

Thousands pack Europe's first VidCon for online stars

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Thousands flocked to Amsterdam from around Europe this weekend to meet their online video heroes and mingle with young fans, eager to learn how they too can become a YouTube star.

They were taking part in the first VidCon Europe, an off-shoot of VidCon US set up in Anaheim, southern California, eight years ago and now a hot venue amid an online revolution.

While such YouTube stars as Tyler Oakley, or Hannah Hart may not be household names to most, they have built up a huge fan base among children and young adults with their funny, often anarchic videos.

Though sometimes dealing with serious issues, they are filmed mostly with a tripod or webcam from their own kitchens or living rooms.

Amsterdam is VidCon's first foray out of the United States. Organisers are hoping it may become an annual event, and are also looking towards the first VidCon in Melbourne, Australia, later this year.

"The European place for online video is a few years behind the US one, but it is approaching it. Every day another kid starts a channel and wants to be famous," Michael Gardner, [chief operating officer](#), told AFP.

Some 3,500 people from as far as Latvia, Serbia and Estonia trekked to Amsterdam for the three-day event, where industry figures also mixed with creators, or video producers often referred to as YouTubers, and

fans.

Although small compared to the 26,000 who travelled to Anaheim in 2016, organisers said it was a good debut and the crowd was three times larger than the first VidCon in the US eight years ago.

"Authenticity" is the key to success for new YouTubers, Gardner said. "These online video stars, they're not on script, they're being themselves."

"It's like having a real good friend, who talks to you every day."

TV doesn't talk back

YouTube's biggest star, PewDiePie, was absent amid a row over a few videos he posted containing anti-Semitic remarks and Nazi references.

A 27-year-old Swede, real name Felix Kjellberg, he has 54.5 million online followers on the Google-owned service.

He is also YouTube's top earner making roughly \$14.5 million (13.6 million euros) last year through revenue-sharing and sponsorships, according to estimates from social media data firm NeoReach.

Gardner said fast technological advances and expanding bandwidth meant online video was an "equal opportunity for everyone to have their voice heard, to tell their narrative."

Every VidCon "I see two people come together, and they say, 'Wait, you like this? I like this too. I thought I was the only one'. And all of a sudden this bond forms."

Asked if television is dead, Gardner joked: "I wish it was." Online video

was more active, involving engagement between its stars and their audience such as comments, likes and dislikes, he said.

"TV doesn't have those factors and in an increasingly disconnected world people are craving those elements. They're craving engagement, and TV just doesn't talk back to you."

The power of nerds

Many of the [stars](#) use their platforms to help advocate for gay rights, greater equality or to end the stigma of mental illness.

Founded by American author John Green—who wrote the bestselling young adult novel "Fault in our Stars"—and his brother Hank Green, VidCon is a forum for self-confessed nerds.

Known online as the Vlogbrothers, the two are now in their late 30s and describe their channel launched in 2007 as "raising nerdy to the power of awesome".

"I want kids to value passion and excitement, and not to disguise it through irony because people will think it's lame," John Green told an audience in Amsterdam.

Starry-eyed fans not only get a chance to meet their favourites, but can gather in meet-ups to hang out with others who share the same interests.

"I was always an oddball," confessed pink-haired British star Lizzie Dwyer, who as LDSshadowlady has amassed almost three million followers, who watch her play and comment on [video](#) games such as Minecraft.

"But it's great there are people on YouTube who appreciate the

weirdness about me."

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