

Chapter 99

The New Jersey YouTube Experience Survey: New Research and Observations

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ABSTRACT

YouTube has changed dramatically since 2005, both in look and platform functionality. There have also been many culturally and internationally relevant events that probably would have not received as much attention from the popular press without YouTube's video sharing and distribution power. This chapter presents current and original research on YouTubers' attitudes, behaviors, and beliefs about YouTube, using the research plan and model designed for the Bronx YouTube pilot study in 2009 described in detail in Chapter 7. New research in the areas of surveillance and learning in YouTube offers insight into how research participants (university students in New Jersey) use YouTube and what they think regarding its potential to help them learn. This chapter also offers observations on the research outcomes and potential future research possibilities in a growing body of scholarly work regarding online activity and the relationship between new technologies and people. As in the 2009 Bronx study, this chapter argues that, while YouTubers are aware of YouTube and Google surveillance strategies and are not necessarily in control of those strategies, they are unconcerned about surveillance unless money or email information might be unprotected. More work along the lines of focus groups and randomized experimental studies will provide better evidence from which generalized conclusions can be drawn regarding people and technology in the YouTube digital sphere. The New Jersey YouTube Experience research study focused on how YouTuber's learn and acquire all types of knowledge. The descriptive results indicate that, as suggested in the earlier Bronx study, YouTubers' obtain information from a variety of sources including professional academics, lay people, corporate interests and random commenters. YouTubers' learn at every level and people of all types are participating in transmitting knowledge. Generally, this happens with little immediate financial benefit although for-profit driven education and learning in YouTube is becoming more prevalent. While the knowledge creation in YouTube isn't all accurate, or even relevant, and sometimes comes with strong bias and personal agendas, this is also true in traditional education although many of us would like to think otherwise.

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INTRODUCTION

In the summer of 2014, using the 2009 Bronx YouTube Pilot study as a springboard for a larger case study in New Jersey, survey data revealed differences between the Bronx and New Jersey groups in their attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors while using YouTube. However, some similar patterns also emerged.

To a significant degree, YouTube's educational and learning opportunities resonated with each group. Privacy and surveillance activities in YouTube's digital sphere were of little concern to YouTubers, in both the Bronx and New Jersey studies, except in a few instances. This may indicate a strong need for education about how Google and YouTube work, particularly in the areas of "big data" collection and surveillance. As discussed at several points in this book, Google gathers data and knowledge from its YouTube users, aggregating, selling, and commercializing that information even while those same YouTubers' exercise democratic freedoms. The New Jersey survey group considered YouTube a space where they could express their individuality in the form of personal opinions and desires. As thousands of people are learning and growing in their knowledge of the world, many YouTubers remain unaware or uninterested in YouTube threats, such as cyberbullying, concerned only with watching the latest comedy or music videos.

In 2009, the Bronx YouTube pilot study suggested trends and future research possibilities in terms of college students and their attitudes and behaviors in the YouTube digital sphere. The New Jersey study was not designed specifically to compare and contrast with the Bronx study; rather, improvements were made to the Bronx empirical model for the New Jersey study's model that emphasized active learning in YouTube and the independent variable (IV) of *technology* was removed from the original Bronx empirical model, which was expressed as "type of Internet connection." Some survey questions were altered as well. In 2009, while broadband technology was widespread, there were many places, even in largely populated areas, where not everyone could afford broadband. As well, at that time, download speeds and access issues affected the YouTube experience. In 2014, "type of Internet connection" became a superfluous variable.

The Bronx study provided heuristic value in the communication field, particularly in terms of Cultural Studies and Uses and Gratifications (UG). At the time, very little quantitative field site work had been done regarding YouTube, inconsistent with its cultural significance, meteoric rise, and ubiquity.

Notable Differences Between the 2009 Bronx YouTube Pilot Study and the 2014 New Jersey YouTube Experience Study

1. The New Jersey survey participants were mostly Caucasian.
2. An additional paper pretest survey was done with a very small group in New Jersey to determine what survey questions and formats, as well as assumptions, might confirm what was learned in the Bronx study or suggest a deeper analysis.
3. The Bronx study used a paper survey. The New Jersey study was conducted online, using a population of nearly twice the size as that in the Bronx study. A randomized sample frame could be taken from the New Jersey population for more precise statistical outcomes.
4. The response rate was low in New Jersey study (approximately 11%) but still produced a larger sample. Fan and Yan (2010) reported that the "response rate is generally defined as the number of completed units divided by the number of eligible units in the sample" (p. 137).

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