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New Visual Media and Gender: A Content, Visual and Audience Analysis of YouTube Vlogs

Abstract: 149 words

This study analyzes short vlogs posted to YouTube in order to investigate how and why people communicate using vlogs, and how viewers react to vlogs. Vlogs are of particular interest because they are visual texts that are user-generated. Vloggers engage with videos on several levels – they are both the encoders and the decoders, both the producers and audience of videos. In particular, we examine gender differences in creating vlogs, viewing vlogs and using YouTube. Our study interprets the dominant messages conveyed by the visual elements of vlogs. Analyzing online videos presents a new challenge for researchers: traditionally, analysis of visual media and communication focused on either the production or the reception of the material. Our vlog study uses a dual analytical approach to analyze both production and reception, while conducting content visual and audience analysis, thus making a useful contribution to the field of new visual media and communication.

Keywords: YouTube, vlog, internet, user, content, visual, reception, production, audience, gender, video

Introduction

Producing and sharing user-generated video, known as "video blogging," has recently become popular with millions of people. Video blogs, also known as "vlogs," are blogs created in video rather than textual form. Vlogs are a simple form of online publishing, allowing everyone with web access and simple video production tools to create and post content. Most vlogs are authored by individuals and focus on personal themes (Nardi, 2004; Schiano, 2004). Like blogs, vlogs are a user-generated form of online communication that serve as a media for social commentary, alternative newscasts, creative outlets or personal online diaries..

We chose YouTube as an obvious source of online videos and a potential user community. YouTube is currently the most popular online video website and hosts more videos than rival video sites (Trier, 2007). Video content on YouTube is diverse, but most YouTube videos are amateur videos that document the everyday lives of vloggers (Godwin-Jones, 2007).

This study analyzes short vlogs posted to YouTube in order to investigate how and why people communicate using vlogs, and how viewers react to vlogs. In particular we examine potential uses of user-generated video for women, and how women are creating vlogs and using YouTube. Our initial findings reveal gender differences in both vlog creation and YouTube use.

Our study interprets the dominant messages conveyed by the visual elements of vlogs. Vlogs are of particular interest because they are visual texts that are user-generated. Vloggers encode their own messages into these visual texts. Vloggers also view other vlogs; therefore vloggers engage with videos on several levels – they are both the encoders and the decoders, both producers and members of the audience and of the YouTube community.

Analyzing online videos presents a new challenge for researchers: traditionally, analysis of visual media and communication focused on either the production or the reception by different

actors. Our vlog study analyzes both production and reception by people who can be both producers and audiences. Our study's dual analytical approach thus makes a useful contribution to the field of new visual media and communication.

Analyzing vlogs

Videos are complicated texts that require careful analysis conducted via various methods. Even though visual analysis is difficult and the results are subjective, videos need to be examined because they are becoming increasingly important in contemporary culture. Videos can aid communication by increasing communication richness, empowering those who develop their own videos and encouraging identity formation among users. Users benefit because video channels allow them to communicate in a more natural way resembling face-to-face communication (Bruce, 1996). Video also facilitates the process of personal identification, allows for the reading of emotional expressions, aids with speech perception, and enables viewers to read gazes – signals that express intimacy and power (Bruce). Communication richness developed through video technologies could contribute to better (stronger and quicker) development of trust; however, there is insufficient research done in this area (Bekkering and Shim, 2006).

New technologies could potentially change traditional social and political hierarchies and transform the boundaries between the private and the public (Rakow and Navarro, 1993). New technologies also create new spaces for interaction and participation. At the same time, however, such technologies serve to widen gaps to access. Marginalized or minority groups are especially vulnerable to this phenomenon. Communication technology could play a role in turning women's talk into voice but there are limitations (Sreberny, 2005). For example, women usually use technology in their jobs, and have used technology in the past – as typists or telephone

operators; however, their work is done through mechanical systems and in limited ways. Work related technologies do not serve to create a voice for women (Rakow and Wackwitz, 2004b). The term voice refers not just to the act of speaking but also to the means and ability to speak, to be heard and to affect social and political life. Rankow and Wackwitz suggest that with limited access women's voices are not being created by the new technology of the internet – that instead the internet is following earlier patterns of technology, whereby women's voices did not become reality.

Another concern with the visual representation of women is exploitative images that present women not as subjects but as objects for the male gaze (Blair and Takayoshi, 1999). The greater visual representation of women on the internet, for example, is not necessarily a sign of progress for women, as greater representation could mean greater exclusion. Regardless of what images are being portrayed, women without ideal bodies are rendered invisible (Nead, 1992). A clear example of this is the proliferation of the image of women in pornographic materials on the internet.

Although intervention is difficult, socially constructed meanings are neither fixed nor unalterable (Rakow and Wackwitz, 2004). Websites created by women for women, for example, are positive spaces where women can be represented as subjects rather than objects. Even though women themselves grapple with the subject/object dichotomy, there is a potential for women's roles to be reconstructed (Blair and Takayoshi, 1999). In user-generated video women depicting themselves can be in control of their own representation. However, women bloggers face particular challenges- they are frequently objectified, threatened, and harassed (Lange, 2007; Ratliff, 2007).

User-generated video on YouTube is just beginning to be examined by scholars. Little is known about who creates these videos, why they post them and who watches them (Croteau, 2007). Our research addresses these questions by building on three theoretical and analytical approaches. In order to examine who is vlogging, why and how, we use a content analysis approach. Visual analysis methods are then used to closely examine the content of four vlogs. Finally we conduct an audience analysis, looking not only at the number of views and text responses for vlogs on the YouTube site, but also at the responses to vlogs from a YouTube viewer study that we conducted.

Media content analysis is performed for many different reasons. Some researchers engage in this type of analysis to compare and contrast media content with ‘social reality.’ Others are interested in studying media bias, or view media content as a reflection of societal beliefs and values (McQuail, 2005). For example, researchers have used content analysis to determine the occurrence of gender stereotypes in television programming (Furham, Adamsky and Gunter, 1997; Fouts and Burggraf, 1999). We conducted our content analysis to explore who is vlogging, how they represent themselves, how audiences respond to vloggers and the influence of gender on these variables.

Content analysis enables researchers to determine, through careful observation and gathering quantitative or qualitative data, the major themes in media content. By itself content analysis does not show researchers what viewers see or understand (Van Leeuwen and Carey, 2001). In order to investigate what viewers see, in this paper we use another analytical approach to examine the visual messages or signs created by vloggers. Our approach to visual analysis comes from visual cultural studies traditions. We conducted a systematic and detailed analysis of a small selection of vlogs based on cultural studies theory combined with film analysis methods.

We recognize several limitations to this method of analysis. Messages are generated by culture and society and the interpretation of images is not fixed but changes according to place and time (Hansen, 1998).

Messages conveyed by signs can also be interpreted in different ways by different viewers. Stuart Hall (1999) notes that audiences do not simply receive messages that are constructed by media producers. Visual information is not passively conveyed to the viewer; viewers actively engage with the visual in order to interpret signs. However, this does not mean that images cannot be interpreted. As Hall states, visual representations have dominant meanings that do not guarantee the decoding of the message but provide interpretive boundaries for the decoding of the message. So while visual messages can be read in alternative ways, dominant meanings limit interpretation (Hall).

Content and visual analyses reveal much about the production of vlogs but do not address the issue of the audience. Audience research – an important branch of study in the field of media and communication research – provides a considerable corpus of knowledge about how people interact with visual images. The focus of audience research is understanding how viewers engage with and make meanings from visual images. Audience research has gone through many theoretical shifts. Early researchers suggested that visual images contained messages that are directly transmitted to the audience. Later research suggested that viewers are not passive recipients of visual messages, but can read visual messages in multiple ways. Audience research is now focused on how viewers understand visual images, such as television images, or vlogs.

Audience research has developed strong theoretical approaches to understanding how views of visual images construct meanings in relation to their social and cultural contexts and their membership in social groups. This knowledge alone is insufficient for understanding the

users of user-generated online video websites because its focus entirely on viewers does not allow for the concept that viewers may also be creators of visual images for other viewers.

We argue that while viewers do not interpret visual messages in the same way, images contain dominant meanings which serve to limit audience decoding. Various methods are used by researchers to conduct audience analysis, including survey and statistical analysis, experiments, ethnographic research and focus groups (McQuail, 1997). Our audience analysis was conducted through the use of a YouTube survey where we had YouTube users view four vlogs and provide feedback on them.

Questions addressed in this current study include: To what extent are women vlogging? How are women representing themselves in vlogs, and what are they vlogging about? How are women interacting with the YouTube website? Do women feel as if they are a part of the YouTube community, or do they feel excluded?

Research methodology

The research methods included a content and visual analysis of vlogs on YouTube and a study of YouTube users.

We conducted a content analysis on a random sample of YouTube vlogs. At the time of the study there was no obvious category on YouTube for vlogs so we conducted an initial search on YouTube using the term "blog" which returned more than 30,000 entries available for general viewing. For our population we chose vlogs posted over a 15-day period, from October 6 to October 21, 2006. To enable comparison among potentially similar vlogs, vlogs longer than three minutes and non-English vlogs were excluded, leaving us with a population of 1,028 vlogs. From this population, we selected a random sample of 100 vlogs for analysis. To conduct the random sample, the list of 1,028 vlogs on YouTube was printed and numbered in numerical

order. Using a listing of random numbers (RAND, 2001) we randomly selected 100 numbers between 1 and 1,028 and selected the vlogs corresponding to these random numbers. The quantitative analysis conducted on this sample is accurate within a 90% confidence level and a 7.8% error level.

Since we were counting number of views for each vlog, we waited one month from the time of initial posting to the coding of the video. The vlogs and the profiles of the vloggers were coded for a number of variables, including gender, age, location, audience, message, motivation, technical quality (both audio and visual), and the number of views. In order to determine the degree of reliability of the subjective elements of coding we conducted an inter-rater reliability test on 10% of the vlogs. The correlation of scores between the two raters was then measured by calculating Cohen's Kappa, a ratio of rater agreement. The data rated included the vlog subject category, intended audience and the sound and visual quality of the vlog. Cohen's Kappa for the data was a .70 agreement for subject, 1.0 for intended audience, .80 for sound quality and .90 for visual quality, with an average of .85.

While coding the vlogs for the content analysis, we faced several challenges associated with correctly identifying characteristics such as ethnicity and profession. We decided not to code for these characteristics because after analyzing the vlogs we were not confident that we could code these factors with certainty. Even if a vlogger self-identifies as belonging to a particular category, the information may be incorrect – as when several young girls stated one age on their profile and another in their vlog.

Nonetheless, we believe that the majority of the vloggers provided accurate information. In general, coding for age and geographic location was based on the information provided by the

vlogger on their YouTube profile page. Future studies could possibly determine more accurate information by communicating directly with the vlog producers via e-mail.

Another challenge we faced when coding the vlogs was the availability of the videos. None of the videos within the sample were deleted due to obscenity or copyright issues; however, the status of one video within the sample changed from public to private before coding started. Vlogs can also be removed by the YouTube user at any time; this occurred twelve times within our initial sample. Consequently, we added 12 new vlogs to the original sample so that we had 100 vlogs to code. One vlog was conducted entirely in sign language and was coded based on the textual description, the vlogger's profile, and visual cues in the video. The low visual quality of the recording prevented an accurate transcription of the vlog.

The next level of analysis was a visual analysis of four videos from the random sample, two vlogs created by men, and two created by women; the vlogs were chosen so that both genders were represented. The choice of vlogs allowed analysis of both genders in two different locations: two authored by a male (one filmed in a bedroom, one filmed in a car) and two authored by a female (one filmed in a bedroom, one filmed in a car). We wanted first to determine if these vloggers represented themselves differently because of their location, and secondly if the audience response differed according to the gender of the vlogger and the location. In the four videos, the length of vlogs and age of the vloggers were similar.

The final aspect of the research was an audience analysis of vlogs. We collected data on the number of views of each of the vlogs within the random sample and the views and comments from the YouTube site on the four videos analyzed in greater detail.

We also conducted a study of 60 participants who were YouTube users. These participants were recruited from a university in Atlantic Canada. The study was designed to

include an equal number of males (30) and females (30). Participants viewed the four vlogs described above, in a random order presented in their questionnaire. The study participants completed a questionnaire comprised of demographic questions and a section for feedback on the video blogs. Additional questions were asked about community (e.g., do you feel like a member of a YouTube community?). We asked participants to view the four video blogs, give the videos a star rating from one to five, stating why they gave the video that rating and how the video could be improved to receive higher ratings. They were asked if the technical quality of the video influenced the rating they gave the video, why they thought the video was created, and the main message of the video. Then participants were asked to rate the importance of the message from extremely important to extremely unimportant. Finally they were asked if they would watch future videos by the vlogger (yes, no or maybe) and given space to elaborate on their answer. After all four videos were viewed participants were then asked to state where the vlogs were filmed and to rank the four videos from one to four. Participation took approximately 45 minutes and participants were given a \$10 honorarium.

Research findings

Our research findings are presented according to the three different methodological and analytical approaches we used, described above. The results of the content analysis conducted on the random sample of our population and the findings from the visual analysis of four vlogs and audience analysis are discussed.

Content analysis – the vloggers

A content analysis of the characteristics of vloggers in our random sample revealed that the majority of vlogs featured a single participant. Men posted vlogs more than women – 58% to 33%; the gender of the vlogger was unknown for the remaining 9%. When vlogs contained more

than one participant, the majority of secondary participants were also male. Most vloggers, 61%, were adults ranging in age from 20 to 50 years, although about one-third, or 36%, were younger. The age of the vlogger could not be determined for 3% of the vlogs. The average age of the main vlog participant was 23 years. There was no great difference in the ages of men and women vlogging. The average age of male vloggers was 24, while the average age of female vloggers was 21.

The majority of vlogs in our study were created by young men in the United States. These findings are not surprising; studies done on internet use in the U.S. show that college students, who have greater access to technology, are frequent internet video users. A 2007 PEW internet study indicates that young adults, ages 18-29 are the most avid viewers of online video in the United States (Madden, 2007).

Text information posted on the user profiles occasionally differed from that stated in the actual video blog. The most popular misreported information was age. The researchers found four cases of vloggers posting on their profile a different age than they state in the video blog. In all four cases the vloggers were young women, ages 12, 14, 15 and 15, who reported their age in their profile as older than their actual age - 86, 22, 20 and 46.

Very few vloggers in this study directly stated their reasons for vlogging, either within the vlog entry or the written statement accompanying the vlog. There are, however, a few examples of vloggers providing reasons. One vlogger noted that vlogging provides people with a new way to communicate that was not a part of the mainstream, that vlogging is the antithesis of commercial communication, and a means of genuine communication. In her first vlog another vlogger states that she is vlogging as a way to meet new online friends.

Only 9% of vloggers stated they were producing their vlog for a particular audience – a specific person or people. Of these, 5% were intended for a specific YouTube user, with the remaining 4% meant to be viewed by friends and family. Thus the majority of vlogs have the general public as their intended audience. It seems that rather than communicating with people they already know, most vloggers aim to communicate with the broader YouTube community. It is interesting to note that while the intent of the vlogs is communication with the general public, the majority of these vlogs contained information that could be deemed personal.

Content analysis – the vlogs

For our analysis we coded each vlog into one of five categories that we created: personal, public, entertainment, YouTube, and technology. The categorization was based on the message of the video, not the meaning. While the message of the vlog is clear, the meaning is not stable but can be multiple and ambiguous (McQuail, 2005).

Personal vlogs offer viewers introductions to the vloggers' personal lives, provide updates on their lives, or act as home movies. Public vlogs report or discuss the news or politics, or offer social commentary. Entertainment vlogs consist of comedy routines, musical numbers, acted skits or dancing or a combination of these elements. YouTube vlogs are videos where people either ask questions for others to answer, respond to questions asked by other vloggers, or discuss other vlogs on YouTube. Technology vlogs either discuss technology or test out equipment.

Almost 50% of the vlogs were Personal vlogs. Just over one quarter of the vlogs were Entertainment vlogs, and almost 15% were YouTube vlogs. Public and technology vlogs were the least frequent type, making up 7% and 5% respectively.

Similar to findings of other research on the gender and subject matter of bloggers (Nowson and Oberlander, 2006; Lange, 2007; Pedersen and Macafee, 2007, Herring et al, 2004) our study found that female vloggers are more likely to vlog about personal matters than male vloggers. More than 60% of the female-authored vlogs and less than half of the male-authored vlog (48%) were about personal themes. More men than women created “entertainment” themed vlogs. More men than women vlogged about public and technology related topics, and more women created vlogs that interacted with the YouTube community.

Content analysis - image and audio quality

The quality of the vlog did not differ by the gender of the vlogger. When coding for quality the researchers took a basic approach, coding for three categories (excellent, acceptable and poor) for the quality of the image and sound.

Men and women scored very similar ratings across the board. The videos created by women vloggers had slightly better image quality, and slightly poorer sound quality than those created by men..

Location was the most robust indicator of quality. Videos filmed indoors were more likely to score a rating of excellent, while almost half of videos filmed outside received a rating of poor. The audio was especially poor in videos filmed outside, as the microphone picked up the sound of the wind, passing traffic, etc. There were no differences between where the vlog was filmed and the gender of the vlogger, since the majority of vlogs were filmed indoors. Only 6% of vlogs created by men and 6% by women were filmed outdoors.

Most vlogs, 82%, were filmed indoors, and most of these were filmed in a house, either in a computer room, living room or bedroom. Because most vlogs were filmed indoors there were lighting problems. Forty-six percent of video backgrounds were evenly lit, 43% were too

dark – a few were so dark that it was difficult to determine the location – and only 11% were too bright. These problems could have been addressed with adequate lighting.

While most vlogs had acceptable video and sound quality, more videos were of poor quality than excellent. Common problems included the image and sound being out of sync and the background noise affecting the sound quality. Background noise included but was not limited to background music which played in 21% of the videos.

Just over half of the vlogs contained no editing at all. There was an average of four scenes, or camera takes, per vlog. Vlogs with entertainment and public content had more scenes than other subjects (five and six scenes, respectively). YouTube vlogs (described earlier) had the least number of scenes, on average two per vlog, while vlogs containing personal information averaged three scenes. There was little difference in the average number of edits according to gender. Vlogs created by women averaged three edits, while men’s vlogs had four.

Most vlogs in this study were the producers’ first attempts at vlogging. Thirty-eight percent of the vlogs were self-identified as first attempts, 34% were later in a series of vlogs, while 26% were neither identified as first vlogs nor as part of a series. Whether the vlog was the first or part of a series did not seem to have an impact on the quality in any major way. Vlogs that were part of a series scored higher than those identified as first vlogs; however both first vlogs and those labelled as part of a series scored a similar “poor” quality rating.

More men than women created vlogs; however, when investigating the average age of the vlogger, the average number of edits, the quality of the vlog and the location where the vlog was filmed the researchers found little difference between male and female vloggers. The biggest difference between men and women’s vlogs was the number of vlogs – men outnumber women – and the subject matter of the vlog.

Analysis of views of the vlogs

The number of viewings of vlogs varied considerably, from 0 to 163,345, with an average of 2,638 views and a median of 54 views. Only 9% of the vlogs had more than 1,000 views and 68% of the vlogs received 100 views or less. The number of editing cuts or scenes in vlogs was not related to the number of views. Subject matter and the gender of the vlogger were the two main factors related to number of views the video received.

The gender of the main participant in the vlogs and the vlog subject matter were the best indicator of number of views. Vlogs with a man as the only participant averaged 166 views, with a median of 35. Vlogs that featured a woman as the only character averaged a whopping 6,797 views, with a median of 75. It is important to note that women vloggers were almost twice as likely to post vlogs that interacted with the YouTube community, and these types of vlogs received the most viewer “hits.”

Although videos under the subject heading “YouTube community” contained the least number of edits they have the highest viewing average, 7,878 views on average, with a median of 358 views. Vlogs containing personal information were the second highest viewed videos, averaging 3,870 views, and contained the second least amount of scene cuts. Entertainment and public vlogs were viewed an average of 444 and 213 times respectively. Technology vlogs were viewed the least, an average of 41 views.

Visual analysis of four vlogs

Visual images are ambiguous and polysemic and are therefore extremely difficult to code. Filmed images can be coded via the conventions of visual symbolism engaged by the filmmaker. These conventions include the types of shots, framing, and camera angles employed.

There are no established methods of analysis but there are a few general conventions used by filmmakers and film analysts (McQuail, 2005; Hansen, 1998).

The four videos chosen for both the qualitative analysis and the audience study share many common characteristics. All four videos were created by and feature young people in their teens to 20s. The vloggers did not indicate where they were from, although three of the four vloggers had North American accents, while the other sounded Australian. The videos were all short vlogs, ranging from 2:00 to 2:53 minutes in length. The vloggers all gazed at the camera directly at the viewer for most of the time. In all four videos, the camera closely framed the individuals, showing only their faces and shoulders; It has been suggested that this video technique creates a personal intimate relationship between the viewer and the person on screen (Hansen, 1998).

Further adding to the “private nature” of vlogs, two of the vlogs selected are shot in bedrooms. The image of the bed implies even greater intimacy between the viewer and the person being viewed (McQuail, 2005). In the first vlog, indoor female (IF), a young woman in a grey t-shirt with her blond hair tied back into a bun, sits at her computer desk. In the background the viewer can see her bed, the dresser on her right, framed pictures on the wall, the Phantom of the Opera curtain on her window, and bright pink walls illuminated by the lamp on her bedside table. She addresses her audience by announcing how busy she is with rehearsals and gives an update of the events in her life.

Similarly, in the second video, indoor male (IM), the vlogger presents his viewers with a brief update on his daily life. He states what he has been doing for the past week, mainly writing, as well as his plans for the next few days: going to the movie theatre, and taking his fiancé’s dog to obedience class. Like the woman, he too is vlogging from his bedroom. He is lying down on

his bed, addressing the camera. The furnishings in his room appear sparse in comparison to the woman's room. There are a few pictures arranged on the back wall of his room. Nothing is hung on the beige, concrete side wall. His room appears to be a university dorm room.

These two videos are fairly accurate representations of vlogs, which, for the most part, are filmed indoors, in a room in the vlogger's home. The framing of the shot, the subject matter as well as the location add to the intimate and personal nature of the vlog.

The other two vlogs are filmed outside, in cars. The woman, outdoor female (OF), is vlogging from a stationary car. She is lying down on the seat while occasionally peering at the camera lens, her long dark hair engulfing most of the view. The siding of a white house can be seen in the background. This is her first vlog and she introduces herself as a high-school student. She notes her favourite music and addresses a few of her online friends.

In the final vlog, outdoor male (OM) is vlogging as he drives. He is dressed in a burgundy jacket and a backwards baseball cap. The camera is placed inside the steering wheel and moves occasionally while he drives. In his vlog he discusses an incident that happened to him while driving and comments on the lack of trust people have in one another.

Historically automobiles have been considered problematic spaces. The space within the car is ambiguous and blurs the distinctions between public and private. Due to the personal nature of the space, the vlogs filmed in the bedrooms can be considered more personal, private and solitary than the vlogs created in the car (Bovill and Livingstone, 2001). Alternatively, the vlogs filmed in cars could be considered more dynamic because of the blurring between public and private space. Does the location of the vlog change the reading of the vlog? And does gender have an affect on the way in which the vlog is viewed, either negatively or positively?

Viewer response on the YouTube site to these four vlogs

According to the user views and comments on YouTube after one month, the vlogs created inside of cars received more attention than those filmed inside of bedrooms. OM was viewed 160 times, rated four out of five stars and received two positive viewer comments. OF was viewed 135 times and received a five star rating by one viewer and two text comments. One text comment was supportive and the other neutral. The two vlogs filmed inside bedrooms did not have either high levels of viewer-ship or comments. IF had more views than IM – 67 views compared to 26 – and one text comment on her appearance.

According to this brief analysis of responses on the YouTube website more people viewed the vlogs filmed in cars, with OM receiving the most “hits.” Out of the two vlogs filmed inside IF was viewed more times and commented on more often than IM. However, the analysis of the viewer responses and hits from the YouTube site is problematic. Traffic to the videos depends upon the number of the vlogger’s regular viewers as well as viewers finding the video through searches. It is highly unlikely that these four videos were viewed by the same people; therefore the number of views and responses cannot give any clear indication of overall viewer preference according to either gender or location. To gain insight into viewer preference we conducted a YouTube viewer study.

Audience research: rating the four vlogs

In our YouTube study we asked participants to rate the four vlogs according to the YouTube star system - ratings from one to five, with five meaning "awesome!" There was little difference in the star ratings from participants according to their age or gender. There also seems to be little gender differences in how women and men rate vlogs .

However, the star rating given by participants in our YouTube study to male vloggers was higher than the star rating give to female vloggers, with a mean of 2.27 and 1.92

respectively. Overall IF was rated higher than OF. OM, however, was rated higher than IM filming in his bedroom. When asked to rank the four videos from one to four the majority of the participants ranked OM as number one.

Audience research: commenting on the four vlogs

Participants not only assigned the vlogs star ratings and rankings but also were asked to write comments about the vlogs. While OM was ranked highest by the majority of participants, an analysis of the written comments by the study participants reveals that viewers felt ambivalent about the location. Some of the participants felt that the location made the vlog better; others felt it made it worse. One participant noted, “I’m not sure I like watching a guy try to make a video while driving a car.” Other participants expressed enthusiasm towards the man’s novel approach to vlogging and gave the vlog high star ratings and a higher rank. As one participant stated, the vlog of the man driving his car “... had an interesting point of view and literally, view-point (behind steering wheel).”

The written comments on the four vlogs were overwhelmingly negative (Table 1). Comments were coded according to the following categories: negative, positive, and neutral, not sure and no comments. The coding also included an examination of the number of respondents using the following often repeated phrases: A. I do not like vlogs; B. Boring/not interesting/ not entertaining; C. I do not care because I do not know this person; D. I do not care about the subject matter.

Some people, 18% of the YouTube study participants, were openly negative about video blogs in general, stating that “I do not care for video blogs,” “I do not enjoy blogs and never watch them,” and, “I find video blogs very boring and superficial.” Many others, 55%, noted that they were not entertaining, writing “it was boring” and “I do not find blogs entertaining unless

(sic) there's a good story involved or something to make me laugh." Fifty two percent of our participants rated the vlogs poorly because they did not know the person. Participants stated that the vlog "Doesn't really have a point without any background as to the individual or their video blog" and "Doesn't have much context not knowing what 'her story' is." One participant noted that the vlogger cannot improve their ratings because of the subject matter – "Personal blogs don't seem to have much point outside of personal expression."

While gender of the participants was not linked to differences in rating the vlogs, there were a few differences between women and men's written comments. Men were more likely than women to note physical characteristics of the vlogger in their comments. A few of the male participants (10%) noted that they gave IF higher ratings, and would watch her again because "she's cute." Only one participant, a female, noted physical attractiveness of the male vloggers, noting that IM received a high rating from here because the "guy was kind of 'cute' in a young Jon Cusack way".

The written comments also reveal a difference between men and women's responses to the vlogs . The women who participated in the study were slightly less likely to write negative comments than men; however men wrote more positive comments overall. Women were three times more likely than men to leave the comment space blank.

Participants who self-identified as YouTube community members were overall less likely to state that they hated vlogs, did not enjoy the videos because they were not entertaining, did not enjoy the subject matter or did not enjoy the vlog because they did not know the vlogger.

Audience research: gendered use of YouTube

The demographic portion of the YouTube feedback study revealed several differences between the YouTube experiences of the men and women in our study. According to our study,

men are more likely to be frequent users of YouTube than women. More men than women in our study visit the site on a daily basis, 26.7% of men compared to 3.3% of women. A large percentage of women (30%) were infrequent visitors - visiting YouTube once a month or less, while only 6.7% of the male respondents noted that they were infrequent YouTube visitors (Table 2).

The study also found that men are more likely to post videos or comments on YouTube. A high percentage of men stated that they posted comments on site videos (40%) compared to women (13.3%). When asked if they had ever posted comments on videos or uploaded videos on YouTube, only 13.3% of female respondents stated yes, compared to 50% of men (Table 3). The men in our study not only used the site and posted on the site more often than the women they also seemed to know more people who visited the site. Half of the respondents in the studies stated knowing more than 10 friends and family members who YouTube; men comprised 70% of this group.

While the women in this study were less likely to post comments, videos and even visit YouTube on a regular basis compared to the men, they were as likely as the men to feel like a member of a YouTube community. O'Donnell and colleagues note that YouTube community members are more frequent visitors and posters on the site, and are more likely to respond favourably to online video.

Discussion

The vlogs analyzed are representative of English-language short vlogs on YouTube in October 2006. The four videos selected for the detailed study are not typical of all vlogs on YouTube. Results from the exploratory study of YouTube users cannot be generalized to the larger population of current or potential users of YouTube. We studied a small sample of

YouTube users in a specific geographical region and all our users were university students – they do not represent the larger population.

Our content analysis of YouTube vlogs reveals that while the majority were created by men, 39% of the primary characters in the vlogs were women. The biggest difference in women's vlogs was the subject matter, as women vloggers focused on the personal rather than public, technological or entertainment subject matter. The quality of women's vlogs was similar to that of the men's, with slightly better images and slightly lesser sound quality. There were also no differences in the average age, number of edits or location of vlogs created by women. While women were less likely to be the primary participant in vlogs they were more likely to post vlogs that interacted with the YouTube community and were more likely to receive viewer "hits" than male vloggers.

Likewise, we found in our YouTube user study that men are more likely to post comments and videos on YouTube. Only 13.3% of the women in our study had posted comments on the site, and none of the women in our study had ever posted a video. However, when asked if they felt like a part of the YouTube community 30% of the women in the study said they were part of the YouTube community, the same percentage as the men.

There are many reasons why people create and post video blogs on YouTube. While the purpose of the vlog was not stated in every video, the answer to the question "why vlog" can be inferred by examining the content of the video blogs as well as the intended audience. A few vlogs were directed specifically towards individual friends or family members, others were directed at the YouTube community, indicating that these vlogs were created in order to communicate with specific people. Vlogging could also indicate an attempt at improving technological skills (Wise, 2004).

Another possible reason for vlogging is to become part of the internet's "attention economy" (Wise 2004). It is important to note that the subject matter of the vlog itself does not necessarily determine whether or not a vlog was created with the intent of seeking "internet fame." For example, not all vlogs with subject matter labelled as "entertainment" were created for the public and the "attention economy." In this study three of the vlogs created for specific family members and friends contained "entertainment" content.

Most of the video blogs were directed towards a general public but dealt with private issues and the daily life of the vlogger, indicating that they are vlogging for the following reasons; to become visible and claim their own identity (Wise, 2004); to broaden their own social sphere and feel connected to the world around them; or as a cathartic activity or a creative exercise. The majority of vlogs were personal in nature but directed towards a general audience, indicating that people create and post vlogs as a way of communicating with the general public and potentially meeting new online friends.

While this study examines both online videos and the reception of these videos, it does not investigate issues surrounding the creation of user-generated videos. The subject matter of the videos offers some insight into the author's intent; however, we can not state the reasons why people create vlogs. By creating vlogs can women empower themselves? How can women use vlogs to make their struggles public and political? What do female vloggers see as obstacles to vlogging? It would also be interesting to investigate the gender of vlog viewers on YouTube who leave comments. Future studies on vlogging could further investigate these questions by administering a study directly to vloggers.

Conclusions

Many vlogs, like blogs, are personal records. Therefore vlogs are created primarily for the vloggers themselves; however, vloggers also have an audience. This audience is not that of the general public but members of the general public that care about the topics raised by the vlogger. Vlogs, like blogs, document personal events, provide commentary based on the vlogger's own opinions, express emotion, and articulate ideas. Communities are often formed when the audience and blogger share common experiences (Nardi, 2004). Most people participating in the YouTube feedback study would not watch vlogs because they do not know the people who are vlogging, but would be more inclined to view these user-generated videos if they knew the person or if the subject matter was of interest to them.

Recent studies identify user-generated online videos as potentially contributing to the virtual public sphere. Online videos can generate discussion by both textual and video comments, thereby expanding textual internet exchanges (Milliken, Gibson, O'Donnell, and Singer, 2007). Vlogs, as a result of comments that viewers make, can become links in a social network. Such connections can form a social hypertext, a network of connected videos. In this manner communities are formed (Chin, 2006). Vlogging is also a social activity and social communication, allowing people to view others vlogs and create their own.

Our findings indicate that vloggers are both producers and the audience – those who create vlogs are likely to be viewers of vlogs, and participate in the creation of their own vlogging communities, and that women vloggers, while posting less frequently than men, are more likely to communicate with the vlogging community.

Our content analysis of YouTube vlogs and responses to vlogs indicates that the female vloggers in our content analysis are not posting videos at the same rate as men; however, female vloggers are displaying similar levels of technical skill when they do post videos. And although

fewer female vloggers posted videos in our sample, they were more likely to interact with other vloggers. In our random sample women vloggers were more likely to ask questions and respond to the questions and posts of other vloggers in their own videos.

Our study also demonstrates the women in our audience survey were less likely to note in their questionnaire that they upload their own videos, comment on videos, and even watch YouTube videos. However, the women in our audience study still feel as much of a part of the YouTube community as their male peers.

This study contributes to the growing literature about the representation of women online while adding to research on user-generated online video. YouTube vlogs have proved an important and rich source of information about the new visual media and will be valuable for future research.

Table 1: Coded Written Comments - General

	Neg.	Pos.	Neutral	Not Sure	No Comment	A	B	C	D
Total	337	189	76	49	30	18%	55%	52%	38%

Numerals refer to the number of written comments; percentages (%) are also included for the following:

A. I do not like vlogs; B. Boring/not interesting/ not entertaining; C. I do not care because I do not know this person; D. I do not care about the subject matter

Table 2: Visiting and Gender

	Once/month or less	Everyday
Men	6.7%	26.7%
Women	30%	3.3%

Table 3: Participation and Gender

	Posted comments	Posted comments and/or videos
Men	40%	50%
Women	13.3%	13.3%

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