YouTube: Online Video and Co-Created Value

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Introduction

Love it or loathe it, YouTube has emerged as a significant part of the mainstream cultural landscape. Though not the only video-sharing website on the Internet, YouTube’s rapid rise, diverse range of content and public prominence in the Western, English-speaking world makes it an important space for understanding the evolving relationships between media, business, citizens and popular culture. It is one of the most heavily trafficked video sites in the English-speaking world, and a key site where disputes about new business models, forms of media, and modes of participation in culture are taking place.

As of April 2008, YouTube hosts upwards of 85 million videos, a number that represents a tenfold increase over the previous year, and which continues to increase exponentially.¹

Yet despite intense interest and increasing attention from both scholarly and business circles, there is still little work that examines YouTube as a cultural system, that looks at the range of content on the site and the way videos move through the service. This paper starts to fill that gap, reporting on a three month study of over 4,300 videos on the site. It analyzes a range of video on the site, looking at where content comes from, who uploads them, and what they appear to be.

A Short History

YouTube’s success couldn’t necessarily have been predicted from the beginning. Founded by Chad Hurley, Steve Chen and Jawed Karim, former employees of online commerce site PayPal, YouTube’s website was officially launched with little public fanfare in June 2005. The original innovation was a technological (but non-unique) one: YouTube was one of a number of competing services aiming to remove several of the barriers to the widespread sharing of video online. The site provided a very simple, integrated interface, within which users could upload, publish, and view streaming videos without high levels of technical knowledge and within the technological constraints of standard browser software and relatively modest bandwidth. YouTube set no limits on the number of videos users could upload, offered basic community functions such as the opportunity to link to other users as friends, and provided URLs and HTML code that enabled videos to be easily embedded into other websites - a feature that capitalized on the recent introduction of popularly accessible

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1 This figure is obtained by running a wild-card search within YouTube, using the universal wild-card expression “*” YouTube has now disabled this search functionality.
blogging technologies. With the exception of the limit on the duration of content that could be uploaded, YouTube’s offerings were comparable to other online video start-ups at the time.2

Most versions of YouTube’s history conform to the Silicon Valley myth of the garage entrepreneur, where technology and business innovation comes from youthful visionaries working outside of established enterprises. In this story, the moment of success arrives in October 2006, when YouTube was bought by Google for $1.65 billion.3 By November 2007 it was the most popular entertainment website in Britain, with the BBC website in second place,4 and in early 2008 it was consistently in the top ten most visited websites globally, according to various web metrics services.5 Internet market research company comScore reported that in March 2008 the service accounted for 37 percent of all Internet videos watched inside the US; the next largest service, Fox Interactive Media accounted for only 4.2 percent.6 As a user-created content community, its size and reach are now utterly unprecedented.

What is YouTube for?

YouTube’s ascendancy has occurred amid a fog of uncertainty and contradiction around what it is actually for. Unlike Facebook or the Wikipedia, YouTube’s apparent or stated mission has morphed as a result of both corporate practices and audience use. In its early days, the website carried the byline ‘Your Digital Video Repository’, a statement which conflicts somewhat with the now-notorious exhortation to ‘Broadcast Yourself’. This shift from the idea of the site as a personal storage facility for video content to a platform for public self-expression matches YouTube to the ‘participatory turn’ that characterizes rhetoric around ‘Web 2.0’ (Grossman, 2006).

Despite the insistence that the service was designed for sharing personal videos among existing social networks, it was a combination of the mass popularity of particular user-created videos and the capacity of the service to distribute media content to a

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2 A survey of the online video landscape circa 2005 is available on technology culture blog Techcrunch: www.techcrunch.com/2005/11/06/the-flickrs-of-video/

3 News Corporation, who had acquired MySpace the year before, were rumored to be bidders (Allison and Waters, 2006).

4 According to a Nielsen news release, available at: www.nielsen-netratings.com/pr/pr_071106_2_UK.pdf

5 At least according to both alexa.com and Nielsen data

wide audience that captured the public imagination. It is also this combination that has positioned the site as a key place where disputes over copyright and the market structures of online video distribution are taking place.

The site is variously understood as a **distribution platform**, challenging the promotional reach mass media companies are accustomed to monopolizing, while at the same time a **platform for user-created content** where challenges to commercial popular culture might emerge - be they user-created news services, or generic forms such as vlogging — which might in turn be appropriated and exploited by the traditional media industry.

**Co-Created Controversy**

YouTube’s business practices have proven particularly controversial, both with the old-media guard and some of the most active members of YouTube's social network. While some Big Content players - large media producer and rights holders such as the Warner and Universal Music Groups, have signed revenue sharing deals with YouTube, others have rejected such deals, arguing the service induces and profits from copyright infringement (Halft, 2008). Large media companies such as Viacom in the US, Silvio Berlusconi’s Mediaset in Italy, and TF1 in France, along with large rights-holders such as the English Premier League, have launched legal proceedings against YouTube, Inc. in an attempt to resolve what they see as illicit business practices.

At the same time, some of the most active members of the YouTube social network (participants often referred to as ‘YouTubers’) have expressed discomfort with the interjection of corporate players such as Oprah Winfrey into a space they experience as community generated. Suspicious of the apparent ability of corporate players to affect videos appearing on the front page and appearing as ‘most popular’ on the site, YouTubers have charged that the company disrespects the community on which its success relies.

Both these groups claim YouTube for themselves. Big Content players seem to approach it as a distribution platform for broadcasting content to online audiences and creating rivers of advertising revenue which will flow directly back to the company. But such an approach misunderstands YouTube for a **distribution platform**, bringing to the space broadcast era logics that value scarcity, top-down content flows and permission-based ideas of acceptable audience behavior.\(^7\)

At the same time, the concerns of YouTubers about corporate presence on the site neglect the fact their community interactions are supported by a corporate space that has since its inception, been made up of commercial and non-commercial participants; it is a space\(^8\)

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7 See YouTube press releases announcing both of these deals - [http://www.youtube.com/press_room_entry?entry=vCfgHo5_Fb4](http://www.youtube.com/press_room_entry?entry=vCfgHo5_Fb4) and [http://www.youtube.com/press_room_entry?entry=JrYdNx45e-0](http://www.youtube.com/press_room_entry?entry=JrYdNx45e-0)

8 This is certainly the model NBC and Fox’s YouTube ‘killer’ Hulu follows.
which supports and can accommodate legitimate commercial and non-commercial activities.

This is not to suggest either of these groups are wrong in their desire to construct YouTube according to their own logics. Rather, the discomfort of both corporate and 'ordinary' participants point to the fact the value of YouTube emerges from its simultaneous status as a high-volume website, a broadcast platform, a media archive and a social network. The value of the site does not come solely or even predominantly from the top-down activities of YouTube, Inc. as a company, but rather, is collectively produced by 'users' en masse via their consumption, evaluation and entrepreneurial activities. On YouTube, co-created value is core business.

Because YouTube is a co-created space, actions against the company are very difficult to separate out from actions against the YouTube community. And while the legal merits of the current charges against YouTube remain to be seen, it is important to acknowledge these actions also strike against the very media users who are the ultimate livelihood of each of these media companies. This is not to suggest such actions are mis-sighted but instead to suggest they are perhaps a little near-sighted. As we have suggested in previous white papers, corporations working in convergence culture need to be aware of the moral economy which governs relationships between media producers and their audiences.

Alternatives need to be found to labelling consumer use of media content as copyright infringement and 'piracy.' As this paper will argue, the activities of the YouTube community need to be thought of as the acts of engaged audiences - precisely the types of behavior that make the products of commercial media producers valuable in the first place.

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9 See both *How to Turn Pirates into Loyalists: The Moral Economy and an Alternative Response to File Sharing* and *If it Doesn’t Spread, it’s Dead: Creating Value in a Spreadable Marketplace*
Making Sense of YouTube

This report draws on a sample from four of YouTube's own categories of popularity - Most Viewed, Most Favorited, Most Responded and Most Discussed. Data was collected daily over three months (August, October and November) in 2007. Sampling six days over two weeks in each of these months, data about 4,320 videos were gathered and a coding system was developed to categorize this content according to textual and extra-textual features. Where videos were repeated in the sample, appearing in more than one category of popularity for instance, they were counted and coded individually, providing a sense of the extent and nature of material being watched and providing a sense of the weight of respective content types within YouTube.

Our survey concentrated on the most popular videos within the time period of the study, partly because it helped to order our sample, but also because we were trying to understand some of the dominant patterns in the popular uses of YouTube. Working through these patterns, we attempted to locate the 'YouTubeness' of YouTube — its shared and particular 'common culture' — while respecting its complexity and diversity. We looked not only at the mix of content that moves through the service but also at the particular patterns of relations between videos on the site and the organization of YouTube itself.

Making it Big: Popularity, Metrics, and YouTube

Understanding how popularity works on YouTube requires more than simply identifying and describing which of the videos have been watched the most. Popularity is problematized by a range of features: the site sports multiple points of entry, meaning there is not one, core 'schedule' of content to measure; participants not only upload their own videos but determine their own schedules of content. Is the 'popular,' then, simply a matter of degree -- are the popularity of particular cultural products measured by reach or sales? Or is popularity a matter of kind -- measured according to the cultural forms that are loved intensely? Even within YouTube itself, content is represented as being more or less 'popular' according to a range of different measures, including:

most viewed, most responded, most discussed, top rated, most favorited, previously popular, and most active

Furthermore, YouTube offers a range of different time periods to measure:

today, this week, this month, and all time

These different types of popularity are more than just differences in measuring systems -- each of these measures of popularity orders YouTube according to a different logic of audience engagement. While all of these measures rely on quantitative assessments -- they all 'count' things - the categories Most Responded, Most

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10 See Figure 1 on the following page
Discussed, and Most Favorited provide a way to access measures of attention of a type different to those that have predominated in the broadcast era. Whereas Most Viewed most closely resembles the aggregate measures of attention utilized by mainstream media industries as a way of counting ‘eyeballs in front of the screen’,\textsuperscript{11} each of the other three measures provide some account of popularity based on activities that signal a degree of participation in the YouTube community — if nothing else, all of them require the user to have an account.

- The Most Favorited category aggregates the videos popular enough to be added to a user’s profile;
- Most Discussed aggregates the videos that generate the most comments;
- Most Responded records the videos that viewers were most frequently prompted to post a video response to, either by filming their own material or linking to another video in the system.

Concentrating on only four of these categories of popularity we hypothesized that comparing across them would provide a sense of the way different kinds of video content are made popular by different audiences.

Of course, in some ways, the popularity metrics do just what we might think - they measure the relative popularity of individual videos over a given time period, according to various metrics. But this is not all they do. Because they communicate to the audience what ‘counts’ as popular on YouTube, these metrics also take an active role in creating the reality of what is popular on YouTube: the numbers not only describe the space, they help people imagine what the space should look like. As a result it might be possible to engage audiences in different ways not only by uploading different types of content, but also by participating in different activities on the site.

This content survey isn’t only about understanding “what” is on YouTube; it is also about understanding how the different

\textsuperscript{11} ‘Most Viewed’ counts only full views and counts views from external embeds once per IP address according to tests run in 2007 by video analytics company TubeMogul: http://www.tubemogul.com/research/video_views_study.php
types of content that make up YouTube allow different constitutions of the site, its community, and uses to be drawn. Looking not only at the fact that there is traditional media content, or fan remixes, or user-created material on the site, but at where this material is on the site, who it is uploaded by and the relationship it might have to other types of content, we are able to look at what YouTube is and how it works.

Because we were looking at a sample of the most popular videos, the results of this content survey are not simply a reflection of the collective tastes of the YouTube audience as a whole. The picture of what YouTube is and how it is used that emerges from the study is also partly shaped by the way popularity is measured, and the way that ‘popular’ content is represented on the YouTube website itself.

Working Out What Counts: Defining Content Type

Videos in this study were coded for origin, uploader, genre, and themes using a coding scheme which, at the base level, involved two primary categories: the apparent industrial origin of the video (user-created or traditional media); and the apparent identity of the uploader (traditional media company, small to medium enterprises/indie, organization, or ‘user’).

Definitions of each of these categories are provided in an appendix at the end of this report. Tables 1 and 2 provide an at-a-glance summary of the coding scheme applied. This coding scheme was two-step, coding first for Content Type, Uploader Type and the “form” of the video according to a number of broad categories. Videos were then tagged according to broad set of keywords for an additional level of categorization.

Before moving on, it is worth taking a minute to discuss the approach to ‘Traditional Media’ and ‘User-Created Content’ taken in this study. Our approach to ‘user-created’ content embraced the “unlicensed” use of copyrighted materials in the creation of videos. Rather than counting every instance of the use of copyrighted material as an appearance of ‘traditional media,’ which would, for

Table 1: Content, Uploader and Video types

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Content type</th>
<th>Uploader type</th>
<th>Video form</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Traditional Media” content</td>
<td>Traditional media</td>
<td>Scripted content</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>User-created content</td>
<td>SME/Indie producers</td>
<td>Promotional content</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncertain</td>
<td>Organizations</td>
<td>Live content</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Users</td>
<td>Music and video</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Vlog</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Informational content (incl. opinions)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Other (emergent forms)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

12 By exploring the content according to different measures of popularity which stand as a way to understand different orientations to it and thus different "uses"
instance, note instances of copyrighted content in Anime Music Videos, mash-ups, and sports-highlight packages, we factored in the degree of transformation -- the extent to which ‘traditional media’ were used in the creation of new content.

Such an approach highlights the fact uploading content to the site is a practice of being an audience member within participatory culture -- making meaning from the content broadcast on media platforms -- rather than seeing the re-use of copyrighted content as needing to be justified as ‘fair use’ or comprising ‘illicit’ distribution. The definitions used to identify ‘traditional media’, and ‘user-created’ content are included below, along with the catch-all definition for uncertain materials.

Content Category Definitions

1. **“TRADITIONAL MEDIA” content.**
Content appears to come from a (traditional) media source. This content is produced for the media industry, or by media professionals, and may be copyright violating or not. It may be lightly edited (but not substantially) and may feature overlays (post-broadcast watermark for instance), but is generally uploaded in its original form. TV shows, news reports, trailers, and music videos are indicative forms. This category includes sponsored content created by large corporations.

2. **USER-CREATED content.** This is content that appears to be produced outside the domain of the traditional media industry. It can be of varying degrees of quality. These videos may include elements from traditional media sources. For instance, a user-produced newscast may feature a picture of Paris Hilton or a clip from television (or another YouTube video) that is being discussed. Vlogs, user-produced comedy sketches, instructional videos, footage of family events or amateur footage of happenings. This content may imitate the style of professional content, i.e. it might look like a documentary, but if you suspect it was produced by someone outside of the professional media industry, it should be coded here. This category also describes content that remixes material. These videos will usually include material from a variety of sources, an indicative example is an Anime Music Video that edits a number of sequences from a specific anime (e.g. Naruto) to a soundtrack (e.g. Slayer). The category includes content such as fanvids, mashups, AMVs, and home-made music videos.

3. **UNCERTAIN.** This is content whose origin you can’t determine. It is not content produced by small or independent film makers (that would count as category 1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Keyword descriptors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scripted TV content</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music video</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Animation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fan video</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sketch comedy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vlog entry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Movie clips</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>News footage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Short film</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newscasts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commercial/advert</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructional videos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trailer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Documentary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Live performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talk or Game show</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sports footage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unscripted “reality” TV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slice of life (“cat videos”)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (emergent types)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Events (school graduations,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>national celebration days)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Innovations of the Study

It is significant to note this study is not a traditional social science-style content analysis. The figures presented here are not statistically significant, nor are they absolute or exclusive; there is a degree of slippage between the categories of analysis, and at a granular level, we didn’t reach sufficient agreement between coders to satisfy the requirements of a truly rigorous content analysis. It is worth noting, however, that for a human-coded study of this size, statistically significant figures or coder agreement is not entirely possible.

Rather than social science, this study represents an attempt to scale up the methods of media studies, and to provide a much needed level of textual analysis to an area of investigation that is frequently dominated by quantitative methods. As such, the slippage between categories and disagreement between coders allows us to explore the difficulty with often simplistic distinctions between ‘professional’ and ‘amateur’ producers emerging in discussions about participatory culture. As we can see in Table 1 above, the uploader categories for this study include categories to account for both Small to Medium Enterprises and Independant Producers (SME/Indie) and Organizations, significant media producers excluded from the binary distinction of ‘produced inside or outside the media industry.’ As detailed in the coding book at the end of this paper, the SME/Indie category accounts for:

uploaders [who] are not “big” media. They are often affiliated with another product, such as a website, production, band or the like...Their videos may feature professionally produced titles, ‘wrappers’ (graphics at the beginning, end, or both), and watermarks that signal the video as the product of a particular company.

SME/Indie producers may create product indistinguishable from that of ‘traditional media’ companies but which was never intended to appear in broadcast channels. They are significant users of YouTube who may not be accounted for by merely distinguishing between ‘traditional media’ or ‘user-created’ or between ‘copyright infringing’ and ‘copyright permitted’.

Similarly, by focusing on the apparent nature of the content coded, the study does not discriminate between supposedly user-created videos produced for ‘viral marketing’ purposes or those seized upon by marketing campaigns and “pure” user-created efforts. Indeed, YouTube

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is an especially useful site to study the crumbling boundaries between ‘traditional media’ producers and ‘users’. It helps us to start to erode the notion of a binary between empowered media business and dis-empowered audiences.

This study is interested in what the videos might ‘be’ - how they might be perceived and function within YouTube’s ecology, not whether they include content claimed to infringe copyright. As we can see from some of the errant cease-and-desist letters which have been sent to YouTube, machine logic is often not nuanced enough to separate appropriate claims from inappropriate ones. The slippage between categories -- where some coders in the study disagree with each other about the nature of a video -- provides us with a way to draw a culturally-grounded assessment of YouTube’s content.

What Studying YouTube can tell us

Studying YouTube like this helps us get a grip on the way the power relationships, the status of producers, and audiences, and our understandings of content in participatory culture are different from the broadcast era. As we move into the post-broadcast era, understanding YouTube can help us come to terms with the way we relate with and through media content.

14 See, for instance, the case of Jim Moore, who’s personal video was caught in a dragnet take-down exercise: http://blogs.law.harvard.edu/palfrey/2007/02/02/viacoms-cease-and-desist-letters-for-a-home-video/

15 See Amanda Lotz, 2007.
Who, What, and Where: What YouTube Looks Like

Overall Content: Two Sides of the Coin

Content on YouTube is often discussed somewhat simplistically as coming either from inside established media practice or outside of it. The site is imagined as a space where these two categories of content co-exist and collide, but do not really converge: where familiar forms of mass media content will be encountered alongside amateur oddities; where television, cinema, music videos and advertising, appear next to bedroom, boardroom, or back-yard productions. While this dichotomy is problematic for understanding YouTube, it nevertheless provides a useful organizing framework with which to begin a large-scale content survey.

The survey of most popular content looks to be weighted, just slightly, in favor of user-created videos. As Table 3 (above) and Figure 2 on page 14 demonstrate, just over half the material, or 2,177 videos, were coded as coming from user-created sources (content produced outside of the mainstream, broadcast or established media). Figure 3 on page 14 breaks down the entire content in the sample by form, and Figures 4 and 5, on page 15, show the video types across the two categories ‘Traditional Media’ and ‘User-Created Content’. It is important to realize these figures are an aggregate of all the videos in the sample. As noted above, some videos were counted more than once when they appeared in more than one category of popularity (or were popular on more than one day). Table 4 on page 15 shows the videos marked ‘Uncertain,’ making up the remainder of the results.

Examining the overall breakdown of content across our sample, a majority of the videos were identified as vlogs (nearly 40 percent), the conversational form that is somewhat emblematic of YouTube’s user-created content. Other significant genres included user-created music videos (15 percent) – including fanvids, and anime music videos; live material (13 percent) – musical performances, sporting footage and ‘slice of life’ footage; and informational content (10 percent) such as newscasts, video-game reviews, and interviews. Scripted material (8 percent) such as sketch comedy, animation, and machinima – animation made using video-game engines often created by capturing and editing choreographed gameplay – all made up a small part of the sample.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Videos</th>
<th>Most Favorited</th>
<th>Most Viewed</th>
<th>Most Discussed</th>
<th>Most Responded</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Traditional</td>
<td>511</td>
<td>717</td>
<td>276</td>
<td>308</td>
<td>1812</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>User-Created Content</td>
<td>466</td>
<td>277</td>
<td>751</td>
<td>683</td>
<td>2177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncertain</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>331</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>1080</td>
<td>1080</td>
<td>1080</td>
<td>1080</td>
<td>4320</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
New or unclassifiable genres, many of them exhibiting a fascination with the manipulation of video production techniques rather than following any established form made up around 10 percent of the sample. Contrary to the emphases of the mainstream media and some academic work on online video (see for instance Aufderheide and Jaszi, 2008), there was a surprisingly small number of amateur, mundane, ‘slice of life’ videos in the sample. Despite the myth, we just didn’t come across very many cat videos at all.

Almost 42 percent of the sample (1,812 videos) appeared to come from traditional media sources – videos originally produced within the established media industry (frequently taken from an original source such as a television broadcast or a DVD) and then uploaded to the website without a substantial amount of editing. Popular genres here included informational programming (30 percent), which collected clips from major news services in the US, the UK, and Latin America, particularly material featuring 2008 US Presidential candidates, celebrity interviews and appearances on talk shows as well as portions from reality television programming. Scripted materials (21 percent) made up the next largest category, and included sketch comedy, animation, and segments from soap operas from Turkey and the Philippines. Videos from traditional media sources also included live content (17 percent) – predominantly sports footage, clips from US pre-primary debates and music videos (13 percent), which came mostly from US Top 40 artists. The final significant category were promotional materials (11 percent) – trailers for films and advertisements for products.
Table 4: Uncertain Videos by Form

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Form</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NA</td>
<td>257</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scripted</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promotional</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Live</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MusicVideo</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vlog</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Info+Opinion</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Removed videos**

It is important to note that the percentage of content from Traditional media sources is slightly higher than reported here. Based on their titles and other studies of copyright content on YouTube,\(^\text{16}\) it is probable that most of the videos that could not be coded because they had been removed came from traditional media sources. These videos make up the majority of the sample of ‘Uncertain’ videos reported above.

We tried where possible to code videos removed from the sample using the available data - video title, description, uploader name, reason for removal - and searching for the video elsewhere online. In total, there were 1,220 ‘Removed’ videos in our sample. Some of these videos we were able to code and include in the sample, so not all of these videos are necessarily ‘untracked’ in this study.

Figure 6 shows the reasons these videos were removed, while Table 5 reveals the breakdown of removals across the four categories studied. Removal due to a breach of YouTube’s Terms of Use could signal a violation of YouTube’s (very loosely defined) policies around offensive content, or (more likely) it may be the result of a complaint the user has uploaded copyrighted content – also a violation of the YouTube Terms of Use. While only twenty percent of the videos in this sample were removed due to a direct copyright claim at the time of the study, it is reasonable to assume a good portion of those removed due to a Terms of Use violation were due to copyright infringement.

\[\text{Table 5: Removed videos across Popularity Categories}\]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason for Removal</th>
<th>Most Favorited</th>
<th>Most Popular</th>
<th>Most Discussed</th>
<th>Most Responded</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Terms of Use</td>
<td>164</td>
<td>231</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>561</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private video</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Copyright claim</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>244</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>User</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>316</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Redirected</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^\text{16}\) See both the VidMeter.com report *Analysis of Copyrighted Videos on YouTube.com* available at: [www.vidmeter.com/i/vidmeter_copyright_report.pdf](http://www.vidmeter.com/i/vidmeter_copyright_report.pdf)
Uploaders

True to the ‘Broadcast Yourself’ tagline, **most of the videos in this sample seemed to have been uploaded by people outside established, mainstream media companies.** Figure 7 on this page shows the percentage of the sample contributed by various uploaders. These figures show the portions across the entire sample, rather than the number of individual uploaders, which is smaller than reported here as some upload more than one video. Our data suggests a majority of the most popular content in this study (around 84 percent) was uploaded by those outside of the established, mainstream media system – predominantly uploaders coded as ‘users.’ (62 percent) ‘Small-to-medium enterprises (SMEs) or Independent producers (indies),’ accounted for around 20 percent of the content uploaded, and Organizations only 2 percent.

Traditional media companies and large rights holders made up a small percentage of the overall sample, only about 8 percent, even if we accept that some of the videos where the uploader was coded as ‘Uncertain’ may be from Traditional media uploaders or large rights holders. The small representation of Traditional media uploaders across the sample is not surprising given the fierce way many companies have patrolled their intellectual property rights on YouTube, and the generally suspicious (and sometimes antagonistic) attitude with which many Big Content companies approach the space.

Looking at the patterns of uploaders across each of the categories of popularity studied, however, we see that traditional media uploaders are a little more significant than these initial figures suggest. **It is only in the Most Discussed category that a traditional media uploader doesn’t appear as one of the most popular contributors** based on the sheer number of videos counted. Table 6 on page 18 shows the top 5 uploaders in each category based on the number of their videos in the sample. Universal Media Group (UMG), the NBA and TNA Wrestling all emerge as significant contributors to YouTube. These figures point to the sheer diversity of uploaders participating in YouTube.

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17 NBC is also well-represented in this sample even though by the time of coding all of their videos had been marked as ‘private’. When videos are marked by the uploader as ‘private’, they are accessible only to invited guests and essentially removed from circulation.
As noted earlier, Universal Music Group and other music labels have negotiated deals to work with YouTube to harness the fan engagement with their product. Both deals provide some provisions for the use of copyrighted content in user-created content. And while these companies still rely on YouTube’s filtering technology to identify copyrighted content, both agree to a licensing deal that sees the music labels sharing revenue generated by advertising running against user-created content that utilizes Warner or UMG material. Such an approach (which doesn’t outright ban the use of copyrighted material) locates these companies as participants in the YouTube community. By not cracking down on ‘ordinary’ users but attempting to find an economically acceptable way to work with the community, both groups avoid appearing on the ‘opposite side’ of their YouTube audience.

Such an approach is aided by the use of YouTube as a platform to distribute content. Admittedly, doing so is made easier by the status of music videos as promotional content, properties designed to drive other types of activity (namely album purchase) rather than properties which are designed to turn a direct profit themselves (through advertising sales). The two other significant Traditional media uploaders uncovered in this study are TNA wrestling and the National Basketball Association. Both of these uploaders use YouTube as a place for highlight packages, promotional content for upcoming events, and archival content which, especially in the case of wrestling, has traditionally been a significant way to brand build and encourage fan proselytizing.18

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18 See the C3 White paper *Fandemonium: A Tag Team Approach to Enabling and Mobilizing Fans* by Sam Ford.
Popularity across categories

When we compare user-created and traditional media across categories of popularity, some striking differences in how popular content appears on the site begin to emerge. Figure 8 (right) shows the distribution of content coded ‘traditional media’ or ‘user-created’ across each of the four categories of popularity studied.

Most Viewed Content

While user-created content dominates the sample overall, and ‘users’ appear to comprise the largest group of people contributing to the system, not all of the categories of popularity are dominated by user-created content. Though traditional media and large rights holders make up a small percentage of the overall uploaders (as indicated above), content from broadcast and mass media sources comprise a significant proportion of the videos coded in the Most Viewed and Most Favorited categories. Indeed, material from broadcast and mass media sources make up two thirds (66 percent) of the Most Viewed category, where the largest genres were informational material – particularly news footage, political discussion, celebrity gossip, and interviews; live content – especially sports footage and live musical acts; and scripted programming – clips from television series, soap operas, and dramas, as well as animation and some sketch comedy.
Table 7 (right) shows the breakdown of the uploaders across the categories of popularity in the sample, and Figure 9 (below right) the percentages of traditional media content in the Most Viewed category. A large portion of the content in this category originated on television, but was mostly uploaded by users rather than by the traditional media and large rights holders themselves.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>UPLOADER</th>
<th>Most Favorited</th>
<th>Most Viewed</th>
<th>Most Discussed</th>
<th>Most Responded</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Traditional</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SME/Indie</td>
<td>174</td>
<td>202</td>
<td>232</td>
<td>253</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>User</td>
<td>676</td>
<td>604</td>
<td>733</td>
<td>668</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncertain</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 9: Traditional Media Content in the Most Viewed Category
User-created content in the Most Viewed category predominantly took the form of vlog entries, though there were also some instructional content, user-created sketch comedy, and musical performances – either footage from live shows or users at home (or in the studio) performing directly for the camera. The percentages of user-created content in the Most Viewed category are broken down in Figure 10 (below).

Figure 10: User-Created Content in the Most Viewed Category

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NA</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scripted</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promotional</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Live</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MusicVideo</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vlog</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Info+Opinion</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

‘Uncertain’ Videos

A portion of videos in each category of popularity were coded as ‘uncertain’; these videos, comprising roughly 10 percent in the case of both Most Favorited and Most Viewed, included videos the coders were unable to make a definitive decision about. Many of the videos coded here had been removed from YouTube, and were undiscoverable on other video-sharing sites or elsewhere across the Internet. Others were from media systems coders were not familiar with – perhaps in a language other than English, Spanish, or Chinese – and coders were unable to read the formal, aesthetic and extra-textual markers to determine the video’s origin.

Finally, some videos were coded as ‘uncertain’ in instances where coders could not clearly determine whether the content was user-created or the product of professional media producers, based on the content of the video and details provided in any intertextual or extra-textual sources (such as the profile of the uploader, hypertext-links that might be provided to other sites on the Internet, or discussion in industry, press, or other publications regarding the videos).

The percentage shown in the of content in each of the categories exclude the 86 videos coded as ‘uncertain’ each, which are shown in

Table 8: Uncertain Content in the Most Viewed Category

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Uncertainties</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Most Viewed</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncertain</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scripted</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promotional</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Live</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MusicVideo</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vlog</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Info+Opinion</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
the accompanying tables. See Table 8 (above) for the ‘uncertain’ content coded in the Most Viewed category.

These ‘uncertain’ videos reveal some of the most interesting difficulties that arise when classifying the content of YouTube. In practice, there is a great deal of slippage between the categories of ‘traditional media’ and ‘user-created content’ in our survey, and making determinations between them relies as much on how the material is positioned by extra-textual and intertextual material as it does on markers within the content itself. But these problems were also very productive: the coding process revealed some of the specific sources of uncertainty around the distinctions between professional and user-created content in YouTube.

Most Favorited Content
The Most Favorited category – videos users have added to their personal profiles – was nearly evenly split between traditional (47 percent) and user-created content (43 percent). Figure 11 and 12 (right) show the break down of content across the Most Favorited category, and Table 9 (page 23) the number of videos coded 'uncertain' in this category.

Whether from traditional or user-created sources, the largest categories of content are Informational content, Scripted material. This is not especially surprising if we understand YouTube as part of everyday media use and social networking functions rather than approaching the site solely as a
space for content distribution, British cultural theorist Simon Frith (1996: 110-11) argues music plays a central role for identity formation, its significance and usefulness coming from its dual status as a marker of individualism and a signifier of group participation. 'Favoriting' something is similarly an act both of self-expression and identity performance; when videos are added to a user's list of favorites they're not just saved for later viewing; they are published as markers of personal taste and implicitly communicate recommendations to other users.

Music has likewise been central to the formation of other social networking services (boyd, 2007) where it plays a significant role as a marker of identity in user profiles, particularly those of teens. Similarly, the appearance of music videos as a significant content type of Most Favorited videos matches the identity forming function music plays, a function that is also supported by social networking sites.

Table 9: Uncertain Content in the Most Favorited Category

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Most Favorited</th>
<th>Uncertain</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NA</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scripted</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promotional</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Live</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MusicVideo</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vlog</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Info+Opinion</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Most Discussed Content and Most Responded Content

It is striking to note the extent to which user-created content dominates the Most Discussed and Most Responded categories, especially when compared with the Most Viewed and Most Favorited categories. Figure 13 and 14 (right) show the breakdown of traditional media and user-created content in the Most Discussed category; Figure 15 and 16 (page 25) detail the percentages of content for the Most Responded category, and Table 10 (page 25) the ‘uncertain’ content in both these categories.

User-created content makes up more than two-thirds of the content coded in both the Most Responded and Most Discussed categories, where it comprises 63 and 69 percent respectively – a dramatically higher percentage than Traditional media content, and an almost complete reversal of the situation in the Most Viewed category.
Table 10: Uncertain Content in the Most Discussed and Most Responded Categories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Uncertain content</th>
<th>Most Discussed</th>
<th>Most Responded</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NA</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scripted</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promotional</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Live</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MusicVideo</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vlog</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Info+Opinion</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As noted above, the sample included some, but not large numbers, of many of the prototypical user-created video forms: There were a few mundane videos, short films, fanvids or hypercreative mashups, and there were also quite a few anime music videos, instructional video-game walk-throughs, as well as some examples of machinima. Overwhelmingly, however, it was the vlog entry that dominated this portion of the sample, making up nearly 40 percent of the videos coded at Most Discussed and just over a quarter of the videos coded at Most Responded.

The prevalence of vlog entries is significant given it is an almost exclusively user-created form of online video production. Vlogging itself is not necessarily new or unique to YouTube, but it is an emblematic form of YouTube participation. The form has antecedents in webcam culture, personal blogging, and the more widespread ‘confessional culture’ (Matthews, 2004) that characterizes television talk shows and reality television focused on the observation of everyday life. The success of Ze Frank (real name Hosea Jan Frank) was important in publicly defining the genre and establishing its possibility as a bona fide mode of cultural production, despite the fact it did not appear on YouTube. His 12-month vlogging project, ‘the show with ze frank’ which ran from March 16, 2006 to March 16, 2007, established some of the formal characteristics of the genre as it has been taken up in YouTube, particularly in terms of rapid editing and snappy performance to camera. Two other significant genres in both Most Discussed and Most Responded were Informational content and Music Videos. The former includes user-created newscasts, interviews, documentaries and a number of videos which would bleed over into the vlog category – they frequently critique popular media or comment on ‘YouTube dramas’ through visual juxtaposition, or by adding commentary or on-screen graphics. Many user-created music videos also adopt a conversational mode, as artists preface their work with a discussion of the motivations or context for the piece they have written or will perform, respond to suggestions and feedback, often drawing the audience into the intimacy afforded by direct address.
The Uses of YouTube

This content survey reveals a number of key developments and approaches to YouTube it is helpful to understand:

that the use of copyrighted media is part of the experience being a participatory audience;

the conversational form of the vlog is a key mode of engagement on the site;

we need to move beyond binary distinctions between 'professional' and 'amateur' media producers as a way to understand participation in convergence culture;

that YouTube is not only diverse but multifaceted, versatile enough to be used for multiple (sometimes apparently competing) purposes;

the space requires media producers to accept their role as one distributor amongst many.

Each of these is discussed below as a way to contextualize the findings of this content survey within the broader practices of convergence culture.

Quotes, Clips and Participatory Audiences

Media studies scholar Axel Bruns (2007) notes participatory culture and digital tools mean audiences no longer need to resort to auxiliary media forms to respond to the culture around them. Recognizing this suggests the everyday experience of being part of the media audience might need to be rethought to include new forms of cultural production that occur as part of ordinary media use (or, as Bruns would have it, 'produsage'). The 'ordinary' users of YouTube conventionally understood as audiences clearly do engage in new forms of 'publishing', but they do so, in part, as a way to narrate and communicate their own cultural experiences which are bound up with commercial popular media.

Theorist John Hartley (2008) describes this mode of cultural meaning making as 'redaction' – 'the production of new material by the process of editing existing content'. For Hartley, redaction is:

a form of production not reduction of text (which is why the more familiar term 'editing' is not quite adequate). Indeed, the current moment could be characterised as a redactional society, indicating a time when there is too much instantly available information for anyone to see the world whole, resulting in a society that is characterised by its editorial practices (Hartley, 2008a: 112).

We can see this process of redaction as a descriptor for the behavior of audiences in participatory culture. Hartley (2008: 19-35) argues 'consumption' of media properties is a source of value creation in a read-write culture. Just as other industries have recognized value is found not only in the processes of manufacturing or the production of goods but also in the creative uses of goods by consumers, we can also find value produced through the creative uses of content by audiences. This is, on the one hand, akin to the arguments of Jenkins (2006), Tapscott and Williams (2007), Von Hippel (2005), Banks and
Humphreys (2008) and others about consumers as sources of innovation, as well as the suggestions put forth by both the Consortium,\(^\text{19}\) C3 Consulting Researcher Rob Kozinets (2008), and Beverland and Ewing (2005) that fans and brand advocates need to be understood as ‘marshals’ who are valuable in managing future directions for brands.

On the other hand, however, Hartley’s argument suggests we must move beyond merely seeing the use and re-use of content as evidence of innovation or lead-use, and instead recognize it as evidence of the practices of media audiences. As we discussed in the C3 white paper *If It Doesn’t Spread It’s Dead: Creating Value in a Spreadable Marketplace*, the success of media properties relies on audiences finding them significant enough to make them a part of their daily lives, finding them useful “to express, define and understand their social and cultural relationships” (Jenkins, Li and Krauskopf, 2008, p.65). While the traditional approach of mass media companies has been to see this as an act of consumption, media properties are never really ‘consumed’ the way packaged goods are. Rather, ‘consumption’ of media properties has always been a process of creative use - of finding ways media goods resonate with lived experiences, are useful for expressing identities or forming communities - and becoming the loved properties audiences are driven to patronize and acquire. As noted above, audiences no longer need to rely on ‘auxiliary’ forms of production to express their love of media properties; they no longer need to only write about their favorite TV shows, they can now show their admiration in the same media as the content itself. In short, in participatory culture, being an audience member includes acts of production and media making as much as it does acts of watching.

Redaction provides an alternative to the discourses of copyright infringement that dog debates around the posting of Traditional media content to YouTube. There were several instances in this sample that constitute the type of uploads Big Content companies seem to dread most – entire episodes of programming divided into sections. In particular, the sample included two soap opera series, one each from the Philippines and Turkey. Not only was this material flagged as copyright-infringing fairly

\(^{19}\) See previous C3 white papers including *Fanning the Flames* and *Fandemonium*
quickly, but in both instances, the videos made for a poor-quality viewing experience.

Although by early 2008 YouTube had begun to make announcements about the introduction of high-resolution video, to date the low-quality of YouTube videos and the 10-minute time limit imposed on uploads, have made it a poor technology by which to ‘illegally’ distribute copyrighted content, especially compared to protocols such as BitTorrent, and compression technologies such as DivX and Xvid supported by some other video-sharing services. While YouTube’s size makes it a significant site to explore the ramifications of digital distribution on the relationship between national boundaries and audience communities (Green 2008), the uploading of traditional media content to the website is part of a more sophisticated range of cultural practices than simply the attempt to ‘fileshare’ or to avoid the national or commercial boundaries around content distribution.

Rather than complete episodes, YouTube is filled with short ‘quotes’ of content – snippets of material users share to draw attention to the most significant portion of a program. The practice of quoting, then, is quite distinct from that of uploading entire programs. Understanding YouTube as a redactional system, we can view the uploading of clips and quotes by audiences as a meaning-making process, rather than an attempt to evade the constraints of mainstream media distribution mechanisms. Particularly through this practice of uploading media ‘quotes,’ YouTube functions as a central clearing house service that people use as a way to catch up on public media events, as well as to break new stories and raise awareness, as in the ‘citizen journalism’ model. When video of campus police using a Taser on UCLA student Mostafa Tabatabainejad was posted to YouTube in November of 2006, the citizen journalism potential of YouTube was elevated to the attention of the US national press.

Frequently, however, quoted materials in the Most Viewed category, tends to reflect the topics already at the top of public agendas rather than breaking new stories. In this sample, for instance, we see quite a number of highlights packages from qualifying matches for the 2008 UEFA European Football Championship, qualifying for which started in August 2007.

Unsurprisingly given the timing of the data collection, quotes from the 2008 US Presidential election campaigning were well represented in the sample, in the form of campaign materials, debates, press clips, as well

20 As of March 2008, the service is testing technology to increase the visual and audio quality of video on the site. See http://cybernetnews.com/2008/02/29/watch-high-resolution-youtube-videos/

21 The poor quality is due primarily to the compression technologies YouTube uses, though quality is also determined by a range of additional factors, such as the quality of the original recording and the technology used to digitize the content.

22 See YouTube’s official response to this behavior on their blog: http://www.youtube.com/blog?entry=oorjVv_HDVs
as commentary, discussion and debate. This is to be expected given the increasingly significant role YouTube has played as a site for both top-down and grass-roots political campaigning (Jenkins, Forthcoming; Shah and Marchionini, 2007). The presence of such material could be taken as an indication of a significant degree of engagement in US politics by the YouTube community on popular rather than official terms. Arguably, the forms of political engagement hinted at in these videos have just as much to do with celebrity culture (Couldry and Markham, 2007) as they have to do with capital “P” political culture – in the same way as the tabloid mainstream media focus on individual candidates as media personalities.

Vlogging: Conversational Form

The vlog reminds us of the residual character of interpersonal face-to-face communication and provides an important point of difference between online video and television. Not only is the vlog technically easy to produce, generally requiring little more than a webcam and basic editing skills, it is a form whose persistent direct address to the viewer inherently invites feedback. While television content – news, sketch comedy, clips from soap operas – may draw people to the service for catch-up viewing, Traditional media content doesn’t substantially engage in the measures of conversational and inter-creative participation (Spurgeon, 2008; Meikle, 2002) vlogging and other user-created content types do, as measured by the numbers of comments and video responses. Scripted content may be marked as a Favorite for the same reason someone may purchase a DVD - to enable the easy revisiting of entertaining or meaningful moments and the ability to share your cultural taste with your friends. But scripted content uploaded to YouTube as a promotional exercise by a Traditional media uploader doesn’t offer anything more than a DVD - it does not intrinsically engage viewers in a conversation or invite them to be part of a process of meaning making, community building or identity formation.

It seems that, more than any other form in the sample, the vlog invites critique, debate and discussion. Direct response (through comment and via video) is central to this mode of engagement. Vlogs are frequently responses to other vlogs, carrying out discussion across YouTube and directly addressing comments left on previous vlog entries. Patricia Lange (2007) notes particularly engaged YouTubers directly address negative comments and ‘hating’ through their vlogs, many seeing this as an inherent part of the form itself. It is this conversational character which distinguishes the mode of engagement in the categories dominated by user-created content from those dominated by traditional media.

Some artists represented by large labels have taken up this mode as a way to engage and manage their fan communities. English/Portugese singer-songwriter Mia Rose is a good example of this. Rose represents herself as an independent artist, using YouTube to sell her content by reaching out across the social network to connect with her audiences. In April 2008, after the sample had been captured, she signed to the NextSection Lifestyle Group and
is now a managed artist with a major label. Her channel remains unchanged, however, still projecting the same home-grown brand image with which it began. She remains, for all intents and purposes, an independent artist who is also a user of YouTube.

Beyond the Professional and Amateur Divide

YouTube’s popular videos are contributed by a range of professional, semi-professional, amateur, and pro-amateur participants, some of whom produce content that is an uncomfortable fit with the available categories of either ‘traditional’ media content or the vernacular forms generally associated with the concept of ‘amateur’ content. University lectures and educational materials (such as those uploaded by institutions including the University of New South Wales and the University of California, Berkeley), online presentations developed by Google for forthcoming products, or footage of military aircraft landing uploaded by the Royal Australian Air Force – each of these are examples of content which strain to fit into the traditional media/user-created content dichotomy.

This dichotomy also fails to accurately characterise uploaders like Ford Models who use YouTube for both promotional purposes and to identify talent. Ford (much like Google, the RAAF, colleges and universities) is not a traditional media player; its presence on YouTube capitalizes on the same self-publishing and conversational opportunities as other non-media participants, despite their size. The material Ford produces – makeup tips, model profiles, fashion guidelines, and modelling tutorials – could conceivably be packaged for broadcast as fashion programming on cable or broadcast television. Outside of the broadcast flow and contextualized within a branded YouTube channel, these videos appear as organic YouTube content; it is only the professional quality of the content and the corporate size of the uploader that would mark Ford Models as a traditional media player.

Similarly, the category of ‘user’ is complicated by web-tv start-ups, such as JumpTV Sports, who put together sports packages and deliver content to a range of sports sites around the world, and nogoodtv, who produce vaguely risqué, masculinist programming. Many of these uploaders resemble traditional television producers using the Internet as a way to distribute niche programming or specialized content without needing to negotiate cable or television distribution deals. nogoodtv’s content, for instance, resembles the laddish programming regularly seen on US cable channels such as Spike and the video-game oriented G4 TV. It is a mixture of music videos, celebrity interviews, sketches, informational programming and miscellanea, wrapped in on-screen graphics. Its resemblance to television content points to the way digital delivery options such as YouTube and the increasing move of material online are destabilizing medium-dependent definitions of media forms (Green 2008).

So too, although videoblogging is a dominant form of user-created content and fundamental to YouTube’s sense of community, not all vlogs are personal journal entries created in
bedrooms. Indeed, a number of prominent vloggers, such as Nalts, Charlestrippy, and Blunty3000 are quite clearly using YouTube as a business venture. They participate in YouTube's advertising sharing scheme and draw revenue from their presence on the site. But unlike users like nogoodTV (who seem to bring to YouTube the same one-way model of participation we know from broadcasting), these producers are active participants in the YouTube community. Even though uploaders like Charlestrippy use their vlogs and YouTube pages to advertise their expertise – in his case, creating viral videos – they are also active participants in the YouTube community. Their online success is as much due to their grounded knowledge of and effective participation within YouTube’s communicative ecology as it is the savvy with which they produce content, and they are virtuosic in their mastery of YouTube’s home-grown forms and practices.

YouTube is a many-faced thing

Despite it often being discussed as a coherent whole or in broad generalizations, with 85 million (and counting) videos and currently 19 different regional versions of the site, there is no singular object that might be meaningfully considered ‘YouTube’. YouTube, like television, is made up of such a diverse range of content and participants, and changes so rapidly that it seems to escape generalizations we might want to make about it.

As the discussion above suggests, the desires of corporate or community participants construct YouTube in very different ways. And YouTube is a large enough entity, and loosely enough managed, that it can almost be whatever its various participants want it to be. The site is big enough to support a multitude of uses, and it does. But it is important to realize that YouTube is not a dedicated, exclusive space for any of these uses, and successful participation requires an awareness and appreciation of the role others play in the co-creation of the site.

The multiplicity of YouTube is furthered by the way the site complicates distinctions between ‘producer’ and ‘audience’ ported over from understandings of broadcast media. ‘Using’ YouTube can legitimately mean uploading or watching content on the service, or doing both as part of one’s ‘use’ of the site. Each is legitimate as a mode of engagement, even if there is a continued tendency in work around participatory culture to privilege those who upload content as ‘active’ or ‘engaged’ users over those whose engagement is primarily watching content. Indeed, as will be discussed below, YouTube points to the need to redefine the idea of the audience in participatory culture, to realize and start to take advantage of the fact that being an audience member is a productive act, rather than a consumptive act.

Each of these modes of engagement might result in the constitution of a very different YouTube, however. The YouTube experienced by someone whose principal use is following links to popular videos forwarded by their friends might look
very different to the YouTube experienced by someone using it as a way to advertise their local business or to follow a series of vlogs. Similarly, the YouTube experienced by a member of an anime fan who connects with others through the production, sharing and critique of Anime Music Videos might look very different to someone who uses the site on a casual basis, surfing in to find interesting content.

**YouTube is a space where all participants are ‘users’**

As noted above, some Big Content players seem uncomfortable with their role as participants in a space where they are not the sole controllers of the flow of their media content. While recent legal action against YouTube has been framed as a dispute over profiting from copyright infringement, however, current actions follow earlier disagreements about the nature of revenue sharing deals between YouTube (Google) and Big Content. In this regard, the actions of Viacom and others can be seen as similar to the decision by NBC to remove its content from the iTunes marketplace after Apple Inc. asserted it would dictate the price of material on the service. In some respects, the frictions between Big Content players and YouTube can be seen as in part due to a re-adjustment of the media landscape to the presence of what David Weinberger (2007) refers to as metabusinesses - those who don’t produce content but act as distributors, making content searchable and findable. Often when dealing with metabusinesses, Big Content don’t hold the balance of power in negotiations regarding advertising revenue to which they may be accustomed to, as television conglomerates generally do in the broadcast space.

Engaging with YouTube requires Big Content players to adjust to a landscape where they may not be necessarily afforded the privilege of monopoly over access to broadcast distribution has provided them. While not a totally flat space, YouTube is a relatively open platform that enables many participants to upload content.

While there are premium deals done which offer different revenue sharing deals to different participants, it is a space where media producers (both large and small) can be considered ‘users,’ disrupting broadcast-era, and even early participatory culture understandings, of the relationship between ‘producers’ and ‘audiences.’

Some of the rhetoric around participatory culture has resulted in the phrase ‘user-created content’ coming to be equated with the idea of a prosumer - the active, productive consumer. But with consumers able to produce content that rivals the quality, style, and reach of professionally produced material the usefulness of the term has frayed. YouTube’s ‘downmarket aesthetic’ (relatively poor image quality, relatively clean page layout and a low-key approach to emphasizing content from premium partners), emphasizes that all participants in the space are ‘users’. A comparison between the front page of YouTube and Veoh reveals YouTube's community emphasis.

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YouTube’s front page identifies ‘Featured Videos’ and ‘Promoted Videos’ but these are presented in the same fashion as the ‘videos being watched right now’ which is the only dynamic element on the page.

Furthermore, while ‘Featured Videos’ in practice frequently come from premium partners, videos from other participants are not excluded by the category. Indeed, videos often end up in this box via the promotion of YouTube’s management team, who may have noticed especially relevant or popular content.

Finally, as the links to the ‘Most Viewed,’ ‘Most Discussed,’ and ‘Top Favorites’ suggest, users can alter what they see on the front page, giving privilege to content voted up by the YouTube community.

Veoh’s front page, by contrast, is nearly wholly dominated by sponsored content from premium partners, rather than videos from the community. While it offers tabs to view the videos of a user’s ‘friends’ the prime real-estate a the top of the page promotes content from premium partners. As a user-scrolls down, they encounter more sponsored content, in the form of ‘Veoh Publisher Videos,’ ‘Featured Channels,’ and ‘Featured Groups.’

Rather than the material popular with its user community, Veoh’s front page emphasizes the delivery of content to users. It resembles something more akin to a broadcasting platform, or a video-on-demand menu, than it does a video sharing site.
YouTube doesn’t draw the same hard distinctions between community participants and premium partners other services do. Non-paying uploaders can customize their sites in similar ways premium partners can, and while big-money deals can get videos featured on the front page, so too can YouTube-grown popularity. If all YouTube’s contributors are users, then they’re all responsible for ‘user-created content.’

This doesn’t make the site horizontal in terms of access - those with better cameras, more skills, or a wittier script, say, will still produce content of different qualities. But what it does suggest is that all participants in the space are members of a macro YouTube community.

Successfully negotiating this space requires companies to realize their position within the space is not necessarily privileged in relation to the rest of the site. This requires us to understand as participants, all those who upload, view, comment on or create content for YouTube, whether they are businesses, organizations, or private individuals. For one thing, content is circulated and used in YouTube without much regard to its source – it is valued and engaged with in specific ways according to its genre and its uses within the website as well as its relevance to the everyday lives of other users, rather than according to whether or not it was uploaded by a Hollywood studio, a web TV company, or an amateur videoblogger. All contributors of content to YouTube are potential participants in a common space; one that supports a diverse range of uses and motivations, but that has a coherent cultural logic – what we might call the particular ‘YouTube-ness’ of YouTube.

Likewise, this model asks us to understand the activities of not only content creators but also audiences as practices of participation, because the practices of audiencehood – quoting, favouriting, commenting, responding, sharing, and viewing – all leave traces, (and therefore all have effects), on the common culture of YouTube as it evolves. Hartley points to the fact the success of media properties has always been produced by polling the size of the audience (through ratings charts or readership figures, for instance). This polling, or estimations about how well programs will do in the polls, creates the ultimate product sold by media corporations - namely, sizeable audiences sold to potential advertisers, or predictions of demand for properties such as movies. As such, the ultimate ‘value’ media producers exploit is co-created by both those who produce properties and the audiences who engage with that content. 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.
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Appendix: Some Categorical Definitions

Apparent Industrial Origin

1. “TRADITIONAL MEDIA” content: Content appears to come from a (traditional) media source. This content is produced for the media industry, or by media professionals, and may be copyright violating or not. It may be lightly edited (but not substantially) and may feature overlays (post-broadcast watermark for instance), but is generally uploaded in its original form. TV shows, news reports, trailers, and music videos are indicative forms. This category includes sponsored content created by large corporations.

2. USER-CREATED content: This is content that appears to be produced outside the domain of the traditional media industry. It can be of varying degrees of quality. These videos may include elements from traditional media sources. For instance, a user-produced newscast may feature a picture of Paris Hilton or a clip from television (or another YouTube video) that is being discussed. Vlogs, user-produced comedy sketches, instructional videos, footage of family events or amateur footage of happenings. This content may imitate the style of professional content, i.e. it might look like a documentary, but if you suspect it was produced by someone outside of the professional media industry, it should be coded here. This category also describes content that remixes material. These videos will usually include material from a variety of sources, an indicative example is an Anime Music Video that edits a number of sequences from a specific anime (e.g. Naruto) to a soundtrack (e.g. Slayer). The category includes content such as fanvids, mashups, AMVs, and home-made music videos.

3. UNCERTAIN: This is content whose origin you can't determine. It is not content produced by small or independent film makers, that would count as 1.

Apparent Identity of Uploader

1. Traditional Media: UPLOADER appears to be a ‘traditional’ media company (e.g. NBC, BBC, Universal Pictures) or a large rights holder (e.g. NBL, Viacom). These uploaders may identify themselves as programs, such as Saturday Night Live or X-Factor UK, or movies, such as Sicko: The Movie.

2. SME/INDIE: A small-medium enterprise or independent producer. These uploaders are not “big” media. They are often affiliated with another product, such as a website, production, band or the like. Their uploader page and/or description often includes a link to send viewers to another site where this content is available - either to watch, to purchase on DVD, or download etc. There is an apparent connection between the content they are putting on YouTube and the content or services offered
on their website. This means a link to a website from a profile page or description does not immediately qualify a user as an SME. Their videos may feature professionally produced titles, ‘wrappers’ (graphics at the beginning, end, or both), and watermarks that signal the video as the product of a particular company. A good example is nogoodtv. This category also includes fan communities who link to discussion forums.

3. **Organization**: These uploaders are principally non-profit organizations such as educational organizations, CSPAN, Government agencies.

4. **User**: An individual, ‘ordinary’ user, not necessarily affiliated with a big media producer, group, or SME. Videos produced by these uploaders vary from highly produced to very amateur content.