

# Commenting on Comments: Investigating Responses to Antagonism on YouTube

Patricia G. Lange, Ph.D.

Postdoctoral Fellow

Annenberg Center for Communication

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[plange@annenberg.edu](mailto:plange@annenberg.edu)

# Theoretical Context

- “Lessons” from studying text-based ICTs may be applied to video-mediated environments
  - Based on differences rather than underlying social similarities of behavior in online and offline interaction
  - Additional identity information through video not a guarantee of cordiality
- How is hating behavior perceived?
- Does it constitute a “problem” for individual participants and for the YouTube community?

# Research Approach

- Explore perception of hating behaviors
- Investigate organically proposed solutions
- Ethnographic investigation
  - Ongoing, nine-month observations of YouTube videos and discourse
  - Attendance at video events in LA and SF
  - Semiotic analysis of video contents
  - Interviews with 41 YouTube participants
  - Teens and early twenties, most from the US

# Participation Categories

- Former participants
- Casual users
- Active participants
- “YouTubers” or “Tubers”
- YouTube celebrities

# Interview Approach

- Define a hater
- Provide examples of hateful comments or “hating on” someone
- Discuss personal experiences with haters
- Consider whether hating was a problem for them and for YouTube in general
- Probe potential solutions

# Findings

- Existence and extent of “problem” were not universally agreed upon
  - A problem for me and YouTube
  - A problem for some, but not for me
  - Not a problem
- Concerns about closing off legitimate participation outweighed benefit of mechanisms to eliminate haters
- So-called constructive criticism complicated personal expression more than haters for some participants

# Definition

- “A hater is someone who posts a negative comment that doesn’t offer any [criticism] or any helpful information. Simply commenting with ‘Gay’ is hater like. Saying ‘This sucks go die’ is hater like. [They] insult you and offer no suggestions on [improvements].”
  - Skazz, male in late teens

# Yes

## Hating is a problem for YouTube

- “The Community of YouTube”
  - Posted by renetto
  - August 7, 2006
- Uses the metaphor of a bully at recess
- Relates emails from people too scared to post
- Begins to explore proposals to deal with the problem
- YouTube participants respond

# Yes

## For others but not for me

- Certain individuals targeted
  - Makers of incendiary videos
  - Female video bloggers
- Intervention not always desired
  - Argument is valued
  - Maturity required to post videos
  - YouTube should not become too strict about criticism

# No

## It is not a problem

- Haters have a right to their opinion
- Comments can be deleted or ignored
- Provide a source of amusement
  - “[You’ve] got to be creative in how you think, and it’s fair game, almost, when people would complain about your things, cause when you put a video online, you’re subjecting yourself to all this, haters or whatever.”
- Allowing comments to remain on page symbolically emphasizes the account user’s support of free speech

# No

## It's not a "problem"

*Patricia:* What is the worst thing about YouTube?

*Anesha:* haters.

*Anesha:* most [definitely]

*Patricia:* Hmm. Earlier you mentioned they were not a "problem." But you would consider them the worst thing about YouTube.

*Anesha:* a "problem" as in they weren't causing anyone to stop going to youtube or to stop making videos because you can always delete their comments and what not. but it's still sucky to have some one talk about your videos in the way that they do.

# Proposals

- Limit participation
  - Age
  - Length of participation
  - Posted videos
- Rate participants
  - Limit participation to highly-rated participants

# Most Proposals Rejected

- Perceived discrimination and unfairness of the policies
- Ability to subvert and/or lack of practical enforcement
- Concerns about preventing ability to provide and obtain legitimate feedback and criticism
- Proposals would not significantly address the problem

# Rating System

- Who does the rating?
- On what basis?
- Subversion too easy
  - Friends could encourage their friends to rate them highly

# Waiting Periods

- After you get an account, you must wait a specified period of time (week, or month) before posting comments to videos
  - If banned, another waiting period
- Most traction among interviewees in terms of effectiveness toward decreasing haters
- Not universally embraced for reasons discussed
- Whether they have been on YouTube “longer or shorter...it wouldn’t stop people from hating” --W. female youth in mid-teens

# Alternate Proposals

- Flag comments, users
- Increased moderation by YouTube staff
- Concerns about overwhelming an already strained system
- More individual control over an account
  - Decide whether to accept comments from registered vs. non-registered users
- Balkanization of YouTube?

# Calculus of Feedback

“But then even when you get one good comment, that makes up for 50 mean comments, cause it’s just the fact of knowing that someone else out there liked your videos and stuff, and it doesn’t really matter about everyone else that’s criticized you.”

--Frank, boy in his mid-teens

# (De)Constructive Criticism

- A girl who ignored haters changed her video style after encountering a “rant” by thewinekone
- “Another beef of mine is when people use web cams to make videos of themselves lip synching. I seriously don’t know why all you Internet people, Internet users love to download and watch others lip synch to their Web cams. This doesn’t make any sense to me! They’re not good. They’re not funny. Why? Why? Tell me why.” --thewinekone

# Conclusions

- Lessons of ICTs that video will limit conflict were not substantiated
  - Based on the idea that conflict is inherently different rather than sharing underlying similarities
  - Not solved by bandwidth
  - Understand social and culture dynamics
- Any proposal must take seriously the need for free speech
- “Haters” or not a singular category; perceptions towards them change over time

# Future

- Explore videos that “hate”
- Explore the genre of the “rant” and perceived differences and similarities to hating behavior
- How do rants change participation or complicate access to free speech?