995) and of Genre Theory, especially of the English for Special Purposes school (cf. Swales 1990; Bhatia 1993). This approach is useful to explore the language and discursive practices of the three different domains this volume takes into consideration (cf., *inter alii*, Gotti 2003; Candlin and Gotti 2004; Garzone 2006; Garzone *et al.* 2016).

As far as the micro level of investigation is concerned, i.e. the level of the linguistic makeup of YouTubers' monologues, this research is mainly based on the categories of M.A.K. Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG; 1985; cf. also Fairclough 1989, 1992). This specific framework provides an adequate foundation for the examination of YouTubers' language choices as the investigation of how SFG metafunctions are realized in videos offers valuable insight into their language codification. Particular attention is devoted to the ideational and the interpersonal metafunction: the analysis of the former can reveal how users construct reality and how they discursively represent people (including themselves), processes and circumstances in their words. The interpersonal metafunction, that is to say the function that relates to the interactional dimension of a text, represents a crucial object of study for linguists interested in YouTube as it has attained an almost hypertrophic status within social media platforms and Discourse 2.0. In actual fact, it is through this metafunction that YouTubers express their stance and take position with regard to facts and events on the basis of presuppositions and latent ideological preconceptions in the context of their own communicative network.

Finally, in order to achieve a complete and systematic description of the materials collected, it is important to stress that the application of the *ad hoc* methodological toolkit presented above entails an ongoing interaction between a top down and a bottom up approach (cf. Catenaccio 2012, 38-41). The top down approach intends to verify hypotheses formulated *a priori*, on the basis of the existing literature on YouTube communication, by applying the selected methodological tools to the

texts collected. Conversely, the bottom up approach starts from the identification of recurring linguistic and rhetorical patterns in the texts included in the data set and aims to generate hypotheses *a fortiori*. These hypotheses can be useful in order to identify the implicit assumptions and premises YouTube communication relies on and which may be more easily overlooked by simply adopting a top down approach.

2.4. THE DATA SET

2.4.1. *Data set description: the communities of practice chosen for the analysis*

As previously mentioned [5], one of the main aims of this volume is to confirm the hypothesis that there is a common core of discursive and rhetorical strategies that famous YouTubers conventionally adopt in order to construct their online identity as authentic. The selection of the materials to be included in the analysis was therefore operated on the basis of this objective and the data set was designed to provide a representative sample of the YouTube population, a rather challenging task.

The first step was deciding to focus on YouTube groups (and their most popular and exemplary users) rather than on single content creators belonging to disparaged categories. This choice was due to the consideration that this book examines the linguistic resources utilized by people who have become successful and have turned youtubing into a profession by strategically interacting with others sharing similar interests and/or posting similar content. This means that professional YouTubers participate in online communities. Susan Herring's CMDA framework (2004a, 2007, 2010, 2013; cf. § 2.2) operationalizes the concept of online community by focusing on members' language use; six sets of criteria are thus identified:

1) active, self-sustaining participation; a core of regular participants
2) shared history, purpose, culture, norms and values
3) solidarity, support, reciprocity
4) criticism, conflict, means of conflict resolution

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[5] Cf. Introduction.

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5) self-awareness of group as an entity distinct from other groups
6) emergence of roles, hierarchy, governance, rituals (2004, 355)

Classifications such as Herring's rely on the assumption that "not all online groups constitute virtual communities" (2004a, 346), a view which is generally accepted (Angouri 2016, 326). A more finely tuned theoretical concept which may be legitimately applied to YouTube groups is that of "Community of Practice" (CoPs; Meyerhoff 2002; Meyerhoff and Strycharz 2013). The CoP paradigm was introduced by Lave and Wenger (1991) and was first applied to the social theory of learning (Angouri 2016, 326) and been subsequently extended to other domains, most notably to the study of organizations (Wenger 1998). After the rise of online communities the construct of CoP has become extremely well-known as it has been adopted as the unit of analysis of many sociolinguistic studies investigating Internet discursive practices within organizations and professional categories (cf. Murillo 2008). According to Wenger *et al.*, communities of practice are "groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis" (2002, 4). McElhinny (2003, 30) notes that membership within communities of practice is not equal for all participants but it is rather a matter of degree, as "different (perhaps hierarchical) positionalities" can be identified with respect to discourse resources. Angouri (2016, 328) contends that Lave and Wenger's framework (1991) – with its emphasis on peripheral participation in the learning process – well describes how complex power negotiation is within communities of practice and can be suited to account for online interaction in CoPs. This seems to be the case with YouTube groups: users with similar interests contribute to the community's discourse, but professional YouTubers are in a privileged and leading position, which allows them to be more influential as far as communication practices are concerned.

After establishing to conduct the analysis across CoPs rather than single content creators, I had to decide what communities to select and according to which criterion. Starting from the premise that many categories turn to social media to gain visibility, the latter was adopted as a point of reference (cf. Introduction). Three YouTube communities were thus singled out: that of scientists, Stay-at-Home Mothers, and makeup artists. All these groups appear to rely on YouTube in order to be more socially visible, but with markedly different results. If combined together, they may be said to offer a significant – although inevitably limited – sample of YouTube's CoPs.

Scientists are the least popular category of the three: they turned to YouTube to make Science and their profession more visible and possibly more relevant in the eyes of the general public, but they only partially met their objective. Although they may effectively encourage a more participatory model of Science [6], they are only famous among users with a passion for Science and remain practically invisible to broad-spectrum audiences.

By contrast, Stay-at-Home Mothers were selected as representative of a group of YouTubers who have obtain visibility thanks to the platform. Whereas in hegemonic offline discourses these women are typically taken for granted and somewhat excluded from the public sphere, their strategic adoption of social media and of YouTube has allowed them to become popular and be "seen". Their videos are discursively constructed as "authentic" and, as such, they are presented as a more credible representation of motherhood than that offered by traditional broadcast media [7].

Finally, the CoP of makeup artists was chosen as an exemplary of hugely successful YouTube communities which are able to literally attract millions of views (and are thus extremely visible). However, this category was also chosen because it is a very interesting, albeit complex, object of study for scholars investigating authenticity. First, it should be noted that makeup videos feature the use of products altering one's appearance, which makes the matter of what kind of visibility they promote rather intricate. Secondly, and more importantly, cosmetics are typically associated with a distinctive artificialness, which raises the question of how authentic makeup artists can appear in the eyes of their audiences.

After introducing the rationale for the sampling of the data set, in the next subparagraph I shall turn to the more technical and practical issues involved in the collection phase.

2.4.2. *The collection phase: issues and procedures*

Working with Internet data sets may seem a somewhat straightforward matter: the sheer volume and apparent ease with which data can be obtained and archived has led to the notion that the Web itself can

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[6] Cf. § 3.1.
[7] Cf. § 4.1.

be considered as a corpus readily available for scholarly use [8]. While it is undeniable that collecting Internet texts is easier than, for instance, recording an offline spoken interaction, this does not necessarily imply that creating a social media corpus is unproblematic. Although many of the methods which are traditionally utilized in the analysis of printed documents can be rightfully adopted for the study of social media, CMD data collection provides scholars with a list of non-trivial questions (Androutsopoulos and Beißwenger 2008); as Unger *et al.* (2016) highlight,

> [...] there are some confounding logistical issues regarding harnessing and defining analytical materials in social media, for instance:
> 1. How to collect and select data from the vast amounts available on some social media platforms;
> 2. How to deal with the inherent non-linearity of text-production and consumption processes;
> 3. How to define context vis-à-vis social media;
> 4. How to deal with the fleeting nature of data and the constant changes in format and functions of platforms;
> 5. How to incorporate systematic observations to account for media and genre-specific contexts of communication;
> 6. How to decide on an ethical framework that respects individuals' rights and their understanding of how public their data should be. (Unger *et al.* 2016, 283)

Building a data set to be analyzed from a SM-CDS perspective means taking even more issues into account. Data selection and sampling in this volume mainly rest upon criteria of popularity of video content and representativeness, but in order to rely on these notions while adopting a SM-CDS perspective, it is necessary to consider the "political economy of social media, the function of algorithmic regimentation of content, corporate valorization of interaction online and affective stylization of communication on social media places" (KhosraviNik and Esposito 2018, 59). As a consequence, at the macro-level of operationalization a digital observational approach can be successfully adopted; in the case at hand, I have exposed myself to a remarkable quantity of YouTube content even before tackling questions of video selection and sampling.

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[8] As Zappavigna points out, it is design criteria that "define the type and scope of data to be included in the corpus, and it is this careful consideration that makes a true corpus different to a text archives. [...] Unprocessed, the web is [...] not a corpus in the traditional sense, as it has not been built following selection criteria but instead has evolved as people have added, modified and deleted documents" (2012, 15-16).

The latter steps represent the meso-level of the corpus construction process and were carried out with the use of statistics retrieved on the website "Social Blade" (socialblade.com) which is specialized in tracking social media analytics. "Social Blade" is mostly known for scraping data from YouTube's public API and has contributed to the identification of the YouTubers whose videos have been investigated in the volume by helping navigate the infinite amount of material available on the platform.

The last stage in the building of the corpus corresponded to the extraction of five entries from each channel selected. This phase was realized by combining information about video popularity (estimated on the basis of view numbers) and topic relevance. In practice, this has entailed the singling out of content that was specific and distinguishing of the three YouTube communities under examination; for example, only make tutorials have made it to the corpus, whereas other types of videos, e.g. vlogs by the same YouTubers, have been excluded from the analysis.

One final word should be spent on the size of the corpus; as previously noted, establishing the limits and quantity of data to select for analysis is particularly complex, especially with respect to ever expanding platforms such as social media. Admittedly, this is a rather small-scale study which cannot be considered as a comprehensive dataset of video content on discourses of authenticity or the topics of Science, Parenting or Makeup. However, this does not affect the validity of the research conducted on it: as long as it is a representative sample (cf., *inter alii*, Daymon and Holloway 2011; Braun and Clarke 2013), the corpus investigated in this volume can legitimately be utilized to explore users' communication practices and, more specifically, how they discursively create and edit their online *persona* so as to make it appear authentic to their viewers.

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3.
Science YouTubers

This chapter sets out to provide a description of how the discourse of authenticity is played out in Science YouTube videos. In spite of being representatives of the least popular community among those analyzed in the volume, Science YouTubers are nonetheless important because they have a role in the development of the Science Participation Model. Famous ones are able to construct a successful online *persona* displaying traits of both "the reliable expert" as well as "the passionate non-specialist". The analysis suggests that authenticity is discursively constructed through a plethora of linguistic means and that, thanks to their "authentic" edited self, well-known YouTubers are able to generate a strong sense of affiliation with their public.

3.1. YouTube and the Science Participation Model

Scientists rely on YouTube in order to gain visibility for themselves and their field of study. Unfortunately, they only partially achieve this goal: among the different types of online entrepreneurs taken into consideration in this work, Science YouTubers are the least popular category. However, they are a fascinating object of study, especially for the kind of analysis carried out in this volume. Since they arguably represent the community of practice viewers least identify with and feel more detached from, they face the challenging task of bridging the gap with the general public. In other words, scientists find themselves in the difficult situation of having to construct a relatable, authentic *persona* in the eyes of their audience in spite of being typically perceived as "weird" and "far-off". Their performances in front of the camera therefore provide very interesting material to be examined in order to explore the notion of authenticity.

The relatively limited success of scientists on YouTube does not mean that a few of them do not enjoy a fairly good following nor that Science communication does not play a role on the platform (a 2017 study by Erviti and Léon aimed at assessing the popularity of Science online videos through a content analysis of what is "popular" on YouTube concludes that "Science and Technology" are rather common). By and large, people across many countries utilize Internet as one of the primary resources of scientific information and "given its relative predominance in the online environment, video has become a tool of crucial importance to communicate science to society" (León and Bourk 2018). At the moment, Science video content creators can count on production technology which is fairly affordable, easy to use as well as capable of producing computer-generated visuals that can efficiently illustrate scientific concepts otherwise difficult for the lay public to comprehend (*ibid.*). Moreover, differently from the written medium, video footage may be able of evoking emotions in the viewers, thus engaging them with scientific issues, an aspect of no secondary importance "if science has to attract citizens in a highly competitive attention market, dominated by commercial and entertainment content" (*ibid.*).

As the current leading video-sharing platform, YouTube represents an effective means of scientific knowledge transfer and dissemination; the video platform may thus be considered as a suitable tool for the democratization of Science and the advancement of the so-called "participatory culture" (Jenkins 2006). As maintained by Burgess and Green, on YouTube "participatory culture is not a gimmick or a sideshow, it is absolutely core business" (2009, 6). The developing "public participation model" (Miller 2001; Lewenstein 2003) and, as far as the case at hand is concerned, the "Science Participation Model" (Myers 2003; Bucchi and Trench 2008), have brought about a substantial shift in the perception of the role of the general audience as a recipient of Science communication, which they depict as dynamically involved in the process of generation and dissemination of Science (Erviti and León 2016). YouTube affordances seem to be very much in line with this evolving conception of the public rather than with the "deficit model" (Gross 1994; Garzone 2014) – introduced in the 1980s and still widely adopted – according to which the audience is a passive component and is "deficient" in scientific knowledge. As a consequence of the gradual emergence of this changing cultural and technological paradigm, increasing importance has been attached to communication as a fundamental factor in the dissemination and sharing of scientific information: "Communication is no longer a goodwill concession from the

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scientist to society but a core requirement that provides oil for the new mechanism to work" (León and Bourk 2018). The progressive consolidation of the Science Participation Model has been made possible by the multiplying of communication tools that has paralleled the development of the Web 2.0 and by the fact that public Internet interaction situates the user in the center of the communicative process. Recent studies (cf. Valenti 1999; Kim 2012; Welbourne and Grant 2016) highlight how YouTube epitomizes "science participatory culture" in that it does not involve a rigid separation between producer and member of the public (scholar Axel Bruns has coined the term "produser" to indicate users of Web 2.0 platforms who act as both content creators and content consumers; 2008).

Science communication on this type of platform is no longer dominated by professional communicators and mainstream media, but scientists, amateurs, interest groups and organizations also partake in it (Weingold and Treise 2004; Nisbet and Scheufele 2009; Lo *et al.* 2010; Claussen *et al.* 2013; Welbourne and Grant 2016). At the moment, YouTube hosts both professionally and user generated content (respectively PGC and UGC) and these two categories compete for audience attention. After YouTube's sale to Google in 2006, the management of the video-sharing website adopted tactics aimed at growing the quantity of PGC, as the latter is of a better quality and can supposedly reach wider audiences (thus generating larger incomes for the platform; Welbourne and Grant 2016, 707). However, "[t]he superior financial resources of professionally created channels and (likely) formal technical training of PGC creators do not lead to science communication videos or channels that are more popular with the YouTube community" (*ibid.*, 715). This rather unexpected result seems to be linked to how the public identifies trusted sources: UGC channels typically feature regular Science communicators who develop a relation with the public – a factor that significantly impacts their overall success and view number – whereas PGC videos may be hosted by a multiplicity of speakers who, due to their discontinuous online presence, have a hard time building rapport with their viewers. It may therefore be stated that user-generated Science channels are more popular than professional ones because, although the latter can rely on advanced content production skills and remarkably more funding, non-professional Science communicators are more capable of generating affiliation with their audience thus appearing more trustworthy and retaining their viewership.

These findings seem to be in line with the initial hypothesis this volume intends to explore, i.e. that successful YouTubers owe their pop-

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ularity to their ability to construct an online identity which comes across as convincingly "authentic". The following paragraphs will explore the linguistic strategies they adopt to represent themselves as genuine and credible and to enter into a relationship with their viewer, a relationship that the latter perceive as "real".

3.2. Aims and outline of the chapter

Despite its remarkable importance and possible future potential, academic research on online Science videos is still in its infancy (Erviti and Léon 2017; León and Bourk 2018). Some studies have been conducted on various Web genres – especially blogs (Batts *et al.* 2008; Blanchard 2011; Luzón 2013; Mahrt and Puschmann 2014) and microblogs (Myers 2013; Puschmann 2014; Dunlop *et al.* 2017) – as embodiments of this new Science participatory culture in which knowledge is constructed and disseminated by both experts and laypeople. As regards YouTube, scholars have analysed different aspects of the platform but research on Science communication is scarce (Costa Carvalho 2016; Welbourne and Grant 2016; Erviti and Léon 2017; León and Bourk 2018 being happy exceptions). Few scholars have investigated YouTube from a linguistic perspective and, to the best of my knowledge, very little research has been carried out on videos as a tool for Science communication yet (cf. Martin Flores and Muniz de Medeiros 2018; Riboni 2019).

Against this backdrop, this chapter sets out to provide a linguistic description of popular Science YouTubers' digital performances in their videos with a view to identify the ways in which they construct their *persona'*s authenticity. Science social media celebrities typically wear multiple "hats" and envisage themselves as performing a variety of roles: as far as society is concerned, they see themselves as explainers of Science to laypeople, curators of scientific information (deciding what pieces of knowledge should be disseminated), civic educators promoting the democratization of Science, public intellectuals and agenda setters, conveners connecting scientists and non-scientists (based on Fahy and Nisbet 2011; cf. also Jarreau 2015). With respect to their YouTube activities, they also consider themselves as content creators and self-employed entrepreneurs. Their multifaceted online self is thus examined in this section to verify how it is discursively constructed as "authentic" and possibly indirectly juxtaposed to the professional, "pol-

ished", and corporate identity of Science communicators appearing in PGC.

The materials selected for this analysis consist of a corpus of fifteen Science vlogs posted over the course of five years (2013-2018; see Appendix for further details) on the channels of three popular young scientists who use the platform to instruct their 'subscribers' about their disciplines. The typical Science communication YouTube post is a sit-down video which features a loose close up of the user performing a monologue in front of the camera. This particular choice of shot is arguably intended to reinforce the notion of authenticity in that it is linked to a sense of close intimacy. Loose close ups allow YouTubers to create the impression that they are engaged in a friendly virtual conversation with their viewers; a medium shot or a medium full shot and the social distance associated to them, instead, would probably enable them to represent themselves as teachers or experts delivering a lesson. Recreating the setting of a (virtual) chat instead allows scientists to construct their *persona* as an intimate acquaintance of the viewer. This intimacy is what makes it possible for them to come across as close to their audience, thus being perceived as authentic and not as fake and "far-off" like the professional Science communicators of PGC.

Science YouTube videos are heavily edited and they incorporate visuals and links that allow scientists to rely on the interplay between text and other semiotic resources in order to better explain themselves. The footage collected shows a high degree of unpredictability in terms of length and token number (which may vary from 504 to 3,437); moreover, most entries (13 out of 15) simply consist of monologues whereas two feature expert interviews. The scientists whose work has been collected for this analysis are called Alex Dainis (Genetics), Sally Le Page (Biology), and Simon Clark (Climate Physics).

Alex Dainis is a graduate student in the Genetics Department at Stanford University (USA). She has a B.S. in Biology and a B.A. in Film, Television, and Interactive Media. She has previously worked as an Associate Producer at an educational media production company and has always been interested in Science communication. Her YouTube channel has about 32,000 subscribers. Sally Le Page recently received her PhD from the University of Oxford. She is involved in a number of Science communication activities addressed to the general public (e.g. volunteering at the Oxford University Museums to teach life Sciences to children at family friendly events such as their "Science Saturdays"). Her YouTube channel has about 65,000 subscribers. Simon Clark recently finished his PhD in Theoretical Atmospheric Physics at the University

of Exeter. His YouTube channel "SimonOxfPhys", started in 2010, initially focused on helping students from disadvantaged backgrounds apply to prestigious universities. After becoming a PhD student, he devoted increasingly more videos to Science communication. His channel has about 221,000 subscribers [1].

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The remainder of this chapter is organized as follows: § 3.3 provides a description of the discursive construction of the scientist identity and focuses on the language features utilized in users' monologues which render them akin to lectures while conferring a conversational tone. The following section is devoted to the examination of the more direct and explicit language strategies adopted by Dainis, Le Page, and Clark to edit their online *persona* in order to highlight that they are genuine (and therefore authentic) Science lovers. Finally, § 3.5 explores the identity traits which may be more apparently connected with the notion of "emergent authenticity". More specifically, the analysis focuses on the language resources associated with the figure of the "scientist influencer", which is typically market-oriented and therefore at risk of being perceived as "inauthentic", and the figure of the "nerd", a clearly stereotypical character who, due to its lack of multifacetedness, may also come across as not credible.

3.3. The discursive construction of the "ordinary scientist"

A preliminary comment that can be made on the three channels selected for the analysis is that they are named after their creators. As already stated, Simon Clark's channel was initially named "SimonOxfPhys", a choice which may have been interpreted as "an attempt to separate the real-life scientist from the YouTuber" (Martin Flores and Muniz de Medeiros 2018, 13) because the use of a pseudonym makes it difficult to establish the user's real identity. However, Clark later changed its mind and decided to no longer keep his two identities separated. Using one's real name for one's YouTube channel can be read as a self-branding strategy, which aims at repeating the name of the "product" (or, as in this case, of the YouTuber) as much as possible so that it will stick to the audience's/consumer's mind (Dowling 2001). Moreover, associating

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[1] Last update: July 2019.

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YouTube channels and academic identities may be a way of underscoring the expertise of the users, who wish their video content to be attributed to their real-life identity just like any other of their scientific output.

Scientists utilize YouTube to gain visibility for themselves and their work, but also in order to popularize Science, i.e. to make it accessible to the general public. As a consequence, they can be expected to rely on language and rhetorical strategies which have been traditionally proven as effective in instructional and educational settings as well as on popularization strategies, i.e. on strategies enacted to recontextualize scientific knowledge for a lay-audience (cf. Gotti 2003; Calsamiglia and van Dijk 2004; Garzone 2006). The analysis of the data set confirms these expectations: Science YouTubers' monologues resemble instructional texts such as lectures or conference presentations in that they show evident traces of careful drafting. For example, list of threes occur rather often in the monologues:

1. *They're* bleach*ing*, *they're* dy*ing*, *they're* go*ing* to go extinct by 2050 [...]. (SLP1)

2. So be *as creative* and *as scientific* and *as inventive* as you can. (SLP4; emphasis added)

The use of parallelisms (ex. 3) and discourse markers (ex. 4) further confirms the presence of language features which can be found, among others, in academic genres:

3. My centrifuge *is pretty old*. My lab manager centrifuge *is pretty new*. (AD2)

4. *Firstly* the water wouldn't be able to drain through holes that used to be magma chambers. [...] *Secondly* even if all the water in the oceans were to drain subsurface if Utapau is anything like the Earth *then* temperatures will increase below the surface by about 30 Celsius per kilometer that you go down. (SC5; emphasis added)

These are combined with elements characteristic of popularizing communication which allows YouTubers to highlight their expertise and, ultimately, their authoritativeness and trustworthiness. A typical feature of popularization is the presence of strategies aimed at facilitating the layman's access to specialized scientific knowledge by, for instance, explaining concepts (explanatory strategies), or by connecting old knowledge to new knowledge through the rephrasing of abstract information in a non-abstract manner (concretization strategies; cf., *inter alii*, Ciapuscio 2003; Gülich 2003; Calsamiglia and van Dijk 2004).

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Instances of explanatory and concretization strategies can be found in the videos[2].

    5. One thing that's special about laser light is that it's directional *which means* that all the waves are going in the same direction and are not spreading out from the source. (SLP4)

    6. Now some allele are stronger than others and *are referred to as 'dominant'*. (AD1)

    7. Several other planets are also similar to what we see in the solar system. Tattoine *for example* is a combination of Mars's dry climate with Earth's thicker atmosphere. (SC5)

    8. Mathematicians working on calculating Pi used it *to turbocharge* their work. (SC2; emphasis added)

Examples (5) and (6) contain explanatory strategies, respectively a definition and a denomination. The former is an illustration of the core qualities of a scientific object, while a denomination provides a name for it. Examples (7) and (8) instead include concretization strategies. Example (7) represents a case of exemplification (i.e. it provides a concrete instance of a general category), whereas example (8) consists of a figure of speech based on analogy, i.e. a metaphor.

The investigation of the videos has revealed, however, that the presence of linguistic resources emblematic of the domain of "expertise" is combined with discursive and rhetorical strategies commonly utilized in spontaneous/peer-to-peer discourse. In particular, Science content creators often adopt an informal register in order to appear as if they were taking part in a casual conversation with their audience:

    9. [...] *this dude* – no I'm not going to try and pronounce his name because I'll only get it wrong – used a polygon with 3072 sides to obtain *Pi* to five decimal places 200 years later. (SC2)

    10. This is *a pile of shit* [sic] and on it are yellow dung flies. (SLP2)

    11. There's some *datay* kind of stuff. (AD2; emphasis added)

In example (10) the register is particularly casual as the sentence contains a swearword, whereas example (11) includes an instance of adjectivalization, i.e. the forming of an adjective deriving from another word class (the noun

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    [2] Riboni (2019) contains a full study of how YouTube videos can be turned into a tool of knowledge dissemination and the discursive and rhetorical strategies adopted by YouTubers in order to educate their audience.

"data" in this case) whose result is totally idiosyncratic, a non-standard word suggesting informality. Besides the use of a low register, the presence of conversational markers also signal YouTubers' attempt to make viewers feel involved by simulating a face-to-face interaction with them:

12. Have you ever been sat in Maths class and the teachers explaining quadratic equations or something is full of equations and you understand everything: it's the worst, *right?* (SC1) [3]

13. *Hi!* I don't know if I remember how to do this anymore… so it's been a while and I've been in grad school. (AD1; emphasis added)

Finally, humour and humoristic statements further contribute to bestowing a laid-back quality upon Science videos and providing the public with the impression that they are engaged in peer-to-peer communication:

14. When the French BNP Paribas Bank Foundation asked if they could pay me to make a video that promotes the research they fund into climate change and coral reefs I was interested. When they then said that they'd give me a camera crew and fly me out to a tropical island paradise to go filming in the reefs, *strangely enough*, I said yes. (SLP1)

15. This video is here to help. *Here is how to suck at Maths with five easy tips.* (SC1)

16. I now need to show you the most serious, most intriguing, most mysterious piece of equipment that we have in this lab: *the microwave!* (AD2; emphasis added)

As it is often the case, humour in YouTubers' monologue may serve multiple purposes: not only does it make the text slick and entertaining and its register rather informal, but it can also be utilized as a tool to indirectly reveal something about the user's personality and beliefs, as suggested by example (17):

17. […] so many people distrust the fields of evolution you have to be extra careful when you're teaching it because there are many people who just completely ignore the science [clears throat] *(religion) – sorry got something in my throat there* – and so we do have to be very careful not to spread any more misconceptions. (SLP3; emphasis added)

The combined presence of discursive and rhetorical resources belonging to the spheres of expert-to-layman and peer-to-peer communication

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[3] Example (12) can also count as an instance of humoristic statement.

can be interpreted as an indication that Science YouTubers provide their constructed identity with traits associable to both expertise and ordinariness. The term "ordinary scientist" can be used to designate this *persona*; this expression has been modeled on Media scholar Andrew Tolson's definition of "ordinary expert", a definition he coined precisely to refer to YouTube microcelebrities and their attempt to appear as "authentic" as possible by putting forth a hybrid identity combining professionalism and amateurship (2010). Tolson maintains that those realized in front of the camera are "performances akin to lectures" but "delivered as conversational talk" (*ibid.*, 282). The utilization of linguistic and communicative features which are characteristic of popularizing or instructional/ educational texts may therefore be interpreted as a way of emphasizing YouTubers' "scientist" identity; as to their "ordinariness", they discursively construct themselves as standard citizens whom the audience can easily identify with using language strategies which are aimed at providing a friendly-like tone to the delivery of their monologues.

To sum up, the language strategies identified in this paragraph possibly indicate that, by editing their online self so as to appear as "ordinary scientists", Science YouTubers are able to discursively portray themselves simultaneously as engaged in an expert-to-layman and a peer-to-peer relationship with their viewers. The "scientist/expert" dimension is what possibly attracts viewers: young scientists showcase their erudition in order to be credible, reliable as well as worth watching. However, it is the "ordinary" element which is probably strategically used by YouTubers in order to construct their "authenticity": in their relationship with their viewers, they portray themselves as the (virtual) friend who shares his/her knowledge rather than instruct.

3.4. The genuine Science lover

Whereas the figure of the "ordinary expert" may rely on language choices that convey the notion of authenticity rather indirectly, the identity of "the genuine Science lover" rests on more explicit language strategies which manifestly aim at underscoring how authentic the YouTuber's character is. The image of "the genuine Science lover" hinges upon the discursive construction of "amateurship", a construction which emphasizes the limitedness of the content user's resources as arguably linked to spontaneity and (supposed) economic disinterest (with the result of possibly making "professionalism" appear as inauthentic). In the foot-

age analyzed, amateurship is rhetorically represented as linked to the imperfections and flaws of the YouTubers, especially with regard to their defects as content creators and the non-polished nature of their video content.

Self-deprecation represents a specific rhetorical strategy often adopted by professional YouTubers in order to appear less artificial: as a matter of fact it allows them to reveal their defects and not just their merits, thus appearing more credible. Moreover, the use of self-deprecating language makes them appear closer to their public, because it enables them to discursively construct themselves as peers of their viewers and not in a higher, unattainable position:

18. […] you may not know that I'm actually a qualified SCUBA diver. I […] hadn't dived in the ten years since qualifying, so needless to say I was a bit apprehensive. *I say here that I'm feeling OK. I was not feeling OK!* (SLP1)

19. I've been in this lab right now for maybe closing in on like 18 months and I have four lab notebooks *because I put too much stuff in* my lab notebook. (AD3; emphasis added)

It is to be noted that self-deprecation may be about bad habits or embarrassing moments (cf. McQuarrie *et al.* 2013, 152), but it never refers to the users' scientific knowledge or their skills as scientists. This should not come as a surprise, because ridiculing their scientific expertise would mean ridiculing the main element of appeal of their channel.

As mentioned before, the concept of amateurship is also rhetorically depicted as connected with the imperfections involved in the process of content creation. Differently from what happens with PGC, minor flaws, problems, and issues having to do with video production are explained and devoted attention rather than glossed over (cf. Tolson 2010, 281), thus reinforcing the impression that the YouTuber is not a professional:

20. *My lighting changed midway through this video. Clearly I am out of practice* on this and I apologize but this is the lab notebook edition of this yet to be titled science vlog thing that I'm doing. (AD3)

21. I have six misconceptions… Mistruths… they are not necessarily wrong… but there are six things that I think could have been done better. *But that wasn't quite as catchy a title as six mistakes so here it goes.* (SLP3)

22. This is first bench and this is the refrigerator that makes so much noise and *I always have to wait for it to stop making noise so that I can film.* Why are you so loud?? Why? (AD2; emphasis added)

The emphasis on the amateur status of the content creators is accompanied by other strategies aimed at portraying them as "genuine Science lovers". The latter strategies focus on providing a representation of the figure of the scientist in less traditional, more informal settings. Taking viewers "backstage", i.e. sharing aspects of scientific practices which are typically left out of scientists' formal accounts of their job, is a stratagem YouTubers rely on in order to appear more transparent and therefore more authentic:

> 23. That is where my camera is generally setup facing this way into the lab, so we have my bench and my desk. The bench is where all of the science happens and the desk is where all the other science happens, but everything – reagents, chemicals, pipettes – everything stays over on this side [...]. (AD2)

> 24. *Nothing in lab ever works on the first try*. (AD1; emphasis added)

Example (23) is a segment of a video where Alex Dainis takes her audience on a tour of the lab she works at. Showing places that cannot be habitually accessed by the general public may perform a double purpose: on the one hand it enables her to look more open and possibly more honest; on the other hand, it may prove entertaining for those who are curious to see what really goes on in a Science laboratory. In the following example Dainis takes her audience backstage in a metaphorical sense, revealing something which may not be universally known.

The final discursive strategy contributing to the construction of the "genuine Science lover" is the significant presence of references to the scientist's emotions:

> 25. I made so many videos on this topic [...]. *That is the topic of my PhD so I get very excited when people start talking about Fitness*. (SLP3)

> 26. Also a couple summers ago, I made a video about the genetics behind seedless watermelons, which you can check out... over there. *Because apparently something about the summer makes me want to talk about plant biology*. (AD1; emphasis added)

As indicated by examples (25) and (26), YouTubers strategically emphasize their personal emotional involvement with their object of study. These examples show them engaged in what Gilbert and Mulkay define "the contingent repertoire" of scientific discourse (1984). These scholars singled out two repertoires scientists typically draw upon when providing an account of their work: the "empiricist" and the "contingent" repertoire. The former is adopted in formal contexts and is characterized by

lexical, grammatical and stylistic choices that depict both the analytical stage and conclusions as stemming directly from scientific procedures. The author is impersonal and represented as an epistemic subject as the process is discursively constructed as reproducible by anyone. By contrast, Science YouTubers tend to portray themselves as feeling subjects. When discussing their scientific endeavors they often engage in the contingent repertoire: their style is personal and idiosyncratic and they may present "their actions and beliefs as heavily dependent on speculative insights, prior intellectual commitments, personal characteristics, indescribable skills, social ties and group membership" (Gilbert and Mulkay 1984, 56). Differently from the empiricist repertoires which are mainly focused on disciplinary procedures, the contingent repertoires are centered around the figure of the scientist which is mainly represented as a social being rather than as an objective researcher. As a result, the appropriation of the contingent repertoire by part of YouTubers allows them to come across as more relatable, spontaneous and fresh.

Based on the above, it may be stated that the discursive strategies characterizing "the genuine Science lover" aim at depicting YouTubers as either amateurs (who are habitually represented as more passionate than professionals) or as scientists who feel a strong personal involvement with the topic of their research. Indirectly, these strategies may also realize the purpose of representing those who only have a professional interest in Science (specifically those who create PGC on YouTube) as not as authentic and trustworthy as the users analyzed. As the following paragraph will indicate, they seem to be able to generate a strong feeling of affiliation with their audience, which possibly represents one of the keys to their online success.

3.5. The emergent authenticity's facets of Science YouTubers: the scientist influencer and the nerd

The last part of this chapter is dedicated to a discussion of the features of the "edited self" of Science YouTubers which are more patently linked to the notion of "emergent authenticity". These features mainly include commercial as well as stereotypical traits; as regards the former, users' embracing of the marketplace and brands may clash with viewers'/consumers' quest for authenticity intended as avoidance of market-constructed meanings (Holt 1998). However, as suggested below, this does not seem to be the case. Secondly, emphasizing the stereotypical

traits of their online persona so as to associate it with the category of "nerds" may make young scientists' identity less multifaceted and therefore potentially less successful, but this hypothesis is not confirmed by the analysis either. In both cases it may be possible to theorize that a sort of "suspension of disbelief" comes into play: viewers may willingly accept traits of their favourite content creators which reveal heavily curated authenticity if the latter prove skilled enough in connecting and affiliating with them.

Science YouTubers may be regarded as "scientist influencers" for the sponsorship deals they sign with corporations and organizations[4]. Typically, there are three ways in which they generate profit from advertising in their videos: sponsored videos, (brief) mentions of products/services, and advertisements of online websites for which they have a promotional code (Martin Flores and Muniz de Medeiros 2018, 17)[5]. As repeatedly stressed, YouTube is a commercial platform which allows skillful users to turn video-making into a successful job, so the fact that these scientists include paid advertising in their footage should be expected. However, followers may be critical or disaffected, especially since the democratization of Science and the advancement of the so-called "participatory culture" promoted by these YouTubers may not combine well with their choice of incorporating sponsored content on their channels. Anyway, this hypothesis is not validated by the analysis: viewers do not seem to be bothered by the presence of advertising in videos. This arguably has to do with the phenomena connected to the "colonization" of social life by discourses associated with marketing and the production of goods were identified by Norman Fairclough as early as the beginning of the Nineties. In particular, he points out that "the genre of consumer advertising has been colonizing professional and public service order of discourse on a massive scale, generating many new hybrid partly promotional genres" (1993, 141). Discourses of commercialization appear as an undeniable reality in the word of current academia (see, *inter alii*, Bok 2004; Porfilio and Yu 2006; Crichton 2010; Natale and Doran 2012) which may also possibly explain why the practice of incorporating promotional messages in Science videos is not detrimental to the overall success of the channel[6].

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[4] An "influencer" is "[a] person with the ability to influence potential buyers of a product or service by promoting or recommending the items on social media" (definition by *Oxford Dictionaries*, lexico.com).

[5] Cf. § 1.3.

[6] An exhaustive review of the literature on the colonization of academia by marketing discourses cannot be provided here, but this phenomenon is briefly mentioned as a

The investigation of the data set collected for this study conversely indicates a correlation between the number of sponsored videos and the number of followers. Alex Dainis does not feature any paid advertisement in the videos analyzed and she has the fewest followers of the three YouTubers. 40% of Sally Le Page's selected videos are sponsored and she can count on approximately a third of the number of Simon Clark's followers whose percentage of sponsored videos is 100%. This arguably indicates that featuring promotional content is not read by the audience as a violation of trust but possibly as a sign of prestige and a ratification of leadership (McQuarrie *et al.* 2013, 153). In some cases, viewers may even encourage YouTubers to collaborate with sponsors in order to be able to create better quality content:

> 27. Could you please get [sponsor's name] to sponsor you more? Those videos are usually the best. (Comment on Sc5)[7]

For their part, YouTube micro-celebrities are extremely skilled at embedding promotional messages within their content. As a matter of fact, sponsorship is typically seamlessly integrated with the rest of the video, as suggested by examples (28), (29) and (30)[8]:

> 28. *In my opinion learning science is all about applying concepts that you've learned to practice problems* and then, if you get those problems wrong, identifying your misconceptions. *Now this is exactly what* [sponsor's name] *is all about.* It gives you a bunch of practice problems and so it helps you identify your misconceptions and then crucially it helps you correct your understanding. So if you want to have a go at this and look through some physics problems go to [sponsored link] and the first 20 people to click on that link will also get 20% off their premium annual subscription. (SC3)
>
> 29. I spend hours in the lab at microscopes like this one looking at flies and larvae for my various experiments but, whilst we are all scientists, we can't all afford beautiful microscopes like this one *and that's why I'm teaming up with* [sponsor's name] *to show you three simple ways to make the microscope* with just a laser pointer ready for you to celebrate world Science Day on November the 10th. (SLP 4)

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possible cause as to why also YouTube Science videos have been colonized by marketing and advertising.

[7] Comments are generally not included in the material under examination, but few exceptions are made in this paragraph. All comments have been anonymized.

[8] The promotional segments of videos appear to be heavily scripted; it is not possible, however, to establish whether they are authored by content creators or by the sponsor themselves.

30. So the next time that you're stuck in a trigonometry test and you're staring blankly at the questions, take some comfort in the fact that the person who named sin and cos didn't really know what they were doing either. If you want to prepare for that test, though, then *the best way you can do so is to actively engage with some problems that develop your mathematical toolkit and give you a deep understanding of the concepts at hand and the best way to do that is through* [sponsor's name]*, a website that promotes learning through problem solving*. (SC4; emphasis added)

YouTubers (especially Clark) often structure their argument as can be observed in the examples: first they highlight the importance of acquiring a certain piece of scientific knowledge or skill, subsequently they go on to promote their sponsors' services, presenting them as a possible solution to a problem somewhat related to the video topic. This specific argumentative structure enables them to simultaneously emphasize the usefulness of the scientific information shared in their videos as well as of the sponsor's products or services.

Besides smoothly incorporating paid advertising in their videos, content creators also try and downplay the importance of sponsorship deals by generating a strong affiliation with their audience. As already mentioned, this may be achieved through a number of rhetorical and discursive strategies which typically highlight the authenticity of the online *persona*. However, Science YouTubers also incorporate some traits which might be considered as stereotypical and artificial rather than genuine, but this does not seem to be a problem for their followers. In order to be entertaining and likeable, the users under analysis (principally Clark and Dainis) tend to discursively identify themselves with the "nerd" category. The definition of "nerd" incorporates numerous stereotypes such as intelligence and studiousness, an obsession with all things technological or scientific, an interest in Science fiction, and a remarkable awkwardness in social situations (Bednarek 2012, 203). Although the term was introduced rather recently, the figure of the nerd has always been part of our imagery (Chirchiano 2015).

Traditionally, there have been stereotypical mass cultural representations of the image of the scientist. That of the "crazy evil scientist" may be seen as the embodiment of the deficit model in that it stands for the dangers associated with Science and scientific practices; the feelings of anxiety that crazy scientists may evoke in the general public arguably underscore the distance between them and the lay population. "Nerds" are another kind of scientists: formerly characterized by a negative connotation, this group is currently enjoying a wide popularity especially

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thanks to mass cultural artefacts such as television programs (Cooper 2014). Besides providing a more positive image of the "nerd", TV series such as, for instance, "The Bing Bang Theory" have produced the effect of normalizing this previously marginalized category. As a result, this kind of scientists is currently enjoying a vast media coverage (Kendall 2011; Cooper 2014) as well as the affection of the viewers, who feel more connected to it. It thus may be hypothesized that, if the "crazy evil scientist" can be associated with the deficit model, the figure of the "nerd" and its recent success probably parallel the development and increasing adoption of the Science Participation Model.

At any rate, just as nerdy TV characters are "*scripted* identities that are *offered* to viewers as a particular construction of identity" (Bednarek 2012, 214; emphasis in the original), Science YouTubers adopt language strategies aimed at strategically highlighting the stereotypical traits of the "edited self". Simon Clark is perhaps the content creator who can most effectively do so. The figure of the nerd is typically linked with whiteness and maleness, therefore his physical appearance probably identifies him as "nerdier" than his female colleagues. In addition, he utilizes other rhetorical and discursive tools in order to construct his "nerdy" identity. For example, he stresses his "nerdiness" by revealing being a big fan of sci-fi (a typical feature of the "nerd"). In his entry "Could Planets from Star Wars Really Exist?" he showcases his extensive knowledge of the *Star Wars* saga; this video represents an attempt to establish whether the inexistent planets of the films could possibly exist in the universe as we know it. This type of content arguably allows Clark to construct himself as a nerd for various reasons: apart from being indicative of the fact that he is a huge Science fiction *aficionado*, it gives him the opportunity to display his deep knowledge of Atmospheric Physics, a crucial element he needs in order to be able to solve his mental puzzle:

31. This still leaves us with plenty of planets, some of which have parallels in the Earth's past or in its future. The frozen planet of Hoth, *for example*, is what the Earth is hypothesized to have looked like several times in its past during periods *known as* "Snowball Earth". During the last of these hypothesized episodes about 650 million years ago, atmospheric oxygen would have been at a level which was breathable - so Hoth as it's shown in the films has historical precedent. (SC5)

32. Kashyyyk (*yes, thank you*) is described as having a perfectly circular orbit – *meaning* it stays the same constant distance from its star and also has no *axial tilt, the angle between the planets rotation and its orbit around the star*. These two combined result in the planet having one continuous season as all parts of the planet received constant solar

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heating year-round. There are two planets in the solar system which actually exhibit these two characteristics: Mercury has almost no axial tilt and Venus has an almost perfectly circular orbit. So, while it's possible that these two characteristics could coincide and they would indeed produce a lack of seasons, this would be very unlikely. (SC5; emphasis added)

These examples contain instances of exemplifications ("for example") and denominations ("known as") as well as definitions. It might thus be argued that these text segments simply illustrate the YouTuber's desire to appear as very knowledgeable and as taking part in an expert-to-laypublic interaction (cf. § 3.3). Whereas this might be true to an extent, it is to be noted that what confers a certain degree of "nerdiness" to examples (31) and (32) is the fact that what is going on in the video is that the young scientist is engaged in a totally speculative exercise which does not have any bearing on reality (the analysis does not take real environments into account). This type of investigation makes it possible for him to show himself as someone who enjoys purely intellectual challenges, which represents another stereotypical "nerd" trait. The joke at the beginning of example (33), i.e. Clark pretending to be sneezing while pronouncing the bizarre name of the planet, is also a strategy aimed at characterizing the YouTuber as a "nerd"; as a matter of fact, bad, silly jokes may be associated with social awkwardness and, consequently, with "nerdiness".

The comments posted below the video seem to confirm that he has been successful in conveying his "nerdy" identity:

33. This is *one of the nerdiest videos I've* ever seen. I loved every minute of it.
34. This was extremely cool and very helpful! I'm trying to create a universe similar to Star Wars with planets and star systems that could theoretically exist in our own world and this really helped me with that! Plus, *I'm a Star Wars fan and a science nerd, so this was just awesome all around*. (emphasis added)

Interestingly, both commenters identify themselves as fellow "nerds", thus validating the hypothesis that YouTubers' self-representations as exemplars of this category may be an effective way of connecting and affiliating with the audience.

Another strategy which both Clark and Dainis adopt in order to underscore the "nerdy" traits of their *persona* is to discursively establish a link between scientific knowledge and practices with "coolness" (the latter also being a discursive construction). This link arguably stems

from "nerds"' obsession with Science, a trait which can be observed, for instance, in Simon Clark's self-introduction at the bottom of the information box of his videos:

> 35. I am Simon, a PhD candidate at the University of Exeter who's about to sit his viva. I upload videos on bits of science which are relevant to what I do, and *sometimes just because they're really cool*. (emphasis added)

Alex Dainis also depicts herself as a "nerd girl" by emphasizing that learning a certain piece of scientific information is "cool" to her:

> 36. This is so *cool to me!* I love knowing the genetics behind everyday stuff around me, and *this is totally the story I will now tell at every barbecue I go to this summer!* (AD1; emphasis added)

In addition, this example suggests that she is either not very familiar with social rules (specifically, what represents typical "barbecue talk") or that she only goes to barbecues attended by fellow "nerds".

Another stratagem Dainis utilizes in order to reinforce the connection between being "cool" and being a Science lover is to end her videos with slogans celebrating Science:

> 37. Go forth and do Science! (AD2)

> 38. So yeah… Science! (AD3)

It is to be noted that the last two examples either rely upon the implicit premise that the audience may be comprised of "nerds", who share a similar notion of what it means to be "cool", or indicate that the YouTuber is constructing her audience, asking viewers to align themselves with her as self-styled nerds.

In conclusion, it may be possible to state that, provided content creators are capable of generating a strong feeling of affiliation with their audience, viewers may willingly suspend disbelief and not notice/ be annoyed by the heavily traits of their favourite YouTubers which may be regarded as connected to an "emergent authenticity". Even apparent stereotypical and commercial features do not compromise (or paradoxically enhance!) the overall success of their edited self, so long as the ways in which they engage with their followers are perceived as authentic.

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This chapter has illustrated a number of language strategies adopted by Science YouTubers to confer "authenticity" to their content. The

analysis has revealed that these users mainly rely on an appeal to *ethos* in order to do that. This persuasive technique can be observed in the traits they confer to their online *persona* which displays features of both "the reliable expert" as well as "the passionate non-specialist". These characteristics allow them to come across as genuine Science lovers as well as honest and transparent users, thus implying that their videos are better and more trustworthy than those broadcast by traditional media because truly authentic.

In the next chapter the attention will shift to another YouTube community, i.e. that of mommy vloggers, and the investigation will see to ascertain whether this category of YouTubers relies on similar linguistic resources or discursively constructs "authenticity" in a different way.

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4.
Stay-at-Home Mothers

This chapter examines the discursive construction of authenticity in Stay-at-Home Mothers' vlogs. In this type of videos motherhood itself seems to work as a marker of authenticity. Recent discourses about the democratization effect of the Internet highlight how social actors who were previously excluded from the public sphere, such as, for instance, Stay-at-Home Mothers, have acquired the possibility of actively participating in social debates making their voices heard. Created directly by social media users who are mothers, YouTube mommy vlogs are therefore perceived as authentic exemplars of the motherhood experience, contrary to what happens with the representations of motherhood provided by traditional mainstream media.

4.1. Looking for visibility through mommy vlogging: radical or conservative act?

The category of Stay-at-Home Mums (or SAHMs) represents a compelling albeit challenging object of study, as its status is ambiguous: SAHMs stress the fact that they are non-working women, but those who are analysed here are professional YouTubers (Lagerwey 2017, 85) just like any other user selected for this study. Their identity is therefore hybrid, as it blends the role of the primary caregiver with that of the YouTube entrepreneur (Burgess and Green 2010).

Stay-at-Home Mothers' vlogs may not be as successful as makeup gurus' tutorials but are a rather popular type of content on YouTube. As previously stressed[1], SAHMs belong to those YouTube communities

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[1] Cf. Introduction.

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which have proven able to gain a certain popularity as well as certain visibility because they have been able to efficiently exploit the potential of the Web 2.0. As a matter of fact, Stay-at-Home Mothers were traditionally considered as passive subjects playing a peripheral role within public discourses, but thanks to social media they have acquired a more active status, narrating and sharing their experience in an online public sphere. As noted by scholar Rebecca Powell, "[h]istorically, depictions of motherhood have been imposed by experts [...] iconicized by the media [...], villanified or glorified by politicians [...], or negotiated in the private space of the home and playground" (2010, 37). Within the traditional public/private dichotomy, "[m]otherhood is seen as a part of the private or domestic sphere that women are supposed to occupy and not challenge" (Lopez 2009, 731). Studies published in the early 2010s highlighted the potential of webgenres to bring about change by enabling mothers to finally participate and provide their viewpoint in the debate about their role; in actual fact, new media "have the potential to embrace a wider range of experience and to resist some of the normative assumptions of a strictly top-down media culture" (Levine 2015, 8). Blogs were probably the first Internet genre to be appropriated by women to publicly express their perspective; mommy blogging was therefore dubbed as a "radical act" (Lopez 2009). Thanks to these new media, "motherhood goes public; motherhood goes rhetorical" (Powell 2010, 37); women rely on them to turn their personal narratives into interactive conversations with other mothers, thus expanding the notion of motherhood as well as mothers' place within the public sphere (Lopez 2009, 744). These interactions are the basis of community-building: just like in the classic oral tradition, women share stories and acquire knowledge from those who are experiencing motherhood alongside them instead of depending on guidance provided by institutions or experts (*ibid.*, 743). Over the last few years, the practice of mommy blogging (just like that of blogging in general) has witnessed a remarkable drop, but it has been paralleled by an increase in its video counterpart, i.e. mommy vlogging. Vlogs are a form of online video journal aimed at recording and sharing users' life experiences and consisting of monologues performed in front of a camera and are arguably an archetypal instance of YouTube participation (Burgess and Green 2010, 94). In this kind of videos "the labours of domesticity and child-rearing are continuously and constantly shared, put on display, and narrated through digital packets of information" (Wilson and Chivers Yochim 2015, 232): it may therefore be stated that they circulate some kind of "mediated domesticity" (*ibid.*, 234-236). This type of content represents "[t]he ideal of

entrepreneurship expanded beyond the technology industry into other aspects of life, including our most personal understanding of selfhood, relationships, and the body" (Marwick 2013, 4) and might be considered as rather emblematic of the current phase of capitalistic production.

Whereas scholarly discourses about mothers' adoption of new media at the turn of the last decade were rather optimistic with regard to their democratic, equalitarian potential, recent academic work on the issue depicts them in a probably less simplistic fashion. As a matter of fact, doubts have been raised as to whether this sort of online practice can be considered as truly empowering for women. Sharing one's personal maternal experience via social media "reap[s] a compelling combination of economic and affective reward" (Leonard and Negra 2015, 196), but economic value is linked to "the way online platforms turn such digital expressions of care into content, which the proprietors of social media platforms leverage for profits via data accumulation, advertising, and website traffic" (van Cleaf 2015, 248). In other words, the representation of motherhood on social media often becomes a commodity, but the latter generates more profits for the platforms than for the mothers who produce and upload content through their free labour.

The process of commodification of motherhood which seems to characterize mothers' social media output is paralleled by a process of depoliticization which may also not prove particularly empowering for them (*ibid.*, 249). Differently from what happens with feminist discourses and practices which attribute political value to the personal women's experiences and situate them within a larger social context as a way to effect change, the act of mommy vlogging does not seem (yet?) to become a vehicle for political action (*ibid.*, 248). As Lagerwey maintains, mommy vlogging about housework or childcare (and the difficulties they entail) does not turn into a possible criticism of the traditional division of domestic labour; on the contrary, self-branding efforts may create the effect of reinforcing its (discursive) naturalness besides conferring a glamorous quality to it:

> Of course, women bloggers are not being paid for their domestic work, but for writing about their domestic work. They are being paid not for their housework or childcare, which they would do anyway, but for narrativizing, aestheticizing, and rendering their housework appealing, work that includes creating and maintaining the self-as-brand, and the affective labor of building and maintaining a fan base – in short, fame work. (Lagerwey 2017, 85)

It may therefore be stated that the processes of commodification and depoliticization of mothers' social media posts, which are both con-

nected to the economic value produced by this type of digital content, may ultimately not always work as empowering tools for mothers, but the emotional value generated by moms' recording and sharing of their experiences may provide them with the possibility of finding validation for their feelings (van Cleaf 2015, 248). Whereas social media probably fail to turn mothers' experiences into arguments for political change and simultaneously embrace and challenge feminist ideas of motherhood, they may be nonetheless relied upon as networks of emotional support (*ibid.*, 260). This latter quality may be related to the idea that new media offer a more authentic version of motherhood than mainstream media accounts of it. The latter seem to only emphasize positive feelings of instinctive and fulfilling maternal love, while they gloss over mothers' "lopsided, slightly hysterical, often exaggerated but more or less authentic experiences" (Bradley 2005). With their blending of the public and the private sphere, of Goffmanian "front stage" and "back stage" (1959), social media and vlogs in particular come across as genuine representations of childcare, unlike traditional broadcast media products. As a consequence, those users who are able to discursively construct their Internet *persona* as "authentic" are those who can aspire to become micro-celebrities; just like in the case of YouTube scientists, being able to appear true to oneself attracts vast online audiences and may turn into a success factor for those mothers who desire to become social media entrepreneurs.

The following sections explore the discursive and rhetorical strategies adopted by SAHMs to construct their online self: by investigating the main identity traits displayed by mommy vloggers, it will be possible to verify whether they have any characteristics in common with Science YouTubers. If this is the case, the hypothesis that professional content creators share a common core of linguistic resources no matter their community of practice will be validated.

4.2. Aims and outline of the chapter

Situated at the crossroads of important discourses such as parenthood, feminism and postfeminism, consumerism and commodification of personal experiences, SAHMs' vlogs may represent a stimulating object of study but they have as yet received scant scholarly attention [2]. To the best

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[2] Ümit Kennedy's PhD dissertation (2019) possibly represents the most comprehensive work to date on the topic. However, Kennedy's research does not provide a linguistic analysis of this kind of videos.

of my knowledge, no work has been conducted which adopts a linguistic perspective on the topic.

Recognizing this gap in the research on digital communication, this chapter aims to single out the linguistic strategies adopted by Stay-at-Home Mothers to construct a successful online *persona* and persuade the audience of its authenticity. More specifically, it outlines the main rhetorical and discursive devices of this community of users and compares and contrasts them with those scientists typically avail themselves of. This way it will be possible to validate the hypothesis of whether different categories of YouTubers utilize the same language resources to come across as "authentic". As mentioned above, SAHM's videos are typically vlogs, one of the most popular types of YouTube posts. Vlogs are a kind of video journals, therefore users record various "watchworthy" moments of their day and then edit them into a coherent whole. SAHMs' video clips habitually consist of monologues performed in front of a camera. They often take place within the mothers' home, but they may also be taped in their car or in closed public spaces (such as restaurants, hotel rooms etc.): very rarely are outside shots incorporated in posts, possibly due to noise reasons. Rather expectedly, SAHMs' close ups are extremely numerous and their perspective and talk is what dominates in their videos, but children are also very present in the vlogs [3] (husbands and pets may be attributed either a significant or a marginal role as different vloggers may opt for different solutions).

The corpus collected for this part of the research contains fifteen vlogs posted from 2016 to 2019 by three English-speaking mothers: Kyra Sivertson ("K Baby"), Tara Lynn Henderson, and Anna Saccone-Joly (cf. Appendix for further details). All of them are American, but Anna Saccone-Joly (whose heritage is Italian) is currently living in the UK. She is thirty-two years old and has four children. With more than a million subscribers, she is the most famous SAHM among those included in this chapter. Kyra Sivertson is twenty-one and has three kids. She started her channel when she was seventeen and pregnant with her first baby, therefore she initially promoted herself as a "teen mom vlogger" [4]. She can count on a loyal fan base of about 800,000 subscrib-

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[3] Mommy vloggers' choice of posting their underage children's images online (possibly as a means to attract views) has been heavily contested. It is to be noted that the life of some of these kids is documented and shared on YouTube from the very beginning (with a "Live Pregnancy Video" and a "Live Birth Video") with the effect that those children whose mothers are really famous become micro-celebrities from the moment they are born.

[4] The category of teen mom vloggers represents a popular subgroup of mom vloggers.

ers. Both Saccone-Joly and Sivertson have extremely popular second channels, "Saccone-Jolys" and "OK Baby" respectively[5], which they share with their significant others and belong to the category of "family vlogs". Finally, Tara Lynn Henderson is twenty-eight years old and has three kids. She is the least famous of the three, as her channel is followed by just below 400,000 subscribers[6].

Just like in the case of scientists, these users were selected on the basis of their popularity, drawing on the assumption that famous SAHMs are possibly more able of coming across as authentic than their competitors besides being more likely to affect YouTube discourses on motherhood and childcare. It is to be noted, however, that prominent mom YouTubers may be influential as regards the online discursive construction of maternity because of their notoriety, but this does not necessarily make them good representatives of the mother category. The three women selected for this study have certain elements in common which may be said to provide a selective (and not necessarily authentic) representation of Stay-at-Home Moms: all of them are Caucasian, blonde, and heterosexual. Moreover, they can all count on good looks and a slender body, in spite of the fact that they all were pregnant and had two babies in the time span considered in this research. Finally, the three women are all either married or engaged, which offers them the possibility of staying at home with their children because they do not have to provide for their families (even though they may currently make more money than their husbands/fiancés thanks to their online entrepreneurial activities). Having made this necessary *caveat*, it is still possible to utilize their vlogs as objects of study in order to investigate authenticity, because, as previously mentioned, their success is arguably connected with their ability to represent themselves as genuine in the eyes of their audience.

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The remainder of this chapter is structured as follows: § 4.3 focuses on SAHMs' self-portray as both expert mothers and "moms in the making"; § 4.4 on the discursive the construction of the genuine, "behind the scene" life as a mother; and, finally, § 4.5 on the apparent "emergent authenticity" of the Stay-at-Home Mom influencer.

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[5] The acronym "OK" of the name of channel has a double meaning: it is both used as an interjection and as a sort of Saxon Genitive, since O and K are the initials of the names of the teen parent vloggers of the channel (Oscar and Kyra). This possibly explains the decision of naming Sivertson's personal channel "K baby".

[6] Data last updated in July 2019.

4.3. The professional "mom friend"

A first step in the analysis is to explore the linguistic strategies intended to convey a sense of authenticity and which are used in vlogs and in their titles. At a micro-level, authenticity construction appears to rely on extremely detailed accounts of mothers' daily life, on the prominence given to words or expressions belonging to the domain of "realness" and to the domain of intimacy and feelings.

The use of meticulous descriptions contributes to making SAHMs' monologues in front of the camera more lively, but it first and foremost reinforces the idea that what is being reported about is genuine and not fake. Details included in the vlogs mainly concern time references, body parts and functions, and numbers (more precisely, the number of children and pets the vlogger is looking after).

The fact that mothers often mention the time of day does not come as a surprise, since, as already pointed out, vlogs are the video equivalent of blogs, i.e. an online form of diary or journal. Moreover, some of the posts selected for the study belong to popular vlog categories which specifically aim at providing a temporally articulated record of the user's life, such as, for example, "A Day in the Life" or "What I Ate Today"[7]. SAHMs mention time with regard to workout activities (ex. 1), meals (ex. 2), children's activities (ex. 3), and free time (ex. 4, 5):

1. If you want to see my workout that I did at 5:45 a.m. this morning then watch the next clip. (AS2)

2. Today is a bit of a rush because we're going to London in like one minute. Oh my God! Our car's booked for 9. It's 8:59 and I'm eating my breakfast now. (AS5)

3. So I decided to swaddle him up again I think at around like 4:30 or so and put him back in the swing and then he woke up a bunch of times. (TH2)

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[7] Hashtags were introduced on YouTube in 2016 but it was only in July 2018 (i.e. after some of the vlogs selected for this study were posted) that YouTube released a new version where they could be actually used as a sort of categorization system (Binder 2018). Before they could use hashtags as a way of labelling their content, platform users usually created titles which would allow their videos to easily come up in YouTube searches: popular titles would spread very rapidly and be reproduced by numerous other content creators, with the result that video titles have become the YouTube equivalent of Twitter's and Facebook's hashtags (although things have been slowly changing after July 2018). Typical examples of video title performing the same function of hashtags are "A Day in the Life", "Show and Tell", "Big Haul" etc. etc.

4. It's currently 12:47 *and I am in my office*. (AS1)

5. *This is my window nap time. It's my window to work. It's currently three*. (AS1; emphasis added)

Incidentally, it is to be noted that free time often equates with working time, as mommy vloggers seem to be working and parenting round the clock.

6. If you don't already know, we have been on holiday. Well, it was like… It was a work holiday technically. (AS4)

7. So I was in Montana, I was in Idaho for a family vacation and then I was on our work trip slash work vacation. (KB1)

In regard to webcam culture, Banet-Weiser maintains that "[w]ork, or labor […] becomes immaterial, and this process does not make work more like 'free time', but, rather, tends to commodify free time by transforming it into time that can be monitored, recorded, repackaged, and sold" (2012, 76). As indicated by examples (6) and (7), this seems to apply to SAHMs, for whom setting boundaries may prove an impossible task, both during their daily routine and during their holidays, which further confirms that their status as non-working moms is open to debate.

Going back to SAHMs' use of details as a linguistic strategy to appear authentic, it is possible to observe that these vloggers provide very accurate descriptions of their own and their children's body parts and functions. This type of text may also serve the function of sharing potentially useful information about what to do in order to guarantee the physical well-being of the mother or of the babies. In other cases, it may be the SAHM herself reporting a specific issue she is experiencing in order to invite suggestions from the public (cf. ex. 8).

8. This is what I'm using right now in the bath for him. I tried this last time we gave him a bath and his skin is not clearing up and this is also what I was using and I don't know… I feel like he has really sensitive skin like… like I do. (TH2)

From a discursive standpoint, the sharing of personal physical details is connected with the blending between the private and the public sphere. This blending may occasionally lead SAHMs to reveal very intimate facts which are thus broadcast online and able to reach hundreds of thousands of viewers:

9. [T]hen I picked up some more pads for myself. *I'm not bleeding* anymore but I got the thong ones. Put in my… my regular like day-to-day

underwear because I'm not wearing those granny panties anymore but *I am still leaking.* (TH2)

10. So I've always had this thing [...] where when I eat a lot of gluten or wheat products I bloat like I look like six months pregnant. I'm not joking like I'm not exaggerating. I will try and show you guys maybe some time on the vlog. *To be honest it's kind of embarrassing and it's kind of... it's not something that I really like to share about but...* (AS1; emphasis added)

In example (10), Anna Saccone seems to acknowledge that her account of her body's possibly allergic reaction may be somewhat inappropriate to the context, but she still decides to share this type of information: this allows her to both come across as authentic, i.e. not concealing anything from her public, and to stimulate a possible interaction (via comment) on the topic of coeliac disease.

By and large, the effect that this insistence on bodily details arguably produces is that prominence is given to the physical aspect of motherhood. What may be inferred from these excerpts is that, rather than turning audiences off, accurate descriptions may actually contribute to captivating their attention. View and interaction statistics suggest that this is particularly true of pregnancy; in actual fact, popular vlog titles (performing the same function as hashtags; cf. footnote 5) among mommy vloggers include "Live Pregnancy Test", "Telling My Husband I'm Pregnant", "XX Week Bumpdate", "Emotional Labour and Birth Vlog", "Bringing Baby Home", "Postpartum Update". Notably, this insistence on pregnancy details is something that SAHMs' vlogs have in common with reality TV shows[8]. Both types of video products may be said to "transform pregnancy into entertainment, [with the result that] conceiving and bearing children become[s] not just reproductive labor but labor that produces a lucrative commodity: the entrepreneurial mother" (Lagerwey 2017, 57).

The representation of SAHMs which is emerging in the analysis is rather ambivalent; this ambivalence can also be observed in the way they construct themselves both as "professional" mothers imparting their wisdom through their videos and as "mom friends" who are "navigating motherhood" alongside their viewers. As remarked at the beginning of this paragraph, mommy vloggers often allude to the number of children (and, in some instances, of pets) they have to look after. Reference to

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[8] Providing information regarding intimate bodily details is a feature shared by both reality TV programs and mommy vlogs.

quantity is very common in video titles, which may not be surprising as it represents an attention-catching strategy often found in headlines, too:

11. Clean & Unpack With Me & My *THREE KIDS UNDER 4* (KB1)
12. REAL LIFE WITH *3 KIDS AND A PUPPY* (TH3)
13. Real Life Mom of *4 Kids & 6 Dogs* (AS2; emphasis added)

The repeated mention of the number of children is linked to the idea of expertise: SAHMs depict themselves as competent mothers who can take care of many kids (and possibly various domestic animals) simultaneously. Emphasizing the fact that they have numerous families allows these vloggers to highlight the significant experience they have accumulated over the years.

14. He was just really fussy and like not himself and was just snacking like on the boob *but I could tell* because I gave him like a few teething toys [...] a few teething toys to play with and *I could just tell* he was like really going at them so I took his temperature. His temperature is fine so I just gave him some teether and put him to bed but he just wasn't... *I don't think he's feeling very great today.* (AS2)
15. When I hold him he's fussy. I've tried putting him in the wrap, he's still super fussy no matter what I do and so I think he's just still hungry. *That's the only thing I can think of so...* I got like a few good burps out of him after I breastfed him *so I know he doesn't have any burps left.* Maybe it could be gas pains but *I don't really think it is. I think he's still hungry.* (TH2; emphasis added)

Examples (14) and (15) show that these women are not first-time moms: as a matter of fact, they demonstrate an ample knowledge of children's behavior and of stratagems to use in order to ease their discomfort. As can be observed, mothers proceed inductively, on the basis of their infants' actions and reactions, and conclude by providing their opinion as to what the matter is: both Saccone and, even more, Henderson, do not attenuate their final statements with hedging devices, but reveal a certain confidence in their judgements.

This display of expertise is, however, balanced out by SAHMs' discursive construction of themselves as "mom friends" who are engaged in peer-to-peer information sharing:

16. Another thing I wanted to mention: I got a ton of good feedback from you guys in my last vlog about Grayson's tongue tie. So I'm definitely gonna get a second opinion [...]. A lot of you guys said that pediatri-

cians aren't really specialized in diagnosing whether or not a newborn has a tongue or lip tie, so thank you guys so much for all of your feedback on my last video. It was super helpful. (TH2)

This careful interplay between expert-to-lay and peer-to-peer communication seems strategic in both catching the attention of new viewers who may be attracted by SAHMs' expertise on "all things motherhood" as well as in retaining old and new viewers by engaging in a sort of peer-to-peer, friendly conversation with them. The combined use of discursive and rhetorical resources belonging to the "expertise" and the "mom-in-the-making" produces an identity trait which is akin to that of the "ordinary expert" described in the chapter about Science YouTubers. In the following paragraphs the analysis will focus on other aspects of the construction of SAHMs' self with a view to verifying whether they are comparable to those of young scientists, too.

4.4. The "real" mom

As previously stated, the second element authenticity appears to be shaped around is the widespread adoption of the semantic domain of "realness". The word "real" (or equivalent expressions) frequently recurs in the titles of the videos with the rather obvious aim of underscoring their authenticity and attracting views, possibly to the detriment of other posts about motherhood whose titles do not contain any instances of this adjective or its synonyms. For example, one of Tara Lynn Henderson's vlogs selected for this study is tactically called "A Real Day in the Life of a Mom", a title which differentiates it from many YouTube videos that are simply named "A Day in the Life of a Mom".

Many of SAHMS' videos feature a discursive distinction between what mothers strategically label as "real" content providing a genuine account of the motherhood experience (i.e. their vlogs) and other maternity narratives, most notably those found in traditional broadcast media as well as those posted on YouTube by other mommy vloggers, which may seem real but are to be regarded as inauthentic.

The strategy of operating a rhetorical separation of the notion of "real" between what has to be deemed as an archetypical instance of "realness" and what may look real but is not is rather common and has been described with recourse to the methodological tools provided by Argumentation Theory, i.e. the study of arguments schemes and logical

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reasoning as means to reach cogent conclusions[9]. Specifically, the above-mentioned occurrences of the adjective "real" and its synonyms often appear within an argumentation scheme called "dissociation". Chaïm Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca were the first to investigate dissociations and to come up it with a definition for them:

> By processes of dissociation, we mean techniques of separation which have the purpose of dissociating, separating, disuniting elements which are regarded as forming a whole or at least a unified group within some system of thought: dissociation modifies such a system by modifying certain concepts which make up its essential parts. (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 1969, 190)

A dissociation entails an artificial splitting of the same concept in two distinct separate entities with the aim of attributing those entities a different value. As stated by van Rees, the creation of dissociations involves the following steps:

> 1. from an existing conceptual unit, expressed by a single term, one or more aspects are split off; 2. through this operation a contradiction or paradox is resolved because now a proposition can be considered true in one interpretation of the original term and false in the other; 3. the reduced and the split off concept are assigned a different value. (van Rees 2005, 64)

By rhetorically dividing the notion of "videos documenting mothers' lives" into two distinct categories, that is to say that of "*real* videos documenting mother's lives" and that of all other videos covering the same topic, it is possible for mothers to suggest that their content is worth watching because, unlike posts which do not feature the word "real", is authentic. 40% of Kyra Sivertson's video titles (among those collected for the study) contains a dissociation, and Tara Lynn Henderson adopts this argumentation scheme even more (60%). On the contrary, Anna Saccone seems to use dissociations more sparingly (20%).

Another way in which SAHMs discursively construct their realness and their genuineness is by drawing attention to possible problems, defects, and negative feelings rather than glossing over them. This strat-

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[9] An exhaustive illustration of Argumentation Theory arguably falls outside the scope of the volume and cannot reasonably be provided due to its complexity. As a consequence, I will limit myself to quoting the words of Frans van Eemeren and Rob Grootendorst, two of the most notable figures of Argumentation Theory, who contend that argumentation is "[...] a verbal and social activity of reason aimed at increasing (or decreasing) the acceptability of a controversial standpoint for the listener or reader, by putting forward a constellation of propositions intended to justify (or refute) the standpoint before a rational judge" (1996, 5).

egy is strictly connected with the new lo-fi, amateurish aesthetics which appears to characterize UGC content on YouTube and which allows creators to come across as truly authentic. SAHMs's videos may include emphasis on flaws which regard their physical appearance (cf. ex. 17), their video-making skills (cf. ex. 18), and, rather unexpectedly, parenting (cf. ex. 19):

17. I just apologize for the state of my hair in this entire video because I didn't have time to do it this morning and so it kind of looks like a hot mess. (AS5)

18. I'm talking so fast, so I'm trying. I'm sorry I'm realizing it's not working very well in this video. I'm talking very fast so we're gonna talk slower. Okay now. (KB3)

19. I don't know how to get her to stop but she does this like high-pitched scream and it just like sets me over the edge and there's only so much screeching and screaming that I can take in a day before I just lose it. (TH5)

Highlighting one's flaws is a typical rhetorical strategy which allows YouTubers to come across as truly authentic and to stress the difference between their truthful video content and the polished, inauthentic products of traditional media. However, whereas other categories of users never mention defects or problems related to their own field of expertise (for example, young scientists never portray themselves as uncertain about scientific knowledge), SAHMs may instead show their struggles with parenting. Other communities of users possibly avoid revealing any indecision or mistake regarding their professional domain lest they should no longer be considered as authoritative and therefore trustworthy. Rather paradoxically, it may be stated that mommy vloggers decide to adopt the opposite behavior in order to accomplish the same aim, that is to say they occasionally allude to their shortcomings as to be able to appear credible. The representation of motherhood which emerges in their vlogs as so difficult and demanding that should SAHMs never mention their failings, their authenticity may be called into question.

The mothers' choice of giving vent to their feelings of inadequacy on camera is another manifestation of this strategy [10]. Just like mommy bloggers, YouTube SAHMs

[...] are creating a different picture of motherhood to what we see in the mainstream media. Instead of the vision of the loving mother, we see

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[10] Cf. § 4.1.

women who are frazzled by the demands of their newborn baby, who have no clue what to do when their child gets sick, who suffer from postpartum depression and whose hormones rage uncontrollably. These are women with immense fan bases, who are critiqued by outsiders but sustained and supported by other women just like them. (Lopez 2009, 732)

Expressing one's emotions is a way of appearing authentic on account of the strong relationship between close intimacy and truth (MacCannell 1973, 591). Mommy vloggers tend to share how they feel about the so-called "mom guilt" (cf. ex. 20, 21) and "mother exhaustion" (cf. ex. 22, 23), oftentimes crying as they address their virtual public. As a matter of fact, their videos contain raw displays of emotion.

20. [Crying] *I feel bad* because I'm taking it out on Bailey throughout the day like I have no patience so I snap at her for the littlest things and she doesn't understand and I tried to tell her before her nap today the reason why mommy's so quick to snap at her is because she isn't sleeping but it'll get better eventually and I'm sorry that I have like no energy to like sit down and she doesn't understand. I'm hoping that it'll get better and I know it will: it's just a phase but it's hard. (TH4)

21. [Crying] *I have had the worst mom guilt today*, in the past couple days. I just feel so bad for like not being able to spend as much time as I have been with the girls. (TH1)

22. *I'm sorry to kind of put that out and put that on you guys. I don't mean… I don't mean it to come across that way at all. I'm just venting because I'm just frustrated*, but I'm gonna go to bed now. (AS1)

23. [Crying] Sometimes it just feels like you don't get a break like ever and sometimes you just want like half an hour to an hour to yourself baby free and I know Andrea's really good baby and *this is so like not an attack on him at all – just let me make that clear – or any baby*, but I think it's normal for mothers… so I have these moments of just like you just want to curl up in a ball and like stop in a corner because you just feel so like one away… (AS1; emphasis added)

These examples once more confirm the ambivalent image and behaviour of mommy vloggers: on the one hand they reveal their feelings in order to convey the message that they are not hiding anything from their audience (i.e. they are letting their viewers access what Goffman dubbed as "backstage"; 1959) and to seem more genuine. At the same time, crying on camera and opening up about their emotions also allows SAHMs to position themselves within those discourses which present new media as empowering for moms, as these media provide the opportunity of documenting motherhood in all its aspects, including those which are

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not linked to positive feelings. However, as suggested by example (22), YouTube mothers harbor very mixed sentiments towards the possibility of sharing their private difficulties online. This does not appear to have to do with concerns about their privacy, but rather with the fact that they are arguably not fully able or willing to challenge the traditional (and sexist) idea that they should not complain about their condition as mothers, because the latter represents their greatest fulfillment. Just like the mommy bloggers studied by Lopez, mommy vloggers "struggle to embrace th[e] act [of creating a different picture of maternity and child rearing], and in their struggle expose these myths of motherhood ever more starkly" (2009, 732). Additionally, whereas SAHMs portray "mom guilt" as a typical corollary to motherhood, feminist discourses about it reject the idea that this type of feeling is innate and natural.

Finally, to further complicate the issue, it may be hypothesized that mommy vloggers rely on the ostentation of their emotions to catch and maintain viewers' attention and not just to provide a truthful account of motherhood. Similarly to what happens on reality TV programs, melodrama can represent an efficient strategy to attract audiences and can be turned into a self-branding tool. Interestingly, both self-branding and melodrama depend on affect to be effective (Lagerwey 2017, 31). Melodrama is aimed at generating a sentimental response in the viewer; by the same token, self-branding heavily relies on the consumer's trust in the person and participation in his/her narrative: "[m]elodrama then, a mode that exploits viewers' emotions [...] is a perfect vehicle for brand expansion" (*ibid.*).

As this analysis suggests, the discursive and rhetorical strategies SAHMs utilize in order to emphasize the "realness" of their *persona* and of their content shows some degree of ambiguity. This probably indicates that a certain suspension of disbelief is required on part of their audience to view mothers' display of the self as genuine and that, as will be shown in the next paragraph, some of their traits may be more associated to the notion of "emergent authenticity".

4.5. The mom influencer

The last section of the analysis of SAHMs' vlogs is devoted to the investigation of moms' role as influencers. As previously noted about YouTube scientists, this specific aspect of professional YouTubers' may represent a trait of "emergent authenticity", in that, in spite of its being

patently connected with market-constructed values, it does not prevent users to come across as genuine [11].

Rather expectedly, the commercial element of mommy videos is more prominent than in those posted by scientists: the greater economic success of the former category is probably both a cause and an effect of this tendency. Differently from Science YouTubers who are more amateurish in this respect, professional mommy vloggers typically work with Multi-Channel Networks (MCNs) that act as intermediaries between creators, media corporations and YouTube [12]. As a consequence, SAHMs can count on external help (besides on their own ability) to develop economically rewarding collaborations with brands and sponsors. It is important to stress that this category of users appears remarkably interesting from a marketing perspective because their videos are mainly viewed by other mothers, who "serve as particularly good consumers because they also make purchases on behalf of their entire family" (Lopez 2009, 740).

Paid advertisement is much more intrusive in mothers' vlogs than it is on other social media platforms. Mommy bloggers, for example, can decide whether to incorporate promotions within their posts or to discreetly place them outside the main content of the blog with the result that "[t]he border position of advertising, the generator of profit, positions it as an addiction to mommy blogging, not the sole purpose, or even driving factor" (Powell 2010, 45). Whereas YouTube mothers also insert descriptions and links to products and services in the peripheral elements of their posts (especially in their info boxes), they are also expected to mention brand names and advertised items in their videos, i.e. in the texts of their monologues.

Sponsorship messages typically take the form of recommendation from mother to mother. Due to the fact that mommy vlogs are, among other things, a means for women to exchange knowledge on parenting, the speech act of suggesting is obviously among those prevailing in them. This means that commercial content is smoothly embedded in SAHMs' talks. As a matter of fact, from the micro-linguistic as well as discursive viewpoint, the analysis of the sponsored sections of videos reveals the presence of the same strategies adopted in the previous paragraphs. In particular, the use of details which contributes to mommy vloggers' self-representation as expert, "professional" mothers can be exploited to make paid advertising possibly more convincing and persuasive.

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[11] Cf. § 3.5.
[12] Cf. § 1.3.

24. During the first year they go through a ton of leaps so this is just the first of many but I just wanted to share that with you because if you do not have it [baby app] and you have a baby then I definitely recommend it because it's super helpful. (TH2)

Example (24) shows Henderson performing the role of the competent mother giving (sponsored) advice on how to track babies' growing spurts by utilizing an app.

SAHMs integrate commercial messages in their vlogs rather frequently, which possibly explains why they tend to provide precise references to products and brands even when they are not remunerated to do so [13].

25. Okay *I swear this is not… these videos are not sponsored* by [brand name] but we are having another [brand name] meal for the second week in a row. (AS1)

26. I love planning but if you don't love planning, just getting like a simple [planner] from [supermarket chain] works as well but I love my [brand name] – *not sponsored* – but I absolutely love the planner that they have. (KB5; emphasis added)

Another strategy that has been previously identified as a distinctive characteristic of mommy vlogs and that is also employed in embedded advertisements is the prominence given to SAHMs' emotions. Typically, mothers express their feelings about products and brands which are almost invariably favourable and enthusiastic, as suggested by the frequent use of either heavily connoted verbs and adverbs of degree which serve the purpose of underscoring the positive sensation.

27. I'm *obsessed with* this rug. (TH1)

28. Have you guys ever heard me talk about them before? *I absolutely love them*. I've been using them since I was about six months pregnant with Avery. (KB1)

29. I'm *really excited* to open this and start using this on his skin. (TH2; emphasis added)

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[13] Paid sponsorship on social media platforms must be disclosed under the law. Whereas it is possible to hypothesize that not all YouTubers necessarily abide by this rule, professional ones (especially those working with MCNs) are less likely to breach it. Consequently, it may be safely assumed that whenever they state that they are not sponsored to talk about a product they are not lying about it.

A final remark that can be made on SAHMs' role as mommy influencers is that, as the examples above indicate, motherhood discourse is so intimately intertwined with commodity and consumerist discourse that, on the one hand, the latter ends up not representing an hindrance to these users' self-representation as authentic and trustworthy mothers. On the other hand, this interdiscursive feature of mommy vlogs possibly provides an image of maternity and child rearing as something that can be mostly experienced through commodities. Once again, this type of ambiguity does not appear to make these videos particularly empowering for women (and not just for those belonging to the less affluent classes), because it seems to imply that products and goods play a substantial role in the relationship between mothers and babies, thus diminishing the formers' ability to cultivate a bond, nurture and care for their children.

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The linguistic investigation of SAHMS' vlogs has revealed that Stay-at-Home Moms create their online *persona* and persuade the audience of its authenticity by often relying on an appeal to *ethos*. As a matter of fact, they represent their content as different from any other documenting motherhood (in mainstream media or on YouTube), different and to be preferred because authentic. Their videos feature a rhetorically and discursively constructed authenticity which, at the micro level of analysis, relies on an abundant use of details, on the emphasis on the semantic domains of realness and of feelings which aims at producing a sense of close intimacy with the audience.

Just like scientists' videos, mommy vlogs feature elements which may be seen as representative of some sort of "emergent authenticity" because their ambiguity requires some sort of leap of faith on part of the audience so that they can be accepted as genuine. The heavy sponsorship of products which characterizes these videos and the favorable opinions and enthusiasm almost invariably associated with them may be a case in point. The same may be said about SAHMs' self-representation as totally devoted to their family (i.e. as non-working mothers): as they themselves declare, their recording and editing schedules are round-the-clock, which may seems to contradict the idea that they only perform the role of primary caregivers.

In spite of this, SAHMs generate a strong sense of affiliation with their YouTube public which allows them to come across as authentic and trustworthy. Mommy vloggers are able to create an appeal to *pathos* which engenders an emotional response in the viewers. The introduction of melodramatic elements in their vlogs as well as the recurrent

reference to solidarity among mothers which entails peer-to-peer sharing of information and opinions is what makes it possible for SAHMs to enter into a relationship with their public, a relationship which is perceived as "authentic". YouTube scientists also achieve the same aim, but their communicative practices rest more on *ethos* creation than on *pathos*.

It may be thus stated that, whereas mommy vlogs distinguish themselves on the basis of their pathetic component, most of the strategies adopted by SAHMs are similar or comparable to those used by young scientists. The hypothesis that different categories of users may avail themselves of analogous discursive and rhetorical means seems to be comforted by the results obtained so far. In the next chapter another group of YouTubers, i.e. that of makeup artists, will be investigated to further confirm whether it is correct to assert that the linguistic strategies adopted to construct authenticity on YouTube are homogeneous even across dissimilar communities.

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5.
Makeup Artists

This chapter investigates the concept of authenticity in makeup tutorials. Makeup discourse and authenticity discourse may seem diametrically opposed but, as this case study suggests, the relation between the two is more complex and multifaceted than it may appear at first glance. Advertising discourses which construct cosmetics as a tool to bring out one's genuine inner self and transform a person into who they want to be hybridize YouTube celebrities' makeup content. However, in spite of being the most heavily sponsored footage among that selected for this study, makeup tutorials come across as products of a spontaneous makeup routines and virtual friendly chats due to their careful rhetorical design. In addition, the analysis indicates that YouTube makeup artists (similarly to scientists and mommy vloggers) are able to discursively juxtapose themselves and their audience as "us amateurs" to "them/cosmetic brands" thus possibly adding to their claims of being "authentic".

5.1. Makeup and authenticity: two irreconcilable notions?

According to the 2018 *Pixability Beauty Report*[1], YouTube is currently one of the most suitable digital platforms for cosmetic advertising campaigns. Even with competing platforms such as Instagram quickly on the rise, "YouTube remains a beauty powerhouse [...] and this trend is

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[1] Pixability is a media and advertising company specialized in YouTube optimization and brand suitability. It provides marketers with help and guidance to amplify the impact of their video advertising across social media platforms. Every year it puts out a detailed report on how the beauty industry is performing on social media and how marketers can better connect with their customers and promote their products.

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showing no signs slowing" (Pixability 2018). What makes YouTube such an efficient tool to promote beauty products is the fact that it offers marketers the possibility to "take advantage of YouTube's massive built-in viewership by developing a longform video strategy, leveraging influencers and publishing frequently to continue building and activating their audience, deepening brand commitment" (*ibid.*). Pixability's study also points out the significant role played by influencers within the online cosmetic domain, noticing that they "drive 32X higher engagement rates than beauty brands" and that, probably due to this fact, "marketers are increasingly adopting digital-first strategies" (*ibid.*).

YouTube cosmetic experts are thus extremely famous; therefore, it should not come as a surprise that the community of makeup artists is the most popular one among those analysed in this volume. However, if the equation between being well-known on the platform and being able to effectively construct authenticity holds, the success of this category of users may be somewhat unexpected as makeup and authenticity may at first appear as two irreconcilable notions. As a matter of fact, a part of the discourses surrounding makeup tends to establish a link between applying makeup and putting on some sort of mask, thus altering one's genuine facial features (Kennedy 2016). As a consequence, it may be claimed that those who share this kind of social attitude entertain the idea that made-up people "are not really themselves", or, worse, are "fake" (*ibid.*) [2].

There are, however, contrary discourses which are mainly circulated within the beauty corporate and advertising domains and which depict makeup and authenticity as not mutually exclusive constructs. Brooke Duffy's study on women's magazines identifies three overlapping notions of authenticity which emerge in this kind of publication, i.e. authenticity as connected with the naturalness of products, with the ordinariness of the aspect of the average person – which should be celebrated as representative of "real external beauty" –, and with internal beauty, which can be found through a journey of self-discovery (2013). Interestingly, none of these tropes which appear to increasingly infuse advertising

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[2] This type of discourse was hegemonic in Victorian America, where the use of cosmetics was associated with prostitution, and during the rise of second-wave feminism in the 1960s, when "movement leaders and social critics denounced the lack of 'real women' in the media" (Duffy 2013, 138). Opposing discourses instead prevailed at the beginning of the twentieth century, when the nascent beauty industry found itself in need of legitimizing makeup practices after the Victorian period, as well as at the end of the century, with the emerge of neoliberal and postfeminist discourses (*ibid.*, 138-139; cf. also Peiss 1998).

beauty discourse seems to disrupt its commercial function, as they portray cosmetics as something that can reveal, rather than conceal, people's true self (*ibid.*). This kind of discourse thus provides women with a "ready-made solution to the problematic struggle between appearance and reality" (Duffy 2013, 138)[3]. Interestingly, the idea that women can express their genuine identity by applying makeup comes to be interlocked with another notion of authenticity construction, i.e. that of the self (and, more specifically, of womanhood) as a performance (*ibid.*).

Both these dynamics are rather discernible in makeup videos. As maintained by Ümit Kennedy:

> Although the aim of beauty vlogs is to teach new makeup techniques, demonstrate and review new products, or circulate beauty-related information, the videos include a large amount of self-disclosure. Beauty vloggers reveal intimate things about themselves and *actively engage in the practice of self-representation* while filming. Beauty vlogging is unique to other vlogging genres as it almost always involves an immediate transformation of the physical self in each video. [...] Thus the process of self-representation is multi-dimensional *as not only are* [women] *presenting the self, but they are also visually constructing the self on camera.* (Kennedy 2016; emphasis added)

It may therefore be stated that YouTube makeup artists engage in a process of identity construction both through the performances they realize in their videos as well as in the visual makeover recorded on camera (*ibid.*). Different scholars have adopted the metaphor of "the mirror" to conceptualize this online unfolding of the self (cf. Kavoori 2001; Procter 2014; Raun 2015; Kennedy 2016). Tobias Raun claims that the vlogging genre may function as "transformative medium for working on, producing and exploring the self" as well as a mirror which makes it possible for "the YouTuber to assume the shape of a desired identity/representation, constantly assuming and evaluating oneself" (2015, 366-367). It may be thus stated that "[t]he mirror (vlog) gives the individual a place/space to construct and perform their mask (identity), and an opportunity to see the reflection and adjust the mask (identity) accordingly" (Kennedy 2016). The metaphor of the mirror may be particularly fitting as regards makeup tutorials: users often gaze directly or almost directly into the camera as they apply the different products because they rely on its viewfinder's window to check on their looks, thus quite literally utilizing their recording devices as mirrors. However, it is to be noted that makeup videos act more as windows with reflective surfaces than as

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[3] Cf. § 5.5.

conventional mirrors (*ibid.*). This is because, just like with any performance of the self – digital or otherwise – YouTube's posts always involve the presence of an audience (cf. Goffman 1959).

The metaphor of the mirror/window suggests that the genre of the beauty YouTube video enables users to craft and carefully monitor their performances in order to confer a quality of authenticity to their content. This furthers confirms the idea that authenticity and cosmetics should not be envisaged as conflicting discursive constructions, especially on social media platforms. As previously stated, discourses of YouTube and comparable websites are typically hybridized with promotional and branding discourses, which seems to be the case with makeup videos as well. Even though it may be more difficult for makeup YouTubers to come across as truly authentic for the reasons mentioned before, they still seem to manage to construct their online *persona* as truthful and to juxtapose it to cosmetic brands on the ground of its genuineness just like other categories of professional users (such as scientists and mommy vloggers) successfully represent themselves as valid alternatives to corporations and traditional broadcast media. The next sections will describe the discursive and rhetorical strategies adopted by popular makeup artists and will verify whether they are the same or similar to those of scientists and YouTube moms. At the same time, it will also identify and account for linguistic features which are instead unique to the community of practice of beauty experts.

5.2. Aims and outline of the chapter

Although they may appear a frivolous object of study, the importance of makeup tutorials against the backdrop of YouTube communication should not be underestimated. As previously mentioned, this kind of video is the most popular among those considered in this volume, amassing dozens of millions of view. The significant number of parodies of makeup tutorials uploaded on the platform also attests to the significance of this genre. However, research on the topic is only slowly developing; noteworthy examples of Communication and Digital Humanities Studies dealing with makeup videos are Spyer (2013), Reichert (2014), and García-Rapp (2016, 2017). Specific analyses of the language used in makeup videos are rather rare: Tolson (2010) and Riboni (2017b) take a critical discursive stance towards this type of texts, whereas Purcariu (2018) mainly aims at providing a genre descriptions of YouTube tutori-

als. To the best of my knowledge, only Riboni (2017a) presents a preliminary linguistic examination of this kind of video.

Taking its cue from this gap in the relevant literature, this chapter examines the language utilized by popular YouTube makeup artists in order to appeal to their audiences and to acquire or maintain a huge followship. It specifically focuses on the rhetorical and discursive strategies which allow this category of users to confer an element of authenticity to their online *persona*. These language devices arguably represent what makes it possible for certain users to come across as more credible and trustworthy than both beauty corporations and the many other YouTubers that also post makeup-related content on the platform.

Just like the preceding section of the book, this chapter also offers a compare-and-contrast analysis of the main rhetorical and discursive strategies of the three communities of content creators under investigation, with a view to verifying whether the notion of "authenticity" is constructed on YouTube by means of analogous language resources (as it appears to be the case with mommy vloggers and scientists) or whether the category of makeup artists (which, as previously stated, is the most popular of the three) relies on its own distinctive set.

Before moving on to the description of the materials examined in this chapter a *caveat* is needed. Although defining makeup application videos as "tutorials" may seem a straightforward question, the linguistic characteristics and communicative purposes of these posts (Riboni 2017a) reveal that the latter are not simply lists of instructions but they also feature a remarkable narrative component, to the point that the expression "tutorial-vlogs" has been proposed to designate them (Gruffat 2015). Video tutorials often position themselves at the convergence of two phenomena: the "Do It Yourself" (DIY) and the vlogger culture.

> What we have called "tutorial-vlogs" pick up YouTube's slogan of "broadcast yourself" and, while they teach some technique, they are also self-referential and exhibit some characteristics of vlogs. Among them: the presence of the "youtuber" in most of the video screen, who looks at the camera and speaks directly to the audience, and the predominance of close up or medium close up shots over other types of shots. (Gruffat 2015, 145)

Gruffat's 2015 study on YouTube's tutorials found that the presence of vlogging rules, i.e. prevalence of close up camera shots, predominance of a narrative style, and use of an "emotional tone", is particularly noticeable in makeup videos, which oftentimes combine footage of how to apply makeup with video "diary pages" in which users typically narrate their daily-life (cf. García-Rapp 2016; Riboni 2017b; Purcariu 2018).

Tutorials are usually recorded in the user's room. In the foreground, the makeup artist gazes frontally into camera as if it were a mirror[4] and applies the different products (Reichert 2014, 108). In the background, "the audience often see part of the bed, dresses and also objects of decoration" (Spyer 2013). The desired effect of these video images is that of creating "a casual visuality aiming at amateuristic immediacy" (Reichert 2014, 105). The choice of camera framing also contributes to pursuing this goal: makeup YouTubers typically utilize a tripod camera which can only provide stationary stationary takes.

> The takes that show the actual makeup scenes are therefore filmed in a single shot process that entails a motionless background and rigid framing. Within the stationary frame, the actual process of putting on makeup takes place. (Reichert 2014, 105)

Makeup tutorials probably share more similarities with Science communication posts than with mommy vlogs: just like the former, they are sit-down videos featuring (loose) close ups of the YouTuber directly addressing the camera (whereas mommy vlogs may be more dynamic). Another element that these two categories have in common is the almost complete omnipresence of the user: scholars may occasionally invite experts for interview videos and beauty specialists may sometime ask a friend or relative to model for them, but this does not happen frequently.

The data set collected for this chapter consists of fifteen tutorials posted on YouTube in the period from October 2014 to April 2015 (cf. Appendix for further details). As in the case of mommy vloggers and scientists, the makeup artists whose content has been analyzed in this volume were chosen on grounds of their notoriety, starting from the premise that popular YouTubers are arguably more capable than the multitude of other makeup content creators of discursively representing themselves as "authentic" and have more chances to influence the platform's discourses on authenticity and makeup use. Similarly to mommy vloggers, famous beauty YouTubers typically work with Multi-Channel Networks (MCNs) which perform the role of intermediaries between the platform, content creators, brands, and media corporations. The makeup experts selected for this analysis all work with this type of agency and are called Michelle Phan, Tanya Burr, and Lauren Curtis. Michelle Phan is an American makeup lover who can count on almost 9 million subscribers. Thanks to her huge fame, in 2013 she was hired by Lancôme to be the brand's official YouTube artist. She has launched

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[4] Cf. § 5.1.

her own makeup line and has published both an autobiography as well as a non-fiction beauty guide. In 2015, due to the pressure of her success as she herself explained in a subsequent video titled "Why I Left", she decided to quit YouTube and social media altogether. After a few years of inactivity, she officially returned to Youtube in September 2019 (Scottie 2019). She is considered the inventor of "the entire genre of YouTube beauty" (Hou 2019) and "has consistently mentored others into the business" (Cunnigham and Craig 2017, 77). Tanya Burr is an extremely popular English YouTuber; her notoriety encouraged her to pursue a side career as an actress. She has 3,5 million YouTube subscribers and has published three books (a beauty guide and two cookbooks) as well as launching her own makeup line called "Tanya Burr Cosmetics". Finally, Lauren Curtis lives in Australia; her channel is followed by 3,5 million subscribers. In 2018 she started a pajamas and loungewear line [5].

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The remainder of this chapter is structured as follows: § 5.3 introduces beauty YouTubers' ongoing negotiation between their "expert" *persona* and the amateur, § 5.4 is devoted to the discursive the construction of the authenticity of imperfection, and § 5.5 explores the possibly "emergent authenticity" of the idea of beauty.

5.3. The amateurish makeup guru

Exceptionally famous beauty YouTubers are dubbed as "gurus": this expression became popular on the platform because for a significant number of years new users could register by opening "guru accounts", which meant that the purpose of their channel mainly consisted in educating the public on a particular topic. As YouTube removed this kind of accounts in 2015, the definition of guru now only designates content creators who are extremely popular and are publicly recognized as authoritative in their field and therefore "watchworthy". As already noted in respect of mommy vloggers and scientists, however, it is amateur discourse rather than expert discourse which is closely linked to the notion of authenticity. As a consequence, popular makeup artists aim at coming across as amateurish and genuine while still retaining their guru status and exhibiting their knowledge. In this regard, the use of the

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[5] Data last updated in July 2019.

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term "tutorial" to refer to their videos is rather paradoxical (Tolson 2010, 282). In spite of social media discourses portraying platforms such as YouTube as more amateurish and more reliable sources than traditional media, the adoption of the tutorial genre

> [...] might seem to be a throwback to the [...] pedagogical monologue [...]. It is perhaps ironic, but also very interesting, that young people are using YouTube not only for entertainment, but also as an alternative source of instruction, and here they are reproducing, albeit in modern colloquial forms, traditional speech genres associated with expertise. (Tolson 2010, 282)

Just like mommy vlogs and Science communication videos, makeup tutorials feature hybrid forms of talk which allow users to come across as "ordinary experts" (*ibid.*, 283). What makeup artists realize in front of their cameras are performances which have much in common with lectures or political speeches, although they are delivered adopting a conversational register. The fluency of their monologues is an effect of their very careful rhetorical construction (*ibid.*), a typical trait of expert genres. For example, figures of speech such as parallelisms (ex. 1), lists of threes (ex. 2), and binomials (ex. 3) are often used in makeup videos analogously to how they are used in political discourse:

1. I like *different* concealers for *different* jobs. (TB2)
2. *It* doesn't smudge, *it* doesn't make a mess and *it*'s very very pigmented. (LC2)
3. [...] even though it's all covered it's still not perfectly *clean and crisp*. (LC2; emphasis added)

Discourse markers, which "signpost logical developments in a way similar to the conventional lecture" (Tolson 2010, 283), also contribute to the effectiveness of the rhetorical composition of tutorials[6]:

4. Hey guys, I'm so excited about what I'm about to film today *for two reasons: one* because this is my all-time favourite makeup for autumn and winter time *and two* because I get to use my new products for Tanya Burr Cosmetics which I've just been waiting for so long to be able to tell you guys about and today for you guys is launch day. (TB5)
5. *Next* I'm going to use my [brand name] ultra black liquid liner. (TB2)

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[6] A significant presence of figures of speech and discourse items has been identified as a typical feature of Science communication videos as well (cf. § 3.3).

6. *And to finish off* just set the cream pencil with an iridescent white eye shadow. (MP1; emphasis added)

Although they rely on the utilization of figures of speech and discourse markers which make their monologues similar to "traditional speech genres associated with expertise", makeup gurus habitually structure their videos as virtual conversations with friends. Most tutorials start with the YouTuber greeting the audience (ex. 7, 8), continue with a segment which details the makeup application process, and end with a Leave-Taking section (ex. 9, 10, 11; cf. Riboni 2017a):

7. Hey gorgeous. (MP1)

8. Hi everyone. (LC4)

9. Thank you so much for watching. (LC3)

10. I love you and I will see you in my next video. (LC5)

11. Good luck. (MP3)

This kind of rhetorical organization, which is more reminiscent of friendly chats than of lectures, is possibly associated with beauty gurus' desire to come across more as fellow amateurs than as professionals in the eyes of their audience. In addition, constructing videos so that they resemble amicable face-to-face interactions represents a strategy to build close intimacy with the viewers.

Moreover, whereas the main communicative purpose of the tutorial is to instruct the audience and one could legitimately expect the instructional text type to prevail, this does not seem to be the case (Riboni 2017a). Most footage selected for this analysis frames makeup application as a process involving steps rather than as a set of instructions: as a matter of fact, gurus typically explain what they are doing in order to create the desired look rather than tell the audience what they should do [7]. The preference for the expository text type (cf. Hatim and Mason 1990) in tutorials further reinforces amateurship and affinity discourses. Rather expectedly, the principal mode-personal pronoun combination is the indicative mode and the first person singular. The "going to" form dominates in the tutorials (cf. ex. 12, 13), but equivalent structures with comparable functions – such as the contracted form of a semi-modal (cf. ex. 14) and the present continuous (cf. ex. 15) – are also widely used:

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[7] The combination between instructional and expository text types (with a prevalence of the latter) is not specific to YouTube makeup tutorials but can be found in other genres too (e.g. cooking recipes).

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12. *I am going to* apply it over the light, silvery-yellowy shade that I've just applied. (LC3)

13. *I am just going to* blend this into the shadow. (TB2)

14. *I wanna go* from here all the way to the inner corner [of my eye]. (LC1)

15. This *I am just drawing* along my lash line. (TB1; emphasis added)

Imperatives are not very common, but those that can be found typically occur in quick tip formats which gurus' explanations are interspersed with. By and large, the prevailing text type and mode-personal pronoun combination contribute to rendering makeup videos similar to intimate moments between friends, in which the friend with the most extensive makeup expertise provides a demonstration of how to create looks (using the indicative mode) rather than list instructions (in the imperative form) as a professional would. It should also be noted that this kind of text is usually recorded in real time, while voiceovers are rarer. This choice is probably linked to the fact that videos containing voiceovers may come across as more polished and professional, whereas those without them appear more "spontaneous" and therefore more authentic.

One final level of linguistic analysis which further reveals beauty vloggers' ongoing negotiation between displaying guru competence and giving the impression of being an amateur (with an inclination for the latter) is the lexical one. Tutorials are characterized by a significant presence of specialized lexicon mainly referring to makeup application (blending, contouring), cosmetic products (e.g. falsies, primer…), and tools (kabuki brush, lash curler…) which suggests YouTubers' belonging to the professional makeup artist community of practice. At the same time, it is to be observed that specialized words and expressions hardly ever come with an explanation or definition, which represents a typical feature of expert-to-expert communication. As a consequence, makeup tutorials are comparable to lectures in that their goal is that of instructing, but they are also similar to conference presentation since text producer and recipients are linguistically constructed as specialists (or, in this case, as peer makeup connoisseurs). Once again, expert discourse is counterbalanced by the presence of elements associated with amateurship and with authenticity: differently from what happens in academic presentations, video tutorials are comprised of numerous colloquialisms.

16. So, just apply *this baby* all over your face. (MP3)

17. [F]or this look *I'm gonna rock* a matt red lip. (MP3)

18. Grab the lash *from the thingy – very professional!* [laughter]. (TB3; emphasis added)

Example (18) is a representative exemplar of "ordinary expert" talk as it includes the use of a colloquial expression as well as a comment on such use: Burr seems acutely attentive to her own word choices and the way in which they partake in the maintenance of her "guru persona". She states that it would be appropriate for her to speak as a professional, but she does not appear to worry about coming across as an amateur.

To conclude, the analysis of different linguistic strategies considered in this paragraph has revealed that, although the expert "guru" element is present in makeup tutorials as it possibly constitutes what initially attracts the audience, the amateurish dimension arguably dominates as it is strictly connected with the idea of authenticity.

5.4. The authenticity of imperfection

The second part of the analysis is dedicated to a discussion of another element of authenticity to be found in makeup tutorials, i.e. the notion of imperfection. In traditional broadcast as well as professional media, imperfection is typically relegated in the private sphere but, as noted by Ramon Reichert,

> [w]hile private space used to be defined as an actual space separated from the external world, in which individuals prepared for their public presentation of the self (Goffman 1959), makeup tutorials shift the conventional limits between private and public space. They turn the domestic sphere traditionally attributed to the female into a medialized venue of public contemplation and collective production of meaning. (Reichert 2014, 102)

As it happens with Science videos and mommy vlogs, makeup videos are rhetorically constructed as – painstakingly crafted – incursions into the backstage regions of this community of practice. In the case at hand, beauty gurus establish a discursive link between the idea of imperfection and that of authenticity. In order to attain this aim, they mainly rely on two strategies (previously identified by fashion blogging scholars), i.e. feigning similarity with the audience and self-deprecating (McQuarrie *et al.* 2013, 151). Popular makeup artists feign similarity with their viewers by "referring to mundane and ordinary aspects of their lives that downplay the glamour" associated with being a micro-celebrity (Reichert 2014, 108-109). In other words, they highlight the (meticulously chosen and tactically presented) imperfections of their lives so as to appear more relatable in the eyes of their audience:

19. This video is going up on Thursday the 23rd October which is *the day I'm launching my lashes!!!* Which is insane and… just so so exciting. I actually wanted to do this announcement once I had all the beautiful makeup on, I don't really know why I'm doing it now. *I have a huge spot on my chin*. (TB1; emphasis added)

In the excerpt above, Burr publicizes the launch of her false lashes collection, an accomplishment that she was able to carry out due to her notoriety and that, for this very reason, sets her apart from her followers. In order to misrecognize this fact, she immediately mitigates her celebrity *persona* by mentioning the presence of a spot on her chin: referring to an everyday problem like this allows her to underscore her ordinariness and look more similar to the members of her public thus coming across as genuine and authentic.

Self-deprecation is another discursive practice based on the interrelated concepts of imperfection and authenticity. Makeup gurus tend to draw attention on their defects rather than gloss over them, as professionals do; this way they once again reassure their audience that they are "real" – as opposed to people working in mainstream media or advertising whose aspect and performances are usually spotless and polished. Self-deprecation strategies mainly involve allusions to one's appearance, makeup application, and video-making. As regards physical imperfections, makeup tutorials are akin to women's magazines: the two genres present an analogous notion of "real" external beauty as they "foreground the flawed, imperfect and hence 'authentic' nature of ordinary women" (Duffy 2013, 143). Beauty YouTubers deliberately (and carefully) showcase their physical defects in order to seem more credible and genuine:

20. With the pencil you just want to lengthen your brows a bit if they need it, *mine do really need it*. (TB1)

21. […] if you're lacking in the lash department *as myself here*. (MP3)

22. This little spot came out just in time for the video. It was like "Lauren I got you!" [laughter]. (LC3; emphasis added)

By and large, the fact that makeup artists are not professional models further reinforces the idea that their content is more reliable and trustworthy than that produced in the corporate world. Just like in advertising,

[t]he incorporation of nonprofessional models […] ostensibly fulfills a dual role: it deflects critiques about the unrealistic standards perpetuated by the beauty industry while simultaneously tapping into the marketing appeal of using "real" (e.g. credible, authoritative) people rather that models and celebrities. (Duffy 2013, 146)

However, it is to be observed that famous YouTubers working closely with the beauty industry (such as those selected for this study) are almost invariably good-looking, which may not necessarily be the case of their public. Definitions of "real" and ordinary beauty which include the presence of imperfections, therefore, "remain narrowly – and institutionally – defined" (*ibid.*).

Makeup gurus' self-deprecation discourse deals with their difficulties with regard to makeup application techniques, too:

23. [...] blend a really small amount – this is probably *too much* – under my eyes... (TB1)

24. *I'm terrible at* applying eyeliner on camera. (LC2; emphasis added)

This type of discursive strategy enables them to appear as genuine (as well as amateurish): if making mistakes is arguably inevitable, editing them out would probably compromise the authentic quality of this kind of videos. As a consequence, professional footage which does not feature errors can be indirectly represented as heavily edited and not worth watching[8]. Highlighting one's shortcomings in applying products also provides gurus with the advantage of creating a sense of solidarity with their followers, who can likely count on limited command of makeup techniques when they try to recreate their YouTube stars' looks.

The last self-deprecation practice identified in the data set has to do with the process of video-making and its imperfections. Differently from professional generated content, "makeup videos are presented not so much as finished pieces of work but rather as improvised drafts" (Reichert 2014, 108). In keeping with YouTube's amateurish aesthetics, defects in video production are very visible in the tutorials, whose low-fi quality seems to be made a virtue of rather than downplayed (Tolson 2010, 281). From the linguistic point of view, beauty gurus draw attention to their problems and struggles with video-making by alluding, for example to their difficulties in organizing both their monologues (cf. ex. 25) and their settings:

25. *I always find it really hard to end a video* [...] like What do I do? (TB2)

26. Oh this isn't the one [lipgloss] I wanted to use. *I picked up the wrong one.* (TB4; emphasis added)

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[8] It is to be noted that makeup tutorials are heavily edited, too. The main difference between them and other types of content does not consist in the degree to which they are edited, but in the kind of material that is selected for inclusion or exclusion (such as, like in the case at hand, the user's mistakes).

In conclusion, it may be possible to affirm that just like mommy vloggers and scientists, famous makeup YouTubers deploy rhetorical strategies aimed at giving prominence to their authenticity which are connected to the notion of "realness". Similarly to the other communities of practice considered in this study, they do so by bringing to the fore elements traditionally neglected or glossed over by mainstream media or brands. In the case of tutorials, it is the concept of imperfection – typically relegated in what Goffman (1959) defines "backstage" – which allows gurus to discursively represent themselves as revealing their followers aspects of the makeup application process that are normally hidden from the general public.

Before wrapping up this analysis, it remains to be verified whether video tutorials also contain traits apparently correlated to the notion of "emergent authenticity" like Science communication videos and mommy vlogs; this hypothesis is explored in the next paragraph.

5.5. The "emergent authenticity" of makeup influencers

As demonstrated in the previous sections of this chapter, the description of the concept of authenticity in YouTube makeup discourse is rather problematic. In particular, it is be noted that, even though all the communities of practice considered in this study create content which both provides information about a specific domain and promotes goods related to it, makeup tutorials are possibly the most marketing-oriented and most likely to come across as "inauthentic". This is because, whereas scientists and mommy vloggers disseminate knowledge about Science and Parenting respectively (that is to say about noncommercial domains), beauty gurus offer guidance on how to use cosmetics, which means their expertise only focuses on products. Consequently, the risk of appearing driven solely by economic reasons and therefore inauthentic is probably higher for makeup YouTubers than it is for the other two categories of users. Features of the so-called "emergent authenticity" are therefore relatively common in the videos selected, and are characterized by a significant degree of interdiscursivity (cf., *inter alii*, Foucault 1969; Fairclough 2003). Different elements are borrowed from a variety of discourses: media discourse and more specifically advertising discourse are the most notable examples, but there are numerous others which are interrelated, thus making the notion of authenticity all the more complex.

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In general, beauty gurus tend to hybridize authenticity discourse with the (neoliberal and hegemonic) discourses of self-empowerment and self-realization. This is particularly evident in the case of Michelle Phan, who is regarded as the most successful and influential makeup YouTuber[9]. Cunnigham and Craig stress that "Phan's key self-narrative is the articulation of authenticity through the Cinderella story" (2017, 77). Apart from her beauty-related posts, she uploads narrative video content such as "Catch My Heart" (2011) and "Underneath Your Love" (2012) in which she provides modern versions of the popular fairy tale. The message she tries to convey both in her tutorials and in her narratives is that people can be empowered by finding their inner beauty and revealing it to the outer world (through the use of cosmetic products). This interdiscursive link between fairy tales and makeup provides an explanation for Phan's lexical choices, which would be otherwise hard to interpret. For example, she typically ends her videos with the expression "good luck", her own way of wishing her viewers to be able to progress on their path to personal development. In her tutorial "Glowing Skin Look ✧ Ethereal Aura", the guru makes plentiful references to the domain of the dream, as she represents makeup as something that offers the self-confidence required to have the courage to realize one's dreams.

Michelle Phan's (and her fellow makeup YouTubers') self-empowerment discourse is in line with those identified by ethnographic research on makeup rituals (McCabe *et al.* 2017) and by studies on women's magazines (cf. Duffy 2013, 146-148). This overarching discourse seems to be "anchored in the idea that the outer self serves to mirror one's unique personhood" (*ibid.*, 148); against this backdrop, "[m]akeup brings inner worth to the surface of the body and *creates and authentic self*" (McCabe *et al.* 2017, 10; emphasis added). Makeup is therefore discursively constructed as something that "joins inner and outer beauty to create authenticity" (*ibid.*, 14) and acts as an enhancer (Riboni 2017a). As the following examples (27, 28, 29) indicate, the action of applying cosmetics is portrayed as providing self-confidence:

27. It's *like stilettos* for your lashes. (MP3)

28. That's *the power of makeup*. (LC5)

29. [...] take a deep breath... because we have concealer here *to the rescue*. (MP5; emphasis added)

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[9] Cf. § 5.2.

The confidence-boosting effect of makeup is particularly noticeable in example (27), which includes the use of a metaphor, that of stiletto shoes, traditionally associated with the idea of augmented height and, implicitly, with augmented faith in oneself. It is also to be noted that high heels shoes, analogously to makeup, are here depicted as something that brings out authenticity rather than conceal it, whereas other discourses may frame these items as linked to inauthenticity.

This ambivalent representation of makeup finds itself at the core of public debates about women's use of cosmetics typically oscillating between the poles of consumer conformity and female empowerment (Peiss 1998, 268-269; cf. also Banet-Weiser 2012, 22). As previously observed (cf. § 5.1), the notion of makeup as a category of cosmetic which does not hide and counterfeits one's appearance but rather discloses it and contributes to its authenticity is borrowed from marketing discourse. The attribution of emancipating quality to cosmetics and makeup in particular results in a rather paradoxical discursive representation: as a matter of fact, the latter is portrayed as something that brings out one's true and genuine self but, in doing so, it almost becomes invisible. According to both YouTube makeup discourse as well as marketing advertising discourse, makeup may unveil people's inner self and contribute to their outer beauty, yet, paradoxically, appearances (which are enhanced by makeup), are to be regarded as trivial and ephemeral (cf. ex. 31):

30. Orange look says that you're fun and you're comfortable in your skin. (MP4)

31. I believe that souls recognize each other by vibes, not by appearances. (MP5)

In example (30) Phan depicts orange makeup looks as associated to a feeling of comfort in one's own skin; however, it be could argued that, if somebody is comfortable in their own skin, they do not need to resort to a makeup look to prove it.

The tendency to imbue products with symbolic meanings has been long identified by scholars as a distinctive trait of marketing discourse, and beauty advertising is no exception in this respect (Phakdeephasook 2009; Kaur *et al.* 2013). Moreover, the representation of makeup as something that may not just ameliorate one's physical aspect but also one's life quality can prove strategic not only in order to promote sponsored products, but also as a self-branding technique. Starting from the premises that makeup can have a positive impact on people's

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self-development and that beauty YouTubers are experts who can impart knowledge on how to use it, then it logically follows that makeup gurus may aspire to become some sort of "life guru". This seems confirmed by the fact that they appear to be expending their content to include general advice and suggestions, sometimes even presenting themselves as role models and not as simply beauty pundits (Riboni 2017a; cf. also Cunningham and Craig 2017, 77).

32. No pain no gain. (MP3)
33. Any man that you see a future with should appreciate and like and love how you look with and without makeup. (LC5)
34. There is definitely beauty in simplicity. (MP2)

Examples (32), (33) and (34) contain maxims, quotations and pieces of life advice, which validate the hypothesis that famous makeup artists also enrich their *persona* by adding this "life guru" dimension to it.

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As suggested by these final considerations but arguably by the rest of this chapter's analysis, too, makeup YouTubers seem to mainly rely on an appeal to *ethos* to persuade their audience of their authenticity. By carefully balancing their guru *persona* with strong elements of amateurship and drawing attention to their imperfections (whereas traditional broadcast media would typically hide them in the "back regions" in order to come up with polished, perfect content), they represent themselves as more authentic, credible and watchworthy than other categories of makeup video creators. Rhetorically, their construction of authenticity hinges upon the adoption of the language of the "ordinary expert", which, on the one hand, allows them to attract viewers and sponsorships and, on the other, to come across as genuine and economically disinterested makeup lovers; YouTube beauty gurus are able to juxtapose themselves and their audience as "us amateurs" to "them / cosmetic brands" (in spite of signing contract deals with them), thus possibly adding to their claims of being "authentic".

The structure of their videos makes them comparable to virtual chats among friends rather than to traditional how-tos, which enables them to enter a relationship with their public, a relationship which is perceived as "authentic". Similarly to scientists and to mommy vloggers, makeup artists also discursively take their audience "backstage" and share aspects which are normally excluded from professional cosmetics communication practices. This way they can both feign similarity with

their audience as well as tactically deprecate themselves, two discursive practices aimed at conferring authenticity to their online *persona*.

As mentioned at the beginning of this paragraph, makeup gurus possibly create the most marketing-oriented type of contents among the different categories selected for this analysis. That is why their tutorials may be perceived as decidedly "inauthentic" and possibly require a kind of "suspension of disbelief" on part of the public to willingly accept them as genuine. The huge followship and affiliation that these YouTubers are able to generate indicates that makeup videos (just like mommy vlogs and Science communication posts) are exemplars of the notion of "emergent authenticity". As noted by García-Rapp, "[t]he relevance of authenticity for the beauty community dictates that through the display of an authentic self, gurus are allowed to continue deploying self-branding strategies in order to sustain their market position and status" (2017, 126).

To conclude, although makeup tutorials feature unique and distinctive characteristics, the analysis carried out in this chapter suggests that most of the rhetorical and discursive strategies adopted by beauty gurus to construct their authenticity are similar or comparable to those adopted by the other communities of practice under scrutiny. Given the significant popularity and success of YouTube cosmetics channels, which far exceeds that of young scientists and overshadows that of mommy vloggers – who can nonetheless count on a remarkable fan base – it can be concluded that famous makeup artists seem to have a firmer grasp of the linguistic devices which allow social media users to build rapport with their audience and effectively create/manage an online identity endowed with authenticity.

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Conclusions

This book has contributed to setting the basis for a codification of the notion of authenticity on the video-hosting platform YouTube. By adopting a social media discourse-analytical perspective to examine the communication practices of popular users belonging to different communities, it has provided new insights into the current issues connected with online identity building and reputation management.

The preliminary standpoint the volume has started from is that the ability to come across as authentic is what distinguishes popular content creators from the multitude of others who also upload posts on the platform, but are not capable of appearing equally genuine and relatable. Another major premise this works has drawn upon is that authenticity is a discursive construction; as a consequence, YouTubers' choices at both a micro- and a macro-linguistic level are here deemed to have a significant impact on how users are perceived by their public, thus determining their notoriety (or lack of it). Within the context of a commodity culture, being able to become a social media "micro-celebrity" gives YouTubers the possibility of monetizing their popularity, with the result that those who can count on plentiful acolytes typically start out as hobbyists to later become professionals.

In this context, the analysis has taken into examination the verbal component of videos made by famous content creators with a view to identifying the main rhetorical and discursive strategies they avail themselves of in order to craft an "authentic" online *persona* – authenticity being by and large the dominant selling point in the YouTubers' world. Three rather different communities of practice – that of young scientists, that of Stay-at-Home Mothers and that of makeup artists – have been selected as objects of study in order to validate the hypothesis that the construction of YouTube authenticity hinges upon similar or comparable resources no matter the community of practice.

Such a hypothesis has been confirmed by the investigation of the videos collected in the data set. Specifically, three main rhetorical-

discursive strategies appear to be deployed by all categorizes of users, i.e. the acquisition of the "ordinary expert" identity, the reliance on the dichotomy between "frontstage" and "backstage", and the adoption of (self-)branding techniques which do not tamper with YouTubers' self-portrayal as authentic subjects.

As far as the first of these strategies is concerned, the study of the language utilized by some of the most famous exponents of the three online communities has revealed a common tendency to blend linguistic features typical of expert discourse with others borrowed from amateur discourse. This careful balance may not be easy to strike, but it seems particularly effective as it maximizes the benefits that both identities can bring to the user. As a matter of fact, it is their expertise and authoritativeness in their field that enables popular YouTubers to attract vast audiences as well as sponsorship deals. This is particularly evident in the case of makeup artists, a community where the definition of "guru" has gained considerable currency. On the other hand, professional content creators tactically emphasize their amateur status because this allows them to evoke a sense of homophily in their viewers. Their register is often colloquial, their videos designed as to resemble friendly chats rather than visual guides, instructions, or personal journals. The aim of these strategies seems to be that of entering into a peer-to-peer relationship with the public: this sort of "calibrated amateurism" (Abidin 2017) enables famous users to come across as more relatable, thus inducing followers to identify with them. The language of the "ordinary expert" represents an expedient through which YouTube micro-celebrities discursively construct an "*us* amateurs" which includes themselves and their subscribers; by the same token, competing UGC, traditional broadcast media and corporate channels are labeled as "*them* professionals", portrayed as driven by economic motives and therefore as "inauthentic" and not trustworthy. The widespread adoption of this type of linguistic stratagem, which is appropriated by all the communities considered, seems to be an indicator of its efficacy in kindling a feeling of homophily in the audience and generating affiliation.

Another strategy that has been singled out in all the categories of users is that of highlighting the boundaries between what is considered "frontstage" and "backstage", public and private. Famous YouTubers tend to depict their content as revealing the Goffmanian "back regions", i.e. those that are traditionally hidden from view and belong to the private sphere, with the aim of appearing more authentic than professional media outlets. Visually, this leading of the audience's gaze towards backstage features what would be probably considered as shoot

mistakes in other genres, i.e. "frontally gazing into the camera, making the camera visible during recording, as well as addressing the medium and set up" (Reichert 2014, 107). Linguistically, emphasizing the distinction between front and back regions means establishing a discursive link between the latter and the notions of authenticity and "realness". This kind of strategy relies on a dissociative mechanism that, although more explicit in mommy vlogs, can be discerned in the whole data set. Professional users resort to the argumentation scheme of dissociation to strategically split the conceptual unit of "YouTube content" into two separate entities, namely "real" (backstage, revealed by YouTubers) content and other types of content (frontstage, typically shown by mainstream corporate media): since only the former provides a genuine account of Science, Parenthood, or Makeup, the latter has to be rejected as inauthentic.

However, the analysis carried out in this volume has demonstrated that the two dimensions of front and back are the product of a discursive construction, with the result that it may be contended that *neither is authentic*. This conclusion is similar to those reached in Tourist Studies (cf. MacCannell 1973, 1999, 2011; Cohen 1988, 1995, 2007), as well as in Media Communication Studies (cf. Tolson 2010; Banet-Weiser 2012). Erik Cohen aptly observed (with reference to tourist destinations) that "back regions are frequently inauthentic 'false backs', insidiously staged for [...] consumption" (1988, 372); this seems to be the case of professional YouTubers' incursions backstage, too.

Interestingly, the dichotomy between frontstage and backstage appears to be simultaneously reaffirmed and challenged in the videos analyzed. As a matter of fact, the insistence on a binary logic which strictly separates front/back and public/private seems to coexist with a less restrictive definition of authenticity, which conceptualizes it neither as present (backstage) nor absent (frontstage) but in terms of the degree to which an online *persona* or an object possesses it. For the analysis of YouTube videos, it may be possible to argue (analogously to MacCannell in his study of "staged authenticity" in tourist settings) that front and back should "be treated as ideal poles of a continuum, poles that are linked by a series of front regions [modified] to appear as back regions, and back regions set up to accommodate outsiders" (1973, 602). However, this is not to be intended as a suggestion that YouTube UGC is successful because it uses deceptive trickery, but possibly because the idea of authenticity entertained by most viewers is broader and more encompassing than those prevailing in past historical periods, which rigidly juxtaposed market values to "authentic" values. In the current com-

modity culture, online identity practices such as those examined in this volume can hardly be investigated without treating them as instances of self-branding and managerialized forms of micro-celebrity construction (Arthurs *et al.* 2018; cf. also Marwick 2013). Against a backdrop where popular YouTubers commonly endorse brands and incorporate promotional messages in their videos in order to turn video-making into a profitable profession, the concept of authenticity has probably come to designate something different from before, for whose "success [...] a great deal of make-believe, on the part of both performers and audience, is necessary" (Cohen 1988, 383). This study indicates that, in the digital performances of the self realized by famous content creators, even identity traits that have to do with apparent self-branding (such as, for example, the use of interdiscursive links between the young scientists and the nerd *persona* or the portrayal of makeup gurus as fairy tale characters) or overt sponsorship are increasingly deemed as authentic, provided rapport has been built with the viewer. The notion of "emergent authenticity" (used in Tourism Studies to designate a similar although not identical notion) has been proposed to define these kind of traits, which appear to require some sort of "suspension of disbelief" on the part of the audience so that they can be accepted as genuine. At the text producer's end, there is constant struggle between being oneself and the branding of oneself (García-Rapp 2017): the resulting "edited self" is heavily monitored and carefully curated, but not lacking a certain degree of spontaneity, which, once again, implies that establishing clear-cut distinctions when dealing with this type of subject may not be efficient and should probably be avoided.

While shedding light onto the rhetorical and discursive strategies adopted in the construction of authenticity on YouTube, this book has probably raised more questions than provided answers. In fact, the intricacy of the issues involved, as well as their recent emergence, contributes to making them a challenging object of study, which has only been very limitedly explored so far. Hopefully, the analysis presented in this volume will act as an encouragement so that more research is carried out which further investigates digital performances of the self and the complexities of contemporary identity practices, as these phenomena are playing an increasingly crucial role in present-day society.

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APPENDIX
Video List

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S<small>CIENCE</small> Y<small>OU</small>T<small>UBERS</small>

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Alex Dainis (Genetics)
https://www.youtube.com/user/Lexie527

(AD1) Nectarine: Mutant Peach
August 15, 2016 (5':31")
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0Wp2K4h21pY&list=PL_abO9xX
zDtadzv4BqVaHRQVO6Qsgy3vE&index=11

(AD2) Lab Tour
March 7, 2016 (3':32")
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VpiqscrcbME&index=27&list
=PL_abO9xXzDtadzv4BqVaHRQVO6Qsgy3vE

(AD3) What Is a Lab Notebook?
January 18, 2016 (4':36")
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sW9YBcDAAvI&list=PL_abO9xX
zDtadzv4BqVaHRQVO6Qsgy3vE&index=30

(AD4) Common Grad School Questions
January 11, 2016 (3':41")
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mc-
POa0vEfY&index=31&list=PL_abO9xXzDtadzv4BqVaHRQVO6Qs-
gy3vE

(AD5) I'm Starting a Science Vlog
January 4, 2016 (2':21")
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YAiZFJBKwZg&list=PL_abO9xXz
Dtadzv4BqVaHRQVO6Qsgy3vE&index=32

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Sally Le Page (Biology)
https://www.youtube.com/user/shedscience

(SLP1) Coral Reefs Aren't as Doomed as You Think
December 13, 2017 (21':56")
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TimJuh09kIw&index=1&list=PL
B645FBDA305D09EB

(SLP2) The Tragedy of the Commons
June 7, 2016 (3':19")
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U9JiGmS4TAw&index=9&list=PL
B645FBDA305D09EB

(SLP3) 6 Mistakes in Charlies' Evolution Fun Science
March 16, 2017 (13':56")
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xfjk_6ygW7A&index=3&list=PL
B645FBDA305D09EB

(SLP4) 3 DIY Microscopes with a Laser Pen
November 6, 2015 (7':12")
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_fHSys_pIEA&index=11&list=PL
B645FBDA305D09EB

(SLP5) How to Be Sexy
July 25, 2013 (6':57")
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P1Y9tG48Vos&list=PLB645FBD
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Simon Clark (Climate Physics)
https://www.youtube.com/user/SimonOxfPhys

(SC1) How to Suck at Maths: 5 Tips
April 30, 2018 (7':53")
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_viPtq68nSk&index=1&list=PLiZ
iIJMDh4ykyK7zLPBwfm0S-tl-MOm0P

(SC2) A Brief History of Pi
March 14, 2018 (16':46")
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1-JAx3nUwms&list=PLiZiIJMDh
4ykyK7zLPBwfm0S-tl-MOm0P&index=3

(SC3) When the Arctic Sky Splits Apart
February 25, 2018 (8'.49")
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y1sw5qLpuSU&index=4&list=PL
iZiIJMDh4ykyK7zLPBwfm0S-tl-MOm0P

(SC4) Why Sin and Cos don't Mean Anything
January 25, 2018 (7'.48")
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AzVL432lEWA&index=5&list=PL
iZiIJMDh4ykyK7zLPBwfm0S-tl-MOm0P

(SC5) Could Planets from Star Wars Really Exist?
December 14, 2017 (18'.50")
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STAY-AT-HOME MOTHERS

K Baby
https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCOAk3B5PdjJbLe2VLsAMXBA

(KB1) Clean & Unpack With Me & My THREE KIDS UNDER 4
August 6, 2019 (14'.53")
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=omFDceSMVaY

(KB2) Realistic Pregnancy Night Time Routine
April 12, 2019 (11'.28")
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vdYNTPvPgZo

(KB3) Chatty REALISTIC Mommy Hair & Makeup | Takes Under 20
Minutes!
November 28, 2018 (10'.48")
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0bbWCB-VUDg

(KB4) What I Do Off Camera
October 5, 2017 (7'.35")
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nUvBCGMunck

(KB5) How I Stay Productive
June 17, 2017 (8'.54")
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5mnCX8caAi8

Tara Henderson
https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCGLwZc7LiGLqXiYp6Y-2hO8A

(TH1) HAVING MOM GUILT | DAY IN THE LIFE WITH
	A NEWBORN | Tara Henderson
July 19, 2019 (14':30")
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DjaN6KYwFt8&list=PLBdEn07C
RiB4S4w_-0dL4pt0sg7tLviDV&index=19

(TH2) REAL LIFE WITH A NEWBORN | Tara Henderson
July 26, 2019 (30':11")
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BRAa-
NwIL_Q&list=PLBdEn07CRiB4S4w_-0dL4pt0sg7tLviDV&index=26

(TH3) REAL LIFE WITH 3 KIDS and a PUPPY | Tara Henderson
August 26, 2019 (19':48")
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pu-
4UZn3sxM&list=PLBdEn07CRiB4S4w_-0dL4pt0sg7tLviDV&index=54

(TH4) DAY IN THE LIFE OF THE 4 MONTH SLEEP
	REGRESSION | Being a SAHM is hard too | Tara Henderson
September 12, 2017 (19':18")
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZqBTuDPIFHY&list=PLBdEn07
CRiB4S4w_-0dL4pt0sg7tLviDV&index=104

(TH5) A REAL DAY IN THE LIFE OF A MOM | Tara Henderson
March 8, 2019 (15':03")
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8R-
cx0v9Xnc&list=PLBdEn07CRiB4S4w_-0dL4pt0sg7tLviDV&index=121

Anna Saccone
https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCzdEQyIy-uCVXcjwfq8SbKw

(AS1) I Need a Break
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https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T2bNrTJwc30

(AS2) Real Life Mom of 4 Kids & 6 Dogs!
November 28, 2018 (14':17")
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UkR-fgcAPe4

(AS3) Getting Stressed Out! | What I Ate Wednesday
May 23, 2018 (15':34")
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qHw7KT47yNc

(AS4) Emotional 22 Week Pregnancy Vlog!
April 4, 2018 (17':20")
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oOgk0enp3YM

(AS5) Toddler Tantrums!
November 30, 2016 (12':12")
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NGwlsWJ-Uw4

Makeup Artists

Michelle Phan
https://www.youtube.com/michellephan

(MP1) Butterfly Kisses
April 17, 2015 (5':58")
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MfvPDTbnplQ&list=PLDm3KH
9jNzQmFrVXOjaHlL-572mQe7zOv

(MP2) Glowing Skin Look ✧ Ethereal Aura
March 20, 2015 (6':35")
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V3CmBjdoHNc&index=3&list=P
LDm3KH9jNzQmFrVXOjaHlL-572mQe7zOv

(MP3) Lunar New Year Beauty
February 19, 2015 (8':33")
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bDciknUOA7w&index=5&list=P
LDm3KH9jNzQmFrVXOjaHlL-572mQe7zOv

(MP4) 5 Lipstick Looks & A Valentine's Day DIY!
February 13, 2015 (3':37")
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3_VIWu5Tbz0&list=PLDm3KH9j
NzQmFrVXOjaHlL-572mQe7zOv&index=6

(MP5) Glam X / (^ x ^) \
December 13, 2014 (5':34")
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sn2YzWqnS7M&list=PLDm3KH9
jNzQmFrVXOjaHlL-572mQe7zOv&index=7

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Tanya Burr
https://www.youtube.com/user/pixi2woo

(TB1) Emma Stone Flawless Skin Makeup Tutorial! ad | Tanya Burr
April 19, 2015 (13':58")
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qPlOSoT_BEQ&list=PLt_BERL-98BiftO9uquOF7wJ97d-AzsOWf

(TB2) My Smoky Night Out Makeup Tutorial! | Tanya Burr
March 22, 2015 (11':58")
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dRk2PrTZchE&index=2&list=PLt_BERL98BiftO9uquOF7wJ97d-AzsOWf

(TB3) Golden Goddess Makeup Tutorial! | Tanya Burr
February 22, 2015 (13':39")
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p6BMkt65rkE&list=PLt_BERL-98BiftO9uquOF7wJ97d-AzsOWf&index=3

(TB4) Selena Gomez Everyday Makeup Tutorial! | Tanya Burr
January 25, 2015 (11:59)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vhr3cvSVK40&list=PLt_BERL-98BiftO9uquOF7wJ97d-AzsOWf&index=5

(TB5) My Autumn Makeup Tutorial! | Tanya Burr
October 23, 2014 (13:29)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kcz6XUdD_bQ&list=PLt_BERL-98BiftO9uquOF7wJ97d-AzsOWf&index=5

Lauren Curtis
https://www.youtube.com/user/laurenbeautyy

(LC1) Inverted Smoked-Out Eyeliner & Ombre Vampy Lips! | Lauren Curtis
February 19, 2015 (11':48")
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AQn1CkXOLTI&list=PLa4Mpt4BD3Pb_Dh6iENxdUZQakFqX2O0D

(LC2) How To Apply EYELINER + Graphic Liner! (ONE BRAND)
February 15, 2015 (11':25")
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T68caIDzOlo&list=PLa4Mpt4BD3Pb_Dh6iENxdUZQakFqX2O0D&index=2

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(LC3) Valentine's Day Makeup Tutorial – Soft & Pretty!
February 9, 2015 (7':49")
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cLc6nOYxDWw&index=3&list=PLa4Mpt4BD3Pb_Dh6iENxdUZQakFqX2O0D

(LC4) Makeup 'Makeover' on my MUM!
January 28, 2015 (14':11")
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IJ27fFddwGE&list=PLa4Mpt4BD3Pb_Dh6iENxdUZQakFqX2O0D&index=4

(LC5) Removing Makeup In Front of BOYS! Tips & Advice!
January 13, 2015 (15':04")
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6IkBQsMzjJs&index=6&list=PLa4Mpt4BD3Pb_Dh6iENxdUZQakFqX2O0D

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