Chapter 6
YouTube:
Surveillance, Power, Audience, and Monetizing the Message

ABSTRACT

According to the London Telegraph (Barrett, 2013), Online London has one CCTV camera for every 11 people in Britain. The average number is most likely around five million cameras in total. MSNBC (Timm, 2013) reported in August 2013 that the number of security cameras in the New York City public sector was as many as 6,000. In Chicago in May 2013 (Cox, 2013), the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) reported a "frightening number" of surveillance cameras, with as many as 22,000 citywide, posing what Adam Schwartz of the ACLU called a menace to privacy. The twin concepts of surveillance and power are expressed in unique ways in YouTube. Philosophers such as Michel Foucault have written extensively about these ideas regarding cultural institutions such as prisons and democratic governments. In many ways, YouTube is organized and exhibits similar expressions of who has power and who is watching us. However, YouTube is different; the Internet and YouTube have made citizen surveillance fast, inexpensive, and easy. According to many companies and corporations, including YouTube's parent company Google, consumers are tracked—in fact, each mouse click is tracked—to provide better services and more products and to prepackage demographic and socioeconomic information, which corporations and companies can sell to other for-profit entities. Google and YouTube make this easy with Adsense and Adwords technologies and, like television and film, the YouTube worldwide audience is ripe for commodification, often with users' full knowledge and consent. YouTube advertising strategies are widely used; reportedly, a full-size YouTube banner advertisement can cost $200,000 or more. YouTube provides a place to make money, although not a living wage for most YouTubers, and this possibility and cultural narrative is widely disseminated throughout the Googleverse and YouTube. Similar to broadcast television audiences, YouTube audiences are measured using A. C. Nielsen tools. This company creates and controls the measurement technology used to determine YouTube's monetary value so advertising costs can be institutionalized. YouTube audiences and how they think, behave, and function in YouTube is an important part of YouTube discourse. The scholarly discourse surrounding Audience Studies shines an additional light into what it's like to be a YouTuber.

INTRODUCTION

The concept of *people watching people* (Andrejevic, 2003) has been around for decades, perhaps for hundreds of years. Frankly, many of us like to watch. Television and film have always influenced audiences. One of the very first silent films shown in a theatre showed a train coming toward the viewers; startled audiences reportedly jumped from their seats because they thought a train was actually coming into the theatre. Audiences continue to be a critical component of mass media but they have become fragmented, which makes it difficult to determine how advertisers can understand the behaviors, attitudes, and beliefs of an audience. In fact, tracking and measurement software used in YouTube make it easier to find audience patterns. Audience theory, or what's sometimes called *audience studies,* is one main way in which this chapter investigates YouTube's digital sphere.

YouTube is an excellent subject for the study of how image and sound—put together in creative and interesting ways—encourage a variety of surveillance-related outcomes. As we watch each other on YouTube and comment about each other's video choices and personal musings, YouTube LLC and Google watch *us*, recommending videos that we might want to see and providing tools to create more video content, link advertising to that content, and become an integral part of the larger Google and Internet universe.

In this book, two important concepts explain how users perceive YouTube and themselves while in that space and how they imagine themselves in relation to each other. The concepts of surveillance and power are explored extensively in this chapter. Key media scholars' perspectives guide the discussion, map some of the history of media surveillance and power, describe the YouTube audience's relationship to surveillance and power and their use of power, and explore how Google/YouTube economics strengthen but complicate current economic strategies related to advertising.

AUDIENCE THEORY AND AUDIENCE COMMODIFICATION

For decades, media scholars looked at audiences as passive. For example, in the 1950s, audiences were thought of as merely *receivers* of information, "injected" with media messages. This "hypodermic needle" theory of communication framed much of the writing about media audiences at the time. The audience was seen as a mass of empty heads.

Christopher Simpson's assessment of early communication history, *Science of Coercion* (1994), cited Harold Lasswell: "Those who have money to support research should systematically manipulate mass sentiment in order to preserve democracy from threats posed by authoritarian societies such as Nazi Germany or the Soviet Union" (as cited in Simpson, 1994, p. 23). There are some significant assumptions in Lasswell's thinking. First, Lasswell conceptualized the audience as one large group of faceless human beings. It is difficult to imagine such a mindset today, particularly when considering YouTube and the fact that we actually see individual humans and their YouTube channels. From Lasswell's perspective, for example, if "mass sentiment" referred to *unique* individuals, then it would not be so easy to "systematically manipulate" them. This suggests what Ien Ang called "evaluative meaning" when referring to the audience. Second, Lasswell privileged the power structures at the time over individual "power"; in this case, he was referring to *researchers* who are given money by the government and the military/industrial complex.

Related Content

Visual Complexity Online and Its Impact on Children's Aesthetic Preferences and Learning Motivation

Hsiu-Feng Wangand Julian Bowerman (2018). *International Journal of Virtual and Augmented Reality (pp. 59-74).*

www.irma-international.org/article/visual-complexity-online-and-its-impact-on-childrens-aesthetic-preferences-and-learning-motivation/214989

PolyOrBAC: An Access Control Model for Inter-Organizational Web Services

Anas Abou El Kalamand Yves Deswarte (2011). *Virtual Communities: Concepts, Methodologies, Tools and Applications (pp. 537-557).*

www.irma-international.org/chapter/polyorbac-access-control-model-inter/48691

Advanced Visual SLAM and Image Segmentation Techniques for Augmented Reality

Yirui Jiang, Trung Hieu Tranand Leon Williams (2022). *International Journal of Virtual and Augmented Reality (pp. 1-28).*

www.irma-international.org/article/advanced-visual-slam-and-image-segmentation-techniques-for-augmented-reality/307063

Bunker-Room Mnemonics for Second-Language Vocabulary Recall

Alexia Larchen Costuchen, Larkin Cunninghamand Juan Carlos Tordera Yllescas (2022). *International Journal of Virtual and Augmented Reality (pp. 1-13).*

www.irma-international.org/article/bunker-room-mnemonics-for-second-language-vocabulary-recall/304899

Using Social Software for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education

Petros Lameras, Iraklis Paraskakisand Philipa Levy (2009). *Handbook of Research on Social Software and Developing Community Ontologies (pp. 269-284).*

www.irma-international.org/chapter/using-social-software-teaching-learning/21378