Anglo-Caribbean YouTuber vlogs: An Exploratory Study

Vlogs de YouTubers anglocaribeños: un estudio exploratorio

Vlogs de YouTubers anglo-caribenhos: um estudo exploratório

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Abstract: The present paper examines Anglophone Caribbean content on YouTube with specific attention to identity and other cultural claims and expressions. The research examined a sample of 520 videos from 52 popular Anglophone Caribbean YouTube content creators and user comments posted in response to those videos. The study also involved analysis of open-ended interviews with 14 of these Anglophone Caribbean YouTube content creators addressing their motivations for posting and their experiences with their audiences. These investigations revealed dominant categories of content such as cooking and family gatherings with varying levels of identity and cultural claims but found that measures of identity and cultural claims did not differ significantly between creators who live in the region and those living abroad. The findings also suggest a diverse set of motivations among producers that include the promotion of national and regional identities, but which often demonstrate more pragmatic and practical considerations with overwhelmingly supportive and positive comments from viewers.

Keywords:
Caribbean, social media, YouTube, identity, culture, nostalgia

Resumen: El presente trabajo examina el contenido caribeño anglófono en YouTube, prestando especial atención a la identidad y otras reivindicaciones y expresiones culturales. La investigación examinó una muestra de 520 vídeos de 52 creadores populares de contenido caribeño anglófono en YouTube y los comentarios de los usuarios publicados en respuesta a dichos vídeos. El estudio también incluyó el análisis de entrevistas abiertas con 14 de estos creadores caribeños anglófonos en YouTube, en las que se abordaron sus motivaciones para

publicar y sus experiencias con su público. Estas investigaciones revelaron categorías dominantes de contenido, como la cocina y las reuniones familiares, con distintos niveles de identidad y reivindicaciones culturales, pero se encontró que las medidas de identidad y reivindicaciones culturales no diferían significativamente entre los creadores residentes en la región y los residentes en el extranjero. Los hallazgos también sugieren un conjunto diverso de motivaciones entre los productores, que incluye la promoción de identidades nacionales y regionales, pero que a menudo demuestran consideraciones más pragmáticas y prácticas, con comentarios abrumadoramente positivos y de apoyo de los espectadores.

Palabras clave:
Caribe, redes sociales, YouTube, identidad, cultura, nostalgia

Resumo: O presente artigo examina o conteúdo caribenho anglófono no YouTube com atenção específica à identidade e outras reivindicações e expressões culturais. A pesquisa examinou uma amostra de 520 vídeos de 52 criadores populares de conteúdo caribenho anglófono no YouTube e comentários de usuários postados em resposta a esses vídeos. O estudo também envolveu a análise de entrevistas abertas com 14 desses criadores de conteúdo caribenho anglófono no YouTube, abordando suas motivações para postar e suas experiências com seus públicos. Essas investigações revelaram categorias dominantes de conteúdo, como culinária e reuniões familiares, com níveis variados de identidade e reivindicações culturais, mas descobriram que as medidas de identidade e reivindicações culturais não diferiram significativamente entre os criadores que vivem na região e aqueles que vivem no exterior. As descobertas também sugerem um conjunto diversificado de motivações entre os produtores, que incluem a promoção de identidades nacionais e regionais, mas que frequentemente demonstram considerações mais pragmáticas e práticas, com comentários predominantemente positivos e de apoio dos espectadores.

Palavras-chave:
Caribe, mídia social, YouTube, identidade, cultura, nostalgia

1. Introduction

The wide diffusion of Internet technologies and social media among residents of the Caribbean and diasporic communities has seen an increasing presence of Caribbean-oriented social media content. The present paper examines the growing corpus of material emerging from and related to the Anglophone Caribbean on the YouTube video sharing platform. The research investigated motivations for content creation, reception to such content and how individual content creators articulate identity and cultural claims.

2. Literature Review

2.1 YouTube and Identity, Global and Local

YouTube enables video makers to share content with a potential audience of millions. Among the most visited Internet sites (Semrush.com, 2022), YouTube also allows feedback from viewers including likes, shares, and comments. Several studies have established YouTube's role in identity expression and cultivation across diverse domains (Johnson & Callahan, 2013; Kavakci & Kraeplin, 2017; Sobande, 2017). These have included explorations of the vlogs of black women in Britain (Sobande, 2017), hair, and beauty vlogs as counter-narratives to mainstream expectations (Neil & Mbilishaka, 2019) youth identity in Moroccan rap (Ben Moussa, 2019) and Caribbean music videos (Balaji & Sigler, 2018). Such studies often present content creators and their viewers as communities of interest or what Rheingold (1993) called "virtual communities." In the present study such communities included vloggers in the Anglophone Caribbean and those from diasporic Caribbean populations in foreign metropolitan centers.

Internet technologies have presented, from the early days of their public availability, the prospect of expressing cultural and identity claims on a global scale. The presumed globalization of discourse, however, has been somewhat more nuanced, involving tendencies towards expressing local identities across geographically dispersed audiences (Halavais, 2000). For example, in a study of social media use among the *Garifuna* people of Central America, Johnson and Callahan (2013, p. 335) concluded *inter alia* that *Garifuna* social media usage mitigated feelings of marginalization in traditional media, facilitated maintaining relational ties with geographically dispersed members of the culture and led to "the creation of a *Garifuna* supraterritorial cultural space… to propagate and strengthen their culture."

Social media such as YouTube allows active cultural and identity negotiations in which audiences may also be producers (Tabares, 2019). It is thus important to investigate what these content creators are producing and what roles their content may play in negotiating identity and culture. Intangible cultural and national identity may find powerful concrete expression in symbols (Bechhofer & McCrone, 2013; Boguslaw, 2020; Guéguen et al., 2017), rituals (Schatz & Lavine, 2007), artistic expressions (Lamikiz Jauregiondo, 2019; Pattinson, 2018), and discourse. As Fox and Miller-Idris (2008) have observed: "National symbols – flags, anthems, statues and landmarks – are neatly packaged distillations of the nation: they are the linchpins that connect people to the nation" (p. 545).

2.2 Culture, Identity, and Imaginations

The notion of culture has evolved from assumptions of fixed, inherent, and essential group qualities towards that of socially constructed (and often communally imagined) beliefs about group identities (Anderson, 1983; Deutsch 1953) and what Hanson (2007, p. 11) has described as "convictions about the texture of reality." In this still-emerging paradigm, cultures and identities emerge out of groups' numerous negotiations of social reality internally among members themselves, with other groups, and with their social and natural environments. Brereton (2007, p. 169) noted that national imaginations include notions of history, writing that "Historians and social scientists agree that nationalisms and national identities, ethnicities, and ethnic identities, are all constructed or "invented" at specific historical conjunctures." In particular, here we adopt Anderson's (1983) notion of the "imagined community" to the active construction of cultural identity in YouTube Anglophone Caribbean videos, focusing on the messages and symbols that these communities (producers and audiences) use to express and construct notions of shared heritage. We also examine these virtual communities as sites of historical creation in which stories are told and retold, partly constructing a "historical" narrative of the contemporary community for posterity and evoking nostalgia for a shared past.

Hall (1997) has focused extensively on how mediated representations of images and messages influence meaning-making through which cultural understandings and various identities are negotiated. The manner of presentation along with the complex of predetermined significances all work to influence how these presentations come to represent meanings in the audiences. Embedded in both the presentation and the interpretation of mediated messages are

deeply ingrained historical conventions and hegemonic (Gramsci, 1929/1971) prescriptions which condition what we expect to see and how we interpret that which is (or is not) presented.

Identity is a fluid concept, which Balaji and Sigler (2018, p. 95) termed "inherently sticky and complex as it includes an intricate and often contradictory nexus of both endogenous and exogenous representational notions." Along with persistent territoriality (even in globally accessible media), this nexus includes the notion of online identities being actively constructed (Costa Pinto et al., 2015; Kavakci & Kraeplin, 2017) and negotiated much as in real life (Hunt et al., 2011; Weber & Francisco-Maffezzolli, 2021). Isajiw (1990) pointed to identity as a subjective notion that facilitates an individual's sense of belonging to a community or nation.

Individuals often employ a wide variety of symbols and practices to express or affirm identity and to negotiate various identity entanglements. Warikoo (2005, p. 806), for example, pointed to wearing ethnic or traditional clothing, the practice of cooking traditional or cooking "food from the native country," and traditional dance as embodying links to tradition and identity. Sutton (2010) has also pointed to the importance of food as a marker of identity and a source of what has been called "food nostalgia" (Espinoza-Ortega, 2021; Moffat et al., 2017) especially in those dislocated through migration.

2.3 The Anglophone Caribbean

The label "Anglophone Caribbean" refers to Caribbean territories which were most recently British colonial possessions stretching from Jamaica in the North to Guyana in the South (also often called the West Indies). Though they have shared histories, social and economic ties and a common language, there remain contentious internecine debates about nationhood and national belonging within (and among) many of these territories (Halstead, 2002; Manuel, 2000; Verma, 2000; Zacharias & Mullings-Lawrence, 2021).

The content producers studied included YouTubers from Trinidad and Tobago, Guyana, and Jamaica located in the region and abroad. These three were chosen because they are the largest territories of the Anglophone Caribbean, with the largest diasporic communities abroad and the highest numbers of YouTube producers. Among the central concerns of the study were describing the content and examining the presence and role of identity claims as part of processes of online community development. With shared histories of slavery, indentureship and colonialism, the territories feature commonalities beyond the English language. The legacy of the

British sport, cricket, for example, continues to be one of the few unifying elements of Anglophone Caribbean (or West Indian) identity (Beckles & Stoddart, 1995; Manley, 1988). There is ample sharing of cultural product with Jamaican Reggae and Soca from Trinidad and Tobago being major influences across the region and some exchange of mass media content.

As the territories gained independence from Great Britain in the 1960s, each began developing distinctive symbols and practices with which to imagine their national communities into being including national flags, coats of arms, currencies, systems of awards for national achievements and initiatives for artistic expressions. Jamaica's national competition called "Festival" favored patriotic songs with folkloric themes. In Trinidad and Tobago, the Prime Minister's Best Village competition presented song, dance, and drama from village performers. In 1970, Guyana introduced *Mashramani*, a festival of street parades and concerts to celebrate becoming a republic. The various territories also started elevating dialect poetry and recognizing their distinctive forms of English (Cooper, 2009; Forde, 2011).

At independence, the major territories considered forming a West Indian Federation which failed after Jamaica abandoned the effort (Archibald, 1962). Later, the independent countries examined other forms of community including the Caribbean Free Trade Agreement (CARIFTA) and, later, the Caribbean Common Market, eventually called the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) Single Market and Economy (CSME) (Edwards, 2005; Marinasotero, 1974; Steel, 1974). While defining their communities in terms of common ties, some territories also imagined themselves in terms of being free from the dominance of colonial power. Trinidad and Tobago took steps to remove vestiges of colonialism by adopting a republican form of government in 1976 thereby removing the Queen of England as titular head of state (Barbados did the same in 2021 and Jamaica has contemplated this for the future). Many of the territories nationalized former colonially-owned mass media, seeking to promote their own national self-interests and development goals, and to identity via these channels (Author/s).

These independent territories also faced contentious internal claims to national culture and identity as descendants of powerful colonial-era creole landowners and capitalists lived alongside emerging (sometimes competing) communities of descendants of (African) slaves and (Indian) indentured laborers (Williams, 1962). The processes of national culture and identity were, thus, often complex, and strenuously negotiated (Khan, 2007; Ramjeet, 2009).

Shared and disputed notions of Caribbean community and nationhood undergo transformation among immigrants in diasporic settlements in metropolitan nations (Henry, 1994; Murdoch, 2007; Pulis et al., 2013). Premdas (2011, pp. 812-813) noted that with the "massive movement of Caribbean peoples to metropolitan centers" Caribbean peoples "have now been forced to renegotiate their identities creating new mental mixes from their old insular spheres and new metropolitan residences." Forde (2011, p. 103), for example noted that: "(I) really knew I was West Indian— when I migrated to America for college… leaving home led to deeper introspection on culture, origins, borders, citizenship and national identity."

Discourses of identity are also relevant as people in the Anglophone Caribbean and in the diaspora have adopted supranational communications and formed supranational communities on social media (Plaza, 2014; Plaza & Plaza, 2019). According to Premdas (2011):

> A multiple headed Caribbean identity has now been forged by both residents in the Caribbean and those overseas attesting to the truism that to survive in the global present requires simultaneity in several spaces… The Caribbean is truly wherever Caribbean peoples reside... (p.811)

3. Research Questions

The present investigation was concerned with the content of Anglophone Caribbean vlogs on YouTube, posing Research Question 1 as:

RQ1a: What are the general characteristics of Anglophone Caribbean individual vlogs on YouTube?

RQ1b: What are the dominant content types of Anglophone Caribbean individual vlogs on YouTube?

Prior research suggests that vlogs are often sites of explicit and implicit cultural and identity claims, prompting Research Question 2:

RQ2a: How prominent are cultural and identity claims on Anglophone Caribbean YouTube vlogs?

RQ2b: Are culture and identity claims associated with viewership or like levels?

Prior research has emphasized culture and identity in the Caribbean diaspora communities in metropolitan settings of the United States, Canada, and Great Britain (Bacchus, 2020; Hall, 1997; Henry, 1994), leading to Research Question 3a:

RQ3a: Do resident and diasporic vloggers vary significantly in terms of culture and identity claims?

The present study also sought to identify differences in subject areas between domestic and diasporic vloggers with Research Question 3b:

RQ3b: Do resident and diasporic vloggers vary significantly in terms of content theme choices.

The present study was also concerned with motivations for creating vlogs and with audience responses, prompting Research Question 4:

RQ4a: Why do Anglophone Caribbean YouTube vloggers create and post videos?

RQ4b: How do audiences respond to Anglophone Caribbean YouTube vlogger content?

4. Methodology

This study involved three related investigations: 1) a content analysis of videos, 2) creator interviews, and 3) an examination of user comments.

4.1 Content analysis

Content analysis is a well-established approach to categorizing and making sense of mediated messages (Carney, 1972; Holsti, 1969; Krippendorff, 2004). In quantitative content analysis, the researcher samples the material, assigns numerical codes for the presence of themes or elements of interest, and then statistically analyzes the data.

4.2 Sampling

The present study sampled videos from YouTube channels whose titles or descriptions included terms relevant to the Anglophone Caribbean including the names of major territories such as Guyana, Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago and which had at least 1000 subscribers and over 10,000 channel views. This yielded 52 channels from which the researcher/s sampled videos for analysis. The investigation used a randomized (range 1-10) start on the list of available videos (alternating the start between the most recent and the middle as listed) and a systematic skip (every 5th video thereafter) to identify 10 videos from each with a total of 520 videos sampled.

4.3 Coding

The researcher/s coded videos on descriptors such as, channel name, video title and URL as well as statistics such as numbers of views and likes. Drawing on prior published research, the study also included coding visual and auditory elements that included claims of identity, cultural belonging, and nostalgia. The author/s together with a trained research assistant familiar with the dialects and cultures of the region, conducted the coding. Prior to the coding exercise, all coders participated in sample coding to establish inter-coder reliability. During this process, they refined the coding instructions and instrument until inter-coder reliability calculated using Krippendorf's alpha was at least 0.7.

4.4 Interviews

After obtaining Institutional Review Board approval, the researcher/s used publicly posted contact information to approach producers whose channels met the minimum criteria. The researcher/s sent IRB-approved interview invitations. Not all producers provided viable (or any) contact information, and many did not respond to inquiries. Approximately half of those approached responded. Several respondents were suspicious, citing an abundance of scams and questionable invitations they often received. A few insisted on knowing which other content creators were participating before committing and did not respond further when told that this could not be divulged.

The recruitment eventually attracted sixteen participants though two eventually dropped out, citing scheduling issues. The process resulted in 14 interviews using Zoom over approximately three months. The researcher/s provided informed consent documentation prior to the interviews. Some participants asked for explanation of the documents; others were unsure of academic research. After obtaining consent the researcher/s conducted interviews which lasted about 40 minutes on average. The researcher/s transcribed and analyzed the interviews and returned portions of interviews for interviewee validity cross-checks asking them to confirm that their words and sentiments were accurately reflected.

4.5 Comments

The researcher/s collected comments from a systematically selected subset of the videos analyzed including at least ten comments (as available) from each vlogger's videos. After

cleaning, the sample yielded a pool of 605 first-level comments which offered supplemental insight into audience reactions. Analysis involved qualitative close reading of the sampled comments, extraction of recurrent and prominent themes and identification of unique or illustrative examples as well as quantitative coding on dimensions such as overall positive or negative tone and the presence of content categories derived from initial readings of the comments including inquiries and requests, salutations, statements supportive of the video, statements critical of the video, cultural or identity claims, and nostalgia. For this phase inter-coder reliability was similarly established with a minimum Krippendorf's alpha of 0.7.

5. Findings

5.1 Content Analysis

The sampled YouTube Anglophone Caribbean vlogs (N = 505) averaged 15 minutes and 45 seconds (SD = 14.8 minutes) duration and 310 likes (SD = 625). The videos (N = 505) averaged 3.6 likes per view (SD = 2.1). Some 315 videos were from vloggers using Trinidad and Tobago as their cultural reference point, 180 referenced Guyana and 10 referenced Jamaica. The data indicated that 334 of the videos (66%) came from vloggers in the Caribbean while 171 (34%) came from diasporic vloggers.

Research question 1b asked about different content types of the sampled YouTube videos. The present study used a small number of categories based on prior literature and early assessments of the target videos. The coding allowed for multiple category assignments. Cooking videos proved to be the most frequent category at 43.4% (n = 219) of all the videos. Family gatherings (or "limes") were the second most frequent category at 20.2% (n = 102). Videos featuring cultural observances accounted for 5.5% (n = 28). All other categories accounted for five percent or less of videos; these included competitions (plus giveaways and charities), "hauls" (shopping and unboxing), geographical explorations, and non-cooking tutorials.

The study measured cultural and identity claims by coding visible symbols (such as flags, icons, or attire), use of colloquial or dialect expressions, references to collective nostalgia or history, showing traditional or cultural observances, and showing traditional cooking. Summing these elements yielded a culture/identity score from 0 to 5. The videos averaged 1.47 on this measure (SD = 1.04). Some 35% (n = 328) of the sampled videos demonstrated either one or two of these indicators. The most common cultural marker was that of colloquialisms, observed in

64.4% (n = 325) of the videos, followed by nostalgic statements in 29.9% (n = 151) and domestic/traditional cooking in 27.7% (n = 140) of the videos. Though any instance of traditional foods could invoke nostalgia, the present analysis calculated the incidence of food nostalgia by counting cases which featured both domestic/traditional foods and specific statements of nostalgia and found that 52 of the cases (10.3%) featured this combination.

In terms of audience response, scores on the culture/identity measure showed statistically significant weak positive correlations with views (r [505] = .10, p = .022) and likes (r [505] = .11, p = .010). This finding suggests that higher levels of culture and identity claims were weakly but significantly associated with more views and likes.

On the question of whether culture and identity claims differed between vloggers in the home countries and those in the diaspora, comparison of the culture/identity scores indicated that the mean for videos domestic vloggers (n = 334, M = 1.48, SD = .97) and videos from the diasporic vloggers (n = 171, M = 1.44, SD = 1.15) did not differ significantly. However, on the content categories (correcting for the differences in numbers for foreign and domestic vloggers) the two groups showed some significant differences. In the pervasive cooking category about a third (n = 111; 33.2%) of domestic videos featured cooking while almost two-thirds (n = 108; 63.2%) of foreign-based videos featured cooking (X^2[1] = 41.24, p < .001, V = .29). Diasporic videos were also significantly more likely than domestic videos to feature hauls or shopping (X^2(1) = 5.14, p = .013, V = .11) and non-cooking tutorials (X^2[1] = 7.45, p = .006, V = .121). Conversely, domestic videos were significantly more likely than those from diasporic vloggers to feature family gatherings (X^2[1] = 4.00, p = .046, V = .09), competitions and giveaways (X^2(1) = 5.65, p = .018, V = .106), and journeys or explorations (X^2[1] 36.57, p < .001, V = .27). The two groups did not differ significantly in presenting news/current affairs or traditional observances.

5.2 Interviews

The study then interviewed domestic and diasporic Anglophone Caribbean YouTube content creators about their motivations, experiences, and perceptions of audience responses.

5.2.1 Producer motivations.

Participants revealed a variety of reasons for starting YouTube channels. Shinez of *Shinezstory (Love in De House)* from Trinidad and Tobago, for example, initially approached the

platform as an outlet for promoting his musical material. TooCool Eyon from Guyana (producer of *Little Guyana by TooCool Family*) described his foray into YouTube as starting "by accident" when his family members decided to record outings on a cellphone and post them online. Jamaican participant, Colaz (*Colaz Smith TV*), who also had an interest in music at the start of his involvement in YouTube emphasized its importance as an alternative to traditional mass media in providing access to audiences: "I always want to see myself on TV. And, you know, our local TV stations… you'd have to be like this big star or something, you know, special had to happen".

Several participants indicated that their motivations changed over time. Shinez, for example, went from a focus on hip-hop music promotion to exploring and countering negative portrayals of his community. Others referenced a desire to engage in storytelling or documenting social realities in their countries.

Trinidad-based Kapil Ramcharan of the channel *Kaps* invoked storytelling as a motivation for producing YouTube content:

> I was always good at storytelling and stuff. I think one of my strengths is doing research and then putting it out in a story form in my own creative way…. I was always an outgoing person so YouTube kind of created this medium for me to sort of share a little story, now and then.

Lyndon Baptiste who produces an eponymous channel out of Caura in Trinidad along with associated channels such as *Red Wall News* recounted being influenced by the notion of current affairs and social documentary as storytelling:

> About 12 to 13 years ago when I first discovered YouTube, I thought it would – I was very much into Jon Stewart, the Daily Show and I thought that format would work wonderfully well for Trinidad and Tobago. And I remember doing some initial videos along the lines of, kind of social documentaries, if I could call it that.

Several participants described their storytelling being aimed at external audiences comprising both members of the Caribbean diaspora and foreign folk unfamiliar with these Caribbean nations.

Some participants described their channels as extensions of pre-existing online efforts such as websites or Instagram presence. Jenna G who produces the channel *Jenna G the Hijabi TT* shared that:

> I was more active on different social media platforms and people started seeing the food and they just wanted me to, to share recipes. So I decided, well, why not just do it video form and jump into the YouTube world and that's basically how I got into it.

For others, there were more pragmatic motivations. For example, Natasha, who produces the channel *Trini Cooking with Natasha* indicated that a particular set of pressures prompted her start:

> So, when I first got started, I didn't do it because I was thinking of a career. I did it because I was trying to help friends and family learn my recipes without having to call me every minute. So, I said, OK, YouTube is the best way. It's out there. And you can pause, record, rewind, fast forward.

A common theme among many participants was the notion of posterity and preservation including generational transmission. Shinez, for example, related an observation that someone made about his YouTube material constituting a historical chronicle of his community (Laventille) at a time of crisis:

> They say, the next 50 years from now, God forbid, if you're not around and anybody want to find out about how Laventille people dealt with COVID19, (they) have to go to your channel they have to go to you. So, right now, you is the person who documenting everything in Laventille and creating history.

Chris De La Rosa who produces the *Caribbean Pot* channel similarly indicated that his motivation included providing legacy materials for his children to build upon and preserve the traditional oral generational passing of cultural items such as recipes.

5.2.2 Food (and other) nostalgia.

Food nostalgia was a major theme, particularly with producers whose primary focus was cooking videos. Canadian-based Trinidadian producer, Chris De La Rosa, distinguished between the responses of those at home and those in the diaspora, noting that while people from the Caribbean were more likely to complain about authenticity of recipes or the specifics of methods:

> The person living abroad, they they're just looking for an easy convenient way to replicate the recipe which reminds them of home or keeps them attached to the Caribbean because by food, I think food and music, that's their sort of connection still to the Caribbean.

Recipes and food as cultural anchors extended, in De La Rosa's view, even to those with only indirect experience of the region and its culture:

> You know, I come across a lot of comments and a lot of emails and stuff from people who, they've never been to the Caribbean. Their grandfather or their mother or someone was born in one of the islands and they took on the identity ... So, by having these recipes available to them, they think they're maintaining their connection to the Caribbean.

Guyanese-American content creator Althea Brown of the channel *Metemgee* noted this food nostalgia as something that drove early arrivals to her channel: "They didn't want this polished, like, video. They wanted to just feel like they were cooking at home in the kitchen with their mom or your grandma".

General homeland nostalgia also featured in the discussions. TooCool, for example, suggested that a nostalgia for their homeland was one of the major motivations for diasporic Guyanese viewers, adding that: "If I'm out walking around in a village, they're going: 'I'm going to look to see if I know anybody from back in my days or back in my time,' you know. I'm trying to reach them on that level".

Lyndon Baptiste similarly referred to the process of facilitating nostalgia through vicarious viewing as one of the satisfactions of his YouTube efforts:

> You know, when you, for instance, do something as simple as driving to Point Fortin and you make a video about it, then someone who, maybe subscribed to your channel and say, 'Hey, I'm from Point Fortin and look at the development that they're doing there.' There's a girl who comments frequently and she says… '…(B)ecause I live away now, you know, I have the opportunity to see it through your eyes.'

5.2.3 Language and culture.

Though English is a defining characteristic of the Anglophone Caribbean, its unique forms and variations also mark cultural territory and thus language was a factor for some producers. Colaz, for example, described his choice of producing in Jamaican patois as a deliberate strategy that he adopted despite his awareness that, on a global medium, it could reduce his reach:

> Well, honestly, honestly, I know that the language that we… well, the patois, as we call it, is basically like a language barrier to some extent. Yeah. But, honestly… I could do, you know, the videos in English, but then I want to preserve our language, which is patois, Jamaica language, you know, I don't want to shy away from that.

Similarly, Lyndon Baptiste associated language choices with the very identity of his channel:

> I was very, kind of confused about what, what voice should I use? How should I present myself? …Whether to use, the standard, the proper English. And what I quickly realized is that didn't really feel like my authentic voice that I was using. So, I think that was my biggest challenge… how much can I stray into dialect so that it could be kind of universally accepted. You want people to be able to understand it, but then relate to you as a Trini or Caribbean-speaking person...

Discussions of language, food and other aspects of culture often intertwined with notions of promotion and outreach both to diasporic Caribbean and wholly foreign audience members. TooCool, for example, was explicit in his dedication to presenting Guyana to those who did not know of the country and those who have left:

> I am pushing Guyana. I want to put Guyana out there. People must see Guyana. You know, I saw a few interviews and some people asked in some other country do you know, where is Guyana? And they were like "Ghana? …So, by doing this on YouTube, it produced a whole new level for Guyana and Guyanese people promoting Guyana and our culture… It's all about Guyana, Guyana, pushing it out there on the spot firm so the world can see Guyana. That is the ultimate goal of this whole project, if you want to call it that.

Rajeev of *Trinbago Vibes* identified a similar motivation for his channel. Having watched tourism guide videos for other places, he felt motivated to produce similar content for Trinidad and Tobago. Eschewing the prevalent family "limes" and cooking videos, Rajeev (who had prior experience as a stage producer and videographer) described *Trinbago Vibes* as a showcasing channel with things to learn especially for people who have never heard of Trinidad and Tobago or who are looking for resources and information when planning a trip:

> So, I decided… let me start this journey and the purpose of this is to showcase the country. And I know here in Trinidad and Tobago we have a variety of cultures and ethnicities so there are different things that we can highlight… So, the purpose of the channel was to showcase and highlight all, everything, Trinidad and Tobago from food from culture from places to visit to things to do.

Other content creators expressed different motivations. Trinidad and Tobago-based Jacob who co-produces *Jacob and Nich Vlogs*, for example, described their channel as a personal diary and a source of advice for locals including product reviews on locally available items and support for the challenges of new parents. For Jacob, the educational and messaging value of their content is primary. While they welcome national exposure and promotion, their approach is

somewhat nuanced: “Well, for us, personally speaking, we, we are Trinis, but we don't really go around saying that “Yo, I'm a Trini” or “Watch our video because I'm a Trini” or anything like that”.

Shurls, the Canada-based (originally from Trinidad and Tobago) producer of *Shurls Kitchen Mashup*, also described a unique focus of his channel despite the presence of food vlogs. He recounted starting content creation on YouTube with a focus on the Caribbean but being drawn, instead, to the potential for addressing a serious single issue, that of prevention of violence against women. According to Shurls: “It is a powerful platform to be on. I didn't jump on this platform to gain fame. I am not in this for money, you know, so it's a message that we wanted to send”.

This phase of the inquiry revealed that many participants identified strong emotional components to their YouTube journeys. For Guyana-based KC Evins, producer of the YouTube channel *KC Evins*, the platform provided a safe space. KC Evins said:

> I was pretty depressed, and I felt like I needed somewhere to go when I felt depressed… I felt like I was more safe telling strangers on YouTube how I felt more than I could talk to friends so that is why I started making YouTube videos.

Lyndon Baptiste described “intense relief” of stress during his production activities and involvement with his subjects while Shinez described going into a “state of depression” when local COVID-19 restrictions hampered his ability to travel and vlog.

Shurls, of *Shurl’s Kitchen Mashup* described the emotional responses to his content focusing on preventing violence against women:

> It was an emotional ride for us because we didn't believe for such a small channel, we would have an impact on people like that and we got some responses that was it was. We cried that's what, that's all I had to say, we cried for the responses we got.

5.3 Reach and responses.

Interviewees were generally quite aware of the responses to their videos and the reach of their material on the platform. TooCool, for example, described his viewership statistics as follows:

> So, when I check on the stats, the thing is telling me 40% Americans are looking at it. 18% Trinidadians 14% Guyanese… so Trinidad people are looking more than Guyanese and that we get a little bit from Canada and UK.

Kapil Ramcharan indicated that five percent of his views originated in India. Jenna-G reported having viewers from Europe and as far as New Zealand, many with Caribbean roots. Others reported views from South Africa and parts of the Middle East as well as from other Caribbean territories.

Most of those interviewed suggested that their primary feedback was in their comments sections and that these comments were mainly positive and supportive. However, more than one respondent indicated that there have been times when they have had to edit, delete, or block some viewers due to negative or hateful comments, including racist invectives. One participant even disclosed that they had stopped producing videos for a while due to the impact of negative comments and feedback (but eventually resumed). Yet, as Chris De La Rosa noted: "There are a lot of people coming to defend you as well, too. The fans will leave comments to defend you… 'You're doing a great job. Don't worry about them. That's just noise.'".

5.3.1 Networking and parochial divisions.

Participants frequently gave indications of contentious relationships among fellow producers. Chris De La Rosa of *Caribbean Pot*, for example, suggested the following:

> It is very competitive, and I don't know if it's because of colonialism, slavery, indentureship, whatever it is, but we all seem to think there isn't enough space for us as Caribbean people on YouTube. And I see the bickering and the back and forth where people are fighting and everything else… there's a lot of negativity.

Other participants indicated problems with collaborations and objections to content on some channels. Contentious exchanges regarding several purported charity efforts from certain channels, for example, evoked accusations of fakery and exploitation from other producers. As noted above, some producers who initially agreed to be interviewed eventually dropped out when the researcher/s would not divulge the identities of other participants. Several interviewees described ongoing conflicts with other producers having to do with perceived ethical misconduct including appropriation of content or breaching of community rules or platform content standards. These concerns were in addition to parochial concerns and criticisms from viewers in which those from some Caribbean countries would sometimes denigrate content originating from others. Especially in the case of food content, these negative reactions often manifested in objections to content creators engaging some viewers felt was cultural appropriation such as when a producer originating in one country prepared food from another. Several participants also

indicated negative feedback when they prepared a dish that was not necessarily associated with their own ethnic group.

5.4 Comments

Comments on the videos averaged 17 words long (the longest being 158) but many of the comments were brief with modal length of 28 characters (about 6 words) and approximately 20% of comments being 28 characters or shorter. These included contributions such as "Beautiful!" "Lovely" and "Very nice video!" 175 (28.9%) of the ($N = 605$) comments contained salutations to the producers, 123 (20.3%) contained cultural or identity claims including statements like "Trini food is de best" and 35 (5.8%) contained references to nostalgia.

As the content creators indicated in the interviews, comments were overwhelmingly positive. Where an overall tone was evident, 503 of the 605 (83%) of the comments were positive while only 14 (2.3%) were negative ($X^2[1] = 70.68$, $p < .001$, $V = .342$); 88 comments (14.5%) were neutral or indeterminate. Comments mostly took the form of supportive appreciative and congratulatory messages such as: "Very entertaining. Keep up the good work with your videos" or "Cool. Great Vlog. Keep the Vibes going. Glad to see everyone having fun time. Enjoy." The few negative comments encountered included one in which a commentor took issue with the authenticity of the peppers being presented: "Not true Scotch Bonnet peppers I grew up with. True Scotch Bonnet are flat looking and have distinctive flavour (*sic.*) those peppers do not have." Another, while complimenting the video overall, noted that the food presented appeared unappealingly dry on screen and suggested that it might be the fault of the lighting or the camera.

5.5 Food (and other) Nostalgia

Since many of the videos involved cooking and other food presentations, comments sometimes demonstrated what has been termed "food nostalgia" where food, cooking and related activities evoke fond memories and associations. Examples included statements such as: "…thanks for your lovely video, you cook so good remind me of Trinidad" and "Love this and thank you so much for sharing this long-lost recipe! Wow lots of childhood memories!"

Nostalgic elements in comments went beyond food. Commentors sometimes, for instance, often thanked content creators for current videos of places they visited before migrating

or during childhood with specific reference to the nostalgia that the videos evoked for them. One poster, for example, wrote of the nostalgia evoked for the homeland: "…I'm an Esequibian, so much memories of those places in your video. Thanks for sharing."

Additionally, commentors sometimes engaged in colloquialisms that evoked earlier places and times. Examples of these included one commentor who described one colloquial Trinidad and Tobago expression as "Haulyuhmuddass. One word" and another who used a colloquial reference for people known to pry into the business of others or "macoes."

6. Discussion

With about twice as many of the videos originating in the region as those produced in the diaspora, cooking videos and family gatherings dominated the content regardless of where the vloggers were located, suggesting a kind of digital and temporal cultural continuity between the foreign and diasporic producers. This continuity was also manifest in some of the collaborations and "meet-ups" in the videos between diasporic and local producers. Several Guyanese producers, for example, posted videos of local and diasporic producers holding joint gatherings and excursions with one group visiting the other. Producers and their audiences constructed and maintained this fluid digital cultural space with the use of numerous cultural markers, particularly by using distinct colloquialisms, presenting flags and other visual symbols, invoking nostalgia, and engaging in domestic/traditional cooking, the latter two combining in what has been termed "food nostalgia" (Espinoza-Ortega, 2021; Moffat et al., 2017). While more than a third of all the sampled videos expressed some form of identity or cultural claim, it was food, more than any other single theme that dominated the content.

The dominance of cooking videos suggests that visual narratives around food provide the basis for communicating cultural meanings. The finding that significantly more diasporic producers featured cooking in their videos may also suggest that the preparation of (otherwise everyday) foods from the region can become an act and a signal of cultural continuity and serve as the focus of identity and contribute to what Anderson (1983) has explained as "imaginative" or creative forces of community.

Domestic and foreign vloggers differed only slightly in general on their content choices and not at all in terms of their overall cultural claims. Some differences in content focus could be explained by the greater accessibility of domestic cultural festivals and even family gatherings in

the domestic environment. While the data do confirm positive relationships between cultural content and levels of viewership and liking, the relationships are both quite weak. These findings indicate that while cultural appeals may improve views and likes, their impact is a relatively small part of viewing and liking decisions.

Producer interviews suggested a nuanced approach to culture and identity portrayals. Some vloggers were very clear that their missions included such imperatives as cultural maintenance, intergenerational transmission, and international exposure, whether that be of Trinidad and Tobago recipes, Jamaican language, or the very existence of Guyana on the world stage. Some defined their cultural and identity claim more narrowly, being concerned with their local domestic community and perceptions of it in the homeland. Others consciously avoided resorting to national or traditional cultural appeals, suggesting a desire to produce content that could stand on its own outside the context of national cultural appeal. For some, other concerns dominated their production decisions, including availing themselves of a source of personal voice and expression, sometimes simply to transcend their parochial cultural strictures and championing social causes of interest in the homeland and the diaspora.

Producers engaged with the global networked technologies in diverse ways. Some felt compelled to tell their stories to the world, particularly in the context of being from countries which are underrepresented or misrepresented on the world stage. Others described social situations in which the challenges sharing cultural content (such as recipes and cooking techniques) became easier through YouTube vlog production. Some interviewees even expressed the value of this content to their own psychological well-being.

Despite some instances of negative audience responses and even contentious relationship with other producers, the Anglo-Caribbean vloggers have continued to produce their materials to overwhelmingly positive responses from those who view and comment on their materials. The quick examination of responses here suggests a further stage to this investigation that might involve more in-depth study of viewer/audience sentiments and an ethnography of viewer experiences.

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