



Full length article

Giving a new makeover to STEAM: Establishing YouTube beauty gurus as digital literacy educators through messages and effects on viewers

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ABSTRACT

The present research examines YouTube content creators, specifically YouTube beauty gurus, as digital literacy educators and how they can represent STEAM. Beauty videos represent a popular category of channels on YouTube, garnering millions of subscribers and lucrative sponsorship opportunities. Although YouTube beauty gurus primarily aim to entertain and inform their audiences about beauty, makeup, and fashion, their content may also communicate technical information and skills related to video production. Applying uses and gratifications and social cognitive theories, this two-part study examined the technology themes in popular YouTube beauty gurus' videos and the effects of this content on emerging adults. Study 1 was a content analysis of 102 YouTube beauty gurus' videos. Analyses indicated that the observed YouTube beauty gurus applied various techniques (such as adding text and social media links to videos) and included positive educational messages (such as educating others about cultures) in their videos. In Study 2, an online experiment revealed that watching a YouTube beauty guru's video can motivate viewers to produce a video, which is mediated through source attractiveness. Overall, this research illustrates how YouTube content creators can represent the technology field and educate viewers about technology uses. This research has significant implications for digital literacy approaches to STEAM education.

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Bridging the gender gap in the STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) fields has been a persistent problem. Especially in the technology field, despite rapid growth of digital technologies, there is a lack of females who are participating and representing this field. For example, in the U.S., only 25% of workers in computing occupations are female (National Science Foundation, 2014). In the top 100 tech companies, only 6% of chief executives are females (Miller, 2010). Additionally, less than 1% of first year female college freshmen stated that they expect to major in computer science (Rampell, 2013). According to market research, 63% of teenagers said that they have not considered a career in technology (Khanna, 2013). The priority then should be finding ways to encourage young people, specifically adolescent girls and women, to be involved in technology from early on so they can be a part of technology innovations. One path to engaging young people in technology is through STEAM education, which adds art into STEM. Engaging in arts fosters creativity and creates new opportunities,

allowing young people to transition into learning about technology. Digital literacy has been conceptualized as one avenue through which to engage the "arts" element in STEAM education. YouTube content creators – beauty gurus, in the present study – are creative artists and entrepreneurs who may serve as digital literacy educators and give a new makeover to the technology field and STEAM education approaches.

YouTube beauty gurus are content creators on YouTube, but they are more specifically defined as gurus of fashion and beauty. YouTube beauty gurus are most often young and female and are particularly popular with viewers and have crossed over into mainstream media. For example, Bethany Mota competed in the season 19 of *Dancing with the Stars*. Michelle Phan has attracted more than 8 million YouTube subscribers, and the combined view of her YouTube videos exceeds 676 million views as of 2017 (Phan, n.d.). Moreover, Google offered her \$1 million to produce 20 h of video, and L'Oréal partnered with her to create her own makeup line called Em (Glamour, 2013). YouTube stated in 2013 there were 800,000 shopping haul videos, a popular video format for YouTube beauty gurus, and their total video views surpass 1.8 billion (Maheshwari, 2013). Despite these statistics, YouTube beauty gurus are mostly judged on a surface level, and they often get ridiculed for

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being materialistic. Research has not looked beyond the fashion and beauty context of their channels to examine their potential to serve as digital literacy educators to young people, adolescent girls and young women, specifically.

We argue there is utility in examining these online content creators from another perspective, as they demonstrate how to successfully take advantage of technology to engage in creative self-expression. By creating their online personas, voicing their opinions, compiling footage, and editing their content, they not only establish themselves as YouTube video producers but also as digital literacy educators. Media literacy is defined as “the ability to access, analyze, and communicate information in a variety of forms” (National Association for Media Literacy Education, n.d., para. 3). With the rise of digital media, the focus has been put on digital literacy skills to use technologies to create content, and it became an important skill to participate in today's technologically advanced society. YouTube beauty gurus are exhibiting these skills through their engagement in video production. They utilize different techniques and equipment to film diverse videos that demonstrate their ability to become video producers. They also often reveal how they edit and film their videos, which can indirectly or directly teach viewers to utilize different technologies. Hence, YouTube beauty gurus represent an alternative educational opportunity to communicate to young people about digital literacy skills, one component of the arts in STEAM education.

The current research utilized a two-study design to examine both the technology themes present in popular beauty guru videos and the digital literacy educational effects of these themes on emerging adult viewers. Study 1 quantified these gurus' technology usage and educational messages in their videos. Doing so confirms that these gurus are actively using various editing techniques in their videos. To test the effects of the videos, an online experiment was conducted in Study 2 where emerging adults watched a YouTube beauty guru's video and responded to items regarding digital literacy and motivation to produce digital content. The results of these studies suggest that entertainment-focused online video creators, such as YouTube beauty gurus, serve to motivate some audiences to be involved in technologies to engage in creative digital media activities. Recommendations are made for future research and the incorporation of online video creators for digital literacy STEAM education.

1. Study 1: literature review

1.1. YouTube content creators and viewers as active media users

The uses and gratifications perspective is useful to understanding YouTube content creators and viewers as it helps to explain media users' motivations for media use. A primary assumption is that “the audience is conceived as active” (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1974, p. 15). This means that people are actively seeking and selectively choosing their media, which makes them goal-oriented, motivated, and purposive in their media use in order to achieve goals. This assumption challenges early mass communication notions that people are passive media users who do not actively use and interpret media. The uses and gratifications perspective is highly relevant today as the emergence of digital media has made it easier to transition people from consumers to active audience in which they “archive, annotate, appropriate, and recirculate media content in powerful new ways” (Jenkins, 2006, p. 8).

YouTube content creators and viewers specifically chose YouTube to become active media users. Out of many video sites, YouTube stands out the most because it is one of the most popular social media. YouTube began in 2005, and it “allows billions of people to discover, watch and share originally-created videos”

(YouTube About, n.d.; YouTube Statistics, n.d., para. 1). Because YouTube offers various video selections, it is drawing many users. YouTube now has 1 billion unique visitors each month, 6 billion hours of videos are watched every month, and 100 h of YouTube videos are uploaded every minute (YouTube About, n.d.; YouTube Statistics, n.d.). YouTube is also a desirable medium for people because it focuses on user-generated media. For viewers, they can see YouTube as a place where they can seek alternative content. They do not have to solely rely on mainstream media that was created by media executives. By exploring user-generated media, they can find customized content that was created by their peers who have similar interests. For content creators, YouTube represents a space to experiment with video forms to showcase their techniques using technology (Burgess & Green, 2009). YouTube also offers its own video editing options that can help content creators to creatively express their talents in their user-generated media. Altogether, because YouTube centers around accessing and creating user-generated media, content creators and viewers have selectively chose YouTube as their representative medium.

As YouTube content creators and viewers utilize the medium for their purposes, they are also satisfying certain needs. Katz, Gurevitch, and Haas (1973) defined general categories of needs. Content creators' needs may be explained primarily through tension-free and personal integrative needs. Tension-free needs are about escapism, and being a media producer can help people to escape their status as passive consumers. This fulfillment can be seen through KevJumba, a popular teen YouTube content creator. Analysis of his videos indicated that he used YouTube as a forum to play different roles, such as a critic and an entertainer, where he performed parodies and deconstructed stereotypical images of adolescence (Saul, 2010). Especially for young people, who are often voiceless and isolated in schools, being on YouTube provides an opportunity to be whomever they want and personalize messages to their viewers.

In the process of sending out their message through videos, they also become educators. Through teaching, YouTube content creators can satisfy their personal integrative needs to gain credibility and increase self-esteem. YouTube is a new form of publishing where creators engage in a meaning making process by narrating and communicating their cultural experiences (Burgess & Green, 2009). This means that these gurus are teaching others about their cultures. For example, examining Ryan Higa and Kevin Wu, two popular Asian YouTube content creators, revealed that they identified their personal experiences and incorporated humor in their videos to discuss Asian-specific vernacular discourses and criticize distorted representation of Asians in mainstream media (Guo & Lee, 2013). As they share their personal stories and become vulnerable in front of the camera, they can gain attention and respect from viewers through receiving positive feedback in comments and view counts. Doing so can help these creators to be self-fulfilled knowing that other viewers are immersed in their stories.

Viewers are also engaged in satisfying needs through viewing online videos. Most relevant to the present study, user-generated media can meet their cognitive needs, which are about using media to seek entertainment and information (Katz et al., 1973). YouTube contains abundance of videos that include many entertainment genres from music videos to vlogs. These content can be short in length so people can watch them to pass time or to be instantly educated and entertained. Because of these characteristics, YouTube is considered “snack food” such that viewers can quickly consume content that is easy to digest and understand (Shao, 2009). In the process of being entertained, viewers can also receive information. YouTube's informative content, such as news and educational lessons, can serve as alternative content, outside of traditional media and school contexts. This is relevant to user-

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