

INFO-608 – 001 Human Computer Interaction

IND-01: User Research Report 1

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Analysis: YouTube

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Introduction

In the age of information and communication YouTube.com has become one of the most popular websites on the internet since its beginning in 2005. It is a widely used video streaming and sharing platform with 2 billion monthly users as of March 2019. The website allows users to upload videos and search for videos based on keywords using the Google search engine. Since its inception YouTube has advanced its functionalities to allow users to subscribe to other users, interact with their content by liking, sharing or commenting on videos, maintain their own library of videos and find videos that match the user's taste by providing recommendations based on the user's interaction on the website. YouTube claims that their "mission is to give everyone a voice and show them the world". This makes YouTube a platform open to anybody with access to internet regardless of age, nationality, race or gender.

This report will analyze the value YouTube holds and the way the website is used by two different users. The analysis will be performed based on face-to-face interviews designed to investigate the contrast in the way YouTube is perceived and operated by users with different needs. The goal is to understand and discuss what makes the users similar or different in terms of the way they experience the website and if the design of the website accommodates their priorities.

Methodology

In order to gain insight into how YouTube is used differently, it was important to first specify two different user groups. This was a challenge mainly because YouTube is used by a wide range of people whose purposes and interests intersect making them very similar. It is a general assumption that everyone goes to YouTube to watch videos and post videos no matter how old they are, where they are from, what they do or what language they speak. But it was assumed that someone who intends to upload videos to YouTube regularly would use the website slightly differently compared to someone who visits the website with the intention of just watching videos to pass time and those users may also be different from users who are on the website looking for gameplay videos most of the time. And so, three different user groups were recognized – content creators, pass-time watchers and gamers. Although this report will focus on analyzing content creators and pass-time watchers.

To find a content creator and a pass-time watcher to interview, multiple casual conversations were held with different people with different backgrounds. The conversations involved asking if they use YouTube at all, what they use YouTube for and how often they use it. These questions were asked to determine if the person has interacted with the website enough times to have the most basic understanding of the platform and see if they fall into any of the two user groups selected for this analysis. While content creators were rare, pass-time watchers were quite common, although, most of them were of similar age to the interviewer and had similar backgrounds and interests. These users were eliminated because they would might not present a new perception and may provide predictable answers and insights. For the purposes of a non-biased analysis it was important to interview someone who falls in a fairly different demographic and so a 15 years old female user was selected. This user will be referred to as user1.

User2 is a 25-year-old male musician who has numerous videos and subscribers on YouTube. He was recognized because of his frequent activity on the website and has a very different background compared to the teenage girl which would allow the interviewer to identify contrasting use of YouTube.

After the 2 users were identified, the interview was designed with 46 questions initially. But it was caught that some questions were leading questions and some may demand repetitive answers. These were questions like “what do you usually watch on YouTube” and “what are your 3 favorite categories of videos to watch on YouTube”. It was also assumed that 47 questions may make the interview longer than 30 minutes resulting in the user losing interest and providing less details towards the end of the interview in order to finish quickly. This led to elimination of 10 questions bringing the total number of questions down to 37. To push the interviewee to provide insightful answers and minimize just a “yes” or a “no” answer most questions were designed to start with a “how”, “what” or “when”. The questions were created to gain five main insights – who the user is, what is the user’s conceptual model of YouTube, what is the user’s purpose and need from the website, how the user uses the website and what other options the user has. It was tricky to set up one set of questions that could be answered by users from both user groups because some questions may not apply to both. An example is a question like “what do you like and dislike about the analytics feature”. While someone who has uploaded a video on YouTube may be able to answer that question, someone who never has may have no idea what YouTube Analytics is. And for the purpose of comparison it was important to ask the same questions to the two users while also determining the knowledge gap between the users. That is why questions that only applied to one user were minimized but not completely eliminated. An example of such a question is “Have you used YouTube Studio?”. Even if a person has not used it, this may trigger them to think about a time they navigated to it and found it intimidating. That sort of answer would help in the analysis.

During the interview, leading questions were minimized and the interviewer refrained from pushing the interviewee to think about too much details so that they don’t over-analyze the question and provide a response that may not be true and just be composed at the time for the sake of a “good answer”. One of the major learning from this interview process was that the personality of the interviewee matters. User1 was a little shy during the interview and so it was hard to get her to speak too much or provide details whereas user2 had an extrovert personality and so he was quite responsive. It may also be because of the age and profession of each user. The interview was voice recorded and later transcribed leaving out any off-topic conversations. The questions and their answers were then re-organized and allocated to one of the five insights to prepare them for analysis.

Analysis

Knowing the user

Questions 1 to 7 are designed to understand who the user is. The interview starts with asking how old they are, what they do, what are their hobbies and what are the 3 most important things in their lives. User1 – the 15-year-old high school girl likes to read, write and play piano whereas user2 – the musician likes to DJ, explore new music, watch Netflix and play video games. Clearly the 2 users are creative individuals and share a love for music. But user2 uses his time consuming more forms of media and entertainment than user1 who reads books instead and writes stories possibly because of restrictions by parents. The question “what are 3 things that are really important to you” was asked to get an idea of the user’s priorities in life. Both the user’s answers reflect an importance for family and profession but user2 prioritizes music specifically a form of media that is widely served on YouTube. The users were then asked about how many multimedia devices they use and user2’s response was somewhat expected. He uses over 8 different gadgets including his iPhone, iPad, laptop, apple watch, kindle, smart TV and Xbox! All of which have the capability to stream YouTube except the apple watch. User1 on the other hand only has an iPhone and occasionally has access to her father’s laptop for homework. This is an important difference to note between the 2 users. Being able to afford so many devices also says something about the financial position and freedom of user2. But having a single device does not necessarily mean user1 is unable to afford other devices. It maybe because she is financially dependent on her parents, her purchases are moderated and she may not be fond of too many gadgets. Although her most used website is YouTube versus the musicians being Facebook. Again, age and parental restriction is most likely the reason for this. Even though both Facebook and YouTube require users to be at least 13 years old to open an account, Parents are usually more concerned about their children being exposed to strangers on Facebook than YouTube. The age restriction feature and the variety of children’s content on YouTube can make parents feel safe about their children accessing the platform. User1 started using YouTube when she was about 7 or 8 years old on her father’s laptop whereas user2 started using it at 14 or 15 years. This shows a difference between the 2 generations. The 25-year-old gained access to the website a lot later than the 15-year-old probably also because YouTube was not yet created when user2 was as young as user1.

Understanding user’s conceptual model

Questions 8 and 9 aimed at analyzing how the users think about YouTube. The users were asked what YouTube is to them and how they would describe the idea of YouTube to an alien! Both the users had different answers. User2 said it was “very important” for him since he shares his music through the platform, learns new things and find out what’s going on in the world whereas user1 claimed that it’s a platform where she can see videos from other creators. She said she would describe it as a place where she can see other people’s hobbies and find people that share the same interest as her. She simply views it as somewhere people can share and find matching interests and hobbies. User2 described the website with a little more depth and from a comical but philosophical perspective claiming that it is a website “where you can go and watch people being people”. He views it as a stage where humans showcase their strengths and weaknesses and that an alien can find out what is good and bad about humans

through YouTube. It was a very interesting way to look at the website. From both their answers it seemed that although their way of describing was different, they looked at it from a similar perspective – a website that allows humans to display and share what they can do.

Analysis of user's purpose and need

The interview continued to discuss what the users use YouTube for. Questions 10-16 was designed to understand why and when they need the website. Both the users use it to learn something. While user1 uses it to understand educational concepts, user2 uses it to learn music production. They use the website to get inspired about their interests like fashion, music and gadgets. User2 also uses the platform to share his music and connect with his fans. He thinks YouTube has had a great impact in his life because without it, he wouldn't have been able to reach out to his listeners and showcase his art to the rest of the world. He claims to be a self-taught musician who learnt most of his skills through YouTube. User1 said that the platform helped her do well in school and learn new skills. She is on it 2-3 hours a day usually and loves that she can watch something really quickly and learn something rather than having to research a lot.

The main difference that was identified between user1 and user2 was that user1 uses the website when she is bored or when she needs to understand something for school. But user2 spends a lot of time on the website to upload videos and interact with his fans and not just when he is bored. This separates user2 from being just a pass-time. He loves the platform because it gives him a voice and makes him feel close to his listeners. While they both hate YouTube ads, user2 explained that he also hates that his videos get taken down for copyright claims. His interaction with the website does not just end at watching videos but as a content creator he has to face other difficulties that may not be realized by a user like user1.

Analysis of the user's use of YouTube

It was found that there are a few similarities but many differences in the way the two users use the features and functionalities of the website through questions 17 to 34. User1 uses her smart phone to access the website most of the time whereas user2 uses his laptop. The laptop makes more sense for user2 because he is a heavy user and not all the functionalities that he may need exist on the mobile platform. When asked about what feature they use the most, user1 replied that for her it was the subscribe feature. Her use of YouTube is very focused and driven by the content creator that she follows. For user2 it was the search feature. His YouTube experience is driven by his own curiosity and does not care much about the contents of the individual creators even though he himself is one.

Both of them use the trending feature the least. User1 said that she does not care about what is popular but rather her interest is towards what fits her taste. The trending feature has categories such as music, fashion, news and games. It was unexpected that the two users would use this feature the least because stereotypically, teenagers are usually into popular culture and user2 being a musician would have benefited from a trending music section to discover new music. Their description of the feature that was most complicated differed largely. For user1, it was changing her profile picture. She has to go to her google account and change her profile picture there in order to change it on YouTube. Being a mobile user changing a profile

picture can be a little time consuming considering that most websites allow users to simply change their pictures by clicking on the profile icon. On YouTube mobile a user has to redirect to their google account and change the picture there.

Upon discussing the features, they find the most complicated, user2 found the analytics section more complicated. The analytics section allows a user with a channel to get insightful analytics such as what countries their videos were viewed in, how many hours they were played and what percentage of them were male and female. Being a content creator, it made sense that user2's pain would be in areas more advanced than user1. The content creator also found it annoying that YouTube was so specific about video formats and aspect ratio. He complained that when uploading videos, if the format is not right it can change the quality of the video and audio completely and he has to reupload the video all over again. User1 on the other hand did not think there was any other feature that was annoying to use other than the ads. This difference again separated the 2 users as basic and advanced. User1 one's purpose of watching videos out of boredom and user2's purpose of sharing videos and expressing his work make them experience different kinds of pain when interacting with the website. The way they pick their videos to watch is also very different. User1 usually selects videos from the homepage because she claims that they fit her taste and sometimes she doesn't know what to watch so she scrolls through the unlimited content until she finds a thumbnail and a title that sounds interesting to watch. She also spends a lot of time watching recommended videos from the side of the player. User2 hardly watches the videos on the homepage. He usually searches what he needs and picks one from the first few results based on the number of views and the title. He also hardly watches the recommended videos. This difference is an indicator that the bored user has more time and so can afford to explore around the website without a specific goal in mind while the content creator being a young professional does not have too much time to consume what is offered on the homepage and recommendation. He usually uses the website with a very specific goal to either find information about something or share his talent.

They were then asked questions such as if it matters if they are signed or signed out when they are watching videos or if they interact with other videos by subscribing to them or linking and commenting on them. Surprisingly user2 does not interact with other videos as much. He said he rarely clicks the like button and hardly subscribes to channels but he responds to comments on his own channel. Being a content creator, it was expected that he would have interactions with other creators on YouTube. But turns out that he does not use the platform as a way to communicate with other creators at all. User2 subscribes to channels that fit her taste but she does not like, comment or subscribe either. It also does not matter to her whether she is signed in or signed out while watching a video unless she wants to save something whereas user2 prefers to be logged in so that he can quickly access his own channel. This was expected considering user1's passive attitude towards the website and user2's active usage.

User1 has also never uploaded a video and had no idea what YouTube studio is while user2 uploads new videos whenever he has one and is an active user of YouTube studio - a dashboard that allows content creators to manage their content. Even though it was expected that someone who does not upload videos may not have used YouTube studio, it was still a surprise that she was not aware of it given that the studio can be navigated to so easily from the website. When asked about what they would change about the website, user2 responded by saying that he would limit organizations from having too much influence on YouTube. He

believes that the platform now promotes too much content from organizations and he would like to see more content from individual users. User1 said she would not change anything. This is natural since user2 experiences the website from a content creator's perspective and has opinions that would not be relatable by user1.

Other Options

Finally, the users were asked if they would replace YouTube with TV to which user1 responded that she does not watch TV but would prefer to choose her own content when she is watching which is how most of the new generation now thinks. User2 said he would replace Netflix with live TV but compare YouTube because it's more of a search engine for videos than an alternative for live TV. Their concept and use of YouTube justify this answer as one watches videos from recommendations and the other searches for videos he wants to watch. None of them have used twitch before which was surprising given that they both play video games but user1 has used Dailymotion before and user2 has used Vimeo but uses Facebook to watch videos on the regular.

Conclusion

Throughout the interview and the analysis process, it was visible that users do not all think about a website the same way or use it with the same purpose even if the features remain the same for all. The purpose and the concept make a huge difference in the way the website is interacted with. A content creator may have more knowledge about the features but is not necessarily as active on YouTube as one may expect. At the same time a teenager is not as keen about popular videos, drama and music as stereotypically expected. Gender and age play a big role on the interaction as well. While one looks for fashion and anime, the other looks for documentaries and tech reviews. While one uses one device, the other uses eight. But since the interview was conducted for only 2 people it will not be fair to generalize that all 25-year-old male musicians follow the same trait as user2 or all 15-year-old pass-time watchers follow the same traits as user1. To come to a more concrete conclusion and find more solid patterns for the user groups it is crucial to expand the number of subjects being studied.

Appendices

1. Interview with User 1 (Female Pass-time viewer)

Understanding User

1. How old are you?
15
2. What do you do?
I am a freshman in high-school
3. What's your hobby?
I like reading, writing stories and playing the piano
4. What are 3 things that are really important to you?
Family friends and school

5. What multimedia devices do you use?
My iPhone. I use my dad's laptop to do homework. Sometimes I use my brother's PlayStation that's probably it.
6. What's your most used website?
Probably YouTube
7. How long have you been using YouTube?
A few years, I was 7 or 8 and my dad would let me watch YouTube on his phone or laptop.

Understanding User's conceptual model

8. What is YouTube to you?
It's a platform where I can see the videos that other creators put out
9. How would you describe YouTube to an alien?
It's a platform I can use to see other people's hobbies and also find other interests of mine. So if I'm into fashion I can go on it to get tips and inspiration about fashion.

Understanding User's need and purpose

10. What do you use it for?
Mostly if I don't understand something in school, music videos, fashion or game play videos.
11. What are 3 categories of videos you watch the most?
Fashion, anime and things for school
12. How often are you on YouTube?
Usually 2-3 hours a day. I have school and homework and tutor on the weekdays so I am not on it as much unless I need something for school. Ut on the weekends I am on it a lot.
13. When do you go on YouTube?
When I'm bored and don't have anything better to do or when I get a notification from a YouTuber I subscribed to. Sometimes when my friends come over we watch makeup videos and try to do those haha. I also watch it when I'm eating.
14. What do you love about it?
I like that it has short videos and I can watch something quickly to get an idea.
15. What do you hate about it?
The ads.
16. How has YouTube impacted your life?
It's helped me a lot with homework and learn new skills and know about random things. Like sometimes I just need to understand something quickly and don't have time to read or research so I'll look it up on YouTube.

Understanding how the user uses YouTube

17. Do you use it more on the phone or laptop?
Phone
18. What feature do you use the most?
The subscribe, I think. Also, I save a lot of videos to show my friends or just to keep a collection of make-up ideas.

19. What feature do you use the least?
I think the trending tab because I don't really care about what's trending I just want to see what I like and what matches my taste.
20. What is the most complicated feature?
It's very hard to change my name and profile picture sometimes. Like you have to go and change it on your google account but I just wanna change it on YouTube!
21. What feature do you find most annoying to use?
Nothing really. Its quite easy to use. Oh, the ads! I hate ads! Now they have more than one ad!
22. How do you choose which video to watch?
I look at the thumbnail and the title and also the creator. But creator doesn't matter all the time. I just watch what sounds interesting.
23. Do you usually search for videos or watch what's on the home page?
Watch what's on the homepage. Because the homepage has videos that fit my taste. I also do search but sometimes I don't know what to search so I just keep scrolling through the homepage.
24. Do you usually find what you're looking for?
Yes.
25. How often do you watch the recommended videos?
More often than I would like to. I end up spending hours watching those.
26. What would you change about the website?
Nothing that I can think of I think they do a great job in terms of usability
27. Do you have an account?
Yes
28. Does it matter if you're signed in or signed out?
No. But if I really like something and I wanna save it or subscribe to it I have to sign in.
29. Do you subscribe to channels often?
Yes
30. Do you interact with the videos? Share, like, comment, subscribe?
No, I just subscribe. But even to subscribe I first see what other videos the channel has and if I find many videos that match my taste, I'll do it.
31. Do you upload videos? If so, how often?
No. never have.
32. Do you have subscribers?
No (cries)
33. Are you aware that you can make money on YouTube?
Yes, but I know it's really hard because there is so much competition.
34. Have you used YouTube studio?
No what's that?

Understanding user's options

35. Would you replace it with live TV?
I don't watch TV ever so I don't know enough about it but I prefer to choose what I wanna watch if that's what you mean?

36. What other sites do you use instead of YouTube?
I have used dailymotion before but that's about it.
37. What do you think YouTube would look like in the future?
No idea

2. Interview with User 2 (Male Content Creator)

Understanding User

1. How old are you?
25
2. What do you do?
I make music and I also work as tech-support at a hospital.
3. What's your hobby?
DJing, finding new music, watching Netflix, playing Fifa?
4. What are 3 things that are really important to you?
Hmm. Music, my mom and success.
5. What multimedia devices do you use?
I have my phone, an ipad, laptop, apple watch, smart TV, Xbox, my musical gear. Oh, I have a kindle that I hardly use.
6. What's your most used website?
Facebook, I think.
7. How long have you been using YouTube?
Since I was 14/15 maybe?

Understanding User's conceptual model

8. What is YouTube to you?
It's very important. I share my music through it, learn new things, find out what's going on in the world.
9. How would you describe YouTube to an alien?
It is a website you can go and watch people being people. You will know what humans can do, their strengths, weaknesses, find out what's good what's bad and anything except seeing them naked hahaha.

Understanding User's need and purpose

10. What do you use it for?
To watch tutorials on music production, random videos, documentaries, sharing my music videos, interacting with my fans, watching reviews for gadgets, music videos, adventures, investing tips I can go on for hours man. Oh, I use it a lot at work to find how to troubleshoot computers or errors.
11. What are 3 categories of videos you watch the most?
Tutorials, documentaries and prank videos haha.
12. How often are you on YouTube?
A lot when I upload a video. Otherwise If not daily atleast a couple hours a week.
13. When do you go on YouTube?

When I am producing and don't know how to use a plug-in or need new ideas to create something different I see how other people are doing it. Sometimes from facebook if someone has posted an interesting video or I want to learn about a particular topic. Tutorials are big for me both at work and at music. I also get a lot of notifications about people commenting or liking my videos so I go to check those. When I'm uploading new videos I spend quite some time.

14. What do you love about it?

I love that it gives everyone a voice and you can be anywhere in the world but still feel that you are close to the people you're interacting with.

15. What do you hate about it?

Ads of course but also their copyright claims. They keep taking my DJing videos down for copyright violations. Obviously if I am DJing I'm playing other people's music! I think now they have an audio library that allows you to download copyright music but not useful for me.

16. How has YouTube impacted your life?

YouTube's played a big part in my life. Without it I wouldn't have gained the popularity I have today as a musician. It's opened a lot of doors for me as a creative artist and enabled me to be visually expressive. I don't think I would've been good at my art either without it coz I'm a self-taught musician and everything I know I've learned it from YouTube really. So, I owe YouTube quite a bit!

Understanding how the user uses YouTube

17. Do you use it more on the phone or laptop?

Laptop but I use phone too if I need to quickly look up something

18. What feature do you use the most?

The search feature

19. What feature do you use the least?

Probably the trending section.

20. What is the most complicated feature?

Sometimes the analytics section can be a little challenging.

21. What feature do you find most annoying to use?

Video formats and the aspect ratio of the videos. It requires conversions to upload videos that are not the exact size of the YouTube player and if the format is not right the video and audio can be changed.

22. How do you choose which video to watch?

I pick something from the first few results of the search that has a high number of views and the right title.

23. Do you usually search for videos or watch what's on the home page?

I usually search. Rarely watch a video from the homepage.

24. Do you usually find what you're looking for?

Yes.

25. How often do you watch the recommended videos?

Not so much unless the video I'm watching doesn't do the job.

26. What would you change about the website?

I think I would limit how much power companies have over YouTube. Because YouTube was made so creators could share their talents but now all these companies just pay YouTube to show their videos and its unfair to individual creators. I would want to find more videos from individual creators than companies.

27. Do you have an account?

Yes

28. Does it matter if you're signed in or signed out?

Yes. I prefer being logged in so I can access my channel quickly.

29. Do you subscribe to channels often?

Not that often.

30. Do you interact with the videos? Share, like, comment, subscribe?

I'll like it if its really good and even share it on Facebook. I respond to comments on my videos.

31. Do you upload videos? If so, how often?

Yes, whenever I have a new video out.

32. Do you have subscribers?

Yes

33. Are you aware that you can make money on YouTube?

Yes but now you need to have at least 1000 subscribers to monetize

34. Have you used YouTube studio?

Yes

Understanding user's options

35. Would you replace it with live TV?

I think I would replace Netflix with live TV but YouTube im not sure because its more of a search engine than a TV.

36. What other sites do you use instead of YouTube?

I use Facebook to watch random videos and even promote my music. Let's see Vimeo has super artsy videos but I'm never on it on the regular.

37. What do you think YouTube would look like in the future?

Were already in the future! They've expanded into music, live TV, premium and so many other stuff I don't know what they'll do next maybe VR videos? Wait they already have that! Damn bro!