



YouTube's Popular Culture

Notes from Chapter 3

"YouTube: Digital Media and Society Series"

by Jean Burgess & Joshua Green

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Contextualizing YouTube's Content

- This chapter analyzes a survey of YouTube's most popular content to establish some baseline knowledge about how people use YouTube
- Looking at the array of content and how videos are shared and discussed doesn't really give the whole picture
- An analysis of the way particular types of videos move through YouTube as a system can help us identify some of the most interesting and dominant patterns in YouTube's popular culture
- The researchers attempted to measure "popularity"- is it based just on overall view numbers, or is it more a type or kind of video that is more popular than others?

Content Survey Details

- The authors content survey drew on a sample of videos from four of YouTube's categories of popularity:
 - Most Viewed
 - Most Favorited
 - Most Responded
 - Most Discussed
- Comparing this way, could (and did) give researchers a sense of the way different kinds of video content are made popular by audiences in different way
- Across these four categories, 4,320 videos were gathered by six days of sampling during two weeks in each of three months in 2007 (August, October, November)

Survey's Coding System

- A way to label each video was done to categorize each video according to:
 - “Industrial” origin- user-created or from a traditional media company?
 - Creator identity- traditional media company, small-to-medium enterprise or independent professional producer, government organization, cultural institution, or an amateur user?
 - There were also categories for video genre and themes
- Levels of audience engagement could be assessed via those four categories: Most viewed, favorited, responded and discussed

Seeking Qualitative Findings

- “Most Viewed” most closely matches what TV ratings have always done: count eyeballs in front of the screen (quantitative)
- “Most Favorited” category counts/aggregates videos popular/liked enough to be added to a user’s profile
- “Most Discussed” aggregates videos that drew the most comments
- “Most Responded” counts the videos that viewers most frequently post a video response to, either with their own material or linking to another video in the system
- The authors feel these four ways of identifying YouTube’s popular culture ends of constituting a different version of what YouTube is, and what it is for
- Their content survey offers a reflection of the collective tastes of the YouTube audience as a whole
- It is also instructive to users who may deliberately attempt to produce content in hopes of achieving mass attention to the present criteria or “formula”
- Such understanding produces a “feedback loop” between the (mainstream media and publics) perceived uses of and value logics of YouTube and its actual uses and meanings

Overall Content Type Findings

- On page 42 is a chart showing a summary of the researchers' 4,320 video sample pool
- User-created content made up just more than half of the total (2,177) with traditional media producing about 350 fewer at 1,812
- User-generated- nearly 40 % were vlogs- the conversational form that might be considered emblematic of user-generated content (listings on page 43)
- Music video (15 %), live material (13 %), informational content (10%), scripted material (8 %)
- New or unclassifiable genres was another 10 %
- Perhaps a surprise among the survey's most popular videos was the lack of amateur, mundane, "slice of life" videos such as cute (or obnoxious) cats and kids videos

Traditional Media Content

- 42 % that came from traditional media sources included content users took off TV, DVDs, films, etc. and put on their YouTube channels (60 % of this total)
- Categories included informational (30 %), scripted (21 %), live (17%), music (13%), promotional (11 percent)
- Traditional media such as networks, NBA and other organizations that strictly patrol and control their intellectual property made up only 8% of uploaders
- Between that group and user-generated, is “small-to-medium” or independent producers
- This section, with 20 percent of the survey’s videos, is defined as those working within the professional media industry but outside the domains of big-media organizations

Most Viewed and Favorites

- While traditional media comprised only 8 % of coded content in this survey, the videos linked to it were very high in the “Most Views” and “Most Favorited” counts (p. 46)
- User-generated content made up more than 2/3 of content coded in the Most Responded (63 %) and Most Discussed (69 percent) categories (p. 51-52)
- Many popular user-created videos in this categories concerned experimentation with the video form, showcasing video techniques and/or “trick” videos
- But “vlogs”- confessional, personal-type “diaries”- dominated Most Discussed (40 %) and Most Responded (25%)- people seemed intrigued if not fascinated by other people’s observations on their lives and/or everyday life
- Does the vlog form’s “persistent direct address” to the viewer inherently invite feedback and participation? It would seem to do so

Other Major Genres and YouTube “Players”

- Informational content and music videos were two other major genres the researchers found among Most Discussed and Most Respected popular videos (p. 54)
- Between amateur and traditional mass media video creators is a large in-between category of organizations that put video on YouTube to promote, peddle, influence and inform (p. 55)

Chapter Conclusions

- To understand YouTube's popular culture, it is NOT helpful to draw distinctions between amateur and professional productions, or between commercial and community practices
- It is more helpful to think about YouTube in terms of a continuum of cultural participation
- This requires us to understand all those who upload, view, comment on, or create content on YouTube as participants
- Content is circulated and used in YouTube without much regard to its source- it is valued and engaged according to its genre- not because it was created in Hollywood, by professionals or amateurs
- To understand YouTube, one must try to understand the content creators (and their motivations) and understand the audiences participation practices (as in quoting, commenting, favoriting, responding, sharing, and viewing)
- Those who insist on treating YouTube as if it is a broadcasting platform are probably less likely to achieve the aims of their participation, whatever they may be