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The MrBeast effect: an expert explains why we're drawn to videos of random people winning big

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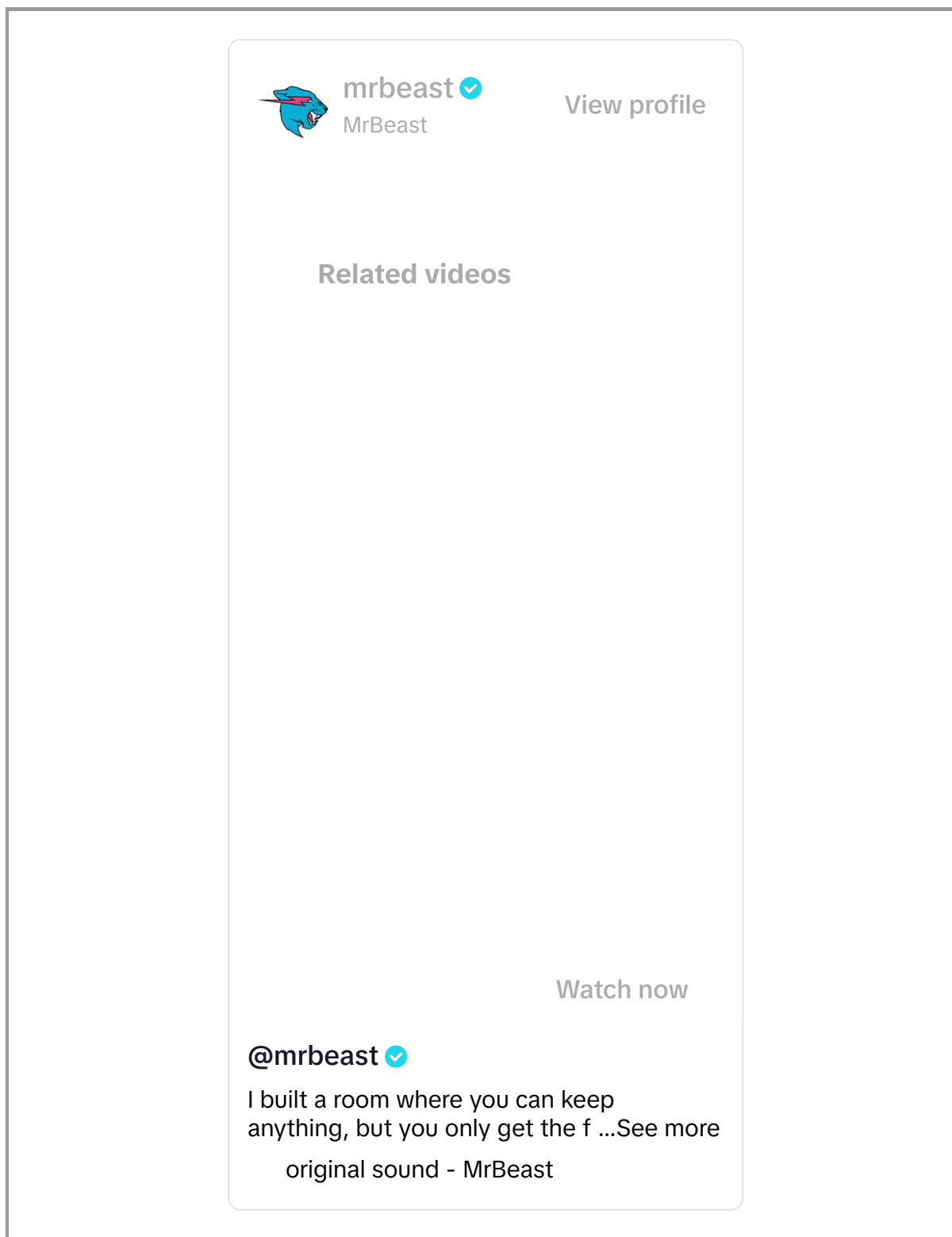
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Yesterday, thousands of Sydneysiders gathered at the Opera House to watch the world's most subscribed-to YouTuber, MrBeast, give away ten mostly luxury cars.

Beyond peopel who can drive, the crowd was also packed with children who decided to sit in the sun for hours just to watch others win prizes.

These fans knew what to expect. MrBeast, whose real name is James "Jimmy" Donaldson, has built his brand on massive giveaways and contests that award ordinary people with great riches. With 290 million YouTube subscribers, his videos tend to quickly amass 100-200 million views, generating revenue through advertising, sponsorships and merchandise.



Participants in MrBeast's videos often undertake unique challenges to win prizes. Other times, they'll do nothing at all: charity videos – aka recording yourself giving huge sums to homeless people – are a massive online trend (and have rightly raised ethical concerns).

The question is *why* do so many of us love watching this content when we ourselves aren't getting much from it ... or are we?

Watching winning feels like winning

When those around us are happy, it rubs off. Researchers call this emotional contagion. This idea suggests people tend to “catch” other people’s emotions and replicate them.

And as you may have noticed, people receiving huge giveaways tend to be pretty happy. Watching contestants laugh in glee after winning as much money as they can carry will naturally curve the lips of most viewers.

If You Can Carry \$1,000,000 You Keep It!



Another reason MrBeast’s content is so popular is because it gives us something to talk about. Research shows the bulk of our conversations tend to relate to our personal experiences and relationships. We use our memorable experiences to fuel quality conversations, which then provide us with social capital.

Who can forget the time MrBeast recreated Squid Game in real life? And who could resist telling others about it? There’s a reason that video got more than 600 million views.

In another video, MrBeast challenged 100 people aged 1 to 100 to democratically eliminate one another over several days until a victor emerged. This production involved 300 cameras and a massive team of crew and editors to cut it down to a 40-minute extravaganza.

Ages 1 - 100 Decide Who Wins \$250,000



There were plenty of tears along the way.

Most of MrBeast's videos are highly extravagant – costing millions to make – and completely novel. They generate surprise and awe, which helps explain why they're so binge-able and widely shared.

You want a Lamborghini? You better work

Although some MrBeast videos show him simply giving money away to people, his more recent videos often require participants to complete various challenges.

In yesterday's Opera House giveaway, contestants had to play a game of cornhole (in which contestants aim objects – usually beanbags – at holes cut into a slanted board). Eventually, a man named Sergio walked away with the coveted A\$450,000 Lamborghini.

In one recent video, a contestant named Alex was offered US\$10,000 (about A\$15,000) for every day he survived alone in an abandoned grocery store. He eventually lasted 45 days and walked away with US\$450,000 (A\$675,000)

\$10,000 Every Day You Survive In A Grocery Store



There are a couple of reasons people enjoy watching others “work” for a prize. Most people, for instance, have a strong sense of fairness and want to believe people get what they deserve. They believe in a “just world”.

When we see someone win something by overcoming a challenge, this feels more deserved and equitable, which makes their victory more gratifying to watch. For instance, on day 13 of being stuck in the grocery store, Alex managed to create a functioning shower out of raw store parts. Who could begrudge such creativity?

People are also drawn to the suspense and narrative arcs that naturally emerge from overcoming such challenges. Researchers call this narrative transportation – the idea that people mentally enter the world a story evokes.

As contestants push to victory we learn about their lives and values, which keeps us engaged and invested as we anticipate a resolution. On day 30, for instance, we meet Alex’s wife and two young children and discover his true motivation for pushing on with the challenge.

A win-win for all?

Although there is little direct research on how such content might affect us individually, these videos do raise some interesting questions.

For instance, could watching too much of such content leave you with unrealistic expectations of reality, or even make you frustrated with your own situation?

The allure of MrBeast's content lies in its life-changing potential, but this is far from most people's reality. Research has found focusing on wealth and expensive possessions can lead to negative effects on mood, motivation and overall wellbeing. And adolescents are at increased risk.

On the face of it, MrBeast's videos may seem to suggest you or I can get rich quick. In reality, however, MrBeast started his YouTube channel when he was 13 years old – and has more-or-less worked tirelessly since then.

His success reminds us we create our own experience of the extraordinary.