

Commenting in Online Communities

Imani McLaurin^{1,2}, Stacy Branham¹, PhD, Wayne Lutters, PhD¹

¹Department of Information Technology, University of Maryland-Baltimore County, 1000 Hilltop Circle,

²Department of Computer Science, Bowie State University, 14000 Jericho Park Road, Bowie, MD 20715

Background

Online Vlogging (Video Blogging) communities, like YouTube, are notorious for their obscene comment threads, and the anonymity of online communities is the prime reason for it. Previous research has stated that these inhospitable comment threads can be viewed as “constructive criticism” by the vloggers (Lange, 2007). We were interested in whether Fieldtrip, an online community similar to YouTube but with the addition of interactive moderators, supports interactive discussion between users, along with providing constructive criticism. This study would give meaning to the question of how useful are moderators to social media comment threads and discussion boards. On Fieldtrip, the participants are able to be pseudonymous, engage in conversation with moderators and vloggers, and give their opinions and thoughts in comments. This study allows the HCI community to have insight into whether an online community similar to YouTube, but with a key difference--the inclusion of known and visible moderators-- , could encourage polite, interactive conversation.

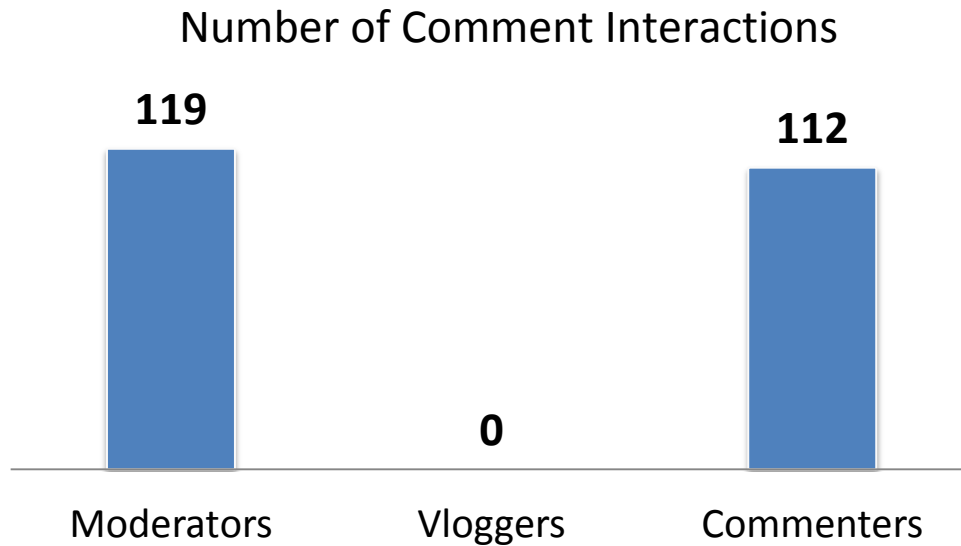
Research Questions

- Did the incorporation of interactive and engaged moderators have an affect on discussions (e.g. Were the commenters on-topic in the comment threads)
- What types of audience-vlogger-moderator interactions does the socio-technical system Fieldtrip support (as seen through the comments on videos)?

Data Collection & Analysis

We were provided much information from the Fieldtrip website. We were given access to the vloggers video archives, the participants profiles, and the video comment threads. Additionally, we were able to view which videos the moderators and the commenters viewed. Prior to analyzing the data, we educated ourselves on the strategies of Qualitative Research (Charmaz, 2006). From this reading, we incorporated coding and memoing into our study. Initially, we analyzed and coded over fifty of the vloggers’ videos. We had over 100 lines of code for both the videos and the comment threads Next we discussed Fieldtrip’s website layout, and how it could affect the user. Lastly, we analyzed and coded over 50 video comment threads. Two of our ten comment thread observations included: “Vloggers rarely participated in commenting, either on their own videos or on

the videos of others” and “Commenters and moderators discussed methods to improve the education system”.



Methods to Improve YouTube’s Comment Threads

Our observations from the vlogs and comment threads indicated that the Commenters were engaged. In the comment threads Commenters asked Critical Questions, gave constructive criticism, and even shared personal experiences. In addition, discussions were on topic and polite. The key finding was that the Participants took on different roles in the discussions. Vloggers primarily engaged the audience with their videos. Moderators were supposed to be behind the scenes, but became a part of the audience. Also, commenters engaged with both moderators and with each other.

Implications

Our study is still in progress, but the findings that we currently have can benefit Online Designers. YouTube is the most popular vlogging community; yet, it comes with a price of rude and inhospitable comment threads. This new perspective of having a smaller and moderated online vlogging community may be more attractive to designers that want to generate conversation without flame wars. In Addition, our findings can aid vloggers in how to generate interactive, polite discussion from their videos.

Future Work

In the future, we plan to continue to analyze the data and work towards developing more findings. From this study, there are questions that can be answered in further research.

- Can an online vlogging community, with a larger amount of participants, achieve the same results of hospitable comment threads because of the installation of Moderators?
- What makes a good Vlogger?

Conclusions

We were able to establish four key points from the observations and findings. **(1)** We agreed that pseudonymous communities don't have to be antagonistic. Online discussions from vlogs can be interactive and generative without flame wars. **(2)** Moderators, instead of censoring conversations, guide the conversations. Also, **(3)** vloggers may not have to be as engaged in their comment threads; because they can elicit empathetic responses from their videos alone. Lastly, **(4)** Fieldtrip is the best of both worlds! The online community is similar to YouTube, but with the addition of interactive moderators. This addition to the website allowed the participants to have the peer-to-peer conversations minus the inhospitable comment threads.

References

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