



# YouTube and the Mainstream Media

Notes from Chapter 2

“YouTube: Digital Media and Society Series”

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# Our Textbook's Context

- Published in 2009 (and likely written in 2008) the perspective of our book's authors is based on YouTube's first few years of existence
- At that point, YouTube is still a novelty , but "represents a disruption of existing media business models and is emerging as a new site of media power"
- Several years later, YouTube is firmly established as a unique mainstream (yet quirky) media form

# Early Analysis of YouTube Impact

- YouTube was part of debates about new media and the Internet as disruptive forces on business and society, especially with regard to young people
- YouTube was framed by traditional news values as either a “lawless repository for a flood of amateur content” or in business-oriented coverage as a big player in the new economy
- Many specific news story angles had such themes: youth, celebrity, and morality on the one hand; copyright law and media business on the other

# Amateur “Free for All”

- There was repetitive framing of YouTube as an amateur “free for all” rather than a place for community or artistic experimentation
- Concerns were raised about YouTube’s “lawlessness, the crisis of expertise, and the collapse of cultural value”
- Mainstream media can have “agenda setting” power to define the issues that may later be realized in policy and laws and public and governmental scrutiny

# Conflicting Coverage Themes

- There was conflicting media news and entertainment attention to YouTube as both a site for “wacky, weird and wonderful user-generated content”
- But within weeks, the same program or publication might run critical material about YouTube as an “under-regulated site of lawless, unethical and pathological behavior centered around youth as a risk category”

# Coverage Evolution

- Over time, as YouTube has evolved so has its mainstream media coverage
- From being described as one among a plethora of novel new media applications and a potential site of ordinary self expression
- To its prominence as a threat to media dominance and even civil order
- And more recently, as a bona fide mainstream, if somewhat unruly and under-regulated, medium in its own right

# “Trouble as Fun, Fun as Trouble”

- YouTube is often used to express familiar anxieties about young people and digital media, especially in relation to risks, uses and misuses of Internet and mobile phone technologies
- YouTube can be a vehicle for irresponsible and [dangerous behavior](#), especially among [young people](#)
- YouTube is knocked too as contributing to childhood physical inactivity, social isolation, as well as cyber-bullying (defined as the use of digital technologies to bully others, especially by posting humiliating or insulting videos, or by using video to document and celebrate acts of violence)
- The concerns over YouTube is evident by the fact that it (and other social media) is blocked at most schools (computers and smartphones)- potential dangers and distractions

# “Moral Panics”

- Today there continues to be occasional media discourses around issues of morality about YouTube
- Symptoms of uneasiness and uncertainty have created a “moral panic” around media expertise and moral authority provoked by the mass uses of new media technologies such as mobile camera phones and the Internet for self-publishing
- The dark side of the “democratization of cultural production” is a legitimate and ongoing concern
- Some criticize the [participatory online culture](#) for eroding intellectual expertise and moral standards while also celebrating its potential for good



# Amateur Video Success Stories

- YouTube “success” can be gauged by “viral” view counts numbers and mainstream media attention
- Several are briefly recounted in this chapter such as girls lip synching a song in a bedroom and a young woman “vlogging” about her troubled family life (the latter’s authenticity would be later questioned...)
- Accounts that celebrate the democratization of cultural production assume that raw talent combined with digital distribution can convert directly to legitimate success and media fame
- YouTube has been mythologized as literally a way to “broadcast yourself” into fame and fortune
- But some detailed studies of how DIY celebratory works caution that the marker for true media success, paradoxically, is not only measured by online popularity but by ones subsequent ability to pass through the gate-keeping mechanisms of “old media”-the recording contract, film festival, TV pilot, advertising deal, etc.
- True YouTube “breakout stardom” is very difficult!

# Copyright Wars

- This is an area where YouTube and mainstream media perhaps most actively interact- YouTube as a new platform for media distribution and consumption
- Dominant questions have been about YouTube's relationships with old media, YouTube's advertising revenues, and the perceived copyright infringement of YouTube users
- Issues included questions about the threat to entertainment industries posed by empowered but unchecked consumers (who post TV content, for example)
- Now it's recognized that YouTube has actually helped many "big media" shows increase in popularity- "The Daily Show" and "The Colbert Report" for example- as people view and share clips with others
- This has helped YouTube be recognized as not just a new media distribution platform, but as a vehicle for a new type of audience practice that is very interactive and social in the commenting on and sharing of video content
- YouTube's dual identity is better understood today as both a business and as a cultural resource co-created by its users