

Vlogging to Learn

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Abstract

Of the emerging social media trends, blogging has generated substantial interest for its suitability to pedagogy. This paper preliminarily explores the rise of a blogging sub-genre, video blogging (colloquially referred to as vlogging). The focal emphasis is on what it constitutes, how it differs from traditional blogging, its relevance in educational settings and an optimistic evaluation of its nascency.

Keywords: Vlogging, Pedagogy, Learning

Blogging is usually referred to as a journal entry or any other such documentation of personal opinions, thoughts and experiences of the writer shared in a public medium (Farmer, Yue & Brooks, 2008). By this expansive definition; this means it could encompass many forms of social media such as Facebook status updates, Instagram picture grids and Twitter's 140 character feeds. The scope employed here however is with regards to the traditional creation of niche content in a chronological fashion, specifically for broadcasting to an audience. Of interest is a sub-genre called vlogging.

So what exactly is vlogging? It is essentially blogging but in a video format. It ranges from the equivalent of a soliloquy to an entire staged cinematic production about an area of interest. The pervasive theme is audiovisual documentation and no topic is off limits (Snelson, 2015). A quick search on YouTube, arguably the largest user generated video repository on the web, reveals that people vlog about everything and anything. Up until recently, vlogging has received the least mention of web-based publishing. But with Google's acquisition of YouTube and the growing appreciation of social currency, it seems vlogging is here to stay (Gao, Tian, Huang, & Yang, 2010). Consider this study obtained from Romania, that highlights the pervasiveness of vlogging; per "official figures, 6.5 million monthly users visit YouTube looking for videos about cooking, sports, news or product reviews" (Bacescu, 2017). These users search for content to stay informed amongst other reasons. It wouldn't be a stretch to imply this is synonymous with learning.

Learning can be understood as how one comes from not knowing to retained comprehension, either as guided by self and/or an external party (Passer & Smith, 2004). These forms could be both formal and informal. Formal learning requires enrollment in a structured program, a finite duration, clear objectives and some assessment component. Informal learning on the other hand, can be any knowledge enhancing activity e.g. reading a book, visiting a museum, watching a film. It can be deduced then, that in either formal or

informal learning, the following elements are always present; a learner, an instructor and suitable content.

In light of this, it then applies that the advent of the web made a significant impact on learning. Of the learning elements aforementioned, content for instance can be represented in a myriad of forms online. Hypermedia is the most engaging form which captures sound, motion and text all at once (Nielsen, 1990). The web also provides the ability to publish content in an instant. And web users can respond to this content in real time. Vlogging harnesses these web-enabled capabilities in a way that is influential to learning.

Video as a tool of learning isn't novel; it is a development that preceded the web era. Some of the earliest educational television programs were on air as far back as the 1930's, around the same time colored TVs became commercially available (Novak, 2012). Most of those videos however were intentionally produced for the mass market and often backed by corporate sponsors. Though a laudable effort, there was an inherent limit in variety. The playing field is much different with vlogging now, the masses are the creators, curators and consumers of their content. Anyone with a camera enabled device and web access can be a vlogger (Snelson, 2015). In a sense, this is knowledge crowdsourcing and can be tied to theoretical underpinnings in socio-constructivism.

Vlogging can be integrated into pedagogy, here are a few examples how. In the role of the learner as vlogger, these are the contexts in which it would apply. To;

- document field experience assignments.
- provide commentary on live events of interest.
- record reflections on assigned reading

And in the role of the instructor as vlogger, to;

- record lecture videos about the topics being studied in class
- broadcast conferences or live demos as needed

- answer students' frequently asked questions.

Research shows that blogging increases “student interest and ownership in learning” and provides “opportunities for diverse perspectives.” (p 124, Farmer, Yue & Brooks, 2008). For vlogging in particular, an easily identifiable benefit is learner engagement (Bacescu, 2017); video is a welcome alternative to the traditional lecture. Another benefit is peer-to-peer instruction; students can participate in the social construction of knowledge. By collaborating on videos or sharing videos with each other, learners can create a community of practice outside the classroom. A community keeps them accountable and encourages them to engage in public discourse about the topic at hand. Vlogging is also ideal for learners who find it difficult to communicate succinctly via text; video assignments give them the opportunity to be a) creative and b) hone their presentation skills. Lange (2015) concurs that “... video is an important medium for self-expression” (p 302).

For the instructor, the humdrum of grading is somewhat eased by the experience of watching video assignments as opposed to reading tons of term papers (Hung, 2011). Additionally, since most instructors teach the same basic courses repeatedly, they can create a series of well-edited vlogs addressing each area of the course content. The effect is manifold; (a) having the vlogs as a playlist online will allow students anytime access outside the classroom to study and revise as needed, (b) students can also ask specific questions in the comment section of each vlog about parts they did not understand, e.g ‘at 4:03, what did that image mean?’ (c) other members of the community can answer these questions, outside the instructor (d) instructor has more avenues to collaborate with other subject matter experts (e) videos can convey a high level of instructor engagement if they are recorded at a time of peak enthusiasm, because instructor engagement and enthusiasm wanes from the monotony of long-term lecturing (f) classes can still be conducted using prerecorded material if the instructor has to be away due to unforeseen circumstances.

There are pitfalls to vlogging; most concern authorship and content creation. E.g. who owns the copyright to the videos? How is intellectual property maintained? What consent must be obtained to record other participants? There is also the sheer amount of effort required to edit and upload the videos. Higher quality videos must be filmed in optimal lighting conditions with background noise correction. This requires some technical know-how and high equipment costs that potential vloggers might find off putting. Videos files are large, so bandwidth and storage accommodations need to be made. Because sharing publicly is essential to vlogging, there are privacy concerns. Lange (2015) is one of those affected and attributes her resistance to upbringing; “I grew up in an informationally-conservative household, in which I was taught the power of information and the need to guard one’s privacy as much as possible” (p. 298).

The mass adoption of vlogging has potential pedagogical implications. In a study by Bacescu (2017) on institutional interest, it was discovered that most schools have resource (cost, human capital) constraints that limit the acquisition of media equipment and training for users. Some adopters have reported technical difficulties to be their primary challenge (Hung, 2011) though others say it helped them “gain new digital literacies” (p 302, Lange, 2015). In the wider academic realm, knowledge dissemination via video is tricky; specifically indexing, searching and attribution (Gao et. al, 2010).

Vlogging could be used in online, face-to-face or hybrid programs as a supplement to other learning activities. A broad empirical evaluation of vlogging efficacy in learning is unfeasible due to the scarcity of literature, though much exists about its forerunner, blogging. The few documented studies on vlogging have been in the language learning domain (Hung, 2011). Hence, the prospects and pitfalls cited herein have primarily been deduced from the intersection of hypermedia and social media use in education. According to (Snelson, 2015), “additional research is warranted to gain a deeper understanding of this practice and its

implications for ...educators and school administrators” (p. 336). The YouTube usage statistics, active enrollments in Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) and increasing ubiquity of mobile video-recording technologies are indicators that the future of vlogging is promising (see appendix). Future work in this area could look at theoretical frameworks for the evaluation of video content by gleaning successful cases in the applications of netnography (Kozinets, 2006) and critical cine-ethnography (Warren & Gratch, 2016).

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Appendix



(Source: <http://ideas.ted.com/moocs-by-the-numbers-where-are-we-now/>)



(Source: <http://www.designinfographics.com/social-media-infographics/youtube-statistics>)