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The 21st Century Addiction: User Generated Content Dependency and Media Aesthetic Expectations as Experienced Through YouTube

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THE 21ST CENTURY ADDICTION:
USER GENERATED CONTENT DEPENDENCY AND MEDIA AESTHETIC
EXPECTATIONS AS EXPERIENCED THROUGH YOUTUBE

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

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August 2011

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and Media Aesthetic Expectations as Experienced Through YouTube

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This 40-item survey study evaluates perceptions of user generated content (UGC) as found on YouTube by undergraduate college students at Indiana University of Pennsylvania. A random sample of 182 volunteer undergraduate students over the age of 18 completed an online survey to investigate if less or more dependent users (as defined by fulfilled needs such as information seeking, entertainment, interpersonal utility, etc.) affected one's UGC aesthetic preferences of sound clarity, editing style, and other entertainment-based characteristics. The investigation is theoretically grounded by the Media Systems Dependency theory that suggests that as users become dependent upon a medium, they are more likely to become affected by that medium.

T-test analyses compared users' dependency upon UGC with their ratings of likelihood to continue watching or stop watching UGC based on aesthetic quality issues. Results indicated differences between dependency levels concerning sound clarity, but not editing style. Results also showed that users rated entertainment-based UGC characteristics such as humor content as more important than any other characteristic, including aesthetics. These YouTube preferences for convenience and enjoyment rather than high-production mainstream media can provide insight to the changing online landscape.

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I am a fan of brutal honesty and succinctness. Yes, my name is on the cover of this dissertation, but it took far more people than that to complete it. Much gratitude is granted to my Chair, advisor, colleague, and friend, Dr. Mary Beth Leidman. Similarly, great appreciation must be granted to committee members Dr. Zachary Stiegler (a fellow YouTube addict) and Dr. Jay Start (a fellow video production enthusiast) for their extensive helpful comments, suggestions, and advisory roles in the process. A sincere 'thanks' also goes out to Dr. Allen Partridge, Dr. Larry Feldman, Dr. John Ellerbach, Bradley Wiggins, and David Keppel who all provided outside counseling.

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CHAPTER 1

THE PROBLEM

Introduction

User generated content (UGC), content created by users on the Internet to share with others, has made it possible for virtually anyone with a computer and Internet access to make the content that they desire. This content may have emerged because the individual felt that it was information that mainstream media would not cover, information that contradicts the status quo, or information that appeals to such a narrow audience that it would never appear on mainstream media's radar (Mäkinen & Kuira, 2008). Though users create the content to convey some type of message, audiences who experience UGC are exposing themselves to more than simply the text included; these media artifacts also contain visual and audio components that are a part of the content's overall media aesthetics. The Media Systems Dependency (MSD) theory states that users dependent upon a media source are more likely to be personally changed by that source in both behavior and opinion (DeFleur & Ball-Rokeach, 1985). This current study focuses on the idea that dependency on a UGC source with varying levels of production and aesthetic styles may alter users' overall media aesthetic preferences and habits.

When people come together online and create UGC that can include text, audio, webpage, or video, information becomes specialized into various portals on the Internet. Individuals passionate about a particular topic create online

portals such as the user-maintained encyclopedia, Wikipedia, that include large quantities of information. Creations such as Wikipedia can be updated and monitored by trustworthy individuals within the community nearly as rapidly as it is uploaded (Grosse, 2002). This situation has created interactive sources of information that all users of the Internet can access, learn from, and experience with other users to help them along the way. While these communities and areas may share the same amount of passion or dedication toward a particular topic, they may not share standards of the content quality or aesthetic elements; in a UGC video community one user may upload informational videos about a topic with their laptop-integrated webcam while another may use professional three-point lighting kits and high definition studio cameras. Perhaps the latter video will be watched more, rated higher by other individuals, and be regarded as the more effective video. Alternatively, the quality may not matter. In another media form, competing blogs may be able to take the number one spot by increasing the quality of accompanying artwork and graphics, or, the content, writing style, and personality of the writer may be the only key factors. UGC is still a "Wild West" type arena where anything goes.

These situations become increasingly important as the power of alternative online sources increases and audiences jump to the more interactive, self-empowering UGC-filled Internet. An investigation of the aesthetic preferences of a UGC audience is important not only to understand an element of our mediated popular culture, but also how UGC is altering what is aesthetically acceptable or preferable among media audiences. The music

industry has been drastically impacted by the user's preference of a lower quality mp3 format with increased online downloads continuing to increase each year. Perhaps UGC is another long-lasting or permanent change to the media landscape wherein convenience, gratification, and empowerment completely change a model of distribution and consumption. Equally as important, perhaps UGC has played a role in the shifting media aesthetic zeitgeist. Rosen (2005) discusses how the power of the TV remote promoted a channel-grazing habit where individuals would change channels, as well as how media companies attempted to adjust and attract audience attention with quickly paced programming featuring expensive opening scenes, special effects, celebrity cameos, cold openings, and hot switching. Cold openings, when a program starts without opening credits, and hot switching, when one program ends and switches to the next program without a commercial break, were drastic changes for the television industry. Showing that companies have changed their ways in attempts to acquire audience attention repeatedly to survive, UGC may be the next habit to battle. If media habits and aesthetic preferences of younger generations online have changed because of UGC, then mainstream media may experience decreased advertising revenue, audiences, and enthusiasm regarding its content that has had the spotlight for many generations.

Mainstream media previously changed to meet some of the expectations of younger generations, adding more interactive measures such as message boards, forums, or wikis to its Web presence. Sunstein (2001) describes how filtering devices enabled users to experience the exact type of information that

they enjoy. For example, *The Wall Street Journal* allows users to have personalized electronic versions sent to their e-mails according to their preferences. Though Sunstein argues that there should be regulation put in place in order to expose individuals to more opinions because of these filtering devices, others argue that UGC already provides such an opportunity. O'Connor (2008), for example, discusses how content created directly by the users and consumers of products now play a key role in the purchase decision-making process.

Amazon.com, the largest online retailer, and Last FM, an online music catalogue, attract the numbers of users that they do partly because of the tailor-made, convenient information toward which they can directly contribute. When shopping at Amazon, individuals are not only able to read numerous customer reviews of the products, but are also able to see similar products and what others buy after looking at a particular item. In a related fashion, Last FM shows what music other users listen to as well as suggestions as to what the user may like based on both their listening history and an intricate keyword tagging system that is made by the listeners (Jaschke, Marinho, Hotho, Schmidt-Thieme, & Stumme, 2007).

When users create content online, the quality and style of the products can vary greatly, yet people continue to fulfill various needs, desires, and goals with UGC. Internet users continue to utilize content created by others at an increasing rate, sometimes even abandoning mainstream media entirely because of their dissatisfaction (Horwitz, 2005; Mabilot, 2007) or because of the ability to access what content they want whenever they desire (Compton & Comor, 2007; Cheshire & Antin, 2008). Researchers and Web practitioners often view this

content created by everyday individuals and shared with others as a new-and-improved version of the Internet, referred to as the New Web (Tapscott & Williams, 2006), social media (Levenshus, 2007), personal media (Lasica, 2005), or Web 2.0 (O'Reilly, 2005). Though there is not one overall agreed upon term for this UGC revolution, all of the academic verbiage points to a changed media consumption paradigm.

Just as individuals in the past were dependent upon technology ranging from clay tablets to the television in their respective generations, today's generations are dependent upon Internet UGC media for the same reasons -- a medium that fulfills one's needs will become a medium repeatedly used and regarded as integral to one's life. Conversely, those media that fulfill fewer needs will be used less frequently and have less power on that particular individual.

This dissertation is based upon the Media Systems Dependency (MSD) theory that states that individuals who are more dependent upon a particular medium to fulfill needs are more likely to be affected by that medium, including changes of opinions, preferences, and actions. DeFleur & Ball-Rokeach (1989) note that when dependency occurs within the traditional media system, the media establishment has the power not only because it controls the information flow, but also because the information that is used by audiences then affects them in the process. With UGC, though large corporations may still control the websites that feature user content, the creative power has been taken from the mainstream media and given to everyday users. Thus, taking the MSD theory further, the central focus of this dissertation looks at how a user's media aesthetic

preferences may change regarding what "pretty," "acceptable," and "enjoyable" qualities actually are when becoming dependent upon UGC. For the purposes of this study, YouTube video UGC will be the focal point because it is the most popular UGC website that promotes itself as a place where everyone can broadcast themselves (ComScore, 2010). Because dependency is involved, a popular UGC outlet had to be selected in order to ensure that enough individuals would exist at the researcher's university who use or have used that particular outlet -- YouTube has become a part of popular culture. Finally, choosing UGC video also ensures that media artifacts will be investigated that include visual and audio elements which some UGC does not usually include such as podcasts and blogs. An in-depth analysis of MSD will be included in Chapter 2, the literature review.

Statement of the Problem

The production and aesthetic construction of UGC video created by non-professional users of the YouTube website can vary significantly based on the experience, equipment, and intent of the creator. There is no aesthetic norm or equalizing set of expectations or outcomes governing the creation of YouTube UGC. The ways in which various individuals use UGC as well as the types of content that users are attracted to can vary even more greatly than the quality of the content itself. The goal of this study is to determine the effects, if any, dependency upon YouTube UGC has on media aesthetic expectations solely on YouTube. As a critical focus, the user dependency level of participants, their positive media aesthetic expectation levels of sound clarity and editing style, and

general demographic information has been investigated and compared. When users fulfill needs with and become reliant upon a particular medium, the researcher wants to understand how their media aesthetic expectations may be affected differently according to user dependency levels.

Purpose of the Study

Historically, media effects studies have been integral aspects of the communications research field. Literature focusing on MSD theory gives indication that users who are more dependent upon a particular medium are also more likely to be affected by it. Though media dependency research has changed its focus from a macro effects theory to a micro effects theory, there are gaps within the literature that should be addressed. When looking at the trends, MSD research shifted from how sociocultural factors intensify peoples' or societies' reliance on media sources (Ball-Rokeach, 1985) to the individual's goals and media dependence impacts. This shift provided the ability for empirical measurement between an individual and a specific medium (Skumanich & Kintsfather, 1998). Because a medium that a user is dependent upon will have more influence and power over the individual (DeFleur & Ball-Rockeach, 1989), a branch of media dependence research evolved regarding its agenda setting and behavioral/attitudinal changing powers. Though media dependence research has been done in the areas of media addiction (Mcilwraith, Jacobvitz, & Kubey, 1998), excessive gaming (Grusser, Thalemann, & Griffiths, 2007), and Internet abuse (Young, 2004), there is no direct research that this researcher was able to

find focusing on possible expectations of media aesthetics compared to the medium depended upon.

Hypotheses

This study focuses on the medium of YouTube and the audience of undergraduate college students who use the website. It is guided by MSD theory and will measure the variables of sound clarity importance, editing style importance, and UGC characteristics importance in the context of participant dependency. As discussed in the literature review in Chapter 2, dependency in this study deals with a goal-directed relationship formed with a particular medium because it fulfills certain needs (Gaziano, 1990). In this regard, dependency is different from substance addiction or dependency research because there is not a physiological demand for the UGC involved (Akers, 1991; Horvath, 2004). Based on this information, the following hypotheses will be researched and evaluated in this study:

Sound Clarity Importance

H₀₋₁

UGC users who are more dependent will rate **sound clarity importance** the same as less dependent UGC users.

H_{A-1}

UGC users who are more dependent will not rate **sound clarity importance** the same as less dependent UGC users.

Editing Style Importance

H₀₋₂

UGC users who are more dependent will rate **editing style importance** the same as less dependent UGC users.

H_{A-2}

UGC users who are more dependent will not rate **editing style importance** the same as less dependent UGC users.

As a third hypothesis, the type of UGC material viewed will be investigated. Previous research in a pilot study has shown that entertainment is the most highly regarded attribute in UGC YouTube material (McKeague & Leidman, 2010). Tension release and play are also central needs in MSD theory that users report as reasoning to use media in general (Charney & Greenberg, 2002; Kaye & Johnson, 2004). Based on this information, the researcher proposes that humorous or comedic UGC will fulfill the entertainment, play, and tension relieving needs more so than other content characteristics and will then be a stronger influence when selecting UGC.

UGC Characteristic Importance

H₀₋₃

YouTube users will rate **humor UGC** at the same level of influence on choosing content as all other characteristics.

H_{A-3} YouTube users will rate **humor UGC** significantly more influential on choosing content than all other characteristics.

Also included in the investigation is whether the gender of the user affects their dependency level.

Gender

RQ-1

Does **gender** play a role in importance placed upon media aesthetics when watching UGC?

Significance of the Problem

YouTube has become the second most popular website on the Internet used to search for specific content as well as the most popular online video website (Trier, 2007) outdone only by Google (ComScore, 2010). Through its integrated search function, YouTube is used as if it was a traditional search engine for those users who want to see their results in a purely visual or audio manner. By itself, YouTube acquires nearly 50 percent of all online, streaming video views of both UGC and professional content in the United States (Stelter, 2008b). However, it should be noted that there are no current numbers for streaming content that would account for the media streaming service Netflix in comparison to websites like YouTube. Online UGC communities are now mainly comprised of users from digital native generations -- groups that are entertainment focused and expect a different aesthetic style in its media (Hill, 2003). This generation is especially engrossed with visually-oriented sites such as YouTube because of its stimulating interactive content that is both convenient and fitting with short attention spans.

More interactions than ever before now occur online with younger generations and because of this a number of societal aspects have changed, ranging from political campaign fundraising tactics to online community message formation. Digital natives now search for educational, informational, and entertaining videos to answer questions or learn about a particular topic, sometimes disregarding the reliability or production value of the source in favor of the appealing way to spend one's time through an interactive medium. Why go to a library and look up a particular reference book when there is a librarian on YouTube who makes instructional videos in an interesting, interactive way about that exact book or topic? Convenience and gratification play a large role.

Fulfilling various needs and desires through one particular medium, users become more attached to and dependent upon not only the Internet, but also highly specific portals on the Internet. Individuals have their favorite places to find information about the world around them, form friendships and larger communities of individuals, and perhaps even create a second life online. With the vast amount of information available on the Internet in these various portals, individuals can have entirely different outlooks on the world that are much more varied than traditional media in the 1950s or 1960s when there were three main television networks that covered very similar content. Just as Guttenberg's printing press revolutionized how information could spread, UGC on the Internet has further democratized electronic and computer communications making anyone with an Internet connection and personal computer their own text, video, and audio publishing company.

With this democratized publication comes no standard in production values or aesthetics; users experiment with new techniques and learn the basics of writing, directing, and editing on their own which has led to a collection of low-quality productions (Petersen, 2008). Since new videos are uploaded to YouTube 24/7 from users around the world, there is now a seemingly endless supply of content created by the users, which can vary in topic and production value. Research has shown that this constant wave of new videos has led to an even more varied behavior of UGC consumers with different, shortened attention spans (Cha, Kwak, Rodriguez, Ahn, & Moon, 2007). With increasing difficulty, the academic community cannot keep up with today's rapidly changing technological development, especially when considering the peer-to-peer breakthroughs of the Internet and its various components (Krupnick, 2006). Despite the fact that content created by users may be more challenging to categorize and study, the role that it plays in modern society demands further research.

Application of the Results

With this newfound, user-empowering system of publishing and acquiring information, UGC has also become an important part of peoples' lives -- sometimes more important than the real world, in-person aspects. Just as one who is more dependent upon a newspaper will develop a deeper connection or romanticized affection toward that particular information source, the UGC dependent will do the same. Traditional media sources and dependency have been studied in the past, but since these UGC sources are so new, there are vast opportunities for research.

Information gathered from this study could benefit four distinct groups of individuals: YouTube users, professional media creators, educators, and the academic research community. YouTube users could learn more about how others use UGC and then, in turn, create their own UGC that fits with discovered needs and particular gratifications; if users create content that others are more likely to use and become dependent upon, then they could create content that would both add more to a particular online community and become more viewed and popular on YouTube in the process.

Professional media creators from traditional outlets such as broadcast television, could develop a better understanding from this research on the satisfaction levels of UGC as compared to their professional content. With the increasing costs of professional media programs and an economic downturn affecting virtually all aspects of U.S. society, professional media creators may go for cheaper methods to reach audiences. Thus, creators who have the capability of producing broadcast quality content may strive to appear to be UGC made by everyday people in order to gain audiences.

For example, during the early years of YouTube, an Internet sensation vlogger emerged who was backed by a professional production company that wrote scripts, filmed, directed, and marketed the vlogging channel of LonelyGirl15. Though the channel appeared to be the story of a teenage female on the Internet, it was entirely a fiction drama created by a production team. Because UGC content is usually made by amateurs, when an audience is duped by a production team, there is usually, if not always, backlash from the users and

other media (Hetcher, 2008). The once online megastar LonelyGirl15, who came across as a bright-eyed, hopeful actress offering intimate details of her life from her bedroom for nearly two years, soon saw many of her followers part ways. In a similar example, YouTube user Marié Digby, a musical artist signed with Walt Disney's Hollywood Records at the time, posted videos of her performing cover songs of famous hits as an everyday member of the community. An entire viral video campaign devised by the music company revolved around making Digby appear to be a struggling guitarist and singer who would then be discovered because of her YouTube popularity (Smith & Lattman, 2007). Many of the fans saw through this however as yet another attempt to generate revenue through UGC content by manipulating audiences into thinking it was an independent, amateur, underdog succeeding before their very eyes.

Research has shown that the U.S. television audience is now more of a collection of niche audiences that can be narrowcasted through demassification, rather than the traditional mass audience (Lotz, 2007). This fits with Anderson's "long tail" concept that there is an audience out there for any type of product or program imaginable (Anderson, 2006). Some directors and producers who have found it increasingly difficult to acquire enough funding or ratings in the mainstream media have already taken notice to this powerful audience and created new, interactive, UGC-like material online (Petersen, 2008). If cheaper media productions can be made through UGC channels in a profitable manner that target these niche audiences, then traditional media outlets may benefit

financially from research conducted on dependency and satisfaction levels of UGC.

Similarly, if users utilize UGC as an information source just as much as an entertainment source with popular how-to or instructional content, then the educational power of UGC cannot be denied. Students familiar with learning from an interactive medium featuring feedback, comments, and materials made by others surrounding them may be more enthused if UGC is included in the classroom. Educators looking to update material for digital audiences may have to look no further than YouTube.

Finally, research on UGC and media aesthetics could add to the academic community's understanding of both areas, particularly on how they interact. Bringing together various fields of research and synthesizing information is one of the recurring ways that academic inquiry can produce entirely new theories and understandings. Through the synthesis of media aesthetics, media dependency, and UGC research, this researcher believes that new information will be generated that is relevant to many current-day topics such as Internet regulation and censorship.

Definition of Terms

Various terms will be used in this dissertation that could be interpreted in different ways that may cause confusion. In attempt to prevent ambiguous understandings, definitions of those frequently used terms follow.

User Generated Content

The focus of this investigation revolves around UGC, or content made publicly available over the Internet which reflects a certain amount of creative effort and is produced outside of professional routines and practices, (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2007). Because UGC can also contain media elements that are not original creations of the user, some researchers have made further distinctions between types of content. Sung, Kim, & Lee (2007) refer to an overarching term of all original content made by users as User-Created Content (UCC), which further contains User-Recreated Content (URC), User-Modified Content (UMC), and User-Transmitted Content (UTC).

These different categories of UCC are defined by the degree of creativity in production. URC still involves original content created by the user, but the content is greatly inspired by existing media such as reenacting a particular scene from a movie with one person playing all of the characters. In order for content to be considered UMC, users must take media created by others and remix it, putting effort into the editing process and making a unique video derived from others' content. Finally, UTC is content uploaded that is virtually unchanged by a user; it is simply transmitted from one location, portal, or medium to another (Sung, Kim, & Lee, 2007). Because the research at hand does not require a breakdown of different categories of UGC, the overall term will be used in order to discuss the YouTube content that individuals may be dependent upon.

Dependence

In media studies, dependence has a different meaning from the same term used in other research areas such as psychology. According to Gaziano (1990), media dependence is defined as a goal-directed relationship between media sources and consumers; though addiction, heavy use of, or extreme affinity toward a particular medium may occur alongside the dependence, the latter term is preferred because there is not a physiological demand for the media sources (Akers, 1991; Horvath, 2004). Dependence, rather than addiction, is an expected state that occurs when one satisfies needs with a medium (Ball-Rokeach, 1985; Rubin & Windahl, 1986).

Digital Natives

Those individuals born after 1980 who have access to networked digital technologies as well as skills to use those technologies at young ages are referred to as digital natives (Prensky, 2001; Jones, Ramanau, Cross, & Healing, 2010; Palfrey & Gasser, 2008). Some earlier researchers such as Prensky (2001) specified the group as born between 1980 and 1994, though the provided, more open definition allows for a represented shift in technical aptitude and importance placed upon technology that may be a permanent change (Jones et al, 2010). Generation Y is the oldest group within the digital native generation and includes those born from 1977 to 1990 who currently make up 30 percent of the Internet-using population (Jones & Fox, 2009). Individuals born post Generation Y have been discussed as the Net Generation, the Baby Boom Echo, Millenials, and Nexters (Rettie, 2003; Sterling, 2006; Gardner, 2006; Tapscott,

2008; Oblinger & Oblinger, n.d.). Regardless of these specific label breakdowns, new generations of digital natives are currently entering higher education environments (Bennett, Maton, & Kervin, 2008) and are the prime focus of this current investigation.

Media Aesthetics

This term refers to "a process of examining media elements such as lighting, picture composition, and sound -- by themselves or jointly -- and a study of their roles in manipulating our perceptual reactions, communicating messages artistically, and synthesizing effective media productions" (Chitra Dorai & Venkatesh, 2001, p.10). Two elements of media aesthetics that will be focused on in this research are sound clarity and editing style. *Sound clarity* can be described by the psychoacoustic magnitudes like loudness, sharpness or roughness as well as attributes such as delay, echo, pleasantness, and background noise (Fastl, 2001; Denisowski, 2001). *Editing Style* includes the characteristics that an editor chooses to mold, improve, personalize, or recreate a motion picture, including narrative and continuity (Dmytryk, 1984). Editing is especially accessible with modern technology enabling editing via cut-and-paste computer software allowing users to experiment worry free compared to the traditional splicing and connecting physical film manner of movie production (Manovich, 2001).

Vlogs

These UGC creations are visually oriented video blogs shared on the Internet. Most focus on personal themes and vary in the amount of editing effort

required (Nardi, Schiano, Gumbrecht, & Swartz, 2004; Molyneaux, O'Donnell, Gibson, & Singer, 2008). Based on the idea of blogging, or individuals writing about personal themes or stories, vlogging can take many forms including social commentary, newscasts, and online diaries made by amateurs (Molyneaux et al., 2008). On YouTube, vlogs remain a large part of the views including megastars such as Meekakitty, Vlogbrothers, and TheAmazingAtheist (Godwin-Jones, 2007).

Defining the Population

This study focuses on the interactive medium of YouTube. The website serves as a repository of popular culture for virtually all generations ranging from some of the first films ever made by the Lumière brothers to entertainment music videos of comedy singer "Weird Al" Yankovic. However, the majority of the clips are of recent events, television shows, and user generated original materials. This pool of information and popular culture, as well as the intense social networking aspect of the website with individuals who interact through text comments and brief video responses talking directly into a camera, makes it an attractive environment for the current undergraduate college-age person. Research has shown that these online, participatory audiences tend to be comprised of a younger demographic because they are drawn to the often edgy and subversive subjects covered in UGC that are unavailable elsewhere (Hewitt & Vazquez, 2010). Thus, for the purposes of this study, all individuals 18 or older who use YouTube to any degree comprise the population that will be investigated. There are no other limiting characteristics.

Overview of Methodology

In conducting this research, data was gathered via a mixed-methods survey approach at a medium sized rural, eastern university. The researcher constructed a survey instrument via the online survey creation and distribution software *Qualtrics*, and then worked with the campus research center to administer it to a randomized group of 1,000 undergraduate students to acquire quantitative information regarding their gender, average usage of YouTube UGC, reasons that they use YouTube UGC, likelihood to watch specific types of UGC, and media aesthetic preferences regarding UGC. By administering the survey through the research center, a random sample of students who met the specific criteria of being over 18 and holding undergraduate status was guaranteed. Throughout the survey, individuals could provide further reasoning or explanation about their responses via open ended questions, incorporating a qualitative element to the research.

Organization of the Study

The literature review, Chapter 2, examines how Internet generations have changed because of this new information, entertainment, and social networking medium. Online self publishing will then be discussed as it relates to UGC -- a key element of this study. As the theoretical basis for the study, MSD theory is also discussed in terms of how individuals can become dependent upon particular media sources and how those sources can affect the individuals. In the final portion of the literature review, specific media aesthetic elements are explained as well as a pilot study conducted prior to the dissertation for further

insight to the investigation.

Chapter 3 outlines the study's methodology describing both the population surveyed as well as the survey instrument in precise detail. A timeline of the research process is discussed as well as the method to administer the survey to the participants. Rational and justification for particular methodologies, survey questions, and scales are included throughout this section.

Chapter 4 discusses and analyzes the data collected by the survey instrument. Participants were segmented into specific dependency levels of UGC and media aesthetic preference levels operationalized by the researcher. Appropriate statistics and tables are also presented and explained when the information is construed more effectively through visual representations.

The final section, Chapter 5, includes summary, discussion, and implications. An analysis of the data covers how undergraduate students utilize UGC, their dependency levels, and if their dependency affects their media aesthetic preferences. Previous relevant research that fits or correlates with the findings is also incorporated.

Conclusion

This study is based on the central idea that media can begin to change who we are and how we think. In order to fully understand the prevalence and importance of UGC in peoples' lives, it is necessary to further discuss UGC, the digital native generations who currently use the Internet as their preferred medium, the needs fulfilled by this content, and the media aesthetics associated with online UGC. All of these areas will be discussed, in detail, in an extensive

literature review that synthesizes the information regarding the online UGC phenomenon.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

The digital native generations actively participate in online communities through comments, feedback, and UGC that are changing the ways that human beings socialize and form relationships. Coming from the Information Age, Internet users create their own content for public consumption and are inspired to continue contributing to the information pools through the feedback of others. Because UGC websites fulfill the goals and needs of users, understanding how users rely on UGC media could show how current generations' behaviors and attitudes may be affected by UGC dependence.

Digital Natives

As digital natives, today's college students tend to prefer to form and maintain relationships online despite the lack of face-to-face communication involved (Bull, Thompson, Searson, Garofalo, Park, Young, & Lee, 2008; Bonebrake, 2002; Yum & Hara, 2005). Though more of their relationship maintenance takes place online, the group members collectively experience friendships through new media platforms featuring interactive elements previously unavailable (Hill, 2003). Online friendships and interactions are enjoyed even more so by college individuals who suffer from loneliness, depression, or other issues because of perceived advantages of online anonymity or the ability to express oneself more effectively (Caplan, 2003). This

interactivity, along with the generation's high regard toward freedom, liberty and online community participation, has become democratizing technology available to those with an Internet connection (Rettie, 2003).

Increased Socialization

While digital native generations tend to socialize more on the Internet compared to face-to-face interactions (Bull et al., 2008; Rettie, 2003), research shows that members display positive social habits including a focus on online teamwork, good conduct, and the formation of social networking friendships (Morton, 2002; Cole, Smith, & Lucas, 2002). Friendships are maintained through nontraditional forms of communication such as e-mail, texting, and networking websites that permeate all aspects of their lives and change traditional conceptions of time, place, and interpersonal relationships (Goldgehn, 2004; Cole et al., 2002; Hill, 2003). This increased online socialization is backed up by Altman and Taylor's (1973) research on relationship development, which found that friendships form as the level of disclosed personal information increases. As individuals are likely to share more information online that they may not share in real life, the online environment can lead to a hyperpersonal state with higher levels of intimacy than face-to-face relationships (Walther, 1996).

Increased New Media Usage

Digital natives' media habits are different from earlier generations, though members report similar reasoning and gratifications that Baby Boom Generation members found in broadcast media. As the first age group to have lived their entire lives in a digital world (Bull et al., 2008), digital natives have become very

visually oriented and entertainment focused segment of the population. While TV changed earlier generations in similar ways regarding visual stimulation and entertainment, digital natives differ in that they think and process information differently than any other generation before it (Prensky, 2001); they multi-task and parallel process, enjoy instant gratification, and stop paying attention when forced to study or learn in an environment unfriendly to these associated skills. These members have been marketed to their entire lives via digital technology (Schor, 2005) and expect a more varied and rapidly paced MTV media aesthetical style including interactive elements in all media ranging from video games and Internet websites (Hill, 2003). While individuals between 18 and 24 watch fewer hours of television and spend more time on new media (Broeck, Pierson, & Lievens, 2007), they report that online media offer a stable routine that makes them feel like part of a greater community, just like television provided to the generations before them (Peters, 2003; Taylor & Harper, 2003; Boyns & Stephenson, 2003).

Though these digital native generations use new media outlets, that does not imply, however, that older generations avoid these technologies entirely. In a study focusing on a sample with nearly 30% of individuals aged 35 to 44, 87% of respondents reported using at least one type of UGC on a usual basis for an average of 55.66 minutes each day that the content was used. In the study, viewing pictures, watching videos, and browsing web pages were the most popular types of UGC usage (Daugherty, Eastin, & Bright, 2008). Thus, as UGC

becomes more prevalent, the experience is bound to attract other generations and users instead of the younger target audience.

Online Community Participation Mentality

Technology has not only empowered digital generations by increasing accessibility to knowledge, but also changed their mentality regarding equality, relationship formation, and participatory communities online. Surrounded by information in online communities, samples studied from the digital generations suggest that they prefer to research and experience information on their own rather than be taught or told (Goldgehn, 2004) and that they hold such values of democracy, openness, and liberty as the most important in their lives (Rettie, 2003). This technology-trained generation places an emphasis on equitable participation (Hill, 2003) that may correlate with their likelihood to use social networking sites as a part of a community (Jones et al., 2009). Bull et al. (2008) report that the rise of social media usage provides new opportunities for members who directly participate in an online community, such as YouTube, which itself is enticing to digital native generations because of its visual and participatory nature (Schor, 2005).

Research has shown similar findings regarding online interaction inspiring real world or offline interactions. For example, users who acquire political information from online sources are likely to engage directly in interactive formats via online communities, discussion boards, chat programs, and feedback (Nah, Veenstra, & Shah, 2006) and form an online, participatory conversation (Domingo & Heinonen, 2008). Those individuals who participate in Internet

political discussions are more likely to vote than those who do not (Price & Cappella, 2002; Cornfield & Rainie, 2006), and more likely to engage in face-to-face political conversation and public political engagement (Shah, Cho, Eveland, & Kwak, 2005). However, some researchers argue that civic engagement as a whole has declined drastically over the past 50 years from technological innovations that take up more time and attention of peoples' overall lives. Putnam (1995) specifically discusses the effects of television in the 1960s where technology individualized and privatized leisure time to the point that communities became wider, shallower, and less meaningful. Thus, Internet participatory communities and UGC appear to be satisfying individual tastes and detracting from the local community social aspects in the same fashion as TV and other technological developments in the past.

Though the Internet provides an opportunity for individuals to interact, empower grassroots movements, express themselves creatively, and create dialogues on various issues without broadcast media censorship or filtering, it is still far from an online democracy. In 2010, it is expected that the number of Internet users will surpass two billion (Wollman, 2010), however, there are still many groups of people who are unable to access the Internet. This lack of access then creates a digital divide between different ages, cultures, and economic statuses (Loges & Jung, 2001). Shah, McLeod, & Yoon (2001) found that seniors are less likely to post or spread information online than younger people, providing an opportunity for certain age groups to populate the Internet more so than others. When looking at a sample aged nine to 19, researchers

also found that the digital divide within younger generations is much smaller because of the general increased Internet access (Livingstone & Helsper, 2007).

Upon analyzing data from 26 developed and developing countries from 1991–2005, Dewan, Ganley, & Kraemer found significant effects between PC diffusion and Internet access -- countries lacking the resources, infrastructure, or economic wealth to have a large enough PC user base are less likely to ever acquire access to the Internet. Similarly, previous research has also found that income disparity is the main factor in the digital divide (Chinn & Fairlie, 2006) and that a nation's income level is positively associated with technology penetration (Corrocher & Ordanini 2002). Regardless of the income of one's country however, individuals who live in rural or economically disadvantaged regions have less access to high-speed, broadband Internet (Parker, 2000; Prieger, 2003), fitting with research that also found that highly educated individuals with money were more likely to use the Internet than others (Goldfarb & Prince, 2007). It is also possible for individuals to have access to the technology necessary to use the Internet but choose not to because they do not see it as a rewarding experience or because they fear not being able to maintain their safety and privacy while online (Lenhart, Rainie, Fox, Horrigan, & Spooner, 2000). Thus, the Internet is not a perfect utopia wherein all individuals equally participate -- there is still a divide between the "haves" and the "have nots" in the online, global information exchange.

Online community participation can be directly seen in one of the first, if not the first, websites promoting users to come together as a community while

also broadcasting themselves as a online television-like series -- YouTube. As Burgess & Green (2009) discuss, YouTube tracks and allows users to search for videos by the most viewed, most discussed, or highest rated categories that are all affected by the community. It is a virtual world similar to that described by Becker (1982) that he titled "Art World" where a network of creative individuals come together and create art; in YouTube these partnerships are called collaborations. Because of this importance placed on user feedback, participation, and content creation, as well as the sheer number of users of the site making it the most popular online video community, YouTube has become the key community to participate in and attempt to acquire an Internet celebrity status (YouTube, 2010; Trier, 2007).

YouTube Community

By promoting itself as an online community where users can broadcast themselves, YouTube has become a powerful social networking, video sharing site featuring UGC. When feedback is left from one user to another on such sites, the content provider is more inclined to become active in the community (Mabillot, 2007) and continue to post more videos regardless of the comment tone: positive, negative, or neutral (Cheshire, 2007). The overall community then benefits from the variety and amount of content that can then be accessed by all users whenever they wish, ignoring any time or space restrictions associated with mainstream broadcast media (Compton et al., 2007). According to YouTube (2010), its users currently view nearly two billion videos a day and 24 hours of video are uploaded every minute.

Social Networking Aspect

Though YouTube is predominantly thought of as an online video sharing website, it also allows users to post their own content and form relationships. The community began as a user generated video sharing platform for users under the age of 35 (Sterling, 2006), but then transformed into a social medium for various age groups featuring customizable channel pages that users can subscribe to and befriend, video linking options, and abilities to view the connections and friends of other users (Fernando, 2007; Donath & Boyd, 2004). When users interact with video makers through written comments or new videos as direct responses to the original content, they not only form social relationships, but also promote a sense of co-viewing by watching, sharing, and discussing videos with friends and family (Lange, 2008; Haridakis & Hanson, 2009).

Just as in other social networking portals, users can form online communities with like-minded individuals (Nardi, 2005) and choose specific friendships and relationships (Lüders, 2008). In a digital video environment especially, content is revised, remixed, and reposted, which inspires conversation even if the video quality does not meet expected broadcast quality (Bull et al., 2008; Lange, 2008). Social networking sites such as MySpace, Blogspot, Orkut, Qoogle, and Friendster are also the top web portals that post links to videos that appear on YouTube, showing the power and connection that these social sites have formed together (Cha et al., 2007). Rather than the traditional ways of discovering online content through search engines, UGC is buzz driven and passed to family and friends via electronic word-of-mouth

methods such as e-mail or social networking website postings (Hewitt et al., 2010).

Information Pool Formation Aspect

When YouTube users post videos, information pools begin to form on various topics that can then be responded to by other users via text or video, adding to the overall UGC of the website. As new media makes interactivity a staple of online culture, users are not satisfied as passive media consumers and then create their own UGC (Mabillot, 2007; Cheshire, 2007). Despite this ability to form an interactive information pool, not all users contribute.

According to the Nielsen principle, one percent of YouTube users contribute most of the content, nine percent contributes somewhat, and 90 percent only consumes content (Nielsen, 2006). However, the 10 percent of contributors display how everyday people can directly contribute to this new online grassroots democracy (Gooyong, 2009). This differentiation between users can be seen in Maia, Almeida, & Almeida's (2008) research regarding the classification of YouTubers by social networks, behaviors, and levels of activity. Their classifications included Small Community Members, Content Producers, Content Consumers, and Producer -and-Consumers. *Small Community Members* use YouTube the least frequently in the number of both visits to other's video channels and of uploads of their own video content, but they have a great deal of connection with a select few YouTubers who are family members and friends sharing personal videos. *Content Producers* are the opposite of the Small Community Members, as they are the most active on the site who frequently

upload videos for their diverse subscribers to watch, and watch others' content on a regular basis. *Content consumers* take a more passive role on the site as they watch more videos, but upload infrequently, if at all. Finally, Producers-and-Consumers share attributes of both groups (Maia et al., 2008). Thus, not all research proposes that YouTube is the purely democratic, frequently participatory environment, as there are groups who do not add to UGC communities.

When digital information such as YouTube videos collectively form a media culture full of ideas, users shape information pools without restrictions associated to broadcast programming such as rigid schedules or distribution (Cheshire et al., 2008; Haridakis et al., 2009). Users are more likely to contribute to this overall information pool when they receive comments from other users who provide feedback regarding previously established friendships (Joyce & Kraut, 2006), the uniqueness of their contributions (Ling, Beenen, Wang, Chang, Frankowski, Resnick, & Kraut, 2005), or even criticisms of the content that inspire more effort in attempt to add worthwhile information to the pool (Cheshire, 2007).

Convenience Aspect

Users can simultaneously serve as the creators, gatekeepers, critics, and audience members of media within the online self-publishing world; when online users have more control over media interpretation through selectivity, they begin to use the online material that is most convenient and accessible to them. As more people use these self publishing and social networking sites with the rapid diffusion of high-speed Internet technology (Chang, Lee, & Lee, 2008), members

can access UGC containing personal and local information from any Internet connection at any time (Lüders, 2008). Self publishers and video makers can create free unlimited media experiences for Internet audiences, and users who want to experience a particular type of information. They can then choose what self-publishers to experience; the audience has more control over the media they watch because of the sheer variety available to them at minimal or no cost (Compton et al., 2007; Cheshire et al., 2008), fitting with college age population's importance placed upon freedom of choice in consumption (Goldgehn, 2004). Because of its inexpensiveness, UGC can be exchanged, commented on, remade, and distributed at a much lower time and energy cost than the same process within the mainstream media (Mabillot, 2007).

The desire to view content that is unavailable elsewhere combined with a lack of total editorial control in YouTube UGC has led to a great deal of copyright infringed materials appearing on the site, both in unaltered and altered ways (Cha et al., 2007). Unaltered copyright materials such as full episodes of TV shows or full-length movies broken into 15-minute segments have turned YouTube into an archive of past and current shows. There is also a vast repository of music videos uploaded by individuals who did not create the material. These are frequently removed from YouTube when the content owner makes a claim that their content has been stolen under the Digital Millennium Copyright Act (DMCA) of 1998. The DMCA created a stricter enforcement policy of copyright that "outlaws technology or actions that circumvent copyright systems . . . it may be illegal merely to create or distribute technology that

enables someone to make illegal copies of digital content" (Campbell, Martin, & Fabos, 2011 p. 375). However, there are a number of provisions included in the DMCA to protect the intermediary service providers of Websites and Internet connections. Under the safe harbor provisions in the DMCA, service providers are less likely to be charged for copyright infringement when illegal content is uploaded or downloaded through their services (Dinh, 2009) so long as they follow a 'takedown procedure' and remove content that a copyright holder claims was uploaded and infringed (Cobia, 2009). Despite the DMCA, users continue to upload content, both altered and unaltered, that is not their own simply to create one online source for entertainment and information that is usable, fitting with the understanding that the usability of a medium is a key element of users' satisfaction rating of that medium (Hassan & Feng, 2005).

Self Selection and Reinforcement

With the available choice between mainstream media controlled websites or self-published information sources of other individuals, users can select what information they want, when they want it, and interact with whomever they desire on the same website. This power can lead to an overall greater happiness for users because of the new control that they have over information with technology. Some researchers point out negative occurrences that follow a user's power to select -- self selection and reinforcement. As Sunstein (2001) explains, individuals are able to seek out exactly what they want to, but can severely limit other available information that could expand their viewpoints. With this comes the possibility that individuals receive a more narrow perspective than those who

will expose themselves to more than what makes them feel safe or happy.

When selecting the information that fulfills the most needs or grants the most happiness, users may select media produced by like-minded individuals online that can then strengthen the user's original viewpoints. Instead of passively receiving information from mainstream media outlets, users can actively find the information that they desire from a variety of online sources (Compton et al., 2007), though despite this variety, users are more likely to gravitate toward information that reinforces their beliefs, which can further polarize them (Domingo et al., 2008). Interaction between users who share strong beliefs has also been shown to increase the likelihood of the online participants to engage in similar actions elsewhere online and offline in the real world (Shah, et al., 2005).

Users can create free and almost unlimited media experiences for other Internet audience members who then have more control over the media they use (Compton et al., 2007) at minimal or no cost (Cheshire et al., 2008). In a blog format, for example, where the most recent news items appear above older entries, users read the most up-to-date information of a blog while avoiding the news framing or gate keeping powers held by mainstream media outlets (Domingo et al., 2008) and are more likely to seek blogs and Web postings that cater to their own interests (Tewksbury, 2006). However, now users can be develop their own news framing and gate keeping patterns. Regarding YouTube, users may select the content of individuals who have similar personalities or interests regardless of that video uploader's credentials, expertise, or

trustworthiness.

When users look for information online that they are attracted to, this encourages users to polarize their uploaded content in order to increase viewership of those looking for particular viewpoints. The purposeful polarization then leads to a one-sided news coverage system (Blumler & Kavanagh, 1999) that strengthens the user's original views, fitting with the ties and devotion that viewers can create with their favorite mainstream media outlet. As people seek out information sources for belief and lifestyle preference reinforcement (Ridings & Gefen, 2004), blogs and Websites become fragmented (Wise, Hamman, & Thorson, 2006) and develop into specific, customized, partisan sources (Domingo et al., 2008). These extremely polarizing UGC sources also attract attention from opposing users who vehemently disagree (Wojcieszak & Mutz, 2009), which can create a beneficial political discourse for the online culture and perhaps society as a whole (Delli Carpini, Cook, & Jacobs, 2004).

When the communication is via text only, arguments are more likely to be evaluated for their soundness only rather than the visual appearance, traits, or nonverbal messages of the commenter (Blader & Tyler, 2003). Also, the associated anonymity of the Internet can create an environment where users do not fear the possible negative effects of expressing one's true opinion that they would mask in person (Bargh, McKenna, & Fitzsimmons, 2002; Stromer-Galley, 2003). However, users may also post hateful or unrelated comments regardless of the original topic as shown in research on the public comment science section of a Canadian national newspaper (Marie-Claire, 2010). A disagreement between

users can quickly escalate via comments or posts to a level that is extremely confrontational and impolite (Angouri & Tseliga, 2010). Despite the possibility of bad interactions occurring in a feedback area such as the comment section of a YouTube video, research has shown that any response will still inspire users to continue to self publish material (Joyce et al., 2006).

Online Self Publishing Trend

Users prefer the power of selection and creation of UGC online media rather than receiving information in mainstream media outlets despite the extra required effort. The recent popularity of self publishing on the Internet can partially be attributed to users who find more gratification using an online format. When users prefer interactive online communities rather than non reciprocal media (Mabillot, 2007) and can access these media sources whenever they desire, users may gratify more of their needs by participating in a self publishing community compared to passively receiving mainstream media content (Compton et al., 2007; Blumer & Katz, 1974).

Mainstream Media Dissatisfaction

When investigating the current self publishing trend, behavioral and psychographic characteristics about online users may help explain the phenomenon. While mainstream media producers remain profitable, they continue to lose audience members who acquire information elsewhere (Horwitz, 2005); younger users leave mainstream media sources in favor of interactive Internet media (Mabillot, 2007). By creating their own digital storytelling media

outlets users become self publishers who not only cover news the way they see it (Lüders, 2008), but also form an online dialogue with other users.

This interactivity and freedom of the Internet can instill a sense of resistance of the mainstream media. Users can both cover the news neglected by the mainstream and criticize these media for not doing so (Mitra & Gajjala, 2008). Dissatisfaction is a driving force behind users who create their own content and learn from others like them, fitting with the uses and gratifications model. Blumer and Katz (1974) explain how people use media based on certain needs and will continue to do so when gratified. However, individuals take one step further when they create their own content despite the extra time and energy required. Research shows that users switch from passive media consumers to active content creators because they can bond or form affinities with others and learn about themselves through the interactivity and feedback of UGC website.

Individuality Within a Community

Users who self publish can develop a different understanding of themselves through their interactions online even though they are also members of an online community that may have its own identity. Self publishing UGC is an act of individualism (Mitra et al., 2008) in which users post writings, videos, audio clips, and web pages about their interests and histories, cataloguing their lives online without knowing who their audience will be (Lüders, 2008). At first, users acquire instant gratification and expression when they see themselves in an online YouTube video, their writing in a blog, or their name added to a global electronic petition (Nelson & Hull, 2008; Compton et al., 2007). Over time

however, users develop online personalities that are either congruent or incongruent with the actual person, causing them to look back at their creations and reevaluate who they are (Snider, 2006).

Self publishers fulfill their social needs of interaction on online social networking sites and creating a format in which others can comment on their material. In online communities and social networking sites, self publishers can also receive positive reinforcement of feeling accepted by other compatible individuals. Members of YouTube post their own personal videos expressing their individuality while they also interact with other users via written feedback or video responses (Compton et al., 2007). Through interaction, online community members choose specific friendships and relationships to form (Lüders, 2008). Different types of relations begin to emerge when users acquire fan bases or form friendships; some self-published information is shared with the community, some is shared with a select few, and the rest is kept private to the self-publisher (Lange, 2008). Frequent interaction between self publishers and audience members can initiate friendships between users who may have never met in the online community and create a potential support system between self publishers.

Participatory Environment

When users participate in online communities, the information produced becomes a process as well as a product. This group of individuals forms a collective identity that creates websites to educate or entertain the public, to promote civic journalism and activism, and to encourage interaction or debate

between members of different nations (Polletta & Jasper, 2001; Mabilot, 2007; Mäkinen et al., 2008; Cheshire et al., 2008).

When large groups of people work together toward a common goal, inaccuracies and stereotypes can be eliminated from the information; working as a team with a common goal online is more effective than group members working with individual goals, especially considering that virtual teams can become so large that members can monitor the content nearly 24 hours a day (Grosse, 2002; Cheshire et al., 2008). Virtual teams, compared with face-to-face teams, are more convenient for users spread around the globe to provide feedback to others (Geister, Konradt, & Hertel, 2006) and craft information pool that they can be proud of. If the public uses a source and notices bias, then those users can alter the content themselves (Grosse, 2002) and, in time, the shared goals of the online collaborative community should prevail. These shared goals can then lead to norms, standards, and rules of content creation to ensure the content is reliable and the group maintains its collective identity (Polletta et al., 2001; Lüders, 2008).

Another key component of online participatory environments includes the ability for everyday users to become civic journalists and activists. Civic journalism is another form of self-published UGC media, but it involves less personal information and more information for the public good. Users of the Internet become active not only online, but offline as well, serving as reporter figures in their respective communities (Mäkinen et al., 2008) that can also stem from dissatisfaction with mainstream media news quality (Mabilot, 2007). Civic

journalism and activism also fit in with important ideals of digital generations that entail equality, freedom, and rebellion against authority.

On a website like YouTube, citizen journalists from around the world can cover local events that may not be covered in mainstream news that propel local events into the mainstream Internet culture (Mäkinen et al., 2008). These reporters usually post stories free for the public good and are not beholden to gatekeepers such as advertisers or owners and editors. With this self publishing, updatable Internet medium, citizen journalism can combine with social media that is equipped to offer a more subjective and detailed report (Mabillot, 2007); anyone with a cell phone or digital camera can capture an event and provide an eyewitness account without worries of breaking for a commercial or following FCC broadcast guidelines and then upload it to for the public domain.

Acting as part user, part journalist, and part activist, these citizen journalists have the opportunity to initiate active debates between other users (Lüders, 2008). On video-sharing websites, this debate turns into a series of video responses between anyone who wants to weigh in (Snider, 2006). When pointing out issues and initiating online debate, citizen journalists are likely to continue producing content because they can feel that they are influential political agents serving the public (Couldry, 2008). In this sense, citizen journalists become the watchdogs of minority issues, uncovered stories, and the traditional mainstream media outlets -- perhaps becoming The Fifth Estate in a liberal democracy. This "watchdog of the watchdog" online environment may be increasing in user numbers and participation because it is, in essence, a

storytelling network consisting of media and interpersonal connections between members of a community, which research has shown to be key encouraging factors in promoting community civic engagement (Ball-Rokeach, Kim, & Matei, 2001, Kim & Ball-Rokeach, 2006a, 2006b).

Media Dependency Theory

Since users of media actively choose venues of entertainment and information to meet their needs and goals (Ball-Rokeach, 1991), they are potentially and inadvertently becoming dependent upon a particular medium. Media Dependency Theory (MSD) has changed since its original conception dealing with individual motivations and effects rather than sociocultural factors and resources (Ball-Rokeach, 1985). Despite the various branches within this research field, there is little research done in the area of media aesthetic expectations when considering the level of user dependence.

Initially, MSD theory dealt with relationships among media, the audiences of those media, and the social system within which they both exist. According to Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur (1976), the media is a system in control of information as a resource that is not only scarce, but also highly attractive and beneficial to audience members who seek to learn about the world and greater social system around them. Society was then an organic structure that contained various sizes and types of groups, organizations, and individuals that created different contexts, preferences, and norms regarding how and what types of media are used within its encompassing system (DeFleur & Ball-Rokeach, 1989).

Media, in turn, have a great deal of power in this model because they control information that can also affect the larger social system; information gathering, creation, processing, and dissemination are all controlled by a media system that promotes dependency upon it (DeFleur & Ball-Rokeach, 1985; DeFleur & Ball-Rokeach, 1989). Thus, the degree of dependency that the audience had on the media was originally viewed as a macro, system-level variable that occurred because of the relationships between the audience, media, and social system, rather than a limited effects variable where the individual characteristics audience members were important. Despite the power that media had over individuals, there were still interdependencies created between the media, audiences, and society; when the people desired particular news, the media system relied on those within the larger society to provide information for the news stories to be disseminated elsewhere. For example, viewers of the JFK assassination became dependent upon the television for news about the incident, but in order to fulfill this increased demand for information, news networks were dependent upon experts, eyewitnesses, and other prominent individuals within the society to bring the news to the people.

Individual Media Dependency

Furthering their research, DeFleur & Ball-Rokeach created a distinction between the macro and micro levels of the dependency model to explain why media could have varying effects on people. The macro level dealt with structural dependency relations between the media and the larger social system that, instead of creating universal rules for the audience to use media, set parameters

and context for individuals at the micro level to incorporate their own preferences, personalities, and interpersonal networks. Though media and society are said to help produce dependency relations, it is up to the individual to choose exactly how that dependency forms. Fitting with gratifications research, the individual's needs and personal expectations of how media can fulfill those needs will both affect individual media selection and usage patterns; not every individual will satisfy their needs in the same ways, be as equally as informed about how to fulfill those needs, or be motivated to do so in the first place (Katz, Blumer, & Gurevitch, 1974).

Going into further depth, research by Grant, Guthrie, and Ball-Rokeach (1991) shows that recurring media needs include play (entertainment), orientation (interpersonal connection), and understanding (information-seeking) which when met, create a dependency on this particular medium (Loges & Ball-Rokeach, 1993).

Play needs include tension release and escape from reality at an individual or social level. Internet users utilize the more interactive, playful types of new media to fulfill such needs as affection, inclusion, and passing time (Charney et al., 2002; Kaye & Johnson, 2004), which when done cooperatively with other users, adds more play elements than available in traditional media (Pesce, 2000; Shedletsky & Aitken, 2004; Ball-Rokeach, 1985). At prime levels of absorption, interest, enjoyment, and excitement while using media, users enter a "flow" state that not only causes them to lose track of time and the outside, offline world (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, 1997), but also provides such a positive,

enjoyable experience that users can become more dependent upon the media source (Lucas & Sherry, 2004). This need can be connected to UGC usage, as most types of UGC are entertainment based and focus on humor (Verna, 2007).

Orientation goals revolve around the individual's desire to behave correctly and fit in with a particular social system. By feeling like a part of a system or community, individuals can relate to and interact with others in ways that they may not otherwise be able to in a real-world environment. When individuals do not act in ways that are deemed acceptable by a particular community, they may be looked down upon, degraded in status, ostracized, or completely banned temporarily or permanently for going against the status quo. Relating this need to UGC exposure, users who act appropriately in UGC web portals would be able to form friendships or relationships with like-minded individuals and, in turn, feel like a greater part of the system and continue to learn about the community (Nardi, 2005; Lüders, 2008; Polletta et al., 2001).

Understanding needs consist of users' desires to learn information about who they are and the world that surrounds them, serving as a driving force behind the learning process in general (Ball-Rokeach, 1985). Both orientation and understanding needs are exemplified by research showing increased audience interest, usage, and dependency during times of social change, disaster, or conflict (Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur, 1976; Hirschburg, Dillman, & Ball-Rokeach, 1986). Media systems frequently convert to an "open gate" dissemination mentality during times of crisis in order to spread as much information as possible, sometimes focusing on quantity alone (Sood, Stockdale,

& Rogers, 1987; Waxman, 1973). Though not included in seminal MSD research, the Internet and UGC have become "open gate" media systems in their own powerful ways where millions of online independent content creators all cover an event the way that they see it with no systematic filtering device (Mäkinen et al., 2008; Mabillot, 2007). Though some individuals certainly filter information according to their own beliefs or understandings, the lack of a systematic filtering device may improve the chances of the truth prevailing. Perhaps as a response to media conglomeration leading to a delivery system with decreasing local voices (Vivian, 2010), everyday users can combine forces and cover local information that they enjoy or see missing from media coverage (McCombs, Hinsley, Kaufhold, & Lewis, 2010). Internet users can acquire local information from as many residents in their areas who create UGC which could lead to an increased "hyperlocal" type of dependency.

Effects

As media provide information that individuals use to attain their goals and fulfill their needs, media develop more power over the individuals (Ball-Rokeach, Power, Guthrie, & Waring, 1990, p. 250). By consuming, processing, interpreting, and involving themselves in media, users can experience media effects (Rubin & Windahl, 1986) along with the increased dependency that can change their attitudes, behaviors, or beliefs more intensely than passive traditional media (Ball-Rokeach, 1985; Loges, 1994; Grant, 1996).

Ball-Rokeach and DeFleur (1976) found that media can alter audience morale or trigger emotional responses if a particular group that they belong to is

characterized in a negative or positive manner. Furthermore, individuals' values regarding political and moral issues could be affected and changed by watching a 30-minute television broadcast (Ball-Rokeach, Rokeach, & Grube, 1984), fitting with previous research showing the media's ability to destabilize people's core beliefs or values by presenting contradictory information and group generalizations (Rokeach, 1971). When consuming media that fulfills needs, individuals are more likely to turn this opinion change into action by media encouragement to either begin a new behavior or discontinue an already occurring action (Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur, 1976). Individuals who have a dependency upon home shopping channels, for example, were more likely to purchase items (Grant, et al., 1991; Skumanich et al., 1998). When individuals purchased items this continued the dependency cycle and viewers' dependence upon the media source grew.

Individuals who are dependent upon a particular medium to fulfill needs will also find it difficult to stop using that source (McIlwraith 1998, p. 372). These individuals then continue the dependency without sacrificing the quality of their offline existence (Widyanto & McMurrin, 2004). Those particular users with decreased commitment and satisfaction with real world offline relationships are likely to seek out mediated channels or messages in order to deal with or escape from these unfavorable feelings (Rubin et al., 1986), increasing the strength of the dependency relations (Anderson, Collins, Schmitt, & Jacobvitz, 1996). These findings fit with previous research on media addiction showing that hours spent on the Internet per day is a positive predictor of Internet addiction (Leung, 2004;

Junghyun & Haridakis, 2009) and that users who are addicted to a particular medium become more engrossed and familiar with the medium in order to bolster self esteem and feel as if they can control their lives (Peele, 1985).

Updating MSD

Though media dependency research has changed its focus from a macro effects theory to a micro effects theory, there are gaps within the field related to new media topics. Research has shifted from how sociocultural factors intensify individuals' or societies' reliance on media sources (Ball-Rokeach, 1985) to the individual's goals and media dependence impacts, which provided the ability for empirical measurement between an individual and a specific medium (Skumanich et al., 1998). Because a medium that a user is dependent upon will have more influence and power over the individual (DeFleur & Ball-Rockeach, 1989), a branch of media dependence research has evolved regarding agenda setting, behavioral and attitudinal changing media powers, focusing on opinions regarding informational or cognitive processes. Previous media dependence researchers have investigated the topics of media addiction (Mcilwraith et al., 1998), excessive gaming (Grusser, Thalemann, & Griffiths, 2007), and Internet abuse (Young, 2004), but there is little focusing on non-cognitive effects and non-traditional media.

For example, previous MSD research has centered on a mainstream media that provides selected and filtered widespread information to the masses, yet, when desired information is not available in the mainstream, people will likely go elsewhere and this could potentially impact the entire dependency model (Tai

& Sun, 2007). The combination of an Internet that serves as an outlet for alternative voices unheard in traditional media and the extent to which new media have become ingrained and routine in younger generations' lives may also impact the application of MSD to new technology (Rainie & Bell, 2004; Lievrouw, 2004). Regardless, the basic tenets and understandings of MSD can be applied to new areas of research such as the Internet, especially considering how users are able to personalize and tailor their media experience in order to fit their particular needs (Liang, Lai, & Ku, 2006).

Media Aesthetics

Information is no longer scarce and mainstream media no longer have the sole power in delivering information, and this change could also impact areas of individuals not touched upon in MSD research. One area unaddressed by the theory is media aesthetics. When people solely obtained information from mainstream media sources, it was professional content with similar voices, production values, and budgets. With people dependent upon the plethora of aesthetical styles of UGC, the entire media aesthetics realm is changing. Audiences may be impacted by the differing UGC styles; audiences' preferences may be different than those dependent upon traditional media.

Aesthetics is a branch of philosophy that deals with perceptions of beauty and ugliness. A central element of aesthetics focuses on the question of whether the perceptions are of a quality that the item objectively has, or if the perceptions exist subjectively within the person's mind (Aesthetics, 1972). Aesthetics has also been referred to as an experience that can be explained by other sciences and

scientific methods (Aesthetics, 1971). What was once a philosophical quandary by Plato in his *Hippias Major* that searched for the definition of beauty, is now a field of study for artists and media producers who attempt to create images to be consumed and experienced by others. The study of media aesthetics revolves around four principal aesthetic areas: light and color, space, time, and sound (Zettl, 2010). Zettl's text "Sight, Sound, Motion: Applied Media Aesthetics" has played a role in the development of media aesthetics, serving as a reference text and teaching instrument for Communications and Media college students since it was first published in 1973, thus, it is important to discuss the five areas as first described.

Lighting

The lighting within a scene helps "tell" viewers how they should feel about a certain screen event subconsciously as well as helps form physical reality; what is visually perceived by the eye are not physical objects, but rather the light reflection variations of those objects. Zettl explains that through the deliberate manipulation of light and shadow, media producers can change the meaning of the screen event and viewer's emotions in the process.

Color

Directly related to lighting, color is able to bring excitement and dynamism through even the smallest change in hue, saturation, or brightness on the screen. Depending on the culture in which one grew up, colors can drastically change a scene because of the different connotations and meanings carried along with them.

Space

Space is the composition of the screen by framing shots that fit a desired mood. For example, by setting the horizon angled a few degrees off, the audience may feel disoriented or even experience a sense of energy depending upon the precision of the scene. Through basic composition techniques such as providing proper headroom, viewers will be able to easily process the visual information instead of becoming distracted from an improperly composed shot.

Time

This area of media aesthetics can be split into two different types: Objective time (the actual running time of an event), and subjective time (the personal experience of how long an event feels). As an editing staple, media producers often have to cut the objective time of their creations, however, it is the subjective time that can be altered aesthetically through editing styles and paces.

Space and time are areas of aesthetics that are impacted perhaps the most by the editor and his or her particular style, and are seeing a change with the digital media revolution. Though celluloid has a limited number of times that it can be physically cut and spliced together, digital media changed the entire process with non-linear, digital software packages that allow media producers to experiment and play during editing (Ganz & Khatib, 2006). A specific example of a changing aesthetic is that of the jump cut, or the juxtaposition of two similar shots making an object seem to "jump" around the screen, which is usually forbidden in the classical continuity editing style (Zettl, 2010). As technology improved, the jump cut's popularity grew through French New Wave films of the

1950s and 1960s and became more prevalent in the next three decades in such modern cinema such as in Tom Tykwer's *Run Lola Run* and Woody Allen's *Deconstructing Harry*. In the Internet age, amateur media producers may go against traditional media aesthetic principles (Hewitt et al., 2010) such as the jump cut, which can be seen frequently in online video productions, though the intents of such usage cannot be said to be either purposeful or accidental.

Sound

Sound is a vital aspect of aesthetics in that dialogue, sound effects, and music can orient the audience emotionally, directly set a mood, and provide structure to a screen event to reinforce the visual aesthetic elements already implemented. Sound is often an area overlooked by video and film novices who are instead concentrating on the visuals (Hewitt et al., 2010). In previous research, a high quality rating and positive auditory experience is often associated with more positive ratings of the specific attributes of a high signal-to-noise ratio, loudness, sharpness, fluctuation strength, roughness, and proper environmental noise or sounds unintended to be captured (Zwicker & Fastl, 1999; van Egmond, 2006; van Egmond, 2008).

Especially considering the time-shifting and space-shifting capabilities of modern technology, media aesthetic importance may be decreasing in favor of convenience (Vivian, 2010). Though screens are larger in living rooms, they are also now pocket-sized for on-the-go media exposure. In fact, high resolution or definition videos do not always display properly on these devices, which can result in torn frames, missing pixels, and frequent buffering which would degrade

the overall experience (Hewitt et al., 2010). Just as entire generations have grown to prefer the lower bitrates audio qualities of mp3s because of the increased portability and convenience (Ferguson, Greer, & Reardon, 2007), it appears that the same situation is occurring with media aesthetic elements in online UGC.

Though focused on full-length feature films rather than UGC, four studies conducted by Kortum & Sullivan found results that reinforce this idea (Kortum & Sullivan, 2010). After showing a total of 180 movie clips of various qualities to 100 participants, researchers found a "strong correlation between the desirability of movie content and subjective ratings of video quality." Thus, lower quality movie clips were rated higher in quality when individuals enjoyed what they were watching. This fits with the idea that viewers will place less importance on the quality of the production if audiences receive pleasure from other aspects of the video clips. Furthermore, because participants were shown two-minute segments of these movies, a case could be made that UGC with similar short lengths would see similar results.

Perhaps also playing a role in shifting aesthetic acceptance is the increased popularity of reality television and movies representing more of an avant-garde production style. Reality TV, for example, typically uses handheld camerawork and synchronized sound recorded on the spot in everyday settings (Murray & Ouellette, 2004), that help focus attention on the character personalities going through real emotions (Aslama & Mervi, 2006). On-location production using digital technologies has also changed film industry aesthetics.

The Blair Witch Project (1999) and *Paranormal Activity* (2007) are two examples of a character and emotion focused film style that appear to be non-fiction; in order to create realism, filmmakers use documentary film conventions playing on audiences' attraction to voyeurism (Landesman, 2008) such as interviews, eye witness testimonies, and footage that appears to be caught on camera (Hill, 2007). As documentarians such as Michael Moore also remain popular and profitable despite competing in a blockbuster, feature film world, the avant-garde, realistic media trend does not seem to be diminishing in power. Though reality TV and documentaries are not covered in this study, UGC video includes many of the same credibility and authenticity building techniques.

Pilot Study

Based on the preceding reviewed literature, this researcher conducted a related pilot study, in that it was a much smaller version of the dissertation study. As part of the study conducted directly on the YouTube community, the researcher administered a survey to 24 users regarding perceptions of UGC's entertainment value and media aesthetic components of visuals, lighting, and audio using attitudinal ordinal data and user level interval data. The researcher found that both heavy users and casual users regarded entertainment value as the most important element and reported UGC as a low quality media compared to broadcast content. However, heavy Users were more accepting of the low quality elements than casual users (McKeague & Leidman, 2010). A difference also existed regarding the ways in which the two groups use UGC and the needs that are fulfilled in the process. Despite heavy Users' low quality perceptions of

UGC, they still reported acquiring a greater level of satisfaction than casual users. Both heavy and casual users reported that UGC was more entertaining than broadcast material, reinforcing previous research that 18- to 24-year olds spend fewer hours watching television and more hours using new media (Broeck, et al., 2007). This importance placed upon entertainment by the research participants corresponds with similar studies done in the areas of this online video-using demographic (Hill, 2003).

Though the data showed that 100% of both heavy and casual users watched YouTube UGC to entertain themselves, it was not the only reason. All of the heavy users (100%) and a majority of the casual users (88%) reported that they used UGC to learn new information as well. However, when looking at the data on using UGC to interact with other YouTube users, a majority of the heavy users (72%) reported that they did, compared to the 31% of casual users. Thus, users who spent the most time with UGC, the heavy users, also reported fulfilling the most needs with UGC. The three needs that heavy users reported fulfilling through UGC, entertainment, interpersonal connection, and information seeking, have already been established as recurring media needs in previous research that create a dependency on a particular medium (Grant, et al., 1991).

After establishing that the heavy users were more dependent upon UGC, their particular responses were compared with casual users regarding the importance of visual aesthetic elements of the content to see if dependency level affects visual aesthetic expectation. Regarding likelihood to stop watching UGC upon being displeased with its visuals, 81% of the casual users said that they

would stop while 86% of heavy users said that they would not. This difference among heavy users reporting that they would not stop watching if they were displeased with the visuals supports the idea that the greater dependency on a medium, the greater influence that medium will have on the user (DeFleur & Ball-Rockeach, 1989).

It is interesting to note that heavy users were dependent upon and preferred media that 72% report having low quality lighting, 57% report having low quality audio, and 100% report being made on smaller budgets. This preference of media containing reported lower quality elements not only fits with 100% of heavy users who reported that they were more concerned with the content than the visual elements of UGC, but also with previous research showing that users who consume, process, interpret, and immerse themselves in media will experience media effects and increased dependency that can change attitudes, behaviors, or beliefs (Rubin et al., 1986; Ball-Rokeach, 1985; Loges, 1994; Grant, 1996).

Conclusion

Younger generations and digital natives are attracted to online, interactive environments in order to fulfill particular needs of social interaction, entertainment, and information gaining. Not only do these younger groups' ideals of freedom, individuality, democracy, and desires to express themselves creatively match the interactive styles of online communities such as YouTube, but also their media preferences of a swiftly paced, entertainment-based match the content primarily found on UGC sites.

When goal-directed relationship begins to form with an individual who uses a medium to fulfill specific needs, research shows that a dependence upon that medium regularly exists. MSD theory discusses such a relationship wherein people become dependent upon media to fulfill needs that affect users of that medium at a personal level in ways ranging from opinion change to behavior alteration. Because UGC by its very nature contains a multitude of styles and levels of quality, a dependency upon this medium may be transforming audiences' media aesthetic preferences such as a decreased importance placed on the video quality in favor of the content or personality of the actor in the video, as found in a related pilot study (McKeague & Leidman, 2010). Results of the pilot study not only reinforce previous research on digital native generations and media dependency relationships, but also suggest that there are discernable differences between importance placed upon the media aesthetic quality of UGC when comparing heavy and casual YouTube users. Thus, a more in-depth investigation will be conducted, furthering this line of research.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This study sought to evaluate to what extent, if any, the aesthetic preferences of users dependent upon UGC are affected by that dependency. Specifically, the study investigated if there were any patterns in media aesthetic preferences and viewing habits when measured in the context of varying levels of individual dependency. In order to narrow the media aesthetic field, the researcher focused on the two specific elements of sound clarity and editing style. The researcher hypothesized that users who are more UGC dependent will perceive sound clarity and editing style differently compared to those UGC users who are less dependent in the sample. To prevent any possible confusion, the researcher never included the direct terms "sound clarity" and "editing style" in the study -- rather, a series of questions revolving around practical and easily understandable "quality" aspects of both media aesthetic elements. Similarly, differences were investigated between less dependent and more dependent users regarding preferred content characteristics of UGC judged by their likelihood to watch. As a secondary area of interest, the researcher searched for any patterns regarding sound clarity and editing aesthetic perceptions and the user's gender. Thus, it is important to note that the inherent or objective qualities of UGC were not evaluated in this study; only included were the perceptions of

UGC aesthetic qualities according to the user's likelihood to continue or stop watching UGC when specific situations were met.

The design of this research was a mixed-methods approach that used mostly quantitative survey procedures featuring open-ended areas for in-depth responses. The online Qualtrics survey focused on four areas: (1) Participant's usage level of UGC on YouTube (2) The needs fulfilled through UGC (3) Users' perceptions of media aesthetic elements of editing style and sound clarity, and (4) Users' likelihood to watch UGC featuring specific genres or content. Usage level and needs fulfilled responses were combined and compared with five previously-established areas of media dependency research: interpersonal utility, pass time, information seeking, convenience, and entertainment (Papacharissi & Rubin, 2000).

This exact process, discussed in detail in Chapter 4, placed all users into two levels of dependency: less dependent and more dependent. The researcher also calculated means for sound clarity importance, editing style importance, and UGC characteristics' likelihood-to-watch levels. The researcher also collected basic demographic information in order to test statistical differences that gender may have with the dependency on UGC and media aesthetic importance constructs.

The researcher selected a survey methodology as surveys are effective and versatile ways to describe opinions, behaviors, or characteristics of a population of interest (Slavin, 2007; Cresswell, 1994) especially when collecting large amounts of data from many people (Buddenbaum & Novak, 2001). The

researcher chose an online survey particularly because undergraduate students were able to complete the survey on their own time at their own convenience, which attempted to increase response rates. The instrument is descriptive in that it attempts to describe the population being studied, further, the instrument is analytical by seeking to find out if segments of the population that cluster together happen to behave differently than other portions. As Berger notes (2000), both descriptive and analytical surveys enable researchers to collect a great deal of current information at one time in a standardized manner that is able to be statistically analyzed. These statistics "can be quantified and analyzed statistically and thus can reach a higher degree of precision about the group being studied that other forms of research cannot duplicate" (Berger, 2000 p. 191).

The survey methodology also matched elements discussed in the literature review regarding the guiding MSD theory (Ball-Rokeach, 1985) and digital native sample (Prensky, 2001). Throughout the years, a branch of MSD theory emerged focusing on individual's media use and dependency that comes about through fulfilling various needs (Skumanich et al., 1998). Survey use is most successful and reliable when asking respondents about themselves rather than others, friends, family, and households. In addition, since media needs of play, orientation, and understanding are all acquired for personal gratification on an individual basis, survey research was more fitting because individuals would be more likely to respond in a way that represented their own viewpoints rather than experiencing the chance of groupthink in a focus group (Grant et al., 1991;

Berger, 2000). Regarding the sample characteristics, digital natives and college students tend to prefer online interactions to face-to-face, suggesting that online surveys may acquire more results than traditional recruitment methods (Broeck et al., 2007; Jones et al., 2009). Since feedback is such an integral aspect of online UGC communities, providing helpful information to a researcher who is also a part of their YouTube information pool is yet another justification for the implementation of survey research (Mabillot, 2007; Cheshire, 2007). Self-reporting was specifically selected for this investigation because it has been demonstrated as an effective tool in estimating consumption in previous research on addiction (Del Boca & Noll, 2002).

Survey Instrument

As the researcher only administered the survey once to one group of individuals, it was cross-sectional in nature, meaning it is a snapshot in time of the opinions, behaviors, and beliefs of one group at one moment (Hagan, 2006; Buddenbaum et al., 2001). The survey, adapted from McKeague & Leidman's (2010) pilot study, collected basic demographic information including subjects' gender to be broken down in the results. Researchers also collected participants' usage level of UGC, including how frequently they used UGC and the length of time per typical UGC viewing session. This UGC usage information, along with data asking respondents for the typical reasons for using UGC, was combined in order to put the users into dependency levels. These dependency levels were based off of a series of 16-Likert scale questions regarding participants' attitudes, perceptions, and opinions toward the media aesthetic elements of editing style

and sound clarity. In addition, the survey asked subjects to respond to specific situations if they were more or less likely to continue watching a UGC video if it met certain characteristics. Likert scales are an effective means to obtain precise information on beliefs and opinions (Berger, 2000) which includes such a subjective area as media aesthetic preferences.

Information regarding UGC usage and basic demographic information was acquired through multiple choice and text box entry items while UGC needs fulfillment and media aesthetic expectation were attained through a series of agreement Likert scale questions. Likert scale responses work well with survey research when investigating beliefs, attitudes, and values of a group (Vogt, 2007). Survey items can also include neutral or "no opinion" options so that participants are not forced to skew the results either way (Buddenbaum et al., 2001) and allow individuals to report true feelings more accurately (Vogt, 2007). See Appendix E for a copy of the survey instrument.

Informed consent information was included in the first section of the survey prior to exposure to any of the questions. The content of this consent section included the following information:

- General descriptive information about the goals of the study to investigate the media aesthetic preferences and usage habits of YouTube UGC.
- Disclaimers that this study was part of a doctoral dissertation required in order for the student researcher to earn a Ph.D.
- Brief definitions of UGC and other related concepts to prevent confusion.

- Procedures regarding taking the survey (i.e. respondents should be the only ones who completed the survey without any outside influence).
- Statements that participation was strongly urged, but not required. Failure to participate may have prevented individuals from having their voices represented in the research, however, their academic standing would not be affected in any way.
- Statements that summarized results of the study can be sent to those who request a copy after completing the survey.
- Guarantee of anonymity and confidentiality, as all data was reported in aggregate form. In-depth quotes or responses provided in the fill-in sections were reported anonymously.
- Contact information for the research to field questions about the survey.

A copy of the in-depth provided informed consent information can be seen in Appendix D.

Validity and Reliability

Surveys are widely used in social sciences, and especially communications research, because they entail excellent validity and reliability (Buddenbaum et al., 2001). While constructing the survey instrument, the items were constructed logically in order to appropriately address the hypotheses. Because of this careful construction, face validity, or validity of the measure because it appeared to make sense, was acquired. Expert jury validity has also been attained through showing the survey to a panel of experts including the

dissertation Chair, Dr. Mary Beth Leidman, and other faculty members including Dr. Jay Start, Dr. Zachary Stiegler, and Dr. Allen Partridge. These faculty members have performed extensive research in communications field. The survey items were also examined by workers at the Indiana University of Pennsylvania Applied Research Laboratory (ARL). The ARL consists of a group of graduate students and faculty members trained in all types of research design and methodologies. With this jury validation, the quality of the measures was determined to be appropriate for academic research. External validity was also increased through the use of a probability sample "large enough for making the desired inferences through statistical analysis" (Buddenbaum et al., 2001, p. 166).

To ensure reliability, the researcher constructed all questions on the basis of MSD, UGC, and media aesthetic literature. Each of the survey items was a Likert scale, thus increasing the consistency of the ways in which participants had to respond. During the construction and expert jury validity of the survey, the researcher worded questions clearly and concisely in a non-biased, non-derogatory manner. When administered, each respondent took identical surveys with the same amount of understanding going into the process after reading the survey introduction. Because of this identical experience, there was no chance for the research to bias the results in any way such as skipping a question, making a mistake with the wording, or failing to record a response. Qualtrics collects and reports all data electronically through a web-based application, so it is also highly improbable for any data reporting issues to occur at that phase.

Survey Variables

This study investigates how dependency upon UGC (the independent variable) may have potentially affected media aesthetic preferences (the dependent variable). Since gender may have influenced the basic relationship between the independent and dependent variables, this was considered as a possible intervening variable in the study (Buddenbaum et al., 2001). These variables enabled the researcher to both judge the hypotheses regarding UGC dependency levels affecting the media aesthetic preferences of sound clarity and editing style, and answer the research questions regarding difference between media aesthetic preferences when considering dependency as well as gender.

Participants

The unit of analysis for this study was undergraduate college students. This particular group was selected based on research indicating digital native, college-age generations as the key audiences of YouTube UGC who are most attracted to the style, pace, and interactivity that the web portal provides (Rettie, 2003; Bull et al., 2003; Young, & Lee, 2008; Morton, 2002; Cole et al., 2002; Goldgehn, 2004; Schor, 2005). Out of the 1,000 recipients of the survey invitation e-mails, one-hundred and eighty-two undergraduate students attending a midsize, rural Pennsylvania state university served as the participants for the current study. The response rate was roughly 18 percent.

Participants were randomly selected from the entire undergraduate population at this institution, excluding individuals under the age of 18 so as to

not include vulnerable subjects. The researcher then sent a link through the university e-mail system, Appendix A, asking the selected individuals to participate in an online Qualtrics survey. Individuals were able to read the introductory e-mail and learn about the particular research study as well as the researcher. When knowing why the research is being conducted, what individuals stand to gain by participating, and through establishing a brief connection with the researcher, those contacted were thought to be more likely to participate. In addition, informing individuals that the researcher was a fellow student in need of their participation in order to complete the doctoral dissertation and degree was a tactic in the initial contact in order to increase response rates. The survey instrument was kept short, easy to fill out, and consistent in order to prevent survey mortality or attrition. Two weeks later, the researcher sent a follow-up e-mail, Appendix B, to those students who did not respond to the preliminary contact in case the e-mail was lost, accidentally deleted, or forgotten. A final reminder was sent, Appendix C, in attempt to increase response rates before the data collection stopped.

As one last filtering device, the first question on the survey asked participants if they ever used UGC before on YouTube; individuals who responded with a "no" response were filtered to the end of the survey that thanked them for their willingness to participate. These individuals were filtered out because with no previous history using UGC, their responses would not be helpful or relevant to the study.

Potential Impacting Variables

The outcome of this research may have been impacted by variables beyond the researcher's control. Since media aesthetic perceptions were investigated and different cultures will affect the certain preferences one has regarding beauty and quality, one's culture and country of birth may have played a key role in creating certain outliers who reported extremely different media aesthetic preferences. Since there were Arts, Journalism, Design, and Media majors included in the study, those individuals with training in production or artistry may have had a more critical eye as compared to those individuals without experience. Overall lifestyle choices of the respondents may have also affected the results, considering that individuals who may live a more sedentary lifestyle or become easily bored may be more accepting of inferior, low quality UGC. Also, the age of respondents may have affected UGC habits, depending upon what technologies they have learned and become familiar with through their life experiences.

Materials

From January 24, 2011 to February 7, 2011, the researcher collected responses from the 182 students. A survey was selected in order to measure a variety of opinions of YouTube UGC, importance levels of the media aesthetic elements, and reasoning as to why they used UGC. To collect responses, the researcher created an online survey using the Qualtrics web-based survey tool and administered it via the university's e-mail system.

Data Collection

The researcher first sent an introductory e-mail. Within the message, users were told that if they participated, then they would remain anonymous and that the researcher would send the study findings to them upon request. Beginning February 7, the researcher no longer accepted surveys. Since the survey solely consisted of demographical information and perceptions of UGC, there was no need for a debriefing after the survey was completed.

Ethics

No ethical principles were jeopardized in this study. The researcher included informed consent information as the first item in the online Qualtrics survey. This information included that their participation in the survey would remain anonymous and that their university standing would not be affected in any way. Any possible embarrassment that may have come about from reporting a high usage of YouTube UGC was addressed by including longer hour categories that the researcher did not expect individuals to choose, thus making the respondents feel more comfortable reporting the accurate usage numbers.

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS OF DATA

Introduction

This chapter describes the analysis conducted in order to investigate the research question and hypotheses. The researcher used Statistical Package for the Social Sciences computer software for data management and calculations. In order to begin looking for relationships regarding dependency levels, the researcher split participants who reported using YouTube UGC and were over the age of 18 into two distinct groups: less dependent and more dependent. Though these categorical groups were not used in previous studies, the researcher based the groups off of trends and characteristics found in the literature (Chou, 2001; Larose, Lin, & Eastin, 2003; McKeague & Leidman, 2010; Goldfarb et al., 2006; Junghyun et al., 2009; Leung, 2004). By splitting individuals into two groups based on dependency, differences will be able to be judged between the less and more dependent users. Those who spend more or less time with UGC will be able to be investigated if dependency affects media aesthetic expectations. Within the survey, there were five areas of dependency investigated: interpersonal utility, pass time, information seeking, convenience, and entertainment. These five dependency areas have been used in previous Internet research (Papacharissi et al., 2000), though they have been adapted in this study to be applied to UGC.

Results

Each of the dependency areas was tested for and represented on the survey. Likert scale responses allowed participants to rate particular reasons for using UGC on a strongly disagree to strongly agree response scale. Depending upon their responses, UGC users were split into two dichotomous, mutually exclusive groups of dependency levels.

Dependency Level

In order to determine if participants belonged in the less or more dependent category, the researcher calculated a dependency sum. This sum was based on 17 items of dependency that respondents rated from strongly disagree to strongly agree, available in Appendix E. These items were on a 5-point Likert scale with a neutral option, and were based on five previously established areas of media dependency research: interpersonal utility, pass time, information seeking, convenience, and entertainment (Papacharissi & Rubin, 2000). After adding each respondent's dependency sum based on the 17 items, this score was compared to what would be the equivalent of a neutral dependency sum of 51. Because higher scores correspond to more strongly agree or agree selections and lower scores correspond to more strongly disagree or disagree choices, participants were categorized accordingly. Scores greater than 51 were considered more dependent and scores lower than 51 were less dependent upon UGC. Any scores of 51, the neutral score, were excluded from the analysis, as the research hypotheses focus on high and low levels of UGC dependency.

Justification for splitting the respondents into two levels of dependency results from a theoretical as well as a practical argument. Blumer and Katz's (1974) uses and gratifications theory claims that users choose media based on goals. Media users are active in this process and have the potential to choose alternatives to fulfill these goals. MSD theory goes further in saying that as users fulfill needs and goals, they are likely to become more dependent upon that medium (Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur, M, 1976). Users will then fall within two groups of being more or less dependent upon UGC as compared to somebody who is neutral and does not use UGC at all. The pilot study using similar survey items also split participants into two distinct groups -- heavy and casual users. Though it was completed on a much smaller scale, the information gained showed that there was a difference in individuals who spent larger amounts of time and effort using UGC than those who used the content more casually. Finally, the hypotheses directly deal with users who are less or more dependent upon UGC, thus, the researcher employed a dichotomous group categorization. Results of this categorization are shown in Table 1, placing all respondents in a dependency level.

Table 1		
<i>UGC User Dependency Level Breakdown</i>		
	Frequency	Percent
Less Dependent	77	38.3
More Dependent	98	48.8
Neutral	7	3.5
Total	182	96.5

Seven respondents did not complete the survey and could not be categorized in one of the two levels. To ensure that the sample was not biased through such strategies as replacing missing data with the mean dependency or media aesthetic preference values, the researcher excluded those seven respondents from the results. Roughly 38% of the respondents were less dependent users, 49% more dependent, and 3% neutral. In the remaining analyses, the researcher also excluded the seven participants whose dependency sums equaled the neutral score of 51. This was done in order to compare only the less dependent and more dependent users and remove those neutral scores.

Gender

To investigate whether gender played any part in a user's placement on the dependency level, the researcher performed a cross-tabulation and

independent t-test. Table 2 shows descriptive statistics of gender and level of dependency.

Table 2					
<i>UGC User Level and Gender Cross-tabulation</i>					
			Dependency Level		Total
			Less Dependent	More Dependent	
Gender	Male	Count	22	35	57
		% within Gender	38.6%	61.4%	100.0%
	Female	Count	55	63	118
		% within Gender	46.6%	53.4%	100.0%
Total	Count	77	98	175	
	% both Genders	44%	56%	100.0%	

As Table 2 displays, gender followed the same patterns of dependency categorization. Nearly 39% of males and 47% of females are less dependent users. Both genders fall within the more dependent categories at a higher percentage with nearly 61% of males and 53% of females. Thus, a higher percentage of females within the gender are less dependent UGC users, and a higher percentage of males within the gender are more dependent.

An independent-samples t-test compared dependency means among male and female users. To calculate the dependency mean, the researcher coded each dependency level as a number (1=less dependent and 2=more

dependent). As shown on Table 3, the mean male ranked as slightly more dependent ($m=1.61$) than the female mean ($m=1.53$).

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Dependency Mean	Male	57	1.6140	.49115	.065
	Female	118	1.5339	.50098	.046

		Levene's Test		t-test for Equality of Means						
Dependency Mean		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Diff.	Std. Error Diff.	95% Confidence Interval	
									Lower	Upper
Dependency Mean	Equal variances assumed	4.462	.036	.998	173	.320	.08	.08	-.078	.238
	Equal variances not assumed			1.005	112	.317	.08	.079	-.077	.238

Significant at the $p < 0.05$ level.

For the statistical analyses, the researcher used a p value of .05 for the significance testing. With a Sig (2-tailed) value of .317 there is no statistically significant difference between male and female users regarding their dependency level. Differences between the two groups are likely due to chance.

Sound Clarity Importance

To address the first hypothesis regarding sound clarity importance, six Likert-item survey questions dealing with audio aesthetics each on a 5-point scale were queried. A mean of this scale was calculated from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The survey items all followed the same structure and asked respondents to rate how much they agreed that they would stop watching UGC based on each specified sound clarity issue. Sound clarity importance items included on the survey are the following:

- If there is a total lack of audio.
- If there is too much background noise
- If the audio (dialogue) is too low/soft
- If the audio (dialogue) is too high/loud
- If the audio (music) is too low/soft
- If the audio (music) is too high/loud

These six questions were then coded from a 1 to a 5 depending upon the participant's response, and then a sound clarity importance mean was calculated. The researcher then conducted an independent-samples t-test to compare the

sound clarity importance mean in both less dependent and more dependent UGC users. Results of this analysis can be seen in Table 5 and Table 6.

	Dependency Level	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Sound Clarity Importance Mean	Less Dependent	78	3.5043	.76566	.08726
	More Dependent	97	3.7457	.79024	.08024

		Levene's Test		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Diff	Std. Error Diff.	95% Confidence Interval	
									Lower	Upper
Sound Clarity Importance Mean	Equal variances assumed	.011	.915	-2.03	172	.044	-.241	.119	-.476	-.006
	Equal variances not assumed			-2.04	165	.043	-.241	.118	-.475	-.007

Significant at the p<0.05 level.

H₀₋₁

UGC users who are more dependent will rate **sound clarity importance** the same as less dependent UGC users.

H_{A-1}

UGC users who are more dependent will not rate **sound clarity importance** the same as less dependent UGC users.

As Table 5 shows, the means of the dependency groups are similar, with less dependent users rating their sound clarity importance mean at 3.5 and more dependent users rating it at 3.7. Both of these means correspond to a rating between the neutral and agree categories on their likelihood to stop watching UGC based upon specific sound clarity issues.

Since the Sig (2-tailed) value of .044 does not exceed .05, the **H₀₋₁** must be rejected. Information gathered provides evidence for a statistically significant difference between less dependent and more dependent UGC users regarding their sound clarity importance. Therefore, **H_{A-1}** can be supported.

Editing Style Importance

In order to investigate the second hypothesis, the researcher focused on six Likert-item questions dealing with editing style importance on a 5-point scale. A mean of this scale was calculated from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The survey items were of the same style and format as the sound clarity items but asked respondents to rate how much they agreed that they would stop

watching UGC based on each specified editing style issue. Editing style importance items included on the survey are the following:

- If the editing is disorienting/confusing
- If the editing is too boring
- If there is a total lack of editing
- If there is too much editing
- If there are no special effects
- If there are too many special effects

These six questions were then coded from a 1 to a 5 depending upon the participant's response, and then an editing style importance mean was calculated. A second independent-samples t-test was evaluated to compare the editing style importance mean in both less dependent and more dependent UGC users. The same dichotomous groupings were used in this analysis.

	Dependency Level	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Editing Style Importance Mean	Less Dependent	78	2.7632	.61419	.07045
	More Dependent	97	2.7049	.66071	.06743

Table 7 shows that the means of the dichotomous dependency groups are similar, with less dependent users rating their editing style importance mean at 2.76 and more dependent users rating it at 2.7. Both of these means correspond

to a rating between the disagree and neutral categories on their likelihood to stop watching UGC based upon specific editing style issues.

Table 8										
<i>Dependency Level and Editing Style Importance Independent Samples T Test</i>										
		Levene's Test		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Diff	Std. Error Diff.	95% Confidence Interval	
									Lower	Upper
Editing Style Importance Mean	Equal variances assumed	.613	.435	.593	170	.554	.058	.098	-.135	.252
	Equal variances not assumed			.598	165	.551	.058	.097	-.134	.250

Significant at the p,0,05 level.

H₀₋₂

UGC users who are more dependent will rate **editing style importance** the same as less dependent UGC users.

H_{A-2}

UGC users who are more dependent will not rate **editing style importance** the same as less dependent UGC users.

Since the Sig (2-tailed) value of .554 exceeds .05, there is not evidence to reject **H₀₋₂**. Information gathered does not provide evidence that less dependent

and more dependent UGC users differ regarding their editing style importance. Therefore, H_{A-2} cannot be supported.

UGC Characteristic Importance

Finally, six Likert-item questions dealt with UGC characteristic importance on a 5-point scale. A mean of this scale was calculated running from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). For these items, however, respondents rated each item on the agreement scale regarding their likelihood to watch UGC based on specific characteristics. The following items were included about UGC characteristics:

- It makes me laugh
- It tells a story
- It scares me
- It's a real life drama
- It's about the news
- The people in the video have fun personalities

These six questions were then coded from a 1 to a 5 depending upon the participant's response, and then a UGC characteristic likelihood-to-watch mean was calculated. A third independent-samples t-test compared the UGC characteristic mean in both less dependent and more dependent UGC users. Table 9 shows the results of this calculation.

Table 9

Dependency Level and UGC Characteristics

	Dependency Level	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
If it makes me laugh	Less Dependent	78	4.29	.780	.089
	More Dependent	97	4.57	.611	.062
If it tells a story	Less Dependent	78	3.67	.944	.108
	More Dependent	97	4.03	.717	.073
If it scares me	Less Dependent	78	2.59	.982	.113
	More Dependent	97	2.96	1.273	.130
If it is real-life drama	Less Dependent	78	3.05	1.094	.126
	More Dependent	97	3.26	1.163	.119
If it is news	Less Dependent	78	3.17	1.063	.122
	More Dependent	97	3.49	.995	.102
If the characters on screen have fun personalities	Less Dependent	78	3.46	.972	.112
	More Dependent	97	3.98	.665	.068

In all of the mean comparisons on Table 9, the greatest difference between less dependent and more dependent users was found in scary content (a 0.52 difference between dependency levels). When comparing the ranking importance by mean of the less and more dependent groups, both groups rated the characteristics in the same order from highest to lowest of their likelihood to watch UGC: (1) If it makes me laugh, (2) If it tells a story, (3) If the characters on screen have fun personalities, (4) If it is news, (5) If it is real-life drama, and (6) If it scares me. Though both groups rated the items in the same pattern, more dependent users rated all content characteristics higher than less dependent users.

Table 10

Dependency Level and UGC Characteristics Independent Samples T Test

		Levene's Test		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Diff.	Std. Error Diff.	95% Confidence Interval	
									Lower	Upper
If it makes me laugh	Equal variances assumed	3.248	.073	-2.672	170	.008	-.283	.106	-.493	-.074
	Equal variances not assumed			-2.599	139	.010	-.283	.109	-.499	-.068
If it tells a story	Equal variances assumed	11.45	.001	-2.844	170	.005	-.360	.127	-.610	-.110
	Equal variances not assumed			-2.756	136	.007	-.360	.131	-.619	-.102
If it scares me	Equal variances assumed	3.571	.060	-2.068	170	.040	-.366	.177	-.716	-.017
	Equal variances not assumed			-2.130	169	.035	-.366	.172	-.706	-.027
If it is real-life drama	Equal variances assumed	1.564	.213	-1.194	170	.234	-.208	.198	-.308	.136
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.203	164	.231	-.208	.203	-.321	.133
If it is news	Equal variances assumed	.518	.473	-2.023	170	.045	-.319	.183	-.400	-.008
	Equal variances not assumed			-2.007	155	.046	-.319	.168	-.375	-.005
If the characters have fun personalities	Equal variances assumed	18.54	.000	-4.146	170	.000	-.519	.125	-.766	-.272
	Equal variances not assumed			-3.974	127	.000	-.519	.131	-.777	.260

Significant at the p,0,05 level.

When looking at the Sig (2-tailed) values of all six items, only one results in no significant difference; Real-life drama content with a .231 value. Real-life drama content ratings between the two dependency levels were likely due to chance. However, all other UGC characteristics' Sig (2-tailed) values are less than .05. Thus, there is a statistically significant difference between less and more dependent users in their likelihood to watch content that makes them laugh (.008), that tells a story (.007), that scares them (.040), that is news (.045), and that contains characters with fun personalities (.000).

Both user dependency levels rated humor content, or content that made them laugh, as the strongest agree response out of all of the other items on a likelihood-to-watch scale, as seen on Table 9. Less dependent users rated their likelihood to watch humor content with a mean of 4.29 out of 5, with more dependent rating a 4.57 out of 5, corresponding between the agree and strongly agree responses. Because the alternative hypothesis for UGC characteristic importance dealt with the entire user base, the researcher eliminated dependency levels and simply compared the mean ratings regarding UGC content characteristics (Table 11).

Table 11				
<i>Combined UGC Characteristics Mean</i>				
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
If it makes me laugh	175	4.45	.696	.052
If it tells a story	175	3.87	.835	.062
If it scares me	175	2.78	1.158	.087
If it is real-life drama	175	3.16	1.131	.085
If it is news	175	3.32	1.041	.078
If the characters have fun personalities	175	3.75	.845	.063

H₀₋₃

YouTube users will rate **humor UGC** at the same level of influence on choosing content as all other characteristics.

H_{A-3}

YouTube users will rate **humor UGC** significantly more influential on choosing content than all other characteristics.

The most important characteristic, based on the mean rating, is humor. With a 4.45 mean out of 5, the humor content rating falls within the strongly agree and agree response. The second and third highest rated characteristics, content that tells a story and content that contains characters with fun personalities, received a 3.87 and 3.75 mean rating out of 5 respectively. These responses fall near the agree category. All other characteristics including news,

real-life drama, and scary content fall within or near the disagree and neutral response.

In order to test H_{A-3} , the researcher conducted an independent-samples, directional t-test to compare the user's rating of their likelihood to watch UGC of content that makes them laugh and content that tells a story. These two characteristics were chosen as humor is the characteristic predicted to be rated as the most influential and content with a story received the second highest mean rating. Calculation of the two-sample t-test revealed a t-value of 7.09. To find significance on a one-tailed test featuring an alpha risk of .05 at 500 degrees of freedom, the t-value must exceed the critical value of ± 1.648 . The calculated value for the t-test (7.09) exceeded the critical value (± 1.648). Since the means of the other four UGC characteristics are below the mean rating of content that tells a story, the evidence against the null hypothesis will be even less than the result of the t test between content that makes users laugh and content that tells a story. Thus, H_{0-3} can be rejected. The significant t-value suggests that there is a significantly higher difference in the influence ratings of likelihood to watch UGC that makes users laugh and the ratings of all other characteristics.

YouTube Habits and Further Comments

Though two out of the three hypotheses are supported showing that there is a statistically significant difference between less and more dependent users, information gained from an open-ended component of the survey suggests further differentiations. The researcher qualitatively analyzed all comments from both user level groups, viewable in Appendix F. Specific attributes of the

comments were coded including if the statement was goal-oriented and what those goals were. A comment was coded as goal-oriented if any need fulfillment occurred. The researcher split the comments into goal-oriented and non goal-oriented categories and then observed various recurring elements within the responses. Within the analysis, the researcher coded the patterns of using UGC for educational, entertainment, and interpersonal relationship maintenance purposes. This pattern of UGC directly fits with Grant, Guthrie, and Ball-Rokeach's (1991) recurring needs that people fulfill through media including play (entertainment), orientation (interpersonal connection), and understanding (information-seeking). Thus, a comment could be coded as containing more than one element if the respondent included multiple reasons behind using UGC.

In order for a comment to be coded as an educational element, participants must have expressed an overall goal to learn new information. Comments including content such as how-to, instructional, and news materials were considered to contain an educational element. Entertainment elements were coded when specific types of fiction or non-news, non-fiction content such as music videos were included in the comments. Finally, in order for a comment to be coded as containing an interpersonal relationship maintenance element, a social component had to be included such as interacting with others, friends, or family in a UGC medium. Table 12 is a representation of all coded elements from the twelve comments included in Appendix F.

		UGC Use Rationale			Goal Oriented	Non Goal Oriented
		Educational	Entertainment	Interpersonal Relationship Maintenance		
Dependency Level	Less Dependent	2	1	2	4	1
	More Dependent	3	4	0	4	3
Total		5	5	2	8	4

As Table 12 shows, there are eight comments coded as goal oriented and four as non goal oriented. Three of the non goal-oriented comments provided by more dependent users were brief, enthusiastic statements expressing their love of YouTube and/or UGC (respondents 40, 171, and 125 in Appendix F), while the fourth from a less dependent user articulated that he or she would stop watching UGC if the audio's pitch had been purposefully altered by the uploader in order to avoid copyright violation (respondent 78). In the goal-oriented comments, there were five instances of comments expressing the use of UGC for both educational and entertainment purposes (five total in each). More dependent user comments included more overall reasons for using UGC (seven) when totaling the amount of motivations for using UGC and comparing it to the less dependent user motivation statements (five). The only area in which less dependent reported using UGC more than the more dependent users was interpersonal relationship management, with two instances as compared to none (respondent 64 and 199).

All of the analyzed comments have also been split in displayed according to the more or less dependency groupings in Table 13 and Table 16 to discuss different patterns.

<p>Table 13</p> <p><i>Further Comments of Less Dependent Users</i></p>
<p>"I use YouTube most for HOW-TO and do it yourself things. I rarely use it for entertainment."</p>
<p>"I go to YouTube because I am looking for something specific. Example included, a friend sends a link to a video, I seek a how-to video, I seek a video that I missed on the news, etc."</p>
<p>"I only use these types of videos when one of my friends posts them on Facebook."</p>
<p>"I don't think people really go to YouTube for professional looking videos. It seems more like a contest of who can make more ridiculous videos . . . They all got their start by acting silly."</p>

Feedback from the less dependent users include specific goal-directed uses of UGC and in only one occasion mention more than one reason or motivation for using the content, as shown in Table 13. These users report visiting YouTube solely to learn how to do a specific task, watch a friend's video, or view content that is not UGC such as music videos. Comments match with the user's less dependent categorization, as they imply a limited time spent with YouTube. The final comment from a less dependent user also discusses the idea that a majority of users on YouTube are looking for entertainment rather than

professional looking videos. This comment is reinforced by the final set of questions included in the survey items focusing on how much respondents agree that quality editing and quality audio add to the overall UGC experience.

	Dependency Level	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Quality editing adds to UGC	Less Dependent	75	3.59	.887	.102
	More Dependent	96	3.88	.757	.077
Quality audio adds to UGC	Less Dependent	75	3.73	.827	.096
	More Dependent	96	4.06	.737	.075

The mean disagreement/agreement ratings given in Table 14 show that less dependent users rated both items lower than the more dependent users. Less dependent users rated the survey item 'Quality editing adds to my overall UGC experience' with a 3.59 mean as compared to the more dependent users' mean of 3.88, Similarly, less dependent users rated the survey item 'Quality audio adds to my overall UGC experience' with a 3.73 mean as compared to the more dependent users' mean of 4.06. The researcher then performed an independent samples t test to compare less and more dependent users' agreement levels that quality editing or audio can add to their overall UGC experience. Table 15 shows the results of this calculation.

Table 15										
<i>Overall UGC Improved By Quality Aesthetics Independent Samples T Test</i>										
		Levene's Test		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Diff.	Std. Error Diff.	95% Confidence Interval	
									Lower	Upper
Quality editing adds to UGC	Equal variances assumed	4.605	.033	-2.291	169	.023	-.288	.126	-.537	-.040
	Equal variances not assumed			-2.247	145	.026	-.288	.128	-.542	-.035
Quality audio adds to UGC	Equal variances assumed	3.082	.081	-2.745	169	.007	-.329	.120	-.566	-.110
	Equal variances not assumed			-2.707	149	.008	-.329	.122	-.569	-.102

Concerning editing, the Sig (2-tailed) value of .026 is less than .05, meaning that there is a statistically significant difference between less dependent and more dependent UGC users regarding their agreement levels on whether or not quality editing adds to their overall UGC experiences. Differences between the two groups are not likely due to chance. Similarly concerning quality audio, the Sig (2-tailed) value of .007 is less than .05, thus, there is also a statistically significant difference between less dependent and more dependent users regarding their agreement levels on whether or not quality audio adds to their overall UGC experiences.

From the patterns, less dependent users agreed less than the more dependent users that quality sound and editing aesthetics would add to their

overall UGC experiences, according to the means. This trend fits with the qualitative comments left by some of the respondents about less dependent users potentially caring less about the aesthetic elements of UGC. Table 16 shows comments left by the more dependent users.

Table 16

Further Comments of More Dependent Users

" [YouTube is a] good way to get interviews, programs etc. that were on [TV] years ago that you can't find anywhere else. Also the YouTube downloader is also a good accessory to have with it so if you need something from one of the videos for a project or something you can download it."

"I watch videos that help teach me a language or instructional videos, as well as videos that are meant to be funny. More of a all rounded viewing scope. With that in mind, it was hard to choose an hourly figure, even with so many options. One day I can spend 5+ hours on content because of learning aspects, then the next it could be down to less than 1 hour because there are a few news videos in total."

"I am a classical musician that uses YouTube as a free resource to professional recordings of the music I am interested. Sometimes I can find music with the score in the video, or a video of the orchestra playing. Users that upload this particular content are doing a gracious favor to users in some countries where buying such recordings can be more difficult . . . I might not have even discovered them or been intrigued enough to listen to them if I hadn't seen them in the "Suggestions" or "Related Videos" column. My other uses for YouTube include finding information on just about anything, since there is just so much UGC that somebody has bound o have made a video on what I'm looking for."

"Most people like myself use YouTube to view videos from different artists, especially if you can't seem to catch many of the videos on the TV."

Comments from more dependent users include intricate stories about their personal use of YouTube UGC, shown in Table 15. As one respondent directly states, these comments may indicate more of a wider viewing scope that is both educational and entertainment based, while the feedback from less dependent users is more focused on finding a particular video and then leaving. These more dependent users also discuss technology used on YouTube such as the downloader to rip the videos directly to their computers, as well as categorization methods to search through content such as the Suggestions and Related Video links that appear after one has searched for or watched a video. Within the comments, they discuss the idea that they are viewing other users' content rather than professionally made content -- a distinction that the less dependent respondents did not provide. Time spent with UGC is also discussed, which one respondent reported could be more than five hours in a viewing session.

Conclusion

Regarding aesthetics in this study, the sound clarity importance hypothesis (H_{A-1}) could be supported while the editing style importance (H_{A-2}) could not; dependency level had a significant impact upon the importance placed on the aesthetic area of sound clarity, but not editing style. Thus, though not uniform across all aesthetic areas, there are differences between less and more dependent users. Furthermore, information gathered concerning UGC characteristics revealed clear preferences among different groupings in reference to humor content, content featuring stories, scary content, news content, and content featuring characters with fun personalities. Humor content was rated as

the most likely to watch, therefore the UGC characteristic hypothesis could also be supported (H_{A-3}). These content differences, as well as patterns concerning importance variances, are explained in further detail in the discussion section. Trends are addressed as related to current-day issues such as copyright, education, and Internet regulation.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, IMPLICATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

Summary and Discussion

UGC has become an integral part of digital natives' lives. The primary purpose of this study was to investigate if UGC users' dependency levels affected their media aesthetic preferences including sound clarity and editing style. Any time a dependency develops where a user can learn information, entertain themselves, or interact with others online socially, those users create a relationship with media that they probably do not even understand.

After conducting an online survey of 182 college students who utilize UGC, the researcher found a split in the data between users. Some go to YouTube to learn a particular piece of information and then immediately depart, while others can go through a marathon of related videos while interacting with other creators via comments and video responses. Some form a social community with friends and strangers, while others are more loners or lurkers. Some users contribute material to the information pool, and others simply leech off of the content and experience it in the same fashion as traditional media, not taking advantage of the available interactivity. This split can be seen in the qualitative analysis of comments provided from users who are more and less dependent upon UGC -- in the UGC usage world not all users are the same.

Hypothesis H_{A-1} and H_{A-2}

While the differences in UGC usage were vital to the backbone and theoretical grounding of this study, the goal was to investigate if those user categories had different media aesthetic preferences. **H_{A-1}** focused on the audio aesthetic area, positing that more dependent UGC users would not rate sound clarity importance the same as less dependent users. Both groups resulted in a mean rating that corresponded between the neutral and agree categories that they would stop watching UGC during certain sound clarity issue situations. However, when comparing the sound clarity importance means of both groups with a t test, they were significantly different and **H_{A-1}** could be supported.

In the second aesthetic area, editing style, **H_{A-2}** put forward the equivalent idea that less dependent users would not rate the editing style the same as those who were more dependent on UGC. The editing style importance means of both groups corresponded between the disagree and neutral categories in their likelihood to stop watching UGC during specific editing style issues. Results were not significantly different and **H_{A-2}** could not be supported. Both more dependent and less dependent users rated editing style importance between the disagree and neutral categories on their likelihood to stop watching UGC based upon specific editing issues (m=2.8 and m=2.7 respectively).

The statistically significant sound clarity finding fits with previous dependency research dealing with media power and impact. As media fulfill needs and people become dependent upon sources, those sources have been shown to affect users in ways ranging from altering political beliefs to behavioral

shopping patterns (Ball-Rokeach, et al, 1990; Ball-Rokeach et al, 1984). As a previous YouTube user sample reported, a majority of the content on the website is perceived to contain generally lower aesthetic qualities (McKeague & Leidman, 2010). Based off of this pilot study and previous literature, the researcher expected that because people belonging to various dependency levels satisfy their needs differently and have diverse motivations (Katz et al, 1974), the community-accepted YouTube aesthetics would alter and affect the ways in which the users experienced content.

Results from this study do not fully indicate that all aesthetic areas are regarded as equally as important to users, however. This finding corresponds with suggestions by Burgess & Green (2009) that state that judgments, aesthetics, and activities on YouTube become normalized to all users through the entire social network, reinforcing the idea that UGC users have a different mindset depending upon their involvement in the YouTube community. The possibility emerges that while the majority of users in the current investigation reported that quality audio and editing can add to their overall experience, the aesthetics are not the purpose or even most important factor in using UGC.

As some of the provided qualitative comments of the user levels suggest, UGC may be more about an experience. Just as portable mp3 players capable of storing gigabytes of CDs were popularized through the technology's convenience and experience of listening to an entire music catalogue on the go (Ferguson et al, 2007), UGC is about expediency and self-empowerment. For dependent users, self-empowerment can develop from groups of unique people coming

together and creating a vast collection of art, music, entertainment, and educational materials on their own budget and time because it is an impassioned hobby. Less dependent users gain power from the convenience of finding specific educational how-to videos that meet an immediate goal that is often fulfilled by content created by the more dependent users. As Lange (2008) concludes, video quality is not the driving factor in videos spread via social networks -- it is the circulation of videos and creation of a communal experience that inspires viewership.

Hypothesis H_{A-3}

Cocerning the possibility that aesthetics may not be fundamental to the enjoyment of UGC, the third and final hypothesis focused on the content characteristics such as genre. No matter the medium, content always seems to be king; audiences are looking for stories and characters to occupy their spare time. This hypothesis posited that all YouTube users would be more likely to watch humor content than any other form. Out of all of the characteristics included on the strongly disagree to strongly agree scale, users rated humor the highest UGC type that they would watch (m=4.45 out of 5). It is also important to note that this mean was the highest out of all other means computed regarding the importance of sound clarity and editing style, supporting the idea that if content is humorous or entertaining, then the production quality may not matter so long as it is not distractingly off-putting. Because of these results, H_{A-3} could be supported.

Similarly, the next two most agreed upon, highest mean characteristics of

UGC were content that tells a story and content that contains characters with fun personalities ($m=3.87$ and $m=3.75$). Data gathered by Kortum and Sullivan (2010) also reinforces this point. In the study, participants viewed two-minute movie clips encoded at various qualities and then rated the content's overall desirability. Results showed a strong correlation between users' ratings of the content desirability and perceived video quality, however, the lower bitrate movie clips were frequently rated higher than the superior quality clips (Kortum et al, 2010). These findings correspond with previous research showing that UGC consumers tend to have shorter attention spans (Cha et al, 2007), and enjoy a multi-tasking, entertainment-based, instant gratification environment (Prensky, 2001; Hill, 2003).

Furthermore, Jenkins (2006) argues that trends within new media reveal that more sophisticated stories are emerging that require focused attention and repeated viewings to fully appreciate. As pockets of dedicated viewers are attracted to specific genres or character types, the fandom and dedication grow into heated discussions about story elements or continuation of story through such expressive empowerment outlets such as fan-fiction -- narratives continued by the fans that are not contrived by the original artist; all being about the content. These more intricate stories that can materialize in UGC as a multiple story arch Webisode, such as the popular Microsoft-sponsored "The Guild," stringing audiences along with cliffhangers and shocking surprises in order to keep them "tuning in" each week. With YouTube vlogs and real-life stories of users talking directly to the camera, viewers can experience a near-reality

program when watching over the course of months or in some cases many years and feel like a part of the family. In many instances, these families have names created by the content creator to further this bond even more so and create yet another smaller subculture within the YouTube UGC arena.

The appeal behind such entertainment-based characteristics of UGC can be exemplified by one of the first popular videos on YouTube titled "Hey Clip." In this video, Lital Mizel and her friend Adi Frimerman perform in a no-budget music video to The Pixies' song "Hey," featuring the pair lip-syncing words and dancing in various areas of their home (Burgess et al, 2009). As of April 15, 2011, the video has received over 32 million viewers despite being shot without a tripod, widescreen aspect ratio, or high-definition format -- it is the type of video with which YouTube has almost become synonymous with. In an interview, Lital discussed her experience and what she gathered from the comments as to why the video was successful so early on:

"We just turned on the camera and danced funny . . . I keep asking people why they like it and they say, 'Because it's reality.' You see it's homemade . . . we're so spontaneous and natural dancing, having fun. It makes people remember when they were young and danced in front of the mirror," (Kornblum, 2006).

Though it also may have helped that the girls were attractive, as many of the comments point out, Lital hits upon the idea that viewers can enjoy a low budget experience in different ways that traditional media cannot or do not provide.

Some researchers compare this UGC phenomena to early Vaudeville days where artists had a great deal of control in choosing what to perform and then perfected their skills and material along a series of performances according to audience feedback (Jenkins, 2006; Butsch, 2000). For the video creator, this experimental atmosphere can be helpful with supportive or constructive feedback provided by viewers and fans. Spam and hate-filled comments of today can then be compared to hecklers in the audience during a stage act. Nonetheless, the experience between UGC creators and the audience is greatly based in emotions and connections between those that they view, especially as the dependency levels increase.

Research Question

As a secondary inquiry of this study, the researcher sought to investigate whether gender had any effect in one's level of UGC dependency. After comparing the genders in their patterns of falling within the less and more UGC dependent groups, the researcher did not find a difference. The mean male ranked as slightly more dependent ($m=1.61$), than the female mean ($m=1.53$). Though a significant difference between the genders was not found, the observable difference that a higher percentage of males within the genders were more dependent users corresponds with previous research.

Previous findings show a difference in the amount that each gender uses the Myspace, Facebook, and YouTube social networking websites (Budden, Anthony, Budden, & Jones, 2007). Females were found to spend more time on Myspace and Facebook, while males spent significantly more time on YouTube.

When looking at those three sites specifically, Myspace is more music oriented, Facebook is geared toward establishing connections between friends and acquaintances, and YouTube is focused on video content. Differences such as these reinforce such arguments provided by Moss, Gunn, and Kubacki (2008), stating that technology is not gender neutral and, when used differently, can have effects on "purchasing behaviors, responses to advertising, product judgments, affective reactions, information processing, and learning" (Till & Priluck, 2001; Moss et al, 2008, p. 4). Though it cannot authoritatively be stated if the slight differences in usage exist in this current study, differences have been shown in the past.

Limitations

This study focused on a randomized sample of one higher education institution's undergraduate population, thus, there are issues with the ability to generalize results based off of certain demographic limitations. The geographic area is a limitation as well, in that the sample comes from only one location. It is also important to note that age was limited to those over 18, thus younger demographics that use UGC are excluded and not represented in this study. Gender was disproportionate and could have altered or biased the results to some extent also, as the breakdown of respondents was nearly 65% female and 35% male. Though this researcher considers the disproportionate survey response skewed towards females a limitation, previous investigations have found that women are more likely to respond to surveys than men (Green, 1996; Grim, Semali, & Maretzki, 2005). Because women tended to be in lower dependency

groupings compared to males, the results of this study would then logically have skewed the results toward less dependent UGC users rather than those who were truly dependent.

Another limitation deals with the method of analyzing perceptions. Users rated aesthetic preferences with the use of a quantitative methodology, so there may have also been the usual survey issues of ability to recall information, respondents answering in a manner to please the researcher, and respondents being unwilling to reveal their true opinions regarding the items on the survey. More importantly, the area of media aesthetics on a Likert scale strongly agree to strongly disagree may have not been able to accurately capture the desired data. The qualitative aspect of the study collecting open-end comments from the users resulted in much more relevant information providing a deeper insight than the calculated statistics. Also in the survey, a neutral response was included to provide an opportunity for a more accurate opinion, however, this response was frequently picked throughout. Forcing the users to place themselves in the agree or disagree sections may have resulted in a clearer picture of dependency levels and aesthetic preferences (Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtle, 2006).

As a part of the data analysis, the researcher categorized users based on 17 survey items for dependency that included average time spent with UGC per typical viewing session. Perhaps the amount of time and dependency items were not the only important factors in determining the dependency level. For example, the amount of years using UGC could have also been included in the categorization method. Additional Likert scales could have been created that

required the user to self report their perceived user level with an open-ended question asking for explanation as to why that level was chosen. These open-ended self reports could have then been qualitatively coded as an alternate way to determine the dependency user level of the respondent.

The lack of research completed in the overlap of the areas of media dependency, media aesthetics, and YouTube UGC may have also affected the grounding theory and overall framework. Perhaps the models associated with the above-mentioned concepts are unable to be applied properly to the varied and non-standardized practices of UGC creation, distribution, and consumption. As research in other areas has shown, the use and expectations of users can drastically change dependent upon the community being investigated. For example, in this study only YouTube UGC as a whole was considered -- the survey could have included an opportunity for respondents to relay information about any of the many sub-communities within YouTube that they belong to or actively participate in. Such information could have provided insight about the various community acceptance levels of aesthetics as well.

One last limitation is a result of the difficulty of studying such a rapidly changing media outlet as YouTube. There is an ever-blurring line between UGC quality and professional quality occurring in recent years as compared to the beginning of YouTube. As users refine their skills, they purchase newer technology and video production equipment in order to create higher quality videos. When the skill level increases, the experimentation continues, but users have more time invested in UGC and are likely to become more immersed. Now, with the mass

availability of low-cost HD flip cameras, many YouTuber users are producing HD content in similar styles to professional content. This similarity was noted in previous research where coding became difficult to perform when trying to determine if a video clip was UGC or professional content (Burgess et al, 2009). If researchers report having difficulty determining the difference, then it is possible that respondents reported aesthetic rankings based off of content that was professional in nature rather than UGC.

Implications

Research gained from this study of media aesthetics implies that while users care about video and audio quality to some extent, low quality productions are an acceptable and enjoyable part of the UGC experience. Corporations attempting to succeed in the UGC world may not need to spend hundreds of thousands of dollars with professional equipment, cinematographers, and lighting experts to produce enjoyable content. The content of a video is more important; if a video can fulfill a particular need of users, then those users will use and attach positive feelings to that particular clip. Content makers attempting to make money from UGC can follow the LonelyGirl YouTuber route of producing lower quality productions with professional know-how that could result in greater profits and increased enjoyment of the users. Furthermore, research shows that content creators should focus on the elements of story and interesting characters rather than attempting to win audiences over with flashy special effects or editing styles. Audiences seeking particular goals and short attention spans may disregard expensive content out to impress them with visuals or audio delicacies, while all

that the user is looking for is a how-to video on a particular topic.

Additional information acquired suggests that dependency does not necessarily affect media aesthetic preferences, as the less dependent and more dependent users consistently rated aesthetic items similarly. Previous research led the researcher to believe that more dependent users would care significantly less about the aesthetics because they were fulfilling more goals with UGC than the less dependent users. Though that relationship was not found, findings in this study reinforce dependency research that repeatedly shows differences between various levels of use.

Education

Data gathered shows both quantitatively and qualitatively that users are seeking UGC for educational purposes on their own time. Students, musicians, and everyday learners are taking the initiative to gain knowledge of particular topics of interest via YouTube UGC video clips. Educational institutions should take notice of this and may want to incorporate more UGC in the classroom, both in showing their students content created by others that contains reliable information, and in allowing students to create their own UGC upon becoming experts of a topic. With the feedback provided by others in the classroom and YouTube viewers, lessons can immediately become more exciting and interactive to the students, using their own preferred medium as an educational tool.

When incorporating UGC in the classroom, it is also important to consider the notion that users are seeking helpful information rather than a certain level of aesthetics. Results of this study suggest that while a higher aesthetic sound clarity

or editing style in an informative video can improve the overall experience of UGC, it is not the key factor in choosing an educational source online. What may be the most important lesson regarding the instructional opportunities of UGC is the idea of personalization. More of the dedicated, dependent users discuss how they can spend hours searching for a video that they are particularly interested in or contains information that they seek. If educators can allow freedom in an academic setting such as allowing students to choose their own research topics and include materials that are made by others, then the classroom can follow an online style environment. Internet sources such as Wikipedia or UGC clips made by individuals without degrees should not be instantly discredited as unreliable, as they can still provide valuable insight and a way for the classroom itself to provide feedback or partake in editing an information pool. Thus, education with UGC following the Vaudevillian feedback interactivity styles can become more of a process rather than a means to an end.

Copyright

Though this study focused on UGC, many of the respondents reported viewing material on YouTube featuring copyrighted material. Recurring comments featured hints that the used copyright-violating material was not uploaded by the original creator. Since its formation, YouTube has worked with copyright owners to remove content violating copyright and, as it has become more popular, the enforcement is occurring at a more rapid pace with more strict guidelines. Channels are oftentimes put on two- to three-week probationary periods where users cannot access their accounts, and if found to be repeat offenders the

channels can be permanently deleted. Modern computer scanning software used by YouTube and copyright holders can now pour through vast amounts of content on the website in search of matching video or music with specified content. It appears that the struggle cannot be totally "won," as users continue to use YouTube as a repository of content and as a way to fulfill information-seeking, social interaction, and entertainment needs. However, as one commenter from the study mentioned, he or she would not view copyrighted material featuring altered audio in attempts to avoid YouTube removing the video -- perhaps audiences can only overlook inferior aesthetics so much.

Nevertheless, whether or not copyright violations are actually harming the industry is still in dispute. Some researchers and media promoters discuss file-sharing and copyright violation on the Internet as a powerful tool to reach new audiences. Researchers from Harvard and the University of Kansas argue that while file-sharing has disrupted traditional business models, media distributors can make higher profits while allowing for more content to be seen if they adapt to a more lax copyright law (Oberholzer-Gee & Strumpf, 2005). Just as users who illegally download music frequently have been shown to use it as a means to sample new music and then purchase albums that they would not have discovered otherwise (Takeyama, 1994; Liebowitz, Bergman, Ben-Shaul, & Shavit, 2002), a YouTube user could theoretically find new television shows, musical artists, or full-length feature films and then spend money seeking higher quality products with lyrics, DVD artwork, and bonus features. In their study sample, Oberholzer & Strumpf found that file sharing had no statistically significant effect on purchases of

the average album and that the overall sales have increased (2005). These findings were consistent with an internal study conducted by a major record company (Economist, 2004).

Some companies are ahead of the curve, however, and have already joined the file-sharing, copyright violating UGC communities. By joining YouTube, companies in all forms of media such as film (The Weinstein Company, Screen Media Pictures, Lionsgate) music (Sony Music Entertainment, Universal Music Group) and television (ABC, CBS, NBC) all have their own channels. With these channels, creators can brand their videos, create a presence, and enable content for AdSense advertising revenue. New features have also appeared that benefit copyright owners. Starting in 2010 on YouTube, film producers, both major studios and independent UGC creators, were able to allow their content to be "rented" for a small fee. Hundreds of full-length films are now available uploaded directly by copyright holders. These clips are of a higher quality and do not have to be split into multiple segments, thus providing incentive for users to pay to experience this content for a limited amount of time or viewing sessions. Whether users will pay money for this limited selection of higher aesthetic quality content is currently unknown, as no internal documents have been released as of 2011 regarding the success of the rent feature. This researcher suspects that until companies upload as much of a variety of their back catalogue as can satiate viewers, the everyday user will prefer the more convenient, lower aesthetic product. Companies simply cannot keep up with audience demand, and they may not have the desire to do so.

Internet Regulation

Internet traffic is predicted to increase fourfold by 2014 and 57% of all traffic will be online video content compared to the current 30% (Friederiszick, Kałużny, Kohnz, Grajek, & Röller, 2011). Reasons for the increase include streaming of HD and 3DHD content as well as a boost in peer-to-peer file-sharing sites. Practical examples of this trend developed during the writing of this dissertation such as Wikileaks releasing undisclosed documents of government agencies and countries revolting around the world wherein social networking tools such as Twitter helped groups communicate during times of crisis. UGC has shown its possibilities not only dealing with the people's ability to be a watchdog of a media system or government that is not acting appropriately or doing its job, but also as a powerful political organization tool. UGC, as Grossman (2006) discusses, deals with self-expression and user-led revolutions relevant to the idea of a Web 2.0. Though all uses of UGC may not be as noble or helpful to society, unfiltered, unrestricted content is increasingly changing the ways in which many communicate, learn, and enjoy themselves. Governments, elite, and those in power have most likely already realized the influence that media can have on the people, but with UGC the people are using those same channels in attempts to gain freedom, expression, and rights.

Research found in this study shows that Internet users, regardless of dependency level, are dependent upon UGC and, as previous literature indicates, tend to prefer it to traditional mainstream sources (Horwitz, 2005; Mabilot, 2007). These results underscore the importance of net neutrality, especially considering

recent attempts by lawmakers and corporations to regulate the Internet in a way that may be counterintuitive to the empowering ability that the medium provides to the people. During its initial formation, the Internet was created as a technology that could not simply be destroyed by taking out one central location -- a helpful attribute to a technology that is so vital to many people's ways of life. As users continue to push for Internet freedom and transparency, countries such as China, Egypt, Iran, and now even the United States, are filtering and blocking access to content that they deem dangerous, hate speech, or harmful (Morozov, 2011).

In 2010, Senator Joe Lieberman introduced the Protecting Cyberspace as a National Asset Act, that would amend the Homeland Security Act of 2002 (S.3480, 2010). Under Section 249 of the bill, the President of the United States of America can declare a national cyber emergency and direct the owners and operators of specified covered critical infrastructure, such as major Internet service providers, to block content or cut off access (p. 76). Results of this study suggest that such restrictions and securities may not be worth the risk. If users are meeting various dependencies other than entertainment, such as information seeking, then individuals are experiencing alternative media as a self-empowerment device. Furthermore, if this medium can challenge the very government entities and agencies that could gain power with new laws, then is not the very purpose defeated and the power taken back away from the people? YouTube exists by consumers and viewers co-creating material (Potts, Hartley, Banks, Burgess, Cobcroft, Cunningham, & Montgomery, 2008) and it is vital to the outlet's ability to disrupt established media business models (Burgess et al., 2009) as well as

governments, as social media revolutions have shown.

In comparison to legislation aimed at censoring or limiting access, net neutrality regulation attempts to ensure that all people have equal access to the Internet. The idea behind net neutrality is to have no restrictions on content, platforms, or equipment regarding the users; it is more like a common carrier such as electricity and telephone. Decisions made by the FCC can directly impact net neutrality principles that will reduce the Internet's open platform status, and, in turn, reduce the availability, delivery, and empowerment opportunities provided by UGC. One such FCC 2010 ruling protected wired Internet access while mobile wireless was not. In this decision, network operators are not to alter web content such as blocking streaming videos on Netflix on wire line Internet connections, however, content accessed wirelessly via smartphones or tablet computers involved no explicit protection. Also, Internet service providers could increase the Internet costs when accessing sites such as YouTube in order to have content delivered at faster speeds (King, 2010). If corporations or corporate-sponsored content creators were to have "fast track" access to the Internet and the ability to serve as gatekeepers charging others to access their speeds, then the UGC playing field would no longer be equal and it would no longer be an open platform -- the very principles that allowed the Internet to flourish and become as significant as it is in many of our lives. Many of us are dependent upon the Internet in some way, and as individuals realize that more diverse and representative voices are available via UGC than mainstream media, the appeal and popularity is bound to increase. Dependency upon other everyday human beings online is quite probable so long as the

individuals still have the same freedom, access, and power online that is associated with the Internet.

Future Studies

Results of this study identify that differentiation exists when comparing the habits and preferences of more and less dependent UGC users. A much larger version of this study focusing on the uses, gratifications, and perceptions of UGC should be implemented in order to draw more sustainable universal conclusions thereby adding substantially to the growing study of UGC, its usages and the audiences upon which it has the greatest impact. This will ultimately lead to more efficient and effective use of the YouTube domain within the world of emerging technologies.

Further studies could be completed using real-world UGC examples in a more neutral setting with a moderator to ensure that users both fully understood the questions and more accurately described their feelings via qualitative procedures. The qualitative comments supplied by users in this study provided more interesting characteristics and brought personality to the results, thus, a more qualitative, open-ended approach may be better suited to tackle such a grey area as media aesthetics. Users may also be able to be placed more appropriately into various dependency groups based upon personal stories rather than meeting a specific amount of time spent with UGC. Interviews and focus groups could be conducted regarding UGC aesthetic preferences and usage habits to provide room for in-depth explanations that statistical procedures may overlook entirely.

Results regarding the type of UGC preferred could also be expanded into a larger study focusing on the most frequent content used. Rather than centering the study on college students, a much wider population could be investigated in order to compare ages, income brackets, cultures, and ethnicities to determine if there are even more differences in usage than simply using gender. The researcher expects that when widening the population, more significant differences would emerge in the results.

Conclusion

After reviewing the literature and analyzing the trends within the survey investigation, this researcher is convinced that aesthetical quality issues can be overlooked if UGC is entertaining or fulfills a need. Significant differences were found when comparing the different dependency levels of users concerning importance place upon sound clarity and content characteristics of UGC. Respondents also as a whole rated the UGC emotional and genre qualities found on Table 9 higher or more important than the editing style aesthetic properties of the content on Table 7. Sound clarity, however, ranked as high as or higher than UGC content characteristics. The investigation shows a consistent trend that there are differences in the uses and amounts of UGC between less dependent and more dependent users, however, both groups report similar importance levels of media aesthetics and similar patterns. While technological breakthroughs can allow users to create higher quality products in a more convenient, timely, and affordable manner, the technology itself is second. If content creators can entertain, inform, or sincerely interact with an audience in a community

environment, then some users are bound to find that content worthy of their time and return for repeat viewings. Broadcasting oneself does not require a professional broadcast crew, and the increasing UGC audiences may even prefer it that way. Thus, though open-access UGC may have become the 21st century addiction, it has the potential to engender a future that is much more free, democratic, and empowering to the people.

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APPENDIX A

E-mail Sent to Students

Hello, I am conducting research as a part of my doctoral work at Indiana University of Pennsylvania regarding individuals who are 18 or older and watch YouTube videos. If you fit both those criteria and are willing to participate in a research study regarding YouTube perceptions, then please help out. The survey will take approximately 10 minutes to complete.

Your participation is voluntary. Individual responses will be kept confidential and only summary information will be included in professional presentations. Please click on this link to take the survey [Link](#). Thank you for your assistance.

* This project has been approved by the Indiana University of Pennsylvania Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (Phone: 724/357/2223). For more information regarding the study, contact Mr. Matthew McKeague or Dr. Mary Beth Leidman.

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APPENDIX B

Follow Up E-mail

Hello, as part of my doctoral studies, I need to administer a **5-minute survey** to IUP students who are 18 or older and watch YouTube videos. Please help a fellow student out by taking five minutes of your time and assisting me. If you already took this survey last week, then thank you.

Your participation is voluntary. Individual responses will be kept confidential and only summary information will be included in professional presentations. Please click on this link to take the survey [Link](#). Thank you for your assistance.

* This project has been approved by the Indiana University of Pennsylvania Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (Phone: 724/357/2223). For more information regarding the study, contact Mr. Matthew McKeague or Dr. Mary Beth Leidman.

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APPENDIX C

Final E-mail Reminder

I am a doctoral student at IUP studying YouTube and need your help. Please follow the link below to take a quick and painless 5-minute survey! You must be 18 or older and watch YouTube videos. If you already took this survey last week, then thank you.

Your participation is voluntary. Individual responses will be kept confidential and only summary information will be included in professional presentations. Please click on this link to take the survey [Link](#). Thank you for your assistance.

* This project has been approved by the Indiana University of Pennsylvania Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (Phone: 724/357/2223). For more information regarding the study, contact Mr. Matthew McKeague or Dr. Mary Beth Leidman.

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APPENDIX D

Informed Consent

The 21st Century Addiction: User Generated Content Dependency and Media Aesthetic Expectations as Experienced Through YouTube

Principal Investigator: Matthew McKeague
Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Mary Beth Leidman

Introduction

This researcher invites you to participate in a research study involving people who use YouTube and are over the age of 18. If you do not meet these criteria, then please respond honestly. The information provided on this form will help you determine if you wish to participate in this study carried out by a doctoral student at Indiana University of Pennsylvania and a faculty co-sponsor.

About this Study

This study aims to investigate how YouTube users feel about certain media aesthetical and video quality elements of YouTube videos, focusing on comparing user generated content and broadcast content expectations. Your participation in this study roughly requires 10 -15 minutes of your time. If you agree to participate, then you will fill out a survey with multiple choice questions regarding YouTube.

Risks and Benefits

This procedure does not have any associated risks. If you participate in this study, you may gain a better understanding of media aesthetics and your media quality expectations. The researcher appreciates your helping with the study.

Compensation

You will not receive a payment for participating in this study.

Confidentiality

In the survey, the only personal data that will be asked for is your age, gender, and video viewing habits and expectations. This information will be used for the demographical portion of the study and will be reported as group data or presented under a pseudonym/alternative name. Though the information may be

published in a scientific journal, you will not be personally identified in any way and personal information will remain confidential. In the electronic data, you will not be identified.

Voluntary Participation

If you decide to participate, you can stop and withdraw at any time without penalty. Your participation in this study is voluntary and will not affect your standing as a YouTube user or any services provided by YouTube. If there are any questions you do not feel comfortable answering, then you do not have to answer them. If there are any questions that you have before, during, or after the study, ask them and the researcher will answer them through the YouTube e-mail system. You may withdraw from the study at any time by contacting the researcher. If you electronically sign this form, you will have agreed to participate in this study based on what you just read on this voluntary consent form. Please keep a copy of this document for your own records.

* This project has been approved by the Indiana University of Pennsylvania Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (Phone: 724/357/2223). For more information regarding the study contact Mr. Matthew McKeague.

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APPENDIX E

Survey

Completion of the following survey measure indicates consent. The consent document can be printed for your information. Response is totally anonymous, the level of privacy is the highest possible, and individual responses cannot be associated with the respondent.

1. AGE

18 19 20 21 Over 22

2. GENDER

Male Female Intersex

3. COLLEGE MAJOR

Accounting	Anthropology	Art
Asian Studies	Biology	Business
Chemistry	Child and Family Services	Pre-Chiropractic
Economics	Elementary Education	Engineering
English	Family & Consumer Science Education	Exercise Science
Fashion Merchandising	Finance	French
Interior Design	International Business	International Studies
Journalism	Management	Marketing
Mathematics	Pre-Medicine	Music
Physics	Pre-Podiatry	Political Science
Pre-professional	Natural Science Psychology	Regional Planning
Religious Studies	Respiratory Care	Safety Sciences
Clinical Laboratory Science	General Studies	Natural Science
Spanish	Communications Media	Geography
Nuclear Medicine	Social Science Education	Computer Science
Geology	Nursing	Sociology
Government & Public Service	Criminology	Nutrition Spanish
Deaf Education	Pre-Optometry	Speech-Language
Pre-Dentistry	History	Pharmacy
Theater	Disability Services	Hospitality Management
Philosophy	Veterinary	Human Resources
Vocational-Technical	Early Childhood Education	Physical Education
Management Education	Earth and Space Science	Interdisciplinary Arts
Physical Therapy		

During the following survey, user generated content will be discussed. User generated content (UGC) refers to YouTube clips made by users of the website who are independent of a network or cable channel.

4. Approximately how many years have you used YouTube? Note: Site began in 2005.

I never use YouTube	1 year	2 years	3 years
	4 years	5 years	6 years

5. Estimate how many days you go to YouTube to watch UGC per typical week?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

6. During each viewing session, estimate how long you watch YouTube UGC.

1-10 minutes

11-30 minutes

31-51 minutes

Over 51 minutes

7. Please respond to all of the following to the best of your ability. I use UGC . . .

SD = Strongly Disagree

D = Disagree

N = Neutral

A = Agree

SA = Strongly Agree

SD D N A SA

A. To communicate with (or watch) friends/family

B. Because it is cheaper than other methods

C. Because it is easier to find what I want

D. Because people don't have to be with me physically to help, entertain ,or inform me

SD D N A SA

E. Because it is entertaining

F. Because I just like to use it

G. Because it is enjoyable

SD D N A SA

H. To participate in discussions

I. To show others encouragement

J. To belong to a group/community

K. To expose myself to more points of view

L. To meet new people

M. To discover what others are saying about topics that I'm interested in.

SD D N A SA

N. To pass time when bored

O. When I have nothing better to do

P. To occupy my time

8. Please respond to all of the following to the best of your ability.

I am more likely to STOP watching UGC if . . . _____

SD D N A SA

A. There is a total lack of audio There is too much background noise (car horns, humming lights, people talking, etc.)

- B. The audio (dialogue) is too low/soft
- C. The audio (dialogue) is too high/loud
- D. The audio (music) is too low/soft
- E. The audio (music) is too high/loud
- F. The editing is disorienting/confusing
- G. The editing is too boring
- H. There is a total lack of editing (one take videos)
- I. There is too much editing (quick cuts between images)
- J. There are no special effects
- K. There are too many special effects

**9. Please respond to all of the following to the best of your ability.
I am more likely to WATCH UGC if . . .**

SD D N A SA

- A. It makes me laugh
- B. It tells a story
- C. It scares me
- D. It's real life drama
- E. It's about the news
- F. The people in the video seem to have fun personalities

10. Please provide any further comments or explanations.

APPENDIX F

Qualitative Coding Sheet

Comment		"I use YouTube most for HOW-TO and do it yourself things. I rarely use it for entertainment."			
Respondent # 193	Dependency Level	Goal Oriented	Goal		
			Educational	Entertainment	Interpersonal Maintenance
	Less	Yes	X	X	
Comment		"I go to YouTube because I am looking for something specific. Example included, a friend sends a link to a video, I seek a how-to video, I seek a video that I missed on the news, etc."			
Respondent # 64	Dependency Level	Goal Oriented	Goal		
			Educational	Entertainment	Interpersonal Maintenance
	Less	Yes	X	X	X
Comment		"I only use these types of videos when one of my friends posts them on Facebook."			
Respondent # 199	Dependency Level	Goal Oriented	Goal		
			Educational	Entertainment	Interpersonal Maintenance
	Less	Yes			X

Comment		"I don't think people really go to YouTube for professional looking videos. It seems more like a contest of who can make more ridiculous videos . . . They all got their start by acting silly."			
Respondent # 121	Dependency Level	Goal Oriented	Goal		
	Less		Educational	Entertainment	Interpersonal Maintenance
		Yes		X	
Comment		" [YouTube is a] good way to get interviews, programs etc. that were on [TV] years ago that you can't find anywhere else. Also the YouTube downloader is also a good accessory to have with it so if you need something from one of the videos for a project or something you can download it."			
Respondent # 74	Dependency Level	Goal Oriented	Goal		
	More		Educational	Entertainment	Interpersonal Maintenance
		Yes	X	X	
Comment		"I watch videos that help teach me a language or instructional videos, as well as videos that are meant to be funny. More of a all rounded viewing scope. With that in mind, it was hard to choose an hourly figure, even with so many options. One day I can spend 5+ hours on content because of learning aspects, then the next it could be down to less than 1 hour because there are a few news videos in total."			
Respondent # 36	Dependency Level	Goal Oriented	Goal		
	More		Educational	Entertainment	Interpersonal Maintenance
		Yes	X	X	

Comment		"I am a classical musician that uses YouTube as a free resource to professional recordings of the music I am interested. Sometimes I can find music with the score in the video, or a video of the orchestra playing. Users that upload this particular content are doing a gracious favor to users in some countries where buying such recordings can be more difficult . . . I might not have even discovered them or been intrigued enough to listen to them if I hadn't seen them in the "Suggestions" or "Related Videos" column. My other uses for YouTube include finding information on just about anything, since there is just so much UGC that somebody has bound o have made a video on what I'm looking for."			
Respondent # 28	Dependency Level	Goal Oriented	Goal		
	More		Yes	Educational	Entertainment
			X	X	
Comment		"Most people like myself use YouTube to view videos from different artists, especially if you can't seem to catch many of the videos on the TV."			
Respondent # 189	Dependency Level	Goal Oriented	Goal		
	More		Yes		X
Comment		"If the video's [audio] has been pitched to avoid copyright, I don't finish watching it."			
Respondent # 78	Dependency Level	Goal Oriented	Goal		
	Less		No		

Comment		"YouTube is the best site ever!"			
Respondent # 40	Dependency Level	Goal Oriented	Goal		
	More		No	Educational	Entertainment
Comment		"I love YouTube."			
Respondent # 171	Dependency Level	Goal Oriented	Goal		
	More		No	Educational	Entertainment
Comment		"I love it!"			
Respondent # 125	Dependency Level	Goal Oriented	Goal		
	More		No	Educational	Entertainment