

Chapter 4

BookTubers as a Networked Knowledge Community

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ABSTRACT

In order to understand the relationship between Networked Knowledge Communities (NKC) and the Networked Knowledge Society (NKS), the chapter authors conduct a genre analysis of a self-titled New Media genre called BookTube. BookTube is a NKC made up of YouTube content creators who use this particular social media channel to celebrate and discuss books, especially young-adult fiction. By examining how BookTube adheres to discourse community features—shared rules, genres, hierarchies, and values—the contours of this particular NKC become clearer. Stylistic patterns, the roles of authors, and author cultural capital all get negotiated within a discernible and definable set of practices that relate participants to other NKC and the broader NKS. Furthermore, by relating these discourse features to other latent educational possibilities of the NKS, the authors explore how BookTube might be usefully implemented to model NKC practices in more traditional educational settings.

INTRODUCTION

YouTube provides a platform for communal expression, education, and socializing among Internet content creators and sharers. YouTube's members, some of whom have not yet reached their teen years, can join or create communities, which grow through a process that creates a network among familiar and communally-

determined (although not egalitarian) channels. For example, the YouTube beauty community, one of its largest and most popular to date, has identifiable and shared conventions, both within the type of video (product reviews, haul videos, tag videos, cross promotions, etc.) and within the structures that unfold during of each narrowcast (an overview, describing the packaging, experience, etc.). The YouTube beauty community has

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created opportunities for teenagers—who have no formal education or professional experience with cosmetology—to gain enough notoriety to be invited to do the makeup of models at New York’s Fashion Week, and have provided spectators more granulated grassroots access to a global industry.

BookTube, a smaller YouTube Networked Knowledge Community (NKC) within the larger YouTube Networked Knowledge Community, also has identifiable elements that include fairly predictable video types and structured elements. In order to better understand how these elements and types connect BookTube as a NKC to the larger NKS, and to locate ways to broaden notions of student engagement, this chapter will sift through shared conventions to locate both intrinsically- and extrinsically-motivated activities that build identity through shared values and genre elements. The activities that embody these values all present forms of synthesis that Bloom placed at the top of his educational taxonomy. We suspect that teachers who incorporate the creation of “BookTubes” or other identity-bound grassroots genres into their curriculum could facilitate the interactive, borderless, social, and collaborative possibilities of such an NKC in the classroom environment, thereby increasing learning and engagement through student production of videos and other multimodal texts. In order to explore the potential of BookTubing (and related networked literacy community activities), this chapter will use genre analysis to better define how Networked Knowledge Communities operate and relate to a Networked Knowledge Society, analyze how the genre of the BookTube functions, and finish with an examination of how BookTube manifests an intrinsically-motivated form of cultural capital.

BACKGROUND

In order to discuss the conceptual framework between Networked Knowledge Communities (NKC) and a Networked Knowledge Society

(NKS), analysts must establish both the dynamic differences between communities and society and the relationship that communities have within a larger social arrangement. Marohang Limbu, in his article “Teaching Writing in the Cloud: Networked Writing Communities in the Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Classrooms” links community to associations that students already make within and without the classroom—links that can be cemented and acted upon through the use of cloud computing and commercial data aggregators like Facebook. In this article, Limbu establishes two important functions of communities, who both establish roles for members and define those members in relationship with one another (p. 15). Though the definition of community remains somewhat vague in Limbu’s article, the more extensive discussions of community in writing studies, especially discourse community theory, can shed some light on what might count as community over communications networks.

Jim Porter, in his work, *Audience and Rhetoric*, describes discourse communities as a “local and temporary constraining system, defined by a body of texts (or more generally, practices) that are unified by a common focus. A discourse community is a textual system with stated and unstated conventions, a vital history, mechanisms for wielding power, institutional hierarchies, vested interests, and so on” (p. 109). Communities are inscribed and structured by shared assumptions about what counts through shared symbolic and material practices. This focus on patterns of meaning and significance in Porter’s definition of discourse community doesn’t depend upon physical proximity, lineage, or nationality. Rather, these patterns depend upon mutual recognition of particular acts as meaningful, which, in turn, may solidify particular patterns into recognizable textual genres. A community of poets, for example, might write electronically-circulated poems and post them on their blogs in much the same way that Hutterite community members might make and distribute their own clothes. It doesn’t matter

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