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YouTube Celebrity and the Future of Online Video

Nicole Shapiro

Abstract

In recent years, the rise of online video streaming services has become so great that traditional media, such as television, are worried about a potential eclipse in popularity and prevalence. YouTube is the largest online streaming platform, with over 1 billion users, and accounts for one-third of all internet traffic. This study analyzes YouTube's attempt to professionalize the platform through a new service YouTube Red – taking amateurs, making them professionals and crafting them into celebrities – and what that means for the future of online video. This study looks at other scholarly works to analyze what makes a celebrity, the professionalization of celebrity and key elements to YouTube celebrity; and how that relates to recent news and trends in the YouTube community. It also examines YouTube Red's potential impact on aspiring professional YouTube celebrities. The study found that existing YouTube celebrities are getting more recognition and are increasingly seen as professionals. However the emergence of YouTube Red highlights the paradox of the YouTube system. While YouTube celebrity may seem easier to attain it is actually no different than any other kind of celebrity.

Celebrity and its function in society

Celebrity plays a significant role in the United States both societally and economically. Celebrities not only provide entertainment, national talking points, they also serve as inspiration for people around the world. Economically celebrities play an important role as social influencers. By endorsing products or acting as a spokesperson celebrities use their social influence to persuade consumers, making them important figures in our economy. **Thus, it's important to know who are the most influential celebrities of today and look towards who will be the celebrities of the future.**

The YouTube Celebrity

In Andrew Tolson's article "A new authenticity? Communicative practices on YouTube," he breaks down some of the key perceived differences between conventional television and YouTube. Some of the key differences are shown below.

Conventional television

Institutional voice
Distinctive class of 'media people'
Construction of otherness
Delegated looking



YouTube

Individual voices
Ordinary people as celebrities and experts
'Broadcast yourself'
User navigation



The perceived differences of traditional television celebrities and YouTube celebrities have led many to believe that YouTube celebrity is more authentic and attainable. This perception of authenticity gives many YouTube celebrities, a greater sway especially among younger audiences.

One study found, after surveying 1500 teenagers, the five most influential celebrities to them were YouTubers (Ault, 2014).

The YouTube System

YouTube is a free video sharing platform that launched in May 2005. In October 2006, a little over a year since the site's launch, Google purchased YouTube for approximately \$1.65 billion (Marshall, 2006). Since the Google purchase, YouTube has steadily grown as a leader in online video.

Over 300 hours of video are uploaded to YouTube every minute and videos are viewed by over a billion people around the world.

While the platform has a significant user base, YouTube has struggled to find a way to monetize and profit from the videos. The introduction of YouTube Red is YouTube's attempt to help professionalize and monetize the platform.

Looking at other scholarly works I analyzed how the YouTube system has changed over the years. Some key quotes and findings from other articles include:

"While YouTube began as an alternative to watching television, it is now an arm of the media industry." (Morreale, 2014, pp.125-126).

Nick Salvato argues in his 2009 article "Out of hand: YouTube Amateurs and Professionals," There is a paradox within the YouTube system, it promotes itself as a platform that can help propel amateurs to fame, as opposed to a site where fame is manufactured.

Using these findings, I tried to predict what will happen as a result of the most recent change to YouTube -- the introduction of YouTube Red.

What is YouTube Red?

Recently YouTube has announced a new service – YouTube Red – a membership that will provide users with "the ultimate YouTube experience," according to YouTube (YouTube, 2015, 2). The membership will feature a variety of services, but the highlight of the subscription is featuring exclusive content to the platform. YouTube Red seems to be the latest step in the movement toward the professionalization of YouTube.

Predictions for YouTube and the future of online video

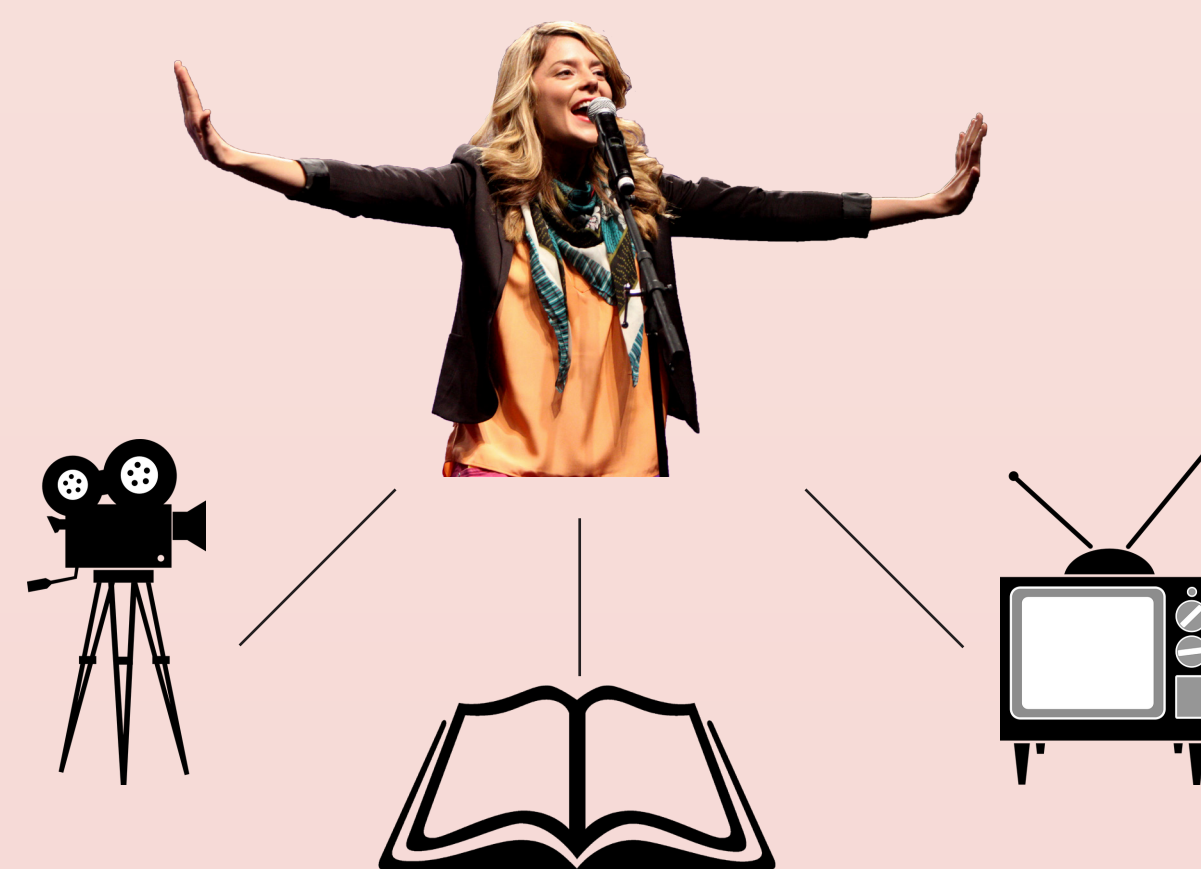
▶ **Existing YouTube celebrities will continue to rise in fame and be seen as professionals, we'll be seeing more of this kind of celebrity, the YouTube celebrity.**

We'll be seeing more YouTube celebrities branch out into other forms of media, to help increase their professional portfolio. And in doing so, they will legitimize YouTube as a profession as well.

▶ **Traditional media companies will become more involved with YouTube.**

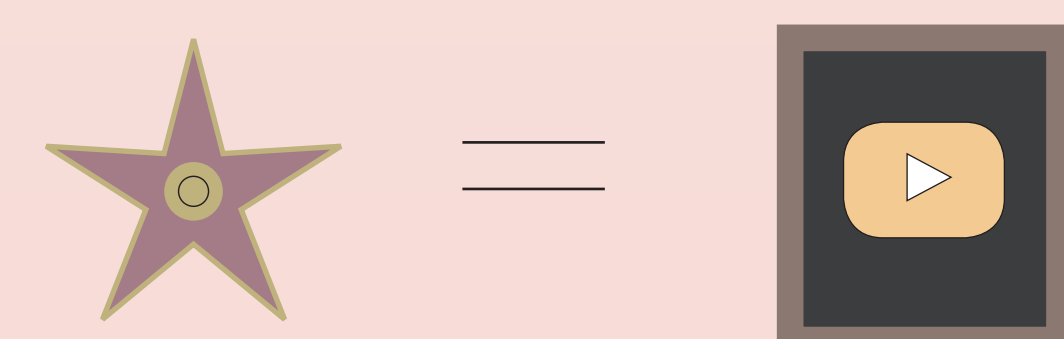


Companies, like Disney, have been buying YouTube channels through multi-channel networks (MCNs) at values that rival payment of traditional celebrities. Media company involvement will heighten the quality of content on YouTube.



Grace Helbig, pictured above, is one example of the YouTube celebrity who exemplifies this idea. Because of her YouTube channel she was able to: star in a feature film, write two books, and have a TV show on the Entertainment (E!) network.

▶ **While YouTube celebrity may be seen as much more accessible than other forms of celebrity. It is not.**



Most likely, the YouTube subscriber gap will continue to increase making it more difficult for aspiring stars.

Those that make it professionally on YouTube will most likely be just as rare as the number of people who have a star on the Hollywood walk of fame. To emphasize this point, YouTube has been giving silver and gold plaques that have over 100,000 and 1 million subscribers respectively.

Citations: Ault, S. (2014, August 5). Survey: YouTube Stars More Popular Than Mainstream Celebs Among U.S. Teens. Retrieved October 29, 2015, from Variety. Morreale, J. (2014). From homemade to store bought: Annoying Orange and the professionalization of YouTube. Journal of Consumer Culture, 13-128. Salvato, N. (2009). Out of hand: YouTube amateurs and professionals. TDR: The Drama Review, 67-83. Tolson, A. (2010). A new authenticity? Communicative practices on YouTube. Critical Discourse Studies 74, 277-289. YouTube. (2015, October 21). Meet YouTube Red, the ultimate YouTube experience. Retrieved October 29, 2015, from YouTube Official Blog: <http://youtube-global.blogspot.com/2015/10/red.html>.

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