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**FACTORS AFFECTING A YOUTUBERS' FAME AMONG
STUDENTS**



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Abstract

Social media has witnessed the explosion of video sharing sites in recent years and has been in the forefront of academic and non-academic research. This study has addressed the role of social and cultural factors in the path to YouTuber's fame. Driven by uses and gratifications theory 2.0 (U&G 2.0) and Kelman's social influence theory, this study determines the effect of socio-cultural factors on YouTuber's fame among students. Using a quantitative method, the hypotheses developed in this study were tested with data collected through a survey of 230 students from universities in Klang Valley. The data was collected was analysed using multiple regression analysis. The findings reveal that aesthetic experience and cultural identity significantly influence YouTuber's fame (overall and within the chosen famous YouTube categories). This study can serve as a guide to YouTuber's to create content that is aesthetically pleasing, emotionally connective and relates to the cultural identity of the viewer in order to attract university students.

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Keywords: Online media, Social media, socio-cultural factors, university students, YouTube fame



1. Introduction

YouTube is a platform that allows users to post original user generated content (vlogs, music, videos and clips etc.) within 10 categories, ranging from entertainment to non-profit and activism to science and technology (Lavaveshkul, 2012). Jerslev (2016) found out videogame players, comedy actors, musicians and beauticians or style icons to be the most watched video bloggers (vloggers) on YouTube. The platform accommodates a wide range of age groups, from 18 to 49 years (Bhatia, 2018).

A 2015 survey done by Google in Malaysia found that Malaysians watch YouTube more than other countries. The platform allows them to have freedom of self-expression while still being useful for their studies, especially English (Güven, 2017). There are several factors that influence a YouTube channels popularity - seasonal views, upload activity and age of channel, geographical locations and video length, number of subscribers, number of likes, number of play-lists, number of shares, number of comments and average percentage viewed (Güven, 2017; Saurabh & Gautam, 2019).

2. Problem Statement

The YouTube phenomenon opened up new possibilities of communication across languages and cultures (Kurpiel, 2017). Malaysian students who tend to be neurotic have a strong urge to use YouTube as compared to students who are friendly, kind and conscientious (Klobas et al., 2018). Personal branding or self-marketing has become a crucial factor for YouTubers and mainstream celebrities (Chen, 2013). The interaction between a creator and the viewer's sense of belonging to an online community is essential for the life of a YouTube channel (Lange, 2008; Lange, 2009).

Comedy and entertainment are the most widely viewed genre among younger generations and adults (Smith, 2017; Tofler, 2017). Whiting and Williams (2013) found out that 64% of people use social media for jokes and humorous content. Malaysian students aged 25 and below, spent at least one hour on YouTube for entertainment and relaxation or academic learning and information seeking (Klobas et al., 2018). Education is also one of the popular categories on YouTube, encompassing formal education (virtual learning-lectures, exams, presentation etc.) and informal education (How-to tutorials, recipe videos, home décor tips etc.) (Purcariu, 2019; Veletsianos et al., 2018). Moreover, a viewer might be attracted to a video solely because they share a certain set of cultural norms or related to the emotiveness of the YouTuber based on their own experience (James, 2017; Park et al., 2017). Social influence has often been used to explore an individuals' attitude within a group (Cheung & Lee, 2010). Malaysian young activists significantly use YouTube videos to highlight important issues that are considered taboo in the society such as homosexuality (Lim, 2013).

There are many technical and self-awareness factors that contribute to a YouTuber's fame such as popularity development, self-representation, attention to editing/music, collaborations or content of the video (Bhatia, 2018; García-Rapp, 2016); however, the question of how these social and cultural factors play a role in achieving YouTube fame has not been addressed in the Malaysian context.

The U&G 2.0 is concerned with the usage of social media which further reflect on the fulfilment that people seek from it (Sundar & Limperos, 2013). Four aspects of gratifications from social media were identified and adapted by previous studies done by Malik et al. (2016) and Whiting and Williams

(2013). Focusing on the main social and psychological origins of university students in Klang Valley watching YouTube, three categories were identified– entertainment, comedy and education. Furthermore, once a viewer lands on YouTube, it is interesting to know what keeps the viewer engaged in terms of the mentioned categories (Lipschultz, 2014). For example, a viewer might be attracted to a video solely because they share a certain set of cultural norms or the viewer is engaged by/relates to the emotiveness of the YouTuber. Kelman’s social influence theory states that an individual’s behaviour is affected by three social processes: compliance, identification and internalization (Kelman, 1958). Adopting two processes from Kelman’s social influence theory: internalization and identification, the socio-cultural factors of this study were identified.

3. Research Questions

Originating from the literature review and theoretical framework, twenty-five hypothesis were developed and tested. H1 and its sub-hypotheses have been listed. The following H2-H5 follow the same pattern.

H1: Ethnic values and beliefs have a significant influence on a YouTuber’s fame

H1a: Ethnic values and beliefs have a significant influence on YouTuber’s fame in the entertainment category

H1b: Ethnic values and beliefs have a significant influence on YouTuber’s fame in the lifestyle category

H1c: Ethnic values and beliefs have a significant influence on YouTuber’s fame in the education category

H1d: Ethnic values and beliefs have a significant influence on YouTuber’s fame in the comedy category.

H2, 2a, 2b, 2c, 2d: Shared interests have a significant influence a YouTuber’s fame (entertainment, lifestyle, education and comedy)

H3, 3a, 3b, 3c, 3d: Aesthetic experience have a significant influence a YouTuber’s fame (entertainment, lifestyle, education and comedy)

H4, 4a, 4b, 4c, 4d: Personality characteristics has a significant influence on a YouTuber’s fame (entertainment, lifestyle, education and comedy)

H5, 5a, 5b, 5c, 5d: Cultural identity has a significant influence on a YouTuber’s fame (entertainment, lifestyle, education and comdy)

4. Purpose of the Study

Based on previous studies and two theories (U&G 2.0 and Kelman’s social influence theory), this study will examine the influence of socio-cultural factors (ethnic values and beliefs, shared interests, aesthetic experience, personality characteristics and cultural identity) on YouTuber’s fame (overall) and within certain famous YouTube categories (comedy, lifestyle, entertainment and education) among university students in Klang Valley.

5. Research Methods

Using random sampling, the study was conducted via an online questionnaire at universities in Klang valley, Malaysia with students within the ages of 19-26 years. A total of 230 responses were used for descriptive and regression analysis. Items for the questionnaire were adopted from previous studies of Ifinedo (2016); Rathnayake & Winter (2018); Sundar and Limperos (2013).

6. Findings

Out of the 230 responses, 105 (45.7%) were male and 125 (54.3%) were female. More than half of the respondents were 19-22 years old (74.3%) and the rest were 23-26 years old (25.7%). Many of the respondents were from Asia (83.5%) while others were from Middle East, Africa and Australia. 170 students (73.9%) were enrolled in a private educational institution while 60 students (26.1%) in public educational institution. The highest representatives of the respondents were pursuing a bachelor's degree (64.3%), followed by foundation programs (15.7%), college - A-levels / SAM (12.6%), diploma (4.3%) and master's degree (3.0%).

The descriptive statistics showed that shared interests had the highest overall mean (mean=3.93, SD=0.654). The second highest were, aesthetic experience (mean=3.90, SD=0.578) and personality characteristics (mean=3.90, SD=0.578), followed by cultural identity (mean=3.81, SD=0.672) and YouTube fame (mean=3.81, SD=0.672). The variable with the lowest mean is ethnic values and beliefs (mean=3.60, SD=0.602).

The following findings are reported based on the regression analysis used to test the hypotheses of this study. The test was conducted in order to identify the impact of independent variable on the dependent variable. The twenty five hypothesis are tested using the standard coefficient beta (β) values and sig. (p-values).

6.1. Hypotheses 1, 1a, 1b, 1c, 1d

The results (Table 01) showed that there is no significant influence of ethnic values and beliefs on YouTube fame ($\beta = -0.043$, $p > 0.05$). Hence, Hypotheses 1 and its sub-hypotheses are rejected.

Table 1. Summary of hypotheses testing (H1, H1a, H1b, H1c, H1d)

Hypotheses	Beta (β)	p	Findings	
H1	Ethnic values and beliefs → YouTuber's fame	-0.043	0.553	Not supported
H1a	Ethnic values and beliefs → Entertainment	-0.080	0.310	Not supported
H1b	Ethnic values and beliefs → Lifestyle	0.046	0.544	Not supported
H1c	Ethnic values and beliefs → Education	-0.068	0.380	Not supported
H1d	Ethnic values and beliefs → Comedy	-0.065	0.407	Not supported

6.2. Hypotheses 2, 2a, 2b, 2c, 2d

The results (Table 02) showed that there is no significant influence of shared interests on YouTube fame ($\beta = -0.055$, $p > 0.05$). Hence, Hypotheses 2 and its sub-hypotheses are rejected.

Table 2. Summary of hypotheses testing (H2, H2a, H2b, H2c, H2d)

Hypotheses	Beta (β)	p	Findings	
H2	Shared interests → YouTuber's fame	0.055	0.451	Not supported
H2a	Shared interests → Entertainment	0.058	0.460	Not supported
H2b	Shared interests → Lifestyle	0.214	0.001	Not supported
H2c	Shared interests → Education	0.095	0.225	Not supported
H2d	Shared interests → Comedy	-0.108	0.170	Not supported

6.3. Hypotheses 3, 3a, 3b, 3c, 3d

The results (Table 03) showed that there is no significant influence of shared interests on YouTube fame ($\beta = -0.055$, $p > 0.05$). Hence, Hypotheses 2 and its sub-hypotheses are rejected.

Table 3. Summary of hypotheses testing (H3, H3a, H3b, H3c, H3d)

Hypotheses	Beta (β)	p	Findings	
H3	Aesthetic experience → YouTuber's fame	0.300	0.000	Supported
H3a	Aesthetic experience → Entertainment	0.229	0.001	Supported
H3b	Aesthetic experience → Lifestyle	0.214	0.534	Supported
H3c	Aesthetic experience → Education	0.233	0.000	Supported
H3d	Aesthetic experience → Comedy	0.280	0.000	Supported

6.4. Hypotheses 4, 4a, 4b, 4c, 4d

The results (Table 04) showed that there is no significant influence of personality characteristics on YouTube fame ($\beta = 0.023$, $p > 0.05$). Hence, Hypotheses 2 and its sub-hypotheses are rejected.

Table 4. Summary of hypotheses testing (H4, H4a, H4b, H4c, H4d)

Hypotheses	Beta (β)	p value	Findings	
H4	Personality characteristics → YouTuber’s fame	0.023	0.754	Not supported
H4a	Personality characteristics → Entertainment	-0.009	0.908	Not supported
H4b	Personality characteristics → Lifestyle	0.048	0.534	Not supported
H4c	Personality characteristics → Education	0.035	0.661	Not supported
H4d	Personality characteristics → Comedy	-0.009	0.909	Not supported

6.5. Hypotheses 2, 2a, 2b, 2c, 2d

The results (Table 05) showed that there is a significant influence of cultural identity on YouTube fame ($\beta= 0.345$, $p<0.05$). Hence, Hypotheses 3 and its sub-hypotheses are accepted. This implies that 34.5% variation in YouTuber fame is explained by cultural identity.

Table 5. Summary of hypotheses testing (H5, H5a, H5b, H5c, H5d)

Hypotheses	Beta (β)	p value	Findings	
H5	Cultural identity → YouTuber’s fame	0.345	0.000	Supported
H5a	Cultural identity → Entertainment	0.321	0.000	Supported
H5b	Cultural identity → Lifestyle	0.242	0.002	Supported
H5c	Cultural identity → Education	0.236	0.003	Supported
H5d	Cultural identity → Comedy	0.347	0.000	Supported

7. Conclusion

This study has shown that aesthetic experience and cultural identity to have the most influence on the YouTube fame. The results are in line to the previous studies of James (2017) and Whiting and Williams (2013) that have shown viewer’s sense of belonging play an important role in a YouTubers path to fame and Park et al. (2017) and Cheung and Lee (2010) that cultural aspects have a significant link with YouTube views. It was also seen that if the two significantly influencing variables (aesthetic experience and cultural identity) were removed, other variables (shared interest, ethnic values and beliefs and personality characteristics) showed a significant influence on YouTube fame. This shows that aesthetic experience and cultural identity are very highly considered by university students in Klang Valley.

Introducing both the theories in a different perspective (i.e. focusing on YouTube), this study provides empirical evidence in relation to the Kelman’s social influence theory as it has previously been

used in qualitative studies of consumer consumption. This study further adds empirical evidence to the body of the knowledge in U&G 2.0, by applying the theory specifically to YouTube as an emerging social media platform and by introducing lifestyle as another aspect of watching YouTube videos. This study has provided evidence for upcoming YouTubers whose focus is mainly Asian people to create videos that are visually pleasing, have an emotional connection or represent their cultural aspects vividly. Therefore, upcoming YouTubers will be able to utilise these results facilitate their YouTube career.

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