



YouTube's Social Politics

Notes from Chapter 5

“YouTube: Digital Media and Society Series”

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You Tube and You
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Review: YouTube's Characteristics

- Commercial enterprise- Google [earned](#) \$50.2 billion in 2012! YouTube is a significant part of that revenue
- YouTube is a platform designed to enable cultural participation by ordinary citizens
- YouTube's value is partly generated out of the collective creativity and communication of its users and audiences
- And its culture has both commercial and community motivations and outcomes
- This chapter's point is whether YouTube's domination of online video distribution, and the market logic behind it, represent a threat to the viability of alternative or community media spaces
- Or whether YouTube's visibility and accessibility might in some ways actually promote and sustain them
- Also, does YouTube enrich our public, global even, discourse?

YouTube as a “Cultural Citizen”

- YouTube does seem to fit the theorists' definition of “cultural citizen” as “the process of bonding and community building, and reflection on that bonding, that is implied in partaking of the text-related practices of reading, consuming, celebrating, and criticizing offered in the realm of popular culture”
- Popular cultural practices are important because they provide much of the wool from which the social tapestry is knit (Karina Hof, 2006)

Debate Facilitator

- YouTube makes it easy for people to participate in or create debates
- Example: Video bloggers may get criticized as self-centered and obsessed with “filming micro-events with no particular point or relevance beyond the videomaker’s own life”
- But many video bloggers argue that it is precisely a positive YouTube point- by putting these intimate moments on the Internet for all to see that a space is created to expose and discuss difficult issues and thereby achieve greater understanding of oneself and others

YouTube Helps Open Dialogues

- “By being vulnerable and sharing intimate moments and choices, it is possible to promote increased public discourse about formerly uncomfortable, distasteful, or difficult topics in ways that other media and other methods have not” –[Patricia Lange](#), online communities “anthropologist”

Participation Gap?

- YouTube is a potential site of “cosmopolitan cultural citizenship” - a space in which individuals can represent their identities and perspectives, engage with others, and encounter cultural difference
- But access to all of the layers of possible participation is limited to a particular segment of the population
- That would be those with the motivations, technological competencies, and site –specific cultural capital sufficient to participate
- So digital literacy and access can create a participation gap
- “Voice” is unevenly distributed
- YouTube, since its inception, has been U.S.-dominated demographically and culturally

Global and Globalizing

- YouTube is global in the sense that the Internet is- it is accessible from (almost) anywhere in the world
- There are [YouTube](#) versions in dozens of different countries and different languages
- YouTube is “globalizing” in that it allows virtual border crossings between the geographical location of producers, distributors and consumers
- But it is not so simple to see YouTube content from other countries due to necessary Internet Service Providers from place to place, in many cases
- And due to some nations’ restrictive censorship policies
- So YouTube and other social media platforms have global limits
- YouTube’s default “global” version is the version seen by U.S.-based audiences
- So the question is whether YouTube’s “common culture” really exhibits and supports genuine cultural diversity
- The authors’ “Most Popular” video study found that only 15 percent of the top videos were in languages other than English
- Perhaps not surprising since the survey machines were based in America

Controversies in the YouTube Community

- As occurs with other social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter, controversies have arisen with the YouTube “community” around the relationship between the company and its users
- Such controversies reveal competing ideas about what YouTube is for:
 - A video formatted social media site
 - A chaotic archive of weird, wonderful and trashy video
 - A distribution platform for branded and Big Media entertainment
 - A growing advertising-oriented platform
- Oprah “big footing” YouTubers example (p. 91-94)

YouTube's Transformation?

- Is YouTube moving from “DIY free-for-all to a corporate media platform?”
- Some feel the “YouTube-ness” of YouTube is threatened by a Big Media takeover
- The desire is to preserve the unique and diverse flavor of “bottom-up” participation
- That YouTube must not become just another TV channel that happens to be on the Internet
- What do you think?
- Google, as a corporate citizen, does demonstrate high ideals and aspirations
 - [Time magazine cover story](#) (Sept. 18, 2013)
 - [Coverage of the Time story](#)