CONTENT MARKETING THROUGH YOUTUBE VLOGS: A DOMESTICATION THEORETIC APPROACH

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, we use the Domestication Theory as an approach to study 'Vlogging on YouTube', which is a popular content marketing activity for the current generations. Travel Vlogger couples from all over the world use this digital platform where they shed their inhibition of being outsiders and look at new spaces from a domesticated viewpoint, as it were. The present analysis considers Vlogs from the Spring of 2017 till Spring of 2020, created by 4 couples from three continents whose quality of videos, subscriber base, motivation, quality, and familiarity with the medium were the basis of choice. Methodologically, we will use 'qualitative observation' technique here within the parameters of Virtual Ethnography and Content Analysis. The vlogging method connects the viewers to socio-cultural webs of relationship (with locals and each other). The cultural spaces the vloggers cover is exotic and perhaps inexpensive. Each vlogger creates a storyline unique to her or his channel and develops a vlogging style that marks their generational values of defying the norms. An eye for capturing diversity, accepting an alternate lifestyle, and building a culture of dissimilarity are their standard and constant features in these vlogs. The paper highlights the domestication processes here and the skill required to develop such visual texts.

Keywords: Vlogging, YouTube, Intercontinental Travelling, Content Marketing Tool, Content Analysis and Domestication Theory.

INTRODUCTION

The term 'Domestication' as a concept provides a theoretical framework for this study showing how Travel Vlogger couples act as participant-observers in a novel socio-cultural setting to create their visual texts on *YouTube*. These travellers live out of their bags, exercise agency, and appropriate the platform of YouTube to market their vlogs in turn maintains domestication for the medium. 'Travel Vlogging,' as a marketing practice and a career, has emerged only in the recent times. The Vlogger Couples hail from different parts of the world, beleaguered by the society and the world around them, as they develop a new type of personal marketing in a unique setting. These vlogs have the potential of turning into a particular genre of Travel Marketing to highlight the shared cultural beliefs of the host community and the communities of their origin. The practices of the observed cultural spaces permeate into their lives to influence their social relations. The difference is that the travellers we have observed do not view this novel experience from the viewpoint of 'Cultural Other,' or from outside. Instead, they practically become a part of the host culture and community whose life they depict and market it for the viewer. However, they do not feel constrained to describe and narrate only verbally but employ several visual tools – beginning from

mobile to tablet to professional or semi-professional cameras for this narration and their narrative commentaries interspersed with local dialogues.

To house or post their narration, the Vloggers employ the media platform of *YouTube*, reinforcing the roles of these couples and satisfying their desire as travellers. The narrative representations mould travellers' memory with the newly acquired understanding of the host culture or travel place. In the process, they develop hybrid identities. While in some Asian cultural settings, the newfound identity always reaches a local name (just as Tagore had a Chinese name), these acquired identities often contribute to the resurgence of the host community's pride. They are often associated with familiar images of the country they visited, ensuring continuity with the local tradition.

The Travellers' defiance of all things grand or pompous now show up as their embattled identities seek validation. Coming from a relatively well-off background, with First world support, their utter disregard for creature comforts indicates a struggle between 'need' and 'choice' when they are traveling for their vlog contents.

This essay examines how the selected vlogs reflect the culture of the vloggers' own country and that of the visited countries and the everyday realities they face in a new space. The criterion of selection has to do with the domestication process that the vlogs facilitate for the couples and, in turn, for their audience taken up for study.

Besides the fact that 'vlogs' are multimodal, they do resemble 'blogs' to some extent. This statement is true because both are products of free agents working for themselves. Due to this feature, the mention of the term 'digital nomad' is apt for both. Travelogues, on the other hand, are channel driven, and usually sponsored, wherein the content (and also the story-line) is "created" by staff who get paid for their services from the channel. The motivation to work for oneself determines their narrative technique, too. The travelogue looks at the theme of the track and follows accordingly. Whereas vloggers try hard to stand out with their content, this can be through places visited, activities performed, stories narrated, or through presentation styles adopted. Travelogues are more set with viewer entertainment, but vloggers are more about viewer participation, allowing them to make their channel a success. Vloggers are also quite approachable and affected by audience response, which cannot be possible for Travelogues. One final point to consider is that travelogues have the freedom to reimagine the place according to their need, whereas vloggers visiting a site like everyday travellers more often than not face real business and people. They also try to do justice to this real-life and real-time images. Vlogs thus are not in the format of known travelogues that has a beginning and an end with a hint towards continuity.

Further, to appreciate the domestication processes, one must understand the nature of these vlogs. Video blogs have content that consists of varied subjects developed by different people based on their interests, choice, experience, and perspectives. The argument set forth is that representations of their narratives correspond to encoding modes or encrypting contexts-of-domestication reflected in the Medium.

While viewing a large number of vlogs and while exploring them, we looked into their beginning and end sequences, along with their 'About Us' page, so that we could analyse the multimodal discourses as displayed on YouTube. The analysis positions itself with regards to the following salient features that shape the Narratives and provide a base for the analysis: (1) The vlog users are millennial couples and not vagabond singles; (2) The main source (or platform) of sharing is already YouTube; and (3) All the couples involved consider this as their occupation. The contention of using opening and ending sequencing for understanding the narratives extend from the views of Frobenius (2011: 814): "Openings in video blogs do not necessarily have the same

functions as conversational openings in other settings. They represent an interactional element to encourage viewers to respond via the interactive feature embedded on the website, and they work toward identity construction."

However, we could not adopt any of these approaches or discussions as they were for analysis of Domestication of YouTube medium through travel narratives. These multimodal discourses still require a scholarly understanding and debate. One must ask if the vlogger couples see themselves as serious travellers or casual tourists. It could be a pertinent question in the context of understanding a platform such as that of YouTube. In this context, the approach used to study how images are selected by traveling bloggers and how their 'tourist gazes' and other experiences are transformed into narratives while writing in their blogs is known as '*Netnography*,' much in the pattern of Ethnography (Thurm & Spotti 2014). The argument is that this offers a new approach that would reveal the tourists or travellers' subjective realities, expressed more candidly concerning local people, their social habits, habitation, cultural practices, and all that goes into making the personality of a place. Much in the line of travels of Marco Polo, "Travel writing is very personal and picaresque; for example, the author presents himself as a hero who survives dangerous travel adventures. At the same time, tourism discourse tends to provide an impersonal, factual, or even commercial language" (Thurm & Spotti 2014).

The discussion remains incomplete without understanding the importance of vlogs in the domestication process. Some researchers provide the theoretical base by writing about blogs, which represent vlogs by their basic features. But there is a distinction that is worth noting. As described by Nardi, Schiano, and Gumbrecht (2004), blogs are a kind of Social Activity where the bloggers connect with their audience or members of their social network by constituting a social world. In comparison, Vlogs uploaded by the couples studied here come upon similar lines, except that their medium, *YouTube*, provides them with certain kinds of freedom and spread that is not easily available for stand-alone blogs unless the author is highly connected or networked.

However, for a better appreciation of these expressions and texts, one also needs to understand that for a large section of our societies, *YouTube* is still a wild place to do – where the young people like to visit at Internet Cafes and on private network connections. Making it a part of everyday domestic life is a big decision leading to domestic spaces' renegotiation. Using the internet as an occasional tool or as a post-box to exchange information was the idea of most families at one point in time. Accepting the Internet, and with it, the platform of *YouTube* changes or transforms the 'Self' and the 'Other,' and becomes visible in the context of family relationships.

Domestication theory helps understand the role of the Internet and *YouTube* in mediating relationships between family members. Secondly, successful domestication of new technologies and platforms hinge upon these tools, apps, environments, and technologies used to conduct practices that were already familiar to family members and thought to be conducive to family life. The justification for such domestication also comes from the influence of the internet over family life, education, vacation, travel, investments, and their offspring's well-being – including their everyday social and cultural activities such as cooking, cleaning, personal hygiene, day-to-day healthcare, offering prayers or celebrating, etc.

Theoretical Framework

The Domestication framework requires that one view every household as a transactional system (or a transactional space) between the home's socio-cultural

aspects with the technologies available in the public sphere. The theory positions itself towards an active engagement of different products (both technological and cultural) and their interaction with the individual to develop a relationship between the two. It is imperative that more and more technologies as well as digital spaces are analyzed within the framework to further establish the theory. The background given below looks at some basic questions to establish the above mentioned claim.

a) How other technologies were domesticated?
b) In what way difference in technology creates differences in the process of domestication?

Silverstone (2005: 15) had envisaged the engagement in the following manner:
At the heart of this relationship is a struggle over control and over individuals' capacity in their primary groups (family, community, and possibly neighbourhoods and networks) to create a sustainable moral space for themselves in which judgments of appropriateness and practices of use are legitimated. Information and communication technologies pose substantial challenges and opportunities to everyday life, precisely because they affect the core meaning-making and communication components of social life. Managing them and positioning oneself about them and what they offer as resources for communication and as tools for understanding the world are arguably some of the critical socio-cultural challenges of the twenty-first century.

The engagement involves integrating the products into what is known as domestic culture, which in turn entails the 'appropriation' of the products, based on the household's values and interests. The essence and relevance of all media and information products are dependent on their interaction with the user. Related to the range of studies conducted within the framework Haddon (2006: 2) writes that "outlines of the domestication framework first emerged at the start of the 1990s (Silverstone et al., 1992; Silverstone 1994b; Silverstone and Haddon, 1996…The very first British research focused on nuclear families (e.g., Hirsch, 1992). But in subsequent studies, other family structures were considered, such as single-parent households (Haddon and Silverstone, 1995b). In later empirical work, the groups studied [included] teleworkers (Haddon and Silverstone, 1993, 1995a), homeworkers (Ward, 2005b), and Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (Pierson, 2005)". It is only recently that the studied groups included age-groups, members of a social class or another, or those engaged in activities such as computer hacking (Håpnes, 1996). But we also emerged studies that focused on "telephone (Bergman, 1994; Frissen, 1994), Cable TV (Silverstone and Haddon, 1996), CD-i (Silverstone and Haddon, 1993), the home computer (Aune, 1996; Lally, 2002), the Internet (Bergman and van Zoonen, 1999; Haddon, 1999) and the mobile phone (Haddon, 2003)," as described by Haddon (2006: 3). Even after more than a decade, we see the theory's application by recent scholars such as Saariketo's (2018) study of Google Glass and its appropriation in Finnish society. Martinez (2020) charts the theory's development in two broad ways' application on new media technologies' and 'socio-cultural effect on media technologies considering various social contexts.' Chandra & Chen (2020:2) "use the lens of domestication theory to study 'why and how' online shopping is being incorporated into daily lives in India."

Now that there have been different studies on Domestication focusing on other products and platforms, a question may arise about how various researchers applied the concept to achieve their goals. Here, Haddon (2006: 3) describes the process very interestingly that makes the meaning of domestication clearer:
These expositions of the framework noted that although technologies come pre-formed with meanings through the influence of advertising, design, and all the media discourses surrounding them, both households and individuals then invest them with their

meanings and significance. Such domestication processes include the effort before acquisition to imagine how technologies might find a place in the home and a role in people's lives.

What Silverstone, Hirsch, & Morley (1991) did was to adopt the metaphor of taming or domesticating animals and take them to apply in the context of various information communications technologies (ICTs). Their idea was to show how both traditional and new media entered and found a place in people's lives and how they entered our homes.

Thus, any research on domestication of IT platforms or products would involve the following steps (Cf. Silverstone, Hirsch, and Morley 2018): (cf. Media, Culture and Society: Domestication. 2018, Web).

1. **Appropriation** is the process of movement of the technical commodity to become owned by an individual or a household. From this perspective, appropriation stands for the whole process of consumption and the crossing of the threshold between formal and moral economics. In this study, the use of *YouTube* by the Vlogger couples is an Appropriation of the Medium. The appropriation of the platform is not just ends with the use of the platform, the vloggers should have enough subscribers watching the vlogs and sending their likes to make it properly appropriated. Each travel vlogger changes his or her usage with time, country specific differences can also be noticed to appropriate the medium.

2. **Objectification** is the stage of usage in terms of the psychical disposition of objects and their presence and acceptance in the home's spatial environment, adding to both aesthetics and functionality. The development of a home like atmosphere in these vlogs is Objectification of the Medium. YouTube becomes the main medium for connection and sharing with travellers adopting ways to be novel in their approach. More subscribers over the years with likes etc. brings the travel vlogs to the forefront. In the current times this is again a major factor of the popularity of YouTube.

3. **Incorporation** is the step under which technology is functional in the intended sense of its use and in benefits that were never thought of by the original designers or marketers. How different Vlogger couples use various methods to enrich their vlogs facilitates the Incorporation of the Medium. The popularity of a particular vlog depends on the abilty of the vlogger to create an atmosphere of suspense or familarity for the audience. This step is not followed as suggested by the proponents because YouTube as a platform provides travel experiences instead of commodities.

4. **Conversion** defines the relationship between the household and the outside world. It allows the technologies to make it possible for the family to claim itself as a part of the 'wider society.' The use of Medium to connect with their subscribers takes the Vloggers to the Conversion stage. Alternatively, subscribers too get connected to world customs and practices through the vlogs.

Hartmann (2020) discusses the application in the current context:

The Norwegian interpretation basically shared the understanding of "taming" the technology but extended the concept on several levels: 1) it did not limit itself to the household; 2) it did not focus on media technologies in particular, but included (in principle) any kind of technology; and 3) it understood the taming process on several levels (individual, group, but also societal). These extensions left little to compare with the original approach in empirical terms but brought many interesting questions and

potential for theoretical underpinnings. One of these was a clear emphasis on a science and technology (or social studies of technology) approach in theoretical terms.

After considering the said idea from Hartmann, allowing a platform like YouTube to be accepted and used comfortably by the people requires the forming of community of subscribers from all over the world. Looking at travel vlogs is something that helps in the process of domestication of the medium just as playing games on mobile made the domestication of mobile possible in the earlier decades. The success of YouTube in India was made possible through the easy access of both watching and making vlogs for the populace.

The methodology used is that of virtual ethnography i.e., online observation of content creation by the vloggers from three different continents, looking at the ways to understand the portrayal of the Everyday Life as portrayed in the Vlogs. The researchers became part of the vloggers life by subscribing to each channel in end of 2016 early of 2017. There on each episode was studied for last four years looking at the process of domestication through the different discourse created by each couple. Noble (2014) thinks that here we get "the opportunity to validate the bewildering, inarticulate, politicized, rhetoric filled everyday world" where we are always engaged in making sense and decisions. Then he adds: "In terms of Everyday Life, we can attempt to understand the context of the home where parents, children, and potentially extended family or friends have to make decisions and meanings about video game consoles. (*ibid*)" Episodes were watched, sorted then finally inferences were drawn on the basis of:

a) About Us page b) Journey through YouTube studied on the basis of steps of Domestication. c) Illustrations used wherever possible. Each couple through creative spontaneity became adept with the medium of YouTube thereby becoming a link between YouTube and the audience, domesticating YouTube thereby increasing its viewership.

Thus, the Domestication framework used here offers a clear base to analyze the complex interaction between human subjects belonging to other cultures and the host society and space as mediated by formal ICT tools. The results are travel discourse collated and created by Travellers. Their method of domesticating *YouTube* media to influence all future tourists and travelers in their choice of destinations seems interesting. It also explains the relationship between travel narratives and the motivation of these travelers.

Discussion and Findings

The focus is on evaluating how the Travel Vlogs are presented to the audience to make it look like a 'domesticated travel video.' The socio-culturally grounded analysis rests on the notions of social practice, genre, and communities of practice as central to a new understanding of narrative during the preparation of videos by couples.
Analysing the select vlogs from a Domestication perspective, we observed that couples strategize through multiple patterns to show the audience how and when they are familiar and personal.

Samuel and Audrey

Joined Aug 11, 2012. 163,934 subscribers. (2017) to 2.19 subscribers (2020) Videos: 800 approx.

This Canadian couple, with a multi-ethnic background, has been vlogging for a long time. The couple focuses on travel-related content, especially creating short videos like "10 things to do in…." Like Quebec City: A Canadian city with a French flair. Vlogs generally reported detailed food critique videos in restaurants with well-versed commentary—for instance, Authentic Italian Pizza in Pompei, Naples. The whole vlog about the Original Pizza. They order Margherita Pizza with buffalo cheese. It is a direct fair with hardly any topping. They assess the pizza by calling it better than chain pizza in North America. Evidence of traveling with parents is also an additional segment. Thereby how to arrange accommodation accordingly is enlightening for the audience. Additionally, a critical feature of this vlog is that they do not publish vlogs in real-time. Long spells of travel end in few months of stay with family and publishing of videos. As indicated in the framework, the four stages of Domestication in the second vlog takes the domestication process with different voices wherein the vloggers' Samuel and Audrey' use their names to Incorporate the Medium. The appropriate and objectify the Medium by 'giving practical information, descriptions, and advice, speaking from a travel expert or tour guide's perspective.' At the stage of Conversion, their perspective is that of a traveller. They narrate about their personal experiences and feelings while talking about food, 'our goal is to inspire you to travel around the world and eat delicious local cuisine wherever you're visiting,' the visited place's culture.

Kinging-it

Joined Feb 6, 2014. 20,962 subscribers (2017) to 55.3k subscribers (2020) Videos: 437 approx.

Investigating the next vlogging by Millennial couples, we must say that the name of the vlog's uniqueness allows the audience to understand the Appropriation and Objectification of the Medium. This Welsh pair started their journey from a hospital when both were not in the mood for anything new. However, once recovered, they decided to live their life king size, or in their words, Kinging it. Their vlogs capture offbeat content without much research—for instance, Visit Body Museum in Amsterdam. The evidence from the real world shows how people donated their body parts to Gunther Museum. Grotesque becomes beautiful because of the underlying reality of life, along with information about human existence. In another episode, they do not share travel details related to Paris but describe how it is an unattainable dream. The incidence of Aimee getting scammed with typical Paris scams (bracelets, etc.) is captured live on the scene, giving an essential insight into the channel's claim to do things wrong to let their audience do the right thing during travel. They Incorporate the Medium through the challenges 'Rule your own world', which they play with each other. They perform the stage of conversion when they ask the viewers to 'hit the subscribe button.'

Endless Adventure

Joined Oct 21, 2015. 106, 902 subscribers (2017) to 3.66 lakh subscribers (2020). Videos:583 approx.

Vlog by this couple is all about food tasting and critique. The following vlog, Trying the Best Seafood in Scotland (Fifeland), is based on clear background research of various villages' food items (along the coast of Fife) with colourful descriptions. Dialogue between Allison and Eric spontaneously informs about the restaurant with a 'perfect atmosphere.' Noting about joining on 'less intense' water sports like sea

kayaking instead of paddle boarding or tubing 'where you get thrown all over the place.' The storyline includes interesting place visits; they capture the adventure experienced through Instagram pictures. Vlogs also consist of 'goofy acts like dropping of lemon on pants etc.' shown without editing, or sometimes with camera effects adding fun & reality for the audience. The vloggers also mention a 'Using paid promotion' from Visit Scotland in the given series to acknowledge Scotland's travel funding.

Desi Couple on the Go

Joined March 31 2016, 1000 approx. subs (2017) to 200K subscribers (2022) Videos 300 approx.

An Indian couple, Megha and Saurabh, on the go, with full time jobs settled in Netherlands creates interesting series of vlogs for their audience. Travel for them is a passion to be enjoyed and depicted with utmost charm. The earliest vlogs shared places to visit in Netherlands with more videos on road trips with friends in Europe. Through the years they became the 'Desi Couple on the Go' appropriating the medium. Their style is more about visuals and enjoyment than paid promotions etc. Even they strongly mention this as one of the rules to be followed in their vlog page. Due to WFH during the pandemic they have been travelling in one country showing all possible travel options for their audience. One way of the going through the domestication steps for them is their multilingual interaction with the audience. The steps of domestication are more or less similar to other mentioned vloggers. However, the change in language is unique as well as the places that they show. The other vloggers visit Asia and other parts of the world whereas this couple focuses on Europe with zeal and sincerity.

The domestication of YouTube for both the creator and viewer adds a new area to communication studies. Though the marketing angle is beyond this paper's purview, it allows researchers to look at vlogging styles around the globe as another method to understand business behaviour. Furthermore, it establishes itself to be growing more and more popular in different disciplines.

Concluding Remarks

After analysing the vlogs, we found some motivations based on which we could divide the vloggers' content: Experience vs. Activity, Cultural vs. Non-Cultural, Common vs. Novel, and finally, Emotion vs. Promotion.

Accordingly, all couples follow some common themes for marketing their vlogs. Like a common problem in visa acquirement. Use of music matched with the vlogs' theme. With time vlogs become more professional, adding better research as well as quality of marketing vlogs. Another common point is the vlog on Best kept Secret episodes. They pick up new places that are not typical travel spots and discuss them for the audience. This episode on new sites also helps vloggers to be exclusive from each other. What is unique is that each vlogger couple has picked up a special place on their visit list. Why is this then an occupation? One of the first aspects to consider is more viewers, more revenue from YouTube. Each vlogger attempts to make their vlog interesting through local food, customs, legends, etc. On the other hand, some also participate in local activities, especially living the nightlife, locally relevant nooks, or adventure through goodbye-lanes. Also, on significant difference in the vlogger's tale is the mention of mundane things like accommodation.

Generally, in the travelogues or blogs checklist, they promote unique attractions in these instances, whereas travel vloggers are more into things like travel days or odd places of stay. They also include paid promotion from AirBnB or travel vouchers or

tour packs. Another common narrative technique used on Long Travel Days: flight, bus, etc. Ex, Endless Adventure makes their travel days full of adventure, running towards the gate, etc. They are also not happy with long flights, Singapore to England, which took them 14 hours. Finally, we found some travel tips from each vlogger. Like about luggage from Kinging it or how to use lounge access card from Samuel and Audrey or how to live with of cost in expensive cities by Desi Couple on the Go or best network in a foreign country from Endless Adventure.

Apart from the common elements, all vlogger couples differ in their start and finish or their way of greetings. Some of them like Desi Couple on the Go narrate a different travel picture as travellers with full time jobs. Their narrative is more self-focused than place focused. Kinging it takes up a challenge and vlog about it, whereas Samuel & Audrey sticks to the critique of site, food, etc. Desi Couple on the Go buy souvenirs, unlike the other vlogger couples. They all also make it a point to capture something new when they visit popular places. All the four couples through the years have familiarized YouTube and become domesticated with the medium, thereby allowing the same effect to be carried over to individual audiences.

Domestication of YouTube for both the creator and viewer adds a new area to marketing interfacing with communication studies. Though the complete marketing angle is beyond the purview of this paper, it allows researchers to look at the alternative content marketing analysis as another method to understand behaviours in vlogging business. Furthermore, it establishes itself to be growing more and more popular in different disciplines.

This research's future direction will focus on a fundamental way of attempting to understand the assumptions held by an audience from varied backgrounds studied through their comments on the vlogs and to examine and become aware of the underlying assumptions that they embody.

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