

**Why Do We Watch?: Travel Vlog Content Analysis**

By

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April 2025

A capstone submitted to Southern Utah University in partial fulfillment of the requirement for  
the degree of Master of Arts in Professional Communication

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### **Abstract**

Vlogs, short for “video logs,” provide millions of viewers with entertainment and information. A content analysis of popular travel vlogs was completed to determine what makes them compelling to viewers. In this research, episodes of three popular travel vlogs were coded for Uses & Gratifications Theory components, and for brand personality traits. This analysis revealed two primary characteristics of popular travel vlogs. This analysis also revealed differences between the three travel vlogs that were studied. Based on the findings, suggestions are made on how the three respective travel vlogs might attract new viewers. Also based on the findings, ideas on how a new travel vlog might differentiate itself are presented.

### **Acknowledgments**

I would like to thank all of my professors to date in the Master of Professional Communication program at SUU: Kevin Stein, Ph.D., Lijie Zhou, Ph.D., Braden Bagley, Ph.D., Jon Smith, Ph.D., and Jonathan Holiman, MAPC. The program has exceeded expectations. The classes have been both enjoyable and rewarding, and I have been surprised at the amount of feedback that I have received. I am grateful to have had a positive experience with my second, and likely final, graduate degree.

I would also like to especially thank Lijie Zhou, Ph.D., for taking interest in my academic success, both during Quantitative Analysis, and for this capstone thesis. I would like to thank him for all the time that he has spent meeting with me and responding to emails, providing me with useful input and suggestions.

I would also like to thank my spouse, Rick Ritz, and my parents, J. Brent and Linda Whiting, for encouraging pursuit of my interests and academic endeavors.

“I’m always asking myself, what is the definition of personal freedom? What does it mean to be a free human being? I don’t think there is one. I think it’s a feeling.” - Ewa Bianka Zubek (Eva zu Beck, July 7, 2024).

## Introduction

Vlogging is a relatively new phenomenon. *Vlog*, or “video log” abbreviated, is defined as “a journalistic style of video that captures the life of an individual while typically being narrated and recorded by the same individual” (Sanchez, “Vlog Defined,” n.d., para. 4). Vlogs have existed since at least the year 2000, when someone posted a video chronicling his trip to Los Angeles on the Internet. Blogs, or written postings, were the precursor to vlogs (Sanchez, “History of Vlogging,” n.d.).

Vlogs provide millions of viewers with entertainment and information. 44% percent of Internet users watch vlogs each month, with YouTube being the most popular platform for vlogs (VloggingPro, 2024). An appeal of vlogs is that anyone with minimal resources, such as Internet access, a camera, and a microphone, can create one. Also, there is a vlog to cover just about every subject, from popular topics, such as news, to niche topics, such as personal development.

According to Ertunc (2025), travel vlogging, or vlogging that chronicles travel, has increased in popularity over the past decade for several reasons. Social media platforms such as YouTube and TikTok make it easy to access such content. Advancements in technology, such as with cameras, drones, and smartphones, have made it easier to produce quality video content. Vlogs can also be monetized to generate income through “ad revenue, sponsorships, affiliate marketing, and crowdfunding” (Ertunc, 2025, para. 7). Travel vlogs also provide viewers with firsthand accounts of travels, covering both the good and bad, which makes for entertaining and informative content (Ertunc, 2025).

Travel vlogs are also relevant to tourism, a driving factor in the worldwide economy. “In 2023, travel and tourism's direct contribution to gross domestic product (GDP) was approximately 9.9 trillion U.S. dollars, making up a 9.1 percent share of the total global GDP”

(Statista, 2024, para. 1). Travel vlogs contribute to tourism by preparing viewers in advance of their travels, and by educating viewers on possible travel destinations. Travel vlogs can also be a platform to advertise products and services that relate to travel.

The purpose of this capstone thesis is to determine what makes popular travel vlogs compelling to viewers. In this research, I coded episodes of popular travel vlogs for Uses & Gratifications Theory components, and for brand personality traits. This analysis uncovered similarities and differences in the travel vlogs that were analyzed. Based on the findings, I discuss how the travel vlogs that were analyzed might take steps to attract new viewers. Also based on the findings, I present ideas of how a new travel vlog might differentiate itself in order to stand out from the rest.

This capstone thesis provides practical contributions to research. It identifies why people seek out media. It also provides direction to vlog producers in revealing qualities of a popular travel vlog. Additionally, it provides direction to vlog producers in showing that there are many possible formulas for a popular travel vlog. Content creators could use this research as a springboard in creating a travel vlog.

This capstone thesis provides theoretical contributions to research. It contributes to Uses & Gratifications Theory because it shows how people utilize travel vlog viewing to fulfill their needs. It also contributes to Brand Personality Theory because it shows which brand personality traits are utilized by popular travel vlogs. Also, this capstone thesis studies an area that has not received a lot of attention. While much research exists on travel blogs (written accounts of travel), little research has been conducted on travel vlogs.

## **Literature Review & Rationale**

### **Vlogging**

The Internet has evolved over time to be more user friendly. The first phase of Internet use, or Web 1.0, was “characterized by separate static websites rather than continually-updated weblogs and social networking tools” (Wiktionary, n.d., para. 1). Web 1.0 lasted from approximately 1989 to 2004 (“Web 2.0,” n.d.). The current Internet phase is Web 2.0. Web 2.0 is interactive, and it encourages users to contribute their own content (Whitacre & Brooks, 2017).

Blogs (short for weblogs), or written postings, were the precursor to vlogs. (Sanchez, “History of Vlogging,” n.d.). Blogs allowed millions of people to exchange ideas, and to develop relationships over the Internet (Rosenbloom, 2004, as cited in Gao, et al., 2010). From blogs, photoblogs were developed, which included sound and video (Hoem, 2005, as cited in Gao, et al., 2010). In 2008, Wikipedia defined “Videoblogging” or “Vlogging” for short, as “blogging for which the medium is video” (Wikipedia, 2008, as cited in Gao, et al., 2010, p. 2). Vlogs’ popularity was facilitated by Google acquiring YouTube in 2006 (Gao et al., 2010). As Gao explains, “YouTube is a popular vlog site that lets users upload, tag, and share video clips—thereby making them known to the world” (2010, p. 2). In 2022, YouTube had 210 million users in the United States, and that is just one platform for vlogging (GMI Research Team, 2025).

### **Travel Vlogging**

Travel vloggers influence tourism and perception of travel destinations. According to Peralta (2019), “Travel vlogs are usually conversational vlogs which show the vlogger appearing in front of the camera talking and showing the place around” (p. 245). Travel vloggers are considered social media influencers who can influence people to visit destinations. Relevant to this discussion, “81% of consumers trust personal recommendation” (Allen, 2005, as cited in Peralta, 2019, p. 245). Travel vloggers usually recommend visiting a destination which they feature, which serves as a kind of personal recommendation to the viewer (Peralta, 2019). For

example, a series of multilingual vlogs was created featuring Garut, Indonesia, and was posted on YouTube, and on other sites. These vlogs were useful in promoting the destination amongst tourists (Purwadi et al., 2017, as cited in Peralta, 2019). In fact, a study found that “85.9% of the respondents believe travel vlogs inspire and create the need to travel” (Jog & Alcasoas, 2023, p. 24).

According to Maj (2024), travel vlogs can also create public discourse. The topic of travel “encourages dialogue and openness” (p. 4). Vloggers become influential. They create communities, and they “become ambassadors of specific ideas, concepts and worldviews” (p. 4). For example, popular travel vlogs tend to promote “sustainable development and cultural dialogue” (p. 4). Travel vlogs thus have the ability to influence beyond just providing entertainment and information.

### **Uses & Gratifications Theory**

This capstone thesis explores how people utilize media to fulfill their needs. As Vinney (2024) reports, “Uses & Gratification Theory (UGT) proposes that people choose to consume certain kinds of media because they expect to obtain specific gratifications as a result of those selections” (para. 1). This theory was first developed in the 1940s by Paul Lazarsfeld, and it has been added to over time. This theory refuted the “Magic Bullet Theory,” or the idea that people have uniform responses to mass media communications, like being metaphorically shot with a message (Infante et al., 2017). Some assumptions of this theory are that people intentionally select media to fulfill goals, wants, and needs; that media selection is influenced by social and psychological factors; that media competes with other forms of communication for fulfillment of needs; and that “media messages don’t exert especially strong effects on people” (Rubin, 1993, as cited in Vinney, 2024, para. 8). This theory holds that people are not unduly influenced by

media. Conversely, “people bend the media to their needs more readily than the media overpower them” (Katz et al., 1973, p. 165). Uses & Gratifications Theory classifies 35 identified needs into five categories: Cognitive needs, or “Needs related to strengthening information, knowledge, and understanding;” Affective needs, or “Needs related to strengthening aesthetic, pleasurable and emotional experience;” Integrative needs, or “Needs related to strengthening credibility, confidence, stability, and status;” Social Integrative needs, or “Needs related to strengthening contact with family, friends, and the world;” and “Tension-release needs, or the need to relax and escape by lessening one's awareness of the self” (Katz, et al., 1973, p. 166; Katz, et al., 1973, as cited in Vinney, 2024, para. 10). Different types of media customarily fulfill certain types of needs. As Katz (1973) explains, “Books cultivate the inner self; films and television give pleasure; and newspapers, more than any other medium, give self-confidence and stability” (p. 170).

### **Brand Personality Theory**

This capstone thesis also explores how people select media based on its branding, or its unique characteristics. Brand Personality Theory, introduced by Jennifer Aaker in 1997, holds that “brands are a set of signifiers which communicate a company’s values, culture, quality of their products and much more” (Aaker, 1997; Aaker, 1997, as cited in Tigre Moura, 2021, para. 1). “Brand personality” is “the set of human characteristics associated with a brand” (Aaker, 1997, p. 347). For example, “Absolut vodka personified tends to be described as a cool, hip, contemporary 25-year old [sic], whereas Stolli’s [sic] personified tends to be described as an intellectual, conservative, older man” (Aaker, 1997, p. 347). There are five traits of brand personality:

1. Sincerity (“Down-to-earth, Honest, Wholesome, Cheerful”)

2. Excitement (“Daring, Spirited, Imaginative, Up-to-date”)
3. Competence (“Reliable, Intelligent, Successful”)
4. Sophistication (“Upper class, Charming”)
5. Ruggedness (“Outdoorsy, Tough”) (Aaker, 1997, p. 352).

For example, the clothing brand Patagonia embodies the Sincerity brand personality trait; “Red Bull” embodies the Excitement brand personality trait; Apple embodies the Competence brand personality trait; Louis Vuitton embodies the Sophistication brand personality trait, and Patagonia (listed again) embodies the Ruggedness brand personality trait (Tigre Moura, 2021). The five brand personality traits were narrowed down from a list of originally 309 traits through a series of surveys which categorized products according to their characteristics. For example, the brands Marlboro, Harley-Davidson, and Levi’s were associated with glamorizing the American West, and with strength and masculinity, placing these brands in the Ruggedness category. Interestingly, the Sophistication and Ruggedness brand personality traits are traits that may be desired, but not necessarily held, by consumers who find them to be appealing (Aaker, 1997).

### **Methods**

Content analysis is the method utilized in this research. Content analysis is a research method used to analyze words, themes, and concepts within data (Columbia Mailman School of Public Health, n.d., para. 1). In this study, content analysis was conducted on three popular but completely different travel vlogs to uncover the Uses & Gratification Theory needs fulfilled by these vlogs, and to uncover the brand personality traits utilized by these vlogs.

### **Sampling**

The three travel vlogs that were analyzed in this study are “Best Ever Food Review Show,” “Wolters World,” and “Eva zu Beck.” These three vlogs were selected for this research because they each have over one million YouTube subscribers, but are completely different in purpose and personality. “Best Ever Food Review Show” (hereinafter BEFRS) chronicles the international culinary adventures of Minnesota-born William Sonbuchner, aka “Sonny Side.” This vlog is based out of Vietnam, and it tends to primarily focus on Asian countries, although the vlog is filmed throughout the world (Best Ever Food Review Show, n.d., *Wikipedia*). This vlog, which has 11.3 million subscribers as of April 2025, is highly entertaining, and it can be edgy in its humor (Best Ever Food Review Show, n.d., YouTube channel). “Wolters World” (hereinafter WW) features the international travels of Mark Wolters, Ph.D., Professor of Business Administration at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign (Georgiadis, 2022; University of Illinois, n.d.). This vlog, with 1.12 million subscribers as of April 2025, takes a down-to-earth approach, and it primarily provides advice to Americans for their international travels (“Wolters World,” n.d., YouTube channel). This is the type of vlog that one would watch in preparation for taking a trip. “Eva zu Beck,” (hereinafter EZB) with 1.85 million subscribers as of April 2025, follows Polish-born Ewa Bianka Zubek as she travels the world, on often solo adventures (Eva zu Beck, n.d., *Wikipedia*; Eva zu Beck, n.d., YouTube channel). This vlog could be described as thoughtful and introspective.

### **Coding Categories**

Episodes of the three respective vlogs were coded for components of the Uses & Gratifications Theory and Brand Personality Theory. First, the episodes were coded for Uses & Gratifications Theory elements to show which needs a viewer might fulfill by watching the vlogs. The five components of this theory, or the five reasons why people seek out media under

this theory, are to fulfill Cognitive (learning) needs, Affective (emotional) needs, Integrative (status) needs, Social Integrative (social) needs, and Tension-Free (escape) needs (Katz, et al., 1973, p. 166; Katz et al., 1973, as cited in Vinney, 2024). Episodes of the three respective vlogs were also coded for human-like characteristics that draw consumers to products, and to media, under the Brand Personality Theory. The five components of Brand Personality Theory are Sincerity (“Down-to-earth, Honest, Wholesome, Cheerful”), Excitement (“Daring, Spirited, Imaginative, Up-to-date”), Competence (“Reliable, Intelligent, Successful”), Sophistication (“Upper class, Charming”), and Ruggedness (“Outdoorsy, Tough”) (Aaker, 1997, p. 352).

### **Results**

The analysis answers several research questions. The first research question asks which Uses & Gratifications Theory needs are met by each of the three vlog episodes that were analyzed, and in what frequency. All three of the vlogs that were studied meet tension-free needs in close to all of the episodes that were analyzed. Beyond this, the three vlogs meet their own unique mixes of Uses & Gratifications Theory needs. These needs and their frequencies in the three vlogs that were analyzed are outlined in the Statistical Test section below. The second research question asks which brand personality traits are most utilized by each of the three vlog episodes that were analyzed, and in what frequency. All three of the vlogs that were studied demonstrate the excitement brand personality trait in most of the episodes that were analyzed. Beyond this, the three vlogs utilize their own unique mixes of brand personality traits. These brand personality traits and their frequencies in the three vlogs that were analyzed are outlined in the Statistical Test section below. The third question asks how the three respective vlogs might reach a larger audience. The below section entitled “Ways to Reach a Larger Audience” explores this question. The final question asks how new travel vlog niches might be crafted, based on the

results of the analysis. The section below entitled “New Travel Log Niche Ideas” explores this question.

### **Statistical Test**

The statistical test utilized in this study “determines whether there is an association between categorical variables (i.e., whether the variables are independent or related)” (Kent State University, 2025, para. 1). “ $X^2$ ” signifies the statistical test (Kent State University, 2025). Within the equation, *df* or *degrees of freedom* refer to the number of variables being compared. The *p-value*, or *probability value*, is the sum of the equation. “A p-value of 0.05 or lower is generally considered statistically significant” (Beers, 2024, para. 2). Also, statistical significance increases as the p-value decreases (Beers, 2024).

In this study, 25 episodes of BEFRS, WW, and EZB were coded for Uses and Gratifications Theory characteristics, and for Brand Personality traits. The purpose of this research was to uncover the traits or combinations of traits utilized by travel vlogs that have significant viewership. Integrative needs, or needs “to strengthen confidence, status, or credibility” are not discussed in this section since none of the vlog episodes that were analyzed appealed to those needs. (Katz, et al., 1973, as cited in Vinney, 2024, para. 10).

### **Cognitive Needs**

Cognitive needs are “the need to acquire information and knowledge or improve understanding” (Katz, et al., 1973, as cited in Vinney, 2024, para. 10). All of the 25 out of 25 (100%) of BEFRS episodes that were analyzed in this study met cognitive needs, 24 out of 25 (96.0%) of WW episodes met cognitive needs, and 6 out of 25 (24.0%) of EZB episodes that were analyzed in this study met cognitive needs. For the crosstab test,  $X^2 = 46.773$ ,  $df = 2$ ,  $p <$

0.05, signifying that there is a statistically significant relationship between cognitive needs being met and not being met in the vlog episodes that were analyzed.

### **Affective Needs**

Affective needs satisfy “emotional needs” (Communication Theory, n.d., para. 4).

Affective needs are “related to strengthening aesthetic, pleasurable and emotional experience” (Katz, et al., 1973, p. 165). None of the BEFRS episodes that were analyzed by this research met affective needs, none of the WW episodes that were analyzed by this research met affective needs, and of 18 out of 25 (72%) of EZB episodes that were analyzed by this research met affective needs. For the crosstab test,  $X^2 = 47.368$ ,  $df = 2$ ,  $p < 0.05$ , signifying that there is a statistically significant relationship between affective needs being met and not being met by the three vlogs that were analyzed.

### **Social Integrative Needs**

Social Integrative needs are needs to “connect with others and maintain relationships through social interaction” (Fiveable, 2025, para. 1). None of the BEFRS episodes that were analyzed by this research met social integrative needs, 3 out of 25 (12%) of WW episodes that were analyzed by this research met social integrative needs, and 7 out of 25 (28%) of EZB episodes that were analyzed by this research met social integrative needs. For the crosstab test,  $X^2 = 8.538$   $df = 2$ ,  $p < 0.05$ , signifying that there is a statistically significant relationship between social integrative needs being met and not being met by the three vlogs that were analyzed.

### **Tension-Free Needs**

Tension-free needs are “the need to relax and escape by lessening one's awareness of the self” (Katz, et al., 1973, as cited in Vinney, 2024, para. 10). All 25 out of 25 (100%) of the BEFRS episodes that were analyzed by this research met tension-free needs, 24 out of 25 (96%)

of WW episodes that were analyzed by this research met tension-free needs, and 23 out of 25 (92%) of EZB episodes that were analyzed by this research met tension-free needs. For the crosstab test,  $X^2 = 2.083$ ,  $df = 2$ ,  $p > 0.05$ , signifying that there is a statistically insignificant relationship between tension-free needs being met and not being met by the three vlogs that were analyzed.

### **Sincerity**

Sincerity as a brand personality trait is described as “Down-to-earth, Honest, Wholesome, Cheerful” (Aaker, 1997, p. 352). None of the BEFRS episodes that were analyzed by this research demonstrated sincerity as a brand personality trait, 5 out of 25 (20%) of WW episodes that were analyzed by this research demonstrated sincerity as a brand personality trait, and 21 out of 25 (84%) of EZB episodes that were analyzed by this research demonstrated sincerity as a brand personality trait. For the crosstab test,  $X^2 = 42.504$ ,  $df = 2$ ,  $p = < 0.05$ , signifying that there is a statistically significant relationship between sincerity being a brand personality trait and not being a brand personality trait by the three vlogs that were analyzed.

### **Excitement**

Excitement as a brand personality trait is described as “Daring, Spirited, Imaginative, Up-to-date” (Aaker, 1997, p. 352). 24 out of 25 (96%) of BEFRS episodes that were analyzed by this research demonstrated excitement as a brand personality trait, 20 out of 25 (80%) of WW episodes that were analyzed by this research demonstrated excitement as a brand personality trait, and 20 out of 25 (80%) of EZB episodes that were analyzed by this research demonstrated excitement as a brand personality trait. For the crosstab test,  $X^2 = 3.409$ ,  $df = 2$ ,  $p > 0.05$ , signifying that there is a statistically insignificant relationship between excitement being a brand personality trait and not being a brand personality trait by the three vlogs that were analyzed.

**Competence**

Competence as a brand personality trait is described as “Reliable, Intelligent, Successful” (Aaker, 1997, p. 352). 22 out of 25 (88%) of BEFRS episodes that were analyzed by this research demonstrated competence as a brand personality trait, 25 out of 25 or 100% of WW episodes that were analyzed by this research demonstrated competence as a brand personality trait, and 1 out of 25 (4%) of EZB episodes that were analyzed by this research demonstrated competence as a brand personality trait. For the crosstab test,  $X^2 = 59.375$ ,  $df = 2$ ,  $p < 0.05$ , signifying that there is a statistically significant relationship between competence being a brand personality trait and not being a brand personality trait by the three vlogs that were analyzed.

**Sophistication**

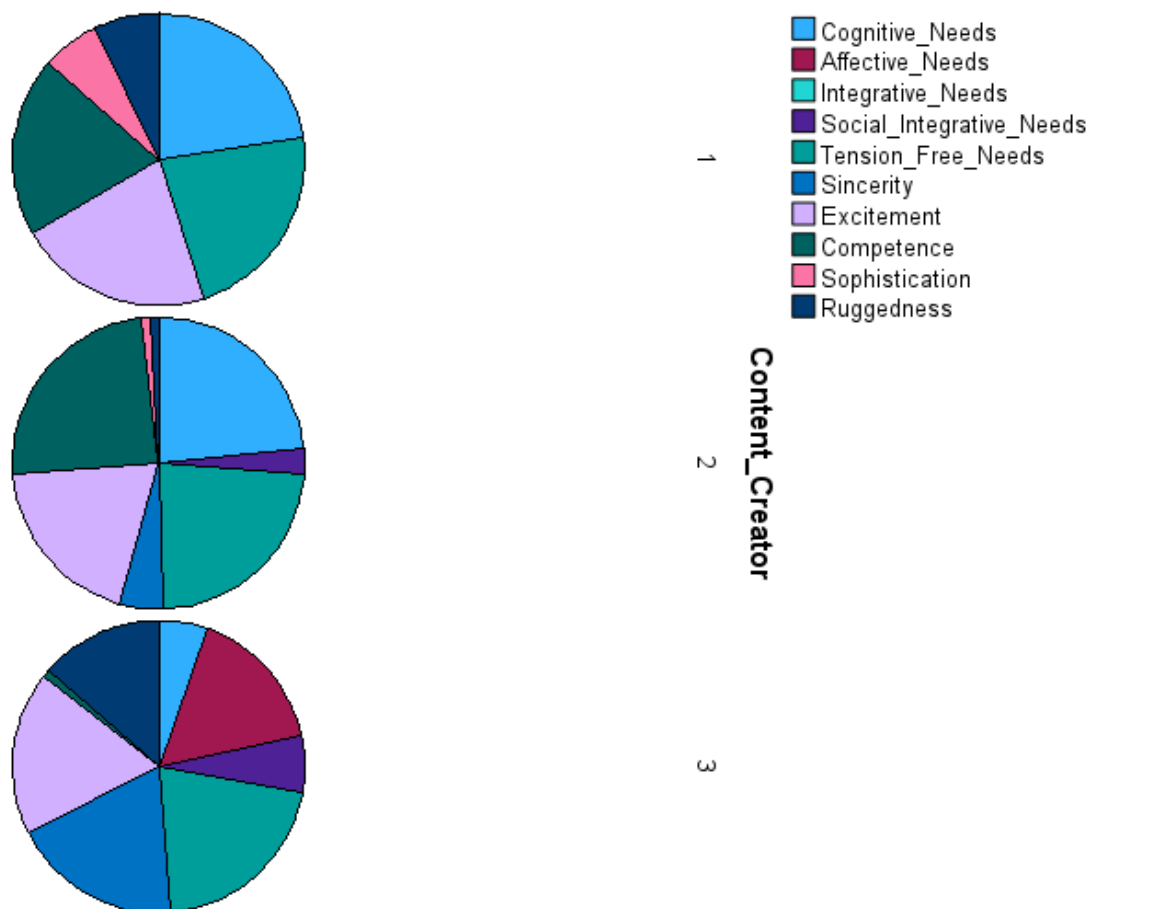
Sophistication as a brand personality trait is described “Upper class, Charming” (Aaker, 1997, p. 352). 7 out of 25 (28%) of BEFRS episodes that were analyzed by this research demonstrated sophistication as a brand personality trait, 1 out of 25 (4%) of WW episodes that were analyzed by this research demonstrated sophistication as a brand personality trait, and none of the EZB episodes that were analyzed by this research demonstrated sophistication as a brand personality trait. For the crosstab test,  $X^2 = 12.034$ ,  $df = 2$ ,  $p < 0.05$ , signifying that there is a statistically significant relationship between sophistication being a brand personality trait and not being a brand personality trait by the three vlogs that were analyzed.

**Ruggedness**

Ruggedness as a brand personality trait is described as “Outdoorsy, Tough” (Aaker, 1997, 352). 8 out of 25 or 32% of BEFRS episodes that were analyzed by this research demonstrated ruggedness as a brand personality trait, 1 out of 25 or 4% of WW episodes that were analyzed by this research demonstrated ruggedness as a brand personality trait, and 15 out

of 25 or 60% of EZB episodes that were analyzed by this research demonstrated ruggedness as a brand personality trait. For the crosstab test,  $X^2 = 18.015$ ,  $df = 2$ ,  $p = p < 0.05$ , signifying that there is a statistically significant relationship between ruggedness being a brand personality trait and not being a brand personality trait by the three vlogs that were analyzed.

### Frequency of Uses & Gratifications Theory Components and Brand Personality Traits



## **Discussion**

### **Commonalities**

The study results show that there is more than one way to create a popular travel vlog, but that the three popular travel vlogs that were analyzed share two commonalities. First, the analysis shows that all three vlogs meet tension-free needs. The three vlogs that were analyzed allow viewers to metaphorically escape from their regular lives. Viewers are able to relax, and to figuratively return to their lives refreshed, and with new perspective. Second, the study results also show that all three vlogs have excitement as a brand personality trait. They are all “daring, spirited, imaginative,” and “up-to-date” in their own ways. (Aaker, 1997, p. 352). BEFRS demonstrates excitement by featuring travels to exotic locations, and by the host sampling tasty or unusual foods. It is important to note that all of the BEFRS episodes that were reviewed in this study have titles that end in exclamation points. WW demonstrates excitement by providing advice to viewers on their future travels. Through hearing accounts of the host’s travels, and by listening to his pragmatic travel advice, viewers are able to visualize themselves going on similar trips as the host. EZB demonstrates excitement by showcasing travel to frequently remote locations, such as to the Arctic (Eva zu Beck, February 2025). EZB also demonstrates excitement because the host sometimes changes her mind about where she will travel to, or about when her travel to a particular location will end, and this adds to the excitement. Part of the excitement of EZB is also concern for the host’s personal safety, due to her frequently traveling and camping alone (alongside her dog, Vilk). (The host reveals that she does camp alone in one of the episodes (Eva zu Beck, 2022).

### **Practical and Theoretical Implications**

There are several practical implications to travel vlogging, based on the analysis, and based on observation. Like the three vlogs that were studied, a popular travel vlog needs to fulfill its own unique but expansive purpose. Some travel vlogs naturally have more appeal than others. For example, BEFRS, as a travel food vlog, is relevant to many people. WW primarily appeals to prospective travelers and learners, and EZB appeals to more of a contemplative crowd. WW and EZB appeal to audiences that are large, but that are smaller in scope than the audience for a travel food vlog, like BEFRS. Thus, a travel vlog should have a purpose that is considered to be pertinent by a sufficient number of prospective viewers. Also, Uses & Gratifications Theory needs that are fulfilled by a vlog, and the brand personality traits utilized by a vlog, need to make sense for the vlog's purpose. Also, the host's personality should be a good match with the vlog.

There are several theoretical implications to travel vlogging, based on the analysis, and based on observation. First, a travel vlog that seeks to be popular may want to test its content to ensure that it meets tension-free needs, and to ensure that it is exciting. Research should also confirm if a vlog's purpose would attract a sufficient audience size. Also, research could identify specific topics of interest to a prospective vlog audience. For example, it likely isn't an accident that WW recently toured Ireland. The vlog's producers likely knew that this topic would interest viewers.

### **BEFRS**

BEFRS has the most viewership out of the three vlogs that were analyzed, with 11.3 million subscribers as of April 2025 (Best Ever Food Review Show, n.d., YouTube channel). In addition to providing excitement at an upbeat pace, and meeting tension-free needs, BEFRS focuses on competence and on fulfilling cognitive needs. Despite its informal presentation, and its edgy humor, the show is well-researched, and viewer usually learns something new from

watching, be it about another country, or about food. BEFRS also incorporates ruggedness into some of its episodes by featuring travel to locations that are off the grid, or even dangerous, such as in an episode when a trip to Egypt went awry (Best Ever Food Review Show, 2022). BEFRS occasionally incorporates sophistication into some of its episodes, usually by the host sampling a high-cost food item, such as a \$1000 curry in one episode (Best Ever Food Review Show, 2024). BEFRS also has comedic value, which also contributes to its appeal. BEFRS is not characterized by sincerity, and it does not fulfill affective or social integrative needs.

## **WW**

WW, with 1.12 million subscribers as of April 2025, in addition to providing excitement and meeting tension-free needs, focuses on competence, and on meeting cognitive needs (Wolters World, n.d., YouTube channel). The host presents himself as an authority on each country that he travels to, although he naturally knows more about some countries than others. Many of the episodes focus on what not to do while traveling, or what to watch out for while traveling, which tends to make them interesting. Unlike BEFRS, occasionally, WW is marked by sincerity. For example, the host is particularly animated when he discusses Germany and Finland, and he seems to be fond of those countries. Also, unlike BEFRS, WW on occasion attempts to meet social integrative needs. For example, in one episode he featured a Question & Answer session with his spouse, Jocelyn, in which they answered selected viewers' questions (Wolters World, 2024). The host apparently routinely hosts such Question & Answer sessions, since a feature of being a paid *Patreon* (a fan platform) supporter of the show is being able to more easily submit travel questions (Wolters World Travel & Culture, n.d.). WW is also taking steps to form community by providing certain *Patreon* supporters with a WW computer sticker and soda huggy (Wolters World Travel & Culture *Patreon* Membership Tab, n.d.). These items

are shipped to the viewer along with a handwritten note from the host of WW. Unlike with BEFRS and EZB, ruggedness is not a brand personality trait incorporated by WW, which features comfortable travels by the host and his family. Sophistication is also not a typical brand personality trait utilized by WW, perhaps because it seems to cater to the average person who travels on a budget.

### **EZB**

EZB, with 1.85 million subscribers as of April 2025, in addition to providing excitement and meeting tension-free needs, focuses on ruggedness, sincerity, affective needs, and social integrative needs. Ruggedness is a key brand personality trait of the vlog since the host frequently camps in a tent, or sleeps in an all-terrain vehicle. The host is also frequently outdoors, and she visits varied landscapes in different countries. Sincerity is a part of the vlog because the host discusses her personal life, and the vlog makes it seem like her travels and her personal life are one in the same. The host meets viewers' affective needs by sharing her feelings. Also, when she speaks, she frequently talks directly to the camera, facilitating closeness. Some episodes of this vlog also meet social integrative needs. By watching the vlog, viewers feel like they get to know the host, and they thus feel like they are interacting with the world by watching. Also, the host has episodes in which she adroitly addresses viewers' sometimes invasive questions (Eva zu Beck, 2022; Eva zu Beck, May 2024). The host also encourages participation by viewers. For example, in one episode, she invites the viewer to "come along" with her on a "new adventure" (Eva zu Beck, July 30, 2024). In another episode, the host demonstrates interest in her viewers when she states, "I'm also super curious to know if you could picture yourself living in a tent like this for any extended period of time" (Eva zu Beck, September 2024). The host also refers to her paid *Patreon* supporters as her "Wolfpack"

on her *Patreon* page (“Eva zu Beck,” *Patreon*, n.d.). In comments below her YouTube videos, EZB viewers frequently share information about themselves, seeking validation or acknowledgment from the host and from other viewers of the show. Unlike BEFRS and WW, EZB does not focus on competence or on cognitive needs. The vlog is more about the host’s personal adventures than it is about anything else.

### **Ways to Reach a Larger Audience**

In order to reach a larger audience, BEFRS might attempt to engage with its viewers, or to fulfill social integrative needs. For example, the host might want to incorporate Question & Answer sessions into his vlog, as do WW and EZB. Not even the *Patreon* page for “Sonny Side,” the host of BEFRS, makes any effort at connecting with viewers (Sonny Side, n.d.). Conversely, EZB recently hosted a live virtual event for its *Patreon* supporters (Eva zu Beck, March 2025).

Another way to reach a larger audience would be for WW to attempt to incorporate ruggedness, as well as sophistication, into its episodes. For example, the host and his family might camp in one of the episodes in order to incorporate ruggedness. In another episode, they might explore fine dining at their travel destination in order to incorporate sophistication. Such attempts at topic diversification might attract a larger audience to the vlog.

Another means to reach a larger audience would be for EZB to incorporate competence, and fulfilling cognitive needs, into its episodes. For example, when the host travels to a destination, she might provide insights regarding the location that might be unknown to the viewer. This additional content might attract viewers who seek to learn about travel destinations.

### **New Travel Vlog Niche Ideas**

One possible way of creating a new travel vlog niche would be by fulfilling all of the four Uses & Gratifications Theory needs that were utilized by the vlogs that were analyzed, and by demonstrating all of the brand personality traits. A risk of this might be trying to appeal to too many people, though. BEFRS did not fulfill affective or social integrative needs, and it did not demonstrate sincerity as a brand personality trait, in any of the episodes that were analyzed. Still, it has the highest viewership of the three vlogs that were studied.

The analysis shows that any popular travel vlog likely needs to fulfill tension-free needs, and to incorporate excitement. Quality content on its own possibly fulfills tension-free needs. Apart from these elements that need to be present in any popular travel vlog, there are opportunities to develop new travel vlog niches.

A new travel vlog niche could be a travel vlog that appeals to ruggedness, while also fulfilling cognitive needs. This travel vlog could also be characterized by the competence brand personality trait. While EZB effectively utilizes ruggedness, it does so with limited authority. Perhaps a travel vlog could provide insights and knowledge on how to navigate rugged travel, such as hiking or camping in varied locations. Such a travel vlog could also fulfill social integrative needs by finding ways to involve its viewers.

A new travel vlog niche could also be a travel vlog that primarily fulfills the sophistication brand personality trait. BEFRS is the only vlog out of the three that were analyzed that routinely incorporates this brand personality trait, and it only does so on occasion. Such a new travel vlog niche could predictably feature high-end travel, but it also might unexpectedly incorporate brand personality traits such as sincerity, or ruggedness. It might also unexpectedly fulfill social integrative needs by seeking participation from its viewers.

## **Conclusion**

Tenets of Uses & Gratifications Theory, and of Brand Personality Theory, can be looked to in creating a popular travel vlog. Whether knowingly or unknowingly, BEFRS, WW, and EZB all meet Uses & Gratification Theory needs, and they all utilize brand personality traits, in maintaining and attracting viewership. The commonality in these travel vlogs, aside from each having over 1 million YouTube subscribers, is that they all fulfill tension-free needs, and they all utilize the excitement brand personality trait, in most episodes. This shows that a travel vlog must excel in these traits in order to be popular on the Internet. Aside from these similarities, the three travel vlogs that were analyzed have their own unique characteristics. This shows that there is not one set formula for creating a popular travel vlog. Content creators have room to develop their own distinctive style.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

There are some limitations to this research. The study's sample size of three vlogs was small in scope. A larger sample size of vlogs would need to be analyzed for a more thorough analysis. Also, there is some subjectivity in determining if a vlog episode meets certain criteria. For example, while one person might see the sincerity brand personality trait in a vlog episode, someone else might not. For a more comprehensive analysis, more than one person would likely need to categorize vlog episodes.

This study also presents ideas for future research. Analysis shows that popular travel vlogs fulfill tension-free needs, and that they embody the excitement brand personality trait. Research could be conducted to determine how vlogs meet tension-free needs. Research could also be conducted to determine how vlogs incorporate the excitement brand personality trait. Another idea for future research could involve exploration of additional communication theories.

This analysis only looked at Uses & Gratifications Theory, and at Brand Personality Theory, while numerous communication theories are likely relevant to creating engaging video content.

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