

Abstract submitted to ECREA's 8th European Communication Conference, 2 to 5 October 2020, Braga, Portugal

Submission title:

"I learned that from YouTube." How Young Users Geek Out with User-Generated Video Tutorials

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Submitted to:

Children, youth and media Section

User-generated tutorials galore. Among young people, how-to-instructions and educational formats are highly popular. Thus, in recent surveys 21% of young German internet users (14 to 19 years) reported watching YouTube tutorials on various topics, from school to leisure, several times a week, while another 25% agreed that the platform had expanded their skills and knowledge (Feierabend et al., 2018; Jörissen, 2019). A Pew research study found that more than half of U.S. YouTube users rely on the service to figure out how to do things or understand things happening in the world (Smith et al., 2018).

Despite the apparent prominence of tutorials to geek out (Ito et al., 2009), we know little about why teenagers pick content and about their engagement with the videos provided. To address these shortcomings, our paper explores the selection criteria of adolescent users and their evaluation of the instructional offerings. We ask: What is guiding the choice of teenage YouTube users when it comes to educational content? How do they judge the quality of what they watch? How do they react to the instructions and explanations provided by the videos?

The paper provides answers to these questions with data from a survey of about 1.000 German pupils between 14 and 18 years. The questionnaire was available on tablets and distributed during class. The responses allow us to examine and statistically analyze digital learning practices in relation to topics of formal school education and vocational orientation as well as in terms of the more interest-based skills of leisure activities.

We find that while teen users frequently discuss tutorials with their friends and school peers, inspiration of what to watch next mostly stems from YouTube's video recommendation system as well as from other users with whom they come in touch in a discussion thread or commenting section on the platform or at some other online venue. Asked about their reliance on algorithmic suggestions and peer references, young users seem to trust both sources in pointing them to explanatory videos they find useful and 'likeable.' Despite all skepticism toward platforms, this trust in YouTube's technical performance and the social

proficiency of like-minded users gradually builds up along the extensive usage of the content provided.

Chief factors for judging the quality of videos were length, where short videos are largely preferred, clarity of presentation, and relevance of the information to the issue the users want to explore. In addition, our respondents also favored videos from creators with whom they sympathized. Their appreciation of content producers based on perceived personal concordance, which in turn rested on what they perceived to be a style of speaking and behaving they could connect to and that differed from their idea of a teacherly habitus.

More than half of the respondents said that they rarely or never spot mistakes. The majority agrees to have gained knowledge about school topics and extracurricular fields of interest. Moreover, they also declare that they have been inspired to try out new things from watching YouTube videos.