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## In the Time of the Microcelebrity: Celebrification and the YouTuber Zoella

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This article discusses the temporal changes in celebrity culture occasioned by the dissemination of digital media, social network sites, and video-sharing platforms, arguing that, in contemporary celebrity culture, different temporalities are connected to the performance of celebrity in different media: a temporality of plenty, of permanent updating related to digital media celebrity; and a temporality of scarcity distinctive of large-scale international film and television celebrities. The article takes issue with the term *celebrification* and suggests that celebrification on social media platforms works along a temporality of permanent updating, of immediacy and authenticity. Taking UK YouTube vlogger and microcelebrity Zoella as the analytical case, the article points out that 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.

*Keywords:* celebrification, microcelebrity, YouTubers, vlogging, social media, celebrity culture

YouTubers are a huge phenomenon online. The name *YouTubers* refers to video bloggers (vloggers) who regularly post videos on their personal YouTube channels.<sup>1</sup> Quite a few vloggers have accumulated millions of views and equally high numbers of subscribers. Right now, the most watched vlogs are uploaded by young men who film themselves playing videogames while they simultaneously comment on the play.<sup>2</sup> Another much-watched category is the comedy and satire vlog, and a third is the beauty and style vlog in which lifestyle vloggers offer advice and share their everyday lives—in the tradition of the webcam culture from the beginning of the new millennium (Senft, 2008). One such “Internet famous” (Tanz, 2008) lifestyle and beauty vlogger is Brighton-based Zoe Sugg (born 1990).

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<sup>1</sup> According to Burgess and Green (2009a, p. 96), vlogs make up almost half of the top 30 most-subscribed channels on YouTube.

<sup>2</sup> The most famous of these is Swedish, UK-based player Felix Kjellberg, aka “PewDiePie,” who has almost 42 million subscribers and more than 11 billion views of his “Let’s Play” videos.

Zoe Sugg is the second-most successful UK vlogger outside of music vlogging. She has uploaded videos on YouTube since 2007—first on the beauty and lifestyle channel *Zoella* and, since 2012, also on the somewhat overlapping, more intimate day-in-the-life video channel *More Zoella*.<sup>3</sup> In February 2016, the vlogger celebrated hitting 10 million subscribers to *Zoella*, which has more than 575 million views. *More Zoella* has around 3.8 million subscribers and 377 million views.<sup>4</sup>

Celebrating the subscription milestone, Zoe Sugg wrote on her blog, *Zoella*:

When I started this, I had absolutely no idea that many people could even subscribe to a channel, let alone mine. I never had an end goal and I still don't which I think some people find quite hard to believe. There was never a certain number that I wanted to reach, or certain number of overall views, I just wanted to make videos I enjoyed that could entertain, distract or add something of value to someone's day whether that was a smile, some reassurance or a recommendation for a new lipstick. The feedback was instant and it was like nothing I had ever experienced on social media before. Suddenly I felt like I could interact in a new and very exciting way. It was only me and a camera, but after a while it didn't feel like that anymore. Suddenly I had more and more people interested in what I was filming and here we are now, still talking about lipstick but to an eight digit audience. Almost daily I am reminded by your emails, letters and constant messages of support how much my videos mean to you, and what they mean to you and every time I hit upload it's you that I have in mind. . . . Every time I hit a milestone, i'm [*sic*] reminded that if you want something and you work hard at it, but more importantly if you love it with every bone in your body, it will all work out in the end and I'm so glad I kept going when I wasn't sure what I was doing or where this was going. I'm so lucky that I get to do the things I love and have the support of such a varied audience.<sup>5</sup>

The excerpt is typical of Zoella's intimate and inclusive here-and-now way of addressing her followers. Moreover, it can be read as a kind of statement about her way of practicing authenticity: first, by constantly invoking her followers as fans; second, by identifying herself as an honest and unpretentious person who got an idea and followed it because it felt right for her, never really caring about the size of her following; third, by performing connectedness (van Dijck, 2013) and availability. Undoubtedly, Zoella orchestrates a girlish lifestyle/"lipstick" universe with herself at the visual center. According to her milestone blog post, her followers are mainly between 18 and 25; however, others describe them as tweens and teenage girls (Sheffield, 2014). This article is not about Zoella's appeal to girls. Rather, I am interested in using her "YouTube celebrity" (Marwick, 2013a) status as one example of the changes that have taken place in celebrity culture within the past decade, how the Internet has fostered its own celebrity circuits, and how the production of celebrity has spread to a range of cultural

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<sup>3</sup> I use *Zoella* instead of *Zoe Sugg* when I am referring to the vlogs and the vlogger, and *Zoe Sugg* when I talk about her activities outside YouTube.

<sup>4</sup> As of February 2016 (see Dredge, 2016), Zoella ranks second in most views among how-to and lifestyle vloggers on VidStatsX. Retrieved from <http://vidstatsx.com/youtube-top-100-most-viewed-people-vlogs>.

<sup>5</sup> See <https://www.zoella.co.uk/2016/02/10-million-subscribers.html>.

practices that differ depending upon media and genre. Hence, digital media genres, blogs, social networking sites, and sites for uploading and sharing of user-generated content<sup>6</sup> have, to a heretofore unseen extent, created celebrified selves, "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). Accordingly, through a diversity of bottom-up processes, bloggers, vloggers, and users on social networking sites may be constructed as celebrities; as such, "[t]he performance of celebrity has become part of the daily practice of millions of consumers" (Hackley & Hackley, 2015, p. 469).

In the final part of this article, I use vlogger Zoella as a case illustrating contemporary processes of celebrification and the celebrified self that is called *microcelebrity* and enabled by social media. The intention of the article is to pursue the argument that, in contemporary celebrity culture, different temporalities are connected to the performance of celebrity in different media; hence, I suggest that the performance of microcelebrity is structured in accordance with a different temporality than what has been called "mainstream" celebrity (for example, Marwick, 2013a; Senft, 2008). As Zoella's celebration blog post and her vlogs exemplify, celebrification on social network sites establish a temporality of permanent updating, of immediacy, and of instantaneity. Correspondingly, this address presupposes immediate responses on the part of audiences in the form of views, likes, subscriptions, and so on. Moreover, celebrity practices (Marwick & boyd, 2011) enabled by social media platforms are connected with the display of accessibility, presence, and authenticity. As such, 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.

In the first part of the article, therefore, I outline in more theoretical terms changes in celebrity culture in the last decade brought about by the Internet and social media platforms. I unpack the term *celebrification*, summarizing how it has been variously understood in the celebrity studies literature; I emphasize the practice aspect encompassed by the term and how it may usefully remind us that celebrity has always been a doing, constituted in and by the interaction of social agents and media institutions at different points in time. Moreover, I point out how celebrity logic has spread from media institutions to a range of less demarcated and, as such, less institutionally supported communication arenas, concomitant with changes in the working of celebrity logic away from performances of the extraordinary and a temporality of scarcity and delay toward performances of the private and a temporality defined by immediacy and abundance.

In the second part of the article, I take issue with the term *microcelebrity* and the favoring of the private brought about by the diffusion of celebrification processes across digital media. Finally, in the third part of the article, I return to vlogger Zoella to outline in more detail how she practices accessibility, authenticity, and the temporality of *nowness* and *connectedness* and, moreover, how the broadening of

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<sup>6</sup> I subsume social networking sites and sites for uploading and sharing user-generated content under the term *social media platforms* in this article (cf. van Dijck, 2013); van Dijck also calls YouTube a social network site.

her field of operation to include more traditional media changed the temporality of instantaneity constructed on YouTube. In the last section of the article, I conclude that the classical definition of celebrity as the result of a transition from ordinary anonymity to celebrity status at a crucial point in time on one hand and microcelebrity on the other as a more diffuse continuum of performing the self seems not only to work within two different media circuits but also to unfold along two different temporalities.

### **Celebrity and Celebrification as Practice**

The vast literature on celebrities includes a variety of definitions. However, most of them have in common an understanding of *celebrity* as a distinct social position marked by an exclusive and privileged distance to the mundane and ordinary. Chris Rojek, for example, suggested that celebrity is “the attribution of glamorous or notorious status to an individual within the public sphere” (2001, p. 10). Graeme Turner claimed in a similar, although more categorical, way and with an emphasis on time:

We can map the precise moment a public figure becomes a celebrity. It occurs at the point at which media interest in their activities is transferred from reporting on their public role . . . to investigating the details of their private life. (Turner, 2004, p. 8; see also Turner, Bonner, & Marshall, 2000, for this definition)

Even so, it appears from the list of online celebrity terms at the beginning of this article that in more recent writing, celebrity is distinctive of broader and less demarcated positions in a social media culture that produces, in the somewhat blunt words of Rojek, a “ubiquity of the celebrity race” (2001, p. 185). Thus, within studies of celebrity culture, there has been a move away from celebrity as a being to a doing and from celebrity to celebrification.

The term *celebrification*, too, has been put to use in different ways in celebrity studies. Graeme Turner uses it specifically for online stardom and claims that “on the internet [*sic*], in particular, ‘celebrification’ has become a familiar mode of cyber-self-presentation” (2010, p. 14). Yet, before the rise of a new media-induced breed of celebrity, Chris Rojek (2001) used *celebrification* to designate a broader and more diffuse cultural performance of mediated visibility, “the *general tendency* to frame social encounters in mediagenic filters” (p. 186, emphasis added), and he further explains *mediagenic* as “elements and styles that are compatible with conventions of self-projection and interaction, fashioned and refined by the mass media” (p.187). Along the same line, Gamson (1994) used *celebrification* already in the mid-1990s to point to the spread of what he called celebrity logic to institutional areas outside the film and media industry—for example, politics and sports.

On a par with Turner’s 2010 use of *celebrification*, Rojek’s pre-social media specification of the term foreshadowed remarkably precisely the public performance of selves in an online media culture in which communicative networks of following and followers are intimately tied to the commodification and branding of selves and in which, as Theresa Senft (2013) argues, the “erosion between private and public has spread beyond those who are famous and those who wish to be famous” (p. 351). In the era of the Internet, processes of celebrification are no longer solely attached to large media corporations; by contrast, “we see the process of celebrification trickling down” (Marwick & boyd, 2011, p. 141).

However, more in keeping with the initial definitions of *celebrity* by Turner and Rojek, *celebrification* has also been used for a transition from ordinary person to celebrity. Hence, Nick Couldry (2004) uses *celebrification* to refer to the process through which the ordinary (understood as that which is outside the media) acquires a media form. In his article about the reality game show *Big Brother*, Couldry (2004) claimed that a “process of celebrification” was the very idea of the program: “It was precisely the transition from ordinary (non-media) person to celebrity (media) person that was the purpose of the game. This was the master-frame without which the game made no sense” (p. 289).

As a consequence of the different understandings—even different spellings of the term, Driessens (2012) sets out to unravel this confusion and makes the case, consistent with Couldry (2004), that celebrification is reserved for specific transitions from nonmedia to media person. That is, it labels the particular process by which ordinary people or public figures are transformed into celebrities. Furthermore, in the context of mediatization theory (see for example, the extensive *Mediatization of Communication Handbook* [Lundby, 2014]), Driessens (2012) claims that the similarly-used term *celebritization* “occurs not at the individual, but at the social fields level” (p. 643) and suggests that it should be reserved for what he, following Krotz (2007), designates as a *metaprocess*, a more thorough process of change influencing culture and society on all levels and over a larger historical span. Accordingly, Driessens (2012) uses *celebritization* to cover significant social and cultural changes over time and regards the term as “on a par with globalization, individualization or mediatization” (p. 643).<sup>7</sup>

In line with other mediatization scholars, Driessens emphasizes that these large-scale processes should not be understood as merely including a linear and quantitative growth over time: “It would be misleading to think of celebritization as simply an increase of celebrity in space and time” (Driessens, 2012, p. 643). Celebrities may have only local fame; along the same line, one can talk about the celebritization of, for example, the fields of sports or politics over a certain period, but still, not all politicians or athletes are subjected to processes of celebritization.

Driessens’s delimited understanding of celebrification corresponds to the way Turner and Couldry defined celebrity as a mediation process in the beginning of the 2000s, the transformation from nonmedia to media person at “precise moments” in time. However, as a result of the changes in the working of celebrity culture caused by the Internet and social media platforms and the increased scholarly focus on celebrity as practice, this understanding of celebrification seems too limited. The reality game show Couldry wrote about was at once orchestrated and celebrated the transition from ordinary to extraordinary as a leap at a memorable point in time. However, since the first *Big Brother* finale around the turn of the millennium, it has become much more difficult to localize a position outside the media. *Big Brother* marked a turning point in celebrity culture. It marked the finalization of celebrity as a distinct and exclusive phenomenon defined by distance and scarcity. *Big Brother*’s narrative of the passage into the realm of what the finale so insistently constituted as the privileged and exceptional few has been surpassed by a

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<sup>7</sup> Again, Gamson (1994) is at the forefront. He does not use either *mediatization* or *celebritization* and is primarily worried about the *celebrification* of politics. But he says, “Entertainment celebrity is an imperialist phenomenon, moving into new arenas and making them over into its own image” (Gamson, 1994, p. 191).

media culture in which celebrity, to a much lesser degree, is about stepping into the media as a totally different realm and is not solely orchestrated by large media institutions.

Celebrity today is also enabled by social media and enacted by ordinary persons who successfully manage the self as spectacle (Hearn, 2008) and are rewarded instantly for their invitations to connect by means of subscribers and followers. Consequently, I would like to suggest a broader understanding of the term *celebrification* that puts celebrity into focus as a cultural and communicative practice that is not, per se, embedded in the operations of larger media institutions but nevertheless works in accordance with celebrity logic. Correspondingly, celebrity logic encompasses the inherent dynamic in processes of celebrification. As such, celebrity logic should be understood as the historically and media-specific ways in which the assumptions of celebrity—coined by Richard Dyer as a field of tension between pairs of oppositional dimensions such as public-private and ordinary-extraordinary (Dyer, 1979/1989, 1986/2004)—are negotiated in different ways.

A celebrification approach studies how performances of celebrity unfold: ways in which celebrity logic's "grammar" (Altheide & Snow, 1979) frames the negotiation and restructuring of the public-private and ordinary-extraordinary dimensions depending on media and media-historical contexts. In summary, celebrification is not only, as Driessens and others suggest, "the transformation of individuals into celebrities" (Driessens, 2012, p. 653) but a communicative and cultural practice in which celebrity logic is played out in various ways and in various, sometimes interdependent, media circuits, depending on platforms' technological affordances and cultural and institutional modes of functioning.

By extension, celebrification does not apply solely to social media practices. Along the same line, celebrity logic is not only institutionally induced but the underlying logic that structures the working of dispersed networked communities on Internet platforms. Nevertheless, contemporary processes of celebrification are increasingly becoming social media practices, characterized by a specific temporality of permanent updating. Social-media-afforded celebrification is characterized by continuous and multiple uploads of performances of a private self; it is about access, immediacy, and instantaneity. By contrast, people we usually classify as big stars or celebrities (such as George Clooney, Angelina Jolie, Brad Pitt, Matt Damon, Jennifer Lawrence, and Scarlett Johansson, to name but a few) still cultivate distance, a temporality of scarcity, and performances of the extraordinary. They are not on social media or, if they are, have only very few tweets or uploads. They keep their private lives private and rarely have their photographs taken outside of official events. The value of scarcity and distance is still high and still a prominent part of contemporary celebrity culture. However, this form of celebrification constitutes quite another media temporality, which belongs to film and television and a traditional media circuit.

The temporality of plenty, of continuous uploads, can migrate into the performances of traditional celebrity culture, however. Some major celebrities also use social media. Mark Ruffalo, for example, is active on both Twitter (where he continuously posts, mostly about environmental and climate-change issues) and Instagram. He has 2 million followers on Instagram, where he presents himself as a "husband, father, actor, director, and a climate change and renewable energy advocate."<sup>8</sup> Ruffalo manages to

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<sup>8</sup> See <https://www.instagram.com/markruffalo/>

successfully orchestrate the temporality of permanent updating—being “Internet famous” through regular postings about his private and ordinary life. However, this fame departs from and is embedded within his status as a “mainstream” celebrity, which, in turn, frames his communication with followers. Uploading photos on Instagram does not in itself entail the claim to connectedness and direct communication with fans that, for example, most YouTubers practice on their vlogs. On the contrary, celebrities may have many, many followers, but their Instagram profiles, for example, also reveal that they seldom follow others and rarely respond to comments on their profiles. To that extent, Ruffalo provides access to glimpses of his private life even as he refrains from performances of connectedness.

Ruffalo posted a short video in late February showing him performing an astounded face with a caption that reads: “When a man realizes he has crossed the 2million followers on Instagram threshold. Wow! Thanks all!”<sup>9</sup>. Even though he thanks his followers, the grimacing face adds an ironic distance to the whole Instagram communication, as if he were only there for himself and did not really care about followers. Thus, Ruffalo complies with social media temporality and its claim to presence and authenticity; however, at the same time, he does not comply with microcelebrity’s performance of inclusivity and connectedness.

### **Celebrifying the Private Self: Microcelebrity**

YouTubers are at the center of Internet celebrity and they are core examples of performances of self as microcelebrity in a culture of universal promotion (Wernick, 1992). The term *microcelebrity* (Gamson, 2011; Marwick, 2013a, 2013b; Marwick & boyd, 2011; Senft, 2008, 2013) has commonly been used for online exposure. A distinctive “Internet-enabled visibility” (Marwick, 2013a, p. 114), microcelebrity implies an online following but may, nevertheless, be micro in scope (Gamson, 2011). Microcelebrity is, first and foremost, a particular online performance designed for self-branding, “the presentation of oneself as a celebrity regardless of who is paying attention” (Marwick, 2013a, p. 114). Microcelebrity is a communicative practice, a “way of thinking of oneself as a celebrity, and treating others accordingly” (Marwick, 2013a, p. 115). The temporality of microcelebrity is right at the center of what constitutes contemporary processes of celebrification, which, to a still larger degree, involve performances of access and presence.

Contemporary celebrity practices favor performances of the private, and this might be the most important change to have taken place in “the game of celebrity” (Senft, 2013, p. 350). Negotiations and tensions between celebrities, fans, and media regarding access to stars’ private lives have constituted the core of celebrity logic since the beginning of the 20th century, coincident with the rise of the star system. During this entire period, stars and celebrities have from time to time released photographs from their private homes showing them doing mundane stuff such as reading a newspaper or playing with their children. But photographs of film stars from the 1930s through the 1950s were scarce and staged a formal self, a public and studio-controlled “privateness” (Mortensen & Jerslev, 2014) that was close and distant at the same time but never intimate. Around 2000, reality television profoundly changed the relationship

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<sup>9</sup> See <https://www.instagram.com/p/BCMaGAKLDZn/?taken-by=markruffalo>

between the mediated private and public and created celebrities through seemingly unlimited exposure of the intimate and private.

In the present media landscape, the “‘star system’ of YouTube” (Burgess & Green, 2009b, p. 24) is one important field in which this blurring of boundaries between the private and the public characteristic of not only celebrity culture but also contemporary media culture as a whole is played out—to the extent that Andreas Kitzmann, already in 2003, talked about “the online collapse of the public/private divide” (p. 58). Attention-creating performances of a private authentic self are the most valuable commodity in social media celebrification. Marwick’s definition of microcelebrity as thinking of oneself as a celebrity and treating others accordingly is another way of saying that the production of attention is reciprocal; success or failure in social media and in the “star system of YouTube” is immediately readable by the number of followers, likes, subscribers, and so on.

Microcelebrity produces the self as brand and commodity; online processes of celebrification today merge commodification and branding smoothly with intimacy and authenticity (Jerslev & Mortensen, 2015). Vloggers display this sense of an authentic self through their straight-to-camera communication, making vlogging the self-realizing result of their individual creative efforts. Therefore, despite successful vloggers’ continuous claim to the ordinary (Zoella and her community of vlogger friends vlog from their own houses—often from their bedrooms—doing what Jean Burgess [2008] calls “virtuosic bedroom performances” [p. 105]), they are also exceptionally successful in their entrepreneurial endeavors. The idea of “vernacular creativity” (Burgess & Green, 2009b, p. 25) and an authentic personal drive as the means to fame is expressed by vlogger Joe Sugg (ThatcherJoe), the equally successful brother of Zoella (Zoe Sugg), echoed in his description of an identity between hobby and work:

“Me and my sister have always been very creative from an early age. We would spend all of our pocket money on blank tapes to make our own radio station,” he says. “When she discovered blogging, and then YouTube, she showed me and I was really intrigued by it. I thought, wow, that’s something I genuinely have an interest in. Then I started doing this as a hobby. Then it snowballed and snowballed.” (Wallop, 2015)

Finally, microcelebrity comprises a sense of self-government. Because of the widespread conception of YouTube as a bottom-up social media platform, it is believed that young microcelebrities are not enlisted into the powerful and commercialized system sustaining celebrity culture (cf. Gamson, 2011; Marwick, 2013a). This idea of autonomy, therefore, underpins their trustworthiness and authenticity. The final part of this article analyzes how Zoella practices microcelebrity on her YouTube channels. I discuss how she manages to create a sense of closeness to her huge following by her address and performances of continuity, authenticity, and connectedness. Moreover, I show how passing “through the gatekeeping mechanisms of old media” (Burgess & Green, 2009b, p. 24) affected the temporality inherent in her microcelebrity.

### Microcelebrity Zoella: "Simply Vlogging My Life"

Zoe Sugg has ironically been hailed as "the most famous woman in Britain you've never heard of" and "a celebrity in a parallel world that passes under the radar for most of us" (Retter, 2014, para. 1, 10). Retter's assertion was published before the launch of Zoe Sugg's first novel, which was said to be the fastest selling book in the UK in 2014. Even so, the journalist's at once ignorant and arrogant "most of us" definitely ignored several hundred million views of her videos and excluded Zoella's huge audience of tweens and teenage girls whom she greets with a cheerful smile at the beginning of each video and the phatic exclamation, "Hellooo everybodyyy!" or "Hellooo you guys!" Zoella has, indeed, managed to create a "publicizable personality" (Marwick, 2013a, p. 117). In tutorials in the "Hair" and "Beauty" series as well as in "Fashion and Style" videos, she gives advice on beauty and style—with an abundance of product placements and references to brands and shops while simultaneously managing to appear as herself. She also invites viewers to "know more about me." Seemingly generously, she shares her at once extraordinary and ordinary life—mostly documented in "Day in the Life" vlogs on both channels. "Chopping Off My Hair,"<sup>10</sup> for example, starts in the typical manner of Zoella's vlogs: "Hi, everyone. I wanted to vlog today because I feel like today is quite a big day in Zoella history."

Zoella is part of a community of prominent UK vloggers, which includes her brother, Joe Sugg (aka ThatcherJoe); her boyfriend, Alfie Deyes (running PointlessBlog); and her friend Louise Pentland (who runs Sprinkleofglitter). Links on the right side of the *More Zoella* channel provide access to videos from their channels and other friends' channels. The group of YouTubers also collaborates in making vlogs, thus constituting a dynasty of vloggers who mutually recommend each other's videos.

Regardless of content, Zoella's vlogs are centered around performances of authenticity (this is the real, private me even though I also lead this extraordinary life), trustworthiness ("I am lucky to do the things I love," as she wrote in her celebration blog post), access (the continuous invoking of "you guys") and a temporality of presence and continuity (I am right here in front of you again right now) such as, for example, when she aims her camera at some solid bathing soap dissolving in a foam of colors in her bathtub and, with her characteristic emphasis on nowness, urges her audience: "You can watch as it happens."<sup>11</sup>

First is Zoella's communication with her followers, whom she addresses directly, straight to camera, thereby giving the impression of connectedness, with continuous updates on her life. She may use a confessional discourse (for example, in the vlog about her recurrent anxiety attacks and in a vlog about "how it all got too much");<sup>12</sup> and from time to time, she whispers confidentially to her followers.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Published January 22, 2015, retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FYc-rzREej4>.

<sup>11</sup> See, for example, "London Fun, Crying in a Car and Hair Twins," published September 7, 2014, retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VyHdy3d8AIU&list=PLojKWDZSIitTD7Vfyt89DAzx375H5A9wZx&index=19>.

<sup>12</sup> "Sometimes It All Gets a Bit Too Much." published June 22, 2014. This vlog has been removed from her channel but can be retrieved at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AX92z4Bny50>. "Dealing With Panic

She may seek immediate advice by asking her audience whether a pair of trousers is okay on her, as if all her followers were her girlfriends. Finally, she repeatedly assures her audience by the end of a vlog that she loves them, as if they were not millions of anonymous followers but a microcommunity of a few dozen well-known friends: "I just love you so much—I hope you know that. I hope you enjoyed the video today, and I'll see you again tomorrow."<sup>14</sup> On Zoella's channels, the time of the microcelebrity is a time of plenty: continuous uploads and perpetual presence.

Second, Zoella is careful in the tutorials to communicate a sense of equality with her audience and, hence, to accentuate ordinariness. Repeatedly, she emphasizes that she is not a professional expert but simply an amateur who wants to share her personal interests. She states, for example, in the vlog "My Everyday Makeup Routine" that she is

by no means an expert in make-up or an expert in fashion tutorials. This is my very first try. I just do my makeup, how I think I like it and I use techniques I enjoy to use, and it doesn't necessarily mean that you have to do it this way, but this is just the way I do it.<sup>15</sup>

Other tutorials also start by reminding the viewer, "as you know, I am no expert." A shrewd opening in which she at once constructs a sense of temporal continuity and includes followers and subscribers as close, informed, and loyal fans. Another way of giving off spontaneity and performing "ordinary expertise" (Bonner, 2003) is by showing ignorance of names of the makeup tools she presents. She always informs the viewer of the brands, colors, and sizes of her brushes and makeup products. She may exclaim that she "absolutely loves" a particular tool. However, most often, she seems to need to look at the brush or the foundation to remember the name—on some occasions not even reading it right. This performance of ignorance attaches authenticity to situations in which brand names are mentioned over and over, as if she were assuring viewers that she had neither rehearsed nor been tutored, let alone made endorsement deals with makeup brands. Along the same line is her repeated disclosure of nervousness (before doing a tutorial) or of being scared (before going on a live TV chat show or meeting with a large crowd of fans). A final example of the way she constructs connectedness is her recurrent claim to an ordinary look—for example, by filming herself without makeup, showing spots on her face. Similarly, she opens her January 18, 2016, "My Everyday Makeup Routine" vlog by saying that she "hasn't done an everyday makeup video" for a long time, but

as you can see, I have zero makeup on, and that is because I wanted to do my makeup on camera with you, so you could see what I was doing . . . I will not say tutorial because, as we all know, all I do is put my makeup on . . . not necessarily the way

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Attacks and Anxiety," published November 7, 2012, retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7-iNOFD27G4>.

<sup>13</sup> "London Fun, Crying in a Car and Hair Twins."

<sup>14</sup> "London Fun, Crying in a Car and Hair Twins."

<sup>15</sup> "My Everyday Makeup Routine," published June 23, 2013, retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CrOAVLICvhw>.

you're supposed to do it, but this is the way I like to do it and you guys really like these videos, so I wanted to do another one.<sup>16</sup>

Zoella's continuous performances of spontaneity add to the feeling of authenticity: not cutting out linguistic errors or mistakes, inviting followers to share tiny moments of accidental occurrences. She invites followers to share her everyday routines in her "Day in the Life" vlogs. She films when she gets up in the morning; when she chats with her boyfriend, Alfie, at home or in their car; when friends are coming over; and when she looks at her dog. She lets the camera pan her messy or, at other times, more perfectly styled apartment. She takes it into her bed. Usually, the camera is handheld, seemingly inviting audiences to be close at all times.

Third, she performs authenticity through straight confessional videos. A much-watched vlog (almost 3.5 million views and 27,000 comments by February 2016) is "Dealing with Panic Attacks and Anxiety," in which she confesses to having suffered from anxiety attacks for years and then explains the condition and gives advice on how to cope with it. Similarly, the vlog "Sometimes It All Gets a Bit Too Much" (see fn. 12) displays a seemingly open and honest description of her relationship with her audience; the vlog works strategically to secure the continued loyalty of fans by means of Zoella's little girl appeal to the support and protection from "you guys."

The video starts with a written disclaimer:

If you have clicked this for 5 minutes of happy time, you will be disappointed. This is hard for me to upload, and i'm [*sic*] sorry it won't bring you any joy, come back tomorrow for a more upbeat video if you would rather skip this one. (YouTube, "Sometimes It All Gets a Bit Too Much")

After the disclaimer, we are invited into an intimate encounter with a crying Zoella, who, in close-up in her bed, sobbingly confesses:

I am not sure why I am filming this. I think, maybe, because this is part of my day, and I want you guys to know that. I'm a real person, and I am not perfect, and my life is not perfect, and sometimes this all gets too much . . . it's just too overwhelming . . . I don't want people to think I have this perfect life where I never get sad and nothing ever bothers me, where I edit out every bit of life I don't want you to see . . . It's important that you guys know that when I say you literally see 10 minutes of my day, you really just see 10 minutes of my day. (YouTube, "Sometimes It All Gets a Bit Too Much")

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<sup>16</sup> "My Everyday Makeup Routine," published January 18, 2016, retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PNidbHZBPxU>.

Zoella tearfully explains in this video that what started out as a joyful hobby has changed.<sup>17</sup> While the handheld camera is shaking a bit, Zoella sniffingly confides that she wants to make “you guys” happy. She admits that she is under a lot of pressure. She wants to put more effort into her videos and, full of sorrow, says that she feels like “I’m failing. I just feel like a big failure today. Big . . . old . . . failure.” “I feel like I have to do videos that you will enjoy rather than ones I enjoy making.” The video ends with Zoella waving her hand to her followers, saying: “I don’t know. I’m making no sense; I’ll probably not even upload this.”

The video projects a Zoella who is vulnerable and in need of emotional support from her followers. By appealing to viewers’ care and understanding, the video is an apt example of online celebrification as narrowing the gap between celebrity and followers in time and space. However, though more subtly and discreetly, Zoella also plays on the *extraordinary* chords. Repeatedly, she calls attention to her huge following and celebrified self—peaking with the 10 million subscribers celebration blog post<sup>18</sup>—by confessing that she is overwhelmed by her megasuccess about which she never dreamed. Even though “Sometimes It All Gets a Bit Too Much” is a performance of the ordinary, the video also complies with celebrity logic by touting a person who has become extraordinary.

### **Microcelebrity and “Mainstream” Celebrity**

Having shown how YouTube microcelebrity plays out in the case of Zoella with an emphasis on the performance of *nowness*, *authenticity*, and *connectedness*, the case is also illustrative of the relationship between microcelebrity and “mainstream” celebrity. Even though Snickars and Vonderau (2009) may be right that “most YouTube ‘stars’ never make it outside their own small Web community” (p. 12), this does not apply to Zoella. Size does matter. The larger the online fan community, the more views, the more interesting Internet celebrities become to advertisers and the whole celebrity entertainment business. Zoella and several members of her vlogger community are now clients of Gleam Futures, which “manages social talent” and whose business aim is to “develop, monetize and protect,” in particular, “individuals who have built considerable audience & influence on social media channels.”<sup>19</sup> Moreover, YouTube has promoted Zoella through TV, billboards, and print ads—for example, TV commercials during broadcasts of *The X Factor* (Dredge, 2016). However, it seems that Zoella’s enrollment in “mainstream” celebrity culture’s institutionalized monetizing machine with agents and advisors has put pressure on her claim to authenticity. It is also clear that the more her activities spread beyond YouTube, the more important it is for her continuous online branding of Zoella to be seen as not only authentic but also accessible.

Zoella’s brand has expanded from YouTube celebrity Zoella to “mainstream” celebrity Zoe Sugg.

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<sup>17</sup> As the video has been deleted from *More Zoella*, she may have decided that this video did not fit with the positive image and the cheerful demeanour toward viewers that is part of her brand—which she reconfirmed in her 10 million subscriber celebratory blog post.

<sup>18</sup> Zoella blogged but did not herself vlog about the milestone; however, boyfriend Alfie Deyes (PointlessBlog) published his vlog “10 Million Subscribers” January 31, 2016, retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rrrQ4u3Pcso>.

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.gleamfutures.com>.

She has appeared in numerous other media outside her YouTube channels—for example, on the daytime chat show *Loose Women*<sup>20</sup> and on the UK morning show *This Morning*; she has modeled for photographs alongside an interview in UK *Vogue*; she has launched a range of bath and beauty products under the name Zoella Beauty; she has been awarded Best British Vlogger several times; and she has done celebrity charity. Moreover, she (and her boyfriend, vlogger Alfie Deyes) were depicted in wax at Madame Tussaud's. On November 25, 2014, Zoe Sugg published her first novel, called *Girl Online*. It sold more than 78,000 copies the first week—more than the first *Harry Potter* books did (see for example Singh, 2014). The launch created immense publicity; however, it also caused a minor uproar in the English media.

It turned out that the book was ghostwritten with no indication in the press material or on the book cover, which proclaimed in the direct and inclusive address characteristic of Zoella that “[m]y dream has been to write a book, and I can’t believe it’s come true. *Girl Online* is my first novel and I am so excited for you to read it.” British journalists were harsh. Under the headline “Yes, using a ghost writer matters when your whole brand is built on being authentic,” Lucy Hunter Johnston (2014) informed readers of *The Independent* on December 8 that Zoe Sugg had not written *Girl Online* alone. A Penguin Books spokesperson confirmed that this was the case, and Johnston concluded: “And a million teenage hearts broke.” Some fans felt cheated (Runcie, 2015). Nevertheless, thousands of fans thumbed up her tweet on December 8 in which she wrote that she had, “of course,” had help to complete something she had never done before (Sanghini, 2014). Moreover, she used her YouTube channels for re-authentication and reconfirmation of herself as having control over her content.

In the vlog “Book Meeting, Date Night & Found the Missing Wallet,”<sup>21</sup> she repeated what she had stated in press releases in December about how scary it was to start writing her first book, how she obviously needed people to help her at that time, and how she is now working closely together with her editor on a second book. In much of the video, which she filmed while waiting for the editor to come to her apartment and work with her, she rambles about how much she wants to reveal the title and bits of content to “you guys,” how much she wants to tell it all and share it all.

Zoe Sugg’s second book, *Girl Online on Tour*, was released in October 2015. Several vlogs successively documented her life with the book: the reveal of the title, the launch, and book signings (for example, the “Brighton Book Signing & Cinema Date” vlog,<sup>22</sup> in which the camera pans hundreds of girls waiting in line). Many vlogs during October documented how the book expanded her status as a celebrity outside YouTube. It was striking, however, that with the expansion of Zoe Sugg’s presence in different media, the gap between herself and her followers widened—not only offline but also online—in space and in time.

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<sup>20</sup> Documented in her vlog “5 Million Subscribers & Live TV,” uploaded June 21, 2014, retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h67kO2Z9EXE&index=16&list=PLojKWDZSItTD7VfYt89DAzx375H5A9wZx>.

<sup>21</sup> Uploaded April 24, 2015, retrieved from [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0-m\\_8d5No5k](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0-m_8d5No5k).

<sup>22</sup> Uploaded October 25, 2015, retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ko4yywnThYI>.

Offline, typical celebrity precautions were taken with the aim of creating distance: Fans who waited for her to sign books were prohibited from taking photographs with her, and book signings were strictly for ticket holders. Moreover, she posted a tweet (February 17, 2015) in which she complained about pictures in the media of her newly bought home. Online, she stopped vlogging daily and even stopped blogging, allegedly because of too many hateful comments to her vlogs.<sup>23</sup> She withdrew a video that might be regarded as not fitting well with the spirit of creativity and optimism on her channels. In addition, part of the "Brighton Book Signing" vlog is not filmed by herself, and she is not shown in the picture. Zoella resumed vlogging quickly, and she took to blogging again after some months; she is also on all social media. Her Instagram profile resembles her vlogs; and on Twitter, she tweets mainly about her own vlogs, new and old, about her line of beauty products, and, in October 2015, extensively about her experiences with releasing the new book, the book signing tour, spending time in hotel rooms—and thanking fans for liking her book. She never forgets to urge followers to comment on vlogs, give thumbs up, tag her on Instagram, retweet her tweets, and go to her Twitter or Facebook profiles—even creatively suggesting how her face could be reused on Tumblr.<sup>24</sup> So, her scaling down of access online was quickly abandoned, and the temporality of continuous uploads resumed, albeit with longer intervals.

In summary, bearing in mind Fiske's (1991) classical notion of an intertextual media circuit, what characterizes microcelebrity practice and the temporality of continuous uploads is that it takes into account fan comments as a means to its very production of access and presence. Therefore, in a sense, microcelebrity constitutes its direct and immediate communication by the conflation of primary with tertiary texts. Implied in immediacy is the temporality of plenty in contrast to the traditional celebrity circuit connected primarily with film and television in which communication is indirect and grounded on a temporality of scarcity and delay.

### Conclusion

The aim of this article has been to outline changes in celebrity culture occasioned by the dissemination of digital media platforms. Social network sites and video-sharing platforms have profoundly changed the balance in celebrity construction toward the ordinary and the private, embodied in the practices of many microcelebrities. Performances of a private, authentic self are what is valued in social media celebrification through strategies of connectedness, accessibility, and intimacy. Even though the term *microcelebrity* refers to a large but also closed social media circuit, the processes of narrowing the gap between celebrities and fans have exerted influence on celebrity culture and contributed to changes in celebrity practices as a whole. Hence, celebrity is no longer an exclusive phenomenon defined by distance in space and scarcity in time.

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<sup>23</sup> The long text "Why I Stopped Daily Vlogging—Hate on the Internet," from November 8, 2014, has been removed from Zoella's blog archive. It can be retrieved from <http://zoella.siteblogs.net/2014/12/06/why-i-stopped-daily-vlogging-hate-on-the-internet/>.

<sup>24</sup> In "Autumn/Fall Makeup, Gold Eyes and Cherry Lips," published September 21, 2014, retrieved from [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_HE49HI4E-0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_HE49HI4E-0).

I have suggested that celebrity can be discussed with a focus on time and argued how contemporary celebrity culture unfolds along different temporalities; in contrast to “mainstream” celebrity, which has traditionally created celebrity value through a time of scarcity, microcelebrity values connectedness and permanent updating. Moreover, while celebrity has been regarded as a transformation at a particular moment in time, contemporary processes of celebrification unfold along a more diffuse continuum.

To set the theoretical framework for the discussion of this change, I have taken issue with the term *celebrification* and argued that it can usefully emphasize celebrity as a doing. Rather than exclusively regarding celebrification as denoting a change in social position with an entry into the media (a leap from the ordinary into the exclusive and glamorous), celebrification designates the continuous cultural processes by which celebrity is produced and reproduced.

Even though celebrification points toward celebrity practices in general, contemporary processes of celebrification are increasingly social media practices. Moreover, the term sheds light on ways celebrity logic has come to structure social interaction within wider institutional settings, omnipresent processes through which celebrified selves are constructed and reconstructed. Therefore, I have proposed to understand the term *celebrification* as covering the broad communicative and cultural practices in which the dimensions of celebrity logic—the ordinary and the extraordinary in celebrity appearance and the private and public part of the celebrity’s life—are played out in various ways, depending on changes in media and the differing social interactions afforded by these changes. If we want to understand changes in celebrity as practice over time, we can then usefully look at shifts in the ways the private is constituted and the move from a temporality of scarcity toward a temporality of permanent uploads of representations of the private and ordinary—yet extraordinary—self.

Finally, I have exemplified the ways celebrification strategies can establish temporality through the case of one successful (micro)celebrity, YouTube vlogger Zoella. Zoella was chosen for two reasons. First, her vlogs illuminate a microcelebrity’s ways of performing authenticity and connectedness by directly and inclusively addressing followers and thereby constructing a temporality of nowness and permanent upload. Second, Zoella’s is an interesting case because it shows what happens when microcelebrity migrates from social media to older media and more “mainstream” celebrity activities. When Zoella was accused of diminishing the trustworthiness and authenticity on which she had branded herself on YouTube, she immediately scaled down the temporality of plenty that was part of her brand. However, the case also shows that microcelebrity is not transformed into a secondary strategy once the gate has been opened to the “mainstream” celebrity media circuit. After her book scandal, Zoella’s YouTube channels helped to re-authenticate the vlogger and reinstall the value in the temporality of permanent uploading.

The article contributes to celebrity studies with a view of contemporary celebrity culture that focuses on temporality. I have argued that there are differing media temporalities at play in celebrity culture today, typically connected with different media: on one hand, a temporality of nowness, plenty, and continuity on social media and YouTube (the value of permanent uploads and direct communication),

and on the other hand, a temporality characterized by scarcity, sporadic media appearances, and distance in space. The latter is the traditional celebrity culture that is primarily enacted around big international (predominantly American) film and television celebrities, who are rarely or only sporadically on social media. However, some major celebrities (actors and actresses but also big names in music) skillfully use social media and the temporality of permanent uploading. They may reflect the fact that distance and scarcity may not continue to be a valuable asset and branding tool in celebrity culture. "Mainstream" celebrity, therefore, seems to be a somewhat misleading term, as opposed to *microcelebrity*, and I have therefore put *mainstream* in quotation marks throughout this article. Social media celebrity circuits are neither less nor more mainstream than others, and bottom-up processes of celebrification in social media are as much at the center of a culture in which the branding of self and construction of the self as a valuable commodity are crucial to communicative practices.

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