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Life Uploaded: A Closer Look at the Analytics and Mechanics of YouTube

If you ask any millennial's parent about YouTubers and how they make a living, you'd likely be faced with critical and negative remarks about how impossible it is to become successful and maintain financial stability with that sort of occupation. In some aspects, that generally held view of YouTube is accurate, however it is hard to see the full picture of how it is really run from the outside. Creators on the platform and employees working at YouTube and Google have been able to give us an inside look on how the site and app function and the numerous ways that it has affected our society. YouTube has formed a growing community of creative and entrepreneurial users who seek to make a difference not only where they live but on a global level, which has led to the development of careers and a new generation of entertainment.

Upon walking into Camila Bes's house, my gaze shifts from the blaring TV screen displaying a video game that her sister was playing to Camila's bright, smiling face. Camila Bes, a 15-year-old juggling school and a growing YouTube channel, ushers us to her room and apologizes for the mess, even though there truly was nothing to apologize for. I notice that there were many items lying around that she uses for her videos, such as her camera on a "monkey" mini tripod as well as lighting sets. Her DSLR camera is perched on top of her makeup table and she has some camera equipment in a corner near her closet. A giant window takes up a whole

wall of her room, filtering a good amount of natural light, which Camila mentions that she likes taking advantage of for her YouTube videos. Her room is immaculate and is decorated with a lot of simplistic decor, especially on her desktop table and on her bed and nightstand. It is a small room but feels bigger from the inside, especially since the window gives an extensive view of her backyard that makes everything feel more spacious.

Camila is just one of the millions, even billions, of users worldwide on the YouTube platform. Besides school and hanging out with friends, Camila dedicates much of her time to filming and editing videos that she releases to her couple thousand of subscribers, who are eager to see what she has currently been up to. For Camila, YouTube is a way for her to “communicate with the outside world” (C. Bes, 0:33) and to document her life so she can save and look back on key events. She tells us that, as a child, her father was always there to film her to capture the little and momentous moments. Now that her father is no longer there to film everything that she does, Camila loves to film herself for the memories and to show what her life is like to the rest of the world in growing form of video sharing known as vlogging. YouTube has given Camila this opportunity to broadcast her life and release her creative energy in a form that is entertaining and genuine, unlike the modern movies and tv shows made for our generation that are professionally edited and even animated, made in an unrealistic form with CGI on computer software and other powerful editing tools.

As a video sharing website, San Bruno-based YouTube allows users to watch videos posted from around the world as well as upload videos that center around the theme of “broadcast yourself”. Since its inception in 2005, the site has become known for its viral videos, educational tutoring lessons, and lifestyle vlogs. Founded by three PayPal employees, the

original goal of the website was to act as a dating site which would be garnered to a single, middle-aged audience. The three founders, Chad Hurley, Steve Chen, and Jawed Karim, had a hard time getting YouTube to take off because YouTube users weren't using the website for what they had intended. The first YouTube video ever was posted by founder Jawed Karim himself, uploaded on April 23, 2005 and was titled *Me at the zoo*. During the summer of 2006, YouTube was one of the fastest growing sites, delivering an average of 100 million video views per day. But what surprised the founders of this popular website wasn't how fast the platform was growing but what was making the platform grow so fast. Chen, Hurley, and Karim soon realized that YouTube was primarily being used to upload short random clips of people's everyday lives and that for every few thousand videos there would be one that would go "viral". These viral videos introduced a lot more people to YouTube and they allowed the platform to be one that people tended to share with others. On October 9, 2006, it was announced that the company would be purchased by Google for \$1.65 billion in stock, which was completed on November 13. This marked a major turning point for YouTube as the website would now be a part of one of the leading search engines in the world. Since then, YouTube has only continued to grow, completely altering the economy and society.

One of the best things about YouTube is the ability to stumble across almost anything. The website (and app) is so diverse that you would not even be able to begin grouping the content it holds into one sole category since the platform is what the creators choose to make it. Mia Bes, Camila's younger sister, gives us the point of view of a child who watches YouTube, a section of the YouTube demographic that has been expanding greatly. Mia loves watching 30-year-old YouTube personality, Shane Dawson, and is especially interested in the conspiracy

theory videos that he uploads on his channel. When asked about trends and trending videos on YouTube, Mia replies, smiling, “I don’t know if it’s the most popular but the one I enjoy the most is conspiracy theories with Shane Dawson because it makes me notice things and they’re actually true... It teaches me not to trust Chuck E. Cheese pizza” (M. Bes). From the way that Mia explains YouTube, we can see that the videos on the platform are not all fun and games. Many of the videos are educational, even if they are not educational in the traditional way that comes to mind. In Mia’s case specifically, she notes how Shane Dawson’s video helped her understand more about analyzing things instead of always believing and listening to what she’s told. Within a few days after it was posted, the video went viral. It had accumulated millions of views and had been reposted by other users as well. Shane Dawson’s video, which he sectioned into two parts, is about some serious issues and some that are less serious, however they are all, at root, educational and beneficial towards his viewers by revealing to them important stories as well as challenges to common concepts and beliefs.

The platform holds videos that thoroughly teach and explain basic problems or topics that we as humans encounter on a daily basis. It has sparked a new age of self-learning that allows all viewers, including those who are less fortunate, to have the chance to learn certain languages and skills since the opportunity of learning from a teacher or mentor in their local area is not a possibility. Camilla Bes saw YouTube as a great option to aid in her transition of moving from Israel to Chile and eventually California. Although English was not her first language, Camilla picked it up quickly from watching American YouTubers as well as watching videos that taught her the language. She recollects that experience, reminiscing, “I moved here six years ago. So I learned most of my English watching Youtube videos and I was obsessed with it. Um, so it was

probably then when I was younger and I really like looked up to Americans and the way they spoke and the things they did and I watched all that on Youtube” (C. Bes). Educational YouTube videos have expanded the horizon of possibility for viewers to grow and learn, just as it gave Camilla more experience hearing the English language as well as practicing it.

YouTube teaches its viewers so much, from worldly issues to school subjects. Whether the video is a vlog of a YouTuber’s average day or a Crash Course lecture on the Progressive Era and its US presidents, these videos posted on YouTube contain lessons and important information that viewers are able to take away from the video and apply to their own lives. This impact of YouTube is substantial and can be seen in even the farthest reaches of every country. Kevin Allocca, the Head of Culture and Trends at YouTube, recently published his book, *Videocracy*, in which he compiled everything that he has discovered in his years working so that those curious about the inner workings of YouTube can at long last have their queries answered.

Later in the interview, Mia states that “over the couple years, more YouTubers have done it [YouTube] as a full-time job so I think it’s going to keep coming” (M. Bes, 2:51). It can be seen in recent years that careers as a “YouTuber” or web influencer have become much more popular, which ties into a new question: will a job on an online platform such as YouTube truly be sustainable for someone as a career?

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