

Virtual spaces and cultural transformations: Deconstructing YouTube Rewind

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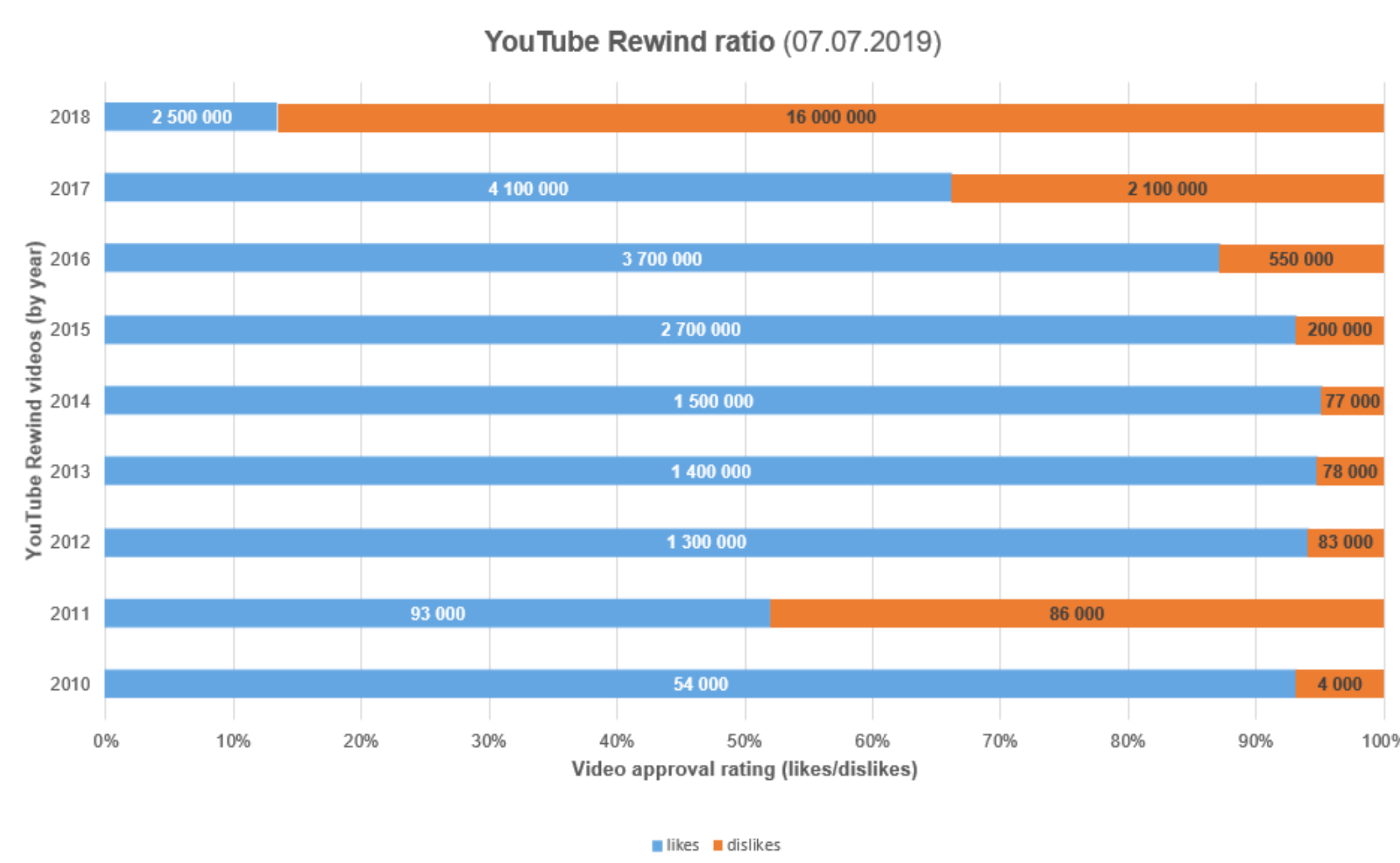


What is YouTube Rewind?

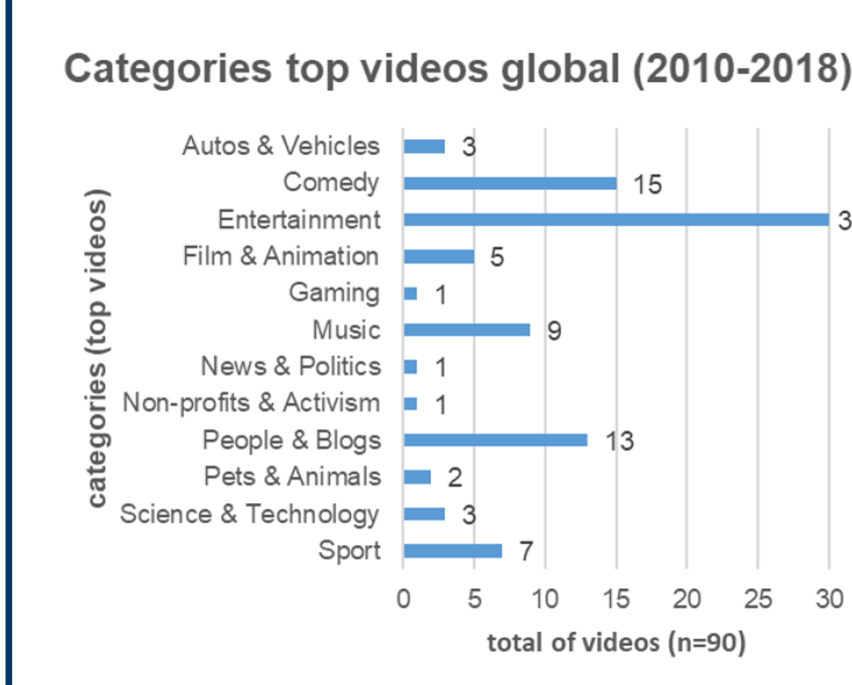
YouTube Rewind is YouTube's year review and features a special video production "Celebrating the videos, people, music and moments that defined 2018", as well as a list of top videos (global and selected countries) and statistics (since 2010).

It is a self-representation and self-fashioning following metric criteria (views) as well as a remix/convergence cultural production, that was continued starting from 2012. Therefore, it constitutes a perfectly manageable set of data that follows the redactional criteria of the platform, itself combining spatial and cultural practices with data.

However, the recent Rewind was not met with positive response from the YouTube community, showing a certain disconnect between the platform and user. This led to several "alternative" versions of the YouTube Rewind by various content creators, including one of the largest channels (PewDiePie) as well as being the most disliked video on the platform!



Categories on YouTube:



Categories play an important role on YouTube in order to distribute the content accordingly. Nowadays, YouTube differentiates between the **guideCategory** (algorithm/channel) and the **videoCategory** (selected by user).

To this day, the "top 10" playlists follow at least two categories:

Top trending video and **Top music video** (except 2012). The view statistics of the annual top-lists showcases those inequalities in views, although the top trending video of 2012 equals the top music video, due to the omission of this category (PSY-Gangnam Style).

Nowadays, YouTube factors in other metrics: related/aggregated views, view generation (views/time), traffic from external locations, channel growth e.g., transitioning from a video per video base to themes/topics as criteria for data aggregation.

This manifests itself in the general structure with a fixed and localized **trending tab** and a somewhat fluid, explorative **recommendation system** (see Chen et al. 2018).

Global and the world: YouTube and localization

YouTube Rewind is a direct result of the discontinued **YouTube Trends** (December 2010), "a destination for daily insight into the zeitgeist of the world's largest video site". It included new algorithmically-generated feeds (trending videos and top-ics), a daily video collection "4 at 4" (precursor of trending tab), a blog (YouTube Trends) and a new dashboard to explore video data. It has been mostly replaced by today's trending tab (December 2015).

Another important category is the **location** (gl parameter) / **language** (hl parameter). It is impossible to reproduce the location as form of data aggregation on a global and local scale due to different forms of representations on the website (dashboard, trends-map e.g.), that have not been ported accordingly or dropped from the transition to the actual site.

However, the Mexican Rewind channel includes localized top lists starting from 2014 (UK in 2013). There is no US rewind channel, which means **global top list = US top list**. This is a location setting, which has been present on the website until 2016 (October).

YouTube Rewind/Remix/Convergence culture?

With "YouTube Rewind Style 2012", began the self-fashioning of YouTube by producing their "own (corporate) culture" in form of a year review. The formula in general has remained untouched and will be shown as follows.

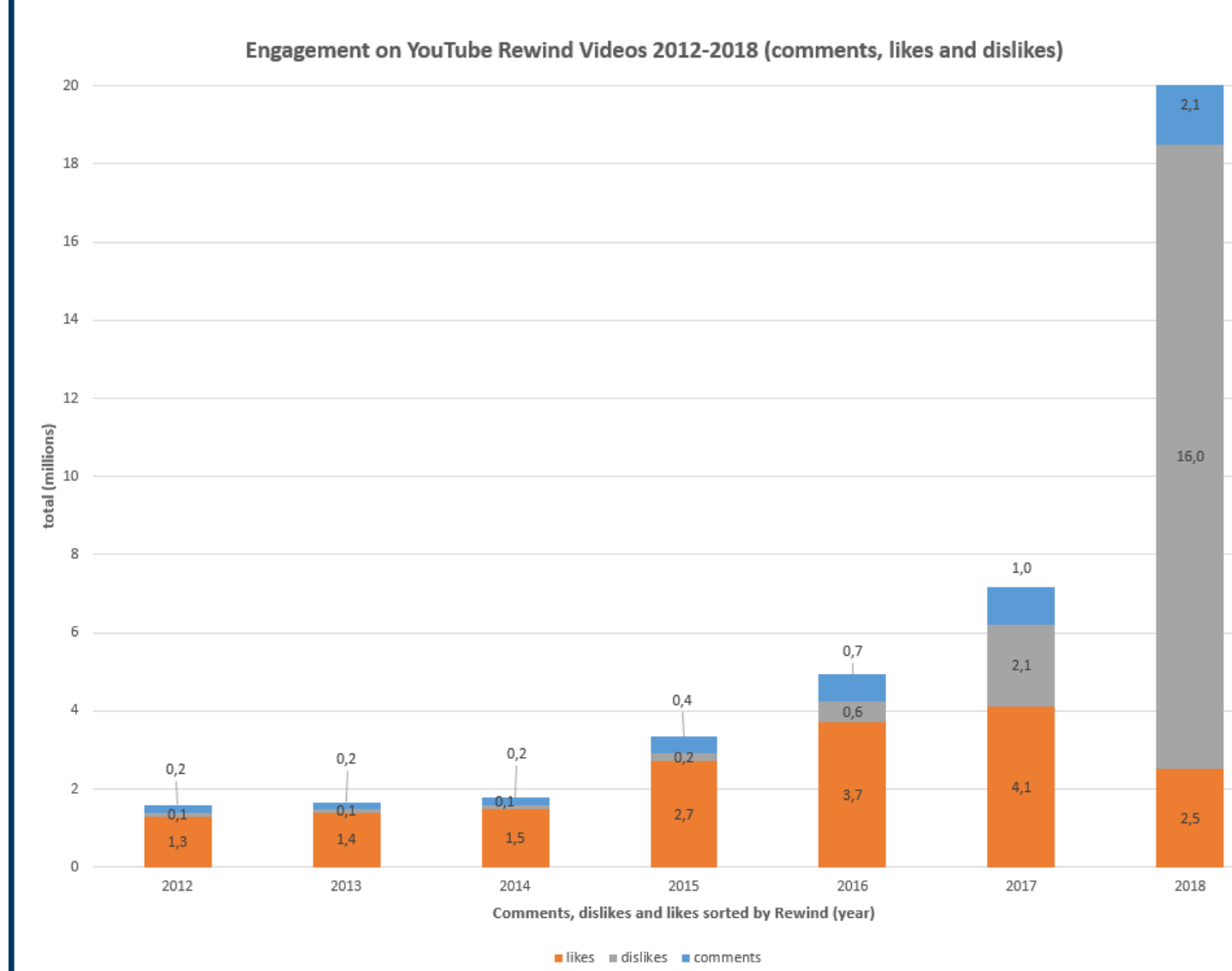
The first four Rewinds start with **musical references** ("Gangnam Style" 2012; "What does the fox say" 2013; "Turn Down for What" 2014 and "Watch Me (Whip/Nae Nae)" 2015) and feature many other songs in form of remixes and most viewed music videos. Starring are **YouTube Creators**, as well as **artists** and **actors** themselves (PSY, Macklemore, Dwayne Johnson, Will Smith e.g.).

The YouTube-Creators **re-enact** certain **events**, **scenes** (movies, series, music videos) and feature **trends** and **memes**, creating a contiguity between YouTube and its "professional creators", "established" media (cooperation with several late night shows) and the music industry (VEVO).

The fluidity and connection between all this topics is a **contiguity of images**, very similar to many relation based products of web culture (memes e.g.). There is no narrative structure involved, only imagery and sound (remixes) which are similar to known media productions as well as trending videos. This bridges the gap between "web" and "world" and promotes YouTube as a cheerful, funny and relevant **advertiser friendly platform**, on a global as well as local scale (diverse content-creators). On a daily base, the localized distribution of content is continued via the trending tab.



Myth: "Rewind 2018 failed because it is a disconnected corporate advertisement!"



The 2017 Rewind contained a political message of unity, which stands out in the cheerful music video spirit of the production. 2018 introduced a narrative structure "**Everyone controls Rewind**", that builds on the previous political message and highlights social causes on the platform. Ironically, this "empowerment" of viewers and creators is in stark contrast to **practices on YouTube**: False Copyright Takedowns (Content ID), demonetization (Adpocalypse), offensive comments as well as political discussions on net neutrality (US) and copyright directives (EU) respectively: Web Utopia vs. Battle of Interests.

On top of that, the last section is supposedly decided by the comments, although we get the following disclaimer in the video description: "All comments featured in Rewind **inspired by real comments** from the YouTube community", thus losing credibility from the get go. There are several creators that implement user input (see PewDiePie's meme review based on posts on his subreddit) and it is well known, that most social media comment sections are definitely not advertiser friendly and very hard to monitor!

With less views than its predecessor and being the most disliked video on YouTube, Rewind 2018 might seem to be a failure altogether. However, views have long since been replaced by **watch time** and **engagement metrics** (likes, dislikes, comments, shares e.g.; see "formalized inscriptions" in Van Dijck, 2013, p. 7), which increased by over 280% compared to 2017. Not only that, but it has also become a meme in itself, which leads to further aggregated views through parodies, reactions and memes.

One could argue, that YouTube -inadvertently- explored another aspect of web culture. Instead of "only" remixing and re-enacting/reproducing content for views (what their creators tend to do), they created new basic material, which is then artfully processed and reproduced by the community. In a way, the new edition of Rewind changed from a mere "**creation through recreation**" to a **meme** itself, which will be build up upon. Nevertheless, Rewind has always been a "corporate advertisement" in form of a cheerful fashioned music video, although mostly based on metrics (trending).

Discussion

What are the problems, limits and possibilities for data science on YouTube?

How can we investigate the relations between metrics and spatial representations on YouTube, without reproducing the same criteria (YouTube = Trending, most views, most likes etc.)?

What are possible outcomes of these editorial practices?

COMMENT

Aim and methods

What is YouTube? What does YouTube want to be?

Analysis of:

- ⇒ videos and metadata of the top trending (global) playlists (2010-2018)
- ⇒ elements of representation on the platform (categories, views e.g.)
- ⇒ spatial configuration and changes on the platform
- ⇒ professional and "classic" media vs. "broadcast yourself"

Imagining YouTube: metrics and myths

⇒ relation between metrics, infrastructure and cultural practices

Data and tools

- ⇒ Wayback Machine (Internet Archive)
- ⇒ YouTube API

Music ≠ music: YouTube categories and professional content



As previously mentioned, music is a trending topic on its own, at least regarding the metrics as shown above. Nevertheless, there are some exceptions which ultimately led to the first production of YouTube Rewind 2012. There are two possibilities to appear as a music video in the top video list (trending).

1. Producing a **music cover** or a **dance choreography** as well as being a **small** or **foreign producer** or not listed with VEVO.
2. Producing a crossover comedy/music as seen with the channels **lonelyisland**, what feature productions with popular musicians, or the popular channel **Epic Rap Battles** (ERB), both featured 3 times on the top list. Or being part of a casting show (**Britain's/America's got talent**).

From 90 top videos, 47 are professional productions (TV and media outlets) and 43 semi- or non-professional. Although it is hard to tell them objectively apart: overall videos on YouTube became more professional.

References

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