Chapter 9
Learning in YouTube:
What Else Is Happening in the Online Universe of Pets and Pop Stars?

ABSTRACT

In academic and business institutions around the world, the transfer of knowledge and the awarding of academic degrees or certificates have been educational and economic practices for decades. However, in recent years, these postsecondary degrees and certificates are available more cheaply, in greater numbers, and requiring less time to complete. Full online academic degree programs, massive open online courses (MOOCS), and other forms of distance learning are quickly becoming the choice for people who cannot afford a traditional brick-and-mortar education. These learners have identified that they have no need for a full load of coursework, learn better visually and through repetition using video, or simply want to learn more about the world. Using technologies such as YouTube, Skype, Facetime, and LMS (learning management systems), learners have more choices than ever before. Online learning and degrees are often provided using YouTube as a delivery platform for knowledge and for corporate marketing messages. Pedagogy and learning in nontraditional lecture formats has long been studied; however, current technologies bring into sharp relief the question of who has the authority to present the knowledge and award degrees and which cultures agree to assign financial value to the marketplace. Today, learners have more power in the choice of the types of knowledge they need and the ways in which they are taught. Worldwide, traditional academic institutions have discovered the financial benefits of online training and education. On the instructional side, less real estate is required for classrooms, labor is less expensive as new labor models and contracts can be written, effective marketing opportunities are being developed to drive traffic to higher education institutions, and now a much larger international and national audience of learners can be accessed. What knowledge is the most valuable and important, who is the true author of that knowledge, and how much knowledge is enough to be considered an expert? Colleges and universities have made strong efforts to stake a claim as the ultimate knowledge authority but they struggle with the tension of providing relevant educational content quickly and affordably amid political pressures to train students for future jobs. The general public has fairly easy access to expert knowledge simply by powering up a mobile device, loading the YouTube app, and selecting the Education Channel on YouTube. With an Internet connection, anyone can Google a word or question and, most of the time, link to a relevant video where, with a little attention to detail, accurate and relevant information can be found.

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INTRODUCTION

This chapter sets forth important historical highlights in education and technology and carefully examines the influence of computers and mobile technology in current, modern education. How learning is defined and how institutions and individuals desire control of the ways in which knowledge is transferred are also examined. The chapter then moves to a discussion of how YouTube promotes and reproduces classic assumptions of "expert" knowledge, with examples of user-generated content (UGC) that challenge those assumptions. The discussion focuses almost exclusively on education in colleges and universities in the United States; however, it should be noted that YouTube's reach goes far beyond the United States. Research that extends to other nations is important to the broader discussion of the most effective ways in which people can learn about the world.

Historically, learning and technology have been complementary. But there has always been resistance to technological initiatives, from the learner and the educator, often to the detriment of the learner in both instances. The tension between "chalk-and-talk" education and newer education methods that utilize technology can be examined through the lens of evolutionary biology, specifically the theory of *punctuated equilibrium*, which suggests that *stasis* dominates the fossil record and explains the gaps in that record, such as the so-called "missing link."

Biochemist Michael J. Behe described punctuated equilibrium: "The theory postulates two things: that for long periods most species undergo little observable change; and that, when it does occur, change is rapid and concentrated in small, isolated populations" (Behe, 1996, p. 27). According to Eldredge and Gould (1972), the theory explains the gaps in the fossil record; simply put, it takes a very long time for change to occur but, when it does, the change is rapid or "punctuated" and these uninterrupted short (in geological time) periods of change are recorded in fossils.

This theory, when applied in the educational environment and expressed in terms of *human time* rather than *geologic time*, might explain why educational institutions still spend millions of dollars on buildings when the majority of their students have access to mobile and desktop computer technology. In other words, in most colleges and universities, the lecture-style classroom is still the common method to deliver education. However, rapid change has occurred recently. Large online degree-granting institutions are quickly gaining legitimacy in the educational world via online educational formats. In response so-called "land grant colleges and universities" are offering more online programs, and shifting resources to nontraditional degree opportunities. Evolution is happening in the academy and YouTube is a large part of that evolution.

CHALLENGES TO TRADITIONAL EDUCATION

The use of technology to supplement traditional educational methods is not new. As early as 1910, instructional films were used in the nation's schools; the first catalog of instructional films was published at that time (Reiser, 2001). As early as 1920, instructional radio was introduced in education settings. Although radio proved to be ineffective in the classroom, it led to the use of television for instruction, with the development of the Public Broadcast System (PBS; University of Florida, 2014). It's no coincidence that many large universities still have Public Broadcasting television stations with an educational