

Jean Burgess and Joshua Green, **YouTube: Online Video and Participatory Culture (Second Edition)**, Medford, MA: Polity Press, 2018, 191 pp., \$19.95 (paperback).

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In the second edition of **YouTube: Online Video and Participatory Culture**, Jean Burgess and Joshua Green update their 2009 volume to reflect the new media environment. A decade is a long time, especially when talking about the Internet. In 2007 when the authors began their research, YouTube was only two years old. The preface to the original edition began: “Love it or loathe it, YouTube is now part of the mainstream media landscape, and a force to be reckoned with in contemporary popular culture” (p. vii). This statement is even truer today. The new edition of *YouTube* builds on the original’s material and updates it to cover new business models, the rise of influencers, and other developments; the authors also update some of the language used to frame their analysis, using terms like “platform” and “community” instead of “website” and “social network” (p. viii). At the same time, the book maintains its focus on YouTube’s position within participatory culture. *YouTube* remains an important work that grapples with understanding YouTube as a cultural object but also examines how to study such a large and ever-changing subject.



In the second edition, Burgess and Green retained their original thesis: that YouTube is cocreated by the company itself, content creators who upload videos to the platform, and audiences that watch these videos. This idea remains their central focus. However, they expand their analysis in the main chapters to reflect YouTube’s role as a dominant force within the media industries and popular culture and also discuss new developments such as multichannel networks, the rise of streaming, and YouTube’s advertising issues. Notably, the new edition omits the original’s concluding essays by Henry Jenkins and John Hartley, which were more relevant to understanding YouTube’s early years.

### Overview

Chapter 1 explains why it is important to study YouTube and lays the foundation for the book’s analysis. The authors explain how YouTube mixes business logics from technology and media industries and also introduce YouTube as a platform. Burgess and Green argue that YouTube remains an “unstable object of study” due to its status as both a “top-down” and “bottom-up” platform and its rapid rate of change, both in its business and in the type and volume of videos it hosts (pp. 13–14). Therefore, any study of YouTube requires mixing methods; as such, the book centers on content analysis but also draws on other digital methods, including critical digital methods, and a cultural studies perspective.

Chapter 2 focuses on YouTube’s complicated relationship with traditional media and discusses its evolution into a major media force. It traces traditional media’s coverage of YouTube as it progressed from

an "amateur 'free-for-all'" (p. 25) to a major media company. The chapter then considers the debates that have surrounded YouTube, illustrating what has remained constant in YouTube's history. First, there are the moral panics about the platform, similar to those that have historically surrounded other new media technologies. Burgess and Green then discuss celebrity culture and provide some new context to illustrate how YouTube fame can now be a lucrative career. They also consider vernacular modes of video on YouTube, particularly vlogs, including a case study of how "lonelygirl15," a fictional vlog, complicated assumptions of the form's authenticity. The authors go on to trace how copyright wars have always been part of the platform's power struggles, balancing the desires of copyright holders and average users. Finally, the chapter concludes by discussing YouTube's role in amplifying traditional television, thus allying itself with mainstream media.

Chapter 3 discusses "YouTube's Popular Culture." It reiterates the results of the original 2007 content analysis performed on a subset of YouTube's popular videos and includes analysis of traditional media versus user-generated content, channel subscribers, and other metrics. Burgess and Green explain that changes in how YouTube measures engagement and the introduction of recommendation algorithms made it impossible to update the original data analysis. Unfortunately, these obstacles prevent the authors from providing a historical comparison between YouTube's past and present. Therefore, the authors present the original content analysis as a historical artifact and add more analysis to contextualize their findings and tie them to YouTube's present. For example, the authors illustrate how vernacular video forms and music videos remain popular on the platform. Another example covers the subgenre of beauty and lifestyle videos, which have since grown in popularity, by highlighting early examples of brand sponsorships.

Chapter 4 discusses YouTube's relationship with its community of users, portraying YouTube as a patron of the arts that provides creators with a platform for their art. The chapter also discusses user innovations that drove the platform to change; in one example, the authors trace how users began using external technology to facilitate live chat, which prompted YouTube to incorporate this feature into its platform. A section on new media literacies argues that YouTube literacy involves being able to create and consume content on YouTube alongside understanding how the platform works. The authors also discuss YouTube controversies, including user fears about the coupling of traditional media companies with YouTube; a case study assesses user reaction to the placement of Oprah's content on the platform.

Chapter 5 continues to emphasize YouTube users by discussing their cultural politics. The authors briefly describe the platform's public and civic value, including how YouTube fosters creativity and greater accessibility of participation; Burgess and Green argue that the ability for anyone, including members of marginalized groups, to upload a video to the platform is central to YouTube's brand identity. Subsequent sections of the chapter highlight the tensions between globalization and localization by discussing local versions of the platform and how YouTube operates as a cultural archive, complementing traditional archives.

The final chapter looks back and then forward. It lays a base by citing two major Australian media events in 2008: the infamous party thrown by teenager Corey Worthington (a.k.a. Corey Delaney), which had significant traction on YouTube and spawned several parodies, and the Australian Prime Minister's official apology to the country's indigenous people, which was a watershed moment for the country and inspired

response videos on the platform but did not gain the number of views that Worthington's antics did. The chapter then reviews the competitive challenges facing YouTube, which have changed considerably during the past decade with the advent of streaming and the introduction of YouTube TV, YouTube's live television bundle service. Finally, the chapter concludes with a discussion of advertising, including the changes made to YouTube's advertising service in 2017, known as "adpocalypse," during which advertisers wanted to prevent their ads from running on controversial content; as a result of these changes, YouTube stripped advertising from many YouTubers' videos.

### **YouTube as History**

A surprising aspect of the second edition of *YouTube* is that many of the case studies were not updated, including the two 2008 case studies that open the final chapter. In a 2010 review, Abigail Thomas complained that the Corey Delaney discussion already felt dated, and nearly a decade later, the example is even more so. Despite numerous more recent stories, however, the original remains. In the new edition, Burgess and Green elect to use new material to highlight newer trends. For example, after discussing Corey Worthington, the authors illustrate how such antics have become more monetizable through a discussion of YouTuber Jake Paul's stunts to gain attention in 2017. The authors also illustrate the concerns by advertisers that close the final chapter with an example of an educational YouTube channel about World War I that had content flagged for violence. Throughout the book, many newer trends, like the clout of YouTube stars such as PewDiePie and Bethany Mota, are discussed in a rather cursory manner; in particular, PewDiePie's high profile in recent years would have made for a fine case study in the new edition's section on celebrity culture.

Since the new information often complements or augments the book's original ideas, the second edition of *YouTube* will be of more interest to new readers than to readers familiar with the original edition. Nevertheless, the new edition of *YouTube* remains a useful history of the platform and its place in participatory culture, and the updated language, historical framing, and context make this edition more relevant today than its predecessor. This second edition contributes to the scholarly understanding of YouTube and its impact on media industries and popular culture, but a fuller update would have been even more welcome today.

### **References**

- Burgess, J., & Green, J. (2009). *YouTube: Online video and participatory culture*. Malden, MA: Polity Press.
- Thomas, A. (2010). [Book review]. *YouTube: Online video and participatory culture* by Jean Burgess & Joshua Green. *International Journal of Digital Television*, 1(1), 121-122.