

Chapter 7

Original Research

Examining YouTube Users’ (YouTubers’) Attitudes, Beliefs, and Behaviors: The Bronx Pilot Study

ABSTRACT

YouTube offers a wealth of combined, creative, and surprisingly expert-vetted knowledge on a variety of topics across ethnicities and culture. Even though it appears that YouTube focuses on kittens, pandas, and exploding bottles of soda, it actually provides knowledge across a wide spectrum, from how to play piano or iron a shirt to learning about hegemony from Noam Chomsky on YouTube (TheEthanwashere, 2012). Partly through its design (ease of use), purpose, and worldwide ubiquity, YouTube has also become a depository for enormous amounts of what many people think is useless dreck. This chapter and the next chapter provide a historical snapshot of two important YouTube research studies. The Bronx Pilot Study, described in detail here, provided the foundation and research design for a more robust and complex study several years later: the New Jersey YouTube Experience Study. To date, most scholarly research about YouTube has tended to focus on YouTube content (i.e., types of videos created and/or shared), the marketing and commercial aspects of YouTube, specific groups in YouTube and their political activities, and of course the unusual videos that “go viral” and end up on Late Night With Jimmy Fallon or Tosh 2.0. Each research study reported in this book employs a Uses and Gratifications (UG) framework grounded in Cultural Studies (CS). Each study analyzed YouTubers’ attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors in relation to YouTube. As a reminder, a “YouTuber” is anyone who uses YouTube to post a comment, watch videos, or upload or download videos. While not experimental, the Bronx Study provides insight and direction for further Social Sciences-based YouTube research.

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INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents a detailed discussion of the research questions, analysis, conclusions, and implications of original YouTube research in the Bronx, NY in 2009. The main goal of the chapter is to orient the reader to the author's research design and purpose and outcomes, which encapsulate, in a practical way, the three propositions stated in Chapter 1. The three propositions are as follows. First, human beings create Internet technologies and, as a result, certain types of designs and technological functions are privileged over other technological functions and designs. Second, YouTube is heavily reliant on Internet-based technologies for its proper function and successful, positive YouTuber experience. Logically then, it follows that a comprehensive understanding of Internet technologies, the technologies associated with creating YouTube videos, older traditional media creation technologies, the technologies associated with advertising on YouTube and the technologies related to managing YouTube subscribers and videos provide a necessary and powerful body of knowledge that is vital to developing a clear and complete understanding of YouTube. Third, the reader's comprehension and application of the theories in this book to the YouTube digital sphere and the ideas, arguments, and research examined through the theoretical "lens" of CS is essential. CS provides an important historical, scholarly debated, and well-researched understanding of media, and this nontechnological analysis connects with a broader examination of human communication practices in a media-enriched online environment.

THE BRONX YOUTUBE PILOT STUDY

Researcher's Role

The online version of the Merriam-Webster dictionary describes *heuristic* as "involving or serving as an aid to learning or discovery by problem-solving by experimental and especially trial-and-error methods"(Merriam-webster.com, 2014); this definition informed the exploratory YouTube in the Bronx from a CS and UG perspective. For the Bronx YouTube Study, great care was taken to position the researcher as an *observer of phenomena* rather than as a replicator of previous studies, as there was no similar research extant at the time and none exists as of this writing.

Research Methods

For the focus group interviews, the following techniques and focus group research design suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994) to establish the focus group framework were used: (a) building a conceptual framework from which, ultimately, interview questions were developed; (b) formulating research questions; (c) defining the case; (d) bounding the collection of data; and (e) instrumentation. In terms of the focus group interviews, as well as the survey instrument design, Corbin and Strauss (2008) articulated several characteristics of a grounded theory approach that the researcher attempted to adopt. Strauss and Corbin stated, "Researchers need not necessarily begin their first studies with these characteristics full developed" (p. 275).

For the Bronx YouTube study, several research design characteristics articulated by Strauss and Corbin were adopted. For instance, when structuring and writing questions, analyzing focus group interview

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