

SOCIAL MEDIA, CROWDSOURCING AND CITIZEN SENSING

Written assessment

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The downsides of YouTube's Haul Culture

From US presidential campaigns to the release of Justin Bieber's "Baby", video-sharing platform, and global phenomenon, YouTube has come a long way since co-founder Jawed Karim posted its very first video, entitled "Me at the Zoo" in April 2005.¹ YouTube is no longer a platform for just video-sharing, it is the ultimate tool for advertising. Every heard of a so-called haul? Let me enlighten you. One of the latest trends in the world of online shopping are shopping hauls; videos where Bloggers and YouTubers film themselves talking about their latest purchases. Following the rise of influencer marketing, more and more brands are using social media personalities to increase the awareness of their brands. Whether it is smart toys, gadgets or clothing, YouTubers flaunting their piles of newly purchased products, and at times offering their subscribers discount codes, is a thing. It could be argued that shopping hauls encourage abnormal spending habits. However, with an increasing number of delivery trucks on our roads, it is even more important to recognize the environmental impacts that the habits of our online shopping have on our planet.

On September 25th, 2018, American Fitness model and YouTuber Daisy Keech posted "LOUNGE UNDERWEAR TRY ON HAUL I DAISYKEECH". As of January 2019, it had been viewed over 26,5 million times.² To compare, former President Barack Obama's 2011 roasting of successor Donald Trump has been viewed 19 million times. Furthermore, British YouTube personalities, such as Zoella, Patricia Bright and Jordan Lipscombe, spend hundreds of British pounds on excessive amounts of clothing weekly. At times, YouTubers and other influencers are offered free products or payment, to present certain products on their social media platforms. Then, through sponsored hauls or posts on Instagram, they can offer their subscribers discount codes, as a method of increasing sales.

Whilst the occasional Sunday evening skim through Yankee Candle tea lights on Amazon.com is somewhat harmless, it is the encouragement of unnecessary spending that is dangerous. For instance, it could be argued that when Patricia Bright posted her clothing haul, titled

¹ <https://www.businessinsider.com/key-turning-points-history-of-youtube-2013-2?r=US&IR=T>

² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KUvu6gup8sc>

“TRYING £1000 WORTH OF CLOTHING FROM AMAZONS NEW CLOTHING BRAND, 'FIND' SIS IS CONFUSED DOE?”,³ she was hoping that her subscribers would visit Amazon.com’s website through her affiliate links, rather than typing their URL into the web browser themselves.

Through the use of affiliate links to advertise products, YouTubers and Bloggers have the opportunity to earn money. But what are affiliate links? According to Techopedia: “Affiliate marketing involves a company that recruits affiliates to sell its products or services online. When affiliates sign up at the provider's website, they are provided with a specific link to that website. When visitors to the affiliate's site click on the advertisements and go to the advertiser's site, the affiliate may receive a commission if that click leads to a sale”.⁴ According to The Advertising Standards Authority’s “Influencer’s Guide”, influencers have the responsibility to inform their audience if certain posts or videos are advertising. “When your content promotes particular products, or services and contains a hyperlink or discount code that means you get paid for every ‘click- through’ or sale that can be tracked back to your content, this counts as advertising [...] For affiliate ads, you are effectively acting as a secondary advertiser so you need to make sure that your content follows all of the relevant rules, not just the ones on making clear that it’s advertising”.⁵

With YouTube being an exceedingly popular platform amongst millennials and Generation Z, it could be assumed that the phenomenon of influencer marketing and hauls has a larger impact on children, teenagers and young adults. Therefore, it is important to be aware that parading excessive piles of products, such as make-up and clothing, could present these with an abnormal idea of what “normal” spending entails. According to Comscore’s study: “Many millennials exhibit a more favorable response to brands that earn their loyalty and are relevant. 62% of Millennials indicated they take action after viewing an ad and 47% said they pay more attention when viewing personalized ads”.⁶

In Royal Mail’s 2018 Delivery Matter report, it was revealed that UK online shoppers make 80% of their retail purchases online, an increase of 6% since 2017. Over a period of three

³ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vEBMxR2NR_o&t=11s

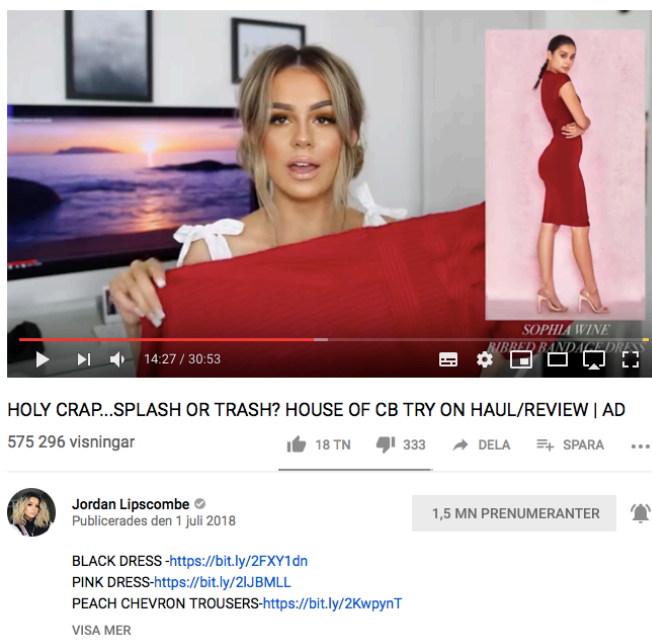
⁴ <https://www.techopedia.com/definition/1397/affiliate-link>

⁵ <https://www.asa.org.uk/uploads/assets/uploaded/3af39c72-76e1-4a59-b2b47e81a034cd1d.pdf>

⁶ <https://www.comscore.com/fre/Insights/Blog/What-Millennials-YouTube-Usage-Tells-Us-about-the-Future-of-Video-Viewership>

months, the survey found that 1 out of 4 of all online shoppers are paying for delivery subscription. In addition, the average online shopper spends £40 per month on clothing, with 55% of female shoppers purchasing clothing online.⁷ Following the rise of online retailers, such as ASOS and Boohoo, the increase of online shoppers does not come as a surprise. With premium memberships that offer cheap next day delivery, many consumers prefer shopping from the comfort of their home. In the article “Can you be sustainable if you're into fast fashion online?”, BBC Newsbeat reports on the increasing popularity of online shopping: “There's no doubt that online fast fashion is booming. PrettyLittleThing and Nastygal fashion labels reported a 50% rise in sales in the six months to August 2018. Boohoo's social media followers have also soared. The brand now has 6.3 million followers on Instagram, a 200% rise in the last 12 months. It has 1.4 million followers on Facebook”.⁸

Paid partnerships are extremely common around Black Friday – the national day of shopping. According to InfluencerDB.com, consumers are “relying on recommendations from influencers”, as well as using the social media hashtag #blackfriday to find the best deals. “The #blackfriday hashtag was used more than 72k times on Thanksgiving and Black Friday and more than 126k times during the entire week”.⁹



In Jordan Lipscombe’s “HOLY CRAP... SPLASH OR TRASH? HOUSE OF CB TRY ON HAUL/REVIEW | AD”, the YouTuber reviews products from British clothing brand “House of CB”, worth over £600.¹⁰ As of early January 2019, the clothing haul has been viewed over 500 thousand times. Praising the brand, Lipscombe is encouraging her audience to have a look at their website, if they “fancy treating themselves”.

⁷ <https://www.royalmailgroup.com/en/press-centre/press-releases/royal-mail/online-shoppers-in-the-uk-make-80-of-their-retail-purchases-online-up-from-74/>

⁸ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/newsbeat-45766366>

⁹ <https://blog.influencerdb.com/influencer-marketing-black-friday-2017/>

¹⁰ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=81dt1aMkTqc>

“Unboxing” videos. Whilst haul videos are filmed to present and review products, unboxing videos are filmed to display the YouTuber’s first impression when opening the actual parcel that the product is delivered in. The Outline writer Alex Nichols explains: “That unboxing videos exist at all would seem to expose one of the most uncomfortable truths of consumer culture, and of human psychology in general — that the anticipation of buying a product is often more gratifying than actually having it. The act of watching *someone else* buy and open something you want tricks the brain into releasing dopamine in the same way opiates mimic the natural endorphins of a runner's high”.¹¹

Another key point to remember is “targeted advertising”. Throughout the years, targeted advertising has become increasingly popular. “Tracking technologies like web cookies are collecting information about our browsing activities from site to site. Marketers and ad tech companies compile that data to target us across our devices. And trackers are now so sophisticated that they can see when you are thinking about buying something but don’t follow through — so they tell the ads to chase you around so you make the purchase”, explains Brian X. Chen.¹² Although somewhat far-fetched, it is worth mentioning that many overly sponsored brands most likely use targeted advertising as a method of advertisement.

In the mid 2010’s, the popularity of online e-commerce companies, such as “Wish”, increased immensely. Founded by former Google programmers Peter Szulczewski and Danny Zhang, the Ebay and Amazon competitor sells cheap goods, manufactured in Asia.¹³ Following its success, YouTubers started filming “Wish” hauls, spending hundreds of pounds on anything from fake iPhones to clothing. Reviewing the – usually – unnecessary items they have purchased for pennies, many YouTubers are seemingly unaware of the poor working conditions most Asian factory employees are working in. “Trying to escape from extreme poverty, rural migrant workers find themselves trapped in appalling working conditions. Most of these workers are women earning extremely low wages – the average monthly salary including overtime is CNY 1,690 (£150). Migrant workers endure long working days, work seven days a week, many without an employment contract and face constant discrimination [...] Women migrant workers, who are primarily employed in factories, rarely get maternity leave, and with no childcare facilities and working weeks of more than 70 hours many are

¹¹ <https://theoutline.com/post/1356/the-relentless-consumerism-of-unboxing-videos?zi=3y43q3tq&zd=3>

¹² <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/08/15/technology/personaltech/stop-targeted-stalker-ads.html>

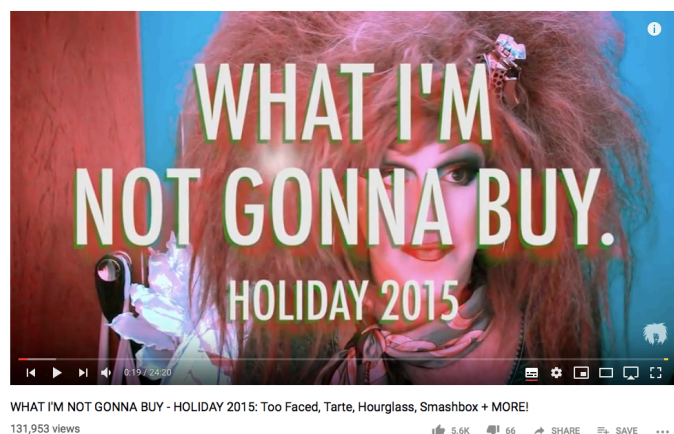
¹³ <https://thehustle.co/wish-founder-peter-szulczewski>

forced to send their children to live with family in the countryside”, explains War on Want.¹⁴ In addition, being the world’s largest producer of textiles, China’s environmental footprint is staggering. According to the Financial Times, China’s carbon emission increased by 4% in the first quarter of 2018.¹⁵ Shipping countless parcels of cheap clothing to the West undoubtedly does not improve the ever-increasing number.

Of course, hauls can be useful as well. For instance, before purchasing an item of clothing, it would be helpful to know whether it is true to size or not. In clothing hauls, YouTubers often describe their usual size, comparing it to the items in the haul. As a result, I believe consumers are more likely to purchase the right size, rather than exchanging or returning it. Moreover, it could be argued that partnerships with YouTubers can help brands to improve their products. The YouTuber’s opinion – if honest, as well as comments from subscribers, could provide brands with a better understanding of the needs and preferences of their consumers.

Furthermore, it could be suggested that YouTubers, in general, are encouraging more teenagers and young adults to become entrepreneurs themselves. According to The Huffington Post and Gen Z marketing strategist Deep Patel, 72% of teenagers would like to start a business someday. As Patel explains: “The newly developing high tech and highly networked world has resulted in an entire generation thinking and acting more entrepreneurially”.¹⁶ However, whether YouTubers have contributed to these numbers or not, remains unclear.

In 2015, as a result of spiralling over-consumption, drag queen YouTuber Kimberly Clarke introduced her subscribers to so-called “anti-hauls”. In contrast to regular hauls, Clarke films anti-hauls to list products she is not going to purchase. In “WHAT I’M NOT GONNA BUY – HOLIDAY 2015: Too Faces, Tarte, Hourglass, Smashbox + MORE!”, Kimberly explains: “They [the YouTubers] talk about how much you need things, how



¹⁴ <https://www.waronwant.org/sweatshops-china>

¹⁵ <https://www.ft.com/content/98839504-6334-11e8-90c2-9563a0613e56>

¹⁶ https://www.huffingtonpost.com/george-beall/8-key-differences-between_b_12814200.html

important these products are for your life, and all this stuff. So, I'm basically going to be talking about how much you don't need things!".¹⁷ Following Clarke's first anti-haul, it has become somewhat of a trend on YouTube. Rather than encouraging their subscribers to spend copious amounts of money on expensive, and overly sponsored, high-end products, anti-haul YouTubers provides them with budget-friendly alternatives.

To conclude, the video-sharing platform, and global phenomenon, YouTube has changed massively throughout the years. From the broadcasting of sports events and presidential debates, to make-up tutorials and shopping hauls, the platform has something for everyone. It could be argued that the viral trends of hauls and unboxing videos are normalizing an unhealthy habit of spending. As the majority of YouTube viewers are children, teenagers and young adults, caution should always be taken. Furthermore, it is important to be aware that over consumption is rather dangerous for the environment, and should not be encouraged. Nevertheless, it has been suggested that the success of YouTubers and other entrepreneurs is inspiring young people to start their own businesses. Whether this statement is true or not, it is very refreshing to see that young people are interested in utilizing their innovative skills and building their own businesses.

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¹⁷ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U4x0KZ49UwU&t=18s>

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