

UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION, WINNEBA

**EXPLORING BRANDING APPROACHES IN MARQUES KEITH
BROWNLEE'S YOUTUBE VLOGS: VALUE EXPERIENCES FOR CAPTURI
NG AND MONETISING ATTENTION**

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**of the requirements for award of degree Master of Philosophy
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MARCH, 2021



DECLARATION

STUDENT'S DECLARATION

I, Isaac Sena Akpa declare that this dissertation, with the exception of quotations and references contained in published works which have all been identified

and duly acknowledged, is entirely my original work, and it has not been submitted, either in part or whole, for another degree elsewhere.

SIGNATURE:

DATE:

SUPERVISOR'S DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the preparation and presentation of this work was supervised in accordance with the guidelines for supervision of Dissertation as laid down by the University of Education, Winneba.

NAME OF SUPERVISOR: DR ANDY OFORI BIRIKORANG

SIGNATURE:

DATE:

DEDICATION

To my parents, Godwin K. Akpa and Cecelia Grant Wharton: thank you for all the sacrifices that you have made and continue to make in my life. You are a blessing.



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ABSTRACT

The study examines the unique brand values of Marques Keith Brownlee (MKBHD) and further analyses the brand strategies MKBHD uses to promote and maintain the image of his vlog. This research, through the lens of Goffman's Presentation of Self and the theory of identity construction, anchored on a qualitative content analysis design interrogates the YouTube vlogs of MKBHD who was purposively selected. This study indicates that MKBHD brands himself as transparent, a tech enthusiast, a storyteller, an entrepreneur, and an athlete. Also, the data revealed that, MKBHD brands and promotes himself through; giveaways, collaborations, and promotion of multiple social media accounts. Further, the study showed that there's very little to no data-driven approach to making his videos. MKBHD maintains his brand image by responding to feedback from his viewers. The study concludes that the MKBHD constructs modifies, promotes, and maintains his identities on social media. A noteworthy finding concerning the implication this study has for the marketing discipline is that social media has shifted value production and power away from manufacturers to consumers. Because of this, YouTubers, who have gained enough social capital under the attention economy, are arguably more influential in fostering a brand image than the companies that own the brand.



CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the introduction of this research work. It discusses the background of the study, statement of the problem, objectives, and research questions. Furthermore, the significance of the study and the delimitation of this research work are outlined in this chapter.

1.1 Background of the Study

Not so long ago, it was wearisome to acquire information than it is today. Digitization and information technology have changed all these and never before has so much information been so easily accessible (Hendricks & Vestergaard, 2019). The ramification of the commonness of the Web and digital media is that information which used to be rare or scarce and therefore valuable, is now so pervasive and almost devoid of monetary value (Huberman & Wu, 2008). The difficulty today is not finding information to pay attention to; it is finding the time to read or look at the material at your disposal. This has brought about an attention deficit, its scarcity thereof, and a crisis of attentiveness (Crary, 1999).

The underpinnings of the new and emerging attention economy were posited in the 1970s when researchers associated audience attention to psychology and neurology. Future Nobel laureate in Economics Simon (1971) observed that,

In an information rich world, the wealth of information means a dearth of something: a scarcity of whatever it is that information consumes. What informatio

n consumes is rather obvious: it consumes the attention of its recipients. Hence a wealth of information creates a poverty of attention... (p. 40).

In line with Simon's (1971) radical observations Rose (2015) explains how the statement

predicted a reversal of the economic relationship between media producers and media consumers. In the future, the value of information (the stuff being produced) would trend toward zero, while the value of attention, which is owned by consumers but can be leveraged by companies that help them allocate it, would only rise. (p. 40).

1.1.1 Monetisation of User Attention

This forms the basis for studying the information age as an attention economy. Situating attention under an economic context makes the concept a complex one to define (Goldhaber, 2006). However, this dissertation draws its point of view from Myllylahti (2019) who defines attention "as a scarce and fluid commodity which carries monetary value; is based on individual user interaction which can be harvested, measured, and exchanged for revenue on a platform, on a news site, or an online site." (p. 2). This definition helps in understanding attention based on three main scopes: attention as a scarce and fluid commodity, attention as a unit for measurement, and attention as a source of monetisation (Myllylahti, 2019). Going by this definition, attention carries monetary value, and can therefore be commodified by trading it for advertising money. This commodification ensues through 'attention brokers' who sell human attention to third parties for revenue (Wu, 2017).

Webster (2014) indicates that media users are the ones that control the attention economy and that their decisions about what to read or watch or share shapes the marketplace

ce of attention. This is because media businesses and social media platforms depend on the resale of attention to make money (Wu, 2017). Therefore their avoidance of media content poses a critical challenge for its monetisation. Conventionally, products and services are sold directly to consumer ‘users’ but, in digital environments, consumers or “users” have become the main source of content creation. This paradigm shift in the consumer producer relationship has enabled an online user to become a ‘prosumer’; active producers and consumers of digital content (Fuchs, 2014; Kotler, 1986; Ritzer, 2015; Toffler, 1980). This prosumerism has modified our comprehension of labour and leisure and developed new dimensions of labour practices (Deterding, 2015; Huotari & Hamari, 2017; Vesa et al., 2017). Activities that were traditionally considered hobbies are increasingly being monetised, whereby the practices of prosumers are shaping the harvesting and monetisation of user attention.

It is also important to note that, attention is not only influenced by content creators but platforms’ policies as well as technological actants such as social media algorithms (Lewis & Westlund, 2015). The role of technological actants can not be ignored in this regard because they have a noteworthy impact on how content creators gain attention on any given platform (Myllylahti, 2019). For example, corporations like Facebook and Google collect and control enormous amounts of data about users and also decide which content to give prominence to. This can have severe ramifications on content producers. It, therefore, behooves prosumers to develop self branding strategies that give them prominence.

1.1.2 Monetisation of YouTube

Advertising is the main revenue generating avenue through which YouTube pays partner channels on the platform (Cunningham & Craig, 2017). Channels that have attained

d 4000 watch hours and 1000 subscribers are eligible to apply and join The YouTube Partner Program. The monetisation of YouTube comprehensively promotes a do it yourself (DIY) philosophy that promises users the hope of being trustworthy content creators (Bakio. lu, 2018) and “rewarding them economically for promoting themselves” (Raun, 2018; p.100).

YouTube’s Creators channel provides users the needed support to become authentic and creative content producers. They do so by offering guidelines through tutorials on the said channel. In addition to that, registered content producers can access equipped studios in selected cities across the globe called YouTube Spaces. Because of its advancement in self representation, which is an essential part of self commodification, the culture of Youtube has become enabling of prosumers (Raun, 2018). A lot of the popular YouTube channels are owned by ordinary people and not established brands. The top 3% most watched channels in 2018 within their first year of existence (which attract 85% of views) present a mix of user generated content (UGC) and professionally produced videos (Bärtl, 2018). YouTube as a result has become the perfect platform to craft a personal brand, with content ranging from gaming to fashion and beauty tips, unboxing consumer electronics to comedy.

Several prosumer content creators devote time and energy to capture attention and participate in the self commodification of their online identity, borrowing strategies, and logic from commercial brand principles (Banet Weiser, 2011). A lot of ordinary people are becoming YouTube stars and are creating professional content with planned or consistent content production and high technical quality (Hou, 2018). YouTube encourages professionalisation because to trend as a creator one has to be consistent. On YouTube, “those that rise, hold, and grow large follower bases are important players in ensuring revenue generation from UGC” (Postigo, 2016; p.345). As a result, YouTube is

a “paradigmatic example of a hybrid commercial environment where UGC production is efficiently tied to forms of monetization” (Arthus, Drakopoulou, & Gandini, 2018 ; p.7).

1.1.3 Vlogging on YouTube

At the beginning of its invention, almost all the different types of media found the World Wide Web was one way. However, we now have novel ways to express our sentiments and gain access to information instantly. This is due to the rapid growth and expansion of the Web, mainly with the development of Web 2.0 and beyond (O’Reilly, 2007). For example, instant messaging, emails, Websites/pages, and Weblogs (blogs) have become conventional ways to publish and exchange information, develop networks, or build relationships (Rosenbloom, 2004). In the field of personal publishing, blogs started as a textual genre, but nowadays it has developed to include visual expressions like photos, sound, videos, or a combination of all three (Hoem, 2005). By combining the abundant, popular blogging with the fullness of expression available in video, videoblogs (vlogs) are an important force in the world of Web based journalism (Parker & Pfeiffer, 2005). Given that a video clip can reveal a whole lot more than text, vlogs serve as a superior expressive medium for vloggers than text blogs.

Vlogging is one of the most recognised video formats on social media platforms like YouTube. It has been described as ‘conversational video blogs’ (Biel & Gatica Perez, 2010) or monologue like videos (Aran, Biel & Gatica Perez, 2014) in which creators record their thoughts, viewpoints, or experiences that are shot and released online. There is an enormous amount of vlogs on YouTube and they consist of a rich body of textual as well as visual data, which typically covers a vlogger's everyday life. Because it

can show a lot more than text or audio blogs, vlogs can be applied in a variety of ways like online education and learning, news reporting, and product marketing.

Vlogs can be grouped into two categories according to their presentation styles: diary or Web TV show. The vlogs of the first classification describe a collection of video recordings made by an individual over a period of time, focussing on their ideas, experiences, and also feelings. Currently, most vlogs take the second classification of presentation formats, that is, the Web TV show like style, which can be referred to as a series of scripted or non scripted online videos, generally in episodic form, released on the internet. The cost as well as mobility of most consumer level video cameras and also some mobile phone indicate that any individual can quickly express themselves in a documentary or narrative style film on a daily basis and afterward upload it for user consumption (King, 2003).

1.1.4 Self branding of YouTube Vloggers

Self branding and personal branding represent the same idea and are therefore used interchangeably in this study. The concept of self branding according to Marwick (2010) is one of the three techniques of self presentation which is deeply stemmed in advertising and marketing. It is very popular in today's world because of social media. On social media Self branding hinges on creating a digital identity that attracts a specific audience through a narrative (inspirational, relatable, instructing, cautionary, aspirational, or entertaining) (Brody, 2001). Additionally, Marwick (2010) remarks that self branding is “primarily a series of marketing strategies applied to the individual which is both a mindset, way of thinking about the self as a salable commodity to a potential employer and a set of practic

es” (p. 307). Consequently, self branding is basically a means of getting attention in order to gain a competitive advantage in any given marketplace (Shepherd, 2005).

The practitioners of personal branding exhibit their passions, truths, goals, and strengths through advertising and marketing techniques that help them attract enthusiasts. Through self examination, an individual can discover a set of authentic talents and skills which is unique to their personal brand (Kheddar, 2013). For the right employer, a well positioned personal brand can be of immense use, leading to the creation of social capital that can be exchanged for wealth (Marwick, 2010). This implies that self branding is a powerful tool for building brand equity. For example, the equity of online personalities (vloggers) comes from fans or supporters who are loyal to their brand (Hearn & Schoenhoff, 2015).

In order to achieve and sustain a successful brand, an individual must have: personality (strong storytelling skills, being relatable, portraying authenticity), providing compelling and distinct content (becoming an authentic credible voice in a specific field relevant to the interests of an intended audience), reach (gathering a community of followers) and generating meaningful engagement (Tilton, 2011; Khamis et al., 2017). Tilton (2011) maintains that many are not blessed with communication skills or the ability to express themselves in a manner that appeals to an audience. Similar to having ‘star quality’, ‘likeability’, or being gifted with approval or recognition is often based on subjective criteria (De Veirman et al., 2017). To create an online brand persona one must have certain looks or project a unique style that is consistent with the content being created. This is because the recognised image of an influencer or endorser should correlate with the product (O’Mahony & Meenaghan, 1998).

An influencer's ability to capture attention is the first step to commercializing and monetizing one's platform in order to earn a steady income. And for brands to be interested in user's content, they must be able to deliver the right kind of eyeballs. This calls for marketing and advertising activities that make a content creator a credible source of information that will cater to the needs of a specific demographic (Hou, 2018). The demand for professional content creators is very high as many social media platforms require prosumers to thrive. Youtube has become a platform filled with professionally generated content because it applies measures that emulate the role of TV (Hou, 2018). In this business model only creators who can bring audiences can monetize (Youtube Partner Program, 2018). Developing a plan based on user segmentation and interests, creating content themes, and using a consistent visual identity are indicators of professional content creation.

A lot of the success and fame attained by individuals in the digital age through self branding has been attributed to technology when it is just a facilitator. Even though social media technologies have made self branding easy and affordable for individuals to promote themselves on a wide scale Marwick (2010). A creator's ability to understand what works with a targeted audience and responding to their needs like a brand would do with its customers is far more important (Hou, 2018). That is to say that prosumers need to become brands and implement business practices in order to gain revenue. Marwick (2010) supports this by stating that the social media persona via profiling is strategically composed and designed to be viewed and to elicit a particular reaction. Also, only prosumers who are consistent with a professional content creation approach rise and become influencers that can monetize their efforts.

1.1.5 Marques Keith Brownlee

Marques Keith Brownlee (MKBHD) born December 3, 1993, is an American YouTuber, best known for his technology focused videos. His channel has over 10 million subscribers and over 1.60 billion total video views. Marques started posting videos on YouTube as a mere hobby (The Famous People, 2019)

His YouTube channel was created on March 21, 2008. As he loves to talk about the latest technology he decided to review the latest gadgets on the internet. Marques Brownlee is obsessed with delivering high quality content (The Famous People, 2019). He is also quite prompt in uploading his videos. As soon as a new gadget is made available in the market, its review can most definitely be found on Marques' YouTube channel. He is also quick in replying to the queries posted by his fans (The Famous People, 2019).

Marques can go to any extent to come up with an honest review. All the reviews are based on his personal experiences and he once declared that he does not get paid to review the products. However, top notch gadgets and software companies do approach him to feature their products in his videos (The Famous People, 2019). Nevertheless, Marques always gives preference to the choice of his fans and reviews those products that are high on public demand. Given the fact that his reviews are so genuine, other tech based YouTube channels recommend and promote MKBHD for a more in depth insight on any product. He also won the 2019 Streamys award for best technology channel on YouTube. Marques Brownlee is an internet sensation who gets paid handsomely for all the videos that he posts on YouTube (The Famous People, 2019). MKBHD relies on strategies of authenticity and intimacy in which emotion and affection are crucial elements in the construction, marketing, and consumption of his branded self (Berrymann & Kavaka, 2017).

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Conventionally, branding is a concept that is linked with businesses, products, organizations, or services, but today researchers recognize that brands can also be human (Peters, 1997; Thomson, 2006). Once considered a ploy for celebrities, leaders in business and politicians, personal branding has become an important marketing task for everyday people (Turner, 2006; Gómez, 2019). The democratisation of Web 2.0 has enabled anyone to create profiles and web pages, which makes the Web a perfect platform for personal branding (Labrecque, Markos, & Milne, 2011). Further, online self branding is “essentially an attention getting device, and is frequently sold as the key to helping the aspiring professional to achieve competitive advantage in a crowded marketplace” (Sheperd, 2005; p. 597).

Because of the affordances, tools and financial rewards that social media platforms like YouTube promise, there is an unprecedented number of fame seekers using social media as the gateway to self promotion (MacDonald, 2014). This cultural shift has created a new set of idols (social media influencers) who are shifting the celebrity marketing. That being said it is important to note that, only users who build the right kind of social capital of interest for brands can monetise (Zulli, 2018). This is to say that not every form of attention on social media can lead to profit.

While there is ample research on how traditional celebrities brand themselves to gain advertising endorsements in emerging markets (Amos, Holmes, & Strutton, 2008; Freire et al., 2018; Cheng, Leung, & Tse, 2018; Osei Frimpong, Donkor, & Owusu Frimpong, 2019). The studies suggest that, the current practice of using traditional media celebrities in marketing communications has become more complicated and challenging due to their overexposure and affiliations with multiple brands.

Cheng, Leung, & Tse, 2018 in their study investigated the current practice of using celebrities in marketing communications in Greater China, as well as the factors affecting the effectiveness of it and its values. Three in depth, individual interviews were conducted with three renowned PR and marketing specialists in Hong Kong. Results showed that the practice of using celebrities in marketing communications is transforming and the effectiveness of it depends on multiple factors (e.g. image congruence, product category, continuity, and consistency, etc.) and requires marketers' and communication specialists' careful planning. The study further explains that, in this digital age, advertisers, marketers and PR professionals have started transforming their traditional model for applying celebrity endorsement. And one of the major shifts is that companies and brands are able to market themselves across online platforms.

Freire et al., (2018) also, examined celebrity endorsement is a phenomenon widely used by companies and studied by researchers. Despite the generally positive aspects of endorsement on the evaluation of products, in some cases, celebrities cannot substantially help promote products. The purpose of the paper was to analyze the effectiveness of celebrity endorsement effect in an aspiring new celebrity. Four studies involving 664 respondents were conducted to analyze the effectiveness of the endorsement. In addition to verifying the existence of the effect Study 1; studies were conducted focusing on contextual variables with the potential to modify effect. Study 2; analyzed the brand and charisma effects, Study 3; analyzed the congruence between celebrities and Study 4 analyzed the exposure level of the endorser celebrity. The results demonstrate the effectiveness of this celebrity endorsement, as well as the effect of different contexts on endorsement, demonstrating that although new celebrities are less affected by acclaimed celebrities, as they become better known.

Employing a quantitative research design, Osei Frimpong et. al., (2019) also, investigated the impact of celebrity endorsement and the moderating effect of negative publicity on consumer purchase intention or attitudes in an emerging market. 500 respondents were surveyed using a structured questionnaire. The findings indicated that a celebrity endorser who has attributes such as attractiveness, trustworthiness and familiarity, has a positive influence on consumer perception of quality, purchase intentions and brand loyalty. However, celebrity endorser's negative publicity had no moderation effect on consumer purchase intention.

It can therefore be deduced from the previous studies that endorsements have primarily focused primarily on traditional celebrities without investigating how aspiring professionals, like MKBHD capture and maintain the right kind of attention that helps them monetise their accounts on a social media platform like YouTube.

This study, therefore, aligns itself with Khedar's (2013) dramaturgical framework of online personal branding (which opines; brand character, brand performance and brand assessment are the building blocks to creating a resonant online brand) in unearthing the core competencies that set MKBHD apart as an aspiring professional in this crowded marketplace of attention seeking amateurs.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

Based on the foundation established by the statement of the problem, this research seeks to:

1. Examine the unique brand identities of MKBHD's vlogs.
2. Analyse the brand strategies MKBHD uses to promote the value of his vlogs.
3. Examine how MKBHD maintains the brand image of his vlogs.

1.4 Research Questions

The research aims to answer the following questions;

1. What are the unique brand identities of MKBHD's vlogs?
2. What brand strategies does MKBHD use to promote the value of his vlogs?
?
3. How does MKBHD maintain the brand image of his vlogs?

1.5 Significance of the Study

Researching this subject is of value to academia and stakeholders in numerous ways.

In academia, the study contributes towards the minimal studies available in the field of self branding of prosumers on YouTube. Given the fact that personal branding on social media is becoming increasingly popular worldwide, a contribution of this kind is arguably highly relevant.

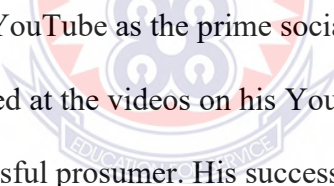
The results of this research will also provide a rich source of information that can be used by other researchers to conduct further studies in this emerging but understudied conversation. The outcomes of this study can provide a clearer picture of successfully t

argeted communications on YouTube which is of utmost importance to digital market
ers.

Similarly, the findings and recommendations of this study will empower users of onli
ne platforms like YouTube to become critical viewers of the highly targeted advertise
ments that can be used to predict personalities that can drive and influence change in
behaviour leading to disempowerment and marginalization.

To governments and civil societies in Africa, this study encourages the promotion of p
ersonal data protection rights on the same level that privacy is considered to be a fund
amental human right and also narratives that counter unidimensional privacy policies t
hat are opaque.

1.6 Delimitation



The study was limited to YouTube as the prime social media website. In examining th
e post of MKBHD, I looked at the videos on his YouTube playlist. The study was also
limited to him as a successful prosumer. His success is attributed to the number of su
bscribers (over 10 million followers) he has and the carefully constructed online perso
na that sets him apart through the application of personal branding techniques over the
period of 11 years. The study was conducted within a period of five months (June to
October), 2020.

1.7 Organisation of the Study

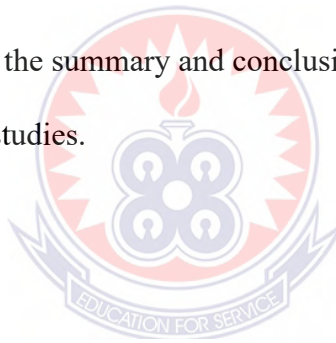
This study is composed of five chapters. The first chapter which is also the introducto
ry chapter constitutes the background of the study, statement of the problem, objective
s, and research questions. The significance of the study along with the delimitation of
the research is also outlined in this chapter.

The next chapter, which is the second chapter, encompasses both the literature review and the theoretical framework underpinning the study.

The research methods and procedures used for the data collection are outlined in chapter three. It should also be noted that issues discussed under this chapter have been sub grouped under the following headings; research approach, research design, sample and sampling technique, data collection methods, data collection procedure and method of data analysis ethical issues, trustworthiness, and credibility.

The findings and discussions of the data collected are discussed in the fourth chapter of this study. Data gathered from the study is discussed in themes and analysed using the theoretical frameworks and concepts in the second chapter of the study.

The fifth chapter presents the summary and conclusion of the findings and makes recommendations for further studies.



CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

According to Creswell (2014), the purpose of a literature review is to improve understanding, at the same time demonstrate knowledge by comparing the results of a study with other findings. Literature Review involves reviewing works that have been done concerning your study. It also involves projecting major concepts in the topics and subsequently shows the relationship between these concepts. This chapter reviews the related works of literature relevant to the study. Discussed in this chapter are central issues in general: an overview of the targeting through market segmentation, online targeting practices, affordances of social media, YouTube and its growing creators, the influence of YouTubers on audience behaviour, the concept of branding, personal branding as a strategy for targeting, principles of personal branding and motivations for creating a personal brand. Additionally, it explains the theories of identity construction and Goffman's (1959) presentation of self and afterward, shows the relevance of the theories to the study. It concludes with a summary of the chapter.

2.1 Targeting through Market Segmentation

Tuckwell (2012) defines market segmentation as “the division of a large market (mass market) into smaller homogenous markets (segments or targets) on the basis of common needs and similar lifestyles” (p.119). In other words, the concept of segmentation refers to the adaptation of marketing strategies that reduces competition and increases opportunity (Tuckwell, 2012). Creating market segments requires marketers to look f

or shared characteristics such as common needs, interests, analogous lifestyles, or similar demographic profiles (Camilleri, 2018). It is crucial for companies or brands that utilize market segmentation to be alert to shifting consumer trends and the cyclical patterns of the economy and adapt accordingly. Ultimately the main purpose of segmentation is to identify high yielding markets, that have the most potential for growth and profit.

Segmenting markets provide firms, organisations, and brands with a better understanding of the needs and want of consumers. This makes them more precise and granular customisation of consumer needs accurate (McDonald & Dunbar, 2012). Segmenting markets serve brands and organisations in many capacities and there are numerous benefits a firm may reap from market segmentation. In meeting and exceeding, customer requirements market segmentation can be very useful, as it supports brands in the evaluation of their competitor's strengths and weaknesses (Lin, 2002). It also enables marketers to adopt systematic approaches when making future plans. The following variables describe consumers based on demographic, psychographic, geographic, and behavioural characteristics (Tucker, 2013).

Demographic segmentation refers to the dissection of a large market into smaller segments based on the combinations of *age, gender, income, education, occupation, marital status, household formation, and ethnic background* (Camilleri, 2018). Marketers examine these characteristics and utilize what emerges as a targeting profile, which is relevant for developing a market strategy Tuckwell (2012). For example, the development of market strategies for consumers within the age ranges 23 38 will differ substantially from strategies for consumers within the ages of 56 74. This is because each generation has different needs, outlooks, and values. Also, within this very same age group are individuals with different psychographic and behavioural profiles.

Brands that seek audiences from any of the above age groups must therefore be aware of how different segments of the population consume media. When the audience being dealt with is a younger one (18-28) then the internet is a much more appropriate media channel (Handley, 2017). The traditional media platforms may be added to mop up the remaining population that uses the media channels. Now, even though older audiences (35-60) may be frequent users of the internet, their main choice of media is newspapers and magazines (Handley, 2017).

Another very important factor marketers consider when creating target market profiles is gender (Hsu, 2018). Women are increasingly earning more and as a result control a lot of wealth. This means they make a lot of investment decisions in addition to controlling a higher percentage of household spending Tuckwell (2012). Consequently, it is incumbent on marketers to capitalize on this and create tailored services if they want to stay competitive. Some progressive brands have reacted positively by creating unisex products that serve the genders equally (Camilleri, 2018). It can be deduced from the above explanations that, brands that understand the differences of the population as they age, the differences in the buying behaviour of males and females, and being versed in ethnic nuances are some of the keys to successful marketing practice.

Psychographic segmentation refers to the dissection of the market according to attitudes, passions, viewpoints, values, and lifestyles of consumers (Tucker, 2014). This kind of segmentation is multifaceted because it takes into consideration several factors that affect a consumer's purchase decision. Having this information gives marketers an upper hand because it reveals who and why consumers choose to buy their products (Risius & Beck, 2015). Together with demographic information, marketers can better define and paint a clearer picture of their target market.

Geographic segmentation explains the dissection of a large geographic market into smaller regional units (Tuckwell, 2012). It involves selecting potential markets according to where they are located. The idea is simple and clear and can therefore be easily understood with no ambiguity (Camilleri, 2018). The essential variables that characterise the approach are climate, terrain, natural resources, and population density. Creating marketing strategies for the purposes of targeting is easy because advertising and promotional activities are limited to the borders of the nation or region (Dolnicar & Leisch, 2004). This makes it convenient and presents advantages like easy monitoring and little to no advanced expertise in data analysis. Once the target group is split into the countries or regions, simple frequency and means computation is sufficient to describe the target segment for the creation of a marketing mix. Also, combined with demographics and psychographics marketers can create clearer descriptions of the target market and develop marketing strategies out of them.

Behavioural segmentation describes the division of consumers according to their occasion for use of a product, the benefits they require in a product, the frequency with which they use it, and their degree of brand loyalty (Tuckwell, 2012).

- Occasion for use explains when marketers show how a product can be used on different occasions. An example is when advertisers portray products like soda, orange juice, or milk as possible alternatives for water when thirsty (Tuckwell, 2012). To explain further occasion for use products are time bound and help in targeting customers who want a certain product for a particular event or occasion. An example of this is marketers selling footballs, jerseys, and other merchandise during the FIFA world cup.
- Benefits sought is the type of behavioural segmentation that groups audiences, prospects, and consumers by their actions and behaviours. In other words, it is

when consumers choose products and services based on the features and solutions that matter to them most. You can see what benefits are important to customers by looking at what types of products and services they choose. For example, if customers consistently choose a low cost option of an offering, you might conclude that price matters most to them. If customers are engaged with a webinar about how a product can save them time but are not interested in a webinar about how the same product can help them improve performance, you could reason that saving time and workflow efficiency is most important to them. The reason they make these purchase decisions has little to do with demographics or psychographics.

- Usage rate refers to the amount of time a consumer spends with a product and how often they use it. There are three categories of such consumers that is:
 - Heavy users: consumers who spend the most time with a product and use it regularly. They are the people who are most loyal to a brand and are most likely to make repeat purchases.
 - Medium users: are consumers who occasionally use products or services.
 - Light users: are consumers who rarely use the products or services. They may be special occasion customers, one time users, or variety seeking customers.

For this variable, the 80/20 rule applies; that is 80 percent of a product's sales volume comes from 20 percent of its users. This makes it necessary for marketers to identify the profile of heavy users and attract more of them.

- Loyalty response refers to the degree of devotion a consumer has for a brand. A consumer's loyalty influences segmentation strategies like the other variable

s explained above. The combination of usage rate and loyalty response aids in the determination of user's characteristics and their motivations for buying certain brands.

In conclusion, marketers of brands that seek an upper hand over their competition must carefully describe who the primary consumer is. The creation of a consumer profile is therefore very relevant. The profile can be made of a combination of the variables (demographic, psychographic, geographic, and behaviour response) discussed above. Based on the profile, a marketing strategy can be created to position the brand.

2.1.1 Online Targeting Practices

The implementation of market segmentations costs a lot of money and requires major investments. It demands a lot of dedication and time to conduct an exhaustive market segmentation analysis (Dolnicar, Grün & Leisch, 2018). Once the developed strategies are pursued, more human and financial resource is vital to develop and implement. Dolnicar et. al., (2018) adds that “the evaluation of the success of the segmentation strategy, and the continuous monitoring of market dynamics (that may point to the need for the segmentation strategy to be modified) imply an ongoing commitment of resources.” (p. 9).

In today's world, however, all the costs, time, and investments needed for the creation of sustainable market segmentation have been simplified under the affordances of social media. Online platforms like YouTube combined with Google Analytics provide users with the needed demographic, psychographic, geographic, and behavioural response information. The European Commission, (2018) asserts that,

The exponential growth of connected devices and the volume of information generated by users online (e.g. when they shop online for products, use search e

engines, online platforms, and social networks, or fill in online questionnaires in order to register to websites) coupled with technological advances in data analytics and machine learning has enabled the emergence of new data driven business models in the digital and advertising ecosystem. (p. 33).

This presents numerous benefits to many industries and individual brands because implementing these technologies can increase revenue or optimise cost through an accurate interpretation of user data. Online advertisement has as a result become a large and growing market (Zenith, 2017). In this context, online marketers engage in activities that focus on understanding consumer behaviour and provide tailored offers that cater to their needs. To be specific, behavioural, contextual, or segmented advertising are three main ways users can be targeted;

- Behavioural advertising is based on the monitoring of consumer behaviour over time. Characteristics such as; repeated site visits, interactions, keywords, online content production, and so on are studied in order to develop specific adverts tailored to match users inferred interests (Kerpen, 2011).
- Contextual advertising describes advertising that is chosen based on the content currently being watched by a potential consumer (Kerpen, 2011).
- Segmented advertising defines advertising selected based on known characteristics of the consumer (age, sex, location, etc.) much like the data users of online platforms provide when signing up or registering (Barbu, 2014).

Contextual advertising has become very popular in Europe (Goyat, 2011) and according to estimates, it accounts for a third of global media spending (Zenith, 2017). In the report of the European Commission, (2018) “This global digital advertisement market is largely dominated by the Google and Facebook “duopoly” – both companies’ combined account for 63.1% out of the total online advertisement market in 2017; a market share that is expected to grow.” (p. 35).

2.2 Affordances of Social Media

Of all of the significant innovations which have advanced society, none has arguably captivated the world as social media has today. Since the advent of the internet and computer mediated technologies, the world has been flooded with new ways to interact with people. van Dijck, (2013) raised the point that the need for human interaction, on an individual and community level, has influenced the internet of things especially as the internet is seen in many of the transactions we perform on a daily basis. This development has disrupted how people share information and has given rise to a whole new degree of consumer to consumer information (Deighton & Kornfeld, 2009). This means that with social media, consumers can effectively and efficiently share information with one another to a greater degree and with a greater reach than ever before. Anderson, Steen, and Stavropoulos (2017) further stress the point that many more people are taking advantage and using social media because it has become an essential part of their lives, providing access to information; enhancing global communication, and being a source of entertainment. In essence, the world has become more connected than ever. The need for being connected to and with individuals online has driven the attraction of users towards social media sites (van Dijck, 2013).

Furthermore, van Dijck (2013) stresses that the new millennium ushered in a culture of participation. This proves the internet's potential to cultivate connections, put together communities, and facilitate participation because of Web 2.0. Similar to culture, there is an insatiable desire for individuals to make connections and stay connected online through the creation of one's content. This provides users with the opportunity to satisfy their desires for self expression and identity creation.

In view of this, the culture of staying connected has become a way of life for some individuals. boyd (2008) asserts that "social media is an umbrella term that refers to tools

, services, and applications that allow people to interact with others using networked technologies” (p. 82). These services or applications point to social media sites such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Snapchat, LinkedIn, YouTube, and the like. On the other hand, Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) provide a more precise description that states that social media is “a group of internet based applications that are built on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user generated content” (p. 60).

Henderson (2015) elaborates that through social media, users can share their own produced content, build profiles, and form connections with other users online. Users also have opportunities to join online communities or different groups based on any interest or hobby to interact with others and keep up with the world.

At the core of social media is the second generation of web, or Web 2.0. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) describe it as a “platform where content and application are no longer created and published by individuals but are alternatively and continuously modified by all users in a participatory and collaborative manner” (p. 61). Johnson (2017) explores the view that the concept of Web 2.0 took shape when consumers of online content were modified into producers and consumers of the content themselves. Labrecque, Markos, and Milne (2011) have contended that the virtual space gives diverse stages to people to self brand their character with the assistance of Web 2.0 innovation.

In effect, Web 2.0 consists of technologies that allow individuals to create, distribute, collaborate, share and edit online content and more essentially, communicate digital media content both locally and globally (Croteau & Hoynes, 2015; Johnson, 2017).

2.2.1 YouTube and its Growing Creators

YouTube has changed a lot since its creation in 2005. Before it was bought by Google in 2006, it was a user friendly and ad free website. After its purchase by the tech giant, it rapidly became a major location for distributing popular culture by the entertainment industry (Burgess & Green, 2009; Holland, 2017). Today YouTube is a very influential online platform and the second most visited website after Google. The popularity of the site is a result of its visual nature combined with its interaction functionalities (Lange, 2014; Khan, 2017). In compliance with the affordances of Web 2.0 YouTube like any other social media platform allows users to create profiles (channel), subscribe to other channels, receive notifications, like, dislike, share, and comment on videos (van Dijck, 2013). The advancement in how we consume media has led to a more tailored experience, where data is collected and used constantly by the platform to adapt recommendations.

YouTube largely makes money from advertising on the platform. The income earned is shared with partner channels (Cunningham & Craig, 2017). Starting from 2018, channels that attracted 1,000 subscribers and reached 4,000 watch hours in the previous 10 months, could apply to join The Youtube Partner Program (YouTube Partner Program, 2018). In the hopes of monetising their channels, many YouTubers strive to create credible content in order to meet the needed requirements set by YouTube and reap the economic reward (Raun, 2018). Social media sites like Facebook, Twitter and YouTube have become very successful enterprises because of this. Users are engaged in unrecognised labour and have become voluntary workers (Bakioğlu, 2018). YouTube encourages participatory culture and offers ordinary users the opportunity to create the material they consume. This paradigm shift in the consumer producer relationship has enabled an online user to become a “prosumer”; active producers and consumers of

digital content (Toffler, 1980). These prosumers become online personalities whose role on YouTube surpasses the content they produce. They become influencers and engage in communication practices that define their online personas (Senft, 2013). They employ strategies that appeal to subscribers, using intimacy, authenticity, and credibility to win their trust (Marwick & boyd, 2010).

Because of YouTube's popularity, industries have shown deep interest in the marketing possibilities that the platform possesses. As a result, creators that started as a hobby are now developing their channels into a source of income (Kim, 2012). Creators now participate in self promotion to create impressions of competence (Turnley & Bolino, 2001). This can be likened to Jones and Pittman's, (1982) taxonomy of impression management strategies, where creators use self promotion to capture attention to their abilities or accomplishments because they want audiences to see them as competent. They make claims that influence others to see them as competent. For example, prosumers may give positive accounts of themselves, brag, or name drop to make themselves look good. YouTube is not left out in this strategy to grow audiences.

van Dijck (2013) notes that YouTube through its popularity mechanisms mediates who sees the content that is being uploaded by creators. The site orchestrates viewer choices through referral systems, search functions, and ranking mechanisms. YouTube's underlying algorithms select and filter content, guiding users in finding and watching particular videos out of the millions of uploads, for example through buttons like 'most popular' (van Dijck, 2013). Thus, YouTube's recommendation system both creates and reinforces the popularity of videos posted by active uploaders such as MKBHD. Even though anyone can broadcast themselves on YouTube, not all the content is equally visible in the YouTube attention economy.

2.2.2 Influence of YouTubers on Audience Behaviour

Marketers use YouTubers to spread messages quickly among their large scale network of followers at a relatively low cost. Influencer marketing is a version of marketing that focuses on the decision making process (Brown & Hayes, 2008). Up until the advent of Web 2.0, consumers made purchasing decisions based on professional advice and advertisements (Dellarocas, 2003). Today, perspectives, opinions, and experiences have become one of the most valuable sources of information to help consumers in their purchase decision. More often than not, purchasing decisions are based on online reviews (Dellarocas, 2003). People consult their favourite YouTubers before they make any purchase decisions like buying cameras, mobile phones, laptops, or any consumer electronic device. This has made YouTube the ideal platform for product, service, or brand promotion.

It is important to note that the networking capabilities of today's world have exposed people to high levels of information. The proliferation of online content and information exchange has led to an attention deficit (van Dijck, 2013). This network allows easy connectivity and communication but the heavy doses of information make it virtually impossible to read everything and so users have to make selections of what to read and what to ignore (Wu, 2017). The result is selective perception and superficial scanning of online content. Superficial scanning describes when users only select and read the things they want to know and selective perception refers to reading things that they are interested in. Because of this attention deficit, creators must come up with unique ways to create value for their target audience (Lewis & Westlund, 2015).

YouTubers have become very influential in capturing the attention of brands and organisations who seek to advertise their products and services. This is some form of celebrity endorsement, which minimises traditional sales barriers by involving individuals

with high levels of influence (McCracken, 1989). Consumers have become very smart, sophisticated, and selective thereby increasing competition among businesses. Today people only buy things that improve their self image by selecting brands that are relevant to their overall self impression (Ghani & Kakakhel, 2011). YouTubers come in handy when it comes to creating awareness and indicating the benefits of a brand to subscribers of their social platforms. This is especially effective with the trial and adoption of new products and services.

Increasing sales nowadays is almost synonymous with influencer marketing. This is because electronic word of mouth (eWOM) is more efficient in spreading messages on a large scale at a lower cost (Dellarocas, 2003). Brands that are interested in engaging in influencer marketing provide YouTubers with products for review. The review is based on what they like and dislikes about the product. Recommendations are made afterward to endorse or discourage consumers from purchasing the product. In exchange for the review, influencers may receive gifts or financial compensation. Other influencers like MKBHD also buy the products with their own money and review them in order to give their authentic opinions without any biases.

2.3 The Concept of Branding

The concept of branding has been well discussed and documented by researchers, pundits, and practitioners. It can be traced as far back as ancient Greek and Roman times when symbols and signs were used by tradesmen as a means to communicate what products they had on offer (de Chernatony & McDonald, 2003; Roper & Fill, 2012). As a form of differentiation, Norde farmers would also make burn marks on the skin of livestock like cattle to claim ownership over the animals (de Chernatony & McDonald, 2003). It can be deduced from the two arguments that the concept of branding is based

on two main ideas: i) brands are used to communicate messages through association with a target audience, and ii) brands function as differentiators. The power of branding has grown substantially since ancient Greek and Roman times. Today, branding has emerged as a very important part of management. Brands have become one of the most valuable intangible assets within a business (Keller & Lehmann, 2006). Branding can be explained as the communication between a product or service and its existing and prospective customers. It also adds value to products or services and sets them apart from others (Biel, 1997). The American Marketing Association (AMA) (2014) agrees that products and services are branded to bring out the uniqueness of the product make it different from other products and services of competitors within the industry the organization finds itself. Their exact words are as follows, "A name, term, sign, symbol, or design, or a combination of them, intended to identify the goods or services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competitors" (AMA, 2014 p.?).

Compared to the definition made by AMA, Keller (2008), combines tangible and intangible brand elements, rational and emotional brand elements, and symbolic brand elements which differentiates brands. This makes Keller's definition complete. This means a brand is more than a physical product because it possesses dimensions that distinguish it from other products designed to satisfy the same need Keller (2008). As a result, customers can develop emotional connections with brands. This emotional connection becomes an added value that goes beyond the functionality of the brand. The functionalities being the image, personality, characteristics, and core competencies of the brand. When this occurs, the brand can be said to be self expressive. This assertion is supported by Kapferer (2008) who concurs that branding qualifies a product to become more than a product because of the emotional and mental connection they develop. I

It can be inferred from the definitions above that brands are a living system built on three anchor points: i) product and service, ii) name and symbols, iii) concept. These dynamics as Van Gelder (2003) argues, are the translation of the business strategy into a consumer experience that brings about a specific behaviour.

This experience holds a distinctive influential position in a consumer's mind where the brand represents a short cut of attributes, benefits, beliefs, and values based on past associations and future expectations. Lastly, it is the brand that differentiates, reduces complexity, and simplifies the decision making process.

Extending these concepts to people is still an ongoing discussion among academics (Gandini, 2016), and a lot of them agree that people can become brands (Chen, 2013; Khedher, 2015; Lair, Sullivan & Cheney, 2005; Shepherd, 2005). Celebrities provide a good example for this because the image of an anchor does not belong to the television station but the individual presenter. This is in recognition of the fact that the individual has now also become a brand. Originally, the idea that people can be marketed and be turned into brands was formally presented by Kotler and Levy (1969). They argued that the marketing principles and concepts used to promote and sell products can be extended to people. They held the position that marketing is an endemic human activity. Therefore, the 'product' as we know it can take many forms and this is an important point as far as extending the concept of branding to people is concerned.

Khedher (2015) also states that brands can be applied to people because i) they can be managed strategically and ii) they possess associations and features of a brand. According to Biel (1997), a brand is made up of three features: brand skills, brand personality, and brand relationships. He defined brand skills as the functional abilities that the brand possesses and delivers. When applied to people brand skills can be construed as

the set of skills or knowledge that the individual inhabits. Brand personality refers to the fundamental traits concerning lifestyle and values. For example, adventure, caretaking, excitement, weakness, and so on. This in itself personifies the ability of brands to take the form or characteristics of people (Cohen, 2014) Finally, the term brand relationship explains the relevance of a brand's ability to communicate with consumers. This feature applies to people because communication is a basic part of how we interact.

2.4 Personal Branding as a Strategy for Targeting

Peters (1997) made the term personal branding popular in his article titled 'The Brand Called You'. The concept has since become very important in the digital age. The premise of personal branding is that every individual has the power to market himself or herself. There was a time when personal branding was considered a ploy of celebrities and leaders in business and politics (Rein, Kotler & Shields 2006). However online tools have allowed personal branding to become an important marketing task for everyday people (Shepherd, 2005). In the era of Web 2.0, personal branding techniques include creating and maintaining social and networking profiles, personal Web sites, blogs, vlogs, as well as using search engine optimization to improve access to information. These tools give individuals the power to be their brand and market themselves to society (Peters, 1997). Product branding is very similar to personal branding in the sense that it involves capturing and promoting one's strengths and unique talents to a targeted audience (Schwabel, 2011; Shepherd 2005). There are so many reasons why an individual may choose to brand themselves, some do it to gain employment, establish friendships, or simply express their opinions and perspectives (Shepherd, 2005). Similar to product branding, personal branding starts with defining the brand identity and then continuously communicating it through brand positioning (Schwabel, 2011). In order to

o be successful at branding oneself, the hurdle of market segmentation must be overcome. Whereas online platforms encourage the creation of multiple personas (Turkle, 1995), advocates of personal branding suggest that a personal branding message is clear and consistent, as it will help create authenticity. Because of this, it is important to defeat messages or stories that dilute the branding messages in order to avoid failure (Shepherd, 2005).

The concept of personal branding shares roots with personal selling since oftentimes certain personality traits lead to sales success. However, in personal branding, the individual is not working for an employer, but rather selling him/herself rather than a business related brand (Shepherd 2005). Personal branding has been conceptualized through the lenses of traditional marketing techniques and currently, there are a wide number of advocates' literature and theories (mostly in the form of self help gurus, website articles, and online pundits) related to personal branding and self marketing (Shepherd 2005). All these terms explain the marketing efforts of individuals who seek to promote themselves in a competitive marketplace. Although personal branding has not yet been developed as an academic discipline (Mohammed & Steyn, 2016), it is possible to define the concept.

The concept of self branding according to Marwick (2010) is one of the three techniques of self presentation which is deeply stemmed in advertising and marketing. It is very popular in today's world because of social media. On social media Self branding hinges on creating a digital identity that attracts a specific audience through a narrative (inspirational, relatable, instructing, cautionary, aspirational, or entertaining) (Brody, 2001). Additionally, Marwick (2010) remarks that self branding is "primarily a series of marketing strategies applied to the individual which is both a mindset, way of thinking about the self as a saleable commodity to a potential employer and a set of practices

” (p. 307). Consequently, self branding is basically a means of getting attention in order to gain a competitive advantage in any given marketplace (Shepherd, 2005).

While it is described in several terminologies, personal branding is generally known to be a three stage process. Arruda (2009), summarises it as extract, express, and exude. The summary involves i) exploring the unique value or key differentiation the person has; ii) developing a strategy to communicate the unique value; and iii) implementing a strategy for making the personal brand visible to the outside world (Arruda, 2009). This means communicating one's uniqueness to a target audience. In order to do this effectively, individuals devote themselves to impressing an audience that is in conformity with Goffman's (1959) theory of self presentation. In Khedher's (2015) view Goffman's (1959) theory of presenting the self in everyday life is a good method for personal branding. Reference can be made to the theatrical performance where performers act out their given roles on stage. Actors play their assigned roles 'on stage' and once they are done, they go back to being their 'true self'.

2.4.1 Principles of Personal Branding

The manner in which one appears to the world sums up the meaning of personal branding. Along this line of thought, a strong brand is more desirable than an unrefined and uninteresting one (Morton, 2011). When people know who you are and begin to separate you from others by associating you with a specific territory of comprehension or ability, then you become the go to person in the corner of that industry. In building a positive image Clare (2002) suggests that there's the need to introduce yourself in a way that is both consistent with self and esteem. If that is accepted by others then that impression made can yield great results. Going against this suggestion and doing otherwise

se by creating an image that is not authentic will not be feasible as it will prompt contrary outcomes professionally and personally (Clare, 2002).

Establishing an effective and successful personal brand requires following the principles of branding as outlined by Kotler and Pfoertsch (2006). According to them, successful branding depends on these five branding principles; consistency, clarity, continuity, visibility, and authenticity.

- Consistency: is very vital for an individual or organisation's brand. Staying consistent means leveraging a holistic approach that goes far beyond the product or brand. It affects each and every single contact point between the organisation and its stakeholders.
- Clarity: makes the brand more perceptible and comprehensible. This is built on the vision, mission, core values, and core competencies of the individual or organisation. Clarity makes positioning of the brand very simple, it offers stakeholders easy communication and understanding.
- Continuity: gives stakeholders trust that the brand will deliver on its promise. This trust is founded on experience and knowing what to expect. This makes continuity a central principle to develop brand equity and trust in the long run.
- Visibility: is all about increasing brand exposure and developing brand awareness.
- Authenticity: is the undeniable source of the brand's temperament such that it creates a feeling that allows the consumer to own the brand and associate unique values to the product or service.

Outside of the principles outlined above Arruda (2009) suggests that a personal brand must incorporate distinctive features that take after the physical appearance, responsiveness, and correspondence/listening.

- **Physical Appearance:** is important because we associate other positive qualities with a pleasing appearance. Also, a dexterous dress, make up, and adornments mirror one's personality, so it behooves individuals to appear proper and appropriately dressed for their line of business.
- **Responsiveness:** is one of the most important qualities for a communicator or professional in today's world. The need to be flexible enough to respond to current events, technological changes, and client needs is unparalleled. Competitive advantage today requires cutting edge innovation, distinctive service, and lightning fast responsiveness.
- **Correspondence and Listening:** while it is important to be responsive there's the need to make correspondences clear, compact, and aware. Take an ideal opportunity to listen, see the world through other people's eyes, and tackle their thoughts. This is a great way to maintain productive relationships.

In addition to the principles above, several advocates of personal branding have emphasised the importance of describing and highlighting one's strengths, values, goals, and personality (Rampersad, 2008; Montoya, 2005, cited in Shepherd, 2005). As proposed by Rampersad, (2008) there is the need for an individual to articulate a distinct brand promise and a personal brand story, as this would give essence and provide the much required positive emotional responses. What this simply means is that, just like traditional branding, personal branding involves defining and communicating the brand identity. The importance of communicating one's uniqueness is unrivaled (Peters, 1997; Rampersad, 2008). This is a lot like the practice of traditional brand positioning, where

re the main aim is to identify and enhance what differentiates the individual from the competitors in the marketplace. Having spoken about brand identity and brand positioning, the reputation of the individual determines the brand image and cannot be forgotten (Gander, 2014).

2.4.2 Motivations for Creating a Personal Brand

Ground breaking studies on the use of the internet reveal that online experiences like texting and playing games give people the freedom to explore parts of the self that is difficult to explore in face to face communications. Online platforms provide improved open communication through anonymity and the annihilation of real world restrictions, like (race, gender), physical ability, and socioeconomic status, which may constrain identity (Turkle, 1995; Wynn & Katz, 1997). The provision made by online platforms encourages identity construction where different sides of the self or multiple selves may be discovered and articulated. Through engagement also, users become engrossed in identities that can become as real and important as the roles played in the real world (Nguyen & Alexander, 1996; Wynn & Katz, 1997). The internet together with advancement in technology has powered the creation of personal websites which is an important platform for self expression and presentation (Vazire & Gosling, 2004). Individuals use self presentation, as a means to convey information to others (Goffman, 1959), it acts as a device that allows people to fashion and sustain their identities. Life is just like a theatre performance where the main actor has control over the choice of clothing, props, and backdrops that best project the desired identity to viewers through intricate self negotiations and adjustments in an effort to maintain a consistent identity (Goffman, 1959). The theatrical metaphor described above is parallel to today's personal

web pages on social media sites where users can compose their personal information, photographs, designs, and layout to tell the stories of their chosen identity.

The motivations for creating these sites are driven by social motives like communicating with friends and strangers alike (Schau & Gilly, 2003). This by extension satisfies the need for affiliation and social connectedness. Nonetheless, the social reasons cited above are not the only reasons people create personal web pages. For some, it is done for self realization (Hemetsberger, 2005). Some people also use it to satisfy the need for power through skill development and mastery of technology. Others use it as a stimulating way to pass time and provide entertainment (Zinkhan, Conchar, Gupta, & Geisler, 1999). Last but not least, others are inspired by advocacy, and therefore create pages concerning a favourite band, activity, or social cause as opposed to oneself (Schau and Gilly 2003).

The affordances of Web 2.0 simplify the process of creating personal online pages and encourages the creation of UGC. There's no need to learn coding and other complex computer languages to be able to create web pages. This has enabled ordinary individuals to upload text, pictures, and video instantly to an online platform from their personal computers or mobile phones. With technological barriers crumbling and its increasing ubiquity, the Web has become the perfect platform for personal branding.

2.5 Theoretical Framework

This part of the study elucidates the two theories: identity construction and Goffman's (1959) presentation of the self that was used to understand and explain how MKBHD presents himself as a brand on YouTube.

2.5.1 Identity Construction Theory

Identity is a well researched topic in the field of communication. There are several definitions by scholars that attempt to explain the concept. They all however have a distinct and practical way of conceptualising the concept of identity (e.g. Giddens, 1991; Goffman, 1959; Littlejohn & Foss, 2011)

Cerulo (2006) considers identity studies as the foundation within which the discipline of sociology is instituted. Similarly, Burke and Stryker (2000) also emphasised the prevalent characteristics of 'identity discourse' in present day social sciences. In the cultural discourse of identity studies, there exist two paradigms. They are the 'essentialist' school of thought and the 'non essentialist' school of thought.

Bauman (2001) as cited in Easthope (2009) contends that identity has evolved since the later part of the nineteenth century due to several vital social and economic changes. According to them, people's identities are determined by one's place of birth (nationalism or ethnicism) and the status of parents. This explains the basic assumption of identity through the 'representational lens' of essentialists. Identity, therefore, becomes a determined label that is given by Orsatti and Riemer (2012), perhaps even before birth. A position that is prescribed for individuals. This is the premise of the essentialist paradigm of identity.

On the other hand, there is another school of thought which believes that identity is not pre-given, but formed. Smith (2001) as cited in Lindlof and Taylor (2002) believes that identity is a performative activity. To the non-essentialists, one gains his identity through the performance of some roles. Consequently, identity for them represents the intersection of several perceptions and actions associated with the relationship between the self and the other. The variables include who we think we are, how we wish other

rs to perceive us, how we present ourselves, how others perceive us, and how others perform those perceptions. Furthermore, according to non essentialist theorists, one's identity is multiple and can be salient through performative activities rather than a prescribed status, as it is in the case of the essentialist.

Nathan (2015) explains in succinct terms the details of these two paradigms. He states that essentialists see identity as 1) rooted in human nature, 2) static, 3) homogeneous, 4) holistic, 5) deterministic, and 6) bounded, whereas non essentialists contest that, identity is 1) rooted in human conditions 2) dynamic (with continuity and change), 3) heterogeneous, 4) internally driven, 5) changeable and 6) blurred boundaries respectively. These studies consolidate both paradigms and throw more light on them. The study will further talk extensively on the paradigm that is most relevant to the study and can be applied in cyberspace.

From the above assertions, there is an indication that identity is more fluid today as compared to the nineteenth century (pre modernity). In other words, identity is not static, because it can change form. This fluidity makes it possible for individuals to have multiple identities. For example, today, one can simultaneously bear the identity of a teacher, parent, entrepreneur, athlete, etc. Each of these identities controls meanings or resources in a situation, such that applicable identities are confirmed.

Similarly, Bamberg, De Fina and Schiffrin (2011) suggest that identity can be seen as possessions of an individual that emerge through social interaction. Additionally, it can be thought of as substantially personal or as relational. Nevertheless, there is no questioning the fact that historically identity has been connected to the concept of self. Littlejohn and Foss (2011: p.102) also provide a general but succinct foundation to the definition of identity which states that "when you ask 'who am I?' you are exploring th

e topic of personal identity your composite picture of yourself as a person”. In this, anything that constitutes your psychological, physiological, and biological makeup is the basis for your identity.

De Fina (2014) positions identity in a more social context. She indicates that people generally use language (and paralanguage) to depict their identities. For example, a discourse on morality with a heterogeneous group of people will be received differently, and subsequently, members of the group will respond to it in divergent ways. Their response provides clues that help in understanding each person’s identity. Further, it is through an identity that one can make judgments, predictions, and classifications of the members in the group (De Fina, 2014). There two basic forms that underline the characteristics of people; they are puritans and libidinous, or nonchalant. This classification can as well be an identity. It is in this light that most scholars aver that social interaction is central to identity construction (De Fina, 2014; Cerulo, 2006).

De Fina (2014) buttresses this assertion with a definition that describes identity as a property an individual possesses or something that emerges through interaction. In this definition, identity can be viewed as a personal phenomenon and at the same time a social phenomenon. These two correlating statements bridge the subtle dichotomy between the self and identity. De Fina (2014) concludes with the phrase “it can be regarded as residing in the mind or concrete social behaviour” (p. 265).

Nonetheless, there is no doubt that historically identity has persistently been associated with the concept of the self (De Fina, 2014).

2.5.1.1 Online Identity Construction

Marwick (2013) observes that,

“[New media] has provided a new set of tools for self expression, from blogs to tweets. Moreover, sites like Friendster and MySpace made the social construction of identity self conscious and visible. People know that they must choose what facets of themselves they want to present online, and unlike in face to face environments where it is possible to switch self presentation strategies quickly, this must be determined in advance” (p. 11).

This declaration is validated by Ellison and boyd (2013) who indicate that because online users lack perceptible bodies, self representation on the internet provides participants many possibilities to actively construct a representation of how they would like to be identified. In other words, identity is malleable and can therefore be moulded into whatever image people intend to project (Marwick, 2013). Additionally, Marwick (2010), remarks that online identity is “both the sum and traces of a person’s online content and actions; identity cues can be gleaned from an e mail address, a nickname or a digital picture” (p. 19).

The affordances and tools available to users through the provision of social media platforms make customisation possible (Young, 2013). Creating channels, pages and profiles requires the combination of digital tokens like photographs, avatars, icons, emojis, fonts, music, and videos that represent the creators of the page. This is comparable to the “face to face” identities people construct through the use of consumer goods, media, fashion, and styles. Similarly, online profiles permit people to use the language of media to express themselves to others. The online presence, therefore, becomes something to be ‘worked on’ and perfected (Perkel, 2008 as cited in Marwick, 2013).

Using the non essentialist multimodal approach that they created Orsatti and Riemer (2015) provide a better way to appreciate how identity manifests in the virtual world. According to them, understanding identity in the virtual world depends on these variables: *reflective identity making, narrative identity making, and active identity making.*

Reflective identity making

[...] how we experience ourselves when we think about who we are or who we want to become. It describes how we set explicit goals for ourselves and execute deliberate strategies in shaping our identity. It further captures how we come to experience a coherent self in the face of contradicting events and life episodes (p. 9).

The second mode – narrative identity making:

captures how we narrate our own life story when we make sense of episodes and turning points in our lives and how we narrate ourselves into (or understand ourselves against) the shared stories that capture the social expectations in various social contexts (p. 9).

Finally, active identity making:

Captures how our unreflective acting in the world already shapes who we are. It captures how we appropriate social identities when we learn the skills and intricacies of social practices and how our various identities are always bound up with activity and the use of tools and technology in our everyday lives (p. 9).

2.5.2 Goffman's (1956) Presentation of Self

The proposition Goffman made concerning the self can be construed as symbolic interactionism. The self as explained in Goffman's (1959) model is the result of an enduring dramatic interaction between an actor and the audience. The analogy he made mimics a theatre performance where individuals play social roles by way of expressing themselves (Aspling, 2011). According to Goffman (1959), everyone we come into contact

act with within our social life is putting up an act just like that of a movie or stage performance. The performance may take the form of non verbal communication: appearance, manner, and setting. What he refers to as appearance is the signals of social status, manner as signals of communicators attitude toward audiences, and setting as the physical elements like scenery and props that define the situation. Goffman (1959) submits that we consistently define our character as we interact with each other and because of this, meanings can be derived from our behaviour.

Schlenker and Pontari (2000) define self presentation as how individuals conduct themselves to create, modify, or maintain the reputation others have of them. Similarly, Benoit (1997) characterises self presentation as a projection of one's identity before an audience. Littlejohn and Foss (2011) state that every situation requires an individual to portray a character that assists them in realising their goals. The goal will be realised when the audience is indeed impressed. By this observation Goffman (1959) suggests that self presentation is cyclical. He explains this by stating that each time we present our self to others, the feedback we receive from them is also a presentation from their end, which enables both communicators to achieve their desired goals.

To ensure the reduction of ambiguity and create impeccable messages that communicate one's exact intentions, it is important we are mindful of the responses to our self presentation. This is a phenomenon that Goffman (1959) terms working consensus. When the self is presented it is important to maintain the initial impression made throughout. Because breaking character will mean the destruction of expected behaviour that has been made in the minds of an audience and betrayal of the working consensus. Adherence to it on the other hand suppresses any other presentation and reassures audiences by removing all skepticism. This is in line with Goffman's (1959) claim that any other presentation that is incongruent with the initial impression audience has about the

presenter is known as a 'contradictory self'. However, there are instances where individuals change or add to their initial presentation. These changes do not necessarily oppose the initial presentation. Using a metaphor of the self in dramaturgy Goffman (1959) brings to bear the multiplicity of the self. This is evident in the everyday presentation of the self where people give out information during face to face engagements by putting up performances.

These performances are the things that are displayed on the metaphorical stage mentioned in Goffman's (1959) everyday self presentation. Therefore, in a more pragmatic form, social actors are simply performers putting up a craft on a stage for their audience to appreciate (Goffman, 1959). Goffman's theatrical analogy involves what he calls a *region* which he defined as any place that is bounded by barriers of perception. He distilled the regions into the well worn dichotomy of the *front region* and the *back region*, or more colloquially, the *front stage* and the *backstage*. In the front stage, we are trying to present an idealized version of the self according to a specific role: to be an appropriate attendant, lecturer, audience member, and so forth. This region of self presentation is where he metaphorically describes using everyday items in a social setting like "furniture, decor, physical layout, and other background items which supply the scenery and stage props for the space of human action played out before, within, or upon it" (Goffman 1956, p.13).

On the other hand, the backstage is where performers do much of the real work necessary to keep up appearances. It is the partition that lies between the audience and performer, where preparations happen before the actual performance intended for the audience (Littlejohn & Foss, 2011). The backstage, as Goffman (1959) says, is "a place, relative to a given performance, where the impression fostered by the performance is knowingly contradicted as a matter of course" (p. 112). During backstage performance, ac

tors prepare in private or out of sight of their audience. In comparison, the backstage performance is more cognitive than the more practical front. Communicators conceive and prepare ideas for performances backstage. It is therefore very important that audiences are kept separate from the back region as challenging problems may arise if an outsider stumbles on a performance meant for them. This is because a sneak peek into the back region can destroy the whole performance. The key in Goffman's dramaturgical perspective is found here, i.e., in the regulation of access between the different regions. Goffman's concept of impression management, or techniques of impression management, deals with these issues. In social situations individuals consciously, or unconsciously, engage in a process where they try to control the impressions others have of them. This is what Goffman (1959) defines as impression management, which also can be understood as performing. Impression management is about "successfully staging a character" (Goffman, 1959, p. 203)

Today, cyberspace has become an alternative place where people create and administer their online identities. Even though Goffman originally related his theory to only face to face meetings Josef and Merunková (2019) opine that his theory is also applicable to the environment of social networks, regardless of certain limitations. This is because the aforementioned tenets can be applied to online platforms. Several scholars have also frequently considered this theory as a useful lens to probe the presentation of self on online platforms (Hewitt & Forte, 2006; Pearson, 2010; boyd, 2007). The common thread running through their works is that people practice impression management (or selective disclosure of personal details designed to present an idealised self). For example, by selecting and controlling the visual elements of our presence on online platforms, individuals engage in online impression management, which is important for online identity performances (Pearson, 2010). When creating a channel on YouTube, for

instance, options are provided to key in your demographic (age, education, occupation, gender, marital status, etc.), psychographic (attitudes, interests, opinions, values, etc.), and geographic (region, city, urban, suburban, etc.) information. Users chose a combination of these variables and provide information that will enable them to create their desired identities. Based on one's discretion, individuals use the most satisfactory and desired presentation they wish to outdoor on social media (Gharbi & Sassi, 2015). It is also important to note that people are selective of their audiences and can target and chose who sees their posts through privacy settings. The ability to manipulate information this way is comparably limited but not absent in face to face social interaction. This notwithstanding, the front and backstage performances can be applied in both circumstances.

By this understanding, the presentation of self through posts made on the profiles of users can be likened to the frontstage performance (Gharbi & Sassi, 2015). Social media, therefore, affirms Goffman's (1959) assertion that identity is a product of interaction. When individuals post information, publication, commentaries, and personal data, they make an impression on the end user.

2.6 The Dramaturgical Framework of Online Personal Branding

Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical perspective as discussed above explained the presentation of the self in a given social interaction. It was established that the theory could be applied to every social encounter, where individuals engage in role playing. In this engagement, there are performers and audiences. Performers act out or portray a persona that is appropriate for a given moment. The self that is performed appeals to the audience to see things in a certain way. This is what Goffman termed impression management.

According to Khedar (2013), Goffman's dramaturgical perspective can be applied to online personal branding. He opines that online personal branding involves (i) Brand Character: which refers to the development of identity. In the process of creating an identity, people plan their actions in any given social setting by assessing the situation and deciding what self presentational attributes are most necessary to portray in that circumstance. (ii) Brand Performance: the communication of a brand requires the performance and construction of a cognitive scenario through which an individual expresses and manifests those attributes using a range of self presentational strategies. (iii) Brand assessment: refers to the associations others link to give to a performance. In other words, it is the comparison of one's self stated branding goals with the feedback from an audience.



Figure1: Online Personal Brand Process (Khedhar, 2013)

Khedhar (2013) opines that brand character (personal brand identity) is the first building block to constructing a resonant identity. This identity is drawn from an individual's inherent set of interests, skills, and values. Defining the boundaries of a personal brand requires the identification of inherent competencies, standards, and styles that go into each relationship that people have with others (Schwabel, 2011).

An online personal brand helps in determining the key differentiators of oneself in an ever expanding digital marketplace (Ambady, Hallahan, & Rosenthal, 1996). Social media technologies teach users to inculcate a self-conscious persona that permits the creation of an image that is presumed to be authentic yet marketable (Danah & Marwick, 2011; Mary & Schau, 2003 as cited in Khedar, 2013). Consequently, putting out one

's personal information becomes a way to appear authentic while maintaining carefully constructed personae that fit within an acceptable image.

Further, Khedhar (2013) asserts that online performances (personal brand communication) “involve the enactment of the desired identity in an attempt to control the image projected and to influence the impressions that others form (p. 4). The virtual experience for personal branding differs from platform to platform. The architecture of Facebook, for example, is different from YouTube therefore the cultures and norms on either platform present a unique experience.

The platforms provide users with a means to interact and also produce content (Labrecque, Markos, & Milne, 2011). In the creation of content, users adopt a brand strategy to manage the information that they reveal and are also conscious of their efforts to express a given identity to their target audience. One of the hurdles that need clearing is deciding what information to post and filtering out information that doesn't align with their brand strategy. Thereby maintaining a consistent image through the choices made to reveal or hide personal information on online platforms (Khedhar, 2013).

Also, Khedhar (2013) states that personal branding isn't only about fashioning an image of oneself but more importantly making that image available to others. The presentation of the self guarantees a visual identity and establishes a link people make between what something looks like on the outside versus what it looks like on the inside. Self presentation is therefore a strategic way to exhibit and harvest attention, status, and social capital which tangibly translates into material rewards. For freelancers, contractors, consultants, or job applicants, self promotion is necessary to distinguish themselves from others and thus stand out in the competitive job market (Gehl, 2011). In this process, strategically appealing to followers becomes a carefully calculated way to mark

et oneself as a commodity in response to employment uncertainty (Lair, Sullivan & Cheney, 2005 as cited in Khedar, 2013)

Finally, Khedar (2013) asserts that a well performed act leads viewers to ascribe a self to the performed character or persona. Brand image depends on information posted by the focal person, information posted by others, and the marketplace reaction to the presented information, which generally is based on visible behaviour, nonverbal behaviour, and other observable cues (Joinson & Vasalou, 2009 as cited in Khedar, 2013). Personal branding requires individuals to take control of the process that affects how they are perceived by their audience or community of people interested in their actions. This helps in the management of the strategic processes that aid in achieving their personal and professional goals.

The creators of personal brands depend on their experience and feedback, together with comparisons of their self stated branding goals to that of written statements and personality judgements to determine whether they have achieved their branding goals (Lair, Sullivan & Cheney, 2005). Moving forward, creators can fine tune subsequent errors in their strategies and performing actions to best fit the existing audience; or target a different audience. A rather risky decision will be showing indifference towards the reviews as being ill informed or wrong.

The use of search engine optimization to track personal and related information has gained popularity on the world wide web. As a result, individuals are investing their energies into actively monitoring and shaping their online information. There is the need for continued maintenance of our online brands as they begin to exist autonomously on online platforms. Thus, users confront and learn about the rationalized techniques of surveillance when they sign up for and use a Web 2.0 site. By engaging in auto sur

veillance, they are merely adapting this logic to their ends (Gehl, 2011 as cited in Khe dar, 2013).

2.7 Relevance of the Theories to my study

In today's world, the advancement of social media platforms and

their varied features such as pictures, videos, likes, followers, and shares, has made it possible for users to showcase an assortment of identities online (Bullingham & Vasconcelos, 2013). The development of online social interaction has brought about the need to discuss whether or not Goffman's dramaturgical perspective and other concepts like identity construction can be related to online platforms and social media research.

According to Miller (1995) interaction on online platforms is a natural extension of Goffman's theory. Jacobsen (2010) concurs, recommending that Goffman's theory is relevant for computer mediated communication because it is timeless and adaptable. Mendelson & Papacharissi (2010) additionally demonstrate that photos on social networking sites adhere to the traditional theory of impression management. The evidence above supports the theories transferability online, therefore, this study adopts it in understanding the frontstage performance of MKBHD vlogs. And how he creates an image that targets viewer attention in order to monetise his channel.

This study also employs identity construction as a concept to explain how MKBHD has created an identity on YouTube. The theory is also conceptualized to help understand how prosumers confer onto themselves peculiar personalities that target their audiences. Since social media gives an individual the opportunity to assert and modify his online identity. The theory is appropriate because it is characterised by multiplicity and subject to modification. Lastly, the ideas of reflective and narrative identity offered in

sights into the factors that endorse the multiplicity of identity, it especially helped in understanding the indicators picked from the vlog posts of MKBHD.

2.8 Chapter Summary

This chapter reviewed various works that are related to the study.

Firstly, the chapter looked at the literature on the broader term market segmentation and defined the variables that help in creating a plausible market strategy for a target audience. It narrowed down to online targeting and how the affordances of Web 2.0 have made things easier for content creators who seek to communicate specified messages to a homogenous group.

It was deduced from the literature that consumers or “users” have become the main source of content creation on social media. And that this paradigm shift in the consumer producer relationship has enabled an online user to become a “prosumer”; active producers and consumers of digital content. This prosumerism has modified our comprehension of labour and leisure and developed new dimensions of labour practices. Therefore, it has become imperative for interested individuals to maintain an image that helps them monetize their channels.

The chapter further discusses personal branding as a tool for capturing attention on social media in order to monetize their image under the business models of social networking sites like YouTube.

The chapter concluded by explaining the theories used for the study and their relation to the topic and objectives for the study. It reviewed the literature on identity construction theory and Goffman’s (1959) presentation of the self. The chapter also highlights the relevance of the theories to the study.



CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

This chapter outlines the methods and procedures used in the collection and analysis of data to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the unique brand identities of MKBHD's vlogs?
2. What brand strategies does MKBHD use to promote the value of his vlogs?
3. How does MKBHD maintain the brand image of his vlogs?

3.1 Research Approach

To understand completely the significances of the aesthetic expression in the MKBHD's vlogs, this research study embraces the qualitative research approach. Qualitative research study essentially seeks to evaluate the experience of social activity or phenomenon with an intention to acquire a proficient understanding of that phenomenon as opposed to subjecting it to mathematical or statistical transformations (Lindlof & Taylor, 2017).

Qualitative study explains social phenomena as they take place naturally without the artificiality that in some cases surrounds speculative or survey research (Hancock, 2002; Wimmer & Dominick, 2015). In qualitative research, the researcher's goal is to reveal the best truth without interfering or manipulating the natural setup of the phenomenon of interest (Patton & Cochran, 2003). Leung (2015) adds that qualitative studies are meant to examine details of a phenomenon within a defined context. Hence, the generalisability of qualitative research findings is not an anticipated feature.

Following these definitions, this research was carried out in the natural context of MKBHD's vlogs with no effort whatsoever to adjust or influence the phenomena under study. To determine a thorough understanding of MKBHD's vlogs, the data accumulated was evaluated inductively, developing specific themes to general themes.

Additionally, the study concentrated on analysing the web content of MKBHD's vlogs in words without subjecting it to any type of statistical or mathematical interpretations. The findings of this study concentrated entirely on MKBHD's vlogs and sought to lay bare the character, visual expression, and appeal of his brand.

3.2 Research Design

Research design is defined as a type of inquiry procedure within every research paradigm that gives detailed instructions that are most ideal for the achievement of the research objective (Creswell, 2014; Yin, 2014). To give more clarification a research design is the action plan or strategy a researcher adopts to enable him/her to arrive at an influential conclusion in a study.

The research design also entails establishing the conditions for gathering and also evaluating information/data appropriate to the researcher and the phenomenon of interest (Yin, 2009). The selection of a research design is often dependent on the nature of the research problem, the researcher's personal experiences, and the audience for the study (Creswell, 2014).

This research consequently employed qualitative content analysis out of a number of others like; ethnography, phenomenology, and case study. The study took on a qualitative

tive content analysis due to the fact that it is the rational link that connects the data to be collected (and the conclusions to be drawn) to the research questions of this study.

3.2.1 Qualitative Content Analysis

According to (Altheide & Schneider, 2013) there are two types of content analysis. These are quantitative content analysis and qualitative content analysis. Hsieh and Shannon (2005) contend that qualitative content analysis is one of the research techniques used in analysing visual texts. It is therefore a suitable choice for this study as far as the views of Hsieh and Shannon (2005), are concerned.

According to Krippendorff (2004), while quantitative content analysis focuses on the perceptible and countable components of the text, qualitative content analysis, on the other hand, explores the ingrained significances of the text. Likewise, Zhang and Wildemuth (2005) also note that qualitative content analysis permits the researcher to comprehend social reality in a subjective yet scientific manner by examining the meanings and patterns that may be manifest or latent in a text. Additionally, Zhang and Wildemuth (2005) recognise further that qualitative content analysis comprises collecting appropriate data and selecting the unit of analysis. The unit of analysis refers to the fundamental unit of text to be categorised throughout the content analysis. With reference to gathering ideal data, Zhang and Wildemuth (2005) recommend that it is suitable for the researcher to select a site that can assist in answering the research questions.

Thirty three (33) videos were analysed in all and each video was averagely 8 12 minutes long. Each video constituted a unit of analysis for this study. I adopted qualitative content analysis for this study because it allows me to appreciate the patterns and meanings entrenched in MKBHD's vlogs. The interpretations I drew from the vlogs were as a result of actively watching MKBHD's videos over and over again (at most 3 times f

or each vlog), moving back and forth through the scenes, and decluttering the volume of data into core patterns and meanings. Due to its concentration on extensive descriptions of embedded meanings from MKBHD's vlogs, this research utilized qualitative content analysis.

3.3 Sampling Technique

Daymon & Holloway (2011) describes sampling strategy as a decision on what data to access and the particular place or site the data can be accessed in order to achieve one's objective for a study. They purport that qualitative research sampling is seldom probabilistic or random but instead, they are often purposeful. Thus, data to be sampled is selected based on their direct relationship to the purpose of the work. Also, the underlying principle of gaining rich, in depth information guides the sampling strategies of qualitative researchers. Hence, whom you select for your study, where and when depends on certain criteria which are determined by the purpose of your study. Therefore, the term purposive or purposeful sampling is applied (Daymon & Holloway, 2011).

Lindlof and Taylor (2011) note that no qualitative researcher can capture every event as it unfolds. This assertion underscores the purposeful selection of participants or sites (or documents or visual materials) of a particular study. They further contend that the right choice of a sampling strategy enables researchers to make systematic contact with communicative phenomena with a minimum of wasted effort.

Creswell (2014) observes that the idea behind qualitative research is to purposefully select participants or sites (or documents or visual materials) that will best help the researcher understand the problem and the research question. In purposive sampling, the selection of participants, settings, or other sampling units is criterion based or purposive (Mason, 2002; Patton, 2002). The sample units are chosen because they have particu

lar features or characteristics which will enable detailed exploration and understanding of the central themes and puzzles which the researcher wishes to study.

My overriding interest in investigating prosumers and their self presentation on social media led me to select MKBHD in order to uncover how he creates and builds his personal brand through content. The research is focused on his primary channel of content sharing which is YouTube. Selecting him was also based on the success he has achieved on the platform as a vlogger (with over 10,000,000 subscribers) and a recognised brand among the YouTube tech community.

Additionally, the videos to be studied and analysed were selected from the archives of his video playlist. I selected three of the most watched videos of MKBHD's vlogs since the beginning of his channel in 2008. A total of thirty three (33) videos spanning his 11 years vlogging career were selected.

Furthermore, the study lasted five months which allowed me enough time to probe into his use of YouTube as a platform for creating a personal brand worthy of monetisation.

3.5 Data Collection Method

Qualitative researchers rely on four methods for gathering data: observational methods, group discussions, in depth interviewing, and analysing documents and material culture (Snape & Spencer, 2003). Even though other secondary and specialised methods of data sources supplement these four primary methods, nonetheless, they remain the core of qualitative inquiry (Marshall & Rossman, 2006).

Documents are not only made up of words. A document can be in the form of photographs and motion images that have been recorded without a researcher's intervention (

Bowen, 2009). This study employs document analysis as a data collection method to systematically evaluate how MKBHD has created a consistent online persona through strategic profiling and professional content creation.

3.5.1 Document Analysis

Bowen (2009) describes document analysis as a systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents –

both printed and electronic materials. Bowen (2009) also explains that a document consists of words and images that have been recorded without the intervention of the researcher. A document can therefore be written, printed, or recorded as an audio visual material (Bowen, 2009).

As a research method, document analysis is particularly applicable to qualitative case studies—

intensive studies producing rich descriptions of a single phenomenon, event, organisation, or program (Stake, 1995; Yin, 1994). Daymon and Holloway (2001) note that the analytical procedure in document analysis entails finding, selecting, appraising (making sense of), and synthesising the data contained in the document into themes or categories. Analysing documents is a useful method because of its unobtrusive, non reactive nature. This makes the documents naturalistic and also possesses a built in level of authenticity (Leavy, 2014).

In line with Bowen (2009), I retrieved and analysed the vlogs of MKBHD's on YouTube. I treated the vlogs as documents that serve as a reservoir of ideas, perspectives, and opinions of MKBHD. According to Leavy (2014), this makes the vlogs under study possess a naturally built in level of authenticity. In this study, I also adopted the anal

tical procedure espoused by Daymon and Holloway (2001) which entails making sense of and producing rich descriptions from the meanings obtained from the vlogs.

3.6 Data Collection Procedure

The data collection procedure looks at the means through which the researcher utilises the various data collection instruments to gather data for a study. The study sought to investigate the brand strategy of MKBHD's vlogs, identify the dominant strategy(s) and examine the difference between what his brand promises and what is delivered.

O'Leary (2014) proposes two major techniques when conducting a document analysis. There is the interview technique that involves treating the document like a respondent or an informant that offers the researcher relevant information. The other technique is noting occurrences within a text. Here, the researcher analyses the data inductively building from specific to general occurrences within the text (O'Leary, 2014). The latter technique which involves coding and category construction (Bowen, 2009; Creswell, 2014; O'Leary, 2014) was used in analysing the data. Basically, the researcher determines what information he or she is looking for, then based on the understanding gained from the text, the researcher notes the occurrences of that information within the text (Bowen, 2009).

At the beginning of this study, I subscribed to the channel of MKBHD on YouTube and turned on his notification button. This permitted YouTube to notify me every time MKBHD uploaded a vlog to his channel. I proceeded to search and watch the vlogs on his channel to ascertain his top performing post. The top performing post was determined by the number of views, comments, and overall impressions made on that particular vlog. So, for each year since the beginning of his vlogging career in March 2008

till July 2020, I retrieved three of his top performing vlogs. The vlogs were chosen from five major playlists on the channel namely;

- First Impressions: refers to a segment on his channel where he expresses his expectations for an upcoming product release.
- Reviews: refer to a segment on his channel where he evaluates a product, by comparing product merits with brand promises and helps his viewers make a purchase decision.
- Ask MKBHD: refers to a segment on his channel where he answers frequently asked questions (FAQ) from viewers.
- Behind the Scenes (BTS): refers to a segment on his channel where he reveals the types of equipment and strategies, he uses to film his vlogs.
- Dope Tech: refers to a segment on his channel where he gives prominence to his favourite discoveries. That is electronic devices he finds very useful and or are exceptionally good.

Each vlog was treated as representative of the voice of MKBHD. A total of thirty three (33) vlogs were retrieved and downloaded on my laptop. This method follows Altheide and Schneider's (2013) advice of saving the data retrieved for later research because it can be more easily searched and a more secure way of reviewing data since you can go back to it at any given time in the course of the study.

I watched each of them, scene by scene in order to gain an understanding to answer my research questions. In watching the vlogs, however, I always had a notepad in which I put down the patterns in the vlogs that were relevant to my study. This is in line with the second technique where the researcher organises the data using coding and category construction (O'Leary, 2014).

3.7 Method of Data Analysis

Data analysis deals with the labelling and breaking down of raw data and reconstituting them into patterns, themes, concepts, and propositions (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). In line with this, the data analysis for this study was done in order to draw patterns and themes from the data collected.

The observations made while watching the vlogs were analysed using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis according to Braun and Clarke (2013) is a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns within data. It also minimally organises and describes your data set in rich detail.

The data collected in this study were analysed to reveal and report the trends and patterns that run through the data as indicated by Braun and Clark (2013). I started the data analysis process by watching each vlog at most five times, moving through the scenes in order to familiarise myself with the strategies embedded in the visual aesthetic of the vlogs.

After getting a full grasp of the issues that were espoused in the videos, I began coding and came up with some thematic categories. The coding was guided by Straker and Wrigley's, (2015) emotional code index but as the study continued others categories and themes emerged.

The data was then analysed inductively, building upon themes obtained from each scene of the vlogs to themes. These thematic categories include a *show of emotions, a show of personality, showing vulnerability, storytelling, expressing values/opinions, use or promotion of products/brands, use of positive laden words, use of music, co creation, and addressing the audience*. I later developed themes out of the categories since some of them were interwoven. The themes were: *technology, storytelling, entrepreneur*

ship, transparency, and athleticism. I continued coding the rest of the data based on the codes that emerged. I kept notes on insights, ideas, patterns, and connections that occur to me as I read and reread the data (Benaquisto & Given, 2008).

The data which resulted from the research were also descriptively represented. I used descriptive statistics as a way of describing the basic features of the data in my study by outlining the data with uncomplicated graphics to illustrate the data. Becker (1990) advocated for representing figures in a more graphical manner to aid interpretation. Descriptive statistics were illustrated using graphical summaries such as tables, figures, and infographics to help narrate a compelling discussion for the study.

In order to minimise my biases since YouTube is a platform used by all including the researcher, I bracketed myself during the investigation in order to prevent my biases from affecting the findings of the research work. Bracketing your biases according to Bertelsen (2005), involves the researcher creating a distance from previously held assumptions, prejudices, or theories and basing interpretations solely on immediate insight into the phenomena themselves. During the interpretative process, I looked out for issues that were raised in the scenes and how these issues related to one another; meanings were then drawn with the aid of the theories underpinning this study. Excerpts from the vlogs were also used to support the analysis and discussions.

3.8 Ethical Issues

Bowen (2009) states that in research, the researcher is expected to demonstrate objectivity (seeking to represent the research material fairly) and sensitivity (responding to even subtle cues to meaning) in the selection and analysis of data from documents. This research is concerned with the observation and analysis of the content on the internet and therefore calls for the respective discussion of *netiquette*, which is the term for th

e etiquette related to the internet research (Bryman & Bell, 2003; Mann & Stewart, 2000). The margins between what is ethical or unethical on the internet are distorted because the internet is a free space where everything is available to everyone. Consequently, electronic communication on the internet is almost without any legislation framework (Mann & Stewart, 2000). Notwithstanding, when it comes to seeking information from social networking sites or communities, ethical expectations provided by the owner of the platform should be considered.

The ethical principles; respect for participants and informed consent are the foundational principles from which all other ethical considerations cascade down (Vanclay, Baines, & Taylor, 2013). Creswell (2014) asserts that deception occurs when the researcher does not disclose the purpose of the study to the participants.

In view of these ethical principles outlined in the preceding paragraphs, this research work first and foremost, was conducted fairly and objectively without any attempt to manipulate the data collected. The selected vlogs of MKBHD are shared on YouTube which falls under Google's privacy policies. The policy gives ownership of the vlogs to the publisher of the said videos, which means MKBHD owns the copyright of the vlogs (Google, 2016). Even though I do not intend to distribute his videos, I checked to see if MKBHD specify any privacy rules on his channel. There were no privacy rules specified.

Secondly, this research work did not require the involvement of participants since it only involved the researcher content analyzing the vlogs of MKBHD which is voluntarily provided for the public. Therefore, according to Bryman and Bell (2007), I am not obliged to protect the confidentiality or anonymity of MKBHD or gain his consent to

observe and analyse his vlogs. Moreover, I commit to not reproduce his work anywhere. Thus, I consider the study of MKBHD's content as complying with netiquette.

Thirdly, this research work fully outlines all the various steps, ways, and means through which the data collection was done and applied. It chronicles in full, the methods and procedures used in the collection and analysis of the data. Similarly, it discusses the principles and assumptions that underpin the methods and procedures and most notably, the rationale behind their selection.

3.9 Summary

This chapter presented the process of the research and the method of data analysis. The researcher adopted a qualitative content analysis to examine the unique brand values of MKBHD's vlogs, identify the dominant brand strategy MKBHD uses to communicate the value of his vlogs, and examine how followers perceive the brand image of MKBHD's vlogs. Using document analysis, the researcher collected data from all thirty three (33) webisodes of MKBHD's vlogs. In addressing ethical issues, the study did not involve any participants since the researcher solely analysed the vlogs of MKBHD fairly and objectively without any attempt to manipulate the data collected.

In conclusion, the entire chapter was subjected to the following outline: research approach, research design, sampling techniques, sample size, data collection methods and procedures, and ethical issues.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.0 Introduction

This chapter deals with the analysis of data collected from the YouTube page of MKBHD and the discussions of key findings. The chapter details a thorough presentation of the findings engendered from the information collected on YouTube. The findings from the investigation conducted into the unique brand values, the dominant brand strategies employed, and how followers perceive the vlogs of MKBHD are also outlined in this chapter.

In order to fulfill the research question and objectives of the study, empirical material from MKBHD's vlogs, were analysed in terms of what he talks about and how he conveys messages. The researcher noted occurrences within the text and analysed the data inductively building from specific to general occurrences within the text. Based on the understanding gained from the text, codes, categories, and subsequently, themes were developed.

Categories and themes initially guided the study, but others emerged during the study, including an orientation to constant discovery and constant comparison of relevant situations, settings, styles, images, meanings, and nuances. The results herein were based on the content analysis of thirty three (33) of MKBHD's vlogs.

4.1 RQ.1. What are the unique brand identities of MKBHD's vlogs?

This research question sought to identify and examine in themes, the unique brand value of MKBHD's vlogs through the lens of Goffman's (1956) theory of self presentation, and the theory of identity construction. A thorough coding of MKBHD's vlogs with

hin five months uncovered some patterns. The empirical data revealed that MKBHD brands himself as: *a tech enthusiast, a storyteller, an entrepreneur, transparent, and an athlete*. The researcher discovered that these five themes could be grouped under one broad theme: *Brand Character*.

Khedhar (2013) opines that brand character (personal brand identity) is the first building block to constructing a resonant identity. This identity is drawn from an individual's inherent set of interests, skills, and values. Defining the boundaries of a personal brand requires the identification of inherent competencies, standards, and styles that go into each relationship that people have with others (Schwabel, 2011).

An online personal brand helps in determining the key differentiators of oneself in an ever expanding digital marketplace (Ambady, Hallahan & Rosenthal, 1996). Social media technologies teach users to inculcate a self-conscious persona which allows individuals to construct an image of themselves that is presumed to be authentic yet marketable (Danah & Marwick, 2011; Mary & Schau, 2003 as cited in Khedhar, 2013). Consequently, putting out one's personal information becomes a way to appear authentic while maintaining a carefully constructed personae that fit within an acceptable image.

4.1.1 Tech enthusiast

Through the content of MKBHD's vlogs, it becomes apparent that he is a person who is interested in technology.

Figure 1 MKBHD's YouTube homepage.

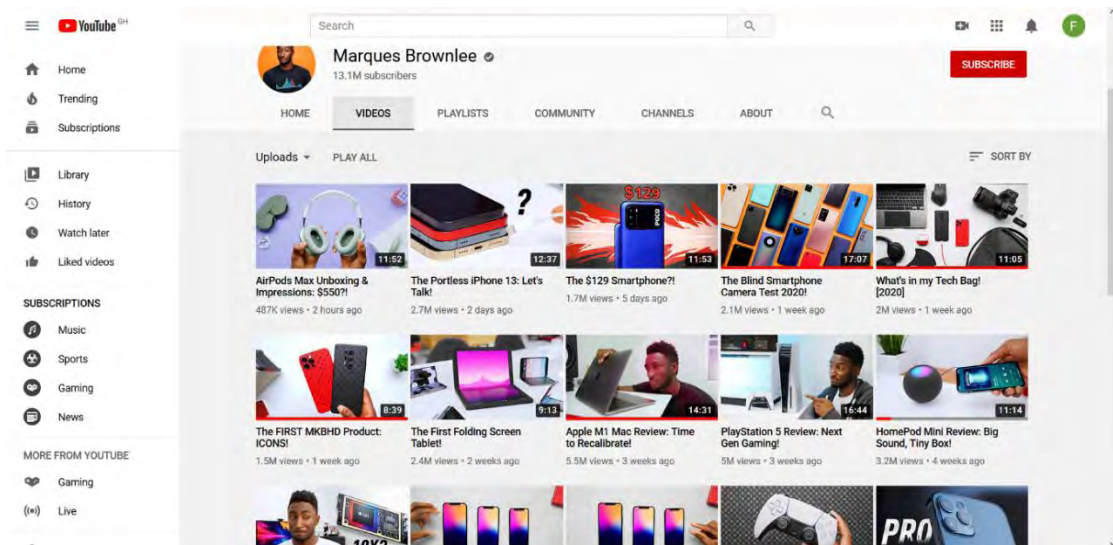


Figure 1 shows several thumbnails spanning eleven years of MKBHD's vlog posts. A quick glance without even watching the videos gives a clear impression of what the videos are about. MKBHD is a person who enjoys using computers and electronic equipment and from the analysis of the data, it becomes clear that he is willing to learn more of the ins and outs of a product than the average consumer, who just wants to use it. He is, therefore, able to provide useful information on the use of a product compared to end users, but is still not classified as a professional. This character makes him an enthusiast/geek/leader/prosumer, someone who is knowledgeable in the areas of technology and consumer electronics. This can be seen in the excerpt below:

There's a lot of things I got to talk about, the tech world is going crazy with the new Facebook Terms of Service, with the new, uh, I got a few laptop buying tips for you guys, I have a Mac Pro and I have a PC so I got to show you guys the differences between the two I had a whole lot of stuff to cover... Stay tuned for more battery tips if you have a laptop, if you have a desktop well, I'll give you some performance tips... I have an entire list of video ideas... I'm gonna do a review of Google Chrome and some Google Chrome add ons. I have a website I have to give you guys, how to get Camtasia Studio 6 Diskeeper... So

, I've got a ton of video and tech ideas and stuff that I gotta give to you guys before the end so um stay tuned.

MKBHD Update 1.0 = Video 100! (February 18, 2009)

This excerpt is from eleven years ago and right from an early stage, it is manifest that MKBHD is a tech enthusiast who is interested in helping others, by providing tech solutions and helping them make a purchasing decision. His identity has stayed consistent over the years with every review, where he measures how good a product is and the potential benefit it may have for its buyers. He is always curious and pays attention to every detail of the gadget he evaluates. A personality trait that serves as an internal brand and resource which he uses to present a coherent brand identity to stakeholders (Harris & de Chernatony, 2001)

Figure 2 MKBHD reviews LG's flagship phone LG G8.



LG G8 Review Master of None! (April 9, 2019)

Figure 2 shows the specifications of the product in a review, which is the LG G8. The specification list includes the processing chip (Snapdragon 855), the size of the Random Access Memory (RAM) which is 6 gigabytes, the size of the Read Only Memory (ROM) which 128 gigabytes, and the size of the battery which is 3500 milliampere hour (mAh). He further illustrates his attention to detail by describing the design, colour, and form factor of the phone. This can be seen in the excerpts below:

... you get a 6.1 inch display upfront and it's quite good. It's super high resolution 1440p and plenty bright, not the brightest but it's viewable outdoors and with a very average notch up at the top... the side bezels are a little bit more than slim. It's kind of feeling like the galaxy S10e or the iPhone X... then the normal stuff at the bottom is which you'd seen any other LG phone. You still have your USB C, still your boombox speaker, still your headphone jack backed by a high quality DAC. This phone is IP 68 water resistant and it still has wireless charging.

MKBHD LG G8 Review Master of None! (April 9, 2019)

Overall the build is good. It's not really like missing anything, although there are two things to note. 1) This boombox speaker it still has at the bottom, for some reason sounds worse to me. I know it's worse than I remember like it's pretty flat and hollow sounding and of course, it still comes from the bottom corner of the phone so it's easy to block by accident, but 2) the other thing is if you actually look up at the top of the phone where the earpiece normally is. This phone doesn't have one instead they have a speaker behind the glass called Crystal Sound OLED which fires from sort of the top third of the phone. Which to my ear sounded just like a normal phone call in terms of quality and volume but I could also sort of hear this buzzing like a thin rattling sound that you don't normally hear in a normal speaker so that's the first time I've actually heard one of these replacement speakers sound a bit weird. But it's not a deal breaker for me because I don't make that many phone calls in the first place.

MKBHD LG G8 Review Master of None! (April 9, 2019)

These specifications that he shows so much skill in detailing are all useful metrics for consumers who have demanding needs for their gadgets (phones, laptops, cameras, etc). And by doing so he inadvertently brands himself as someone who is knowledgeable in consumer electronics and therefore must be trusted. His identity is very evident in the way he shares his opinions and perspectives while giving tips to his audience. He describes every little detail and manages to quantify the feeling of having the phone in your hands.

Another thing that the data laid bare was that MKBHD tests the limits to the usefulness of the gadgets that he is reviewing. This is because manufacturers usually provide the ideal use case scenarios for how a product works best, but their usefulness in the real world can be questionable. This can be seen in the excerpt below:

So, you would think there's got to be something about this phone that takes it to the next level, that really makes it stand out above the rest to make it LG's flagship. So, I guess for LG those things are hand ID and air motion. Yeah, so, the notch up here in the phone is so big because LG has dropped a few extra sensors up there including a time of flight camera and an infrared blaster and a receiver to be able to read and identify and track your hand and its movements. So, with hand ID you're supposed to be able to just hover it over your phone to unlock it and with air motion you're supposed to be able to open apps and control media and things like that without touching your phone. And I will say it is a cool idea I kind of wish it works better than it did but in practice as you can probably understand from my tone and from the first impressions video it's far from ideal.

MKBHD LG G8 Review Master of None! (April 9, 2019)

This revelation indicates that he is constantly trying to evaluate whether or not a certain feature made by manufacturers will be used in real life situations or they are just gimmicks to get consumers to buy their product. To sum up, MKBHD provides his final verdict on whether a product is worth purchasing:

...It seems tough to even say the G8 is worth buying. Even though it's a pretty good phone, like overall the G8 does have a good build quality, it has good software and a good set of cameras... Now if this phone was 700 bucks or 650 then the reason to buy it would be that it's cheaper than the rest, that would be its main advantage... don't buy an LG G8 jack of all trades master of none thanks for watching catch you in the next one. Peace.

MKBHD LG G8 Review Master of None! (April 9, 2019)

Further examination shows that he is always looking for new ways to create videos in new formats. In this line of curiosity, he has published one studio tour in a 360° video

format. 360 video formats, also known as immersive videos, are video recordings where a view in every direction is recorded using an omnidirectional camera. These videos give viewers the illusion of being present at the location where the video is being shot.

Welcome to the studio tour 2016 in 360 degrees so right off the bat you can probably already tell you can look around if you're in Google Chrome you can drag around the window this actually works best on a mobile device so if you're on your phone you can literally like look around what's next to you what's behind you or if you have something like this Google cardboard you can put your phone in there and really get immersive

MKBHD 2016 MKBHD Studio Tour in 360°! (November 26, 2016)

What facilitates his consistent production is access to high end equipment. And this has created a niche for him, where he is able to produce detailed consumer electronics evaluations to help tech enthusiasts like himself in making purchase decisions. Upon popular requests, he provided a sneak peek into his production setup. He took viewers behind the scenes (BTS) and showcased the gear in his production arsenal. A reveal of the gear that helps him achieve the quality videos he is so proud of.

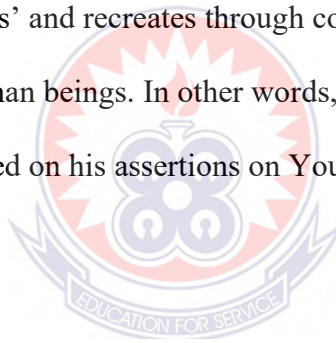
...there's a lot of gear on this channel as you probably already know but I was just trying a mic here a mic there and I eventually found the Sennheiser MKH 416 and not a lot of people, not a lot of YouTubers are talking about this mic or reviewing this mic so... once I found it and started using it I loved it it's amazing. Now typically with a find like this I immediately want to like use it a bunch and then turn around and review it and share it with you all but even with as many of you as are into tech; how many of you are really interested in a \$900 shotgun microphone? Like not that many.

MKBHD The MKBHD Gear Tour 2019! (April 12, 2019)

By being loyal to his brand character, MKBHD can clearly communicate and present his identity through his reviews. Like product branding, MKBHD is able to capture an

d promote his strengths and unique talents to his audience (Schwabel, 2011; Shepherd 2005). Furthermore, the manifestation of MKBHD reaffirming his brand character through his vlogs can equally be explored through the definition of identity by Bucholtz and Hall (2005) as the social positioning of the self and the other and also through their principle of relationality. This principle stipulates that the process of identity construction does not reside within the individual neither is it autonomous or independent but in intersubjective relations of sameness and difference, realness and fakeness, power and disempowerment.

Also, to have an identity as a technology enthusiast, one has to perform this identity as Butler (1990) states, identity is not something that one ‘has’, but rather something that one ‘does’, or ‘performs’ and recreates through concrete exchanges, discourses, and interactions between human beings. In other words, viewers get to know that MKBHD is a tech enthusiast based on his assertions on YouTube and the roles he plays in his vlogs.



4.1.2 Storyteller

The tech industry moves fast so it is incumbent on creators to evolve in their production process in order to keep up. While analysing the data, the researcher could clearly tell the dexterity with which MKBHD is able to fit as much structurally sound information into a twelve minutes review. Information density is a writing challenge because it is tough to decide what is most valuable to people (Kemper & Sumner, 2001). This, therefore, affects the length of his videos which hinges on the retention and attention span of internet users. Too much information and it becomes unwatchable, too little and it looks like he doesn't have much insight into what he is evaluating (Kintsch, 1998)

The storytelling technique of MKBHD is hinged on ‘context’. That is what came before the product under review, what came next to it, what it is up against, and its momentum. For example, when a phone is released, he compares it to phones that came before it, and then he compares it to other phones released around the same time versus the advancements made in the phone and the other phones in the same category. That to him is enough to create an interesting story. This can be seen in the excerpt below:

If you're gonna get rid of the headphone jack you might as well make them go good right? But as far as like the de facto standard wireless earbuds for Android you think Google would make the best ones. When they finally got rid of the headphone jack in the Pixel, they did make the first Pixel Buds but they weren't that good. They were pretty disappointing honestly, they had the cable between them, they had missing features, they weren't very comfortable so I never really recommended them. But now these, these, are the new 2020 Pixel Buds maybe you've seen them by now. And they are way better, they are miles better than the previous ones. That wasn't a very high bar to clear but they vaulted so far up they are now in my top three favourite wireless earbuds period.

MKBHD Google Pixel Buds Review: WAY Better! (May 5, 2020)

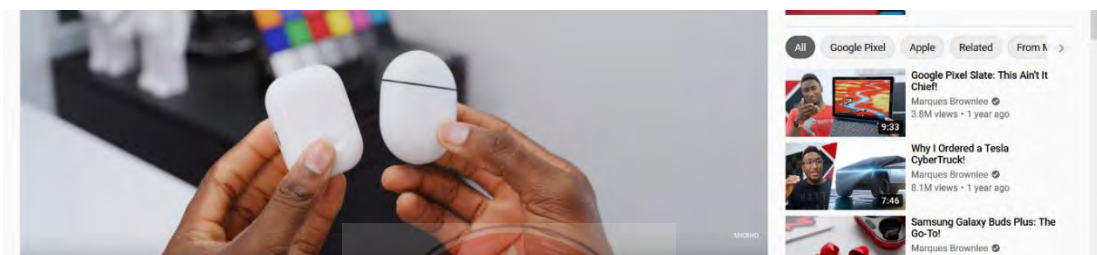
The Pixel Bud is a wireless earpiece made by Google and right from the word go MKBHD compares the latest Bud in review with its predecessor. Then he lays the foundation for what would later on in the review become a comparison with the Pixel Buds' competition. He continues the review by saying:

...actually, on the surface with just those specs, they're not that impressive at all. Right? You know pretty average battery life and no noise cancellation like some of the other premium buds... it's really pocketable. It's around the same size, same volume, as an Air Pods Pro case if you've seen that before and just as thin so on the spectrum of different case sizes for wireless buds... okay pause just that right there, just in this new case is a lot more than many other Wireless buds can say. You know so many times the case is too big or it's not a high quality build. Like this is a nice case wireless charging USB Type C all this tog

ether that's nice... I don't mind too much that they don't have it like it would be nice you know. On one hand, the noise cancellation I've heard from the two to three hundred, three hundred fifty dollar earbuds like AirPods Pro, Sony WF 1000 XM 3, is you know, those, those are more expensive ones it's a really nice and they sound better.

MKBHD Google Pixel Buds Review: WAY Better! (May 5, 2020)

Figure 3 MKBHD compares the Pixel Bud with the AirPod.



MKBHD is charismatic, acutely articulate, and incredibly deliberate in his presentation. He's also authentic and consistent with his persona. Consistency has been Brownlee's hallmark in part because his primary motivation is pretty simple. He's trying to make something that's expert, but accessible and something that he would want to watch.

The excerpt below exemplifies this:

All the information that goes into saying those top level things the way I said them came from all the depth of using the device and all the hardcore stuff that I left out... so in a way it feels like oh I should just include everything so that they know that I'm like really into what I'm talking about. Yes, I'm with you I swear but it becomes less presentable... it becomes verbose... **I can say the same thing five different ways but the shortest most succinct complete way is usually the best way** so that's what I've been trying to do that's kind of a mark of someone who really knows what they're talking about.

MKBHD How to be a YouTuber Ask MKBHD V10! (August 23, 2016)

About his dexterity a curious viewer asked him this in one of his Question and Answer (Q&A) series:

Do you prepare your script for video or you just speak live without preparing what you say? I typically don't script my videos at all in fact I usually just get a list of bullet points of things I want to talk about. Reading off a script doesn't feel too authentic to me so I go off the top of my head a hundred percent of the time you will never see me reading off of a script.

MKBHD Ask MKBHD V8: Tesla Model 3?! (April 12, 2019)

From the foregoing, it was manifest while examining the data that MKBHD gives prominence to technology. The most personal he gets in the reviews are him telling a couple of jokes to keep things interesting. Aside from that 'tech' takes centre stage and remains the star of his reviews. In an iPad impressions video, he pokes fun at Apple and their late founder Steve Jobs for not being consistent with their brand promises. The excerpt below illustrates Steve Jobs condemning the use of a stylus pen for the iPhone:

Who wants a stylus? You have to get them, and put them away, and you'll lose them. Yuck! Nobody wants a stylus. So, let's not use a stylus.

Steve Jobs Apple event (May 1, 2007)

Eight (8) years later, Apple makes an iPad and includes what they call the Apple pencil. Which is a stylus, something they so vehemently discarded years earlier. And MKBHD made sure it didn't go unnoticed.

Whoops! so much for that, Apple is now going to sell this \$99 stylus alongside the iPad pro. And it's a weird one at that.

MKBHD iPad Pro Impressions! (September 10, 2015)

In the same impressions video, he continues to make fun of Apple whose slogan is Think Different but seems to be copying Microsoft Surface Pro's keyboard design for their iPad Pro. Here's what he had to say:

...first of all, the iPad Pro is the first and only Apple product with this new little connector over here on the side called the smart connector. Apple is kicking

off smart connector accessories with this smart keyboard that folds from a case, maybe reminiscent of a certain other keyboard fold out case by a certain other manufacturer (mockingly clears throat) Microsoft Surface Pro.

MKBHD iPad Pro Impressions! (September 10, 2015)

In a much recent video, MKBHD makes a sarcastic joke about the perks of being a tech reviewer. As if to say his job is better than that of his viewers. This joke can be seen in his evaluation of Sony's latest gaming console, the PlayStation 5.

But you guys already know, as soon as I turn the camera off, I am going to go ahead and plug it in and fire it up and start playing some games. I mean testing, I am going to be testing the Ps5 for the next couple of weeks.

MKBHD PlayStation 5 Unboxing & Accessories! (October 27, 2020)

4.1.3 Entrepreneur

On YouTube, "those that rise, hold, and grow large follower bases are important players in ensuring revenue generation from user generated content (UGC)" (Postigo, 2016; p.345). As a result, YouTube is a "paradigmatic example of a hybrid commercial environment where UGC production is efficiently tied to forms of monetization" (Arthus, Drakopoulou, & Gandini, 2018; p.7).

MKBHD's success has been at the forefront of the evolving understanding of what a life lived on YouTube can be. It is no longer just a platform for stay at home amateurs working out of their basements; it is a social media outlet with massive reach, huge financial stakes, and mainstream implications. YouTube encourages professionalisation, because in order to trend as a creator one has to be consistent.

The environment within which MKBHD films the vlog is reflected in his personal growth and the growth of his channel. You can see from the excerpts below that he is con

stantly seeking to achieve a certain level of professionalism through his working environment.

He grew up in Maplewood, New Jersey where he attended Columbia High School. He first started uploading technology videos in January 2009, while still in high school. He produced his first few videos through screencasting and his first several hundred videos in his parents' home until he went to college.

Figure 4 MKBHD's Maplewood home setup.



He had his college education at Stevens Institute of Technology, where he majored in business and information technology. While there he continued vlogging in his dormitory apartment in his spare time.

Figure 5 MKBHD's Hoboken dormitory apartment setup



After graduating from the Stevens Institute of Technology in May 2015, he began to feel constrained by the confines of his 12 by 12 foot bedroom in the Hoboken apartment and started to look for studio space. He moved out in 2016 and got himself a much bigger studio in Kearny, New Jersey.

Figure 6 MKBHD's Kearny studio space.



Far removed from the days of filming in his apartment MKBHD was now filming in a studio space around 3,000 square feet. In the excerpt below he explains the reason for the move.

The new space gives us more room for us to mess with things like lighting, depths of field, framing, and building different sets for different purposes and videos. It's been pretty great so far.

MKBHD MKBHD Update 13.0: The Studio! (April 8, 2016)

I've read a bit about like your comfort zone recently and trying to branch out and stepping outside of your own comfort zone... If anything is my comfort zone it's shooting videos in my apartment. I've shot videos in there for like the past five years you've seen like every possible angle of that apartment as you possibly can. So, it would be really nice like I finally get another space to shoot in. But as you can see between all those videos searching for things visiting them poring over the details finally found something and it's looking pretty dope. So, this is the studio as you can see, I'm really glad I found it... it's super empty right now.

MKBHD MKBHD Update 13.0: The Studio! (April 8, 2016)

The excerpts above show the incremental growth of MKBHD's channel. At every stage, he improves on the environment that he works in and continuously seeks to professionalise his channel. Further, his eternal search for incremental innovation cannot be overemphasized, because after four years of using the Kearny studio space he is now moving out to an even bigger studio. And because his enterprise is growing he has hired a few hands to support him.

Figure 7 MKBHD's current studio space.



We relocated, so basically, everything is in a studio environment now, which facilitates video shooting obviously. It makes it a lot easier to have more space.

But as far as a lot of the tech goes, it's actually a lot of the same stuff. The desk is still exactly the same desk I was using in my dormitory apartment, the speakers are the same —

it's just all scaled up. The hard drives we need and the cameras we use are different, but it's just growing from that exact setup from my apartment.

MKBHD MKBHD Studio 2020 Build Part 1! (April 12, 2020)

In the excerpt above, he talks about using the same stuff from his apartment setup. That is because there isn't much upgrade after RED cameras. MKBHD currently utilizes a RED Weapon Dragon, a camera setup that can fetch up to \$70,000 and is used to film Hollywood blockbusters.

4.1.4 Transparent

Because of YouTube's popularity, industries have shown deep interest in the marketing possibilities that the platform possesses (Raun, 2018). As a result, some creators who have harvested enough attention get to work with brands by recommending, promoting, or endorsing products. The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) of America requires creators to disclose every material connection (personal, family, employment relationship, or financial relationship) that creators have with a brand. But because YouTube is an independent platform, people create their own rules and don't disclose their brand promotions and end up deceiving viewers into thinking that they are watching something organic when it's a paid ad.

Analyses of the data made it clear that MKBHD abides by the FTC rules and presents himself as transparent to his viewers. There are two ways that he does this, he discloses every sponsored segment or collaboration he has done with companies and brands. In his sponsored segments he clearly states or writes boldly somewhere on the video th

at, this video is sponsored by or this portion of the video is brought to you by or you can pick it up at our channel sponsor. An example of MKBHD disclosing a sponsored video is seen in figure 8:

Figure 8 MKBHD's Buick electronic car review.



The second kind is the long standing collaboration he has with dbrand. dbrand is a company based in Toronto that makes customizable skins for smartphones, computers, or game consoles, and ships them anywhere in the world. This collaboration with dbrand is clear to be seen by MKBHD's followers. He is direct with his advertisements so that viewers know when they're being advertised to. In the excerpt below he explains why some sponsored videos don't work in his favour:

For me, for the MKBHD channel you should know; one I have never and will never do paid reviews, and two I have never and will never give a manufacturer an early look at a review before it goes live. Every time you see a review, you're seeing it at the same time that manufacturer is seeing it too.

MKBHD Can You Trust MKBHD? (July 9, 2020)

Wojdyski, Evans, and Hoy, (2018) refer to sponsorship transparency as the extent to which a sponsored communication notifies a viewer of its paid nature and the identity of the sponsor. Consumers learn about the strategies, tactics and motives that rest beh

and brand information through daily exposure to advertising and media messages (Campbell & Kirmani, 2000).

However, it is not certain that consumers will realize the commercial intent of the message, and they might therefore process the content in a more objective light than should be done (Balasubramanian, 1994). Hence, in the context of sponsored content by SMIs, the foremost task of a sponsorship disclosure is to inform the audience about the commercial relationship between an SMI and an advertiser (FTC, 2017).

For brands, authenticity is a recipe for success as it “forms a unique brand identity” and “provides a strong, favourable association” (Keller, 2001). The stance taken by MK BHD in the extract above reassures his viewers that if he ever says something positive about a product in a video, it is because he genuinely thinks it is good. And if he says something bad about a product it is because he genuinely thinks it is bad. When the authenticity of the product or service is substantial with the viewers’ brand values and personality, the viewers can become intensely connected with it (Arruda, 2009).

The data gathered, suggests that once influencers fail to appropriately disclose paid relationships, they are opening themselves to the risk of losing trust from the followers that they have built (Chia, 2012). Labrecque, (2014) clarifies that word of mouth marketing strategies such as stealth marketing and falsification are unethical. Stealth marketing refers to how brands intentionally mislead their audiences by not revealing their involvement in influencer's communication and falsification refers to the act of knowingly distributing dishonest information (Labrecque, 2014).

The impact may be worse than the audience only ignoring the message; the audience may get a negative lasting impression and perceive both parties as desperate for publicity. Firstly, audience may lose trust toward the brand as the promotion does not seem

sincere and thus the brand is perceived as deceptive since ‘paid publicity guarantees a positive review instead of an honest one.’ Secondly, the audience may cease to trust and respect the influencer as they perceived the influencer to be a ‘sell out.’ Audiences are becoming much more attentive toward inauthentic content as the social media is becoming flooded with paid endorsements. To sum up, it is far more valuable to develop partnerships with influencers that yield genuine relationships with the audience than with influencers that seem attractive only because of their abundant number of followers. (Hall 2016).

Consequently, the function of sponsorship disclosures is important for consumers’ understanding and recognition of the content as advertising. The presence of a sponsorship disclosure may be the only aspect distinguishing the communication as advertising (Amazeen & Wojdyski, 2018).

While MKBHD is good at disclosing sponsored videos, his evaluations do not always catch on with viewers because of his biases. This is because the data reveals that, the personal preferences of MKBHD informs the kind of product he recommends. For example:

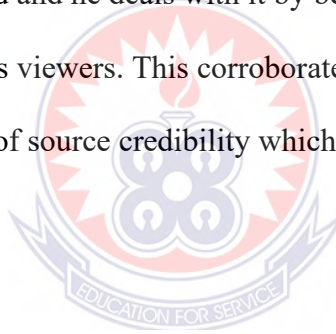
Question: In Supersaf’s video, you said your favourite smartphone of 2017 was the Pixel 2XL... but in your smartphone awards, you said that the Note 8 was the MVP why? Explain yourself, Marques.

Response: Ok so, the simple answer is I am biased and I know I’m biased. I value different things than different people so I acknowledge that. I think the Galaxy Note 8 is the best overall most well rounded most complete smartphone that came out in 2017 best screen objectively on any phone has a great camera has great performance. But the Pixel 2 has stock Android which I personally like more it’s not objectively better I just like it and the Pixel 2 does have an objectively incredible camera now it might have a much worse screen and no headphone jack and a bunch of other things that aren’t quite up to par including the

design. But I don't really mind that as much, so I'm willing to sacrifice that to keep that amazing camera. I know that I value the camera more than a lot of other people who might just want an overall complete package that's why I pick the Pixel with stock Android and a great camera as my daily driver and can still acknowledge that the Galaxy Note 8 is an overall great phone because I'm biased. See how that works?

MKBHD Can You Trust MKBHD? (July 9, 2020)

The extract above shows that MKBHD has a taste for high resolution screens but not everyone watching his vlogs share the same proclivity. An average user who does not really care about the details of screen resolution might simply opt for a bigger screen over the actual number of pixels that fit into that display. Because of this some viewers fault him of being biased and he deals with it by being honest, sincere, truthful and staying transparent with his viewers. This corroborates Hovland, Janis, and Kelley's (1953) second determinant of source credibility which is trustworthiness.



4.1.5 Athlete

MKBHD also presents himself to his viewers as someone who loves sports. In the videos related to this theme, he shares his opinions on current sporting events and provides updates on his progress as an Ultimate Frisbee professional player. In other instances, he is seen wearing jerseys of his favourite basketball team or that of his Ultimate Frisbee club. For instance:

Figure 9 MKBHD wearing his team jersey.



I'm a professional athlete. What? I know, yeah weird. So, uh you can't really tell on camera and my videos anyway unless you maybe watched my CES videos. But I'm 6 foot 3 my wingspan is six foot seven ish and I play Ultimate Frisbee professionally. So, if you may have noticed the jerseys that I've worn in a couple of my videos in the past that have some frisbee related things written on them or a frisbee school that I go to the team that I play for this is the professional team that I play for the New Jersey hammerheads.

MKBHD *Five Facts About Me!* (April 12, 2013)

This post brands MKBHD as an athlete something that does not necessarily have anything to do with tech. But this branding appeals to sports fans and helps draw more attention to his channel.

Ultimate Frisbee is not a very popular sport and by branding himself as a professional player he extends the game beyond the field. Because of this, there is a platform for lovers of the game who watch his videos to engage. This engagement in his videos increases watch time and translates to social capital. For example:

So, in the United States in New Jersey, there is a professional team called the New Jersey hammerheads that I play for. I'm going to leave their Facebook page down below the like button on this video so if you've thumbs up this video

and you want to go check out that Facebook page, definitely give them a like and tell them I sent you.

MKBHD Five Facts About Me! (April 12, 2013)

Figure 10 MKBHD playing Frisbee.



Finally, MKBHD brands himself as an athlete by showing support to his favourite basketball team. Every athlete is competitive and MKBHD is not an exception, he takes pleasure in discussing the game with his viewers, debating whose team is better.

Are you worried about OKC taking out your Clippers next season? You know what, I'm honestly not and the thing is I realized that Oklahoma City is going to have a healthy Russell Westbrook and a healthy Kevin Durant for this upcoming season and that's one of the hardest hitting one two punches in basketball. But the reason why the Clippers were basically doomed to failure at some point last season is because they weren't deep they had a great starting five but then their bench tapered off really quickly. And I see the same problem for Oklahoma City, their starting five is going to be great but the Clippers have a massive bench now this year they built up and in a plus offseason I would say I think this is the year if any for the Clippers to at least go to the finals.

MKBHD Ask MKBHD V3! (July 24, 2014)

Through the above excerpt, MKBHD builds his personal brand as a competitor, a sports enthusiast, and an athlete for his followers to see.

4.2

RQ. 2. What brand strategies does MKBHD use to promote the value of his vlogs?

The internet has become the number one branding tool in this era and the advances in social media are offering an unprecedentedly easy, convenient, and flexible way for individuals to manage their personal images (Alghawi, Yan, & Wei, 2014, p. 184). In a connected world where the democracy of information rules, individuals can create a brand—which is an extension of themselves or separate from who they are—outlined by the opinions, comments, values, stories, and even personal quirks (Vazire & Gosling, 2004).

Khedhar (2013) asserts that online performances (personal brand communication) “involve the enactment of the desired identity in an attempt to control the image projected and to influence the impressions that others form (p. 4). The virtual experience for personal branding differs from platform to platform. The architecture of Facebook, for example, is different from YouTube therefore the cultures and norms on either platform present a unique experience.

The platforms provide users with a means to interact and also produce content (Labrecque, Markos, & Milne, 2011). In the creation of content, users adopt a brand strategy to manage the information that they reveal and are also conscious of their efforts to express a given identity to their target audience. One of the hurdles that need clearing is deciding what information to post and filtering out information that doesn't align with their brand strategy. Thereby maintaining a consistent image through the choices made to reveal or hide personal information on the online platforms (Khedhar, 2013).

Also Khedhar (2013) states that personal branding is not only about fashioning an image of oneself but more importantly making that image available to others. The present

ation of the self guarantees a visual identity and establishes a link people make between what something looks like on the outside versus what it looks like on the inside. Self presentation is therefore a strategic way to exhibit and harvest attention, status, and social capital which tangibly translates into material rewards. For freelancers, contractors, consultants, or job applicants, self promotion is necessary to distinguish themselves from others and thus stand out in the competitive job market (Gehl, 2011). In this process, strategically appealing to followers becomes a carefully calculated way to market oneself as a commodity in response to employment uncertainty (Lair, Sullivan & Cheney, 2005 as cited in Khedar, 2013). This research question sought to bring another dimension to understanding MKBHD's vlogs by identifying and analysing how he promotes the salable self he has created to reach more YouTube audiences.

The data revealed that, MKBHD brands and promotes himself through; *giveaways, collaborations, and promotion of multiple social media accounts.*

Creators now participate in self promotion to create impressions of competence (Turnley & Bolino, 2001). This can be likened to Jones and Pittman's, (1982) taxonomy of impression management strategies, where creators use self promotion to capture attention to their abilities or accomplishments because they want audiences to see them as competent. They make claims that influence others to see them as competent. For example, prosumers may give positive accounts of themselves, brag, or name drop to make themselves look good. YouTube is not left out in this strategy to grow and keep audiences.

4.2.1 Giveaways

The strategic use of giveaways is to: either retain loyal customers or to acquire new ones (Kotler, 1997). Further, the chief purpose of a giveaway is to attract interest to a c

company or brand and create excitement in the marketplace (Schultz, Robinson & Peterson, 1998). For example, in the world of music, retailers raffle off major concert tickets or a large prize to give customers a feel good moment and to contribute to word of mouth advertising as people tell others about the opportunity. Also, when new movies also come out for home entertainment, companies and advertising firms often offer contest promotions through radio, television, and online media. This attracts attention toward the new product launch.

MKBHD uses giveaways to promote his brand, generate interest, and grow his viewership. Right from the beginning, MKBHD understood the use of giveaways, in the excerpt below he uses giveaways to grow his viewership:

I have 74 subscribers so I was thinking I would do some sort of subscriber milestone giveaway whether it's 200 or 150 whatever seems realistic I will do a giveaway. All you have to do to be entered in my giveaway is just to be subscribed to my channel that's it. So just you might as well hit that button it's, it's, not that wrong so go ahead and enter my giveaways. All my giveaways just by hitting that subscribe button

MKBHD – Update 1.0! (February 18, 2009)

He also uses giveaways to generate and sustain interest in his vlogs as seen below:

...uh before we get into it though, there is a little bit of a giveaway at the end of this video so definitely stay tuned for that if you want to win some of this stuff.

MKBHD – What's in my Tech Bag! [2020] (November 30, 2020)

The excerpt above shows MKBHD urging viewers to stay tuned till the end of the video for a chance to win a giveaway. Viewers who would have otherwise skipped this video are enticed to stay and watch the eleven minutes video to the end in order to get the information regarding how to participate.

According to Palmer (2004), giveaways as a sales promotion tool is distinctive, because they offer additional incentive to buy or subscribe to a service. Thorne (2011), also points out that promotional products have an important characteristic that exceeds all other forms of advertising which is their staying power. Promotional products are products which can be used for a long time and every time the customers use the product they are being reminded of the company. Lastly, Carlton and Blaise, (2004) assert that, “promotional products hold the key to quantifying the performance of every marketing medium you see. In short, you can use them to keep all of your other advertising honest!” (p.7). The advantages to giveaways as stated above helps MKBHD in promoting his vlogs.

4.2.2 Collaborations

Collaboration is when two or more entities team up to create something together that will have mutual business value for everyone involved. It's mostly used as a type of marketing where brands work with other brands or individuals to create something new, interesting, or more valuable than what the individual could create alone. Collaborations help brands reach more people, increase credibility, create content, or generate sales.

Collaboration has been a great tool for growing MKBHD's personal brand.

"The best technology reviewer on the planet right now."

Vic Gundotra (August 2013)

This statement made by Vic Gundotra the former Vice President of Google opened many doors for MKBHD to collaborate with several brands.

For example:

Figure 11 MKBHD interviews Bill Gates.

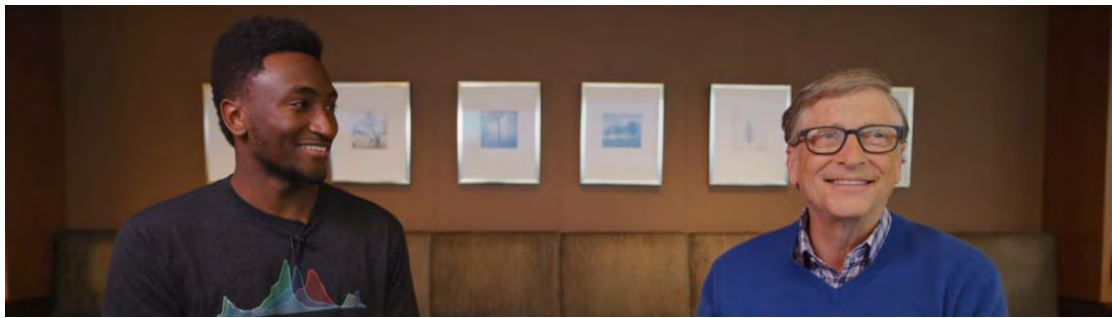


Figure 12 MKBHD interviews Elon Musk.



Figure 13 MKBHD interviews Kobe Bryant.



These collaborations have helped re enforce and solidify his brand as a tech enthusiast and an athlete.

Aaker and Keller (1990) on brand extensions revealed that co branding arrangements form positive consumer perceptions about a particular brand. A consistent finding in brand collaboration research is that a well known, reputable brand improves consumers evaluation of an unknown brand (Keller, 2001)

It can therefore be deduced that, by teaming up with these other reputable individuals, he has essentially shared their reputation which by extension builds his own. Lastly, c

collaborations like this automatically put him in front of new audiences, which helps him grow his reach and build a larger audience over time.

4.2.3 Promotion of multiple social media accounts

Another pattern that emerged while analysing the data was the promotion of multiple social media accounts. Two things can be drawn from this theme. Firstly, the fact that MKBHD promotes multiple social media sites through the content he posts implies that when building a personal brand on social media, being active on just one site is not enough. Secondly, the findings suggest that self promotion, that is, promoting one's social media accounts, is important when building a personal brand on social media. Altogether, these two factors can be summarized and understood as the importance of visibility.

That is, by being present and active on several social media sites it is likely that MKBHD is able to increase both his reach and visibility. For example, in one of his videos MKBHD says:

thank you for your questions I think this was fun to do the video style I think we'll probably do that more in the future stay tuned on Twitter for when I asked for when we do these and you can submit your questions there

MKBHD – Ask MKBHD V35! (May 1, 2019)

So, let's say that 'Ike', who has 200 followers on Twitter, watches MKBHD's video and decides to follow up on the request by tweeting a response to MKBHD. When Andy does this, he contributes to increasing MKBHD's visibility, because Ike's tweet will show up in the feed of his 200 Twitter followers. Out of these 200 followers, let's say that five persons become curious and decide to go on MKBHD's YouTube channel and check out the video. Now, five persons is not an impressive number; however, if w

we consider that for every ten persons that respond to MKBHD with a tweet the potential number of new subscribers is 50 persons, the effect becomes clearer.

Considering that MKBHD currently has over 10 million subscribers on YouTube, it is easy to grasp why the promotion of one's own social media accounts could have a positive effect in terms of increased visibility and reach.

Moreover, by being present on several social media platforms and encouraging the viewers to follow his channels, MKBHD is able to stay visible to his audience in another way as well.

If the viewers follow MKBHD on all his social media accounts, the viewers will likely be subjected to his content and communication frequently, because it will show up in their social media feeds. In other words, MKBHD manages to stay visible and 'top of mind' among his viewers. According to Arruda (2009, p.410), this is another important part of building a personal brand, as "strong brands are constant – always visible to members of the target group – regardless of the setting".

Thus, while MKBHD establishes his personal brand by being loyal to his brand character, it seems that, by encouraging his viewers to subscribe to his channel and follow him on other social media sites, he also actively enforces his personal brand. That is, through his content MKBHD makes an effort to ensure that his brand is constantly visible to the outside world, which in turn enables him to increase his reach and grow his audience.

4.3 RQ. 3. How does MKBHD maintain the brand image of his vlogs?

Khedar (2013) asserts that a well performed act leads viewers to ascribe a self to the performed character or persona. Brand image depends on information posted by the foc

al person, information posted by others, and the marketplace reaction to the presented information, which generally is based on visible behaviour, nonverbal behaviour, and other observable cues (Joinson & Vasalou, 2009 as cited in Khedar, 2013). Personal branding requires individuals to take control of the process that affects how they are perceived by their audience or community of people interested in their actions. This helps in the management of the strategic processes that aid in achieving their personal and professional goals.

The creators of personal brands depend on their experience and feedback, together with comparisons of their self-stated branding goals to that of written statements and personality judgements to determine whether they have achieved their branding goals (Lair, Sullivan & Cheney, 2005). Moving forward, creators can fine-tune subsequent errors in their strategies and performing actions to best fit the existing audience; or target a different audience. A rather risky decision will be showing indifference towards the reviews as being ill-informed or wrong.

There is therefore the need for continued maintenance of online brands as they begin to exist autonomously on online platforms. This research question was posed to understand how MKBHD responds to feedback from his viewers.

4.3.1 Responsive to feedback

There's very little to no data-driven approach to making his videos. The comments of subscribers indicating what they like, enjoy, questions they need addressing or requests that he provides more detail on a certain subject often inform his videos. From the analysis of MKBHD's vlogs, it was revealed that he addresses his audience regularly and welcomes feedback. By doing so he builds relationships through his content on YouTube and other social media platforms. Even though the scope of this thesis does not

include observation of MKBHD's activity on Twitter and Instagram it was clear to the researcher, that he involves his audience through 'Ask MKBHD' a 'Question & Answers' (Q&A) session, he hosts on his YouTube channel. He interacts with his viewers by answering questions and asking them to provide their own opinion or advice or asking what the audience would like to see in the upcoming videos. The excerpt below is from his first ever Ask MKBHD Q&A:

...This is a Q&A video. Now fun fact I used to be completely against Q&A videos at all. I feel like you know if someone has a question, I'll just answer it if someone has a comment, I'll just answer the comment. But inevitably there's a few like hot questions that just come in over and over and over and over again and no matter how many times I answer the comment it'll pop up again because someone else wants to know and they didn't see it. So, that's what these Q&A videos are going to be for they're going to be answering the persistent questions that are pretty much trending I guess that are people asking me on Twitter or on Facebook or on Google⁺ or in the comments section of a bunch of videos in a row so let's go ahead and get to those.

MKBHD Ask MKBHD VI! (March 16, 2014)

The above excerpt is what Arruda (2009) refers to as responsiveness. According to Arruda (2009) responsiveness is one of the most important qualities for a communicator or professional in today's world. The need to be flexible enough to respond to current events, technological changes and client needs is unparalleled. Failure to do so can lead to the collapse of productive relationships with one's audience. Biel (1997) as cited in Fill (2005) emphasizes the importance of brands' interactions with consumers as it helps build strong relationships. This also corresponds to how MKBHD interacts with his audience. For example:

Question: Do you own a dog? Because you should.

Response: I don't own a dog mostly because if I were to like leave and go like on a trip for ultimate or school or something, I would not have any place to keep that dog because you know you kind of have to feed it and walk it and stuff that's pretty important. But I think in a later time I will probably end up getting a dog or cat or something that I can pet.

MKBHD Ask MKBHD V3! (July 24, 2014)

By the 2nd of November 2014 which is barely six months in the same year, he got a dog as he had earlier stipulated. Now, this is a fairly short time for a person who didn't previously own a pet to make such a long term commitment. The dog has since then appeared in several of his vlogs. Figure 13 shows a picture of Mac and MKBHD in one of his videos.

Figure 14 MKBHD's dog Mac.



By addressing or involving the audience, it is likely that MKBHD masters and creates more personal and authentic ties between him and his audience. This can lead to the audience's impression of knowing MKBHD very well and even feeling like they are a part of his personal brand, although the relationship is only virtual. Further, MKBHD involves or encourages his audience to co create, showing that he cares about his audience (i.e., he responds to their requests). Below is an exemplar:

Question: Can you do a behind the scenes video showing how you make videos?

Response: Yeah, so, this is something I've considered doing for a little bit. Mostly haven't done it yet because it's really hard to like do a behind the scenes of how I'm making an actual video when I don't have someone to shoot me making a video. So, it would be like me making a fake video while I make a real video about how I make the fake video, kind of difficult. I don't know leave a thumbs up if you like want to see something like that. Like how the videos become what they are sort of tutorial, I guess but it's something I've considered and I think it might be an interesting topic at least to cover.

MKBHD Ask MKBHD V3! (July 24, 2014)

Also, by involving his audience in cocreation, he is able to build relationships and also maintain his personal brand.

Question: Once the studio is done are you going to do a tour of it?

Response: I kind of liked the idea of it and actually kind of need a use for a 360 degree video and I was thinking maybe thumbs up below if you like the idea, I was thinking of a 360 degree video of the tour where I like to walk around the camera and show you stuff and I don't know seems like a cool idea but anyway yes, I probably will do a full tour one of the things done

MKBHD –Ask MKBHD V9 Building a Studio! (May 13, 2016)

This can be partially linked to brand image (Roper & Fill, 2012; de Chernatony & McDonald, 2003; Labrecque, Markos & Milne, 2011), which is the branding concept that covers the brand relationship and image management.

Even though he encourages co creation, MKBHD is on all occasions the decision maker and the one who ultimately decides what will be included in his videos. That is to say that, only things, that align with his personal brand are accepted. And he enjoys using

ng hype and suspense to create attention on his vlogs. For example, no one knew what the 'K' in MKBHD stood for.

Viewers kept searching:

Question: What's up with Kumar?

Response: This is kind of a long story, but not really, some of you guys have seen that video where there's like "10 facts about Marques Brownlee that you didn't know" and one of them is that my middle name is apparently Kumar. Which is funny because first of all, it's not. But I know exactly where that guy got that from which is if you go to one of those like Quora like question and answer sites, where someone asked what is Marques Brownlee's middle name? Someone came up with this flawless logic to explain why it must be Kumar.

MKBHD – First Video and Pixels: Ask MKBHD V11! (November 4, 2016)

And asking:

Question: What does the 'K' stand for? #1000VideoSpecial.

Response: The 'K' in MKBHD I think we'll save for another milestone, how about that.

MKBHD – I've Made 1000 Videos! Ask MKBHD V26! (March 29, 2018)

Question: Can you reveal what the "K" in "MKBHD" stands for at seven million subscribers?

Response: Naah, how about ten (10), how about ten (10)? If we add a digit, I'll tell you. How about that?

MKBHD – iPhone Xr Specs Letdown? Ask MKBHD V32! (September 27, 2018)

Upon achieving the 10 million subscriber's milestone he stayed true to his words and did a big reveal of his middle name. He used this suspense marketing strategy to create a buzz among his viewers and create a viral hype. This is a form of scarcity marketi

ng where MKBHD limits the supply of personal information to boost suspense. Per human psychology, the process of transforming suspense into anxiety and then revealing the hidden agenda carries a strong stimulus (Sexton, 2011). This is done to draw adequate attention from the target audience.

4.4 Summary

This chapter presented the findings, discussions, and analysis of the study. It began by answering the first research question which sought to examine the unique brand values of MKBHD's vlogs. The identity construction and Goffman's presentation of the self were used to interrogate this question and it was concluded that MKBHD branded himself as *a tech enthusiast, a storyteller, an entrepreneur, a transparent person, and an athlete*. Secondly, the brand strategies used by MKBHD to promote the value of his vlogs were analysed and it was revealed that he uses; *giveaways, collaborations, and promotion of multiple social media accounts to communicate the value of his vlogs*. Finally, the study concluded that MKBHD maintains his brand image by comparing his personally stated brand goals with feedback from his viewers. By responding to feedback he created a personal and authentic relationship between himself and his audience .

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the summary of the analysis based on the objectives of the study which are to examine the unique brand values of MKBHD's vlogs, to analyse the brand strategies MKBHD uses to promote the value of his vlogs, and to examine how MKBHD maintains the brand image of his vlogs. Conclusions and recommendations are also discussed in this chapter.

5.1 Summary

In order to answer the questions posed in this thesis, an extensive literature review was conducted which served as a foundation for exploring the phenomenon. The literature discussed online targeting practices, the affordances of social media, YouTube, and its growing influence, the concept of branding, and personal branding as a strategy for targeting. The theories of Identity Construction and Goffman's (1959) presentation of self was used to expound the data.

Goffman's theory of self presentation proved relevant even though it was propounded before the advent of social media because social media users appropriate the platforms as their frontstage whereas any other space aside from social media becomes their backstage. It came to bear that users manage the impressions others have of them by their frontstage acts (creating and editing videos) and efficaciously staging their performances (uploading an edited video). These theories enabled me to make sense of the data collected.

The research approach and design for this study were qualitative (Lindlof & Taylor, 2017) and qualitative content analysis (Altheide & Schneider, 2013). These provided the researcher with the opportunity to probe deeper into the phenomenon in a natural setting. MKBHD was selected based on this criterion hence the relevance of purposive sampling (Daymon & Holloway, 2011). Finally, the researcher's content analysed the data. This method of data analysis was deemed appropriate since a large chunk of the data was extracted through document analysis (Bowen, 2009).

5.2 Conclusion

The key findings that were discovered upon analysing the data to answer the research questions led to several conclusions.

Firstly, his study suggests that MKBHD creates and builds his brand through content by employing various performance principles. Research question one which sought to examine the unique brand values of MKBHD's vlogs revealed that MKBHD presents himself as *a tech enthusiast, a storyteller, an entrepreneur, a transparent person, and an athlete*. Through these, it became clear that MKBHD constructs, modifies, and promotes multiple identities through his social media use in order to stay relevant and remain appealing for the consumption of his viewers. The data also revealed that MKBHD is skilled at being consistent with his branded content and as a result comes across as authentic.

Secondly, research question two which sought to analyse the brand strategies MKBHD uses to promote the value of his vlogs discovered that he uses; *giveaways, collaborations, and promotion of multiple social media accounts* to communicate the value of his vlogs. This presupposes that it was imperative that he made his brand constantly visible to his viewers and by doing so, MKBHD enforces his brand among his audience.

This was seen to be important because the wider audience he has, the more attention he is able to attract.

Lastly, the study examined how MKBHD maintains the brand image of his vlogs and the data revealed that he is *responsive to feedback*. This image of MKBHD is shaped by how he relates to his viewers. Because by relating with his viewers, he is able to assess the interpretation others put on his acts and compare his self stated brand goal with the feedback he gets. Examination of the data revealed that he regularly addresses his audiences and encourages co creation which creates a strong bond between them.

Drawing from the theories of identity construction and Goffman's presentation of self, it was concluded that the identity of the MKBHD is constructed, modified, and affirmed on social media as identity is fluid and multiple in nature. Also, Goffman's presentation of self was seen at play in how he prepares behind the scenes (where the audience is absent) before staging his performances on YouTube (in front of an audience) so as to stage a favourable character.

In conclusion, all the preparations MKBHD goes through before sharing a post and the management of the multiple identities that are given off are all geared towards the creation of a professional brand out of himself.

5.3 Limitations

This thesis sought to investigate how MKBHD has created and built a personal brand through his content. However, the study encountered a few limitations.

The limitation relates to the overall concern of all qualitative methods, namely subjectiveness. Qualitative research has been criticised for being too subjective as it ultimately is the researcher's worldview and understandings of the phenomenon that forms the

conclusion (Bryman & Bell, 2015). That is, the act of drawing valuable information from the empirical material heavily relies on the interpretations made by the researcher.

A major drawback I faced was difficulty in reaching MKBHD for an interview. Efforts to reach him on his socials and through email proved futile. So I resorted to using a segment on his vlogs called behind the scenes where he reveals how he films the vlogs, the equipments he uses and the overall strategies for scripting his vlogs. This was complimented with another segment called the AskMKBHD which is basically a Q&A session for his frequently asked questions FAQ.

However, these limitations did not take away the credibility of the study as it has implications for further studies

5.4 Suggestions for further research

In view of the opportunities and challenges the researcher had while reviewing literature and collecting data for the study, the researcher makes the following suggestions for future research so that the knowledge base of social media users will be increased and also serve as a repository for researchers.

This thesis is based on the investigation of content posted on the social media site YouTube. And the results of the research are arguably transferrable and equally relevant when it comes to personal branding on other social media sites, it could be fruitful to conduct a study that considers the content published by personally branded individuals on other social media sites. This is due to the fact that the present research revealed that YouTubers utilize several social media sites in order to brand themselves.

Also investigating the content posted on multiple social media sites by the personally branded individual could possibly provide an even deeper and more cohesive understanding

nding of the phenomenon, as it would allow researchers to compare how individuals adapt their personally branded content to various social media sites.

Furthermore, the scope of this thesis was narrowed to the investigation of content posted by MKBHD, and only him. However, since the research revealed that MKBHD is active in involving his viewers by encouraging co creation, it could be argued that research that includes the investigation of the audience's comments is beneficial. This type of addition to the present thesis could potentially provide valuable insights into how the audience perceives and responds to the content of personally branded individuals and, consequently, enhance the understanding of how personally branded individuals build their brand through co creation.

5.5 Recommendations

The following recommendations are made based on the findings of the study.

As explained in chapter two of this thesis, social media has shifted value production and power away from the producers to the consumer. In this sense, successful YouTubers, who have millions of subscribers, are arguably more influential in shaping brands image than the companies who own the brand. Therefore, the researcher recommends that marketing managers of brands need to stay aware of what is being said about their brands by successful YouTubers and other branded personalities on social media with a wide audience. Marketing professionals should acknowledge that such an audience can be considered as a strong community, following and supporting the YouTuber when needed. It is possible that a successful YouTuber can turn not only an individual but an entire community either in favour or against a company, which can significantly impact its reputation and consequently its sales.



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