Since its creation in 2005, YouTube has quickly risen to the public eye. YouTube is a user-driven video streaming platform, through which “content creators” can upload videos and interact with their viewers. These videos, almost entirely free of charge, cover a seemingly infinite array of genres and topics, with few limitations on creators’ uploads. Though primarily reliant on the visual media of video, YouTube also makes significant use of images, such as advertisements and video thumbnails, as well as written text, which is used to give viewers a greater degree of information and interactivity with the content. The characteristics of YouTube as a medium have evolved most directly from television. In fact, YouTube serves as a perfect example of some of the predictions made by McLuhan during the twentieth century, chiefly his statement that “The new telecommunication multi-carrier corporation, dedicated solely to moving all kinds of data at the speed of light, will continually generate tailor-made products and services for individual consumers who have pre-signaled their preferences through an ongoing data base” (83). This has undoubtedly been a major factor in YouTube’s success, as every user’s experience is tailored to their viewing preferences, search habits, subscriptions, and likes. In many ways, a similar idea is also expressed in their mission statement; the organization emphasizes their belief that “the world is a better place when we listen, share and build community through our stories” (“About”). In building the medium around this idea of community, YouTube has developed a unique approach to web socialization, which has brought it a significant amount of success in the market. Beyond this success, however, YouTube
continues to play a significant role in the advancement of both parasocial relationships and the
global village as a whole.

The uniqueness of YouTube as a medium can be seen more distinctly through analysis of
the characteristics of interpersonal communication identified by Hjarvard. Though the platform
in its entirety makes use of most every characteristic Hjarvard outlines, it is most heavily based
on a few. The typical user interacts with YouTube through the consumption of pre-uploaded
videos - a visual and auditory medium. However, site navigation, as well as much of the
identifying content that comes with each video - title, description, and tags, chiefly - add a verbal
element. Because these videos are pre-uploaded, recorded, and edited, there is a significant
amount of time displacement. While viewers do not typically create videos themselves, there is
also an element of mutual exchange, since users are able to interact with each other and with
content creators via the comments section at the bottom of each video. While the addition of
YouTube’s livestream function introduces some alternate traits - being interactive and time
simultaneous - the characteristics listed above are the ones most commonly associated with the
platform. As such, the medium is able to generate a unique and individualized relationship with
its users, a topic which Horton and Wohl expand upon in their discussion of parasocial
interactions.

Perhaps the most impactful element of YouTube’s content is the relationship that is
formed between its users - most importantly, between consumers and creators. Modern content
creators, sometimes called “YouTubers,” “vloggers,” or “influencers” parallel the television
personalities and talk-show hosts of the twentieth century. They are encouraged to focus their
content towards a particular genre or audience, to upload regularly, and to market themselves
with a strong personal brand. This role matches strongly with those of successful T.V.
personalities, and also fits snugly into Horton and Wohl’s explanation of the persona: “The
persona offers, above all, a continuing relationship. His appearance is a regular and dependable event, to be counted on, planned for, and integrated into the routines of daily life” (3). In many ways, the “continuing relationship” that develops between the viewer and the creator is responsible for the medium’s success. While some users make casual use of the medium by consuming only those videos which they come across in daily life, many users - those who enter into this parasocial relationship - actively seek out new content from those they have subscribed to as well as similar creators; YouTube becomes a regular source of entertainment, much like television or the more contemporary Netflix. The parasocial relationship creates a bond that continuously draws the viewer back, building the community which YouTube describes as their ultimate goal.

With YouTube’s extreme popularity, spanning more than 1.9 billion users in 80 different languages, the community has a major impact on the global media village. The international reach of the platform allows users to interact with diverse cultures, countries, and perspectives; efficient and widespread closed captioning helps eliminate any language barriers users may face. This heightened exposure to other cultures contributes significantly to a sense of connectedness, and later, acceptance. The global system, in turn, promotes a higher degree of interaction with cultures other than the viewer’s own - a positive feedback loop of interactivity. This is exactly the concept outlined in YouTube’s mission: the building of community through sharing stories. Ultimately, the prevalence of parasocial relationships as well as the diverse array of available content is what makes this possible, causing consumers to crave and value interaction with others despite the physical limitations of the technological platform.

In conclusion, YouTube’s unique characteristics combined with its dominance in the market grant it a major influence in the global village. Its use of parasocial relationships stimulates continuous, long-term relationships with viewers. Its vast range of content and
intuitive user experience allow consumers to access immense amounts of information with ease. The interactivity promoted by the medium promotes acceptance and freedom of thought, carrying out the goal of community outlined in the company’s mission. While YouTube is already a successful and dominating force, it has evolved significantly since its origination over ten years ago, and will continue to adapt with other social media. One of the strongest elements of YouTube’s platform is its interactivity, and it can be expected that these features will continue expand for both creator-to-viewer relationships and creator-to-creator relationships. Creators and viewers will likely benefit from more direct lines of communication, drawing influence from media like Twitter, where users can speak directly to each other outside of a comments section. Users will also see the option to have a more significant impact on the creator’s content through features like surveys and enhanced viewer analytics. Creator-to-creator features will evolve to more heavily support collaboration, with more avenues for in-site conversations and account relationships. In this way, YouTube will continue to have a lasting impact on its users. As the platform grows closer and closer to its ultimate goal of a globally united community, the medium will reach a new closeness to the interpersonal relationships media have always aimed to replicate.
Works Cited


