

Interactionally produced interpretations of ‘Big Tech’ discourse in YouTube live chats

In its constant effort to attract and retain online audiences, YouTube has introduced various new features, including ‘YouTube Live’. After initially only allowing selected YouTube partners to stream their content, YouTube now permits all adults with a verified account to “go live” and adds an ‘opt-out’ live chat to every live stream by default. Consequently, YouTube Live yields a distinct category of ‘interactionally produced’ (Benson, 2015) YouTube pages in which different modes — including the live streamed video, likes, its written description and comments in the live chat — become interrelated. Stemming from the idea that these modes affect each other, this paper presents a mixed methods analysis of four YouTube live chats that were produced during the United States’ 2020 Online Platforms and Market Power hearing in order to reveal how YouTube Live’s aim to engage audiences by prompting them to “say something” during the live streamed event might impact the interpretations and ‘uptake’ (Maly, 2022) of live streamed events. Consequently, this paper finds that on-topic, conversational comments in YouTube live chats can be divided into three categories: (1) comments that reflect common ground across different YouTube channels, (2) comments that reflect common ground within their substantive niches, and (3) interpretations that are developed interactionally within particular live chats. Paying special attention to the third category, this paper demonstrates how some ideas that are inserted into live chats incite prolonged collaborative interpretations and interactions — which can also include parasocial interactions involving the individuals in the live streamed event. Therefore, this paper concludes that YouTube’s efforts to retain the attention of online audiences by offering services like YouTube Live, leads to a situation in which people collectively develop discourse in interaction with live streamed events — in this case the ‘Big Tech’ hearing.

References

- Benson, P. (2015). YouTube as text. In *Discourse and Digital Practices* (pp. 81–96).
- Maly, I. (2022). Guillaume Faye’s legacy: the alt-right and Generation Identity. *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 28(1), 35–61.

Primary author: BEEKMANS, Inge

Presenter: BEEKMANS, Inge