Exploring the Gender Divide on YouTube: An Analysis of the Creation and Reception of Vlogs

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This study analyzes short vlogs posted to YouTube in order to investigate how women and men communicate using vlogs and react as viewers to vlogs. Vlogs are visual texts that are user-generated. Analyzing online videos presents a new challenge for researchers: traditionally, analysis of visual media and communication focused on either the production or the reception of the material. Our vlog study uses a dual analytical approach to analyze both production and reception, while conducting content, visual and audience analysis, thus making a contribution to the field of new visual media and communication.

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Producing and sharing user-generated video, known as "video blogging," has recently become popular with millions of people. Video blogs, also known as "vlogs," are blogs created in video rather than textual form. Vlogs are a form of online publishing, allowing everyone with web access and simple video production tools – such as a computer and a webcam or a cell phone with video capabilities – to create and post content. Most vlogs are authored by individuals and focus on personal themes (Nardi, 2004; Schiano, 2004). Like blogs, vlogs are a user-generated form of online communication that serves as media for social commentary, alternative newscasts, creative outlets or personal online diaries. We chose YouTube as an obvious source of online videos and a potential user community. YouTube is currently the most popular online video website and hosts more videos than rival video sites (Trier, 2007). Video content on YouTube is diverse, but most YouTube videos are amateur videos that document the everyday lives of vloggers (Godwin-Jones, 2007).

This study analyzes short vlogs posted to YouTube in order to investigate how and why people communicate using vlogs, and how viewers react to vlogs. In particular we examine potential uses of user- generated video for women, and how women are creating vlogs and using YouTube. Analyzing online videos presents a new challenge for researchers: traditionally, analysis of visual media and communication focused on either the production or the reception by different actors. Our study's dual analytical approach thus makes a useful contribution to the field of new visual media and communication. Our initial findings reveal gender differences in both vlog creation and YouTube use.

Analyzing vlogs

Videos are complicated texts requiring careful analysis conducted via various methods. Even though visual analysis is complex and the results usually subjective, videos need to be examined because they are becoming increasingly important in contemporary culture. Videos can aid communication by increasing communication richness, empowering those who develop their own videos and encouraging identity formation among users. Users benefit because video channels allow them to communicate in a more natural way resembling face-to-face communication (Bruce, 1996). Video also facilitates the process of personal identification, allows for the reading of emotional expressions, aids with speech perception, and enables viewers to read gazes – signals that express intimacy and power (Bruce, 1996). Communication richness developed through video technologies could contribute to better (stronger and quicker) development of trust; however, there is insufficient research done in this area (Bekkering and Shim, 2006), and some research on YouTube videos suggest that the addition of the visual does not necessarily reduce antagonism (Lange, 2007a).

New technologies could potentially change traditional social and political hierarchies and transform the boundaries between the private and the public (Rakow and Navarro, 1993, Milliken et al, 2008). New technologies also create new spaces for interaction and participation. At the same time, however, such technologies serve to widen gaps to access. Marginalized or minority groups are especially vulnerable to this phenomenon. Communication technology could play a role in turning women's talk into voice but there are limitations (Sreberny, 2005). For example, women usually use technology in their jobs, and have used technology in the past – as typists or telephone operators; however, their work is done through mechanical systems and in for organizational goals. Work related technologies do not serve to create a voice for women

(Rakow and Wackwitz, 2004b). The term voice refers not just to the act of speaking but also to the means and ability to speak, to be heard and to affect social and political life. Rankow and Wackwitz suggest that with limited access women's voices are not being created by the new technology of the internet – that instead the internet is following earlier patterns of technology, whereby women's voices did not become reality (Rakow and Wackwitz, 2004).

Another concern with the visual representation of women is exploitative images that present women not as subjects but as objects for the male gaze (Blair and Takayoshi, 1999). The greater visual representation of women on the internet, for example, is not necessarily a sign of progress for women, as greater representation could mean greater exclusion. Regardless of what images are being portrayed, women without ideal bodies are rendered invisible (Nead, 1992). A clear example of this is the proliferation of the image of women in pornographic materials in magazines, on film and on the internet (Mulvey, 1989).

Although intervention is difficult, socially constructed meanings are neither fixed nor unalterable (Rakow and Wackwitz, 2004). Websites created by women for women, for example, are positive spaces where women can be represented as subjects rather than objects. Even though women themselves grapple with the subject/object dichotomy, there is a potential for women's roles to be reconstructed (Blair and Takayoshi, 1999). In user-generated video, women depicting themselves can be in control of their own representation. However, women bloggers face particular challenges- they are frequently objectified, threatened, and harassed (Lange, 2007b; Ratliff, 2007). Vlogging may hold similar challenges for women.

User-generated video on YouTube is just beginning to be examined by scholars. Little is known about who creates these videos, why they post them and who watches them (Croteau, 2007). Our research addresses these questions by building on three theoretical and analytical approaches. In order to examine who is vlogging, why and how, we use a content analysis approach. Visual analysis methods are then used to closely examine the content of four vlogs. Finally we conduct an audience analysis, looking not only at the number of views and text responses for vlogs on the YouTube site, but also at the responses to vlogs from a YouTube viewer study we conducted.

Research methodology
The research methods included a content and visual analysis of vlogs on YouTube and a study of YouTube users. Content analysis enables researchers to determine, through careful observation and analysis, the major themes in media content. We conducted our content analysis to explore who is vlogging, how audiences respond to vloggers and the influence of gender on these variables. Interpretations of vlogs change according to place, time and the audience; however visual messages have dominant meanings that provide interpretive boundaries for the decoding of messages (Hansen, 1998; Hall, 1999). Our visual analysis is based on dominant messages, while our audience research recognises that viewers are not passive recipients but can read visual messages in multiple ways (Livingston, 2003).

We conducted a content analysis on a random sample of YouTube vlogs. At the time of the study there was no obvious category on YouTube for vlogs so we conducted an initial search on YouTube using the term "blog" which returned more than 30,000 entries available for general

viewing. For our population we chose vlogs posted over a 15-day period, from October 6 to October 21, 2006. To enable comparison among potentially similar vlogs, vlogs longer than three minutes and non-English vlogs were excluded, leaving us with a population of 1,028 vlogs. Using a listing of random numbers (RAND, 2001) we randomly selected 100 numbers between 1 and 1,028 and selected the vlogs corresponding to these random numbers. The quantitative analysis conducted on this sample is accurate within a 90% confidence level and a 7.8% error level.

Since we were counting number of views for each vlog, we waited one month from the time of initial posting to the coding of the video. The vlogs and the profiles of the vloggers were coded for a number of variables, including gender, age, location, audience, message, motivation, technical quality (both audio and visual), and the number of views. Cohen's Kappa for these variables averaged .85.

The final aspect of the research was an audience analysis of vlogs. We collected data on the number of views of each of the vlogs within the random sample and the views and comments from the YouTube site on the four videos analyzed in greater detail. We also conducted a study of 60 participants who were YouTube users. These participants were recruited from a university in Atlantic Canada. The study was designed to include an equal number of males (30) and females (30). Participants viewed the four vlogs described above, in a random order presented in their questionnaire. The study participants completed a paper questionnaire comprised of demographic questions and a section for feedback on the video blogs. Participation took approximately 45 minutes and participants were given a $10 honorarium.

Research findings and discussion

Our research findings are presented according to the three different methodological and analytical approaches we used, described above. The results of the content analysis conducted on the random sample of our population and the findings from the visual analysis of four vlogs and audience analysis are discussed.

Content analysis – the vloggers

A content analysis of the characteristics of vloggers in our random sample revealed that the majority of vlogs featured a single participant. Men posted vlogs more than women – 58% to 33%; the gender of the vlogger could not be determined for the remaining 9%. When vlogs contained more than one participant, the majority of secondary participants were also male. Most vloggers, 61%, were adults ranging in age from 20 to 50 years, although about one-third, or 36%, were younger. The age of the vlogger could not be determined for 3% of the vlogs. The average age of the main vlog participant was 23 years. There was no great difference in the ages of men and women vloggers: the average age of men was 24, while the average age of women was 21.

These findings are not surprising; studies done on internet use in the U.S. show that college students, who have greater access to technology, are frequent internet video users. A 2007 PEW internet study indicates that young adults, ages 18-29 are the most avid viewers of online video in the United States (Madden, 2007).

Text information posted on the user profiles occasionally differed from that stated in the actual video blog. The most popular misreported information was age. The researchers found

four cases of vloggers posting on their profile a different age than they state in the video blog. In all four cases the vloggers were young women, ages 12, 14, 15 and 15, who reported their age in their profile as older than their actual age - 86, 22, 20 and 46.

Content analysis – the vlogs

For our analysis we coded each vlog into one of five categories that we created: personal, public, entertainment, YouTube, and technology. The categorization was based on the message of the video.

Personal vlogs offer viewers introductions to the vloggers' personal lives, provide updates on their lives, or act as home movies. Public vlogs report or discuss the news or politics, or offer social commentary. Entertainment vlogs consist of comedy routines, musical numbers, acted skits or dancing or a combination of these elements. YouTube vlogs are videos where people either ask questions for others to answer, respond to questions asked by other vloggers, or discuss other vlogs on YouTube. Technology vlogs either discuss technology or test out equipment.

Herring, et al, note in their study of blogs that more bloggers discussed personal matters than any other category (Herring, et al, 2004); similarly, almost 50% of the vlogs in our study were Personal vlogs. Just over one quarter of the vlogs was Entertainment vlogs, and almost 15% were YouTube vlogs. Public and technology vlogs were the least frequent type, making up 7% and 5% respectively.

Similar to findings of other research on the gender and subject matter of bloggers (Nowson and Oberlander, 2006; Lange, 2007b; Pedersen and Macafee, 2007, Herring et al, 2004) our study found that female vloggers are more likely to vlog about personal matters than male vloggers. More than 60% of the female-authored vlogs and less than half of the male-authored vlog (48%) were about personal themes. More men than women created "entertainment" themed vlogs. More men than women vlogged about public and technology related topics, and more women created vlogs that interacted with the YouTube community.

Content analysis - image and audio quality

The quality of the vlog did not differ by the gender of the vlogger. When coding for quality the researchers took a basic approach, coding for three categories (excellent, acceptable and poor) for the quality of the image and sound. Men and women vloggers scored very similar ratings across the board. The videos created by women vloggers had slightly better image quality, and slightly poorer sound quality than those created by men.

While most vlogs had acceptable video and sound quality, more videos were of poor quality than excellent. Common problems included the image and sound being out of sync and the background noise affecting the sound quality. Background noise included but was not limited to background music which played in 21% of the videos.

Just over half of the vlogs contained no editing at all. There was an average of four scenes, or camera takes, per vlog. Vlogs with entertainment and public content had more scenes than other subjects (five and six scenes, respectively). YouTube vlogs (described earlier) had the

least number of scenes, on average two per vlog, while vlogs containing personal information averaged three scenes. There was little difference in the average number of edits according to gender. Vlogs created by women averaged three edits, while men's vlogs had four.

More men than women created vlogs; however, when investigating the average age of the vlogger, the average number of edits, and the quality of the vlog the researchers found little difference between male and female vloggers.

Analysis of views of the vlogs
The number of viewings of vlogs varied considerably, from 0 to 163,345, with an average of 2,638 views and a median of 54 views. Only 9% of the vlogs had more than 1,000 views and 68% of the vlogs received 100 views or less. The number of editing cuts or scenes in vlogs was not related to the number of views. Subject matter and the gender of the vlogger were the two main factors related to number of views the video received.

Vlogs with a man as the only participant averaged 166 views, with a median of 35. Vlogs that featured a woman as the only character averaged a whopping 6,797 views, with a median of 75. It is important to note that women vloggers were almost twice as likely to post vlogs that interacted with the YouTube community, and these types of vlogs received the most viewer "hits."

Although videos under the subject heading "YouTube community" contained the least number of edits they have the highest viewing average, 7,878 views on average, with a median of 358 views. Vlogs containing personal information were the second highest viewed videos, averaging 3,870 views, and contained the second least amount of scene cuts. Entertainment and public vlogs were viewed an average of 444 and 213 times respectively. Technology vlogs were viewed the least, an average of 41 views.

Viewer response on the YouTube site to four vlogs
We selected four videos for our qualitative analysis and audience study. The four videos share many common characteristics. All were created by and feature young people in their teens to 20s. The vloggers did not indicate where they were from, although three of the four vloggers had North American accents, while the other sounded Australian. Their videos were all short vlogs, ranging from 2:00 to 2:53 minutes in length. The vloggers all gazed at the camera directly at the viewer for most of the time. In all four videos, the camera closely framed the individuals, showing only their faces and shoulders; it has been suggested that this video technique creates a personal intimate relationship between the viewer and the person on screen (Hansen, 1998).

In the first vlog, indoor female (IF), a young woman in a grey t-shirt with her blond hair tied back into a bun, sits at her computer desk. In the background the viewer can see her bed, the dresser on her right, framed pictures on the wall, the Phantom of the Opera curtain on her window, and bright pink walls illuminated by the lamp on her bedside table. She addresses her audience by announcing how busy she is with rehearsals and gives an update of the events in her life.

Link to vlog on YouTube:
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7htGWybRzLo&feature=PlayList&p=99E36BBA7E7CC17D&index=1

Similarly, in the second video, indoor male (IM), the vlogger presents his viewers with a brief update on his daily life. He states what he has been doing for the past week, mainly writing, as well as his plans for the next few days: going to the movie theatre, and taking his fiancé's dog to obedience class. Like the woman, he too is vlogging from his bedroom. He is lying down on his bed, addressing the camera. The furnishings in his room appear sparse in comparison to the woman's room. There are a few pictures arranged on the back wall of his room. Nothing is hung on the beige, concrete side wall. His room appears to be a university dorm room.

Link to vlog on YouTube:
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vH2oHbOVe8Y&feature=PlayList&p=6411FB47197D38CB&index=0

These two videos are fairly accurate representations of vlogs, which, for the most part, are filmed indoors, in a room in the vlogger's home. The framing of the shot, the subject matter as well as the location add to the intimate and personal nature of the vlog.

The other two vlogs are filmed outside, in cars. The woman, outdoor female (OF), is vlogging from a stationary car. She is lying down on the seat while occasionally peering at the camera lens, her long dark hair engulfing most of the view. The siding of a white house can be seen in the background. This is her first vlog and she introduces herself as a high-school student. She notes her favourite music and addresses a few of her online friends.

Link to vlog on YouTube:
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iTGgA61UxJY&feature=PlayList&p=E0A06E6C2EC42C81&index=1

In the final vlog, outdoor male (OM) is vlogging as he drives. He is dressed in a burgundy jacket and a backwards baseball cap. The camera is placed inside the steering wheel and moves occasionally while he drives. In his vlog he discusses an incident that happened to him while driving and comments on the lack of trust people have in one another. *Status of YouTube vlog set to "private" at time of publication.*

According to the user views and comments on the YouTube sites of these videos after one month, the vlogs created inside of cars received more attention that those filmed inside of bedrooms. OM was viewed 160 times, rated four out of five stars and received two positive viewer comments. OF was viewed 135 times and received a five star rating by one viewer and two text comments. One text comment was supportive and the other neutral. The two vlogs filmed inside bedrooms did not have either high levels of viewer-ship or comments. IF had more views than IM – 67 views compared to 26 – and one text comment on her appearance.

In our analysis of the four videos on the YouTube site, more people viewed the vlogs filmed in cars, with OM receiving the most "hits." Out of the two vlogs filmed inside IF was

viewed more times and commented on more often than IM. However, the analysis of the viewer responses and hits from the YouTube site is problematic. Traffic to the videos depends upon the number of the vlogger's regular viewers as well as viewers finding the video through searches. It is highly unlikely that these four videos were viewed by the same people; therefore the number of views and responses cannot give any clear indication of overall viewer preference according to either gender or location. To gain insight into viewer preference we conducted a YouTube viewer study.

Audience research: rating the four vlogs

In our YouTube study we asked participants to rate the four vlogs according to the YouTube star system - ratings from one to five, with five meaning "awesome!" There was little difference in the star ratings from participants according to their age or gender; however, the star rating given by participants in our YouTube study to male vloggers was higher than the star rating give to female vloggers, with a mean of 2.27 and 1.92 respectively. Overall IF was rated higher than OF. OM, however, was rated higher than IM filming in his bedroom. When asked to rank the four videos from one to four the majority of the participants ranked OM as number one.

Audience research: commenting on the four vlogs

Study participants not only assigned the vlogs star ratings and rankings but also were asked to write comments about the vlogs. While OM was ranked highest by the majority of participants, an analysis of the written comments by the study participants reveals that viewers felt ambivalent about the location. Some of the participants felt that the location made the vlog better; others felt it made it worse. One participant noted, "I'm not sure I like watching a guy try to make a video while driving a car." Other participants expressed enthusiasm towards the man's novel approach to vlogging and gave the vlog high star ratings and a higher rank. As one participant stated, the vlog of the man driving his car "… had an interesting point of view and literally, view-point (behind steering wheel)."

The written comments on the four vlogs were overwhelmingly negative (Table 1). Eighteen percent of the YouTube study participants were openly negative about video blogs in general, stating that "I do not care for video blogs," "I do not enjoy blogs and never watch them," and, "I find video blogs very boring and superficial." Many others, 55%, noted that they were not entertaining, writing "it was boring" and "I do not find blogs entertaining enless (sic) there's a good story involved or something to make me laugh." Fifty two percent of our participants rated the vlogs poorly because they did not know the person. Participants stated that the vlog "Doesn't really have a point without any background as to the individual or their video blog" and "Doesn't have much context not knowing what 'her story' is." One participant noted that the vlogger cannot improve their ratings because of the subject matter – "Personal blogs don't seem to have much point outside of personal expression."

While the researchers did not find a link between the gender of the participants and the vlog ratings, there were a few differences between women and men's written comments. Men were more likely than women to note physical characteristics of the vlogger in their comments. A few of the male participants (10%) noted that they gave IF higher ratings, and would watch her again because "she's cute." Only one participant, a female, noted physical attractiveness of the

male vloggers, noting that IM received a high rating from here because the "guy was kind of 'cute' in a young Jon Cusack way".

The written comments also reveal a difference between men and women's responses to the vlogs. The women who participated in the study were slightly less likely to write negative comments than men; however men wrote more positive comments overall. Women were three times more likely than men to leave the comment space blank.

Participants who self-identified as YouTube community members were overall less likely to state that they hated vlogs, did not enjoy the videos because they were not entertaining, did not enjoy the subject matter or did not enjoy the vlog because they did not know the vlogger. In general, participants who noted that they felt like YouTube community members reacted in more positive ways to the vlogs than those who did not consider themselves as community members.

Audience research: gendered use of YouTube

The demographic portion of the YouTube feedback study revealed several differences between the YouTube experiences of the men and women in our study. In our study, men were more likely to be frequent users of YouTube than women. More men than women in our study visited the YouTube site on a daily basis, 26.7% of men compared to 3.3% of women. A large percentage of women (30%) were infrequent visitors - visiting YouTube once a month or less, while only 6.7% of the male respondents noted that they were infrequent YouTube visitors (Table 2).

The study also found that men were more likely to post videos or comments on YouTube. A high percentage of men stated that they posted comments on YouTube videos (40%) compared to women (13.3%). When asked if they had ever posted comments on videos or uploaded videos on YouTube, only 13.3% of female respondents stated yes, compared to 50% of men (Table 3). The men in our study not only used the site and posted on the site more often than the women, they also seemed to know more people who visited the site. Half of the respondents in the study stated knowing more than 10 friends and family members who YouTube; men comprised 70% of this group.

While the women in this study were less likely to post comments, videos and even visit YouTube on a regular basis compared to the men, they were as likely as the men to feel like a member of a YouTube community. O'Donnell et al.(2008) note that YouTube community members are more frequent visitors and posters on the site, and are more likely to respond favourably to user-generated online video.

The vlogs analyzed in the content analysis were representative of English-language short vlogs on YouTube in October 2006. The four videos selected for the detailed study are not typical of all vlogs on YouTube. Results from the exploratory study of YouTube users cannot be generalized to the larger population of current or potential users of YouTube. We studied a small sample of YouTube users in a specific geographical region and all our users were university students – they do not represent the larger population.

Our content analysis of YouTube vlogs reveals that while the majority were created by men, 39% of the primary characters in the vlogs were women. The biggest difference in women's vlogs was the subject matter, as women vloggers focused on the personal rather than public, technological or entertainment subject matter. The quality of women's vlogs was similar to that of the men's, with slightly better images and slightly inferior sound quality. There were also few differences in the average age, number of edits or location of vlogs created by women. While women were less likely to be the primary participant in vlogs they were more likely to post vlogs that interacted with the YouTube community and were likely to receive more "views" than male vloggers.

Likewise, we found in our YouTube user study that men are more likely to post comments and videos on YouTube. Only 13.3% of the women in our study had posted comments on the site, and none of the women in our study had ever posted a video. However, when asked if they felt like a part of the YouTube community 30% of the women in the study said they were part of the YouTube community, the same percentage as the men.

Conclusions

Our content and audience analysis both suggest that there is a gendered imbalance in both the creation and reception of vlogs; however, this does not mean that female vloggers are not as technically apt as male vloggers, or that female viewers of vlogs feel less like a part of an online community. Our findings indicate that women vloggers, while posting less frequently than men, are more likely to communicate with the vlogging community. The content analysis of YouTube vlogs and responses to vlogs indicates that the female vloggers in our content analysis are not posting videos at the same rate as men; however, female vloggers are displaying similar levels of technical skill when they do post videos. And although fewer female vloggers posted videos in our sample, they were more likely to interact with other vloggers. In our random sample women vloggers were more likely to ask questions and respond to the questions and posts of other vloggers in their own videos. Our findings also demonstrate that the women in our study were less likely to report uploading their own videos, comment on videos, and even watching YouTube videos. However, the women in our audience study still feel as much of a part of the YouTube community as their male peers.

Recent studies identify user-generated online videos as potentially contributing to the virtual public sphere. Online videos can generate discussion by both textual and video comments, thereby expanding textual internet exchanges (Milliken, et al. 2008). Vlogs, as a result of comments that viewers make, can become links in a social network. Such connections can form a social hypertext, a network of connected videos. In this manner communities are formed (Chin, 2006). Vlogging is also a social activity and social communication, allowing people to view others vlogs and create their own.

This study contributes to the growing literature about the representation of women online while adding to research on user-generated online video. YouTube vlogs have proved an important and rich source of information about the new visual media and will be valuable for future research. While this study examines both online videos and the reception of these videos, it does not investigate issues surrounding the creation of user-generated videos. The subject matter of the videos offers some insight into the author's intent; however, we can not state the

reasons why people create vlogs. By creating vlogs can women empower themselves? How can women use vlogs to make their struggles public and political? What do female vloggers see as obstacles to vlogging? It would also be interesting to investigate the gender of vlog viewers on YouTube who leave comments. Future studies on vlogging could further investigate these questions by administering a study directly to vloggers.

Table 1: Coded Written Comments - General

	Neg.	Pos.	Neutral	Not Sure	No Comment	A	B	C	D
Total	337	189	76	49	30	18%	55%	52%	38%

Numerals refer to the number of written comments; percentages (%) are also included for the following:
A. I do not like vlogs; B. Boring/not interesting/ not entertaining; C. I do not care because I do not know this person; D. I do not care about the subject matter

Table 2: Visiting and Gender

	Once/month or less	Everyday
Men	6.7%	26.7%
Women	30%	3.3%

Table 3: Participation and Gender

	Posted comments	Posted comments and/or videos
Men	40%	50%
Women	13.3%	13.3%

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