

## **From YouTube to TV, and Back Again: Viral Video Child Stars and Media Flows in the Era of Social Media**

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It is a common perception that television talk shows, a genre of reality TV, can serve as an amplifier for celebrity-aspirants. Everyday, ordinary people have been known to capitalize on their talk show exposure, using their prominence and infamy on the old media platform as a springboard to wrestle attention and establish their digital media estates. One recent example is 13yo Danielle Bregoli who appeared as a foul-mouthed out-of-control teen on the *Dr Phil* show in September 2016, and whose snippets on the *Dr Phil* YouTube channel have accumulated over 59 million views. Since then, Bregoli has fostered a following into the millions on Instagram where she hawks sponsored advertorials. However, we focus on a less visible but arguably more insidious, commercialized, and exploitative form of virality flows and currency exchange, in the reverse between television and social media around child personalities. This paper examines the way TV talk shows borrow from the native virality of social media vernaculars to bolster old media's struggling foray into digital spaces. From *The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon's* "Hashtag Fail" segment to *Jimmy Kimmel Live!'s* "I told my kids I ate all their Halloween candy" video challenge, TV talk shows have been soliciting the free and willing labour of social media users to produce content for their show. Moreover, *The Ellen DeGeneres Show* regularly mines YouTube for viral videos starring children in order to invite them as guests on the show, often to replicate their viral act for a live audience, disseminate these programme clips on their corporate YouTube channel, and eventually contract viral YouTube children with high attention value to star in their own recurring segments on the Show. The pathway from parents and others posting videos of children that go viral, through to their appearances on TV talkshows, incorporation into the social media output of those shows, and subsequent reappearances if warranted, beg important questions about the agency, monitoring, and exploitation of young children. Our paper investigates the way the ailing old media of television is cannibalizing the spontaneous social capital of viral YouTube children, and the ethical considerations of such childhood commerce. In tracing the lifecycle of such viral YouTube children, we map the historical precedents of pre-internet television formats that similarly capitalize on "kid moments" such as *America's Funniest Home Videos* and *Kids Say The Darndest Things*, while drawing out the important differences that are now possible due to networked communication. The paper draws on the theoretical lenses of intimate surveillance (Leaver 2015) and micro-microcelebrity (Abidin 2015), and extends these to map the shifting flows between media platforms, and the way children are implicated, exploited, and situated by these processes.

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