

Appendix 4a: Stars of the Vlogosphere

Helicopters circled the sky above Piccadilly Circus as the police officers below struggled to control the thousands of fans on the streets outside the bookstore. A few weeks earlier, seven hundred people had been waiting at the same store the day David Beckham arrived to sign copies of his autobiography, so little public interest was expected for someone that nobody over twenty had ever heard of. So who were the thousands of young fans waiting for? The latest pop sensation? A celebrity from a reality show? No, the young man causing so much excitement was a 'vlogger' - a video blogger.

Twenty-one-year-old Alfie Deyes was in London to promote a book based on his extremely successful vlog Pointless. With over four million subscribers, Alfie had become famous by making and uploading videos of himself and his friends taking part in games and activities that have no purpose, hence the name of the vlog. But he is just one of a small army of vloggers with large followings that have become much bigger stars than actors and pop singers, and now the mass media want to know what makes them so attractive.

The answer, of course, is not simple, but successful vloggers do share some common characteristics. They are outgoing, quick-witted and spontaneous in front of their webcams, which enables them to create a close relationship with their viewers. There is also a lot of interaction with the audience and vloggers ask their followers for feedback on their videos. This means vloggers can adapt the content of their videos to keep so their viewers happy. It is material that is made by young people for young people without any intrusion from media corporations. What is more, the accessibility that modern technology offers means that the vlogs can be watched anywhere and at any time. All these ingredients put together have created a two-way relationship between vloggers and their fans, based on shared interests and trust that cannot be found between the providers and users of other media.

However, it appears that those shared interests and that trust might be negatively affected by something that has existed for a lot longer than vlogging: money. Some of the big-name vloggers can earn up to £20,000 for displaying an advertisement on their channel, or for showing advertisements at the beginning of their videos. They can also earn a lot of money for mentioning a product in a vlog and even more money for reviewing new products. About 1,000 vloggers around the world earn at least £100,000 a year from their YouTube income. Furthermore, when a vlogger has more than 10,000 subscribers, they can use the hi-tech facilities at YouTube Creator Spaces in cities such as London and New York and produce very professional, and some would say commercial, vlogs for the platform

So, will vlogs go the way of many TV programmes and films and become simple vehicles for selling products? Not according to the vloggers, who say that their creative independence is far more important than making money. However, Zoella, one of the few vloggers in the public eye in Britain, caused a scandal after following Alfie Deyes' example and publishing a book. At the book launch, Zoella claimed that it had always been her dream to write a novel, but just a few weeks later, she had to admit that she hadn't written it alone and had had help with it. Her name was just being used to sell it. Most of her fans forgave her, but many media experts saw it as a sign that vlogging had lost its innocence and that the media corporations were taking control.

[611 words]

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Appendix 4b: The Instagram Effect

Influencer Lauren Black and former Instagram employees speak in a new BBC Three documentary *The Instagram Effect*.

As influencer Lauren Black gained more than 100,000 followers on Instagram, she felt the pressure build.

"I was quite anxious because every day I had to then please thousands more people," she says.

BBC Three documentary *The Instagram Effect* hears from people like Lauren - as well as former Instagram and Facebook employees - to explain how the app has affected its users.

As Lauren spent more time on the platform, her eating disorder worsened. She felt exposed to harmful content as she scrolled on Instagram, because she followed and interacted with accounts that were sizes four to six.

"Having an eating disorder, it's really easy for you to fall into... a trigger hole," she explains. "Once I see one thing that's triggering it is kind of easy to then go and find things that are also triggering just because that part of your brain likes it.

From the moment she woke up to when she fell asleep, Lauren would be scrolling and liking other people's pictures. At the height of her eating disorder, Lauren says she would put off eating - and then when she did eat, she would only consume a very small amount. *"I basically just ignored it when I was hungry," she says.*

"When I look back on pictures now, you can clearly see that I was ill."

Lauren eventually started treatment for her eating disorder.

Former Facebook and Instagram insiders agree that the app contributed to the pressure its users faced.

"This challenge of making Instagram feel less pressurised is very difficult, if not impossible," explains Greg Hochmuth, one of Instagram's first engineers, adding he felt a shift when Facebook bought Instagram in 2012.

Hannah Ray, former community manager, says she saw ordinary people rise to success because of their popularity on Instagram, while others were worried they would miss out on jobs because of a low follower count.

Frances Haugen, a Facebook whistleblower, disclosed Instagram's own research into the negative effects it has on some vulnerable users: *"You might have... a single low day and you might go and search for something on Instagram, that you might not otherwise search for."*

"If you want to understand why Instagram is the way it is, you have to understand how the algorithms have shaped it to be that way. They are the result of people's choices," Manish Raghavan, former Facebook responsible AI researcher, says.

In 2016, Instagram changed from ordering posts chronologically to using an algorithm.

Another issue that Lauren and other Instagram users have had to deal with is the use of filters.

"All the images would be quite highly edited. I was comparing myself to this false person I was looking at," Lauren says. *"I always used to use filters on Instagram, and I didn't realise how damaging they were."*

Instagram launched around the same time as the iPhone 4 and filters were designed to improve the poor quality of the cameras at the time, says Cole Rise, designer of the first Instagram logo and seven of its original filters. His view has changed since cameras have improved, and now he welcomes a warning label on whether filters are used in an Instagram post.

"If you make people aware that there is a filter, that's good because they know that there's some sense [that] this image has been doctored," he says. *"It's our responsibility to tell people that."*

What is Meta's response? Meta - Instagram and Facebook's parent company - said its policies are designed to help reduce societal pressure some people can feel.

"People come to Instagram to express themselves, explore and connect," a Meta spokeswoman said. *"We spent approximately \$5 billion on safety and security last year alone, and it continues to be our top priority."*

The company works with experts to develop rules and features that help protect people and give them more control over the experience, she said, adding:

"We care deeply about this, and about making sure people feel good about the time they spent on Instagram."

Lauren says she now uses her platform to spread body positivity and no longer edits her photos.

"When I started this job, I didn't realise the impact of looking and comparing myself to other people had on my mental health," she adds. "If I'm scrolling 13 hours a day, it's kind of no wonder that it had a negative effect."

[745 words]

Source: <https://www.bbc.com/bbcthree/article/bd4cff91-1de5-4a2a-8dea-7dba656626b9>