

Louise Ha (Ed.), **The Audience and Business of YouTube and Online Videos**, Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2018, 230 pp., \$39.99 (paperback).

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***The Audience and Business of YouTube and Online Videos*** is a systematic and thorough empirical study of YouTube’s college student users, covering viewer profiles, viewing activities, and engagement patterns, as well as the businesses potentials of the platform.

When taking audience research into the age of new media, it is imperative to combine an enquiry regarding users’ engagement with what’s on the screen with an account of the context of use in front of the screen, including the motives, locations, timetable, etc., even though it demands time-consuming projects often using multiple methods (Press & Livingstone, 2006). Situated in today’s complex and shifting media environment, the book, edited by Louisa Ha, provides a timely examination of a rich number of ongoing activities and relationships involving the millennial audience of this global online video portal, an important part of their daily rituals. Taking a mixed-method approach, from surveys, interviews, and observations to content analysis, the book aims to offer insights and analyses of its young audience and their viewing of different types of videos, including professional media content and advertising. Given YouTube’s dynamic global growth and its potential profound social impact, the extensive data and research findings by the authors are highly valuable, unfolding an intricate map of the online lives of digital natives.

With 12 chapters in total, the book has an overview and final two chapters by Louisa Ha, and nine chapters contributed primarily by her students collecting data from other students at Bowling Green State University, a mid-sized public university in Northwest Ohio. The average age of 647 respondents was 22, coming from both low-income and high-income families. The major portion of the data was surveys, combined with in-depth interviews and observations. The first four chapters address essential questions of YouTube viewership—the portal’s evolution and global significance; how YouTube users differ from nonusers and users of other online videos such as Amazon Video and Hulu; what types of content are consumed by college students; and how digital natives watch online videos with varied devices in various settings. The following chapters focus mainly on product review videos and comments, brand videos, sponsored videos, and advertising viewership. Also examined were the most popular YouTube channels, personalized ads, and the difference between YouTube and other social media.

The final chapter discusses YouTube Red, the subscription service offered by YouTube, and also points out significant issues concerning “what’s next for online video audience research” (p. 167). It convincingly argues that YouTube’s complex multiple revenue model, a combination of both direct payment and advertising/sponsorship, makes it capable of maximizing the audience base for YouTube, positioning it



as the destination for all types of video content. It also discusses the effectiveness of specific features such as YouTube's recommendation algorithm, in-video advertising, and free subscription of Google Play Music.

One of the notable research questions addressed in the book concerns the digital divide and online video consumption, which can be exhibited through the gap in the proficiency in using Internet technology, as well as Internet access and devices due to income level difference (Norris, 2001). The authors find that those who create videos on YouTube use more devices than the noncreator audience to watch YouTube. Gender, race, and income disparity also influence how college students watch online videos and participate in the online community through comments and sharing. Meanwhile, between heavy users and light users, there is a wide range of differences in terms of motivations and purposes. For instance, those who watch product review videos daily claim that they do so to pass time or seek pleasure from watching people commenting on products or sharing their experiences as consumers.

Another interesting issue addressed by the researchers is how the type of mobile device one uses impacts the content selection of the audience. The data among the book's research respondents generally confirmed what scholars have found in earlier projects (Dimmick, Feaster, & Hoplamazian, 2011). Watching YouTube videos from smartphones could make one less selective and more willing to try video links suggested by others and content automatically played or recommended by YouTube. This is because mobile devices are often used to fill interstitial time while on the go and waiting in lines. These findings make valuable contributions to the body of media effect research by contextualizing the consuming behaviors and circumstances of viewers using their mobile devices.

The final chapter also points out several important directions researchers could work on in addition to its consumption activities by young people. These include career building and DIY learning, self-initiated search versus recommended content use, global versus domestic audience, and the promotional and entrepreneurial culture of YouTube. Looking toward the future, the editor observes that Marshall McLuhan's (1964) vision of a global village with vivid audio and video was about to become a reality, facilitated by "the speed of global dissemination of content around the world overcoming the language barrier through the use of subtitles and Google Translate function" (p. 173). However, it remains to be seen how other barriers, particularly geopolitical and ideological ones, might hinder the full rollout of the global village vision for humankind. As the final chapter points out, many governments have been trying to utilize the global online video portal by establishing their own presence on YouTube, including the state-owned media of China; yet YouTube is blocked there, inaccessible to Chinese citizens.

As a product that started from a service-learning project for the editor's students of audience research, this book is immensely successful. It fills a gap that the editor saw in quantitative analysis of online video audience in book form, with conscious efforts to document the wide range of viewing, engagement, and creative activities by millennial users in their daily context. Thus it goes beyond a typical media effect research on youth and digital content. This book would be beneficial to scholars and graduate students studying mobile communication and video audience, or to general readers interested in youth and digital culture. It could be also helpful for marketing and advertising professionals interested in new media.

### References

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