FROM HERO TO ZERO?

Navigating in an online culture of social media platforms, subscribers, views, and online identities.

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June 3rd 2019

Abstract

This study has the purpose of investigating the social media platform YouTube and the controversies (or scandals) that several popular YouTubers have been involved in within the last couple of years. The study centers around two main cases, the first case being Logan Paul and the Suicide Forest video controversy and the second case centers around racism in the beauty community on YouTube with YouTubers Jeffree Star and Laura Lee and their racist comments as case material.

Due to social media platforms being a significant part of modern society, the influencers/YouTubers on social media platforms hold a special value in the society which makes them and their online behavior relevant in relation to investigating the digital literacy on these platforms. With social media offering platforms for the individual to portray themselves in an online space, the ability to create a social media identity as well as communicate this identity to a large group of social media platform users is interesting to investigate. The theoretical background for this study contains an introduction to media literacy as well as the main focus on digital literacy which contains topics such as digital identity, digital culture, digital immigrants/natives, etc. This online culture-based study has been investigating in an online space which means that the method of collecting analytical material is based on a netnographic approach. This means that the analytical material is based on YouTube videos posted by and about the key figures of the case material and online articles in order to keep track of timelines and information of already deleted YouTube videos. By working within the online space of the social media platform YouTube, without interacting directly with the case material, the research role has functioned as a 'fly on the wall' approach in order to investigate the online culture without partaking in the online discussions on the platform.

The creation of a social media identity as a popular YouTuber is inevitable both due to the pressure of staying relevant within the platform and in relation to being able to create entertaining or informing content for the subscribers and viewers of the videos. As well as the online culture of going viral and creating popular content within an online space where the struggle to stay relevant and successful is dependent on the continuity of the content posted by the YouTuber. This not only creates pressure to create and post content frequently, but it also leads to controversies when these content creators are overstepping the lines or pushing the limits too far. Therefore, the online fieldwork proves that the digital tools for digital natives as well as immigrants have a significant role in the online culture and holds immense value in the technological age.

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1.Introduction

YouTube, YouTube, YouTube, the social media interest of 2018 was all about YouTube and the scandals and controversies created by the platforms popular content creators – but what is so interesting about this social media platform and the users thereof? According to the website Webwise, YouTube is "[…] a video sharing service where users can watch, like, share, comment and upload their own videos" (Explained: What is YouTube?). Within the YouTube environment, a new term has arisen and popular content creators on this social media platform now refer to themselves as 'YouTubers'. According to the Oxford Dictionary, a 'YouTuber' is a person "[…] who uploads, produces, or appears in videos on the video-sharing website YouTube" (Oxford Dictionary: YouTuber). As seen on other social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram, being an influencer can in modern culture become a fulltime job as the popularity and following, or as YouTube defines it, subscribers, increases.

As mentioned, 2018 was quite an eventful year on the YouTube platform and a lot of the platforms popular YouTubers ended up in scandalous situations. This controversial year on YouTube started off with the Youtuber Logan Paul uploading a controversial video of a deceased man on a trip to the Aokigahara forest in Japan, better known as the Suicide Forest, and uploaded the video to his YouTube channel 'Logan Paul vlogs' for his subscribers to see. As the online YouTube news outlet, *We The Unicorns* wrote in an article about *'5 YouTube scandals that rocked the community in 2018'*, "Logan Paul's behaviour in Japan at the start of the year really set the mood for the rest of what would be a generally controversial year on YouTube" (Townsend). Throughout the year, YouTuber after YouTuber was confronted with their controversial or scandalous online actions from Paul and the Suicide Forest to racism and controversial apology videos to the 'YouTube Rewind' video becoming the most disliked video on the platform. And as *We The Unicorns* wrote in the article "[f]rom the miserable Logan Paul scandal that kicked off the year to the YouTube Rewind becoming the most disliked video in YouTube history, it seems that the mood online is more negative than ever before. Lovely!!!" (Townsend).

Another interesting aspect of social media and the consequences thereof is the focus on mental health and how social media can be damaging for the user's mental health. In a social media society where the social media users use various platforms to share their experiences of vacations, relationships, gifts and so on, mental health come into mind and an article called *'The Changing Position of Social Media in 2019: What Does It Mean for Marketers?'* by Eric Siu posted on the website iMPACT, the article states that "[…] studies show that younger generations have experienced 70% more depression and anxiety over the past 25 years and that social media use is heavily linked

to the increases" (Siu). According to an article on Forbs called '*New Studies Show Just How Bad Social Media Is For Mental Health*', November 16, 2018 by Alice G. Walton, a study showed that by reducing time spent on social media, the individual would feel less, lonely, depressed and would feel less anxiety (Walton). Furthermore, the article states that "[s]ome of the existing literature on social media suggests there's an enormous amount of social comparison that happens. When you look at other people's lives, particularly on Instagram, it's easy to conclude that everyone else's life is cooler or better than yours" (Walton).

Researchers have since technology became an integrated part of society in the 90s played with terms such as media literacy and digital literacy in an attempt to establish how technology in a healthy way can become a part of the individual's everyday life. Digital literacy has become a tool for educators to try and educate the young generation on how to act and interact in an online context and with social media platforms and the evolution thereof, digital literacy seems to have become a more relevant topic. But how can the older generation educate the young generation who has been born into the technological age? This new world of online (social) media have started a new culture in the modern and technological part of the world and have become a tool as well as a way to keep in touch with humanity without necessarily being face-to-face with other people. Furthermore, social media have opened the way for an influencer market in which posting on social media in today's society is seen as an actual and beneficial job for some individuals across various social media platforms.

Depending on the specific social media platform, influencers are gifted, sponsored and ambassadors for companies or specific products and this has shown to be beneficial for both the influencer and the companies. According to the article '*How and why do influencers make so much money? The head of an influencer agency explains*', November 28, 2018, Chavie Lieber posted to the site Vox.com, the article claims that "[a]ccording to the influencer management platform Traackr, 72 percent of major brands say they are dedicating a sizable portion of their marketing budgets to influencers – people with a strong relationship to an audience who can heavily sway decisions like purchasing habits" (Lieber). With influencers, companies are selling their products through influencers, and the online culture has changed significantly within the last few decades.

This leads the attention to the research interest of this study which will aim to investigate and research how YouTubers on the social media platform YouTube within the digital culture has created controversies and therefore have had to face the consequences thereof. Furthermore, it will investigate how these YouTubers' social media lives have contributed to the construction of a social media identity. Therefore, the research question is:

How does digital literacy on the social media platform YouTube challenge the digital culture and

digital identity of the individuals in the case material and why does the controversial online

behavior of these individuals seem to have such a significant influence on the YouTube culture?

2. Theory

This part of the study will focus on a theoretical part divided into three main sections; a historical overview, Media Literacy, and Digital Literacy. The third section, which centers around the term Digital Literacy, will furthermore contain six sections in order to cover aspects on the term digital literacy, identity in online communities, the panoptic understanding of the surveillance society, being a digital native/digital immigrant and lastly, the digital culture.

2.1 A Historical Overview of Literacy in Modern Media

In the book *Media Literacies: A Critical Introduction,* 2012, written by Michael Hoechsmann and Stuart R. Poyntz, they underline the fact that media literacy has contained flaws when it comes to the development of a method of media analysis "[…] or a way of thinking that speaks across the various technologies, texts, and institutions that make up contemporary media culture" (Hoechsmann & Poyntz, 1). They furthermore elaborate on how media throughout time has expanded and developed into a more complex term which seems to be "[…] in a position to see patterns that were not as clear even a decade ago, and to view a world powerfully transformed from the one of 20 years ago" (Hoechsmann & Poyntz, 2). Since this book is from 2012 and the media world is a fast-moving society, a lot has happened since 2012, the main point in Hoechsmann and Poyntz's argument of media transformation is still relevant in today's society. From TV and radio being the most prominent media in the 1990s, the internet, computers and later smartphones and apps have become the most prominent media used in today's society and that, of course, comes with both advantages and disadvantages.

The 1980s and the 1990s represent a period in time where media literacy has grown with a rapid speed and has become an era of media literacy that Hoechsmann and Poyntz have decided to name 'Media Literacy 1.0' (Hoechsmann and Poyntz, 2). During this period of history "[…] was a stage of growth in media education that focused primarily on the power and influence of broadcast media (i.e. the production of film and television studios, record labels, and corporate advertising)" (Hoechsmann & Poyntz, 2-3). During this time, the method used when handling media literacy "[…] was a critique of *representation* focused on what was being communicated (the 'texts'), by whom (the media 'industry'), and for whom (the 'audience')" (Hoechsmann & Poyntz, 3). Hoechsmann and Poyntz quote the UNESCO Grunwald Declaration from 1982 about Media Education. The quote starts with: "Rather than condemn or endorse the undoubted power of the media, we need to accept their significant impact and penetration throughout the world as an established fact, and also appreciate as an element of culture in today's world […]" (Hoechsmann & Poyntz, 3). This quote

shows that as early as 1982 when this declaration was released, modern society was interested in and willing to give the new media a chance in society. With Media Literacy 1.0, it becomes clear that the individual "[…] need to engage with issues of media production, language, representation, and audiences to address how meaning operates in the broadcast media" (Hoechsmann & Poyntz, 3). However, this seemed to enable "[…] a rich, critical, and savvy analysis of media institutions, texts, and media reception context" (Hoechsmann & Poyntz, 3).

   Michael Hoechsmann and Stuart R. Poyntz present another term called 'Media Literacy 2.000' which should be understood as the millennium (the 2000s). This centers around how communication through technology has become a part of rapid evolution in society. Hoechsmann and Poyntz states, "[t]he previous decade had seen the entry of a variety of new technologies and applications into the marketplace and a thoroughgoing transformation of others that had still been in primitive forms a decade before" (Hoechsmann & Poyntz, 4). This new form of communication was mainly based on textual communication through internet applications such as "[…] e-mail, instant messaging, and chat" (Hoechsmann & Poyntz, 4).

   Because of the new possibilities the new media forms offered, video games also became relevant to analyze in order to understand the new norms in society as well as modern culture (Hoechsmann & Poyntz, 4). Hoechsmann and Poyntz state that some of the most important questions in the 2000s were "[…] what's on the screen, who makes it, and how does the viewer respond to it?" (Hoechsmann & Poyntz, 4). However, a similar approach was used in magazines, newspapers, and radio (Hoechsmann & Poyntz, 5). Hoechsmann and Poyntz explains that throughout the decade of 2000 the "[…] interaction and participation in media consumption and production has increasingly become the norm rather than the exception" (Hoechsmann & Poyntz, 5) and that these practices are described as "[…] part of a culture of convergence" (Hoechsmann & Poyntz, 5). This is further elaborated with the fact that the change in the culture is based on "[…] where there are more opportunities for young people (and others) to express themselves through digital media, 'to transform personal reaction[s]' to images, sounds, and narratives of consumer media culture into forms of 'social interaction'" (Hoechsmann & Poyntz, 5). In other words, it becomes obvious that through technology and the new media the individual has found a new way to communicate with other individuals, whether it being a one-on-one chat in an online space or a more public form of communication on a social media platform.

2.2 Media Literacy

Michael Hoechsmann & Stuart R. Poyntz discuss, in *Media Literacies: A Critical Introduction*, 2012, the term media literacy which is described as "[…] a set of competencies that enable us to interpret media texts and institutions, to make media of our own, and to recognize and engage with social and political influence of media in everyday life" (Hoechsmann & Poyntz, 1). This is further elaborated with the suggestion that media literacy holds "[…] capacity or competence to do something with media, whether to make sense of it, to produce it or to understand its role in our societies" (Hoechsmann & Poyntz, 1). This clarifies the different layers of media literacy which, according to Hoechsmann and Poyntz, consists of: 'the receiver', 'the producer' and 'the analyzing/understanding' layer of media literacy.

These layers seem to have a connection to Stuart Hall and his 'Encoding/Decoding'-theory in relation to media studies. The encoding/decoding theory centers around how media is produced, distributed and received by the audience. In the book *Media and Cultural Studies: KeyWorKs*, 2001, in the chapter called "Encoding/Decoding" Stuart Hall writes that in relation to the television communicative process "[u]sing the analogy of *Capital*, […] is the "labour process" in the discursive mode" (Hall, 164). In this case, the production "[…] constructs the message" (Hall, 164) and Hall notes that the discursive aspect of production "[…] is framed throughout by meanings and ideas […]" (Hall, 164) thereof "[…] knowledge-in-use concerning the routines of production, historically defined technical skills, professional ideologies, institutional knowledge, definitions and assumptions, assumptions about the audience and so on frame the constitution of the programme through this production structure" (164). This is due to the fact that broadcasters rely on a media discourse that draws on "[…] topics, treatments, agendas, events, personnel, images of the audience, "definitions of the situation" from other sources and other discursive formations within the wide socio-cultural and political structure […]" (Hall, 165). However, Hall points out that the encoding message of broadcasters has to contain a meaningful discourse and that "[…] the institution-societal relations of production must pass under the discursive rules of language for its product to be "realized"" (Hall, 165). As Hall explains, before the message "[…] can have an "effect" […] satisfy a "need" or be put to a "use", it must first be appropriated as a meaningful discourse and be meaningfully decoded" (Hall, 165). Hall explains that the decoded meaning of a message can "[…] "have an effect", influence, entertain, instruct or persuade, with very complex perceptual, cognitive, emotional, ideological or behavioural consequences" (Hall, 165). This is further backed up with the fact that in "[…] a "determinate" moment the structure employs a code and yields a "message" […]" (Hall, 165) and that "[…] at another determinate moment the "message", via its decodings, issues

into the structure of social practices […]" (Hall, 165) to which Hall refers to a figure called Figure 13.1 (appendix, 1).

Hoechsmann and Poyntz mentions that the ability to engage with texts is bound to a traditional literacy in society whereas media literacy "[…] enables one to engage with a variety of multimodal texts ('texts' that may include visual, audio, and print text elements) that range from a magazine advertisement to a televised rock video, a radio talk show to a video game, a cell phone photograph to a website" (Hoechsmann & Poyntz, 1). This also means that the extent of material that is produced, received and analyzed through media literacy seems to be quite vast (Hoechsmann & Poyntz, 1). However, Hoechsmann and Poyntz indicates that one should be aware of the fact that these media "[…] includes both media texts (i.e., a newspaper, a song, a film, or a website) produced by broadcasters, filmmakers, and Web designers, and media technologies (i.e., television, film, and digital technologies such as cell phones, iPods, and digital cameras) used to produce these texts" (Hoechsmann & Poyntz, 1). This means that the understanding of the definition of media and media literacy is considered to be rather broad because of the multiple and diverse options of media elements that, through time, has evolved in and with society.

Hoechsmann and Poyntz argue that "[m]edia analysis and critique have been central to the media literacy agenda throughout its history" (Hoechsmann & Poyntz, 63) and that being able to deconstruct the technological surroundings is dependent on the ability to denaturalizing the media in society. This means that the approach aims to enrich the young and digital generation with tools "[…] to read the media critically" (Hoechsmann & Poyntz, 63). This is further explained with the fact that "[t]hroughout the study of media texts and institutions, youth are encouraged to 'deconstruct' their social and cultural environments" (Hoechsmann & Poyntz, 63). Apart from 'deconstruction', Hoechsmann and Poyntz present another term called 'demystification' which is described as "[…] the symbolic detective work of young media literacy students" (Hoechsmann & Poyntz, 63). Furthermore, either by deconstructing, denaturalizing or demystifying an important factor in order to recognize seems to be that "[…] a central project of media literacy over the years has been to provide young people with the critical conceptual tools to interpret and analyze media texts and institutions, and hence to read more critically into their social and cultural environments" (Hoechsmann & Poyntz, 63). This is an example of how society has changed and how technology has become an indispensable part of the social and the digital culture and that it is important […] to recognize that macro and micro change – major events and gradual changes – are all historical and that history is worth studying as it unfolds" (Hoechsmann & Poyntz, 64).

2.3 Digital Literacy

Technology has, without a doubt, evolved with a rapid speed since the 1990s and a new term, aside from media literacy, has arisen. Digital literacy has become a relevant aspect due to the highly active participation culture that social media platforms have planted in the online society. Therefore, this passage of the theory section will focus on defining what digital literacy is. The approach to digital literacy and the investigation thereof will focus on how the term has evolved from 2008 to 2019 in regards to how digital literacy is defined and understood. This eleven-year span has been found relevant in order to establish how society has evolved and changed through the 00s into the 10s. This section will furthermore contain subsections centering around the definition of the different aspects of digital literacy such as 'digital identity' and 'digital culture'.

2.3.1 Lankshear, Knobel – Their view on Digital Literacy

In the book *Digital Literacies: Concepts, Policies and Practice* by Colin Lankshear and Michele Knobel, 2008, Lankshear and Knobel suggests, that digital literacy should be considered plural (literacies) because "[…] there are significantly different kinds of concepts on offer" (Lankshear & Knobel, 2). However, Lankshear and Knobel extend the definition by mentioning that digital literacy involves "[…] mastering ideas, not keystrokes"(Lankshear & Knobel, 2) and explains that "[…] digital literacy is, indeed, to delineate those that emphasize mastery of ideas and insist on careful evaluation of information and intelligent analysis and synthesis, from those that provide lists of specific skills and techniques that are seen as necessary for qualifying as digitally literate" (Lankshear & Knobel, 2). Furthermore, they state that the individuals conceiving digital literacy should "primarily [be] concerned with technical skills and those who see it as focused on cognitive and socio-emotional aspects of working in a digital environment" (Lankshear & Knobel, 2).

Lankshear and Knobel also presents the definitions 'conceptual definitions of digital literacy' and 'standardized operational definitions' to which they explain how the conceptual definition offers the idea that digital literacy is "[…] couched as a general idea or ideal" (Lankshear & Knobel, 2) and that "[…] "literacy" has extended its semantic reach from meaning "the ability to read and write" to now meaning "the ability to understand information however presented […]"" (Lankshear & Knobel, 2-3). The general understanding of literacy has changed because of the technological evolution that has happened in the society which has changed the way individuals understand and process content. From reading papers, letters and such compared to today's society where the individual is able to process a variety of opportunities via the internet. Certain character traits for digitally literate people are listed as people being "[…] quick on [their] feet in moving from

one kind of medium to another […]", and knowing "[…] what kinds of expression fit what kinds of knowledge […]" as well as "[…] become skilled at presenting [their] information in the medium that [their] audience will find easiest to understand" (Lankshear & Knobel , 3). Because technology has become so ever-changing and social media platforms have entered the scene, the individual is able to portray an online persona to their fellow social media users which have created a new form of communication between individuals as well as a new way for the individual to portray a self in an online context. Lankshear and Knobel furthermore explain that "[a]ccording to this ideal, digital literacy enables us to match the medium we use to the kind of information we are presenting and to the audience we are presenting it to" (Lankshear & Knobel, 3). The standardized operational definitions offer the idea that "[…] what is involved in being digitally literate in terms of certain tasks, performances, demonstrations of skills, etc., and advance these as a *standard* for general adoption" (Lankshear & Knobel, 3).

        In the book, it is argued that in the western world where "[…] our actions are frequently mediated by digital tools, and the objects we encounter are frequently shaped by digital intervention" (Lankshear & Knobel, 151) which creates a powerful value of technology and in particular social media. An example of this is how important technological devices such as smartphones, computers, and tablets have become in order for the individual to stay up to date with news, friends, and work. Lankshear and Knobel argue that "[…] it would be wrong to think that we live in "The Digital Society," for this suggests that society is *made* by the digital, and that its essential characteristics have been created because of the development of digital technology" (Lankshear & Knobel, 151). However, it should be kept in mind that this book was written in 2008 where social media platforms such as Facebook which was founded in 2004 (Facebook Newsroom: Company Info) and YouTube, founded in 2005 (Wikipedia: YouTube), was relatively new and did not hold the same value in society as they do today.

        With social media sharing platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube, the social value of social media has become more evident since this book was written in 2008. In relation to social interaction via technology, it is argued that "[…] a human product obscures the fact that change and, indeed, technology are both products of human action and interaction, and that the relationship of technology to social change is a non-simple one" (Lankshear & Knobel, 152). Furthermore, the events in a technological origin "[…] is also a moral statement, since the blaming of human actions on technology allows humans to escape responsibility for actions which were the result of their own choices" (Lankshear & Knobel, 152). This is relatable in today's society and for this project as one of the main points seeks to investigate how society has changed when it comes to the social life on social media platforms. Lastly the idea of a 'technological revolution' is presented

based on the argument that "[…] social change is characterized by revolutions, i.e., sudden, unexpected, and simple shifts from one mode of activity to another […]" however "[…] in reality change displays more embeddedness in what came before, and all inventions have an ancestry […]" (Lankshear & Knobel, 152). Again, it is important to note that this book is from 2008 and therefore does not contain the last decade of the social media evolution in society.

2.3.2 The Pangrazio View on Digital Literacy

In the book *Young Peoples's Literacies in the Digital Age: Continuities, Conflicts and Contradictions* from 2019, written by Luci Pangrazio, digital literacy is referred to as a difficult term to define "[…] as the spaces, texts and tools which contextualise such practices are continually changing" (Pangrazio, 19) and therefore the term *'digital literacy'* has adopted a broad definition in the digital theoretical field. Pangrazio explains that while some have defined digital literacy as a "[…] semiotic activity mediated by electronic media […]" (Pangrazio, 19) others have defined it as "[…] proficiency-related lines, which involves operating digital tools and 'the ability to adapt the affordance and constraints of these tools to particular circumstances […]" (Pangrazio, 19). Moreover, digital literacy is argued to be "[…] about 'knowledge assembly' and 'how to assimilate the information, evaluate it, and reintegrate it'" (Pangrazio, 19). As to how this differs from media literacy, the difference seems to be that digital literacy centers around the use of digital platforms and the use thereof, media literacy centers around a critical view on media in general. Luci Pangrazio explains that while these different definitions have been tested in real life, "[…] there is a growing sense that none of these can account for the diverse and dispersed range of digital practices and processes of everyday life" (Pangrazio, 19). Since the technological and digital world seems to be everchanging Pangrazio underlines that researchers have expressed the need for "[…] new frameworks and approaches to study and develop these new and dynamic literacies […]" (Pangrazio, 19) in order to follow the complexity of the digital age. Another issue seems to be of defining how to be critical towards digital media which Pangrazio suggests "[…] could be considered a set of 'skills and practice' […], a form of curatorship […] or empowering consumers to shape content […]" (Pangrazio, 19).

Luci Pangrazio explains that she prefers to use the plural form of literacy (literacies) instead of the singular version because, as she expresses her acknowledgment of "[…] the multiple and varied practices young people draw on to make meaning of the world" (Pangrazio, 18). She expresses the need for a reframing of digital literacies as a critical social practice because it aims to "[…] take account of the historical as well as cross-cultural perspectives" (Pangrazio, 19). In other words, since the term seems to be so broad and since it carries a lot of meaning, both from a historical

point of view but also in particular from a cultural point of view, the term digital literacies become difficult to define. In relation to this, Pangrazio stresses the fact that "[w]hile there is a strong body of work on the digital lives of young people, particularly in sociology […] health […] and citizenship and globalization […] there has been a lack of empirically grounded, theoretically rich accounts of what young people's everyday digital experiences mean for literacies and literacies education" (Pangrazio, 18). This is evident based on the awareness of how young people gain the tools for developing "[…] a critical awareness of the language in and around their digital media use" (Pangrazio, 18).

When it comes to how one could approach digital literacy, Luci Pangrazio presents the idea that there are three main approaches when it comes to literacies which can be applied to digital texts and contexts. Pangrazio points out that "[w]hile these approaches clearly overlap, each has different points of emphasis" (Pangrazio, 19). Here Pangrazio presents the critical literacy tradition in which it is explained that "[…] a variety of models built on sociocultural perspectives of literacy and sought to contextualise digital practice within history, culture and power" (Pangrazio, 19). In this case, criticality, Pangrazio explains, is presented in order for it to be translatable when it comes to contexts and media (Pangrazio, 19). Pangrazio clarifies that the three-dimensional model of literacy consists of "[…] operational, cultural and critical dimensions […]" which create a basis for the individual to transform and produce "[…] meaning through their literacy practices" (Pangrazio, 19). However, Pangrazio identifies the ability "[…] to 'understand and manage the relationship between language and power' […] as the key concern of critical literacy" (Pangrazio, 20).

Pangrazio presents another approach of critical digital literacy which "[…] seeks to highlight the personal experience of individuals" (Pangrazio, 20). This approach weighs "politics of pleasure" (Pangrazio, 20) higher than ideology and the attention is drawn to "[…] young people's everyday use of digital texts in which a 'correct' ideological reading of these texts is less important than how they connect with learners' lives" (Pangrazio, 20). The issue however, of the contemporary forms of critical literacies "[…] is that they tend to be based around one commonly perceived reading of political correctness […]" (Pangrazio, 20) and that the individuals, therefore, end up as "[…] victims of media manipulation […]" (Pangrazio, 20). This, Pangrazio explains, happens because the essential educators end up as the gatekeepers "[…] over the knowledge and skills that will liberate them from the repressive ideologies expressed through popular media" (Pangrazio, 20).

In relation to social media, Pangrazio highlights the inter-relationships between "[…] identity, practice and networks that take place around, through and outside social media" (Pangrazio, 20). The approach centers around how an individual interact and engage with social media and in the book, this is explained with: "Critical practice in this context may be less about digital technology as an

abstract force (one that considers how it might structure our thoughts and actions) and more about an interrogation and evaluation of what we and others are actually doing on and off-live" (Pangrazio, 20). Pangrazio points out that for the majority, social media is often looked at as a pleasurable pursuit and therefore "[…] any critical practice needs to balance young people's interest […]" (Pangrazio, 21) and that when using this approach, "[…] critical literacy is […] linked to the process of shaping social identities" (Pangrazio, 21). Which means that social media and the communities within social media addresses different platform users with a purpose of entertainment and these communities thereby contribute to shaping an online and social identity.

In relation to critical digital literacy, Pangrazio expresses the importance of understanding that the focus should be on what individuals are doing with digital media rather than "[…] assessing a set of rarefied skills or capabilities" (Pangrazio, 21). When focusing on how the individual uses digital media, it shapes what Pangrazio calls 'materialities' of the media they are using, and with this Pangrazio points out that this does not only refer to "[…] physicality of hardware, software, digital objects and processes […]" (Pangrazio, 21) but also in relation to "[…] material conditions of production, including 'social relations, political context, and aesthetic experiences'" (Pangrazio, 22). Furthermore, materialities refer to "[…] the overarching system in which digital literacies are embedded, digital texts or media are where practices typically take place" (Pangrazio, 22). This means that the context and content online on social platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, Facebook and so on have an impact because of the content function as the media material where the digital literate individual is able to interact with other users as well as the content creator. This is done through like, dislike, commentary section and general interaction with other followers/subscribers.

Pangrazio argues that the term '*platform*' is "[…] both discursive, in that it shapes how users, developers and technology companies come to think about function […], *and* technical, as it refers to an architecture structured by software […]" (Pangrazio, 22). Furthermore, Pangrazio states that because of the rapid revolution in the software industry it can be a struggle to identify "[…] the challenges presented by networked digital media […]" (Pangrazio, 22). An example of this could be the dilemma with 'fake news' that during the past few years has grown to become a bigger issue on social media platforms. Pangrazio explains that just as physical news media such as magazines and papers, "[…] social media platforms seek to make a profit through users' interactions and representations" and that the "[…] information, interactions and relationships are commodified through digital platforms have implications for the kinds of social practices that take place in and around […]" (Pangrazio, 22) social media platforms. Apart from that, Pangrazio points out that "[i]n everyday life, individuals move fluidly between the ethical and the personal; the objective and the subjective; the creative and the critical" (Pangrazio, 22) and that these practices span "[…] across

digital contexts and include social, cultural and political elements" (Pangrazio, 22). In addition to that, the term 'critical digital disposition' is explained to be as "[…] encompassing a form of curatorship, as well as a degree of skepticism or even 'radical skepticism' […] in their [the individual] digital practices" (Pangrazio, 22).

2.3.3 Young People, Digital Media, and Identities

Luci Pangrazio writes in *Young People's Literacies in the Digital Age: Continuities, Conflicts and Contradictions*, 2019, that in order to understand the importance of the individual being digitally literate is connected to the enormous impact and influence that technology and especially social media platforms seem to have on the users of these platforms. This is based on a leaked document from Australia from 2017 which stated that Facebook had the ability to "[…] share details about the psychological state of teenage users with its advertising partners" (Pangrazio, 14). This means that Facebook has the ability to identify when users "[…] are feeling 'insecure', 'anxious', 'depressed', 'silly', 'useless' and 'a failure', which can help advertisers pinpoint when these young people might be interested in 'working out and losing weight' or 'needing a confidence boost' […]" (Pangrazio, 14). Pangrazio also pinpoints that this is the first time that Facebook has "[…] admitted that they collect and exploit young people's social media data" (Pangrazio, 14). The interesting fact about this is how social media data become a profitable item for companies to buy into and at the same time, it shows how fast social media have become an important part of the economic part of society. Pangrazio furthermore highlights that this becomes an issue when large-scale institutions and companies invade and influence the individual's 'privacy' with the intention to manipulate the user's opinion which "[…] are indicative of the power held by such companies" (Pangrazio, 14). Furthermore, individuals use social media to "[…] share detailed and emotional information with their friends and followers, making these platforms rich sources of personal data for the platform operators" (Pangrazio, 14).

Pangrazio presents the idea that the cultural technological change in society has made adults believe that "[…] their children are safer on social media than in 'real-life' public spaces" (Pangrazio, 14) and that this has made social media a space for individuals to "[…] develop an identity […]" (Pangrazio, 14) on social media that is destined from the 'real life'. However, it is crucial to note that even though online spaces and physical public spaces seems immensely different it is important to understand that both spaces give access to other individuals which perhaps can pose a threat or influence for the child or other individuals. Pangrazio furthermore explains that social media offers the opportunity to "[…] engage in practices that traditionally would take place in public spaces – to 'hang out, jockey for social status, work through how to present themselves, and take risks that

will help them to assess the boundaries of the social world' […]" (Pangrazio, 15). Because these digital social media platforms have become such a huge part of society Pangrazio argues that the lines and distinction between what is public and what is private becomes blurry to the individual "[…] which has raised concerns over how young people maintain control over their digital content and online relationships" (Pangrazio, 15).

The argumentation of whether or not the individual understands the extent and power of social media are questioned and explained with the idea that "[…] [y]oung people are constantly experimenting and realizing the affordance of social media, combining these creatively with face-to-face socialites, and trading off visibility and participation […]" (Pangrazio, 15). This is furthermore explained with the understanding that the social media practices of especially young people are shaped and influenced by "[…] social trends, peer expectations and the specific qualities of these digital platforms" (Pangrazio, 15). This is also a way for the individual to create, express and experiment with a digital identity and Pangrazio explains that the online identity practice will also have to spread into the offline and 'real world' context. Pangrazio presents a dualistic view of online versus offline in an analytical context in order to "[…] explore the interplay between online 'space' and offline 'place'" (Pangrazio, 15). The way in which the individual "[…] negotiate their peer networks both online and offline is indicative not only of how they perceive themselves, but also how others perceive them" (Pangrazio, 15) which means that the line between the online and offline world becomes blurry.

Pangrazio further explains that while the individual becomes able to create an online identity "[…] the audience might know the offline identity of the individual […]" and that "[…] the online identity that is presented through digital profile works in an aspirational way" (Pangrazio, 15). This is further considered in relation to the theory that "[…] in a digital context, individuals are 'inclined to present the side of themselves that they believe will be well received by these peers' […]" (Pangrazio, 15). This seems to be related to how, as Pangrazio writes, "[…] an online profile is an avatar of sorts or 'a statement not only about who you are, but also who you want to be' […]" (Pangrazio, 15). Pangrazio highlights that "[o]ther researchers have argued that digital media create places where roles and identities can be worked through" (Pangrazio, 16) and a place where "[…] the 'collectively performed narcissism' […] [is] thought to be a step toward self-reflection and self-actualisation, rather than self-absorption" (Pangrazio, 16). With several digital social media platforms to choose from, it is argued that the user finds a way to adapt the media to their specific needs, however, "[d]igital platforms facilitate particular practices, but they also encourage similar dispositions toward fundamental practices, but they also encourage similar dispositions toward fundamental concepts, such as privacy and trust" (Pangrazio, 16).

This furthermore shows how "[…] digital platforms not only facilitate meaning-making practices, but also *condition* them" (Pangrazio, 16). Because of this new digital society sphere, Pangrazio states that the ability to distinguish between what is public and what is private becomes blurred for the individual. This is due to the fact that social media and the networked public creates "[…] space where individuals engage online and the imagined community that emerges from the intersection of people, technology and practice" (Pangrazio, 17). However, Pangrazio underlines that "[…] socialising or connecting in a 'networked public' often takes place *in private* and involves sharing *personal* information – all of which blurs the boundaries between public and private spheres" (Pangrazio, 17) and that "[…] mediation is often to share and connect, which fundamentally depends on a public, rather than private, sense of self" (Pangrazio, 17). Lastly Luci Pangrazio presents the argument that due to the changes in the digital age, "[…] digital platforms have fundamentally changed who and what we trust" (Pangrazio, 17) and that "[…] we have moved to a 'distributed' model of trust, where we are more likely to trust strangers over government officials and authorities" (Pangrazio, 17). What Pangrazio means with this statement is that in the digital society the individual depends on and trust in the different platforms to operate as well as deliver a service rather than trusting the government, and this is referred to as 'Blind trust' (Pangrazio, 17).

2.3.4 Foucault and the Panopticon

In relation to Pangrazio and the discussion of personal versus public information Foucault and the Panopticon theory, in relation to the 'Surveillance society', seems addable. According to the chapter called "The post-panoptic society? Reassessing Foucault in surveillance studies" from the book *Social Identities: Journal for the Study of Race, Nation and Culture*, 2010, by Gilbert Caluya, Foucault's idea of the panopticon is "[…] the leading scholarly model or metaphor for analyzing surveillance" (Caluya, 621). The panopticon idea was originally created by Jeremy Bentham as a penal building idea, however, Foucault presented the idea as "[…] an exemplar of the shift in mechanisms of social control" (Caluya, 622). In the post-panopticism, three intentions of Foucault's panopticon theory has been noted, firstly the fact that "[…] Foucault traces a shift in the nature of punishment (from torture to imprisonment) […]" (Caluya, 622) secondly that there is "[…] a shift in the content of punishment (from body to soul) […]" (Caluya, 623) and third "[…] about a broader change in the social order […]" (Caluya, 623). This is furthermore explained as a change in society where there seem to have been "[…] a movement *'from the situation where the many see the few to the situation where the few see the many'* […]" (Caluya, 623). Caluya mentions that the post-panopticism movement notes that "[…] Foucault fails to acknowledge the rise of the spectacle in mass mediated societies where the many watch the few […]" (Caluya, 623) which is referred to as

'synopticism'. However, this is followed up with the fact that according to Foucault, "[…] we impoverish the question of power if we pose it 'in terms solely of the state and the state apparatus'" (Caluya, 623) which means that power "[…] 'is quite different from and more complicated dense and pervasive than a set of law or a state apparatus' […]" (Caluya, 623-624).

Gilbert Caluya states that according to Foucault "[…] 'the major effect of the Panopticon' was 'to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power' […]" (Caluya, 624). This means that the inmates in the Panoptic prison would not be able to know when they were being watched and that "[…] there is no need for the inmates to be actually watched […]" (Caluya, 624) because the important aspect would be the result of "[…] internalisation or interiorisation of the watchtower's gaze, such that the prisoner became his own overseer" (Caluya, 624-625). Foucault furthermore concludes that "[…] 'it is at once too much and too little that the prisoner should be constantly observed by an inspector: too little, for what matters is that he knows himself to be observed; too much, because he has no need in fact of being so' […]" (Caluya, 625). This control of power can lead to an analysis "[…] of the functioning of power through the ingenious use of surveillance in which even the inspector is caught [..]" (Caluya, 625). This is further described as something that "[…] is only evident if one views it from the perspective of the repression of inmates by their prison guards, in other words if one re-establishes the sovereign power in prison" (Caluya, 625). However, Caluya points out that Foucault's idea is that "[…] the panopticon is a machine that effectuates the dissociation of the seeing/being seen dyad […]" (Caluya, 625) and that if "[…] one views the panopticon, as Foucault did, as a machine of power in which everyone is caught one has a very different understanding of the panopticon" (Caluya, 625). Caluya concludes that according to Foucault, power "[…] 'has its principle not so much in a person as in a certain concerted distribution of bodies, surfaces, lights, gaze; in an arrangement whose internal mechanisms produce the relation in which individuals are caught up' […]" (Caluya, 625).

In relation to surveillance the term 'Sousveillance' is presented in the research article 'Cyborglogging with camera phone: Steps toward equiveillance', 2006, by Steve Mann, James Fung and Raymond Lo. Mann, Fung and Lo states that "Sousveillance stems from the French word sous, meaning "below", and "veiller" ("to watch")" (Mann et. al., 177) which originated "[…] with the use of cyborg-logs (i.e. using electric eyeglasses) and other wearable computing devices" (Mann et al., 177). In a society where surveillance to some extent have become normal it "[…] connotes a kind of "archicentric" omniscient "eye-in-the-sky" (God's eye or authoritarian view), in which cameras are affixed to buildings or other architectural elements" (Mann et al., 177). In relation to panopticism, the surveillance culture is often connected with a certain form of secrecy because of the idea of total transparency versus no transparency. The article underlines that in relation to sousveillance the term

"[…] usually involves a peer-to-peer approach that decentralizes observation to produce transparency in all directions" (Mann et al., 177) and that sousveillance "[…] seeks to reverse the otherwise one-sided panoptic gaze" (Mann et al., 177). Furthermore, it is noted that sousveillance "[…] is related to (even if the opposite of) the tradition of surveillance […]" (Mann et al., 177).

2.3.5 Digital Natives

According to the Oxford Dictionary, a digital native is defined as "a person who was born or grown up since the use of digital technology because common and so is familiar and comfortable with computers and the internet" (Oxford Dictionary: Digital Native) the opposite which would be a Digital Immigrant is defined in the Oxford Dictionary as "a person who was born or grew up before the use of digital technology became common" (Oxford Dictionary: Digital Immigrant).

In the book *Media Literacies: A Critical Introduction*, 2012, by Michael Hoechsmann and Stuart R. Poyntz, they discuss the term digital native in the educational system however they also elaborate on the cultural aspect which is the main focus for this study. Hoechsmann and Poyntz elaborate on the discussion of "[…] adolescents' learning in relation to contemporary media cultures […]" which are "[…] ideas about digital natives who are like 'aliens in the classroom'" (Hoechsmann & Poyntz, 7). This is further elaborated with the question of whether or not educators need to adapt their teaching in order to embrace their students "[…] whose coming of age has corresponded with the birth of a digital culture" (Hoechsamnn & Poyntz, 7). So, in order to teach the new generation, the system must embrace and incorporate the digital media which already plays an enormous role for the digital natives. Moreover, Hoechsmann and Poyntz, point out the fact that in the digital age the gap between a digital native (i.e. a student) and a digital immigrant (i.e. a teacher) is apparent and problematic because, as Hoechsmann and Poyntz argue, "[i]f the immigrant can never catch up with the natives, how can they be presumptuous enough to teach them new literacies and practices associated with digital technologies?" (Hoechsmann & Poyntz, 8). This is an interesting societal structure because this shows how the students might have an advantage of having a head start as a digital native and furthermore how the younger generations might be better at understanding how to use and communicate in a technological setting. Since the younger generations seem to be fluent when it comes to social media platforms the older generations, who have dealt with media literacy in a simpler time where the main digital source was a TV or a radio, seems to be 'speaking with an accent' in relation to new technology.

In the article 'Digital Culture: Immigrants and Tourists Responding to the Natives' Drumbeat', 2007, by Cheri A. Toledo, she presents definitions for digital natives and digital immigrants: (digital native) "A technology user under the age of 30, who was born into the digital

world" (Toledo, 84) and (digital immigrant) "A technology user, usually over the age of thirty, who was not born into the digital world" (Toledo, 84). Now it is important to note that this article is from 2007 and even though it is 'only' 12 years ago, it is still important to note that a lot has happened in those 12 years. The social media culture has changed evidently since 2007 and social media platforms have become a more integrated part of the technological world's citizens everyday life. Toledo further pinpoints the fact that digital natives "[…] developed their first information literacy skills "in the digital world with computers, videos, and the Internet" […]" (Toledo, 84) whereas digital immigrants "[…] formed their information literacy skills "in the print world" […]" (Toledo, 84). Where the digital immigrant would typically pick up a book, newspaper, etc. in order to gain certain information, a digital native would typically reach for a computer, tablet or phone in order to Google their way to the needed information. However, it could be argued that within the 12 years that have passed since this article was written, digital immigrants, or at least the majority, have gained a stronger understanding and dependence of technology and the internet.

       In relation to digital natives, Alexiei Dingli and Dylan Seychell investigate how a digital native interact in society in their book *The New Digital Natives Cutting the Chord*, 2015. Dingli and Seychell explains that a digital native "[…] think in random access like hypertext, use instant information for judgment […]" (Dingli & Seychell, 13-14) and that "[t]his shows that the way Digital natives think is directly influenced by the technology they are using" (Dingli & Seychell, 14). The digital native is furthermore presented as individuals who have the ability to shape a personality not only through physical appearance in the living and breathing world but also through social media platforms and this is explained with the fact that "[t]he digital age allows digital natives to change many aspects of their personal identities much quicker and easier than it was before" (Dingli & Seychell, 18). However, Dingli and Seychell highlight the fact that technology and social media does not in any way change the idea of identity, "[…] it simply provides possibilities to create an identity online […] where digital natives could present themselves in a way that could be striking different from the way they present or express themselves in real space" (Dingli & Seychell, 18). This is explained by Dingli and Seychell to be a significant character trade for digital natives because they have the ability to change both personal and social identity through technology constantly. Dingli and Seychell explains this with the understanding that "[n]atives update their avatars and profile pictures as frequent as they change their clothes or hairstyle" (Dingli & Seychell, 18) and that "[n]atives constantly add and sometimes delete friends" (Dingli & Seychell, 18) on their social media platforms. This is due to the fact that the word 'friend' in a social media context does not contain the same value as it does in the 'real' world. Furthermore, an important character trade for a digital native is how they "[…] express themselves through their posts in social networks, blogs, videos and music which

they share and upload on YouTube" (Dingli & Seychell, 18). Lastly digital natives "[…] are ready to experiment and reinvent their identities" (Dingli & Seychell, 19) this is due to the fact that they are "[…] more open-minded, they learn how to socialize and express themselves, experiment with, develop, and learn to evolve their talents and present their identities" (Dingli & Seychell, 19).

2.3.6 Digital Culture

When it comes to digital culture, Luci Pangrazio explains in her book *Young People's Literacies in the Digital Age: Continuities, Conflicts and Contradictions*, 2019, that "[…] cultural practices provide opportunities for young people to rehearse and represent their identities and their relationships with others […]" (Pangrazio, 42). This means that due to social media platforms, the individual has the opportunity to represent their online identity the exact way they want it to be represented. In this case, Pangrazio highlights that the significance, in this case, is "[…] the fact that youth cultural practices are not 'imposed' upon young people, but instead are 'reflexively constructed by active and effectively empowered social subjects' […]" (Pangrazio, 42). Pangrazio presents the concept of 'figured worlds' in order to "[…] account for how young people engage with virtual worlds, and the worlds of popular culture and fantasy, to *create* identities for themselves" (Pangrazio, 43). This is further elaborated with the understanding of when the individual is taking part in 'figured worlds' "[…] people tell others who they are, but even more importantly, they tell themselves and they try to act as though they are who they say they are […]" (Pangrazio, 43). This shows that the struggle to distinguish between 'figured worlds' and their actual 'real world'.

This furthermore suggests that the individual struggles to match up to the digital identity that social media platforms can provide for the individual. Pangrazio explains that "[…] youth cultures are 'cultures of "shared ideas", whose interactions take place not in physical spaces such as the street, club or festival field, but in the virtual spaces facilitated by the internet' […]" (Pangrazio, 43). This is further elaborated with the idea that "[…] many cultural practices – whether they take place in the online or offline world – involves more than just participation in a culture or community, and include a type of informal learning" (Pangrazio, 43). Pangrazio presents the term 'affinity spaces' in order to describe "[…] a place or a set of places where people affiliate with others based primarily on shared activities, interests, and goals, not shared race, class, culture, ethnicity, or gender […]" (Pangrazio, 43). These affinity spaces are furthermore explained to "[…] potentially enable young people to transcend physical and geographical limitations to engage and learn with others about their own personal interests and hobbies" (Pangrazio, 43). These spaces furthermore servers the opportunity for the individual to portray and evolve different identities and patterns depending on what social media platform one might use and Pangrazio explains it as the ability to "[…] be someone

different in each of these communities" (Pangrazio, 43). This insinuates that the digital culture within social media platforms serves the opportunity to 'shed the skin' depending on the platform.

3. Methodology

This part of the project will be focusing on Netnography as a method which is a relatively new approach in the methodical field. The method focuses on doing ethnographically-inspired research in an online space such as social media platforms. A prominent netnographer is professor Robert V. Kozinets who has written several books about netnography and therefore this methodology section will also use his work in order to determine what netnography is and how to use it as a method.

3.1 Netnography

In the book *SAGE Internet Research Methods,* the chapter called *The Method of Netnography,* from 2012 by Robert V. Kozinets explains that there is a connection between netnography and ethnography. Ethnography is known as "[…] an anthropological approach that has gained popularity in sociology, cultural studies, marketing and consumer research, and many other fields in the social sciences" (Kozinetz, 2). Netnography originates from ethnography and therefore it is important to determine and understand a definition of what ethnography is before one can dig deeper into the netnographic field. Kozinets quotes a definition of ethnography by Dick Hobbs which states:

> "a cocktail of methodologies that share the assumption that personal engagement with the subject is the key to understanding a particular culture or social setting. Participant observation is the most common component of this cocktail, but interviews, conversational and discourse analysis, documentary analysis, film and photography all have their place in the ethnographer's repertoire. Description resides at the core of ethnography, and however this description is constructed it is the intense meaning of social life from the everyday perspective of group members that is sought […]" (Kozinets, 2).

This quote shows that ethnography is based on and focuses on the human being and the material a researcher gains from observational methods. This is furthermore proven by Kozinets who states that ethnography and the flexibility thereof "[…] has allowed it to be used for over a century to represent and understand the behaviours of people belonging to almost every race, nationality, religion, culture and age group" (Kozintes, 2).

When it comes to netnography, Kozinets explains that it is based on "[…] participant-observational research based in online fieldwork" (Kozinets, 3) and that this method "[…] uses

computer-mediated communications as a source of data to arrive at the ethnographic understanding and representation of a cultural or communal phenomenon" (Kozinets, 3). Kozinets explains that researchers use of netnography as a term, is an "[…] attempt to acknowledge the importance of computer-mediated communications in the lives of culture members […]" (Knózinets, 3) and the acknowledgement that "[…] like interviews or semiotics, netnography has its own uniquely adapted set of practices and procedures that set it apart from the conduct of face-to-face ethnography" (Kozinets, 3). When it comes to the approach and the usage of netnography, it would not only be based on "[…] the presence but the gravity of the online component" (Kozinets, 3) furthermore, "[i]t would mean that significant time was spent interacting within and becoming a part of an online community or culture" (Kozinets, 3). Kozinets points out the similarities of ethnography and netnography by stating that "[l]ike ethnography itself, it has inherent and necessary flexibility" (Kozinets, 4) and that netnography "[…] aims at legitimacy and seeks the trust of its constituents by a careful attention to shared, detailed, rigorous research practices" (Kozinets, 4).

Kozinets presents an approach to a netnographic research method consisting of six steps that explains how the netnographic fieldwork works for the researcher. These six steps are "research, planning, entrée, data collection, interpretation, ensuring ethical standards, and research representation" (Kozinets, 4-5). At the same time, Kozinets presents a figure (Figure 1: Simplified flow of a netnographic research project), that simplifies the approach of working within the netnographic field.

Figure 1: Simplified flow of a netnographic research project

Step 1
Definition of Research Questions, Social Sites or Topics to Investigate

Step 2
Community Identification and Selection

Step 3
Community Participant-Observation (engagement, immersion) and Data Collection (Ensure Ethical Procedures)

Step 4
Data Analysis and Iterative Interpretation of Findings

Step 5
Write, Present and Report Research Findings and/or Theoretical and/or Policy Implications
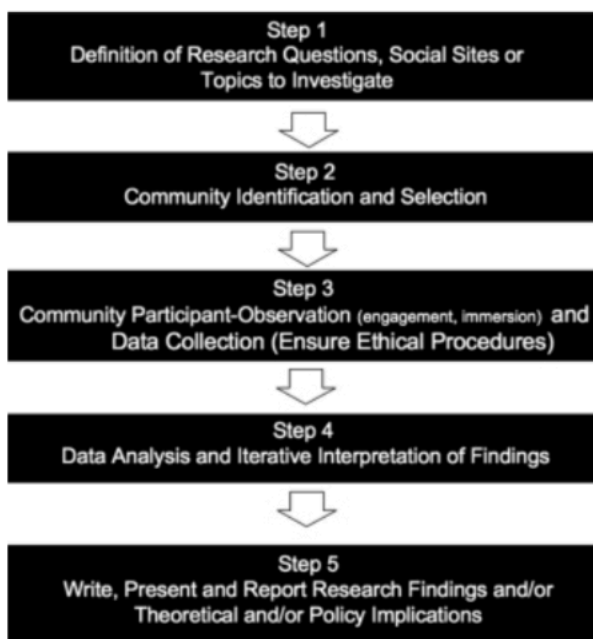
(*The Method of Netnography*: Kozinets, 4).

Robert V. Kozinets highlights that Figure 1: Simplified flow of a netnographic research project "[…] offers a diagrammatic flowchart" (Kozinets, 5) and that it is important to note that the figure "[…] offers a much neater-and-cleaner representation of the netnographic research process than ever actually occurs in reality" (Kozinets, 5).

The first two steps of the figure are first and foremost defining the purpose of the investigation topic as well as a definition of what community the researcher considers to investigate. Step three is the observational part where the researcher digs deeper into the chosen online community in order to collect analytical data. Step four is the analytical part where the collected data, the results of the finding, and the expectations gets analyzed and considered in relation to the research question in order to complete step five, which is writing and presenting the findings of the research.

3.1.1 Netnography and research in an online community

In relation to research in online communities, Robert V. Kozinets explains in the chapter 'The Method of Netnography', 2012 that a netnographic study in online communities examine "[…] general social phenomena whose social existence extends well beyond the Internet and online interactions, even though those interactions may play an important role with the group's membership" (Kozinets, 7). Kozinets further states that "[s]tudies of communities online take a particular social or communal phenomenon as their focal area of interest and then extend this, arguing or assuming that, through the study of the online community, something significant can be learned about the wider focal community or culture, and then generalized to the whole" (Kozinets, 7). The reason for a growing interest in the online community is based on the group culture that is prominent especially on social media platforms and the group communication in these online spaces can "[…] inform and relate to the wider social phenomenon, behavior, its participants, their values or beliefs" (Kozinets, 7). A group in an online space can, for instance, relate to a part of the fan culture that is prominent online, which can arise in online spaces/communities and as an example one could mention YouTube where prominent and popular YouTubers often encourages their online viewers to subscribe to their channels in order to join the fandom and that way become a part of a social media society within another social media society. Kozinets explains that when it comes to researching in online communities "[…] the key question to ask is whether the online component is *considerably less important* to the investigation's theoretical orientation than other aspects of the research" (Kozinets, 8) as well as whether or not "[…] the online information and access instead sharpen our understanding of some wider, focal construct, theory, or set of concerns […]" (Kozinets, 8).

Robert V. Kozinets furthermore explains that when investigating in an online space the researcher must ask oneself "[…] whether we are studying an online community, or conducting other research focusing on online cultural or communal phenomena, or their elements" (Kozinets, 8). If that is the case, then the researcher would be able to use a netnographic approach as a stand-alone method and Kozinets states that "[a] netnography in this case is entirely appropriate, exhaustive, and complete within itself" (Kozintes, 8). Kozinets highlights the fact that if a researcher is investigating a case, tendency or social structure that goes beyond the online community, it would be necessary to explore other methodologies such as ethnography where face-to-face interactions can be analyzed. Kozinets presents three aspects for the researcher to keep in mind when using a netnographic approach: Integration vs. Separation of Social Worlds, Observation vs. Verbalization of Relevant Data and Identification vs. Performance of Members.

Integration vs. Separation of social Worlds some of the questions asked is "How closely related are the behaviours online and in face-to-face social situation?" (Kozinets, 9) and "Is there a direct relation, or are they different, separate behaviours?" (Kozinets, 9). In the case of this study, the question would be whether or not it would be beneficial for the results of this study if the researcher observed (face-to-face) how an individual is interacting on social media through technical devices or if the actual result that is posted online is enough research material. In this case, the results (content) on social media would be enough firstly due to the fact that this study focuses on prominent YouTube figures who has millions of subscribers and therefore are relatively difficult to get in direct contact with and secondly because the observational results would be rather dull compared to observations of for instance individuals playing videogames.

In regards to Observation vs. Verbalization of Relevant Data, the question asked is "How important is the repeated observation of physically manifest rather than verbally articulated behaviours?" (Kozinets, 9), "Is it likely that there is useful new information that will not be communicated online?" (Kozinets, 9) and "Are there rich online representations of the behaviour, perhaps including photographs or audiovisual recordings?" (Kozinets, 9). In relation to these questions, Kozinets argues that "[…] actual observation may reveal interesting tacit elements of the behavior that they cannot, do not, or are unwilling to communicate" (Kozinets, 9) which means that an individual might claim a certain behavior but when a researcher observes the situation it might be different. However, in the case of this study, it is still important to note that the focus is mainly on the online behavior of YouTubers who have all experienced controversies in relation to their online space.

Lastly, Identification vs. Performance of Members can be considered based on questions such as "How important is the further identification of the individual culture member, i.e., their linkage to demographic characteristics such as age, race, gender, and so on? (Kozinets, 9) and "[…] are the performance of the actions captured and recorded in the online community or culture entirely sufficient for the generation of theory?" (Kozinets, 9). Kozinets explains this with "[…] if the researcher is studying a particular group of people […] then confirmation and verification of the identities of message posters may be warranted and useful" (Kozinets, 9) and that if anonymity does not change or affect the results of the research question "[…] then identification may not be necessary" (Kozinets, 9).

This line between ethnographic and netnographic approach is further shown in Figure 2 (Figure 2: Coordinating online and face-to-face interaction and data collection):

Figure 2: Coordinating online and face-to-face interaction and data collection
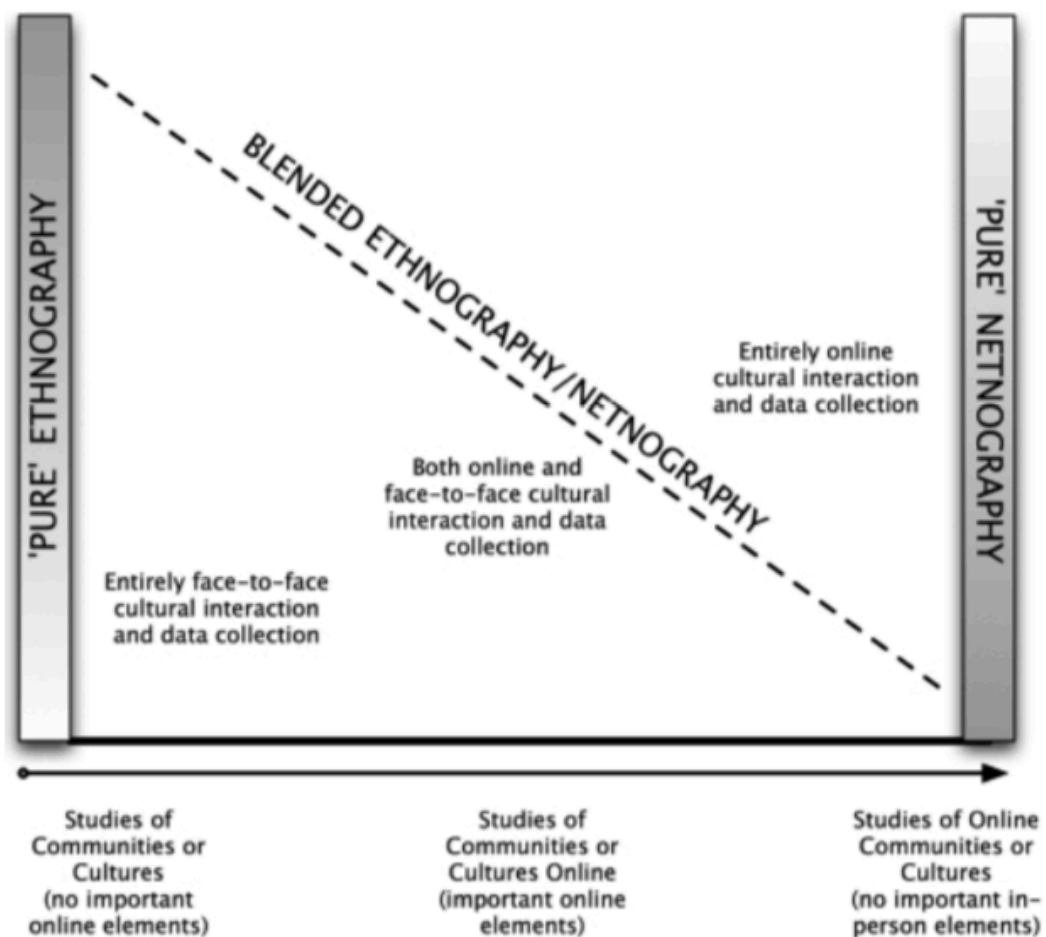
(*The Method of Netnography*: Kozinets, 10).

As Kozinets explains, this figure "[…] provides a visual representation of the weighting of online and off-line fieldwork leading to blended or pure netnographies and ethnographies" (Kozinets, 10). In relation to this study, the research material for the analysis will be based on the online findings within the different online communities that the chosen YouTubers create and maintain through their YouTube channel. Therefore, it is safe to state that according to figure 2, the study will be netnography based because the focus is on online communities and cultures and the research and data collection will solely be based on the online material provided and published to the YouTuber's YouTube channels.

4. Analysis

This part of the study will center around an analysis of three different YouTubers and their controversies on social media and how they have approached these controversies. These cases will be split up into two case sections (4.3 and 4.4) and the second case section will contain two cases because the cases are remarkably similar and have taken place within the same community. This means that they have been posting similar videos and collaborations, which again makes it interesting in relation to investigating how they handled as well as going through their own controversies.

4.1 How Dawson and YouTube Changed the Game

But firstly, this section of the analysis will focus on introducing, categorize as well as creating an overview of how the analysis will be structured. First and foremost, it is important to note that the analysis material collected for this study have been collected on the social media platform YouTube. YouTube has grown into a platform where content creators, or 'YouTubers' as they are called, can create their own entertainment platform for their subscribers and other platform users. In other words, it is important to note that a platform user does not have to be subscribed in order to watch the YouTubers videos and furthermore a platform user is able to watch videos on the platform without being logged in via a profile.

In 2018 the YouTuber Shane Dawson started uploading documentary inspired videos to his YouTube channel and the online news website Polygon explained in a 2018 article called 'Shane Dawson's new documentaries crack YouTube culture's Kardashian problem', the content created by Dawson is explained as being "[…] over-the-top, charming and play out like old friends whispering intimate details about their seemingly luxurious lives" (Alexander) in relation to the first documentary Dawson did centering around a failed event called 'Tanacon'. This statement is an example of how YouTube is different from flow-TV and mainstream media production companies which in the past have provided entertainment for the general public. Moreover, the statement pinpoints the main difference from YouTube and mainstream media which is the 'homemade' vibe, the intimacy and familiarity between YouTuber and subscriber that creates a friendly and confidential relationship between the content creator and the viewer. Furthermore, the article explains that "The docs aren't HBO- or Netflix-worthy" and that "They're not going to win any Emmys next year" and "Yet they portray actual reality – something often taken for granted on YouTube." (Alexander). Which again highlights the difference in quality between content creators on YouTube versus production companies. However, Dawson's two-part documentary on conspiracy theories collected 65 million views together this year (YouTube: shane). In relation to data collection, the material used

in this study will as mentioned be collected on YouTube and due to the netnograpic approach this will be done with the researcher being a fly on the wall in the online space in order not to interact, influence, manipulate or affect the collected research material. Besides the collected YouTube material, the analysis will also be based on online articles in order to keep track of timelines and important details within the cases. Furthermore, this analysis will focus on YouTubers who have collected a great number of subscribers which means that YouTube in fact function as a source of income for these individuals, which is also something that will be taken into consideration in this analysis. In relation to the categorization of cases, the analysis will be built around two case sections (section 4.3 and 4.4). These sections will firstly cover the YouTuber Logan Paul and the controversy of the Suicide Forest and the other section will center around the YouTubers Jeffree Star and Laura Lee and racism in the beauty community.

4.2 The Panoptic Idea and Surveillance Society

A main observation for the YouTube platform and YouTubers in general, in relation to the panopticon theory is that Foucault and the panoptic idea offers the understanding that a YouTuber and in particular a popular Youtuber who has gained massive following gain visibility which comes with a certain power. However, this power seems to be rather fragile – this will be further discussed in the upcoming cases. When taking the panoptic idea into consideration it feels as if it could be understood in two different ways. Firstly, the YouTuber could be considered the inspector, the one in a powerful position due to the fact that the YouTuber 'sees' the subscribers and other viewers because he/she serves entertainment content for this audience and furthermore chooses to create the content for the channel. Moreover, due to the massive following (subscribers), the YouTuber seems to be put in a powerful position because the subscription to a channel suggests that the YouTuber has gained a fan group of subscribers who feels some sort of attachment or relation to this YouTuber. The power structure arises in the subscription and the idea that the YouTuber has a choice of when he/she wants to upload entertainment content as well as what he/she wants to upload to the YouTube channel. However, if the YouTuber fail to serve the right content on the right time, the chance of 'fans' unsubscribing is a consequence thereof.

One could argue that this idea could be turned around and it would be the subscribers as the inspector and being able to look at the YouTubers content when and wherever they want. They have the right to and the opportunity of interacting with other subscribers via the commentary and thereby discuss the video content, the YouTuber and so on. In this case, the power comes with being a subscriber because the power of views and clicks for a social media persona is alpha and omega. If the YouTuber does not create entertaining and interesting content, the viewer might not want to click

and watch the content that is produced by the YouTuber and that way, the YouTubers channel can lose its value and the opportunities of an income. This way the subscribers, who at the same time are users of the platform, become the main factors in who makes the cut as a popular YouTuber and who does not. The YouTuber community are highly dependent on their fan groups and within these fan cultures, popular YouTubers are often seen contributing to the fandom for example by giving the fandom a name which is also seen in mainstream pop culture where an example could be the musician Beyoncé and her fandom called the 'beehive'. This dependency between YouTuber/subscriber and subscriber/YouTuber highlights the panoptic power structure where both parties are interested in and dependent on one another. It is furthermore important to mention that the overall power position in this context is the platform (YouTube) itself. The platform has a powerful position and opportunity of pulling the plug on a YouTuber if they are crossing or disrespecting the guidelines for the platform. However, when these YouTubers end up in controversies and scandals, YouTube as a platform becomes the center of attention when mainstream media and the public are discussing a YouTuber, scandal or controversy.

　　　　In relation to the phenomena of a trend called daily vlogging, a vlog being "a video blog: a record of your thoughts, opinions, or experiences that you film and publish on the internet" (Cambridge Dictionary: Vlog) where the individual 'vlogs' parts of his/her daily life as YouTube content. In this case, the subscriber might have the idea and feeling of being able to spy or have a look into the 'everyday' life of the YouTuber. However, it is important to note that this feeling is not a hundred percent true since the YouTuber have the ultimate editing control of what is being published, how a situation is portrayed and in what order these things might happen. By posting videos to the YouTube platform, the YouTuber strengthens their visibility and therefore automatically have to become more conscious about how they portray themselves because a lot of people (subscribers) are watching their every move posted online.

　　　　Another aspect is that with the growth of their following in subscribers, the YouTuber becomes a noticeable face in a public setting which means that while interacting in an everyday life activity such as going out with friends, getting groceries and such, the YouTuber might end up being 'watched' by fans the same way more mainstream celebrities (actors, musicians, etc.) are being watched in a public setting. Therefore, it is arguable that the YouTuber becomes the prisoner according to the panoptic idea, simply because the YouTuber should expect to be watched at all times. The question is whether or not this 'fear' of possibly being watched at all times, as Foucault suggests, cause the result of "[…] internalisation or interiorisation of the watchover's gaze […]" which would make the YouTuber his/her own overseer. This furthermore strengthens the visibility of a surveillance society or in this case 'sousveillance' because it is the individual watching the individual.

4.3 Logan Paul, The Suicide Forest and the Controversy Thereof

This part of the analysis will focus on the YouTuber Logan Paul and his controversial video from the Suicide Forest in Japan as well as investigate how Paul navigates through the aftermath of the controversial video.

4.3.1 When the Controversial Behavior Had Consequences

On the last day of 2017, the popular YouTuber Logan Paul uploaded a vlog to his YouTube channel 'Logan Paul Vlogs' with the title "We found a dead body in the Japanese Suicide Forest…" (Swearingen). In the article called 'Logan Paul Posts Footage of Apparent Suicide Victim on YouTube' written by Jake Swearingen, the YouTuber is quoted for saying "This is not clickbait. This is the most real vlog I've ever posted to this channel […] I think this definitely marks a moment in YouTube history because I'm pretty sure this has never hopefully happened to anyone on YouTube ever […] Now with that said: Buckle the fuck up, because you're never gonna see a video like this again!" (Swearingen). The video was a 15-minute long vlog filmed in the Japanese Aokigahara forest, better known as the Suicide Forest and the video has since been deleted from Paul's YouTube channel. First and foremost, it is important to note that this analysis will not use or refer to any re-upload of this video due to the possibility of editing in a re-uploaded video and due to ethical circumstances. Instead, this study will refer to articles written about the video as well as other videos posted by Paul or other YouTubers with relation to the Suicide Forest controversy.

Before the Suicide Forest scandal, Logan Paul along with his little brother Jake Paul was known in the YouTube community for being controversial as well as pushing boundaries when it comes to posting videos to their YouTube channels. An example of this could be Logan Paul's video called "LOL I GOT ARRESTED" where he claims to have been arrested during a filming of the digital TV series called 'Logan Paul Vs' which according to IMDb is an online series where "Logan Paul travels the US seeking challenges versus unpredictable things" (IMDb: Logan Paul Vs). In relation to the controversial behavior in his YouTube videos it could be argued that Paul, before the Suicide Forest scandal, used controversial behavior in order to gain views and attention to his YouTube channel and career and that only when he crossed the line with the Suicide Forest video, he realized the full effect that comes with his job as a YouTuber. This seems to be confirmed by the written apology he posted to his twitter account January 2nd, 2018 stating "Where do I begin… Let's start with this – I'm sorry. This is a first for me. I've never faced criticism like this before, because I've never made a mistake like this before […]" (@LoganPaul). This written apology was posted to Twitter along with a highly discussed 1 minute and 45-second apology video uploaded to Paul's

YouTube channel January 2nd, 2018 in which Paul says "I've made a severe and continuous lapse in my judgment, and I don't expect to be forgiven. I'm simply here to apologize" (So Sorry.).

Whether or not Paul fully understands the power of his massive following is interesting to look deeper into when it comes to digital literacy and the knowledge and ability to use digital media. One could argue that Paul with his 19 million followers to his YouTube channel 'Logan Paul Vlogs' have become a popular content creator on the platform, but whether or not he has mastered his ability to be a digitally literate individual is arguable. During his video apology, Paul states "For my fans who are defending my actions, please don't. I don't deserve to be defended" and that his goal with his content "[…] is always to entertain; to push the boundaries, to be all-inclusive" and that "In the world [we] live in, I share almost everything I do. The intent is never to be heartless, cruel, or malicious" (Shugerman).

Paul explains that the content he produces for his YouTube channel has the purpose of entertaining the viewers who might come across his videos, however, his actions of uploading the Suicide Forest video have led to viewers and onlookers offended by his actions. Furthermore, Paul underlines that he "[…] share almost everything […]" (Shugerman) he does. With Paul confirming that he chooses to share main parts of his life via his vlogs, he underlines that he strengthens the panopticism of his life. By willingly sharing his life through a social media platform he knowingly will share content and that way he knows that he will be observed by the viewers who might come across the content he posts to YouTube. However, he has no idea when the viewers will watch his content, how they will receive the information in his vlogs as well as what cultural background these viewers might have. In the Suicide Forest case, Paul would have had to have some sort of understanding of the cultural difference between Japanese and western culture, however, the temptation of making click-worthy content for his YouTube channel might have been his first priority instead of respecting a different culture, the deceased individual in the vlog or the young viewers who watched the video while it was online.

In relation to power and Foucault's machine of power, it becomes obvious that in the case of the Forest video one side of the power structure contain Paul because he first and foremost had to take down the video due to mainstream media commenting on and engaging in the discussion and criticism of the video. However, it is important to note that despite the criticism and the video being deleted, Paul still maintained a massive following on his YouTube channel which maintains the power Paul has on the social media platform. Secondly, Paul has later stated that the video had major consequences for his career as an influencer/YouTuber and therefore he lost some of his income due to this video. In an article called '1 Year After His Infamous 'Suicide Forest' Video, Logan Paul Is Bigger Than Ever', January 4, 2019, from the news website HuffPost, the article states that

"[b]rands axed deals with the influencer, YouTube slashed his advertising privileges and more than 750,000 people signed petitions calling for him to be banned from the platform" (Cook). This confirms that the power structure also landed with the viewers and mainstream media who have the power to criticize and hold Paul accountable for his actions and his choices on the YouTube platform – and any other social media platform. However, somehow Paul, according to the article, still managed to grow from the Suicide Forest incidence since the article states "[…] Paul insists he's learned his lesson and says 2018 was "the most important" year of his life" (Cook) and that "[i]t was also the most lucrative: The 23-year-old was the 10th highest-paid YouTube star last year, according to Forbes" (Cook). This is an interesting aspect since Paul's "most important year" of his life (due to a scandal) also landed him on the Forbs list of highest paid YouTubers. This is another example of the power of social media and how being in a powerful position such as being an influencer can be lucrative despite being controversial or the center of a social media scandal. This also suggests that bad press is better than no press. Lastly, it is important to note that these statements verify the importance of clicks and exposure that a social media personality has the opportunity to turn into a lucrative and million-dollar business in modern society.

4.3.2 Suicide Prevention or Not?

In relation to digital literacy, it seems as the viewers of Paul's Suicide Forest video and the general social media community found the video and Paul's behavior in the video appalling which indicates that the general understanding and respect of a suicide victim, in this case, has been (or become) more important than being entertained by Paul's videos. The set of skills in relation to being able to watch this video with a critical view suggests that within the YouTube community, there is some sort of critical view and understanding of how this video was disrespectful for various reasons. Furthermore, it suggests that exploiting a dead body on a visual-based social media platform such as YouTube uproars the YouTube users because it collides with the moral aspect of respect for a suicide victim. The title of Paul's Suicide Forest video was as mentioned 'We found a dead body in the Japanese Suicide Forest…' and an interesting fact is that the video and the reuploads (uploaded by other channels) has had views despite the fact that the title of the video states that they are going to find a dead body. This indicates that the digital culture and the click-value on a video such as Paul's video have the capability to go viral even though the viral effect has a negative outcome in relation to the public discussion and Paul's online reputation after the video. If YouTube users find this title interesting and worthy of a click, they also contribute to a social media society where Paul's behavior is rewarded with a video going viral which furthermore would lead to more clicks, more press and more subscribers for Paul. Whether or not this social media scandal was a result of Paul being

empowered by his viewers (consumers) to create controversial content and click-worthy videos for his channel is arguable since it could be argued that Paul state, in his written apology on Twitter, that he was driven by his job as an entertainer through his daily videos. He states "I do this sh*t every day. I've made a 15 minute TV show Every SINGLE DAY for the past 460+ days. One may understand that it's easy to get caught up in the moment without fully weighing the possible ramifications" (@LoganPaul). Paul's statement touches on the issue of Paul being caught up in the drive to create entertainment via his daily vlog and that the backlash from the Suicide Forest video has come as a surprise for Paul. This could furthermore indicate that Paul's digital identity has evolved and changed in an attempt to experiment with a social media identity that is testing the limits. Another interesting aspect of Paul's written apology on Twitter is his statement:

> "I didn't do it for views. I get views. I did it because I thought I could make a positive ripple of the internet, not cause a monsoon of negativity. I intended to raise awareness for suicide and suicide prevention and while I thought "if this video saves just ONE life, it'll be worth it," I was misguided by shock and awe, as portrayed in the video. I still am" (@LoganPaul).

This statement indicates that Paul's intentions with the Suicide Forest video were to "[…] raise awareness for suicide and suicide prevention […]" (@LoganPaul). Whether or not the Suicide Forest video was intended as a suicide prevention video or not is arguable since sources suggest otherwise (Logan Paul Is Manipulating You) however, Paul uploaded his first video of 2018 on January 24, with the title "Suicide: Be Here Tomorrow." (YouTube: Logan Paul Vlogs). This video was an actual suicide prevention video; however, this video was not showcasing Paul's usual wild and energetic side which he has become known for. The Be Here Tomorrow video starts out with relaxing piano play while filming a bridge with a lot of traffic and the text "About 800,000 people worldwide die by suicide every year. 1 person every 40 seconds takes their own life" (Suicide: Be Here Tomorrow.: 0.00-0.06) meanwhile a male voice is stating "For forty minutes, crying like a baby. Bikers, joggers, tourists, runners, they went by me, police officers searching for suicidal people went by me twice. I'm standing at the ledge leaning over the rail with tears flowing down to the waters and I thought to myself; absolutely nobody cares!" (Suicide: Be Here Tomorrow 0.07-0:27).

When comparing what Paul called an attempt to raise awareness of suicide prevention by posting the Suicide Forest video with the 'Be Here Tomorrow' video the difference between the videos seems immense and not even comparable to one another. The Be Here Tomorrow video suggests that Paul has realized the effect and power that his status as a YouTuber and influencer contain. Furthermore, it could indicate that he feels some sort of remorse by posting and exploiting

the Suicide Forest video. The question, however, is whether or not this change of behavior and sign of responsibility in Paul's Be Here Tomorrow video could also indicate that Paul is an extremely educated digital native who seems to have cracked the code of rising from a scandal and turning the negative attention into positive attention by creating a video that highlights the aspects of suicide, which his forest video did not. As a successful influencer and YouTuber and as a digital native, Paul has a great advantage of understanding and working in the social media space. The millions of followers that he has collected through social media shows that Paul is able to navigate in an online setting as well as his capability to navigate through the bad press from the Suicide Forest video. In this case, it could be argued that even though the Forest video gained negative press and online debates the phrase 'bad press is better than no press' seems addable. Even though Paul uploaded the Forest video, then took it down, and then came back with the Be Here Tomorrow video a month later, his following has stayed solid which indicates that Paul, first of all, is somebody the users of YouTube enjoys watching and secondly that he is a strong and important player on the YouTube platform.

4.3.3 Neistat Wants the Truth

During a YouTube interview created by the YouTuber Casey Neistat, posted to the channel CaseyNeistat on July 27, 2018, titled "The Logan Paul Interview.". Logan Paul talks about a documentary that he is making about himself and his downfall during the Suicide Forest scandal. Paul explains that the documentary is not supposed to be about how "dang hard" his life has been during the scandal but instead should center around a young man from Ohio who ends up falling into the media machine of creating content to YouTube while building an audience and "garnering false power for views" (The Logan Paul Interview.: 4:07-4:10). This, Paul states, has ensured that he earned money before the Suicide Forest video and in the past, the money made him feel successful as a YouTuber compared to when he 'lost it all overnight' after posting the Suicide Forest video (The Logan Paul Interview.: 3:42-4:19). This indicates that Paul's understanding of his own situation is that he does not consider himself the victim of the Suicide Forest scandal however, he explains how he got sucked into the social media machine and how social media got the best of him which indicates that Paul to some extent, in fact, does consider himself a victim in relation to social media and the pressure thereof.

In the description box of the video and at the beginning of the actual video Neistat explains that he does not in any way or form try to rehabilitate the image of Logan Paul. The description box states; "Logan's impact on YouTube has been far and wide. The controversies around the suicide forest video and other negative things he's done has had an impact on [YouTube] that was felt by a lot of the creator community. I wanted to understand why he did what he did and what his

true intentions were moving forward" (The Logan Paul Interview.). This written description shows how Neistat approach the viewers of his video with the intention of creating content for his own channel while dealing with or trying to understand another YouTuber's (Logan Paul) situation.

This video was as mentioned earlier posted in July of 2018 and the Suicide Forest video was posted December 31st, 2017, however, the scandal of Logan Paul still seemed to be a hot topic based on the 5.4 million views the video have reached (as of May 2019). Furthermore, Casey Neistat underlines in the description box that the Suicide Forest video not only affected Logan Paul but also affected other content creating YouTubers which would include Neistat himself. In addition to that, this is further backed up by Casey Neistat in the beginning of his video where he states that Logan Paul's actions have affected the entire YouTube community and that Logan Paul and the size of his viewers and subscribers have amplified the consequences to Logan Paul's bad decisions (The Logan Paul Interview.: 0:10-0:31). Furthermore, Neistat explains that the Suicide Forest video caused embarrassment as well as shame within the YouTube community because of all the negative press the Suicide Forest video brought with it (0:31-0:45). With these statements, Neistat reinforces the fact that the Suicide Forest video affected not only one person (Logan Paul) but YouTubers in general. This tendency of one content creator affecting other content creators on a platform is based on the social media identity which Logan Paul practiced on his YouTube channel. In a digital society, the individual has been given an opportunity to express a social media identity and as stated in the theory section about 'Digital Culture' this relates to how "[…] young people engage with virtual worlds, and the worlds of popular culture and fantasy, to *create* identities for themselves". Paul's Suicide Forest video pushed the limits of the development of his social media identity and this, according to Casey Neistat, not only had consequences for himself but for the YouTube community in general.

This points in the direction of a digital culture where a shared community equals a somewhat shared destiny where companies and business partners might have had to reevaluate their collaboration with a YouTuber due to the negative press after the Suicide Forest video. In an episode of the podcast 'Impaulsive', in the episode titled 'JAKE PAUL BREAKS THE INTERNET – IMPAULSIVE EP. 44' posted on March 4, 2019 the topic of how the Suicide Forest video had consequences for Logan Paul's little brother, and fellow YouTuber, Jake Paul arises. Both brothers have had social media scandals and during the podcast, the brothers discuss the effect of the Forest video and how far along they are in their journey of getting past these controversies. Jake Paul explains that he considers himself eighty percent through the consequences of his past behavior on YouTube and Logan Paul follows by saying that he himself 'has a long way to go' before he can put the Suicide Forest video behind him and estimates that he has another year before he considers himself over the scandal (JAKE PAUL BREAKS THE INTERNET – IMPAULSIVE EP. 44:

1:43:32-1:43-46). The struggles of going through a public scandal as both Paul brothers have been through which first and foremost is self-inflicted and which furthermore has not only had an effect on their own career but also has had an effect on other content creators' career, indicates a weak understanding of their viewers power as well as other platform users' digital literate expectations. Since social media platforms have become such a significant and important tool in everyday life and a way for the individual to interact with friends and other platform users, the importance of a well-educated and healthy digital generation seems as a significant tool for a digital user. However, as Pangrazio mentions in relation to a healthy digital knowledge, the digital universe is still so young and fast-changing which makes it difficult to navigate through.

       The brothers have used their social media platform to evolve a career and create and produce entertainment for the platform users who might find their content click-worthy. But whether or not they understand the relationship between the digital 'language' they use and the powerful position of having close to 20 million subscribers to their accounts is arguable and this is as mentioned in the theory section a key concern when it comes to critical literacy. Furthermore, both Logan Paul and Jake Paul only have the opportunity of sharing their own personal experience from their own point of view and how they remember and experience the situation. Their everyday use of social media and their daily video content for their YouTube channel, and as Pangrazio points out, when it comes to digital literacy the focus on a social media platform is to connect with other platform users and the 'correct' ideology seems to be less important when communicating via a social media platform.

       Both Paul brothers are young adults and according to Wikipedia Logan Paul is 24 years old and Jake Paul is 22 years old. Therefore, both men would be considered a part of the digital native generation in society because they have been born and grown up in a society and culture where digital technology has been accessible and an integrated part of society. Therefore, they have had the ability to use and embrace the digital culture and furthermore with their status as digital natives they would be considered to have a head start in relation to using digital technology in their everyday life as well as in relation to their careers. However, their need for pushing the limits as a part of their social media identity could have relation to Dingli and Seychell's theory on how the digital native and the behavior thereof is "[…] directly influenced by the technology they are using". In this case, Logan Paul might in the past have had the experience that when he pushed the limit of what is socially acceptable the video would gain views which equals publicity and interactions on his YouTube channel which again equals a bigger paycheck and new possibilities in relation to creating new content. Again, this has relations to the phrase 'bad press is better than no press'. When Paul uploads a video to his channel with either a click-worthy title or thumbnail or generally acts in, what mainstream society would

interpret as controversial behavior, the video has the ability to go viral. When other media platforms such as other popular platform users or news outlets engage in a debate or in other way or form reacts to the video, Paul gains press and views which keeps his channel interesting and lucrative for both Paul and YouTube as a platform since Paul will be referred to as a YouTuber.

In relation to digital culture it could be argued that Logan Paul has had, and still has, the opportunity to portray his social media identity the exact way that he wants to be portrayed due to editing control of his videos and power in relation to what is being published to his channel. Furthermore, his massive subscription number suggests that he is a highly popular YouTuber which makes him a part of and an influence on how one can behave within the social media platform that is YouTube. When he is rewarded with clicks and a rising subscription count for his controversial behavior, he is influencing the platform in relation to how it is acceptable for him and other content creators to behave. This not only gives Paul some sort of freedom in relation to what he seems to get away with, but it also suggests that Paul gains power alongside YouTube since his videos not only benefits his own channel but also YouTube as a platform.

4.3.4 Is There a Way of Distracting People from What Was Done?

In relation to digital identity, Logan Paul has created an online social space where his subscribers, and other platform users, can interact with him and other subscribers via the commentary (as well as the like/dislike button options) to his videos and with that comes the opportunity for the subscribers and viewers to voice their own opinion on what Paul is publishing. This digital culture furthermore proves Pangrazio's point in relation to digital culture and how the digital culture creates online spaces for individuals to interact with one another in contrast to the past decades where the primary interactions between individuals have taken place in physical spaces. With Paul creating an online community where individuals can interact and connect with peers sharing the same interest and without necessarily having to meet in person creates an affinity space. Within this affinity space, the Logan Paul account creates a place (or space) where people can affiliate with other individuals based on a shared interest in the Paul channel. Since this study does not seek to investigate the individual subscriber but rather the main character (Logan Paul) and how he himself have experienced his downfall during the Suicide Forest scandal, it is difficult to assume whether or not the general individual is enabled however it is possible to analyze this from Paul's role as the topic/reason for an online social gathering.

With Paul being the center of the online social gathering, and in the Casey Neistat interview, Neistat asks Paul whether or not the 'Be Here Tomorrow' video was a 'fluff piece' to make the YouTube users and other individuals feel better about him and the Forest video to which Paul

answers "No… no not at all" (The Logan Paul Intervew.: 4:50-5:00). This statement, along with their further conversation on sympathy and forgiveness, seems like a contrast to the conversation between Jake Paul and Logan Paul on the Impaulsive episode, mentioned earlier in this analysis, in which the Paul brothers discuss how far along they are in getting through their scandalous past. If their discussion, understanding, and definition of 'getting through' equals being forgiven by the general YouTube (and online) public then this statement of not expecting to be forgiven seems to be forgotten. However, if Paul understands and defines 'getting through' as the general YouTube public moving on, forgetting and/or discovering new scandals on the platform then his statement of not being forgiven might be reliable in the Neistat interview.

Digital identity however also seems to play a big role in the Casey Neistat/Logan Paul interview where Logan Paul as mentioned above explains to Neistat that he cannot nor does he feel that he has been forgiven for his actions in relation to the Suicide Forest Video (The Logan Paul Interview.: 5:25-5:31). Furthermore, Paul explains that by publishing a video with content as done in the Suicide Forest video, there is no way of distracting people from what was done and, as Paul states in the interview that there is no way of saying "[…] well here is what I tried to do and this is why it is okay […]" (The Logan Paul Interview.: 5:32-5:44). This statement is rather interesting since Paul, as mentioned earlier, in his apology on twitter stated "I intended to raise awareness for suicide and suicide prevention and while I thought "if this video saves just ONE life, it'll be worth it," I was misguided by shock and awe, as portrayed in the video" (@LoganPaul). Here it seems as Paul's past online behavior and his present understanding of his situation have changed, in his apology on twitter he does, in fact, express an agenda of the Suicide Forest video as a suicide prevention video and an attempt to help other individuals who might be struggling in life. However, in the Casey Neistat interview, Paul explains that the Suicide Forest video in no shape or form was okay based on the content and decisions made in that video. In his apology on Twitter, Paul does, in fact, come up with an excuse and justification for uploading the Suicide Forest video and by stating in the Neistat interview that in a case such as the Suicide Forest video, one must not come with an excuse. An explanation of this change of mind could be the fact that the time between the apology on Twitter and the statement in the Casey Neistat interview is six, almost seven months and that in that time Paul has changed perspective in the way he is addressing the controversial video.

Whether or not Paul has an advantage of impacting, influencing and/or determining the psychological state of his viewers is arguable. His ability to influence his viewers on their journey to building an online identity could be massive if these individuals are in an early stage of their digital literate education. According to the online website SocialBook which is a site that provides influencer insight as an analytical engine powered by machine learning (SocialBook), the site states that in 2017

Paul's audience "[…] was primarily on the younger side, with 49% clocking in under the age of 24, with 40% of them being at least 18" (Logan Paul YouTube Stats for 2017 That You Need to Know about). This indicates that the subscribers and viewers of Paul's video are in the younger spectrum of the age categories, however, it is possible that the registered age of a subscriber can be false in order for a younger subscriber getting access to watch age-restricted video material on the YouTube platform.

Since social media platforms such as YouTube has become popular spaces for young people to meet and interact with one another, these platforms become major factors not only in the individual's development of an internet identity but also a major factor in the building of the general identity development and representation between the young generation in society. Due to the value, these online spaces have gained within the society they also gain power in relation to what and how much is being shared online. An example of this is the vlogging-wave on YouTube to which Logan Paul with his channel 'Logan Paul Vlogs' have joined in and started to share everyday life experiences and uploading content centered around himself on an everyday basis. This leads to the question of whether or not content creators such as Logan Paul understands the power of social media and in the theory section the quote "[…] [y]oung people are constantly experimenting and realizing the affordance of social media […]" which suggest that the young generation is learning the lectures of what to share and what not to share on social media by a 'trial-and-error'-method. Whether or not this is the method that Paul has used in relation to his Suicide Forest video seems legit since it has previously been argued that Paul was experimenting with how far he could go when pushing the limits. When looking into the vlogging environment of YouTube it becomes clear that Logan Paul is far from the only vlogger who has been displayed in the online public eye for insensitive behavior. Apart from Jake Paul and Logan Paul, vloggers such as David Dobrik and his 'vlog squad', FouseyTube and so on have ended up with minor or major incidence on their vlogging channels.

4.3.5 The Story of a Redemption

In the Casey Neistat interview, Logan Paul discusses, what is being referred to by Paul as an attempted redemption story in relation to the documentary that Paul is producing on himself and his persona. Paul explains the purpose of the documentary with the question "Will I come back?" (The Logan Paul Intervew.: 8:00-8:02) to which he answers his own question by stating "I say yes, that is what the doc is about that is what the story is" (8:03-8:07). The fact that Paul uses the words "that is what the story is" suggests that he, in fact, does portray a YouTube persona to which his social media identity have been created and evolved. The word "story" suggests that he is building a plot

for his media personality and while this might not have the same connotation as a character of a book or a movie it still suggests that today's society allows and provide a social space online where people have the opportunity of creating a self that is, in fact, only existing in the online space. A social media persona such as Paul portrays a social media identity in order to protect the privacy of the off-camera Logan Paul. As a daily vlogger he is inviting the viewer into his actual home, filming his house, his friends and family which all suggest that the viewers experience a private Logan Paul through his video, however, in relation to identity, it is important to note that the difference between public and private identity also applies to Logan Paul. By making his 'everyday life' into YouTube entertainment, Paul is also creating the role of 'Logan Paul the YouTuber'. Furthermore, the creation of a social media identity can challenge the individual when the evolution and development of this identity either crosses the line of the social standards or challenges the individuals everyday 'real' life. In Paul's case, he had to face the actions of his self-made social media persona's actions which to some extent might or might not be somewhat close to his offline personality.

When Casey Neistat asks Logan Paul whether or not this redemption story is premature, he points out the fact that before there can be a redemption story, there has to be some sort of actual redemption and furthermore asks what actions Paul have made in order to claim a redemption story (The Logan Paul Interview.: 8:08-8:22). To which Paul states that at the point of the interview, there has not been a redemption story yet and that the documentary that he is producing is his act of redemption (The Logan Paul Interview.: 8:27-8:32). The conversation goes on to discuss whether or not Paul will profit from the documentary and whether or not to monetize the video to which Paul answers that he does not know whether or not to monetize the video and that he has "told stories" his entire life and therefore he would not let someone else create the story of his redemption.

According to Paul someone would want to make the story and he states "Why let someone else do it, when I can just do it myself and I know that if we do decide to monetize it, hundred percent of the proceeds will go to some sort of suicide prevention awareness program because that is essentially what this whole thing is about" (The Logan Paul Intervew.: 8:38-9:18). The idea of a redemption story is an interesting aspect of the conversation because the redemption idea is portrayed as a story that needs to be produced, constructed and told which will also make it calculated, somewhat scripted and staged. This suggests that Paul and his media identity and the development thereof follows Pangrazio's theory on how social media users use social media in order to "[…] share detailed and emotional information with their friends and followers, making these platforms rich sources of personal data for the platform operators". As Logan Paul in the past have been daily vlogging his life and that way have shown, shared and exposed, detailed, in some cases emotional, information through his YouTube channel, he has not only enriched his own life with an

income and a job but he has also enriched YouTube as a platform due to his massive following and his viral videos. This adds to the idea of a social change in society where digital life has become extremely important in the process of portraying and evolving an identity online. With Paul's social media identity being so popular, his 'fans' or subscribers would expect Paul to be the personality that he is portraying in his online universe. Furthermore, the strong fan culture which in relation to YouTube would be defined as subscribers is also an interesting aspect. Paul uploaded a video to his YouTube channel in August 2017 titled 'HOW I HIT 10,000,000 SUBSCRIBERS IN 340 DAYS!' which gives an insight of how massive and how fast Paul has managed to grow and influence the YouTube community.

With the following of subscribers that Paul has been able to collect within a short period of time, his following on social media which on YouTube is defined as subscribers and by Paul himself referred to as the 'Logang' as seen in the video titled 'HELLO PEWDIEPIE… THE LOGANG IS HERE', Paul creates a community for his subscribers – or a 'gang'. By creating a 'gang' Paul not only creates a community for his fans to interact with one another, but he also creates a title that his followers can use in order to identify as a Logan Paul supporter. This fan culture of influencers mirrors the celebrity culture that has existed in mainstream society for decades and which have been immense among the music and acting business. According to Chris Rojek, professor of sociology, debates celebrity culture and the religious feeling of fan cultures in *Encyclopedia of Social Theory* from 2005 in the chapter titled *Celebrity*. In this chapter Rojek argues how a celebrity "[…] offer narratives of recognition and belonging in secular, multicultural societies in which standards of bureaucracy, anonymity, and high levels of mobility are ascendant" (Rojek, 4). With Paul creating content centering around his daily life, his friends, family, and work life as well as bringing the viewers visually into his home, he and the rest of the YouTube community offers a new version of fan culture. Furthermore, it could be argued that bringing the viewers into their personal space and at times talking directly to their viewers imitates a more intimate and personal relationship between the celebrity and the fan. Where a musician connects with fans through a melody or a lyric, the YouTuber might have an advantage of creating the illusion of being more personal and friendlier with the fan/subscriber.

Rojek also touches on the subject of 'public face' and 'private self' where the public face "[…] is a construction of both the individual intent on attaining achieved celebrity and cultural intermediaries" (Rojek, 4) and that the private self "provides a sense of personal integrity" (Rojek, 4). This distinction between 'public face' and 'private space' harmonizes with the online identity from the Digital Culture theory section in which the online identity is presented as something the individual is able to build up via a social media platform and that way takes part in a 'figured world'

by telling "[…] others who they are, but even more importantly, they tell themselves and they try to act as though they are who they say they are […]". With Paul inviting his viewers and his 'Logang' into his private space it could suggest that he is being his true authentically self on his YouTube channel, however, in relation to online culture, the idea of portraying oneself in a certain way on social media seems more realistic. Therefore, it could be argued that according to celebrity studies and online culture studies, Paul is giving the illusion that he is letting people into his 'private space' but in reality, he is working his 'public face' in his online space in order to portray great content and at the same time keep a 'gang' relation to his subscribers. This furthermore adds to the argument of Paul building a narrative or plot for his YouTube persona in order to keep his content interesting as well as protecting his private space and his private identity.

4.3.6 Bending and Pushing the Limits

In the last part of the interview with Casey Neistat and Logan Paul, Neistat and Paul discuss how vlogging and sharing everyday life with whoever might come across the videos they upload. Neistat questions Paul to where his mindset was before he went into the Suicide Forest to which Paul interestingly answers that at that moment in his life, his goal was to create content every day with the purpose of bending and push the limit and at the same time be entertaining and fun for the viewers. This, Paul explains, caused him and the people around him to being caught up in making and creating this type of content and that he eventually did not stop to evaluate what he was publishing to his channel (The Logan Paul Interview.: 16:43-17:44). This is an interesting fact since Paul seems to confess that he did not fully understand his reach with his YouTube channel until the scandal of the Suicide Forest started rolling. This also indicates that Paul, even though he would be considered a digital native, has struggled to manage and comprehend the consequences of his actions before he went into the Suicide Forest. As mentioned, he explains how he was pushing and bending the limit to what he could do in his vlogs and how he was intrigued to keep pushing the limits in order to create content for his viewers.

Besides not fully understanding the reach of his channel, Paul also does not seem to have acknowledged how strong the power of his channel has been. As mentioned earlier in this analysis it has been argued how Paul and his powerful position as a popular YouTuber have been able to turn his vlogging content into a popular and click-worthy choice for YouTube users and that way, Paul also follows the pattern of digital literacy and the character traits thereof. In the theory section, Lankshear and Knobel argue that among other character traits of digitally literate people one aspect is that they know how to "[…] become skilled at presenting [their] information in the medium that [their] audience will find easiest to understand". In this case, it could be argued that Paul before the

Suicide Forest video has been excellent at creating and publishing content on the social media (YouTube) that has been entertaining for his viewers which in the end has caused Paul to push the limit too far with the Suicide Forest. In the interview, Paul explains this phase of his life as being on 'autopilot' (The Logan Paul Interview.: 17:45-17:47) which furthermore insinuates that Paul, in fact, did not fully understand the power of how fast and how enormous his following on YouTube had become. Furthermore, Paul explains how he, at the time of the Suicide Forest video, was broadcasting his own entertainment via his videos to an audience of up to 5 to 7 million viewers every single day (The Logan Paul Interview.: 17:48-17:54). With Paul's explanation of 'broadcasting' content via his YouTube channel, he is following Hoechsmann and Poyntz idea of media literacy and how media literacy involves creating and making "[…] media of our own, and to recognize and engage with social and political influence of media in everyday life". In this case, it is Paul who is producing and making media via his YouTube channel and in the case of the Suicide Forest video, the viewers and the general online media society has had the role of engaging in the debate on what is acceptable to publish online. Paul's apologies on both Twitter and YouTube combined with his comments in the Casey Neistat interview suggests Paul as the producer has not met his audiences/receivers' expectations with the Suicide Forest video.

This leads to the understanding of the Encoding/Decoding process by Stuart Hall from the theory section. In the process of Encode/Decode the production is the construction of a message, in the case of Logan Paul and the Suicide Forest that means that his video(s) arise a message to the viewers for them to decode. According to Hall's theory, Paul, with the Suicide Forest video, does not seem to match up the expectations of him as a producer due to the fact that he is not able to match the "[…] assumptions about the audience and so on frame the constitution of the programme through this production structure". In this case, the program would be the former daily vlogger's daily videos that he produced and published to his YouTube channel and the audience would not only be the viewers of his video(s) but every individual with access to an online space who wanted to participate in the debate about Paul's video.

4.3.7 The Views and the Message

With the World Wide Web comes the opportunity of participating in an online culture where the individual has the opportunity of becoming a producer of entertainment through an online social platform such as YouTube whereas, in the past, production of entertainment has been ruled by television and production companies. This furthermore highlights the difference in becoming an entertainer in the 21st century since the ability to create content via a social media platform in today's society depends on internet access and technical devices whereas the ability to create entertainment

in the 20th and the beginning of the 21st century has been dependent on working in some sort of production company in order to be able to air the material on television. The proportion of producing a television series versus creating a daily vlog for a YouTube channel also differs from one another. A great amount of pre-work goes into creating a television series and the time from creating the idea to actually airing an episode on television is a rather long process. For a YouTuber to create a vlog, edit the video material, edit a thumbnail and coming up with a title for the video seems more basic and faster to do. With the YouTuber being the driving force in choosing whether or not to upload a video to the YouTube channel without necessarily having the same timeframe as an 'old school' production company, the YouTuber has the ability to create content rapidly and thereby entertain the viewers with fresh content.

In the process of creating entertainment content in broadcast media, considerations such as "[…] topics, treatments, agendas, events, personnel, images of the audience, "definitions of the situation" from other sources and other discursive formations within the wide socio-cultural and political structure […]", as mentioned in the theory section, are being evaluated. In relation to being a YouTuber, the same amount of considerations might not be worked through. However, Logan Paul has on several occasions revealed that he has a manager that he referrers to as 'Manager Jeff' this is seen in the video called 'REACTING TO JAKE AND I's OLD YOUTUBE VIDEOS! **cringe**' uploaded July 11, 2017, to the channel 'Logan Paul Vlogs'. The difference of working for a production company where some sort of media education would be expected along with fellow colleagues and procedures to ensure that the end result has a clear message compared to a YouTuber who might not have the same number of co-workers to answer to every time when uploading a video. This might also be the reason to why the Suicide Forest video happened in the first place, as Paul explains in the Casey Neistat interview that he (Paul) was on autopilot at the time of the Suicide Forest video and interestingly enough Paul uses the word 'we' when stating that he, at the time of the Suicide Forest video, was creating a new piece of content every day for his YouTube channel (The Logan Paul Interview.: 17:06-17:44). By using the word 'we' Paul could be referring to the friends he brought on the trip to Japan, his cameraman at the time Brendan North or his manager Jeff.

Furthermore, Paul's claims of his Suicide Forest video being made in order to create awareness of suicide and suicide prevention as stated in his apology on Twitter. This suggests that the claims of encoding a message and awareness of suicide prevention were not the decoded result of his viewers. If Paul's attempt with the Suicide Forest video was to encode a message of suicide prevention, he did not succeed, as Hall puts it, to "[…] have an "effect" […] satisfy a "need" or be put to a "use" […]" the way the message was intended. The decoded message from the Suicide Forest video can as mentioned in the theory section, "[…] "have an effect", influence, entertain, instruct or

persuade, with very complex perceptual, cognitive, emotional, ideological or behavioural consequences". With Logan Paul's massive subscription number to his YouTube channel and his videos having up to 5 to 7 million views at the time of the Suicide Forest video, Paul and the message of his video has an impact on the viewers as well as to the platform that is YouTube.

In an article from the online media WeTheUnicorns titled 'Another YouTuber filmed inside the Japanese suicide forest' from December 6, 2018, the YouTuber Qorygore is explained to have uploaded a video going in to the Suicide Forest and the article states that Qorygore "[…] has inexplicably decided to replicate Logan's actions – and naturally it didn't go well" (Townsend). The article furthermore states that the video has since been taken down and that in the video "[…] Qorygore enters the forest with the express purpose of emulating Logan – even dubbing himself "Logan 2.0". He does apparently eventually find a body" (Townsend). Qorygore's actions of emulating himself as the new Logan Paul is, first of all, an indication of how Paul's video was received and decoded. How the video has had an effect and an influence in the online YouTube society, the video was uploaded with the purpose of entertainment and had both emotional and ideological reactions from online users which as mentioned earlier in the analysis has had consequences for Logan Paul as well as his brother Jake Paul. With Qorygore, as mentioned in the article, naming himself 'Logan 2.0' furthermore reinforces how Qorygore who at the time of this analysis has collected over 1 million subscribers to his YouTube channel (Qorygore) is comparing himself to Logan Paul and thereby sets Paul and his behavior in the Suicide Forest video as a model for success.

In the Casey Neistat interview, Neistat touches on the topic of Logan Paul's excitement in the Suicide Forest video and Neistat states "You were excited to have found a dead body" (The Logan Paul Interview.: 24:48-24:54). Neistat vocals his disapproval of Paul's behavior and furthermore states that Paul's explanation of intending the Suicide Forest video as a Suicide awareness or prevention video is hard to believe and Neistat highlights this by pointing out that Paul and his friends were laughing in the video when they discovered the dead body (The Logan Paul Interview.: 24:37-24:55). Neistat furthermore states, when Paul disagrees, that this was the emotion that Neistat was left with after having watched the video and that this was the emotion that he took and read from Paul and his friends. Neistat with the age of 38 (Wikipedia: Casey Neistat) has been born into the digital age and with his career as a YouTuber, he furthermore proves that he is a successful user of digital media. In relation to whether or not Neistat is a digital native or a digital immigrant, the Toledo article from the theory section says that a digital immigrant is "A technology user, usually over the age of thirty, who was not born into the digital world". Now since the article dates back to 2007 the age of thirty must have changed as well in order to match the age of a digital

immigrant. Neistat, however, has still been growing up in a media culture and with his approach to Paul on how Paul handled the situation in the Suicide Forest video indicates that Neistat possesses the ability to deconstruct the situation and read the video in a critically way as Hoechsmann and Poyntz points out. Furthermore, Neistat demystifies the video by actively choosing to establish a sit-down interview with Paul in order to demystify some of his own questions about the video that he might feel that Paul has not managed to explain thoroughly in past interviews and videos.

Lastly, during the Casey Neistat interview, while Paul and Neistat are discussing the topic of responsibility, as well as what Paul's mission with his YouTube content should be, Paul states "I'm a brand that's who Logan Paul is because I do bridge the gap between being like a motivational speaker for kids and standing on a stage in front of 300 people but also like - hey! I am a fucking kid – I'm 23 years old – 22 years old at the time and if I want to go jump out of a plane naked, I'm gonna fucking do it" (The Logan Paul Interview.:18:53-19:12). This statement from Paul is rather interesting since his choice of stating "[…] I am a fucking kid – I'm 23 years old […]" suggests that Paul is justifying his previous actions by stating that he is a child. At the age of 23, however, Paul would be considered a young adult both legally and in a societal context. With his 23 years of age, Paul has had the right to vote since he was 18, he has had the right to a driver's license at the age of 16 and moreover, he has had the opportunity to legally buy and consume alcohol since the tender age of 21. All of the above opportunities are considered privileges that the individual obtains while slowly progressing into adulthood and yet somehow Paul still, according to his statement, considers himself a child. This statement of claiming to be a child, therefore, seems odd and incorrect, however, the social media identity of Logan Paul might see and portray himself as a childish adult.

4.4 Racist Controversies in the YouTube Beauty Community

This part of the analysis will center around the controversies of racism that has occurred on YouTube within the last couple of years from prominent and well-known YouTubers in the beauty community. The beauty community on YouTube is a growing and thriving niche of the YouTube platform, and the beauty community counts numerous popular and followed males and females sharing their beauty related videos on the platform. The controversies in this analysis will center around YouTubers such as Jeffree Star and Laura Lee who have been the center of accusations of racism on social media, and been in a position as prominent and popular YouTubers which has resulted in different approaches and outcomes of apologizing to their viewers and subscribers.

Firstly, it is important to highlight that through time the standard of beauty and the beauty community have primarily been communicating to women of Caucasian descent. In the beauty business and community this has meant that women of color have had a hard time finding make-up fitting their skin tone which naturally highlights the inequality and injustice for these women when it comes to the opportunity of highlighting their beauty with make-up the same way individuals of lighter skin tones have had for decades upon decades.

4.4.1 Jeffree Star, Battery Acid and Lighter Skin Tones

Jeffree Star, who is a part of the beauty community on YouTube and who has a subscription count of over 14 million subscribers to his YouTube channel called 'jeffreestar', has throughout his YouTube career been accused of being racist due to videos uploaded to the social media platform Myspace 13 years ago. Star was a popular user on the social media platform Myspace and the videos and the term 'racism' has become a returning issue and dilemma for Star and his social media career on YouTube. The interesting fact of how these videos have traveled from one social media platform to another social media platform shows how content can travel from one platform to another which highlights how social media works in relation to sharing content. The idea of 'when you share something on social media, it is out there forever' seems to be relevant in the case of Jeffree Star.

During a conversation between fellow YouTuber Shane Dawson in a video titled 'The Truth About Jeffree Star', A tweet from Star stating that he was 19 years of age when these videos were made is posted on Myspace are shown which establishes that Star is, in fact, a Digital Native who joined a social media platform in the early stages of social media (The Truth About Jeffree Star: 19:47-19:48). This most likely indicates that Star with his young age and with his narrow knowledge of social media and the ability of social media had no idea that these videos would follow his career

onto another social media platform. Furthermore, even though Star would be considered a Digital Native who grew up with digital technology and social media, due to the early stages of social media when Star joined, he has most likely not had the chance of learning digital literate behavior in relation to social media before he joined a social media platform. This means that Star most likely has had to educate and figure out how to act and interact on social media in a learning-by-doing approach which would involve a trial and error technique. Furthermore, Star's early social media rise to fame indicates that he from the start of his social media career have been able to handle the digital culture of being interesting and worth of following/subscribing to. In other words, in an online universe where change and relevancy are main factors, Star has managed to stay relevant across platforms, kept his subscription and following number growing and despite scandals and a fair share of controversies been able to stay popular on the platform.

The controversial videos that Jeffree Star is referring to centers around him using racial slurs in a conversation between Star and a Drag queen named Sharolaid who acts during a staged phone conversation. In this video, Star states that if one cannot get their foundation color right, he wants to throw battery acid in the face in order to lighten their skin tone (The Truth About Jeffree Star: 15:35-17:10). Star further explains to Dawson that this video was made as a comedy-skit and that the statement was a "sick stupid skit" that was filmed in a time where social media was relatively new in society and Star explains that 13 years after the video was published the video has morphed into the conclusion that Star wants women of color to lighten their skin tone (17:00-17:10). Furthermore, Star reveals to Dawson that there is a second video of him in which he uses the racist slur 'N****r bitch' towards a group of girls which he states had yelled 'fucking faggot' and 'freak' after him during a walk on a boardwalk in Miami (17:20-17:45). Star explains that due to his past mistakes including these Myspace videos he has learned that defending his actions when he has said something that could be interpreted as either racist or offensive has never worked out for him. However, Star points out to Dawson that in the video of him using the N-word, the group of girls that he is addressing is Caucasian but nonetheless Star acknowledges that his choice of words was, in fact, racist (17:48-18:03).

4.4.2 RACISM by Jeffree Star

In a YouTube video titled 'RACISM.' posted to Star's channel on July 20, 2017, Star addresses his journey on social media. He states that through the last decade Star has lived his life on social media and further elaborates by stating that the journey from being a niche-musician on Myspace to evolving his career into a YouTuber, Businessman and Beauty guru has been long (RACISM.: 0:15-0:39). He furthermore goes on to explain that he admits to not always understanding

the size and reach of his platform via his social media (hereof his YouTube channel) and that people who follow him via his social media platforms actually knows a fair amount about his life (0:39-0:50). Star's acknowledgment of his life on social media and his popular YouTube channel that hold more than 14 million subscribers indicates that he during his 'education' on social media have gained an understanding and an awareness of his reach. However, Star emphasizes at the beginning of the video that his agenda is to reveal and explain his own story about his past and the allegations of him being racist (0:50-1:05).

The video is neutral in relation to the visual effect and it shows Star sitting in front of a dark blue background and nothing more. The general tone of the video is serious and the minimalistic visual effect furthermore indicates that the topic of the video is serious and crucial and that the message of the video should not be misread or misunderstood. The title of the video contributes to the serious tone and the bold letters spelling out the word 'Racism', which has a deep meaning in American society, seems simple yet significant. Furthermore, Jeffree Star is wearing rather neutral colored clothing and hair/make-up compared to his usual looks in his videos. All of these visual effects contribute to the indication that Star is regretful and that he in some way or form has a mission to explain himself and his past behavior. This also indicates that Star's digital literate journey on social media has changed or evolved over a decade of sharing his life on a social media platform. Furthermore, this video was published by Star in July of 2017 and the Dawson video was published in August of 2018. As Star explains the controversial videos has followed his career for over a decade and his own attempt to address the situation through a video performed in a serious tone still does not seem to answer all questions since Dawson still feels the need to address the situation.

Jeffree Star's need to change the perception of his social media persona is of course due to the fact that he does not want to be associated with racism, but it could also be argued that he is attempting to reshape his social media identity and his viewers' interpretation of him. Having started out as a popular social media persona in the early days, it could be argued that Star in the early stages of his social media career and in an early stage of his life as a young adult shaped and expressed an identity that he no longer associates with. Star is open about the fact that he is homosexual and that he likes wearing heavy make-up and experimenting with hair and wigs. These are traits that to the general public often is associated with the Drag Queen community, and with Star confessing in the Dawson video that when the videos containing racist slurs were filmed Star was struggling with a depression this portrays Star's former persona in a sensitive position (The Truth About Jeffree Star: 18:02-18:26). Pangrazio mentions that social media platforms such as Facebook have been caught sharing "[…] details about the psychological state of teenage users with its advertising partners […]" and that the social media platform were able to detect and identify when the users felt all sorts of

emotions from happiness to anxiety. However, in the case of Jeffree Star and his past as a depressed and offensive angry young person these actions were portrayed and performed by Star himself, which according to Pangrazio is what the individual is using social media to "[…] share detailed and emotional information with their friends and followers […]". By using the social media platform to share emotions, thoughts, struggles, and memories the platform and the followers, subscribers, viewers and so on makes platforms gain a sense of power, both over the concept of the individual's 'social' life but also the fear of missing out (FoMo). The difference of having personal information stolen as the case of Facebook and willingly publishing certain information and emotions on a social media platform is different and therefore evident, and the regret of past online behavior should in this case not be mistaken as stolen material.

Star's willingness to discuss and address his prior digital behavior, which as mentioned has been controversial and therefore the center of criticism could be a sign of Star's digital literate education throughout the years. Star's understanding and use of digital tools and his ability to collect subscribers to his YouTube channel indicate that he either is an interesting person for other people to subscribe to and therefore knows or at least has a sense of the power of his digital popularity. Secondly, it could be argued that due to his experience as a social media persona that has been sharing information as well as entertainment for other platform users for over a decade, he does, in fact, understand the 'social media game' and the strategy to get other users to click and interact on the material he uploads. By keeping the apology simple, serious and sincere Star increases the chances of a redemption story for his channel and his business empire.

Since Star and his YouTube channel is highly popular in the beauty community which has evolved on YouTube, a part of his everyday life is to post material for his social media platforms which, apart from his popular cosmetic brand and other business ventures, seems to be his main source of income. For Star, his YouTube channel and social media career is a way to promote and advertise products of his beauty company which is a free and effective way of selling products. With 14 million subscribers to his YouTube channel, the opportunity of selling products through his videos are highly possible and therefore it could be considered highly important for Star to clear his reputation as a racist in order to reach broader, both culturally and in relation to ethnicity.

4.4.3 The African American Beauty Community and Star's Comments

In the Shane Dawson video, Dawson has included video clips of other YouTubers from the beauty community commenting on the allegations that Star is a racist. Some of the comments made are that a Caucasian woman claims that she will never buy a Jeffree Star product ever again and an African American woman is stating that Jeffree Star could be a changed man and that no

matter how many times he has apologized for his old racist content he still has to address the situation properly (The Truth About Jeffree Star: 14:58-15:17). These statements from the YouTube community and the fact that the racist videos from over a decade later is still being brought up not only underlines the issues within society when it comes to racism but furthermore underlines the fact that if Star is not addressing the situation in a digitally literate and thought-through way, the situation might carry even more negativity in the future. In relation to this, it is important to mention that among communities that have risen on social media platforms, are movements such as Black Lives Matter and other pro movements of the African American communities. This means that it has become easier for the African American community to connect via social media and create online communities in which Black Lives Matter issues from society can be discussed and shared. This gives the opportunities for an ethnic group to gather in an online space and put on a united front in relation to inequality or racism.

       In a video titled 'Anti Haul! Spring 2017│ Jackie Aina' from the YouTube channel Jackie Aina, the YouTuber who has 3 million subscribers to the channel and is a part of the Beauty community on YouTube, states that she will not be buying any of Star's beauty products due to his past racist behavior (5:38-6:34). The YouTuber who is of African descent furthermore posted an open letter to her Twitter profile on September 29, 2018 in which she states about Star "I have not and will not excuse his blatantly racist behavior – not his past references to me in derogatory terms, his continued use of the N word, not his efforts to eliminate spaces and opportunities for people of color" (@jackieaina). This statement on Twitter was posted on September of 2018, Dawson's video in which the controversy of racism is discussed was as mentioned posted in August of 2018 and Star's own video and apology for past behavior was posted in June 2017.

       This, first and foremost, highlights the fact that when something is posted on the internet it will in some shape or form be there forever. This also means that Star is, and should be, held accountable for his actions of past racist statements, and according to Jackie Aina his continued use of racist words and terms. Whether or not these statements from Jackie Aina is correct or incorrect is not the main focus of this analysis, however, an interesting fact is that Star in his own apology video titled 'RACISM.' comes off as a regretful person who is willing to apologize for past behavior and in some way try to explain his past actions as an angry young man. Star has disabled the comments on this video and therefore it is not possible to analyze how the general reaction to this video was. What Star is doing with his own video is setting the expectations that he changed his ways and have moved on from past mistakes. Aina, however, is stating that Star, in fact, has not changed his ways and have used derogatory language towards her and she further states in her open letter that "No one

in the community should feel they are protected enough to continuously say things to make black women feel ugly and ashamed in their own skin" (@jackieaina). Here Aina insinuates that Star and his massive following on his social media have given him immunity in relation to slithering his way around his past and apparently present behavior with racism.

When Star uploads a video addressing his past behavior, he creates this type of content in order for it to have an impact and an agenda for his viewers and this, of course, comes with a message. Star's message in his 'RACISM.' video firstly seems to be that he explains himself as an equal to everyone who is watching his video and he states that he wants to speak to his audience as a human being (1:45-1:52). By 'stepping down' and declaring that he wants to speak as a human being, he establishes the idea that he with his business empire and his status as a YouTuber and influencer has some sort of celebrity status which again could make him seem as something more despite just being a normal human being. In modern culture and especially as digital culture has evolved, the internet and social media have allowed people to become famous due to the following/subscription that social media gives the users. When social media users choose to join a bigger social media persona they also to a small or bigger extend chooses to engage within this online community.

With Jeffree Star expressing that he is no racist he, as Pangrazio explains, presents who he is, or more importantly whom he wants his social media personality to be. However, if Jackie Aina's statements about Star and his derogatory use of language is, in fact, true, he is not matching his social media personality to his actual actions in the 'real world' and therefore is not able to match his figured world to his actual world as described in the theory section. This furthermore highlights the fact that Jackie Aina is presenting a different identity than the one Star is expressing in his 'RACISM' video. Even though Aina's subscription number does not match Star's she is still a part of the same community and by portraying Star as someone who is still using derogatory language and racist statements, she is contributing to defining Star's online social media identity – maybe even as a liar as well. This way, Aina takes part in influencing and informing the beauty community audience on character traits that she claims to have experienced and that Star's audience might not have the opportunity to discover themselves.

4.4.4 The Power of Subscribers

With Star's 14 million subscribers on his YouTube channel comes, as mentioned earlier, a lot of power both in relation to his reach with his channel but also in relation to the social media platform (YouTube) itself. This means that whether or not his subscribers and other YouTube users choose to believe him when he says that he has changed his ways from 13 years ago is an interesting fact. The first thought that spring to mind is that if his viewers do not believe him, his career could

suffer immensely, maybe even to an extent where he would not be able to recover. However, when looking into the number of people that have clicked and watched both the 'RACISM.' video and the 'The Truth About Jeffree Star' video both videos have high view counts. With the racism video gaining close to 5 million views and the Dawson video collecting a whopping 20 million views it is safe to state that both videos have been highly popular among the YouTube community.

These sort of views both gives Star a powerful position as an interesting YouTuber and influencer as well as YouTube as a platform. 20 million views are a high number of clicks and these sorts of videos not only benefits the YouTuber but also grants YouTube with publicity which again leads to an economic benefit. Therefore, it could be considered that YouTube as a platform and business benefits from these sorts of controversial videos. When a controversial video is posted on the platform, the more the community discusses and interact on the video, the more views it receives and that way becomes popular material. The 'RACISM' video on Star's channel seems click-worthy due to the general seriousness to the word and the issues within the American society. Star's association with the word creates a natural curiosity because the title does not expose Star's intentions with the video which makes the video even more tempting to click on. This video is furthermore a great example of how Star gains a lot of views on his video, avoids negativity directly on the video by disabling the opportunity to comment and like/dislike and thereby keep his YouTube channel interesting and relevant.

In relation to general behavior on social media, Jeffree Star has become known for his disagreements and feuds with other YouTubers in the beauty community as well as mainstream celebrities. In August of 2017, the reality star Kim Kardashian defended Star's past racist comments. The article 'Kim Kardashian Just Apologized to Her Fans for Defending Jeffree Star' by De Elizabeth states that Kim explained "I get it's a serious deal if you say racial things, but I do believe in people changing, and people that apologize, I will give them the benefit of the doubt" (Allure: Elizabeth). With Kim Kardashian West's defense of Star on her social media platforms and her hundreds of million followers to these sites one would think that this was a powerful approval of Star as an influencer and as a human being, however, according to the article Kardashian West suffered backlash for defending Star. The article states that "[…] Kardashian's comments haven't been sitting well with some of her fans, who have since taken to social media to explain that Star's apology cannot erase the words that were said" (Elizabeth) and Kardashian West ended up commenting on the matter on a live-stream by stating "I really didn't have the right to say 'get over it' to a situation that involves racism" (Elizabeth). This both shows how strongly individuals feel about the topic of racism as well as the need for a public and popular face such as Kardashian West to stay on good terms with her social media following. However, it is an interesting aspect that Kardashian West and her defense of

Star seems to have such an impact on her followers. Again, this shows how important and relevant the issues of racism both in relation to derogatory language use and in relation to the clear distinction in American society when it comes to race and ethnicity.

4.4.5 Laura Lee Treading Water?

In the summer of 2018, another controversy involving racism hit the YouTube beauty community, this scandal involved a handful of beauty YouTubers, including the popular YouTuber Laura Lee. In an online article from the website BuzzFeed News, the article 'Here's What's Going On With All The Drama Between Popular Beauty YouTubers Accusing One Another Of Being Racist' written by Tanya Chen, it says "A group of famous makeup artist YouTubers are being called out for using racist and derogatory language in old tweets" (Chen) and that these old tweets were discovered after these beauty YouTubers were accused of demeaning the beauty YouTuber Jeffree Star. The group of YouTubers involved, besides Laura Lee, was Gabriel Zamora, Nikita Dragun, and Manny MUA and the episode started when Zamora posted a picture on Twitter with the caption "Bitch is bitter because without him we're doing better" (Chen). This was followed up by Zamora with another tweet in which Zamora wrote "Imagine stanning a racist? I could never" (Chen). The article further states that "Like cyberpaleontologists, Star's fervent fans were triggered and began digging into Zamora and the rest of the YouTube posse featured in the original photo" (Chen).

The tweets found on Lee's Twitter has since been deleted from her Twitter account but as in the case with Jeffree Star and Logan Paul the material, in this case, tweets, have been saved in screenshot format. Some of her tweets read "[…] tip for all black people if you pull ur pants up you can run from the police faster… #yourwelcome" (Chen), "Ni**as in Paris? Whaaaaat I thought they couldn't afford to leave Compton! LOL!" (Chen) and "How do you blindfold a Chinese person? Put floss over their eyes! #dumbgook" (Chen). The tweets which were posted to Lee's Twitter profile back in 2012 resulted in Laura Lee uploading and later deleting an apology video in which she tearfully addressed and apologized for her tweets. In an article from cosmopolitan titled 'Laura Lee just made her return to YouTube following racist Tweets' written by Laura Capon, Capon writes that Lee "[…] admitted that she couldn't even bear to look at herself" (Capon). An interesting aspect of this controversial situation is that, as seen in the case of Jeffree Star, the popularity of his YouTube channel never seemed to settle during his racism scandal(s) however, according to an article from Polygon titled 'Jeffree Star, Laura Lee, Gabriel Zamora and YouTube's issue with problematic faves' by Julia Alexander, Lee lost more than 200,000 subscribers on her YouTube channel in just a few days (Alexander). The article furthermore points out that the amount of economic benefit lost from

the loss of subscribers "[…] approximately equates to a loss of $70 a day – or, $25,000 a year" (Alexander).

Firstly, this points out that Lee is dependent on her subscribers in order for her to benefit from the job she has as a YouTuber. However, the major loss of subscribers resulted in Lee going from having over 5 million subscribers to her YouTube account, to ending up losing over half a million subscribers due to the scandal (Capon). When a YouTuber loses such a massive number of subscribers during a short period of time, it suggests that within the community a common opinion arises within the subscribe/fan culture. When a common opinion or agreement within a community spread as in the case of Lee, this is, within the YouTube community, referred to as cancel culture. Now of course the culture of 'canceling' an individual, a brand or a certain dilemma is not exclusive to the YouTube- or social media communities, but within the social media society this 'cancellation' of something or someone does seem strong and powerful due to the ability for users to post, repost and share an opinion or a pending topic to a large group of people in a matter of minutes maybe even seconds. Cancel culture is defined as "[…] a term used to refer to the phenomenon of "cancelling" or no longer morally, financially, and/or digitally supporting people – usually celebrities- events, art works such as songs, films or TV shows, or things that many have deemed unacceptable or problematic […]" (Wikipedia: Call-out culture). Examples of significant people who have been the center of cancel culture in the recent years could be significant Hollywood names such as Bill Cosby, Harvey Weinstein and R. Kelly who were 'canceled' after their past sexual assault history emerged at the beginning of and during the #MeToo movement.

This definition points out the fact that canceling a social media persona can be harmful and crucial for the media personas career. If Lee loses an income of $70 a day when losing 200,000 subscribers, her income would be significantly lower when losing over half a million subscribers. Beside losing subscribers to her YouTube channel, Lee also lost brand deals and in an online article from allure titled 'Is Laura Lee Getting Dropped by Beauty Brands Because of Her Past Racist Tweets? [Updated]' by Lea Prinzivalli it becomes clear how serious the previous tweets have affected not only her YouTube career but her business career as well. The article states that her beauty products called Laura Lee Los Angeles "[…] are mysteriously missing from Ulta, ColourPop Cosmetics, Morphe, and BoxCharm" (Prinzivalli). This shows that either due to the massive unfollowing of Lee's YouTube channel or the negative press Lee received after her tweets were revealed, business partners and companies chose to part ways with Lee. Whether or not the joined canceling of Laura Lee stems from the fact that she posted racist tweets during a particularly difficult time in America (in 2012) in relation to inequality, racism and police brutality or if this simply stems from the fact that the controversy arose from a conflict with Jeffree Star is difficult to decide. However, the tweets were

posted on Lee's Twitter profile in 2012 and do not seem to have posed as a problem for her up until Zamora tweeted about "stanning a racist" which was from 2018.

4.4.6 Star, Lee and the Similar Situation

When comparing the cases of Jeffree Star and Laura Lee their situations have some similar points. In both cases, both Star and Lee's controversy centers around derogatory and racist language and in both cases the racist material have been found in old video material or in the form of tweets. An interesting fact is that Star and Lee are former friends and have collaborated on several videos in the past for both YouTube channels, but their friendship seems to have fizzled out. The fact that these two works within the same community on YouTube and therefore might share the same audience for their videos and that they are no longer friends might have resulted in the subscribers of the beauty community having to choose a side between these two. Furthermore, both Star and Lee have been creating and posting similar videos to their YouTube channels as well. An example of similar videos between Star and Lee could be the videos with the title 'FULL FACE USING ONLY MAYBELLINE PRODUCTS! | Jeffree Star' and 'I USE A FULL FACE OF MAYBELLINE MAKEUP' on Lee's channel. Both video titles express that they will only be using one make-up brand and both titles imply that they will be doing their entire make-up with only Maybelline products when using the words 'Full Face'. This furthermore adds to how similar these two YouTubers are to one another, and the fact that the similar controversies surrounding both of them have not had the same consequences for both of them. Lastly, another interesting aspect being the fact that a cosmetic brand such as Morphe chose to stop their association with Lee due to her racism controversy while they in February of 2019 chose to collaborate with Jeffree Star despite his connection to racism (Jeffree Star x Morphe Brushes Reveal).

The question is, however, whether or not their interest in Star stems from his 14 million subscription number, his million-dollar cosmetic brand, the fact that he teamed up with Dawson who has 20 million subscribers and made a YouTube series on Star or the fact that Star's apology video was better received in the beauty community. If Star's YouTube channel and cosmetic brand could survive his past racist behavior being brought up again and again through time, and Lee's channel and business suffered severely one could be tempted to declare that Star's ability to handle controversy is better and that he, therefore, would be stronger and more literate in the social digital environment. Furthermore, his social media career started over a decade ago, Lee's oldest video posted to her YouTube channel is from March 2013 and is titled 'how to: contour and highlight 2013 laura88lee'. Even though Lee probably has used social media before becoming popular on YouTube,

Star has had over a decade of training as a social media personality and dealing with the obstacles thereof.

The main factor in which Lee seemed to fail during this controversy was her first apology video in which she seemed visibly upset and agitated. Now it has not been possible to find a re-upload of the first apology video in its full length and therefore it cannot be referred to, however a YouTube user named K-Row L uploaded a video titled 'Laura Lee "apology" with closed caption on SUBTITLES' in which the clips of Lee, apart from K-RoW L's 'subtitles', seems to have been edited down to only contain the main part of her first apology video. As mentioned, Lee is tearfully addressing the matter of the racist tweets, she appears to be sitting on the living room floor and is not her usual 'glitz and glam'-self. Compared to Star's 'RACISM' video and the video he did with Dawson, Star seemed composed, calm and ready to share his side of the controversy whereas Lee seems stressed out, upset and extremely emotional during her apology which could be interpreted as her trying to bluff the community into forgiving her (Laura Lee "apology" with closed on SUBTITLES). If Lee was trying to manipulate her audience in order to gain sympathy for her situation and thereby gain forgiveness from her subscribers and the rest of the beauty community by creating and posting the first apology video, it is safe to say that the plan did not succeed.

4.4.7 Fool Me Twice?

Her second apology video is titled 'Let's Chat: 9-25-18' and was posted to Lee's YouTube channel on September 25th, 2018. In this video, Lee states that she owes her subscribers a sincere apology and that in her first apology video, she came off as the victim and she further clarify that she in no shape or form should be considered a victim in relation to this controversy (0:01-0:36). She furthermore starts out the video by saying that she took a month off of posting to her social media platforms. The 3-minutes-and-43-second short video is, despite a more detailed background, similar to Star's 'RACISM.' video. Lee is sitting in front of the camera and speaking directly to the viewer of the video which gives a one-on-one and close feeling. As well as Star, Lee has toned down her appearance which gives her a neutral and calm look. Due to Laura Lee disabling the comments on the video, it is not possible to determine how the video was received directly on YouTube by her subscribers as well as the general YouTube community who would have had a chance to comment, like and dislike the video. One assumption to why Lee would disable the comment section to this video could be due to Lee trying to minimize the negative reaction directly to her video. If the YouTube users were to react negatively to her second apology, they would have to create their own video on their own YouTube channel or create content such as text for another social media platform in order to comment on the matter. Even though Lee's video does not reveal the immediate reaction

of her subscribers, it is safe to assume that a good amount of her former subscribers still has not forgiven her past racist tweets due to the fact that she has not gained her lost subscribers back yet. As of May 2019, Lee's channel has 4,4 million subscribers which mean that she is 600,000 subscribers down from when the racist tweets were discovered back in August 2018.

Early on in the video, Lee explains that the first apology video she made did not represent her well (Let's Chat: 9-25-18: 0:50-0:54). Her choice of word is interesting due to the fact that 'representing' could have two different definitions. Firstly, Lee could be referring to the reaction of the YouTube community after she posted her first apology video and in this connection mean that the video was misunderstood and that her emotions during the video were misinterpreted as being staged and fake. Another way of interpreting her choice of words could be that Lee feels some sort of embarrassment due to her first apology video not being accepted by the YouTube community and her apology being mocked and to some extent being labeled as 'not good enough'. Either way, cutting her second apology video short and choosing to title the video a neutral title that has no connection to her racism controversy or her first apology video as seen in the Logan Paul case and the 'So Sorry.' video. Furthermore, it could be argued that she by explaining and re-representing her side of the story, tries to re-identify her digital social media persona by claiming that she is not a victim. The word 'victim' carries degrading and humiliating characteristics which one would assume does not harmonize with being an online public personality with a popular and followed social media platform.

Before the racism scandal, Lee had built an internet identity and community, and within her own community, she had built a place to create content that could express and experiment with her digital identity. With the racist tweets emerging some of that identity has suffered and therefore changed from what it has been in the past. With the first and the second apology video, Lee's obvious goal has to be to change the narrativity of her YouTube identity in relation to assuring that she in no shape or form wants her name to be associated with racism. The definition and history attached to racism are negative and are associated with a long list of negative synonyms such as oppression, inequality, slavery, injustice, etc. This, along with the history of slavery in America and the issues of race/ethnicity that is still present in modern day society is not something a popular beauty YouTuber would want to be identified with.

Some of Lee's tweets suggested that African Americans are more likely to be criminal; "[…] tip for all black people if you pull ur pants up you can run from the police faster… #yourwelcome" (Chen), and that African Americans are likely to be a lower social class; "Ni**as in Paris? Whaaaaat I thought they couldn't afford to leave Compton! LOL!" (Chen). In the case of Laura Lee and her former 5 million subscribers, it is easy to determine that a significantly small amount of these subscribers has met Lee or is friends with her in person, and therefore it is safe to say that the

subscribers are only familiar with her online identity. That way Laura Lee cannot rely on her subscribers and fellow platform users to identify that she, in fact, is not a racist. The subscribers would only be able to identify Lee's identity from what she portrays on her social media platforms and since her YouTube channel is a part of the beauty community and centers around make-up products, brands and methods of applying these. The chance of Lee creating a video centering around racial injustice and inequality in society seems distant from her channel's main focus and also out of interest for the main reason her subscribers might visit her channel and watch her videos.

4.4.8 From Glam to Skid Row

In other words, sharing non-beauty related content to her channel seems not in line with the direction and community of her YouTube channel, however, on October 7, 2018, Lee published a non-beauty related video titled 'THE HARD REALITY OF LIFE ON SKID ROW | HOMELESS CRISIS'. This video centers around the homeless crisis in Los Angeles where a considerable number of children and young adults have ended up on the streets. The video itself has gained nearly 600,000 views which is a significantly low number compared to the video posted before and the video posted after this video. The video posted before, on October 4, 2018, is titled 'NEW VIRAL OVERHYPED MAKEUP 2018 | HITS AND MISSES' and received close to 900,000 views and the video posted after titled 'HATE COMMENTS DO MY MAKEUP FOR ME | OUCH!', posted on October 11, 2018, received over 1 million views. Both titles contain the word 'Makeup' which matches both the community and content that Lee mainly posts to her channel, and both videos have received more views than her video on the homeless crisis. Which video carries the most meaning in relation to issues in society is a no-brainer, however, Lee's subscribers click on her videos in order to gain knowledge on beauty and make-up and not about issues within the American society. Furthermore, the first few comments on her homeless crisis video state "I hope you use the money you make off of this video as a donation to this very charity." (Appendix, 2) and "If she actually did this out of the goodness of her heart and not to gain her subscribers back, she wouldn't have [monetized] this video. Just saying..." (Appendix, 2).

Both comments suggest a mistrust in Lee's intentions of making a non-beauty related video and their comments suggests that Lee with this video is trying to re-identify and change the narrative and interpretation of her identity through her YouTube channel. From the number of views the video received and the comments made in the commentary of the video, it becomes clear that what might have been an attempt to gain back some of the lost respect has not necessarily been successful for Laura Lee - and this covers when considering her two apology videos and her homeless crisis video. Another interesting fact about these comments from YouTube users to Lee's video is

that the viewers of her videos seem to be aware of the fact that she is able to earn a salary on a video by monetizing her videos. When Lee monetizes her 'Skid Row' video, which would be assumed to have the purpose of informing her audience about a severe issue in the state of California and in society, Lee's potential purpose seems to drown in the questions of whether or not she is cashing the check for this video. Furthermore, this shows that some of the YouTube users are drawing a line and suspects that Lee's intentions with this video might not be as pure as she is portraying in the video. Therefore, this analysis can be finished off with the understanding that YouTube users and viewers are able to hold more popular and influential YouTubers accountable for their actions on social media.

5. Discussion

This part of the study will center around a discussion on how the online culture with the fast progress and popularity of social media platforms have evolved the understanding of media culture and how media is used by the individual.

In the analysis, the case material proved that the social media platform YouTube and some of the popular YouTubers on the platform have experienced challenges in relation to their behavior on social media. Since social media is a relatively new phenomenon and therefore in the early stages of development it is important to understand how visual and audio entertainment with platforms such as YouTube have changed the way in which entertainment is provided as well as how accessible it has become for the individual. As mentioned in the analysis, the difference of producing a movie or tv-series is, without a doubt, immensely different from a YouTuber creating a vlog or video for a YouTube channel. However, with the popularity of this easily accessible content and with the enormous amount of views some of the most popular YouTubers bring in on some of their videos, production companies are, just like different business brands already have, opening their eyes for the new platforms which provide entertainment for the individual.

5.1 The Purpose of YouTube

The YouTuber Casey Neistat uploaded another interview titled 'Interviewing the Head of YouTube Business' on his YouTube channel in which he interviews the Chief Business Officer of YouTube, Robert Kyncl. The interview, which was posted to YouTube on February 12, 2018, after Logan Paul and the Suicide Forest video, centers around Neistat trying to understand how Kyncl experience what is happening on YouTube and how the platform is evolving. With the Kyncl interview, the machine of YouTube is revealed and the business side of how YouTube is not only a creative platform where creative individuals can unfold their creative minds. YouTube is a business, a brand, and a platform where individuals join to watch, share, interact, and for some of the popular channels, make a living of using the platform. In the Interview, Kyncl states that if the content creators (YouTubers) does not succeed, YouTube as a platform will not succeed in mainstream society (Interviewing the head of YouTube Business: 6:38-6:41). This statement makes sense since YouTube is dependent on the platform users who provide the platform with content as well as dependent on popular YouTubers, who collects views and thereby makes the platform tempting and lucrative for companies and brands to advertise on the platform. The statement furthermore seems to back up the theory on Foucault and the panoptic power structure and how both parts are severely dependent on

one another in order to stay relevant on and as a platform and in order to keep making a living off YouTube.

Casey Neistat emphasizes that a new trend on YouTube seems to be 'drama' in which Neistat highlights that drama has been a driving force in order to gain views and subscribers on YouTube in the last couple of years. In order to stay relevant, it could be argued that YouTube, as well as the YouTubers, benefits from the scandalous controversies that are taking place on the platform, and Neistat highlights that drama is rewarded with views, and that drama is rewarded with attention which makes drama rewarded with dollars (Interviewing the head of YouTube Business: 5:34-5:39). The way in which Neistat present how drama benefits a YouTuber suggests that the platform also would benefit from this drama due to the YouTube reference which would mean more traffic on the platform. When a video on YouTube goes viral, for example, due to a dramatic happening, YouTube as a platform will automatically also experience more traffic than usual. This sensationalized drama culture would therefore mainly be considered a positive effect for a platform such as YouTube because even though the platform might experience criticism for allowing these situations to happen on their platform, the situations would at the same time be a way for the YouTube platform to grow and thrive.

Neistat asks Kyncl how YouTube affect the culture that is evolving on YouTube to which Kyncl highlights that YouTube is working with the terms 'incentives' and 'disincentives' and in relation to how YouTube can create the right environment for creators to "do the right things" (Interviewing the head of YouTube Business: 5:56-6:10). This, Kyncl states, includes advising the platform users not to chase sensationalism, to not chase views for the sake of views, not use drama for the sake of views and not use drama at YouTubes expense for the sake of views (6:21-6:31). However, this seems to collide with the main interest of the YouTube platform which would be staying relevant and gaining views on the content creators' videos. If YouTube's main goal is to be a successful and relevant platform they would also want as much traffic on the platform from internet users, this includes popular YouTubers but also regular YouTube users. Even in an online culture with phenomena such as cancel culture, YouTube as a platform seems to thrive and the ones that could end up suffering from a scandal or controversy seems to be the YouTubers and not necessarily YouTube as a platform. An example of this could be a controversy that happened on May 10, 2019, with the Beauty YouTuber James Charles who has been outed by former friend and fellow Beauty YouTuber Tatiana Westbrook, better known as Tati, for allegedly having sexually harassed several heterosexual/bi-curious men. This controversy has let to James Charles as of May 16 loosing close to 3 million subscribers on his YouTube channel called 'James Charles' (Socialblade: James Charles). However, according to Socialblade, which is a website keeping track on subscription numbers and

view counts of YouTube, the site has registered an increased view count of +128 million views within the last thirty days on Charles YouTube Channel. This is interesting since Socialblade have estimated that it would enrich James Charles with earnings between $32.100 to $514.000 within the last 30 days which means that James Charles, despite the fact that he has lost almost 3 million subscribers (and counting), could be earning a great amount of money because the videos uploaded to his channel is being watched or replayed after the controversy erupted on May 10, 2019.

This is a great example of the drama culture that Neistat and Kyncl were referring to in the interview and whether or not the YouTuber Tati exposed her experience of James Charles for the sake of getting views and subscribers is questionable. However, Tati did gain 4,4 million new subscribers to her YouTube channel within the last thirty days and her views have increased with +80 million views within the last thirty days (Socialblade: Tati) with the expose video on James Charles titled 'BYE SISTER…' cashing in over 47 million views alone. With Tati's overall view count from the last thirty days, SocialBlade has estimated that Tati would be earning between $20.100 to $321.800. Both Tati and James Charles seem to have gained economically from this dramatic and controversial scandal which would also mean that YouTube as a platform has gained and benefitted from this incident due to the press and activity on the platform. However, at the same time, the exposure of James Charles seems to be the polar opposite of what Kyncl mentioned of YouTubers not using drama in order to gain views as well as the incentives Kyncl mentioned which was for creators to "do the right thing". The sentence "do the right thing" could, of course, be interpreted in different ways. Firstly, it could be argued to mean that doing the right thing would be to create content that was thought through and not intended to hurt or offend other platform users and other popular YouTubers. Secondly, it could mean creating popular content that the users of YouTube would want to click on, watch, comment, like/dislike, which would maintain a high activity on the YouTube platform which again would feed both YouTube and the YouTubers economically. If these dramatic controversies and relations are what keeps videos going viral and creates debates online then it would be one of the main focuses in order to keep the platform relevant and active.

In relation to these 'do and do not' values that Kyncl vocalizes in the Casey Neistat interview, Kyncl also mentions the Four Freedoms of YouTube when asked what YouTube stands for. These freedoms are listed as the freedom of opportunity, the freedom of speech, the freedom of information, and the freedom to belong (15:30-16:46). These Four freedoms do not seem to harmonize with Kyncl's statement on wanting the platform users and the content creators to not chase views for the sake of views and not use drama for the sake of views as well as encourage the popular content creators to 'do the right thing'. If the content creators have the freedom of opportunities, speech, information, and freedom to belong, the YouTubers would be considered to have the right to

post any dramatic video they want to as long as it does not go against the main platform guidelines that YouTube has set up for the website. These four freedoms could be argued to invite the popular content creators on YouTube to create content that reflects how they feel, what they think and what they are experiencing. They have the opportunity of sharing these thoughts in an online setting, they have the freedom to speak freely about what is on their mind and they can collect or create information via the platform which exists and belong not only in the online space but within the different communities that are created on the platform. This furthermore brings back Kyncl's statement on the fact that if the YouTubers do not succeed then the platform will not succeed, but if some of the conditions to succeed in order to gain views, make a lucrative deal out of content, and in some of the cases, gain subscribers, is to partake in the drama culture of YouTube then that would be, among others, a criteria of succeeding on YouTube as a popular and relevant YouTuber.

5.2 The Evolution of Entertainment

In the Casey Neistat/Robert Kyncl interview, Neistat highlights the difference in social media culture and in mainstream entertainment culture to which he explains that the social media culture is at such an early stage compared to mainstream entertainment society. Neistat wonders how it is possible for the Head of YouTube Business to understand and relate to their content creators when an important figure in the YouTube Business such as Robert Kyncl is filming his first YouTube video with Casey Neistat for this interview. This is an interesting observation of Neistat since the parallel to mainstream media entertainment is that Kyncl 'worked his way up' by working in a talent agency moving on to working in different production companies such as HBO and Netflix, however, never in direct relation to producing YouTube videos (Interviewing the head of YouTube Business: 9:00-10:17). With Robert Kyncl being a middle-aged man, he would be considered a digital immigrant who has worked in the field of media production and therefore at points in his career has worked within the media literacy field. However, as mentioned earlier in the analysis, the difference between producing media entertainment and digital/online media entertainment is visible both in relation to the number of people producing the content but also in relation to how fast the content is able to be produced, published and shared with an audience. Moreover, Kyncl's inexperience in the digital field of YouTube seems to highlight an overall dilemma within the theoretical aspect of digital literacy – digital immigrants educating and developing a set of rules or skills for the digital native platform users. As mentioned in the theory section, it is difficult for a non-native to navigate, understand and educate within a digital culture that is fast moving, everchanging and indefinable.

Furthermore, a significant difference in relation to mainstream media and digital media is the format of the content being produced. With a platform such as YouTube evolving and providing

users of the platform with an enormous opportunity in relation to different content, the opportunity to join different communities or as in a specific 'gang' as seen in the Logan Paul case this also supports Lankshear and Knobel's theory on the definition of digital literacy being plural. In this case, this would mean that with a variety of different social media platforms that offer different formats of content sharing, and with the different communities and influencers within these social media platforms it can be difficult to lay down a specific and singular definition and approach to digital literacy. The World Wide Web itself is a difficult space to define because it is a space but not in a physical sense. Therefore, it could be argued that the controversies presented in the case material from the analysis highlight the fact that the online space of social media is completely different from the physical world. This first and foremost mean that due to the editing control that social media provides the individual has the opportunity to present a polished version on their identity or they have the opportunity to invent a character for their social media platform and create a storyline, scripted or lightly scripted videos, that differs from the actual identity of the individual in the physical world. This, of course, depends on how the individual's technical skills, their experience, and considerations with their social media persona and image are handled.

Pangrazio as well states that digital literacy should be considered plural and that social media and the practices thereof provides individuals with multiple ways of making meaning of the world. In relation to the case material, dilemmas such as racism, suicide, and disrespect towards different cultures were analyzed and these dilemmas both carry relevance in the American society (physical world) and in the public debate. The social media way of handling these dilemmas could be by 'canceling' an individual, however, 'cancel culture' and the cancellation of an individual contains a lot of social media discussions which could mean that the chances of more traffic on the canceled individual's content would skyrocket as seen in the first part of the discussion with James Charles. This makes social media and the procedure thereof difficult to predict and moreover, the easy access to social media (if one has internet connection and is not living in a place such as North Korea) makes it easier for a variety of individuals to have, be influenced to, or create an opinion on a matter, controversy or individual on a social media platform.

6. Conclusion

This study sought to investigate the social media platform YouTube and some of the controversies that popular YouTubers on the platform have been experiencing within the last couple of years. Firstly, the analysis uncovered how entertainment sources have evolved within the last couple of decades and how social media have come to play a significant role in relation to entertaining. Furthermore, how the popular content creators of YouTube have been able to create relevant content and change the concept of social media content such as Dawson with his documentary inspired videos.

Secondly the power structure of social media and how the dependency between YouTuber, subscriber, and YouTube as a platform are connected. The YouTubers are dependent on a social media platform in order to post their content and a large group of subscribers in order to gain an income on posting their content to their YouTube channel. Therefore, YouTube as a platform is also dependent on popular YouTubers and their content in order to gain traffic on their platform which means that they are also dependent on normal platform users in order to generate views on the videos. In addition to this, popular YouTubers builds a fandom within the community of their YouTube channel which creates a common identity, as seen with Logan Paul and his 'Logang', where the platform users have the opportunity to belong and connect with other individuals who share the same interest. This highlights the entertainment value that the platform and the YouTubers provide for the viewers/platform users which show the importance of this new source of entertainment in society and for the individual.

The case material in the analysis centered around Logan Paul and his Suicide Forest video controversy and the aftermath thereof which highlighted how the digital culture and the construction of a social media identity generated a conflict for Paul in relation to creating click-worthy content and in the process of this crossing the line of what is socially acceptable. During the Casey Neistat interview, Paul expressed a storyline for his video content which highlighted the social media persona he has created for his channel as well as his plans with a redemption storyline after the controversy. The challenge for Paul was in the process of balancing his brand, which he explained to be bending and pushing the limits, and at the same time not harming his social media career by doing so. The Suicide Forest video did hurt his public persona and therefore also his private life due to the amount of negative press the controversy caused, however, Paul did manage to obtain a spot on the Forbs list of highest paid YouTubers which showed that bad press does not necessarily only have a negative effect on a YouTuber. This not only showed that Paul is talented at creating entertainment for his viewers, but it also showed that he as a digital native understands how to use his platform for

his own benefit. This does not necessarily portray a digital literacy in the sense of being a responsible social media personality but more in the sense of being smart in relation to being relevant on the platform. Lastly, Paul's situation also showed that one YouTubers controversy can harm the entire YouTuber community, as Casey Neistat explained.

In the Jeffree Star and Laura Lee case, it became clear that similar controversy can have two different outcomes. With similar situations, Star handled and went through the controversy differently than Lee which resulted in two different outcomes. Star was calm and collected where Lee was more emotional and stressed out by the situation. Both cases involved racist content that was posted to different platforms and showed how content can travel from one social media platform to another. Furthermore, this case highlighted how Star's digital skills seemed to be stronger and well-considered where Lee failed in gaining the beauty community's trust back. Her first apology was deleted and replaced with a second apology video, and she even changed tactics by creating the homeless crisis video to her channel which did not gain views the same way her make-up videos did. The unsubscribing to Lee's channel highlighted the power of subscribers and how the cancel culture can affect these YouTubers both economically and in relation to relevance on the platform.

Lastly, the discussion highlighted how the drama culture on YouTube generates views, which generates popularity which equals a bigger paycheck for the YouTubers involved. This also highlighted that the values, presented by Robert Kyncl, do not harmonize with the purpose of being a popular YouTuber which is to create views. Furthermore, the freedoms of YouTube provide the YouTubers with the opportunity of creating drama as long as the dram does not cross the guideline of the platform. Finally, the discussion displayed the dilemma of how digital immigrants and their media literate knowledge are having control of the platforms where digital natives operate.

Therefore, this study can conclude that the digital literate behavior on YouTube is not necessarily about having a squeaky-clean image within the digital culture and that digital identity is connected to an online culture where the individual can portray an edited version of the 'real' world identity. The controversial behavior online brings pros and cons. Losing subscribers/followers is a possibility, but at the same time controversies results in more interaction on the YouTubers videos which keeps them relevant in the online and public debate.

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Appendix