

Grace Helbig Will NEVER be a Hollywood Star, but David Dobrik Will Be

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If you were an avid YouTube watcher within the last ten years, chances are you have heard of Grace Helbig. Helbig is a comedic, vlog style YouTube content creator with over 2 million subscribers. To put it simply, she was an internet sensation. Helbig created her fame from utilizing her hilarious relatability to connect with her audience. She was one of the first female YouTubers of her era to understand how successful parasocial relationships can be between a creator and their audience. However, if I have one thing to say about Grace Helbig, it is that she will never be a Hollywood star, ever. Harsh, I know.

Parasocial relationships are one sided relationships, most commonly relevant on the internet. It is the sensation of hanging out with a person who does not know you exist. You bond with that person by learning about their personalities, their traits, and simply what makes them human. These creators make it feel like they are your friend. This dynamic with her audience is what made her so famous on YouTube in the first place. Josh Meyorwitz describes these parasocial relationships as a connection, “fostered by media that simulate the sights and sounds of real life interactions”(Meyorwitz 2008). Everything from the way she sets up her camera to make it feel as if you are sitting in front of her, to the direct eye contact she makes, to the way she asks her audience questions like a friend would. Helbig never tries to be perfect. She tries to be relatable. Anne Helen Peterson writes, “In a certain corner of the YouTube world (read: the part where people make money), Helbig is ubiquitous with what she documents. She tapes herself as she sits in a bathroom waiting for the train, dying her hair, waking up jet-lagged, and dorking around her hotel room (Peterson 2015). Unlike many other YouTubers on the internet, Helbig does not necessarily care about her appearance. She is a beautiful woman but that is not the reason for her fame. Helbig's funny, quirky, and sometimes awkward personality entices her audience because they can relate to her on a personal and emotional level.

With all of this success, Helbig was offered opportunities to move out of the YouTube space and into television and movies. This is when Helbig's career begins to hit a standstill and the reason she is not in television or movies today, and never will be. Of course, Helbig wanted to move into "the big leagues". At that time (around 2015), the term "YouTuber" was still struggling to be respected as a profession. Helbig had so much success and she wanted to grow her career. However, Helbig's YouTube videos do not follow the same rules as television does, hence the success. Television and movies are scripted, heavily produced, heavily edited, and is not nearly as relatable as self made videos are. There are so many people behind the scenes of this world that these connections seem disingenuous and it is difficult for people to form the same type of personal relationship. Helbig's fame was produced because of the parasocial relationships she created with her viewers. When she removes that dynamic, the "Helbig magic" disintegrates. To prove this point I will name examples of Helbig's failed attempts at television and movies. To start, Helbig starred in her first movie, *Camp Takota*, with a 67% on Rotten Tomatoes, then *Electra Woman and Dynagirl* with 5.4/10 on IMDB, and finally *Dirty30* with 5.5/10 on IMDB. She also was given her own talk show, *The Grace Helbig Show*, which aired on the E! channel and only lasted one season before it was cut off the air. It is clear there is a disconnect when Helbig is acting (or at least acting when scripted) that her audience can not relate to and therefore do not respond well to.

There is a reason that Helbig is only successful on the internet. The parasocial relationships she is a master at creating are lost in mainstream media. Today, Helbig almost strictly runs her own podcasts, including *Not Too Deep with Grace Helbig*, and *This Might Get Weird*. She is not seen on YouTube making edited videos as much because her podcasts are the most successful way to create parasocial relationships with her audience. You feel as if you are in the room with her and her guests while you listen. There is no editing, the videos are longer, and she is as candid as possible. Helbig has not tried to keep up with the currently fast paced new wave of YouTube because she knows her audience and she is loyal to their relationships with her. She is an internet celebrity for millennials. The parasocial relationships she builds are with people her age, which makes a lot of sense. If 36 year old Helbig attempted to create new parasocial

relationships with teens and young adults, she would not be able to relate to them and therefore be unsuccessful. Helbig is incredibly smart, and she understands her audience and herself as a creator. She has stopped trying to be mainstream, and has clung onto authenticity. It has paid off as well considering her podcasts are immensely successful, getting thousands of views every episode.

Along with Helbig's fame, and her failures, I can't help but notice how limiting parasocial relationships were to creators back then. She could not break into mainstream media because the parasocial relationships she made were the reason for her fame in the first place, and she isn't alone. Many vlog style YouTubers in the early 2010's have tried to attempt television and movies and have failed. To list off a few: Shane Dawson, Colleen Ballinger (Miranda Sings), and Lucas Cruikshank (Fred). The lack of authenticity is what restricts these YouTubers' fame. It is unfortunate because that is the goal of many internet celebrities: get off of the internet and into Hollywood. However, in the past 5 years there have been a heavy shift within Youtube moving to become a mainstream form of entertainment and even surpassing cable. With this comes a space for YouTubers to break out into mainstream media and Hollywood unlike any creators like Helbig were able to accomplish. With the internet and social media becoming the main source of entertainment for almost all of Generation-Z, Hollywood began to take notice. People cut the cord on cable and started subscribing to monthly streaming services like Netflix, Hulu, HBO Max, and YouTube. YouTube created its own streaming service called YouTubeTV. Created in 2017, YouTubeTV included original series and other channels. A lot of the time these original series included actors who were YouTubers. This was when mainstream T.V. and social media entertainment tv started to blur lines. YouTubers were becoming actors and actors were starting to make YouTube videos or create social media accounts like TikTok to help their careers. Cable was out, Internet T.V. was in. The internet became the new Hollywood.

An example of this phenomenon is the career of David Dobrik. David Dobrik is a 25 year old YouTuber with 18.3 Million Subscribers. He is infamously known to many as the "King of

YouTube". He started his channel in 2015 coming from Vine. He creates vlog style videos that Rolling Stones describes as "zipping around Los Angeles filming gross-out pranks, stunts, and lavish giveaways, resulting in an aesthetic that's a cross of *Jackass*, *Entourage*, and *The Oprah Winfrey Show*" (Dickson, 2021). His videos are semi-scripted and not necessarily parasocial. David does not talk into the camera, he talks from behind the camera. It is like you are watching a T.V show and his friends are the characters. This is how many of the new aged YouTubers are filming their videos. Because of this, it has become easy for people like Dobrik to transition to TV.

In the earlier years of YouTube, Hollywood wanted nothing to do with creators. There was a bold line between internet entertainment and cable/movies. People like Grace Helbig and old school YouTubers were not treated as serious professionals with their careers. A career on YouTube was very new and brands were not endorsing YouTubers yet. This creators want to attempt to break into mainstream media or Hollywood. Also, the term "influencer" did not exist yet. An influencer is someone who has received their fame from their notoriety on the internet. Some influencers are famous for a specific skill, but many are famous for simply being famous. Influencers make their money from influencer marketing which is "the art and science of engaging people who have influence on the Internet (Influencers) to spread the message of a brand and its target audience in the form of a sponsored content" (Bognar, Puljic, Kadezabek, 2019). The bigger your number is under your follower or subscriber count, the more brands want to work with you. A big portion of internet celebrities are influencers and make their money this way, Dobrik being one of them. David Dobrik is making millions of dollars from independent sponsorships and advertisements, he would never even need to make it to Hollywood to be successful. However, Hollywood feels they need people like Dobrik to stay relevant to the younger generation.

It appears that the Internet and the culture of Generation-Z are always two steps ahead of Hollywood. This is why they seek out people like Dobrik, to help them catch up with the fast paced success of the Internet. Hollywood has hired Dobrik to host T.V shows like *Discovering*

David Dobrik on DiscoveryTV and Talent show *America's Most Musical Family* on Nickelodeon. Not only did he star in these shows, but they were successful. Dobrik starring in these T.V shows work because he is being himself. He is not acting, it is not very scripted, it is David Dobrik playing the same David Dobrik you watch every week on YouTube. It's ironic because, as I discussed earlier, the reason Helbig could not break into Hollywood was because they would let her play herself. I believe people like Helbig were living in the wrong place at the wrong time. During her era, Hollywood would try to turn YouTubers into actors. Now, it is the other way around. The industry understands why YouTubers are so popular. Their fans feel they can create bonds and relationships with them, which creates an attachment. Now, we see famous actors, singers, comedians, etc, making YouTube accounts to reach a bigger audience. If Internet entertainment established faster and Hollywood was caught up with the success of the Internet earlier, people like Helbig would have had a chance the same way Dobrik does. Helbig lived in a time when Hollywood didn't want to be the Internet and they prided themselves on that. Helbig had to try to adapt to Hollywood standards which ripped away her charm and caused her to fail. Now, people want Dobrik to be as himself as possible. They want to recreate the success of Dobrik's YouTube videos on TV.

The main takeaway of this assessment on the Internet is how influential parasocial relationships are. Parasocial relationships have changed the dynamic of the internet forever. It has made the internet a place for human beings to feel connection, to imitate relationships and stimulate emotions that they may be lacking in reality. Creating bonds is all that humans really want at the end of the day and it has been translated onto the Internet. It shows how prevalent the Internet has become in our environment, as real relationships have been imitated. However, you have to ask what parasocial relationships are doing to us, to our social skills, to how we form relationships. Is it broadening our horizons to a new definition of what relationships and communities look like? Or, it is forcing humans to lack real life skills. As we grow into era after era of the internet, the definition of relationships is going to change. It is up to us to use this power to create meaningful connections, to not forget the importance of relationships in real life, living in a digital world.

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