

Jean Burgess and Joshua Green, **YouTube: Online Video and Participatory Culture (2nd edition)**, Medford, PA: Polity Press, 2018, 180 pp., \$18.12 (paperback).

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Starting out in 2005 as a website for uploading and sharing amateur video productions, YouTube has grown into a global digital media platform. According to the Web traffic analysis company Alexa Internet, YouTube is now the second most popular platform in the world ("Competitive Analysis, Marketing Mix and Traffic," 2020). What makes YouTube unique is that in comparison to other social network platforms, video is the primary vehicle of social interaction and communication. Originally published in 2009, Jean Burgess and Joshua Green's book was the first study that focused solely on the unique affordances and dynamics of YouTube. While remaining faithful to the spirit of the original publication, this updated 2018 edition adds new examples, updated theoretical perspectives, and comparative historical insights to each of the original six chapters.



The first chapter of **YouTube: Online Video and Participatory Culture (2nd edition)**, titled "How YouTube Matters," provides a historical narrative on the origins of the platform. The first section of the chapter documents the origins of YouTube in the mid-2000s as a social networking site specializing in video sharing. It is argued that YouTube, from the very start, strove to balance the two seemingly contradictory logics of community and commerce (p. 7). The value of the platform has always been based on user-generated content, yet YouTube's revenue streams are very much dependent on advertising. Building on this, the authors argue that monetization and participatory culture are the dual engines powering the platform's evolution. Over the course of the past decade, these forces have turned the platform into "a site of conflicts over copyright, the politics of participatory culture, and the governance structures of digital media" (p. 8). The second half of the first chapter is devoted to describing the emergence of YouTube's business model. Here, the authors argue that the platform's business model addresses a multisided media market, wherein a multitude of different stakeholders and differing regulatory regimes shape the ways in which profit is created on YouTube (p. 9).

The second chapter takes a more detailed look into YouTube's relationship with the mass media. During the early years of the platform, YouTube tended to be portrayed in the mass media as either a chaotic and unregulated repository for amateur content or as a potential market leader in the emerging digital economy (p. 25). These two frames yielded media coverage centered around social themes such as youth, celebrity, and morality as well as legal or business themes like copyright law. The authors rightly point out that these frames are important insofar as they both produce and reinforce public perceptions surrounding the platform. In turn, these public perceptions can lead to regulatory interventions. For instance, news coverage about YouTube being a site of cyberbullying and antisocial behavior eventually

leads to measures such as blocking access to the platform on school computers. In this regard, particular frames of coverage often tend to connect with persistent social anxieties around the relationship between young people and digital media, leading to the formation of moral panics about YouTube.

The last part of the second chapter examines YouTube's evolving relationship with the incumbent entertainment industries from the vantage point of copyright. It is stated that YouTube's relationship with entertainment industries has complexified over the past decade, moving beyond early portrayals of the platform as a disruptive upstart challenging the status quo (p. 45). Within such a context, copyright has become a key battleground for stakeholders to etch out their contending (and often conflicting) visions of governance. The emphasis here is on the balancing act happening in YouTube's corporate boardroom; lax copyright policing draws the ire of media industries, while too much compliance has a chilling effect on vernacular creativity and fan engagement. Drawing from this, the authors propose conceptualizing YouTube as an institution coordinating between individual and collective creativity as well as a mediator among competing stakeholders.

The third chapter begins with a discussion about YouTube's "ranking cultures" (Rieder, Matamoros-Fernández, & Coromina, 2017). Initially, YouTube used four categories of popularity (most viewed, most favorited, most responded, and most discussed) to rank content, without any recourse to personalization or localization. These ranked lists have gradually begun to disappear with the introduction of personalized and localized recommendation systems. Nevertheless, these four popularity categories offer insight into how social media metrics not only reinforce the importance of popularity but also the notion of popularity itself. As the authors suggest, metrics on social media platforms are not only descriptive or representational but are also performative. Each definition of popularity generates a different emphasis that in turn shapes the character of content uploaded onto the platform. Users wishing to generate large-scale attention on YouTube replicate the format and style of highly ranked content, in effect trying to "game" the parameters delineated by popularity metrics. This also means that content not conforming to the popularity paradigm attracts significantly less attention on the platform.

The last part of the chapter is devoted to the relationship between ranking cultures and politics. As the authors astutely observe, populist and reactionary movements worldwide are instrumentalizing social media metrics to broadcast their messages and facilitate engagement online. Troll armies and computational propaganda are some of the strategies used by such movements to manipulate the popularity metrics of social platforms. Such developments have put ranking cultures, their governance and regulation, into the center of contemporary electoral processes worldwide.

Chapter 4 provides an in-depth discussion of the YouTube community. The authors argue that YouTube needs to be conceptualized as a "patron" controlling the conditions under which collective creativity can be expressed. On the other hand, it is within the user community that aesthetic values, cultural forms, and creative techniques are generated and normalized. This symbiotic yet asymmetric power relationship between the company and users means that administrative decisions to regulate or valorize certain forms of expression can be met with resistance by the community.

The fifth chapter discusses the significance of YouTube for the politics of global citizenship and diversity. Within the framework of the latter, YouTube is a site of cosmopolitan cultural citizenship that allows marginalized groups in societies to express themselves within the realm of popular culture. Yet as previously described in the third chapter, much of the more popular (and accessible) content on YouTube is based on antagonistic, intolerant modes of expression and participation. This means that YouTube, while being a potential enabler and amplifier of diversity, does not necessarily provide the guarantee of an engaged or even sympathetic audience. Furthermore, the logics of popularity discussed in the fourth chapter can often cause messages of diversity and social inclusion to remain stuck within their own filter bubble or echo chambers. In order to harness its potential as an enabler of global cosmopolitan citizenship, the authors rightly point out that YouTube urgently needs to reevaluate its popularity metrics and ranking cultures. These metrics need to reward not only those who make the most noise but also those who encourage diversity and tolerance.

The final chapter provides a short discussion on the future of YouTube as a platform. The authors argue that one potential flashpoint will be in regards to toxic technocultures that have made the platform their home. As discussed in previous chapters, overregulation will stifle the creative output of the YouTube community as a whole, while too little regulation will not placate the problem. Thus far, the solution to this conundrum devised by YouTube has been the introduction of advertiser-friendly content regulation. Yet as the authors point out, this is problematic insofar as such regulation methods tend to stifle not just extreme, right-wing content but also progressive voices also.

In conclusion, Burgess and Green's book is an essential introduction to YouTube as a highly influential yet unstable media platform. In comparison to more entrepreneurial accounts of YouTube (see for instance Cannell, 2018, or Hogue, 2019), this book provides a scholarly narrative on the dynamic process of cocreation, focusing on how multiple (and often competing actors) have shaped the development of the platform over the past decade. It is recommended for anyone interested in contemporary digital media platforms and will be of particular value to students and scholars in media and communication studies.

### References

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