

Do You YouTube? The Power of Brief Educational Videos for Extension

Abstract

The growth of online video provides a tremendous opportunity for Extension professionals to expand the reach of educational content. Through repurposing existing content, we at the University of Minnesota Extension Children, Youth, and Family Consortium created several brief educational videos that address pressing challenges for children and families. YouTube analytics indicate that our shorter videos are more often viewed, shared, and liked by our viewers than our full-length seminar videos are. Since we began creating these videos, we have doubled our number of YouTube channel subscribers and likes and increased our video view count over 180%. Online video is a promising way for Extension professionals to extend their reach to a global audience.

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Why Should We Care?

YouTube, the online video juggernaut, has existed for just over a decade. In that short time, it has grown to have over a billion users, boasts hundreds of millions of hours of content viewed daily, and reaches more 18- to 34-year-olds than any cable network in the United States (YouTube, 2015). In addition, 80% of YouTube's views come from outside the United States, creating tremendous opportunity to reach audiences across the world. Though YouTube has long been viewed primarily as a source of entertaining content, educational content on the platform has grown. Some universities have started using YouTube to share course content and other educational materials with broader audiences outside institutional walls (Burnsed, 2011). Though some Extension staff have used YouTube videos to enhance educational programming (Case & Hino, 2010; Parish & Karisch, 2013), little has been documented about the effectiveness and audience reach of such videos.

How Do We YouTube?

We at the University of Minnesota Extension Children, Youth, and Family Consortium have been hosting in-person educational professional development seminars on pressing issues facing children, youth, and families for over a decade. Most of the seminars have been video-recorded, and the videos have been uploaded in their entirety to our YouTube channel (<https://www.youtube.com/user/UofMNCYFC>). However, we know from our YouTube

analytics that viewers usually do not watch an entire seminar video. In fact, for our most watched seminar video (2,124 total views), viewers watched only 4.4% of the 3-hr video on average. Short-form content that is shareable has become more desired in the online world, though research has suggested that Millennial audiences may also appreciate the opportunity to delve deeper into topics (Hyrkin, 2015). Sensing an opportunity, we capitalized on our existing material to create short-form educational content accessible to a wider range of viewers.

In December 2014, we began creating 5- to 8-min videos by using existing content from our full-length seminar videos and shooting new footage. To create these videos, multiple content experts viewed the full-length seminar videos and coded content themes. Staff then met to discuss the themes and plan the video flow for the short-form content. Then a content and video-editing expert compiled the video clips, created additional visual graphics, shot new video, and produced the final versions by using professional editing software (iMovie; Final Cut Pro X). The resulting videos feature educational content and evocative stories to communicate research and practice information meaningfully and effectively.

What Do the Numbers Tell Us?

Between late 2014 and mid 2015, we created and published five short-form educational videos. By December 13, 2015, one of our first videos, *Trauma-Sensitive Practices in Schools* (<http://z.umn.edu/traumaschools>), had garnered 1,501 views, with viewers watching 52% of the video on average. In just over 9 months, our three-part series *Historical Trauma and Cultural Healing* (<http://z.umn.edu/htplaylist>) had 5,809 views. Viewers also watched over 54% of these videos on average, and videos were shared via social media 78 times and added to other users' playlists 63 times. We also created a video with new content, not from previous seminars, by using a mix of video from an individual presentation and computer-generated animation graphics. From its release in April 2015 through December 13, 2015, the video *Mental Health: Yours, Mine and Ours* (<http://z.umn.edu/cmhpbh>) had 1,681 views, and on average, viewers watched 53% of the video. Table 1 shows engagement data for all six videos.

Table 1.
Video Analytics Comparisons

Video name	Video post date	Video length	Views	Average view duration	Average percentage viewed	Subscribers gained	Shares	Likes
More Than Just Mean Girls: Relational Aggression	3/12/13	3:28	2,124	9:13	4%	2	5	5
Trauma-Sensitive Practices in Schools	12/4/14	4:44	1,501	2:29	52%	6	17	7
Historical Trauma and Cultural Healing, Three-Video Series	2/27/15	17:20	5,809	3:10	54%	8	78	17

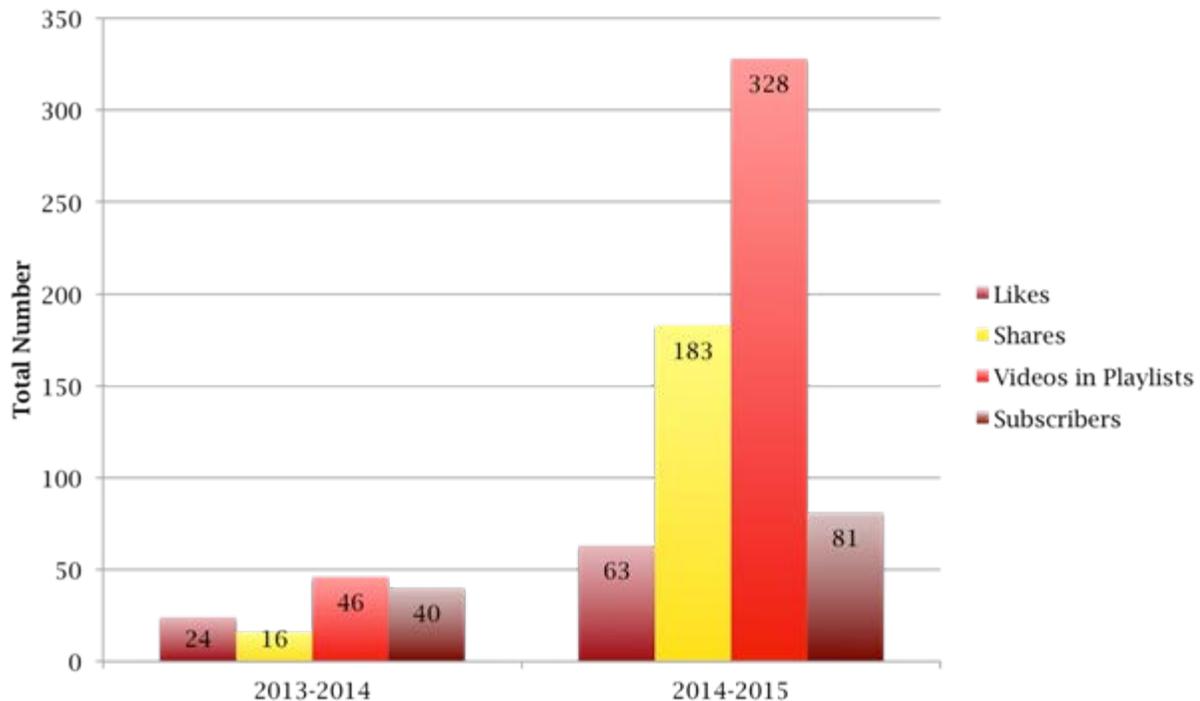
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Video 1: What Is Historical Trauma?	2/27/15	5:53	2,947	2:56	50%	5	40	13
Video 2: How Do People Experience Historical Trauma?	2/27/15	6:08	1,581	3:34	58%	1	21	1
Video 3: What Is Cultural Healing?	2/27/15	5:19	1,281	3:13	61%	2	17	3
Mental Health: Yours, Mine and Ours	4/21/15	5:47	1,681	3:05	53%	3	21	5

Note. All data reflect duration from video post date through December 31, 2015.

Additionally, in the year after we began creating shorter videos (December 4, 2014–December 15, 2015), we saw a 180% increase in total video views on our channel as compared to the previous year, and as shown in Figure 1, we more than doubled our number of channel subscribers and "likes" on our videos as compared to the previous year. Based on our engagement data, we see that shorter-form content is viewed by more people and has higher levels of audience retention (see Table 1). Thus, more people are finding and viewing our content, and they are watching our short-form content for longer durations than they do our full-length seminar videos.

Figure 1.

YouTube Channel Engagement Before and After Release of Short Videos



What Are People Saying?

In addition to the promising YouTube analytics findings, we have heard praise directly from viewers of our content, many of whom have used the videos in their own work. Viewer feedback has included the following comments:

"I think the videos are excellent. They provide good factual information plus the emotional aspects to these important issues." (mental health professional)

"Those videos do help you take [the] next step of putting yourself in someone else's shoes in a way that I haven't seen anywhere else—in a nonthreatening way."
(Extension professional)

"Wonderful work! I sent a note to the commissioner, and her deputies to consider this as a much needed practice to be learned here." (Minnesota Department of Human Services professional)

Furthermore, we have received requests from viewers to use the videos in novel ways. Our staff has been asked to lead discussions on these videos, and we have developed additional discussion questions and materials to enable viewers to engage more deeply with the content. These videos provide an exciting opportunity to extend the reach of our content beyond seminar participants to a potentially global audience. The analytics, comments, and repeated requests to use the videos suggest that creating educational videos is a useful way to leverage Extension's existing educational content.

Where Do We Go Next?

Despite offering a promising way to engage new audiences, development of short-form educational videos is challenging. It takes approximately 40–60 hr to create one video from existing content. The process also requires periodic review by research and community experts to maintain content accuracy. Though analytics tell us part of the story, we have not yet systematically evaluated how people are using the videos or how the video content has changed viewers' knowledge, skills, or behaviors.

Despite these challenges, creating YouTube videos provides a unique opportunity to increase use of Extension's educational resources across the United States and the world, especially with younger audiences. Extension professionals interested in learning more about creating effective online videos should explore YouTube's Creator Academy (<https://creatoracademy.youtube.com/page/education>). Video creation is a promising way for Extension professionals to expand the reach of their educational content and delivery skills.

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