The building of a sense of community by the videoblogger *Blogilates*

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Tiivistelmä – Abstract

YouTube on suosituin videotoistopalvelu Internetissä. Sivustolle voi ladata omia videoita, katsoa, tilata sekä kommentoida muiden videoita. Osa sivuston käyttäjistä on erittäin suosittuja ja heillä voi olla miljoonia seuraajia sekä katselukertoja videoillaan. Kaikkein suosituimmat videobloggaajat (tai "tubettajat") elättävät itsensä videoiden mainostuotoilla ja sponsoreiden tarjoamien diilien kautta. Tubettajien ympärille rakentuu usein uskollinen ja tiivis yhteisö. On syytä kuitenkin muistaa, että vloggaajan tarkoituksena on kuitenkin myydä omia tai edustamiaan tuotteita tai palveluita.

Tutkielmani tarkoituksena on tutkia yhden tietyn YouTube kanavan yhteisöllisyyden rakentumista erityisesti kielellisten keinojen kautta.. Kyseinen kanava on nimeltään Blogilates, ja se edustaa urheilu/fitness aihepiiriä. Kyseinen kanava on toiminut jo vuodesta 2013 ja on aihepiirinsä suurin ja suosituin: sillä on yli 4 miljoonaa seuraajaa. Koska kyseinen kanava on niin vaikutusvaltainen, on se hyvä tutkimuskohde. Kanavan ympärille onkin rakentunut oma brändi ja kanavan seuraajia kutsutaan omalla lempinimellään POPsters, jonka kanavan perustaja amerikkalainen Cassey Ho on keksinyt. Aineistonani oli seitseän eri videota, jotka on julkaistu vuosina 2013-2017.

Herringin (2004) tietokonevälitteinen diskurssianalyysi sekä McMillan ja Chavisin yhteisöllisyysteoria (1986) toimivat tutkimukseni pohjana.

Tutkimuksessani selvisi, että vloggaaja käyttää pitkälti samoja viestinnän keinoja kuin muukin media ja ihmisten arkipäiväinen kasvokkainen kommunikointi. Persoonapronominien käyttö, faniryhmän nimeäminen, henkilökohtaisten kokemuksien jakaminen, käskymuotojen käyttö sekä toistuvat tervehdykset ja lopetukset ovat esimerkkejä kielellisistä valinnoista joita vloggaaja käyttää yhteisöllisyyden rakentamiseksi ja ylläpitämiseksi. Lisäksi selvisi, että Internetissä oleviin yhteisöihin voi soveltaa samoja rakenteita ja käsitteitä kuin fyysisiin yhteisöihin. Tällaisia esimerkkejä ovat muunmuassa jäsenyyden määrittely sekä yhteisten kokemusten jakaminen yhteisön kesken. Voidaan olettaa, että mitä parempi suhde vloggaajalla on katsojiinsa, sitä todennäköisemmin hän on suosittu ja tienaa enemmän rahaa videoillaan. Suositut vloggaajat ovat onnistuneesti luoneet yhteisön ja toimivat sekä sen johtajina että jäseninä.

Asiasanat – Keywords   community theory, YouTube, computer mediated discourse analysis, vlogging

Säilytyspaikka – Depository

Muita tietoja – Additional information

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1 Introduction

YouTube is both a very popular and well known online platform, especially among young people, founded in 2005. Burgess et al. (2013) describe YouTube as a place where identities can roam free and where viewers can gain information and tolerability. Often perceived as only having entertainment value both the number and genre of channels in YouTube have greatly increased in recent years. Genres on the platform vary greatly from purely entertaining to educational and informative, and each channel has their own respective communities. The overall popularity of clean eating and the fitness boom all over the world is also reflected on YouTube. Numerous channels exist solely for fitness/exercise/healthy living habits related videos.

The fitness channel this study focuses on is *Blogilates* which is one of the most popular and influential channels of its genre. Founded by Cassey Ho in 2009 the channel currently has four million subscribers and over 300 million video views (YouTube 2018). More views and subscribers translate to a larger fanbase/community. Her videos focus on different kinds of workouts, mainly pilates, but also on other topics that relate to fitness and a healthy lifestyle (such as cooking tips). The popularity and influence of this particular channel make it an ideal object of study.

YouTube, like many other online platforms, is interactive in the way that vloggers and viewers interact, e.g. viewers can make content suggestions in the comment section or simply comment on how they feel about the content already published (Burgess et al. 2013). Thus, the vlogger often addresses the viewers directly in their videos and comments on the feedback given or asks for suggestions on certain matters concerning the content of the channel. This study uses McMillan and Chavis' (1986) theory on the sense of community as a basis for studying how a community is constructed and maintained by the vlogger. Due to the nature of YouTube being an online site, computer mediated discourse analysis (CMDA) will be used as the framework for this study. The focus is particularly on the linguistic elements, which are found in both CMDA and McMillan and Chavis' (1986) theory on the sense of community.

Another study on the topic of community theory in a YouTube setting has previously been conducted by Mustonen (2015). She studied the YouTube channel *Vlogbrothers* which has

two leadership figures (who are also brothers): John and Hank Green. Mustonen's (2015:10-22) analysis includes in-depth examination of the linguistic means of establishing a connection, establishing membership, using insider language, honoring traditions, and encouraging participation. She also discusses visual means through the following categories: using eye contact, expressing excitement, and setting the environment. Visual findings are supported and illustrated by accompanying screenshots. Her study acted as an inspiration for this study. However, the current study focuses on an entirely different channel genre. Both studies provide more information about how an online community is built and shows how similar methods can be found in the channels regardless of the genre type.

This study consists of five sections, including this introduction, which is the first one. The second section will discuss background theories this study relies on. Section three will introduce the aim and research questions, the data obtained, and also the methods used when analyzing the data. Section four contains the analysis of data in regard to my background theories. In the final section, I will summarize the findings and make suggestions for further studies in the future.

2 Background

The background section of this thesis aims to introduce the theoretical concepts that are related to the present study as well as discussing some previous studies conducted on both YouTube as well as community theory. Firstly, I will introduce YouTube as a platform and describe some previous studies which have been conducted on the site. Secondly, I will discuss the framework of this study which is computer mediated discourse analysis (CMDA). Lastly, I will explain what community theory means in the context of this study.

2.1 YouTube as a platform

YouTube is the world's largest video sharing website and can be viewed as a fairly recent phenomenon. It was founded in 2005 and has grown alongside the popularity of the Internet in general (Moylan 2015). Hence studies on it are not yet vast in numbers. That is to say, video bloggers (also known as vloggers) can freely publish content on the website in hopes of gaining revenue from it through in-site advertisements or other endorsements. Revenue is

based on the number of viewers gained. Earlier studies on YouTube focused on it as a site or one larger community (for example Burgess and Green 2009) rather than on individual channels. The research which has been conducted on YouTube in recent years instead focuses on, for example, the participatory culture on YouTube (Mueller 2014).

Burgess and Green (2009: 54) suggest that a distinctive feature of vlogging is its "conversational character" which in turn "reminds us of the residual character of interpersonal face-to-face communication". Burgess and Green (2009:54) continue by stating that it "distinguishes the mode of engagement in the categories dominated by user-generated content from those dominated by traditional media". Interestingly, the same communicational features apply to both vlogging as well as traditional media. In both cases the qualities required to build the identity of the media person need to be relatable, up-to-date and charismatic in order to amass a large following through which revenue can be obtained. As Burgess et al. (2013) remind: YouTubers get paid for every time that their video is watched. YouTubers are not necessarily categorized as celebrities or famous people but are very well known within their respective communities. Thus, the identity of a vlogger needs to be relatable, up-to-date and charismatic. Similar qualities are required for someone working in "traditional media" in order to build up a large following and create a community. This is an important point to remember when studying how a YouTuber interacts with their respective community as it is a form of business to them and the end goal is to promote/sell something they endorse.

2.2 Computer-mediated discourse analysis

Computer-mediated discourse analysis or CMDA (Herring 2004:2) can be described as "any analysis of online behavior that is grounded in empirical, textual observations" and is used in this study due to YouTube being an online site. Herring (2004:1) defines discourse as happening when "participants interact by means of verbal language, usually typed on a keyboard and read as text on a computer screen". Herring (2004) also points out that textual observations in this context include both written or spoken language as long as they can be studied in the form of text. Although CMDA is also applicable to multimodal aspects, the focus often times lies on textual information alone. This may be due to the fairly recent nature of video sharing online.

CMDA views online behavior through the lens of language and, according to Herring (2004:2), CMDA applies to four levels of language: 1) structure, 2) meaning, 3) interaction, and 4) social behavior. It "seeks to identify patterns in language structure and use that may have been produced unconsciously yet shed light on broader phenomena such as decision making, gender ideology, cultural identity and the social construction of knowledge" (Herring 2014:43). At the core of CMDA and its approach to language is the analysis of logs of verbal interaction such as characters, words, utterances, messages, exchanges, threads etc.

Herring's (2004:3) four levels of language are defined in further detail as follows. The first level (structural) includes the use of special typography or orthography, novel word formations, and sentence structure. The second level (meaning) consists of the meanings of words, utterances and larger functional units. The third level (interactional) includes aspects like turn-taking, topic development, and other means of negotiating interactive exchanges. The fourth and final level (social) includes linguistic expressions (play, conflict, power, and group membership) over multiple exchanges.

Herring (2004:14-16) defines a virtual community as having six criteria which can act as possible indicators of it, although not all of them have to necessarily be present: (1) active, self-sustaining participation with a core of regular participants (2) shared history, purpose, culture, norms and values, (3) solidarity, support, and reciprocity (4) criticism, conflict, and means of conflict resolution (5) self-awareness of group as an entity distinct from other groups, and (6) emergence of roles, hierarchy, governance, and rituals. This study focuses mainly on textual observations obtained from the online data according to the criteria of CMDA. However, this study applies linguistic elements found in the data to a specific community theory by McMillan and Chavis (1986), which is discussed in further detail in the following section.

2.3 Community theory

McMillan and Chavis' (1986) classic theory on the sense of community is widely known in the field of psychology as well as sociology. McMillan and Chavis (1986:8) firstly define a community according to Gusfield's (1975) two definitions. The first definition is the

territorial and geographical notion of community which can, for example, be a city or neighborhood. The second definition is relational, members of a perceived community do not have to be in the same place physically. Such a community can be for example, a professional community. According to Gusfield (1975), the two definitions are not mutually exclusive. McMillan and Chavis (1986) apply both of the aforementioned definitions equally when they talk about a community in their theory. Especially Gusfield's (1975) second definition of a community can clearly be applied to an online context as Internet users can access the same content simultaneously regardless of their physical location.

The sense of community theory (McMillan and Chavis, 1986) includes four different elements and is used as the theoretical framework for this study due to its nature of being one of the mostly widely known theories on the topic. The four different elements and a brief summary of each are listed below. Membership can be defined as a "feeling of belonging or of sharing a sense of personal relatedness" (McMillan and Chavis, 1986:9). Influence is a sense of being important to the group and vice versa, thus it is important to note that influence works both ways within a community. Integration, also known as fulfilment of needs, refers to the reinforcement and reward the members of a community gain through being members. Shared emotional connection consist of aspects such as shared history and similar experiences which strengthen the community bond.

McMillan and Chavis (1986: 10-11) point out that groups of people use language to create boundaries and distance between members and nonmembers. Such ways found in my data are for example addressing the audience directly (eg. the use of pronoun "you") to form an illusion of a connection and interactive interaction with the viewer is one obvious and popular way. The personal pronoun "we" referring to both the community as a whole as well as the staff who work at the company emphasizes and strengthens the feeling of belonging. Further examples of linguistic elements will be discussed in the analysis section in relation to the data obtained for this study.

One criticism of this particular study that I have to take into account is that it is fairly "old" and its applicability to an online community (which is a modern concept) can be questioned. However, later studies have shown that the elements provided can be seen and found in online communities as well and were also applicable in the context of this study. A study by Rotman, Golbeck and Preece (2009:48) found that a sense of community was present among YouTube

users despite it being scattered and lacking structure and "even on large scale dispersed networks, users do find each other, communicate and create a deep sense of community".

Similarly, a study by Mustonen (2015) also found that community theory is applicable to an online fandom in a YouTube setting whilst focusing on a single channel. In her study on the channel *Vlogbrothers* Mustonen (2015:24) "focused on three channels of meaning-making in a video: the visual channel, the language channel (what is said), and the action channel (what is done)". She consulted the work of Johnstone (2002), LeVine and Scollon (2004), Herring (2004) and Jones (2002) for discourse analysis as well as computer mediated discourse analysis which were applied to her data in the analysis. Her findings will be discussed and compared in the conclusion section.

3 The present study

3.1 Aim and research questions(s)

My research aims to explore how the YouTube channel Blogilates creates, and also upholds a sense of community among her viewers. The focus will mainly be on the linguistic means (such as choice of pronouns and the use of adjectives) but also briefly discussing other means (such as gestures and settings) in cases where they emphasize, strengthen or support linguistic elements. All the elements mentioned previously together create the setting around which a community is built upon and later upheld and developed.

The research questions this study aims to answer are as follows:
1. How is the sense of community constructed in the Blogilates YouTube channel?
2. How can the Blogilates community building be viewed through language and other features that emphasize the linguistic choices made?

3.2 Data

The data comprises seven videos from the Blogilates YouTube channel. Each video is of a different topic and duration so as to provide as broad a view as possible of the channel as a whole. Videos also spanned several years, published between 2013-2017. The videos were transcribed to text and multimodal aspects, such as the setting, were also written down for further reference due to the multimodal nature of YouTube as a site.

The videos are listed below: with their title, duration and when they were published. The names of the videos are, for the most part, relatively self-explanatory regarding the content of each video. However, for those that are not, I have added a short summary of the content of the video. Most of the videos follow a similar structure of: greetings, the point of the video (certain topic of discussion or exercises targeted at a certain body part) indicated in the title, thanking viewers for watching and reminding them to subscribe to the channel and to check out any new merchandise.

The total combined duration of the videos is approximately one and a half hours.

1. The 5 Best Ways to Lose Weight (11.11.2013) 14:43 min
"Pep talk" about healthy ways to lose weight as well as asking the viewers how they are doing.
2. Flat Belly Fat Burner POP HIIT (5.1.2014) 13:13 min
3. Body Slimming Workout POP Pilates for Beginners (30.6.2014) 17:17 min
4. Lift Your Booty Workout – 5 Moves to Your Fittest Butt (12.3.2017) 7:35 min
5. Why I Will NEVER DIET Again (22.1.2016) 15:07 min
Personal story and warning to viewers about going to extreme lengths with dieting.
6. 8 min bikini body workout! Swimsuit Slimdown Series (31.5.2015) 11:17 min
7. Feel Good Soul Stretches Takeover Makeover 1 (22.3.2013) 11:42 min
Stress relief.

3.3 Method of analysis

Since YouTube is an online platform this study relies on Computer-Mediated Discourse Analysis (CMDA) and especially on the work by Herring (2004). Firstly, the channel was

viewed overall and suitable videos were selected to act as samples. The goal was to choose as broad a sample as possible to provide a wide-ranging overview of the entire channel. Secondly, the videos were transcribed into text form.

The transcribed data was then identified through Herring's linguistic components, which include CMDA's four levels of language: 1) structure, 2) meaning, 3) interaction, and 4) social behavior (Herring 2004:2). Afterwards the identified data was further categorized according to the four elements described in McMillan and Chavis' (1986) theory of community. Each category is first described and defined, then suitable extracts are added to the analysis section to indicate how they fit in and support the community element studied. Data excerpts were chosen for closer analysis based on their suitability regarding the four elements of the sense of community. Further in-depth analysis of linguistic features was provided to strengthen the community features.

4 Analysis

This section presents the findings based on the analysis of transcribed data from the video material studied. The data has been divided according to the four main categories based on McMillan and Chavis' (1986) sense of community theory and focuses mainly on the linguistic aspects. The four categories analyzed are membership, influence, integrity and fulfilment of needs, and shared emotional connection. In chapter 4.1 I will discuss the linguistic features. Some of extracts from the data are numbered and singled out in the text as well as having references to the particular video they are taken from to provide clarity.

Due to the four elements of McMillan and Chavis' (1986) community theory being highly related to one another, as well as not always having clear boundaries, some of the linguistic elements discussed below could be included in several different categories. However, I have categorized the elements based on the frequency and how well they fit the definition of the category in question. It is also worth pointing out that the vlogger acts as both the leader of the community as well as a member of it and as such her speech can be categorized and understood in both ways.

4.1 Linguistic features

In this section, the linguistic means that serve to build the four elements of community previously discussed are examined one by one. I will discuss the elements in relation to the transcribed data obtained from the vloggers videos.

Membership

Membership is defined by McMillan and Chavis (1986: 9) as a "feeling of belonging or of sharing a sense of personal relatedness". Vlogs often times have some sort of script that vloggers follow, and videos are edited before publishing. Thus, most mishaps that occur in physical real-time face-to-face communication (for example stuttering, long pauses, forgetting what to say) are omitted in the version that fans view.

A recurrent linguistic method with which the vlogger establishes a sense of relatedness is by frequently and directly acknowledging the viewer through the personal pronoun *you.* The vlogger says that "it is such a beautiful day so I wanted to take you outside with me" in her video titled *Feel Good Soul Stretches | Takeover Makeover 1* (transcript 2). By combining this personal pronoun with gestures, such as pointing directly at the viewer and talking straight to the camera, the vlogger creates a seemingly more personal means of communication instead of referring to the group as a whole or being one large entity, hence lacking individuality. The personal pronoun *we* referring to both the community as a whole as well as the staff who work at the company emphasizes and strengthens the feeling of belonging. It is used throughout the videos, especially when acknowledging hardships and how to overcome them. For example, in the video titled *Flat Belly Fat Burner POP HIIT* (Transcript 4) the vlogger states that *"*we are going to do it together" referring to the completion of the workout.

In an earlier publication, Burgess and Green (2009) suggest that a distinctive feature of vlogging is its 'conversational character' which is also evident in the videos studied. Informal language is abundant and especially American slang (e.g. the use of "booty" instead of "butt") is often noticeable due to the vloggers location as Cassey is based in Los Angeles (CA) in the United States. The vlogger's standard greeting "Hey guys!" mimics that of what friends might say to each other. The choice of the slang "guys" is more informal compared to for example "followers" or "subscribers" which are more neutral terms. Informal language blurs the line between viewing the vlogger as a leader or as a peer. Familiarity between the vlogger and the

viewers strengthens and reinforces membership within the community.

Gratitude and appreciation towards fans is expressed through the phrase "Bye guys, I love you!" at the end of every video. Such a phrase also creates a sense of importance to the viewer and enforces binds within the community.

McMillan and Chavis (1986: 10) state how personal influence affects membership by pointing out that (a) working for membership will provide a feeling that one has earned a place in the group and (b) as a consequence of this personal investment, membership will be more meaningful and valuable. This is visible in the data as well. Namely, the vlogger also publishes a workout calendar, which is available to members only, as is seen when she instructs her followers to "be sure you're subscribed to the newsletter I send out the secret password and the secret password will reveal the calendar every month". By using an adjective such as "secret" it makes the people who are already subscribers feel special and it arouses the curiosity of new or potential followers.

Another aspect of membership found in the data is the use of the fandom name given by the vlogger. By referring to the community with a specific name, *POPsters,* it creates a sense of belonging as well as creating a boundary of the people who belong to this certain fandom and those who do not. Membership is emphasized by addressing the viewers as *POPsters*, a combination of the vloggers own fitness programme *POP pilates* and the English language suffix *-er* which refers to a person or thing that does an action indicated by the root verb. The understanding of the name requires previous knowledge about the vlogger and her previous work, thus creating a sense of inner group and outer group. It also creates a sense of belonging, something that McMillan and Chavis (1986:10) believe include feeling, belief, and expectation that one fits in the group and has a place there. A feeling of acceptance by the group as well as a willingness to sacrifice for the group are also mentioned by McMillan and Chavis (1986:10) as being a part of the sense of belonging. Viewers leave positive comments to one another on all of her social media accounts; hence the group members get a validation of belonging from other members.

Influence

Influence can be understood as working in a dual manner. Members of the community must feel that they themselves can influence what happens within the community, but it also means that the group can influence its members (McMillan and Chavis 1986:11). According to McMillan and Chavis (1986:15), "people are more likely to choose a leader who listens and is influenceable rather than one whose mind is made up and will never change." Hence, it can be stated that it is crucial for a vlogger to listen to their fanbase in order to maintain and develop the community and not lose any members.

Viewers can leave comments below the videos and each comment can be upvoted or downvoted depending on how agreeable/relatable it is. A frequently appearing comment in many of the videos is "no junk food for X amount of days depending on how many likes this comment gets". Community members can thus encourage one another and show support by liking the comment and perhaps leaving their own message of encouragement or experience below it. In addition, the vlogger encourages her viewers to follow her on various social media accounts so as to access new content as the extracts from video 3 show:

(1) "I will be releasing the secret password in different places the first week is going to be YouTube the second week is going to be Twitter third week Facebook and the fourth week the newsletter".

Different social media accounts are also mentioned as being the channels through which fans can contact her personally and shows that by supporting the vlogger's business endeavors the viewer will also gain something personal out of it. The vlogger also asks fans to give feedback on her videos and products, in this fashion the community influences the vlogger's future actions based on previous feedback.

(2) "If you order this book right now you'll be put on a special mailing list in which I will personally email you".

Here Cassey repeats the offer twice so as to emphasize what the viewer may gain out of ordering her book. To acquire such an acknowledgement from the vlogger participation is mandatory, whereas it is usually optional and free of charge. Here the vlogger uses her influence to endorse her own products. It also creates an inner and outer group within the community.

The vlogger frequently urges her viewers to participate in challenges of varying themes. Challenges are often advertised at the end of the videos as is shown in extract 3 below. Hence the vlogger persuades and encourages the members to participate, but the members can also influence what happens on the channel by commenting on videos and expressing how they feel about them. Extract 4 from video 2 demonstrates how she reminds the viewers that there is also a possibility to meet her in person face to face. These meetings however are often only accessible to US fans due to the international community being physically spread all around the globe.

(3) Video 3

  "I'm going to be doing a 12 week new body makeover and I want you to join me (mm-hmm) we're going to be doing this together"

(4) Video 2

  "remember I want to see my LA residents at the meet up on April 6th in Runyon Canyon".

Integration (fulfilment of needs)

Integration refers to the reinforcement and reward members of a community gain through being members (McMillan and Chavis 1986:12). This can also be understood as reinforcement. In the following examples the vlogger encourages viewers (example 5), provides something they need (example 6) as well as takes into account the different skill levels of her followers (example 7). Example 5 also reinforces viewers why they are watching the video in the first place and reassures them that they will find what they were looking for.

(5) Video 4

"if you want that body you want that life of yours you've always dreamed of it's possible and we are going to do it together".

(6) Video 4

 "okay beginners you can walk these out you don't have to do the jump".

(7) Video 2

"all of us are at different levels of flexibility so if you can't straighten out it's ok"

The different skill levels are also integrated, and separate instructions are given to beginners in many of her videos. Hence the videos are as inclusive as possible and thus reaches a wider audience. The vlogger acknowledges the variety of different members of the community as opposed to treating them as a homogenous group. She also reassures viewers that it is fine to be at a different level than other members of the same community. The examples above highlight this point.

The vlogger also integrates herself as a part of the community, rather than simply acting as a leader. She both instructs "bring your elbows down on to the mat right underneath your shoulders extend out that leg and bring the knee in flex it toward the ceiling or the sky" and comments on the moves "do you see me suffering I might be smiling but I'm doing it for you" as the extracts from video 1 show. By commenting on how she feels she assures fans that she is also human and can empathize with their feelings, even though she is a professional in the field whereas the viewers most likely are not. The difference in skill level and endurance is thus lessened and the vlogger and viewer connect on a more personal and intimate level. The vlogger balances between maintaining authority over the community but also integrating as a part of it.

Shared emotional connection

McMillan and Chavis (1986: 14) state that people who invest more time and energy to an association (in this case this particular channel) will be more emotionally involved. Similarly, they state that the community bond is stronger the more important the cause is to the participants. To emphasize the importance of a shared emotional connection McMillan and Chavis (1986: 14) also point out that "There appears to be a tremendous bonding among people who experience a crisis together". Although it may be a slight exaggeration to compare weight loss and exercise to a crisis, it is something that many people struggle with and a like-minded community can provide crucial support. It is also logical that multiple positive experiences and relationships create and uphold stronger bonds within communities. The following extract shows how the vlogger validates any negative feelings the followers may have as well as personally relates to the community's struggles:

(8) Video 3

 "losing weight is not easy it's not easy for me it's not easy for you for your friends for other people and even other fitness professionals it is an emotional process it is physical it is time consuming".

Such a list of different people emphasizes the variety and number of individuals who have similar struggles and reassures viewers that they are not alone. It can also be viewed as a struggle that binds the community together as it is a shared goal they wish to achieve/overcome. Due to the highly personal nature of the topic the vlogger is faced towards the camera (and hence the viewer) the entire duration of the video, keeps eye contact and uses hand gestures similar to that of a normal physical day to day communicative interaction.

The vlogger also shares highly personal stories to teach the community about things she has learned and to make a point about a certain topic as well as creating an emotional connection through shared experiences. For example, she tells the story of the time when she was training for a bikini competition and had to follow an extreme diet leading up to it.

(9) Video 6

 "I got myself into a really bad situation because afterwards I was afraid of eating apples".

By sharing this personal story with her followers the vlogger emphasizes the danger of dieting too hard and hopes to educate her followers not to repeat the same mistakes. The word choice "be afraid of" can be viewed as rather strong in relation to the topic: eating fruit. It highlights the severity of her experience in relation to a trivial and everyday matter. Personal stories are often viewed as more relatable than talking about a topic on a general level and hence the message may get across better.

Shared emotional connection can also be a more trivial matter, as is illustrated in the following extract:

(10) Video 2

"I am loving this nail polish colour it's periwinkle (shows nails) totally matching my cloud shorts I'm like all about nails good thing nail art is back in style".

This casual and everyday topic brings the vlogger and the audience closer together in a friendly manner and viewers have a chance to learn more about the vlogger. It can also be

viewed as acknowledging the (presumably) largest part of the community: women. Discussed topics do not always have to relate to the genre of the channel and the tone can be more relaxed creating a more equal power relationship within the community between the leader (vlogger) and the followers. Hence, the vlogger acts in a dual manner as both the leader as well as a member of the community.

4.2 Other elements

 Due to the multimodal and hence also visual nature of YouTube videos, the setting of each video plays a significant part in what kind of a mood the vlogger wishes to create. A personal setting (such as an apartment or bedroom) versus a more professional studio looking setting can greatly influence the mood of a video and emphasize the message it wishes to portray.

The viewer feels more connected to the vlogger when they interact with viewers from a familiar and more intimate setting compared to a more clinical/sterile setting. Colourful and visually pleasing settings attract more viewers and help promote the vlogger's products/anything else they endorse. Often times the videos include products the vlogger endorses, including clothes and workout gear (such as mats etc.), in the background as well as on the vlogger herself. In a similar fashion, the names of her videos are catchy and use elements such as alliteration, rhyming, multiple adjectives and rhyming to catch the attention of the viewer as well as making the video sound fun: for example, Feel Good Soul Stretches Takeover Makeover 1.

Camera angles, lighting and the positioning of the vlogger is a crucial element of a video. For example, video 3 is based on talking and informing about a personal and difficult topic (weight loss) rather than instructing a workout. Hence, the vlogger can be seen as being much closer to the screen than usual and only showing her torso. This way her facial features and emotions can be shown to the viewer in greater detail. Instructing workouts often requires the vlogger's entire body to be shown and hence the distance from the camera is greater, the focus is on larger and broad movements as opposed to smaller facial expressions for example.

In these videos where the distance to the camera is greater the vlogger relies on her voice: the tone, volume and emphasis of her speech all indicate different things to the viewer. This is

illustrated well when she commands (and almost shouts) to "not give up" when a particularly demanding exercise is almost over, and she knows the motivation of viewers may be wavering at this point. Additionally, many pilates moves require the viewer to keep their gaze down towards their mat. This means that the viewer should concentrate on executing the movements in good form rather than continuously straining to view the screen. In these cases, the linguistic communication between the vlogger and the viewer should be concise and clear as possible. This can be achieved through, for example short sentences ("eyes on the mat", "keep that leg straight" and "keep breathing") which relay the important message without any fillers that may distract the viewer.

Gestures such as pointing, smiling and eye contact with the viewer mimic real life face to face communication features. The vlogger addresses the viewers (even while instructing) through various means such as by maintaining eye contact from time to time so as to check whether the viewer is still watching or not. It can also be viewed as a psychological way of checking that nobody is slacking off. Pointing at the viewer, smiling while encouraging/persuading viewers to push themselves to their limit as well as showing her own feelings by for example shouting during and after a particularly hard or difficult move. By having a gruntled and exasperated look on her face the vlogger portrays her own feelings nonverbally.

5 Conclusion

This thesis aimed to explore how a sense of community is formed on the YouTube channel Blogilates through a linguistic lens. This thesis heavily relies on the sense of community theory by McMillan and Chavis (1986). That includes four different elements: (1) membership, (2) influence, (3) integrity and fulfilment of needs, and (4) shared emotional connection. The structural linguistic elements portrayed in CDMA (Herring, 2004) acted as the stepping stone for analyzing the data. Such elements included words and utterances in an online environment for example.

All of the elements of McMillan and Chavis' (1986) sense of community theory previously discussed could all be found in my data, despite the original theory being mainly formed upon physical communities. This study has shown that community theory is indeed applicable to an

online context as well, as previously also shown by Rotman, Golbeck and Preece (2009). The vlogger acts as both a leader as well as a member of the community, hence guiding but also interacting with the community in order to uphold the community bonds. Similar communicative features are used as one might use in face-to-face communication: examples of this include elements such as informal language, gestures and eye-contact. Frequently occurring linguistic features found included choice of pronouns, use of adjectives, giving a personalized fandom name to the community (*POPster*) as well as using persuasive and encouraging language when instructing viewers to do her exercises.

Emotional connection is established through personal stories which allow the viewer to get to know the vlogger personally, common goals and hardships as well as talking about topics that are important (to either the vlogger or the viewer) but do not necessarily relate directly to the genre of the channel in question. The viewers watch this particular channel in hopes of losing weight and living a healthier lifestyle and the vlogger aims to fulfill their need by instructing them as well as providing services and products that may aid them on their journey. Various other communicative elements and visual elements further emphasize the linguistic choices made by the vlogger when addressing their community. Tone of voice, volume of speech and the setting of a video are all examples of such choices.

A previously discussed earlier study by Mustonen (2015) states that she also found all of the elements of McMillan and Chavis' (1986) theory to be present in the channel she studied. However, Mustonen (2015:23) mentioned shared emotional connection as being the most prominent element found in her data. Mustonen's (2015:18-22) analysis includes examination of both linguistic and visual means, which are also supported and illustrated by accompanying screenshots from her data. This study briefly discusses other elements thought to be relevant to the linguistic choices made by the vlogger, such as tone and volume of voice, which are perhaps more appropriate to my channel due to its instructional nature. Another major difference in the two studies is that in the channel Mustonen (2015) studied there are two leadership figures whereas the channel *Blogilates* has only one leader. This may affect the community dynamic and power balance.

This study focused on only seven videos out of a large pool of videos published by the vlogger. Although the videos chosen for my sample were all of different duration, topic and year published, the sample size remains relatively small when compared to the whole channel.

Hence, the applicability of the findings in relation to the entire channel cannot be stated for sure. Relevant extracts were found for each element of McMillan and Chavis' (1986) community theory, even when extracts could apply to several different categories simultaneously. Due to transcription being carried out mainly through listening to the videos and writing down meanings based on that transcription errors are possible.

More in-depth study could be conducted on the community as a whole (the inner workings), the other multimodal features (audio and visual) as well as a look at the comment section of the vlogger's social media accounts which act as median between the vlogger and the viewers. These findings could also be compared to other similar studies from other channels to compare whether there are differences between genres. As online communities continue to grow both in numbers as well as followers and expand throughout the internet, the possibilities for study are endless.

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