Establishment on YouTube

Catchphrases, communities and user involvement

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Abstract

YouTube is a great place for attention and discussion. Individuals and companies can use the context and the system for branding of their content. Previous research in the area has had a larger focus on mass statistics and social patterns on YouTube as equations, rather than as a social platform with people using it. Our research focused on the users and why they choose to involve themselves with the content of the SwedishMealTime channel on YouTube and what we could do as a producer to create a more established channel, since we run it ourselves. This gave us an opportunity to extract data from the statistics on both YouTube and the corresponding Facebook page of SwedishMealTime. We sent out an online survey to our subscribers with questions revolving around the channel and content, in order to gain more insight of what kind of content they prefer. A netnographic study was made in combination with a survey to collect the data for the analysis. Our results suggest that a regular upload scheme, communication and interaction with subscribers and establishment of the channel increases the sense of belonging, which in turn increases the exposure of the channel and the number of users subscribing to it. Future research will require information about more channels, to identify behaviour between them, and if there are any patterns for a viral success.
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1. Introduction

Social networks are growing each day, and take up more and more of our time on the web (Cheung, Chiu, Lee, 2010). YouTube is mainly a source of sharing videos, but shares attributes that are similar to other social networks as well, like being able to have a profile (channel on YouTube), add friends, send messages and share what you have recently watched etc. It consists of an endless amount of videos and everyone has a length, title and a thumbnail. Attached to every video posting, there are ratings, comments, views and other statistics. All of these aspects help in creating an understanding for the quality of the video. Along with the videos, there are channels, which represent the distributor/source of where the video comes from. The channels, in the same way as the videos, have a representation of themselves. The channel has a theme, colour, text information, comments, views and most importantly the content (Videos for YouTube), which all helps to display the character of it.

Most of the studies of YouTube in the past have been focusing on statistics, the user participation as something that can be measured via numbers and equations, and social patterns as a solution to the problem of understanding user involvement and viral exposure. Not much focus has been directed towards specific types of content and how users relate to it in terms of a sense of belonging to a specific sub-group or channel, and how they are affected by the source (channel/distributor). Behaviour of viewers on YouTube is similar to users on other social media platforms, and even real life situations (Lee, Joshi, McIvor, 2007) (Cheung, Chiu, Lee, 2010).

Someone who walks into a grocery store and imagines him/herself having to spend a lot of time finding the specific item that they are looking for will have a less positive attitude visiting the store in comparison if he/she would know that they would find the specific item instantly. The influence of perceived time/risk/performance/price spent on a specific artefact has a great impact on how the general appreciation of a service will look (Lee, Joshi, McIvor, 2007). This applies for online services as well. Millions and millions of people are watching YouTube videos every day, and it’s a great place to affect people, whether it is for personal interest such as hobbies etc., or branding for companies.

If one wants to create a source of value and/or usefulness on a platform such as YouTube, an understanding of the platform, the content and its users and how they receive it, is required to achieve a concept that will be enjoyable. The perceived usefulness in this case would be how a user experiences the content as positive, negative, fun, provoking etc., if it has any entertainment value, how the content affects other users and how the user is motivated to share the content within their social network.

Our aim is to contribute to the understanding of user involvement of a YouTube channel and content on it, as well as how an increased number of subscribers can increase exposure. Our own experiences from the SwedishMealTime channel as a producer on YouTube had a crucial role in our choice of research questions and method. We got interested in the aspects of why people choose to involve themselves with a YouTube channel and if there is anything you can do as a producer to make your channel more desirable. We could not find any previous research that looked in to that.

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1 http://www.youtube.com/SwedishMealTime
2. Research Questions

In this paper we will answer the following questions in order to increase the understanding of how the YouTube channel SwedishMealTime gained an increased user involvement which resulted in a community and a strong sense of belonging in it. This will support the opportunity to gain a greater understanding of the channel’s evolution and how it happened.

- What factors are the most important to create users involvement on a YouTube channel?
  - How did the SwedishMealTime channel increase its user involvement?
  - How did establishment of the channel increase exposure of the videos and content?

Our object of study SwedishMealTime is in the humour genre, and our research focuses on content which is made for that category and categories with similar content.

3. Method

3.1 Choice of method

Many of the previous studies use quantitative research approaches. Quantitative research is based on the ability to measure the value between two or more qualities (Hartman, 1998). Seeing how many users that attach them to a YouTube channel were not that interesting in our study. Quantitative methods have played a dominating role in Social Science in the past. (Holsti, 1969) This approach focuses on absolute numbers as a way to determine how different phenomenon’s really are constructed. (Holme, Solvang, 1997)

“If you can’t count it, it doesn’t count”

(Holsti, 1969)

In quantitative research you shouldn’t as a researcher be a part of what you study, you should observe your research object for the outside. (Holme, Solvang, 1997)

We wanted to know why people choose to subscribe to specific content, spread it among their friends and networks, as well as to dig deeper into the mechanisms of controlling a YouTube channel. Thus we saw an opportunity to analyse YouTube from a producer’s perspective. For that we used the SwedishMealTime channel as our object of study.

Based on our research questions we saw that a qualitative method, heavily based on ethnography, or more specifically netnography, would be very well suited for our purpose. (Kozinets, 2010)

Qualitative data and methods has its strength in that it goes deeper in to the subject you study. This renders the possibility to get a deeper understanding for the social processes and coherence in a community. The method is also recognised by the close proximity to the source from where you collect your data. (Holme, Solvang, 1997)
Since our study is of an online community it is hard to use some of the traditional qualitative methods such as interview study or focus groups. Members of the community of a YouTube channel are geographically spread out and that makes it difficult to conduct that type of research.

This makes a qualitative method adapted to the online environment suitable for our study since we want to know how the SwedishMealTime channel increased the user involvement and how the establishment of a channel increase the value of the videos and other content of the channel. We also decided to conduct an online survey (See appendix 5) aimed towards the subscribers of the SwedishMealTime channel. How we used this quantitative data collection method in our qualitative analysis, we argue later in the method discussion.

Ethnography is commonly used to study cultures and communities and it focuses on participant observation and a face-to-face social experience observation. The most common data collection methods are observations and interviews on different levels.

Netnography is a specialized form of ethnography adapted to analyse the social landscapes and interactions online where it’s difficult if not impossible to have the face-to-face interactions and relationships. (Kozinets, 2010)

Kozinets suggests that the standard ethnographic type of fieldwork can be adapted to online interactions, and in doing so; the term field site as a specific geographical place gets out-dated.

“Netnographers grant great significance to the fact that people turn to computer networks to partake in sources of culture and to gain a sense of community”

(Kozinets, 2010)

Netnography is mainly used in marketing research and how to understand online consumer behaviour and the dynamics of user behaviour in online communities. Our object of study isn’t really a competitive e-commerce, but there are similarities in a YouTube channel and the competitive e-commerce field since you in a way have to sell your channel and its content, to get users to subscribe. You need to have content that people want to see; otherwise you won’t get any subscribers. The data collection in netnography is adapted to the online environment and there are three types of data to collect, first there is “archival data” which is data you collect directly from pre-existing interactions in the online community, in our case comments and interactions on the Facebook page and on the YouTube channel itself. Secondly there is “elicited data” were you as a researcher co-creates the data with the community/culture members through various interactions like postings online etc. The third data is “field note data” where you as a researcher reflect over your observations of the community and its members, and also the meaning of your own participation. (Kozinets, 2010)

We used these three data collection methods and complemented it with the online survey (appendix 5).
3.2 Procedure

We started by looking into what earlier researchers had done in the field to see if there was anything in their work we could use and what our contribution to the research field could be. As producers and YouTube partners we have access to a lot of data of the viral spreading of our content, we looked into when certain videos got lots of hits and from which sources they came to be able to isolate occurrences that had an impact on the spreading. This was done to be able to analyse it with help of the data generated from the netnographic study and survey. Our netnographic study of the community started with what Kozinets calls “Coding”, categorizing the data and earlier experiences from the SwedishMealTime Facebook page and the YouTube channel, to be able to analyse it in a timely manner. We logged on to the Facebook page and went through every single post made since the start and logged all interesting data in a document. Then we sorted the data “Abstracting and Comparing” (Kozinets, 2010) from the SwedishMealTime Facebook page to identify patterns in the community such as phrases used, how the users respond to different posts made by us as the producers and also the interactions between different users.

When we had identified some patterns within the community we returned to the Facebook page to confirm the patterns with a new set of data. In this stage we got ourselves deliberately involved by posting things that could give us confirmation of the earlier data, such as phrases and other activities around the concept, like what kind of content that was more pleasing than other content to the subscribers. At the same time we did this data collection we had a survey (appendix 5) aimed towards the subscribers online.

3.3 Method Discussion

One of the biggest problems when it comes to online research like this is the ethics. It’s a fairly new field of research and it can be difficult to say what is ethical or unethical in an online environment. It has been debated about the ethics of using netnography; some insists that people should know that the things they post on the internet are public. It has been discussed if online communities’ are private or public spaces in the online research field. (Kozinets, 2010)

“Analysing online community or culture communications or their archives is not human subject research if the researcher does not record the identity of the communications and if the researcher can legally and easily gain access to these communications or archives.”

(Kozinets, 2010)

We made sure to leave the identity of the community members out of the paper, so that it would be more acceptable from an ethical perspective. An exception was for the e-mail conversation we had with a Reddit user. In that case we had his consent to publish his username.

One limitation in netnography is the inability to use the attributes you can use in a participant observation or face to face interview situation, in those situations you can see how the participants react with body language, voice tone, pauses for reflection, etc.
Because we didn’t have these visual aids we had to have a more interpretive approach to the analysis of our data.

When you conduct online surveys there is always a concern in the honesty of the responses, and in our object of study the seriousness of the answers. The SwedishMealTime concept is in the comedy genre and therefore it can be tempting for the participants to not take it seriously. We could see that in our pilot survey where we had more open ended questions, that some of those who participated in the survey weren’t serious. Because of that, we had to revamp the survey and take it into account in the procedure. We decided to make the survey more structured with multi choice answers instead of open-ended questions, which made some other problems arise. We could not for example get the reflective answers we wanted from the beginning.

Surveys are usually made to collect quantitative information and since we had to make our survey more structured than we initially wanted, it’s reasonable to ask how we used it in a qualitative analysis. We collected 3441 completed surveys and we could see how many users that liked or even knew about the different content we put up, like in a quantitative data collection method.

However, we used this data to compare it with the data we got from the netnographic study, such as the patterns in the comments of the different types of content we put up to get a deeper understanding in what the users like about the channel and what makes them want to involve themselves in the community around it.

4. Related Work

Earlier research have focused much on content similar to ours, except that it has had a more mathematical approach about the users and their behaviour, and not about the relationship between the distributors’ content and the viewers. Some of our references in this research has this kind of method, but still contains specific approaches which are related to our research questions. While it may be unwise to use these references to a full extent, specific parts of their results has helped us to make our own conclusions and identify patterns between their approaches, and our object of study, which has increased the credibility of our own results.

In this study, we are focusing on YouTube, which main purpose is to share videos. YouTube can be seen as a social network or “culture”. There are ways to interact there, certain ways to comment on videos in terms of language and trends², popular videos which people tend to see and share in their personal networks etc. The videos have a number of views, a rating, and comments etc. The mathematical and social approach which has been used in many cases before explains how the behaviour of users increases viral exposure and that you can foresee the results in terms of views and ratings by a formula or theory. We believe that it is important to know of these aspects while understanding social media, and in this particular case YouTube, in order to gain knowledge of how the “culture” works and develops over time.

However, there’s a lack of knowledge in how the distributors of content and users interact with each other, and how the users identify themselves with the context of a specific channel on YouTube. The research we have taken part of to dig deeper into this problem have helped us to further understand what defines a community and how YouTube’s shape and functions allows or denies users a specific interaction with each other or a channel. (Cheung, Chiu, Lee, 2010)

YouTube is the world’s largest user-generated content system (from now on UGC system) (Cha, Kwak, Rodriguez, Ahn, Moon, 2007), which consists of a wide variety of categories, groups, sub-groups, channels and so on. This has to be taken into consideration when applying different theories to the context, since the consumers have a wide variety of backgrounds, come from different cultures and prefers different content. People consume content in different ways, and a distributor has to figure out what its audience want to see and what they appreciate, in order to be recognized as useful and enjoyable. (Chu, 2009)

Understanding how people behave in a specific context and how they alter their behaviour in order to fit in or “belong” is very important to achieve success on the web, and more specifically on social platforms (YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, Digg, etc.). Some of the related work for this paper describes the sense of how a person wants/need to belong to something in order to fully appreciate or absorb an experience, and how to satisfy his or her needs. Rotman and Preece (2010) refer to a community as:

“... a collection of people engaged in social interaction, within a geographic area, that has one or more additional ties”.

(Rotman and Preece, 2010)

UGC systems and communities in general, are created and shaped by its users. Facebook would not work if people couldn’t interact with each other. YouTube wouldn’t be as exciting if a single person or a specific group of people were uploading videos, instead of the community itself. The user plays a critical role in the creation and value of a community. Communities serve as a place of identification and a source/culture of common interests. It strengthens the sense of belonging to something and divides the users from other places of interaction, to create a greater system of meaning. It can contain symbols, interactions and other unique ways of approaching a discussion, to increase the attachment a user feels towards the context. (Rotman, Preece, 2010)

“Community culture provides a framework for understanding each other, directing users’ conduct, interacting and communicating, providing the community its uniqueness, and inspiring a sense of belonging.”

(Rotman, Preece, 2010)

Rotman and Preece (2010) also describe how it would seem like YouTube’s immense size is a problem in their case, and that it would be hard to engage users to a community of that proportion. However, the mechanics of YouTube allows users to shape sub-groups/communities and it’s more than just a broadcasting service.
It’s about communicating and collaborating with each other. The categories and popular channels create small networks within themselves, and users unite under a common cause. This can be used by distributors on YouTube to interact with subscribers/viewers, and alter the content to be more satisfying to their subscribers.

According to Chyan, Yi-Chun and Suyanti (2010), the ease of use is important to determine the chance of a user sharing the video. Ease of use would be the functionality of YouTube, as with share buttons, or just the perceived usefulness and/or how enjoyable the content is. A task which is more complex than clicking a share button is perceived as easier to perform if the content has affected the user somehow. It serves as a trigger.

While this can used to understand how users appreciate content, there are also patterns that outline popular videos, in particular if it has already been seen by many people. Two theories in online viewership are the rich-get-richer and Pareto-principle (Cha, Kwak, Rodriguez, Ahn, Moon, 2007). The rich-get-richer principle explains how users or videos with already a certain amount of exposure, gains an additional amount of space and recognition based on the initial or already established popularity. The rich-get-richer effect (or Matthew effect from sociology (Merton, 1968)) explains how, in this case, a video or channel with already a certain amount of views, gains more views based upon that number. A channel, which has an established amount of exposure, will get more exposure over time. This theory is confirmed through the relationship between a theory by Joinson (2003) “if it rings, answer it” and the Pareto-principle. Joinson argues that;

“.. most telephones do not have off switches”
“.. this effect creates a rule that says 'if the telephone rings, answer it’”

(Joinson, 2003)

Older telephones could not be set to busy or call back later, like modern cell phones can, and the limitations of the telephone created a culture around itself that said “if it rings, answer it”. If the call was missed, there wasn’t any way to figure out who made the call in the first place, thus promoting people to answer as soon as it rang. Similarly, a culture around the medium exists on YouTube. If you notice a video that has been viewed 100 million times, you are triggered to watch it, since so many others already has.

The Pareto-principle (80/20 principle) (Newman, 2006) explains how the initial number of views will determine the views to come over a specific period of time. For example, if 1000 views would be obtained the first few days of when a video has been uploaded, the number of the following amount of views would be based upon the first volume of views. If 1 million views would be obtained, a significantly higher number would follow over time. Very popular videos on YouTube that has gotten over hundreds of millions of views keep getting more views over time, and that volume is based on the initial amount of views that were obtained to begin with.

Users have different intentions when watching and spreading videos. Users are divided into two different groups, HitOnce and PowerUsers. While this theory was applied within a study of P2P file sharing systems (Cha, Kwak, Rodriguez, Ahn, Moon, 2007), it has very much in common within UGC system behaviour. HitOnce users have no intention to view a video more than once, while PowerUsers have the potential to watch a video multiple times.
It is also important to understand what has a positive impact on the viewer. Southgate, Westoboy and Page (2010) talk about five hypotheses, or “Established Creative Drivers” of impacts on online viewership;

- “Established creative drivers (enjoyment, involvement and branding) positively predict online viewing volume.”
- “Ad distinctiveness positively predicts online viral viewing volume.”
- “Celebrity popularity positively predicts online viral viewing volume.”
- “Claimed “likelihood to forward” survey responses positively predict online viral viewing volume.”
- “Levels of category and brand interest positively predict online viral viewing volume.”

(Southgate, Westoboy and Page, 2010)

They also refer to messages of the email marketing as such:

“..Messages that spark strong emotion – humour, fear sadness or inspiration - are likely to be forwarded”

(Southgate, Westoboy and Page, 2010)

Chyan, Yi-chun, Suyanti (2010) suggests that the impact a video has on a user, whether it is a humorous, impressive or frightening emotion that is achieved, has a great impact on the user’s intention to share the video or channel within its social network.

The perceived ease of use, attitude towards use and the intention to use the content helps to show the actual use of the content.

Southgate and Westoboy means that this might increase the number of hits a video receives and it also makes a greater impact on the user, which will increase the attachment a user feels towards the content. Viral video campaigns of different sorts have different types of target groups, and depending on the end consumer, the desired feeling from watching a particular video might be very different. Although the brand and category play a less important role in the end, it’s more about gaining attention on a general level with other attributes, like how you present your content and define your context. (Southgate, Westoboy, Page, 2010)

The related work in this section helped us analyse our object of study SwedishMealTime, and understand the impact that the channel have on its audience. Understanding the categories and what kind of people that visits specific parts of YouTube, how people relate to content, how a popular video or channel increases its volume of views and why, different kinds of intentions to view videos and how the videos themselves makes an impact on the user, all helped us to further identify patterns and behaviour of users on the SwedishMealTime channel.
5. Object of Study – SwedishMealTime

5.1 Background

January 6th 2011, Niclas Lundberg and Isak Anklew created the SwedishMealTime channel on YouTube, and its first video. The idea was to create an EpicMealTime parody with a “Swedish” touch to it. It would be something with a normal approach, rather than epic. The niche of SwedishMealTime was going to be cooking in an aggressive manner, but with a “regular and ordinary” result. Along with the first video, we established a channel with custom graphics, a twitter and a Facebook page.

The first episodes name was “Spaghetti Explosion”. It was about Niclas and Isak cooking a meal of spaghetti and meat sauce, in a very aggressive manner.

After approximately one week, a decision was made to create a second episode, since the first episode was so well received by those who watched it: Meatball Massacre (produced by all of the current members of the channel). Meatball Massacre featured Niclas cooking Swedish meatballs and mashed potatoes. The episode was released two weeks after the launch of the channel. Reaching around 40'000 views within six days, it proved enough to motivate us to create the 3rd episode: Sidepork Pandemonium. The 3rd episode featured Niclas cooking Swedish sidepork and macaroni, with the most brutal methods so far.

After the release of “Sidepork”, another decision was made: We would only create a 4th video if the latest episode had gained over 50'000 views by the end of the weekend. The number was an estimation based on the exponential number of views gained over the last 2 weeks, by the other episodes. By Saturday afternoon, the video had gained over 200'000 views.

It had been featured on various popular websites, such as Reddit4, where it was at the second place position on the front page for the whole Saturday it was uploaded.

Many popular channels on YouTube, such as GoldGlove5, EpicMealTime, TotalHalibut6 etc., mentioned us in their videos, posted comments and/or “liked” our videos. We also gained exposure on TV, radio, the local newspaper website, the communal website, offers to be on established national TV shows, etc. (Wallsten, 2010)

Since then, the goal has been to release a video every Thursday. The 5th episode was a special episode, which featured Niclas reading comments and answering them in a sarcastic manner, with a style similar to the Christmas TV shows on SVT1 in Sweden. This was to communicate with the subscribers and increase their attachment with the channel.

Several of the things that have been performed in the episodes so far, have been picked up as catchphrases, even though it wasn’t the intention to begin with. During the first episode, Niclas was eating a sandwich with butter and mayonnaise, after which he said: “Good for you!” Some people gave this more attention than was intended, and it was soon picked up as a catchphrase within the community.

3 http://www.youtube.com/epicmealtime - A Canadian YouTube channel featuring a couple of guys cooking extreme meals with lots of meat and bacon
4 http://www.reddit.com/ - A popular website featuring hot content and links on the web
5 http://www.youtube.com/goldglove
6 http://www.youtube.com/totalhalibut
7 Swedish television channel
Additionally, after around two months of actively uploading videos, we decided to create other content and events for our community, both which would be featured on Facebook exclusively. One of these was the Mayo Mystery, which was a noir style thriller story, about Niclas’ mayo being stolen, and the hunt for the thief that stole it. The other event was the Pre-dinner snack challenge. The event promoted fans to print out and put up a small note which said “Pre-dinner snack” at the mayonnaise aisle/shelf in their local supermarkets, take a photo of it, send it to us, and have a chance of obtaining a special prize. These events were estimated to enhance the experience for the SwedishMealTime fans.

5.2 Results

As YouTube partner you have access to several in-depth analytic tools, which is meant for you to track things such as; views per day, comments per video per day, how long each visit is etc. The information is very detailed and almost overwhelming at times. We decided to put together pieces from all different sources of empirical data, and draw conclusions based on those numbers in collaboration with our references and different patterns we have identified. The numbers and patterns would help us to further investigate our object of study.

First of all, we took a look at the initial circumstances for the Swedish Meal Time channel. It started January 6th 2011, with no previous exposure and did not have an already established channel to promote it. In other words, it was created from scratch.

At the same time as the channel on YouTube was created, a Twitter profile and Facebook fan page was founded. This was an informed decision to display consistency. We created an ambitious look of something that could be an established channel, in order to promote users subscribing to it.

The first strategic choice when we uploaded the first episode was to make it visible. People don’t know of its existence if they can’t see it or find it anywhere. We posted the video as a response to the famous Epic Mealtime’s latest video. We also spread the video as much as we could on Facebook, on several forums we are registered on, emailed lots of our friends and family and so on. This served as a method to get the “snowball going”.

The first episode, Spaghetti Explosion, received attention up to an approximate volume of 20’000 views in seven days. The second episode, Meatball Massacre, made it to approximately 40’000 views in the same period of time. During the third episodes week of release, Sidepork Pandemonium, the number of views grew exceedingly and reached over 200’000 views within the weekend8. The insight on YouTube and the 3rd episode specifically, showed that a large amount of views were received from Reddit.

During the Saturday of that particular weekend, we identified this particularly early, and noticed that Sidepork Pandemonium was being featured as the second most popular topic on the homepage of Reddit, the whole Saturday. The numbers on the video had similar patterns as the hits redirected via Reddit had.

After the video had been featured on Reddit, it started to show up on various blogs, websites, other YouTuber’s recommended their subscribers to check us out, we were receiving likes and comments from popular and established channels etc.

8 Episodes were uploaded every Thursday night at 19.00 GMT+1
We contacted the user on Reddit that had posted the link to Sidepork Pandemonium in the first place; Stenkall. We asked him several questions about the link, in order to understand why he had made an informed decision to show a video of that kind; why did you upload the video? Why did you upload it to Reddit specifically? What kind of links do you usually upload and how often? How do you think that the fact that you are an established Reddit publisher had an effect on the popularity of your link? His answers were valuable to our research:

“Your data is correct, it was me who posted the link and I was probably the first, at least on Reddit to discover you. I searched randomly on YouTube and was looking for something funny. I sorted by most recently posted, and there I found your video. Your video has a unique combination of a Swedish Viking feeling and a wonderful concept. Additionally, it is by no means a copy of Epic Mealtime. These factors mean that it is a good link to post here. Being an established user plays a very important role, in my opinion. It has the recognition factor, but above all, I think that Reddit favours links to the users that has a lot of karma. Of course, this is only speculation. I post stuff on Reddit about once a week, but it varies. It is a hobby of sorts. I would say that I put up the most light-hearted stuff, but because I am studying for engineering, some stuff is a part of science and technology.”

(Interview with Stenkall from Reddit)

Based on our data around the channel and its subpages, we can conclude that the Reddit exposure has played an important role in the viral spreading of the channel. In appendix 1, figure 1.1, a jump from less than 150,000 views to almost 0.8 million views indicate the impact of Reddit on our volume of exposure.

Along with views, the number of subscriptions increased. A similar pattern can be seen in appendix 1, figure 1.2, from a couple of hundred subscribers (approximately 700), to over 10,000 in less than a week.

In appendix 2, figure 1.3 displays the total number of channel views during the exposure on Reddit (from 70’000 to around 780’000). According to the YouTube insight of “Sidepork”, referrals from Reddit had by far the biggest numbers (59.9%), as shown in appendix 4, figure 1.9. The Reddit phase was also a success because of the established channel look and amount of videos, which helped further increase of views and new subscriptions. The data we have collected from the channel makes it reasonable to say that an impression of a regular scheme of distributing new content provides more viewers and subscriptions.

We executed a survey that was aimed towards our fans on Facebook and subscribers on YouTube. With the survey, we were hoping to gain further insight into how people experience and gain knowledge of SwedishMealTime, and also analyse the answers towards the archive data.

The first limitation with the survey would be the small number of participants that in the end would represent the entire community. The result would not be as credible as if the entire fan base had participated. When the survey was taken offline, we had received 3441 completed surveys. This only represents a fraction of the over 80’000 subscribers we had at that time.
The second limitation was the probability of the answers not being serious. With these in mind, we obtained several interesting results, which would prove useful in the analysis. Another limitation would be that we were only reaching people that are actually subscribing, which would not represent the “casual” people viewing our videos. Another problem was that the subscribers are/were most probably involved with the content already and have a positive attitude towards it.

While putting together the questions for the survey, we kept them open and fairly general, to make it easier to interpret the answers in relation to the research questions. Some of the estimations we had, laid ground for some of the predicted results, such as the age. The age question had options from the age of 10 to 55, with a span of 2-3 years between each age group.

We wanted clarify where the people who took the survey were from etc., to in a certain extent establish our target group and get insight into who were watching our content. The results from both the survey and YouTube insight showed us that around 80% of the viewers are male, and the most common ages are in between 13-25 years old. It also showed us that the highest number of people that took part of it, were from Sweden. Similar to the general demographic popularity of the YouTube channel, Sweden and Europe is at 1st and 2nd place, with USA in the 3rd position. See statistics in appendix 3 for 1.6 and appendix 4 for 1.8.1.

More than 75% of the subscribers that took part of the survey were in the age groups between age 15 and 24.

This was a result we had expected, based on the insight given from YouTube. We had also been aware of the wide variety of nationalities that enjoys SwedishMealTime, again based on the insight from YouTube, and comments on the videos. (See appendix 3, figure 1.5).

Two other important questions were about how and when they first discovered SwedishMealTime. These questions were used to confirm the impact Reddit had on the total volume of views when we were featured there.

We also wanted the results to give insight into other patterns or sources that could have spread the knowledge of our channel. We found the answers to these questions to both confirm that “Sidepork” had a majority of the initial number of discoveries, and they also made us realize that “Meatball” actually had greater popularity than expected, before “Sidepork” was released.

Another important part of the survey was the chance for us to discover what the subscribers find most enjoyable with the channel. In this case, we focused particularly on the Mayo Mystery and the Pre-dinner Snack Challenge. According to the answers we received, we were overestimating the importance of additional content outside the regular episodes (See appendix 3, figure 1.7).

These answers suggest that a minority of the people asked knows what the Mayo Mystery really is; only 41% of the people who took the survey. It also suggests that almost half (39%) of the people that actually do know what the mystery is, thinks that it does not increase their overall experience of SwedishMealTime. See all the survey questions in appendix 5.

After we had reviewed the survey, we collected the archival data on Facebook and the YouTube channel.
We noticed that a status update on Facebook that said something in context with anything outside the episodes or catchphrases, didn’t receive as much attention as those that were related to the content of SwedishMealTime (See appendix 6 for an example). We confirmed it with the elicited data when we did our second wave of data collection.

Figure 1.4 displays the amount of total views of the channel, based on the most popular period, where we maintained a “normal” uploading schedule, and when we didn’t upload a video for several weeks; irregular. Comparing this to the YouTube insight statistics, the result provides us with clear information that is easily interconnected with the dates that we uploaded videos regularly and vice versa.

6. Analysis & discussion

According to our results, the “catchphrases”, or other symbols of the particular context, seems to be very important to our subscribers. These catchphrases serve as a way of identifying the users with the content and are also a way to make them feel “at home”. (Chyan, Yi-chun, Suyanti, 2010). Catchphrases increase the sense of belonging that users have, and the attachment for the channel as their virtual place of belonging. (Rotman, Preece, 2010)

People tend to identify themselves with the catchphrases and actions we perform, as well as the role that we have created as a representation of the typical Swede. This identification is addressed to Swedes in particular, but according to the demographics of the comments and subscribers of the community, people outside Sweden and even Europe have taken this role as well (Biel, Gatica-Perez, 2009). A typical estimation of how a Swedish person works and behaves would be very neutral and unexciting in a “normal” situation. By assuming that these expectations are defining a typical Swede, we turned them upside down. We took something that the users were expecting to see and surprised them with something entirely different. (Southgate, Westoboy and Page, 2010)

The web is open for everyone to use, and the country borders are blended in some cases, which would make it reasonable to believe that people adjust themselves for a common cause in a community on the web. A common interest strengthens a group. (Rotman and Preece, 2010)

The age group and demographic of our viewers helped us to understand who were watching our videos and where they are from, or rather known as our target group. We did not know that users would appreciate our content when we first began releasing videos. We early realized that lots of users gave us positive feedback and really enjoyed what we produced. Most importantly, they had never seen anything like our show before. This suggests that we didn’t have to know our target group or future community, but could rather let them shape and create the community themselves. (Southgate, Westoboy and Page, 2010)

We identified our exposure at Reddit as the main source of the great increase of popularity we gained during a short period of time. The difference between the total views of the channel (all videos/channel) between the time before and after the Reddit exposure, are shown in appendix 2, figure 1.3.
The lifetime of the link that was featured on Reddit resembled patterns similar to the theory of rich-get-richer (Cha, Kwak, Rodriguez, Ahn, Moon, 2007) (Merton, 1968), which in turn made the “Sidepork” video pick up a similar pattern. As the link became more popular on Reddit, so did our views and the rate that hits were redirected to the video, and that resembled the Pareto principle. Chyan, Yi-Chun and Suyanti (2010) also argue that the general appreciation of the video increases as the number of viewers increases, which also gives further credibility to the rich-get-richer principle in our case.

As Joinson’s (2003) theory of “if it rings, answer it” explains, a trigger for people to watch the video could have been the sheer fact that it had been viewed many times before. In our case, the theory would be something like: “If it has been viewed before, I might have to see it”. Again, this would be a relationship between the urge to belong to something, like a group of people who enjoy something (Chyan, Yi-Chun and Suyanti, 2010). In episode 5, which was the first special episode, our intention was also to pick up comments with high rating on the episodes released so far, and mention them in a video, to increase the feel of impact by the users on the channel. We decided to keep introducing the pre-dinner mayonnaise, as a symbol of the context and our “regular ordinary style”. Similar examples can be seen in Tejbz and Epic Mealtime’s channels. Tejbz has been saying “To tha face, to tha face” for a very long time during his casting/commenting. That phrase has become a symbol of his context. EpicMealTime once made a meal with lots and lots of bacon strips.

Every time they put on strips of bacon, they say “And bacon strips... And bacon strips...”, and that has in turn made “Bacon Strips” into a symbol of Epic Mealtimes.

This further introduces a culture around the limitations of a certain device or artefact. As mentioned, older phones couldn’t be set to “busy” or “do not disturb”, which left the only option to actually answer it when it rang (Joinson, 2003). Similar behaviour can be found on digital platforms such as YouTube. A video that has been seen five million times tends to be drawing additional attention from users who are yet to see it, since others already have. Behaviour like this, together with the rich-get-richer principle, would create a result that point toward users wanting to see what others already have seen.

As we mentioned in the related work section, a community has a set number of rules, either created by the administrator of the site or by just growing into the context, based on the behaviour and the way the users interact with each other and the content. A definition of this would be a more “closed internet meme” within the community. If the attention is big enough, it will spill over on other communities and contexts (Chyan, Yi-Chun and Suyanti, 2010). The Reddit community’s way of receiving something new for the users to take part of, and the initial feelings and discussion that were going on around our link, might very well be one of the reasons for our success.

While it resulted in a great exposure increase for our channel, it’s hard to say that the same would happen for a different channel. Stenkall’s influence and reputation on Reddit probably made the exposure of the link greater than if a less experienced user would have posted it.

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9 http://www.youtube.com/tejbz
10 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Internet_meme
As Lerman and Galstyan (2008) propose in their case study of Digg\(^\text{11}\), which resembles similar patterns as Reddit, users with larger social networks and/or influence on them have a greater chance of being exposed on a “feature/start page”.

The most important factor for us in this case, was the volume of views the exposure on Reddit generated. This issue differs from case to case and is difficult to measure, but it had a big impact on the immediate success of our content. It would be reasonable to believe that our content and the style of the impression that we make, fits into the context of Reddit. Reddit in particular does not guarantee viral success, but it worked in our case. The key to increase the volume of views, and maintain a high stream of hits towards a certain channel, seems to be a way to generate them early, and establish a connection between the viewer and distributor. The more people that gains knowledge of the channel (as long as the experience is powerful), the greater the chance of viral success is.

There are cases where the impression of a video is purely negative, but it has still been very popular (Rebecca Black, Justin Bieber)\(^\text{12}\). This would be defined as a common enemy that the rest of the community rallies against in a joint action. (Cheung, Chiu, Lee, 2010) (Rotman, Preece, 2010)

This would mean (in this case of a UGC context) that a channel can choose to obtain a feeling of any kind, as long as it is strong, in order to increase the emotional impact of the video, and thus increasing the volume of views obtained.

If the content results in positive experiences for a big audience, the chances of viral spreading are increased significantly (Cha, Kwak, Rodriguez, Ahn, Moon, 2007).

7. Conclusion

There are many things that were crucial for our success, and understanding them helped us understand how it developed over time, as well it helped us to enhance the quality and usefulness of the channel.

**Consistency** is very important if one wants to maintain interest in subscribers/fans. A person subscribes when he or she believes that new content will be distributed on a somewhat regular basis. Subscribing means that you want to take part of more content, not the same content over and over. As we showed in figure 1.4, a lack of a pattern of uploading new content, resulted in a loss of views and less people subscribing to the SwedishMealTime channel, as well as some people even unsubscribing.

The emotion that is sent has to be powerful. It can be sadness, happiness, anger or confusion etc., as long as it is powerful. Strong emotion has a positive impact on the volume of views on the channel, as it can trigger the will to send it to a friend or community.

**Actions or phrases** that are strongly connected to the channel or context will represent the image that viewers take part of. It can result in a great way of users identifying themselves with the context.

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\(^{11}\) http://www.digg.com/ - Site similar to Reddit, featuring news as links

\(^{12}\) http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rebecca_Black
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Justin_Bieber
Understanding this will help increase the enjoyment and also increase the chance that the viewers will share the video within their network, and thus increasing the chances of getting more hits on the video, which will in turn increase the chances of more users getting attached to the content. In our object of study, as the netnographic study showed, the catchphrases are strongly connected to the context.

The age, gender, demographics etc., are all target group qualities. They were used as a way to define and locate our target group. One important thing to remember however is that we shaped and created our target group in the long run. People who might have been interested in our content didn’t know so yet. Making them understand that they will appreciate and/or find the content useful will increase the overall involvement of the channel.

Reddit was the main source of the great increase of popularity of the SwedishMealTime. While this specific case is easy to prove with empirical data that we have collected, it would be difficult to apply the same suggestion to other channels. The principle still seems to be valid; that an external and popular site that is not a part of YouTube can create popularity over the platforms. It all comes down to how users perceive the content and how it is received and appreciated.

**Getting an established role** on YouTube also tends to increase the popularity of your videos. As we gained more subscribers, more would watch and comment on our content. As a subscriber likes or favourite marked our videos\(^\text{13}\), his/her own subscribers will see it in turn, and thus more people will be notified of it, and so on. To increase the way users enjoy our content and feel that they belong to our channel, we had to gain knowledge of how they interact with the content and why they feel attached to it.

Summarizing the results and how they are represented as ways to increase the attachment, involvement and maintain subscribers, which will in turn increase exposure for the channel, results in:

- Maintain a regular upload scheme (consistency).
- Communicate and interact with the subscribers by finding something that represents your context and establish it as a catchphrase or action.
- Establishing the channel on YouTube increases the number of subscriptions, and thus the number of views.
- If content is delivered regularly, the number of subscribers will increase over time.

While these are the results of our research, there are many other things to keep in mind in order to achieve an overall successive channel on YouTube. These will serve as an additional resource for future research.

\(^{13}\) When a channel likes, favorite or comment a video, subscribers of that channel will be notified on their homepage on YouTube about it, and it will increase the chance of them in turn viewing the video.
8. Future research

The next step in our own research would have been to compare our results with other popular YouTube channels, in order to identify similarities and see if there are any solid patterns of viral popularity. We would also conduct our research on other categories and see how they differ from each other, in order to gain an understanding of YouTube as a whole.

There are many aspects of the viral success of videos on the web. Understanding the mechanics of the platform that the context relies on and the way of how the interaction works is merely one way to approach the phenomenon. Future research about the human psychology and instincts, like the urge to belong and be part of something, like a group of people etc., is needed to gain even further insight.

Behaviour like this can be seen in videos made by Justin Bieber and Rebecca Black, among others. The artists themselves have become a common enemy for the community of YouTube, and the Internet in general. Videos they have made have gained over hundreds of millions of views. The difference from extremely popular videos, like theirs, is the rating. “Charlie Bit Me” is one of the most popular videos on YouTube, and has got well over 300 million views, and it has hundreds of thousands of ratings, which of those a majority are positive. Bieber and Black’s videos have a similar volume of views, but has a like/dislike ratio of the opposite fashion.

It seems reasonable to believe that there isn’t any “recipe” for a success on YouTube, but guidelines and patterns can be identified to increase the chances for it. This paper focused on the process and culture around the SwedishMealTime channel, and how the content and catchphrases/symbols that are part of the context increased the perceived usefulness of the channel. We believe that our results can be identified in other channels, even if changes have to be made regarding the context and category, to apply them. Although, in order to fully understand channels and communities on YouTube, more research has to be made, involving more channels from different categories and styles.
9. References


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Kozinetz, R (2010), Netnograpgy – Doing Etnographic Research Online


Rotman, D & Preece, J. (2010). The ‘WeTube’ in YouTube – creating an online community through video sharing. *Int. J. Web Based Communities, Vol. 6 No. 3 2010*


Appendix 1

1.1 YouTube Insight on total channel views

![Total channel views graph]

1.2 Total Insight on subscriptions

![Subscriptions graph]
Appendix 2

1.3 YouTube Insight on total views during Reddit exposure

![Graph showing volume increase in channel views during Reddit exposure]

1.4 YouTube Insight on views based around the most popular and least popular periods

![Bar chart showing difference in channel views during most and least popular periods, based on continuity]
Appendix 3

1.5 Age and Origin from survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>15 to 17</th>
<th>17 to 19</th>
<th>19 to 21</th>
<th>21 to 24</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16.20%</td>
<td>18.70%</td>
<td>18.10%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Origin</th>
<th>Sweden</th>
<th>EU</th>
<th>USA</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>51.30%</td>
<td>14.50%</td>
<td>30.20%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1.6 First episode viewed and latest episode released from survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Which ROSMT episode was the first one you saw?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sidepork</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meatball</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spaghetti</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chop-chop</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>When you discovered ROSMT, which was the latest video released?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sidepork</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't know/remember</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chop-chop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meatball</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1.7 Knowledge of The Mayo Mystery and experience from it from survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Do you know what The Mayo mystery is?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>If yes, does The Mayo Mystery enhance your experience of ROSMT?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 4

1.8.1 YouTube Insight on demographics

![Demographics Chart]

1.8.2 YouTube Insight on geographical popularity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Popularity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>86.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>40.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>40.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norway</td>
<td>38.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>37.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Korea</td>
<td>37.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>32.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hungary</td>
<td>31.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>31.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>31.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1.9 Referrals from Reddit

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>External Website</th>
<th>Views</th>
<th>% of external website views</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><a href="http://www.reddit.com">www.reddit.com</a></td>
<td>85,719</td>
<td>59.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><a href="http://www.facebook.com">www.facebook.com</a></td>
<td>17,466</td>
<td>11.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><a href="http://www.reddit.com">www.reddit.com</a></td>
<td>8,684</td>
<td>5.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><a href="http://www.reddit.com">www.reddit.com</a></td>
<td>4,076</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><a href="http://www.reddit.com">www.reddit.com</a></td>
<td>3,114</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>twitter.com</td>
<td>2,306</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><a href="http://www.reddit.com">www.reddit.com</a></td>
<td>1,528</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><a href="http://www.reddit.com">www.reddit.com</a></td>
<td>1,147</td>
<td>0.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>forums.somethingsilly.com</td>
<td>1,004</td>
<td>0.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><a href="http://www.reddit.c">www.reddit.c</a></td>
<td>716</td>
<td>0.48</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 5

Gender
Man/Woman

Age
10-13
13-15
15-17
17-19
19-21
21-24
24-27
27-30
30-35
35-45
45-55
55+

Where are you from?
Sweden
Europe
USA
Australia
Asia
South America
Africa

How/where did you get to know of ROSMT?
Friend recommendation (Word-to-mouth, IRL)
YouTube (Via subscription notification, such as like, fav or comment)
YouTube (Via search engine, such as browsing the category system)
Friend recommendation (Via Social network (FB, Twitter etc)
Facebook (Via status update with link or similar)
Reddit
Blog
Other

Which ROSMT episode was the first one you saw?
Sidepork Pandemonium
Meatball Massacre
Spaghetti Explosion
Chop-chop Carnage Stew
Swedish Sausage Stroganov Suicide
Superior Smörgåscake
Barbaric Brutal Breakfast
Painful Patriotic Pancakes
Massive Meatloaf Mayhem
Special Episode and Cookie Cataclysm
Satanic Salad
Supreme Swedish Pilsner Sausage (on bread)
Happy Fatty-Tuesday
Any of the bloopers
Special Episode: Swedish Salad
Live Performance in Umeå

**When you discovered ROSMT, which was the latest video released?**
- Sidepork Pandemonium
- Don't know / Can't remember
- Chop-chop Carnage Stew
- Meatball Massacre
- Spaghetti Explosion
- Swedish Sausage Stroganov Suicide
- Special Episode and Cookie Cataclysm
- Barbaric Brutal Breakfast
- Painful Patriotic Pancakes
- Satanic Salad
- Massive Meatloaf Mayhem
- Happy Fatty-Tuesday
- Special Episode: Swedish Salad
- Supreme Swedish Pilsner Sausage (on bread)
- Live Performance in Umeå
- Any of the bloopers

**Do you know what The Mayo mystery is?**
- Yes
- No

**If yes, does The Mayo Mystery enhance your experience of ROSMT?**
- Yes
- No

**Do you know what the Pre-Dinner snack challenge was?**
- Yes
- No

**If yes, did the Pre-dinner snack challenge enhance your experience of ROSMT?**
- Yes
- No

**What kind of content by ROSMT do you enjoy the most?**
- Video - Episodes
- Video - Bloopers
- The Mayo Mystery
- Pre-dinner snack challenge
- Status Updates and Comments by ROSMT

**Do you believe that the way ROSMT interacts with the viewers enhances your overall experience?**
- Yes
- No
- Don't know
Appendix 6