

Michael Gesese-Elsenpeter

COME384A

Dr. Glantz

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The Second Largest Web Platform: Tetrad Analysis of YouTube

Introduction

I chose to analyze YouTube (online video sharing and social media platform) for this assignment because it's one of my favorite media to use. YouTube was founded on February 14, 2005, by three ex-employees of PayPal, Steve Chen, Chad Hurley, and Jawed Karim in San Mateo, California, but it wasn't officially launched until December 2005 (Hosch, 2022). As you would've guessed, it's headquartered in California, but to be more specific in San Bruno (Hosch, 2022). YouTube is the second most visited website, only trailing the platform that bought them out, Google (Hosch, 2022). To put it into context, in 2022, every day billions of views are generated every day from people watching beyond a billion hours of video. The age range for YouTube users ranges from teenagers to adults in their middle thirties (15-35). YouTube has grown dramatically and continues to grow today because 70% of watch time is accumulated from mobile devices (GMI, 2022). The average video is 12 minutes long, which is perfect because most people don't have the attention span to watch anything much longer (GMI, 2022). With that being said, YouTube also allows movies, documentaries, and even television shows to be watched on their website, some movies you have to pay for, but there are many free movies as well. YouTube is the reason for roughly 25 percent of global mobile traffic, with 16.4 percent coming from the United States, 9.2 percent from India, and 4.8 percent from Japan (GMI, 2022).

Their goal or mission is to allow the average person to show off their creativity with this medium and give each and every individual a voice in their community and society in general (Hosch, 2022).

Theory

Marshall McLuhan is well known for his phrase, “the medium is the message,” which simply implies that our cognitive and communication skills are adopted through media. People wanted scientific evidence to answer the question: “What general, verifiable (that is, testable) statements can be made about all media?” (McLuhan & McLuhan, p. 13). Marshall McLuhan’s main purpose for developing his four effects of media, or as he called it the “laws of media” was because of the feedback he received from his audiences in response to his book, *Understanding Media* (McLuhan & McLuhan). In these “laws, McLuhan carefully outlines four effects of media in a model, in which he was able to explain the scientific evidence that the readers were looking for. According to McLuhan, all media, whenever a new form of media or technology is launched, we experience these 4 effects or laws: enhancement, retrieval, reversal, and obsolescence (McLuhan & McLuhan). Enhancement is the idea that the media that is created and exists is simply an extension of the human, for example, we could solve math problems in our head, but we use a calculator instead (McLuhan & McLuhan). Yet another example is that the internet is an extension of the human brain because we could think of statistics, and information in our own brain, but Google makes it that much easier. The second tetrad, or law listed talks about media as retrieve, meaning that the current media retrieves something of the past, an old medium (McLuhan & McLuhan). The third law is a reversal, or flip, which is exactly as it sounds, reversal means when the media is starting to go the opposite direction, this could happen when the media is over-enhanced (McLuhan & McLuhan). For example, today's social media

could be reversing back to colonial times because social media has made it easy to communicate with people across the world to the point that it feels like a global village once again. Lastly, obsolescence refers to the possibility that some media could possibly be outdated or removed from modern society (McLuhan & McLuhan). For example, overhead projectors were used by teachers for decades, but thanks to smartboards, they are no longer used as often. Therefore, the smartboard obsolescence the overhead projector, in other words, it means they basically put them out of business because the smartboard is superior to the overhead projectors. The two products achieve similar outcomes, but the smartboard is an updated version that allows for more efficient use, as well as better functionality.

The first two laws, enhancement and retrieval are the positive laws, or as he put it, the figure qualities because they are noticeable in media when they occur (McLuhan & McLuhan). In the latter half, flip/reversal and obsolete laws McLuhan labels them as the ground laws, which simply means they are negative, or in his words, they are not noticeable within the medium (McLuhan & McLuhan). Regardless of whether the law is figure quality or ground quality, they all collectively work together and the order of the laws can be interchangeable.

YouTube Analysis: Enhancement

I could argue that YouTube enhances entertainment, but I will attempt to be more specific than John Gallagher when he was doing a tetrad on Facebook. For starters, one form of entertainment medium YouTube enhances is television because YouTube allows viewers to watch movies, television shows, talk shows, and news, you name it, YouTube has it covered. The majority of videos watched on the web is more than likely YouTube video. YouTube allows users to connect their medium to the television instantly as long as they have a stable WIFI connection. My favorite use for YouTube is to watch sports highlights of games I might have

missed, or games I would like to watch again. No need to record shows or movies on television when you can easily find them on YouTube. YouTube is also very useful for talk shows, my personal favorite is the “First Take” show featuring Stephen A. Smith, or “Undisputed” with Skip and Shannon and YouTube is the perfect platform for it. YouTube has billions of different videos for different viewers in many different languages.

One can argue that YouTube also enhances the radio as well as the news platforms. It enhances the radio in the sense that any music can be found on YouTube and it’s typically better than the radio because the majority of the time there will be a video along with the music. I say the majority because I know a few music videos just have a photo cover along with the song on YouTube. YouTube allows viewers to understand the music better because the visual aids understand the meaning behind the music or the lyrics. The news is available on YouTube almost instantly, it even allows live streaming on the platform for live audiences. YouTube enhances many different forms of entertainment, but it also retrieves or recalls traditional society in one way or another.

Retrieval

YouTube retrieves a few different traditional societal doings and, or media. For example, YouTube retrieves the tribal sense of community because billions of people are on the platform creating videos for viewers. YouTube allows anyone around the world to create any form of video whether it be educational, entertainment, or neither, as long as the medium is appropriate YouTube will leave it be. As with any privately owned medium, YouTube owners, and Google are in charge and have the right to delete any posts and users from the platform, but usually, they only do so if they have a good reason to do so.

Another product, or medium retrieved by YouTube is streaming services, such as Starworks. The first streaming service began in the 1990s, YouTube as we know was launched in 2005, but it allows users to stream and does similar things as the medium Starworks was able to do. Users stream sports, games, and other forms of entertainment on YouTube, and they are able to monetize based on their views. Although one can argue that YouTube obsolesces Starworks, I believe that it obsolesces and affects another medium to a greater extent.

Obsolesce

VHS tapes are the medium I believe YouTube makes obsolete because what use are VHS tapes with the existence of YouTube? YouTube allows users to watch documentaries and any other old footage from the past. One can find any video on YouTube that was once only available on VHS tapes, but in modern society, it's much easier to access on YouTube. I have watched many documentaries and historical content on YouTube. Although VHS tapes were significant at one point in society, I don't believe this medium is as poignant as it once was because of a medium such as YouTube. One day YouTube could also be made obsolete by another medium that allows users to do better and bigger things, but until that day arrives, YouTube is strong as the superior platform, especially in regard to homemade videos that allow users to show off their creativity and gives users a voice. That medium might already be here. TikTok allows users to voice their opinions and make homemade videos to entertain themselves and others, but the issue is that the videos are limited unlike on YouTube. My point in bringing TikTok into this is to simply say that a new medium will always emerge that makes today's new big thing a thing of the past in no time. Although YouTube has made many media obsolete, eventually a new medium will come around that will surpass its capabilities.

Flip

I will be as general as John Gallagher in regard to YouTube as a surveillance medium. YouTubers, specifically bloggers, show every aspect of their life to audiences on the platform, which can be any individual that has access to the internet. Some of the users literally show where they live to the world, which in my opinion can be extremely unsettling because you don't know who is watching. YouTubers show their homes, their relationships, their families, and so much more commodities and entities that should be kept private.

Another form of medium that YouTube flips into is a vine, which no longer exists possibly due to the growth of YouTube. Although YouTube was launched before YouTube, short videos were not brought into YouTube until after vine. Vine was a medium that allowed the general public to create videos for people to view, usually comedic videos. YouTube in recent years has started to do that short video as Vine did.

Evaluation

I have been raving about how wonderful YouTube is, I have even stated that it's one of my favorite platforms if not my absolute favorite. YouTube plays a significant role in society because it allows people to educate one another. Any form of educational material or tool can be found on YouTube. For example, I deliver appliances for Lowe's Home Improvement, and when I first started, when I ran into something like installing an icemaker, I preferred to watch a YouTube video rather than read the manual. Traditionalists might argue that technology is not the solution for everything, and sometimes reading the manual is the only way to do that specific icemaker. I totally disagree because it could be as specific as possible and YouTube still has a video for it, and in different languages too. That's simply one example of the significance of YouTube, but I think the point is made regarding the educational as well as the entertainment aspect of YouTube. The negative aspect of YouTube is that some users share too much

information on that platform. The example I used earlier is the bloggers that seem to forget that anyone can access their videos once they put them out there. Therefore, although YouTube is significant in society to share information, entertain, and educating, it can also be surveillance.

Summary

YouTube, founded in 2005 by three ex-employees of PayPal is the second biggest website in the world, only trailing its conglomerate, Google. The mission of the medium was to allow users to be creative and give everyone a voice no matter their role in society. A medium cannot become the second biggest platform, especially in today's modern society without enhancing, retrieving, flipping, and obsolescing many other forms of media. YouTube allows users to do nearly anything that other media can do. For example, YouTube enhanced television, retrieved tribal sense of community, obsolesced VHS tapes specifically Starworks, and flipped vine and acts as surveillance. In conclusion, as superior as YouTube sounds, eventually, a medium will come around that could enhance, or even obsolesce this medium.

Reference

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