

Study: Viewers turning to YouTube as news source

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This file image of a screen grab provided by Google Inc. on Dec. 1, 2011 shows the YouTube website. A new study finds that YouTube is emerging as a major platform for news, one to which viewers increasingly turn for eyewitness videos in times of major events and natural disasters. (AP Photo/Google Inc., File)

A new study has found that YouTube has become a major platform for news, one where viewers are turning for eyewitness videos in times of major events and natural disasters.

The Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism on Monday released their examination of 15 months of the most popular news videos on the Google Inc.-owned site. It found that while

viewership for TV news still easily outpaces those consuming news on YouTube, the video-sharing site is a growing digital environment where professional journalism mingles with citizen content.

"There's a new form of video journalism on this platform," said Amy Mitchell, deputy director of the Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism. "It's a form in which the relationship between news organizations and citizens is more dynamic and more multiverse than we've seen in most other platforms before."

More than a third of the most-watched videos came from citizens. Than more half came from news organizations, but footage in those videos sometimes incorporated footage shot by YouTube users.

The Japanese earthquake and tsunami was the most-viewed news event during the length of the study, which spanned January 2011 to March 2012. The top videos from Japan included footage from surveillance cameras, a news network and a Japanese Coast Guard vessel — a typical variety of sources.

Such dramatic events were often among the most watched videos. Other popular news events included the Russian elections, unrest in the Middle East, the collapse of a fair stage in Indiana and the crash of an Italian cruise ship.

"One of the things that emerges here is the power of bearing witness as a part of a news consumption process," said Mitchell. "Many of the most viewed stories that we're looking at here have real powerful imagery around them."

The results depicted both reasons for concern and encouragement for traditional news outlets. While citizen journalism accounts for a large slice of viewership on YouTube, its users are also eager distributors of

professional news video. The study shows YouTube as a global news arena where professional and amateur video bleed together, and is made consumable in on-demand style.

That kind of atmosphere also makes for issues of authenticity. Though YouTube has guidelines for news video, they aren't always followed and some videos go viral despite uncertain sources.

"This is a young platform and there're certainly aspects of this interplay and the way information is going to flow that's still being worked out," said Mitchell.

A relatively nascent new organization, Russia Today, a network founded in 2005 and backed by the Russian government that often reports rumor, had easily the most videos among the most-viewed. The second most-viewed news organization among the top videos was Fox News, although the study pointed out that more than half of those videos were posted in criticism of the network.

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