

# **Everyday, Bro?**

## **Authenticity and Performance Intersections in the Vlogs of Jake Paul**

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Pernille Rosenlund and Susanne Lisberg Jørgensen

### **Abstract**

With the rise of social media, a new type of celebrity has emerged: one who takes on a different type of celebrity which performs intimacy, community, and authenticity to their audience in a new way. One such person is YouTube star Jake Paul, a vlogger who connects to his fans through any means available to him. In a mass-media culture, celebrities distinguish themselves from the masses through glamour or notoriety, but in a social media culture, celebrities must be approachable and intimate with their fans. Jake Paul positions himself as part of his own fandom, utilizing the separation of I and Me to inhabit the role of fan and celebrity at once, creating a role of fan-leader. When faced with scandals Jake Paul was put in a difficult situation; to wholly denounce his behaviour would be to denounce his fans who share in that behaviour, but to endorse it would taint his reputation. He chose to use his 'involvement shield', a distancing technique used by mass-media celebrities to deal with fans, on himself, joining his fans in 'dissing' him, while admitting to his fault. Thus, Jake Paul performs a new version of himself, which is better than the old.

### **Keywords**

YouTube, celebrity, authenticity, intimacy, performance

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As new media evolves, so must the celebrities who inhabit it. New tools become available and those most capable of utilizing them help shape the media landscape and its rules. The increasing popularity of social media has created a new type of celebrity who embraces the new platforms as sites of performance, on which they can make a living simply from showing off their lifestyle to whoever may be watching. The ‘vloggers’ of YouTube have an especially tight grip on their audiences with some gaining the attention of millions of people with every upload. The distance between these content creators and their fans appears much shorter than that of traditional mass media celebrities and their fans, as the creators share images from their own personal lives and thus create a sense of intimacy between themselves and their viewers. This relationship challenges the general understanding of celebrity personas and presents a new one, in which the celebrity and their fans are both same and other by virtue of their simultaneous perceived closeness and their roles as idol and fan.

One such creator who has made a career out of his lifestyle, and built his lifestyle from his career, is YouTube vlog star Jake Paul. Originally a video creator on the Vine app, Paul moved on to vlogging in 2016 and saw a meteoric rise to

stardom. Over the course of a year and a half, he gained almost 15 million subscribers and his videos were watched over 4 billion times (Paul n.d.). Along with the attention came a dedicated fanbase and a number of controversies, and Paul has had to navigate the relationship between his veridical I and Me. During his controversies, he has distanced himself from his exaggerated persona, an act of self-othering that allows him to join the chorus of criticism while still performing authenticity as a friend of the audience. Jake Paul's friends are his fans, and his fans are his friends, therefore his viewers and co-stars belong to a single group – all one and the same.

Social media entertainment in general and YouTube vlogging in particular is a form of entertainment which 'put[s] the highest value on authenticity and community' (Cunningham & Craig 2017, 72). As such, YouTubers are meant to be relatable (through emphasizing how similar they are to the viewer), yet at the same time being a celebrity means being apart from the masses (being something other than the rest). In this paper, using rising YouTube star Jake Paul as a case study, we will argue that in order to perform celebrity online, vloggers on YouTube need to shift between authentic and staged intimacy on the same medium; they have to straddle the line between the familiar and the other. By doing this, vloggers not only transgress audience expectations for authenticity and an intimate connection but blur the lines between reality and fiction resulting in a form of performance art.

YouTube has changed drastically since its early days, and so has the content placed on it. When YouTube was created in 2005, the intent was for it to be a site where users could upload their own home video content (Cloud 2006, 5). Soon, however, users began creating videos made exclusively for the purpose of being put on YouTube and not just to be shown to family members and friends. One of the things that came from this was a genre of videos called vlogs (i.e. video blogs), a genre popularized on the YouTube platform, in which the YouTuber in question sits down

in front of the camera and tells the audience about themselves (from this point on called ‘sit-down vlogs’) While vlogging is not necessarily a form of content exclusive to YouTube, it is emblematic of the platform and its user participation, and vlogs of various kinds make up a large portion of the content uploaded to the site (Burgess & Green 2008, 7). Of course, YouTube has grown exponentially since the first vlog was posted.

These days YouTube is filled with every kind of video and video creator: companies seeking to market their products, music videos, memes, comedy videos, home videos, and people who make a living out of posting videos on the site. Today, sit-down vlogs still exist and are still created, but the new trend for vlogs is for the YouTuber to bring the camera (and thus the audience) with them throughout their daily activities, filming their life instead of retelling it. This type of vlog varies widely in terms of range. Some YouTubers vlog only sometimes and upload weekly or even monthly vlogs, some exclusively vlog special occasions such as travels or events, and some vlog almost every day, calling themselves ‘daily vloggers’.

What has remained constant through the evolution of the vlog genre of videos is the appearance of authenticity:

Many viewers on YouTube are concerned with what is real and authentic online. Individuals who go online are often skeptical about what they see, to be sure. **Online, however, especially with private and personal distribution sites like blogs, webcams or liveblogs, and vlogs, there is an expectation of truth, a hope for something “real.”** Even those who produce the content often presume an almost revolutionary kind of “honesty” (Jean Christian 2009, conclusion, emphasis ours).

Vlogs appear to be a genre concerned with self-expression and an intimate connection between the vlogger and the audience. But as has been noted multiple times by both academics (Jean Christian 2009), YouTubers (Folding Ideas 2017), and YouTube viewers, the format does not seem to be this simple. A user on Folding Ideas’ video *Vlogs and the Hyperreal* commented:

One trend I’ve started seeing in many “vlogs” is the blending of an authentic portrayal of day-to-day life with improv and sketch-style storytelling. David Dobrik,

Steven Suptic and to an extent Anthony Padilla create vlogs that are less like young people with a webcam recording their life and more like self-aware reality shows. Unlike “The Real World” in which it tries to pass itself off as authentic, these vlogs’ “authenticity” is merely a thin dressing over an apparent creative process. Many of these vlogs start out showing actual events like David Dobrik getting breakfast and then he proceeds to have conversations with his friends many of whom are skilled in improv and intentionally say jokes with the intent of building on top of them as the vlog progresses and finally the vlog crescendos into fiction with David's friends doing cocaine with Spongebob or Carmelita the Prostitute journeying around L.A. It's as if within these vlogs, they're moving down the spectrum from realism to formalism. Their personal lives are still there, but they are merely a foundation for a hyperreality (Liam Shanley, July 2017).

Vlogs are not as authentic as often they appear, rather they are performances made by amateur or professional entertainers. While this comment specifically has been taken from a YouTube video that discusses the nature of vlogs and how vlogging creates a hyperreality (showing a prior interest from the user in investigating vlogging as a genre), it would be naive to believe that fans of vlogs are completely unaware that what they are watching is not the full truth. Many YouTubers stress that they only show parts of their day, implying that what is presented in the vlogs are highlights of a particular day or week and not necessarily a full or accurate representation of the creator's everyday life. Some prospective vloggers have revealed concerns that they do not ‘do enough’ in their daily life to make interesting vlogs (Butler 2017; Dominique 2016) and that they might be tempted to plan their day in terms of what would be good content. This shows an awareness on the creator's part of the vlog as a performance; a hyperreal version of their life.

The birth of photography raised questions about authenticity and artificiality, many of which seem to be just as relevant for the genre of vlogging and its questions of authenticity. Is it real life or just staged fantasy? Erving Goffman has made the point that photographs are indexical glimpses of ‘real life’: ‘however posed or “artificial” a picture is, it is likely to contain elements that record instances of real things’ (1979, 21). This seems to hold true for vlogging as well. The events shown in the vlogs clearly *do* take place in real life, but many of them seem to be staged

for the purpose of entertainment, placing the vlog in a peculiar space between authentic and artificial.

The *Lonelygirl15* controversy in 2006 became a noteworthy turning point for the expectations surrounding YouTube creators when it was revealed that the vlogger Bree Avery (Jessica Rose) was an entirely fictional character and that her vlog channel and social media accounts were actually set up and run by the media company EQAL. Jean Christian (2009) noted in relation to the controversy that

more viewers were upset at the prospect of corporate marketing than about authenticity or fakeness. That the actual creators of the show were young, independent, aspiring producers interested in building a show based on “community” seemed to ease concerns (Jean Christian 2009, conclusion).

That holds true today as well, and the importance of a YouTube community seems more important than ever with scandals and drama content becoming increasingly popular. It has become clear that the YouTube community frames YouTubers and YouTube viewers as part of the same group, whereas their critics (notably mass media news sources) are the outgroup; the other which they unite against; even when the two groups overlap.

YouTube has grown, and with it has the stakes for those who put videos up on the platform. Being a YouTuber is now a job which can bring in an unspecified (creators never reveal the specifics of their income) but large amount of money, which is revealed when creators use their content to show off what they can afford in terms of material possessions. The audience is aware of this because YouTubers explicitly state it. It is not uncommon for a YouTuber to thank their audience for ‘making this possible’, referring to the lifestyle they can now afford. With this comes the understanding that YouTubers are paid entertainers. On the one hand, by showing the wealth that can never be shared with the audience, YouTubers frame themselves as Other than their audience. On the other hand, by connecting the wealth to the audience watching the videos and buying the merchandise, YouTubers allow their audience to be part of the success; the YouTuber and the audience are

on a team whose mission is to further the YouTuber. The YouTuber is thereby allowed to other themselves from their audience (by showcasing wealth) while emphasizing their sameness (by making it a team effort).

### **Social Media Presence as Performance Art**

The new ‘trend’ in interaction is all about performance (Nitshe 2013, 93). On social media, users’ daily lives are shared through a stream of self-curated content, and whether posts portray fancy dinners or a fun night with friends, the point is to appear interesting and perhaps enviable to one’s followers. In the social media landscape, any user who creates content is essentially a casual amateur performer, yet as in any medium, some fare better than others. Some creators manage to make a living through what is essentially still amateur work, capturing audiences to match even the most popular television shows. Groening (2016) describes ‘amateur influence’, stressing the word’s etymological origin:

This sense of amateurism (as “a lover of”) might help us to think more clearly about online videos, which are marked by a significant number of users who are so “in love” with the form they themselves feel compelled to practice it. The amateur is therefore an experimenter, someone aware of, but not bound by, professional conventions and protocols; this freedom to ignore conventions results in formal and technical experimentation as well as the production of new genres and types that other amateurs emulate (Groening 2016, 3).

As such, although vloggers, like Jake Paul experiment with filming techniques and different visual styles, their content remains at an amateur-level – they are the same as their audience. As stated earlier in this paper, a vlog is at its very essence a reproduction of the creator’s life, expected to be authentic. To achieve this authenticity, it is filmed by the creators themselves and accompanied by their own commentary. Vlogs must be small-scale productions in order to be accepted as genuine and acceptable examples of the genre. It is important that they give the impression of sameness; that the only thing separating the vlogger from the viewer is the camera; that audience and creator are *at their core* the same.

In a similar vein, Paul Kristeller describes a ‘rise of an amateur public’, arguing that modern aesthetics originate from amateur criticism, which is focused on the experiences of the *spectator* rather than those of the producer (1952, 44). This places the amateur creator in a peculiar space of authority in which they function both as producer and critic with the power to influence their preferred medium. As a creator, Jake Paul has himself expressed this sentiment. During his appearance on the *H3 Podcast*, Paul noted that he always tries to ‘innovate the game and ... push it forward and forward ...’ (Klein & Klein 2017, 00:07:40-00:07:44). Here he reveals his intent as a creator to be experimental in terms of challenging the expectations and boundaries of the vlogging genre, which he in turn critiques with his suggestion that it is in need of innovation in the first place. He further describes his own evaluation of his content, stating: ‘Sometimes I’m watching myself and I’m like, “bro, you’re being boring right now”, like, “this vlog sucks”, and I’m like, “okay, I’ll remember that, I can get better”’ (00:14:42-00:14:50). Jake Paul is part of his own viewership, a part of his own amateur public. As he plays the role of both producer and viewer, he gets to play with the line between sameness and otherness.

In these instances, Jake Paul describes efforts to break new ground in content as well as editing styles, striving to include memes and both visual and sound effects to create excitement within his videos in a new way. Paul’s editing style emulates ‘MTV style’, which rebels against traditional stylistic conventions and is ‘characterized by jump cuts, camera jiggle, swish pans, tilted framing, eccentric cropping, and the like’ (Messaris 1998, 71). The style is dynamic and fast-paced, giving the impression that there is simply no time to re-shoot or worry about conventional cinematic aesthetics.

While this style arguably does seem to indicate authenticity in this way, the constant cuts also bring about the knowledge that an unknown quantity of potential content has been cut from the final product. As a result, the vlogs portray a better,



perhaps more aesthetically pleasing version of Paul's real life (Benford and Giannachi 2012, 38), blending the real and virtual world into a hyperreality. The final video product is thus a recorded, carefully constructed performance of the life of Jake Paul and his friends. The highlights of his days are shown in a variety of angles and with elaborate drone shots, leaving out the thinking pauses and stumbling over words that undoubtedly occur in the part of his life that is not shown on camera. The drone shots give the vlogs a cinematic style, directly in contrast to the more intimate hand-held style of filming. Jake Paul uses both to varying degrees; the handheld shot can be used both for a confessional segment about something deeply personal (Paul 2017d, 00:00-00:07), but it can also be used as an ironic introduction of something which would never happen to anyone other than Jake Paul (Paul 2017e, 00:10-00:40). Drone shots are used in the same way; sometimes they are used earnestly to create the impression of the idealized life (Paul 2017c, 06:45-06:58), at other times they are used to underscore how ridiculous Jake Paul's life can be to his viewers (Paul 2017e, 01:45-02:10). Thereby the different shots are used both to underscore Jake's otherness ('see how my life is better than yours') and his sameness ('I go through tough times too').

### **Mass Media Celebrity, SoMe Celebrity, and the I/Me Divide**

There is a big difference between traditional mass-media celebrities and social media celebrities. Rojek, in his influential book *Celebrity* from 2001, tied the rise of celebrities to mass-media culture, writing that as mass-media has spread, the importance of the public face has too. He defines celebrity as a '... crude equation: celebrity = impact on public consciousness', maintaining that celebrities are 'glamorous or notorious' (Rojek 2001, 10). Connecting celebrity with the importance of a public face led Rojek to conclude that '... celebrity status always implies a split between a private self and a public self' (2001, 11). Using the division of the veridical I (the public face) and the Me (as we see ourselves) from

G.H. Mead's *Mind, Self and Society* (1934), Chris Rojek continues: 'For the celebrity, the split between the I and the Me is often disturbing' (2001, 11). Writing further on the subject of the celebrity self, he states:

With respect to the relation of the celebrity to the fan, celebrities usually develop what Goffman called "involvement shields", which hide the veridical self from the public face. These "shields" can be raised when celebrities attend conventions... . . . Notwithstanding this, the general attitude celebrities cultivate in relation to their fans is that of negotiating with an abstract other (Rojek 2001, 46).

This 'involvement shield' is part of the veridical self, part of the public face that celebrities use, often to their own detriment (Rojek 2001, 11). For traditional celebrities their public I was to be separate and other from the masses, they were meant to rise above. The private Me, on the other hand, was to be the same as any other person; thereby confessionals of how celebrities are just like anybody else.

Rojek ties celebrity to mass-media culture, however, as mass-media has been replaced with social media, celebrity has not disappeared but instead evolved to fit the times. Social media has changed what it means to be a celebrity. The division of the I and Me is no longer as strict, the 'involvement shields' are no longer as thick, and the ability for celebrities to relate to their fans as if they are an abstract Other has been diminished. Celebrities have to become closer to their fans. Even when treating them as a coherent mass, they still have to connect with each and every one of them in some way.

This is true for social media celebrities. Mass-media still exists, and so the old celebrities still exist as well. But social media is growing and the number of celebrities utilizing these platforms is growing. Social media celebrities have been named many different things, Jerslev (2016) wrote a short collection of terms:

"micro-celebrities" (Gamson, 2011; Marwick, 2013a; Marwick & boyd, 2011; Senft, 2008, 2013;), "microfame" (Sorgatz, 2008), "Youtube stars" (Burgess & Green, 2009a, 2009b Snickars & Vonderau, 2009), "YouTube celebrities" (Gamson, 2011; Lange, 2007; Marwick, 2013a), "Internet celebrity" (Gamson, 2011), "Web stars" (Senft, 2008) and "Internet famous" (Tanz, 2008).  
[Jerslev 2016, 5235]

Cunningham & Craig (2017) tried to put into words what makes social media, and by extension social media celebrities, different from mass-media: ‘These formats differ sharply from established film and television, and are constituted from intrinsically interactive audience-centricity and appeals to authenticity and community in a commercialising space – “social media entertainment”’ (72). They argue that social media has created new rules for celebrities, in particular: ‘... that SME is governed by quite strict norms that put the highest value on authenticity and community, and these governing “rules of the game” have developed rapidly to shape and discipline creators and the commercial environment in which SME creators work’ (ibid. 72).

Jerslev also noted the sameness between social media celebrities and their fans: ‘online celebrity practices unfold in accordance with a particular temporal and spatial logic characterized by what Marshall (2006) has called a “narrowing of the gap” between celebrities and their fans or followers’ (Jerslev 2016, 5235). Due to the nature of social media ‘microcelebrity strategies are especially connected with the display of accessibility, presence, and intimacy online; moreover, the broadening of processes of celebrification beyond YouTube may put pressure on microcelebrities’ claim to authenticity’ (Jerslev 2016, 5233). Traditional media celebrities had to keep their public I as other than the masses, while their private Me should be the same as the masses. However, social media celebrities cannot have the same stark separation of I and Me and can therefore not divide the roles of ‘same’ and ‘other’ to each. Instead, social media celebrities are expected to find a new balance between sameness and otherness from their audience; a balance which is constantly renegotiated.

Jake Paul tries to straddle the line between mass-media celebrity and social media celebrity, having confessed that he seeks to be a celebrity both online and in traditional media (Klein & Klein 2017, 00:31:04-00:31:17). He began his career on the now-defunct app Vine, where users uploaded 6-second video clips. Once he had

gained a massive following and popularity on the app, he signed a contract with Disney to be a lead character on their show *Bizaardvark*. When Vine shut down, Jake Paul moved over to YouTube where he quickly began his daily vlog routine and grew his fan base. After his neighbors sued him in July 2017, Disney announced that the company and Jake Paul had decided to part ways (Bromwich 2017). Now Jake Paul maintains a presence on YouTube and other related social media, such as Twitter and Instagram, but his only exposure in mass-media is in the news through the coverage of his scandals. In trying to embody both the mass media celebrity and the social media celebrity, Jake Paul has had to create an entirely new balance between similarity and otherness; between relating to his audience and being better than them. However, the recent loss of his Disney contract and the lawsuits filed against him show that he might just have struck the wrong balance.

Jake Paul uses the separation between his 'I' and 'Me' to distance himself from his scandals, while still taking responsibility for them. Rather than a hindrance, his I/Me divide becomes a tool he can use to navigate his transgressions. For a celebrity that spends so much time connecting with fans, Paul spends a lot of time distancing himself from his online persona, suggesting that he uses his 'involvement shield' when interacting with his own image, but not when interacting with his fans.

Jake Paul has thus far had two major scandals surrounding, respectively, his song *It's Everyday Bro* and the feud with his neighbors. The music video for *It's Everyday Bro* (Paul 2017b) was published on Paul's channel on May 30th, 2017 and is his most viewed video by a significant margin (Social Blade 2017). The song drew attention from Paul's regular viewers and a wider audience, resulting in almost 200 million views, one million likes, and two million dislikes. The song sounds and the music video looks exactly like what they are: made in a day by people with enough money to buy the templates of a 'real' song and music video. Paul himself has expressed this, revealing to the *H3 Podcast* that '[they] present it

as real music, but like we made that song in three hours' (00:06:47-00:06:52). He further adds that the video was produced so quickly, with '18 hours from making the song to it being online' (00:08:59-00:09:06), that he had no chance to even view it before it was posted. The song caused offense because Jake Paul bragged in the song and in his social media promotion about how he is the best and most popular YouTuber (in terms of skill and growth in subscribers). This sparked an interest in watching the music video, which featured meme-worthy lines - meaning that they were short, easy to remember, fun and cringe-worthy lines.

The shared language of Jake Paul's fan base was on display to the out-group and was relentlessly mocked. What most pointed to as the actual problem with the music video was Jake Paul's arrogance. Jake did not apologize, instead choosing to continue as usual. But now Paul had the attention of YouTube influencers like Philip DeFranco<sup>1</sup> and H3H3 Productions<sup>2</sup>, and when his neighbors sued him only a few months later, claiming that he was a menace, the YouTube community was ready to continue the criticism and mockery. The critique reached a tipping point when a news station came to interview Paul and he climbed up on the news van, prompting accusations that he was arrogant and reckless (Tharp 2017; Bromwich 2017; Bradley 2017) and finally culminated in a 2018 lawsuit by Paul's former landlords (Hills 2018).

The scandals grew to a point where Jake Paul felt the need to respond to the criticism. In his responses, specifically his appearance on the *H3 Podcast* (Klein & Klein 2017) and his song *F\*\*K JAKE PAUL* (Paul 2017a), a recurrent theme is how he distances himself from 'on-camera Jake'.

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<sup>1</sup> DeFranco is a YouTuber most famous for The Philip DeFranco Show, a channel which follows a news show formula, presenting stories relating primarily to American politics, the internet, and pop culture.

<sup>2</sup> h3h3Productions is a comedy channel run by married couple Ethan and Hila Klein. The channel largely consists of reaction videos and responses to "YouTube drama", while the two also host more serious discussions about the platform on the H3 Podcast.

In the *H3 Podcast*, Paul speaks at length about how the Jake Paul in his vlogs is an exaggerated version, a fake version, of the real person Jake Paul. Indeed, his whole demeanor on the podcast seems subdued and quiet in comparison to the loud always-yelling Jake Paul of his vlogs. He says:

Jake Paul on camera is like... 'okay, like, we're doing this for entertainment', like, a ton of people are gonna be watching this. Um, it's telling a story. It's like a heightened version of, of who I am...

...And then off camera, it's like, I'm that same person but it's like, I'm more chill. I kinda just hang out, you know, doing my thing, and like, me and my friends joke around, but it's not like, loud and in your face (2017, 00:12:24-00:00:13:11)

More than separating himself from his Me, he is almost speaking as if he has created a personality outside of himself. Later in the podcast, when Ethan asks if the news report episode was On- or Off-Camera Jake, Paul replies that it's 'way too On-Camera Jake' (00:13:32), describing how he's playing a character, even putting on a silly voice. 'On-Camera Jake' is an exaggeration of 'Off-camera Jake', but he is also an 'extra Jake', another identity that Jake Paul can use.

*F\*\*K JAKE PAUL* further explores this theme of self-othering. In the music video, two Jake Pauls appear side by side. One represents the critics and 'haters', the other represents the creator himself. This is not a new trope, but Jake Paul uses it in a new way. Rather than having the Jake representing himself defend himself, he instead agrees and continues the critique, blurring the line between the critics and himself. The song opens up with the "hater" critiquing his authenticity and the quality of his work. This never gets a response in the song; however, outside of the song Jake Paul is not shy about the fact that he believes he could do better on the quality of his vlogs and even that his vlogs are somewhat staged. He told Ethan and Hila Klein on the *H3 Podcast* that: 'You never know what the audience is gonna, like, eat up. It's always, every day it's different. It's like, 'what can I do here? Like, do I talk about this? Do I... you know, do I do this prank?' (2017, 00:16:14-00:16:23), showing a conscious process of choosing his vlog content.

When the ‘real’ Jake Paul starts rapping, he seems surprised at the critiques before agreeing with them and even expanding on them:

Hold up, hold up, yo, let me stop you real quick  
It's Jake Paul, why you're saying all this shit?  
‘Oh hey Jake, you're a fucking bitch’  
Ok, yo, yeah I understand that shit  
And I know everything you can say about my clique  
And I'm not saying I don't disagree with it  
But let me tell you my point of view of it  
Man I know all of my flaws, man here it is  
(00:01:21-00:01:41)

This is a departure from how these songs typically go. The part where Jake Paul is supposed to defend himself is instead replaced with further ‘hate’. And the song continues like that; Paul never refutes the critique. He softens it up, saying for example that the problems he had with his brother are not an issue, that they are brothers and therefore will always be close. He ends the song:

And my neighbors wanna move, shit I would too  
O.J. out of jail put him next to me  
That's a punishment worse than the penalty  
But I do fuck up, and sometimes I wanna quit it all  
Sometimes I wish I wasn't involved  
Sometimes I wish I could hate Jake Paul  
I really wanna see that motherfucker fall  
From the bottom of my heart, man fuck Jake Paul  
(00:02:43-00:03:06)

This ending seems to suggest that Paul is suffering from a separation between his veridical I and his Me, but right after the song ends, the video cuts to Jake sitting in his car saying: ‘I don't even know what to make of that. But the bottom line is you're right when you hate on me. I'm agreeing with you guys. You suck Jake’ (00:03:10-00:03:23). After this, he turns the conversation back to his fans with a message of support for them, that it is okay to make mistakes and learn from them. Paul then proposes an opportunity for interaction, the option for viewers to make a ‘diss track’ (hate song) about him and they might win a trip to meet and record a music video with him. Thus, Jake Paul uses the separation between his I and Me to

make the scandal less painful *and* as a way of connecting with his fans; simultaneously distancing Jake Paul from himself (self-othering) and emphasizing his sameness in relation to his fans. By separating himself from his scandals, he can join his fans in creating diss tracks aimed at himself. Ultimately, Jake Paul does not suffer from a loss of identity. The separation between the I and Me provides him not with a fractured self, but a multiplied self, supplying him with identities he can shift between in order to deal with celebrity life.

### **Jake Paul and the Performance of Authenticity**

We are first going to analyze how Jake Paul performs authenticity in his vlogs, with a focus on how he uses authenticity as a way of connecting and being intimate with his fans. Then we are going to discuss how he uses mass-media and social media celebrity tools to distinguish himself from his fans - he is both the celebrity that is better than his fans, as well as a fan of himself blending in with the other fans. Unlike other celebrities that try to connect with their fans by engaging directly and turning the focus on the fans, Jake Paul instead connects to fans by being as enamored with himself as they are.

The purpose of Jake Paul's authenticity is to create and maintain an intimate relationship with his fans. He does this through editing, merchandise, and from creating and referring to a community (known as 'Jake Paulers'<sup>3</sup>).

Jake Paul has made some experimental choices in his editing, which he does himself (Klein & Klein 2017, 00:07:15-00:07:23). The four most obvious examples are using Instagram tagging effects on his friends, adding dolphin sounds to cover up swear words, telling the audience what clip he is putting into the video before doing so, and showing memes (here meaning audio and/or visual internet jokes).

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<sup>3</sup> It is unclear who coined this term, however, as Jake Paul performs the part of Jake Paul fan as often as the part of Jake Paul the Celebrity, it might not matter if it originated with him or the fan base.



Instagram tagging is used at the beginning of the videos. Whenever a new person appears a small picture of their Instagram username will appear, using the same icon that is seen on the Instagram app. This has multiple effects, including feeding into the gift economy of YouTube celebrity (Turk 2014), but for our purposes, it places Jake Paul and his friends firmly within the same world as his viewers. While not all of his viewers will have an Instagram account, it is available to all of them. YouTube is also available to all, but it takes more work (and technical equipment) to make a video than to take a photo and post it. Seeing Jake Paul tag his friends, as his viewers do their own, creates a digital connection. It puts them closer and emphasizes the possibility that the viewer might connect with Jake Paul online.

The dolphin sounds are perhaps born out of necessity. Jake Paul's audience and fans appear to be quite young (the fans that show up in his videos are often in their early teens), and to reach them he would have to censor all swear words. It also has the double effect of creating a shared language (which will be expanded upon later) and clearly signaling to kids and their parents that this content is for them. Rather than choosing to not use swear words at all, this calls to attention that he does use them and chooses to censor them through editing rather than censoring himself on the spot. This way he markets himself to a particular group of young boys who want to swear but are not allowed to. By censoring the words, rather than omitting them, he lets his fans fill in the blanks with whatever swear words they like.

Jake Paul occasionally tells the viewer what kind of editing he is going to do before he does it. An example is when he tells the viewer that he did something the night before, which did not make it into that vlog, but that he is now going to 'roll the clip'. This gives the impression that he shares everything - even when he does not get everything into the first vlog, he will show it later. It also creates the illusion of exclusivity. If you do not watch *all* of his vlogs, you might miss something.

Finally, he incorporates internet memes into his videos. Whenever he or his friends use a meme to make a joke, or whenever he believes using a meme in a post will be funny, he will cut away from the vlog to show the meme. That serves to create another node of digital connection between Jake Paul and his viewers, showing that he also sees and enjoys the same jokes as everyone else.

All of these types of editing, beyond the effects written above, ultimately serves Jake Paul's authenticity by calling attention to the fact that he knows that the viewers know that vlogs are edited and not the whole truth. By making it clear that he is editing (and where), he is admitting to inauthenticity, which makes him more trustworthy and therefore more authentic.

Merchandise (from here on called 'merch') is mentioned in every single vlog. Not only in the outro, where he replays the same clip of him urging fans to buy his merch, but also within the actual vlog, where he himself advertises his merch. Not only does his merch serve the usual purposes (as a way of making money, using fans for word of mouth marketing); it is also an important part of both Paul's connection to his fans and of his brand. For Jake Paul selling merch in this way has become part of his brand and wearing merch is both a way for him to be closer to his fans and an inside joke. Merch is part of Jake Paul's shared language with his fans and a way for him to sell that language back to fans.

Jake Paul sells his merch in a way which is unusual for most celebrities, even social media celebrities. Most celebrities either do not mention merch or they sell it as something fans have asked for and they have worked to provide. Jake Paul, on the other hand, directly tells his fans to buy his merch: 'Jake Paulers, what's popping. Check out this new *merch*... click the link', he says in the outro in his vlogs. 'Link in the bio' is also a phrase he uses often, guiding his fans to his merchandise. Jake Paul's way of selling merch has become part of his brand and was even put into one of his songs *It's Everyday Bro*. Here Paul famously sings: 'And I just dropped some new merch and it's selling like a god, church' (00:00:47-

00:00:51) - a phrase which has itself become something fans can buy on a T-shirt. Interestingly, Jake Paul does not use financial reasons for fans to buy merch. They should buy it because 'it's the hottest' and to be part of the 'Jake Pauler squad'. To incentivize fans to buy the merch, Paul and his friends wear the merch themselves in the vlogs. This makes the merch serve two purposes for fans: they can emulate the celebrity, and they can showcase to insiders and outsiders, where they belong. For Jake Paul, this also serves as a way to find new things to sell. An example is his yellow sunglasses. He wore them in his vlogs, they stood out enough for him and his fans to name them 'yellars', and now fans can buy their own pair of 'yellars - link in bio'.

Most important for Jake Paul's authenticity is the community he has created with his fans. Unlike other celebrities who do not get directly involved with their fandom, Jake Paul is not only part of his own fandom, he is himself a fan, the leader of his fandom and uses the position to create a community with his fans. Unlike other celebrities who engage with their fans, Jake Paul does it not by taking an interest in his fans, but by being a fan of himself. He has fans in his videos, references things he has done/recurring events in his vlogs, and he creates and uses a shared language with his fans, which relies on inside jokes referencing his videos.

Fans in his videos appear in different ways. There are fans that stand around in groups whenever he appears, fans he randomly meets, and fans who lend out their houses, boats, or other possessions to the creator. Having the fans in his videos creates an intimate experience for fans. They can imagine themselves being the ones to meet him in the future, and it shows Jake Paul as part of the group. Jake Paul engages with his fans as if he were a part of the fandom, specifically a ringleader of the fandom. He asks them to share collective signs (asking fans to dab<sup>4</sup>, which, while not exclusively part of Jake Paul fan culture, is an important part

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<sup>4</sup> A dab is a popular dance move, which consists of the dancer dropping their head into the crook of their elbow.

of it) and shows a lot of excitement when they do. He interacts with his fans as he interacts with his friends as if his friends are his fans and his fans are his friends, reinforcing the notion that they are all part of the same group.

He references things he has done in his videos and has things he does again and again, which provides consistency for his vlogs. Examples include his intro and outro, his merch gun, running around shirtless, and his kick of excitement. All of these actions are actions that fans can repeat, either to imitate or to partake in Jake Paul's lifestyle. He uses them to reinforce the community; these are things that *we* do.

Lastly, he has created an ever-expanding shared language. From inside jokes and phrases, to songs and actions. Almost everything Jake Paul does is meant to be passed on to fans. The songs, in particular, are interesting. Music videos make up seven of his top ten most viewed videos, including *It's Everyday Bro* and excluding his newest song *Jake Paulers*. These two songs are important for Jake Paul and his fans for different reasons. *It's Everyday Bro* was the song which propelled Jake Paul into public consciousness on YouTube and opened him up to external critique. Countless videos now exist of other YouTubers reacting to (and mocking) the music video. Thus, the Jake Paul fandom was provided with an 'enemy' to unite against. *Jake Paulers* serves the opposite effect, being a song about how his fans are the best (interestingly, he phrases the song as if he himself is a Jake Pauler), thus giving a song for the fandom to unite around akin to a national anthem. These are brilliant strategies, but in general, the songs serve to spread the Jake Paul brand around on different media than YouTube.

The shared language is not limited to songs. From popular internet slang, which has fallen out of fashion elsewhere ('savage', 'dab', and 'maverick') to unique phrases ('dab on the haters' and 'what's Gucci'), some of which come from his songs ('god church' and the phrase 'England is my city') or gets featured in his songs ('everyday bro'), the language of Jake Paulers is ever-expanding. New

phrases appear at a rate that is higher than the rate at which they disappear. What is clear about the authenticity that Jake Paul performs is that it places him among his fans, not above them. Every strategy he uses emphasizes intimacy and connection, his editing makes it clear where he exaggerates, his merch gives a shared uniform, which he wears himself, and the shared language connects and unites the group around shared values and against critics. Jake Paul is both the object of fandom and a fan himself.

So how does he distinguish himself from his fans? He makes use of mass-media celebrity tools as well as social media celebrity tools. Mass-media celebrities are either glamorous or notorious (Rojek 2001, 10). Jake Paul embodies glamour and shows his life as glamorous. He surrounds himself with expensive material possessions, with other celebrities, lives an expensive and enviable life, and everything he creates is heavily produced and made to look expensive. All of these things frame his life as enviable. Internet celebrities often embody the American Dream in a way that is meant to be inspirational; if they can do it, so can you (Sternheimer 2011). However, Jake Paul instead frames his wealth as something unique to him. Instead of emphasizing his sameness with his viewers while showcasing his wealth, he instead uses it to distinguish himself.

He makes use of social media celebrity tools of distinction to soften the distance between himself and his fans, but also to place himself in an unusual position for a celebrity. Jake Paul might have nice things and know influential people, but that is not the point of his vlogs (rather, perhaps, his music videos). The point of his vlogs is presenting Jake Paul as the celebrification of everyday life. Through his personality, he manages to come close to his fans, share their fan practices, and to emerge as a fan leader. He makes sure to frame himself as a role model, for example helping after Hurricane Harvey and using his scandals to grow as a person. He participates in the fandom, for example speaking of himself as a

Jake Pauler, and he shares fan parodies and creates them himself. He never lets anyone forget that it is all about him: the jokes, the songs, the parodies all build on who he *is*, rather than what he *makes*. He uses his excitement and extroversion to center every interaction in his vlogs around him, and when he meets fans he continues the same way.

Jake Paul is not wholly different from his fans; he shares enough qualities with them to be familiar and intimate. He is, however, *more* than his fans. He has more money, he is more sociable, he is more energetic, and he is more recognizable. He is what they try to be, but can never reach, because just when they reach his level, he has already moved on: 'I always wanna beat myself, and my whole thing is, like, becoming better every day, bro' (Klein & Klein 2017, 00:15:30-00:15:34).

YouTube is a social media, which paved the way for a new type of celebrity and a new type of authenticity, evident especially in the vlog-format. Vlogs allow an intimate connection between viewer and creator as the vlogger shares their daily life with the audience. The creator brings a camera with them throughout their day, filming and narrating as they go, and the viewer is along for the entire ride. With this genre comes the expectations from the audience that what they are shown is *real*, and when YouTubers sometimes transgress on this expectation, it results in scandal. Even more so than an authentic *reality*, viewers expect an authentic intimate *connection* with the YouTuber they choose to watch. The YouTuber has to be approachable and emotionally honest with their audience for this connection to be experienced. Emotions are at stake, and, as a result, transgressions against this expectation are penalized to a higher degree by the YouTube community than seemingly any other form of transgression.

Along with shifts in the expectations of authenticity and intimacy, the difference between traditional mass-media celebrities and social media celebrities has also resulted in different 'I/Me relations' and the 'involvement shield' being used differently. Jake Paul is a popular vlogger, here used as a case study of this

new celebrity reality. He continually and openly transgresses on his viewers' expectations for authenticity, making them effectively void. However, he still keeps the fan connection exceptionally strong, positioning himself amongst the members of his fandom, not above them. He uses his I/Me divide and his involvement shield to distance himself from his scandals and himself, not from his fans, who participates (are in fact invited to participate) in the othering of the scandalous Jake Paul.

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