

Chapter 4

Collective Problem–Solving and Informal Learning in Networked Publics: Reading Vlogging Networks on YouTube as Knowledge Communities

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THE RISE OF SMART MOBS

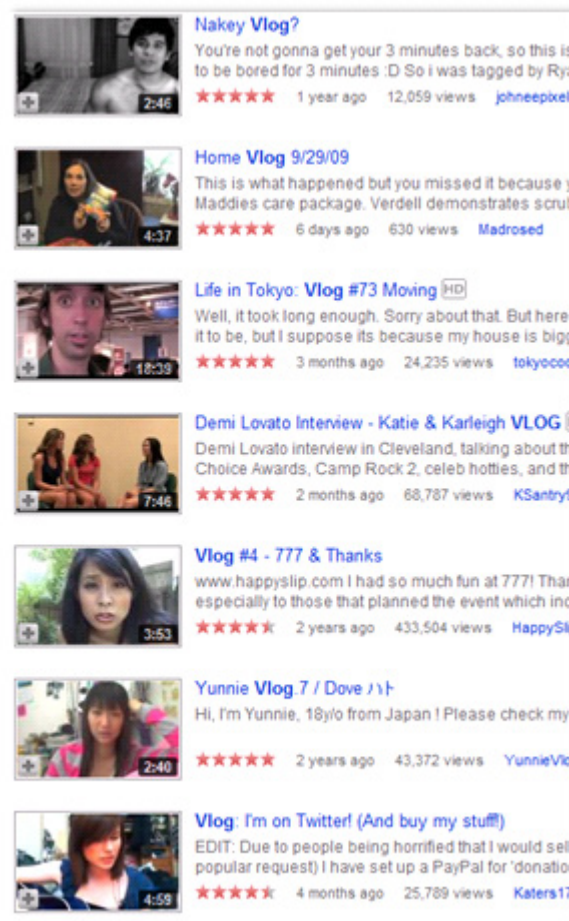
This chapter will focus on community aspects of *vlogging* (video blogging) on *YouTube* (Figure 1). This site, familiar to most, is a popular video sharing platform with built-in social networking functions such as tagging, commenting, favoriting and the possibility to leave video replies. The typical vlog entry consists of a clip that is a few minutes long and features the vlogger looking straight into the camera, addressing the viewers.

Vlog entries are generally based on oral narratives that sometimes build on previous entries by the same person, and sometimes serve as video replies to entries posted by other vloggers.

The chapter is based on a qualitative case analysis focusing on vlogging as *participatory culture* (Jenkins, 2006, 1992). While *YouTube* started out as a straightforward video sharing platform, it has increasingly come to offer a number of social networking site (SNS) features (Lange, 2008). The meanings of SNS practices vary across sites and individuals (boyd, 2006). This case study will explore how the affordances of the site may be

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Figure 1.



employed by vloggers in order to establish and maintain social networks. My analyses serve to illuminate, from various perspectives, community and social network aspects of *YouTube*. The overarching question has to do with finding basic dynamics of this cooperation system.

American technology writer Howard Rheingold (2002) predicts that one result of the ongoing development of digital media will be the rise of ever more so called *smart mobs*. These are communities – much like the vlogger community – which “consist of people who are able to act in concert even if they don’t know each other. The people who make up smart mobs cooperate in ways never before possible because they carry devices

that possess both communication and computing capabilities. Their mobile devices connect them with other information devices in the environment as well as with other people’s telephones” (Rheingold, 2002, p. xii). But similar to what Henry Jenkins writes about convergence culture – we are still “testing the waters and mapping directions” (Jenkins, 2006, p. 246) – there is a need for more practical knowledge of the dynamics of these cooperation systems (Rheingold, 2002, p. 202).

In the early forms of virtual communities (Rheingold, 1994), participation was limited to being present in physical spaces where internet connections were available. Those types of virtual communities transcended space in the sense that

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