

# Chapter 1

## YouTube's Importance and How the Internet Shapes the YouTube Experience

### ABSTRACT

*YouTube is more than cute pet videos and aspiring musicians. Fully understanding YouTube and how it influences, reproduces, and changes our culture begins with accepting the role of media technologies inside and outside of YouTube. The history of the Internet and its core technologies provides one foundational proposition in this book. Two other propositions, regarding YouTube's reliance on Internet-based technology and historically relevant communication theories, specifically Cultural Studies and Medium Theory, are discussed, as well. In consideration of important historical and theoretical perspectives, YouTube is transformed in our minds from a simple user-generated content repository to a cultural change agent. The tools and technology associated with the Internet, richly integrated and manifest in YouTube, allow us to change the world around us. Understanding the function and design of Internet-specific technology and how we experience social networking can contextualize current trends and influences in our daily online experience. Essential to our understanding and ultimately our power over the technology that we create (in this case, YouTube) is informed through understanding the technologies presented as part of our shared history. Finally, grasping the technological concepts and terminology reveals a deeper perspective on our cultural and participatory experience with the Internet and YouTube far beyond cute pet videos.*

### THEMES AND PROPOSITIONS

On the surface, YouTube appears to be a vast morass of user generated homemade videos of kids doing silly and often dangerous stunts and commercial content you can watch for free, some of it violating copyright and some of it posted by the copyright holders. This book is not focused on user-generated content alone. In fact, it argues that YouTube is, at the core, a much more complex international cultural system that simultaneously provides tantalizing user-generated content, thoughtful political commentary,

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-4666-9855-0.ch001

educational videos, professionally produced commercial content, and historically important moments captured live—events and experiences that, without YouTube, would have been experienced by only a handful of people. YouTube also reproduces and challenges traditional forms of media power, such as those transmitted through broadcast networks and film studios and their highly centralized modes of production and distribution. YouTube decentralizes those traditional structures as well. To a large degree, the YouTube user-generated and controlled web environment is an entirely new cultural phenomenon, unique in the world of media consumption and distribution. There have never been so many people, from all over the World, participating in the production of so many widely distributed, viewed, altered, and reproduced cultural products. However, participation in that creation, while democratic in many ways, is still guided by a highly structured, legally defined system based on classic capitalistic and restrictive goals, rules, and regulations. That said, uploading a video to YouTube is very easy as long as you have a Google account, so the first barrier of entry into this relatively new cultural phantasmagoria is quite low, compared to traditional broadcast television, cable, film, and even streaming technologies.

Just like commercial broadcast television and studio created films, YouTube LLC requires users or *YouTubers* to negotiate rules, guidelines and legal restrictions. In order for a person to become commercially successful in YouTube with her/his particular YouTube Channel or video, a certain threshold of viewers—an audience—must be reached before YouTube Partner status is given; this status brings opportunities for shared advertising dollars, celebrity, and the potential for crossing over into the traditional broadcast mediums. These goals are very similar to traditional goals for success in broadcast television and film. In fact, the process for achieving success in YouTube is similar to the process in traditional broadcast television and film; this is partly why original content from YouTube is often used in traditional media for its own content creation and distribution.

This book describes in detail how YouTube functions technologically, its cultural roles, and its influence in our daily lives. YouTube's history, scholarly research, and the relationships between traditional forms of media power in the YouTube space are also discussed. Original research presented here describes how some people think about power and surveillance in terms of YouTube. One significant area of inquiry begins with a detailed description of the technological aspects of YouTube, with deep roots that have changed with the rise and influence of Internet technologies. The importance of this discussion should not be underestimated, primarily because it's the technological design of YouTube, bound and driven by the technological aspects of the Internet, that empowers some people and disempowers others.

## THE PROPOSITIONS

This book presents three main propositions to help the reader negotiate the technological, theoretical, and intellectual viewpoints presented. While all of these propositions are interrelated, the first is the most technical: that *YouTube's technologies parallel the historical development of Internet technologies*, particularly video sharing, compression, bandwidth, and streaming technologies.

Human beings create Internet technologies; thus, certain designs and technological functions are privileged over others. Sometimes, designers are unaware of this privileging and its consequences but sometimes these consequences occur in purposeful ways through design. For instance, it's not an accident that YouTube requires YouTubers to choose from only three possible Privacy settings before uploading a video; also, there is the design presumption that you are a Google+ subscriber and have a Gmail account, or that privacy settings exist at all.

23 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage:

[www.igi-global.com/chapter/youtubes-importance-and-how-the-internet-shapes-the-youtube-experience/144118](http://www.igi-global.com/chapter/youtubes-importance-and-how-the-internet-shapes-the-youtube-experience/144118)

## Related Content

---

### Teamwork Issues in Virtual Teams

Diane-Gabrielle Tremblay (2006). *Encyclopedia of Communities of Practice in Information and Knowledge Management* (pp. 523-528).

[www.irma-international.org/chapter/teamwork-issues-virtual-teams/10541](http://www.irma-international.org/chapter/teamwork-issues-virtual-teams/10541)

### Virtual Communities, Real Struggles: Seeking Alternatives for Democratic Networking

Francois Fortier (2000). *Community Informatics: Enabling Communities with Information and Communications Technologies* (pp. 446-469).

[www.irma-international.org/chapter/virtual-communities-real-struggles/6722](http://www.irma-international.org/chapter/virtual-communities-real-struggles/6722)

### An Immersive Tractor Application for Sustainability: A South African Land Reform and Learners' Perspective

Ofentse Mabiletsa, Sarel J. Viljoen, Jason Arthur Farrell, Lwando Ngqwemlaand Omowunmi Elizabeth Isafiade (2020). *International Journal of Virtual and Augmented Reality* (pp. 35-54).

[www.irma-international.org/article/an-immersive-tractor-application-for-sustainability/262623](http://www.irma-international.org/article/an-immersive-tractor-application-for-sustainability/262623)

### Leveraging Virtual Reality for Bullying Sensitization

Samiullah Paracha, Lynne Halland Naqeeb Hussain Shah (2021). *International Journal of Virtual and Augmented Reality* (pp. 43-58).

[www.irma-international.org/article/leveraging-virtual-reality-for-bullying-sensitization/290045](http://www.irma-international.org/article/leveraging-virtual-reality-for-bullying-sensitization/290045)

### Digital Gamification in the Tourism Industry

Emrah Özkul, Emre Uygundand Selen Levent (2020). *Handbook of Research on Smart Technology Applications in the Tourism Industry* (pp. 169-203).

[www.irma-international.org/chapter/digital-gamification-in-the-tourism-industry/248554](http://www.irma-international.org/chapter/digital-gamification-in-the-tourism-industry/248554)