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Independent Creators and Freebooting

In this age of the web people rarely go to individual sites for things and rather use a select few sites for all their needs, such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, or any other large social media network to receive information. As a result many do not try hard to find content to consume be it artistically, academically, or for entertainment purposes and would rather have it all given to them with little to no effort. Many have taken advantage of this and create pages that host or curate content from around the world for all to see in one convenient place. While it may be convenient many individuals take advantage of this opportunity by hosting content without permission and claiming it as their own. Facebook in particular has been a big component in this problem. Facebook brags about the fact that they are able to obtain billions of video views a day and a majority of these views come from stolen content. Many creators have contacted Facebook about this problem but they have done very little to help considering it keep users on the site and it earns them ad revenue. With Facebook boasting about their views and the money they are obtaining from it they have very little incentive to stop this problem. Many don’t give it a second thought, consume something and are on their way. But I would like to inform others of the effects such a thing has on creators, audience, and the people who take such content.

In November of 2015 Facebook announced that they receive roughly 8 billion video views per day. While that is a quite an accomplishment such a number is practically impossible to achieve. *Kurzgesagt*, or better known as *In a Nutshell* creates a video essay titled “How Facebook is Stealing Billions of Views” to explain how Facebook is able to reach such a milestone thru stolen content and false analytics. *In a Nutshell* is a small design studio based out of Munich, Germany that are known for creating distinct designs, animations, interactive software, and music to inform an audience about the fields of education, science, and commerce. They have worked for clients such as Microsoft, Autodesk, and Audi. They describe themselves as “a small team of like-minded people who want to make science look beautiful. Because it is beautiful.”. In 2013 they launched a YouTube channel to publish personal projects revolving around information and science. As of March 2016 that channel is a prominent YouTube channel with hundreds of millions of views and over 2 million subscribers. The video *How Facebook is Stealing Billions of Views,* was created to persuade, inform, and provide an outlet to convince an audience that Facebook’s statistics are false and about the troubles independent creators face when their content is stolen and reposted without consent, or freebooted and how big sites such as Facebook are doing very little to help.

Facebook boasts about its views but the retention of the viewers is so low that it shouldn’t technically be called a view. Facebook counts a view after 3 seconds and with videos autoplaying as you scroll through your timeline if you scroll slow enough you count as a view, even if the video is muted, compared to videos on a site such as YouTube the user retention is drastically low. On top of that Facebook prefers to show videos from its own player rather than videos from other sources such as YouTube. Facebook tries to keep users on the site for as long as possible to view advertisements so they can make money off of ad revenue. It seems like Facebook has done very little to combat stolen videos. People are constantly uploading content without the permission of the creator or even citing the creator. Some of these people end up creating a large fanbase off this stolen content, sometimes even bigger than the original creator itself. It’s very difficult to even find your stolen content in the first place without it being informed by someone.

It’s pretty much luck whether or not you are able to find the stolen content. Unlike sites like YouTube who have safeguards to protect content from being stolen Facebook has no such safeguards and it is a difficult process to claim your content. When a stolen work is found Facebook has a very long process to claim that work as your own and takes a few days to process. By the time the work is processed the content is usually old news and has gained most of the attention that it will ever receive. So by the time something is taken down, it’s too late for it to make an affect and the people who stole the content just get a slap on the wrist allowing them to steal whatever they please with little repercussion. This can become detrimental to some creators who live off their work and could affect someone’s income or a viral piece could be the exposure needed to make or break a career.

Hank Green, a YouTube entrepreneur know for creating a merchandise company, a conference for internet creators known as *VidCon*, and a variety of YouTube programs weighed in on the problems of Facebook in his *medium* article titled *Theft, Lies, and Facebook Video*. In his article he provides statistical evidence from Sonja Foust of Duke University who posted 2 videos on both on Facebook’s own video service and posted an embedded link to the same video from YouTube. The uploaded video received a significantly larger view count and reach. The first YouTube link was opened 108 times with a reach of 13,184 and the second as opened 166 times and reached 19,984 people. The Facebook videos were opened 438 times and reached 74,752 users, and the other was opened 20,686 and reached 931,328 people. The videos were posted on the same account yet the Facebook posts reached a significantly larger audience, this evidences points to how Facebook is prioritizing their own video service compared to an embedded video from another site.

On top of prioritizing their own videos they also lie about views. Facebook counts a view significantly sooner than any other video service. Facebook counts a view at three seconds whether or not the viewer has even turned the sound on. Facebook videos are also known to auto play so you could possibly count as a view just by scrolling through a Facebook feed at a slow enough speed. While it may technically count as a view the viewer retention, or the engagement of the viewer is practically non-existent. In the study listed above the Facebook videos were opened 438, and 20,686 times but were technically viewed 20,536 and 321,067 times respectively. Video sites such as YouTube use formulas to determine viewer retention which is usually around 30 seconds for videos over 3 minutes in length. So while they brag about reaching billions of views, it devalues what views really are. Views are what creators use to show advertisers and potential partners that they are worth investing in or working with, so by devaluing these views companies will see what would be a successful creator as worthless.

Hank Green quotes a recent report from Oglivy and Tubular Labs stating that out of the 1000 most popular Facebook videos of Q1 2015, 725 were stolen re-uploaded. These 725 freebooted videos were responsible for roughly 17 billion views. The lack of searchability on Facebook makes it practically impossible for creators to find if their content was freebooted, so the only real way for someone to find out is if they are told by someone else. Facebook is doing little to help this theft. When a video is reported they usually take a couple days to take it down, but by the time it’s taken down its too late and the video has received the majority of the views it would ever receive anyways. An example of this would be Destin Sandlin, creator of the YouTube channel Smarter Every Day. Had his video *TATTOOING Close Up (in Slow Motion)* illegally downloaded and uploaded to the Facebook page ZOO Magazine. It was later removed following a copyright claim by Destin, but not before it gained 18 million non-YouTube views. While posting other people’s content and television clips may be forgivable for a site like YouTube when it was just a small company back in 2006 trying to find a place to stand, but soon after they were bought by Google they initiated a Content ID system that analyzes every video uploaded to YouTube and checks it against a database of known content Facebook has no excuse today. Facebook, a gigantic corporation worth roughly 260 billion dollars launched their video platform with no system to protect against independent rights holders.

In the Linkedin article When *Content Curation Is The New King, What Happens to Content Creators?* Tara Hunt, a digital marketing executive defines content curation and its need as a sort of necessary evil. Hunt opens up her article recalling an interview she had with a print magazine in 2007 asking what print can learn from the internet and she told them that curation was key. Newspapers needed to stop trying to create their own content but instead use their power of distribution to amplify the best content they can find. Years later most people receive their news from curated sites like Buzzfeed and Reddit who are making large amounts of profit off of ad revenue and newspapers are still struggling with their old business models. Not unlike newspapers, creators struggle trying to get their original content out to a larger audience.

Today when you read an interesting article you are likely to share it on social media sites hoping that your audience will appreciate it. You may write a small blurb or mention a highlight but all you are really doing is spotlighting it. You weren’t the one who took the time to write the article you simply enjoyed it and spread it. This is what is considered content curation. However in the days before social media most people who wanted to share something would create their own article and research with a link back to the original article, you needed to add value to your own work to even consider showing an audience.

While it may not be as complicated to share something now to grow an audience it still takes a lot of time and effort. There are millions of videos, pictures, articles, music, etc being uploaded every day. While these pieces of content might have had a large amount of time, experience, and effort behind it it’s impossible to see it all. You can’t expect most people to go through thousands of hours of content to find one or two things that are worth mentioning. That’s where curators come in, to sift through it all and come out with some gems, and some of these curators make large amounts of money off of it.

Tara Hunt gives an example of some of these curators by explaining how she posted a Vine of her dog that became really popular with over 118 thousand likes and how it was featured on a Facebook page with 6.2 million likes called *Best Vines* and received roughly double the amount of likes that she received on her own personal account. The page owner lifted the content off of Vine and reposted it without consent. She personally didn’t care much until she found out this page was receiving money from it through advertisements. While that video might have only taken 30 seconds to make and they had no intention of it getting that kind of awareness but for some who create content fulltime someone stealing content like that can cause a huge dent, by stripping the creator away of potential fans and revenue.

One such popular content creator Elliot Tebele or better known by his Instagram handle “FuckJerry” explains his outlook on content curation in the article *titled This Instagram User Is Going Viral Without Taking Any Of His Own Pictures* by Maya Kosoff. Instagram, a social media platform known for hosting user posted pictures has evolved as platform and some of its users are using the platform for more than just posting their own personal photos, some are treating the site similar to sites like Facebook, Twitter, or Tumblr and reposting other’s pictures and videos. Tebele’s instagram page has more than 8 million followers and is primarily reposted funny pictures and memes that have appeared on websites like Reddit, Imgur, Twitter, and Tumblr, essentially aggregating funny pictures he finds around the web. "I’m aggregating what I believe is the best content available and I’m doing it all day," he says. Tebele receives submissions from his followers via email or direct message. Tebele states that he tries to give credit whenever he can, but that it is often difficult to find an original source for the content he aggregates. Tebele has begun to monetize on his large following by posting sponsored content. He’s able to make enough to consider it his full time job. Tebele is just one person who has acquired this sort of fame but there are thousands of people out there who have received or are trying to receive the same amount of fame as him by curating content.

 There is no definitive answer to whether or not freebooting is right or wrong; it differs on a case by case basis. There is no real way to stop freebooting, with over a billion people online on millions of sites it’s impossible to know whether or not your content is being stolen or not. A creator can only wait until a fan stumbles upon plagiarized content and informs you or reports it themselves. As a creator the only thing you can do is educate your audience on freebooting and its effects. While some creators might see it as an opportunity for exposure others might see it as a loss of money and a large dent in their careers.

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