

Chapter 2

Making and Sharing YouTube Videos, History, and YouTube Economics and Advertising: The Promise of a Better World

ABSTRACT

Less than 2 years after YouTube was created, the search engine giant Google bought the start-up for 1.65 billion dollars. According to the Associated Press, the announcement “came just a few hours after YouTube unveiled three separate agreements with media companies to counter the threat of copyright infringement lawsuits” (Liedtke, 2006). Years later, YouTube’s legal concerns continue, as Google has recently lost a court battle, forcing it to remove content from YouTube. Google is appealing the decision to a higher court (Landau & Marquez, 2014). The recent lawsuit is just one example of YouTube’s significant and global influence and its deep and abiding connection with larger social concerns and institutions, such as freedom of expression, the power of democracy, and computer-mediated communication. YouTube’s history, corporate ownership and influence, cultural recognition as a place that can promote hate speech and bullying tactics, and the continued legal challenges that threaten individual rights to fair use and freedom of expression all define YouTube’s power as part of the new evolution of the Internet and Web 2.0. Tempering YouTube’s democratic potential and cultural importance is YouTube LLC’s predetermined economic goal to increase revenue streams through advertising and content creation. To those ends, YouTube provides detailed instructions on how to make videos and how to advertise. A detailed case-study of one video’s path through the creation and advertising process on YouTube illustrates how user-generated videos become YouTube videos.

INTRODUCTION

Chapter 1 provided a glimpse of the Internet’s history and the technologies associated with delivering high-quality video and audio content—the primary content produced, uploaded, and delivered on YouTube. Chapter 1 also presented three essential propositions that frame this book: (a) YouTube’s technological development mirrors development of Internet technologies, specifically video sharing,

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compression, bandwidth, and streaming technologies; (b) YouTube relies heavily on Internet-based technologies to function, expand, and provide a memorable and engaging YouTuber experience; and (c) the Cultural Studies perspective discussed in this book proposes a historical and mass media-centric understanding that is nontechnological and connects with human communication practices in general. These propositions provide the context, but video content on YouTube drives the economics, advertising, and community sharing on the website. Almost everything on YouTube begins with a fundamental building block: a video rarely longer than 10 minutes and shared with millions of users.

YouTube can be defined in a variety of ways. According to YouTube, LLC,

YouTube allows billions of people to discover, watch and share originally created videos. YouTube provides a forum for people to connect, inform, and inspire others across the globe and acts as a distribution platform for original content creators and advertisers large and small. (YouTube, 2014a, para. 1)

YouTube is also a social space where people exchange written comments, video responses (in the form of VLOGs), and homemade *mashups*. YouTube is a video-sharing website that delivers a wide variety of social, democratic, and corporate messages, typically in the form of video content. While it is designed somewhat similarly to traditional television in terms of having channels, program categories and fairly recently significant advertising content, YouTube is also a website where traditional forms of “top-down” control and surveillance occur, “bottom up” policing from YouTubers themselves, as well as unexpected cultural and historical import. That said, YouTube, first and foremost, has always been a *business*. Older technologies such as radio and television, in their heyday, also shared content with listeners and viewers, who had much less control over how that content was distributed, the time(s) for viewing and listening, and duplication and manipulation of content. YouTube’s business is *video sharing*.

THE RISE OF VIDEO SHARING

In the past 10 years the Internet has exploded with a kind of *glocal* (global + local) shared experience through websites such as YouTube and Facebook. These social networking sites (SNS) have fueled deep emotional desires and connected all of us through geography, time, and space. Cultural discourse has been enlivened. For many people, through YouTube and other video sharing technologies, everyday life is reproduced and described in original ways. In YouTube, the emotional and informational experiences manifest through the act of video sharing. While YouTube is considered by many to be a platform for *user-generated content*, many other types of social activity take place minute to minute on YouTube. However, *video sharing* remains the core activity in YouTube.

It is no coincidence that the explosion of video sharing (i.e., uploading and downloading videos) on YouTube coincides with prolific video sharing throughout the Internet. In fact, in November 2013 *The Guardian* reported that YouTube and Netflix, for the first time, accounted for “more than half of the downstream traffic in the United States” (Holpuch, 2013). According to Holpuch (2013),

54% of adult Internet users post original photos or videos online that they themselves have created. We call them creators and their number has grown from 46% of Internet users last year. 47% of adult Internet users take photos or videos that they have found online and repost them on sites designed for

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