

# Participatory **Culture**

Intellectual Property, Media Panics and Micro-Celebrity

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# Participatory Culture

*Wide definition:* Culture in which “fans and other consumers are invited to actively participate in the creation and circulation of new content” (Jenkins, 2006a: 290)

*Narrow definition:* “link between more accessible digital technologies, user-created content, and some kind of shift in the power relation between media industries and their consumers” (Burgess & Green, 2009: 10)

# Participatory **Culture**

Is *not about* lowering the barriers to participation with the help of digital technologies

Is *about* creating social incentives to produce and share media content

(Jenkins, 2006a: 116)

# Participatory **Culture**

Is *not directly caused* by digital technologies

Is *made more accessible* by digital technologies

(Jenkins, 2006a: 112)

# Participatory Culture

*Viral model*: connotes the proliferation of something negative (germs) that self-replicates passively

*Spreadable model*: takes into account the agency exerted by participants as they actively share and discuss media content

(Jenkins and al., 2013: 293-294)

# Participatory Culture

Participants do “not simply pass along static texts; they transform the material through active production processes or through their own critiques and commentary, so that it better serves their own social and expressive needs”

(Jenkins and al., 2013: 294)

# Disruption of the traditional media business model

YouTube led to the development of new vernacular genres

YouTube is used to reach niche audiences and distribute controversial material without having to negotiate with cable or television channels

YouTube plays an important role in grassroots political campaigns

YouTube is used to experiment with technologies and media conventions

(Burgess & Green, 2009)

# Disruption of the "stickiness" media business model

## Stickiness Model

- counting isolated audience members
- putting material in a centralized location
- limiting personalization
- integrating pre-structured interactive games, quizzes and polls
- favoring one-to-many communication

## YouTube Model

- social connections among individuals
- easy-to-share format that can be spread across the Internet
- having your own unique experience
- letting the audience use content in unanticipated ways
- favoring peer-to-peer communication  
(Jenkins in Burgess & Green, 2009)



# Reproduction of the traditional media business model

YouTube also functions as a top-down platform for the distribution of commercial culture

YouTube has reached the status of mainstream media

The agency of YouTubers takes place at the nexus of a corporate-controlled technological system

Mass media adapted their business model to the growing participatory culture

(Burgess & Green, 2009)

# Astroturfing

Masking the sponsor or the organization behind a message by making it appear as if it was created by grassroots producers

Example of Astroturfing – [Al Gore's Penguin Army](#)

(Jenkins & al., 2013: 296)

# Tensions between commercial interests and public good

Companies' attempts to gain more control (blocking or moderating comments) go against the participatory culture's ethos

Some YouTubers claim that corporations do not care about the “youtubeness” of YouTube

Some Youtubers fear that sensationalist big budget videos shift the focus away from creative amateur videos

(Burgess & Green, 2009)

# Tensions between commercial interests and public good

the advertising industry complains about the lack of a guarantee regarding the neutrality of the content

members of the YouTube community accuse this commodity logic of altering social relationships

some people claim that the commercial logic of YouTube threatens the traditional model of innovation (coming from the margins)

(Burgess & Green, 2009)

# Popular culture and resistance

“one of the sites where this struggle for and against a culture of the powerful is engaged [...] It is the arena of consent and resistance. It is partly where hegemony arises, and where it is secured. It is not a sphere where socialism [...] might be simply ‘expressed’. But it is one of the places where socialism might be constituted”

(Hall, 1981: 239)

# The importance of digital media literacy

Earlier concerns focused on:

the “digital divide” (access or lack of access to technologies)

Recent concerns focus on:

the “participation gap” (level of engagement)

(Burgess & Green, 2009: 70-71)

# Media literacy

Two different visions of literacy have competed since the advent of print media:

1. the “enlightenment view” ( literacy = democratizing)
1. the “critical view” (literacy = discriminatory)

(Livingstone, 2004)

# New media literacy

Current definitions of new media literacy range from:

1. *the tautological one*: computer literacy is the ability to use computers
2. *the idealistic one*: shorthand for cultural ideals ranging from economic development, to personal fulfillment and moral strength
3. *the widely adopted one*: ability to access, analyze, evaluate, and create messages in a variety of forms (skills-based approach)

(Livingstone, 2004)



# Skills-based approach to media literacy

does not take into account the specific type of media and technology

prioritizes the abilities of individuals over the knowledge arrangements of a society

(Livingstone, 2004)

# Literacy and Ideology

“literacy is not and never has been a personal attribute or ideologically inert “skill” simply to be “acquired” by individual persons... It is ideologically and politically charged – it can be used as a means of social control or regulation, but also as a progressive weapon in the struggle for emancipation”

(Hartley in Livingstone, 2004: 10)

# System-based approach to media literacy

Considers media literacy as:

- medium-dependent

- a system that enables and shapes participation

- a social practice that emerges from the interaction between technologies and their users

- a bottom-up approach: what skills are users developing?

(Livingstone, 2004 and Burgess & Green, 2009)

# Vlogger: Geriatric1927

Video #1 – [First Try](#)

Video #36 – [Telling It All](#)

# Old media vs new media

**Misconception:** digital media are colliding with traditional media and replacing them

**Other conception:** the relation between old and new media should be seen in terms of co-evolution, co-existence and convergence  
most videos from traditional media are uploaded by people outside of the media industry  
old and new media converge in hybrid media forms (mashup, semi-professional video, machinima, etc.)

(Burgess & Green, 2009)

Many machinimas parody old media forms

[Counter-Strike for Kids](#) by Machinima on YouTube.

The co-existence and convergence of old and new media on YouTube sometimes leads to frictions

Nalts on Oprah? Noprah. By nalts on YouTube.

# Debates around copyright issues

## Arguments of the media conglomerates

YouTube makes profit on their back

YouTube threatens the mass media industry

(Burgess & Green, 2009)



# Debates around copyright issues

## Counter-arguments

the appropriation of media texts by consumers has been normalized and media corporations should adjust their business model accordingly

media conglomerates have benefited from the visibility of their shows on YouTube

selecting and editing existing media content should be considered a creative act

(Burgess & Green, 2009)

# Debates around copyright issues

Some people are concerned with the way platform providers profit from YouTube users' creativity and use them as "free labor". But, consumers should also conform to the participatory culture norms and let corporations appropriate their creative work

traditional theories on the exploitation of labor are not useful to understand this particular situation

(Burgess & Green, 2009)

# The myth of newly active audience

**Misconception:** digital media allow media consumers to become active

**Other conception:** books, movies, and TV shows are not passively accepted by the audience:

readers/viewers interpret and negotiate meanings according to their cultural background and life experiences (Hall, 1980)

fans are actively engaging with media content, discussing and appropriating it (Jenkins, 2006b)

# What is new about YouTube

- it provides a favorable environment for reflexivity by encouraging viewers to comment on videos and post replies
- a small portion of YouTubers use the video-sharing platform as a social network
- it constitutes “a normal, calm, established appropriation of speech” (Levy, 1997)

(Burgess & Green, 2009)

Everyday School Makeup \*SPOOF\* by  
WonderlandMakeup on YouTube

Harry Potter and the Dark Lord Waldemart by Wal-  
Mart Watch on YouTube

# Media panics around YouTube's morality

YouTube is seen by many as an unethical website that:

encourages pathological behavior and puts the youth at risk

provides a platform for exhibitionists, voyeurs, hooligans, propaganda, violent footage, etc.

encourages reprehensible practices such as car surfing, happy-slapping, vandalism, schoolyard fights, etc.

facilitates cyberbullying, abusive comments, and trolling

(Burgess & Green, 2009)

# Media panics around YouTube's morality

In response to these claims, Burgess and Green remind us that:

the proportion and popularity of offensive and “slice of life” videos is overstated

these videos do not have much visibility until the mass media expose them

these media panics mirror past concerns about tools that make media production available to ordinary people

vlogs are a means of social networking that invite feedback and create intimate spaces where difficult topics can be discussed

(Burgess & Green, 2009)



# Media panics around YouTube's morality

In response to these claims, Burgess and Green remind us that:

bedroom dance videos have been normalized in YouTube and considered an empowered form of exhibitionism  
apparent anti-social behaviors, such as trolling, have also been normalized

moderating and banning comments would go against YouTube's ethos of openness

(Burgess & Green, 2009)

# Media panics around YouTube's morality

In response to these claims, Burgess and Green remind us that:

the YouTube community actively negotiates and contests the social norms of participation on the video-sharing platform

attempts to shape the ethics of online behavior from an insider position are probably more effective than top-down enforcements of new regulations

(Burgess & Green, 2009)

Don't Read the Comments by BrainCraft on YouTube

# Debates around the archiving function of YouTube

YouTube has no obligation to store these data beyond their commercial viability

Cultural institutions cannot re-archive YouTube's material because of the website's Terms of Use

YouTube's archive remains unfiltered, disorganized, and heterogeneous because it is constituted through a bottom up process

(Burgess & Green, 2009)

# Debates around the archiving function of YouTube

Some people argue that:

YouTube content is filtered in use

YouTube's editors and web designers are actively working on better strategies to filter YouTube's archive

(Burgess & Green, 2009)

# Debates around the archiving function of YouTube

What are the risks of counting on a commercial organization to preserve our cultural heritage?

Can we count on a community of ordinary citizens to do the work of librarians and curators?

Should we reconsider the criteria according to which cultural heritage should be constituted and preserved?

# YouTube and Micro-celebrity

*Common assumption:* YouTube's star system is more democratic than the mass media star system

*Other conception:* having your voice heard does not guarantee an empathic audience and visibility on YouTube does not guarantee success

*Correction:* the micro-celebrities' success is measured by "their capacity to pass through the gate-keeping mechanisms of old media"

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