

Vlogging and the discursive co-construction of ethnicity and beauty

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ABSTRACT

Taking as its data set beauty tutorials on YouTube, considered to be audio-visual discursive products that combine speech, body performance, and text (posted comments) to relay specific meanings (Bhatia, 2018), this paper investigates both production of text on part of the sender (vlogger) and interpretation of the text on part of the recipient (viewers) in the joint creation of identity. As such, I analyze the data by employing van Dijk's (2009) socio-cognitive approach to critical discourse analysis, which emphasizes that the relationship between discourse and society is 'cognitively mediated' (p. 64), and aspects of Gee and Green's (1998) MASS System in treatment of discourse as social practice. More specifically, this paper focuses on how British-Indian vlogger Kaushal discursively constructs the role of expert YouTuber and Indian diaspora in her tutorials to attract a niche viewership within the mass audience of beauty consumers to boost both her unique and conforming identities. Analysis reveals Kaushal's use of a more 'racialized beauty grammar' (Chang, 2014) within mainstream beauty discourse consisting of code-switching, cultural reference points and gestures that appeals to her viewers, thereby contributing to the creation of a community of beauty consumers who deviate from mainstream beauty standards.

KEYWORDS: YouTube, critical discourse analysis, digital communication, identity-construction, ethnicity

1 INTRODUCTION

Among the most influential websites, YouTube reaches more '18-49 year-olds than any other network'¹, and within this space beauty alone has generated over 130 billion views, the highest of any industry (Pixability, 2015). As a platform for expression and socialization, YouTube has raised much interest in how communication and interaction unfolds through new media technology. This has included the growth of informal learning, particularly 'pedagogical entertainment' (Sintonen et al., 2012), self-branding, prosumerism (consumption and creation of products), and identity-construction.

The popularity of video-sharing platforms like YouTube emerges from the shift in power on a participatory space that emphasizes user-created content, and success is often a result of well-practiced creativity. Burgess and Green (2009, p. 103) thus argue that YouTube should be seen as a platform, which features social interaction between a varied community of users, including both savvy and amateur participants in the pursuit of various agendas. There has been, as a result, much work done on, for example, the value of YouTube in education, particularly online learning (Agazio & Buckley, 2009; Burke & Snyder, 2008; Snelson, 2009). Roodt and Peier (2013) reveal that technology like YouTube can improve emotional engagement with subject matter because the medium is relatable to a generation of digital natives in the classroom. Bloom and Johnston (2010) argue that YouTube can be drawn on to develop cross-cultural understanding between students and teachers. Tan and Pearce (2011) conclude video technology in classroom teaching can foster both confidence and discussion on part of students from different backgrounds.

Relatedly, there has been work as well on the shift of the teaching classroom online, and in the hands of amateur participants (Burgess & Green, 2009) since YouTube provides a

space 'with relatively low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement, [and] strong support for creating and sharing creations' (Jenkins, Purushotma, Weigel, Clinton & Robison, 2009, p. xi). For example, Bhatia's (2018) work focuses on the interdiscursive construction of expertise on YouTube as beauty vloggers discursively exploit the boundaries between expert and layperson by drawing on their discursive competence, disciplinary knowledge and professional practice in how-to tutorials. Similarly, Tolson (2010, p. 282) focuses on comparisons between pedagogical entertainment and traditional forms of broadcast talk, indicating a resurgence in the 'pedagogical monologue' in YouTube tutorials, as opposed to more formal instruction traditionally associated with expertise. Muller (2009), in a slightly different vein, examines quality discourse of YouTube tutorials to demonstrate the hierarchies between professional and novice vloggers.

Apart from education, identity-construction on YouTube has also attracted attention, with scholars employing various analytical approaches including content and visual analysis, traditional and cyberethnography to its investigation (Gao, 2012; Taylor, 2006; Strangelove, 2010). This has resulted in two noticeable sub-streams of research: firstly, the rise of the micro-celebrity and self-branding on YouTube, especially work on prosumerism (Fuchs, 2014; Jerslev, 2016; Morreale, 2013; Salvato, 2009; Winter 2012) Morreale (2013, p. 113), for example, examines the gradual disintegration of 'boundaries between media platforms' as YouTube evolves into a revenue-generating medium for content creators, who gradually assume the role of Influencer, posting content and engaging with viewers for profit. Ritzer & Jurgenson (2010) refer to such prosumerism as a new form of capitalism, in which 'capitalists have more difficulty controlling prosumers... [thus] a distinct economic system may be emerging there where services are free and prosumers are not paid for their work' (p. 31).

A second, though smaller, sub-stream in identity-construction research is identity performance. From a discourse-based point of view, Jeffries (2011, p.60) contributes to a better understanding of how interlocution by viewers of YouTube channels and posted videos provides insights into gender performance in youth culture, including the rise of a fairly limited speech community. Hall et al. (2012), drawing on membership categorization analysis, explore the representation of metrosexuality in online makeup tutorials through the invocation of particular gendered norms and categories. There has also been a demonstrated interest in the articulation of Muslim identity online. Rahman (2012), using feminist discourse analysis, investigates how vlogging allows Muslim women to address problematic social narratives by engaging in trending vlogging practices (cf. Anarbaeva, 2016; Phelps-Ward & Laura, 2016).

However, despite the plethora of work conducted on self-representation online, the focus seems to have steadily stayed on the areas of expertise, micro-celebrity and prosumerism. The varied user community of the 'multicultural and neoliberal platform' that YouTube is, and on which vloggers are 'unconstrained by skin color and racial difference' can lead to creation of video posts that prove to be 'poignant locations that demonstrate this shift in the determination of surplus subjectivities' (Chang, 2014, p. 6). Chang's (2014) work, in this respect, has brought a better understating of how vloggers perform racial identity on YouTube, particularly 'the ways in which digital communities identify, track, and challenge the construction of contemporary Asian America' (3). It is this under-researched area that the paper attempts to fill by exploring the discursive construction of ethnic identity and taking as its data set beauty how-to tutorials on YouTube. More specifically, this paper is interested in how perceivably successful vloggers, through their language, construct 'Indian-ness' within more mainstream beauty discourse on YouTube.

2 DATA

This paper is part of a larger project² on digital professions consisting of over 1000 videos posted by 10 different YouTubers. The selection of data for this paper includes videos (also known as video-blogs or vlogs) posted by popular Indian YouTuber Kaushal with close to two million followers. Kaushal is among the most prominent Indian beauty gurus on YouTube, featured in Elle Magazine as a superblogger³, a L'oreal Company Ambassador, and 'one of the world's leading vloggers' (Verve Magazine)⁴. On-going analysis as part of the larger project revealed that Kaushal's beauty-how-to tutorials were fairly representative of those typically perceived as 'expert' beauty tutorials on YouTube (see Bhatia 2018 for a more detailed discussion on what constitutes expertise in this genre), drawing largely on mainstream beauty discourse in terms of typical tutorial structure, use of jargon, demonstration of disciplinary knowledge, discursive competence and professional practice, but also included more specific instances of intercultural behavior, so that Kaushal negotiated two interdiscursive identities- expert YouTuber and diaspora Indian.

For this particular paper, a total of 40 videos (with lengths varying between 5-25 minutes) were analyzed (while all examples informed the analysis, due to word limitation not all could be included in the paper). Each video was viewed three times: first to gain a holistic impression of the content; secondly, for the purposes of transcription; and thirdly to situate the posted comments by viewers in the context of the video content. A broad, manual transcription of the monological content was conducted (and although all nonverbal features are important, to maintain the paper's focus on construction of Indian-ness through language, a more specific set of non-verbal cues were included in the process of

meaning-making). Within the macro category of Beauty Vlogs, the typical subcategories of videos under study in the project are makeup tutorials (tutorials on how to achieve specific make up looks) and 'Get Ready With Me' videos (tutorials on how vloggers achieve their daily/routine looks), this paper focused on both as well.

In addition to the actual vlogs, the paper focused on just as prominently the written data set consisting of the comments threads that viewers posted below the published videos, within which conversation ranged from advice, questions, praise, anecdotes, and so forth. The comments on videos ranged in the hundreds, and while all the comments were analyzed, due to journal word constraints, only the most representative examples that provided an indication of how the YouTube videos were received by the audience, and of the rapport shared between the YouTuber and their viewers, were included⁵. From the perspective that meaning through discourse occurs as a result of both production of text on part of the sender (vlogger) and interpretation of the text on part of the recipient (viewers), analysis of the comments in this paper was as crucial as the vlogs themselves. In this sense, the discursive construction of Indian-ness becomes a joint process on part of Kaushal and her viewers.

3 METHOD

Criticality in discourse analysis derives from the belief that discursive events share a mutually constitutive relationship with the sociocultural and political contexts within which they take place (cf. Fairclough, 1989). That is to say that discourse both shapes and is shaped by society. Further, the practice of discourse arises from both the production and interpretation of text, where 'the production shapes (and leaves "traces" in) the text, and the interpretative process operates upon the "cues" in the text' (Fairclough, 1993, p. 136).

Discourse becomes then the means through which interactive participants construct self, society, and system of knowledge (ideologies, cultural models and myths, beliefs etc.), both on part of the sender and receiver. In this way, 'the study of discourse triangulates between society/culture/situation, cognition and discourse/language' (Wodak & Meyer, 2009, p. 14).

Threading the needle in this direction, this paper takes a critical discourse analysis approach to the discursive construction of identity in YouTube tutorials. To do so, I borrow from van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach, which emphasizes that the relationship between discourse and society is 'cognitively mediated', and thus 'social interaction, social situations and social structures can only influence text and talk through people's interpretations of such social environments. And conversely, discourse can only influence social interaction and social structures through the same cognitive interface of mental models, knowledge, attitudes and ideologies' (van Dijk, 2009, p. 64).

Analysis deriving broadly from this approach operates in two ways: at the macro level, cognition mediates in terms of socially shared knowledge, attitudes, norms and ideologies between larger groups and communities; and at the micro level cognition mediates in terms of personal experiences of social members, occurring in their discourse and interaction (van Dijk, 2015). This includes focus on what van Dijk (2015) refers to as the 'ideological structures of discourse', such as polarizing pronouns, identity markers (labels and names), positive and negative group descriptions, stereotypes, modals and instructives about group activities, norms and values (statements of evaluation and judgement), and interests all conveyed through various linguistic and semiotic features.

This paper, regarding video-blogs as 'audio-visual discursive products that combine speech, body performance, text in the form of posted comments to relay specific meanings' (Bhatia, 2018, p. 109), will focus on ideological structures of discourse, realized through

various linguistic and semiotic means, to construct ethnic identity. In addition, this paper also draws on aspects of Gee & Green's (1998) M(aterial) A(ctivity) S(emiotic) S(ociocultural) System which lays out the different aspects of discourse that need to be considered when considering discourse as social practice. Within this system, a social situation is made up of four interconnected components: the material component that involves analysis of 'actors, places, (space) time, and objects present (or referred to) during interaction'; the activity component that involves analysis of 'specific social activity or interconnected chains of activity (events) in which the participants are engaging'; the semiotic component that involves the analysis of 'situated meanings and cultural models connected to various sign systems such as language, gestures, images, or other symbolic systems'; and finally, the sociocultural component that involves analysis of 'personal, social, and cultural knowledge, feelings, and identities' (Gee & Green, 1998, p. 134).

4. ANALYSIS

4.1 Expertise and YouTube

As a participatory platform that requires interactants to continually shift between multiple identities and roles to achieve an intended communicative purpose, we see YouTube encourage interdiscursive identity performance on part of its users (Bhatia, 2018). In the case of Kaushal, we see firstly the interdiscursive performance of expertise.⁶

Extract 1

Hi my Angels and welcome back to my channel. Today I'm doing this makeup look that I have on my face right now, it's a purple cut crease with some glitter which is super

appropriate for Diwali... over on my Twitter I asked what kind of color combinations you would like to see... and I had a lot of gold, a lot of green and purple....⁷

Extract 2

...a lot of you guys have requested the shade purple over on Twitter... please don't forget to subscribe first of all, it's totally free and the button is down there... now I will straight cut to the tutorial....⁸

Extract 3

...I'm actually going to take my favorite primer at the moment which is the Fenty beauty primer. I really like this because... it primes my skin but also moisturizes it at the same time. I don't think it helps my foundation last longer but I just love the way it feels on my skin....⁹

Extract 4

I'm going to take the YSL All Hours Foundation, this is the shade BD30 and I'm going to mix some of my True Match into that and I'm going to bounce all of that into my skin using my damp Beauty Blender before we move straight to the eyes....¹⁰

Extract 5

All of the palettes that NYX do are affordable and really really good quality....¹¹

Extract 6

I started by priming my lids with the Too Faced Shadow Insurance in Lemon Drop...
because it reduces any kind of redness on my eyelids... this helps with any kind of
fallout....¹²

Extract 7

... I am putting that all over my eyelid as a nice neutral eyeshadow shade which matches
the rest of my eyes... for the dramatic eyeliner I first went in with a gel eyeliner, this is the
one from Anastasia Beverly Hills and you want to make sure that the eye line that we do
doesn't go too far up where our eye crease is... we're just going to slowly map out where
we want this line....¹³

We see in the extracts above the establishment of Kaushal's identity as an expert vlogger by demonstration of professional practice, which we can understand as the ways in which 'expert professionals exploit generic resources... to create new and hybrid forms transcending professional... as well as cultural boundaries' (Bhatia, 2017: 58). This is perhaps most evident in the manner in which Kaushal shifts between formal tutorializing (*I'm going to bounce all of that into my skin, I am putting this all over, you want to make sure, slowly map out where we want the line, I started by priming etc.*), informal chattiness (*Hi my Angels, I just love the way it feels on my skin*), and promotional talk for products received as part of PR packages (*All the palettes that NYX do are affordable, my favorite primer at the moment*).

We also see Kaushal's discursive competency, which we can understand as the manner in which an expert negotiates 'corporate or individual identity within the concept of

generic integrity in professional contexts' (Bhatia, 2017, p. 206), through the use of discipline specific jargon (*primer, YSL All Hours Foundation, BD30, True Match, Too Faced Shadow Insurance, gel eyeliner, Anastasia Beverly Hills, cut crease*), in addition to other references found in the larger data set, *contouring, highlighting, setting foundation, concealer, Tarteist Pro Glow palette, matte, smoke out, fan brush, line upper waterline, bronzer, cool tone, falsies* etc.). Kaushal further assumes a typically 'managerial classroom mode' (Walsh, 2003), involving interactional features such as 'single, extended teacher turn which uses explanations/or instructions... [and] absence of learner contributions' (Walsh, 2003, p. 3) in her tutorials transforming her online channel into a pseudo-classroom: *I'm going to bounce all of that into my skin using, priming my lids with the Too Faced Shadow Insurance... because it reduces any kind of redness on my eyelids, this helps with fallout, you want to make sure that the eye line that we do doesn't go too far up where our eye crease is.* In doing so, she also constantly shifts between the use of I, we, and you in order to both 'create shared alignment of professional need' (Gordon & Luke, 2012, p. 118) and guide viewer attention to significant moments of instruction.

Lastly, Kaushal is able to demonstrate her disciplinary knowledge (Bhatia, 2017) in the manner in which she draws on her savvy use of YouTube to both instruct, educate, and capitalize on her skills. She is able to recommend products based on expert knowledge and experience (*All of the palettes that NYX do are affordable and really really good quality, it primes my skin but...I don't think it helps my foundation last longer, my favorite primer*) and also create a positive self-presentation (*over on my Twitter I asked ... and I had a lot of, a lot of you guys have requested the shade purple over on Twitter*) indicating her popularity and engagement not just on YouTube where she can boast 2 million followers but also on other social media platforms. And lastly, we also see her indulge in a form of self-celebrification,

quite typical of social media discourse, whereby she requests viewers to subscribe and boost the popularity of her channel, thereby translating to greater individual revenue (*please don't forget to... it's totally free and the button is down there*). What is interesting here is that such blatant self-promotion, unlike typical face to face interaction, is not 'considered impolite, but necessary to present oneself as a confident and experienced participant of the community' (Bhatia, 2018, p. 111).

Kaushal's expertise is well evidenced not just in her large viewership and following on other social media platforms, but more textually, in the responses she receives to her videos. Consider these representative comments posted under her videos.

Yassss this was the look I was waiting for. Always love your Indian tutorials, I've learned so much. Happy Diwali Kauhal 🥰🥰🥰

I created this look today 🥰 received so many compliments 🥰 i also have all the products You used and everything was just so easy following setup by step 💖

can't take my eyes off!!! you are a beauty. lots of love from BANGLADESH.

I love how open you are to different cultures. It shows that you are a great role model and an amazing person. We all love you kaushal xx I hope you have a bright future ahead of you

You're a goddess of makeup. I'm not even kidding Kaushal . Wishing for all the best things to happen to you <3

Can you recommend a good Makeup Revolution palette? I have the Flawless palette, and want to buy another one and I swear by your suggestion! ❤️

Kaushal I normally use nars concealer in custard, what colour shade is the equivalent in tarte shape tape? Would you recommend light sand? Thanks cxxxx

These comments provide a reasonable indication of the rapport that Kaushal shares with her viewers, and their perceptions of her expertise and YouTube savvy. Similar to Bhatia's (2018) observations, YouTube as a participant-driven, interdiscursive space encourages

users to shift between multiple identities. Even within the limited role of the viewer, constrained purely by textual responses, we see the audiences shift their roles between learner (*I've learned so much, everything was just so easy step by step*); admirer (*love your Indian tutorials, love your videos, a great role model, you are a Goddess, we all love you*); well-wisher (*I hope you have a bright future, wishing for all the best things to happen to you*); and trusted friend (*Can you recommend, I swear by your suggestion, would you recommend*) among other roles (critic, mentor, mediator, etc.). It is also interesting to note that the majority of the roles that viewers play reflect what is perceived to be stereotypically feminine discourse of exaggerated compliments and emphatic encouragement, which 'vloggers draw on in their speech and viewers in their written comments, namely use of overstating through hyperbole and superlatives' (Bhatia, 2018, p. 114).

4.2 Ethnicity and materiality

Past constructing her role as an expert YouTuber and beauty guru, Kaushal is also convincing in her performance of ethnicity. Even though she achieves this in various ways, the key means seem to be through materiality, popular culture, and appropriation of heritage and tradition. I will discuss each of these below.

In considering vlogs to be audio-visual discursive products, we give importance to not just verbal but also the non-verbal construction of identity. Vlogs combine sounded speech, bodily performance, writing in the form of text stamps and subtitling, music, lighting, styling of background set, props, and physical location in order to relay particular meanings. Thus, it is important to consider how Kaushal constructs identity through what Gee & Green (1998) refer to as the material component of any situation (i.e. actors, places,

time, objects present or referred to), and van Dijk (2015) as part of the ‘ideological structures of discourse’.

Extract 8

Now time for the tika I got this tika from Bombay Looks Leicester and I put a bobby pin into the little hole... then I parted my hair into the center and simply pushed the bobby pin into my hair... so the tika did not budge... I used some DUO adhesive glue which is just eye lash glue....¹⁴

Extract 9

I wasn't completely happy with the color so I added Sleek's liqueur lipstick on top to add a bit of sheen... this by the way is a gorgeous nude color for Asian skin tones.¹⁵

Extract 10

For the final few Deepika touches I added a big black round bindi and grabbing any black liquid eye liner I added a small dot below that bindi....¹⁶

Extract 11

For my earrings I wore these traditional looking earrings which I got from a boutique in India... and my bangles which I got from India....¹⁷

Extract 12

I put on my Ardell Wispy Lashes and my Tanvi bindi which I got from Bindi Box... and I also made sure I put some eye lash glue on my tika because that way it doesn't budge... this ring is from Atrang in Bombay....¹⁸

Extract 13

I'm wishing you all a very happy Diwali and saal Mubarak for everyone that is celebrating.¹⁹

We see in the extracts Kaushal perform two identities- her expert vlogger self and an Indian girl through code-switching between Hindi and English, with English acting as her primary form of communication in providing expert instruction and explanation (*I put a bobby pin into the little hole... and simply pushed the bobby pin into my hair, I added a big black round bindi, I put some eye lash glue on my tika because that way it doesn't budge* etc.) and use of Hindi in referring to common greetings (*saal mubarak/Happy New Year*), ethnic objects (*tika, bindi, Tanvi bindi*), and Indian places (*Bombay Looks, Atrang, Bombay, Bindi Box, boutique in India*).

The introduction of ethnic terms like *bindi* and *tika*, or the consideration of makeup suitable for *Asian skin tone* (extract 9) incorporates into mainstream beauty discourse, which includes jargon like *contouring, highlighting, setting my foundation, concealer, line upper waterline*, more cultural specificity, a 'racialized beauty grammar' (Chang, 2014, p. 8) particular to South Asian identities. The creation of such a grammar both 'encourage[s] the development of community and recognition of certain (phenotypic) attributes of the community' (Chang, 2014, p. 10) while also challenging stereotypical notions of Indian-ness by situating Indian femininity comfortably within mainstream notions of beauty.

While it is entirely possible to regard these brief instances as ‘unremarkable cohabitation’ of English-Hindi (Bhatt, 2008, p. 181), when paired with the physical expression of her ethnic identity (objects and props- see Image 1) the words become signifiers of the concept of Indian-ness (*traditional looking earrings*). As such, we see YouTube transform into what Bhatt (2008, p. 178) refers to as a ‘third space’, or ‘a semiotic space between competing cultural collectives... where cultural identity across differences of class... gender roles... and cultural values (traditional/local-modern/global) is negotiated, setting up new structures of socio-linguistic authority and new socio-political initiatives.’

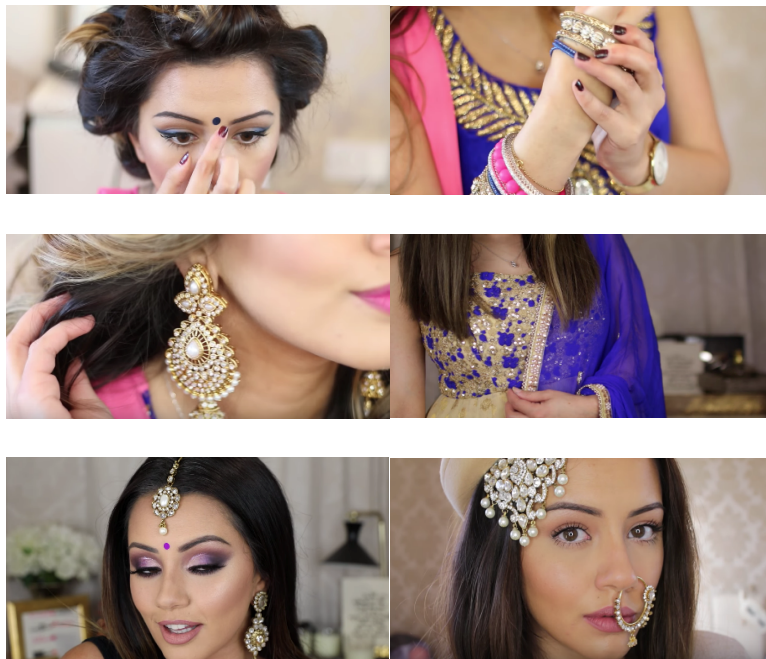


Image 1. Screenshots from *Kaushal Beauty* tutorials

On YouTube, participation can be considered equal and democratic, with anyone being able to post videos, or comments, dis/like or subscribe to videos and channels, to repost or re-

popularize videos or vloggers on another social media platform via shared links. Although ‘participant dynamics are the result of a reciprocal process’ thus vloggers are both subscribed to and subscribers, and their viewers are both recipients and co-creators (Bhatia, 2018, p. 108), interaction is also asymmetrical due to the physical nature of the medium, whereby viewers are able to make their presence visible most strongly through written text. As such, we see the absence of Gee & Green’s (1998) semiotic component in the composition of a social situation, in terms of sign systems involving non-written forms such as gestures and images. However, there is, compared to Kaushal, a higher use of code-mixing and mention of phenotypic traits in viewer comments, possibly to substitute the physical displays of ethnic identity.

what's the name of the moisturizer you show in all your videos before the make up..can you suggest a good hydrating moisture for Indian skin tone(combination)

omg you're so pretty, I'm so glad I found your channel. if you don't mind can you please do a video of facial hair removal, you know how it's more noticeably on Indian skin. pleaseee

I loved the trick of your smokey. Honestly it's really hard for natural Tan skin to bring out the silver color in correct amount. You just nailed it :) with the smokey.

Loved the video Kaush! Could you do a video orientated towards setting a tikka, passa, jhoomer, matha patti? Thanks x

References in last sentence (*traditional jewelry worn in hair*

parting and on forehead)

Hello Kaushal. I just discovered your channel 2 days ago and have been loving every tutorial. I'm so glad I found this Ram Leela one because I have a performance coming up to the same song and this is just the perfect makeup tutorial for it. I'm loving every one of your videos. Keep rocking fellow Indian. ^_^ Tame khuba ja sundara che. :D

Translation of last sentence (*‘you are very beautiful’*)

U look patakha in Indian costume and bindi suits u alot
🥰💕

Translation of sentence (*'you look like a firecracker...'*)

mane tame bahu gamo cho Kaushal Di.

Translation of sentence (*'I really like you sister Kaushal'*)

Madam Aap Jo makeup ki o to bhout Acha hai par Aap K piche Jo anty hai O Ky kare hai dekha

Translation of sentence (*'Madam the makeup you do is very good but can see what the aunty behind you is doing'*)

In the posted comments, we see representation of ethnic identity via description of phenotypic traits (*hydrating moisturizer for India skin tone, hair removal...on Indian skin, hard for natural Tan skin*), viewers thereby confirming not just Kaushal's own physicality representative of her ethnicity, but also creating a community of makeup wearers who deviate from mainstream beauty standards. In other words, there is a shared assumption on part of viewers that Kaushal experiences similar ethnically-sourced problems (*hard for natural Tan skin to bring out the silver color, can you please do a video on facial hair removal*) and that she is a part of the deviating community. Use of Hindi and Gujrati without preamble (*setting a tikka, passa, jhoomer, matha patti, patakha, mane tame bahu gamo cho, aap jo makeup ki o bhout acha hai*) also illustrates a shared assumption of Kaushal's ethnicity as well as her participation in this ethnic community of makeup wearers as a *fellow Indian*. Thus, we witness 'moving images meet deterritorialised viewers' creating, as a result, 'diasporic public spheres' (Appadurai, 1996, p. 4), within which young Indians enact their reconstituted identities. A third space, especially in the context of post-colonial and (late-)modern India, as a theoretical construct to refer to a semiotic space between competing cultural collectives – e.g. colonized- colonizer, indigenous-foreign, local-global, traditional-modern – where cultural identity across differences of class (English bilinguals-

other bilinguals), gender roles (male-female), and cultural values (traditional/local-modern/global) is negotiated, setting up new structures of socio-linguistic authority and new socio-political initiatives.

4.3 Ethnicity and pop culture

The construction of race and ethnicity can be perceived as an on-going process very much shaped by the medium and participants involved. As a UK-based vlogger, Kaushal is seen most commonly drawing on contemporary Indian popular culture to negotiate the demands of her diasporic ethnic identity and British vlogger identity. Her appeal for viewers' lies in (as we will see in more detail later on) her ability to combine her ethnic culture and YouTube culture, filling a gap in mainstream beauty discourse where women of color 'are putting themselves on the map of cyberspace by demanding their right to be beautiful in their own way, not the way the media tell them' (Anarbaeva, 2016, p. 5). In doing so, Kaushal displays what van Dijk (2015) explains to be individual cognitive mediation of shared norms and experiences with members of the larger community, and what Gee & Green (1998) refer to as the sociocultural component of a situation.

Popular culture, in this regard, especially references to Bollywood (Indian Film Industry), forms part of what Appadurai (1990, p. 591) refers to as *mediascapes*, that is fluid, evolving landscapes of 'image-centered, narrative-based accounts of strips of reality' offering people who experience them components of the narrative (actors, storylines, textual and visual forms) in order to create their own 'scripts' of possible, imagined lives, both their own and other's.

Navratri season is coming up and I decided to recreate this Deepika Padukone look from Ram Leela and it's such an easy look so let's get into the tutorial.²⁰

Extract 16

Now onto the face. Deepika had quite a glowy look so I'm using my Touche Eclat Foundation by YSL and my Beauty Blender to blend it all out and the shade I use is BD50.²¹

Extract 17

Sonam was wearing a beautiful subtle pink coral lip so I used East End Snob lip liner by Rimmel... I love this look it's so perfect for summer, Indian weddings and it's so chic and simple... please give a thumbs up if you'd like to see more Bollywood videos...²²

Extract 18

... so recently it was the premier of the Bajirao Mastani movie... those of you guys who have no idea what I'm talking about Bajirao Mastani is a new Bollywood movie coming out in December and one of my favorite actresses and beauty and style icons called Deepika Padukone was wearing a look very similar to this....²³

We see Kaushal being especially adept here at negotiating between multiple identities on YouTube as her tutorials become an opportunity and starting point for cultivating a discussion on both mainstream beauty and Indian pop culture. Kaushal situates Bollywood representations of beauty and femininity by connecting current Bollywood actors (*Deepika Padukone, Sonam*) to mainstream beauty products (*Deepika had quite a glowy look so I'm using my Touch Eclat, Sonam is wearing a beautiful subtle pink... so I used East End Snob by*

Rimmel). In so doing, we see the discursive accomplishment of three things: (1) Kaushal's demonstration of disciplinary knowledge whereby she is able to recommend products based on knowledge of purpose and application; (2) her effective exploitation of professional practice within which she is able to represent her expertise in achieving ethnic looks suitable to a global audience through clear instruction (*such an easy look so let's get into the tutorial, Beauty Blender to blend it all out, it's so perfect for summer, Indian weddings and it's so chic and simple*) and positive self-promotion (*please gives a thumbs up if you'd like to see more Bollywood videos, wearing a look very similar to this*); and (3) attracting viewers with similar interests and likes that derive from a niche viewership—South Asians in general, but particularly the British diaspora.

In this manner, YouTube and similar social networking sites that give power to user-generated content become a space in which women in general and particularly ethnic minorities are able to combine 'self-expression and creativity display... [as] there are minimal barriers for participation and involvement as well as strong support for sharing one's creations with others in the community' (Anarbaeva, 2016, p. 3). Extract 18, in particular, seems to insinuate two types of viewership (in addition to subscribed/not)—a primary audience made up of South Asians (the Us group) and a secondary audience made up of non-South Asians even though they themselves may be minorities. In offering an explanation 'to those of you guys who have no idea what I'm talking about,' Kaushal distinguishes different members of her viewer community through polarizing pronouns as well as her own familiarity and practice of Indian culture. She also does the same in written form in the descriptions posted below the relevant videos:

*Hi my lovelies! Ever since Ram Leela came out, my obsession with Deepika grew... I thought what better way to kick start my Navratri makeup series then to recreate Deepika Padukone's super natural, garba makeup :) I hope you angels like it *5 heart emoticons*²⁴*

Her reference to viewers as *lovelies* and *angels* and use of heart emoticons in a colloquial, intimate manner indicates a typically female viewership, reiterating the relatively feminine nature of YouTube beauty discourse, but also similar interests or desires on part of ethnic viewers who might share her *obsession with Deepika*. Kaushal further performs her diasporic Indian-ness by correlating pop cultural references to the movie *Ram Leela* with the traditional Hindu festival of Navratri (*kick of my Navratri series, garba markup*), code-switching to express her fluency in both Indian pop cultural and religious lingo with her beauty expertise (*super natural makeup*), bringing to light the fairly 'composite character of diasporic experience both within local contexts and across transnational spaces' (Dawson, 2005: 162). In this regard, South Asian youth prove to be especially proficient at remixing ethnic language codes with cultural references, generating 'much of the appeal and innovation of diasporic youth culture... [here] Hindi films offer second-generation Asian youths a visual and aural archive from which they may appropriate elements of cultural identity' (ibid.).

The constitution of diasporic identity involves a complex mediation between ethnicity, class, language, roots, and present culture, made apparent through interactants' discursive practices. In this case, popular culture offers young people sociocultural narratives as resources for the construction of identity. On highly dynamic and creative platforms like YouTube, community practice and identity performance linked with gender,

sexuality, race and ethnicity 'are intimately connected with issues of transnational identity; these modes of identification emerge within a "mediascape" of popular images and texts that circulate locally and globally via electronic technologies easily accessible' (Durham, 2004, p. 141).

Pleeeasee do more Bollywood inspired looks especially old bollywood like Preity Zinta from Veer Zara or Aishwaria from Devdas 🍷
Love ur videos 💕

Gorgeous! Deepika is one of my favorite Bollywood actresses! I loved her in Love Aaj Kal and Chennai express! This look is amazing! Please create more Bollywood inspired looks :) xoxo

Hi Kaushal I'm not of Indian ethnicity but I love your videos and all of your Indian celebrations videos you are one of my favourite you tubers along with jamie genevieve and fleur de force xx

You look so much like Hillary Duff but an Indian version.

You're literally an Indian version of Mila Kunis!💕😘😘😘

In the representative comments posted below Kaushal's videos, it is reaffirming to see the acknowledgment of this shared popular culture, both Indian and, more broadly speaking, Western. The emerging viewer discourse is one which reiterates both feminine speak in its use of exaggerated compliments (*Love ur videos, This look is amazing!, xoxo, I love your videos*), net speak in the easy use of emoticons, and youth speak that borrows from both Indian pop culture (*old bollywood, Preity Zinta from Veer Zaara or Aishwaria from Devdas, Loved her in Love Aaj Kal and Chennai express*), and more mainstream popular culture (*so much like Hillary Duff but an Indian version, literally an Indian version of Mila Kunis*).

Furthermore, in ascribing to Kaushal both similarities to Western celebrities like Hillary Duff and Mila Kunis, but also Caucasian YouTubers (*you are one of my favorite you tubers along with jamie genevieve and fleur de force*) there is an acknowledgement of the mainstream

contribution that Kaushal makes to the YouTube beauty community, but also the niche she has carved out as an Indian (*I am not Indian but I love your videos, Please create more Bollywood inspired looks*).

4.4 Ethnicity and heritage

The construction of identity is integrally linked with the politics of location, and rather than rooting out of a historical past (how we have been), the discursive construction of identity seems to emerge from 'what we might become' (Hall, 1996, p. 4). In this way, Hall argues that identities are 'constituted within, not outside representation... [relating to] invention of tradition as much as to tradition itself... [arising] from the narrativization of the self' (4). This fourth section of analysis focuses on how Kaushal and her viewers represent their ethnic identities by renegotiating tradition through contemporary digital culture, constructing their identities not on the basis of a historicized tradition but on a reimagined present.

Extract 20

To all my Indian followers, what are you guys doing for Diwali? I would love to know. We are doing lots of family gatherings which is always fun. I'm going to be doing some fireworks hopefully...if anyone is doing fireworks make sure you stay safe.²⁵

Extract 21

...the glitter definitively makes it stand out and makes it really nice and dramatic and very like Diwali appropriate because I feel like Diwali just has to have a little bit of glitter...makes your Diwali sparkle....²⁶

Extract 22

I hope you guys liked the video. I absolutely love garba....²⁷

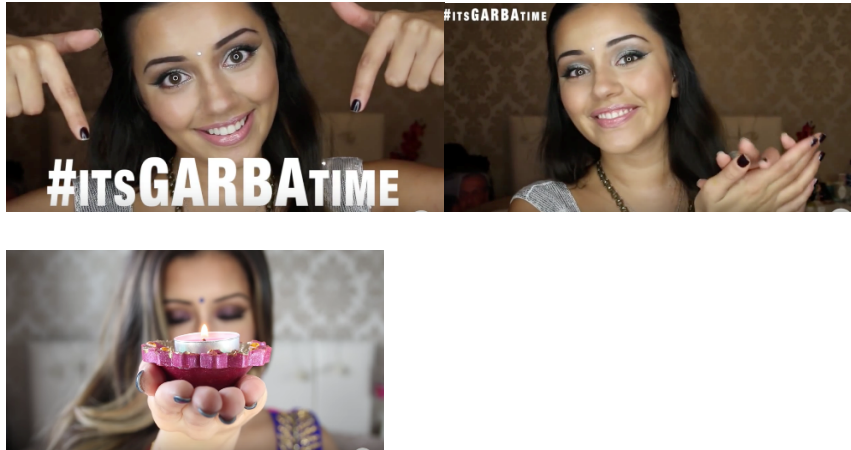


FIGURE 2 Screenshots from *Kaushal Beauty* tutorials

Kaushal produces groups identification markers through direct reference to ethnicity and unifying pronouns (*my Indian followers, we are doing*), in addition to positive self-description related to Indian festivals (*lots of family gatherings, always fun, stay safe, love garba* (traditional Gujrati folk dance), *make your diwali sparkle*), she demonstrates shared assumptions about common practices and activities of the community including celebration rituals and characteristics, since 'ideological discourse typically features many references to our interests, such as basic resources (food, shelter, and health) as well as symbolic resources such as knowledge, status, or access to public discourse' (van Dijk, 2009, p. 74). Her language implies a close relationship with viewers when she tells them to 'stay safe' while playing with firecrackers, evidencing both fellowships based on ethnicity and pseudo-

friendships formed between YouTubers and viewers. Kaushal also uses traditional props (oil lit lamp- *diya*), accessories (sticker on forehead-*bindi*), and gestures (garba style hand movements), reinforcing importance of the ‘semiotic component’ (Gee & Green, 1998) in constructing identity because the values of objects and things emerge not from ‘interpretative procedures or internal representations... [but from] the context of material encounters between actors and objects’ (Hutchby, 2001, p. 27).

It is also interesting to note in Image 2 the discursive repositioning of objects through use of hash-tags (*#ITSGARBATIME*), another example, albeit a textual one, of what I earlier cited as the third space, arising from the ‘linguistic indexing of this liminal space, of new identity-positions, [and] signaled through discursual hybridity in texts and interactions’ (Bhatt, 2008, p. 181); the remixing of Hindi/Gujrati/English with netspeak is an example of that hybridity.

I love how you incorporate your culture and youtube together. You do you girl

I like how you embrace your culture as opposed to hiding it, as many southasian girls i know do. you could easily get away with saying that you're white (you look kind of caucasian) but no you're proud of your ethnicity and not pretend like you're something that you're not. it's very admirable and adds a lot of attraction to your channel

I'm always looking for indian youtubers ...And i think i've found the indian makeup guru !!!
So proud of indians who dont turn their backs on their heritage and culture when they settle in foreign countries !

Love and respect from India !!

We also see acceptance and practice of this third space by viewers reflected in their comments: *love how you incorporate your culture and youtube together, I like how you embrace your culture, you're proud of your ethnicity, so proud of Indians who don't turn their backs on their heritage and culture.* The comments seem to provide a fairly accurate

impression of how convincing Kaushal's discursive performance of ethnicity is. The comfortable use of emotive vocabulary (*love* and *like*) indicating an intimate revelation of feelings in a public sphere; the polarizing or uniting *you's* and *I's* determining who is communicating with whom; references to a shared, collective identity (*indian makeup guru, so proud of indians, indian youtubers*); and exaggerated praise (*very admirable, adds attraction, so proud, love and respect, you do you girl*) indicate the importance of 'reciprocity and interactivity in bonding and for the development of a collective identity' (Kavada, 2012, p. 34). In this sense, YouTube as a platform that encourages 'interactive broadcasting (Etzioni & Etzioni, 1999), truly requires effective participation management and simultaneous performance of multiple roles on part of its community of users, as broadcast single-person messages not only reach the ratified participant (often the vlogger) but also the rest of the viewership that becomes a secondary audience, which might choose to treat the textual posts as either stand-alone comments to the vlogger or the starting off point for 'communal feedback' (Etzioni & Etzioni, 1999)²⁸.

What also occurs in the written comments is a positive presentation of a more particular sub-group of diaspora Indians, within which the viewers distinguish between the diaspora who embrace their culture (*embrace as opposed to hiding, not pretend like something you're not, don't turn their backs on their heritage*) and, therefore, deserve *love, respect, pride*, and negatively represent those who adopt a *white* identity, bringing to light the complicated identity politics of British Indians specifically, and diaspora Indian more generally. In this sense, members of communities that form on YouTube do not attempt to find a definitive place in the pre-existing cultural spheres, either Indian, British or American, either traditional or mainstream, but rather they recognize 'the need to assert a new identity position that, in a sense, reject[s] the options offered by Indian as well as American

[often considered mainstream] media texts' (Durham, 2004, p. 155). Their understanding of cultural texts and positions is not just resistance or blind acceptance but rather a negotiation of a third space (Bhatt, 2008).

5 CONCLUSION

This paper explored the discursive co-construction of ethnicity and beauty by Indian diaspora on YouTube through analysis of makeup tutorials by expert vlogger Kaushal and the received impact on viewers through posted written comments. Findings revealed that participants of the beauty community, particularly, women of color constructed their ethnicity in three key ways: through materiality (references regarding places, time and objects), in which we saw several instances of code-switching when Kaushal and her viewers referred to ethnic beauty props, cultural gestures, and beauty queries associated with Indian phenotypic traits (e.g. brown skin). Secondly, we saw Kaushal and her viewers jointly construct their ethnicity through references to pop culture by situating regional traditional practices, festivals, and rituals in the context of wider Indian culture, specifically Bollywood. The third manner in which ethnicity was co-constructed was through references to Indian heritage where the construction of diaspora identity was most prominent, and the notion of heritage emphasized through it.

More importantly, the paper explored the emergence of a creative, semiotic, and virtual space within which diaspora youth renegotiated what it means to be Indian. Drawing inspiration from what they want to be represented as, as opposed to how they have been perceived previously, these diasporic youth displayed innovation in remixing and switching (1) codes (whether between languages or dialects, or between languages and netspeak); (2) traditional and pop cultural reference points; (3) materiality on a digital platform. This

remixing was performed effectively despite textual, verbal or visual constraints of the medium/platform.

In this way, diasporic Indian youth truly represent global citizenship, acting not just as minorities that have been re-rooted outside of their native country but as individuals of a community, which has 'retained a memory and cultural connection with their "home" India' (Bandyopadhyay, 2008, p. 82) and that can be conceptualized in the contexts of wider social and cultural, ethnic and commercial, physical and digital communities, to form what Hall (1996) terms 'new ethnicities'. Members of the beauty community in general, but of this subset of ethnic Indian beauty users in particular, form a powerful collective that is self-regulating, innovative, interactive, and persuasive in resisting mainstream standards of beauty yet simultaneously conforming to the categories and norms of its own community of users.

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NOTES

¹ <https://www.youtube.com/intl/en-GB/yt/about/press/>

² The project pursues a better understanding of the discursive construction of identity in emerging digital professions to better serve both pedagogic and professional communicative needs.

³ <http://elle.in/beauty/superblogger-kaushal-m-flawless-skin/>

⁴ <http://www.vervemagazine.in/people/up-close-and-personal-with-india-born-kaushal-one-of-the-worlds-leading-vloggers>

⁵ Typical examples of 'hate', 'ranting', and 'flaming', 'trolling' were not included because they constitute a substantial research topic of their own, and would have deviated from the focus of the paper here.

⁶ This area of study has much to offer, and since the focus of this paper is construction of ethnicity, this section is purely to indicate the typical expert behaviour on part of the vlogger in order to contextualize how Kaushal shifts between her vlogger and Indian identities. A

more detailed study on interdiscursive performance of expertise can be found in Bhatia (2018).

⁷ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=heC0UQ1ZvhU>

⁸ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=heC0UQ1ZvhU>

⁹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=heC0UQ1ZvhU>

¹⁰ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=heC0UQ1ZvhU>

¹¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=heC0UQ1ZvhU>

¹² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DShdX88ggwA>

¹³ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kEk-GBx82vM>

¹⁴ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DShdX88ggwA>

¹⁵ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UQoaEjy3hDU>

¹⁶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UQoaEjy3hDU>

¹⁷ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xGWMBXMzcOc>

¹⁸ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R0DQ3sLR2k8>

¹⁹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=heC0UQ1ZvhU>

²⁰ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UQoaEjy3hDU>

²¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UQoaEjy3hDU>

²² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zw0Tiojz4gE>

²³ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kEk-GBx82vM>

²⁴ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UQoaEjy3hDU>

²⁵ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=heC0UQ1ZvhU>

²⁶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=heC0UQ1ZvhU>

²⁷ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UQoaEjy3hDU>

²⁸ Micro-dialogue (dialogue created when multiple viewers reply to written comments) is a substantial area of study in itself, and therefore, to keep the focus of the paper (on co-construction of ethnicity between the vlogger and viewers), this aspect has not been included.