
BOOK REVIEW

Douglas A. Ferguson 



Ha, L. (2018). *The audience and business of YouTube and online videos*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 230 pp., \$95, ISBN 978-1-4985-7648-2

This collection of research studies about YouTube is an ambitious and important book that is best defined by its empirical findings. Anyone doing research on online or streaming video will appreciate the findings of Dr. Ha and her research team. The topic has been understudied but this book makes a major contribution and gives good focus on what has been a moving target. Only ten years ago, online video was a novelty that many industry observers felt was ancillary to broadcast and cable. Nowadays online video has become a true alternative to old-style television. Media researchers will likely choose to cite this significant book and its timely data from 2015 and 2017. Furthermore, the conceptualization might provide a useful framework for future studies.

After a brief overview of the diverse viewership of YouTube, Ha identifies the triggering elements behind the growing impact of online video: connectivity, speed, and the number of devices involved. She further classifies the content into such categories as prosumer, passive loyal, and ad-hoc. I would have liked to read more about the effect on habit formation but Ha and her collaborators have assembled a very impressive array of research topics and resulting data. For me, the biggest takeaway is the “long tail” of content on YouTube, where 95% of the viewing comes from 5% of the content. Ha correctly identifies YouTube as a global “video commons” of media content.

One of the strengths of the methodology employed in this book is the consistent focus on heavy users of YouTube. The second chapter also reveals the demographics of YouTube users compared with nonusers of YouTube and other nonusers of online videos. Although the quantitative results are very useful, the qualitative analysis is even more revealing, making good use of exemplar comments as evidence. The decision to include qualitative data is a distinctive addition.

2 Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media

The book includes an assortment of chapters that look at online videos as a source of music, electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) product reviews, branding, sponsored videos, and avoidance of advertising. I also found in Chapter 7 an intriguing contrast between YouTube and other social media sites. Despite being seen as a one-way medium, YouTube offers its users the opportunity to read and post comments and this book examines how readership influences posting behavior. Chapter 6 presents interesting findings with regard to the various types of videos on YouTube.

The book concludes with two interesting extra features unrelated to the data revealed in earlier chapters. Channel popularity and genres are examined to study the advantage of channel subscription over show viewership. The final chapter adds additional analysis of YouTube Red, a recent service that could be the future of online video. In effect, Ha has created a research agenda for other researchers to follow, which appears to be the greatest contribution of all from this book. YouTube is hardly static; Ha and her colleagues collected research findings seemingly point the way toward future studies of online video users. It seems clear to me that we have all become accustomed to the bundling of exclusive content, via streaming or offline access, with or without advertising. Television will never be the same.

ORCID

Douglas A. Ferguson  <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-6991-4255>