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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 society. 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: Instructional 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).

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. 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.

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.

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.

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 may been seen as much more valuable than other celebrity plaques.

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