



# YouTube's Social Network

Notes from Chapter 4

"YouTube: Digital Media and Society Series"

by Jean Burgess & Joshua Green

You Tube and You  
Comm 336  
Fall 2013

# YouTube's Social Media Function

- YouTube offers a different type of social media experience than Facebook, which is a conduit for “friending,” sharing news, thoughts and experiences with a community the user establishes and controls (mostly)
- YouTube-the video content itself is the main vehicle and the main indicator of social clustering
- This chapter examines YouTube’s “social core” of users who spend time on the website contributing content, referring to, building on and critiquing each other’s videos, as well as collaborating and (sometimes) arguing with one another

# “YouTubers” are Vital

- The authors contend that of importance to YouTube are so-called “YouTubers”- a group of “lead users” who independently but collectively identify and exploit opportunities to improve the way YouTube works through their own practices
- They are important drivers of the attention economy of YouTube
- And are significant in the co-creation of a particular version of YouTube’s culture
- This is evident by examining a list of all time Most Subscribed and Most Viewed channels (p. 59)
- Traditional media companies are well represented on the Most Viewed list (as a platform for brand extension)
- But the Most Subscribed list is dominated by “YouTube stars” whose brands were developed within YouTube’s social network
- Their work covers a range of genres: sketch comedy, celebrity news, comedy-style vlogging based around everyday life and personal identity

# Spectrum Opposite Ends

- The content within Most Viewed and Most subscribed represent opposite ends of YouTube's spectrum of engagement
- Most Viewed simply measures the number of times a particular channel page has been viewed and mostly are one time views
- These channels may not draw a high level of intensity or direct visible engagement- just show great "reach"
- Most Subscribed category has channels people want to regularly follow, or at least "publicly perform" following (or just show support)
- This analysis helps show what the YouTube community values most

# YouTube as a Patron of Creativity

- It can be said that among YouTube social network functions is that of a “patron”, in that it maintains the ongoing operational environment and offers “patronage” to site users
- Likewise, YouTube can be seen as a “patron of collective creativity” or a “network of creative practice” offering a platform and controlling at least some of the conditions under which creative content is produced, ordered, and represented for the interpretation of audiences

# YouTube's Social Network Spin

- YouTube is different than social media forms like Flickr, Facebook and Twitter in that it's the product- the video- that's promoted more than the person
- We see thumbnails of videos- not their producers- that often determine if we view a video
- Despite its "community" rhetoric, YouTube's design and architecture are not primarily designed for collaborative or collective participation
- YouTube provided no built-in, routinized methods of capturing video from other users and reusing it, or of making one's own content available for this purpose
- Nevertheless, remixed vlog entries were a very noticeable feature of the most popular content in the authors' survey

# The Work of Building a Social Network on YouTube

- Vloggers and other video producers who want to gain sustained viewer followings, must put in the time and effort
- Building a presence on YouTube requires time, patience and persistence
- It often requires a propensity for self-revelation and even self-promotion
- You must commit yourself to being visible to the YouTube community and the wider public by putting your face on camera, putting yourself “out there”
- And be willing to take the lumps (and glory!) that may go with that exposure

# YouTube as an Educator

- While YouTube may lack the real time social give and take of Facebook, Twitter and text messaging, it has proven the go-to online resource (like, in ways, Wikipedia) for users seeking help, problem-solving, explanation, understanding and clarity
- Well produced and articulated videos can provide valued educational experiences, not just entertainment