



The YouTuber

A Qualitative Study of Popular Content Creators

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Abstract

Den sociala videoplattformen YouTube firar i år sitt 10-årsjubileum och har under den tiden bildat en kraftfull kultur. Över en miljard användare som delar och tittar på videoklipp innebär att tusentals individer kan kalla webbplatsen YouTube för sin arbetsplats. Genom att skapa videoklipp som många tycker om bildas en enorm attraktion till vissa kanaler och utifrån detta genereras så kallade YouTube-kändisar. Den här kvalitativa studien dyker in i upplevelsen av att inneha en populär YouTube kanal genom att intervjua fem individer som besitter just en sådan. Är det verkligen drömjobbet som alla talar om? Resultaten visar en talande ökning av entreprenörskap på YouTube. För att bygga en publik krävs strategi och passion. Denna undersökning resulterar i en överläggande förståelse för hur deras personliga framgång har gått till, men även en aning om var YouTube är på väg i framtiden.

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1. Introduction

1.1 The Phenomenon of YouTube

Do you remember anything of significance happening in February 2005? The internet had been out for a while and what the future of this technology had in store was very uncertain. This was the time where three former PayPal¹ employees decided to throw together a video sharing website with the domain name of YouTube.com (Hopkins, 2006). Little did they know that their online creation would spread like wildfire and eventually have global influence and lead to millions of people coming together to share video content. YouTube is today the third most visited website and online video entertainment has never been as popular as it currently is (Alexa, 2015). There are more than 1 billion users on YouTube and adding up the time that people spend watching videos every day leads to hundreds of millions of hours (YouTube, 2015). On top of that, YouTube is localized in 75 countries across the globe. These numbers are simply unfathomable. So what exactly turned YouTube into the phenomenon it is today?

If we go back back to the year of 2007 when YouTube was purchased by Google for \$1.65 billion dollars, we will find parts of the answer. Lives on YouTube started to change from this day forward. Advertisers became willing to invest in this online field as the amount of users on YouTube would never stop rising and where many humans are gathered and invested, there is money (YouTube, 2007). The most prominent YouTube users were given the ability to monetize their uploaded videos. This made so that any advertisements playing on their videos would give them a percentage of that revenue. The gold rush had begun. Investing time into a YouTube channel became more and more popular as people wanted to be a part of this movement. Earning money from making any type of videos and uploading them to the internet did not seem like such a bad idea. A new era of online entrepreneurship had started to grow.

Today, over 10 years later, YouTube is bigger than ever before. The content creators of YouTube have been in the spotlight of this development as they become the face of the platform. Every user on YouTube chooses who and what they want to watch, so certain video makers naturally gain a bigger following than others. This hobby of uploading considerably unprofessional video clips has become a road to success for many people. Thousands of YouTube channels are making six figures each year, which is a ridiculous amount of money and a career most of us can only dream of (YouTube, 2015). The top YouTube creators are according to U.S. teenagers considered more popular than traditional celebrities such as music artists and movie stars (Ault, 2014). Because of the high saturation of YouTube channels, a big majority of them are of course not close to having an audience big enough to provide a sustainable income.

There are clearly plenty of potentials and rewards that come with developing a YouTube channel. But is this really a path suitable for everybody? I quote one of the founders of YouTube from an interview back in 2006:

¹ PayPal – an online payment service. (<https://www.paypal.com>)

“What we are creating is a stage for everyone to be seen.”

(Chad Hurley, 2006)

Over 300 hours of video are uploaded to YouTube every single minute, so it seems like many people want to be on that stage (YouTube, 2015). The competition for attention on this social media platform is so high that any way of breaking through seems impossible. Are there any particular strategies that can lead to growth on YouTube? What is it really like to gain online popularity through a YouTube channel? Is it as gracious as it seems? Those are some of the question marks that motivated this study.

1.2 Research Questions

I consider it highly relevant to discover new knowledge about YouTube in general, as it is an ever-changing dynamic platform. This work aims to not only accomplish that, but also provide an insight of the lives of content creators on YouTube. Understanding how they have gained their popularity contributes ideas for how it can be done for other channels. Additionally, answering the following questions in this research will hint us towards the future of YouTube and the online video industry.

- *What are some pros and cons about establishing a popular YouTube channel?*
- *What factors are the most important for the growth of a YouTube channel?*
- *What differences in behavior can be seen for content creators in the early days of YouTube and now?*

2. Background

A person who is completely unfamiliar with YouTube might notice there are a few terms and concepts throughout this study that need a little further explaining (Humphrey, 2012). I will in this section try to give a short description of these seemingly technical aspects to avoid any sort of confusion while reading. YouTube is more than just a website for some people. Thousands of individuals actually upload videos to YouTube for a living. For many years it has been the platform where they invest multiple hours every single day towards uploading and sharing videos. By making an account on YouTube you automatically create a YouTube channel. This channel is your own personal hub, the place where the videos you upload end up. For users that do not upload any videos, the channel is just a plain desert of zero content. Every user has the ability to subscribe to other YouTube channels if they enjoy their video content. If they choose to do so, they will be notified whenever that channel uploads a new video.

Some individuals have managed to build up their YouTube channels to have many millions of subscribers. The number one subscribed channel right now is called *PewDiePie* with over 36 million subscribers and more than 200 million monthly views by itself (Vidstats, 2015). Below this channel are hundreds of other channels and personalities that also have found major success through YouTube. We can only imagine the influence and responsibility these global YouTube celebrities experience. The YouTube channel *PewDiePie* is run by a guy from Sweden who makes gaming videos. He simply records himself playing various video

games while simultaneously adding his comedic commentary. Important to note is that an enormous majority of YouTube channels have closer to no subscribers at all. I am personally invested in this platform and have a channel of my own, but instead of dealing with millions of followers, I am appreciative for just a couple hundred. There is an endless field of video categories, including all variations of cultures and interests. Because there are so many users on YouTube, there truly is a place for everyone with so many different video genres covering everything from makeup tutorials to short action films.

So how do these popular YouTube channels lead to making money and becoming a sustainable job? Back in 2007 when Google bought YouTube, the most popular YouTube creators were invited to the so called Partner Program (YouTube, 2007). This Partner Program gave these channels the ability to get paid through their videos. Today almost anyone who puts in a small amount of effort can also be part of this Partner Program and its privileges of earning money off of videos. Every time someone watches the advertisements that play before and around a YouTube video, the uploader of that video gets a small amount of revenue. When thousands if not millions of viewers get together to watch a video clip, this quickly adds up and can turn into large amounts of money towards the content creator. YouTube and Google started off paying their most loyal content creators, but as time went on, external networks took over this process. By signing a contract to a so called Multi-channel network², users can get paid directly from an organization. By making videos parts of the gathered revenue goes to the network, and the rest to the content creator. There are hundreds of networks out there, and the most popular ones have thousands of content creators signed to them. Besides paying their members, networks try to aid content creators with easier access to sponsorships and brand deals. The networks are basically making a different kind of business out of YouTube.

Over the years, these video content creators and what they do have even gotten its own terminology. Any content creator who invests a lot of time into YouTube is commonly titled a *YouTuber*. The process a YouTuber goes through of making and uploading videos to YouTube is, by some people, called *YouTubing*. You will see these words further on in this paper and considering how big a part YouTube is becoming in our society, you might as well add them to your vocabulary. There are many different video sharing websites out there today, but most of them do not have an established title for their users or verb connected to what their users are doing. YouTube is a modern online media culture that is constantly growing and breaking boundaries (Beck, 2015).

3. Related research

In terms of global development and the advancement of human technology, the last 200 years show exponential growth (Hubbert, 1993). YouTube as a website and community has been no different. Every year the online video culture and experience grows richer and this makes it hard to keep up with. In the early days of YouTube most content creators seemed to just upload aimless videos with zero level of strategy in mind. The common methods and ways of dealing with a YouTube channel back then may not apply in the same sense today.

² <https://support.google.com/youtube/answer/2737059?hl=en>

With millions of new users every year, the competition for originality and breaking through as a YouTube channel becomes tougher and tougher. The online environment is simply always changing. Therefore newer research and findings within this field can often be found more relevant (Hoffman, 2009). With this mindset, I've valued the more recent investigations higher than older material in this chapter on related research.

From the involvement I personally have with this medium combined with my aims of this research, I have seen similarities between the process of running a YouTube channel with *online branding* (Rowley, 2004). It is a relatively new concept of building the image for a business using the internet. Not many sources mention this connection, but the concept behind these two approaches has its similarities. The YouTube channel itself being the business, and what it represents through catchphrases and content being the brand. Rowley explains the potential and important aspects that come with the internet regarding a brands perspective. Most, if not all, of the practical steps that Rowley presents as developing an online brand can in one way or another be connected to the process of building a YouTube channel (Rowley, 2004).

Catching people's attention, not only their attention, but their full interest is one of the challenges with online branding and YouTubing alike. In a world where even the biggest brands with a lot of resources struggle to withstand viral staying power and relevancy on the web (McEleny, 2010); how are individuals on YouTube expected to succeed? This is the beauty of YouTube, which gives everyone an equal chance of creating and sharing content for the world to see.

“User generated content sites such as YouTube and Wikipedia have built significant brand equity in a short time due to their ability to interactively create content and value.”

(Christodoulides, 2007, p.2)

Every video on YouTube has various data stored together with it, for example the number of views, ratings in the form of likes/dislikes³, comments, and an “age” being counted from the day it was uploaded. All of this information, statistics and more, is available to the public. With that said, any owner of a video has the option to turn off ratings and comments on a specific video. After proving to YouTube that you're a qualitative user by uploading valid content, they offer you to join the Partner Program⁴. There is even more in-depth information to be gathered once a channel becomes a part of the Partner Program, and this is done through the so called Analytics Tool. This service and function is not available for new users on YouTube, but only for the Partner members. While this function is commonly used amongst researchers, it would be more relevant to know if the actual video producers of YouTube use it.

The absolute most common way of researching the phenomenon of YouTube and activity on this online platform is through deep analysis of video statistics. Clever mathematicians have developed formulas and calculations using the information provided that can reveal different patterns or trends. Through various sources of data, Figueiredo et al. (2014)

³ This is the current rating system on YouTube, however it often changes as it has previously been a scale of 1-5 stars (<http://youtube-global.blogspot.se/2009/09/five-stars-dominate-ratings.html>).

⁴ <https://support.google.com/youtube/answer/72851?hl=en>

attempts to bring clarity to the ever so complex notion of social media popularity. This way of approaching YouTube goes a long way back. After only two years of YouTube existing as a website, Cha et al. (2007) discovered relations between the popularity life-cycle of videos and video age. A common distinguished notion is the rich-get-richer, where video popularity evolves proportionally from its current number of views (Borghol et al. 2012).

The analytics tool provided by YouTube to their more dedicated content creators is meant to identify who the viewers of a specific channel are, but also where they are coming from. This means both geographically and how individuals are finding the videos, whether it is through simply using the search function on YouTube or an external link. Going behind the scenes of the actual video content like this can generate new ideas on how to execute maximum efficiency on YouTube, achieving more views and subsequently increasing the gathered revenue (Cheng et al. 2014). But at the same time it seems unwise to strictly follow numbers when there are so many other aspects involved, such as user experience, cultural background, and the personal connection between content creators and their audience (Lundberg & Söderman, 2011).

Some say that YouTube is mainly covered with content that originates in the professional entertainment business. The little bit of User Generated Content that exists, lacks quality and is a poor excuse for a creative outlet for creative people (Kruitbosch & Nack, 2008). However, I beg to differ. YouTube is more than mindless content; it is filled with personified data. The ability to build up a supportive audience of global scale is a powerful tool. There is potential on this part of the internet that the majority of our society does not even know of.

“YouTube can be an avenue to increase sales, followers and interest in your products, services and your interests. Making videos is not just for comedy routines and kittens.”

(Claretta, 2014, p.1)

In contrast to the conclusions drawn purely off of video statistics, there are a few findings that have gone through a more personalized process. This includes analyzing user experiences and interacting with actual people that at the end of the day are the ones using YouTube. The importance of catchphrases and creating a sense of belonging within the community surrounding a YouTube channel is deeply studied by Lundberg & Söderman (2011). Figueiredo et al. (2014) discovered whether or not the quality of the content itself matters when it comes to a video’s popularity. They asked users to evaluate pairs of videos’ content and connected those results to their relative number of views on YouTube. By doing this they found that users often could not agree on which video contained the better quality content. The conclusion was that the perception of content being good is a very subjective matter. Although a clear connection between preferred video content and popularity online was found.

“Nevertheless, when consensus was reached, the video with preferred content almost always achieved greater popularity on YouTube, highlighting the importance of content in driving information popularity on social media”

(Figueiredo et al. 2014, p.1)

Now this is valuable information for a content creator, as it provides direct information from a possible target audience. Something that I will also delve into in this work is the importance of content and how that affects an audience.

Being appreciated by thousands, working without restrictions and simply just doing what you love through creating videos is often seen as a luxury (Lavaveshkul, 2012). A large amount of articles have been written around a step-by-step way of launching a successful YouTube career. The social media expert Gahan explains the three main steps towards success on YouTube in his essay on *thenextweb.com* (Gahan, 2015). He clarifies how standing out through being an original source of entertainment is rewarding. Then goes into how collaborating with the community is essential for expanding ones channel. Making videos together with other major YouTube channels allows for bridges to be built. Collaborating is a way of sharing ones audience with other creators. One channels' subscribers gets exposed to a completely different channel, thus uniting the channels and their respective audiences. This is supposedly a very efficient way to grow a YouTube channel. Combining these previous steps with a high level of consistency can lead to the recipe for growth on YouTube (Gahan, 2015).

Others specify in reaching audiences within certain categories of video content as for example gaming videos (Martell, 2014). Having found popularity on social media himself, Martell shares many practical tips about building a YouTube gaming channel. He shares self-taught information about advancing in video production, for example the importance of editing. Martell also insists that a YouTube channel should be treated like an official television show. He means that every video made is an investment and a result of time and money. Achieving a closer connection with the audience through various social media is also mentioned as something that requires a lot of work. Using built-in functions on the different social media platforms can facilitate the process of sharing. By taking a couple of minutes to schedule posts on a Facebook page, a steady flow of content is ensured for a longer period of time (Martell, 2014). Lastly he writes about how analyzing video statistics can help tailor the YouTube channel towards perfection. Questions like what time in a day is the most optimal for uploading a video, or what video tags are the most efficient, gets answered by analyzing data (Martell, 2014). Step-by-step studies like these two mentioned are often written in a very confident manner and ascertained attitude that '*this is how it is done*' (Bevan, 2015).

While this simplified and seemingly easy way of understanding the process to success has its benefits, I believe it is difficult to find a universal road of actions that leads to online fame. As there is a lack of qualitative studies surrounding YouTube in general, this opens up for my research that aims to analyze the personal experience of operating a channel. Focusing on achieving a deeper understanding of the platform and broaden ones perspective through interviewing content creators is not something that previously has been explored.

4. Method

4.1 Qualitative approach

The problem and reason for this article being connected to the personal experience of a content creator on YouTube provided many options for which methods to be used. I was

faced with the importance of choosing between a quantitative and a qualitative research method. With a quantitative study I would have to focus on numbers and things connected to YouTube that are measurable by figures. To create a generalization of some sorts I would have to include huge amounts of participants or discover ways to find a broad spectrum of statistics. Both of these procedures seemed far away from what I had in mind. With almost every single previous study within this field using a quantitative approach, an immediate gap was left for a qualitative study. Through reaching out towards a perspective that had yet to be explored, the idea of interviewing and getting in the minds of already successful YouTube content creators came to be. However, the general perception within social sciences is that a quantitative method often appears more respectable than a qualitative one (Berg, 2001).

Berg explains further how qualitative research has contributed in many ways to social studies and been the reason for many social understandings. The concept and perception of quality is important to everything around us (Berg, 2001). Many quantitative studies about YouTube have contributed towards understanding the platform in all its complexities. What this work aims to find is unexplored knowledge about online popularity through YouTube. Even though quantitative research is often put in the spotlight, there are many reasons for a qualitative method as it can lead to interesting and original results. By this following quote, the method to answer my research question points me towards doing interviews and a qualitative study.

“Although various technologies may be used by different researchers, it turns out that everyone is doing science, provided that science is defined as a specific and systematic way of discovering and understanding how social realities arise, operate, and impact on individuals and organizations of individuals.”

(Berg, 2001, p.10)

4.2 Process

4.2.1 Selecting respondents

In an effort to reach an answer to my research question and learn more about producing on YouTube, I have approached some well-established content creators. In this case, to be successful and established on YouTube means having a considerably large audience or ones YouTube channel being one of the main ingredients in an individual’s career. The degree of what deems this popularity impressive is generally dependent on the category of videos a channel takes part of. A YouTube channel with a smaller and more specific target audience usually has a smaller following compared to more widely appreciated content. With this in mind I pursued my search for distinguished YouTubers. The aim with this work is partly to figure out how my chosen respondents managed to reach their online popularity. This is accomplished through asking them questions related to YouTube.

In a YouTube climate filled with successful channels, there were thousands of possible targets for my study. The people who have YouTube channels with the absolute biggest following are basically impossible to get a hold of without appropriate connections. What is often difficult to understand for people outside of the YouTube community is how content creators can reach celebrity status. Instead of pursuing the impossible and trying to get a hold

of these YouTube superstars, I have focused on more realistically sized channels within my grasp. The size of a channel being measured in its amount of subscribers, my respondents all having below one million. By no means does this indicate that my respondents are underwhelming or not worthy the recognition of a large channel. More so the contrary as their number of followers is impressively high compared to the majority of channels on YouTube. I am very grateful to have gotten the chance to delve into the thoughts and perspectives of the individuals that agreed to help me with this research.

Due to my own influence of having a YouTube channel focused around video games, I was able to contact a couple of other producers in the same field. Even with more followers and success, the people I approached were still more than willing to help. This generosity of time and knowledge was important towards completing this research. There was limited access to both time and appropriate connections in this work, but the search resulted in finding five respondents who own a popular YouTube channel. Four out of the five are connected to the field of gaming videos. The market for this type of video has grown drastically for the past five years, and what used to be considered a waste of time, now video games along with many other things can become a full-time job through YouTube. All of my respondents are male, and between 20-35 years old. Their approach to YouTube completely varies and the way their mindsets and opinions clash brings out a very honest perspective on YouTube. Every single one of them is highly respected within the community and this makes my study gain significant credibility. I consider them YouTube experts. However, they are presented anonymously in this work to protect their thoughts and statements that could potentially hurt their reputation.

4.2.2 Observations

When they all had agreed to get interviewed about their relation with YouTube I started analyzing their channels, what their video content looks like, who they are and what has brought them success on YouTube. Because of the personalized and qualitative approach of this study, it was important to recognize the differences between my respondents. My presumption was that all of their stories would vary and lead to different points or conclusions. By observing the history of the channels and their owners I became aware of shifts in their perspective. During the interviews this allowed me to pay attention to both the actual past of the YouTubers and how they currently felt about it (Becker & Geer, 1957). Observations as preparation also makes an interviewer more equipped to deal with unexpected inferences, Beck & Geer (1957) argues.

On a YouTube channel there are certain statistics that are attainable for the public, such as the amount of subscribers, total views, number of uploaded videos and the age of the channel. Any remarks that I made about their channels provided me with a better understanding of their experience and attitude towards YouTube. This observation is presented in deeper detail early on in the results section.

4.2.3 Interviews

There is a burning passion within me for modern media and the concept of finding success online. All of the experience and knowledge these YouTube pioneers possess and listening to the phenomenon of YouTube from their perspective is highly valuable not only to me, but

also to the entire field of social media research. An important factor when pursuing interviews is a genuine interest for the stories our interviewees share with us (Seidman, 2013).

"[Interviewing] is a powerful way to gain insight into educational and other important social issues through understanding the experience of the individuals whose lives reflect those issues."

(Seidman, 2013, p.13)

Discovering the unknown around YouTube channels was part of the goal of this research, therefore a qualitative semi-structured interview was set up with each YouTuber. The interview contained several main themes to discuss, with guiding questions within those themes in case the conversation got stuck or off track. These themes were based on the expected knowledge amongst the interviewees but also any possible question marks that were generated from the related research I studied. Additionally the observations of the channels led to a few extra questions related to the various respondents. All of the main questions can be found in appendix 1. In the interviews we began by talking generally about YouTube and their perception of it and then transitioned into their personal story and growth on the website. This study was made possible through interviewing over the computer software Skype⁵. Geographical restraints made this necessary because of the global spread on my respondents ranging from Sweden, England to America.

"...the primary reason that one might conduct a qualitative telephone interview is to reach a sample population that is in geographically diverse locations."

(Berg, 2001, p.82)

Many concerns appear amongst researchers when it comes to telephone interviews where there is a lack of real human connection between the interviewer and interviewee (Berg, 2001). However, through using the video chat function on our computers the interviews turned into a much more valid method of interviewing. The benefits were that I could take notes of their body language, feel more engaged to what they were saying, and they were able to comfortably sit in their own home feeling secure about what they were sharing. This method may even have led to a higher level of results than what would have been gathered from a regular meeting in a physical space. By using this method one can assume that the pressure on my respondents was significantly decreased, along with the notion of social discomfort due to eye contact not being an issue. The video chat was the perfect way to execute these interviews for me as an inexperienced interviewer.

Using a tape recorder in a regular interview can sometimes mean low audio quality which can complicate reading the data afterwards. Additional software was used in my case that recorded the audio from the conversations automatically in very clear quality. This made transcribing the interviews and analyzing them a much easier task and risks of mishearing information were completely disposed of. The duration of the interviews all varied between 30 and 60 minutes.

⁵ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Skype>

4.3 Data Analysis

Any means of generating data is commonly followed by an analysis of that particular data. This study followed the guidelines of a qualitative content analysis. Dealing with a relatively undiscovered research field such as YouTube creates an interpretive paradigm. A qualitative content analysis is valuable in cases like this as it helps with identifying essential themes and explaining complicated social realities (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009).

“Qualitative content analysis goes beyond merely counting words or extracting objective content from texts to examine meanings, themes and patterns that may be manifest or latent in a particular text. It allows researchers to understand social reality in a subjective but scientific manner.”

(Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009, p.1)

There are a various amount of steps in pursuing this type of analysis. Zhang & Wildermuth presents eight general steps that begin with preparation of data. For me this involved transcribing four hours of interview recordings. With the fear of losing valuable details for the analysis, I went with a complete and literal transcript. Allowing any pauses or other audible behaviors to be noted, also not letting my own perception affect the data in such an early stage. The second step of a qualitative content analysis involves defining the unit of analysis, being the classification of the text. Defining the unit of analysis is one of the most fundamental decisions in a content analysis, as it can alter the final results as well as the ability to compare outcomes with other similar studies (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009). Throughout my semi-structured interviews various individual themes became apparent; therefor the themes became the unit for analysis in this study. The importance of developing categories and a coding manual for the process of content analysis is also emphasized by Zhang & Wildemuth (2009).

Steps 4-6 revolve around testing coding schemes, being flexible with adding new categories throughout the process and working with the data over and over again. Many details and patterns might be missed due to lack of persistence (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009). After reading through every transcript three times, actively making sense of the themes and categories, I developed a summarized overview of all the data. Lastly I finalized the themes of the qualitative content analysis, which is the further presented result of this paper. This part of the research is heavily dependent on my ability to reason and interpret the data. Luckily I have been deeply invested in YouTube for many years and can understand the perspectives of my respondents.

For the observations I used a less complex way of analyzing, as it mostly lead to mental notes about who my respondents were. This also provided an idea of how their respective YouTube channels operated. Diving into their video content resulted in finding patterns such as the most common video length for their videos. This told me whether or not they run by a particular format, or if they mostly improvise their way on YouTube. What happened to become one of the more important factors in these observations was the age of their channel. This is brought up later in this article. The analysis of the observations purely relied on my interpretation of their YouTube channels and served as a guiding introduction heading into the interviews.

4.4 Method Discussion

There is one problem with doing research on a new field that has not been deeply explored before. A qualitative study about YouTube producers is certainly a specific area of research. It will be difficult to know how valuable and applicable any result that this work manages to generate is. The general information and the insight about the lifestyle and process of running a YouTube channel is at least guaranteed. One important factor for the credibility of this work lies within my connection and relationship with my respondents. I have over the years built connections in the YouTube community through previous experiences and circumstances. My success in getting popular content creators to participate in this research was very dependent on them having heard my name before. Their willingness to get interviewed on this personal topic is a result of my previous contact with them. While having a background with respondents may be frowned upon, in this case it gave me the chance to retrieve the desired information for this research.

Everything from approaching my interviewees to executing the interviews was handled in a professional and scientific way in order to keep away any negative impact on the credibility of this study. Keeping the interviewees anonymous seemed to make it easier for them to share their more personal thoughts. Additionally I promised not to publicly spread the things they communicated, but only use it in the name of research (Vetenskapsrådet, 2002). It was made clear beforehand what the research was about and that it was up to my respondents to individually decide whether or not they would like to share their knowledge. Permission to record the interviews was given and how long it would take was in freedom of the interviewees as they could cancel their participation at any time.

Observations done on the YouTube channels provided an understanding and the opportunity to see patterns in the videos before going through with the interviews. The idea of this process was to make me prepared for any surprises the respondents might come with regarding their channel, and also understand how they overall handle their channels. Any questions about the channels that came up during the observations were documented. One thing to note is the difficulty of summarizing and understanding the content of an entire YouTube channel. Many aspects are bound to fall out of sight. Another issue with this process was the risk of my perception of the channels being inaccurate as I only analyzed smaller parts of their content. With hundreds of videos uploaded to each of these channels over the course of many years, it would take months to go through their entire history. The risk of me accidentally finding an inaccurate pattern in my respondents' behavior or in their videos could potentially have a negative effect on the interviews. Thankfully, in this particular study the end result of the interviews maintained positively affected by these observations.

As always when working with interviews and a qualitative method, a lot of focus is centered on the analysis of gathered data. Miles and Huberman (1994) mention the interpretative approach as a way of reading human and social activity as text. This is exactly what my research aims to do, which makes my understanding of the field and assembled information a very important factor towards the later discussion and conclusions part of this article. The same concept applies to my content analysis, where the themes and categories found are a result of my personal experience and understanding of the topic. The eight steps

provided by Zhang & Wildemuth (2009) really helped shape the data analysis in an accurate and productive way.

My results are compiled from five different interviews. The optimal scenario would have been if I never ran out of successful video creators to interview so that the saturation of the data would reach a more final state. In this project with five sources of information, only a slim sample of online success through YouTube is explored. Even though this study is arguably only scratching the surface, clear patterns and behaviors were found amongst the respondents. It serves as a foundation for qualitative research within this specific field of modern media entrepreneurs on YouTube.

5. Result

5.1 Observations

Any statistics gathered in this work is from the end of April 2015, and the assumptions made from this data are only relevant when connected to those numbers.

Channel A: Male, 21

Subscribers: 552,902

Views: 94,607,679

Videos: 623

First video: 7 Apr 2012

Video category: Gaming & animations



Content creator A has built an audience within the field of gaming videos, focusing mostly on the video game *Minecraft*⁶. Unlike most gaming channels on YouTube, the selling point of his videos lies within improvised comedy. Meaning that him and his friends create their own little skits and jokes within the video games. Besides playing video games with friends, he is also a very talented animator and scriptwriter. This has led to a lot of his most popular videos being short animated movies, most often ranging between 1-3 minutes long, with their own little story and very unique and humoristic, almost postmodern, approach. The rest of his content varies in time length quite a bit, with no videos longer than 15 minutes. Within the past year he has started to collaborate with other big YouTube channels in his animations, which has granted him a lot of exposure. This is due to those bigger audiences finding *channel A* through these collaborations. The animations he makes has resembling graphics to one of the world's most popular video games right now, which is *Minecraft* (Phillips, 2015). Hard work on YouTube has allowed *respondent A* to move to Los Angeles to pursue a full-time job. His experience and talent shown through his YouTube channel was attractive enough for a company to hire him.

⁶ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Minecraft>

Channel B: Male, 22
Subscribers: 756,086
Views: 108,997,087
Videos: 1175
First video: 12 June 2012
Video category: Gaming

B

Content creator B is my interviewee with by far the highest amount of videos uploaded. What is impressive about that is that every single one of them are completely user generated. Not only recording but editing gaming videos is a very time-consuming activity. His devotion to giving his audience a consistent flow of videos is partly what makes him stand out from the rest. Having an optimistic approach to every video makes it hard to find any bit of melancholy in his personality. Just like *channel A*, his content mainly consists of him playing different forms of Minecraft with his friends. But he also showcases new Minecraft mods, and most of all, does role-playing. He does the latter by setting up a fictional world within Minecraft, and role-plays as a specific character in a certain situation. Through a mixture of script and complete improvising, he tells an active story to his audience. These particular videos have gathered millions of views, just in the last couple of months. Something specific about *channel B* is that his gaming videos usually are up to 10 minutes long, when it is often stated how shorter videos generally are more popular (Minimatters, 2015). He also makes real life videos from time to time appealing even to the non-gaming audience and that could be the reason why he is my interviewee with the biggest following.

Channel C: Male, 35
Subscribers: 30,242
Views: 4,462,928
Videos: 739
First video: 4 Mar 2010
Video category: People & Education

C

Channel C is the lesser subscribed content creator of the five I approached, but he has managed to withhold a considerably large audience for almost five years. He has accomplished this with creative reoccurring series on his channel, as well as collaborating with both content creators and his own viewers. His videos aim to not only entertain but to educate, often within the field of language. Learning about words, phrases, lifestyle and culture connected to his native country is his focus. These videos tend to be shorter, often ranging between 1-4 minutes long. The overall approach to YouTube for *channel C* seems very casual and lighthearted, which is quite rare to see on YouTube these days with business slowly taking over. When he documents his life in vlogs the videos are usually longer, closer to 10 minutes and above.

Channel D: Male, 27
Subscribers: 543,699
Views: 100,621,716
Videos: 862
First video: 6 May 2009
Video category: Gaming

D

Channel D owns one of the first globally successful video game channels on YouTube. All of his hundreds of videos contain his life story scattered all over the content. Through video commentary⁷, comparable to radio shows or podcasts, he has shared his thoughts, personality and life events in video form for over five years. The gaming aspect of his channel comes through having footage from video games playing in the background while he is talking. This way of gaming video production became common and very popular around the year of 2010. By mainly focusing on First-Person Shooter video games, it has been important for him to perform well in the game he is showcasing in his videos. This is different as other channels often fully commit to entertaining through comedy in the video game, not necessarily having any expectations on the video game footage itself. *Channel D* has a highly interesting development of subscribers and viewers. He went from being one of the biggest and most well-known channels within gaming back in 2011 and 2012, to drastically losing viewership from there on out. With what seems to be a loss in interest and motivation towards making videos, his YouTube channel has gone from being at the top, to blending in with the rest. Many of his strong supporters have left his side stating in comments that he has changed and that his videos are getting boring. Why exactly all of this happened is unclear and it was a point of interest for me as a researcher. Throughout the 6 year history of his videos, the length of his content usually varies between 3-10 minutes.

Channel E: Male, 20
Subscribers: 292,774
Views: 32,405,100
Videos: 372
First video: 23 Nov 2012
Video category: Gaming news

E

A majority of YouTube channels aim to entertain in a comedic sense. *Content creator E* has a completely different approach. His channel partly serves as a news hub for a specific video game series where fans can gather and receive the latest information about the game. He also makes videos providing an in-depth understanding of the storyline and background of the game series, all without being partnered with the creators of the game. This edutainment inspired way of video production is rather unique on the website. Through talking about his speculations and thought-provoking topics surrounding the game his followers get so invested that they have no problem watching his often 10 minute long videos. However to

⁷A gaming commentary contains video footage from a game, and a voice track playing simultaneously from the creator who talks about various topics.

keep up with the high frequency of uploading videos he happens to make videos ranging from being only 1 minute, to being 30 minutes long. Popular YouTube channels are in most cases an individual effort. *Channel E* is today different in the sense that it has become a small collective of people providing knowledge, news and content about a specific video game. The creator has expanded his initial channel focusing on only one video game, to creating an entire organization making additional YouTube channels for various other video games. This efficient format of videos has proven to rally in millions of monthly viewers and this is clearly being acknowledged by the founder. YouTube *channel E* has many similarities to traditional gossip and news shows that we are used to seeing, except it focuses on video games. It is also the youngest channel out of my respondents, but still has almost 300,000 subscribers.

5.2 The YouTubers' Perspective

Asking questions and talking to these five YouTube experts lead to data within four compressed themes. All of which contain ideas and opinions from their individual perspective on YouTube. Some quotes are chosen to illustrate this data. Listing these thoughts side by side can generate further understanding and appreciation for establishment on YouTube.

5.2.1 YouTube in general

According to the different voices of the respondents, YouTube is defined in various ways. It can be anything from a unique social media for sharing videos on demand, to a career choice similar to any other entrepreneurship. *Channel E* compares YouTube to an ecosystem similar to the functionality of a lake. This concept will be further investigated later. Some of the interviewees state how YouTube has changed over time from what it once was. There is a noticeable difference in attitude towards YouTube depending on who is speaking.

"YouTube is a video sharing platform where content creators try to appeal to a whole new younger demographic, the millennials, whether it be through gaming, skits or pretty much any type of interest." Channel A

"I think YouTube was a gathering point. It was larger than life, where you could get connections and make funny videos. But now I sometimes see it as a chore. I have liked it more in the past, before people started trying so hard to gain an audience." Channel D

Video entertainment has grown into one of the main activities for internet users. YouTube is a huge reason for this, even being the third most visited website in the world (Alexa, 2015). There are many reasons for YouTube's popularity, but *channel A* suggests the fact that YouTube was one of the first video streaming platforms and thus got a head start. They were there at the right time, in the early days of the internet, before anyone else. YouTube provides people with the service and freedom of being able to upload almost anything they want to the internet. *Channel C* explains how no path, genre or interest goes excluded on YouTube; it is a place for everyone.

"Nobody realized they needed YouTube until it came around. There was not anything else at the time." Channel B

“YouTube was something so different and of course it was bought by Google, and anything that Google touches turns into gold.” Channel E

“The people who make these videos have gotten better at making entertainment and therefore can compete with traditional media such as TV and radio. YouTube has pushed away radio completely in my country.” Channel C

Even though YouTube has grown to become essential in many people’s lives, the majority of the population and societies with internet access seems to not know what it is. *Channel B* argues that the older generation does not understand it. YouTube means nothing to the public according to *channel D*. It is simply a site for funny and inspiring videos like so many other places on the internet.

“Our generation sees YouTube as the now. We can’t live without YouTube; everything is on YouTube now like music and even your favourite TV shows.” Channel C

And out of all the millions of people that actually do know what YouTube is, a majority of them lack the knowledge to truly understand the potential of it. Running a YouTube channel and making videos can be a way of earning money. The views generated by these creators translate into monthly earnings, similar to any other job. According to my respondents this concept has yet to be commonly known.

“I believe people think it is not a lot of work. That you just say some things and boom- there is a million dollars. But in reality you wake up every day trying to figure out how you are going to adapt to a changing environment of content where everyone is trying to beat each other. To figure out new trends and being able to figure out a good way to push your YouTube channel and get views is extremely difficult.” Channel A

“People around me are very jealous of the job I have, because with YouTube you pick your own hours. It really is a dream job.” Channel E

The widespread of success on YouTube has affected the common approach to the entire platform. People see others succeed and they want similar achievements. One very often mentioned word in the interviews respectively is *saturation*. Videos on YouTube used to be scarcely spread amongst the various genres of content, but today a huge saturation has swarmed the YouTube video fields. There are thousands of individuals running channels, creating very identical content, making it harder than ever to stand out. This competition affects the newly started channels more than the ones already established. *Channel D* means that he would definitely not have become successful if he started out on YouTube today.

“Now that more and more people are doing YouTube, it has become difficult to be relevant. I mean when I started I was basically alone.” Channel C

“At the time, Minecraft animations were not as popular or saturated as they are now, and I was able to sort of get my reputation and following by doing these new type of videos.” Channel A

“You cannot just upload anything these days, because so many people are doing it. You need to stand out. Showing off your personality is key in this. Variety also helps and for me that means making not just gaming but also real life videos.” Channel B

Connected to this notion of YouTube being over-saturated is the metaphor of YouTube being an ecosystem. Both *channel D* and *E* mentions this in the interviews. The platform has a maximum capacity and that it is now filled to the brim. Many people starting out on YouTube dream about something they might never achieve, says *channel D*.

“They start by looking at PewDiePie and think that they want to be like him, instead of aiming towards doing something fun. It is somehow an ecosystem. When I started everyone had an equal chance to grow big. In the beginning everyone could become PewDiePie. But today it is done, it is settled. The ecosystem is finished. PewDiePie and everyone else have already taken that spot. It is now difficult to make a name for oneself.” Channel D

However, *channel D* also argues that it is never impossible to break through and become the next big YouTube channel. Only that it is much more difficult and new measures have to be taken to get there these days.

“If PewDiePie starts today, there is no guarantee that he becomes the biggest.” Channel D

A reoccurring theme in the interviews was the idea that content creators have changed their approach to YouTube over the years. How it used to be all about the social aspect and had nothing to do with money. Compared to today where all people talk about is the potential revenue and fame that is accessible through having a popular YouTube channel. The strategic part of YouTube did not exist back when *channel D* started.

“I was never actively looking for an audience. It was all about a social medium, it had nothing to do with money or becoming famous. YouTube changed a lot when ads and networks came into the picture. Now it is a lot about being famous. I know a lot of people that are very popular but do not love making videos. They feel like they have to because it is their job. And that is what makes it problematic, that people do things that are popular instead of things that they enjoy.” Channel C

“I got conflicted with YouTube when people started putting their fame before making entertaining videos. I started because it was fun and if I am going to continue I have to find joy in it. I think my viewers enjoy the videos the most when I, the creator, am having fun in them.” Channel D

Content creator D goes on to say how he is jealous of the business oriented people that can pursue YouTube fully as a job. For my other respondents the strategic aspects came naturally to them and are considered a part of YouTube. They even thrive on these types of things and have gained most of their audience through a competitive and strategic mindset. It is necessary to have this kind of approach to even stay relevant, otherwise your channel gets too far behind. *Channel A* explains how it is all about the chase, basically trying to gain as many

loyal viewers and subscribers as possible. Similar to how bodybuilders want to gain as much muscle as possible by any means necessary.

5.2.2 Becoming a YouTuber

A big majority of YouTube users only consume video content rather than produce it. My respondents have various ideas regarding watching other peoples YouTube videos. *Channel B* explains that YouTube is so appealing because it is accessible everywhere and that the younger generation generally watch everything online for that reason. Watching the YouTube videos that close friends produce has always been a priority for *channel C*. It becomes a way of catching up about how and what they are doing in life. There are a few things that make *channel E* avoid almost all user generated content.

“I like to listen to my music on YouTube, and I also watch politics, global news and some viral videos. But there is no particular YouTuber that I watch. For me as a content creator it kind of makes me anxious seeing other people being successful as it makes me want to be successful and I get all riled up. I prefer avoiding that and try to not get affected.” Channel E

Something that is commonly understood amongst anyone who has spent time with video production is that it is time-consuming. To keep up any sort of consistency of uploads to a YouTube channel will require a high level of dedication. There are both benefits and drawbacks from committing to a YouTube channel. *Channel A* describes the reward of *making it*, that feeling of success, comfort and money through doing something that you love. It also requires being willing to pay the cost of one’s social life, possibly a school degree and home life. To share ones heart and soul in videos can be risky in the sense of online haters. Developing thick skin is a necessity. *Channel B* means that the opportunities he has gotten because of his YouTube channel are a big rewarding factor. This involves travelling, friendships and contacts that can significantly help your future career and dreams. Setting out with the goal to succeed is not the best idea according to *channel C*:

“If you are doing YouTube as a hobby, then keep it a hobby. In the best cases you can get opportunities to build it from being a hobby to it being your job.” Channel C

“If you are one of those people who want to go on an entrepreneurship path then you have the flexibility to do so. And there is no ceiling on how much you can make and it is just constant growth. You can get demoted at a job, but you can really only be promoted on YouTube. If your views start going down it is no one’s fault but your own.” Channel E

Working towards growing a YouTube channel can lead to life-altering opportunities for an individual. Using YouTube from a professional company’s point of view is also very powerful. *Channel C* states that showing and sharing products or whatever your company is doing, in video format, is highly beneficial. Many years of hard work on YouTube having this potential outcome was completely unknown a few years back, which meant none of my respondents set out with the idea of success. What got them started was a unified and obvious interest for video production. The inspiration to even get the idea of uploading videos to the internet

often has a source. For *channel C* it came naturally as he had been documenting his own life long before YouTube existed and only saw it as a hub for sharing this documentation with friends and family. His love for a specific video game lead *channel A* to experience his first bit of online video exposure. He explains that experiencing the initial attention his first videos received made him feel so good that he just wanted to continue. The most common statement regarding my respondents early days of online video is how bad they were at it. Like with everything else, it takes time and effort to get good and YouTube is no different.

“I never thought about making money or what I was doing. I did not use my Twitter, no Facebook fanpage, I had nothing but the fact that I loved doing it.”
Channel D

“The first video game news video I made led to me growing 17 subscribers and to be completely frank, I knew I was onto something and decided to see where it would take me. Within 30 days of this I had 60 whole subscribers and I was beyond excited.” *Channel E*

To find out what type of videos works well is very difficult. As an individual you only have so many interests that you can engage in through video making. Finding an audience for that particular category of videos is also not always easy. It is beneficial to choose a more commonly popular genre, such as videos about a certain video game or the very common YouTube genre of make-up videos. This search for a content creator’s genre and style is an important process that is essential to the future of any YouTube channel’s prosperity. Although this depends on the intentions of the content creator, most people do not upload YouTube videos aiming for stardom, and then the choice of genre matters less. *Channel D* argues that the niche and direction a channel takes is automatic, that it is all about pressing that record button and simply start making videos. As long as the video making is kept fun, it will be easier to settle for a certain type and format that works well.

“You have got to find something that no one else has done, see if it does well and then take advantage of it. Just jump on that train as hard as you can.” *Channel B*

“Eventually I realized that the video game my channel was based on is kind of a dying game. It is not going to get me anywhere on YouTube and Minecraft is the number one game right now. I also really enjoyed Minecraft at the time, so I started uploading videos of that instead.” *Channel A*

“I started off as a traditional vlogger who only showed what I was doing. But as soon as I do not enjoy making my videos anymore, then I have stopped with a certain series. For me YouTube is two things; it is creative and it is social and sometimes even affirming a sense of self-worth.” *Channel C*

One of the more desperate measures to find a style on YouTube was made by *channel E*. After developing a channel for about a year he had reached 85,000 subscribers but he was far from satisfied. The revenue was disappointing to him and he had committed his entire life to this channel. As the results were not living up to his dreams, he quit the channel; completely stopping the video uploads to it. This was a unique decision to make and came out of

personal reasons. All of which to pursue a new channel, where he would embrace the lessons previously learnt and create something new and truly great. This risky maneuver paid off in this case and became the start of a successful journey.

“I stopped at the 85,000 subscribed channel that I worked on for a year and then I started from scratch. But two and a half years later and here I am at 300,000.” Channel E

There are important things to think about when a style is determined and an audience start to gather around that video concept a channel is going by. *Channel A* explains how Minecraft videos are so common on YouTube that shaping them in a unique fashion is essential. He does this by following trends and understanding what people are culturally catching on to. Evolving the content to the next level is a main ingredient for channel E as well. Simply making news videos about a video game is becoming more and more regular on YouTube. His recipe involves obtaining a deeper level of knowledge about the game series, far above the audience and his competition. From there he can speculate and add an interesting perspective to his video game news that people find interesting and latch on to.

Today all of my respondents either work full-time as a YouTube creator, or simply uses it to enhance their career. But when starting off these privileges were not available. Many distractions stood in their way, hindering them from investing the amount of time they desired into YouTube. The age of content creators' normally means that they are occupied by school and studies which becomes an interruption. *Channel D* says that having to juggle school, a job and a relationship was too hard when investing so much into YouTube. Sacrifices have to be made in order to keep up with the YouTube ecosystem.

“Because YouTube has always been fun to me I have always had time for it. I was even studying back then, and working with freelancing. Only this most recent year is the first time I have had employment, and it has been more difficult to find the time. In the beginning no one had a strict schedule for uploading videos like today. It was okay to be sporadic with the uploads.” Channel C

In order to get away from these distractions, further commitment was necessary for many of the interviewees. Choosing to drop out of college eventually became the decision coming out for *channel A*. He was not enjoying his studies and the potential in his YouTube channel started becoming clearer. It came down to a decision and a risk he was willing to take. *Channel B* pursued his university degree, but YouTube became his full time job as soon as he finished.

“My channel was not even doing that well at the time. I was getting about a million views a month, and in terms of YouTube money that translates anywhere from like a thousand to two thousand dollars a month. Now that is not a living by any means. So to take the risk to move in with some friends to do YouTube for a living it was definitely an interesting decision. Luckily my parents are supportive which made it all a little bit easier for me.” Channel A

“I had this idea for a Minecraft series and it just insanely blew up back in 2013. That grew my channel from 40,000 to 100,000 subscribers in just two weeks. It was at that point I thought that I had to start taking YouTube seriously.”
Channel B

5.2.3 Strategy on YouTube

Many years back the idea of YouTube fame was rare and not as attainable. As time went on and significant amounts of money became a reason to do YouTube, the overall approach took a turn. Figuring out the best ways to shape a channel, all the aspects of being original and captivating new viewers to a loyal audience has become important. My respondents have different thoughts about this new strategic era of YouTube, as it benefits some more than others. A business oriented mind certainly helps. Many straight forward approaches towards gaining subscribers are mentioned by *channel A*. Having a charismatic personality and being an entertainer is one of the most powerful tools a YouTuber can have. The often mentioned originality in the sense of what video content is offered compared to what is out there, is very important. *Channel A* talks about the earlier mentioned choice of style, as in his case a popular video game, helps out tremendously. Minecraft in particular is so efficient because there is a massive movement amongst younger users on YouTube. Kids in the ages between 5 and 13 are prominently more active on the internet today than they have previously been according to *channel B*. Mobile platforms and a more generous availability of computers and the internet in our homes allows for this demographic to entertain themselves by watching YouTube videos. Within this particular age gap the video game Minecraft is also globally popular, which leads to a huge audience drawn to that category of videos.

“It is important for me to create my own style. It makes my channel more unique and fun, rather than just being a copy of some other channel.” Channel B

“Some videos just create a buzz, something you talk about. There are a lot of good videos that do not make it anywhere. It is about creating videos that are share-able, which is key to all success on YouTube. You want to create a desire in the viewer to share the video.” Channel C

There are of course many other reasons for YouTube popularity that are much more elusive. Sometimes an unexpected opportunity or happening appears out of pure coincidence. A motivating code to live by that helps persist and never stop trying has changed *channel E*'s advancement on YouTube. A majority of *channel A*'s new subscribers in the past year has come from making collaborations with bigger channels. There can be many difficulties with getting in contact with other YouTubers but he found a way. Building relations and connections can truly help you climb the YouTube ladder.

“I had to go through quite a bit in order to put myself in an area where other YouTubers are at. My friend told me that I could submit an animation to a big organization that uploads user created videos in exchange for money and promotion. I thought this sounded great. They saw my video and were interested in me making a video for them. Eventually I got added in their Facebook group which was the same area as other YouTubers were at and that

really helped. I was able to meet not only some of my current friends, but some big YouTubers through that. And that was definitely how I was able to sort of get going with collaborations.” Channel A

Having a likeable personality is useful in almost any career choice, but the importance of it is enhanced on a public medium such as YouTube. The core of YouTube is video sharing and one of the many beauties of video production is the ability to edit and adjust the result to one’s liking. This opens up for the notion of creating a character, a persona representing a YouTube channel rather than an honest replica of the person running it. Creating a character is confirmed by *channel D* who used to act a certain way in his videos and say the things his audience wanted to hear. The other side of the spectrum is creators who focus on being themselves and entertaining thereafter. Maintaining a genuine and nice image is what *channel B* is aiming for.

“When I think of my videos I think of trying to portray myself how I am, and my channel is my personality. I do not want it to be a different character. I guess I just want to be myself in my videos and appeal to people that are interested in watching me for me.” Channel A

“You started talking a certain way and found your own thing that people thought was funny. And then keeping that up for a few years and people started having expectations for who I was. It is funny to me that people tell me I have changed from who I was 5 years ago. Oh really? Everyone changes. I said what they wanted to hear.” Channel D

Alongside the personality and character that is presented on a YouTube channel comes the face. The visual aspect of recognizing a person, an individual, becomes a tool for exposure as well. Using external social mediums such as Twitter and Instagram has helped *channel B* get his own face out there in pictures. So when he started making real life videos his face did not come as a surprise. There are many in-depth things like this that these YouTube content creators actually think about, the face of a channel being one of them.

“There is one thing that makes a brand a brand and it is a face. Even though I wanted my channel and organization to be a faceless organization, I realized that was not really possible. People follow who they like, why should anybody care about the video game news we share if I do not personally show that I care.” Channel E

Becoming accomplished or successful in something is often something to be proud of. Generally people who get rewarded suggest that they deserve it because of the effort they put in to get it. This also applies to the interviewees to some extent. *Channel D* would like to see himself as pretty good at what he does, but there is always that uncontrollable luck-factor. Sometimes doing all the right things on YouTube and producing great video content is just not enough. Certain aspects of YouTube require various amounts of luck according to my respondents. Breaking through as a YouTuber and making it is a very tough thing to do according to *channel A*, and a lot of luck is required to do so. The lucky timing of starting out

in the early days of the YouTube phenomenon helped *channel D*, as it is considered much harder to become popular today.

“The biggest thing for your video is if it pops up in other peoples video suggestions. After watching that video the viewers might go click your video. That is not something you as a YouTuber can control, no one can control that, it is just luck. You just have to hope that the video pops up. Because a lot of my viewers are not from subscribers, and that is because of video suggestions.”
Channel B

“The series which is the foundation for where I am at today was pure coincidence. Of course it was lucky that I chose to do it. I know people that are extremely talented at what they do, but have not gotten that breakthrough. So luck is needed.” Channel C

“I would have to say if you are in the right place at the right time you have got a better chance, but I really would not call it luck. I would call it more like, strategy, I suppose. There was nobody doing the same thing that I was doing. It is about snatching the opportunity to fill that gap before anyone else does.”
Channel E

Any traditional media production is generally made for a specific target group. Some YouTubers take this into account more than others when they make their video content. With a younger audience through Minecraft videos, it becomes important for *channel B* to make his content child friendly. However being a grown up entertainer he still acts and jokes about things that his teenage viewers can relate to as well. His goal is to make his channel universally entertaining, a potential place for everyone. Because of the character that *channel D* applied to his video making, he naturally grew a younger and mainly male based audience. Although a slightly accidental target group, he noticed who his viewers were and acted accordingly.

“My target group would be console gaming. I immediately assume everyone has the console and I try to coordinate that with what I do. My channel is obviously very niched.” Channel E

YouTube conveniently has a tool for directly figuring out who it is that are watching a channel's videos. The analytics tool is used very differently between the various content creators. All of its functions can seem overwhelming and unnecessary for some, while it is a helpful tool of adjusting a YouTube channel to perfection for others. Reading statistics about how the viewers are interacting with video content has improved *channel B* significantly. The analytics tool also shows the monthly estimated earnings for a YouTube channel. Money is a sensitive topic and for both *channel A* and *C* this is a discouraging factor that tends to keep them away from using the analytics tool. However using the statistics can be a way of finding a higher monetization, *channel A* explains. At one point he analyzed his viewer retention in order to find a way to earn more money from his YouTube channel. Viewer retention means how big of a percentage that a viewer watches from a video, if they click away immediately or stay and watch the entire thing. Maintaining a high percentage of viewer retention is

supposedly a way of earning more money. *Channel D* is absolutely against the idea of reading statistics in order to improve a YouTube channel. He thinks it takes away the essence of YouTube which is fun and friendly video sharing. Nonetheless, the analytics tool is proven to have a powerful impact on strategic content creators' YouTube channels.

"I definitely know how long each video needs to specifically be. I know when to put annotations and when not to. I know what kind of videos do well, what kind of videos do not, that I should just drop from the channel. Just kind of optimizing the content like that." Channel B

"I use the analytics tool all the time. It has definitely helped me. I use it in a way to capture viewer retention. Top 10-videos are glorious as everyone wants to know what the number one thing is. The lure, as I would like to call it. I have studied this for quite a while; viewer retention is what makes the dough on YouTube. The more you are able to get to the point faster, it is not even necessarily just the two minute video rule where everyone says make a two minute video and make it really high quality and fast. That used to work; it does not anymore because the YouTube algorithm has changed. It used to be about having many views on short videos, but not anymore. It is now about how long you can make your viewers watch the video." Channel E

The analytical and business oriented approach has really benefited certain creators on YouTube. Channels such as *channel D* receive the bad end of the stick in this new transition. He admits that his lack of strategy has led to him losing momentum with his YouTube channel and thus being left trailing behind.

"There are so many people abusing the system, uploading Minecraft videos for views and they often do not even think it is a good time." Channel D

Success on YouTube becoming more dependent on business is good for someone like *channel E* that sees YouTube as a strategy game and loves getting invested in strategy.

"I think that when I started I knew so little and none of us knew what we were doing, so the people who started YouTube after us are the experts." Channel D

My respondents confirm that online branding and branding in general is a big part of running a YouTube channel these days. Branding involves everything from the image of the channel, catchphrases to any quirky original gimmicks that are used to stand out. *Channel B* means that any reoccurring, silly aspects of a YouTube channel provide a huge sense of belonging amongst the audience. The importance of these unique inside jokes and the overall image of a YouTube channel is a concept only realized this past year by *channel A*. Spontaneously mentioning a thing in a video that the viewers' found funny and catch on to can lead to many things. It is common that these branding points become merchandise that the content creators start selling. *Channel A* and *B* both actively sell t-shirts with their gimmicks on them, and their audience love it.

"Having a brand feels nice. Because I feel like I have a business. And it is small baby steps into the real world, but I guess this is the real world now but when you first start off you do not really see it coming. I started calling the cows in

Minecraft a certain thing and thought it was a fun name. And then you go down the road you realize you can just brand that.” Channel B

“I think about my brand when I am selling it to companies and such. Then I can snap into that mode and talk about this and stats on YouTube. But the things I used to say in my videos that became my brand, now I would rather stop saying it. My viewers have an expectation for how I start my videos and now I sometimes just want to start my videos with something normal.” Channel D

“Within our organization we have a few video production templates for transitions, lower thirds, for logos and stuff like that. But we have been changing the look of our brand every six months and I just want to pick something that is better and stick with it.” Channel E

“It is very important to have a brand. So if you have a familiar consistency that people recognize and connect to your channel, they will know that it is you. If you completely change that brand, then it gets strange, it gets unfamiliar and people will not hold on. They might not even like your channel that much anymore.” Channel B

In our modern day and age the internet is globally covered with many different social media. YouTube is only one of many websites that offer this social service. For a content creator, there are many useful assets to using additional platforms to enhance one’s YouTube channel. One use for external social mediums is sharing and promoting the actual videos that get uploaded to the YouTube channel. To be a follower or fan purely of a certain Twitter, Instagram or Facebook fan page is also possible. *Channel A* tries to accomplish this by creating original content for the various platforms respectively. This is so that the audience does not have to witness the same content over and over, but actually have a reason to follow the other pages as well.

“You have many different social platforms and they are used in different ways depending on how they are constructed. I get a lot more interaction from my Facebook than YouTube because it is built for that type of correspondence.” Channel C

“I just cannot get into Instagram. But Twitter and Facebook, I nail those. I put out content; I am very interactive on Twitter. I think that makes a lot of people feel at home. Really Twitter, Facebook and YouTube is our little pyramid of gold right there.” Channel E

Keeping a steady flow of content and linking between the different platforms is what *channel E* is talking about. Other than branding the YouTube channel itself, there are more and more opportunities for content creators to involve sponsorships and external brand deals into their channel. It is becoming more commonly known that a powerful way of advertising is through these personalities online that can easily influence their followers of thousands. *Channel A* explains that from time to time companies reach out to him with a deal and it is similar for many content creators. Usually this entails the YouTubers saying something about the product or service in one or more of their videos and linking the company’s website in the

description of the video. Description being an editable information box connected to every YouTube video. This behavior can be seen more and more throughout the YouTube landscape. *Channel B* even went as far as hiring a manager to take care of contracts and fixing sponsors for him.

“I have done so many deals, every video outside of my main series is payed. Almost everything. I have probably done 100 campaigns and made a decent amount of money on that.” Channel D

Almost no one enjoys watching advertisement and being sold products they did not ask for. Maintaining a positive image while selling a product is a tough balance for any YouTuber. *Channel C* means that it is right to apply brand deals to your YouTube channel if it does not negatively affect the video content. Similar statements were made by *channel B* who thinks brand deals are a good thing as long as the priority is to entertain. The way *channel D* sees it is that it does not hurt anyone to quickly share a brand in a video, but how it sometimes backfires in the form of negative comments. By producing video content in certain genres, products are a necessity for the video to even happen, sponsored or not. *Channel C* goes on to explain how content creators in the makeup and fashion industry have a much easier time selling a brand as it is a completely natural part of the process to involve products. This applies to video gamers too in the sense that prominent YouTubers such as PewDiePie has a huge influence on the industry because of the game he is playing. He playing a game in a video becomes free advertising for that particular game as millions are going to watch his video. He once even made the older game *Skate 3* go back into production and the charts of video game stores through his major impact (Dring, 2014).

“I think what is interesting about the YouTube audience is that you can kind of sell out and people will still watch you. I do not know any YouTuber that has gotten ruined by selling out honestly. But I would say 90-95% of my videos are not sponsored. Generally what I do is that I maybe talk about it in the beginning or in the end of the video, and the rest of the video continues like any other.” Channel A

“Me as well as other similar channels could have sold millions of copies of the video game that we support. The reviews, walkthroughs, I mean just look at all the games PewDiePie have made famous.” Channel E

“Going through with a brand deal for a product that I genuinely enjoy and think is good makes it much easier.” Channel D

Many opportunities and sponsorships for YouTube creators come from being part of a network. This works negatively towards the people who avoid networks, such as *channel C* who is not signed to any network at all. For this reason he has not been able to get many brand deals at all. This does not seem to bother him as he does not look at his YouTube channel in terms of expanding or growing an audience, but simply as a creative forge. There are hundreds of different networks out there that are trying to get video content creators to

apply for their services. This is seen as a problem on YouTube, but these communities that get built surrounding some of the popular networks has its benefits.

“It seems like networks have taken advantage of a lot of partners and a lot of people are getting screwed and what sucks is that you have got to know what you are doing before you actually, professionally, try to get into it.” Channel E

“There are many benefits of joining a network, but it depends on which network you choose. In some networks you might get to know a lot of the big and popular and might get to do a collaboration with them.” Channel C

5.2.4 Being successful on YouTube

So what is it like to make YouTube videos for a living? Is it the dream job that everyone is talking about? Like any other career choice there are both positive and negative aspects of it. Both *channel A* and *B* talks about how YouTube never leaves their mind, that it is a constant journey towards pleasing an audience. Even vacation becomes filled with YouTube and there is no such thing as a weekend off. Weekends mean the highest viewership because people are at home those days. After pursuing such an intense lifestyle for a longer time it gets exhausting. Some days it even becomes hard to motivate oneself to record a video, says *channel E*. Every content creator seems to have their own way of finding motivation to keep going. Finding new things to do and adding different types of content helps *channel D* to find his energy. *Channel C* has a similar approach, aiming to renew himself often and only do things that he finds joy in. Taking some days off is important to *channel E* and he also feels a lot of pressure from having a large following that expects videos from him.

“Now that I got such a huge following I want to make sure that they are happy. And so, it is a win-win for everybody for me to keep doing YouTube.” Channel B

For people who manage to break through on YouTube there are almost endless opportunities presented. Dreams of becoming a film director working in Los Angeles has been a lifelong dream for *channel B*, and he is now able to pursue that dream because of his YouTube channel. The ability to work from any point in the world with internet access really makes YouTube a versatile job. As previously mentioned *channel A* also received offers coming from Los Angeles which has become a hub for YouTubers alongside the traditional media celebrities of Hollywood. Conventions and events all around the world often desire profiles and personalities to visit and content creators often become the target for these types of offers, especially through the networks they work for. *Channel C* considers YouTube a hobby and the opportunities gained are just a bonus on the side.

“YouTube can be a fantastic opportunity, if you are really good at something, or have a big interest for something really specific, then you can become the best within that. I know about a girl near where I live who was interested and made videos about hockey, and now she is an official reporter broadcasting since two years back.” Channel C

“I am travelling the world now, I am moving to L.A. because of YouTube. I got so many business contacts, and I have gotten so many friends from it. Honestly, it is just an adventure I do not see stopping for a very long time.” Channel B

There are many positive vibes coming out of these successful YouTubers and they seem very content with their lives. For some these blessings are not enough, *channel E* eagerly wants to continue the growth of his channel. He argues that being satisfied is a bad thing. An overall feeling of being proud overwhelms *channel B*, he cannot almost believe how far he has gotten and aims to just continue what he is doing as it is working very well for him.

“I am never satisfied. It is always about the chase, always trying to work towards something. I want to create and come up with new ideas or figure out how to push my channel into a new era of content. I mean eventually I hope to use this YouTube popularity to start my own business down the line.” Channel A

Most of the respondents have big dreams for their future, and YouTube is certainly helping them get there. Even though *channel D* has lost a big part of his motivation to continue YouTube, it has been a rewarding experience and lead to his resume being able to get him any social media related job he asks for. Making a living through playing video games is however something he wants to hold on to so *channel D* has taken his remaining YouTube popularity and shifted his time into Twitch.tv⁸. It is a video streaming website for gamers where he has found a new audience that supports him. Sometimes switching medium is a clever decision as all platforms are not made for everyone. After years of investment into YouTube, *channel C* is looking towards becoming a YouTube expert, giving talks about the phenomenon and his perspective.

“I could not imagine a better thing to be doing than YouTube. Film is something very difficult to get into, and that is the ultimate goal for me. Being able to use the money that I receive from this and eventually make movies with it.” Channel E

It becomes very clear that YouTube has changed these young men’s lives. For *channel E* YouTube granted a way to find his passion. There are even more rewards than just allowing these content creators to visit places, meeting people and earning money. Having a prosperous YouTube channel can do things like boost an individual’s confidence, says *channel A, B* and *D*. Their life’s story starts to really revolve around the internet web page that is YouTube.

“I more often talk with people I know through YouTube than with the ones that do not do YouTube. When we got married we had seven guests that I had gotten to know through YouTube. I like to say that I have 3 couches or beds in every state in USA. And after a global collaboration project I did last year, that applies globally.” Channel B

“It makes me really proud to say that the organization I started has led to more people getting to have what I have. One of our members was able to quit his job and work full time on videos for one of our channels. And that is a really good feeling. It has not only changed my life, it has started to change someone else’s within the same organization.” Channel E

⁸ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Twitch.tv>

With all the talk about an ecosystem and the difficulty of building an audience in today's YouTube climate, it can seem discouraging to even begin the climb. My respondents have a few ideas of what it might take to succeed and possibly achieve something similar to what they have. Following trends with certain types of videos and making videos related to topics that are commonly discussed at that time is a good way of reaching new viewers, says *channel A*. *Channel D* takes that to the next level with the idea of figuring out the trends before they arrive, and through that finding a personal niche that you enjoy. It can be dangerous to start off with the mindset of making money according to *channel E*, as the highest priority needs to be learning how to entertain people through video production. Clearly, becoming popular on YouTube is not something that happens overnight. These content creators have been working hard for years now and that long process needs to be taken into account when starting up a new channel.

"Sometimes you can see in a video that a person does not want to be making the video, so I think to be successful you need to show the audience that you are passionate about what you are doing. Having a good time is the most important part, as people like seeing that. I think that is a big reason why I am where I am today." Channel C

"For YouTube, simplicity is everything. With simplicity also comes one of the great secrets of YouTube. It is a 3 word recipe. Do. Not. Quit. Amount of subscribers or view count does not matter. I mean it is obviously a lot more complicated. But in order to be successful on YouTube no matter what genre, whatever kind of video you make, you just cannot quit. I have seen this so many times with channels having potential. With persistence you are going to be able to learn a lot of different things while you are on your adventure of YouTube." Channel E

6. Analysis and Discussion

It would seem like humanity has always been interested in documenting our lives and our progress, even going back to the age of cave paintings. A very noticeable increase in documentation through film can be seen ever since the video camera became accessible for private use. This video culture has in recent days transitioned online with YouTube leading the way. YouTube is now over ten years old, which is plenty of time for an online culture to establish (Burgess & Green, 2013). What started off as a place for sharing family recordings has transitioned into being an alternative entrepreneurship. Seeing how serious these content creators are about their YouTube channels indicates a shift in video behavior. People around the world attempt to recreate and experience what they have, filling up the ecosystem of YouTube accordingly. The individuals maintaining an effortless and infrequent approach to YouTube have a tough time building an audience and subsequently making money off of YouTube. These previously uncertain notions were confirmed by my respondents in how they talk about their channels.

“A lot of people do not describe YouTube as an entrepreneurship path when really, it is. You have got to grind, you have got to keep learning. I think a lot of people came to accept this and think that they cannot do it so they never get into it. Maybe it is good that they do not get into it because right now YouTube is already over-saturated.” Channel E

One part of business is branding and even though *channel C* and *D* claims to avoid most strategies related to YouTube, they get stuck with a brand nevertheless. The videos a YouTube channel produces becomes what the subscribed viewer start to expect from that channel. Altering a channel’s brand, the type of content or completely shifting a personality becomes problematic when building a relationship with the viewers. The negative consequences of this became *channel D’s* reality. After a few years he could not withstand frequently creating the same type of content. His YouTube persona was eventually not an accurate representation of himself and it all became difficult for him. He simply changed and grew up as a person. This tells us that the brand and image of a YouTube channel is a powerful but fragile asset for content creators. Seeing unnatural excitement and loud reactions to things that happen in for example a video game is normal on YouTube, most often it is a way of entertaining. *Channel A* means that sometimes showing a more genuine and humane side helps build the bond with the audience. He wants to be able to entertain while at the same time being relatable as a person to the viewers.

As far as I knew before this study, the Analytics Tool was considered a function to see funny and sometimes unnecessary statistics. I thought that it possibly had some use in complicated calculations in the name of research. After picking the brains of full-time content creators it turns out the Analytics Tool has almost unlimited potential for optimizing a YouTube channel’s video content. It provides the option to try new things and seeing numbers on how that impacts the channel. A common difficulty on YouTube is making people watch longer videos, as those type of videos have a history of receiving less viewership. Reading statistics allowed *channel B* to understand that longer videos with high percentage of viewer retention translates into better monetization. From that knowledge he was able to come up with a video format of storytelling in video games that received both views and high revenue. Similar findings were made by *channel A* and *E*. The Analytics Tool should not be underestimated and a completely new qualitative research would be required to cover all of its possibilities.

The popularity of videos online can depend on many different things. It is proven that well produced videos appeal to a broader audience and are frequently more popular on YouTube (Figueiredo et al., 2014). *Channel A* confirms this as he talks about having quality content and being especially good at what you do.

“If someone else out there is making similar videos to yours, you find a way to do it better.” Channel A

Like with all other things, becoming good takes effort. *Channel B* who almost has one million subscribers today shares how he started out on YouTube:

“I really liked watching videos at first, and got inspired to make my own channel to try it out. And I was really rubbish at it when I started off, but you

grow and learn from the experience. You learn from your past, from every video. Then it got to the point where people really liked it and people would subscribe, and I have been doing that for a couple of years now.” Channel B

The step-by-step processes by Gahan (2015) and Martell (2014) that were presented earlier both had ideas that my respondents agreed with. Martell insists that a YouTube channel is taken seriously like any other sustainable job. This is of course if the intentions are to grow the channel and eventually make a living off of it. The importance and understanding of statistics is also something that has been elevated to a whole new level in this work and seems to be a really helpful tool for building a YouTube channel. Usage of other social mediums in conjunction with YouTube is yet another tool that provides a positive effect (Martell, 2014). To those terms, many similarities are found in the behavior amongst the successful content creators I interviewed. All of the three steps Gahan (2015) talks about are known indicators of success by my respondents. Especially collaborating which is something essential for *channel A*, his most popular animations are based on other content creators participating.

There are valuable lessons to be learnt even from the way that YouTube became popular as a website. By being early with their service in a relatively empty market, they got their advantage against the competition. It would be basically impossible for a brand new video sharing platform to take YouTube’s place. This seems to have become a common pattern in development in our modern day and age. Reaching the goal first, or in this case the market, seems to have gotten a whole new meaning. However, there are exceptions. Even though the saying about reinventing the wheel has a negative flare to it, many YouTubers copy each other and make it work. There are thousands of YouTube gaming channels focused around Minecraft videos, but it does not stop them from being original and gaining online popularity. After all YouTube is about personality and we all grow up learning how every individual is unique. For a person with no history of uploading videos to YouTube, the knowledge about the ecosystem that my respondents bring up becomes highly relevant. Even though *channel D* states that the YouTube ecosystem is settled, there are still ways to find loop holes that lead to success. After all, the YouTube industry is always changing and following trends can be difficult even for the already established creators. *Channel E* even goes as far as saying that persistence in making videos will always produce a great channel.

The current understanding of what YouTube is does not last forever. Five years ago YouTube was simply a social platform and a video community for people who wanted to share a fraction of their life with the world. It has transformed since then and developed into something so much more. What was once a hobby for any genre can now be turned into a respectable and desirable occupation. This drastic cultural advancement of online opportunity is changing our connection with people all around the world. So the question is, will YouTube remain this way or possibly keep heading in the same direction? Or maybe even go back to what YouTube once was as *channel C* and *D* seems to prefer it. We simply do not know what the future has in store for modern media. Seeing as the content creators interviewed in this research are in the early stages of their careers and already getting so much out of YouTube, one can only assume that this is only the beginning.

So much changes from year to year and more people are being able to live off of their YouTube channels. One could speculate that pioneers such as *channel E* and his organization

are setting the standards for what is expected. This turns a YouTube channel into a team effort, working together in a smaller collective to produce higher quality content more frequently. There are many examples of promising collaborative channels out there, even amongst the top 10 most subscribed YouTube channels. However, someone like PewDiePie who is setting every record on YouTube has done it all by himself. Every single one of his 2,300 videos are recorded and edited by himself. This goes back to how being relatable and humane can give a channel a great reputation. To summarize, understanding the YouTube climate is a constant process of evaluation and consideration.

“YouTube is about sticking the finger in the air and figuring out where the wind is heading.” Channel D

How the YouTube phenomenon will be defined in another five or ten years is very unpredictable, which opens up for a heavy amount of future research on this topic. Explaining YouTube will always be relevant, as it is changing lives daily. This qualitative study will forever stay relevant in the sense that it helps define what YouTube has been so far and what it currently is.

7. Conclusion

We who go through life working regular jobs can often wonder what it would be like to make a living off of what we truly love doing. A new perspective of success is gained from this research and it not only teaches us what having that is like, but also how it can be achieved.

The content creators interviewed in this study show us the endless **opportunities** that can come with an established YouTube channel. It can provide everything from personal growth of confidence to moving into big cities to pursue dreams. Being a YouTuber has become a luxurious career option. Having a returning audience big enough to make a living off of YouTube has many benefits. One is working every single day from the comfort of home, having no boss or unpleasant working hours. It is a level **freedom** that not a lot of people get to experience in their lives. These modern day online personalities who work their butts off deserve to be classified as digital entrepreneurs (Nyberg, 2012).

The essence of YouTube revolves around sharing your hobbies and interests in video format. YouTube provides the ability for people to turn their innermost passions into a **source of income**, no matter how obscure the genre might be. These categories include playing video games, teaching fashion, and now even the food phenomenon of *Muk-bang*. The trend of *Muk-bang* videos is coming from Korea and it entails nothing but simply eating food on camera (Evans, 2015). YouTube has an audience for everything and this gives room for unconventional trends that we are not used to seeing.

Building a YouTube channel can be a heavy **investment** of life. Constantly creating videos with the hopes of gaining a following can be tough. Most YouTubers seem to not be able to withstand this intense lifestyle as it can completely consume their time and energy. It is clear that finding personal sources of motivation are necessary in the long-lasting chase for YouTube popularity. The battle of YouTube never ends as the platform and people are constantly changing. A lack of ability to adapt to the culture can lead to a channels **risk of losing** all of its momentum and subsequently losing its subscribers.

By this research we learned about certain factors that tend to lead towards growth for YouTube channels. Considering the over-saturated ecosystem of online video content, it is important to find and predict undiscovered trends and styles of videos to bring **originality** to a channel. According to the YouTube experts of this research the reason for investing time into a channel is important. Starting off making videos need to be all about learning and enjoying the process. It takes years to establish a channel in almost every case on YouTube. So by **never quitting** and aiming to always improve significantly increases the chances of expanding a YouTube channel. YouTube is a media platform with content by people, for people. It is deeply beneficial to connect on a humane level by **showing passion** for the investment one has towards a YouTube channel. With many content creators focusing on following trends, they forget to withhold a genuine liking for what they do. Viewers hold onto these values and prefer honest and relatable personalities.

The age of YouTube has allowed for many points of change in how the platform works. A natural thought for a long time was that the internet was a place for information and entertainment. Not a way of business strategy and building online popularity. In this research we come across two YouTubers who have been making videos for over five years. They both admit that they **cannot keep up** with the competitive side of the website and they even prefer the older days of YouTube. What used to be a social place for meeting people and sharing video with each other has become something different. The remaining respondents of this study have during the past few years developed an entire **business** plan around YouTube and are now living their dream lives because of it. They even go as far as figuring out the algorithms of YouTube to reach new viewers. By this we can see a trend of possible shift in the YouTube ecosystem where some of the older channels are being replaced by newer ones. The channels that find it difficult to adapt to this strategic environment of making money, are facing a much higher level of competition today than a few years back. YouTube used to be a place for everyone to upload videos, but the previous slogan of *Broadcast Yourself*⁹ has even been removed from the logo. It is thus more difficult today than ever for new users to establish a YouTube channel.

⁹ <http://logos.wikia.com/wiki/YouTube>

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Appendix 1

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS:

1. YouTube in general

How would you define YouTube?

Why do you think YouTube is so popular???

How much time do you spend watching videos on YouTube?

What are some pros and cons about investing time into building a YouTube channel?

What do you think is the general understanding/opinion about YouTube & YouTubers in our society?

2. Your YouTube-career: The beginning

How come you started uploading videos on YouTube to begin with?

What type of videos were you making back then?

What was your opinion of your channel back then?

How did you find your style/type of videos that lead you to where you are today?

Were there any things in your life back then, that distracted you from investing a lot of time into making YouTube videos?

3. Your YouTube-career: To build a Channel

*Did your channel and the videos you've made come from a specific idea you had early on?
Or has it just happened to grow into what it is today?*

What are some essential things you've done that has lead to the growth of your channel?

Would you say you have a target group for your videos?

Tell me about how you use the *Analytics tool*. Do you use it at all?

What do you think makes your YouTube channel stand out from the rest? *Why are you relevant?*

How much luck would you say is involved in your success?

4. Online Branding

What are your thoughts on your channel being an "Online Brand"? Your style of videos, catchphrases, your face etc...

Are there any complications that come with all these expectations for *who you are* and what you upload?

Tell me about how you use your other social media accounts to build your *brand* and also benefit your YouTube channel.

5. Sponsorships & external offers

What is your experience with sponsorships regarding your YouTube channel?

1. Your connection with YouTube today

It's been 3+ years of running this YouTube channel –do you ever get tired of it?

How much time do you spend on your YouTube channel on a daily basis?

Talk to me about how you feel about your channel right now. Are you satisfied with what you've accomplished, and where you're at?

What do you see your own YouTube channel as? Work? Hobby?

Could you please explain to me the impact YouTube has had on your life.

Tell me about your dream future with YouTube. Where do you see yourself in 5 years from now?

What would you want to be doing if you didn't have YouTube?

2. YouTube success in general

What do you think is key towards having a more successful YouTube channel in 2015?