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YOUTUBE: A PLATFORM FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

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ABSTRACT

Only half a decade in existence, YouTube is home to millions of online videos. Communication within YouTube is multidirectional, linked, and always expanding. When a person uploads a video, others comment on the video, rate it, upload response videos, and take the conversation to other venues, creating a discussion that is live and always expanding. As a result, the site is a powerful venue for public deliberation and allows us to explore the potential for positive social change. There are many instances, from Barack Obama's 2008 presidential campaign to Carnegie Mellon Professor Randy Pausch's lecture, that create social change, while simultaneously providing evidence of that change occurring. Furthermore, YouTube gives rarely before seen insight into the audience's motives and actions by serving as a rhetorical archive that displays years of comments and videos. Not only can ideas be seen evolving over time, but people's opinions can also be seen changing as users interact on this online realm.

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Introduction

First launched in 2005, YouTube boasts hundreds of thousands of newly uploaded videos daily. The site is user-generated and anyone with access to the Internet can upload videos after quickly creating a free YouTube account. As a result, there are now millions of videos on the site and the site itself can seem like a wasteland. Yet, within that apparent wasteland is a rhetorical venue for public deliberation and social action.

What is especially significant to communication within YouTube is its multidirectionality and linked, extensive, and infinite conversations. The discussion is live and always expanding. Viewers of a video can rate it, comment in a text area below the video, or upload their own response videos. The site also displays the number of views each video has, whether a video has only generated a few dozen views or a few million. However, an initial video is just one tiny aspect of YouTube as a whole. That video begins a domino effect on YouTube with many extensions and branches that become complicated; the video may even be part of a preexisting “domino” line that began outside the realm of the Internet. A video may spawn many other response videos. People leave comments concerning the initial video and the response videos. Entire discussions can occur in the text comment areas. People create videos as a response to the response videos. Users also take the discussion to other venues, connecting their Facebook or Twitter accounts with YouTube.

YouTube has thus become a social network. By creating an account, a person is assigned his or her own page within YouTube called a channel. This page emulates a personal web page in many ways and shares characteristics seen on social networking sites like Facebook and Myspace. For example, a person can write a short description of him or herself, allowing people to learn about the person behind the user name. There are also sections on the page that show the

user's friends, subscribers, and subscriptions to other users' channels. Even recent activity is displayed.

The design, popularity, and complex communicative practices of YouTube raise the question of how and whether this intensely rhetorical space can enable social change. Scholars have long recognized the powerful relationship between rhetoric and social change. As Marlana Portolano and Rand B. Evans note, "more is at stake socially and ethically in public speaking than in private interaction or individual acts of persuasion because the element of persuasion means influencing many people's decision-making processes" (138). This is relevant for YouTube because the number of users totals in the millions. One person who uploads a single video is engaging in public speaking and can alter the thoughts of any number of these users. And it is a very short step from influencing people's thoughts to impacting their actions. James A. Herrick describes rhetoric as "the power to shape the thinking of other people...It also becomes possible to change the way people behave by the same method" (20). More specifically, he discusses rhetoric's role in the realm of social change saying its functions include helping to disseminate information while spreading the power distribution, ultimately allowing communities to be constructed (17). For rhetoric to create social change, the discussion has to be open for many people to contribute. The more people from the community included, the higher the chance for change to occur in the community because more people will be invested in making that change happen.

In a unique way, YouTube is a place where people come together to talk; at times it is a forum for significant public deliberation and therefore a site of potential social and political action. Recently scholars have begun to explore the potential of social networking sites. Mary Milliken, Kerri Gibson, Susan O'Donnell, and Janice Singer say "the Internet has often been

identified as a potential public sphere for political and social discourse due to its neutrality, versatility, and relative accessibility” (1). They conducted a study about YouTube and the interactions on the site by citizens living in the region of Atlantic Canada; they explored those people’s regional identity, levels of engagement, and creativity. When it comes to regional identity, nearly half of participants “believed that watching more videos about Atlantic Canada, posted by Atlantic Canadians, would help them connect with the regional community” (4). From this, the authors conclude that although YouTube is worldwide, it can connect people who live down the street from each other. This finding is key if people are going to make changes within their community and society from the use of a global venue like YouTube. Furthermore, the researchers note “that some YouTube users in the study learned something or changed their opinions after viewing video suggests educational potential is possible” (8). I extend their argument because not only is education possible, but so is the potential for action because of that gain in knowledge.

Researchers have also looked into the democratic nature of the online sphere. May Thorseth explores “how worldwide deliberation connects to the idea of democracy unbound” (248). That is, if every person in the world can join the discussion via the Internet, a boundless democracy is created because no one is excluded. Of course, this is not entirely true because not everyone, especially those in developing nations, have money for or access to the Internet. However, Thorseth calls the Internet “a powerful medium with the greatest potential for global and democratic deliberation today” (248). For the most part she only discusses the potential within authoritarian regimes, claiming the Internet allows government silenced voices and opinions to be heard and aids people “in coordinating political action offline” (251). She states that exploring this phenomenon in democratic societies has only been “hinted at” in her paper.

However, as I will show throughout this essay, people in democratic societies do use YouTube not only to engage in political discussion and action, but also action in other arenas. Couple this democratic feature with the fact that YouTubers have professed to gaining knowledge through the site and are aware of the potential to increase their connection to their local community, and YouTube has the potential to be a powerful force.

The power of a speaker and his or her language to motivate and convince people of an argument has been around for as long as humans have been using language to communicate. As I argue throughout this essay, YouTube allows us further understanding of rhetoric in two significant ways. First, YouTube is a powerful rhetorical venue for public deliberation and therefore does enable positive social change. Second, applying an Aristotelian lens to YouTube allows us the opportunity to see the audience's role in effective rhetoric, something largely unavailable until recently.

YouTube: A Powerful Site for Public Deliberation and Potential Positive Social Change

YouTube is Multidirectional

Although what people say they will do and what they actually do can be two very different things, it is evident that there is at least potential for change based on the evolution of conversation seen as a result of YouTube's structure, which enables various branches of dialogue. As Triadafilos Triadafilopoulos notes, "Good public speakers...persuade their audience to adopt the best means available. In some cases, this may lead to noble actions that transform society and improve its citizens in the process" (747). Thorseth discusses the Internet more specifically saying, "there is a link between communication online and political action offline" (249). This idea is key when it comes to YouTube acting as a catalyst for social change.

However, as mentioned earlier, Thorseth is mainly concerned with non-democratic societies becoming more egalitarian: for example, people coordinating the place and time of demonstrations against unfair acts of their government. However, people in democratic societies can also engage in discussion online to enable action in the real world. In fact, they can probably do so with greater ease because they know they have the right and freedom to do so without risk of arrest or government counteraction.

People in democratic societies are taking full advantage of YouTube. In fact, academics and politicians alike note that the style and process of presidential elections was changed in 2008 because of the site. As Mitchell S. McKinney and Leslie A. Rill note: “Throughout the election much was made of team Obama’s ability to reach, to organize, and to turn out a generation of ‘digital natives’ by developing campaign appeals that used the very communicative practices and language of young citizens” (393). There are many similar stories that rave about Barack Obama’s videos. Yet, these observations fall short because they do not discuss the entire ripple effect that is generated in the realm of YouTube. A video never stands alone; it is always part of a wider network. People watch it, spread it, comment on it, create more videos, and take the discussion to other venues. The moment a video is uploaded to YouTube it takes on a whole new life. In fact, Milliken, et al.’s claim about the Internet in general can be applied specifically to YouTube: “The potential for the Internet to act as a mechanism of an online public sphere is attributed to the levels of interactivity that are possible between creators and consumers of content, and the opportunities that the medium offers for greater public input” (2). With YouTube, the interactivity that Milliken discusses is nearly limitless. YouTube is designed specifically for creators and consumers to interact as public deliberators.

In fact, YouTube complicates the role of producer and consumer greatly because the multitude of levels blurs traditional classifications of speaker and listener, as evidenced by the many videos by and about President Obama. Obama has nearly two thousand videos on his YouTube channel. However, these videos are part of a preexisting thread that includes television appearances, newspaper articles, live speeches, and press releases. To date, Obama has nearly two thousand video uploads on his channel with a combined 147,000,000 views. His videos are engaging and wide ranging. Some of his videos take a more serious tone and discuss important political issues. For example, when George Bush was still president, Obama used his channel to respond to Bush's final State of the Union address. More recently he used his channel to display videos discussing healthcare. However, intermixed with these are more lighthearted videos. In an earlier video he is playing basketball at a middle school that sponsored a voter registration drive. There is also a fifteen-minute video showing the Obama family behind the scenes at the Democratic National Convention. Even a clip of his appearance dancing with Ellen DeGeneres on her talk show is available to watch.

Taking a cue from Obama, his supporters have taken it upon themselves to upload videos. Their doing so adds another link in the multidirectional aspect of Youtube, expanding the public deliberation. A video from February 2008 titled "Obama vs Clinton Hollywood Democratic Debate 3" depicts a young man outside a debate between the two democratic candidates. He is grilled by the man holding the video camera about why he supports Obama. The interviewer urges the man to give specific examples to show he actually knows the policies behind the candidate and has legitimate reasons to support him. For example, the interviewee is asked why he supports Obama. He responds, "Because I think he is the best qualified candidate." This is a fairly generic response. However, the interviewer continues to probe deeper and asks the man,

“Do you have any technical versus emotional specifics?” The man answers with clarity and intelligence. He discusses healthcare and explains why he favors Obama’s plan. He says that all three candidates represent universal healthcare although “Obama’s plan is not exactly universal in the same way that Hillary’s is.” He continues by saying, “The reason that I like Obama’s plan is because it’s one that’s voluntary so part of the way in which it gets paid for is by both the worker and the employer as opposed to just the government which I don’t think is really feasible.” He continues to explain his position further throughout the six-minute video, answering the interviewer’s questions completely and with information to back those answers up. This video was uploaded to YouTube by the interviewer and has received over 1.1 million views.

The online community was intrigued by the video and wanted to keep this dialogue going. Comments seen below the video include one person who wrote, “Well done Derrick! You handled him! Firing back at all of those questions he fired at you. You showed that you made a very well-informed decision to back Senator Obama and that we're not just cult-members blindly jumping on the band-wagon as many people seem to think” (24LakerGirl). Another writes, “Man no one can shake this guy!!! Our generation is ready to take America to the top!!!” (elaharo). In fact, the interviewee says in a response video that he has gotten a lot of feedback, especially through emails and Facebook, about the initial video. This caused him to upload his own video, to elaborate further why he supports Obama, this time talking from a more emotional stance. In “Why I Support Obama - The Emotional Response,” he tells how he is an immigrant from Africa who, for much of his life, was not able to experience free and democratic elections. Thus, to him voting is a privilege that he does not take lightly.

People apparently enjoyed and were affected by that video so much that they uploaded response videos to it, creating another branch of discussion. They continue the conversation and even allude to social change occurring. One man uploads a 15 second video of himself saying, “That was a great response. Congratulations. It’s great to see very educated Obama supporters throwing it down hard. We’re going to deliver Virginia on Tuesday” (comingawakening). A student, who will be voting in her first election, also posted a video. In it, she says she wants to have a mock election at her school to remind people about the importance of voting. She also says, “I just posted a note on my Facebook informing my friends to watch this because the more they know, the better” (th3DIVA). This provides clear evidence that the conversation continues away from YouTube, further complicating the discussion.

The entire online aspect of Obama’s campaign has led some to assert that it caused direct social change through his being elected. McKinney says, “Certainly, based on their electoral turnout, and particularly the wide margin of Obama support from young citizens, one might conclude that the many emails, text messages, Facebook posts, and YouTube videos were successful in mobilizing younger voters like never before” (393). Of course it would be impossible to have an exact breakdown of what caused people to vote. Even McKinney notes, “we have little if any empirical evidence to help us understand if – and perhaps even more importantly how – specific youth-oriented civic engagement messages may have worked to engage young citizens in the campaign dialogue and to persuade them to vote” (393). Although it may be difficult to gauge exactly how much, clearly YouTube had a degree of influence.

YouTube Conversation Never Ends

The conversation on YouTube could potentially be infinite, enhancing the rhetorical power of the site. Brian Jackson and Jon Walin describe this characteristic of YouTube while

discussing how they are teaching students to think about writing. Although they are discussing pedagogy, their ideas can be used to analyze audience and YouTube. They say, “We are talking about an *actual* dialectic that requires students to write to other students, respond to other students, and write yet again in an argument that could potentially go on forever, like the comment thread of a YouTube video” (Jackson and Walin 375-376). Research has shown that YouTube does expand conversations. Jackson and Walin discuss a video of a student getting shot with a taser gun that went viral: “Amazingly, considering the media shelf life of such conversations, a month later on YouTube people were still writing comments” (375).

Similarly, YouTube videos concerning Obama, even those uploaded a few years ago, still display recent comments. These discussions have obviously evolved over time as there have been changes in the government, such as Obama being elected and sworn in as president, and world events. However, the clashing of ideas does add to the power of public deliberation to vet the best ideas. This also sums up the entire purpose of the comment page. People with different opinions come together and discuss, argue, and debate. And clearly, much of the time, there is a disregard for proper spelling, grammar, and punctuation. However, social change may result. Not only in the activities people have discussed through their videos, but also the text comments and discussion can lead to a change in how actively they are involved in politics and indirectly as they vote for various leaders after considering the comments and arguments people put forth on YouTube. In March 2010, 23 months after the video “Why I Support Obama: The Emotional Response” was uploaded, one person wrote, “I don’t trust any leader. They are not for the people no more. They do what they want to get there agenda through” (leebog31). Another comment (based on the time of the post, it is most likely referring to the healthcare bill) asks, “Are you still proud of your Socialist President? He is smashing the dream that the United States of America

stand for [sic] and replacing it with a Nightmare!” (dmgstuff). Another responds to this and similar comments by saying, “stop hating. politics is controversial and divisive by it's [sic] very nature. there is no such thing as perfection in this arena. i wish people would be more proactive” (TheSexyBulgarian).

The continuous line of videos people create and upload also provide evidence of this idea of a neverending dialogue. Thorseth makes a connection between two ideas in the online realm: storytelling and grassroots. She says: “Virtual communities online must prove to enable the participants to enter a public domain. There is some evidence that the most successful strategy for such transcendence is by way of storytelling and grassroots interaction” (Thorseth 248). She notes that grassroots activities can simply involve people telling their own stories to others in an uncomplicated, user-friendly manner. A prime example of only storytelling is a blog. And YouTube allows users to broadcast a video blog that can go on for years.

During the election, a woman who has been a member of YouTube for four years posted a video titled “Boots on the Ground! Obama Campaign Grassroots Organization,” which discusses her involvement in the Obama campaign. In it she says that she signed up to help the campaign. However, when the campaign came to her home state of Maryland, she says, “I did not canvass, I did not phone bank, I didn’t do anything.” However, she says, as the primary in Ohio approached, “I just decided, ‘Why not?’ So, tomorrow I am flying to Columbus, Ohio to canvass and phone bank for the Obama campaign. I’m really excited. I’ve never done anything like this before in my life...There are just so many people that are coming. Chicago, Pittsburgh, Philadelphia, Detroit, Virginia, really Richmond, North Carolina, the Washington D.C. area, Baltimore, West Virginia, Louisville...people are about to invade Ohio in the next couple of days.” She continues this story by proving she acted on her statements. Soon after the first

video was uploaded, she uploaded a video of herself in Columbus; it is a clear example of the video blog, of storytelling, in action. In “Grassroots Campaigning for OBAMA in Ohio” she discusses her experience actively campaigning for Obama: “We’re going to the neighborhood to knock on doors and leave flyers and talk to voters.” The video then cuts to her after she has canvassed. She tells viewers, “We canvassed over 100 houses in an area that was mostly Republican. It was a good day...and this was an experience I’ll never forget!”

People left text comments below the video. One person writes, “I wish I could go. That would be amazing to actually get out and share with people the potential in Barack Obama” (katlunn). Below that text response, the person who uploaded the video writes, “The experience is one that I wouldn't trade! It was great. I didn't do anything when Maryland was up and I felt guilty because I didn't canvas [sic] or participate...so I decided to go to Ohio and try to make a difference. So in a few weeks I'll be off to PA to help in that effort!” (ZETAZEN). Even this back-and-forth dialogue could potentially continue indefinitely.

Clearly, by posting her experience with being part of a campaign, she has inspired others through her story. Although the text poster cannot, for whatever reason, participate by traveling to a location and canvassing, she may be inspired to get active in some other way. Similarly, other people may have seen this video and become motivated to get active even if they do not state that they have done so through a video or text post on YouTube.

In fact, the woman still updates her YouTube channel and has approximately 100 videos on the site. Many of these have nothing to do with politics or activism of any kind. For example, she has videos of herself and friends at a bowling alley and videos of her dog. Together the videos combine to show over a span of a few years various stories of her life. However, sprinkled throughout are videos that discuss political issues like the campaign, primary

results from other states, and the controversy with Obama and Reverend Jeremiah Wright. She has well over 100 subscribers to her channel, all of whom see her newly uploaded videos and can view and comment on them in one continuous dialogue that exists as long as she is a member of the site. However, even the dialogue continues if her channel ends because the conversation can expand beyond her YouTube page. And, in fact, has. One of the blurbs under “Recent Activity” on her channel explains why she does not post on YouTube as often as she once did:

“ZETAZEN is mostly on Twitter these days!”

YouTube is All-Inclusive

The all-inclusive nature of a social networking site is a far cry from the democracy of Aristotle. As Triadafilopoulos notes, “Are not Aristotle’s views on women and slavery at variance with the idea of an inclusive public?” (743). However, today democracy is in full swing online. Thorseth researches “how worldwide deliberation connects to the idea of democracy unbound” (248). Perhaps one of the biggest reasons for the promotion of democracy is a lack of filtering. As Milliken notes, “The content is not edited by YouTube and is only censored at the request of other YouTube users” (3). Both are key concepts because not only is everyone with an Internet connection able to have a voice on YouTube, but those same people are the ones who decide if a video is inappropriate; a “big brother” is not the controlling force.

Arguably one of the most popular videos in YouTube history is that of Randy Pausch’s *Last Lecture*. It is a great example of people from diverse backgrounds coming together to create a movement in a change of thinking and ultimately change in society. Dying of pancreatic cancer, the Carnegie Mellon University professor gave a speech to a room full of a few hundred people at the school in late 2007. In the 75-minute talk, he discusses rules to live by using humorous stories from his own life. The video was posted on YouTube and started what might

be called a social revolution. What struck a chord with a lot of people is Pausch's upbeat and optimistic personality. For example, at one point he says, "I'm dying and I'm having fun." It sums up his attitude throughout the entire lecture when he talks about experiences from his childhood, teaching career, personal life, and more. He says fairly typical things like "Never give up," "Show Gratitude," "Work hard," and "Find the best in everybody." But he does so in a unique fashion by offering examples throughout his life to reinforce the ideas.

Triadafilopoulos discusses Aristotle and asks what the philosopher sees as the site for exchange and deliberation. He writes, "While Aristotle does not provide us with a direct answer to this question, we may assume that he would agree that in a democracy, deliberation can occur wherever two or more citizens are gathered" (751). YouTube allows this discussion to be viral, occurring completely online, and the number of citizens gathered to be unlimited, creating a wide range of people to be involved in the conversation and contribute. And contribute they did. The single video spawned many response videos, many different threads exponentially expanding the discussion. One YouTube poster says in his video, "I'm really happy that this video was shared with the public because I think it's something that everyone needed to see. I don't think in our country and society that we are encouraged often to embrace our dreams and our imagination and Randy's video inspired me to do just that" (ronald179).

This comment shows the importance of the content of and techniques employed in a speech. As Triadafilopoulos says in interpreting Aristotle, "The good public speaker must aim his or her speech to appeal to that which is best in the community" (750). The comments about the lecture make it clear that the speech did appeal to the best in the community. The word "inspiring" appeared in the majority of comments, both in videos and writing, about the lecture; people from all different backgrounds said they wanted to incorporate Pausch's lecture into their

everyday lives. In a video uploaded by a teenage boy, he says about Pausch, “I’m glad personally that I was able to know so much about this person and have this person impact my life so much...knowing about this person has given me a more positive view of my life” (PlainYellowTs). His comment is interesting because he has never actually “met” Pausch, but feels like he knows the professor simply by watching his powerful YouTube lecture.

However, a simple YouTube search will reveal various versions of the lecture, some translated in Spanish and many others subtitled in an assortment of languages; his speech and message were cross-cultural. A woman in Australia posted a ten-minute video, titled “Randy Pausch! Thank-you!” in which she discusses what aspect of his lecture (and the book version published soon after – further proof of what happens on YouTube overflowing to other media) spoke to her and urged people to hear the message themselves (jewelchic). YouTube enabled a speech from a small auditorium in western Pennsylvania to be heard by people from all around the world. And people from all around the world joined in on the discussion of his message and again and again proclaimed that they would act in the world for change. For example, in one video message a man talks about how he now plans on inspiring people “to embrace their dreams through my own stories just as Randy has encouraged me with his” (ronald179). In a text comment another says, “I’ll do my best to share it with others and embrace the message” (Echuu88).

Many people joined the discussion outside the YouTube venue. Oprah Winfrey had Pausch on her show after the video began to gain popularity. There he did a shortened 10-minute version of the lecture. Similarly, nearly every major news network picked up the story. With help from another man, Pausch wrote a book titled *The Last Lecture* that reiterates the thoughts and opinions discussed in the speech. These avenues add more people to the worldwide

discussion of the professor's video, creating an expansive forum for democratic dialogue and avenues for progressive action.

However, it is important to note that the use of YouTube does not always create an unfiltered democracy. The CNN/YouTube debates are a prime example. By combining with CNN, YouTube actually diminished the idea of the all-inclusive democracy. Twice in 2007, once during the Democratic primary debate and once during the Republican primary debate, the candidates were asked questions by YouTube posters. In many respects this is a very interesting concept. A person could be sitting on his sofa thinking he would love to ask the candidates a question and literally in that moment that person could film himself asking the question and upload it for potential inclusion in the debate.

Approximately 8,000 videos were uploaded between the two debates but only six dozen questions were included. McKinney notes that the videos, "appeared to be selected by CNN as much for the question's entertainment value as for its voter educational potential. For example, a talking snowman asked the candidates' views on global warming; a 'life time member of the NRA' – after firing a round from his AK-47 – asked candidates their position on gun control...an animated cartoon featuring a talking Uncle Sam quizzed candidates about their tax policies" (394). So although on social networking sites "there is no particular authority restricting the speech" (Thorseth 244), CNN's intervening with YouTube did create a restriction of speech. Time constraints and the process for selecting the videos that were featured silenced thousands of other videos, other voices.

YouTube and truth

YouTube gives insight into the entire process of people arriving at the truth. Aristotle says, "Rhetoric is useful because things that are true and things that are just have a natural

tendency to prevail over their opposites” (*Book 1 2*). Although he may be discussing a higher truth, the entire process of people receiving the most accurate facts is seen on YouTube, which subsequently leads more people to act. For example, the World Food Program uploaded a video specifically tailored to the online community. It is called, “World hunger - A Billion for a Billion.” A ticking clock is the only audio and the video opens with text reading “In the next 60 seconds.” The video explains what will happen in the very minute that a person is watching the minute-long video. Viewers learn that “145,833,233 emails will be sent...2,777,731 videos will be watched on YouTube...\$43,681 will be spent on eBay... 83,273 people will log on to Facebook...the word love will be Googled 4,260 times...2,083 tweets will be tweeted.” All the while, the seconds continue to tick away. Finally, at 16 seconds into the video the main point is made clear when text on the screen reads, “And 10 children will die from hunger.” The video urges people to donate in order to help those dealing with starvation around the world. It states, “For the first time in humanity over 1 billion people are chronically hungry. There are also 1 billion people online who can help. Just 25 cents can fill this cup with food. You are one of the online billion. You can turn this around. You tell all your friends online to help and they tell all their friends and all their friends tell others. Just imagine what the online billion could achieve. Let’s get the online billion to help the hungry billion.”

People reacted to the video and many stated in text comments that they would donate and spread the message to others. However, there were also negative comments underneath not only this video but also other videos created in response. In “Donate to World Food Programme” a woman was touched by the video. She says she made her donation and urges others to view the video and donate. However, underneath the video one person wrote, “20 cents of your money will actually benefit those kids. Congrats” (Crazyhornet). Another echoes that sentiment, “i dont

give and never will cos the money never gets to the people in need...the money goes to the people in power ,never [sic] to the hungry....they use this tatics to fool people,sad [sic] but true....” (kinakona). A person responds, “I am sorry but you are absolutly wrong!I work for WFP and I can tell you that money doesn't go to ‘the people in power’ . Did you know that the 90% of WFP staff work on field?I [sic] suggest you to visit the WFP site...and maybe you will change your mind! :)” (benitodux). The creator of the video joins in on the discussion, writing, ““WFP operations are funded by donations from world govts, corps and private donors. In 2006 the WFP received \$2.9b in contributions. The WFPs administrative costs are only 7%—one of the lowest and best among aid agencies. In 2006, WFP distributed 4 million metric tons of food to 87.8 million people in 78 countries; 63.4 million beneficiares [sic] were aided in emergency operations, including victims of conflict, natural disasters and economic failure’ - wikipedia” (BorderlineNOS). Because the person quotes Wikipedia, the information cannot be taken for fact. But, a user can easily take a few moments to open another tab and verify the information him or herself from more reliable sites.

This discussion may lead to a clearer understanding of the truth and because of it, people are taking action once they have the facts. After the discussion of how legitimate an organization World Food Program is, one person writes, “I'll have to check out the WFP, and see if I can come up with some money to donate” (TriciaCrafts). Another writes, “I have studied the WFP, as an int'l org, and I know that the money is well spent” (elaron).

A similar conversation occurs on the original video’s page as well. One person writes, “You do realize that no more than 30% of that money will actually go to charity!! I used to work for such a company. The rest of the money will go to advertisement, salaries, flayers, [sic] etc. according to the government in my country you have to use at least 10% for aid, all the other

money can go to your pocket or for the companys growth, so dont be fooled by this things [sic]” (camoy0). The World Food Program responds directly to the user, “Hi Camyo0, I'm not sure where you worked previously, but at WFP around 93% goes to either providing food directly to the people who need it through short and long term projects, or to transporting the food there. We have one of the lowest running costs out of most of the major charities and UN agencies” (WORLDFOODPROGRAM). Interestingly, some people utilize this structure of YouTube more than others. While that one person mentioned s/he is going to the website first and then donating, another was convinced of the video’s validity from the start. The user writes, “i like it it kind of tells the truth” (lordjak09).

Perhaps a more important truth that YouTube allows to be demonstrated is the possibility of ending hunger worldwide. The video did cause people to act. Despite people who may have been reluctant to donate, the video by the World Food Program calling to connect the online billion with the hungry billion was successful. Proof comes from a video uploaded on YouTube soon after the first one was uploaded. The original video was the featured video on YouTube on Friday, October 16, 2009, World Food Day. A few days later, World Food Program Executive Director Josette Sheeran uploaded a short 28-second video appropriately titled “Thanks A Billion!!!” thanking everyone for their contributions. She says, “I’m thanking you because on World Food Day a billion Internet users, through YouTube, connected to a billion hungry people who don’t even know how to fill this cup each day that’s how hungry they are. A Billion for a Billion. Thank you. Yes we can do it. Let’s beat hunger now.” This positive result that Sheeran discusses clearly shows the potential a site like YouTube has to spur noticeable action.

The Audience: Its Reaction to and Role in Effective Rhetoric

Aristotle recognizes the importance of the audience, saying, “For of the three elements in speech-making – speaker, subject, and person addressed – it is the last one, the hearer, that determines the speech’s end and object” (*Book I 7*). Centuries later and within an online realm, his statement could not be more true. A speaker can spend a great amount of time preparing a speech, creating a convincing argument; it can be perfect in his eyes. However, in reality he has no power or control over what the audience will do after hearing the message. Aristotle offers advice about the techniques that can be employed by a speaker to get the audience in the correct state of mind. However, ultimately the speaker does not control the audience’s mind and only the audience can take action.

Furthermore, with YouTube a speaker cannot even control who comprises an audience. Even if a speaker thinks she is talking to a certain audience, the Internet will surely allow people from various and diverse audiences to view and have opinions on it. Because of the large role the audience plays, it is important to first discuss the worldwide audience that exists whenever a video camera, or even a mere camera phone, is present. While this can be beneficial, as in the case of Pausch, for others it has been detrimental. Although it was before the YouTube era began, Howard Dean screaming at supporters in 2004 after placing third at the Iowa primary when he was expected to win it, yelling out the names of each state that he would eventually win, did overtake the Internet and epitomizes the age of YouTube that we live in today. As a news article from that time sums up perfectly, “The Iowa speech has become a problem because Dean’s aides either failed to recognize or failed to convince their candidate that when he speaks to a roomful of people, he is not speaking to a roomful of people; he is speaking to a television camera” (Salzman). It further explains the problem with how the video was perceived: “The

cameras focus in to a tight shot of the candidate, not the rest of the room.” The article notes you are not seeing or hearing “thousands of people screaming and cheering...hundreds upon hundreds of American flags waving...audience members shouting out state names urging Dean to list more...the way Dean’s supporters were lifted out of their slump by the speech. In a nutshell, you are not seeing that Dean’s speech fit the tone of the room” (Salzman). In the digital age of YouTube, something that may have been acceptable for the context of the situation can come across as bad and negative by people only seeing a video of it. Other people have experienced similar nightmares. Virginia Senator George Allen referred to a man of South Asian descent at a campaign event with a racial slur. It began a spiral of him losing the race in which he was by far the favorite.

These various examples are in direct contrast with Aristotle’s opinion of the audience. As Edward W. Clayton points out about the philosopher, “In his ethical and political works he frequently points to the importance of having the correct audience if any kind of teaching in these areas is to be effective...Aristotle discusses how important it is for the speaker to know the characteristics of his audience” (Clayton). However, all of this is moot because the worldwide audience is so large and diverse that it is basically impossible for anyone to tailor a message to a specific audience.

Despite these difficulties, other claims about audience from Aristotle are relevant to YouTube. He says, “A statement is persuasive and credible either because it is directly self-evident or because it appears to be proved from other statements that are so. In either case, it is persuasive because there is somebody whom it persuades” (*Book I 5*). With YouTube, these “somebodies” can number in the millions. What the negative instances with Dean and Allen show is that the YouTube audience can appear limitless, creating the possibility for more people

to be persuaded and subsequently take action. Thus, if a message is positive, great things can happen. And Aristotle echoes this. Ideally, according to Aristotle, rhetoric should be used only for good and positive motives. Other rhetoricians that came before him discuss a speaker's power over an audience. However, "Aristotle also took these sophistic rhetoricians to task for focusing too much on having power over an audience by using any means whatsoever, even deception. From an Aristotelian point of view, this kind of discourse was overly concerned with audience response and 'winning' the immediate argument instead of probable truths and group adherence to cultural mores" (Portolano 131). I assert that with such a massive audience, people would be able to weed out any deception, greatly diminishing the power of a single speaker and instead giving the power to the various speakers and contributors as a whole.

Aristotle is clearly more concerned with truth rather than developing ploys to manipulate people through the power of language. He states that "things that are true and things that are better are, by their very nature, practically always easier to prove and easier to believe in" (*Book I 3*). The truth will rise above and persuade people. What is interesting about YouTube is that the online community can make this assertion either more or less difficult for the persuader. Videos are not being sent to people who are cut off from the rest of the world. Instead, as a video plays, a viewer can see how others have rated the video, comments below the video, and a list of similar videos beside it, some which may be response videos. Thus, when one person views a video, others before him or her either have or have not been persuaded by it already and that information is immediately available. A video may have a poor rating and a few negative comments. A person may see these negative opinions some people have of the video and believe that the video is a waste of time. That person may click away to another page before the video has even had a chance to load, never watching the video or hearing its message. However,

preexisting judgments from others are not always negative and the chain reaction of a message spreading through ratings, comments, and response videos can be seen again and again in a positive light.

This process is quite different than the influence process seen in other media. For example, a news outlet will filter the information ahead of time before presenting information to a user. Thus, a person listening to a political story will get a very different view of that story on FoxNews compared to MSNBC. Even in an arena where a speaker takes questions from an audience, filtering is occurring. Time constraints may not allow every question to be answered (like the CNN/YouTube debates). Furthermore, once a person is selected, most likely he or she will not be called on again. However, there are no limits or time constraints to YouTube comments.

The Queen of Jordan's YouTube page is a prime example of YouTube enabling social change because of the thoughts, motives, and actions of the audience. Thorseth says, "There has been much debate of the question whether online deliberation will improve people's opinions and emotions in the direction of more tolerance and awareness of the plurality of different voices" (250). This is exactly what Queen Rania is attempting to do through YouTube. She uploaded a video to her channel in March 2008 in hopes to start a movement to dispel common stereotypes that the West has of the Middle East. In "Send me your stereotypes" she says, "In a world where it is so easy to connect to one another, we still remain very much disconnected. There is a whole world of wonder out there that we cannot appreciate with stereotypes. So it's important for all of us to join forces, come together and try to bring down these misconceptions." She goes on to say, "YouTube is a great platform for a dialogue and I believe that we need to use these tools in order to get those messages out there because change begins within each one of us

and our willingness to reach out to each other...I want people to know the real Arab world, to see it unedited, unscripted, and unfiltered. To see the personal side of my region.” Queen Rania asks YouTubers to not only upload their questions about the Arab world, but also for others from the Arab world to post videos to dispel stereotypes. People responded. Her original two-minute video has received over 1.7 million views and the YouTube community did not hesitate to post videos.

YouTube gives insight into these actions. People react to an online environment differently than they do a situation in which they are talking to people in person. Christine Satchell and Marcus Foth have researched how people re-create their identities online and how they subsequently interact online. They discuss how the Internet creates “digital identities” that “are lent greater fluidity and flexibility” and that it allows users to “break free from the constraints of everyday life” (16). Thus, there are people who may not feel comfortable talking about issues of racism and stereotypes with others face-to-face. However, the Internet gives them some anonymity and a degree of removal from the people that they are conversing with. In the example with Queen Rania, people are talking about differences in ethnicity, race, religion, culture, etc. However, this conversation is occurring in a space where these characteristics are shed by users. But this is not necessarily a bad thing. Research has shown that the Internet actually “changes people’s lives through the possibility of transgressing borders of gender, nation and social class, and building new social networks and knowledgeable capital” (Thorseth 249). As Thorseth argues, because the Internet can be anonymous, people use it as a “training ground” for eventually taking their voices out into the actual world (249). Thus, this discussion that Queen Rania has facilitated is bound to extend beyond the online arena.

The rhetoric involved with Queen Rania's request also shows other aspects of the audience, including the psychological benefits people receive through contributing to public conversations. One person's uploaded video response to Queen Rania's request uses pictures and text in a slideshow format to help dispel stereotypes. He received many positive comments. One person wrote, "muslims, christians, and jews, etc made this world good! without our talents math, science or anything isn't possible! muslim women are successful just like any other religion!" (MeAndTheWeb). Another wrote, "i luv this video ...simple unprofessional but yet very meaningful" (crescentstyle). Another wrote, "Good Work. Keep It Up :)" (muslimpurple). These comments are important to the audience member turned speaker. Cheshire and Antin found during their research, "when individuals were told that a high percentage of users liked their last contribution, it had a strong, significant impact on continued contributions...social approval had a strong impact on contribution behavior simply by informing individuals about how much others liked their last contribution to the system" (710).

Not surprisingly, because the video was well received, the man created another one. The second is much like the first with the use of pictures, text, news clippings, etc. He is showing that Arab women and Western women are not that different. This includes going to school, traveling to outer space, competing in the Olympics, etc. People like the video. One person wrote below it, "I am gonna send a few friends to watch this, am curious of their (non Muslim) opinion too...is a good thing, this clip...hope it helps even a tiny little bit" (sophiedenis). Action (a message being spread) is taking place because of this second video. Thus, clearly an influential factor in social change occurring is because of the positive feedback people receive. If the person received negative feedback on the first video he most likely would not have created

a second, similar video. Furthermore, it is important to note that the second video is actually more popular than the first. It has over 800,000 views compared to the first's 50,000+ views.

There are many more videos in response to Queen Rania that show people displaying their creativity to create videos to dispel stereotypes. Cheshire and Antin say “at least four key processes can encourage contributions of information in online settings: uniqueness of contributions, goal-setting, social approval, and the observation of cooperative behavior” (709). Although any YouTube example discussed thus far can be looked at through this context, the example with Queen Rania and dispelling myths is just as good an example as any. Clearly that one person was apt to upload a second video because of the positive response of the first. The idea of social approval is similar to this. People spoke out that they liked the video. However, there is also the possibility that the psychological benefit of being socially accepted through comments posted or videos created has the potential to be negative. It is not farfetched to reason that one factor in people posting positive comments is that they know these messages doing so would be well received. Furthermore, not only may users consciously make a decision to agree or disagree with something, going along with the majority of users, but this may also be happening subconsciously; people in fact may be predisposed to like or not like a YouTube video. Because when a person logs onto YouTube to watch a video he or she immediately sees the rating, views, comments, and links to response videos, that person's individual views are immediately influenced by others. A person is almost unable to fully have his or her own opinion that is uninfluenced by others because the structure of YouTube displays this other information.

People cooperating and working together for a common good is also evident. It started with Queen Rania and the fact that her asking people to join in on the discussion resulted in a

multitude of people contributing. Although not everyone creates his or her own video, many do utilize the comment area. Together they are all cooperating and trying to create a change in thinking to lead to a more peaceful world that understands and respects each others' differences while realizing there are many similarities between people.

Queen Rania may even be affecting other world leaders. She has been a YouTube member since March 2007. In a December 2009 video titled "President Shimon Peres Launches YouTube Channel," Israeli President Simon Peres welcomes users to his new YouTube channel. On his homepage he says, "Please join me in finding solutions to three key issues: how to advance peace in the Middle East and the world, how to further reconciliation between different faiths, and how to harness new technologies for the good of mankind. I ask you to share your thoughts, suggestions, opinions, and dreams through comments, video responses, and a virtual press conference I will soon hold." Because the welcome video was only posted a few months ago, it is difficult to gauge the success. However, the audience will determine how successful his endeavor is in the coming months and years.

Although millions log on to YouTube every day, people are more likely to contribute if they feel like an individual on the site. Coye Cheshire and Judd Antin's have studied different social network/collaborative sites. They have found that intrinsic benefits motivate people to contribute, ultimately helping the group as a whole. Their study shows support "for the motivational benefits of the perception of uniqueness when contributing to an information pool" (709). When it comes to their identity, people are able to almost reinvent themselves online. While hiding behind a user name, people simultaneously want to stand out for their individuality. In this respect, YouTube caters to a wide range of people. If people want to stand out they can; if others want to stay in the shadows they don't have to actively interact. A great example of

the former comes from a video created in response to the World Food Program. The animated video is titled “Shared Food Tastes Better.” It depicts a person cutting a cake and sharing some with a dog. As the dog starts eating his share, a cat enters the picture. The dog barks and scares it away. However, he soon has a change of heart as he realizes that the person shared cake with him. He then cuts his slice in half and shares it with the cat. The message reads, “Shared Food Tastes Better.”

It is an effective video. People have left comments below the video proclaiming as much. However, one person leaves a comment encompassing all the aspects of the video, “Wow! You're pretty good at themes, morals, music and animation altogether! A cute video!” (nintendog11). The creator of the video responds, “Thanks a lot man! Be sure to share ;)” His YouTube channel states as his occupation, “Artist, animator, musician, songwriter, video maker, visualizer, website host.” In fact, he has a variety of other animated videos on his channel. Although his video concerning world hunger is effective and has the potential to create change (comments below his video attest to that fact), clearly a factor of his creating the video is its uniqueness; he has a motive outside of just creating change. His occupation is creating animation and he obviously wants his work noticed. He even makes a comment below the original video posted by the World Food Program, urging those who watch that video to also watch his: “Thank you so much for uploading videos here to inform the masses and do your part to help stop World Hunger. Inspired by your channel I recently made a small PSA animation myself called ‘Shared Food Tastes Better.’ Thanks for accepting it as a video response and keep going on with your noble cause :)” (jackbliss). Although he may have ulterior motives, social change is occurring anyway. Obviously he had to be moved by the original video in order to make his own video on the topic.

One video that caused a lot of people to contribute to the discussion through video responses came as a result of the earthquake in Haiti. This instance, too, gives insight into the audience. A group of celebrities joined forces to film a new version of “We Are the World.” The song was originally produced in the mid 1980s to raise awareness of and help end the famine occurring in Africa. Before the song is actually sung, Jamie Foxx introduces “We Are The World 25 For Haiti - Official Video” saying, “Two weeks ago we found ourselves surrounded by a dazzling array of artists of all ages, backgrounds, and genres but all of whom share a common commitment to take action to help Haiti rise from the rubble and rebuild.” Studies of social networking sites found that “people will still make the decision to contribute, especially if they have strong positive beliefs about the overall outcome” (Cheshire 707). People may have had strong beliefs about helping beforehand, but those feelings were only reinforced many times over by seeing the dozens of celebrities who took the time to do their part to make change for Haiti. The video is also very popular. It has received over 30 million views and that number continues to climb everyday. Even Foxx states, “Please do more than just watch. Reach deep into your hearts and give anything you can... Whatever you have, no matter how big or how small, it all counts.” People are being told by a celebrity that helping has a direct effect. And if people were not convinced by Foxx, the celebrities singing, or the pictures of Haiti intermingled in the video, Lionel Richie makes a final plea. He says at the end of the video, “We are the World 25 is an opportunity for us to see what we can do help our fellow man. Haiti right now is in desperate need of our help and only you can help them. Do what you can. Haiti needs your help. Now.”

Cheshire and Antin found that “group oriented goals were actually more effective than individual-oriented goals at motivating contributions” (709). Despite the importance of

individual benefits discussed already, people are well aware of others. However, Cheshire and Antin say that motivation through group goals is actually affected by the person's identity. If a user feels like he or she is involved and part of the group, versus outside of it, he or she wants to maintain that position through regular contributions. Thus, with so many people speaking positively about the video and discussing their contributions, others wanted to be part of this group, too. They established this role in the group by helping to fulfill the group goal of raising enough money.

The idea of people being motivated by the group goals is reinforced when the video asks for people to join. At the end of the video, text reads, "You can join the chorus. Upload your own version of We Are the World by posting a video response to this video." The video engages the audience directly. This is interesting because by doing so people are affirming that they are part of a group and these group goals are extremely important. However, at the same time users are able to express their individuality by uploading a video of themselves singing alone. Furthermore, by contributing they affirm their belief that doing so will help.

Many people did just that and others took action because of these response videos. One woman gave her rendition of the song. Before she begins she says, "I'm not really good at singing, but if my terrible singing can somehow bring someone to send a donation to Haiti or something, hopefully it will help. I can't afford to send money myself...so maybe through this I can help" (merishane). Underneath the video people said they would take action because of the woman singing. One person says, "Because of your post, i will donate. I wanted to donate before, just havent done it (being lazy). But i'm definetely [sic] doing it! Thanks for the post!" (Dcole11). Another has similar feelings saying, "I have happy tears mixed with sad tears. I have been thinking about buying a calendar from "Reddit" (the proceeds go to Haiti) - I am now going

to order it. THX to YOU! ((HUGS))” (SuzySunflower). Clearly, the original video’s ability to engage the audience had a direct effect, creating an interesting cycle. Although people may be more inclined to contribute if they feel those comments will help, their contributing actually does create the change as well.

However, all these example of the audience’s motivation, reactions, and role in social change on YouTube show us just how little can really be known about an individual audience member. People are offering more of themselves online today. In fact studies have shown online users are “quite blasé about revealing information... The research revealed that it comes at a time when there is a distinct shift as young people move away from the ‘big brother’ Orwellian notions of privacy that characterized the baby boomer generation” (Satchell and Foth 19). Nonetheless, the Internet also allows them to hide their identity. The various examples mentioned show that people are willing to contribute and put forth their opinions and beliefs on YouTube, creating change in the process. However, because it is impossible to actually get inside people’s heads it is unclear if they truly feel this way, have self promoting motives of wanting to get noticed by others online, or are following the majority because it may lead to social acceptance.

The motive of an audience as a whole is clear because the audience is the deciding factor in which YouTube videos get noticed and what change is seen in society. If an audience wants a video to get popular it will be because more and more people watch it. However, one is left wondering if the audience should even have this power. In fact, the vastness of YouTube might be hurting the site’s potential. Not everyone can watch every video. Thus, should popularity (which the audience and the audience alone decides) really be the deciding factor in which videos will get noticed, what messages will be heard, and what action by people will ultimately

be taken? Because of the high volume of videos that are uploaded each day, ones with powerful messages are bound to slip through the cracks. The audience of YouTube is a busy one. People in today's world have far too many things beckoning their time. YouTube is just a tiny sliver. Thus, no one can stop powerful videos from falling into the shadows.

Conclusion

Youtube not only promotes dialogue and discussion that leads to social change but also shows that change occurring. Although the site gives a lot of insight into this process, perhaps one of the most interesting aspects is the change remains invisible. One YouTube study found that "96% of the users reported talking about videos they had seen on YouTube with other people" (Milliken 5). Unfortunately this dialogue is undocumented and goes unstudied. The undocumented conversation gives even greater importance and weight to YouTube because of the rhetoric and chain of dialogue that it does allow scholars to view and study. YouTube functions as a rhetorical archive. The political videos are a prime example. When Obama leaves office, scholars can look back at the four or eight years worth of videos on his YouTube page as well as all the videos about Obama that others have uploaded over the years. Furthermore, there are about two years of campaign videos on the site. This could potentially be a decade's worth of rhetoric and social deliberation that is easily available for study. Besides the videos, thousands, and potentially millions, of text comments can be sifted through that show conversation occurring over years. This gives insight, rarely available to such an extent, into how thoughts and ideas develop and how people's attitudes change.

However, the importance of exploring YouTube's potential for public deliberation and social change as well as the insights into the audience extend past mere scholarly exploration. Clearly YouTube has become a vital tool that affects many people. More and more people join

YouTube everyday and users should know how people tend to interact on social networking sites to give insights into their own motives. Even people who do not log onto YouTube are affected by it. With people participating in YouTube discussions and creating change in society, everyone living in the society is affected and should know about the important venue. By becoming knowledgeable about the site they can make the decision to participate in the deliberation about various societal issues and have their voices heard; they can be involved from the inception of an idea all the way through to noticeable action being taken in the community.

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Education

B.A. in Professional Writing at Penn State (May, 2010)

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Honors & Awards

Dean's List

Professional Writing Achievement Award (2010)

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Professional Experience

Center for Learning and Teaching Intern (1/09 – present)

Penn State Berks Library

Creating help documents for different technology and software, editing and proofreading, assisting with the online course management system, various office work

Writing Tutor (8/09 – present)

Penn State Berks Learning Center

Tutoring students and helping them develop their writing skills

Research Assistant (Summer 2009)

Penn State Berks

Conducting preliminary online research for a professor who was exploring the role of the traditional literary critical essay in contemporary college literature classes

Civic Engagement

Co-author (Fall 2009)

Penn State Berks

Conducting community research, including interviewing residents and searching online archives, and eventually writing an article as part of a class project on local Latino history. A book of each student's article was published in early 2010 and distributed throughout Berks County, PA.

Co-editor (Spring 2009)

Penn State Berks

Listening to recordings of student interviews with community members and editing the student written papers about the interviewee, considering issues of accuracy, omission, organization, and general proofreading in order to prepare the papers for publication. A book of each student's article was published in 2009 and distributed throughout Berks County, PA.

Co-author (Spring 2008)

Penn State Berks

Interviewing a local African American resident and, along with three other students, writing an article on her life. The article appeared in a locally published book that displayed narratives of various African Americans living in Berks County, PA.

Research

National Collegiate Honors Council Conference (October 2009)

I presented a poster on my work with two separate projects that dealt with Penn State Berks students interviewing African American and Latino community members, writing articles on their lives, other student editors reviewing the articles, and the articles finally being published. I researched how well the interviewees' voices could be heard despite the different layers.

Penn State Undergraduate Exhibition (April 2009)

I co-presented a poster discussing my work with two projects in which Penn State Berks students interviewed African American and Latino community members and wrote articles on their lives. I explored how successfully the projects enabled the historically silenced to be heard.

International Experience

Portugal (Spring 2009)

As part of an honors course, I spent a week in Portugal exploring the "Idea of the Castle." Along with visiting many castles and palaces, I read about the historical significance of castles, exploring them not only as physical structures, but also how their historical meanings have evolved over centuries.

Europe (Spring 2006)

As a member of the Spanish club my final year in high school, I traveled to five different European countries over a ten-day period, exploring the differences in language and culture of the geographically close but historically different countries of Italy, France, Germany, Austria, and Spain.

Skills

Competent in Microsoft Word, PowerPoint, and Excel

Proficient in Adobe Photoshop, InDesign, Illustrator, Dreamweaver

Basic command of Spanish (three semesters in college)