Exploring YouTuber Considerations on Public Relations-Sponsored Content on their Channels

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At the beginning of this project, I was quite nervous about it all, the words of one of our Stirling tutors echoing in my mind, warning us that the dissertation period would be one of the hardest times of our lives. And yet, although there were undoubtedly many stressful and daunting moments during the past few months, overall, I have found it to be a highly rewarding and enjoyable experience. The challenges I faced during both the research and the writing process have taught me valuable lessons for the future and that alone is something for which I will never regret my decision to embark upon this Master’s journey.

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Abstract

With the increasing popularity of the online video-sharing platform YouTube, some of its most-followed users have attained vast amounts of subscribers to their channels, enabling them to reach and influence large online audiences. This development has transformed YouTubers into non-traditional social media gatekeepers making them relevant figures to consider for the practice of media relations in public relations. This study investigates YouTubers’ motivations for creating content on YouTube, their considerations regarding PR-sponsored content on their channels, and what influences them in building relationships with PR practitioners. For this purpose, a qualitative research design comprised of semi-structured interviews with 5 YouTubers from different content backgrounds was conducted. The findings of this study provide interesting insights into YouTubers’ perceptions of sponsored content on their channels, and help to understand what contributes to positive relationships between YouTubers and PR practitioners.

Keywords: YouTubers – Public Relations – Sponsored Content – Influencer-Practitioner-Relationship
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1. Introduction: The Power of YouTube

In recent years, social media has steadily evolved into an integral part of everyday life and an important means of both private and professional communication. This development has given rise to a new generation of social media influencers, some of whom have millions of online followers on their various social media networks (Valentini, 2015). The online video-sharing site YouTube is one of the largest social media platforms with more than one billion users worldwide and the ability to reach “more 18-34 and 18-49 year-olds than any cable network in the US” (YouTube, 2016). After launching in 2005, the vast expansion and increasing popularity of YouTube over the last decade has enabled some of its users to attract very large followings on the site. With some of the most popular channels counting more than one million subscribers and generating millions of views each month, the content creators of these channels, also known as YouTubers or vloggers, possess a substantial influence on their viewers (Lee & Watkins, 2016).

The key to the success of these YouTubers primarily appears to stem from the familiarity with which they communicate with their audiences and their ability to build trusting relationships with them. As pointed out by Lee and Koo (2012), consumers tend to be more trusting in the opinions and recommendations of their peers and fellow consumers than in promises made by companies. Especially the younger proportion of viewers made up of under-20 year-olds appear to see YouTubers as role models and form an extremely loyal and adoring fan base. This popularity of YouTubers has been attributed to their “ordinariness” and “relatability” (Dredge, 2016) which seems to make them more appealing than traditional celebrities (Dredge, 2016). For that reason, popular YouTubers “are now seen as the key to reaching younger audiences, not just for commercial advertising but for the orthodox broadcasting and book publishing businesses” (Singh Chawla, 2014). This is reflected in examples such as YouTuber Zoella’s successful book
series *Girl Online*, TatcherJoe and Caspar Lee’s movie *Joe and Caspar Hit The Road*, and Tanya Burr’s popular cosmetics line.

The success of these YouTubers and their status as social influencers have not remained unnoticed by the corporate sector. YouTube’s transformation into an advertising and product placement-friendly environment was facilitated by its acquirement by Google (Kim, 2012). Many brands and organisations have since discovered the potential opportunity to monetize the YouTube phenomenon for their own purposes. The measures brands take range from sending out new product launches to YouTubers as free PR samples in the hope of them promoting them on their channels, inviting YouTubers and other influencers to press trips in order to introduce them to their products, and venturing into sponsored collaborations with YouTubers. Such collaborations of brands from different backgrounds with popular YouTubers have now become a common occurrence on the platform. By including the products of the sponsoring brand in their videos, YouTubers actively promote these products to their audience which generally corresponds to the target consumer group of the sponsoring brand. Their influence and reach makes YouTubers important social media gatekeepers and therefore valuable stakeholders for brands.

For public relations practitioners this entails the need for establishing positive relationships with YouTubers. Here, it could also be useful to understand what makes YouTubers want to work with certain brands more so than with others, and which other aspects they consider before deciding to promote or collaborate with certain brands on their channels. Therefore, the purpose of this research project is to explore YouTubers’ motivations for creating content as well as their considerations concerning public relations sponsored content, and to investigate the relationships between YouTubers and PR practitioners from YouTubers’ perspectives. The aim lies in finding out what reasons and motives YouTubers have both for
making videos in general and for creating sponsored content on their channels as well as in examining their perceptions of the individual relationships they have with public relations practitioners. The findings of this research project can both serve to inform practitioners in the future when building relationships with YouTubers as stakeholders, and shed light on the still rather unexplored role of YouTubers in public relations.

2. Literature Review

The aim of this review of literature is to gain a basic overview and understanding of the theoretical background underlying this project as well as to offer an insight into the previous research which has been conducted in this area of interest. Since the focal point of this research project surrounds the social media platform YouTube and more specifically those of its users who have attained popularity within the YouTube community, the first chapter of this review provides a brief introduction to the background of and research into public relations and social media.

Among the aims of this project is the exploration of the relationship between PR practitioners and YouTubers as new, non-traditional media gatekeepers. Therefore, the second chapter focuses on the relationship perspective on public relations.

The third and final chapter of this literature review discusses the specific role of YouTubers as social influencers and, therefore, as important actors in the public relations arena. This chapter also indicates the early stage of research into YouTubers in relation to public relations and highlights the relevance and interest of further research into this topic.
2.1 Public Relations in the Age of Social Media

The rise and influence of digital and social media has arguably brought about changes to how public relations is practiced today. In the era of Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Instagram, such social media sites have become an essential marketing tool for companies worldwide. While there are scholars who remain critical of social media as an uncontrolled environment (Yaxley, 2012) and perceive it as a potentially dangerous shift in power from a small group of mass media gatekeepers to the masses themselves (Demetrious, 2011), the dominant discourse in public relations research is that social media is good and can be a useful tool for building both organisations’ reputations and influencing their relationships with stakeholders (Valentini, 2015).

Businesses strive to be increasingly active on Social Media because it allows them to reach a global target and the content that they publish is easy to control (Durbhakula & Kim, 2011). Furthermore, companies have recognized that the relationship that customers have with a brand can be established and strengthened through social media which is why businesses use social media to foster those relationships (Faulds & Mangold, 2009).

Consumers and customers, however, are of course not the only key stakeholders for companies and organisations. A further highly important stakeholder group to maintain positive relationships with is the media. Media relations is the aspect of public relations practice that most people will associate, and in some cases even equate with the entire profession of public relations (Waters, Tindall & Morton, 2010). Although there is a tendency in public relations, particularly amongst academics, to de-emphasize media relations’ centrality and importance to the profession in favour of highlighting public relations’ management function, the fact remains that it is one of the most visible parts of public relations activity (Young, 2012).
Over the past decade, the changing media landscape characterised by social media’s persisting dominance has had a profound impact on media relations practice. Since media relations primarily consists of dealing with the mass media, the steady decline of traditional media outlets such as print media, radio and television and the move towards new forms of online media has transformed the way in which media relations operates (Waters, Tindall & Morton, 2010). Practitioners in media relations are no longer primarily working with traditional media gatekeepers like journalists, publishers and broadcasters but with non-traditional media gatekeepers in the form of social media influencers such as popular bloggers, YouTubers and Instagrammers. As trusted and popular figures on their respective platforms, social media influencers can be viewed as playing a key role in the digital age and are essentially characterised by having an influence on other social media users (Morris, 2017). Their influence has attracted the interest of brands who wish to use social media influencers in order to promote their products. These developments are reflected in the increasing amount of collaborations between brands and social media influencers.

For public relations practice this development implicates the need to “build and maintain positive relationships with active consumers as well as with bloggers, community managers and other gatekeepers on the social web” (Moreno, Navarro, Tench & Zerfass, 2015, p. 245). The concept of the Social Media Release “as a blend between the traditional press release, and digital social media” has been proposed as a response to the appearance of new social media gatekeepers who create content online on blogs, videos and numerous channels (Steyn et al., 2009, p. 87). Whilst such concepts can be helpful and present a step in right direction, there are more aspects to be considered when working with social influencers, particularly regarding the relationship quality between social media influencers and PR practitioners.
2.2 Exploring the PR Practitioner-Media Gatekeeper Relationship

The relational perspective on public relations lies within the conception of public relations as an important management function (Ledingham, 2010), and can be viewed as one of the dominant paradigms in public relations scholarship. Central to this concept is “the notion of public relations as the management of relationships between an organization and its key publics” (Ledingham & Bruning, 2009). Managing these organization-public relationships is approached with the aim to establish and maintain mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and their publics (Cutlip, Center & Broom, 1994). Relationship management is thereby positioned as essential to the successful practice of public relations due to its potential to differentiate companies from their competition on a deeper level compared to simply providing financial incentives (Bruning & Ledingham, 2009).

Since its origins in the 1980s (Ferguson, 1984), a large body of research has been conducted to explore different models and dimensions of public relations as relationship management in various settings and contexts such as public affairs, crisis management and media relations (Ledingham, 2010). Much of the scholarly literature is integrative and draws upon already existing concepts from other disciplines including mass media, interpersonal communication, and marketing studies (Ledingham & Bruning, 2009). In one of the most recent concepts suggested by Ledingham and Bruning in 1998, the organization-public relationship has been attributed five dimensions which are seen as influential and predicting factors regarding perceptions of satisfaction, both from the organizations’ and the publics’ perspective, and as indicators of overall relationship quality. These dimensions include openness, trust, involvement, commitment, and investment. Maintaining good relationships with key publics is viewed as being directly dependent on achieving positive perceptions in the above mentioned dimensions and therefore allow for public relations to be measured and evaluated with regard to its contribution
to an organization’s overall success (Ledingham & Bruning, 1998). Ledingham and Bruning furthermore highlighted the importance of loyalty for relationships stating that organizations that are actively involved in and support their surrounding communities can generate the loyalty of key publics so long the involvement and support is effectively communicated to key publics (Ledingham & Bruning, 1998).

On a more individual level and in contrast to the measurable approach to relationships, Pieczka (2006) explored the notion of “chemistry” as another important aspect in the building of relationships between PR practitioners and individual representatives of key publics. Chemistry is described as an intangible feeling of sympathy and subconsciously knowing when a relationship works (Pieczka, 2006). Such “intuitive judgements” (Pieczka, 2006, p. 326) can be a vital element to consider since it has the potential to essentially make or break a relationship. If two parties simply do not feel like their relationship is working the successful outcome of any collaboration between the two is highly doubtful.

Relationship management within the media relations function of public relations relates directly to one of the research questions of this project which seeks to examine the relationship between PR practitioners and YouTubers as new, non-traditional media gatekeepers whom can be classified as key publics of organizations. From the relational perspective on media relations, the transition away from the dominance of traditional towards that of non-traditional media gatekeepers irrefutably has implications for the practitioner-gatekeeper relationship. Yaxley (2012) argues that is important for public relations practitioners to recognise there are differences between dealing with traditional mainstream journalists and online influencers. She highlights that while some may appreciate being approached by public relations practitioners, others may be less welcoming and consider it an unethical invasion of their personal online space or potentially damaging for their reputation and credibility (Yaxley, 2012). Furthermore, the
increasing commercialisation of the online social media sphere has ensued discussions about openness regarding sponsored content on social media sites (Yaxley, 2012). This is reflected, for example, in the way sponsored videos on YouTube must now contain ad-disclaimers to make it clear to viewers that they are, in fact, watching paid-for advertorials.

Previous research into social media influencers as key stakeholders for organizations, and the relationship between them and PR practitioners has so far mainly focused on bloggers. A survey from 2009 by Porter, Sweetser and Chung investigated practitioners’ roles in relation to personal and professional blog use. They found that practitioners used blogs to a similar extent as the general population, and that this might indicate them “missing an opportunity to reach publics directly both through blogging and placing stories in blogs” (p. 250). The notion of blogs providing organisations with the opportunity for two-way communication with their stakeholders was also ascertained by Mangold and Faulds (2009).

Regarding the link between public relations and bloggers from the blogger perspective, Smith (2010) sought to investigate bloggers’ considerations on public relations sponsored content in the blogosphere. He concluded that bloggers undergo an evolution over their time in the blogosphere and that the stages of this evolutionary process influence bloggers’ readiness to publicise sponsored content on their blogs. Studies by Walden, Bortree and Di Staso (2015), and Archer and Harrigan (2016) explored the relationship between bloggers and public relations professionals. Walden, Bortree and DiStaso compared both bloggers’ and practitioners’ perceptions of relationship quality and discovered differences in the views on their relationships, particularly regarding mutual trust and satisfaction. Archer and Harrigan furthermore found that bloggers’ demand to be paid for creating sponsored content for brands was changing the nature of relationship building in public relations.
The research conducted on bloggers has provided an array of interesting and relevant insights into their role in public relations. Initially, it may seem probable that corresponding research into YouTubers would produce similar insights. However, there are differences between bloggers and YouTubers, and simply assuming their experiences and perceptions are the same presents a disregard for potential insights unique to YouTubers. The following chapter further elaborates the specific role of YouTubers in today’s (social) media landscape and emphasizes the importance of studying their unique traits.

2.3 The YouTube Phenomenon: YouTubers as New Media Gatekeepers

In recent years, the surge in the popularity of YouTubers or, as they are also known, “vloggers” (video bloggers) has developed into somewhat of a phenomenon in which some YouTubers have now superseded actors, popstars, and models as today’s young generation’s favourite celebrities. Initially, YouTubers may appear to be very similar to bloggers in that they both produce regular content on various topics on their respective platforms. However, the seemingly obvious yet important aspect distinguishing YouTubers from bloggers is the fact that YouTubers produce video content instead of written content. While this may not seem like a significant difference upon first glance, the more visual and direct nature of video content does appear to appeal to many people. Simply by filming and posting videos of themselves describing their daily make-up routines, performing pranks on their friends, or going about their day-to-day lives, some YouTubers have acquired extremely large and loyal audiences on the platform.

Nowadays, the most popular YouTubers’ channels count several million subscribers and their videos regularly generate millions of views per month. Apart from the vast reach they have through their videos, a further important aspect surrounding YouTubers is the fact that their
audiences are fiercely loyal and view them as friends. Such feelings of attachment and friendship towards a person one actually does not know in real life have been explained by researchers as parasocial relationships. Herein, parasocial relationships are understood “as any social relationship users develop towards characters they only know from the media” (Hartmann, 2017) which can take both positive and negative forms. “Benefitting from the often regular, reliable and stereotypical appearance of mediated others” (Hartmann, 2017), the formation of parasocial relationships can be viewed as rather similar to that of real life, face-to-face relationships in that parasocial relationships grow and evolve over time and exposure (Hartmann, 2017). Looking at YouTubers and their audiences, it becomes clear that their relationships are examples of such parasocial relationships. Although most viewers of YouTubers have actually met the YouTuber in person, they nonetheless appear to develop friendship-like feelings and trust towards them. This gives YouTubers not only a large platform to spread their content on but also endows them with a high level of influence on their audience, making them important and powerful opinion leaders on the social media landscape.

The steadily increasing popularity and success of YouTubers has now developed to the extent that being a full-time YouTuber is now considered a legitimate career. The way in which YouTubers are able to make money is largely thanks to advertising on YouTube and by creating sponsored content for brands. With sponsored posts on popular blogs already being regarded as a very effective marketing-communication tool (Lu, Chang & Chang, 2014), brands’ eagerness to expand such collaborations to YouTubers is self-explanatory, especially considering the influence YouTubers possess regarding their audience’s opinions.

Yet, in spite of their relevance for public relations, the specific role of YouTubers as important actors in the public relations arena has only recently begun to receive more attention by researchers. In this area, much of the research has focused on YouTubers and their role in
companies’ marketing communications efforts which can be seen as a part of public relations. Franssen (2015) investigated the brand building measures and communication strategies of successful beauty vloggers on YouTube by analysing three of the most popular beauty YouTube channels in the UK. She concluded that not the information the YouTubers give on a certain product but their social status within the YouTube community, their trustworthiness and their physical attractiveness appear to be the crucial factors in attaining a great number of viewers and subscribers to their channel, and therefore help to establish a successful brand on YouTube (Franssen, 2015).

Westenberg (2016) highlighted that especially teenagers are susceptible to being influenced through YouTube videos due to the fact that YouTubers are often regarded by teenagers as role models and as more reliable and trustworthy than traditional mainstream celebrities. Therefore, YouTubers have a big influence on the consumer behaviour of teenagers because they trust in the opinion of YouTubers on a product and aim to buy the things that YouTuber claims to use. Although it can be argued that among YouTubers’ primary intentions and goals would seem to be attracting viewers to their channels, one study found that YouTubers’ trustworthiness is rated higher when they have a lower viewership (Fred, 2015). Moreover, “non-brand endorsed YouTubers possess higher-rated expertise and trustworthiness” (Fred, 2015, p.27). This presents a potential source of conflict for YouTubers who wish maintain a high level of trust and credibility among their viewers yet also engage in sponsored collaborations with brands.

Product placement in popular YouTuber’s videos is a further topic of interest. In a study examining the influence of product placement in YouTube videos on the purchase intentions of youths in Germany, Leitner (2016) found that while YouTubers do play important roles in terms of young people’s purchase intentions, the impact of such product placements was not as
prominent as expected and purchase intentions depended more on the amount of trust individual respondents placed in the specific YouTuber. A further study by Lee & Watkins (2016) on this topic exploring the purchase intentions and luxury brand perceptions of viewers of YouTube videos promoting luxury brands and products came to a somewhat different conclusion. It revealed that the purchase intentions regarding luxury products of regular viewers of such videos were higher than those of people who did not watch such videos. Therefore, the authors argued YouTube videos promoting sponsored products do in fact have a high influence on the purchase intentions of their viewers.

When reviewing the previous research in the field of YouTubers and public relations, it becomes apparent that, so far, most work in this area has looked at the effects of YouTubers on consumer behaviour and on the potential benefits of YouTuber collaborations for brands. Comparably little attention, however, has been laid upon the YouTubers’ considerations and motivations when it comes to such collaborations. This raises questions about what makes YouTubers want to work with certain brands and not with others. What do they value in working with brands and PR practitioners? What do they consider before entering sponsored collaborations? And what are their general motivations for creating content? These questions provide the basis for the research questions underlying this study.

3. Methodology

The methodological approach used in order to answer the central research questions concerning YouTubers’ opinions and considerations regarding sponsored content as well as their relationships with PR practitioners is conducting qualitative interviews with YouTubers. The first section briefly recaptures the results of the literature review and outlines the specific research questions underlying this study. The second section discusses the chosen methodology as well as
the epistemological and paradigmatic underpinnings of this approach. In the third section, the sampling method and criteria regarding the YouTubers under analysis are addressed. In the fourth and final section, the detailed methodological process is described and evaluated.

3.1 Research Questions

The review of literature indicates that YouTubers are indeed influential figures on the social media landscape and have become relevant and important actors to be considered in public relations practice. Previous research has so far mainly focused on blogger considerations regarding public relations-sponsored content (Smith, 2010) and the relationships between bloggers and practitioners (Archer & Harrigan, 2016). YouTubers’ specific roles within the PR arena as well as their motives for content creation, their perceptions of sponsored content and their relationships with PR practitioners have not yet received much attention, providing a relevant and interesting basis for research. This study explores these issues. Regarding the relationships between YouTubers and PR practitioners, the focus was deliberately placed purely upon YouTubers’ perspectives in order to provide practitioners who work with YouTubers with valuable insights regarding YouTubers’ perceptions of their relationships. Whilst practitioners may have the best intentions, relationships are complex and gaining an understanding of how YouTubers actually feel and what they appreciate or dislike when working with practitioners can be very helpful.

To explore the above mentioned issues, the study sought to answer the following research questions:

R1: What are YouTubers’ motivations for creating content?
**R2:** Which considerations do YouTubers take into account with regard to creating public relations-sponsored content on their channels?

**R3:** How do YouTubers perceive the relationships they have with PR practitioners?

The first research question aimed at gaining an insight into why YouTubers started creating content on the YouTube platform in the first place. Their initial reasons for starting to film and upload videos to YouTube are interesting and important factors to consider because they reveal the deeper meaning and motivation behind YouTubers’ videos. Exploring these original motivations furthermore aimed at establishing possible connections between YouTubers’ initial motives for content creation and the aspects they consider before engaging in sponsored collaborations which was explored in detail through the second research question.

The second research question sought to establish how YouTubers are influenced in their decision to produce sponsored content on their channels. It aimed at understanding the specific considerations YouTubers take into account before agreeing to promote or collaborate with certain brands by creating sponsored content for them. This question intended to gain an insight into whether there are any universal “no-go” areas for YouTubers in terms of sponsored content.

The third research question aimed at exploring the ways in which YouTubers perceive the relationships they have with individual PR representatives of brands they are collaborate with. As outlined above in the literature review, the notion of public relations as relationship management is a dominant paradigm in public relations scholarship on which substantial research has been conducted (Ledingham & Brunig, 1998, Ledingham, 2009, Broom, Casey & Ritchey, 2009, Ki & Hon, 2007, Hung, 2005, Piezcka, 2006). In addition, the changing media landscape has brought forward social influencers including YouTubers as non-traditional media gatekeepers. Therefore, there is an interest to examine YouTubers’ individual perceptions and
experiences regarding their relationships with PR practitioners on a personal level and to establish what they value in these relationships.

3.2 Sampling Procedure and Sample Description

The sampling strategy selected for the present study is that of purposeful sampling which is useful since it enables the researcher to study “information-rich cases . . . from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the inquiry” (Patton in Rapley, 2014, p.54). The basis of purposeful sampling lies within “the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight” (Merriam, 2009, p. 77) into a certain topic of interest or phenomenon. With the objective of this inquiry being to explore the individual and subjective perceptions and experiences of YouTubers regarding sponsored content and working with PR practitioners, purposeful sampling was considered to be the best approach.

The sampling criteria set up to aid the selection of potential participants was limited to the YouTubers having previous experience in any form of contact or collaboration with brands regarding sponsored content, PR samples or press events hosted by brands. This criterion was selected in order to ensure the participants would be able to share their experience and opinions on working with brands and PR practitioners.

Initially, the possibility of applying further sampling criteria such as defining a minimum number of subscribers, reviewing monthly click rates, or limiting the focus onto one specific content category was considered. However, since there has been very little previous research concerned with YouTubers’ motivations for content creation, their perspectives on sponsored content and their relationships with PR practitioners, the choice was made to include a more broad selection comprised of YouTubers from various different content backgrounds. This ought
to provide a good initial overview, shed light on possible differences between content categories, and allow for future research to explore any potential findings that may be individual to specific content categories.

The above mentioned criteria (click rates, subscriber numbers, content category) merely served as indicators for the probability of the YouTuber having worked with brands or having been sent PR samples to promote in their videos during the initial search for potential participants.

3.3 Research Method: Qualitative Interviews

Due to the exploratory nature of this study and its focus on individual perceptions and motivations of YouTubers, a qualitative research design comprised of semi-structured, individual interviews with the sample of participants was deemed most suitable.

Qualitative research is based on an interpretive epistemology and a constructivist worldview. The social constructivist worldview assumes that individuals attribute subject meanings to their surroundings and therefore have subjective experiences and understandings of the world in which they live and interact (Creswell, 2009). Therefore, meaning is socially constructed as individuals generally base their subjective interpretations on the social and cultural norms that preside in their lives (Creswell, 2009). Since the aim of this study was rooted in gaining an understanding of just these individual, subjective experiences and opinions of YouTubers, a qualitative approach based on the interpretive nature of the constructivist perspective was selected.

Furthermore, qualitative analysis allows for an in-depth analysis of relatively rich and complex sets of data and, in contrast to the more rigid process of quantitative methods, enables
the researcher to explore phenomena based on their individual interpretations and reading between the lines. This freedom for individual interpretation, however, also remains one of the main criticisms of qualitative research methods (Daymon & Holloway, 2002).

The specific research design of this project was largely inspired by Smith’s (2010) study on blogger considerations of public relations sponsored content in the blogosphere. Smith conducted a series of semi-structured interviews with bloggers which he analysed using the constant comparative method. His design was replicated and slightly adapted for the purpose of this project. Accordingly, individual, semi-structured interviews with YouTubers guided by a set of key questions and issues designed to elicit information related to the research questions were conducted.

Interviews are particularly useful when the subject of interest cannot be directly observed by the researcher such as personal feelings, thoughts and perceptions (Merriam, 2009). Since the objective of the present study lies in exploring and understanding such un-observable sentiments experienced by YouTubers, interviews provide an ideal approach. Instead of adhering to structured interviews with a pre-determined and fixed set of specific questions, the choice was made to employ semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews have the advantage that they provide the researcher with the flexibility to diverge from a fixed set of questions and thereby further explore unexpected topics of interest that could potentially arise during the interview (Merriam, 2009). Thus, the decision to conduct semi-structured, individual interviews enabled the gathering of in-depth and detailed information from the participants’ subjective feelings and experiences, and furthermore allowed for the focus of the subsequent analysis to be centred on the participants’ perspectives and perceptions (Daymon & Holloway, 2002).
For the analysis of the data, the constant comparative method was employed. This approach is mainly based on grounded theory which was first introduced as a qualitative research method in 1967 by Glaser and Strauss. Grounded theory is a strategy of inquiry often used in qualitative research in which “theory is generated from the data rather than from pre-existing theoretical frameworks” (Daymon & Holloway, 2001, p. 119). It is mainly characterised by the constant comparison of the collected data with the categories which emerge during the analysis.

In the present study, it was aimed to generate new theoretical insights regarding YouTubers’ considerations on sponsored content as well as their perceptions of the relationships they have with PR practitioners.

The constant comparative method of analysis involves continuously making comparisons throughout the analytical process, thereby enabling the researcher to identify relationships as well as contextual differences between the different codes and categories and to understand in how far a generalization of the main themes can be made (Scott & Garner, 2013). The analysis began with an inductive approach in which the researcher identified codes and categories from the utterances of the participants based on her interpretations of the data. An inductive approach to coding has the advantage that is allows for the systematic collection and structuration of themes and patterns that are identified during the analysis. The coding process consisted of three main steps: open coding, axial coding and selective coding.

The initial open coding stage involved the fragmentation of the data into smaller units of meaning. The data was thus broken down and conceptualised during which each separate idea was given a certain label and similar ideas were grouped under the same label (Daymon & Holloway, 2002). In qualitative content analysis, these units of meaning are called codes and are based directly on the data in order to avoid any preconceptions of the researcher influencing the analysis. After all the data was coded for the first time, similar codes were grouped together into
broader and more abstract categories (Gibbs, 2007). The axial coding stage involved the re-assembling of the data broken down during open coding by reviewing and re-sorting re-occurring themes as well as searching for any links or relationships between categories (Daymon & Holloway, 2002). This resulted once more in a grouping together of categories into even broader categories which were then labelled according to their meaning and characteristics. The final step of the coding process, the selective coding stage, involved establishing the central codes or themes of the study (Gibbs, 2007).

3.4 Data Collection and Analysis

Fieldwork for this study commenced with identifying and recruiting potential participants for the interviews. Once this first stage was completed, a total of 53 YouTubers from various content categories who fulfilled the sampling criterion were contacted via social media or E-Mail and invited to participate in an interview. Unfortunately, the recruitment stage proved to be more challenging than previously anticipated as the majority of potential interviewees declined to participate due to high demand and limited time at their disposal. Therefore, this aspect ought to be taken into account by researchers interested in interviewing YouTubers in the future.

Of the 53 YouTubers that were contacted, five agreed to participate in an interview. Although both male and female YouTubers were invited to participate, those who agreed were all female. The sample consisted of a beauty YouTuber from Greece with 50,985 subscribers, one lifestyle YouTuber from the UK with 25,682 subscribers, a book YouTuber from the Netherlands with 163,354 subscribers, a health food YouTuber from Germany with 11,503 subscribers, and a fitness YouTuber from the U.S. with 242,942 subscribers. Four of the interviews were carried out via Skype call and were recorded with the researcher’s Samsung Galaxy S4 mobile phone. One
participant preferred to answer questions via Email. In order to guide the interviews, a number of key issues and questions was noted and used by the researcher whilst conducting the interviews. A detailed list of the key issues and questions is provided in the appendices. Prior to beginning the interviews, each participant was asked to confirm their consent to participate and was once again informed that they were not obliged to answer questions they did not feel comfortable with and had the right to withdraw from the study at any point. The length of the interviews varied from 15 to 35 minutes in total.

Once all interviews were completed, the data were transcribed, coded and analysed by the researcher. The initial organisation of the data involved the researcher reading through the data several times before beginning with the inductive coding process. During the initial open coding stage of the analysis of the interviews, a total of 194 initial codes were identified which were subsequently compared, examined with regard to links or relationships between them, and then accordingly grouped and categorized together into seven main codes consisting of 58 sub-codes. Following data reduction, the interpretation was conducted. The meanings of the established categories as well as their relationships were explored. Furthermore, differences and similarities to existing concepts were investigated and evaluated. A list of codes and sub-codes, the codebook, as well as a coding sample may be found in the appendices.

In compliance with the ethical guidelines which informed this study (ESRC Framework for Research Ethics), the decision was made to anonymise the identities of the participants since they are public figures who rely on their reputation for the success of their respective channels. In addition, detailed information on the purpose and procedure of the study as well their individual role within the study was sent to each participant before completion of the interviews. Participants were made aware that their consent to participate in the study was entirely voluntary and they would be able to withdraw their participation at any point.
As mentioned previously, a qualitative research approach in the form of interviews has many strengths but also limitations. The subjective nature of the analysis and interpretation of data is often criticized for concluding in results that are biased by the researcher. Furthermore, interviews are often subject to the issue of participants not being entirely honest when answering questions but rather giving responses they deem socially acceptable or stating what they think the researcher would want to hear. Additional limitations of this research project include the small sample size of participants and the therefore relatively small amount of data.

4. Findings

The analysis of the interviews provided highly interesting insights regarding the research questions underlying the study. Following the coding of the interview data, the analysis of the participants’ responses concluded in the establishment of seven main categories. These seven categories consisted of a number of different codes and sub-codes which were grouped into the categories according to the topics they covered. The following table provides an overview of the main codes and sub-codes that were established in the analysis:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main Codes</th>
<th>Sub-Codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal motivation</td>
<td>• Creative outlet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Viewer first</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Community membership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Viewer relationship</td>
<td>• Nature of relationship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Exchange of opinions/experiences</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Transparency and authenticity</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Integrity and responsibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justification of sponsored content</td>
<td>• Professional opportunity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Service for viewers</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Service for brands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Value of YouTubers</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
4.1 RQ 1: YouTuber’s Motivations for Content Creation

4.1.1 Community Membership and Viewer Connection

Regarding their motives for creating content, all participants give fairly similar responses. A strong motive is the desire to be part of the YouTube community. Three participants indicated they had been viewers before starting their own channels and saw launching their channels as an opportunity to become more actively involved in the YouTube community:

I really wanted to start a YouTube channel because I wanted to become part of the community. (. .) Because I was watching lots of YouTubers who I really loved and it kind of seemed like the only way to get in touch with them was by making videos yourself (. .) and then sort of being part of that community and chatting with people.
Once part of that community, YouTube represents a platform for its members to share both their personal opinions on and experiences with products or brands they are passionate about. One participant described how her initial desire to simply share tips and tricks for leading a healthier lifestyle evolved into a passion to inspire and motivate people “. . . to be the best they can be”. Her motivation for making videos stems not only from wanting to have a platform to share her opinions but also from wanting to support and inspire her viewers. Her statement reflects a further significant motive that was mentioned by all participants: YouTubers’ relationships with their viewers.

Overall, the participants’ perceptions of the relationship they share with their audience were again very similar. All but one stated that they felt a close bond with their viewers, with two participants even referring to their audience as their “online family” and describing this relationship as “. . . one of the best things and feelings that you can experience online”. This sentiment is highlighted by one participant’s remark: “I try very much not to use words like fans and things like that”. The term “fans” conveys a much more distant relationship and a form of hierarchy between the “fan” and the YouTuber. Most participants, however, appear to truly value the personal connection they establish with their audience, and see their relationship as an exchange of knowledge as well as a form of mutual support. One participant described the sense of identification she feels with her viewers:

For me it’s like when I meet subscribers it’s like me but just five years younger (. ) Like so many people did the same thing at university and have the same interests and they’re all just like people that you could see getting along together and being friends.

Another participant stated: “I’m just really grateful of the support they give me (. ) Because without them I wouldn’t be able to do what I’m doing”. Therefore, YouTubers place importance
on making an effort to maintain their close relationship with their viewers by replying to their comments and interacting with them on their other social media channels.

Even the participant who expressed a more neutral perception of her relationship with her viewers than the other participants did, conceded that she feels a sense of responsibility towards her audience, especially regarding the truthfulness of her content and the safety of her viewers in the comment section of her videos. She also indicated that her more distant relationship with her viewers stemmed from her content background and video format. Since she mainly creates recipes on her channel and does not post videos of her daily life as some YouTubers do, she concluded that the lack of highly personal information regarding her private life results in the fact that her relationship with her viewers remains more neutral. This impression was reiterated by another participant who expressed that in her experience, YouTubers who share many details of their private life receive more views and appear to have extremely loyal followers.

4.1.2 Creative Self-Expression and Professional Differentiation

Another reoccurring motive for all participants is the perception of their YouTube channels as a creative outlet. Two participants described how they started their channels whilst attending university as a way of expressing their creativity due to feeling unfulfilled in their respective studies. One participant recalled:

So I was in college and was feeling very lonely because um (.) I was studying to become an engineer (.) and it turns out that I'm very artistic and engineering is not my thing so I was feeling very suppressed and very lonely in this environment (.) so YouTube was like a great outlet for me.
Thus, a primary motive for YouTubers to start their channels lies not only in sharing their personal opinions about products they love but, on a deeper level, presents a way to express their individual creativity as a balance to the more unfulfilling aspects in their lives.

Furthermore, one participant mentioned professional reasons as one of the motives for starting her channel. Aspiring a career in influencer marketing, she saw her YouTube channel as a means of demonstrating true interest and relevant skills to potential future employers and thereby differentiating herself from other candidates. Her statement highlights how the rise of YouTubers and other social media influencers has not only opened up new career paths for YouTubers themselves but has also changed the PR and marketing profession. Specializations such as influencer marketing are becoming increasingly popular career paths, particularly among younger practitioners. Another participant also ventured into the subject, drawing upon her experience as a digital content manager. She argued that knowing both perspectives of the YouTuber-practitioner relationship had proved to be an extremely valuable feature for her career.

4.2 RQ 2: YouTuber’s Considerations on Sponsored Content

4.2.1 Justifications of Sponsored Content

Concerning YouTubers’ considerations regarding sponsored content, all participants expressed generally positive opinions on sponsorship and gave interesting arguments for the justification of paid collaborations with brands. For one participant, sponsored content is “one of the very few viable ways of making money through YouTube”. Overall, the most salient argument justifying sponsorship was based on the fact that YouTubers provide brands with a service by creating a video promoting their products and should therefore be paid just like any other
freelancer or company is paid for providing a service. One participant commented: “. . . it’s a service like anything else (.). It’s a service you’re providing for a company so why not get paid”.

The value of sponsored videos for brands was also highlighted by all participants. One participant argued:

I think like a lot of people are like oh why is this person making so much money from a sponsored video and I’m like if you only knew how much money like a tiny poster on the tube costs (.). Compared to getting a really niche audience and custom content from someone who is a presenter and editor (.). Like you’re getting a full package deal pretty much.

Her statement reveals that YouTubers are very much aware of their value for brands by “. . . helping the brand get some exposure to a relevant audience”, and demonstrates confidence regarding their skills as a “full package deal”. Furthermore, it is interesting to see how YouTubers still feel somewhat disadvantaged compared to more traditional media channels in terms of brands’ readiness to pay them. Whilst they are willing to spend high amounts of money on traditional means of promotion such as billboards or posters, they seem to be more reluctant to pay YouTubers for their efforts.

YouTubers view creating sponsored content on their channels not only as a service to brands but also as a service to their audience: “For me I’m bringing my subscribers something really cool that they may not have known about before”. Here, the importance of the YouTuber’s relationship with their audience is once again highlighted. All participants emphasized the acceptance of their viewers as one of the most significant conditions for the justification of sponsored content. In order to guarantee the acceptance of their viewers, the participants stressed the importance of correctly and explicitly disclaiming all types of sponsored content.
which appears on their respective channels. One YouTuber remarked: “I think product placement is good as long as you disclaim it and also if you (. ) Like I think it also has to be accepted by the viewers”. Transparency regarding any form of paid collaboration is thus a key factor for YouTubers, and the disregard of some YouTubers to disclaim sponsored content in their video was blamed for its increasingly negative image:

I think it’s so important to properly disclaim sponsored videos so it really makes me angry when some YouTubers don’t do that. I’m proud of the collaborations I do with brands and I don’t think they should something you hide.

A further point made by all participants is that sponsored content helps YouTubers maintain a high standard of quality for their videos. Long gone are the days when YouTubers simply used their integrated webcams or mobile phone cameras to record their videos. Nowadays, high quality cameras as well as professional lighting equipment are the norm. Viewers have become accustomed to such standards and their expectations regarding video quality necessitate YouTubers to keep up-to-date with the best and newest equipment. Sponsored content provides a great help for YouTubers to afford to invest in maintaining the best possible quality of their videos, thereby satisfying both the brands they work with and their viewers.

4.2.2 Considerations and Selection Criteria

Concerning the specific issues YouTubers consider before collaborating with brands, the participants’ responses revealed three main themes that influence them in their decision process. The most prominent theme is creative freedom. YouTubers lay extremely high value upon their personal creative control and consider brands who dictate very specific instructions to be a “no-go”. The common practice appears to be for brands to provide the YouTuber with a
loose set of guidelines while the main creative direction and style of the video remains within the YouTuber’s control.

The second main aspect YouTubers take into consideration before choosing to work with a brand is the brand’s reputation and their personal identification with the brand. This is due to the fact that YouTubers are reliant on their own channel’s reputation and must therefore be cautious of associating themselves with brands that are in any way attached to a negative image or generate bad publicity. Specific factors mentioned by the participants include the brand’s ethical background, previous controversial actions undertaken by the brand as well as the brand’s credentials and level of experience.

Personal identification with the brand is related to YouTubers’ wish to maintain their credibility and authenticity. One participant remarked that collaborations which do not come across as sincere can reflect badly on their relationship with their viewers:

You know if I was just talking at like a void and it wasn’t at like a specific audience that’s been with me for like eight years then I think maybe I’d be like whatever. But you’re talking to these people that know what you like that know what you do and what you try and stand for.

The third main issue YouTubers consider regarding sponsored content relates to the actual product or service they are promoting. Here, the quality of the product is one of the most significant aspects the participants focused on. Most participants emphasized that they only ever promote products that they have tried and tested personally. One participant commented: “... and of course number one the product has to be good. I like to do sponsored videos with a good product not a sponsored video with a bad product because that doesn’t benefit anyone”. When she mentions that promoting bad products does not benefit anyone, she again indicates
the importance of maintaining her positive relationship with her viewers. Risking that relationship by choosing “money over your principles . . . is just not worth it”.

Furthermore, some participants stated that while their own personal liking for the products they promote is important to them, the relevance and even the affordability of the product for their audience is of equal importance. Affordability, however, was described as a “bonus” and does not appear to automatically rule out potential collaborations with more luxury or high-end brands.

4.3 RQ 3: The YouTuber-PR Practitioner Relationship

4.3.1 Interaction and Power Relations

Regarding the relationship between YouTubers and PR practitioners, the participants expressed some interesting and unexpected insights. In general, all participants highlighted the fact that they turn down most of the requests they receive to collaborate with brands. This meticulous selectivity is mainly due to the above mentioned criteria YouTubers consider to be important requirements for agreeing to a collaboration. One participant claimed:

I get (.) like a couple . . . of requests a month but I’d say like ninety-nine percent of those are (.) like either they seem like nonsense or you’re like this is really weird or this is just sent to everyone or it’s just a really ridiculous offer . . . and then from time to time . . . I’ll get one that is like a perfect fit and then I would say usually like fifty percent of those will actually happen.

Interestingly, she continued that, in many cases, it is the brand that pulls out of the collaboration at the last minute. In addition, she commented that whilst YouTubers are mostly
granted creative freedom regarding the content, the brand does have the final say and retains
the right to request alterations before the video is posted. These power relations between the
YouTuber and the brand offer interesting insights into the dynamics of their relationship and
demonstrate a slight discrepancy in the participants’ responses regarding the fact that one of the
most important considerations on sponsored content most named as being creative freedom and
control.

Regarding the way they prefer to be approached by PR practitioners, participants once
more gave fairly similar responses. Most stated they prefer for the initial contact to be via Email,
though future meetings often involve meeting in person or at least speaking directly over the
phone or Skype call. A common aspect which YouTubers appreciate is for PR practitioners to
demonstrate sincere interest in their channel content and their personal interests instead of
simply sending out generic messages to a large number of influencers. One participant
commented: “I love it when they’ve actually followed me, checked my content, read my stuff,
taken the time to meet with me and get to know me”. For PR practitioners looking to venture
into potential collaborations with YouTubers, this implies the importance of investing enough
time into researching the YouTuber’s background, interests, and compatibility with the brand.

This desire for a more personal approach reflects the fact that YouTubers do not seem to
see their channels as simply a business and a way to make money but first and foremost as their
own personal space in which they express their creativity. Therefore, they value for anything they
create in this space, including collaborations with brands, to be based on a certain level of
personal connection. This notion is supported by one participant’s reflection: “I also love it when
I meet them multiple times and we feel like friends so then end up working on some fun, long
term collaborations”. Going beyond a traditional business relationship and feeling “like friends”
makes sponsored content seem much more familiar and relatable, not just for the YouTuber but also for their audience.

There appear to be, however, some individual differences between the participants regarding the direction of the initial contact with brands and PR practitioners. While three participants indicated they do not have the time to contact brands and initiate potential collaborations themselves, the two other participants remarked that they do often “make the first move” and contact brands in order to signal an interest in working with them. One participant in particular, expressed her opinion that YouTubers “… should never stand still and wait for the companies” but rather ought to be continuously “… searching for products and for companies they might like”. As a beauty YouTuber, she also described how she often attends events such as beauty fairs and exhibitions in order to personally meet representatives of brands she could potentially work with.

With regard to the nature of the message itself, YouTubers dislike feeling pressured by PR practitioners and prefer for the tone of the message to be more relaxed and informal. One participants explained:

And so you know the ones that start like: Hey would you like to try out this and this and then go on like but you also have to do this and this and this and have the video ready by tomorrow (.). I’m just like: No.

This is directly related to the fact that YouTubers lay extremely high value on maintaining their creative freedom when working on paid collaborations with brands. Pre-scripted videos and strict deadlines presented by the brand’s PR representatives appear to be a no-go for YouTubers since they hold the risk of them losing their credibility and the respect of their viewers.
Accordingly, the participants also made a point of emphasizing they generally do not take on significantly different approaches in the process of creating sponsored videos in comparison to non-sponsored videos. Whilst two participants did admit they feel slightly more pressure to deliver high quality content, the overall consensus appears to be that YouTubers put equal amounts of effort into sponsored videos as they do into their “normal” videos. One participant commented:

I film my videos exactly the same regardless if there’s a feature in them, I think if I did have to like completely change my creative process then perhaps it’s not the right kind of sponsorship for my channel.

Another participant furthermore pointed out that making substantial changes to the creative approach of a sponsored video compared to the YouTubers other videos is mostly not in the interest of the brand since they “have already seen your videos and they already know your content so they don’t want your content to be that different from your actual content like from the rest of it”.

In addition to valuing a personal connection with practitioners they work with, YouTubers appreciate when practitioners demonstrate trust in their competence as content creators. Since YouTubers are very much aware of their own worth to brands, they wish for their knowledge and skills to be taken seriously. One participant remarked: “It’s great when they listen and understand that I know my audience and know what works and what doesn’t”. PR practitioners displaying confidence in the YouTuber’s abilities and showing respect for their creative freedom can thus be seen as important factors in terms of building positive relationships.
4.3.2 Industry Issues

A further insight gained from the interview data is that of the more general and wide-spread issues within the PR industry regarding collaborations with influencers, and YouTubers in particular. Two participants have a background of working in influencer marketing and digital content management, and were therefore able to draw conclusions from their experience of knowing both sides of the relationship between PR practitioners and YouTubers. A major problem both identified is that many practitioners and agencies who take on social influencers do not have an appropriate understanding of the YouTube culture and tend to follow an “old-fashioned media way”.

Another point of critique they made, specifically regarding the role of both talent agencies that manage YouTubers and external PR agencies that are hired by brands, is the “long chain” between the YouTuber and the brand. According to one participant, a lot of valuable and important information can get lost when there is no direct contact between the sponsoring brand and the YouTuber. In addition to the “long chain”, the issue of conflicting interests can also present a challenge in building positive relationships between YouTubers and PR practitioners. One participant mentioned that external agencies contacting YouTubers on behalf of a brand are naturally more focused on securing the best possible deal for their client. In her opinion, this can sometimes lead to the YouTuber feeling disadvantaged and prevent the development of a positive relationship between the parties.

A more general industry issue that was criticized by some participants is the double standard surrounding sponsored content on YouTube in comparison to both traditional media outlets and other social media platforms. Although YouTube belongs to the strictest platforms concerning their regulations and guidelines for disclaiming sponsored content, YouTubers
nonetheless seem to receive more public criticism for paid collaborations than other social influencers and traditional media personalities.

Overall, it is interesting to observe how some of the themes that were found in the participants’ responses appear to be connected. Regarding YouTubers’ initial motives for creating content and aspects they consider on sponsored collaborations, the data demonstrates that motives such as creative self-expression and viewer relationships seem to be influential factors when considering sponsored collaborations. Here, YouTubers stated creative freedom and benefit or relevance for their viewers as two of the main aspects they consider before engaging in a sponsored collaboration. The theme of creative freedom re-appeared once more when YouTubers were asked about what they value in working with brands and PR practitioners. This demonstrated how YouTubers original intentions and motives for starting their channels do appear to influence them, both in terms of considerations on sponsored content, and in their perceptions of positive relationships with PR practitioners.

5. Discussion

As described in the findings chapter, the analysis of the data gathered from the interviews with the participants gave new and interesting insights into both the motivations and considerations of YouTubers regarding sponsored content as well as their relationships with brands and PR practitioners. Drawing upon these insights and comparing them to some of the previous research that has been conducted in this area, there are both expected and unexpected discoveries that were made. Furthermore, the findings offer valuable practical implications for both PR practitioners and YouTubers.
As expected, the results of the analysis mainly found similarities between YouTubers and bloggers regarding their motivations for creating content on their respective platforms. Comparing the present findings to those of Smith’s study on blogger considerations regarding sponsored content, both YouTubers and bloggers are motivated by a desire to express their creativity and therefore place great value on upholding their creative freedom when engaging in paid collaborations with brands. The aspects of community membership and sharing opinions are also primary motivations shared by bloggers and YouTubers. There are, however, some aspects which were discovered in the present study that provide a deeper insight into motivations that appear individual to YouTubers.

An interesting motive is professional differentiation. Starting a YouTube channel herein also serves the purpose of improving the participant’s prospects for a desired future career in influencer marketing by demonstrating real interest and first-hand experience to potential employers. Whilst this is not necessarily one of the main motivations for YouTubers to start their channels, it does offer a rather interesting perspective on the way social media is influencing younger generations in their career aspirations.

In addition, the aspect of community membership appears to be amplified in YouTubers to the level of friendship, and even family. Almost all participants reported an extremely close bond they feel with their audience, one describing it as a special thing to experience in the online world. This feeling of friendship is highly probable to stem from the more personal nature of YouTube as a platform compared to blogs. Aside from the more intimate medium of a video format, many YouTubers tend to share rather private details of their personal life with their viewers, often filming their daily activities as well as special occasions in their lives. They also actively engage with their followers in the comment section below their YouTube videos and on their other social media platforms. In the literature review, the concept of parasocial
relationships was discussed as developing social relationships with individuals one only knows from the media. Applied to YouTubers and their audiences this concept explains the extreme loyalty and feeling of friendship viewers develop towards their favourite YouTubers. Drawing upon the findings of the analysis, it appears that, in the case of YouTubers, the direction of parasocial relationships between them and their viewers is very much reciprocal. The participants’ descriptions of the close bond they feel towards their viewers in spite of never having met most of them in real life demonstrates that viewers and YouTubers alike form parasocial relationships with each other. This may be partly explained by the fact that YouTubers film their videos as if they were talking to a real person, not just their camera, which helps foster the illusion of actually having a face-to-face conversation with their viewers.

A comparison of the considerations of YouTubers and bloggers regarding sponsored content once again reveals both similarities and differences between the two types of content creators. Both strongly consider the degree of creative freedom and autonomy they would maintain in any sponsored collaboration with a brand. A further common consideration is the interest of their respective audience. As pointed out by Smith (2010), YouTubers like bloggers envision themselves and their audience as part of a community based on mutual respect, and therefore generally consider their audience’s interests to be more important than financial gains they would receive from a sponsored collaboration. This theme appears to be related to the parasocial relationships YouTubers and their viewers form with each. Therefore, avoiding putting these relationships at risk or losing their viewers’ trust through promoting controversial brands or products seems to be one of the most important considerations for YouTubers when contemplating potential collaborations.

Aspects mentioned by YouTubers, not however by bloggers in Smith’s study (2010), are the brand’s reputation, the YouTuber’s personal identification with the brand, and the quality of
the product or service they would be promoting. These issues could be more important to YouTubers than bloggers because YouTubers are more visible than bloggers. While bloggers mainly publish written content and thereby maintain a certain level of anonymity, YouTubers physically appear in the videos they post. They represent their YouTube channel almost in a way in which their persona becomes the channel, thereby attaching their own personal reputation to that of their channel. Therefore, by associating themselves with unethical or otherwise controversial brands, they arguably run higher risks of permanently damaging not only the reputation of their channel but also their personal reputation. A more meticulous selectivity regarding the brands they choose to work with thus seems a logical consequence.

Here however, it is important to challenge the assumption that YouTubers always act ethically themselves. Whilst most of the participants did state that they would never work with unethical brands or promote products purely for the money, the ethical implications surrounding paid collaborations remain a significant issue to consider. An example for this would be a YouTuber claiming to support animal rights going on to promote the brand L’Oréal, which conducts animal testing on the products they sell on the Chinese market, on their channel. It is important to remember that one of the main incentives of sponsored collaborations between brands and YouTubers is both parties using each other’s status and influence in order to further their own careers or agendas and to enhance their public image.

Regarding the YouTuber-practitioner relationship, the findings of the present study support the results of Fred’s (2015) study on the effects of brand endorsement on the trustworthiness and credibility of YouTubers. Fred found that brand-endorsed YouTubers who regularly post sponsored content are perceived as less trustworthy and credible. This issue corresponds to the experience of two participants who have professional backgrounds in influencer marketing and digital content management besides being YouTubers, and remarked
that it has recently become popular in the industry to turn towards so-called “micro-influencers” instead of influencers with extremely large audiences.

The reasons for this appear to be two-fold: one the one hand, brands face a higher risk by sending out their products to YouTubers with millions of viewers in case the YouTuber does not end up liking the product. The potential damage to the brand caused by a spread of negative reviews is thus kept lower when the YouTuber has a smaller audience. On the other hand, sponsored content by YouTubers with a smaller audience, as shown by Fred, often appear more credible and trustworthy than by those with a larger audience. Therefore, their audience is more likely to follow their recommendations and buy the products they promote in their videos, causing YouTubers with a smaller viewership to be more attractive collaboration partners for brands.

Examining the perceptions of YouTubers with regard to their relationships with PR practitioners, interesting insights concerning relationship management theory can be observed. Many of the aspects that are valued by YouTubers in terms of their interaction and relationship with practitioners correspond to the five dimensions of positive relationships as suggested by Ledingham and Bruning (1998). The importance of the dimensions of mutual trust and openness is made evident in the participants’ preferences to work with brands that are open and honest about their expectations, and trust the YouTuber’s expertise to deliver high quality videos. Commitment also appears to be a significant factor since YouTubers tend to prefer long-term collaborations with brands over one-off arrangements. Investment plays an important role in terms of the brand recognizing the value of the YouTuber and providing them with appropriate incentives for working with them whereas involvement is reflected in the way YouTubers welcome a certain level of guidance by the brands whilst still maintaining their creative freedom.
In addition, the participants’ responses re-affirm Piezcka’s (2006) notion of the significance of chemistry for building and maintaining positive relationships between organisations and their publics on the personal level of said relationship. The value YouTubers lay on establishing a personal connection with PR practitioners indicates a validation of the importance of chemistry as described by Piezcka (2006). This highlights the fact that there are certain aspects of personal relationships and interaction that cannot be planned or forced. In fact, attempting to force chemistry by “trying too hard” can make matters worse and come across as insincere. It can therefore be argued that although a thoroughly planned, strategic approach to relationship management may yield positive relationships in theory, the influence of chemistry on the personal level of relationships remains a highly significant factor which, in some cases, can make or break relationships regardless of how strategically they are managed.

6. Conclusion

YouTubers’ main motives for creating content are rooted in a desire for creative self-expression and membership of a close-knit and personal online community. Furthermore, YouTubers possess a high level of awareness of their value for brands, and expressed professional aspirations as secondary motivations for starting their channels, which differentiates them from bloggers.

Creative freedom and their viewers’ interests form the central aspects YouTubers consider regarding the creation of sponsored content. Further issues they take into account include the sponsoring brand’s reputation, the YouTuber’s personal identification with the brand as well as the quality of the product or service they would promote.
Due to their value of creative freedom, YouTubers welcome mutual trust and openness as well as transparency when working with practitioners. Forming close positive relationships with practitioners is important to YouTubers since it enables them to build a more personal connection to the brand they associate themselves with.

The results of this study have both re-affirmed and extended discoveries made in previous research into the role of influencers in public relations and relationship management. YouTubers and bloggers share similar motivations for creating content and moreover consider similar issues regarding sponsored content on their respective platforms. They are, however, differentiated by several significant aspects due to the fact that YouTube channels and blogs are different communication platforms with different implications for content creators. With regard to their perceptions of their relationships with PR practitioners, the data corresponds to Ledingham and Bruning’s (1998) five dimensions of trust, openness, commitment, investment and involvement as indicators of positive relationships. Pieczka’s (2006) concept of chemistry as a vital factor in relationships is also confirmed by YouTubers’ responses.

For public relations practice, the study provides useful insights into the preferences of YouTubers in terms of interacting with PR practitioners. Practitioners looking to work with YouTubers are thus encouraged to contact them in a personalized manner, demonstrating sincere interest in them and their channel. Here, sufficient research into the YouTuber’s background and interests is essential. Mutual respect, openness and trust in their abilities are further aspects to consider when working with YouTubers. Once a personal connection has been established, YouTubers value being granted creative freedom in joint projects and tend to welcome the possibility of long-term collaborations. While making an effort is important, practitioners should avoid “trying too hard” or being overly attentive since this can appear insincere and superficial.
Regarding the limitations of this study, the problems regarding the recruitment of participants for the interviews caused the sample size and resulting data to be relatively small. In addition, all participants happened to be female even though both male and female YouTubers were invited to take part. Participants potentially not giving entirely honest responses in order to conform to social norms or appeal to the researcher present a further limitation. Overall, due to its small scale and rather descriptive nature, the results of this study cannot be claimed to provide revolutionary discoveries. It does, however, offer a first glimpse of YouTubers’ motives for making videos, the issues they consider regarding sponsored content, and their perceptions of their relationships with PR practitioners.

Topics of interest for future research into this subject matter could include expanding this current study to a more broad and diverse pool of participating YouTubers, investigating the YouTuber-PR practitioner relationship from practitioners’ perspectives, and exploring the role of YouTubers and other social influencers with regard to public affairs and advocacy, and more specifically their influence in political campaigns. The high percentage of youth turnout in the recent general election in the UK has been largely attributed to many social influencers utilizing their platforms to encourage their followers to exercise their right to vote. In light of these events, it would be interesting to explore the ways in which social influencers use their platforms to promote certain political or social agendas. Moreover, it would be interesting to examine some of the general PR industry issues pointed out by YouTubers regarding sponsored collaborations such as problems arising through employing external agencies, the use of “old” media, and double standards surrounding sponsored content on YouTube compared to other social media platforms.
7. References


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8. Appendices

Interview Consent Form

Research investigator: Annabel Müller

Research Participants name:

Research project title: Exploring YouTuber Considerations of Public Relations-Sponsored Content on their Channels

Research purpose: This project aims to explore the role of YouTubers as new media gatekeepers in public relations, particularly with regard to their considerations towards PR-sponsored content on their channels and their experiences in working with PR practitioners. The purpose of the project is to establish different aspects YouTubers take into account when considering to work with brands, and what they value in collaborations with brands and PR practitioners. Thus, this interview has the purpose of gaining an insight into the considerations and first-hand experiences of YouTubers with regard to PR sponsored content on their channels.

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research project.

The interview will take approximately 20-30 minutes. We don't anticipate that there are any risks associated with your participation, but you have the right to stop the interview or withdraw from the research at any time.

This consent form is necessary for us to ensure that you understand the purpose of the project and your involvement, and that you agree to the conditions of your participation.

This form will ensure that you are clear on the terms of the interview and you approve the following:

- The interview will be recorded and a transcript will be produced;
- Your participation is voluntary and you will be free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason;
✓ Your interview will be anonymised;
✓ The transcript of the interview will be analysed by me, Annabel Müller, as research investigator and access to the interview transcript will be limited to myself and my supervisor (if applicable);
✓ Your data will be kept confidential and stored securely under password, not disclosed to third parties without your prior consent and used exclusively for the purposes of this project.
✓ Any summary, interview content, or direct quotations from the interview made available through academic publication or other outlets will be anonymized unless otherwise agreed.
✓ You will not receive any benefit or payment for your participation;
✓ You can request a copy of the transcript of the interview and may make edits you feel necessary to ensure the effectiveness of any agreement made about confidentiality;
✓ The actual recording will be destroyed upon completion of the research project in October 2017.

Please notice that any variation of the conditions above will only occur with your further explicit approval.

By stating your voluntary agreement to participate on record before the interview, you grant your approval to the above mentioned utilization of your data.

This research has been reviewed and approved by the General University Ethics Panel (GUEP) at the University of Stirling. If you have any further questions or concerns about this study, please contact: guep@stir.ac.uk
Interview Guide

1. What were your main motivations for starting your YouTube channel?

2. How do you see your relationship with your viewers?

3. What are your thoughts on sponsored content on YouTube?

4. On average, how often are you sent items to review or are you approached by brands or organizations to work with them? How do you prefer to be approached?

5. For you, are there any differences in the creation process of sponsored videos compared to non-sponsored videos?

6. What are the main aspects or issues you consider before you decide you would like to work with/promote a certain brand or product?

7. What are the things you value when working with brands, or more specifically PR people? How would describe your relationship with the PR people you have worked or currently work with?

8. In your opinion, what makes for the best collaborations with brands?
Interview with Eileen Lameiras: 07/05/2017

IR: Interviewer (Annabel Müller)

IE: Interviewee (Eileen Lameiras)

IR: Ok gut. Also genau dann fang ich erstmal mit der ersten Frage an und zwar er wäre das zu deinen YouTube Anfängen warum du mit deinem Kanal angefangen hast und was deine Hauptgründe dafür waren deine Motivation?

IE: Ja also ich hab meinen YouTube Kanal vor zwei Jahren gegründet hauptsächlich aus dem Grund ich hab ja Wirtschaftswissenschaften studiert und es war ein sehr trockenes Studium, sehr Mathe-lastiges Studium und es mich einfach nicht komplett erfüllt, weil ich auch sehr kreativ einfach bin und dieser Part auch immer zu mir gehört hat und das das erste Mal in meinem Leben war wo ich also gar nichts damit zu tun hatte und ich hab privat auch schon sehr lange YouTube Videos geschaut und dachte so ja das könntest du doch eigentlich auch und hab dann angefangen vor allem hab ich auch im Studium gemerkt ok wir haben mit 800 Leuten angefangen und habe gemerkt, dass ich eigentlich nichts habe was mich jetzt von den anderen irgendwie em absetzt oder mich besonders macht und em mich auch quasi so als Arbeitgeber gesehen habe und wusste ok warum sollten die überhaupt einen Grund haben mich einzustellen und nicht andere Leute Mir war auch relativ früh schon bewusst auf eine solche Schiene gehen wollte auch so Social Media Influencer Marketing wo ich gerade auch arbeite also es ist eigentlich ganz witzig, weil ich kenn auch die andere Seite davon genau und dass ich einfach schon was vorzuweisen habe, dass ich mich halt wirklich dafür interessiere und nicht einfach nur im Vorstellungsgespräch das dann sage und ja genau das waren so meine Hauptgründe und Motivation.
IR: Ok. Cool ehm (beide lachen) ehm das mit dem dass du em ich find das voll interessant, dass du gesagt hast das mit den beiden Seiten (. ) da komm ich vielleicht später nochmal drauf zurück, weil das find ich voll interessant (. ) genau dann die zweite Frage wäre em wie du deine (. ) ich sag mal Beziehung klingt vielleicht jetzt ein bisschen komisch aber also wie du dich im Gegensent- oder in Relation zu deinen Viewers siehst (. ) also em wie siehst du deine Beziehung zu deinen Viewers?

IE: Mhm nicht so eng wie zum Beispiel bei anderen Leuten (. ) Ich glaube wenn du also wenn man anderes Videoformat hat wie zum Daily Vlogs oder generell Vlogs oder auch Live-Aktionen ist die Verbindung viel enger (. ) oder auch wenn man zum Beispiel auf Instagram mehr macht als ich es mache (. ) dadurch dass ich inzwischen hauptsächlich im Food Bereich bin und sehr viel mit Rezepten und so arbeite (. ) ehm (0.3) ist die Bindung jetzt nicht so eng (. ) also ich sehe es tauchen immer wieder die gleichen 10 15 Namen auf die kenn ich auch em und ich weiß auch dass sie mir manchmal Nachrichten schreiben aber es ist jetzt nicht ein freundschaftliches Verhältnis oder so

IR: Ok (. ) und du würdest jetzt auch nicht unbedingt sagen dass du: eine Verantwortung oder irgend so was gegenüber deinen Zuschauern hast oder so

IE: Nee aber ich muss auch also weil es sind ja nicht wahllos Rezepte und es geht schon um gesunde Ernährung und also zum Beispiel wenn ich sehe dass jemand unter meinem Video halt (. ) Schwachsinn schreibt em (. ) dann sehe ich mich aber schon in der Verantwortung hinzugehen und zu sagen hey das ist aber anders m: das stimmt nicht Em (. ) genau also da fühle ich mich schon in der Verantwortung

IR: Ok (. ) ok cool (. ) Em dann die dritte Frage kommen wir jetzt zu sponsored content (. ) genau em dann einfach so allgemein wie deine Meinung zu sponsored content also sponsored videos
oder allgemein product placement die ganze Schiene auf YouTube ist (.) also wie siehst du das ganze

IE: M::: (0.2) ich bin nicht generell dafür aber auch nicht prinzipiell dagegen (.) ich finde es kommt immer sehr auf die Angebote an gerade wenn man noch ein kleinerer YouTuber ist (.) also ich weiß jetzt nicht wie weit du informiert bist aber es war ja ganz lange dass diese ganz großen YouTuber also 50 000 plus mega beliebt waren (.) e:::m alle Produkt Placements dann auch eher so in die Richtung gegangen sind aber momentan gibt’s halt eine Gegenentwicklung dass man sich man sich auf Mikroinfluencer e:::m (0.3) irgendwie em dass man die eher kontaktiert das wären die mit so 5000 bis 25 000 Follower Leute e:::m weil die eben noch glaubwürdiger sind und dieses Problem ist halt eben mit diesem ganzen Produkt Placement irgendwie entstanden dass die ganz oft dumme Produkte in die Kamera gehalten haben dass man es einfach merkt (.) also ich hatte da auch schon Anfragen von em Seifen mit einem Diamant in der Mitte ((sarkastisch, beide lachen)) ja wo man sich dann so denkt klar kriegst du dann e::: 300 Euro für so ein dummes Video aber deine Glaubwürdigkeit und ich meine du stehst ja praktisch für deinen Kanal (.) du stehst für deine Videos und es ist für alle zugänglich und du kannst den Ruf deines Kanals irgendwie mit Produkt Placements so::: sehr kaputt machen (.) auf der anderen Seite hab ich letztens auch zum Beispiel eine bezahlte Kooperation gemacht mit Gervais (.) die machen so Hüttenkäse also das ist echt die Hüttenkäse Marke (0.2) und da::: hab ich mir halt auch so gedacht warum nicht (.) also ich investiere so viel Zeit in so ein Video da können die mir auch ruhig was zahlen und ich mein Hüttenkäse ess ich so oder so (.) also ob die mir das kostenlos zuschicken oder ich mir das dann kaufe macht keinen Sinn (.) aber ich finde Produkt Placement ist gut wenn man es kennzeichnet und wenn man auch (.) also ich finde auch von den Zuschauern muss es auch akzeptiert werden also ich versteh diese Leute nicht die dann mega mit Shitstorm anfangen und so eh du machst nur alles für Geld (.) ja
Du investierst aber auch 10 Stunden von deiner Zeit wo du auch irgendwas anderes machen könntest (0.2) und das sehen ganz viele nicht und ich glaube das ist so das hauptsächliche Problem

IR: Ok dann die nächste Frage wäre: em generell gibt es für dich Unterschiede e:m in dem Prozess also beim Produzieren von gesponsorten Videos im Gegensatz zu ich sag mal normalen Videos (0.2) em also kriegst du zum Beispiel irgendwelche Vorgaben von den Marken was die von dir wollen wie du das präsentierst oder hast du da kreative Freiheit generell

IE: Also bei mir sind es ja meistens Rezepte die ich mache und em es gibt schon Vorgaben aber das heißt dann Gervais ((französische Aussprache)) und nicht Gervais ((deutsche Aussprache)) ((beide lachen)) (0.3) ja oder benutze den und den Hashtag und zeige die Produkte also auch die Verpackungen davon aber jetzt nicht dass die dir das Rezept vorgeben also nach dem Motto hier sind die Zutaten da mach (.) also so gar nicht sondern da lassen die mir echt kompletten Freiraum (.) manchmal gibt’s halt E::m sowas wie es soll mindestens 10 Minuten lang sein oder halt zwei Videos (0.2) manchmal gibt’s auch Storytelling Einleitungen die man praktisch benutzen sollte (.) bei diesem Hüttenkäse Video war eigentlich low carb die Storytelling Einleitung aber (.) hab damit halt eigentlich nichts zu tun (.) also ich vertrete das eigentlich überhaupt nicht und e:m ich weiß aber dass viele von meinen Zuschauern voll viel davon halten und das befördern und das deren Ernährungsform ist (.) und e:: ja also ich würde niemals sagen eh voll geil low carb hier nur weil die mir das sagen sondern ja halt so hab ich es dann im Endeffekt auch gemacht so ich weiß dass viele von meinen Zuschauern ernähren sich so und finden das gut und dafür ist das ein gutes Produkt einfach weil es enorm viel Eiweiß hat (.) aber ich achte schon drauf dass alle meine Aussagen konsistent sind und ja:: dass alles zusammen gehört (.) und zu deiner Frage nein ich unterscheide nicht ob es gesponsort ist oder nicht vom Aufwand weil (0.3) nee (.) also es sind ja im Grunde genommen ich denk immer dass es wichtig
ist dass das Video gut ist egal ob es nur für mich ist oder für Firmen und deswegen (.) nee eigentlich nicht

IR: Ok gut (.) e:::m dann-

IE: Außer ich würde 1000 Euro kriegen für ein Video dann würde ich mir extra viel Mühe geben((beide lachen))

IR: Kann ich gut verstehen ((lachen)) Em ok (.) dann e:::m die nächste Frage wie oft würdest du sagen wirst du angefragt bezüglich sponsoring oder wie oft kriegst du sag ich mal irgendwelche Produkte zugeschickt von Marken?

IE: Jeden Monat auf jeden Fall. Also drei vier Pakete jeden Monat.

IR: Ok und sind das dann meistens dieselben oder e:::m also würdest du sagen es sind generell mehr aus der Lebensmittelindustrie oder kriegst du manchmal auch Anfragen von Marken die mit deinem Thema eigentlich gar nichts zu tun haben?

IE: M::: also man muss ja wissen ich hab am Anfang mit em Beauty angefangen gar nicht mal Food und em dann hab ich auch ein in diesem Bereich gemacht hab aber gemerkt nee das ist nicht so meins und bin dann erst auf Food übergegangen und ja damals als ich noch Beauty gemacht habe kamen echt die wildesten Anfragen (.) also e:::h auch ja diese Diamant Seife ((lachen)) em genau und ja da hab ich gar keine Kooperationen gemacht weil einfach so mega unseriös ware- doch ich hab mit manchen Make-Up Marken Kooperationen gemacht (.) ja da hält eher im Beauty Bereich und als ich dann langsam in Food übergegangen bin gabs halt immer noch komische Anfragen a:::ber jetzt aktuell muss ich sagen ist hauptsächlich irgendwie im Food Bereich oder e::: gesund leben (.) oder Nachhaltigkeit also immer so in diesem Segment fragen mich auch die meisten an und ja::: e:::m zur Regelmäßigkeit Just Spices und ... schickt mir jeden Monat was zu bzw. hat man da so eine Flatrate mit einem bestimmten Wert wo du
irgendwas aussuchen kannst (.) und das ist halt eine andere Art der Vergütung anstatt dass die dir Geld zahlen kannst du dir die Produkte aussuchen die du dir sowieso kaufen würdest (.) genau::: weil dann ist es ja kein gesponsortes Video dann schenken die dir praktisch was also da muss man auch nochmal unterscheiden (.) und e::m sonst ja neulich hab ich eine Teekanne getestet e::: (0.2) und eine Kaffeemaschine und ja dann den Hüttenkäse dann so Soßen (.) Mandelmus von so einer Nussbutter Marke (.) solche Sachen halt (.) und du selbst kannst halt auch immer noch aktiv auf Firmen zugehen (.) auf YouTube sind diese Foodvlogger ja gar nicht so::: groß also es gibt so 5- oder sagen wir 3 große und danach kommen halt alle sie jetzt nicht so eine große Reichweite haben und ich mit meiner kleinen knapp 12 000 Reichweite bin eigentlich schon gar nicht mehr so klein in diesem Food Bereich und wenn du dann auf Firmen zugehst dann sagt keiner nein (.) also du kannst-

IR: Ok (.) also du würdest dann bei sowas du würdest die dann einfach anschreiben und sagen Hi ich bin YouTuberin ich mach Sachen über Essen und gesunde Ernährung und dann-

IE: Genau (.) aber das mache ich eigentlich nie muss ich sagen weil (.) das hört sich jetzt dumm an aber ich hab einfach nicht die Zeit dafür mich jetzt da irgendwie hinzusetzen und irgendwas zu recherchieren und dann auch noch großartig da Emails aufzusetzen (.) aber zum Beispiel ich mach das ja auch auf der Arbeit weil das ist ja praktisch mein Job auf der anderen Seite dass ich Influencer anschreibe und frag Hey hast du Bock unser Zeug zu probieren E::m (0.2) ja und da aber uns also da schreiben uns echt regelmäßig Leute an (.) und was auch ganz witzig ist manche die echt eine riesige Reichweite haben von 1 000 000 wenn du die Bruttoreichweite berechnest und die machen es umsonst und dann kommen manchmal Leute an die weißt du so 2000 Leute auf Instagram haben und wollen mindestens 100 Euro für einen Post (.) nur für einen Post das ist ja auch das krasse irgendwie zwischen YouTube und Instagram (.) dass du bei YouTube halt irgendwie noch (.) e::m (.) echt Arbeit damit hast weil du musst das ja drehen und
bearbeiten und alles machen und auf Instagram ist es ein Bild und du kannst niemals länger als 2 Stunden für ein Bild investieren das geht einfach nicht

IR: Ok und meine nächste Frage wäre em was sind so die Dinge die du in Betracht ziehst bevor du sagst ja mit der Marke würde ich zusammenarbeiten?

IE: Ja also auf jeden Fall muss mir persönlich das Produkt gefallen ich muss mich auch auf jeden Fall mit der Marke identifizieren können zum Beispiel bezweifle stark dass ich mit Nestle selbst wenn die ankommen würden eine Kooperation machen würde ja weil es ist halt mein persönlicher Kanal es ist kein Job für mich bisher es ist einfach ein Hobby von mir das mich Gott sei Dank schon relativ weit gebracht hat aber man ist einfach nicht käuflich so ja das ist so ziemlich das wichtigste aber ich mach nicht nur bezahlte Kooperationen ich mach auch unbezahlte Kooperationen und es hängt halt immer davon ab wenn ich sehe keine Ahnung das ist jetzt ein riesiges Unternehmen Gervais und dann wenn die mir das aktiv anbieten sag ich nicht nee aber letztens hab ich halt auf einer Messe so ein kleines Food Start-Up kennen gelernt die machen so extrem hochwertige Bio Mandelbutter ja natürlich können die nicht zahlen ist mir ja mal klar und mit denen mach ich aber auch Kooperationen also muss man sich dann halt überlegen

IR: Ok also das Produkt ist dir definitiv am wichtigsten?

IE: Genau und auch die Marke halt, weil irgendwie kannst du es ja auch schon einschätzen ob die Kohle dafür haben oder nicht

IR: Ja Ok und dann wären wir jetzt auch schon bei der letzten Frage und zwar da kommt jetzt das mit rein was du vorher schon gesagt hattest dass du jetzt auch selbst im Influencer Marketing arbeitest und meine letzte Frage wär dann nämlich so die Arbeit mit PR Leuten also wie siehst du das von deiner YouTuber Sicht und wie von der anderen Seite e::m also
worauf legst du Wert als YouTuber wenn du von PR Leuten kontaktiert wirst (.) und wie ist es von der anderen Seite (.) m::: wie suchst du dir Leute aus mit denen du sagst ja die könnte ich mir vorstellen

IE: Mhm (.) ja also ehm Anrufe sind richtig strange (.) ((lacht)) also das find ich immer richtig komisch e:::m nee also mir persönlich auf meinem YouTube Kanal ist mir wichtig dass ich ein persönliches Anschreiben (.) also eine persönliche Email einfach kriege (.) also dass ich auch sehe ok die hat sich tatsächlich jetzt auch meinen Kanal angeguckt und findet was ich mache wirklich und findet dass ich dazu passe und hat nicht nur irgendeine komische Liste bekommen und schreibt jetzt alle an (.) ehm ja (.) das ist mir total wichtig (.) und auch (.) also::: so die Stimmung der Nachricht ist mir wichtig (.) nichts mit vorgeheucheltem Interesse oder halt so die anfangen hey willst du das und das probieren (.) A::ber du musst auch das das das und das beachten und am besten bis morgen das Video haben dann denk ich mir immer so oh nee (.) das ist mir dann einfach zu stressig und ja man merkt ja auch ob Leute dafür Verständnis haben dass du noch einen normalen Job hast ja und ich mein auch 8 Stunden am Tag arbeitest und auch nicht vor 7 zu Hause bist und nur am Wochenende drehen kannst (.) und wenn ich halt merke ok das verstehen die nicht und die erwarten irgendetwas Kranken Dinge von einem (.) dann mach ich es nicht (.) ach ja:: ich mag es auch nicht wenn die Leute total fake rüberkommen und so auf beste Freunde machen wenn man sich noch nicht einmal getroffen oder persönlich gesprochen hat oder so (.) und ich mach es auch nicht so von diesen auf Provisionsbasis praktisch (.) also mit diesen Tracking Links und je nachdem wie viele Leute dann auch diesen Links gefolgt sind (.) nee also das mach ich auch nicht das finde ich total bescheuert (0.2) e:::m ja das sind so die Sachen die mir wichtig sind glaub ich u:::nd von unserer Sicht (.) also ich arbeite bei ... ehm also ich hab das da jetzt übernommen und hab das auch alles ein bisschen umgeschmissen weil der Sven der das vorher gemacht (.) der hat halt so hauptsächlich
gemeint ja also irgendjemand wird das schon nehmen (.) ok ich gebe einfach so raus (.) hat ein bisschen geguckt ob es nicht irgendwie gekaufte Follower waren, wie die Like und Comment Ratio war und ja auf solche Sachen hält geachtet (. ja aber halt hauptsächlich an Zahlen gearbeitet und ich geh (. ehm wir machen halt Eis also Frozen Joghurt und so und wir haben Premium Produkte also sie sind schon recht teuer aber alles nachhaltig (. alles Fair (. und wir sind eben ein Social Entrepreneurship das heißt (.) mit jedem Produkt was man von uns kauft unterstützen wir gemeinnützige Zwecke und Projekte (. ja und e::m ja ich hab mich halt damit beschäftigt wie andere Unternehmen die halt das gemacht haben und die mega erfolgreich damit geworden sind (. u::nd die haben das halt so gemacht dass die nicht nur Food Vlogger kontaktieren sondern einfach generell Fitness Vlogger, Beauty Vlogger Fashion Vlogger Instagrammer Facebook also alles quer Beet durch (. dass halt die Leute auf allen Kanälen die Influencer mit ihren Produkten sehen (. ich achte noch drauf dass die Influencer zu uns passen also mit (0.3) hhhh keine Ahnung 16-jähriges Mädchen lässt sich dauernd halbnackt ablichten mit ihren IKEA weißen Möbeln da (. also sie kann auch 100 000 Follower haben aber passt halt nicht zu uns ne (. ehm ich schreib die Leute auch immer super persönlich an (. also ich versuche immer irgendetwas über sie persönlich rauszufinden (. also was sie besonders gerne essen zum Beispiel (. oder was sie gerade machen und baue das dann im Anschreiben ein (. weil das fällt den Leuten auf und die denken sich dann halt so oh die hat sich ja wirklich mit mir auseinander gesetzt (. und e::m ich betone auch sehr stark immer unsere soziale Mission weil es uns auch persönlich super wichtig ist und ich finde es ist auch einfach so ein Hebel wo du richtig viele Leute dazu kriegen kannst Teil von uns zu werden und uns zu unterstützen (. e::m ja ich achte drauf (. also ich bin sehr vorsichtig mit ganz großen YouTubern weil eh ich sag dann halt nicht ja sag denen wie lecker das ist sondern komm probiert das und wenn du es gut findest würde ich mich freuen wenn du das auch sagst (. so und aber wenn du jemanden hast
der 1 000 000 hat und wir machen halt gesunde Produkte und klar die sind super lecker aber es
ist halt kein cremiges mit Fett und Zucker vollgepumptes Eis und das kann man auch nicht
erwarten(.) was aber viele machen und wenn halt Leute mit so vielen Zuschauern sagen eh
schmeckt voll schieße dann hast du gleich mal 1 000 000 Leute die das dann so gesehen haben
((lachen)) (0.2) und die haben halt auch absurde Preise(.) also wir bezahlen niemanden und
machen keine bezahlten Kooperationen und auch für die die Geld verlangen könnten ist das
das auch eine super Aktion um zu zeigen dass sie soziales Engagement unterstützen(.) klappt auch
ganz gut e::m also wir sparen auf jeden Fall richtig viel Geld dadurch ((lachen)) Ehm ja::: aber
Jungs und Mädels quer Beet durch und (.e:: wir haben ja zum Beispiel eine Zielgruppe also so
18 bis 35 (.e:: urban gut gebildet Lifestyle orientiert Fitness begeistert gesunde Ernährung ist
ihrigen wichtige (.e:: und e::m versuche ich irgendwie abzudecken aber nicht nur (.e:: also es gibt
zum Beispiel so eine YouTuberin die heißt Lady .:: und sie halt auf jeden Fall bestimmt schon
Anfang 40 und hat 3 Kinder (.e:: macht halt auch Rezepte immer biologisch solche Sachen (.e:: und
natürlich kooperieren wir dann auch mit ihr auch wenn sie jetzt nicht unbedingt 18 bis 35 ist
und nicht gerade im Studium steckt aber ich meine für sie sind die Produkte ja auch super cool
(.) und ja::: halt nicht immer nur mit Scheuklappen alles ansehen (.e:: ja einfach nicht schwarz
weiß sehen sondern so ein bisschen flexibler sein (.e:: was ich auch schon gemerkt habe dass
ganz viele nicht mehr auf bezahlte Kooperationen eingehen weil halt Produkt Placements nicht
mehr so gut aussehen A:::ber man kriegt alle dazu auf InstaStories was zu posten und klar
verschwinden die dann nach 24 Stunden wieder aber das ist eigentlich trotzdem mittlerweile
gleichwertig
Interview with YouTuber 2: 16/05/2017

IR: Interviewer (Annabel Müller)

IE: Interviewee (YouTuber 2)

IR: Ok cool (.) so::: the first question I have is what your main motivations were for starting YouTube in the first place (.) so u:m sort of the reasons why you started up your channel

IE: Cool (.) so I started my channel in 2008 (.) so::: YouTube was only (.) like (.) two and a half years old at that point (.) So: u:m (.) the only motivations that people- we:ll (.) it was different for people but I think there wasn’t a lot of monetary incentives there was zero monetary incentives (.) Um and so I really wanted to start a YouTube channel because I wanted to become part of the community (.) because I was watching lots of YouTubers who I really loved and it kind of seemed like the only way to get in touch with them was by making videos yourself (0.2) and then sort of being part of that community and chatting with people and my first ever video was an audition for a Twilight themed collaboration channel (.) so that’s was sort of set it off because I saw that they were auditioning- like holding open auditions to launch this channel and that’s what made me go Ok I need to figure out how the hell I can film a video (.) because I only had this like gi:ant brick of a picture camera u:::m that could record about thirty seconds of footage at a time (.) so I had to like run upstairs to the family computer put it on the computer and then go downstairs and film another thirty seconds like e:: and edit it on Windows movie maker (.) technology was not that far ahead yet (.) U:::m yeah so that’s basically why- e: the reason was I had been thinking about doing YouTube for a while (.) I’d been watching for probably about a year and then when those auditions opened up I was like right ok so this is my incentive to like start my very first- like make my first video (.) yeah pretty much
IR: Ok (.) Yeah it’s interesting because I was just trying to think like at what point I sort of started getting into YouTube and it’s right what you were saying that it’s actually not that old when you think about it (.) and that’s kind of the thing that I find really interesting about it that in its short age it’s blown up so much now (.) and also really interesting what you said about the- that in the beginning it wasn’t- like money wasn’t something that would’ve been a reason for you to start it whereas now I think (.) that’s changing

IE: Yeah and I think some people might- in the past even have already wanted to do it because they wanted to get famous like there’s always people that are like oh I’m a singer I want to get famous like that kind of thing but I think most of the people back then just wanted to like chat with people on the internet

IR: Ok and so you mentioned that you were a viewer first before you started (.) and so: now or sort of over the years (.) how do you see your relationship with your viewers (.) like the way that you interact with them or (.)

IE: So:: I try very much not to use words like fans and things like that (.) like I really actively avoid that (.) I know a lot of people do use that but that is not for me (.) and for me it’s like when I meet subscribers it’s like me but just five years younger (.) like so::: many people like did the same thing at university and have the same interests and they’re all just like people that you could see like getting along together and like being friends and that’s what I find really funny (.) and I love it’s sort of like a mix of talking about stuff I know about like the educational side to it (.) but very like people that comment will know more about stuff than I do as well (.) so I think it is just a like very interesting community where like I give my five cents (.) and then everyone else joins in pretty much

IR: Yeah I totally agree (.) like for me it’s like you know the other person even though you don’t
IE: Yeah exactly. cause I very consciously don’t put a lot of very personal stuff online and on YouTube very often the more you give of yourself the more you get back so the more personal you get the more views you get. so like talking about really really personal stuff often gets a ton of views and I that for me as a person is not something I’m interested in just because of what my personality is like so I very consciously sort of stuck to obviously talking about my life and my experiences but not you know talking about relationships not talking about family things and just like I completely have sort of left that off.

IR: Yeah so nothing too personal that interferes with your-

IE: Yeah

IR: Ok so the next question would be about specifically sponsored content and the first aspect would be just sort of in general what your thoughts are on sponsored content on YouTube and whether you think that it’s changed the way that YouTube works now.

IE: Um I think it’s one of the very few viable ways of making money through YouTube. like looking at my own channel like any money that I’ve made off of it outside of sponsored content is pretty much like pocket money. like nothing that would ever even let me pay for my like train tickets or tube tickets. so for people wanting to make lots and lots of content and to make a bit of money off of that that is just the only viable way of doing it. and because I work party in digital marketing I see how much money companies spend on things like posters on the tube and TV ads and when I see how much money goes into that then I’m like I’m glad that YouTubers are getting a cut of that now. because I think it’s going to a way better place than just to like a big company that’s sucking up all that advertising money. does that make sense?

IR: Yeah
IE: And I think like a lot of people are like oh why is this person making so much money from a sponsored video and I’m like if you only knew how much money like a tiny poster on the tube costs (,) compared to getting a really niche audience and custom content from someone who is a presenter and editor etc. like you’re getting a full package deal pretty much (,) and I feel like sometimes it helps to put it in perspective like that (,) and then when it comes to how has it changed the way YouTube works I think it’s just enabled more people to be full-time YouTubers (,) so I think if sponsored videos didn’t exist I think probably the number of full-time YouTubers would be cut in half (,) if not a fifth or something because to get the amount of view were ads will give you enough money to sort of pay your rent you have to get really really high

IR: Mhm yeah (,) I mean I totally agree about the thing with the u:m with the advertisements (,) because I didn’t know about this before I started my course at the moment and I just think it’s like the proportions are- I mean the effectiveness I think of a YouTube video at least for- not for everyone maybe because I think a lot of older people don’t get it

IE: Yeah it’s for a specific audience

IR: Yeah for them it’s so:: much more effective in my opinion because I also I have a younger sister and I coach a Handball team in my town and so I’m in contact with these younger kids- well teenagers (,) and so amazing to see how effective it is for brands to work with YouTubers (,) and I agree- I even think that it’s u:m like I always have discussions with people who say like YouTubers get money just for sitting in front a camera and talking about stuff and I’m like hell no (,) like do you even know about editing (,) about setting up (,) and I keep saying it’s not just about sitting in front of a webcam anymore because people have got so used to like high quality content and that’s what I find a lot of kind of forget
IE: Yeah and I know- like I know how much it costs to set up a video shoot (.). I know how much it costs to rent a presenter that doesn’t have an audience (.). I know how much it costs to get editing done and I’m like even just to pay for that like even just the cost that would go into setting a video without any resources is probably already more than people are willing to pay for a YouTube video (.). like not even counting in the audience and like the bond of trust that there is

IR: Yeah (.). I agree

IE: Obviously for like my- I don’t know how much you know about what I do for my job (.). U:::m but I work for Penguin and I do a lot of like paid influencer outreach and paid collaborations (.). so like one of the like day-to-day things that I do is reach out to YouTubers and offer them money for like video collaborations and like organise how much money they get and that kind of thing so (.). I- I think about it quite a lot

IR: Yeah- that’s so interesting because you know both sides then

IE: Yeah (.). it’s really valuable I think (.). U:::m just because I have a bit of an idea of like ok (.). you know (.). how high should I go that is basically not taking the piss either way like I don’t want to offer something that’s like too ridiculous like I don’t want to be like oh have a hundred pounds to make five videos for me (.). but I also don’t want to do the thing that a lot of companies do where they just throw like thousands and thousands of pounds into a video without thinking like what’s the effect going to be what’s the click-through going to be (.). I try and make as good of an informed decision whilst also supporting like that system

IR: Mhm (.). ok (.). so the next question would be U:::m (.). how often on average would you say are you approached by brands with requests to work with (.). and like how often do you get sent books to review
IE: Mhm so:: basically books I get Emails every day (.) so I probably get four or five Emails every
day (.) U:m (.) to which I say no mostly like I only accept about four books a month maybe five
(.) and so I find it funny like when people are like you’re accepting so many books it’s more than
you can read when I’m literally saying no to ninety-five percent (.)and then obviously there’ll be
some in there where I’ll be like this is interesting and this is interesting and that’s sort of how I
choose to accept stuff (.) U:::m and then when it comes to other brands (.) I’m actually not
approached that much because I think a lot people go like oh you talk about books that doesn’t
apply to my brand but the most interesting ones have basically been when it’s like a
combination of a book and something else (.) so:: I did the one with Great Western Railway
where it was like oh travel and books (.) a:::nd then there was the one- that was ages ago with
Far From The Madding Crowd and I’m like oh you get to visit some of the locations from this
book to movie adaptation (.) so like that’s when the crossover happens and that’s when I get
the most interesting stuff (.) but I get (.) like a couple like a handful of requests a month but I’d
say like ninety-nine percent of those are (.) like either they seem like nonsense or you’re like
this is really weird or this is just sent to everyone or it’s just a really ridiculous offer (.) like
they’ll go like we’ll pay you a hundred dollars to talk about this terrible app for twenty minutes
and it’s like that kind of thing (.) um and then from time to time u:m like once every two or
three months I’ll get one that is like a perfect fit and then I would say usually like fifty percent
of those will actually happen (.) because it just doesn’t work timing-wise or we actually try and
work out what the creative of the video is going to be and somehow like they aren’t happy with
it or they’re like I’ve had it before where we’d like talked through the whole thing and then
suddenly they go like oh sorry the brand decided to go with someone else (.) it’s like yeah it’s
quite difficult for it to properly come together and whenever I do find something where I’m
yeah I like this brand- because very often I just don’t like the brand and I don’t want to work
with them (.) so it’s I like the brand (.) they’re paying me a decent amount of money and they’re like giving me enough freedom that I can actually make a good video (.) that’s quite rare and I think I’ve only done one this year

IR: That was the one you did with Lex right

IE: Yeah that was a no-brainer like I got the Email and I was like yep I’ll do that

IR: I actually really want to go to Exeter now ((laughing))

IE: It was a really fun day (.) and so like last year I had where I suddenly had like four opportunities in a row (.) and then I had to make a video were I had to go like listen there’s a couple coming up (.) I can’t help that they’re all coming at the same time but they’re all great opportunities so I’m going to take them all ((laughing))

IR: Yeah I mean I think that’s the most important thing I think when you’re open about it and just say like this a sponsored- because there’s nothing bad about it and I think it’s bad when people try and hide it

IE: Oh yeah (.) I over-announce that this is a sponsored video (.) like I go further than the guidelines basically say you should go ((laughing)) so that’s just to like make sure I have it all covered

IR: So everyone gets it ((laughing))

IE: Yeah hopefully

IR: And so you mentioned about the process so when you want to work with a brand and then the kind of the creation process of the video- a sponsored video (.) u::m does it differ a lot from normal videos you do and if so how does it differ (.) like do you get like a lot of prerequisites
from brands (.) like do they tell you we want this and this and this and you have to have it done by then or how is that

IE: M:: sometimes there are really tight deadlines sometimes not (.) like I can’t really film throughout the week so I always have to go listen I need to film on the weekends cause I have a full-time job and I need daylight (.) Um I have though sometimes filmed like before work if it’s a really tight deadline and it’s a really good opportunity I’ll just like get up early and film for like an hour (.) Um but (.) in general they sort of have a- because very often these things will go through agencies and not through the brand directly (.) so:: the agency will go Hey we’re looking for a YouTuber to work for this brand on this brief this is what the brief is and they’re the sort of go-between (.) um and so I’ll be like Oh we could do this and then they go to the brand and then they’re like the brand says that’s fine (.) u: it’s quite funny and they’re obviously sort of like trying to get the best deal for the brand so they’re more on the brand’s side than on my side I would say usually (.) but also very often they’ll sort of have helped the brand put together a brief that you get in a PDF that goes sort of like ok so we’d like I mean obviously I depends on what sort of video but sometimes they Right (.) so the goal of this video is let’s say for the Exeter one (.) for people to know about these tickets that we’re giving away and to promote reading while being on the train (.) like something like that (.) and then they’ll go So what you need to do is go on this trip (.) make sure you show the ticket (.) chat for at least thirty seconds about what the give-away is (.) and then the video should be no longer than five minutes and then usually they’ll need to see it (.) they’ll be like one round of minor edits if necessary (.) so you sort of send over a brief of what you’re going to do (.) then when you film the video and edit it you send it over and they have the right to sort of go oh we don’t like this bit (.) or maybe could add in a little bit more about this (.) U:mm but that’s something you agree upon beforehand (.) so usually they’ll say there will be one round of edits if necessary (.) u:mm
and then usually before I put the video up I’ll put it on listed and send it over and they go yeah everything looks good and then you push it live so there’s a bit of a backup force (.) and then they’ll obviously they’ll want it on a certain day or like at a certain time or whatever and when I do my own videos I just upload at two in the morning like when it’s ready (.) and also when it comes to usually these videos are a little more elaborate than my own videos cause usually what I do is just sit down and chat (.) and a lot of these videos include a bit more like (.) including a product or going somewhere for a trip or something like that.

IR: Ok (.) so:: and you mentioned some of this before but again specifically for this question (.) u::m about the things that you consider before you decide you want to work with a brand or you want to promote a certain product U:::m (.) what are the most important things to you

IE: So for me- so one of the things is (.) is this a brand I want to associate myself with (.) like have they done something- like have they done like terrible ads in the past (.) or is it a non-ethical brand at all which makes it quite difficult like if I had an agent I bet they would hate me because they’d be like why don’t you want to work with any of these brands (.) ((laughing))

U::m (.) because I’m trying to- like obviously you want to associate yourself- cause they’re might be certain things that I buy in a day-to-day life that I wouldn’t necessarily want to be the face for if that makes sense

IR: Yeah totally

IE: So that’s one of the things (.) and then the other thing is I don’t always go oh have I already used this product before or would I personally buy it (.) I think ok this is something maybe I’m personally not interested in but I think the people watching the video wouldn’t mind seeing it and might be interested (not only personal interest but also viewer’s potential interest important) (.) then I’m happy to do it as well as long as it’s like a decent product or a decent
thing (.) and obviously if it’s something that I absolutely love then it’s a no-brainer (.) but I’ve
definitely- sometimes it’s with like- very often they’re not asking for a review but more of a
discussion (.) so even of it’s like a film where I’m like you know I enjoyed it (.) it’s not my
favourite film of all time but I enjoyed it (.) I would recommend it to other people (.) then I’m
happy to work with it (.) Um (.) but I think for a lot of films or a lot of books or a lot of other
things there are just like little objections where I’m like (.) M: don’t think it’s worth the money I
would get for this to have to like deal with this (.) so I have very often just said to brands Listen
(.) I can’t associate myself with this film (.) there’s a lot of controversy around it and it’s just not
worth it

IR: Mhm yeah (.) I actually had a similar response from- I did an interview with a girl she does
food (.) and she for example she said that she- even if she got- which she probably would
because it’s a big brand u:m Nestle (.) she said that she wouldn’t do a video with them just
because of the whole image of the brand (.) and I thought that was super interesting because
she said she knows people that have collaborated with Nestle and they got a lot of money for it
but she just said completely she wouldn’t do anything because (.) ((laughs)) she said something
like she couldn’t live herself afterwards ((laughing))

IE: With like a bit of a mix where it’s like (.) you know if I was just talking at like a void and it
wasn’t at like a specific audience that’s been with me for like eight years then I think like maybe
I’d be like whatever (.) but you’re talking to these people that know what you like that know
what you do and what you try and stand for (.) and it’s just a bit of a like (.) you know you took
money over your principles kind of thing (.) and I find it interesting when people do podcasts
because I think in podcasts I think people are a bit more lenient about what ads are in their
podcasts and they aren’t as criticised for it (.) whereas when it comes to YouTube people are
like (.) oh what have you done (.) so I’m curious to see how that will develop as well
IR: Yeah and I think podcasts are getting bigger (.) especially at the moment like- I live in Germany and over here it’s like no one knows (.) like when I talk about a podcast everyone’s like huh (.) even when it comes to YouTube (.) Germany was lagging behind (.) at least a year I would say maybe even two years

IE: Oh yeah (.) I mean the BookTube community in the Netherlands is only now starting (.) like just now (.) and I find it fascinating to see

IR: Yeah (.) I agree (.) So:: and now the last question would be about kind of the more personal level of the relationships that you have (.) if have any with u:m PR people so:: you mentioned that it’s um mostly via agencies that you get contacted (.) Um is it generally the same agencies that do this sort of Um (.) influencer collaborating for brands or (.)

IE: Well (.) funnily I have a lot of agencies that I work with for things like premier invites or like press screenings and stuff (.) but they have actually almost never offered me any payment (.) and all of the payment I’ve gotten has been from individual agencies sort of coming to me for like a one-off (.) so I feel like for certain agencies I’m in a database of like yeah we’ll invite her to this and this but then like (.) they’ve never been able to get me like paid deal even though we’ve like chatted about it (.) U:::m which is quite interesting (.) and then most of the sponsored content I’ve done has just been like a one-off thing (.) so it’ll just have someone that will just come email me being like Hey we’re this agency and we’re working with this brand (.) we think you would be a great partner (.) and with some of the ones I actually meet more often they’ll be like oh this could be interesting for you (.) the next time we need someone we’ll get back to you which actually hasn’t really happened with me before yet

IR: Ok
IE: But I think I do have a lot of people for the non-paid stuff that regularly get in touch with me and I like (.I know them by name and I know who they are and I’ve them at events and stuff

IR: Ok so that’s actually more on a personal level (.I that’s interesting (.I wouldn’t have thought that (.that it would be that way round

IE: Yeah well I think because that kind of stuff would be very London-centric (.so these London agencies that constantly have press screenings and they all do film stuff and so they just know that I’ll go I’ll chat about it and it’s quite an easy sort of agreement if that makes sense

IR: Yeah

IE: And then I’ve had meetings with them as well where I’ve gone in and I’m like listen there’s a lot of films I can’t work with for obvious reasons (.and usually I think they appreciate honesty (.so I’ll just be like listen I can’t work with this film because of this and this specific reason (.I think that’s helpful as well (.I mean they’ll probably go and find someone who doesn’t care (((laughing)) which is fine

IR: Yeah I mean (.each to their own (((laughing))

IE: And I do find it interesting that I think a lot people have audiences that do not watch or like judge very critically what’s being sponsored (.because I think some people can get away with working with certain brands and their audience will be like amazing (((ironic)) and other people would absolutely not be able to work with those brands

IR: Ok (.good so that’s me done with my questions (.thank you so much for your interesting answers, I really appreciate you talking to me (.is there anything you would like to add

IE: I would like to add by the way (.something that I find quite important what I think makes for the best kind of collaborations is when a brand comes with a sort general idea or a general
sort of this is what our campaign is and then goes (.) what do you want to make (.) which is rare but I’ve done it before where they’re like this is our message what do you suggest and I’m like actually I would love to do a video with this and this and this where I’m like I was already planning on doing this video (.) and now I can include this brand and make this video anyway (.) and U:m that’s when I think the best kinds of videos are made (.) either that or like when a brand organises a certain thing for you to do that wouldn’t be able to do otherwise (.) so like an exciting trip or like an exciting opportunity that kind of thing

IR: Yeah and I think as a viewer you can (.) like you can also tell when a YouTuber is actually behind what they’re doing (.) like whether this is actually something the really want to promote

IE: Yeah I’ve seen some really awkward ones (.) where I was like oh this is like this is terrible (.) and I can also totally see how for some of them I can just tell that they probably agreed on this and when the video was filmed or the event was done and the YouTuber was oh I don’t want to this and I don’t like the way this has turned out (.) and then the brand has sort of been like nope you’re on our contract like (.) you have to do this (.) and then all you can really do is go on one of other social media platforms and be like sorry about that

IR: Yeah (.) I mean what are you going to do ((laughing)) people will understand (.)

IE: Yeah so I’m curious (.) are you also speaking to people who have management?

IR: Well yeah (.) I’m trying so I’ve sent Emails and stuff but so far (.) no replies

IE: Oh ok (.) yeah because I’ve worked a lot with agents of other YouTubers like for my job and also just in other capacities and I find that like (.) I personally would never get a YouTube ag- like I would get a talent agent (.) so just like someone that like organises speaking events for you and is like you can be on this talk thing (.) so like (.) more like that than you will organise this YouTube deal for me because I feel like a lot of management that is taking on YouTubers
doesn’t actually know a lot about YouTube (.) there’s obviously people that are really good as well (.) but some people are obviously going right YouTube new talent let’s do this and then they just organise it in like an old-fashioned media way and it doesn’t always go well and also think that sometimes the messages between the brand, then a potential agency, then an agent and then the YouTuber that’s a long chain from brand to the YouTuber (.) so I think that makes it a lot more complicated (.) so if you could do direct brand to direct YouTuber I think that would just make it easier although I mean sometimes you need an agency to do the like business talk bit because I think some businesses don’t get it (.)

IR: Yeah (.) ok great so I think me done and thank you so much again for your help it was really interesting to hear about your thoughts and experience

Interview YouTuber 3: 20/05/2017

IR: Interviewer (Annabel Müller)

IE: Interviewee (YouTuber 3)

Questions were answered via Email.

IR: What were your initial reasons for starting your YouTube channel?

IE: To share the things I love, particularly beauty.

IR: How do you see your relationship with your viewers?

IE: I feel like I have a very close relationship with my viewers because I do share quite a lot of personal things on my channel. So I definitely feel a special bond with my viewers and I see
them as friends. I’m also very grateful of the support they give me, without them I wouldn’t be able to do what I’m doing.

IR: What is your general opinion on sponsored content on YouTube?

IE: I think sponsored content is a great way for YouTubers to earn money to invest in their channels while working with brands they know and love. That being said I also think it’s so important to properly disclaim sponsored videos. It really annoys me when some YouTubers don’t do that. I’m very proud of the collaborations I do with brands and I don’t think they are something you should hide. That will just make those who do disclaim properly look as though all they do are sponsored videos even though it’s so common among all YouTubers.

IR: Are there differences in the creation process of sponsored videos compared to non-sponsored videos? If so, how does it differ?

IE: I’d say when it is sponsored there’s the pressure to make it higher quality so the brand is happy but at the same time, I always recognise how important it is to make it appeal to my viewers which is why I always just do it in my style. It goes through a longer process as they have to check it but they rarely make any changes or give much creative direction as that’s all up to me.

IR: On average, how often are you approached by brands to work with them/create content for them? How do you prefer to be approached?

IE: On a daily basis but I turn most things down as a lot of the time the brands aren’t for me, and I prefer to be approached via email.

IR: What would you say are the main aspects or issues you consider before you decide to work with a brand?
IE: It depends what they’re wanting me to promote, where they’re wanting me to promote it, and how much creative control I’ve got.

IR: What do you value when working with brands, or more specifically PR people? How would describe your relationships with the PR people you have worked or currently work with?

IE: I love it when they’ve actually followed me, checked my content, read my stuff, taken the time to meet with me and get to know me. I also love it when I meet them multiple times and we feel like friends so then end up working on some fun, long term collaborations. It’s great when they listen and understand that I know my audience and know what works and what doesn’t.

Interview Transcript YouTuber 4 (24/05/2017)

IR: Interviewer (Annabel Müller)

IE: Interviewee (YouTuber 4)

IR: Ok so: my first question would be What were your main motivations for starting your YouTube channel?

IE: Ok cool so: in the beginning I just wanted to share beauty tips for the everyday girl like myself and now fast forward a few years later and I’m motivating others to be the best they can be like I just want to motivate and inspire others to take back control in their lives through fitness, eating healthy and staying inspired

IR: Like me for example ((laughing)) Ok U:mm ok and so how do you see your relationship with your viewers?
IE: M:: I see it as a community because we all have similar interests (. ) U:m (. ) so yeah kind of like an online family and like we’re friends

IR: Ok great (. ) a::nd u::m (. ) what are your thoughts on sponsored content on YouTube?

IE: Mhm (. ) so:: what a lot of people don’t get I thi nk (. ) is that there are a lot of sacrifices that go into making an established channel with great content (. ) like it doesn’t just come out of nowhere (. ) With that being said (. ) sponsored videos on YouTube are obviously great for creators because u::m (. ) it gives them a chance to make a living while featuring products they love (. ) Most YouTubers like myself actually turn down more brands than we accept (. ) like me for example I am super picky before featuring a brand (. ) A::nd so questions I’m known to ask are like (. ) ok so how will this help my subscribers? Will you take care of them if they have issues with the product over email or phone? Because- (. ) For me I’m bringing my subscribers something really cool that they may not have known about before (. ) and I’m also helping the brand get some exposure to a relevant audience (. )

IR: Ok cool (. ) yeah that’s really interesting (. ) A::nd so on average (. ) um how often are you sent items to review and (. ) u::m how often would you say are you approached by brands or organizations to work with them? (. ) And also (. ) how do you prefer to be approached by them?

IE: Right (. ) so:: I’m asked daily through email to be sent free products (. ) but this actually doesn’t mean the brand is going to pay you (. ) u::m (. ) so like they basically just want to send you some stuff in hopes you’ll feature it but there is there is no pressure

IR: For you, are there any differences in the creation process of sponsored videos compared to non-sponsored videos?
IE: No I film my videos exactly the same regardless if there’s a feature in them. I think if I did have to like completely change my creative process then perhaps it’s not the right kind of sponsorship for my channel.

IR: Mhm. Ok. And speaking of that, what are the main aspects or issues you would consider before you decide you would like to work with a certain brand or promote a certain product?

IE: Yeah so I like to make sure the company is actually legit so: that they’ve been in business for a while and that they’ve established a good reputation. Because like a company that’s been running their business for a while has most probably already experienced mistakes and like shipping issues stuff like that and so therefore they would have a better idea of how to make sure that doesn’t happen again. Yeah because like I said before I want to make sure they’re actually going to take care of my subscribers and treat them well. So: if I get a feeling the company isn’t nice, or professional in any way I run! (laughing)

IR: Ok great. And what would you say are the things you value when working with brands or more specifically PR people. And like how would describe your relationship with the PR people you have worked before or currently work with?

IE: So what I love about the PR people I work with is that there’s like no pressure to talk about anything you are sent or to like feature it in a video and stuff like that. So they have you on their mailing list and they send you stuff with a nice but simple note like “I hope you enjoy” or “happy holidays” yeah so they’re just very laid back and not trying too hard which I really like.
IR: Cool (.) and so now finally u::m (.) in your opinion (.) what makes for the best collaborations with brands?

IE: Um (.) so for me (.) a brand that you actually already use or want to use are definitely the best collaborations

Interview Transcript YouTuber 5: 29/05/2017

IR: Interviewer (Annabel Müller)

IE: Interviewee (YouTuber 5)

IR: Ok so I guess we can just start with the first question (.) and that would be what your main motivations or your reasons were for starting your YouTube channel?

IE: Alright so I was 22 when I started (.) and I was watching Beauty channels (.) because my channel is about beauty on YouTube (.) for about one and a half years (.) so I was in college and was feeling very lonely because u::m (.) I was studying to become an engineer (.) and it turns out that I’m very artistic and engineering is not my thing so I was feeling very suppressed and very lonely in this environment (.) so YouTube was like a great outlet for me (.) and I always loved makeup and beauty so (.) I decided to just grab my phone and start just like that (.) it was like a spur of the moment thing

IR: Wow so the first videos you shot were actually recorded on your phone?

IE: Yeah on an IPhone 4S

IR: Wow ((both laughing)) that’s cool (.) ok so the second question is about your viewers (.) u::m (.) how would you say do you personally see your relationship with your viewers?
IE: U:m (. ) I consider them my second family as u:m heavy as that sounds (. ) because I was actually
doing an Instagram live right before this (the interview) (. ) so I’m talking to my audience as often
as I can because I believe that they’re helping me out a lot (. ) in other aspects of my life as well
besides beauty of course and I’m helping them out a lot so we’re like a family (. ) so I try to respond
to my messages as often as I can (. ) I try to upload videos as often as I can because I want to keep
that relationship going (. ) it’s one of the best things and feelings that you can experience online.

IR: Ok cool (. ) great so u::m third question would be moving towards sponsored content (. ) and
just um the whole thing with like brands getting in touch and ads and product placement (. ) and
first of all what are your feelings on that sort of in general? Or your opinions (. ) both positive and
negative?

IE: I love watching sponsored videos on YouTube as crazy as that sounds (. ) because I know that
this way the YouTuber is getting paid and he or she can afford better equipment for his or her
videos (. ) so I consider that to be very important (. ) um what I don’t like about sponsorship and
what I would never do on my channel is to u::m you know force my opinion (. ) and unfortunately
I’ve seen that in some YouTubers and I don’t agree with that because (. ) if your audience that
you love so much goes out and buys this product or this service and don’t like it (. ) it’s you that’s
going to look bad and not the company (. ) the company has already done its profit (. ) so I don’t
agree with YouTubers just promoting anything (. ) they should consider what they promote
according to their channel and according to what they actually like (. ) but I love watching
sponsored content because I know this way the YouTuber is happy is making money and can
continue to make videos which is important.

IR: Yeah I actually agree (. ) because I think YouTubers are a bit undervalued in that sense because
people don’t see how much work and effort goes into videos (. ) I’m not a YouTuber myself but I
have been watching YouTube videos for a long time and from the interviews that I’ve been doing it’s really (.) it’s just so much more effort than people think (.) and when I see how much companies are willing to pay for other things I think it’s fair that YouTubers get at least a small amount of that share

IE: Yeah it’s a service like anything else (.) it’s a service you’re providing for a company so why not get paid

IR: Yeah exactly (.) ok u:m then next would be (.) just for you personally on average how often do you get contacted by brands or how often do you get sent products to review that sort of thing?

IE: Ok u: I receive products every single day ((laughs)) it’s crazy yeah because everyone wants just a spot of your channel (.) so I get sent a lot of products but that doesn’t mean necessarily that I’m getting paid (.) I’m often sent products for free and that’s it (.) um I am approaching brands and brands are approaching me so it’s about fifty-fifty for me (.) I think that’s healthy I don’t think a YouTuber just should stand still and wait for the companies (.) I think they should write very polite texts and send it to the companies like I have this YouTube channel maybe you want to check it out (.) something like this not talking about money you just want the company to see your channel and that’s enough I think (.) so then the company can decide if they want you to promote their products or not (.) yeah so I think a YouTuber should never stand still they should be searching for products and for companies they might like and why not ask for sponsorships and I do that even after four and a half years I still do that I still send emails to companies if they want to do a collaboration (.) and 95% of the answer is no (.) even for a somewhat big channel in Greece because 50 000 is a big channel for beauty in Greece because we have such a small audience (.) and I even get no for an answer so can’t be still but keep going keep hustling as I like to say ((laughing))
IE: Ok yeah that’s interesting I wouldn’t have thought that that many companies would reject that kind of offer because I kind of see it (.) for a company it can be so valuable to be mentioned on a platform like YouTube

IR: Yeah lots of companies prefer actually Facebook Ads it’s way easier for them because they give like five to ten Euros and they have a really good and strong Facebook Ad or Instagram Ad they don’t want to pay like 50 or 100 whatever a YouTuber might ask for a video so

IR: Although that isn’t even a lot in my opinion

IE: Yeah I know (.) I think we create more of a promotion than an ad

IR. Yeah ok (.) so the next question (.) ah yes that would be about the creation process of a sponsored video in comparison to a non-sponsored video (.) and if for you there are any differences for example if you get specific recommendations or requests by brands like we want this and this and this (.) or if you have freedom in that area

IE: U:m I prefer to have my freedom although I always ask the company for a couple of bullet points what they want me to highlight (.) because I think that’s important I want to highlight what they want to promote (.) um my opinion on a product is always- u:m so I always tell the company before I shoot the video if my opinion is negative or positive so that they know (.) because I always try out the product or the service before I make a deal for a sponsored video I think that’s very important (.) and making the video (.) it’s the same I think I put in a ton of work for videos that are not sponsored (.) I would say that because I mean companies have already seen your videos and they already know your content so they don’t want your content to be that different from your actual content like from the rest of it (.) so I think it actually benefits us all (.) I try to be as direct as I can with my words and everything I am a little bit more serious I would say (.) but nothing- no big differences
IR: Ok (. ) yeah I guess it’s important that it’s still you and not the company is the main thing it’s you

IE: Yeah they actually ask me if I can make a joke even in a sponsored video (. ) because that way it can be more relaxed

IR: And I guess that’s what they’re aiming for because (. ) consumers are just so fed up with people being too serious about everything (. ) Yeah ok and so the next thing would be (. ) if you are approached by a brand or you yourself contact a brand (. ) u:m what do you consider before you say ok this is a brand I would like to work with this is a brand I can imagine collaborating with in the future?

IE: I always consider the price of the brand’s products (. ) because I live in Greece and we have economic crisis and so I know that the price is important to my audience and me personally (. ) so I always consider the price (. ) it’s a bonus at least I would not reject a high end luxury brand or something (. ) but it’s a point I always try to think about (. ) I also think about if I have already used things and products which is important because I have all this knowledge because I’m using them already (. ) and it’s really important to me that I have a personal connection to the brand (. ) I’m not saying we need to be best friends but I’m saying that we have (. ) you know that we’ve had a talk and it’s important to me because I know that these are real people and not just emails I’m getting so if I have a problem I can talk with them in a more easy way than just with an email (. ) it’s just so that I have a personal connection with the brand’s people and of course number one the product has to be good (. ) I like to do sponsored videos with a good product not a sponsored video with a bad product because that doesn’t benefit anyone (. ) it’s still promotion but it doesn’t benefit anyone I think (. ) if I consider a product to be bad I will mention it another video that is not sponsored and I will mention it in a monthly favourites for example where I show ten
products and I will show this one and I will explain why and I will explain too what kind of people I think this product would be good for (. ) because we all have different skin types hair types everything (. )

IR: So if you personally just didn’t get along with something you’ll just say I didn’t get on with it for this reason but I think other people might potentially like it for this reason

IE: Yes I think that’s very important because I think if you were bashing a product you will u:m look bad and lose a connection with the company and that’s not good

IR: Yeah because you never know (. ) like for me when I think of products I like almost every company or brand that does one of my favourite products also has products that I really don’t like (. ) so

IE: Yeah there’s not a single brand- and I’ve tried a lot of brands- where I think all the products are good

IR: And so you mentioned about the personal connection with brands that you like to have and so that’s a thing that you value (. ) and so what else would you say that you value in terms of working with the people- the PR people that you’ve met (. ) and how do meet them so do you meet them in person or is it strictly via email?

IE: U:m sometimes- so the first time we usually talk through email (. ) that’s what we usually do (. ) and then there are a lot of beauty exhibitions that are taking place so I go there and I actually meet them in person (. ) or sometimes there are brands that organise um (. ) beauty events and YouTubers are getting invited (. ) so there we get to meet them in person (. ) and I prefer talking on the phone more than talking via email (. ) I think that’s better and more direct (. ) because when you are talking to someone on the phone you get a response immediately (. ) and sometimes I even arrange um (. ) skype calls so (. ) I try to be as close to them as possible because (. ) they know
more about the product than I do (.) they know more they’re selling it so it’s their job 24/7 and 
they know way more than I do (.) so even if I’m using the product in the wrong way which has 
happened (.) they can teach me how to use the product correctly and it has happened that when 
I’m using it correctly it’s the best product ever for me because I was using it wrong and that way 
I’m learning about it (.) so yeah especially for a beauty channel it’s very good

IR: And u:m would you say there are any sort of (.) u:m no-go areas for you? In terms of ways 
that you’ve been contacted in?

IE: Yes (.) there is a no-go way for me and that is when companies are sending me products for 
example (.) not sponsored videos (.) and they’re sending me an entire list of things I need to do 
or say in the video (.) like I don’t even do that with sponsored videos so that’s a no-go for me (.) 
and I try to be polite and I try to explain that this is not how it goes (.) and you know I’m not their 
employee so they can’t tell me what to do (.) I’m completely free with my channel so:: (.) and I 
am seeing that a ton of people in Greece in the PR industry and they are fifty or sixty years old (.) 
I see them a lot (.) so we don’t have any young people in the PR part and that’s a negative because 
young people do know the internet’s power (.) older people maybe they don’t use it maybe they 
don’t care about it so they can’t understand me (.) so when I’m talking with a PR manager that is 
fifty or sixty years old I am constantly finding myself having to explain again and again what I do 
and I’m sending more and more statistics about the sales that I can make (.) you know we have 
a voucher code (.) and u:m the viewer can put the voucher code so the company knows what 
power the YouTuber has (.) because you can have a really big channel and not sell a thing because 
(.) you know the viewer might not be interested or whatever (.) and you can have a smaller 
channel and actually sell more things than a bigger channel (.) so voucher codes really help to 
track that (.) but I think that the PR industry for all the companies needs younger people (.) so 
that they can understand the internet better
IE: Yeah (. I guess just in general (. because I do feel that media is changing (. I mean traditional media like newspapers, TV, radio is still there and I don’t want to say that it’s completely irrelevant now (. but I do think younger generations’ media consumption behaviour is changing (. because even when I look at myself and I’m not that young (. but I also have a younger sister and she’s fourteen and her and her friends don’t watch telly anymore they don’t watch TV (. they watch YouTube or Netflix that sort of thing but they don’t watch TV (. so I think it’s really important not just for PR people but marketers, advertisers in general to be aware of the fact that media is changing (. and yeah I guess you’re completely right (. I mean fifty or sixty year-olds like nothing against them-

IE: Yeah that’s fine because they are wiser than I am or than a thirty year-old (. they know a lot about PR and marketing I give them that (. but they need to you know keep up with the age (. with this generation that’s going on here so (. I think it’s crazy to spend thousands of Euros on an ad on TV and not just give a way smaller amount to a YouTuber and Instagrammer whatever (. to promote your product (. it benefits you as a company for your budget so (. we all win ((laughing))

IR: It’s true yeah (. completely (. and yeah so almost done (. U::m my final question would be u:m (. for you what has been your best collaboration that you’ve done so far with a brand? What has been your favourite one (. and why?

IE: My best collaboration (. hm:: (. ok my best collaboration was with a makeup company (. um it was MUA (. it’s based in London (. they have really great products and I’m creating makeup tutorials with different brands (. so I told them I had this idea if we could create a video exclusively with MUA products (. like exactly the same as my previous videos just with MUA products it would be really good (. and it was a first impressions so I wouldn’t have tried the
products before .) and it was my original idea because I think authenticity is number one on YouTube (.) and in all social media (.) the more authentic you are people are going to feel closer to you (.) so the company said yes and I created this video (.) and they loved it so much we actually turned down their website in Greece ((laughing))

IR: Really? Wow (.) that’s amazing

IE: Yeah from all these sales (.) and the next day when I got this head executive from MUA in Greece saying like I’m going to send you something ((laughing)) yeah that was so successful and that was my best collaboration because (.) I think it was so authentic that no one even realised that it was sponsored even though I always write it in the description (.) but no one even realised and that was the most amazing thing (.) and I had so much fun creating this video because I was 100% free to create what look I would like (.) so that was an amazing collaboration totally my best

IR: Yeah I guess because it was also your idea and your initiative

IE: Yeah they let me be completely free and do whatever I want

IR: Ok great (.) well thank you so much (.) that’s my questions done (.) if there’s anything you would like to add please feel free

IE: U:::m (.) I just want to point out the point with the authenticity (.) even if it’s a sponsored video and even if it’s not (.) I think being honest is the most important thing because when people feel like you’re lying to them or you have a different persona (.) I think you really have to reject things you don’t like for the sake of your audience and that’s the most important thing (.) because if you’re a YouTuber and- knock on wood- it doesn’t exist tomorrow (.) you have an audience on Instagram and Facebook and you can work on these platforms (.) I also work on Instagram a lot (.) you know you need to be all over the place as much as you can (.) so the more authentic you
are people are going to follow you to whatever platform you go to. I think that that’s the key to social media.

**Coding Sample and Codebook**

IR: Ok so I guess we can just start with the first question and that would be what your main motivations or your reasons were for starting your YouTube channel?

IE: Alright so I was 22 when I started and I was watching Beauty channels because my channel is about beauty on YouTube for about one and a half years (viewer first) so I was in college and was feeling very lonely because I was studying to become an engineer and it turns out that I’m very artistic and engineering is not my thing so I was feeling very suppressed and very lonely in this environment so YouTube was like a great outlet for me (creative outlet) and I always loved makeup and beauty so (love for beauty) I decided to just grab my phone and start just like that it was like a spur of the moment thing (spur of the moment)

IR: Like me for example (laughing) Ok U:mm ok and so how do you see your relationship with your viewers?

IE: M:: I see it as a community because we all have similar interests (sense of community with similar interests) U:mm so yeah kind of like an online family and like we’re friends (online family and friends)

IR: Ok so the next question would be about specifically sponsored content and the first aspect would be just sort of in general what your thoughts are on sponsored content on YouTube and whether you think that it’s changed the way that YouTube works now

IE: Um I think it’s one of the very few viable ways of making money through YouTube (viable way of making money/YouTube as a viable career) like looking at my own channel like any money that I’ve made off of it outside of sponsored content is pretty much like pocket money (0.2) like nothing that would ever even let me pay for my like train tickets or tube tickets U:mm
so:: for people wanting to make lots and lots of content and to make a bit of money off of that (. ) that is just the only viable way of doing it (. ) and because I work party in digital marketing I see how much money companies spend on things like (. ) like posters on the tube (. ) and TV ads (. ) and when I see how much money goes into that then I’m like I’m glad that YouTubers are getting a cut of that now (legitimacy of sponsored content on YouTube) (. ) because I think it’s going to a way better place than just to like a big company that’s sucking up all that advertising money

IR: Mhm (. ) Ok (. ) And speaking of that (. ) what are the main aspects or issues you would consider before you decide you would like to work with a certain brand (. ) or (. ) promote a certain product?

IE: Yeah (. ) so I like to make sure the company is actually legit (legitimacy of company/brand) (. ) so: that they’ve been in business for a while (experienced business) (. ) and that they’ve established a good reputation (reputation of company/brand) (. ) Because like (. ) a company that’s been running their business for a while has most probably already experienced mistakes and (. ) like shipping issues stuff like that (. ) and so therefore they would have a better idea of how to make sure that doesn’t happen again (. ) Yeah because like I said before I want to make sure they’re actually going to take care of my subscribers and treat them well (caring for viewers) (. ) so: if I get a feeling the company isn’t nice, or professional in any way (. ) I run! (legitimacy of company/brand)

IR: What do you value when working with brands, or more specifically PR people? How would describe your relationships with the PR people you have worked or currently work with?

IE: I love it when they’ve actually followed me, checked my content, read my stuff, taken the time to meet with me and get to know me (Effort to learn about the YouTuber). I also love it when I meet them multiple times and we feel like friends (Personal and friendly connection) so then end up working on some fun, long term collaborations (Long-term relationship). It’s great when
they listen and understand that I know my audience and know what works and what doesn’t

(Trust in YouTuber’s knowledge and expertise).

IE: Yeah so I’m curious (.) are you also speaking to people who have management?

IR: Well yeah (.) I’m trying so I’ve sent Emails and stuff but so far (.) no replies

IE: Oh ok (.) yeah because I’ve worked a lot with agents of other YouTubers like for my job and also just in other capacities and I find that like (.) I personally would never get a YouTube ag- like I would get a talent agent (.) so just like someone that like organises speaking events for you and is like you can be on this talk thing (.) so like (.) more like that than you will organise this YouTube deal for me because I feel like a lot of management that is taking on YouTubers doesn’t actually know a lot about YouTube (agents don’t know enough about YouTube) (.) there’s obviously people that are really good as well (.) but some people are obviously going right YouTube new talent let’s do this and then they just organise it in like an old-fashioned media way and it doesn’t always go well (agents still use old media) and also think that sometimes the messages between the brand, then a potential agency, then an agent and then the YouTuber that’s a long chain from brand to the YouTuber (.) so I think that makes it a lot more complicated (.) so if you could do direct brand to direct YouTuber I think that would just make it easier although I mean sometimes you need an agency to do the like business talk bit because I think some businesses don’t get it (problem of long chain from YouTuber to brand can mean that lots of important information gets lost)
**Codebook**

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<td>YouTuber’s personal reasons and motives for starting their channels and creating content on YouTube</td>
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<td>Viewer relationship</td>
<td>YouTuber’s perception of their relationship with their viewers</td>
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<td>Justification of sponsored content</td>
<td>YouTuber’s arguments for the justification of sponsored content, both in general and on their personal channel</td>
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<td>Creation Process</td>
<td>Aspects and issues of the creation process of sponsored videos</td>
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<td>Considerations/Selection criteria</td>
<td>Issues and selection criteria YouTuber takes into consideration when deciding whether to work with brands or not</td>
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**List of Codes and Sub-Codes**

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<td>• Nature of relationship • Exchange of opinions/experiences • Transparency and authenticity • Integrity and responsibility • Consistency and credibility • Sharing personal life • Personal communication • Mutual support and respect</td>
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- Acceptance of viewers
- Creative control
- Authenticity
- Longer process
- Quality of product
- Personal interest/experience
- Brand identification
- Affordability
- Relevance for viewers
- Direct vs indirect
- Long-term vs One-off
- Reliability
- Openness/honesty
- Communication
- Personalized approach
- Real interest
- Trust and respect
- Flexibility
- Double standards