Sheffield Hallam University

Evoking presence in vlogging: A case study of U. K. beauty blogger Zoe Sugg

ZHANG, Hantian <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-2759-5609>

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Evoking presence in vlogging: A case study of U. K. beauty blogger Zoe Sugg
by Hantian Zhang

Abstract

In this paper, we explore how video blogs (vlogs) evoke the sense of "presence", by examining famous U. K. video blogger (vlogger) Zoe Sugg's "Haul" videos. As a result of this analysis, we argue that vlogs could evoke presence through two main elements: sensory and social elements. Sensory elements refer to colour, camera usage, video image and sound qualities. Social elements are eye contact, facial expression, conversation and gesture. Past studies have rarely applied "presence" theory to vlogging. As vlogs have become a popular format on the Internet, this study could provide new directions for research into the experiences of vlog viewers. It also offers video bloggers initial understandings of how their content could affect their popularity by altering audiences' feelings of presence.

Contents

1. Introduction

Video blog (vlog), is a type of computer-mediated communication (Frobenius, 2014), a popular video format since the birth of YouTube (Burgess and Green, 2009). The basic form of a vlog features an individual talking to a camera, with content loaded on the Internet. Like written blogs, individuals make video blogs to document their lives, make commentaries, express feelings, generate ideas and form communities (Nardi, *et al.*, 2004), but in an audio-visualised form. Vlogging is a way of connecting with others in the world while presenting vloggers themselves (Christian, 2009).

The year 2016 witnessed growth in the consumption of online vlogs. Young (2016) stated 44 percent of Internet users were watching vlogs every month. Meanwhile, famous vloggers on YouTube can acquire millions of subscribers and treat vlogging as a full-time career. For instance, Zoe Sugg, a YouTube beauty vlogger who is famous for her product videos, secured over 11 million subscribers and 900 million views, earning over £50,000 per month from her YouTube career (Forrester, 2016).

There are a variety of explanations for the fame of vloggers. For instance, Harvey (2013) reported that famous vloggers create trust with their fans, adding value for their advertisers. Gil (2014) noted that vlog success was dependent on the quality of content, honesty of a given vlogger to an audience, research on advertising companies, marketing strategy and schedule management.

An interview with Zoe Sugg (Sheffield, 2014), mentioned that Zoe's fans like her videos because of the way her videos are real to them. Compared to television, vloggers create feelings of reality as well as trust for their audiences (Sheffield, 2014). Jones (2016) stated that connections between a vlogger's video content and the audience's lives affected a vlogger's popularity. Chen (2013) and Tarnovskaya (2016) noted concepts of self-branding on YouTube, with reference to self-promotion to audiences. From a media product perspective, one might account for some of the popularity of vlogs in terms of the effects on an audience's mental state, a sense of "presence".

1.1. Definition of presence

Initially introduced by Minsky (1980), "presence" is defined as the illusory sense of being in mediated environments (Lombard and Ditton, 1997; Kim and Biocca, 1997; Kallinen, *et al.*, 2007; Slater, *et al.*, 2009; IJsselsteijn, *et al.*, 2000). For instance, a movie audience may feel themselves as being actually in scenes if they experience a sense of presence. Individuals watching a sports event on television may also feel that they are at a stadium rather than in front of a TV. Presence is related to the evaluation and design of large categories of media products, such as those designed for entertainment and telecommunications (Lee, 2004; Lessiter, *et al.*, 2001; IJsselsteijn, *et al.*, 2000).

Media products with higher presence levels provide an enhanced experience to an audience. Previous studies have demonstrated that presence can impact an audience's feelings, for instance, enjoyment, involvement, engagement and arousal (Lombard, *et al.*, 2000; Freeman and Avons, 2000; Lombard and Ditton, 1997).

Apart from feelings of being in a mediated environment, Short, *et al.* (1976) discussed "social presence", where a social character is encountered through mediated communication invoking a reaction akin to a character in real life. Social presence can be found in telecommunications in contexts such as online conferences (Gunawardena, 1995; Gunawardena and Zittle, 1997).

1.2. Presence: Application and issues

Scholars have applied the concept of "presence" in multiple fields, such as traditional media like television (Kim and Boccia, 1997), or new media such as virtual reality (VR) (Steuer, 1992) and online conferences (Gunawardena and Zittle, 1997). However, presence has rarely been discussed in the context of vlogs. Harley and Fitzpatrick (2009) mentioned that video blogs are similar to online conferences in terms of social presence. They examined an elder vlogger to explore factors used in face-to-face communication. However, they did not apply social presence directly.

Some studies have applied presence studies to traditional media like television. For instance, Kim and Biocca (1997) stated that in television viewing, the degree of presence an audience experiences during a sequence presenting a product (for instance on a teleshopping channel) lets the audience escape the feeling of a mediated environment, persuading them to believe in information about a product provided by a sequence. Kim and Biocca focused on "infomercial" videos, which provide detailed information about a specific product and its functions. However, among beauty vlogs, there are the so-called Haul videos, in which vloggers perform in manners similar to infomercials, permitting an audience to experience a level of presence.

Lombard, *et al.* (2000) explored whether television generates presence by using clips with fast-moving scenes. The result showed that television scenes with a fast-moving camera view enhance presence, with a larger screen creating a stronger presence. However, vloggers may use both moving and static camera techniques. For instance, lifestyle vloggers use moving cameras to show an audience their activities and surroundings, while beauty vloggers use static cameras to present beauty products. Lombard, *et al.* (2000) only used footage with fast-camera movement, suggesting that vloggers with the same camera skills may affect an audience's presence. nevertheless, vlogs with static cameras should not be ignored.

Troscianko, *et al.* (2012) studied audience presence levels while watching movies on large and small screens. They found that presence level was higher on larger screens especially when there was a focus on facial expression or landscape scenes. Movies can evoke an experience of presence in an audience.

Vlogs contain different characteristics from other media such as television programs, movies and commercials, so the presence of vlogs may be embodied in different ways. As presence is crucial for media evaluation (Lee, 2004; Lessiter, *et al.*, 2001; IJsselsteijn, *et al.*, 2000), we believe applying presence theory to vlogs could provide new directions for studying the experience of vlog audiences.

However, to apply presence to vlogs, we need to understand how to affect presence level. It would be difficult to evaluate correlations between presence and a vlog viewer's experience, without knowing which factors relate to presence in vlogs. This issue leads to the main objective of this paper, which explores the question: "How do vlogs evoke the sense of presence?" More precisely: "What factors affect the degree of presence experienced by viewers of vlogs?" The implications of an experience of presence to different degrees are also considered.

2. Related work

2.1. Determinants of presence

One primary determinant of presence in media products is vividness (Steuer, 1992; IJsselsteijn, *et al.*, 1998). Vividness contains visual factors, sensory wideness, quality and physical and social realism.

Visual factors include all things that an audience can see in a video, like colour, use of the camera, size of the screen and a feeling of dimensions (Lombard and Ditton, 1997), which means the creation of depth factors in media such as camera movement and depth of field.

Sensory wideness means how many senses are interpreted from media (Steuer, 1992; IJsselsteijn, *et al.*, 2000). For instance, a film with both audio and visual elements could generate higher presence (Lombard and Ditton, 1997). Wideness also includes the possibility of adding other senses, as in 4D movies, in which a filmmaker adds not only audio-visual cues but touch and movement.

Quality indicates mainly image and audio quality of media (Lombard and Ditton, 1997; Slater, *et al.*, 1994).

Physical realism shows how realistically the objects are presented in media compared to real life (Witmer and Singer, 1998; Lombard and Ditton, 1997).

Social realism is a factor thought to influence social presence. This factor could be affected by intimacy (Argyle and Dean, 1965), which refers to behaviours of characters. Social realism is also affected by immediacy, the psychological distance between an audience and the character in a media product (Wiener and Mehrabian, 1968).

Additionally, an audience's characteristics could also be a factor that affects presence level. For instance, a person working in the movie industry might experience lower presence than others when watching a movie, because of personal experiences on the creation of movies (Lombard and Ditton, 1997). Rigby, *et al.* (2016) examined presence in Netflix audiences; however participants watching their favourite genres might experience higher presence as a result.

2.2. Presence and vlogs

Although existing presence determinants are useful, they have not been applied directly to studies of video blogs. Presence has been rarely mentioned in past studies on vlogs. For example, Biel, *et al.* (2011) claimed that visual, audio and other non-verbal elements in vlogs could affect attention. They explored an audience's impression of a vlogger's personality by extracting visual, audio and behavioural elements. They found that behavioural cues in vlogs affected impressions of a vlogger's personality, with a correlation to personality traits such as extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, emotional stability and openness to experience. Biel, *et al.* (2011) indicated that personality scores of vloggers affected social attention. Visual and audio factors related to vlogger popularity and attention with an audience (Biel and Gatica-Perez, 2010), for instance, visual cues such as camera distance and head movement were related to attention. Audio factors such as talking speed and pause rate were also related to the number of views of certain vlogs.

Visual and audio cues and personal behaviour in Biel, *et al.* (2011) were similar to some of presence determinants, such as visual factors and social realism, as found in Lombard and Ditton (1997). Additionally, verbal, audio-visual and facial elements expressed by vloggers connected to an audience's impression of a vlogger's personality (Biel, *et al.*, 2013). Verbal and facial elements could affect social presence such as intimacy and immediacy, as concluded by Short, *et al.* (1976), while audio-visual elements might affect physical presence, a sense of "being there".

Harley and Fitzpatrick (2009) examined an elder vlogger and response videos from three fans, to explore modes used to establish communication via vlogs. They found that cues like eye contact and gestures were used to build a conversational sense. These factors might be considered as determinants of social presence (Short, *et al.*, 1976; Gunawardena and Zittle, 1997). Overall, even though some elements in Harley and Fitzpatrick (2009) might be considered as causes of presence, there was no direct evidence on how vlogs generated presence.

Two major elements could influence presence: sensory and social elements. Sensory elements include audio-visual cues from vlogs, while social elements refer to the behaviour of a given vlogger in videos.

This paper explores the question how vlogs evoke the sense of presence, by observing sensory and social elements that could relate to presence in vlog entries, and their possible correlations to a vlogger's popularity. An analysis was conducted of U. K. beauty vlogger Zoe Sugg's main YouTube channel, examining 63 videos uploaded between 2010 and 2016.

3. Methods and procedure

3.1. Case study

Zoe Elizabeth Sugg, also known as Zoella, is a U. K. beauty, fashion and style vlogger. She created her YouTube channel Zoella in 2009 and gained over 10 million subscribers and over 900 million views. Her main channel Zoella features mainly videos relating to beauty or fashion products, tutorials and other content. Her second channel MoreZoella contains videos showing her daily life and activities.

Zoe was selected because she is a successful vlogger (Dredge, 2016), with high popularity and a large fan base. Her videos provide a basis for generalisation on videos dealing with beauty and fashion. She has had a relatively long career on YouTube so her videos could provide insights into how her channel has grown over time. This study focuses on her main YouTube channel, Zoella.

3.2. Sample selection

Videos on Zoe's main channel contain different themes, some more numerous and popular than others. In selecting suitable videos for this study, all videos from 2010 to 2016 on her channel were recategorised. The processing was based on the title and theme of videos. Overall, videos were classified into 12 types:

Haul: These videos feature Zoe displaying products that she just acquired from a varied range of retail outlets, with some commentary and introductions including on occasion prices [1].

Collection: Featuring Zoe's beauty products, these are not necessarily products just acquired or unpacked. There are two kinds of collection videos. The first is Favourites illustrating Zoe's favourite products while the second is Pure Collection, in which she shows products considered worth acquiring but not necessarily among her favourites [2].

Entertainment: The goal of these videos is fun, with Zoe inviting other people to join in her videos. The forms of entertainment include conversation, reaction, challenge and DIY with other vloggers [3].

Personal Item Showcase: In these videos, Zoe shows her audience that she considers her makeup essentials or some daily utilities. Most of the time these videos maintain the form of Zoe taking the items one by one out of her bags. The main titles of these videos are consistently "what's in my bag" [4].

Q&A: In Q&A videos, Zoe answers questions from her fans. She also invites other YouTubers, friends or family members to answer questions. Sometimes, instead of answering questions from the audience, she and her guests will ask questions of each other [5].

Experience: In this category, Zoe will share advice and tips to her audience based on her or her friends' personal experiences, such as daily routines [6].

Beauty How To: All videos in this type are tutorials, in which Zoe explains to her audience beauty styles step by step. These videos mainly focus on hair and makeup [7].

DIY: These videos are primarily instructional for members of her audience to try at home, including food and handcraft [8].

Fashion Style: Videos in this category represent Zoe's fashion style. They are consistent with a short film approach with cinematic editing, dedicated mainly to clothing and makeup styles [9].

Personal Information: The content is more personal in these videos, mainly about Zoe's experiences. For example, one video called "draw my life" discusses personal stories [10].

Product review: In these videos, Zoe examines particular products, mostly new releases [11].

Documentary: These are daily vlogs recording some events for Zoe, such as trips and parties often with other YouTubers or friends. On 9 December 2012, Zoe announced the creation of the MoreZoella channel, where she moved most of her documentary videos [12].

Overall, Haul, Entertainment and Collections are Zoe's most popular categories. Among these three, Haul is the most well known of her video types (Meltzer, 2014; Sheffield, 2014). Haul videos maintain a consistent format. Although Entertainment videos gained more views than Haul, the formats of Entertainment videos were too random for analysis.

This analysis started in October 2016, with all 63 Haul videos collected Zoe's main YouTube channel Zoella for study [13]. All videos were treated to identify key factors and their changes over time, as well as dissect them according to existing presence determinants as described in the literature.

3.3. Observed elements

There were two major elements in the videos, sensory and social. The sensory element concentrated on visual and audio elements that Zoe employed in her videos. The social element was mainly about her behaviour, that is how she acted in front of the camera compared to face-to-face conversations.

This study ignored some aspects, such as physical realism, media size and others. Firstly, the videos were recorded in real time, hence physical realism was not considered, as it mainly relates to computer-generated scenes. Secondly, YouTube videos are traditional, featuring basic visual and sound elements. Other additional sensory elements were ignored. Thirdly, since all observations were completed on the same computer screen, media size was excluded. Audience characteristics were not included since this study, but might be included in future experiments.

Apart from vividness, interactivity is also considered in the literature as a presence determining factor, especially in the virtual environment (Steuer, 1992; Ijsselsteijn, *et al.*, 1998; Lombard and Ditton, 1997). Interactivity means how freely an audience could interact with individuals and objects in an environment. However, since I was exploring only video blogs, interactivity was also ignored as the videos themselves were not interactive.

3.4. Procedure

3.4.1. Observation of sensory elements
Key frames of the 63 videos were extracted via the application ffmpeg.exe (https://www.ffmpeg.org). Then key frames were reconnected into a single video based on uploading dates (oldest to latest). The process created a single time lapse video of all Zoe's Haul videos, allowing visual changes to be observed more easily. For audio, sound in all 63 videos was examined, especially those sounds at the beginning, middle and the end of videos.

3.4.2. Observation of social elements
In order to observe vlogger behaviour, all 15 Primark Haul videos from 2010 to 2016 were selected. These videos mainly demonstrate Zoe displaying products acquired from the fashion store Primark. The Primark Haul represents the starting point of Zoe's vlogging career and have gained in popularity over time. The Primark Haul maintains the same format, reducing variables that might cause distractions. Observing every Primark video could reflect her overall behavioural changes in the Haul series. All 15 videos were analysed for Zoe's behaviour on camera.

4. Findings and discussion

4.1. Sensory elements

There are recognisable sensory elements that could influence presence in Zoe's videos: colour, camera skills, video quality and audio quality.

4.1.1. Colour
The first recognisable element in Zoe's videos over time is the use of colour. Through the sequence of videos, video scenes become more colourful.

In most older videos from February 2010 to March 2012 (see [14] through [25]), colours in every video remain monotonous. For example, the first three videos were shot in her bedroom; although she used decoration lights the whole room remained the same grey/orange colour. From August 2011 to March 2012, Zoe has changed her location from the bedroom to the living room. The furniture in the background (sofa, curtain and rugs) were of a similar colour, and most of the colour looks grey (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Examples of video colours from February 2010 to March 2012.

There were changes between 10 April and 22 October 2012 (see [26] through [31]; Figure 2). Zoe started using decorations to introduce more colour diversity. For example, in the video of 10 April 2012, there were bright orange candles and lights on a white dresser and a wooden door [32]. However, in videos uploaded on 9 May [33] and 11 October 2012 [34], the background is a blank wall, which is only used twice in her Haul videos. From 22 October 2012 [35], the colour of the whole scene increased. She also used more decorations, for example, such as white lights on a curtain, a pink sheet and a photo on the fireplace.
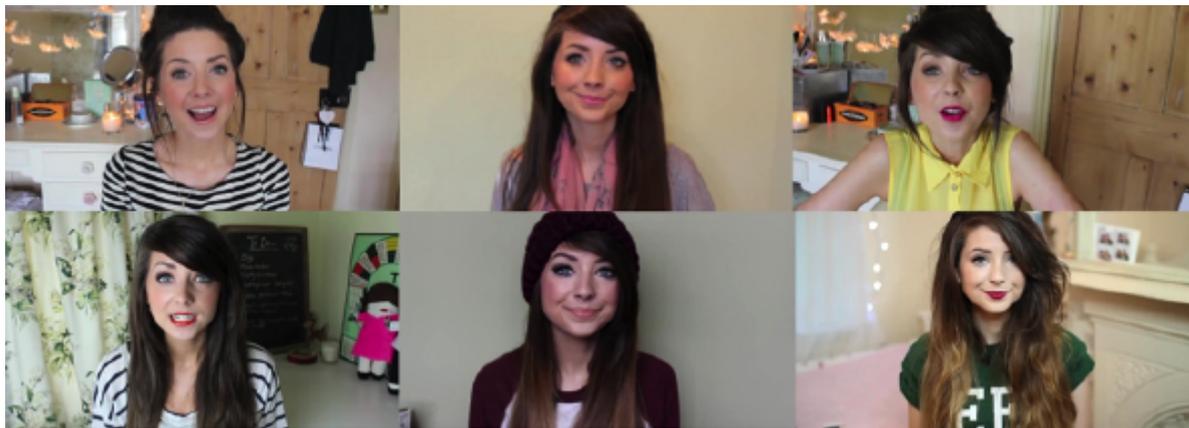

Figure 2: Examples of video colours from 10 April to 22 October 2012.

Since 22 October 2012, most of her videos were recorded in the same bedroom but on occasion from different angles. Background decorations have changed over time, adding additional colour elements to the scene, such as flowers, Christmas decorations, candles, film board and colourful bed sheets.

Figure 3 provides video examples after 22 October 2012 until 2016 (see [36] through [50]). On 2 February 2014, Zoe's Haul video was recorded in the living room of her new home in Brighton. The next two videos on March 2014 were filmed in front of her dresser. In those videos colour elements are still diverse such as white flowers, an orange makeup box, handicraft and a candle [51]. In the remaining videos, locations are mostly confined to Zoe's bedroom. Although some videos have relatively less colour, colour sources were still more diverse compared to her older videos. This situation was maintained until videos shot in 2016, where she added more decorative lights in front of her bed.

Figure 3: Examples of video colours from October 2012 until March 2016.

Colour and presence

Colour could be one factor that generates presence for an audience. Some studies have found a correlation between colour variety and audience feelings. For instance, Gorn, *et al.* (1993) explored relationships between emotion and colour differences in printed advertisements found in magazines. Gorn, *et al.* used three variables: hue, lightness and chroma to alter advertisements and test them on different subjects. Colours with higher chroma, or higher saturation or brilliance, made subjects feel more aroused.

Detenber, *et al.* (2000) conducted a study on the emotional significance of coloured and monochrome television clips. They found that coloured videos were reported as more positive than monochrome clips. Subjects who watched coloured clips were more aroused than those viewing black-and-white clips.

Kaya and Epps (2004) selected ten colours with different hues but full chroma and analysed responses of college students. Principal hues (red, yellow, green, blue and purple) were mostly rated positively. Suk and Irtel (2010) conducted experiments on emotional responses to colours in both traditional and digital media. They found that vivid tones, with high chroma and lightness, were rated highly for arousal and dominance.

Although the aforementioned studies were not related directly to presence, two keywords were significant: arousal and emotion. Arousal is one of the effects of presence (Lombard and Ditton, 1997). If a vlog contains colour tones that make an audience feel aroused, it could indicate that viewers have a sense of presence. Additionally, Suk and Irtel (2010) mentioned that a grey colour with different lightness has no correlation with arousal, so it might suggest that if the video contains more grey colours (like Zoe's older videos), the audience might feel less presence.

Emotion is also an element that alters presence level. Baños, *et al.* (2005) conducted a study on the effects of both immersion and emotion on the sense of presence in virtual environments. They demonstrated that participants with positive emotional reactions to environments also gained a high level of presence.

Riva, *et al.* (2007) studied a correlation between presence and emotion in virtual environments, and found that both negative and positive emotional environments could affect presence level. They found that emotional participation in an environment would influence the presence level of an audience and higher emotional involvement would lead to stronger presence. Therefore, if different colour tones in vlog videos can affect emotion, they could also generate different levels of presence.

4.1.2. Camera usage
Another factor in Zoe's videos is the use of the camera. There were three main factors relating to camera usage: camera angle, shot types and depth of field.

Camera angle

Zoe used three camera angles in her videos, low, high and eye-level angles. The low angle was used for the first videos from February to August 2011. Then, from 15 September 2011 until 21 July 2012 the high angle was used, except on 9 May 2012. After 11 October 2012 until November 2013, Zoe lowered the camera angle. In the rest of the videos from February 2014 to 2016, most camera angles became eye level and sometimes high angles (see [52] through [54]; Figure 4). So, overall camera angles in Zoe's videos were eye level or high.


Low Angle   High Angle   Eye-Level Angle
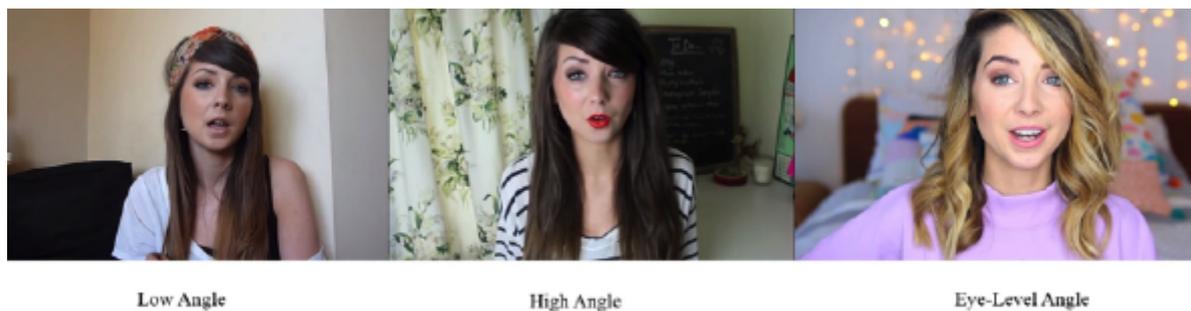
Figure 4: Camera angles in Zoe's videos.

Shot types

Another camera skill change in Zoe's videos was shot types. Shot types are defined by how much of the figure in the frame is viewable (Giannetti, 2008). I observed shot types by referencing a guide ([55]; see Figure 5), and simplified it into three main shots: close-up (includes extreme close-up), medium (includes close-medium) and long shots (including medium and extreme-long shots). Zoe used close-up and medium shots for her videos most of the time. Close-ups displayed only Zoe's head and shoulder; Medium shots were from the waist up to the head. Sometimes Zoe used long shots to show her whole body when she was trying on clothes (see Figure 5 and [56] through [58]). However, the long shot was not a major shot type in most of her videos. Shot types may also relate to products under consieration. For example, in a Boots Haul on 15 February 2016, she used close-up shots as the product sizes were relatively small.
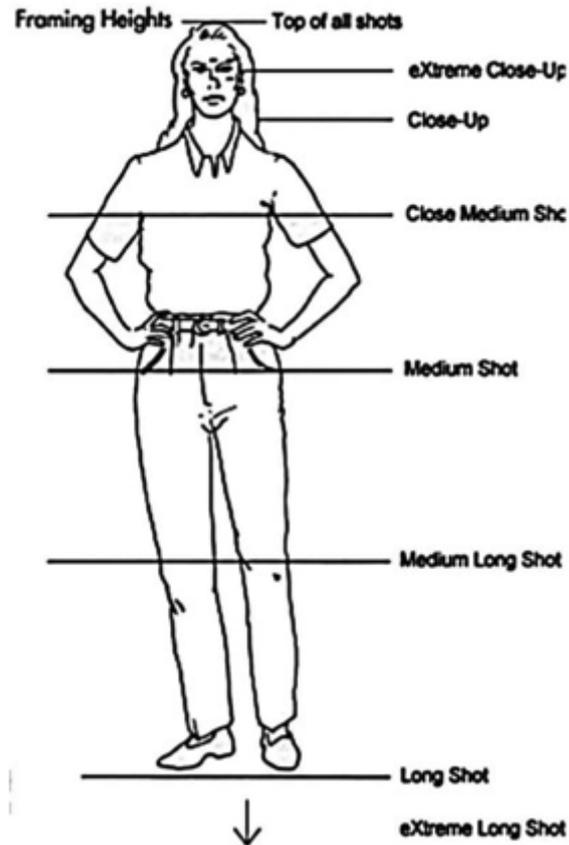
Figure 5: Shot size gauge. Source: Smith, 2013, Figure 9.3.

Close-Up Shot   Medium Shot   Long Shot

Figure 6: Common shot types in Zoe's videos.

Depth of field

From the first Haul video in 2010 to the video on 11 October 2012, there was a deeper depth of field, in which the visibility of both foreground and background were equal. Zoe made a noticeable change to this starting 22 October 2012. Most of the videos after this date shared a similar shallower depth of field. In those videos, the focus point was mainly on Zoe's face, and the background looked blurry. Although the audience still can recognize things behind her, the shallow depth of field separated Zoe more from the background (see Figure 7).

Figure 7: Depth of field: Deeper (top) [59] vs. shallower (bottom) [60]; circles show background areas that are in focus (top) or out of focus (bottom).

Camera usage and presence

Luers (2007) stated that vlogs can generate cinematic feelings if producers use particular camera skills. Camera skills could also be a presence determinant in vlogs such as Zoe's.

For camera angles, Giannetti (2008) stated eye-level shots permit the audience to forget the existence of a camera and create realistic scenes. Therefore, when Zoe used eye-level angles in her videos, she might have created a more realistic and natural sense for her audience and affected the level of social presence.

Camera angles also affect eye contact between vlogger and viewers. Böcker and Mühlbach (1993) studied the effects of different eye-contact angles in video conferences by using different camera angles. They found that larger eye-contact angles made it more difficult for audiences to identify non-verbal communication cues, while a face-to-face angle provided higher presence. As eye contact is one of the essential elements that affects a level of intimacy (Short, *et al.*, 1976) in social presence, changes of camera angle from lower to a more face-to-face angle in Zoe's videos may affect presence levels of her videos.

In Zoe's latest videos, close-up and medium shots were standard. The close-up aims to present the significance of objects (Giannetti, 2008); close-up shots of Zoe's head forced the audience to pay full attention to her. Close-ups also increased intimacy. For example, Huang, *et al.* (2002) found camera angle, zoom and screen distance created an illusion of closeness for the audience. Bousé (2003) studied the use of the camera in wildlife documentaries and mentioned that filmmakers use close-ups to increase intimacy.

Medium shots present the character from the knees or waist up and are a suitable choice for shooting dialogues and demonstrations (Giannetti, 2008). The shots will also attract audience attention like close-ups. Smith (2013) studied audience attention towards multiple shot sizes, finding medium close-up and medium shots created more attention. Shot types in Zoe's videos might be another element that contribute to presence.

The depth of field in Zoe's videos could increase a feeling of dimensionality: the shallower depth of field creates depth between the video background and Zoe's face, which simulates how images are perceived in real life when we are focusing on a person's face. This could be another factor that triggers presence (Lombard and Ditton, 1997). Apart from the depth of field, techniques like camera movement can also increase a feeling of dimensionality; however, in Zoe's case no particular camera movement was found.

4.1.3. Image and audio quality
Based on the quality settings on YouTube, Zoe has improved the quality of her videos compared over time.

For instance, in older videos, the first two Haul videos, on 16 February 2010 and 15 February 2011, were recorded in 720p. Pixel tiles are apparent, and overall the videos were blurry ([61], [62]). From 13 March

to 14 December 2011, videos were recorded in 480p ([63], [64]); compared to the first two videos were visually higher quality, perhaps because in improvements in recording equipment.

On 2 February 2012 [65], the quality became higher again to 1,080p. However, videos until 21 July 2012 maintained a resolution of 720p [66]. From 11 October 2012 on ([67], [68]), all videos were recorded at 1,080p. This higher quality is a trend for most Youtube videos.

For audio in videos before 30 December 2012, Zoe's audio was probably recorded via a built-in microphone of her camera as the sound seems not clear and focused ([69], [70]). On the Winter Primark Haul video of 30 December 2012 [71], audio is cleaner, which perhaps might be the result of an external microphone.

Thanks to evidence in a behind-the-scenes image (from *Stylist*, 2014; see Figure 8), Zoe was sitting on her bed with a camera with an external microphone. By comparing the room in the image with Haul videos [72], the image probably was captured in 2014, with improvements in audio. Audio quality has continued to improve but this study does not exactly quantify those improvements over time.

Figure 8: Zoe's filming equipment. Source: *Stylist*, 2014.

Quality and presence

Image quality is important for generating presence. In Zoe's Haul videos, high image quality made the details of products in the video clearer for viewers. Quality determines how well the audience will receive stimuli. Reeves, *et al.* (1993) claimed that higher quality images in video would create a more realistic feel for the audience (cited in Lombard and Ditton, 1997).

Böcker and Mühlbach (1993) noted the effects of eye-contact angles in video and mentioned that low-quality video decreases eye contact and affects presence. Slater, *et al.* (1994) claimed that for better presence experience, sensory elements must be of a higher quality.

Bracken (2005) indicated that Lombard and Ditton's (1997) notions on image quality and presence were based on speculation, leading to experimental tests. Bracken examined relationships between image quality and presence for high-definition television. Viewers of HDTV were more immersed and reported higher presence as well as greater realism. Overall Bracken (2005) concluded that image quality affects presence for television, supporting the initial ideas described by Lombard and Ditton (1997).

In an analysis on television news, Bracken (2006) claimed that higher image quality caused an upper level of social presence. Dobrian, *et al.* (2011) examined the impact of video quality on user engagement by studying quality metrics. They found that rendering quality and buffering ratio will highly affect play time, which in turn affects engagement level. Bracken (2014) found that participants who watched higher quality commercials experienced a greater sense of immersion and presence than those who watched a low-quality program.

In Zoe's videos, better video quality makes background colour more visible; improved audio quality makes speech more focused and clear. Higher and lower image quality in Zoe's videos from different time periods should be one of the determinants that affects presence.

On audio quality, Doornbusch and Kenderdine (2004) described essential elements that could trigger presence. They stated that to evoke presence, the source of audio should be easily identifiable and relate to the visual environment. The sound quality in Zoe's later videos improved, in agreement with recommendations by Doornbusch and Kenderdine (2004).

4.2. Social elements

4.2.1. Eye contact
Since the first Primark Haul video, Zoe has been making eye contact with her audience, by looking directly at the camera. However, in older videos, eye contact was less frequent. For example, in her first Primark Haul video on 16 February 2010, Zoe was not looking at the camera most of the time while displaying products. From the first Primark Haul through the next seven videos until 21 July 2012 eye contact became more frequent.

The most significant improvement occurred on 22 October 2012. In that video, Zoe started looking straight at the camera, making constant eye contact with her audience. From this video throughout the rest of the Primark videos from 2013 to 2016, every time she featured a product she always improved her level of eye contact over earlier videos (see [73] through [76]; Figure 9).

Figure 9: Levels of eye contact in Zoe's videos.

4.2.2. Facial expression and conversation
In the first four Primark Haul videos, Zoe's facial expressions appeared nervous. Starting on 22 October 2012, when she modified colour, camera usage and eye contact, she seemed to smile more frequently,

with a more vivid facial expression. Her audio seemed more comfortable and natural. These factors continued to improve over time (see [77] through [79]; Figure 10).

Figure 10: Examples of a shift in facial expressions extracted from Zoe's videos, 2011 to 2015.

Zoe's newer videos featured more natural conversations compared to her older postings. In her older Primark Haul videos, especially those from 2011, she just featured a product and explained it with little additional dialogue. In later videos, there was a more natural, almost face-to-face conversational mode.

In the editing of newer videos, Zoe intentionally kept unscripted dialogues. For example, in the video of 11 September 2016, she complained about lighting in her room, such as "Never film videos on cloudy days!" (see [80]; Figure 11). She also expressed her feelings about her pugs when they disturbed filming, as in "No, there is nothing to bark at ... ." (see [81]; Figure 12). Additionally, over time Zoe's speaking voice became louder and more confident.

Figure 11: Zoe: "Never film videos on cloudy days."
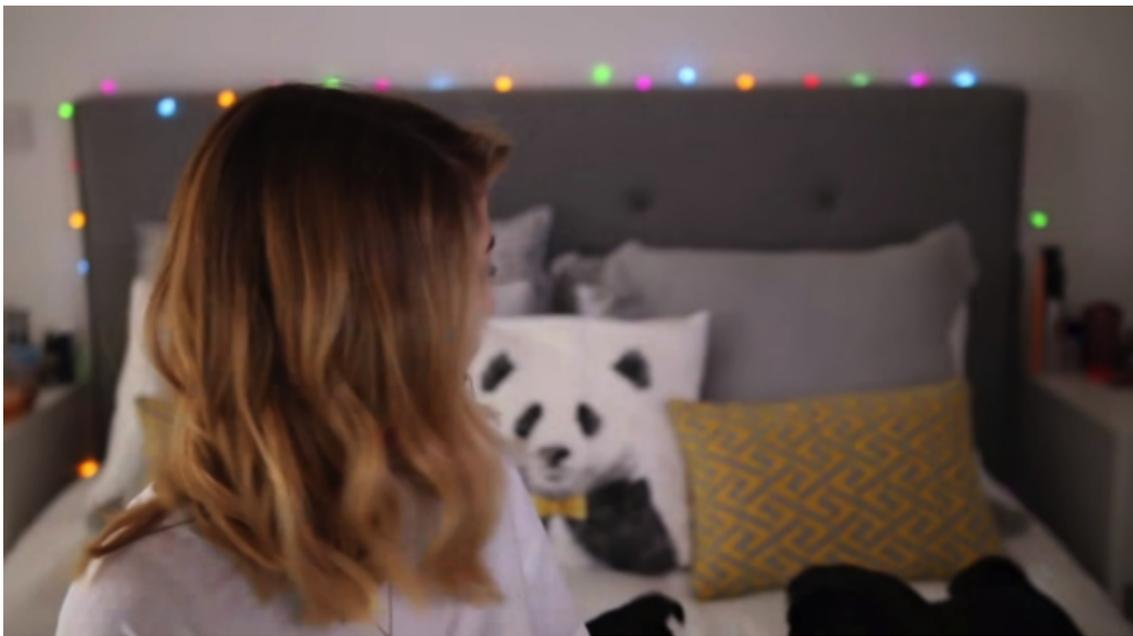
Figure 12: Zoe: "No, there is nothing to bark at ... ."

4.2.3. Gestures
Over time, Zoe has been adding more body gestures and motion to her videos. In the first four Primark videos from February 2010 to October 2011, other than gestures for showing products, there were few additional significant movements. Most of the time she was talking to the camera with her hands on her lap. Her few hand movements made her look a little nervous. More gestures were added starting on 22 October 2012, especially hand movements which made her behaviour appear more natural and conversational (see [82] through [85]; Figure 13).

Figure 13: Example of gestures selected from videos, 2011 to 2016.

Social elements and presence

Shot, *et al.* (1976) claimed one of the factors that will affect social presence level is intimacy (Argyle and Dean, 1965). Intimacy means how realistically a character behaves in media. It can be affected by factors like eye contact, distance between people and smiling (Shot, *et al.* 1976). Böcker and Mühlbach (1993) discovered that difference eye contact angles affect intimacy. Increasing eye contact in Zoe's videos could improve her social presence.

Gunawardena (1995) studied social presence in education and found that immediacy refers to a mental distance between an audience and a mediated figure, which might be affected by body language, smiling and speaking style. Facial expressions and gestures in Zoe's videos could be determinants which influence her social presence. Verbal action might also modify the immediacy level of a character (Gunawardena, 1995).

Similarly, Frobenius (2014) indicates that video bloggers may use different conversational methods and speaking styles to assign roles to an audience and involve them in video content, perhaps increasing immediacy to enhance social presence. The shift to a more casual conversational style in Zoe's videos might alter her social presence.

4.3. Other changes

In addition to alterations over time that relate to presence, there were also a few other changes by Zoe that might not connect to presence directly. For instance, her fashion style changed over time, including variations in her hair style, makeup and clothing. There were other changes in the kinds of disclosures made in the videos, such as descriptions of pets that she acquired.

Themes in the Haul videos became diverse over time. In the earliest videos Zoe displayed two types of products, clothing and makeup. In more recent videos, she has diversified her products, to include even stationery and books. Her changing fashion style may generate social presence, considering her actions more natural to the audience with similar style changing behaviours. The diversity of products might affect social presence as it could influence the audience into thinking that Zoe shares similar interests.

■ ——————————————————————

5. Presence and vlog popularity

5.1. Sensory elements and vlog views

Could changes in sensory elements possibly affect Zoe's popularity? Before 11 October 2012, all of Zoe's videos had less than one million views. After 11 October 2012 when she made obvious changes, her views have increased remarkably. From 11 October 2012 through 2016 almost every video had more than one million views with the highest level at over four million. Image quality could be a factor because starting on 11 October 2012 she recorded at 1,080p. Changes in other sensory elements after that date, such as colour, higher quality and better camerawork, may have been a factor in altering presence and affecting her video views as well.

5.2. Social elements and vlog views

By examining all of the 15 Primark Haul videos, Zoe has improved eye contact, facial expressions and conversational mode. These factors may have influenced presence, generating more traffic to her videos over time.

■ ——————————————————————

6. Conclusions

This research explored possible elements that could evoke a sense of presence in Zoe Sugg's Haul vlogs. Zoe may have stimulated presence by sensory elements — colour, camera usage, audio quality and image quality, among others. In Zoe's videos over time, there is some evidence for a correlation between a modification of presence elements and popularity. However, a great deal of research needs to explore other factors that may have influenced popularity over time.

This research suggests that some of the aforementioned elements could generate presence in vlogs. The paper offers some initial steps in bridging the gap between video blog studies and presence theories. It also provides some suggestions about which factors could be measured in vlogs to test presence levels with real audiences.

This study has several limitations, primarliy that it focused only on beauty vlogger Zoella. Future studies need to explore other vloggers and vlog types. This study was also limited to a handful of Zoe's videos. Counting views is not necessarily representative as a measure of popularity for a variety of factors. Other metrics could be invoked and correlated over time.

This study is based only on individual observations, suggesting that a broader observational structure may be necessary. Future research with a real audience, using presence measurement techniques such as presence questionnaires, focus groups and heart rate detection (van Baren and IJsselsteijn, 2004), could test some of the observations described in this work.

Overall, this study is an initial step for gauging presence in vlogs, and expanding possible fields in both vlog and presence research. Further studies are still required to evelop a more complete and accurate understanding of vlogs and their relationship to presence. ■M

About the author

Hantian Zhang is a Ph.D. candidate at the Edinburgh College of Art, University of Edinburgh. With a background in design and digital media, his research focuses on content, context and presence in video blogs.
E-mail: hantian [dot] zhang1991 [at] hotmail [dot] com

Notes

1. Zoella, "Autumn Bath & Body Works Haul | Zoella" (31 August 2016), at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nxs6DCR2SDM.

2. Zoella, "July Favourites 2016 | Zoella" (16 August 2016), at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mNNXcV7eUB4; Zoella, "My Makeup Collection & Storage | Zoella" (27 July 2014), at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rEhDxSSb0Kk.

3. Zoella, "Accent Challenge with Marcus | 2016 Edition | Zoella" (31 January 2016), at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VcmK4Hm0v9I.

4. Zoella, "What's In My Handbag 2015 Edition | Zoella" (15 March 2015), at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ckiQV_0RXyU.

5. Zoella, "Anxiety Q&A | Zoella" (15 June 2014), at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sjuk3WMZByo.

6. Zoella, "My Festive Pamper Routine | Zoella" (8 December 2015), at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A_gDHHhufDY.

7. Zoella, "How To: MilkMaid Braid Up-do | Zoella" (14 May 2014), at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ABbUI8R_tPk.

8. Zoella, "6 Quick & Easy Easter Treats | Zoella" (26 March 2016), at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pxKJPlk2GX4.

9. Zoella, "Christmas Lookbook | Zoella" (14 December 2015), at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WrsllIEpHHc.

10. Zoella, "Draw My Life | Zoella" (14 April 2013), at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qx6fwery65M.

11. Zoella, "11 NEW IN BEAUTY: Blogger Mail 1 | Zoella" (23 April 2016), at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PSVrkAWubw0.

12. Zoella, "VLOG: Weekend of Funzies | Zoella" (25 July 2012), at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iaeyvjt4luQ.

13. Zoe is continuing to upload new videos on her channels. By October 2016, there were 63 Haul videos on Zoe's main channel; this paper is based on those videos. By August 2017 there were 72. Additional videos may be considered for future research.

14. Zoella, "Promarni Loot" (16 February 2010), at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yhib4Q404Bg.

15. Zoella, "Primark Haul" (25 February 2011), at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JUxDKZLOKYQ.

16. Zoella, "Haul: Primark, H&M & Lush" (13 March 2011), at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dSLPyyYtvIs.

17. Zoella, "16 Haul: Topshop, New Look, H&M & Superdrug" (15 April 2011), at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VUkj9waw864.

18. Zoella, "Mahusive Collective Haul" (15 April 2011), at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6uCY8EO5PDY.

19. Zoella, "Primark Haul" (6 August 2011), at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iMwxRg9XZOI.

20. Zoella, "Haul: Makeup & Car Booting" (15 September 2011), at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lnz3rx_MTPM.

21. Zoella, "Primark Haul" (13 October 2011), at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PZx9DRQvj9M.

22. Zeolla, "Haul: New Look,Topshop, H&M & Bootsale" (19 October 2011), at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eEcp6jFZGZU.

23. Zoella, "Primark Haul" (14 December 2011), at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wlJEvAytN1E.

24. Zoella, "Collective Haul: Topshop, New Look, Soap & Glory, Style Compare, Orange Circle & Vintage" (2 February 2012), at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n-bb2LY6-GQ.

25. Zoella, "Haul: Primark & New Look" (4 March 2012), at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GYgTyPwYGto.

26. Zoella, "Primark Haul | Zoella" (10 April 2012), at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_kOPu-SXQDU.

27. Zoella, "Little Haul: Mac, Revlon, Car Booty, Disney etc. | Zoella" (9 May 2012), at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wyn0J3Rg80o.

28. Zoella, "Little Haul: FeelUnique, Boots & eBay | Zoella" (8 June 2012), at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qv_DRdaF3IE.

29. Zoella, "Collective Haul: Mac, Zara, Primark, American Apparel etc. ... | Zoella" (21 July 2012), at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RCZNbABwBqM.

30. Zoella, "Collective Haul: Topshop, Lush, H&M, FeelUnique & AA | Zoella" (11 October 2012), at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7ZIPQqBzNuo.

31. Zoella, "Primark Haul | Zoella" (22 October 2012), at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CpNGTNJIekY.

32. Zoella, "Primark Haul | Zoella" (10 April 2012), at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_kOPu-SXQDU.

33. Zoella, "Little Haul: Mac, Revlon, Car Booty, Disney etc. | Zoella" (9 May 2012), at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wyn0J3Rg80o.

34. Zoella, "Collective Haul: Topshop, Lush, H&M, FeelUnique & AA | Zoella" (11 October 2012), at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7ZIPQqBzNuo.

35. Zoella, "Primark Haul | Zoella" (22 October 2012), at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CpNGTNJIekY.

36. Zoella, "Winter Primark Haul | Zoella" (30 December 2012), at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jPNcldD6Dmc.

37. Zoella, "Topshop Haul & £500 Giveaway | Zoella" (3 February 2013), at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IH8rWvom_oc.

38. Zoella, "Drugstore Makeup & Beauty Haul | Zoella" (21 July 2013), at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mej9EejFQyI.

39. Zoella, "Huge Lush Haul | Zoella" (26 October 2013), at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lJDOtzCHXKo.

40. Zoella, "Home 'Stuff' Haul | Zoella" (2 February 2014), at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ciouSXGeg10.

41. Zoella, "HUGE Beauty & Cosmetics Haul | Zoella" (9 March 2014), at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bBJ5vBvDEPE.

42. Zoella, "Huge Lush Haul | Zoella" (5 October 2014), at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ClPu5aB5RPs.

43. Zoella, "BooHoo Haul & Giveaway | Zoella" (9 November 2014), at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Un2HHllfzHI.

44. Zoella, "Drugstore Beauty Spree | Zoella" (23 November 2014), at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O5dl-P_DoXQ.

45. Zoella, "Clothing, Homeware & Beauty haul | Zoella" (18 January 2015), at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ALxSVK2j1i8.

46. Zoella, "Huge Summer Clothing Haul | Zoella" (12 April 2015), at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rZp8eFnJd5g.

47. Zoella, "Stationery Haul | Zoella" (23 August 2015), at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ecq7Yd1_vLU.

48. Zoella, "Halloween & Christmas LUSH Haul | Zoella" (25 October 2015), at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YNhMbJCIkrc.

49. Zoella, "Christmas Homeware, Clothing & Accessories Haul | Zoella" (3 December 2015), at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CN1_RvKmj18.

50. Zoella, "Easter LUSH Haul | Zoella" (21 March 2016), at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-xyNw4UxLAI.

51. Zoella, "HUGE Beauty & Cosmetics Haul | Zoella" (9 March 2014), at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bBJ5vBvDEPE.

52. Zoella, "Haul: Topshop, New Look, H&M & Superdrug" (15 April 2011), at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VUkj9waw864.

53. Zoella, "Collective Haul: Mac, Zara, Primark, American Apparel etc. … | Zoella" (21 July 2012), at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RCZNbABwBqM.

54. Zoella, "Stationery Haul | Zoella" (1 May 2016), at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fDpUGd7fUOM.

55. Smith, 2013, p. 53, Figure 9.3.

56. Zoella, "Huge Boots Haul | Zoella" (15 February 2016), at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ty0PScqt1w8.

57. Zoella, "Huge Spring Primark Haul | Zoella" (11 March 2015), at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mCpx2M3GRH8.

58. Zoella, "Huge Holiday ASOS Haul & Try On | Zoella" (20 June 2016), at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eyhMtyE1x1w.

59. Zoella, "Primark Haul" (14 December 2011), at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wIJEvAytN1E.

60. Zoella, "Huge Disastrous Primark Haul | Zoella" (11 September 2016), at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tOafTz1RgXA.

61. Zoella, "Promarni Loot" (16 February 2010), at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yhib4Q404Bg.

62. Zoella, "Primark Haul" (25 February 2011), at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JUxDKZLOKYQ.

63. Zoella, "Haul: Primark, H&M & Lush" (13 March 2011), at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dSLPyyYtvIs.

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65. Zoella, "Collective Haul: Topshop, New Look, Soap & Glory, Style Compare, Orange Circle & Vintage" (2 February 2012), at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n-bb2LY6-GQ.

66. Zoella, "Collective Haul: Mac, Zara, Primark, American Apparel etc. … | Zoella" (21 July 2012), at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RCZNbABwBqM.

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68. Zoella, "Huge Disastrous Primark Haul | Zoella" (11 September 2016), at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tOafTz1RgXA.

69. Zoella, "Primark Haul" (25 February 2011), at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JUxDKZLOKYQ.

70. Zoella, "Primark Haul | Zoella" (22 October 2012), at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CpNGTNJIekY.

71. Zoella, "Winter Primark Haul | Zoella" (30 December 2012), at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jPNcldD6Dmc.

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74. Zoella, "America Haul | Sephora, Bath & Body Works & Sweets | Zoella" (15 February 2015), at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VoMqWgqIiCo.

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76. Zoella, "Homeware Haul | Zoella" (24 April 2016), at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1PspMpI4B4g.

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79. Zoella, "Huge Spring Primark Haul | Zoella" (11 March 2015), at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mCpx2M3GRH8.

80. Zoella, "Huge Disastrous Primark Haul | Zoella" (11 September 2016), at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tOafTz1RgXA.

81. *Ibid.*

82. Zeolla, "Haul: New Look,Topshop, H&M & Bootsale" (19 October 2011), at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eEcp6jFZGZU.

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85. Zoella, "Easter LUSH Haul | Zoella" (21 March 2016), at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-xyNw4UxLAI.

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Editorial history