Parasocial Interactions and Relationships among Emerging Adults in Online Communities

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ABSTRACT

Emerging adulthood (age 19-29) can be an exploratory, yet tumultuous time of life. Online methods of connecting with others can be especially effective during this often-fluctuating life stage since the point of entry to engage online is generally low. Among the most popular social media sites, YouTube has had the highest traffic on a video streaming site almost since its inception. YouTube enables content creators to express themselves and connect with a follower base, and for followers to receive advice, entertainment, and even relate personally to content creators. Content creators are often unable to communicate directly, leading followers to experience one-sided connections. Such one-sided connections, or "parasocial interactions," (PSI) have historically occurred toward film and television figures but have also occurred toward YouTube presenters. When PSI extend beyond consuming content to perceiving the existence of a relational bond with a creator, they form a "parasocial relationship" (PSR). With over three million subscribers, the Nerdfighteria community evolved from a YouTube vlog channel called the Vlogbrothers, founded by Hank and John Green in 2007. This work focuses on understanding the Nerdfighteria community through the conceptual framework of the development of PSI and PSR through video streaming and an ecosystem of platforms used by online communities. Major contributions include (1) Extending the themes of PSR development through the lens of emerging adulthood, (2) Understanding design heuristics supporting the development of PSR online, (3) Providing methodological insights for the use of graphic elicitation in remote qualitative data collection for participant agency and equity.

ALISE RESEARCH TAXONOMY TOPICS

Social computing; Research methods; Social media; Information practices.

AUTHOR KEYWORDS

Emerging adulthood; parasocial interactions; graphic elicitation; multi-platform; online communities.