

The hidden value of online video

The ability to analyze, share and comment helps develop critical thinkers

By: [Sean Brown](#) | Issue: [October, 2019](#)

September 12, 2019



Photo by Annie Spratt



Sean Brown, with years of experience in academic video production, is a consultant with Minneapolis-based Contegy Digital.

We have celebrated college in the past as a place where we formed our opinions. Remember your college bull sessions? Those sessions have moved online—and students start having them long before they get to campus. They are engaged in a global dialog about everything they see and hear. They arrive on campus with experience forming, comparing and sharing opinions about everything they consume—in writing.

The dark cloud of our internet culture has a silver lining from the perspective of engagement and media literacy. Today's college students arrive prepared for critical thinking and academic discourse; the key to taking advantage of that is video.

Social video

Each week, students ages 13 to 24 view an average of 22 hours of streaming video. Video information dwarfs all other content they consume. Today's college students do not routinely gather together to watch *The Price is Right* or *Wheel of Fortune* as my Generation X cohort did, but they do use the campus network to view online videos alone and together.

Students watch alone because they have access to a growing number of video-capable devices, and together because videos go viral. As they watch videos, they are more likely to interact online in the form of likes, shares and posts about this material than any other type, regardless of the subject matter.

For this generation, watching video is an active process that includes sharing and commenting on what they see. Every series they watch, every politician they follow or artist they listen to has likely inspired self-assigned supplementary reading.

The number of words that students have written about unboxing the iPhone 11, the Tame Impala band, or Japanese animated series *Dragon Ball Super*, for example, grows every day. Online discourse in the social media environment requires analysis, synthesis and the formulation of convergent or divergent responses—activities positively related to the development of critical thinking.

Hot takes

The explosion of instructional videos—from technology product unboxing and makeup application to integral calculus tips—has made YouTube a primary source of academic support in addition to a source of entertainment.

For this generation, watching video is an active process that includes sharing and commenting on what they see.

The instructional video domain has the same rubric applied for the viral and for the ignored—viewing, liking and sharing equals success. Students are also sharing instructional videos, which help them understand what they are confronting in their lives.

As video-enabled classrooms and devices capture moments, an increasing number of students engage online, discussing what they have learned and how it was taught.

A few of these captured and shared moments have become controversial viral sensations, prompting some faculty to allow only a limited distribution of their digital lessons. Leading a cohort of students is a test of courage already; the risk of ending up as a hilarious meme or on CNN could be daunting.

But faculty members who use all the available technology and policy advances to capture, author and distribute instructional video content are taking advantage of the nascent talent that students bring to campus.

As university curated or created videos increase, trends show that students will turn those videos into valuable viral information that they curate for their peers. Hot takes on *Rick and Morty*, an animated sitcom, become hot takes on “Political Science 101.”

Faculty members’ nightmares about starring in memes will be replaced by the ambition to embrace their role as “Intranet Stars.” Hot takes on viral videos will save the world. The challenge is no longer getting students to engage critically; it is to teach them how to do it well.

Sean Brown, who has years of experience in academic video production, is a consultant with Minneapolis-based Contegy Digital.

<https://universitybusiness.com/the-hidden-value-of-online-video/>