



## Full length article

## Social media engagement: What motivates user participation and consumption on YouTube?



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## ABSTRACT

This study unearths the motives for YouTube user engagement that has been conceptualized as active participation and passive content consumption. In light of the Uses and Gratifications framework, a sample of 1143 registered YouTube users completed online surveys that helped gauge user behavior. Results showed that for participation on YouTube, the strongest predictor for liking and disliking videos was the relaxing entertainment motive; commenting and uploading being strongly predicted by social interaction motive; sharing being strongly predicted by information giving motive. Passive content consumption in the form of video viewing was most strongly predicted by relaxing entertainment motive, and reading comments predicted by information seeking motive. Greater YouTube experience negatively predicted liking, and anonymity played a role in sharing and uploading videos. Males were more likely to dislike YouTube videos in comparison with females.

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## 1. Introduction

YouTube is a go-to resource for viewing videos. Launched in 2005, it is the third most visited site in the world after Google and Facebook (Alexa, 2016). YouTube content is diverse and global, offering the opportunity to disseminate content to a very broad audience of site visitors. The site thus serves as an attractive platform for both amateur content creators and media companies alike (Xu, Park, Kim, & Park, 2016). Politicians, news organizations, education institutes, businesses, music and film artists, and people from all walks of life use YouTube.

Recent years have witnessed the rise of video sharing in various forms. Better broadband Internet speeds and growing mobile device use have also fueled higher video consumption. According to Pew Research, the use of online video-sharing site showed a constant rise, in which about 33% of US adults had posted a video to an online site (Anderson, 2015). As of July 2015, 400 hours of video content was uploaded every minute on YouTube (Statistica, 2015).

Amongst various social media platforms, YouTube popularity is right behind Facebook; 77% of Internet users are on Facebook, while 63% use YouTube (Anderson, 2015). YouTube allows users to interact with the site in multiple ways, whereby participation on

the site takes a deeper meaning. For example, registered users can rate (like/dislike), upload videos, comment on and share them. This phenomenon has given a greater degree of control to social media users in creating and manipulating content besides creating a sense of community. User Generated Content (UGC) in the form of comments may further encourage user interaction and discussion, and give the impression of an active website where everyone is and, thus, adding to the overall credibility (Kraut & Resnick, 2011).

Crucial to understanding the future of social media is studying the characteristics that make these sites appealing to people. Such sites are increasingly becoming a single platform for social interaction, information, news, and entertainment. A great deal needs to be learned about why and how users participate and consume information on various online sites. The design of socio-technical systems especially for promoting engagement in terms of maximum user participation is both a theoretical and real-world challenge that researchers strive to understand.

This study applies a motivational construct to unpack the motives of user participation and consumption on YouTube. Likes, comments, and shares are common features that enable user participation on social media sites. However, there is a diversity of features that are used for varied reasons. The appeal of YouTube, which is relatively an understudied social media site, can be understood through the Uses and Gratifications (U&G) framework. U&G is an established framework in media research that looks into

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the psychological needs and gratifications of individuals (Blumler & Katz, 1974).

This study advances our understanding of social media engagement and moves beyond a general view of user motivations of media use to include an analysis of specific features on YouTube. The study focuses on motivations to participate and consumes information on YouTube at a deeper level by viewing engagement in terms of liking, disliking, commenting, sharing, uploading, viewing, and reading comments. Through survey-based research method, the current research concentrates on unpacking engagement as a function of user participation and consumption of content on YouTube.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1. YouTube

Social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube have unique architecture, norms, and culture (Smith, Fischer, & Yongjian, 2012). As a result, users may tend to view these sites differently in terms of their unique affordances and how they interact with them. The variety in the ways YouTube is being utilized for not only entertainment but also social interaction in the form of commenting, and seeking and providing information makes the site interesting from a research perspective.

YouTube “can be regarded as a convergence of the traditional entertainment choices of television, music, and film” (Shao, 2009, p. 12). The site centers on a culture of self-promotion and broadcasting the self (Burgess & Green, 2009), and due to the wide variety, users have the option of subscribing to a myriad of video channels. YouTube is viewed as a platform to learn about things (e.g. “How-to” videos); and is a popular resource for sharing and watching music videos (Cayari, 2011). Brands also have a strong YouTube presence, and marketers increasingly rely on YouTube for not only promotion but also customer feedbacks (Smith et al., 2012).

The popularity of social media sites has encouraged social interaction and participation on an unprecedented scale. YouTube allows content to be shared, embedded and discussed (Burgess & Green, 2013). The site offers a variety of functionalities besides uploading and video viewing, that encourage both active and passive user engagement. In comparison with typical relationship oriented social media platforms such as Facebook, YouTube being focused on viewing videos, offers a unique online atmosphere to visitors with interesting set of interactive features such as the dislike button. UGC sites are, therefore, “creating new viewing patterns and social interactions, empowering users to be more creative, and developing new business opportunities” (Cha, Kwak, Rodriguez, Ahn, & Moon, 2007, p. 1). It thus becomes important for researchers to investigate these nuances in interaction and explore the motivations behind the use of YouTube.

### 2.2. YouTube engagement

Engagement has been defined as “a user-initiated action” (Gluck, 2012, p. 8), which leads to a ‘co-creation’ of value (Brodie, Ilic, Juric, & Hollebeek, 2013). Other scholars like Hollebeek (2011) viewed engagement as a multidimensional concept that comprises not only behavioral (actions) but also cognitive (thoughts), and emotional (feelings) aspects. Engagement may be viewed as an individual’s interaction with media. This study views engagement as comprising behavioral aspects or click-based interactions (participation) as well as simple content viewing and reading (consumption).

Online behavioral engagement on Facebook is typically

manifested symbolically through actions such as liking, commenting, and sharing. On YouTube, such engagement is manifested through actions such as liking, disliking, commenting, sharing and uploading videos. Moreover, viewing videos and reading comments is included as a form of engagement. Users may choose to remain passive by simply consuming content, or play an active role by participating in various interactions, and even repurpose content to fit their needs.

Engagement in the form of user participation on social media is not uniformly distributed, as a few users do a significant fraction of work. This is evident on sites such as Wikipedia where a small percentage of users write articles or edit them (Kittur, Suh, Pendleton, & Chi, 2007). Similarly, a fraction of visitors contribute videos on YouTube and comment and engage in discussions on videos. This type of distribution in terms of user participation on sites is known as the Pareto principle that suggests 80% of the work is done by 20% of individuals (Best & Neuhauser, 2006), which is also similar to the power law distribution in mathematics (Newman, 2005). Therefore, to have a wholesome understanding of engagement, both of its forms—active (participation) and passive (consumption) forms need to be examined.

### 2.3. Participation versus consumption

Passive users, also known as lurkers are users who read but do not post messages (or comments). Takahashi, Fujimoto, and Yamasaki (2003) define lurkers as those “who do not post any messages in an online community” (p.1). It is therefore argued that lurkers engage in consumption behavior. On the other hand, active users or posters participate by posting comments, like/dislike and share videos. Nonnecke and Preece (1999) show that lurkers (or passive users) make up 90% of many online communities.

Shao (2009) stated that individuals deal with content in three main ways: consumption, participation, and production. According to the study by Shao (2009), content consumption is when users watch a video, read comments and view likes/dislikes but do not respond. Viewing videos add to the number of views depicted at the bottom of a video. By viewing videos, users consume content. Shao (2009) viewed participation to include user-to-user and user-to-content interaction (commenting, sharing, liking, disliking). Lastly, the same study viewed production involving a greater degree of engagement that comprises actual publishing of content such as uploading a video on YouTube. In this study, uploading a video on YouTube has been categorized as a participatory act. Thus, the concept of YouTube engagement has been made more parsimonious and is conceptualized under two main categories—participation and consumption. Table 1 depicts these engagement classifications.

Amongst various participatory actions, UGC in the form of comments on various news sites has gained considerable importance overtime. Besides reading a news article or watching a video, individuals may also engage in reading comments posted by others. It may be argued in the age of social media, UGC in the form of comments carry weight in how individuals perceive reality, and even compete for influence against original news content posted by a news establishment. Research has already shown that UGCs have the potential to alter reader’s perception significantly about the topic discussed (Kim & Sun, 2006; Lee & Jang, 2010).

A second most important form of content consumption is reading comments, which are available as text. YouTube allows any site visitor to read comments posted by registered users. In fact, users not only gain gratifications from writing comments but also reading them (Diakopoulos & Naaman, 2011). These comments are an expression of user opinions and reading them adds to the pool of information on the site. What is unique about YouTube is that it can

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