



2017 specification
Exams from 2024



Getting to Know...

Component 2C: Zoella

Second Edition, May 2023

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Teacher's Introduction

This resource has been written for the Eduqas Media Studies A Level specification (A680QS), with a specific focus on Component 2: Media Forms and Products in Depth: Section C: Media in the Online Age – Group 1: Zoella.

As a 'Getting to Know' pack, this resource has been constructed to actively engage students with the source material through a range of stimulating, focused and entertaining magazine-style articles exploring different topics across the media frameworks and theories. Discussion tasks are included throughout to recap knowledge. At the end of the resource, we have included a range of more challenging essay-style questions for students to test their learning.

The structure of the pack is as follows:

1. What Should I Know? – a brief overview of the key facts/information of the set product.
2. Getting to Know... Zoella – nine articles on a variety of topics. Here we have tried to focus on more niche aspects of the text that may not have been covered by textbooks, in order to broaden students' understanding.
3. Show What You Know – four essay-style questions on the set products, across a range of difficulty levels, complete with an answer section.

The appendix includes two further articles which discuss Zoella (Group 1) with *Attitude* (Group 2). These articles are only relevant to those students studying Zoella in conjunction with *Attitude*, and not those students studying *gal-dem*, although they may still find the Zoella content useful.

The aim of this resource is to provide variety for those students who may feel overloaded by textbooks and other learning materials with a solely academic writing style. Ideally, the blend of informative content and entertaining presentation style will not only help to strengthen a student's knowledge of the texts, but also to foster a genuine interest in the texts.

C Byrne, May 2023

Second Edition, May 2023

Changes have been made to the resource to account for the changes made to the set products, for assessment from 2024.

What Should I Know?

Who is Zoella?

Please note that all social media subscriber counts and video views have been sourced from Social Blade, which collates data on YouTube users, and these figures are correct at the time of writing in August 2019.

- **Zoe Elizabeth Suggs** is a British YouTuber, influencer and (more recently) novelist.
- She was born in Wiltshire in 1990 and has been mostly resident in Brighton since 2012.
- She began vlogging in **2009** on her YouTube channel '@zoella280390', which has:
 - As of **2019**, this channel has approximately **1.1 million subscribers** and a total of **1.1 million videos**.
 - The channel has been **declining** since **2016**, and has been **losing subscribers** since **mid 2018**.
- Her secondary channel, **morezoella**, is smaller but has been updated more frequently and focuses on vlogging content.
 - This channel was set up in September **2012**.
 - As of August **2019**, this channel has **4.6 million subscribers**.
- Her personal Instagram **@zoesugg** has **9.6 million followers**, with **1,732 posts**.
 - This account posts more personal content – selfies, photos of Zoe and her friends.
 - Photos receive around **150,000 to 300,000 likes** on average.
 - Videos receive around **850,000 to 1.1 million plays**.
 - Her profile features a selection of story highlights about different elements of her life.
- The **@zoella** brand Instagram has **1.2 million followers** from around **1,700 posts**.
 - This account is more focused on Zoella's brand identity, with more professional-looking photos and video scenes content – some of which is cross-posted from the **@zoesugg** account.
 - There is **much less engagement on this account**, with photos receiving around **10,000 to 30,000 likes** and videos receiving around **10,000 to 30,000 plays**.
 - This account is updated less frequently.
 - Also features story highlights with custom icons – such as 'Weekly Wants' and 'Zoella Club', etc. – to encourage traffic to her blog.
- Her blog is an **independent** website – i.e. it is not being hosted by a site such as WordPress. It can be found at **Zoella.co.uk**.
 - This website looks professional in the design and layout of it.
 - There are different **tabs** that focus on certain aspects of her content, such as 'Blog', 'Shop', etc.
 - The front page cycles through images and links to blogposts, videos and photos.
 - There are icons that link to her other social media outlets – **Facebook**, **Twitter** and **Instagram**.
 - The blog has a comment section that allows people to comment on and share their thoughts.
- Her content has focused on beauty, lifestyle and vlogs that often feature her friends. She is also a relatively famous YouTuber.



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Getting to Know...

1. Influencers – the new wave of celebrity

We know that, if you're reading this, you're an A Level student and you already know a lot about social media. However, we're trying to educate, so prepare to delve a little deeper into the brave new world of social media beyond what you see on the Instagram explore page.

If you're not familiar with the term, an 'influencer' is a broad term for someone who has a large following on social media through social media. The critical part of being an influencer is that they are already famous before they start their YouTube channel or their TikTok account; it's the fires of the Internet. For example, Conor McGregor has 31 million Instagram followers, but his level of clout doesn't make him an influencer because his fame came from boxing. People who have 'influence' but who don't make them an 'Influencer™'.

Who becomes an influencer?

Becoming a social media phenomenon is pretty much mostly down to luck. For one conventionally attractive person with a keen eye for fashion trends that are popular at the moment, fame is often a game of chance. Getting in on a trend or platform before it becomes a way of racking up those follower counts – something that can be seen in the popular vloggers Dawson, Jenna Marbles and Dan Howell (to name a few), who began vlogging when they were teenagers. But in 2019 the influencer marketplace is packed, so good luck getting into that elite club.

Being a part of Internet subcultures and keeping up with the ever-changing landscape of online slang and humour are also desirable traits for an influencer. Heavy social media users are quick to notice when memes or other online trends are used in a forced or awkward manner, and the Internet is not a forgiving place. A famous example is fast-food chains on Twitter adopting millennial humour and slang. Apologies in advance for making you read these, but here are some examples: @BurgerKing: 'THIS WHOPPER BRUH', @IHOP: 'Pancakes on fleek', @mtn_dew: 'Mountain Dew is the bae'.

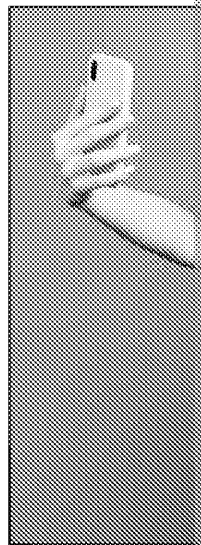
This trend has been widely mocked for being pandering and insincere. So, if you want to be an Influencer™, you want to avoid coming across like you're frantically googling 'What are memes?' or 'What do Generation Z find funny?' because your audiences will notice.

Zoella's fame as a YouTuber could be partly due to the fact that she was one of the first to use the term 'influencer'.

What effects do influencers have?

Influencers have a great deal of sway over their followers. When you have several million (or even millions) of people who follow you based on their admiration for your appearance, your opinions, or other aspects of your life, some of these followers are invariably going to model themselves after you.

Influencers often help set trends in fashion, cosmetics, hairstyles, humour, etc. that become part of youth culture because of the collective sway that social media has over heavy users.



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How do influencers make money?

Getting thousands of likes on a photo is probably a good way to get a warm fuzzy in a cruel world, but likes don't pay the bills. So, influencers have developed a variety of ways to turn their popularity into ready money:

- **Sponsored content** – being paid by a company to promote their product or service, especially for larger accounts.
- **Merchandise** – if you've got a fan base, then you can sell T-shirts and stickers.
- **Fan meet-ups** – conventions where fans pay to meet YouTubers and other influencers around for a while now.
- **Advertising revenue from YouTube** – videos on the site can be monetised on the basis of subscriber count, i.e. companies can advertise on your videos, and you earn money from video gets.

Zoella is a perfect example of the conventional ways in which an online influencer can make money using these methods, and then build on them through more conventional methods such as working with companies to produce her own perfume, make-up lines, clothing lines and similar products. She has also written fiction and non-fiction books that she has then been able to market to her online



Discussion questions

- 1) How is an 'influencer' different from a traditional celebrity?
- 2) Which age groups are most likely to follow influencers on social media, and why?
- 3) What are some of the negative impacts that influencer media has had on heavy users?



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2. Parasocial relationships

'Parasocial' is a word you might not have heard much, and it's a term that has only become widely known in the last decade or so. Even though the concept was first written about in 1956 by sociologists David Horton and Richard Wohl, Microsoft Word doesn't even recognise it as a word and keeps slapping it with the red squiggly line of shame. But the effects of a parasocial relationship on someone's emotions and mental well-being are very much real.

What does it actually mean though? Without meaning to sound like Socrates, the prefix 'para' comes from the Greek for 'resembling', 'apart from' or 'next to', so the word **parasocial** literally means 'nearly social' or 'resembling friendly'.

Parasocial relationships and interactions are one-sided connections, specifically between a celebrity, public figure or an Internet personality. They feel like real friendships and can never be because the celebrity isn't really there. What the viewer sees is that celebrity and not their authentic personality.

Positive aspects

- **Relating emotions and experiences** – for many people, especially younger adults whose content is open and honest about their life and their feelings can be a way to understand their own lives. Zoella, for example, has made many videos about her own problems with anxiety, and having someone they admire talk openly about theirs is incredibly beneficial for young people who struggle with this issue by helping them feel less alone.
- **Fighting loneliness** – loneliness is a common emotion but a horrible one. For many people, hearing of someone talking to them in a friendly and engaging way can make them feel less isolated. One of the most positive and understandable reasons why people become involved in parasocial relationships.

Negative aspects

- **Overinvestment** – as much as these relationships can be beneficial, they can also lead to someone becoming overinvested in someone they think they know but who is not. This can be psychologically damaging.
- **Imbalance of power** – these parasocial relationships are always weighted towards the audience. A friendship whereby one person has much more power over another is not a genuine relationship.

Are parasocial relationships a modern phenomenon?

As mentioned previously, the concept of parasocial interaction was coined in 1956 by David Horton and Richard Wohl. So this is definitely not a new concept. But it is one that has become much more widely prevalent in recent times because of the Internet age.

Originally, it made reference to how people become obsessed and emotionally invested in someone they saw on television or heard on the radio; however, the limitations of this technology meant that someone could only establish one of these parasocial relationships with a particular person. If you were exposed to the content for 20 minutes a day, you're likely to just crack on with your day and not become obsessed with it.

But the nature of digital technology today is interconnected and interactive. When you have 4G (probably 5G/6G by the time you read this) on your phone; you can watch

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you can comment directly to the people who make the media you consume. Not more prevalent in society, the average age of children and teenagers who have access to the Internet is on the decrease. With less time taken up by work or studying, younger audiences have more time consuming online media – the perfect storm of circumstances for parasocial relationships.

The effects on young people

The fact that parasocial relationships have been discussed and theorised decades ago, strongly we all, as humans, value that feeling of connection, even when it is one-sided. Internet technology hasn't created this issue out of thin air but merely amplified it.

But while there are definite upsides to parasocial relationships (in moderation), there are also downsides for other adults is the potential effects on children and teenagers: poor social development; being easily influenced; party; being influenced irresponsibly; struggling to form and maintain real friendships. With the Internet providing round-the-clock access to these celebrities and influencers, parasocial interactions are becoming too frequent and are coming to dominate some aspects of our lives.



Discussion questions

- 1) Do you think younger audiences are more likely or less likely to engage in online parasocial relationships? Explain your choice.
- 2) What technical factors made parasocial relationships uncommon before the Internet?
- 3) How does a parasocial relationship connect to the idea of media representing reality?



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3. Aspirational and 'affiliate' marketing

A huge portion of all advertising, across the whole spread of mediums and formats, is getting you to splash your cash on various products to satisfy your longing for a bit more. A two-week trip to Phuket will make you forget about the awful job that you hate; a new ride is going to improve your relationship with your family; aftershave advertisement will make you dangerously attractive to anyone in a five-mile radius. But they work.

There are a lot of influencers, particularly on Instagram, who seemingly have pictures from one sunny beach to another, being extremely conventionally attractive, and wearing designer outfit twice. For the average person who follows accounts like this, seeing this basis is unlikely to make them feel good about their own life. You're going to wish you could have that hassle-free luxury existence where you don't have to work in an office, post on Instagram or Snapchat or wherever, and you can see the end result of a carefully constructed life implied that this is their everyday life.

'Instagram real life' is a trend that's cropped up in recent years as a reaction to the difference between carefully posed and edited shots and candid photos that are often taken in a serious and comical way. But when you're repeatedly exposed to a constant stream of 'real', the understanding that these lifestyles aren't realistic gets eroded by the desire to be like them.

Affiliate marketing

Affiliate marketing is the big one for influencers when it comes to making money, but it's also the one with the most controversy surrounding it. It works off the principle of **endorsement**, which is basically a celebrity saying that they use/like a product to help boost its image. It's nothing new; traditional celebrities have been doing it for years: Roger Federer and Gillette razors, Kanye's Adidas collaboration, George Clooney and those little coffee machine pod thingies – the list goes on and on.

Even Orson Welles, the bearded behemoth of stage and screen, did a TV advert endorsing a range of champagne in the 1970s, which has mainly become famous for the drunken out-takes. But the point is, it's not a new invention by any means.

Influencers, especially those like Zoella, whose content is very focused on product reviews, clothing, will often receive free products and/or money from brands to promote them. But unlike a TV or newspaper advert that is very distinctly separated from the rest of the content, the promos are woven into the rest of their output – something that can become a problem.

Backlash and criticism

OK, so we have got to establish something. For every new wave of media that becomes popular, there is a time when children and teenagers enjoy it, and then come the fury of people with a burning desire to see it banned. Video games swept the 1980s, and there were all sorts of eye-catching sensational headlines like 'Video Games Lead to Drug Use' or 'Says Science' or 'Is Pacman a Communist Sympathiser'. There was a bit of a moral panic hysteria that this new, dangerous type of music was turning young people into devil-worshipping cultists who sacrifice babies to Beelzebub. But mostly this was just because young people liked because they were new and strange, not because they actually were dangerous.

The Internet and social media have resulted in some similar backlash; maybe not as much, but there are narratives in society about how everyone online was a sexual predator, a scammer, or a liar. To be fair, these aren't invalid worries by any means, but there is also a desire for sensationalism when the reality is much safer.

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Influencer media, especially in the last five years or so, has also been met with some of the attitudes of ‘ah it’s just dumb Internet stuff’, which is a personal preference, but the potential harm and impact on younger audiences’ perceptions of their own lives is a different matter.

The stance critics take is that influencer media is so prevalent, and so much of the content is altered and tweaked, that the knock-on effects are younger audience members of their appearances against utterly impossible standards to achieve. And, unsurprisingly, there is a negative effect.

Legal action

Influencer marketing came onto the scene so rapidly and uncontrollably that it was a shock to lawmakers. Advertising is a highly regulated industry, and there is an extremely long history of stopping marketing agencies just flat-out lying, promoting unhealthy/unethical products, or

Affiliate marketing has been controversial because a lot of it, especially in the early days, was like an advert. A lot of times where influencers were saying things like ‘hey, this is great and you should buy it xoxo’ came across as genuine and unprompted. But if you’re paid to do it, you can have an opinion on a product, sure, but if you’re being paid to say complimentary about it then you have to make this clear, otherwise it’s manipulative.

After a number of lawsuits and reviewing of existing statutes, the rules on affiliate marketing are tighter now. For example, YouTube videos come with a pop-up at the start that says ‘this video contains affiliate links’ and Instagram posts and captions have to include a clear indication that it is an #ad or #sponsored, otherwise they could face having their account deleted or could even be prosecuted.

Artistic integrity – selling out or entrepreneurship

Hesmondhalgh’s theories about modern media being risk-averse and profit-driven, and how large companies and conglomerates – Disney, Universal, Comcast, and so on – but they are also seen to be adopting this same strategy. You could argue that influencers whose content is for established brands, and whose product is heavily featured in the YouTube video or Instagram post, are prioritising financial gains over creativity.

It’s a ‘which came first, the chicken or the egg?’ question, but more about ‘which came first, the advert?’. If an influencer’s content is dictated by what they are paid to endorse, then it’s clear that they are operating on a profit-driven, risk-averse strategy, just like the multi-national corporations.

Discussion questions

- 1) Do you think that an athlete being sponsored by a brand (Nike, Reebok, etc.) is the same as affiliate marketing? Explain your answer.
- 2) What are the potential ethical issues surrounding influencers’ use of affiliate marketing, given their psychographics?
- 3) How might this style of marketing be described as postmodern? Refer to theories of postmodernism.

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4. YouTube – development and history of the platform

'Me at the zoo'

YouTube is a pillar of the modern Internet, alongside Google and Wikipedia. One made, it has become a bona fide media institution with a great deal of resources; however, it was nothing more than the after-work project of a handful of PayPal

In 2005, the service was launched with the first-ever YouTube video being a short Karim having a nice time kicking it with some animals at San Diego Zoo, which you want to do some Internet archaeology. From there, the popularity of the site sky watching videos, where you could interact with people, upload your own content, having to spend a penny? This was a goldmine and the beginning of a billion-dollar

2006 Google buyout

Just a year after their inception, it was announced that the online overlords, Google colossal \$1.65 billion. With the financial and technical support of Google, coupled with that the search engine juggernaut had already established, this was fertile soil for YouTube

Over the next decade, YouTube became hugely popular with viewers and creators videos on the site because of the massive pool of regular users – something that YouTube became a hub for many creators, casual users and professional media consumers consume videos of all manner of subject matter or style.

The Adpocalypse

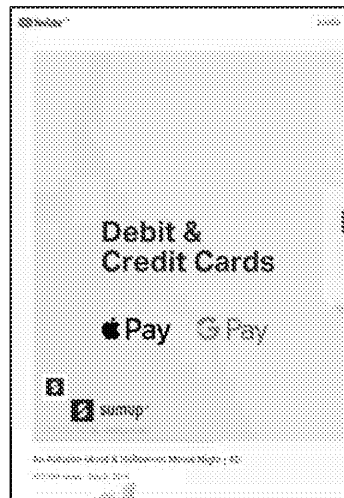
One of the most controversial turning points in the history of YouTube has been what's become commonly known as the 'Adpocalypse'. Bad pun aside, this phenomenon was a shift by YouTube's management to cater more towards advertisers.

YouTubers have been able to 'monetise' videos and channels that rack up at least 1,000 subscribers and a total of 4,000 hours of viewing time in the last year (these are the most recent requirements), and this had been the way that many large YouTubers made a living. But the decision was made somewhere in around 2014/15 to make the platform more usable and appealing to potential third-party advertisers, i.e. any company that isn't YouTube that wants to market its products/services. To do this, they had to have to reel back some of the creative freedom that it initially offered.

After this shift, YouTube began to restrict what kind of content could be monetised, adult or controversial content could be demonetised, even seemingly innocent content creators who felt that the rules were overly strict, the reasons for what would or wouldn't be monetised were unclear and illogical, and that YouTube management was prioritising cash flow from advertisers over creator experience.

Commercialisation of the platform

While YouTube was once touted as a platform where independent creators could be living from producing video content, the climate of the site has changed over time, with the already-famous YouTubers that have emerged from the site, as well as YouTube's most popular recent videos) being filled with music videos from major record



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shows, independent YouTubers have criticised the site for capitalising on the success of the site by prioritising YouTube's own site culture and users.

Decline in quality

Another part of the discourse surrounding YouTube is that, like TV, film or other existing forms of media, the quality of content has declined as the company executives have tried to increase their profits. At the forefront of this debate are YouTubers such as Jake Paul or the Dobre Brothers, whose channels often rely upon **clickbait** in order to appear on the 'Trending' page and attract the largest audience of 12-year-old kids. The argument is that the most popular content that YouTube's brand is being built on is lacking in creativity and artistic integrity.

Interesting, engaging and creative content still exists, but it's hard to deny that YouTube has become more profit-driven than it is artistic. Here you can see theories on the commodification of culture, and the risk-averse nature of large media conglomerates moving from traditional media into the Internet age. After all, technology might char-

YouTube becoming a form of mainstream media

You could easily make the case that, in 2019 and beyond, YouTube has become a form of mainstream media such as television. In fact, a study by Ofcom found that people aged 18–34 spend an average of 20 minutes per day on YouTube, beating Netflix by a solid 20 minutes and absolutely clobbering BBC iPlayer with a pitiful 17 minutes. Much as streaming services (Netflix, Hulu, Disney+) have invested in original and exclusive content, YouTube's management have done the same in the form of YouTube Premium, a subscription service that lets members access premium videos, a lot of which are produced by YouTube Originals, videos with a much higher production budget thanks to YouTube opening up the

A strange case of things coming full circle is the way in which a lot of YouTube videos have become more formal to television programmes in certain ways. A lot of creators on the site have started to focus on their image and aesthetic, much in the same manner as a TV channel. Some creators even have a credits section where they list the names of their supporters (often people donate a monthly amount to support an independent creator), a convention more commonly associated with TV and film.

YouTube's future

Being an integral but undeniably flawed component of the modern Internet machine, YouTube's future is hard to predict. It's still an insanely valuable and popular platform. As of 2019, the net worth of YouTube is estimated to exceed \$100 billion, so there's no doubt that the Google board of directors will continue to support the platform. The question of whether or not the problems and complaints that audiences and creators have with the site are going to be resolved remains unanswered.

Discussion questions

- 1) YouTube has struggled to become popular among YouTube's users – why do you think that is?
- 2) What are some of the pros and cons of YouTube for independent video creators?
- 3) What problems arise when conglomerates such as Google or Facebook own many popular social media platforms like WhatsApp, Instagram or YouTube? Consider industrial and audience factors.

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5. Beauty gurus, fashion influencers and other online

Online content genres

When it comes to genres, the Internet is a forge where the established genres of old are melted in the flames and reformed into shiny new ones. Reaction videos, let's-plays, vlogs... these are all examples of YouTube video types that have become more than just a trend; they have become genres with conventions that you expect to see when you click on them.

The most obvious way to see the conventions of these new internet genres is when people roast them for comedic effect. You have probably seen Instagram or Twitter skits of people mocking the typical actions, music and format of beauty gurus, which goes to show how well-established and recognisable these new genre conventions have become.

Reaction video (parody of someone's video) – other YouTube events – entertainment
 Let's play video game features to

Beauty gurus

What exactly are they? The clue's in the name, detective. Beauty gurus, or make-up artists (be pronounced 'mwahs', but who knows?), are content creators who make tutorials on how to apply a certain style of eyeliner, and similar topics along these lines.

The foundation of their output is about beauty – whether they review certain products, show how to achieve a certain look, or whether they paint *The Last Supper* on a head with make-up – and so on. Beauty gurus are people such as James Charles, Jaclyn Hill and Jeffree Star, whose names don't begin with a 'J'.

Fashion influencers

Fah-shun baby – it's important. Or maybe you don't care about it at all. But fashion influencers and their followers certainly do. With these guys, it's all about having threads worthy of a photo, and their content is entirely centred on outfits, shoes, accessories and so on.

Fashion influencers are also a pretty varied bunch when it comes to their style: mainstream high-street, insanely colourful Harajuku, all-black Gothic, suave gentleman – whatever you like to wear, you can probably find inspiration online from one of these people. Important distinction: we're not talking about models from the world of high fashion, such as Taylor Hill or Miranda Kerr, we're talking about home-grown Internet celebrities such as Cameron Dallas, Chiara Ferragni, Jay Alvarez and so on.



Lifestyle influencers

A 'lifestyle influencer' is a person whose Instagram account is a guide to how to live a desirable life (and how to be very hot while you do that). They may be very fashionable but they don't produce videos that are tutorials on how to achieve a look or a color. Much more about depicting a desirable, aspirational lifestyle. Travel, relationships and other subjects being covered on a lifestyle influencer's social media account.

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Zoella and genre hybridity

Just like the media formats of old, online content also exhibits genre hybridity. Whatever you want (if it's legal), user-generated content often blends different styles. Online content can become very strongly linked with a particular genre and style of content. Zoella is a content creator – and Zoella could definitely be an example of this.

Zoella's overall content exhibits some genre hybridity of the three new 'genres' mentioned. Her videos often feature some vlog footage, a 'haul' of beauty products or clothing, a 'day in the life' of her friends or boyfriend that fall more into the 'lifestyle' label. The tabs on her website – 'Places', etc. – are a good indication of how she crosses genres in her output.

Discussion questions

- 1) How does a genre become established and recognised?
- 2) For content creators, what are the advantages of online content genres?
- 3) What are the limitations and problems that come with genre-driven content? Consider Zoella's content.



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6. Self-branding

When you hear the word ‘brand’, you generally associate it with big recognisable Coca-Cola, Gucci, etc. companies with logos, colours, signature images and slogans – what the term ‘brand identity’ conjures up. This is correct, but it’s not only large outward image that becomes their brand. When you become a celebrity in the past, you achieve this through making videos about your own life, you transcend above being a brand as well.

Influencers versus traditional celebrities

What’s really the difference between an influencer and you, a average run-of-the-mill person? Does anything really matter? (Well that last question is unanswerable and depressing on it.) But influencers definitely do have a different way of creating brands based on their image.

For one thing, traditional celebrities become famous from being a part of something – playing guitar in a band or performing stunts that nearly get them killed for our entertainment. They become famous independently for their appearance, their lifestyle or something similar. They do other things as well, but the main way they amass a following is by being appealing for one reason.

Influencers are generally much more conscious about their branding, and the image that has driven their success. Traditional celebrities often don’t have to carefully curate their image (unless they do something really terrible and have to salvage their career), but influencers know when you mess up, or when people uncover your past mistakes you thought you were hidden. Branding decisions that cause controversy, you can find your career plummeting like a modern-day Icarus. In the following article, we take a more detailed look at the rise and fall of controversies in Zoella’s timeline.

Zoella’s brand

Zoella is a definite example of a YouTuber who has turned their personal style and image into a commercial brand – literally; she’s started up companies such as Zoella Lifestyle and Zoella Beauty (which sell stationery, skincare, towels, candles, cosmetics, etc.) that are built on the foundation of her online image. In fact, she now self-promotes her own brands on her social media, and has moved away from affiliate marketing with a whole swath of different companies – a sign of how strong her brand image and recognition have become.

Zoella’s Instagram is a perfect example of a highly curated and posed account, and it makes sense for her to do this. Her audience have come to expect a level of aesthetic care and attention, and a bright, conventional, all-feminine visual style that she has cultivated over years.

Each post has been shot and styled with care and attention – not just as an individual image, but as it fits into the visual and colour scheme with the rest of her posts.

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Discussion questions

- 1) What are some of the key aspects of Zoella’s brand identity, and what messages does it convey?
- 2) How might personal branding be described as postmodern?
- 3) How might establishing yourself as a brand limit or stifle creative freedom? Consider the pros and cons and reactions.

7. Criticism of Zoella

There are skeletons in the closets of many celebrities (except Danny DeVito, who is honest). Influencers are no exception, partly due to the fact that so much of their mistake that they make is very visible. In the last few years, the world has watched in confusion at, for example: Logan Paul going into a Japanese forest notorious for complete chaos and failure that was Tana Mongeau's 'TanaCon', event where 20,000 fans showed up at a venue that could only fit 5,000 and, therefore, was cancelled less than a day in; and stupid happenings in the weird world of influencers.

If you wanted to you could probably cue up a solid four-hour playlist of 'YouTube' controversies that have unfolded in the last few years. Unfortunately for Zoella, she has a place on the list.

Driving while vlogging

In 2014, Zoella was fined for not wearing her seat belt while driving while filming a vlog – a uniquely terrible thing to do. The rest of the world from Zoella's side was that most of the vlog was shot in city traffic. The Metropolitan Police were not so keen, issuing a statement that this was irresponsible.

Shooting in a car is not illegal, but it often involves training and/or specific permits. The criticism was levelled at Zoella because she is a role model to her fans. So, whether or not it is dangerous is beside the point; it's more about the possible ramifications on her young fans.

The Advent calendar backlash

There are ethical concerns that arise when selling any sort of merchandise to children. Younger children are impressionable, naturally trusting and supportive of the people they look up to, but this makes them very easy to manipulate. Children don't have their own money; they don't have jobs (it's illegal, plus they'd be pretty useless), so if you market to children then you know that they are going to be asking their parents for your product, or for the money to buy your product.

As much as Zoe probably wants it hushed up and forgotten about, we've got to talk about the Advent calendar fiasco. In 2017, Zoella proudly released a 12-door calendar – emblazoned with the slogan 'All You Need Is Xmas' – that promised a selection of hand-picked gifts such as candles, a bauble, a notepad and so on. 'Hey Grinch, what's your problem with Advent calendars? Christmas and joy, huh?', you might ask. But just wait until you hear the price being Fifty. Pounds. FIFTY.

Turns out that the Internet, parents of Zoella's fans and news outlets didn't take to the ridiculously expensive Advent calendar (all things) to an audience of mostly pre-teens. There are fancy luxury Advent calendars with a mini bottle of gin or perfume behind each door. Most certainly, these are the things that parents are more likely to have disposable cash to drop.

Not only was the price being criticised, but the quality of the gifts in the calendar was also a disappointment. Expectations, such as the confetti or the cookie cutter. So, understandably, Zoella's was a poor business move. Boots, the retailer that Zoella had partnered with to sell the calendar, cancelled the order just days after the furore. Problem solved? Right?

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The offensive tweets scandal

Unfortunately for Zoella, the Advent calendar scandal had whipped up a frenzy and not best pleased with what they viewed as someone exploiting children for financial gain, users took out their shovels and went digging.

What they found was a slew of old tweets made by Zoella from around 2009–2012, a real nightmare. They were a selection of about 15 tweets that called people ‘fatty’, ‘skinny’, and were derogatory towards gay men, mocking them for ‘trying to be macho’. As you can imagine, they did not go down well with audiences.

Zoella quickly deleted the tweets in question and issued an apology soon afterwards. Her apology was met with mixed reactions by both her fans and the general public. Her apology did not mention the tweets and instead brought up the fact that the tweets were posted from her account seven or eight years ago and had since been deleted and changed. This was accepted by some of her fans as being an understandable mistake when they are young. However, others were quick to point out that, yes, she was young in 2009, but in this time, Zoella would have been between the ages of 19 (at her oldest). Making a mistake as a teenager might be one thing, but people argued that Zoella was a successful YouTube channel with a large following, and that she shouldn't be exempt from public scrutiny for her youth. The double whammy of these two successive scandals has arguably put Zoella under a microscope in the public eye.

Like a spy burning fake passports and wigs in a back alley, if you want to be an ‘influencer’, then it's probably best to wipe your old online identity clean. Or, and this is probably the best advice, avoid doing anything that will embroil you in a big controversy in the first place.

Discussion questions

- 1) What level of responsibility do influencers have, and why are their actions (good or bad) so influential?
- 2) Do you think that influencers are more susceptible to controversies than traditional celebrities? Why or why not?
- 3) How could negative press actually be beneficial to an influencer? Consider how Zoella's situation might have been different if she had not been so young.



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8. Aesthetics and style

Aside from content such as articles on personal blogs, music on SoundCloud, or podcast recordings, much of the **user-generated content** on the Internet is highly visual. Web design – eye-catching and memorable online content needs to have thought. Zoella's videos, insta posts and other creations all share some aesthetic sensibility that strengthen her brand identity.

Blog

Zoella's blog (Zoella.co.uk) is a hub of all her collective content in one place. Arguably beyond being a 'blog' simply because of the breadth and quality of content that is as professional the quality of web design is. But placing aesthetics to one side, let's look at the features at play here.

- 🔗 **Tabs** – a bar below the masthead features tabs such as 'Life', 'Places' and 'Style' to access content easily.
- 🔗 **Masthead** – a serif-style font spells out 'Zoella' in the top left; small social media link icons adorn the right-hand side; and, at the top of the page, there is a graphic of fairy lights.
- 🔗 **Interactive design** – the front page has a section that cycles through a selection of her latest content, flicking between large photos and a text box with a link to entice traffic.
- 🔗 **Photography** – the photos are large in size and are very high-definition. They have been shot using a **DSLR** and have used compositional and technical conventions such as **shallow depth of field** and placing key visual information along third-lines.

Instagram

Zoella has two Instagram accounts: one is @zoesugg, which is a 'personal' account, and the other is @zoella, which is more of a business account. Calling it a 'personal' account is pushing the limits of the word a bit, as it is apparent that many of the posts have been shot by photographers and have been edited afterwards, so it's probably more accurate to call it her primary account.

For analysis, let's focus on the much more popular @zoesugg account (which has 9.7 million followers as of August 2019, compared to a weak and pathetic 1.2 million on the other account).

- 📌 **Subject matter** – as you would expect, most shots are of Zoe herself, or are shots of locations, photos of her and her boyfriend or friends, or shots of beauty/lifestyle products.
- 📌 **Composition** – the photographs follow compositional guidelines, such as the placing of key visual information along thirds of the image instead of centrally, making use of foreground and background to create depth, and using depth of field to place focus on the subject and blur out the background.
- 📌 **Mise en scène** – Zoella and other people in the shots are not posing in the way that models would pose, but these shots are not fully candid/natural either. Items and objects are carefully laid out, such as shots of a dinner table with food and drink all arranged in an eye-catching and neat manner.

From the perspective of analysing media, it's obvious to us that there is a level of **artifice** on display on the @zoesugg account. We know that an Instagram account is a selection of the best bits of life, and not an accurate window into someone's existence.



Artists being candid, e.g. photos

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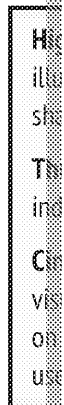
look up to Zoella and the life they see through her content might not be able to reach as being attainable and possible.

Overall, Zoella's Instagram account does a great job at conveying a certain mood of good, spending time with friends, eating food that looks fancy (it probably tastes good, can't tell through a phone screen) and living a life of socialising and being happy.

Darkness is avoided; almost every photo is washed in bright light and filled with the very joyful, comfy content.

YouTube

- Filming style** – shot on a DSLR camera; a mix of handheld and static shots. In vlogging, the fourth wall is consistently broken, and there is a direct mode of address where she looks straight at the camera to heighten the sense of connection between her and the viewer.
- High-key lighting** – this lighting is often used in situations where make-up and hairstyling is the focus. The bright lighting is to ensure maximum visibility, rather than eliciting an emotional response. A real-world example of this is in shops with make-up counters, such as Boots and Harrods, which will be lit in a similar way.
- Editing** – cuts are used in a functional manner rather than a stylistic way. They are used to make the different segments of video flow smoothly into one another instead of creating/altering meaning of shots through edits.
- Use of sound and music** – amateur level of sound design, where the audio recording is relatively clean and clear (except for ambient room echo/noise), but there is no background music or sound effects that a television show or other YouTube videos would probably use. This lack of focus reinforces what the priorities in the video are – Zoella's thoughts and the visual appearance of the frame.
- Thumbnails** – Zoella uses custom thumbnails; instead of taking a still frame from the content, she uses an edited frame with a text overlay of the title, and a coloured line around the key visual element in the frame (i.e. herself, a dog, a product). This is to appear professional, to convey that time and effort have been put into the production and publishing of the video.
- Channel header** – this is the banner image at the top of Zoella's main YouTube channel; Facebook and Twitter have a similar header image function that acts as a way of setting the tone for your account. Zoella's features gold script saying 'Zoella' and black type underneath 'Lifestyle Beauty Channel' her videos. The Zoella logo ties in with her branding across the rest of her social media, which is a mix of a modern, clean, and a more conventionally feminine aesthetic.



Compared to fiction films, documentaries, or even other styles of YouTube videos, Zoella's content takes a more technical approach to cinematography. Sure, there are a lot of techniques used, such as using a shallow depth of field, using Steadicams for smooth camera movement, but the content takes precedence over the form.

An audience watching a vlog are more interested in what the vlogger has to say, and how it is visually presented. This becomes really apparent when you see original vlogs from 2010 which have pretty atrocious audio and video quality by 2019 standards and were still popular because of the occasional cut thrown in for good measure. But these videos were still popular

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Colour scheme

One of the most notable ways that design consistency is achieved across all these **colours**. Traditional brands and managers have known this for years – if you want your brand then you bust out some paint and start slapping everything with your even managed to tie their brand to the very idea of Christmas itself when they kicked fresh new red-and-white threads in the 1930s.

Zoella was working at an interior design company when she first began her YouTube through in how colours are used across her media to create a mood and an identity. account, YouTube channel and blog, we see an array of bright whites, light blues, pinks – and an absolutely minimal use of black.

It's also important to note that almost all the shades seen are **desaturated**, meaning. Designers, artists and other visual creators often avoid using fully saturated colours; they stand out from the rest of an image. There's a reason why the walls in most and why they aren't bright – by desaturating colours, you create a subtler and with Zoella's content.

A traditional feminine aesthetic

Zoella's look, her videos and her style are rooted in many things that have been typical for decades. Shopping, make-up, hairstyling and jewellery – these all compose a media.

The soft pastel tones; the cursive script fonts; the visual imagery of comfortable dresses, flowers, small animals, cupcakes, fairy lights; these are all signs that are repeated and they all have associations with the traditional gender roles of women being soft.

It's difficult to overlook the fact that generally both the form and content of Zoella's conventional, especially in how rigidly feminine it all appears – which might be why success. But it's hard to deny that her media can sometimes seem like the resurrections magazine from the 1950s but reconstituted into a YouTube channel.

Now, traditional gender roles have been pretty widely criticised for being rigid and. People are too diverse and varied to be wedged into these unhelpful boxes of who because you're a man or a woman. But some people may just happen to like the personality traits associated with these gender roles.

Because she's a media personality and not someone we know as a person intimately (we never know yourself truly and unfiltered), we can't say for sure whether Zoella's femininity personally likes, or whether it is a strategic choice to appeal to a mainstream audience.

Overall vibes

Zoella's overall aesthetic – her approach to how things look on her social media platforms could definitely be described as the archetypal 'Influencer™' look. In fact, considering the media wave since 2009, it's fair to say that she's pretty much laid down the blueprint of the all been carefully produced. She's made consistent across all the various social media home her brand identity – and it is effective in this regard.

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Discussion questions

- 1) Zoella's use of lighting design and the colour schemes across her social media platforms (bright whites / black tones). Why do you think this choice has been made, and how would the content change if they were included?
- 2) What does a consistent visual style across different platforms inform us about Zoella as a content creator?
- 3) How might Zoella's aesthetic style influence her fans, and why?

9. Regulating the Internet

There have been all sorts of debates raging for the last few decades about this sort of complete answer. Sure, there are definitely aspects of the Internet that are dark and disturbing things such as graphic images of real and sexual content.

Who regulates the Internet?

Internet regulation is something you can most obviously see in the absolute extreme. North Korea, as you might expect, has the most restricted Internet in the world, and access a fraction of the websites that we can here in the UK. In China, certain social media like WhatsApp, are restricted for political reasons: instead they use domestic social networks.

In this country, our access to the Internet is largely free and unrestricted but is still regulated. The ISPA (Internet Service Providers' Association) is a group of companies that, for broadband and mobile phone services, work alongside Ofcom, the regulator that handles radio and advertising, making recommendations about what the

Apart from this, the Internet is nowhere near as heavily regulated as television or traditional media. But why is that the case? Is the Internet a Frankenstein's monster that can't hope to control their unstoppable new creation?

What are the problems?

1) The Internet has no borders

For one thing, the modern Internet is a sprawling behemoth that has tendrils all over the world. In the caveman days before iPhones and TikTok, the only people who would have had control over the networks would have been scientists or the military. Regulation was easy then – if you wanted to control the networks, the army would come to your house in the middle of the night and unless you try hacking into the Area 51's restricted files, you're probably not going to

For governments, the fact that the Internet is global is a problem – it's not something you can regulate without it becoming a complex political mess with other countries. As of 2019, the UK is leading the way in regulating online media.

2) Regulation comes after posting

Online content doesn't go through a stringent box-ticking process before it gets posted. Instead, you can get away with posting something deemed inappropriate and only face repercussions when (or if) people complain, and **moderators** delete the content.

But this is not an ideal set-up if you really want to stem the flow of illegal, immoral or inaccurate content. Moderators are always scrambling to keep up with the flood of online **user-generated content** slips through the net.

3) Hatred and bigotry

This world is full of wonderful individuals who make life a vivacious, colourful experience. Unfortunately, there is also hatred and bigotry out there, and the Internet has proven to be a gathering place for it.

It's not just the dark, dingy forums that are home to hateful ideology. Social networks have been found to have supporters of terrorism using their website, receiving widespread attention and down on these accounts. Hate speech is both illegal and against these companies' terms of service, but it doesn't seem to be improving.

Moderators are those who manage a specific network or volume of content.

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4) Plagiarism

Plagiarism is a big issue online among content creators. Stealing designs, joke the putting together a video – this sort of behaviour unfortunately happens a lot. Works are expensive. You can't get away with plagiarising the intellectual property of a Universal or Disney because a) everyone will realise and b) they will sue you. But an individual without this level of legal defence, so plagiarism is a common problem.

5) Anonymity

One of the most freeing and appealing aspects of the Internet is the ability to be anonymous. Online, you can reinvent yourself with multiple identities across social media, or you can simply be no one at all. Having to constantly present yourself as a person in the real world is a drag, so it's no surprise many people wholeheartedly embrace the ability to hide under a cloak of digital anonymity.

But, as with any double-edged sword, there is a danger. For some people, being anonymous allows them to engage in hateful, cruel, or even illegal behaviour with the fear of immediate direct repercussions that you get in real life. You insult someone looking at their face and you might end up picking your teeth up off the wall, but do it online and, unfortunately, you can hide away unashamedly.

This is a problem because anonymity is simultaneously both an extremely positive and negative aspect of the Internet. It's a game of regulation Jenga that's rigged to fall whichever option you choose, and there will ever be a solution to this question.

Where does Zoella fall into this debate?

Zoella is relevant in this ongoing discourse about whether or not the Internet should be regulated for important reasons.

First of all, as we've established already, Zoella's audience is predominantly an audience of young females. Traditional media that is tailored towards children, especially in 2019, has to jump through so many hoops and avoid a whole bunch of danger areas. Children are inherently more trusting and naive. Because children are so impressionable and don't have the same level of awareness as adult audiences, media made for children can be exploitative and harmful. But on the Internet, without Ofcom or the FCC, people can make all sorts of **clickbait** to target children, and they get away with it.

Another major point in this is the issue of location. Zoella is a British citizen producing content in Britain, but most major Internet companies are based in the United States. So, is her content subject to US law or British law? This isn't clear-cut – often these issues are only explored in court cases when YouTubers are embroiled in some legal issues.

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Discussion questions:

- 1) What are the pros and cons of online anonymity? Refer to audience, industry and regulation.
- 2) How can the Internet be manipulated for political purposes? Refer to real-world examples.
- 3) If you were in charge of regulating the Internet worldwide, what would you do, and what real-world technology that exists today.

Show What You Know – Essay Q

Below are a number of practice essay questions. Have a go at answering them, using

- 1) How does Zoella's content present a filtered version of her own identity and themes, messages and ideas her content conveys, and the reasons behind this?
- 2) How has the rise of influencers such as Zoella changed the media landscape, technology played in this? Consider factors such as the creator–consumer dynamic and impact on traditional media industries.
- 3) Argue both for and against this statement: 'Zoella is an example of an independence away from traditional media ownership structures.' Consider technological factors.
- 4) How does Zoella demonstrate gender through the use of visual codes? How and why conform to or challenge popular representations of masculinity and femininity?



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Answers

1. Influencers – the new wave of celebrity

- 1) An influencer becomes famous and popular through the Internet, while a traditional celebrity is famous through music / acting / reality TV and other conventional mediums.
- 2) Young audiences (13–17 and 18–24) are most likely to be following social media, and are more heavily involved in the Internet than other age groups. Teenagers and young adults are role models more devoutly than adults.
- 3) Negative effects include:
 - a. Copying styles and imagery that has resulted in oversaturation
 - b. Making audiences, especially young people, feel insecure and less happy
 - c. Blurs the line between the real world and social media

2. Parasocial relationships

- 1) Younger audiences are more likely to be susceptible to parasocial relationships through social media (particular vlogs) than other demographics, and they are less developed psychologically than adults.
- 2) Before the Internet, you couldn't choose what media you consumed – this made it unlikely to form strong parasocial bonds with celebrities because of the low visibility. They could see them. Equally, they couldn't directly comment on or interact with them, so they maintained a level of detachment and disconnection.
- 3) Parasocial relationships involve one person being shown through media, but not directly interacting, and altered by the process of selection and mediation, and their genuine audience is not represented.

3. Aspirational and 'affiliate' marketing

- 1) This is open to interpretation, but should reference how influencer affiliate marketing is different to the fact that influencers are solely famous through social media, while athletes are famous through consistent performance.
- 2) This style of marketing could be seen as postmodern because the influencer is showing their real life, but these sponsored advertisements blur the line between the constructed life in how they are presented.
- 3) Affiliate marketing relies upon audience members believing in the endorsement from the influencer's end, and that it is a part of their real life / routine – this breakdown of the real world could be seen as an example of simulation, one of Baudrillard's concepts.

4. YouTube – development and history of the platform

- 1) Students should refer to YouTube being free as a major draw of the platform, and that users who are used to paying for the service are unlikely to pay for additional content. They should also note that YouTube's content is perceived to be amateur, unlike streaming services.
- 2)
 - a. YouTube is free to use, video creators can upload high-quality video and make a living online, outside traditional media industries.
 - b. YouTube is a competitive environment that doesn't guarantee success, and the focus on advertising limit what content can become popular.
- 3) Major conglomerates such as Google owning other online companies can result in a monopoly, where small companies can't compete and consumers don't have as much choice.

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5. Beauty gurus, fashion influencers and other online genres

- 1) A genre becomes established through texts having shared attributes that are strengthened over time by new texts.
- 2) Online content genres make it easier to produce a video with less risk because of the genre.
- 3) Genres can become oversaturated and stale, losing popularity. Neale puts forward ideas every so often to shake things up and keep audiences engaged.

6. Zoella – self-branding

- 1) Example answers include:
 - a. Conventional beauty standards – conveys the brand target audience of young women
 - b. Carefully styled outfits that follow mainstream trends – conveys the brand's aesthetic and that fashion is important
 - c. Professional layout, use of white space – reinforces brand's awareness of marketing and fashion
 - d. Any similarly well-explained and reasoned answer is fine
- 2) Self-branding could be described as post-modern because it relies on breaking down authentic personal identity and a constructed media identity.
- 3) If you establish yourself as a brand with a particular image and style, you might be able to experiment with new ideas without losing audiences and potential financial loss.

7. Criticism of Zoella

- 1) A large portion of their core audience will try to emulate them to some degree, which could convey the wrong message to a large and impressionable group of young people.
- 2) Influencers are much more present on the Internet than traditional celebrities, so their actions are archived and resurface – unlike a real event or incident.
- 3) Negative press could be beneficial for an influencer because it would direct attention to their content, even if people are interacting out of anger/dislike for their actions. However, if everyone hates the video, it could be detrimental.

8. Aesthetics and style of Zoella

- 1) Shadows and dark tones have been excluded because they would detract from the vibrant tone of her content – including shadows would introduce connotations of negativity that would undermine this.
- 2) It conveys that she curates her content intentionally to appeal to a certain demographic or target audience in a professional way.
- 3) Fans will idolise/admire Zoella's personal style and the aesthetics of her content, which could lead to her style and preferences to hers.

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9. Regulating the Internet

- 1) Pros and cons
 - a. Pros include: freedom to create your identity, freedom to speak out against world repercussions (political dissidents, criticising a bad boss, whistle-blower world where your identity is constantly being perceived).
 - b. Cons include: lack of accountability, makes it easier to commit crimes (buying illegal goods), can allow people to become crueler / more vindictive because of detachment.
- 2) Governments, such as those in North Korea, China, Saudi Arabia, Russia and other authoritarian and ideological regime, can restrict their citizens from accessing foreign websites that are critical of the government under penalty of arrest, imprisonment, or death.
- 3) This is up to the individual student, but their strategy should be well-explained.

Show What You Know – Essay Questions

- 1) Zoella's construction of reality
 - a. Her content is a filtered version of reality due to the fact that it shows content that has been carefully selected and mediated to fit her image.
 - b. Her own identity is a persona because we see only certain parts of her life that are edited and performed to an extent.
 - c. Her content has been planned, shot and edited to create and reinforce her image as a beauty and lifestyle guru.
 - d. Her visual content focuses on a limited range of imagery and visual presentation; desaturated colours, such as light blues, tan, pink and other pastels; and feminine iconography, such as long hair, make-up and jewellery.
 - e. Her content focuses on uplifting themes – friendship, being beautiful, travel, pets, etc. – that are intentional to create the image of a life worth desiring for her audience.
- 2) Influencers
 - a. Digital technology (such as the Internet, social media, smartphones and tablets) is essential to creating the content itself.
 - b. Influencers have created a new genre of Internet content that focuses on content tailored to Instagram and YouTube audiences.
 - c. Influencers are an example of how the Internet has allowed amateur audience members to become active audience members, instead of passive consumers.
 - d. Online influencer content is much cheaper to produce and can amass a large audience, unlike traditional media, such as a television program or a film.
 - e. Traditional media has viewed Internet content as being inferior or lacking in quality, despite the huge popularity of influencers.
- 3) Zoella is an independent creator who has broken away from traditional media.
 - a. For Zoella:
 - i. Her work is self-produced; initially 100%, but she still takes a key role in the publishing of content.
 - ii. She did not work in the media professionally before creating her channel.
 - iii. She is not like the CEOs of major media companies, who have, historically, been older white men with pre-existing wealth / social status.
 - iv. Her brand is owned and run by herself, not by a larger parent company.

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- b. AGAINST
- i. Her income has still been the result of YouTube advertising and pro larger companies.
 - ii. She produces content for sites such as YouTube and Instagram, and have power over her because she uses their services.
 - iii. Her content is now produced by a team of people – photographers, designers – and she has become part of the traditional pattern of c
 - iv. She is now a multimillionaire, and this means that she has become (even if she did not begin there).
- 4) How does Zoella represent gender, and why?
- a. Zoella's depiction of femininity is conventional.
 - b. There is a visual focus on aesthetic qualities commonly associated with make-up, tanned skin, a bright pastel color scheme.
 - c. Zoella is the primary example of representation of womanhood in her appearance, her clothing, the interior design of her home and her interior decoration, femininity or girlishness.
 - d. The motivations behind her representation of women may be more personal, how she likes to dress and what she likes to do, rather than what she aspire to.
 - e. Equally it could be seen as a commercial decision – these depictions of c broad appeal to mainstream female audiences. Style and aesthetics that popular, but not to the same extent – so this may have influenced the c



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Appendix 1. How Zoella and *Attitude* have approached digitalisation differently

It's 2019, and we're in the Fortnite TikTok era of the Internet where everyone is constantly online and connected. Every company and creator has had to adapt and incorporate the Internet or risk being left behind. *Attitude* and Zoella are two different animals when it comes to the Internet. *Attitude* has been uprooted from its own world and forced to adapt to a brand-new ecosystem, while Zoella has emerged fully formed and perfectly adapted to this new world.



Attitude – adapting to the times

Attitude started in 1994 when physical publishing was still a booming industry and limited computer use were really into computers as a hobby. The World Wide Web was only four years old in 1990, so it was taking shape but still expensive and complicated to get involved with.

Attitude has had to digitise its content; on a practical level, this actually offers a lot of advantages over a physical magazine. Apart from street newspapers that are sold face-to-face by individual vendors, magazines really don't lose out on much by transferring their content onto a website. Some of the benefits that come from going digital include:

- **Lower cost** – the financial cost of printing, shipping and selling physical magazines is significantly higher than the cost of uploading digital copies and emailing them.
- **Less environmental impact** – ink and paper production, printing and the carbon footprint of delivery lorries are all negatives of physical publishing that can be avoided by publishing digitally.
- **Wider reach** – online content can be shared and spread to a massive audience far beyond what is possible with physical copies. For a niche magazine such as *Attitude*, this allows the magazine's content to reach its intended audiences.
- **More opportunities for advertising** – online advertising can be updated and targeted to reach an individual visitor to *Attitude*'s website.
- **Video and audio content** – you can't play a video on paper, unless you're scanning the page. Publishing articles online means that writers can link to related videos or audio recordings, increasing reader engagement to their content.

There are many titles – notably large newspapers such as *The Times*, the *Financial Times* and the *Guardian* – that post their articles online but under the lockdown of a paywall or a number of (irrelevant) ads that force you to subscribe to see more. This strategy helps to control the circulation of content but the percentage of people who are willing to pay real money to read online articles is low. So, attitude.co.uk doesn't do this – you can read and watch as much of the content as you like. So, on the masthead there are adverts for subscriptions, but there's zero obligation to subscribe.

Even though *Attitude*'s success in the 1990s meant that the company had to evolve with the times, the title has no real struggle in doing so. The fact that content is available without a paywall means that more potential readers can enjoy the content, instead of being blocked by a paywall.

Zoella

OK, so 2009 really wasn't that long ago at all in the grand scheme of things, but digitalisation was moving at such an extremely rapid pace that an original iPhone could probably be in a museum by now. By this point, social media networks such as Facebook and Twitter had been established, and the foundations for the Internet we know now in 2019 had all been laid out.

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Zoella's content didn't exist – and probably couldn't have – before 2009 simply because there was no outlet for it. You couldn't pitch the idea of a regular person talking to a camera channel because who would want to watch that?

Because Zoella began on the major social networks that have pretty much remained the same since, she hasn't had to adapt to completely different technology – only to expand into new apps and technology.

Developments in social media:

- **Snapchat** – the picture-chat app was launched in mid 2011 and has been huge for Zoella's account (@zoella) where she regularly posts content.
- **YouTube changes to the format** – YouTube has introduced a number of new features such as live streaming, changes to channel layouts and the algorithm that recommends content.
- **Instagram stories and IGTV** – Instagram has added vertical videos, ditched the square format for a vertical-video feature, called "Stories", where creators post original content for 24 hours.

Discussion Questions

- 1) Zoella has appeared on television programmes and has written books, proving that she has moved into traditional mediums. Do you think a celebrity who has become famous from the Internet can reach a similar level of success? Consider audience response.
- 2) Why does *Attitude's* core audience, both in terms of demo and psychographics, make this a successful business move?
- 3) There are now professional media companies (BuzzFeed, Barstool, Shots Studios) that focus on online use – how could this negatively impact user-generated content and smaller creators?

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Appendix 2. Blurring the lines between amateurs (Zoella and *Attitude*)

Attitude – traditional professional media

Attitude, despite being non-traditional in subject matter and content, is still an professionally created media.

In 1994, there would have been very little avenue for amateur creators to publish a zines or university papers; if you wanted to become a journalist or a publisher, you need experience. This is still pretty much the case today if you want to go into the industry. It still exists to produce your own magazine and publish online, but it is not any requisite experience.

Of course, society has become more open and inclusive in terms of professional opportunities. Those involved in journalism and publishing are probably more diverse than it was in the past. Training in the subject is still a requirement to be a key requirement to entry.

Zoella – amateur creator

There's no denying that Zoella started off as an amateur creator. That's not to diminish her talent and beauty, but merely to acknowledge the fact that she was not producing videos or writing a blog as a professional journalist. Her blog and channel began as a place to share her thoughts on style, show her 'hauls' and make content that she wanted to make.

Clay Shirky, a media theorist who has written about the Internet, has taken a special interest in the relationship dynamic between the professional creator and the amateur audience.

In the past, if you wanted to make a short film and share it with the world, you'd need a camera, lights and a recording studio, and then you'd need to either work in the industry or maybe get it broadcast or sold in shops if you were lucky. Now, you can rent or buy a camera for a few hundred dollars, and you can post your film online for free, and you can potentially become successful without needing any money, professional connections or previous experience.

Amateur creators becoming professional through fame and success

The funny thing is that even though someone like Zoella may start off as an amateur creator, producing and publishing their own work, they eventually become a form of professional creator because of their success.

Many successful YouTubers have a videographer, an editor, a manager and other people working with them to produce their work and maintain their image. Sure, they're not a professional media producer in the sense that they don't work in the old-school industries, but there's no denying that at that level they're not really an 'amateur' in the true sense of the word either.

Future outlook

Clay Shirky wrote about how the amateur creators are becoming professional creators that have changed since the time he wrote it. While it is still definitely something that is going to happen, the more that the traditional media institutions (YouTube, Instagram, Snapchat, etc.) become profit driven, the more it is going to be for new amateurs to achieve the same level of success.

But the Internet will evolve as it has always done; therefore, by 2025, much of the current Internet landscape will be irrelevant anyway.

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Discussion questions

- 1) Why is making Internet content much less risky than producing conventional media?
- 2) How has the modern Internet become similar to pre-existing media industries?
- 3) Do you think that it is harder or easier to become Internet famous now than it was in the past? Argue both perspectives.
 - a. Harder
 - b. Easier

Appendix Answers

Appendix 1. How Zoella and *Attitude* have approached digitalisation differently

- 1) Online audiences are typically much younger than those of traditional media that world – unless they are hugely famous like Beyoncé or Terry Crews – with a large fan base. Internet content often follows internal trends and styles, which someone trying to co-opt this.
- 2) *Attitude's* core audience are known to be early adopters of technology, and it is beneficial for marginalised groups to form online content communities – so going digital is an advantage of this.
- 3) This could see online marketing becoming more like traditional media, where you and company budgets are used to produce content that's likely to succeed and become an entry point. This makes user-generated content appear more amateur by comparison.

Appendix 2. Blurring the lines between amateurs and professionals (Zoella)

- 1) Internet content is much less expensive, or even free, to make – if it fails, the cost is minimal.
- 2) The modern Internet is like traditional media industries because of the fact that a few companies (Google, Facebook, Amazon, etc.) own the major assets.
- 3) Internet fame is harder to come by because:
 - a. It's harder because there are far more people vying for the same spot, and it's harder to cultivate because things have been done already.
 - b. It's easier because there are larger pre-established audiences and more established fan bases.

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